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[A REFLECTION ON THE SEMINARY MISSION STATEMENT]

Dr. Gregory Robertson, associate professor of Christian theology, penned this writing for the school's Spring 2013 e-Newsletter. Robertson believes that reflection and theology are communal acts. He asked the Seminary Faculty to read and make comments before the final work was completed. This is the result of that communal act.

A REFLECTION ON THE SEMINARY MISSION STATEMENT

Dr. Gregory Robertson, associate professor of Christian theology
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We live in a world divided, politically, socio-economically, racially, and unfortunately religiously. Into such a world the Christian church brings an important message: reconciliation. Seldom has such a term offered so much promise, so much hope, for a time such as ours. In ancient (and unfortunately our own) times, the human goal has been domination over one's opponents, an utter vanquishing of any contrarian perspective. Who amongst us has not thought that such a demanding approach would vindicate and thus liberate those who might confirm our position? Are we not right to deem holy and justified our own perspective, and thus demonize and strip of any godly-power divergent interpretations or approaches? Into such absolutist positions comes the radical (from the Latin meaning *to the root*) account of a God whom we wish were consumed with our attempts to defend God's character, yet what we encounter is a God who acts to free us from our own misunderstandings of what reconciliation entails. Our God actuates a freedom to be for God and others in a fundamental change. God seeks, enacts, and makes present a whole new way of being that frees each person for life in communion with God and with others.

Paul seeks to articulate this new possibility in 2nd Corinthians 5:16-21. Whereas sin has separated us from God and others (remember that the classical definition of sin is that we are *incurvatus a se*, bent in upon ourselves), God creates a space where we may risk living turned outwardly, a life of love. God has done a new act, something that was previously inconceivable, in Jesus the Christ. God has made feasible something that we could not expect, a new form of being that releases us to try a form of life distinctive from our self-centered pasts. Now we may be different from how we have sought to be human, for now we know that we are those created in the image of God. Through the Holy Spirit, we are empowered to live in love .for God as we live in love for others.

To begin to understand reconciliation, we must therefore redress some of our misconceptions about what it entails. Especially within North American Evangelicalism, we have been tempted to reduce reconciliation essentially to the relationship between God and ourselves. However, such an approach misses the breadth of the Gospel's promise, which is a holistic and therefore holy possibility. Reconciliation is not about a state one achieves but is about the form of life one inhabits. Reconciliation is relational language; it is about learning to live in new ways as those redeemed by God and thereby placed into the new community (the Church) that God's redemptive activity creates.

This means, however, that reconciliation must be a lived experience. As Scott McKnight observes, "Theology...transcends proposition in *performance*."¹ We must never permit

¹ Scot McKnight, *A Community Called Atonement* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 28.

reconciliation to be reduced solely to an idea that does not necessitate our most faithful obedience. A failure to live into reconciliation denudes the term of all its meaning. It reduces the scope of reconciliation to mere sophistry, an ideal that sounds promising but that can never come to fruition in our fallen environment. Nevertheless, the reality that the Gospel creates makes possible a new form of existence, lives enacted in love for God as we seek to live in love for each other. Jesus the Christ's life (the Gospel) thereby becomes the condition for the possibility of a new existence in and through our incorporation into the life of God's Spirit.