




Reformed Pulpit and God's mission: 'Solae Doctrine' to *missio Dei*

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Abstract

The five *Solas* of the Reformation, *Sola Scriptura*, *Sola Fide*, *Sola Gratia*, *Solus Christus* and *Soli Deo Gloria*, harmoniously or correspondingly affirm the central position of God in the work of salvation (*missio Dei*). The conceptualization of the *missio Dei*, which grew out of the 1952 International Missionary Council (IMC) reasoned on the basis of *Solae* doctrines, equally points to the central role of God in the work of salvation. Although the centrality of God in the work of salvation is consistently reflected through the *Solae* doctrine, and thus through understanding of the *missio Dei*, such consistency is seldom associated with the placement of the Reformed pulpit. To this end, this article draws on the available literature to show the doctrinal consistency reflected in the *Solae* teachings and the conceptualization of the *missio Dei* in relation to the placement and outlook of the Reformed pulpit. Consequently, this paper concludes that the Reformed tradition, encompassing the *Solae* doctrines, the conceptualization of the *missio Dei*, and its attitude toward the pulpit, harmoniously reflects the central role of God in the work of salvation. Within the Reformed knowledge space, this article thus makes a contribution as it discusses the placement of the Reformed pulpit in accordance with the *Solae* doctrines and the *missio Dei*, expressing the centrality of God in the work of salvation.

Keywords: *Missio Dei*, *Sola Scriptura*, *Sola Fide*, *Sola Gratia*, *Solus Christus*, *Soli Deo Gloria*, Reformed Pulpit,

Introduction

When Martin Luther (1483–1546 CE) was nearly struck by lightning while riding to university on July 2, 1505, he feared death and divine judgment, at which he swore that he would be a servant of God if his life saved would devote himself to become a monk. Thus, after joining the Augustinian monastery in Erfurt and subsequently being ordained a priest, he suffered from a crippling spiritual anxiety imposed on him by the Catholic tradition against which he discovered the core teachings of the Reformation. The core doctrines of the Reformation, including the so-called five *Solas*, arose out of a rejection of what Luther and others saw as godless, deceitful doctrines and continue to shape the Reformed tradition today. The three pillars of Reformation teaching: *Sola Scriptura*, *Sola Fide* and *Sola Gratia* form the theological basis on which Reformed theology is built. Furthermore, both *Soli Deo Gloria* and *Solus Christus*, although sometimes excluded from the traditional list, became equally part of the central tenets of Reformation theology. The five *Solas*, therefore, not only form the foundation upon which the Reformation was built, but are also the fundamental elements that mark the quality and authenticity of the Reformed preaching.

A pulpit, which generally refers to an elevated enclosed platform from which the Word of God is conveyed, is commonly used in religious settings and has a history dating back to ancient



times. The general reference to a prototype of church pulpit appears in the Old Testament as *bima* (בִּימָה) in the book of Nehemiah, where Ezra the scribe is said to have stood upon it at the city gate to read the law of God (Nehemiah 8:4). This form of pulpit (ancient Greek *bēma* βῆμα) is also mentioned as the elevated seat of the judge as described in several instances of the New Testament (Matthew 27:19; John 19:13), and as the elevated seat of the Roman emperor (Acts 25:10; Romans 14:10). According to early Christian literature, ninth-century Christian churches often had two desks, called ambos, one for reading the Gospels and the other for reading the Epistles (Hillenbrand, 1985:37; Marinis, 2014:90-91). In the 13th century, as preaching gained prominence and became an institutionalized practice in the Christian churches of medieval Europe, so-called pulpits were installed in most church buildings (Roach, 2014:83). However, the first mention of the term 'pulpit' seems to be in the Epistles of Cyprian (Epistle XXXIII), where it is the tribunal of the Church reserved for confession, reading the commandments and the Gospel of the Lord.

Although the use or handling of pulpits vary across contexts, traditions and even Christian denominations, such is not the case in most Reformed churches. The handling or placement of pulpits in most reformed churches, often than not, is done submissively to the Reformation founding teachings or in accordance to the expressions of Reformed teachings. Reformed pulpits are often elevated at the center of the church symbolically to represent the centrality of God in the whole life of the church. In other words, the central placement of this pulpit and its elevation essentially expresses the symbolic centrality and grandeur of God's mission in the world. Not only that, the elevation and centralization of the reformed pulpit enables a reformed preaching which, in line with its founding teachings, to constantly underscores the centrality of God in the work of salvation (*missio Dei*). In other words, the central placement of the Reformed pulpit, and the sermon delivered from it by a Reformed minister, is a symbolic reminder that God plays a central role in the work of salvation (*missio Dei*). To this end, the work of this study examines the way in which the Solae teachings, expressed through the use of a Reformed pulpit, intellectualize the centrality of God in the *missio Dei*.

Pulpit and Preacher

The word pulpit comes from the Latin term: '*pulpitum*' which means a platform or stage from which the law or the Word of God could be publicly read for the people. In most cases, the traditional pulpit is positioned well above the surrounding area for reasons of audibility and visibility. In other words, the raised platform essentially helps carry the voice further and provides excellent visibility amidst the gathered crowd. In its broadest sense, the pulpit is mentioned in the Old Testament in the book of Nehemiah, with the scribe Ezra climbing onto the wooden pulpit specially made for the reading of the Law (Torah of God) to the tribes of Israel in what was then restored Jerusalem (Nehemiah 8:4). Although the New Testament makes no precise mention of the physical pulpit, there are instances encompassing preaching in the context of a gathered crowd. An example of this is found in Acts where, or at least as suggested in Acts 1:12-14, the apostle Peter may have been speaking to the crowd from the higher prominent level of the upper room (*avayarov* in Mark 14:15 or *ὑπερῶον*, Acts 1:13). From this point it can be inferred that the disciples, led by the apostle Peter, left said upper room to see or make contact with the crowd that had gathered there for the feast (Acts 2:1-4, 6-11). Furthermore, while the focus of this passage is certainly the content of Peter's message, the possibility that he delivered such a talk while standing in a pulpit-like position cannot be ruled out with certainty. Beyond biblical origin, however, the exact earliest mention of this word is in Epistle XXXIII of Cyprian of Carthage (250 CE) in connection with the abuse of ordination. Cyprian writes this letter from his sanctuary during the Decian persecution, praising the steadfastness of Celerinus in his creed stating:

When this man, beloved brethren, came to us with such condescension of the Lord, illustrious by the testimony and wonder of the very man who had persecuted him, what else behooved to be done except that he should be



placed on the pulpit, that is on the tribunal of the church; that, resting on the loftiness of a higher station, and conspicuous to the whole people for the brightness of his honor, he should read the precepts and gospel of the Lord, which he so bravely and faithfully follows? Let the voice that has confessed the Lord daily be heard in those things which the Lord spoke.

Since the pulpit was already considered a suitable platform at that time (3rd century) from which the Word of God was to be heard and a solemn confession made, its sanctity cannot be questioned. On the surface, therefore, one can imagine that even then there was a belief that whoever stood in the pulpit made a commitment to completely renounce themselves and depend entirely on God. The broad significance of this elevated platform was so that the one on it could be elevated slightly higher, be seen (visibility) and heard (audibility) by those listening, particularly prior to or in the absence of modern audio equipment. On this very high platform the Word of God is audibly expressed or expounded by one qualified in large part by solid training and core teachings. Consequently, or at least depending on tradition, in many Reformed and Evangelical Protestant denominations the pulpit is generally placed in the front center of the church and its use is reserved for the ordained minister. In the context of Nehemiah as mentioned above, the one person to take the great task of expounding the Law of God to the people, the one learned or able to undertake such a weighty task was none other than Ezra. As shown at Ezra 7:10, he was best qualified because he had prepared his heart to seek, do, and teach the law of God. In relation to the Reformed minister, the Reformed minister must be endowed with the *Solae* teachings at all times, just as Ezra carried the law of God in his heart (Ezra 7:10), or at least as the section below seeks to demonstrate.

***Solae* Preacher**

In contrast to ancient historic churches such as the Catholic and Orthodox denominations, the Reformed tradition places a strong emphasis on the sufficiency of scripture as the ultimate authority. On the other hand, these ancient churches view scripture as playing complementary role to the holy tradition. Consequently, the five Solas not only form the basis upon which the Reformation tradition is built, but also distinguish the Reformed preacher from all other preachers. These five statements of faith are not only central to a Reformation tradition, but form the whole of Reformed theology and thus its preacher. As the father of the Reformation, Martin Luther not only recognized the sermon as a central charism of the church liturgy, but elevated it to an indispensable means of salvation (Ngien, 2018:15). The Reformed minister, aware of the early Reformers' long struggle for freedom of preaching, recognizes that preaching is more than just a privilege of speaking. The Reformed sermon is all about conveying *Sola Gratia*, *Sola Scriptura*, *Sola Fide*, *Solus Christus* and *Soli Deo Gloria* as evangelical means in the work of salvation. In other words, while other ministers of various denominations might have the benefit of enjoying what might be called free speech in their preaching, Reformed ministers' discourse is tied to or confined to the *Solae* doctrines. Reformed ministers are advocates of the *Solae* doctrine with the express mandate to teach the reformed brethren about the centrality of God in the work of salvation. Reformed ministers are commissioned to persevere in preaching the infallible Word of God about His saving grace through faith in Jesus Christ, thereby giving glory to God.

Sola Scriptura

The *Sola Scriptura* doctrine (Latin for scripture alone) constitute the heartbeat of the reformation tradition as it finds its origin in the 1517 CE within Luther's 95 theses. Luther did not only challenge the authority of the Catholic church out of or for sweet nothing, but sought to underscore the truthful authority of scripture over and against the Catholic tradition. At the heart of his challenge to the Roman Catholic church was a firm call for a return to the authority of scripture as the living word of God. Beyond long hours of prayer and fasting which imposed



in him the feeling of unworthiness to stand before God, Luther as a monk dedicated his time to the extensive reading of scripture. The realization of the exceptional authority of scripture came as the result of himself having a personal witness of the Holy Spirit after intense scripture reading. The intense reading of scripture had a profound impact on him and can be counted amongst exercises which elevated him into the spotlight of being the Reformation giant he became. The attainment of his (PhD) Doctor in Theology degree in 1512 CE was followed by the appointment as a lecturer of the Bible at the university of Wittenberg and perhaps further deepened his awakening about the authority of scripture. Consequently, it can perhaps be argued that Luther's realization of scriptural authority constituted the main aspect of his challenge to and against the Roman Catholic tradition of his time. Williams (1998) posits that medieval Catholicism placed the authority of the church or ecclesiastical office above the authority of Scripture (Williams, 1998:357). In other words, the medieval Catholic Church emphasized the church's claim to an office of authority superior to, or at best secondary to, the authority of Scripture. To this end, the early Reformers used the authority of Scripture alone (*sola scriptura*) as a rationale for rejecting the tradition that wanted the ecclesiastical office of the papacy to be secondary to the authority of Scripture.

More than anything, his 95 theses argued firmly against human authority and more in support of scripture alone (*sola scriptura*) as having exclusive authority on the question of salvation. During the debate which took place in 1519 CE at Pleissenburg Castle in Leipzig or what came to be known as the Leipzig Disputation, he relentlessly embraced the authority of scripture. He further discounted the authority of the Catholic hierarchy as he asserted: 'A simple layman armed with Scripture is to be believed above the pope or cardinal without it' (Bainton, 1978:107). The intent had never been to disregard the authority of the papacy, but to plead for the papacy to submit to Scripture to avoid conflict with its authority. Consequently, it is safe to say that *Sola Scriptura* is the core or foundation upon which all other *Solae* teachings are based. This is consistent with the assertion observed in Williams (1998) that if the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura* should fall, all other principles of the Reformation would fall on and with it (Williams, 1998:355). In other words, *sola scriptura* is not only the foundation upon which the entire Reformed tradition was founded, but also the sword against which the Reformation tradition would fail if abandoned.

When asked to recant his teachings, in 1521 CE at the Diet Worms or formal assembly presided over by Emperor Charles V, he (Luther) premised his refusal on authority of scripture arguing that he will obey such an instruction only if his teachings were found to have erred on the side of scripture. He stated: 'Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted, and my conscience is captive to the Word of God' (Bainton, 1978:182). In other words, Luther was willing to recant his argument as encompassed in the 95 theses only if they were found to have contradicted scripture. Similarly, John Calvin in his 1536 CE Institute of Christian Religion, underscored authority of scripture as overriding any human concocted church tradition even if in the name of scripture.

Sola Fide

Although *Sola Fide* (Latin for faith alone) maxim had virtually been developed prior to the reformation, it seem to have been elevated by Luther's Treaties in 1519 CE where he argued that salvation is by faith alone and not good works (Packer 2012; Roach 2018). Luther had remained somewhat troubled by the question of divine justice from as far back as his joining of the monastery in 1505 CE (Dunn, 1992:1-22). Medieval and Catholic tradition had taught that righteousness can be attained through good works (Shuger, 2008:561), which in itself leads to an unhealthy introspection that often troubles the human conscience. As recited in Dunn (1992) Luther himself expresses this inner conflict when he says: 'My situation was that, although an impeccable monk, I stood before God as a sinner troubled in conscience, and I had no confidence that my merit would please' (Dunn, 1992:1). In spring of 1513 CE while



sitting in the Black Augustinian monastery in his secluded chambers preparing for his next lessons, he encountered the Epistle of Paul to the Romans revealing that the righteousness of God comes only by faith (Romans 1:17) In addition to this, the maxim is further deepened by Romans 3:28 where Paul further asserted: 'For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law'. According to Methuen (2017) the first instance wherein Luther explicitly made mention of this verse was at Epiphany sermon of 1521 CE where he affirmed: 'we do not become godly [*fromm*] through our own works, but only through faith in Christ, as Paul says to the Romans in the third and to the Galatians in the second chapter' (Methuen 2017:160). On the basis of this verse, Luther understood that good works themselves do not determine salvation but are merely the sign of faith as the essential key for salvation (Barney, 2011:1-30). It was on the basis of this very verse that Luther at last felt somewhat liberated from the constant fear of earning the grace of God through good works and consequently used it to develop his dogma. As if repeating what became Luther's liberating understanding, Heinz (1984) formulates it: 'The believer does not need to earn anything more, but he probably needs the encouragement and comfort of knowing that God rewards – even undeservedly' (Heinz 1984:48). In other words, the focus that Luther was trying to demolish was more on the virtue of human works or righteousness in the context of salvation than on God's agency in administering justice. However, neither he (Luther) nor his followers belittled the value of good works, but rather believed that good works were the result of faith and not the other way around.

While faith arises only through the Word of God, its ultimate presence leads to good works or good works manifested as the fruit of faith (Grislis, 1986:177). Heinz (1984) explains: 'Again and again, Luther emphasizes that work is a witness to faith – that faith makes one religious, and that works demonstrate this' (Heinz, 1984:48). Consequently, Luther viewed *sola fide* as the fundamental doctrine on which the church stands and falls (Santrac, 2017:1-7). It further found clear expression in the Augsburg Confession, also known as the Augustan Confession, which was written in 1530 CE in German and Latin. This confession became one of the most important documents of the protestant Reformation confessing faith. Similarly, in 1563 the Heidelberg Catechism affirmed that justification is solemnly by faith, thereby equally cementing this maxim as the pillar of reformation (Hunsinger, 2013:256-260; Potgieter, 2013:1-10).

Sola Gratia

Sola Gratia (Latin for by grace alone) maxim underscores that the believer does not attain salvation on the account of their good works but purely as the gracious gift of God. In other words, in harmony with the above maxims, *sola gratia* posits that salvation comes to human beings not because of merits of their works but purely on the basis of God's grace. God's grace in this respect meant the undeserved good intention or favor (*favor Dei*) not toward a few with a religious inheritance, but toward all sinners. The early reformers, particularly Martin Luther and early reformers such as Philipp Melancthon and Huldrych Zwingli who followed his teachings, came to this doctrine recognizing that the Catholic tradition of the time thrived on the manipulation of believers in the name of good works. In other words, he opposed the pious tradition, based largely on the corruption of presenting people's good works as currency with which to buy salvation. Paul had also affirmed this in his letter to the Romans, in which he stated succinctly and in detail that salvation was due solely to the grace of God and was certainly not based on human works or human choices (Romans 9:15-16, 22-23). In his 1525 CE *Bondage of the Will* as quoted in Ortlund (2021), Martin Luther explained this doctrine in an excellent manner stating: 'But no man can be thoroughly humbled until he knows that his salvation is utterly beyond his own powers, devices, endeavours, will, and works, and depends entirely on the choice, will, and work of another, namely, of God alone' (Ortlund, 2021:38).

The Synod of Dort, composed of Dutch delegates who met in the city of Dordrecht in 1618–1619, marched in the shadow of the early reformers by discounting good works and equally



affirming the grace of God as the source of salvation (Foster, 1923; Milton, 2005; Rohls, 2005). Article seven focusing on the question of election state: 'Those chosen were neither better nor more deserving than the others, but lay with them in the common misery'. The understanding here is that God alone accomplished the work of salvation based on His grace (*Sola Gratia*), but human beings are only to contribute to the realization of salvation through faith (*Sola Fide*) in Jesus Christ (*Solus Christus*). The sovereign grace of God alone is the standard by which salvation is preserved and consequently granted to all whom God chooses regardless of merit.

Solus Christus

Solus Christus or *Solo Christo* (Latin for Christ alone), consistent with the Solas discussed above, affirms the centrality of God incarnate (Jesus Christ) as the sole Redeemer through whom believers are to receive salvation. To the extent that every Solae doctrine discussed above points in one way or another to Christ's eternal presence in the work of salvation, *Solus Christus* is essentially at the very centre of all other Solas. Wellum (2015) puts it more profoundly: '*Solus Christus* stands at the center of the other four solas, connecting them into a coherent theological system by which the Reformers declared the glory of God' (Wellum, 2015:80). In this way, *Solus Christus*, or the presence of Christ in the context of salvation, remains the central pillar on which all other solas rest (Huijgen, 2017:79-104). Wellum (2015) bases such a claim on authority of scripture and goes on to say: 'The Reformers placed Christ alone at the center of their doctrine because Scripture places Christ at the center of God's eternal plan for his creation' (Wellum, 2015:81). Furthermore, salvation can only be obtained through belief (*Sola Fide*) in the atoning work of Jesus Christ alone (*Solus Christus*). In this context, atonement or work of atonement signifies Christ's birth, ministry, and death on the cross, without which salvation could never be accomplished. In other words, the birth of Jesus Christ, his life and the cross point to him alone (*Solus Christus*) as the intermediary without whom the work of salvation could not be realized or fulfilled. As a result, not only is the person of Jesus Christ at the center of the history of salvation, but also the facets of his work of atonement, which includes his birth, his earthly ministry, and his death on the cross.

These profound facets express at the highest level that Christ alone (*Solus Christus*) is the substance and heart of the work of salvation (*missio Dei*). Likewise, the early reformers acknowledged Jesus Christ alone as the source of salvation and rejected the bestowal of the papacy and the Catholic Church as responsible for dispensing salvation (Root, 2001:24-27). Luther himself did not mince his words in his sermon on the Gospel of John, but consistently emphasized that the church should follow in the footsteps of John the Baptist and point to Christ alone (*Solus Christus*) as the source of salvation. Ngien (2018) argued that Luther understood that no ordinary mortal would enable the transmission of salvation unless the Son (Jesus Christ) alone revealed salvation as God's gift to sinners (Ngien, 2018:15-16).

Soli Deo Gloria

Sola Deo Gloria (Latin for Glory to God alone), while included somewhat later in the traditional list of Solae teachings, represents the comprehensive summary that in many ways accentuates the focus of the four teachings discussed above. Consequently, or at least as some have tried to explain, *Soli Deo Gloria* picks up on the fact that all previous Solae doctrines glorify God as the sole source of salvation. The early reformers themselves, at least in the works of Martin Luther and John Calvin, never used this expression in so many words, but over time it added the central emphasis intended by its antecedents. Actually, it can be argued that *Soli Deo Gloria* represent the somewhat concentrated beginning and end of the other four Solae doctrines. As emphasized in *Sola Scriptura*, *Sola Fide*, *Sola Gratia*, and *Solus Christus* alike, the *Soli Deo Gloria* calls for giving all credit to God alone in matters of salvation. Walking in the shadow of early reformers, this doctrine discounts human beings from the glory of attaining salvation, but emphasizes that all honor, as far as the question of salvation is concerned, should be directed to God alone at all times. Justification is the gift of God's grace



(*Sola Gratia*) as promised by the infallible Word of God (*Sola Scriptura* + *Solus Christus*) endorsing faith in Christ (*Sola Fide* + *Solus Christus*), and as such all glory belongs to none other than God alone. In the spirit of honour or glory, the Reformed pulpit is held up as the centre of all honour, so to speak, and represents the act of giving all glory to God in the work of redemption. In other words, to the extent that all preceding Solae have consistently affirmed the centrality of God in connection with salvation, ultimately all glory is bequeathed to Him alone. Consequently, or at least as the rest of this essay will show, the Solae doctrines as enshrined in the Reformed pulpit consistently bestows all the glory to God in the context of salvation.

Reformed Solae Preacher

On ascending the steps of the pulpit, the Reformed minister says a reverent and authoritative prayer, asking God to clothe him/her with nothing but His eternal Word so that he/she may become merely the mouthpiece of God's mission. This prayer is meant to invite the full and active presence of God, since he alone is able to express His infallible Word regarding the main goals of the *missio Dei*. The Reformed minister is merely a witness at the service of calling others to the divine mission of *Missio Dei* (Guder, 1985). In other words, such a minister remains only an agent of God's mission, or at best God's mouthpiece in the apostolic mission (Citron, 1955:395-405). This means that right in front of the pulpit the Reformed minister fully perceives the divine sovereignty in the context of mission and right there confesses own feebleness (Packer, 2008). The understanding at this point is that the minister in human form is neither sufficient, worthy nor wholly competent to speak the Word of God, but rather represents a mere vessel through which God will speak His own Word. In addition, Reformed ministers understand that the space they will occupy is far too sacred and that it is therefore necessary to place oneself in the hands of God. Luther's Sacristy prayer reflects this very clear:

Lord God, you have appointed me as a pastor in your Church, but you see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon your Word. Use me as your instrument — but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all. Amen. (Janke, 1999)

Above all, this prayer is a tribute to God's supreme authority and self-sufficiency, especially when it comes to preaching His infallible Word. In other words, one who recites such a prayer recognizes that the Scriptures alone (*Sola Scriptura*) constitute supreme authority, possessing within itself the infallible truth that no ordinary person can offer. Hence the Reformed minister takes the Reformed pulpit knowing that from such a holy platform the true Word of God is to be preached without error by God Himself. Such a minister understands that Scripture is the infallible Word of God and subjects all speaking and hearing to the authoritative orders of the Word. This then explains why the Reformed minister is taught exegesis skills and encouraged to study the Scriptures quietly in order to avoid mistakes at all costs. In other words, through full devotion to a quieter and more useful study of Scripture, a Reformed minister is able to avoid ill-preparation and poor preaching. This is to ensure that the entire life, conscience, thought and work of the Reformed minister, or at least as Luther lived it, remains deeply connected to the commandments of the Word of God as fully set forth in Scripture. Lotz (1981) confirmed this in relation to Luther and went on to concede: 'His theology is preeminently a theology of the Word and, as such, implicitly maintains the sufficient authority of that Word for the Church's faith and life' (Lotz, 1981:25). Every word uttered from the mouth of the Reformed minister in the pulpit is devoid of human pride, but rather is about bringing the preeminent Word of God to the congregation. Consequently, Reformed ministers fully understand that the



Word of God as recorded in Scripture represents the true presence of the living God speaking to His people.

Upon entering the pulpit, the Reformed minister is bound to uphold the doctrine of justification by faith in Jesus Christ by the grace of God alone. In other words, whatever is to be said from the pulpit in the name of God's Word, its theology is centered solely on faith (*Sola Fide*) in Jesus Christ. Hearers of the Word must hear from the pulpit that the only requirement for attaining justification is faith and that in its absence humanity remain lost in itself (Baker, 1985:121). Consistent with the central teaching of what Cary (2007) sees as the commonalities between Luther and Calvin, the Reformed sermon constantly emphasizes faith as the fundamental belief in Christ (the Word), without which no body of good works can bring salvation (Cary, 2007:265). In other words, from the Reformed pulpit, believers are taught in no uncertain terms that salvation is by faith in what the gospel has promised, and certainly not by works. The Reformed minister, and thereby those who have gathered to hear the Reformed sermon, inherit a belief that nothing in itself makes them the object of God's saving grace except faith alone (Santrac, 2017:1).

The Reformed minister occupying the pulpit lacks no intellectual equipment to facilitate consistent reconciliation between the five *Solas* and any theological subjects to be preached. The five *Solas*, expressing the central role of God in the work of salvation, form the core idea that articulates the main ideas that such a minister regularly preaches from the Reformed pulpit. Applying this fundamental teaching in a sermon, the reformed preacher makes it known to all who care to listen that salvation comes as a gift of God's inestimable grace and not through any perceivable human acts. The proclamation of the consciousness of grace as a framework through which the gift of salvation is to be received makes the Reformed clergyman both Paul and Luther's disciple. Santrac (2017) puts it in more precise terms: 'The article of justification and grace is the most delightful, and it alone makes a person a theologian and makes of a theologian a judge of the earth and of all affairs (Santrac, 2017:2).

A Reformed minister is always concerned to reassure the sinful consciences of believers that the grace of God has provided the blood of Christ as the sufficient price of salvation. Article 11 of the Christian Reformed Church Order asserts that, "The calling of a minister of the Word is to proclaim, explain, and apply Holy Scripture in order to gather in and equip the members so that the church of Jesus Christ may be built up." In other words, the Reformed minister has a duty to make the hearers of the Word understand that without the grace of God they are helpless, hopeless, and without prospect of salvation. The audience is constantly reminded that St. Paul said in his letter to the Ephesians: 'In [Christ] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace' (Ephesians 1:7). He further emphasised: 'For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast' (Ephesians 2:8-9). On the basis of such important Scriptures, a Reformed minister like Luther is fully aware that nothing can so comfort the heart of a sinner than to hear that the grace of God alone is the cause of salvation. Thus, *Sola Gratia*, or the emphasis on the grace of God in connection with salvation, is perhaps far more important to the Reformed preacher and as such the crucial theme characterizing the validity of their sermon.

Reformed Pulpit

As mentioned above, in other denominations such as the Catholic, Lutheran, and Anglican traditions the pulpit is mounted on the side, while in most Reformed and Evangelical protestant denominations it is mounted high in the front center of the church building. Since the main pulpit is generally reserved for the ordained minister of the Word of God in most Reformed denominations, a smaller pulpit is often provided for lay use, either mounted or placed slightly to the side or in front of the main pulpit. For this reason, or even more for doctrinal reasons, in such churches the main pulpit is considered the most sacred piece of furniture (Old,



1997:223). The elevation and central placement of the Reformed pulpit are consistent with the fundamental tenets of the Reformed tradition, particularly the five Solas discussed above. Since Reformed teachings emphasize the Word of God as the first infallible sign of the true church, it might be appropriate to begin with how teachings about the Word affect the handling of the Reformed pulpit. Luther himself, in his 1539 council and church treaties, emphasized the authority of scripture and unhesitatingly declared that the single, unbroken, and infallible mark of the church had always been the Word (George, 1993; Wengert, 2015). Accordingly, the next paragraph focuses on *Sola Scriptura*, an understanding of which further underscores the presentation of other Solas as reflected in the Reformed pulpit.

As indicated above, *Sola Scriptura* is a key principle of the Protestant Reformation that emphasizes the centrality, authority, and priority of the Word of God in the life of the church. By analogy with how the core Reformed teachings regard the Word of God as the most important aspect of the whole life of the church, they also regard the pulpit (where the Word of God is preached) as the most important piece of furniture in the church.

The work of Old (1997) underscores the idea that the pulpit enjoys a high status in most Reformed churches, noting: 'The pulpit is the central symbol of Reformed worship, and this centrality reflects the importance of preaching in the Reformed tradition' (Old, 1997:223). In other words, the importance of the Word of God in the Reformation is not only taught theoretically, but also demonstrated through the placement and viewing of the platform on which it is preached (pulpit). Just as the Word of God (*Sola Scriptura*) is given central importance, so too is the Reformed pulpit (the place from which the Word is preached) of exceptional importance. In other words, the central placement of the Reformed pulpit has important theological significance, underscoring the pre-eminence of the Word of God (*Sola Scriptura*) in the foundation of the Reformed tradition. Furthermore, the fact that the Reformed pulpit is considered the most valuable piece of furniture in the church speaks for the *sola gratia* doctrine, which assigns all honour to God alone. In other words, the fact that the Reformed pulpit is placed high in the centre of the entire church underscores the *Sola Gratia*, which in the context of salvation gives glory or exaltation to God alone. Since, according to *Sola Gloria*, glory belongs to God alone, no place or object should be so praised and cherished as the Reformed pulpit where the word of God is preached. Consequently, the Reformed pulpit features many doctrinal harmonies with the five *Solas*, glorifying the sole centrality of God in the work of salvation, as explained below. The Reformed pulpit and the theology it preaches tell the story of the centrality and exaltation of God in the *missio Dei*.

***Missio Dei* Preacher**

To the extent that the Reformed pulpit can be said to be the center of the gospel from which the true Word of God is to be preached, the pulpit can be seen more broadly as a symbol of the centrality and grandeur of God's missionary intentions. Similarly, to the extent that the Reformed pulpit marks in every respect the centrality of God's Word, which encompasses His saving mission, those who sit or stand under such a platform submit to God's mission (*missio Dei*). To this end therefore, the five *Solas* are a precept of the *missio Dei* in more ways than one, or a *missio Dei* is an afterword of the five *Solas* in more ways than one. The five *Solas* in collaboration with the *missio Dei* from the perspective of the Willingen Conference point to the central prominence of divine action in the work of salvation. In other words, both the five *Solas* and the concept of *missio Dei* point more than anything to God's commitment to attaining total salvation and the all-encompassing kingdom as the standing objectives of the *missio Dei*. Consequently, it is in the nature of a Reformed sermon to filter down to *Solae* teachings that embrace the eternal presence of God and thus His central active role in the work of salvation (*missio Dei*).

Ascending the pulpit, the Reformed minister, aware that the work of redemption belongs wholly to God, immediately emulates the sentiments of the Roman centurion: "Lord, I am not worthy,



but speak the word only' (*Sola Scriptura*) so that your congregation and the world at large shall be saved. This is because the while occupying the pulpit, they are totally immersed in, or totally subject to, the ordinances into the sending of the divine (*missio Dei*). At that point, God, perhaps similar to Jesus (God incarnate), will turn and see true faith that has never been witnessed in Israel. Therefore, the Reformed minister is aware that preaching and the pulpit are not just about telling a story, reciting a poem or making a public speech, but rather about being fully immersed in the mission of God. The fact that the Reformed pulpit is raised centrally expresses in many conceivable ways that God's mission (*missio Dei*) is above other aims and is central to human life. The Reformed minister occupying the holy pulpit consistently engages the world in God's mission through the church, in accordance with the core meaning of the five Solas. In other words, through the Reformed minister and the important pulpit they occupy, the whole world is made fully aware of the divine action in the work of salvation. In other words, the Reformed pulpit, or the theological dynamic that surrounds it, describes the story of God fully engaged in the work of salvation, the *missio Dei*. This pulpit provides a conceptual framework and a theological orientation that expresses the central role of God in the work of salvation.

Conclusion

This paper underscored the importance of the central Reformed teachings in the form of the five Solas, which, when understood in harmony with the *missio Dei* from the perspective of the Willingen Conference, proclaim and glorify the central role of God in the work of salvation. It stressed that the Reformed minister and the pulpit from which he/she preaches the Word of God similarly point to the centrality of divine action in the work of salvation (*missio Dei*). Consequently, *Sola Scriptura*, *Sola Fide*, *Sola Gratia*, *Solus Christus*, and *Soli Deo Gloria* recognize the central role of God in His plan of salvation, as does the placement of a Reformed pulpit. This means that the Reformed pulpit reflects the central position of God in the life of the church and thus also in the work of salvation in accordance with the Reformed fundamental teachings (*Solae* doctrines). Likewise, the elevation of the Reformed pulpit, or its high exalted position, represents the sovereignty of God not only in the life of the church but in the whole work of salvation (*missio Dei*). The Reformed minister on this venerated platform is relegated by the grace of God (*Sola Gratia*) to a lowly position by which only God is glorified. It can therefore be concluded that the Reformed tradition, through the *Solae* doctrines, the conceptualization of the *missio Dei* and its approach to the pulpit, harmoniously reflects the centrality of God in the work of salvation.

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