




# The *Presbyterii fidelium* representative of God's-Human Covenant in *missio Dei*

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## Abstract

The *Presbyterii fidelium* (Priesthood of the faithful or the priesthood of all believers), is an important tenet of Protestant-Reformed Christianity and the foundation upon which all Reformed ecclesiology is built. Early Reformers formulated this doctrine on the basis of Sacred Scripture (*Sola Scriptura*) affirming salvation as the grace of God (*Sola Gratia*) through faith alone (*Sola Fide*), in the divine sending work of Christ (*Solus Christus*) and consequently giving all Glory to God alone (*Soli Deo Gloria*). Although the *Missio Dei* may have been fully explored, particularly from the resulting perspectives of the 1952 Willingen IMC Conference, its God-human covenant as underscoring the priesthood of all believers is rarely rationalized. Relying on available literature, this paper defines the priesthood of all believers as anchored in *Sola scriptura*, *Sola fide*, *Solus Christus*, and *Sola gratia* to understand human participation in the *missio Dei*. While these five solas are correctly expressed within the theological framework of the teachings of Calvinism, abbreviated TULIP, they are considered here from the broad perspective of their emergence in the 16th-century Protestant Reformation. Consequently, this contribution uses the broad perspective of both the *Solae* doctrines in conjunction with *presbyterii fidelium* with expressed intention of deepening the understanding of human participation in the context of the *Missio Dei*. By enriching the field of missiology with Reformed Knowledge, this article makes a contribution as it discusses the priesthood of all believers in the context of human participation in the *Missio Dei*.

**Keywords:** *Missio Dei*, *Sola Scriptura*, *Sola Fide*, *Sola Christus*, *Sola Gratia*, *Solus Christus*, *Soli Deo Gloria*, Priesthood of All Believers,

## Introduction

The *Presbyterii fidelium* (Latin for: priesthood of all believers, or the universal priesthood), is an important tenet of Protestant Christian doctrine and the foundation upon which the ministerial order of most Reformed churches is assembled. According to Anizor and Voss (2016), the priesthood of all believers has been not only the foundation but also the strong pillar of order in most Reformed Protestant churches for over five hundred years (Anizor & Voss, 2016:11-12). As pointed out in Horton (2007), the priesthood of all believers contradicts the notion that a mere human (in the form of an ordained priest) could ever act as mediator between God and His creation (Horton, 2007:1-20). In this way, this teaching aimed to reject the unjustified distinction between priestly ordinations and lay people. In the words of Lotter and van Aarde (2017): 'The reformed tradition rediscovered the role of the laity in mission' (Lotter & van Aarde 2017:1). Similarly, Dreyer (2020) traced such emphasis back to the work of Martin Luther (1483-1546), stating: 'Luther placed much emphasis on the priesthood of believers in his rejection of the Roman Catholic differentiation between ordained clergy and laity' (Dreyer, 2020:1). In this way, this doctrine excludes human agency from the context of reconciliation between God and humanity, as though replacing or in a Christlike manner. This was in close agreement with several biblical scriptures that emphasize Christ as the only



mediator between God and His human creation (John 14:6; Timothy 2:5-6; Hebrews 9:15, 12:24). Similarly, from the perspective of the 1952 Conference of the International Missionary Council (IMC), the renewed understanding of the *missio Dei* excluded human agency from the context of salvation. Conceived in this way, a return to this important teaching will surely provide a ground-breaking orientation and a new understanding of human participation in the context of the *missio Dei*.

Properly defined, *missio Dei* or mission of God so to speak, points to the centrality of God as the primary and ultimate agent in His saving mission. However, while God undeniably remains the source and center that directs the flow of this mission, human beings are both subjects and objects for whom salvation is intended. Therefore, human being is an integral part of the *missio Dei* and is to participate with God within His grace in carrying out the work of salvation in the world. The 1952 International Missionary Council (IMC) and resulting research not only recognized the sovereignty of God in the realm of mission, but also emphasized the need for human participation in the attainment of salvation. There is ample literature on the subject of the *missio Dei*, as well as the resulting literature, which underscores the value of human participation in achieving its goals. Bosch (2017) recited Hoekendijk (1967), who suggested that the world as the scene of God's work and consequently agreed with (Schutz, 1930) that mission implies man's participation in God's existence. Consequently, for several missionary researchers such as Flett (2009), Sunquist (2013), Gorman (2015), and many others, reflects the understanding that missionary theology cannot be fully defined without including human involvement in the sending narrative. In other words, they are convinced that while mission remains God's work, man is an important partner who must live a life in harmony with God's grace in order to make possible the attainment of salvation. Consequently, it can be argued that an overwhelming portion of the missiological literature consistently accepts that God is the source of mission and, second, that human committed participation is required to achieve salvation.

Apart from Voss (2013/16), who explicitly related the priesthood of all believers to the context of the *Missio Dei*, followed by Park (2017), who considered it from 1 Peter 2:9, and van Aarde (2017), who integrated it into the description of The Missionary Church (van Aarde, 2017:1-9) such an association is lacking in the missiological literature. He (Voss 2016) approaches priesthood of all believers and *missio Dei* from the perspective of seeking unity between believers of different Christian denominations (Voss, 2016:1-65). Van Aarde (2017), on the other hand, convincingly argues that the priesthood of all believers has profound implications or a direct connection to the cause of church mission (van Aarde, 2017:2). In addition to this pioneering work, this article considers the priesthood of all believers based on the *Solae Doctrines* to further deepen the understanding of human participation in the *missio Dei*.

The aim is to harmonize human participation with the central teachings of the Reformation in the form of *Sola Scriptura*, *sola fide*, *sola gratia*, *solus Christus* and *Soli Deo Gloria* within the framework of the *missio Dei*. In other words, this paper will review the vast body of literature surrounding the Reformed doctrine of the priesthood of all believers and use it to explore what human participation in the *missio Dei* means. That is, the idea of active human participation in God's saving work dominated the Reformation in the early 16th century (Anizor & Voss, 2016:12), or manifested itself in the birth of the Reformation on October 31, 1517, and even germinated in the conceptualization of the *missio Dei* in 1952. In the words of van Aarde (2017): 'The priesthood of the believers has been central to both these traditions (Reformed and Lutheran) since the reformation and has profound implications for the missional church' (van Aarde, 2017:1). Therefore, this paper argues that the priesthood of all believers, or as it is understood in this paper's version, is a metaphorical representation of what is meant by active human participation in the *missio Dei*. Consequently, the content of this paper affirms that the priesthood of all believers calls all believers to active participation in the *missio Dei*.



## **Solae to TULIP**

Although both the five Solae and TULIP (to be defined later) share protestant Christianity heritage, their respective applications address different theological concerns. On the one hand, the five solae in the main express what one can call the broad foundational principles of the protestant movement, or upon which the protestant Christianity is found. To this end, it is important to remember that Martin Luther was the initiator of the Reformation, which John Calvin was instrumental in spreading. On the other hand however, TULIP as shall be seen in details below, outlines the key tenets of John Calvin (1509-1564), though still within the framework of the protestant foundational teachings. In other words, TULIP distinguish Calvinist beliefs in addition to the broader protestant Christianity than they can ever be used to contradict its foundational teachings. To this end, while there may be some complementary overlap in the theoretical application of TULIP and the five Solae, they each emphasize different aspects of Protestant theology through association and different aspects of Christian doctrine through unity.

The acronym TULIP represents or emphasizes the five major tenets of Calvinism, or what is also called the Doctrines of Grace. The five essential Calvinist tenets of total depravity (T), unconditional election (U), limited atonement (L), irresistible grace (I), and the perseverance of the saints (P) were summed up in the acronym and immortalized TULIP. In other words, the initials of these five sets of Calvinist doctrines are deliberately combined to form a memorable tool and pronounceable framework of Calvinist theology. Consequently, Calvinism or the Reformed tradition, has over the years become an important branch of Protestantism that fundamentally emphasizes the sovereignty of God and the authority of His Word (the Bible). Both the theological frameworks in the form of the Five Solae and the TULIP, while equally related to Protestant Christianity, have different emphases, with the TULIP focusing on the specific points of Calvinism and the Five Solae on key principles of the 16th-century Protestant Reformation. The Five Solae are fundamental to the Reformed tradition because they coherently order its evangelical mission on the basis of total trust in Scripture alone, in faith alone, in grace alone, in Christ alone, and in the glory of God alone. On the other hand, TULIP correspondingly was specifically designed to underscore the teachings of John Calvin, more so as he understood and articulated the fundamentals of the Reformed tradition. As such, the Five Solae by any interpretation precedes or gave rise to the development of TULIP.

Although TULIP has become an important summarizing tool used in underscoring key points of Calvinism, it is worth noting that it is not an invention of John Calvin himself. In other words, while this acronym exceptionally underscores his key teachings within the frame of protestant reformation, its invention came as a way of memorizing the frame Calvinism. Actually, TULIP by all indications had not been coined even during the Synod of Dort (1618-1619) where Reformed theologians, particularly of the Dutch Reformed Church, had gathered in Netherlands to counter the teachings of Arminianism. It was here where the five points were solidified into the Canon of Dort to counter the teachings of Arminianism, though without the explicit mention of the acronym TULIP. Only afterwards in 1905, Dr William H. Wail conducted a survey of leading Calvinist theologians associated with the five points of Calvinism. It was during this very year that Dr Wail heard Dr Cleland Boyd McAfee make mention of the acronym TULIP during his lecture on five points of Calvinism at the Presbyterian union of Newar, New Jersey. To this very end therefore, it is not unsafe to imagine that the acronym TULIP is likely invented by Dr Cleland Boyd McAfee if not his close friend.

On the basis that both the Solae doctrines and the priesthood of all believers existed prior to the formulation of TULIP, this essay will therefore make restrictive use of the Solae teachings in relation to the priesthood of all believers, as expressing human participation in the Missio Dei. At the same time, however, TULIP remains significant as it is viewed on the basis of its aspects that enrich the Solae teachings and deepen the understanding of the priesthood of all believers.



## Solae Doctrines

The five Solae doctrines (occasionally Anglicized to five solas), have been and remains foundational set of Protestant Reformation Christian theological teachings advocated by early reformers such as Martin Luther and John Calvin. Although these teachings were not assembled into a theological unit prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they represent the early protestant tradition which sought to define itself in a distinct fashion from the theological doctrine of the Catholic Church. Although the early reformers appear to have clearly expressed the Protestant position only in relation to three (sola scriptura, sola fide and sola gratia) of the five solae, the comprehensive interpretation of their teachings over the years has further solidified other sole doctrines. In other words, although the five solae were not systematically combined into a single entity, at least until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the early reformers seem to have used sola scriptura, sola fide, and sola gratia in conjunction. However, what is perhaps important to mention at this very juncture is that, while there is a clear unification amongst major banches of the early protestant Christianity, that does not in any way deny that they have significant difference which continue to put cracks on their wall of unity.

First, Martin Luther (1483-1546) is rightly considered the central figure as the first to champion sola scriptura, sola fide and sola gratia conjunctly in his challenge to the practices and teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. His assertion that the Bible is the sole authority for the entire Christian practices and faith without a doubt underscored sola scriptura. Conjunctly, he believed that faith alone (sola fide) and God's grace alone (sola gratia) are the only avenues or sources through which humanity is to achieve salvation. Huldrych Zwingli (1484-1531) who was his contemporary in Switzerland, similarly advocated for the supremacy of scripture (sola scriptura) in his teachings equally rejecting the Roman Catholic beliefs and practices. Not only him, but the German reformer Philip Melancthon (1497-1560) also, who by all indications was a close associate of Martin Luther, equally upheld the significance of the Solae doctrines. He believed in the authority of the Bible (sola scriptura) while at the same time emphasizing that salvation is not only the result of God's grace (sola gratia), but can only be attained through faith (sola fide).

On the other hand, or somewhat more prominently, John Calvin (1509-1564) was the prominent figure of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, who exceptionally expanded on Luther's teachings. He is rightly credited for having developed a more comprehensive system of theology underscoring the protestant reformation core teachings. As already alluded to above, what came to be called Calvins TULIP while addressing different aspects of protestant theology, has connection enriching Solae doctrines in one way or another.

Firstly, his Total depravity (T) while asserting the state of utter corruption that humanity is entrapped in as the result of the fall, at the same time underscores God's grace (sola gratia) as the source of human salvation instead of or as opposed to human merit. Second, the Unconditional election (U) further emphasizes that God's sovereignty constitutes the authority of salvation and as such is not reliant upon human merit or good works so to speak. Third, the Limited atonement (L) in many ways or correspondingly points to Christ alone as the only exclusive sacrifice that God has set apart as defining the parameter of atonement. In other words, Christ is the only exclusive or limited source of salvation without which salvation cannot be attained. Fourth, the Irresistible grace (I) aligns profoundly with sola gratia in emphasizing God's grace as a freely given gift of salvation which requires no human will or good works in facilitation of salvation.

In many ways, the irresistible grace extends God's saving grace as a gift that cannot be resisted by all humanity since all are entrapped in the state of corruption following the fall. Lastly, the Perseverance of the saints (P) underscores eternal security or safeguards salvation of all who have been saved by faith in Christ and through the grace of God. In other words,



this aspect deepens in my ways the surety or security of salvation that is gained or is to be gained by those who have faith in Christ and embraces salvation as God's irresistible gift.

### ***Presbyterii fidelium***

The *Presbyterii Fidelium*, otherwise translated as the presbyters of the faithful, is a concept that emerged from the Catholic Church during the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). That being said or being the case however, while its historical association with the twentieth century Catholic church remains indisputable, the broader concepts it represents, or at least as this paper sees it, traced back to the protestant Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In other words, what came to be understood or entertained as 'Presbyterii Fidelium' at the Catholic's second Vatican council, even if never acknowledged as such, is an acknowledgement of the wider protestant Reformation set of arguments. This is all the more so because at the heart of such arguments was, among other things, open questioning of the hierarchal structure of the Catholic Church, which centralized authority within the papacy. It then follows, though at the risk of oversimplifying matters, that by embracing *presbyterii fidelium* the catholic church was in part reforming from its centuries held tradition.

The early Protestant reformers, particularly Martin Luther and his contemporaries, emphasized the need for a translation of the Bible into the vernacular to ensure individual interpretation and personal study of the Scriptures, thus extending the priestly status to lay people. Actually, McGoldrick (1984) recited Luther as he declared in his letter to the Princes of Germany in 1520 saying: 'It is pure invention that pope, bishop, priests, and monks are called the spiritual estate while princes, lords, artisans, and farmers are called the temporal estate..... all Christians are truly of the spiritual estate' (McGoldrick, 1984:5). In other words, when Protestant reformers like Martin Luther and William Tyndale championed the translation of the Bible into vernacular languages, they replaced the authority of the Catholic priestly hierarchy as sole interpreters with a broad lay priesthood. Once what was once reserved primarily for the hierarchy of bishops and the pope is suddenly made available to all, it poses a challenge to the magisterium or authority of Catholic's hierarchy as the sole interpreters of the Bible. It should not be problematic, therefore, to insinuate cautiously that the Second Vatican Council, in taking up this phenomenon, was in many respects following the historical precedent set by the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation. *Presbyterii fidelium*, which among others emphasize active lay participation, be it in the governance of the church and in spiritual life, had been embraced or underscored by the protestant reformation centuries earlier. As such, *presbyterii fidelium* is deeply rooted or largely originated with the 16<sup>th</sup> century protestant reformation. Although one can go on and on in proving this suspicion of originality, the space of this paper is perhaps not adequate for such an exercise. However, what is important to reiterate in this regard is the argument that the term *presbyterii fidelium* was without a doubt coined by the Catholic church, but such was as good as dancing to the music of the 16<sup>th</sup> century protestant reformers.

### ***Sola Scriptura in Priesthood***

*Sola scriptura* (Latin for: by scripture alone) is a Christian theological doctrine which posits that the incarnated Word of God as recorded in the Bible remains the sole infallible source of authority for the practice of Christian faith (Mathison, 2001). Literature is replete with seminal works that explores the meanings or implications of this doctrine even beyond the scope of this paper (Greidanus, 2001; Keith, 1985). However, what is important to mention here or in relation to the aim of this paper is that, this doctrine asserts the holy scripture as the sole infallible authority constituting the body of Christian faith in its entirety (Vanhoozer, 2003:149-169). This emphasis followed the observation that the Roman Catholic Church began the virtual tradition of believing so much in the authority of the Pope and consequently the teachings that were not supported by scripture (Barrett 2016). The 16<sup>th</sup> Century reformers such as Martin Luther (Jeong, 2017:133-164), John Calvin (Kreijkes-van Esch, 2017), and



many others argued contrary to what was becoming the Catholic tradition then, that the holy Word of God as recorded in in the Bible alone should always reign supreme with ultimate authority in the practice of the Christian faith (Mathison, 2001:106). Lotz (1981) similarly posits that for Luther and others the Bible is accepted as the sole normative authority because of its apostolic testimony of Jesus Christ as the center and the eternal Word of God (Lotz, 1981:266). Defining this doctrine from the perspective of John Wesley as noted in Santrac (2013), notwithstanding his consequent drift, the threefold pathway to spiritual truth begins with scripture, and then move to reason and experience (Santrac, 2013:109). In other words, scripture alone (*Sola Scriptura*) is the fundamental starting point through which understanding of Christian faith is attained. With such arguments they, early reformers of whom John Wesley or at least notwithstanding the consequent drift, sought to underscore among others, that Christian believers ought to embrace the Bible as the only reliable source of divine revelation and never to support practices or teachings that sought to contradict such authority as contained in scripture. This recited exceptionally well by Migliore (2014) who stated: ‘the Scriptures of Old and New Testaments are the only necessary source and sufficient norm of Christian faith and life’ (Migliore, 2014:424). Although the orthodox denominations, Catholicism, and Anglicanism equally belief in the scriptural authority, they in addition consider sacred tradition, consensus of the early church fathers, and the historical teachings of the church as essential factors in shaping the Christian belief. Consequently, slightly against such inclinations, while the Reformed tradition equally accomodates the importance of sacred tradition and historical interpretation in shaping the composition of the Christian faith, it nonetheless maintains scripture as but the ultimate authority. That is, in contrast to the broad presentation of the Christian faith’s foundational principles by Orthodoxy, Catholicism, and Anglicanism, the Reformed tradition emphasizes the Bible as the sole infallible authority for the formulation and practice of the Christian faith.

The idea of *Sola Scriptura* rejects the tendency of religious leaders, such as was the case with the Catholic Pope in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, who sought to give an impression or claim authority in matters of faith. Instead, *Sola Scriptura* doctrine commissioned all believers to personally engage the scripture when seeking answers in matters of faith, and particularly the question of salvation. Lotz (1981) proposes that Luther’s *Sola Scriptura* sought to present the deep-rooted belief that the Christian church as a whole and not in part, represented a community which sustained its authenticity through having an ongoing encounter with the Holy Scripture (Lotz, 1981:258-259). Consistent with this, Migliore (2014) accentuated that *Sola Scriptura* was a defense of the Reformers against the tradition of the Roman Catholic Church, which promoted the idea that the Church represented the ultimate interpreter of Scripture (Migliore, 2014:424-425). It is on this very note that the priesthood of all believers is geared to affirming that each and every believer can read and interpret scripture as the only medium that contains the true Word of God. In other words, particularly in the sense of the priesthood, the whole community of believers exists as a product or within the framework of the infallible Word of God as contained in Scripture (Ephesians 2:19-21). This means that all believers have the priestly accreditation allowing access to the holy Word of God without having to rely on human entities such as religious leaders. In this way, while there continues to be a need for religious leaders, all believers ought to participate equally in ensuring that the Christian faith is practiced on the basis of sound doctrines. This is precisely why, as Lotz (1981) discussed, Luther assessed medieval Catholic teachings and found them littered with unreliable teachings and lacking in authenticity (Lotz, 1981:267).

Sustained by scholars such as Vanhoozer (2016), it can be said that Luther's *Sola Scriptura* opened the floodgates of scriptural interpretation in an unprecedented manner (Vanhoozer, 2016:274), which essentially expressed the priesthood of all believers and even active participation in the *missio Dei*. Consequently, *Sola Scriptura* anchored the priesthood of all believers as consisting of those with priestly status not only to consult scripture in matters of faith, but those with priestly accreditation to join the sending of God or participate in the attainment of salvation as the primary objective of the *missio Dei*.



In the light of *Sola Scriptura* and the priesthood of all believers therefore, every human being is called to participate in the divine work (*missio Dei*) to attain the total salvation. Every believer in this context, has direct access to the infallible Word of God and as such is equipped with the priestly status as they participate in *missio Dei*. Constant reliance on normative Scripture compels each individual in the priesthood to the undeniable and authoritative theology through which the goals of the *missio Dei* are assuredly attained. In this way, the priesthood of all believers is left with no choice but to submit to the commandments of Scripture as the sole oracle of God, which by its authority directs the course of mission towards the fulfillment of primary goal (total salvation). both *Sola Scriptura* and the priesthood of all believers offer every believer a priestly accreditation to personally take part in the sending of God (*missio Dei*) and ensure that its objective of total salvation is fulfilled. Participation in the *missio Dei* is therefore not meant for the few selected, nor is to be done through intermediaries of a particular priest or clergy as though some have no priestly accreditation to participate meaningfully in the work of salvation (*missio Dei*). Therefore, *Sola Scriptura* itself affirms the priesthood of all believers, or priestly participation in the *missio Dei*. Furthermore, the priesthood of believers participates in the *missio Dei*, entirely under the authority of Scripture as the only guide to attaining complete salvation.

### ***Sola Fide* in Priesthood**

The doctrine of *Sola Fide* (Latin for: by faith alone) is a soteriological Christian theological doctrine which posits that justification or salvation can only be attained through faith in Jesus Christ. There exists a wealth of literature which examines this doctrine from its origin and even far beyond the limited scope of this paper. However, perhaps what is important to mention here is that, this doctrine points to biblical teachings as having unilateral authority on the Christian faith and demands that all teachings must be rooted within the authority of scripture in order to be considered valid. This doctrine is based on Saint Paul's teaching that a person is saved not by works but by their faith in Jesus Christ (*Solus Christus*). In other words, this doctrine is purely formulated on the basis of scriptural authority (*Sola Scriptura*) which asserts beyond reasonable doubts that believers are made righteous only through faith (*Sola Fide*) in Jesus Christ (*Solus Christus*) and not by means of their works. Similar to *Sola Scriptura* doctrine as already ventilated above, *sola fide* emerged through the devoted works of the early 16<sup>th</sup> century reformers including but not limited to Martin Luther and John Calvin (Crawford, 1968:145-156). These early reformers and many others who came after them, strongly rejected the idea that people could earn salvation through good works or penance as the Roman Catholic church sought to teach. They argued opposingly that any teaching which inserted the requirement of good works or human merits as a condition for salvation effectively contradicted the authoritative teachings of the Bible or the Word of God (*Sola Scriptura*) as it were, and as such warranted strong rejection. It is important to emphasize, however, that this teaching does not seek to diminish the value of good works, but rather contradicts or reject the idea that good works are key in human salvation. In other words, without discrediting good works, it merely points out that faith alone is the only means by which salvation can be freely received. This understanding is clearly mirrored in Migliore (2014) when he states that: 'this teaching does not mean that our faith rather than our works is the way we achieve our salvation. Rather, the grace of God is freely given and is gratefully and trustingly received by faith alone' (Migliore, 2014:424).

The Word of God as contained in the Bible or as Paul outlined emphatically beyond doubts, clearly embraced faith alone (*Sola Fide*) in Jesus Christ (*Solus Christus*) as the only condition between human beings and the attainment of salvation. The Word of God as expressed in scriptures such as Romans 4:5 and Ephesians 2:10, points to salvation as a free gift of God's grace (*sola gratia*) which can only be received by all who have faith in Christ (*Solus Christus*). This is better explained by Migliore (2014) when he states that: 'Grace is not some thing but God's personal self-gift of renewed relationship with us' (Migliore, 2014:424). While good



works and obedience to the law of God continue to be warranted, on their own they do not constitute the means by which people can earn salvation. Faith in Jesus Christ alone (*Sola Fide + Solus Christus*), and by implication Christ' sacrifice on the cross alone is sufficient to bring about human salvation. On the basis of scriptural authority (*Sola Scriptura*), having faith in Christ alone (*Solus Christus*) is the bridge into salvation and as such, any teaching which gives the impression or sought to focus on meritorious works in the context of salvation ought to be rejected, thus argued Luther and others. Every believer who, in the eyes of both doctrines of sola fide and priesthood of all believers, has acquired uncompromising faith accrediting them with priestly status to form part of priesthood of believers. As such, such a faithful believer with priesthood status, need not to rely blindly upon human hierarchical authority consisting of certain individuals to access God, and thereby participate in the sending of God to attain salvation. Thus, having acquired scripturally based and priestly knowledge that persons can only be saved through faith in Christ, all believers have the priestly authority to participate confidently in the *missio Dei*.

In the light of sola fide therefore, the priesthood of all believers does not comprise of a hierarchy with a single authoritative figure, but consist of the faithful with a Priestly capability to participate in the *missio Dei*. Every believer within the priesthood has the knowledge that only through faith (*Sola Fide*), they have earned the qualification to become active agents or participants in the *missio Dei*. Consistent with Paul's theology, all believers including those considered to be ungodly (Romans 4:5), are all justified by faith and consequently have earned the right to take part in the *missio Dei*. This is precisely the point that he (Paul) sought to underscore in reference to or in mentioning that Abraham too was justified not through his works but by faith in the Lord, which essentially qualified him as one with the priestly capability to participate in God's mission towards salvation. To this he states: 'For we say that faith (*Sola Fide*) was counted to Abraham as righteousness', constituting the necessary credentials to participate actively in attaining the goals of the *missio Dei*. The take home point here is that the grace of God (*sola gratia*) enables all (priesthood of all believers) to be saved by faith (*Sola Fide*) and be made righteous enough to partake in the sending of God (*missio Dei*). Put concisely yet differently, God's grace provisioned human participation in the *missio Dei* so that all the people will form part of priesthood of all believers who will be saved by faith in Christ.

### **Solus Christus in Priesthood**

*Solus Christus* or *In Christo solo* (Latin for: in Christ alone) is a Christian theological doctrine underscoring Jesus Christ as the only mediator without whose intervention salvation cannot be obtained. There is a wealth of available literature which examines the origin of this doctrine and its dynamics far beyond the limited scope of this paper. However, given the scope of this paper, it is important to note that perhaps rightly so, this teaching is often cited as the most important element in the scheme of Sola(s) precisely because it points to Jesus Christ as the cornerstone of the whole Christian religion. This doctrine teaches that Jesus Christ is the only way by which salvation can be received as a gift of God's grace. In other words, while salvation remains forever a priceless gift of God's grace, Christ is the only means or Mediator who brings this gift of God to humankind. It underscores that Christ's birth, earthly ministry, sacrificial death, and resurrection are all integral assurance that humankind receives God's gracious gift of salvation. This doctrine was and is a central belief on which early reformers such as Martin Luther and John Calvin based their arguments against Catholic teachings. Their argument rejected the idea that a mere religious figure, whether in the form of the Catholic Pope or otherwise, should ever emerge as the authenticator of salvation, while Christ remains the only Mediator through whom salvation can be obtained. Thus, only Jesus Christ, not through any other human agency, is the only Mediator who can facilitate the realization of salvation as the gift of God's grace to humankind.

In the light of solus Christus, the priesthood of all believers invites all to have the priestly discernment of Christ as the highest Priest who alone is the source of salvation. To the extent





that those within the priesthood circle relied only on the word of God (*Sola Scriptura*) and have acquired the knowledge that through Christ only (*Solus Christus*) can salvation be attained. Rather than seeking salvation from human entities within the religious hierarchy, all believers have full access to Jesus Christ by virtue of whom salvation can be attained. By faith alone (*Sola Fide*) in Jesus Christ (*Solus Christus*) all believers are granted the priestly status to each access God's gracious gift of salvation without having to seek validation from other human entities such as the Catholic Pope. All and not some within the religious hierarchy, have equal access to God through faith in Jesus Christ who alone is sufficient to grant direct access to the gracious gift of salvation. The sacrifice at the cross as attested in scripture (*Sola Scriptura*) points to Christ (God the incarnate) who gave himself to the world or placed himself at the disposal of all, so that all believers will access salvation by virtue of having faith in him. Consequently, *solus Christus* rightly places Christ (God the incarnate) at the center of mission to salvation (*missio Dei*). In other words, the same way that *missio Dei* is giving emphasis to the centrality of God in the context of mission, *Solus Christus* affirms God the incarnate (Christ) as the central figure through whom all can be joined to the work of salvation. Now that through his birth, earthly ministry, death at the cross, and his resurrection as attested in scripture, all represent a sounding invitation for all to participate through him in the work to attain salvation. Each and every person within the priesthood circle, know very well from the word of God (*Sola Scriptura*) that the significance of the cross is that Christ gave himself to the world so that all who have faith in him (*Sola Fide*) will have full access to salvation as the gracious gift of God (*Sola Gratia*). Consequently, all (priesthood of all believers) who have faith in Christ have acquired the necessary credentials to actively participate in the work to bring salvation (*missio Dei*).

### ***Sola Gratia* in Priesthood**

*Sola Gratia* (Latin for: by grace alone) is the Christian theological doctrine expressing the deeply rooted belief that salvation is a provision of God's grace alone and as such cannot be earned through human efforts. There exists a wealth of literature which examines this doctrine from its origin and even far beyond the limited scope of this paper. However, given the limited scope of this paper, it is perhaps important to emphasize here that this teaching presents the grace of God as the framework within which salvation is found by all believers. In line with other *Sola* teachings, it affirms that the precious gift of salvation is offered to all believers by the grace of God. In other words, the gift of salvation is an unmerited favor which finds its origin within the Grace of God and it is on the basis of that grace that this gift is freely given to all believers. In conceptualizing this important doctrine, early Reformers in the persons of Luther and Calvin, reacted to the then Catholic teachings which while acknowledging the grace of God, at the same time placed undue emphasis on human merits. They argued that in accordance with the redemptive work of Jesus Christ alone (*Solus Christus*) as recorded clearly in scripture (*Sola Scriptura*) salvation is comprehended as God's act of free grace which is freely given to all who have faith (*Sola Fide*) in Jesus Christ alone. Therefore, contrary to the medieval Catholicism, the early reformers unambiguously believed that no amount of human merits will ever bring about salvation, but that salvation is only by the grace of God alone. Migliore (2014) further explains: 'As the free and unmerited mercy and forgiveness of God extended to sinners, God's grace alone is the entirely sufficient basis of the healing of the relationship between God and humanity broken by sin' (Migliore, 2014:424). In other words, no amount of human good deeds could ever reunite them with God, but only the grace of God can sufficiently provide the context in which people are reunited with God.

In the light of *Sola Gratia*, especially its affirmation that no amount of human merits can ensure one's salvation, it simply means that amongst all believers who share the priestly status in Christ, there is no special class of people whose good works can grant them salvation. In other words, in line with what is underscored by the priesthood of all believers, *sola gratia* discount the idea that there is a priestly class of people within the religious hierarchy who are more



deserving of salvation. Instead, while not discrediting the value of good works that have an obligation to perform dutifully and religiously, all within the priesthood of believers have freely earned the gracious gift of God (salvation) by virtue of their union with or faith (*Sola Fide*) in Christ (*Solus Christus*). The birth, earthly ministry, the cross and resurrection as recorded in scripture (*Sola Scriptura*), sufficiently fulfilled the priestly role of disrupting sin and as such ensuring that all stands a chance to receive God's grace of salvation. Together, both *sola gratia* and priesthood of all believers emphasise beyond reasonable doubts that all believers have a direct access to God's gracious gift of salvation which is freely given to all without limitations nor requirement of good works. Consequently, when integrated within the context of the *missio Dei*, God's mission of salvation emanates or comes as an act of love geared towards availing the gift of salvation to all human *beings* whom, on the basis of their faith in Christ (*Sola Fide + Solus Christus*), have earned the priestly status to receive salvation freely. In other words, by virtue of believer's faith in Jesus Christ, they all formed the priesthood who are the recipients of God's gracious gift of salvation and as such are well placed to fully participate in ensuring its total actualization in the world. Based solely on the grace of God, not on the basis of human deeds or their spiritual merits, all are deemed righteous enough not only to receive the unconditional gift of salvation, but also to participate freely in exposing the whole world to the ultimate goal of the *missio Dei* (total salvation).

### ***Soli Deo Gloria – missio Dei***

*Soli Deo Gloria* is a Latin theological expression often added as the fifth *Solae* doctrine to honor God alone as the source of salvation. In summary, this *Solae* postscript convey the idea that the *Solae* doctrines as a whole attribute the work of redemption to God alone. As such, the *Solae* doctrines, when read cumulatively, disregard the ecclesiastical hierarchy, and correctly give glory to God alone (*Soli Deo Gloria*), congruent with scholarship on *missio Dei*. What is emphasized in the *Soli Deo Gloria* is the understanding that since salvation comes through God alone, all glory must be given to Him alone as the sole Author of salvation. Consistent with the scholarship on the *missio Dei*, the entire network of *Solae* doctrines extols the central sovereignty of God in the work of salvation. In other words, the comprehensive interpretation of these teachings offers a unique presentation of the central role of God in His saving mission. Viewed from the perspective of the Willingen Conference, the *missio Dei* is consistent with the *Solae* doctrines as together they glorify the centrality of God (*soli Deo Gloria*) in the work of salvation. Analogous to the course of the *missio Dei*, this teaching consistently expresses the central supremacy of God and the exclusive authority that He alone exercises in the mission to obtain complete salvation. Not only that: *Sola Scriptura*, *Sola Fide*, *Solus Christus* and *Sola Gratia* unanimously underlined that God entrusts to all the priestly task of calling the whole world to actively work towards the realization of full salvation.

Human participation in the *missio Dei* is by the grace of God (*Sola Gratia*) and requires no meritorious works on the part of the participants. Belief in Christ alone (*Sola Fide + Solus Christ*) is sufficient as it is deeply rooted in the infallible Word of God in Scripture (*Sola Scriptura*). Consistent with the understanding of the *missio Dei*, every aspect of the *Solae* doctrine is designed to emphasize the centrality of Christ (God incarnate) or the supreme Word of God in the whole life of salvific mission. Through indoctrination with the *Solae* teachings, all believers within the priesthood are imbued with an attitude of utter humility that produces a degree of holiness that enables active participation in the divine act of salvation. Therefore, it can be argued that the system of *Sola* doctrines provides the solid foundation upon which missiology is built and upon which the main aims of the *missio Dei* are reflected. Furthermore, the entire system of *Solae* doctrines is not only an anchor of the *missio Dei*, but attests to the active involvement of the priesthood in the attainment of total salvation as the primary objective of the *missio Dei*.

### **Priesthood in *missio Dei***



To the extent that Reformed theology is merely the outcome or provisional outcome of covenant theology, (Vos, 1980; Horton, 2006), *missio Dei* too ought to be understood from the perspective of a covenant theology (Schirrmacher, 2017:1-83). *Missio Dei* deals primarily with God's work of salvation and is rooted in the teaching of covenant theology in every interpretation. In other words, given that the *Missio Dei* as a whole is about God's saving work in the world, it fits well into God's saving covenant with mankind. Through Christ's earthly ministry, death, and resurrection, all believers have been reconciled to God and, as such, have been empowered with priestly status to participate in His plan of salvation. In this context, or with such an understanding, Schirrmacher (2017) speaks of the priesthood as the result of the covenant of God, which secures salvation through the mediation of Jesus Christ. He consequently writes: 'God's mission and God's covenant show that Christianity is a religion of salvation history and of historical advance' (Schirrmacher, 2017:20). Covenant theology which, among other things, recognizes covenants God the Father made with biblical figures such as Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and, more importantly, the new covenant with Jesus Christ as greatest priest, reveals God's commitment to His redemptive plan. To this end, the New Covenant in particular made it possible for all believers to participate in God's plan of salvation. In other words, the new covenant provided a participatory framework that allowed all believers to participate in God's obligation to restore His creation. In this context, all believers are called to work actively and priestly to achieve the goals of the *Missio Dei*. Therefore, the priesthood of all believers is essentially, or according to all interpretations, rooted in God's covenant with humankind through the agency of Jesus Christ as the eternal embodiment of the new covenant.

Reflecting on Luther's understanding of the church or the priesthood of all believers as it were, Lotz (1981) underscored that the existence of the priesthood (the church so to speak) can only be ascribed to the sole agency of God's Word which constantly guides mission towards the attainment of salvation (Lotz, 1981:259). In the context of the *missio Dei* therefore, the priesthood of all believers ought to forever be captivated by the work to attain salvation as the gracious gift of God (*sola gratia*) as clearly promised in the word of God (*Sola Scriptura*), sustaining faith in Jesus Christ (*Sola Fide + Solus Christus*). In order for the mission (*missio Dei*) to attain its primary objectives, the priesthood of believers continuously participate within the authoritative theology that is only sourced from the Holy scripture (*Sola Scriptura*) and not from any religious hierarchy. Priesthood of all believers consist of a whole assembly of believers who are gathered not only for worship, but joined divine action in mission towards salvation. The centrality of divine action in this mission (*missio Dei*) is preserved by the grace of God (*Sola Gratia*) and faith (*Sola Fide*) in God incarnate (*Solus Christus*), who is the true Word of God (*Sola Scriptura*). Equally, van Aarde (2017) expresses in clear terms that the Reformed mission encompasses these very basic teachings (van Aarde, 2017:1).

The priesthood of all believers is only committed to divine self-action aimed at attaining total salvation as the main goal of the *missio Dei*. By commissioning the priesthood of all believers as the body of the risen Christ, the triune God acts directly and authoritatively to bring about complete salvation. The priesthood of all believers participates effectively and religiously in the work of salvation as representatives of the body of the risen Christ. The missionary vocation anchored in the priesthood of all believers is expressed much better by van Aarde (2017) when he asserts that: 'the missional calling is for every believer to participate in the fulfilment of God's plan for the church and the cosmos' (van Aarde, 2017:3). Based on this teaching, as also observed in Lotter and van Aarde (2017), the father of the Reformation (Luther): 'transformed the use of the words calling and vocation by assigning it to all Christians' (Lotter & van Aarde, 2017:3). In other words, the priesthood participates vicariously in the name of the risen Christ, through whom the work of salvation is brought to its final fulfillment.

The *Solae* canon, in the form of *Sola Gratia*, *Sola Fide*, *Sola Scriptura*, and *Solus Christus*, confers on the priesthood of believers the right to participate jointly in divine action of redemption. To the extent that the priesthood of believers participates actively in the work of



salvation, this points to the central activity of the body of the risen Christ himself (God incarnate) in a mission. Through the eternal presence of the incarnated Word, the Triune God remains the sole initiator of the mission of salvation, in which the whole world is to participate through intercession for the body of the risen Christ. Eventually, the participation of each individual, regardless of their religious status, is important to hasten the attainment of full salvation in accordance with the eternal framework of the *missio Dei*. In this way, or to the extent that the whole world can participate in the *missio Dei* through the intercession of the Church, salvation becomes efficacious and real for each person personally.

## Conclusion

Effective participation signifies the work that is done collectively towards its totality or for the sake of completion. Similarly, it can be concluded that human active participation, as intended in the priesthood of all believers, is directed towards the fulfillment of God's plan of salvation (*missio Dei*). Furthermore, or at least as has been shown, the *Solae* doctrines were not only central to the cause of the Reformation, but equally dominated the understanding of human participation in the *missio Dei*. While the *Solae* doctrines emphasize divine centrality in the context of mission (*missio Dei*), the priesthood of all believers calls all to ensure active participation in God's work of salvation (*missio Dei*). Consequently, the essence of the *missio Dei* not only emphasizes divine action or its centrality, but also warrants the active participation of believers in missionary work (*missio Dei*). In this context, through the active participation of the priesthood of all believers, all are engaged, so to speak, in the divine action of attaining full salvation. The *Solae* doctrine, in connection with the priesthood of all believers, prescribed an active participation in the divine work of salvation (*missio Dei*). According to this script, God remains the central figure in the context of the mission (*Solae* Doctrines), while all people are called to participate actively (the Priesthood of all Believers). Consequently, the main conclusion that can be drawn from this paper is that the priesthood of all believers, in the light of the *Solae* teachings, underscores the centrality of God and deepens human participation in the *missio Dei*.

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