

Articles

Truly Confessional: Responding to the Collapse of Christendom

Robert Newton

Abstract: Postmodernism has pushed many Christian churches in America to a state of cultural, theological, and ecclesiastical crisis, marked by profound questions of identity. “What’s our purpose as Christ’s church in America?” “How do we remain faithful to Christ and His Word?” Its confessional moorings enable Lutheran churches to avoid two pitfalls prevalent among other Christian churches: Compromise of biblical truth and/or shallow discipleship. In their desire to remain faithful, however, Lutherans are tempted to circle their confessional wagons in defense of the Gospel, thereby diminishing their missionary vocation in the world. To remain truly confessional Lutherans must keep first and foremost their evangelical identity and purpose.

It was but a few years ago that I often heard the phrase, “America is a Christian nation.” Rarely do I hear those words anymore. I most often hear that America is “post-Christian,” even “anti-Christian,” referring to the direct assaults by secularism and religious pluralism against the church.

Post-Christian America presents formidable challenges to Christians and their churches, especially for their Gospel outreach to the unchurched world. Our churches have been thrown off balance. Having held for centuries the pole position of cultural relevancy in society, they continue to organize and operate with the assumption that the unchurched will be naturally attracted to their churches and ministries. They struggle to understand why individuals and/or families find the soccer field, Starbucks, or just sleeping in more appealing than going to church on Sunday morning. They feel threatened when people challenge the traditional Christmas tree in the town square, the Ten Commandments in a court of law, or, most recently, the traditional definition of marriage. For them, these radical changes make no sense.

Along with these challenges, however, come incredible opportunities for Gospel outreach. Making the most of these opportunities depends primarily upon our

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ministry approach to and attitude regarding them. St. Paul exhorted the Christians in Ephesus, “*Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is*” (Eph 5:15–17). Maximizing the time requires that we understand the post-Christian arena in which we live and how it affects our responsibilities and roles as Christ’s light and salt in the world.

Collapsing Christendom

Dr. Timothy Tennent, in his recent and insightful book, *Invitation to World Missions*,¹ identifies seven mega-trends occurring in the Christian movement around the world. The mega-trend that leads the list, and has the greatest impact on my church body, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, he dubs “The Collapse of Christendom.” He writes, “The Western world can no longer be characterized as a Christian society/culture in either its dominant ethos or worldview. Christendom has collapsed², and twenty-first century missions must be re-conceptualized on new assumptions.”³ The issue boils down to this question: “Who’s in charge of leading and shaping our culture?” That is, “Who or what is determining its values, morals, and priorities?” Christendom would have answered the question: “The Christian Church is in charge. We are a Christian society.” That self-understanding was foundational in the forging of Western civilization. The fact of the matter is that Christendom and its prevailing worldview is collapsing. The institutional church⁴ is not in charge in America.

Tennent’s second mega-trend, “The Rise of Post-Modernism,” suggests that with the collapse of Christendom no one or no thing is culturally in charge. Our society, including its church population, is caught in cultural, moral, and religious free fall. He explains,

The West is experiencing a growing skepticism about the certainty of knowledge, an increasing distrust in history, and a general cultural malaise caused by the loss of meaning. In 1979, the French philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard coined the term postmodernism to describe these changes. . . . The key shift from modernism to postmodernism, argues Lyotard, is marked by the collapse of what he calls these “grand narratives,” which guided and produced stability in the formation of modernity. . . . Today, the rise of relativistic pluralism, the loss of faith in the inevitable progress of the human race, and an increasing uncertainty about normative truth claims have resulted in a cultural, theological, and ecclesiastical crisis.⁵

Postmodernism has pushed many Christian churches in our nation to a state of crisis, marked by a profound loss of identity. As our Judeo-Christian value structures collapse around us, churches are uncertain how to respond. As the church’s role in society is devalued and Christian leaders are marginalized from the mainstream of

decision making, identity questions loom large. “Who are we as Christ’s church in this society?” “What is our role?” “How do we serve?” “How do we proclaim God’s Word to people who seem increasingly indifferent to its saving message?”

Tennent identifies two responses by churches in America to this crisis: (1) compromise and (2) entertainment. Compromise is the price tag mainline Protestant churches pay in the hope of preserving a seat at the table of cultural relevance. Having long enjoyed a privileged position at the center of Western culture and decision making, they are desperate not to lose their influence in society. Postmodernism, however, has steadily chipped away at the credibility of churches by challenging their most essential and valuable asset, the “objective truth claims” of the Bible, especially the dual realities of (1) sin as defined by God’s natural and revealed Law (Rom 3:19, 23) and (2) salvation as found in no place, practice, or person other than the crucified and risen Son of God, Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12). “[The] scandalous particularity of the Christian message [is] increasingly unacceptable to those at the center of the culture.”⁶ Tragically, many churches are choosing to compromise, even abandon, the essential truths of historic (creedal) Christianity rather than be marginalized by the cultural gate keepers of American society.

Tennent notes that many evangelical churches in America were equally unprepared to meet the challenges of postmodernism. While they were unwilling to compromise the essential truths of the Bible, they were equally unwilling to be culturally marginalized. They opted instead for packaging biblical teaching in a worship format that was practical, user-friendly, and culturally relevant. Tennent characterizes their approach as “entertainment,” and while it may be a sweeping overgeneralization, he put his finger on the primary concern:

[The] evangelical churches were just as unprepared to respond to the collapse of the cultural center as the mainline Protestants. They have not known how to respond to the loss of confidence in the gospel in many of their youth, who are growing up in a relativistic, pluralistic, entertainment-oriented culture. Many members of evangelical churches, who had been joyfully ushered into the church on a kind of minimalistic basis, remained poorly equipped theologically and were no longer convinced that those without Christ are lost. Evangelicals have not been immune to the general cultural malaise. They were ill equipped for the robust catechesis (theologically and experientially) that was required to counteract the wider cultural attitudes.⁷

A Lutheran Response

Engraved on the cornerstones of any number of LCMS churches are the words, “Evangelical (Ev.) Lutheran Church of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession (UAC).”

These two words—Evangelical and Confessional—form the essential building blocks of Lutheran DNA and well position Lutheran Christians for engaging the post-Christendom world with the Gospel. In short, they call Lutherans to their missionary vocation, faithfully following their missionary Lord into the world (Mt 28:18–20).

Lutheran theology and practice centers in Article IV of the Augsburg Confession (AC), entitled “Concerning Justification”:

Furthermore, it is taught that we cannot obtain forgiveness of sins and righteousness before God through our own merit, work, or satisfactions, but that we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God out of grace for Christ’s sake through faith when we believe that Christ has suffered for us and for his sake our sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us. For God will regard and reckon this faith as righteousness in his sight, as St. Paul says in Romans 3[:21–26] and 4[:5].⁸

As the centerpiece of Lutheran theology (Material Principle), this article serves as the interpretive lens⁹ through which Lutherans read the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions and apply them to their everyday life and ministry. To maintain our posture as Lutheran Christians in this post-Christendom era, it is essential that we take note that Article IV rests entirely on the missionary character and purpose of the Triune God (Jn 3:16–17). The Father *sent* His Son into the world to bear through His death the entire punishment of God’s judgment against our sins (AC III, IV). On the basis of Jesus’ sacrifice alone, God has pardoned us and declared us right with Him. He offers these gifts to all people freely, to be received through faith when we believe that our sins are forgiven for Christ’s sake (AC IV). Furthermore, the Father and the Son *send* the Holy Spirit into the world to create this saving faith where and when it pleases Him (AC V). The Lutheran confessors noted that the Holy Spirit does not float immaterially out in space somewhere, but anchors Himself to the Gospel as it is proclaimed throughout the world. “So faith comes from hearing and hearing through the word of Christ” (Rom 10:17). St. Paul’s great missionary questions follow naturally and necessarily from these articles of faith, “But how are they to call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?” (Rom 10:14–15)

This confession of the “Mission of God,” including its divine agency and universal dimensions, distinguishes Lutheran Christians from other Christian churches and provides them a sound, unambiguous understanding of who they are and what they are about in the present age. Distinct from those Christians who teach that we must first seek God in order to find him, Lutherans hold that God alone acts in seeking, finding, and saving us (divine monergism). He came to us; He died in our place; His Spirit works faith in our hearts through His external Word and Sacrament.

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Lutherans cling to the confidence that our right standing with God is alien to us. That is, it's not of our making. Rather, it's a pure gift of God, without our energy or work.

Simultaneously, Lutherans confess the universal dimension of God's Mission: "[God our savior] desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:3–4). That distinguishes Lutherans from Christians whose interpretation of the Bible limits the scope of those God would save. Lutherans insist on the universality of God's grace in Christ. They evangelically ask the great dual questions, (1) "How can we be sure that God justified *us* if He did not justify all people everywhere in Christ?" and (2) "How can we be sure that our faith sufficiently grasps the salvation God offers in Christ if it is a product of our own human pursuit and sincerity?" The doctrine of justification by grace through faith is hollow if it does not assert the missional character and work of God who loved the world so much that He personally pursues it in His Son, Jesus Christ, who died for the sins of the whole world and whose love and forgiveness always come to all people as a gift, not a reward. Lutheran faith stands solely and securely on these missional assertions—God alone and God for all.

The necessity of lifting up the missionary nature of Lutheran doctrine has never been more critical than now. Over the seventeen centuries of Christendom, churches and pastors grew to assume (correctly or incorrectly) that the Christian church played an essential role in the mind of the general population; and, therefore, "going to church" was part of the normal pattern of life. More recently, particularly in the years following World War II, American church leaders assumed that the general American culture shared the church's value that Christian worship is a basic building block of our life and society. Believers and nonbelievers alike were drawn to worship by the "natural law" operating in creation "that [all mankind] should seek after God in the hope that they might . . . find him" (Acts 17:27). While the U. S. Constitution forbids the promotion of any religion over another, the American culture gave the Christian church a virtual monopoly on the "seeking after God" options. Lutherans did not have to *actively* consider the missional nature of their confessional theology. They could posture themselves as the confessional voice within the greater "Christian culture," attracting religiously leaning people to the pure Gospel. Since the pure Gospel was proclaimed in worship services, Gospel proclamation outside the church need only attract people to what was going on inside the church. As Tennent points out, "Because Christianity is part of the prevailing plausibility structure and lies at the center of all public discourse, evangelism occurs passively. It is assumed that citizens grow up as Christians"¹⁰ and are looking for opportunities to be a part of the life of the church.

As the phrase "post-Christendom" suggests, those days are gone. Our American culture no longer points people to the Christian church to find the answers to their spiritual questions and longings. It is neutral at best, even antagonistic, to the church's claim that it is the keeper of God's objective truth. Contemporary culture

increasingly questions the notion that there is even such a thing as objective truth. Lutheran Christians should not be surprised or disappointed to find that people are not seeking the church in their spiritual meanderings. The Lutheran Confessions teach plainly that humankind is “unable by nature to have true fear of God and true faith in God” (AC II). If there is any seeking and finding to be done, it is God alone who must do it. More than ever, the Lutheran understanding of the broken nature of people and the missionary nature of God must inform our (the LCMS) self-understanding as a confessional church and our engagement with the world.

Confessional Significance

In his lifelong endeavor to call Christians of the Reformed tradition to their missionary vocation, Dr. Donald McGavran raised the need to pen new confessions that responded to the human predicaments of the twentieth-century world, particularly the billions of people still unreached by the Gospel.¹¹ By request, Dr. John Kromminga, then president of Calvin Theological Seminary, responded with an insightful article on the need and purpose of confessional writings. He identified three specific roles confessions play in the life of churches be they Reformed or Lutheran.

A confessional document as usually understood may be any or all of three things: (1) a witness to the world concerning the beliefs held by the church; (2) a teaching instrument for instruction of church members in those beliefs; and (3) a test of the orthodoxy of the members, particularly those entrusted with propagating and defending these truths.¹²

These three roles apply well to the Lutheran Confessions. The majority of the Book of Concord, including The Augsburg Confession, its Apology, the Smalcald Articles of Luther, and the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope were intentionally written for evangelical witness and apologetic defense of the true Gospel before the entire Roman Catholic Church. The Lutheran church fathers make clear the intention of their confessions in the Preface to the Book of Concord:

In these last days of this transitory world the Almighty God, out of immeasurable love, grace, and mercy for the human race, has allowed the light of his holy gospel and his Word that alone grants salvation to appear and shine forth purely, unalloyed and unadulterated out of the superstitious, papistic darkness for the German nation, our beloved fatherland. As a result, a short confession was assembled out of the divine, apostolic, and prophetic Scripture. In 1530 at the Diet of Augsburg it was presented in both German and Latin to the former Emperor of most praiseworthy memory, Charles V, by our pious and Christian predecessors; it was set forth for all estates of the Empire and was disseminated and has resounded publicly throughout all Christendom in the whole wide world.¹³

It is significant to note that of the three confessional purposes identified by Tennent the Lutheran fathers regarded as primary their evangelical witness to the world. They desired and intended that all peoples everywhere hear and believe the true Gospel and disseminated their confession accordingly. Understanding the evangelistic or missionary purpose of their confession is necessary for the proper application of the pedagogical and norming purposes of the confessions. The confessions serve no greater purpose than proclaiming the true Gospel of Christ for the eternal salvation and comfort of broken sinners.

This evangelical spirit underlies the two catechisms of Luther and the Formula of Concord. Upon seeing the deplorable condition of the faith life of the Evangelical¹⁴ Christians and their pastors, Luther wrote both the Small and Large Catechisms. He understood the need to provide consistent Christ-centered teaching on the chief doctrines of the church and to provide evangelical tools for parents and pastors to disciple their children and parishioners in the true faith. Years later, the Reformers drafted the Formula of Concord, both the Epitome and the Solid Declaration, in order to bring Christian unity to the Evangelical churches divided over key doctrinal concerns. The Formula, as well as the other Confessions, served the ecumenical purpose of keeping the churches in the unity of the true faith and of norming the teaching and practice of the pastors and churches according to the saving Gospel.

The importance of these three confessional functions has not waned in the almost five hundred years since their writing. In fact, they become an ever-increasing aid to Christian churches called to proclaim God's Word in and to a postmodern world. They aid the missionary task by first sharply defining the church's essence and purpose in this world by the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ, including the divine intention that all be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. Secondly, they recognize the need for the comprehensive discipleship of Christians in the Gospel, both old and young, equipping them to live "sober-mindedly" in this chaotic "no truth" world (1 Pt 1:13), to honor Jesus Christ as Lord, and to speak gently and respectfully to non-Christians of the hope that lies within them (1 Pt 3:15). Thirdly, they gather Christian churches together around the true Gospel, mustering and focusing their energies on the clear evangelistic proclamation of Christ crucified. Fourthly, they serve as a solid launching pad from which to address questions facing the church and the world today. Kromminga writes,

[There] is a comprehensive crisis faced by the church in today's world. It is the secularization of society, a secularization which has pervaded not only politics, economics, education, science, and the like, but also man's understanding of his own nature and destiny, his hopes, his aspirations, his values. . . . The crisis is comprehensive in its geographical scope. . . . [It] is comprehensive theologically. . .

. . . The church's response to the modern crisis should indeed be a missionary response. But behind and beneath this response there must be a great rallying of forces and a clarification of issues. This must take place in some way. In whatever way it takes place, it will be a confessional activity of the church. But the best way to gather the scattered efforts and undergird a positive Christian address to the world is in a confession which faces underlying issues.¹⁵

Retaining an Evangelical Center

The leaders and congregations of the LCMS, with our strong commitment to the Lutheran Confessions, have the ability and opportunity to avoid the pitfalls encountered by other Christian churches that have wrestled with their purpose and place in post-Christendom. The confessional subscription required of all LCMS congregations and rostered workers helps steel us from the dual sirens Tennent identified: theological compromise or shallow discipleship. In fact, the LCMS has responded to the postmodern crisis with an increased emphasis on the confessional fidelity of its pastors and teachers and thorough catechesis of its members. In our zeal to remain faithful to the Lord and His church, however, LCMS churches and leaders may fall prey to a trap equally dangerous to those identified by Tennent—losing our evangelical center and purpose. Kromminga observed regarding the evangelical function of confessions,

The element of witness to the world usually seems to enjoy its greatest prominence when a confession is first written and adopted. This is because a confession is ordinarily produced in response to some crisis on which the church must take a stand. But as time goes by and the particular crisis fades into the past, the accent tends to fall more and more on the second and third functions of a confession.

A confession, thus, is a living document whose role in the church varies with the passage of time and with changing circumstances. It may retain its full value as a teaching and testing device, but its freshness and spontaneity are in direct proportion to the imminence of the crisis to which it is addressed.¹⁶

Kromminga's observation alerts us to a grave concern. When the evangelical purpose is no longer the driving force of a church's confession, the teaching and norming functions of the confessions become twisted, curved in on themselves. "Confessional" displaces "evangelical" as the primary descriptor of Lutheran churches as the priority shifts from proclaiming the true Gospel before the world to preserving the true Gospel for its own members.

This danger is especially real as Christendom collapses. Faithfully following St. Paul's admonition, confessional church leaders need to position themselves to

protect their members from the vicious attacks mounted against the Christian faith and its values. “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood” (Acts 20:28).

They err, however, when they assume that protection assumes a defensive posture and that protecting doctrine is the primary function of a confessing church. Adopting a besieged mentality compels them to retreat from the unbelieving world into their ecclesiastical stronghold. Instinctively, faithfulness seems to require the thickening and sharpening of the church’s walls in order to protect itself and its confession from the assaults of secularism and religious pluralism. Consequently, they abandon the public square believing that the Gospel can only be proclaimed purely in those arenas in which the church retains complete and unchallenged control. That often limits their Gospel proclamation to the confines of their own sanctuaries—far from the ears of those who have not yet heard.

The Lord Jesus warned his New Testament church of this danger in its encounter with anti-Christian forces. His warning needs to be sounded again in our day and age.

To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: “The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands. ‘I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name’s sake, and you have not grown weary. But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.’” (Rev 2:1–4)

The resurrected Jesus, as Lord of the Church, addressed seven churches of Asia Minor, giving specific encouragement, rebuke, and admonition, calling them to remember who they were as His own and what they were to be about in a world hostile to the Gospel. He began with the church at Ephesus. Louis Brighton, in his commentary on Revelation, suggests that Ephesus may have been the oldest or foremost church of the seven and as such is addressed first.¹⁷ Within the priority of order, however, stands the significance of what the Lord commended and admonished, not only for Ephesus but for all churches: their faith and love.

The Lord commended the Church at Ephesus for its faithfulness in doctrine and practice. Doctrinal fidelity is essential for all who would follow Him and animates the confessional subscription of LCMS congregations, pastors, and teachers, “*If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free*” (Jn 8:31). In the Lord’s mind, however, love cannot—and therefore must not—be separated from doctrine. Thus, Ephesus’ loss of its “first love” became the locus for all manifestations of unfaithfulness.

“You have left your first love” (2:4) is the chief sin, from which all the others mentioned in the following six letters evolve and result. How the church had left her first love is not mentioned, but the sins and failings mentioned in the six following letters indicate what she had done to manifest her loss of it.¹⁸

Interpretations differ on the intended meaning of the word “first” as the modifier of “love” in this passage. Is it temporal, referencing the love that marked the Ephesian Christians in their earliest days? Or is it positional, that is, is it referring to a kind of love that exceeds all others? St. John’s ability to use the same word to mean more than one thing at the same time suggests that both interpretations are possible. Both interpretations depend on St. John’s identification of God alone as the author of true love:

In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. (1 Jn 4:9–11)

God’s love is “first” in two ways. First, it precedes all other love: “We love because he first loved us” (1 Jn 4:19). Secondly, it exceeds all other love both in its scope and depth. God loves the entire world (Jn 3:16). Furthermore, He loves all the peoples of the world even as they remain His enemies (Rom 5:10). “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends” (Jn 15:13) and again, “But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8). God’s “first love,” therefore, is missional. It cannot be stated more simply or clearly: “God so loved the world” (Jn 3:16). Jesus’ call to radical faithfulness (Rev 2:10) requires an unadulterated love for His Word of truth and an unwavering love for His sinful world. LCMS churches, pastors, and teachers, in their desire to remain truly confessional in this present evil age, must keep the evangelical function of their confession their highest priority.

Keeping our first love requires, then, that we follow our Lord into the world rather than retreat from it. Jesus taught His disciples to face the forces of darkness without fear or compromise, believing that He builds His Church at the very “Gates of Hell,” which cannot prevail against Him (Mt 16:13–23). As much as the world’s growing hostility toward the church tempts us to feel besieged, confessional Christians must not surrender to its deception. No powers in the heavens or on the earth are able to shut the door on the Gospel’s proclamation. Only God can do that (Rev 3:7). Jesus didn’t teach that the world’s hostility threatens the Gospel; He taught the exact opposite. He taught that the Gospel thrives amidst the antagonism of the non-Christian world. In fact, by its very nature, the Gospel specifically comes to those hostile to its message: “while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8).

As evangelical Christians of the Lutheran Confessions, we are blessed to build our theology, and therefore our action plan in this world, squarely and exclusively on the “Theology of the Cross.” That theology confesses that our Lord Jesus was rejected by the world, condemned to death, and crucified in the public square. Rather than closing the door for the Gospel, the world’s hostility against the Lord opened it for all peoples. God not only anticipated this world’s hostility in His salvation plan; He harnessed it for His divine purposes.

Lutherans need to follow His lead. Rather than falling back to a defensive position, envisioning that our engagement with the postmodern world takes place at the gates of the church, we need to champion a strong missional posture, where we engage the world at its gates with the Gospel. Our Lutheran fathers praised God that in “these last days of this transitory world” Almighty God “allowed the light of his holy gospel and his Word that alone grants salvation to appear and shine forth purely, unalloyed and unadulterated out of the superstitious, papistic darkness.”¹⁹ Their confidence in the powerful Word of God gave them the courage needed to proclaim to the world the evangelical message of God’s love for all in Jesus Christ. Fortified by this same Word and the testimony of their lives we, by God’s grace, may do the same.

Endnotes

¹ Timothy C. Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions: A Trinitarian Missiology for the Twenty-first Century* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2010).

² Assuming the complete collapse of Christendom overstates the matter. Christendom, with its roots in the Roman Catholic Church, continues to enjoy great cultural and social significance in Latin America, including Latin American churches here in the United States. The collapse of Christendom is most keenly felt among churches born in Northern Europe, particularly of white Protestant traditions.

³ Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions*, 18.

⁴ “The institutional church” must be understood as distinct from the “One Holy Christian Church.” The institutional church is a sociological entity in which the true Church of Christ on earth resides (Augsburg Confession, Art. VII). The institutional church as we know it may fade; however, Christ’s Church will not. Despite the raging of human rulers and nations against the Lord and His Church, Jesus reigns over all things for all times (Psalm 2). Furthermore, we are assured that Jesus’ personal reign will continue unabated until His last enemy—death itself—has been destroyed (1 Corinthians 15).

⁵ Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions*, 25.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁸ Augsburg Confession, IV in Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, ed., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. Charles Arand, Eric Gritsch, Robert Kolb, William Russell, James Schaaf, Jane Strohl, Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 38, 40.

⁹ In his German translation of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Justus Jonas highlighted the hermeneutical role the article on “Justification by grace through faith” plays in understanding the Scriptures by adding the following to Article IV: “which is especially useful for the clear, correct understanding of the entire Holy Scriptures, and alone shows the way to the unspeakable treasure and right knowledge of Christ, that alone opens the door to the entire Bible.” Apology to the Augsburg Confession IV in Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 121.

¹⁰ Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions*, 20.

¹¹ Donald McGavran, “A Missionary Confession of Faith,” *Calvin Theological Journal*, Vol. 7 (Nov. 1972), 135–145.

¹² John H. Kromminga, “The Shape of a New Confession,” *Calvin Theological Journal*, Vol. 7 (Nov. 1972), 149.

¹³ Preface to the Book of Concord in Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 5.

¹⁴ “Evangelical” was the preferred self-designation of the Lutheran Reformers in the sixteenth century.

¹⁵ Kromminga, “The Shape of a New Confession,” 156–157.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 149–150.

¹⁷ Louis A. Brighton, *Revelation* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 59–60.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹⁹ Preface to the Book of Concord in Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 5.