

KEEPING THE CHURCH ON TARGET: FIVE DEFINING FEATURES OF THE REFORMED FAITH

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“As evangelical faith has become secularized, its interest has been blurred with those of the culture. The result is a loss of absolute values, permissive individualism, and a substitution of wholeness for holiness, recovery for repentance, intuition for truth, feeling for belief, chance for providence, and immediate gratification for enduring hope. Christ and his cross have moved from the center of our vision.” - The Cambridge Declaration, 1996.

“Without these five confessional statements--Scripture alone, Christ alone, grace alone, faith alone, and glory to God alone--we do not have a true church, and certainly not one that will survive for very long. For how can any church be a true and faithful church if it does not stand for Scripture alone, is not committed to a biblical gospel, and does not exist for God’s glory? A church without these convictions has ceased to be a true church, whatever else it may be.”¹

“What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you-- guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us” (2 Tim. 1:13-14).

Mastering the Fundamentals

Whenever people come together and organize for a larger purpose, it is important that they clearly understand their identity. This is especially true of churches. Christian churches are different from secular organizations. The fact that we worship God, and, in particular, God in three persons, sets us apart from other entities, religious or otherwise. We share a common confession in the Apostles' Creed, and we each seek to live out our vision of Christ's kingdom as we understand it.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that we enjoy complete unity on earth. There are other issues often neglected and sometimes not even understood in some branches of the church. The purpose of

¹ James Montgomery Boice, *Whatever Happened to the Gospel of Grace? Rediscovering the Doctrines That Shook the World* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2001), p. 32.

this presentation is to mark out the five leading themes that emerged from the historic period in church history known as the Reformation. These themes are not arbitrarily chosen. They are thoroughly Biblical, have been affirmed by Protestants since the Reformation, and fully deserve a central place as guiding lights for church life. Although we may enjoy fellowship with other believers on a broader level, we find our greatest kinship with Reformed churches that share this common heritage and embrace those beliefs that resurfaced in the sixteenth century Reformation. It is this self-conscious Reformed identity that we seek to define.

When I wrestled in High School, my coach followed a philosophy of training that stressed mastering the fundamentals. Day in and day out, we relentlessly practiced three basic moves: one take down, one reversal, and one pin. All other more complex wrestling techniques came later. However, in both practice and competition, we persistently returned to these fundamentals. At the end of the season we had taken the league title and four individual wrestlers won sectional championships.

Over the years I have found that my coach's philosophy is applicable to other pursuits, not the least of which is the Christian faith. As we struggle through life, we look for moorings to which we can fasten ourselves. Many have found that the Reformed faith is both satisfying to the soul and stimulating to the heart because it offers such moorings that keep the faith from becoming shipwrecked. The Reformed faith grants five emphases that are Biblically sound, historically rooted and found in the best Christian minds and movements in ages past. They are as follows:

1. *Sola Scriptura*: The Bible is our sole authority for faith and practice and is fully sufficient to provide everything we need for life and godliness.
2. *Sola Christi*: The person and work of Christ is the sum and substance of our preaching, teaching and the entire focus of our devotion.
3. *Sola Gratia*: The hope of eternal life is based solely upon

God's sovereign grace and is not earned or deserved.

4. *Sola Fide*: The good news is that in Christ God has granted forgiveness of sin and righteousness from heaven to undeserving sinners. This gift is the righteousness of Christ and received by faith alone.

5. *Soli Deo Gloria*: The calling of every Christian is to advance the glory of God in all areas of life and to find complete and ultimate satisfaction in Him.

These fundamentals were regarded as essential to the Christian faith. They were taught regularly and frequently. They are the *solas* of the Reformation because, when briefly stated, they make use of the Latin word *sola* which means "alone." In summary, the Christian faith is founded upon *sola scriptura* (the scripture alone). The Christian gospel proclaims that salvation is by *sola gratia* (grace alone) through *sola fide* (faith alone) because of *sola Christi* (Christ alone). The Christian life is to be lived *solis Deo gloria* (to the glory of God alone).

Let us consider in greater depth these foundational truths that beautifully summarize the Reformed faith. My hope is that your life will become more grounded as we return to these fundamentals.

I. Oh, How I Love Your Law (*Sola Scriptura*)

The first Bible verse I memorized as a young boy of seven was Psalm 119:11, "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you." What I did not know at that time was that virtually every one of the one hundred seventy-six verses of that Psalm says something about the Word of God. Consider this sampling for example, "How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word" (vs. 9). "The law from your mouth is more precious to me than thousands of pieces of silver and gold" (vs. 72). "Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long" (vs. 97). "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path" (vs. 105). "Great peace have they who love your law, and nothing can make them stumble" (vs. 165). This

Psalm is not only the longest in the Book of Psalms (the Psalter), it is the longest chapter in the Bible. As part of God's hymnbook it affirms at least this: The Scriptures were central to the worship and life of God's covenantal people.

One of the leading features of Reformed Christians is our conviction that the Bible is our sole authority for faith, doctrine and conduct. We believe it is the Word of God and the only infallible rule for these things. Our beliefs are not founded upon cherished traditions, ecclesiastical pronouncements, or personal experiences, but on the Scriptures alone. Creeds, confessions, catechisms and statements of faith are only valuable when they reflect biblical teaching.

The church of Jesus Christ draws its definition from the Bible. "God's household [meaning the church]," says the apostle Paul, is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone." (Eph. 2:19-20). The Holy Spirit through the "prophets" gave us the Old Testament. Through the "apostles" he gave us the New Testament. These two halves of the written Word, together with Jesus Christ the living Word, give the church its shape and identity.

There is power in the Word of God. When the Word works in concert with the Spirit of God in a person's life, it possesses an irresistible strength. It is called the, "sword of the Spirit" (Eph. 6:17), and as such it is living and active (Heb. 4:12). Furthermore, it "penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Heb. 4:12). The Word of God reveals sin, smites the conscience, fosters hope in Christ, creates faith, and tears down the walls we hide behind. Jeremiah asks rhetorically, "Is not my word like fire," declares the LORD, 'and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?'" (Jer. 23:29).

Christians are people of an extraordinary book. Paul writes, the holy Scriptures "are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:15). Furthermore, "All Scripture is

God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Because of this, the Bible is central to everything we do as a church. It defines our worship. It guides our mission. It informs our decisions. We preach and teach it to young and old alike. Nothing else is necessary to equip us for the work God has called us to do.

Also, the Bible must be central to everything we do as Christians. We must be students of the Word, engaged in corporate, family and personal Bible study. As the Word enters our lives, it sanctifies (John 17:17) and transforms us by the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:2). It roots out worldliness and conforms us to the image of Christ. Therefore, God's Word will foster truth in business, love in relationships, and responsibility within families. If we love God, we must not only be hearers of the Word but doers as well (James 1:22).

When Ezekiel was called and equipped to preach to Israel, the Lord, in a symbolic gesture, gave him a scroll and directed him to eat it. "So I ate it," says the prophet, "and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth" (Ezk. 3:1-3). Here is a vivid metaphor picturing the delight of devouring the Scriptures. The Bible is the Church's most treasured possession. It is God's Word to us. It is "more precious than gold" and "sweeter than honey" (Psalm 19:11). It is your sword--the weapon of defense against Satan's devices and the weapon of offence in wielding the power of the gospel. May the Psalmist's exclamation be true of us, "Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long!" (Psalm 119:97).

The Scriptures are central to all we do as Christians; but, more importantly, they reveal the glory of God in the Lord Jesus Christ.

II. No Other Name! (*Sola Christi*)

The early Christian church, from the beginning, underwent severe persecution. This may seem strange, since the ancient world, like

today, was replete with religion. Why should one more cause a stir? Yet, the Book of Acts in the Bible tells us how these believers suffered under courts and councils while enduring arrests and martyrdom. They were subjected to sinister plots, unjust imprisonments, and confiscation of properties. They were routinely vilified, maligned, and driven from their homes. In a world where religious pluralism permeated every layer of society, why would Christians be singled out for such maltreatment?

The answer is simple. They were tenaciously, stubbornly and exclusively Christ-centered. They believed the words of Jesus with exclusive conviction when he said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). People of various religious persuasions then, and now, have embraced the first half of this verse. However, what is insisted upon in the last half incites people and draws for them a line in the sand. There is no eternal hope apart from Jesus Christ. Peter, when brought before a hearing of the Jewish ruling council, boldly declared, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). The Philippian jailer, who held Paul and Silas under lock and key, demanded of them, "What must I do to be saved?" Rather than affirm his paganism, in which he was doubtlessly reared, they replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:30-31). When Paul and the other apostles were speaking to Jews or Gentiles, or appearing before the Sanhedrin or Roman authorities, they were singular in their stand. Paul said it best, "For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2).

The Apostles believed the Old Testament Scriptures revealed Christ, and, therefore, they used these Scriptures in their preaching. Jesus said, "These are the Scriptures that testify about me" (John 5:39). All Scripture must be related to that central theme in order to be properly understood. However, the grand themes the Apostles emphasized time and again pertained to the humiliation and exaltation of Christ. They routinely showed how his incarnation, life, death, resurrection, session, priesthood, and

coming again were taught in the Old Testament Scriptures. These events had powerful significance in redemptive history. They persistently called people to faith in Jesus Christ for they insisted there was "no other name" that could save.

Like the early church, Reformed Christians are driven by the same Christ-centeredness in all things. While affirming the triune nature of the Godhead, we also affirm that the Father is known by and revealed through his Son, the Lord Jesus (John 14:7). Jesus is the head of the church (Eph. 1:22) as well as its cornerstone (Eph. 2:20) and foundation (1 Cor. 3:11). He is the Bridegroom of the church (Mark 2:19-20) and the Great Shepherd of the sheep (Heb. 13:20). He is the sum and substance of the Scriptures and, consequently, our preaching (1 Cor 2:2). We pray in Jesus' name. We worship the Lamb who was slain. In so doing we glorify him and enjoy the presence of Christ among us. Our sacraments point to Christ and mediate His blessing to us. He is the object of our devotion. In him we find our Sabbath rest for He is Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:28). He is our temple (Matthew 12:6), our atoning sacrifice (John 1:29), our Great High Priest (Hebrews 4:15), and Shepherd of our soul (Hebrews 13:20-21). We meet him in his Word (John 6:68), at his table (1 Corinthians 10:16) and font, and wherever two or three are gathered in his Name (Matthew 18:20).

Although the Christian faith promotes moral living, it is more than morality. It resolves the fundamental issues of life; yet it is not a therapeutic religion. Christianity is about Jesus Christ and what he has done for the church. It offers hope to all who look to him in faith. "For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ" (2 Cor. 1:20).

Reformed Christians unite with the Apostolic Church in their insistence that there is only one way to eternal life. It is *sola Christi* through Christ alone. Although we risk being treated in the same malicious manner as our brothers and sisters in the early church, integrity demands that we tell the world the truth: "There is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

III. Because He First Loved Us! (*Sola Gratia*)

The most famous and dramatic conversion story in the Bible is Saul of Tarsus. The sin in his heart and mind was well established in his attitude toward the early church. Luke is direct, "Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples" (Acts 9:1). Recall how Saul planned and organized an inquisition to crush the incipient Christian movement in Damascus. With vicious resolve Saul arrested believers and "[took] them as prisoners to Jerusalem" (Acts 9:2). Saul was not seeking the Christian faith; rather, he was determined to destroy Christ's witness in the world.

But something happened. We are told, "As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him" (Acts 9:3). Jesus Christ, the crucified, risen and exalted One, appeared to Saul in power and glory. He was never the same again. Later, he became Paul, the apostle of Jesus Christ, and would give the church thirteen New Testament books. He became the church's premiere theologian, a pastor of pastors, and a pioneer missionary. This man, once driven by hate, now exuded the love of Christ in his letters and his life. Furthermore, he affirmed in his preaching the words of Saint John, "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

Here is a great plank of the gospel which Reformed Christians passionately embrace. Salvation is *sola gratia*, by God's grace alone. All that we are and ever hope to be in Christ is through God's initiative; that is, it is by His grace alone. In the words of Jonah, "Salvation comes from the Lord" (Jonah 2:9). We may think that since our conversion was not as spectacular as that of Paul's, it is somehow different in scope and origin. It is not! Conversion is a supernatural work of God's grace, whether it comes with drama or subtlety. Although we may not have been as stubborn in our sin as Paul, we were just as dead; we were not as deluded in our thinking, but we were just as blind. Perhaps we did not wander as far, but we were just as lost. Like Paul, we

added nothing to the grace of Christ. Our merits contributed nothing for our salvation! Apollos, the faithful preacher, was a great help to the Achaians, "who by grace had believed" (Acts 18:27). When Lydia gave her heart to Christ, she did so *only* because, "the Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message" (Acts 16:14). Our love for God was, like hers, a result of God's prior love for us.

The acts of divine love, which reclaim sinners, are called the *doctrines of grace*. They affirm God's love is an electing love, "for he chose us in him before the creation of the world. . . . In love he predestined us . . . in accordance with his pleasure and will--to the praise of his glorious grace" (Eph. 1:4-6). Jesus said to his disciples, "You did not choose me, but I chose you" (John 15:16). God's love is also an atoning love for, "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). Furthermore, God's love is a regenerating love for, "he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5). Finally, God's love is a sustaining love because those for whom the Good Shepherd gave His life are held securely in the Father's steady grasp. "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; . . . no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand" (John 10:28-29). The great Saint Augustine repeatedly said in his *Confessions*, "Grant what you command and command what you will."² He understood that loving obedience on our part first required sovereign grace on God's part. Indeed, "we love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

The two great redemptive moments in God's plan of salvation are election and the new birth (regeneration). In both eternity and time, the Lord has taken the initiative to save his people from their sin. We contribute nothing to this blessed outcome. Neither our works nor even our faith can be considered worthy of meriting

² Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, Trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 202, 206, 214

God's favor. The life and ministry of the Lord Jesus provides for redeeming grace, so that our lives will rely on him and his grace alone. This is why it is said of our Savior that He is both, "the author and perfecter of our faith" (Heb. 12:2; cf. Rev. 22:13). How beautifully the hymnist W. Spencer Walton captured this gracious love of him who seeks us when he wrote:

"O the love that sought me! O the blood that bought me! O the grace that brought me to the fold, wondrous grace that brought me to the fold."

Reformed Christians delight to ponder and proclaim the marvelous grace of God in Christ. The gospel is saturated with this good news. We cannot be saved without it. Paul's testimony regarding grace is simple, "For it is by grace you have been saved,...it is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8). This saving grace is amazing. Through it God loved us, reached us and holds us through Christ. May the gospel of grace never lose its marvel and mystery to us who love him in return.

IV. Who Can Stand? (*Sola Fide*)

When it comes to spiritual matters, we often ask the wrong questions. How can I achieve fulfillment? Where can I find happiness? Why don't I feel God's presence? And there are more. There is, however, a primary and more fundamental question than these in the Bible. It must be addressed first. The Psalmist asks it this way, "Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart" (Psalm 24:3-4). The problem is we have unclean hands and an impure heart. We are sinners through and through. Psalm 76:7 raises the question another way, "Who can stand before you when you are angry?" If this surprises you, it shouldn't. For the apostle Paul claims that, "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness" (Rom. 1:18). Does this not also apply to us? Psalm 130:3 captures this question most pointedly, "If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O LORD, who

could stand?" Who could stand indeed!

We quickly want to get to the heart of the relational and psychological matters of religion without dealing with the fundamental issue: How can I stand before a holy God? Will he who tolerates no wrong (Hab. 1:13) ever accept me? Can I ever be certain that I shall not be justly cast into outer darkness because of my sin? Will I ever be assured that I shall hear his voice saying to me, "Well done, good and faithful servant! . . . Come and share your master's happiness" (Matt. 25:21).

Here is our problem. We have plenty of sin, but we have no righteousness. Our hearts are deceitful (Jer. 17:9), our sins have separated us from God (Isa. 59:2), and all our righteous deeds are as filthy rags in his sight (Isa. 64:6). We are in no position to stand before the judge of heaven and earth. Yet, God has offered his righteousness in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. "For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith'" (Rom. 1:17). The Lord Jesus had no sin and lived a righteous life. To those who trust in him a great transaction occurs. "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21). Peter says it this way, "For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteousness for the unrighteous, to bring you to God" (1 Pet. 3:18).

In the Reformed understanding of the gospel, Jesus took our sin upon himself at Calvary and bore the wrath and curse of God in our behalf. Furthermore, God imputed to us, or counted as our own, Jesus' perfect life so that we may stand before God robed in the glorious righteousness of Christ. This monumental and gracious transaction is called justification. Martin Luther called it "the article upon which the church stands or falls." Its benefits and reality are received only by faith and never earned or deserved. Thus, Reformed Christians affirm that the gospel of grace alone (*sola gratia*) is rooted in the righteousness of Christ alone (*sola Christi*) and received by faith alone (*sola fide*). The

apostle Paul expressed his heart's desire in this way, "[to] be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith" (Phil. 3:9).

Consider for a moment how this liberating gospel message is woven into the fabric of Christian hymnology. The Moravian Nikolas Ludwig von Zinzendorf wrote:

"Jesus, thy blood and righteousness my beauty are, my glorious dress; 'midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed, with joy shall I lift up my head."

Samuel Medley in his beautiful hymn, "O Could I Speak the Matchless Worth," is sung to a Mozart melody. Verse two says:

"I'd sing the precious blood he spilt, my ransom from the dreadful guilt of sin, and wrath divine: I'd sing his glorious righteousness, in which all-perfect heavenly dress my soul shall ever shine.

Edward Mote gave us these words:

"My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness; I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name. On Christ the solid rock, I stand; all other ground is sinking sand, all other ground is sinking sand."

Hymnist Norman Clayton wrote in 1945,

"No merit of my own his anger to suppress, my only hope is found in Jesus' righteousness. For me he died, for me he lives, and everlasting life and light he freely gives."

Let us finish with the Psalmist's words, "If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O LORD, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared" (Psalm 130:3-4). In and of ourselves, we can no more stand before the bar of God than a reed before a hurricane. But, justified freely by faith through the redemption we have in Christ Jesus we can and will stand. Here

is the banner of the Reformation: The Father's wrath is satisfied by the Son's obedience. There is forgiveness through Jesus Christ. We can stand in God's presence "in the holy place," not because we have "clean hands and a pure heart," but because the righteousness of Christ has been imputed to us when received by faith alone.

V. Now Show Me Your Glory (*Soli Deo Gloria*)

In Greek mythology, Narcissus was a nymph known for his beauty and arrogant conceit. Catching a glimpse of his image in a pool of water he fell in love with his own reflection. Unable to extract himself from his romance with himself, he pined away and died. It seems the ancient Greeks understood something about human nature that we moderns have forgotten. Self-absorption is self-destruction.

The Reformed Faith offers a corrective to our modern love affair with the self. The Westminster Shorter Catechism begins with this question and answer: What is the chief end of man? Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever. To live to the glory of God is to have a completely different purpose and orientation to our lives. Our foremost desire is to shine the spotlight on God and his glory in Christ. We want to showcase his glorious works of creation and redemption. We know that complete satisfaction is found only in God. King David was driven by this holy singularity when he said, "One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple" (Psalm 27:4). The Reformers simply said it this way, *solī Deo gloria!* (glory to God alone!)

There is no feature more important to the Reformed faith than this. *Soli Deo gloria* is the apex and watershed issue. As snowmelt flows in opposite directions, depending upon which side of a mountain it has fallen, so this God-ward focus takes us in a different direction than the man-ward focus so prevalent in

today's church. From God's perspective the world looks very different from our own perspective. Rather than give ourselves to the vanquishing pursuit of self-promotion, we should align ourselves with the Lord of heaven and earth who says, "I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols." (Isa. 42:8) Or again, "For my own sake, I do this. How can I let myself be defamed? I will not yield my glory to another" (Isa. 48:11). That is why the apostle Paul said succinctly, "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31).

The tenacity with which the Reformed faith pursues *doxology* (an ascription of praise to God) changes everything in one's worldview. Think about the post-modern world, where man's chief end is to glorify the self and enjoy it forever. Here is why our interests rise no higher than the next concert, the latest movie, the weekend binge, or the acquisition of more material things. Consider the emerging neo-paganism of today. This cult's chief end is to glorify mother-earth and worship the environment forever. This romantically devious world view diminishes human life and elevates lower forms of life to the same status as human beings. But to live *solus Deo gloria* (to the glory of God alone) is to acknowledge that God is the supreme ruler of the universe. As the crown of His creation, we are called to worship and serve Him as Creator, and act as stewards of what he has made. *Soli Deo gloria* gives dignity to human life without falling into the trap of self-absorption. It fosters a true environmental consciousness without resorting to earth-worship. Love for God leads to a love for neighbor (Mark 12:28-31) in a world where we affirm that, "His glory is set above the heavens" (Psalm 8:1).

The church of Jesus Christ is the last bastion of this God-ward focus. Nevertheless, in many segments of the church this focus, too, is lost. It is popular today to insist that we must preach to "felt-needs" in order to reach people. The gospel, however, addresses the deeper needs of sin and its consequences--needs that are often unfelt. More churches today are willing to exchange the timelessness of God's truth for the trendiness of modern

culture under the false pretense of building the church. This is giving in to the narcissism of our age rather than the doxology of God's kingdom.

The Psalmist Asaph inquired of the Lord, "Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever" (Psalm 73:25-26). Pastor John Piper has said that, "God is most glorified when we are most satisfied in him." Asaph would agree and so do I. As we think about the *solus* of the Reformed faith, *solus Deo gloria* is the one that binds them all together. May we possess the longing expressed by Moses when he pleaded with the Lord, "Now show me your glory" (Ex. 33:18). As we unite in the communion of the saints, let us sing forever,

I will extol the LORD at all times; his praise will always be on my lips. My soul will boast in the LORD; let the afflicted hear and rejoice. Glorify the LORD with me; let us exalt his name together (Psalm 34:1-4).

Concluding Reflection (*The Solus*)

When I was a boy growing up on the Niagara River, the passage of lake freighters were a common sight. Buoys marked the channel by day and beacons by night. Along the shore of the river a tower was posted with a bright red light shining out over the water. Then a mile or so inland was another tower with its own red light. A pilot navigating down the river from Lake Erie could clearly see these two lights at night as they appeared side by side. This was the intended effect, for as he proceeded, the lights would appear to slowly come together due to the motion of the ship. Although separated by nearly a mile the beacons would eventually shine as one light. When that happened, the pilot knew he was safely in the narrow channel. Then he would turn his great ship toward the light and steer his vessel to its destination.

Imagine for a moment, not two beacons, but five beacons lining

the dark shore of this world. The channel is narrow and there are dangers that await those who wander from course. But Christ, the Great Navigator, has provided for the church five brilliant beacons to keep his church on course within the narrow channel. These five *solas* are the great beacons shining and guiding as one. Our authority for faith and practice is *sola Scriptura* (the Scriptures alone). Our eternal hope is rooted in *sola Christi* (Christ alone). The good news proclaims that salvation is by *sola gratia* (grace alone) through *sola fide* (faith alone). All of life is to be lived *solī Deo gloria* (to the glory of God alone). When we, the people of God, embrace these Reformational truths and follow their leading, we shall be positioned to stay on course, and arrive safely at our final destination. The Psalmist says, "They were glad when [the waters] grew calm, and he guided them to their desired haven" (Psalm 107:30). These wonderful truths of the Reformation, the *solas*, are beacons to keep the church moving forward and staying on course. If she ignores them, she will go adrift and endanger herself on the craggy and uncharted shore of eternal unbelief.