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Solus Gratia, Solus Fide, and *Solus Scriptura:*
Reforming Protestant Principles to Serve the Present Age

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During the sixteenth century, three theological principles came to identify the Protestant Reformation: *Sola gratia, sola fide,* and *sola scriptura. Sola gratia* (Latin, 'grace alone' or 'by grace alone') emphasizes that salvation occurs by God's 'grace alone' and not by human merit. *Sola fide* (Latin, 'faith alone' or 'by faith alone') is similar in that it emphasizes that people accept God's gracious offer of salvation by (or through) 'faith alone' rather than by human will or good works. *Sola scriptura* (Latin, 'scripture alone') emphasizes that 'scripture alone', rather than ecclesiastical authority or human opinion, represents religious authority. As such, it is sometimes called the 'formal principle' of the Protestant Reformation, or the 'scripture principle'.

However, there has always been debate with regard to the extent of exclusivity to which the Protestant Reformers, and others who followed in their tradition, held to the *sola* principles—to grace, faith, and scripture 'alone'. In *theory*, *sola gratia, sola fide,* and *sola scriptura* became powerful slogans for identifying, defending, and promoting the Protestant Reformation. Protestants continue to tout them. However, in *practice*, there are many reasons to question the Protestant principles both in terms of how the founders used them and especially in terms of how Protestants have used them since the time of the Reformation. In many ways, Protestantism includes more than grace alone, more than faith alone, and more than scripture alone. The Latin word *solus* ('primarily') makes more sense in describing the complex understanding of Protestant Reformers and their nuanced articulation of salvation and religious authority. The concept of *solus* makes even more sense in describing the diversity of beliefs, values, and practices in the subsequent development of Protestant Christianity.

John Wesley is a pivotal example of a Protestant who affirmed the Reformation tradition, yet went beyond it in all three of its principles. Most notable is Wesley's complex understanding of religious authority. Albert Outler says:

> The great Protestant watchwords of *sola fide* and *sola Scriptura* were in fact fundamentals in Wesley's formulation of a doctrine of biblical authority. But early and late in his career, Wesley interpreted *solus* to mean "primarily" rather than "solely" or "exclusively."[1]

In addition to religious authority, Wesley's complex understanding of salvation affirmed more than grace alone and faith alone. Grace worked in prevenient as well as justifying ways; and people's acceptance of salvation involved more than just faith. Salvation was a lifelong process

[1] Albert C. Outler, Introduction, *John Wesley*, ed. Albert C. Outler (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 28.

that required responsible thoughts, words, and actions on the part of believers. Wesley's *solus* understanding of the Reformation principles is as important to the present age as it was to Wesley's age. In fact, his theological contributions become increasingly important to the so-called postmodern trajectory of our age. Wesley's complex, dynamic, and holistic understanding of grace, faith, and scripture are crucial to both our personal Christianity and to the nature and mission of the church.

Although the *sola* principles remain important for understanding the history of Protestant Christianity, they are best understood theologically from a Wesleyan perspective as representing *solus* principles because Protestants—past and present—think that salvation and religious authority include more than grace, faith, and scripture alone. Salvation should be thought of in terms of *solus gratia*—initiated primarily by God's grace—and *solus fide*—accepted primarily through faith. Likewise, religious authority should be thought of in terms of *solus scriptura;* scripture represents the primary religious authority of Protestantism but not its exclusive religious authority. Church tradition, logical reflection, and relevant experience all play important and authoritative roles in the founding and continuation of Protestantism.

In order to better understand, teach, and advance the received tradition of Protestant Christianity, it is helpful to re-examine the *sola* principles in terms of a more realistic and relevant perspective as *solus* principles. The *solus* principles help us to understand the history of Protestantism; we need to understand them in their historical context. They also help us understand our personal Christian vocation and the nature and mission of the church in our present, global, inter-religious context. The *solus* principles, in fact, are crucial to fulfilling God's redemptive mission in the world in the present age.

I will begin by discussing *sola scriptura* in its historical context—its spirit and mythic quality. I will continue by talking about the conceptual progression from *sola scriptura*, to the Anglican *via media*, and finally to the so-called Wesleyan quadrilateral. Because Wesleyan scholars first promoted *solus*, rather than *sola*, principles in relation to religious authority, I will present an extended discussion of the topic. After discussing the quadrilateral, I will proceed by talking about the *sola gratia* and *sola fide*. In addition to looking at them in their historical context, I will talk about their relevance to individuals as well as to the nature and mission of the church. Thinking of these Protestant principles as *solus*, rather than *sola*, principles will help in communicating biblical and historic Christianity in ways that are relevant and persuasive in the progressively postmodern world in which we live.

1. *Sola Scriptura*

Sola scriptura represents the Protestant Reformation emphasis upon scripture as the only reliable religious authority—scripture alone. Anticipated by John Wycliffe in the 14th century, the cry of *sola scriptura* became widespread among Protestant reformers during the 16th century. Because of the political and religious authority of the Roman Catholic Church, resistance to the traditions and magisterial authority of the church was a matter of life and death. Thus, Protestant reformers such as Luther, Zwingli and Calvin needed to be very precise about their rationale for defying centuries of Christendom.

1.1 Spirit of *Sola Scriptura*

Although Luther made a simple appeal to the authority of scripture alone, it was not a simplistic appeal. On the contrary, Luther did not think we could rightly appeal to scripture without reference to either church tradition or reason. The spirit of *sola scriptura* included a more comprehensive and dynamic method of religious reflection, formulation and application. For example, in Luther's famous stand against the Roman Catholic Church at the Diet of Worms, he significantly appealed to more than scripture. Although Luther appealed to primarily to scripture, he also appealed to reason and to conscience. Luther said:

> Since then your serene Majesty and Your Lordships seek a simple answer, I will give it in this manner, neither horned nor toothed. 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. I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience…. May God help me. Amen.[2]

Despite his affirmation of *sola scriptura*, Luther does not speak simplistically of scriptural authority. On the contrary, a more sophisticated, broadly conceived, and relevant approach to theology and ministry occurs.

Luther as well as Melancthon—Luther's colleague at Wittenberg University and collaborator in the Protestant Reformation—used diverse religious authorities, despite their affirmation of *sola scriptura*. The Augsburg Confession provides one of the best examples. Although it reflects Luther's theology, Melancthon was the primary author of the document. In the Augsburg Confession, the following is stated about justification:

> This teaching about faith is plainly and clearly treated by Paul in many passages, especially in Eph. 2:8, 9, "For by grace you have saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not because of works, lest any man should boast," etc.
>
> That no new interpretation is here introduced can be demonstrated from Augustine, who discusses this question thoroughly and teaches the same thing, namely, that we obtain grace and are justified before God through faith in Christ and not through works. His whole book, *De spiritu et litera* (*The Spirit and the Letter*), proves this.
>
> Although this teaching is held in great contempt among untried people, yet it is a matter of experience that weak and terrified consciences find it most comforting and salutary.[3]

In the preceding paragraphs, we see Melancthon's use of 1) scripture, 2) tradition, namely, Augustine, and 3) experience, which is explicitly mentioned in the document. Clearly, more than scripture is present in key Reformation documents.

Like Luther and Melancthon, Calvin affirmed *sola scriptura* with sophistication, breadth and relevance. For example, Calvin spends a great deal of time talking about the relationship between scripture and other religious authorities, especially church tradition, since he clearly distinguished between Roman Catholic traditions and those of the Reformers. In the *Institutes of*

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[2] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works,* vol. 32: "Career of the Reformer: II," eds. G. Forell and H. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), 112-113.

[3] Text from *The Book of Concord*, ed. and tr. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), Art. IV, "Justification," p. 30; Art. XX, "Faith and Good Works," 42-46, quoted in *Readings in Christian Thought, ed. Hugh T. Kerr, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), 156.*

the Christian Religion, Calvin states in Book One, Chapter VI that "Scripture Is Needed as Guide and Teacher for Anyone Who Would Come to God the Creator."[4] Immediately thereafter, Calvin talks in Chapter VII about how scripture must be confirmed by the witness of the Holy Spirit and by how some traditions, for example, as found in Augustine, contribute positively to Christian theology.[5] This chapter talks about the experience of the Holy Spirit as well as the benefit of church tradition, rightly discerned. Chapter VIII is entitled, "So Far as Human Reason Goes, Sufficiently Firm Proofs Are at Hand to Establish the Credibility of Scripture."[6] Thus, Calvin appeals to reason as well as experience and church tradition in how he goes about the task of theology. Although he might explicitly affirm *sola scriptura*, a more complex and dynamic approach occurs.

Alister McGrath speaks of the Reformers as having a matrix of religious authority, which includes multiple factors in reflection upon and in the application of scripture, especially with regard to the church and ministry. McGrath says:

> Although it is often suggested that the reformers had no place for tradition in their theological deliberations, this judgment is clearly incorrect. While the notion of tradition as an extra-scriptural source of revelation is excluded, the classic concept of tradition as a particular way of reading and interpreting scripture is retained. Scripture, tradition and the *kerygma* are regarded as essentially coinherent, and as being transmitted, propagated and safeguarded by the community of faith. There is thus a strongly communal dimension to the magisterial reformers' understanding of the interpretation of scripture, which is to be interpreted and proclaimed within an ecclesiological matrix.[7]

The Westminster Confession, the primary affirmation of Reformed theology in English, affirms *sola scriptura*. However, it does not present a simplistic understanding of the principle of religious authority. On the contrary, the Westminster Confessions allows for other dynamics that are necessary. Chapter 1: "Of the Holy Scripture" says the following:

> The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit or traditions of men. Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word: and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed.[8]

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[4] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* 2 vols. in 1, tr. Ford Lewis Battles, vol. 20 of The Library of Christian Classics, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 69-73.

[5] Calvin, 74-80.

[6] Calvin, 81-92.

[7] Alister McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine: A Study in the Foundations of Doctrinal Criticism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 130.

[8] Westminster Confession, "Of the Holy Scripture," Presbyterian Church in America, http://www.pcanet.org/general/cof_chapi-v.htm#chapi, accessed 6 May 2005, II.6.

In explication of *sola scriptura*, reflective of the Westminster Confession, Kenneth Samples says it "implies the authority, clarity, and sufficiency of Scripture, and uniquely gives Scripture alone the role of final arbiter in all matters of faith and morals."[9] However, as the final arbiter, it considers more than scripture alone, literally understood.

1.2 Myth of *Sola Scriptura*

Sometimes people misunderstand the sophistication with which the founding reformers understood and applied *sola scriptura*. Any principle used second hand runs the risk of it being used either honorifically or naively, without the benefit of knowing the context of the lengthy, painstaking work of the originators. Consequently, it takes on 'mythic' qualities, that is, *sola scriptura* becomes more than a statement of religious authority. It becomes an archetypal symbol of Protestantism as a whole, distinguishing it from Roman Catholicism and Orthodoxy as well as other religions. As such, its existence becomes sacrosanct, something that is zealously affirmed regardless of critical issues related to is its understanding and application. Having mythic power, *sola scriptura* becomes self-sealing no matter how it is used. *Sola scriptura* becomes a shibboleth or test of fidelity to the principles of the Protestant Reformation. Unfortunately, sometimes it is used in ways incommensurate with its originators. One could argue that this happened and, indeed, continues to happen with *sola scriptura*. For example, it happened contemporaneously to Luther and Calvin.

The Anabaptist movement affirmed *sola scriptura* more radically than had Luther and Calvin, which is why—in part—the Anabaptist movement is referred to as being part of a 'radical Reformation'. Reformers such as the Zwickau Prophets and Thomas Munzer were radical for various reasons, including their belief in the exclusive affirmation of scriptural authority without need for any admixture, other than the Holy Spirit. Literally, this view emphasized how individuals need no input other than their own insights, thoughts and decisions about understanding and applying scripture.

Keith Mathison notes that the radical reformers of the sixteenth century went beyond Luther and Calvin's rejection of the magisterial authority of the Roman Catholic Church over the interpretation of scripture. The radical reformers rejected non-biblical input "in and by the Church within the hermeneutical context of the *regula fidei,*" that is, the 'rule of faith', which reflects biblical interpretation through the baptismal formulas of the ancient church, ecumenical creeds, and development of subsequent church tradition.[10] This restorationist approach to scripture and scriptural interpretation ('back to the Bible!') wants only the Bible, arguing that an individual unaided by anything or anyone other than the Holy Spirit was spiritually, theologically and ecclesiastically self-sufficient. Although naïve in its individualism, this type of biblicism has perennially reigned among the more fundamentalist, conservative and evangelical Christians. For example, Mathison says the following about the influence of anabaptistic individualism in the United States:

> In eighteenth-century America, this anabaptistic individualism combined with Enlightenment rationalism and democratic populism to create a radical version [of tradition], which has prevailed to this day. This doctrine has become the standard evangelical posi-

[9] Kenneth R. Samples, "What Think Ye of Rome: An Evangelical Appraisal of Contemporary Catholicism," part two, *Christian Research Journal* (Spring 1993): 32.

[10] Keith A. Mathison, *The Shape of Sola Scriptura* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2001), 151.

> tion on scriptural authority. Recognizing the many errors inherent in this doctrine, many evangelicals who wrongly believe it to be the Reformation doctrine of sola scriptura have left evangelical Protestantism.[11]

Although the radical reformers thought that they were taking Luther and Calvin's understanding of *sola scriptura* to its logical conclusion, they—in fact—reduced Luther and Calvin's principle to a simplistic and potentially dangerous understanding of religious authority and theological method. Too often in church history, Christians have taken this unsophisticated approach—a myth of the Protestant Reformation—to biblical interpretation, ignoring the complexity for which the Protestant reformers struggled and defied the Roman Catholic Church.

Roman Catholics, of course, resisted the Protestant Reformation for many reasons. Among those reasons, they noted the potential 'mythic' problems of narrowly conceived religious authority, influenced by individualism, at the Council of Trent. However, Roman Catholics—like the Anabaptists—did not always recognize the methodological sophistication of a Luther and a Calvin. To this day, both Roman Catholics and Orthodox Christians continue to attack the principle of *sola scriptura*, arguing for the historical, social and cultural impossibility of its individualistic approach to scriptural authority and interpretation.[12] Certainly they consider *sola scriptura* both naïve and dangerous to church unity as well as to how Christianity may be applied in life and ministry.

The Protestant apologia for *sola scriptura* also continues today, mostly among conservatively oriented Christians concerned for upholding scripture exclusively, vis-à-vis, other potential religious authorities. Don Kistler, for example, edited *Sola Scriptura! The Protestant Position on the Bible.* In it are articles by prominent authors such as Michael Horton, John MacArthur, and R.C. Sproul. Of scripture, Kister says:

> The battle for the Bible has been raging since the beginning of time. Satan, the great enemy of souls, began his assault with a question: 'Hath God said?'….
>
> The slugfest goes on. Romanists add tradition to what is written in Scripture, and place it on an equal plane with Scripture….
>
> Many Charismatics and evangelicals place their personal experience on a par with Scripture, thereby adding to God's written revelation….
>
> Scripture is complete. God has said everything necessary for us to live the holy life to which He calls us. Nothing further needs to be added to what God has already revealed in His written Word.[13]

These defenders of *sola scriptura* reject the kind of biblicism (and bibliolatry) that can be accused of being unsophisticated and narrow in its theological understanding. Nevertheless, they come precariously close to it. For example, Horton claims an exclusivist understanding of *sola scriptura*. He says, "Not only must we recover the official commitment to the sufficiency of

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[11] Mathison, 152.

[12] For example, see Robert Sungenis, *Not by Scripture Alone: A Catholic Critique of the Protestant Doctrine of Sola Scriptura* (Santa Barbara: Queenship Publishing, 1997); Joel Peters, *Scripture Alone? 21 Reasons to Reject 'Sola Scriptura'* (Rockford, IL: Tan Books, 2001); and John Whiteford, *Sola Scriptura: An Orthodox Analysis of the Cornerstone of Reformation Theology* (Ben Lomond, CA: Conciliar Press, 1996).

[13] Don Kistler, postscript*, Sola Scriptura! The Protestant Position on the Bible,* ed. Don Kistler (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1995), 277, 278.

Scripture, it must be the *only* voice we hear from those who assume the momentous task of being God's spokesmen [sic]."[14]

James White provides helpful perspective, historically speaking, on what the Protestant Reformation principle of *sola scriptura* does not affirm and what it does affirm. This comparison and contrast of affirmations cannot, of course, be applied to everyone who affirms *sola scriptura*. There are too many factors that come into play with regard to how the principle is understood and applied. Yet, the comparison helps to distinguish between the more sophisticated understanding of *sola scriptura*, reflective of its originators, and more simplistic ways that result in potentially dangerous as well as naive Christian conclusions. White says:

What *Sola Scriptura* Is Not

1. First and foremost, *sola scriptura* is not a claim that the Bible contains all knowledge. The Bible is not a scientific textbook, a manual on governmental procedures, or a catalog of automobile engine parts. The Bible does not claim to give us every bit of knowledge that we could ever obtain.

2. *Sola scriptura* is not a claim that the Bible is an exhaustive catalog of all religious knowledge. The Bible itself asserts that it is not exhaustive in detail (John 21:25). It is obvious that the Bible does not have to be exhaustive to be sufficient as our source of divine truth.

3. *Sola scriptura* is not a denial of the authority of the Church to teach God's truth.

4. *Sola scriptura* is not a denial that the Word of God has, at times, been spoken. Rather, it refers to the Scriptures as serving the Church as God's final and full revelation.

5. *Sola scriptura* does not entail the rejection of every kind or form of Church 'tradition'. There are some traditions that are God-honoring and useful in the Church. *Sola scriptura* simply means that a higher authority must test any tradition, no matter how ancient or venerable it might seem to us,, and that authority is the Bible.

6. *Sola scriptura* is not a denial of the role of the Holy Spirit in guiding and enlightening the Church.

What *Sola Scriptura* Is

1. The doctrine of *sola scriptura*, simply stated, is that the Scriptures alone are sufficient to function as the *regula fidei*, the infallible rule of faith for the Church.

2. All that one must believe to be a Christian is found in Scripture, and in no other source. This is not to say that the necessary beliefs of the faith could not be summarized in a shorter form. However, there is no necessary belief, doctrine, or dogma absolutely required of a person for entrance into the kingdom of heaven that is not found in the pages of Scripture.

[14] Michael Horton, foreword, *Sola Scriptura! The Protestant Position on the Bible*, xviii.

> 3. That which is not found in the Scripture either directly or by necessary implication is not binding upon the Christian.
>
> 4. Scripture reveals those things necessary for salvation (2 Tim. 3:14-17).
>
> 5. All traditions are subject to the higher authority of Scripture (Matt. 15:1-9). There can be no understanding of the sufficiency of Scripture apart from an understanding of the true origin and the resultant nature of Scripture. The Reformers had the highest view of the Bible, and therefore had a solid foundation on which to stand in defending the sufficiency of the Scriptures.[15]

It is not necessary to develop this comparison and contrast. Even so, White suggests a more full-orbed presentation of the principle of *sola scriptura,* reflective of the spirit of the early reformers. Despite sometimes poorly conceived and truncated uses of *sola scriptura*, most Protestant leaders understood that Christianity required an awareness and level of theological reflection that involved more than scripture alone, though scripture needed to remain the primary religious authority.

1.3 *Sola Scriptura* to *Via Media*

In the spirit of *sola scriptura*, the Anglican Church affirmed the primacy of scriptural authority along with the secondary, albeit genuine, religious authority of church tradition and reason. Reflective of the burgeoning Enlightenment, Anglicans such as Richard Hooker advocated reason as the *via media* ('middle way') between scripture and church tradition. Unlike Continental Protestantism, the Church of England was not convinced that *sola scriptura* worked either in theory or in practice. In theory, Anglicans agreed with the Roman Catholic Church that reformers such as Luther and Calvin had gone to an extreme in reducing Christianity to scripture alone. In practice, the Protestant reformers looked nothing like a 'restored' first-century church. On the contrary, church tradition significantly influenced the church in Wittenberg as well as the church in Geneva. Thus, there needed to be a more comprehensive, dynamic way of discerning the truth between scripture and tradition. Reason was considered the divine provision by which these sometimes-competing authorities reached a prudent conclusion. Francis Paget summarizes the spirit of Anglicanism, giving the following description of Richard Hooker's view of religious authority. He says:

> Thus Hooker's appeal in things spiritual is to a threefold fount of guidance and authority—to reason, Scripture, and tradition all alike of god, alike emanating from Him, the one original Source of all light and power—each in certain matters bearing a special and prerogative sanction from Him, all in certain matters blending and co-operating.[16]

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[15] James White, *The Roman Catholic Controversy,* quoted by John Samson, "Sola Scriptura-By the Scriptures Alone," website, http://www.fccphx.homestead.com/SolaScriptura.html, accessed 30 March 2005.

[16] Francis Paget, *An Introduction to the Fifth Book of Hooker's Treatise of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1907), 284.

In this context, Wesley began his various ministries and theological writings. He did not inherit a narrow, wooden understanding of scripture and scriptural authority. On the contrary, Wesley—with his Oxford University education—received sophisticated schooling in matters of Christian beliefs, values and practices.

Ironically, in the century after Wesley, John Henry Newman and the Tractarians tried to return the Church of England to its Roman Catholic roots rather than it Continental Protestant roots. In a nineteenth century Anglo-Catholic movement, Newman thought that, in Christian antiquity, theological and ministerial decisions were made by general consent about the 'rule of faith' passed on by the Patristics rather than a *via media*-like balancing of religious authorities, mediated by reason.[17] In the eighteenth century, Wesley also sensed an inadequacy in the *via media*; however, it did not involve a return to restricted Roman Catholic ways of decision-making based upon the magisterial authority of the church and its traditions. On the contrary, it involved an expansion in recognizing the realistic ways Christians made decisions, reflected in the biblical witness as well as in the practices of Christians throughout church history. That realism led to what today has become known as the Wesleyan quadrilateral.

2. The Wesleyan Quadrilateral

The Wesleyan quadrilateral refers to Wesley's understanding of religious authority. It affirms the primacy of scriptural authority along with the secondary, albeit genuine, religious authority of tradition, reason and experience. Although Wesley was not a systematic theologian, his theological understanding of religious authority and theological method had a dramatic impact upon the formulation of his beliefs, values and practices in the rise of Methodism as well as in his influence upon subsequent theology.[18] The following discussion represents a summary of the quadrilateral drawn from other writings I have done on the subject.[19]

2.1. Rise of the Quadrilateral

Wesley did not coin the phrase 'quadrilateral'. Instead, Albert Outler coined it during the 1960s in an attempt to summarize Wesley's contribution to the theological and ecclesiastical discussion of contemporary issues facing Christians. Outler had no idea of the life the phrase would have, nor was he entirely pleased that he had coined it, since there arose so many misunderstandings and misuses of it.[20] Nevertheless, the quadrilateral has become increasingly prominent in stating the way Christians articulate religious authority.

Let us look more at the development of the quadrilateral. Outler says the following about his coinage of the phrase:

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[17] For example, see John Henry Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (rpt.; London: Longmans, jGreen and Company, 1914), 130.

[18] Here my focus is on Wesley's understanding of religious authority rather than on theological method. I discuss his theological method in-depth in *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral: Scripture, Tradition, Reason and Experience as a Model of Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 96-124.

[19] In addition to *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral,* see my upcoming book chapter entitled "The Wesleyan Quadrilateral in Contemporary American Theology," *Festschrift for Lane Scott*, ed. John Park (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, forthcoming in 2006).

[20] Outler publicly expressed regret that he had coined the term, since it has been so widely misconstrued. See Albert C. Outler, "Wesleyan Quadrilateral in John Wesley," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 20:1 (1985):16.

> It was intended as a metaphor for a four-element syndrome, including the four-fold guidelines of authority in Wesley's theological method. In such a quaternity Holy Scripture is clearly unique. But this in turn is illuminated by the collective Christian wisdom of other ages and cultures between the Apostolic Age and our own. It also allows for the rescue of the Gospel from obscurantism by means of the disciplines of critical reason. But always, Biblical revelation must be received in the heart by faith: this is the requirement of 'experience'."[21]

Although Outler coined the phrase in the context of his involvements with his denomination, the United Methodist Church, he tried to present the quadrilateral with historical respect for the way Wesley utilized scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. Because Wesley was more of a churchman than a theologian, he approached issues of religious belief and practice with the church in mind more than historic and systematic theology. Thus, as Randy Maddox says, "the term was coined by Albert Outler to emphasize that Wesley relied more on 'standards of doctrine' in his theological approach than on theological Systems or juridical Confessions of Faith."[22] The standards of doctrine represented the practical guidelines for the Methodist movement Wesley founded.

Outler recognized that Wesley affirmed the classic Protestant principle of *sola scriptura*, scripture alone as the primary religious authority. However, Wesley also recognized that Christians used more than scripture in how they went about making decisions about what they believed and what they practiced. Although Christians may not always be conscious of their understanding of religious authority and theological method, they usually function in ways that are identifiable. Thus, according to Outler, "The great Protestant watchwords of *Sola Fide* and *Sola Scriptura* were also fundamental in Wesley's doctrine of authority. But early and late, he interpreted *Solus* to mean 'primarily' rather than 'solely' or 'exclusively'."[23]

2.2 Spirit of the Quadrilateral

The spirit of the quadrilateral draws from the rich theological heritage it received from Christian wisdom of the ages. It is not a lone spirit in that it looks upon religious authority so uniquely or in an isolated way that does not draw from other tributaries. On the contrary, Wesley's view of religious authority emerged out of Christian tradition, which started from the Bible and developed through various Western and Eastern, Roman Catholic and Protestant perspectives. As such, Wesley did not think that he was a religious innovator. Instead, Wesley thought he was being faithful to age-old wisdom, translating it in ways meaningful to his contemporary context. In so doing, Wesley actually contributed significantly to Christian beliefs and values as well as to Christian practice as manifested in the Methodist movement.

When talking about the nature of religious authority, including the nature of the quadrilateral, it has to be remembered that, ultimately speaking, all authority comes from God. Wesley

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[21] Outler, "The Wesleyan Quadrilateral in John Wesley," 11.

[22] Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994), 36.

[23] Albert C. Outler, ed., *John Wesley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 28.

affirmed this, yet it is easy to lose sight of this fact while arguing about the particular relationship between scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. However, Wesley knew that all authority comes from God and that religious authorities with whom or with which we function are somehow derivative of God's ultimate authority. Even scripture only represents a derived or secondary religious authority. Thus, while the focus of so much of this study is on scripture, tradition, reason, and experience, we must not forget that Christians ultimately look to God alone as their source of religious authority.

With regard to the quadrilateral, Thomas Oden talks about its etymology, which in his opinion functioned since the early patristic writers of the Christian church. He says, "the term *quadrilateral* comes from the image of the four 'fortress cities' of Lombardy, suggesting that if Christian teaching is constructed within such a fourfold fortress, the church can stand secure." [24] Later, according to Oden, "The document most commonly associated with the term is the Lambeth Quadrilateral of 1888, which stated four essentials for a reunited church from the Anglican point of view."[25] Outler used these sources as a backdrop for formulating the quadrilateral, rather than an abstract geometrical image. Although Wesley may not have used the phrase, its essence appears prominently throughout his writings.

Wesley often appealed to scripture and one of the following: tradition, reason or experience.[26] Occasionally, he referred to scripture, reason and tradition, or to scripture, reason and experience.[27] Wesley's reference to all four, therefore, is implied more than explicitly stated. Nevertheless, evidence for a fourfold view of religious authority can be found. He did not intend to be innovative in his approach to theology, yet he laid the foundation for an approach to matters of religious faith and practice that continue to be relevant today. From Wesley's perspective, scripture was the inspired, authoritative, and trustworthy revelation of God. One was to study it inductively and critically, relative to his eighteenth century understanding of biblical hermeneutics. However, he was not afraid to apply insights from reason and experience as well as church tradition in interpreting scripture.

With regard to tradition, Wesley thought that Protestants undervalued history—especially church history and tradition. Yet, Wesley endeavored to investigate both his immediate ecclesiastical church history as well as ancient traditions that supplemented his religious understanding and his ministry priorities and activities. With regard to reason, "Wesley appealed to reason more than the other two elements of the trilateral hermeneutic. He was prone often to repeat 'all reasonable people believe'."[28] Although Wesley thought of reason primarily as a tool with which to think critically about scripture and related matters, he thought that reason, logic, and critical thinking were complementary to right belief and practice. Finally, with regard to experience, Wesley thought it could not be ignored in relationship to Christian belief and especially in relationship to Christian practice, both individually and socially, ministerially and publicly.

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[24] Thomas C. Oden, *The Living God, Systematic Theology: Volume 1* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), 332-333.

[25] The Lambeth Quadrilateral affirmed the following: Scripture contains 'all things necessary to salvation', as the 'rule and ultimate standard of faith'; the ancient ecumenical creeds (Nicene and Apostles') as the sufficient rule of faith; the two sacraments ordained by Christ himself, as the means of grace; 'The Historic Episcopate, locally adapted in the methods of its administration to the varying needs of the nations and peoples called of God into the Unity of His Church'; see Oden, 332.

[26] See Maddox 36, n. 72, 73, 74.

[27] See Maddox 36, n. 75, 76.

[28] John Wesley, quoted by W. Stephen Gunter, "Conclusion," *Wesley and the Quadrilateral: Renewing the Conversation*, ed. W. Stephen Gunter (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997J), 134; cf. Maddox, 36.

He certainly recognized the potential abuses of experience and appeals to experience, yet Wesley thought it undeniably influenced Christians. They should recognize the experiential dimension of Christian reflection and appropriate it properly, rather than use it naively. Although Wesley did not have a well-developed understanding of experience—relative to contemporary views of it—he thought it included more than personal experience. It also included experience of scientific, behavioral scientific, and other investigations into humanity.

2.3 Myth of the Quadrilateral

Once any phrase becomes common parlance, people set out to demythologize it. For example, Ted Campbell calls the quadrilateral a "modern Methodist myth."[29] Of course, there is a lot to be said for this opinion. After all, Wesley did not coin the term. It was not coined till almost two hundred years after Wesley, undoubtedly with alternative motives driving its coinage—motives unrelated or even unfamiliar to Wesley.

One of the more prominent opponents to the use of the quadrilateral is William Abraham. It is not because Abraham is opposed to Wesley. On the contrary, he is a great advocate of Wesley and the Methodist tradition. However, Abraham regrets the non-Wesley usages of Wesley's understanding of religious authority. In particular, he laments the minimization of scriptural authority. For example, Abraham says, "Efforts have been made to treat these four elements dialectically, granting each of the elements relative autonomy. In response since such a dialectic relationship fosters confusion, a call for scrapping the quadrilateral has been issued, suggesting that the quadrilateral invites antipolarization of these four elements."[30]

In defense of the quadrilateral, Stephen Gunter says, "But the misuse of the quadrilateral should not be an excuse to dismiss it. The relationship of these four elements needs to be seen dialogically, with scripture as the rule and authority in a way that should not be ascribed to the other components."[31] In fact, it would be wrong to think of the four aspects of the quadrilateral in static relationships or even dialectical relationships between only two of the four aspects of it. Instead, proponents see all four aspects in dynamic interaction. The main point of contention with the quadrilateral has usually been in terms of maintaining Wesley's historic emphasis upon the primacy of scriptural authority, vis-à-vis, one or more of the other aspects.

Some contemporary theologians critique the quadrilateral, while adopting it in a modified form. Gary Strauss, for example, affirms dispensationalist theology, and he critiques the quadrilateral for being too linear, envisioning isolated 'conversations' between 'scripture and tradition' or 'scripture and reason' but not between all four at once. This is a critique Strauss believes he shares with John Stackhouse, a prominent evangelical theologian.[32] Of course, such a critique

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[29] Ted Campbell, "The 'Wesleyan Quadrilateral': The Story of a Modern Methodist Myth," in Thomas A. Langford, ed., *Doctrine and Theology in The United Methodist Church* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1991), 154-161.

[30] William J. Abraham, *Waking from Doctrinal Amnesia: The Healing of Doctrine in the United Methodist* Church (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 69, summarized by Carl Schultz, "Biblical Hermeneutics in the Wesleyan Tradition," Houghton University Home Page, 10 February 2003 <campus.houghton.edu/personnel/gavery/Wesley-web/biblical_hermenutics.htm>.

[31] Gunter, 131.

[32] According to Gary Strauss, Stackhouse provides four criteria: "reliance upon the primary authority of the Bible in all matters of faith and practice; belief in eternal salvation by personal faith in Christ and his atoning work on the cross; the practice of personal piety in the context of a disciplined life; and concern for the evangelism of all people"—see John Stackhouse, Faculty Seminar, Biola University, La Mirada, California, January 1996; summa-

caricatures the quadrilateral because, if anything, it advocates a dynamic interplay and interdependence between the various religious authorities, which is anything but linear. Be that as it may, Strauss says that Stackhouse "perceived a need, therefore, for a revision of the quadrilateral. In its place (a process in which each element contributes to a kind of composite knowledge), he proposed what he described as a four-way conversation between the four elements of the quadrilateral. He holds that, in our process of thought, none of the four can stand by itself as an inviolable authority over the other three due to the reality of our finite and fallen human understanding and interpretation of each."[33] Stackhouse modifies the quadrilateral in describing the nature of evangelical theology. However, the essence of it remains.

In actuality, one could modify the quadrilateral in a variety of ways, appealing to creation, culture, or the behavioral sciences as a variation of three or, perhaps, four or five religious authorities. For example, Luis De Souza argues for a 'pentalateral', which includes creation as a fifth component of Wesley's understanding of religious authority.[34] On the other hand, one could say that Wesley affirmed "a unilateral *rule* of Scripture within a trilateral *hermeneutic* of reason, tradition, and experience."[35] However, these various articulations of Wesley affirm the quadrilateral, broadly conceived, and there is no reason to think that either Wesley or Outler, who coined the term, would want to conceive of religious authority too narrowly. One could even cease calling it the 'Wesleyan quadrilateral', such as Kevin Lawson at Biola University, who refers to it as the "Protestant quadrilateral."[36] By renaming the quadrilateral, it may well be that more people, including evangelical theologians, would be willing to use it as a model for their theological reflection. Regardless, the quadrilateral steadily seems to make headway in shaping present and future evangelical understandings of religious authority.

3. *Sola Gratia*

Sola gratia was the preeminent teaching of the Protestant Reformers with regard to salvation. Divine grace alone is the ground of salvation, and Christians are justified by grace alone through faith. Protestants such as Luther thought that Roman Catholicism placed too much emphasis on the role of the church, if not also people, for salvation. Any admixture of human or ecclesiastical responsibility robbed God of sovereignty. There should be no synergistic understanding whatsoever of cooperation between people and God. The very suggestion of synergism tempted people; it led to thinking that they merited salvation, which Protestants pejoratively referred to as legalism. Belief in salvation by grace alone was the only way to safeguard a biblical understanding of God's sovereignty and salvation as a gift, not the result of human will or good works.

3.1 Spirit of *Sola Gratia*

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rized by Gary Strauss, "An Evangelical Looks at Homosexuality: From the Wesleyan Quadrilateral to a Postmodern Tetralectic," *Christian Scholar's Review* 26.4 (Summer 1997), 517-520. Strauss applies Stackhouse's understanding of religious authority to an evangelical assessment of homosexuality.

[33] Strauss, 518.

[34] See Luis Wesley De Souza, "The Wisdom of God in Creation: Mission and the Wesleyan Pentalateral," in *Global Good News: Mission in a New Context*, ed. Howard Snyder (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 138-152.

[35] Maddox, 46.

[36] Kevin E. Lawson, "Developing a Model of Theological Reflection for Educational Ministry Practice: Exploring the Wesleyan Quadrilateral and Stackhouse's Tetralectic," unpublished paper.

Protestant Reformers such as Luther and Calvin revived the spirit of Augustine (354-430), who emphasized the sovereignty of God. In particular, Augustine championed God's sovereignty in reaction to Pelagius' view of God and salvation. Pelagius (354-420/40) left no writings, so we rely upon Augustine for what he considered to be so threatening. Pelagius thought that God created people with the ability to do all that is necessary for salvation. Although their ability is God-given, people must take the initiative for their salvation. People are free to choose that which is good and evil, without the aid of God. Pelagianism was eventually considered a heresy because it was thought to denigrate God's sovereignty by emphasizing how people can earn or merit salvation.

Augustine was equally opposed to what he called semi-Pelagianism. Semi-Pelagianism affirms that God needs to act graciously in the lives of people in order to aid in their salvation. They alone, unaided by God's involvement in their lives, is insufficient for salvation. However, people can initiate their salvation, cooperating with God by applying or attaching their will to grace. Augustine thought that semi-Pelagianism made people's will the effective ground of salvation, and that too was thought to denigrate God's sovereignty. Because of the pervasive effects of sin, Augustine thought that people are totally dependent upon God. Augustine thought that there was nothing whatsoever that people can do for their salvation. People are totally dependent upon God's grace for salvation and for living the Christian life.

The Protestant Reformers thought that Roman Catholicism had allowed the leaven of Pelagianism—of works righteousness—to permeate the church. Since the Pope and magisterium refused to recant their heretical beliefs and practices, Luther, Calvin, and others felt forced to protest and eventually break away from the Roman Catholic Church. Only then would Christianity be able to return to the original teachings of the Bible about God's sovereignty and salvation by grace alone. In order to overturn centuries of degenerative leadership and doctrine in Roman Catholicism, schism was necessary to purify and revive true Christianity.

3.2 Myth of *Sola Gratia*

The boast of *sola gratia* was, in many respects, a reactionary statement created in order to counteract centuries of Roman Catholic hegemony. In order for Luther and others to succeed in breaking away from Roman Catholicism, dramatic choices and distinct theological positions were necessary in order for schism to succeed. The Protestant Reformers' appeal to the Augustinian view of the sovereignty of God helped them to articulate their opposition to views they considered heretical. The appeal to Augustinian tradition aided the appeal to *sola scriptura*, since Augustinianism was thought to promote the primacy of scriptural authority as well as the primacy of grace and faith for salvation.

Of course, it was not true that the Roman Catholic Church advocated Pelagianism or even semi-Pelagianism. Such abuses may have occurred, especially in Germany and Switzerland, and insufficient steps were taken to correct them. However, Roman Catholicism never affirmed Pelagianism or semi-Pelagianism, much less salvation by earning or meriting it. For example, at the Council of Trent (1545-63), which spearheaded the Counter-Reformation, Roman Catholics discussed the nature of salvation. According to the Council and subsequent teachings, people are saved by grace through faith: "Our justification comes from the grace of God. Grace is *favor*, the

free and undeserved help that God gives us to respond to his call to become children of God, adoptive sons, partakers of the divine nature and of eternal life."[37]

In order to underscore the similarity—rather than difference—between Roman Catholic and Protestant views of salvation by grace through faith, a joint document was authorized in Augsburg, Germany, in 1999. A "Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification" was signed by the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church. The significance and scope of the consensus reached can be summarized in the following two points of the Joint Declaration:

> 40. The understanding of the doctrine of justification set forth in this Declaration shows that a consensus in basic truths of the doctrine of justification exists between Lutherans and Catholics. In light of this consensus the remaining differences of language, theological elaboration, and emphasis in the understanding of justification described in paras. 18 to 39 are acceptable. Therefore the Lutheran and the Catholic explications of justification are in their difference open to one another and do not destroy the consensus regarding the basic truths.
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> 41. Thus the doctrinal condemnations of the 16th century, in so far as they relate to the doctrine of justification, appear in a new light: The teaching of the Lutheran churches presented in this Declaration does not fall under the condemnations from the Council of Trent. The condemnations in the Lutheran Confessions do not apply to the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church presented in this Declaration.

Protestant Reformers too often caricatured official Roman Catholic doctrine as being Pelagian or semi-Pelagian. Such caricatures persist today. (Of course, both sides of the debate were and continue to be guilty of caricaturing the views of one another.) However, it is more appropriate to refer to Roman Catholic beliefs about salvation by grace as semi-Augustinian. This is not a category with which everyone is familiar. Indeed it may not be a category that people like or want to acknowledge as valid. Yet, it is very important for understanding, perhaps, the majority viewpoint of salvation in church history as well as today. The difference between semi-Augustinianism and previous heretical views is that it places emphasis upon the initiation of God for the salvation of people rather than people initiating it. In a sense, God is thought to initiate, facilitate, and complete salvation, including the response of faith on the part of people. This response or cooperation on the part of people represents synergism, but it does not deserve to be called Pelagian or semi-Pelagian. People's choice or free will is enabled by God's grace, so it is not anything that people earn or merit for salvation. Yet, it represents a needed response on the part of people, which is the condition of their salvation. Salvation is not unconditional, as Calvin asserted and, later, the Synod of Dort (1618/9). God foreknows those who will believe, but God does not foreordain it. Foreknowledge is not causative knowledge, which is a distinction between Augustinian and semi-Augustinian beliefs.

Augustinianism was characteristic of Luther and Calvin, and that influence continues among Protestants. However, it semi-Augustinianism was and continues to be characteristic not only of Roman Catholicism and Orthodox Churches. For all the influence Augustine had over the development of Christianity, ancient and medieval churches did not follow his lead with regard to issues of salvation related to divine predestination and human freedom. The Second

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[37] *Catechism of the Catholic Church,* United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Article 2, Grace and Justification, § 1996 < http://www.usccb.org/catechism/text/pt3sect1chpt3art2.htm> accessed 17 July 2007.

Council of Orange (529), for example, affirmed that salvation involves both divine gift and human task.[38] Likewise, other Protestant developments followed semi-Augustinian rather than Augustinian views. Most notable were the founders of the Church of England, James Arminius and the Arminians in the Netherlands, and John Wesley and the Methodists in Great Britain. Statistically, the overwhelming majority of Christians in church history and today reflect semi-Augustinian and not Augustinian views, which is counterintuitive to many Christians, inside and outside the Protestant tradition.

Not all the Protestant Reformers affirmed Augustinianism, at least, not in its most pronounced form. Luther, for example, is sometimes interpreted as having a semi-Augustinian view of salvation, divine predestination, and human freedom, though his writing on *The Bondage of the Will* strongly suggests Augustinianism. Melancthon, on the other hand, advocated a kind of synergism, which was debated in 16th century Lutheranism, and his views were excluded by the *Formula of Concord* (1577). Melancthon argued that there occurs a coincidence between the Word (or Bible), Spirit, and the human will not refusing God's grace. He does not believe that the human will occurs prior to grace as an active power or faculty capable of applying grace to the individual. So, Melancthon was not considered heretical, though he advocated a synergistic relationship between God and people for salvation.

Calvin and the Reformed tradition certainly represent the strongest version of Augustinianism, especially in Calvin's affirmation of double predestination. [39] Double predestination affirms that God foreordains both those will be saved (elect) and those who will be damned (reprobate). There is no conditional election; God does not predestine people for salvation based upon any foreseen faith or merit. On the contrary, election is unconditional, and grace is irresistible. Calvin, like Luther, believed that people are saved by grace through faith. Faith is a result of

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[38] See Rebecca Harden Weaver, *Divine Grace and Human Agency: A Study of the Semi-Pelagian Controversy* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1996).

[39] John Calvin wrote about double predestination, though his followers sometimes prefer to speak in terms of single predestination, leaving the damnation of people a mystery (similar to Augustine). Calvin says: "We call predestination God's eternal decree, by which he compacted with himself what he willed to become of each man. For all are not created in equal condition; rather, eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others. Therefore, as any man has been created to one or the other of these ends, se speak of him as predestined to life or to death"; see *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.21.5, The Library of Christian Classics, volume XX, ed. John T. McNeill, tr. and indexed by Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 926. In the introduction to the *Institutes,* McNeill refers explicitly to Calvin's double predestination: "Calvin goes beyond Augustine in his explicit assertion of double predestination, in which the reprobation of those not elected is a specific determination of God's inscrutable will. Apparently, the statement of this became a constituent element in Calvin's theology through his never relaxed conviction, borne out by his reading of Scripture and reflection on his own experience, of the unconditioned sovereignty of God. He feels under obligation to close the door to the notion that anything happens otherwise than under the control of the divine will. Man is wholly unable to contribute to his own salvation; nor is election conditioned by divine foreknowledge of a man's faith or goodness" (lviii-lix).

The Westminster Confession, which represents the main statement of Calvinist teaching in the English language, clearly teaches the doctrine of double predestination. For example, the Westminster Confession states the following with regard to 'Of God's Eternal Decree': "God from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass; yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures; nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established. II. Although God knows whatsoever may or can come to pass upon all supposed conditions; yet has He not decreed anything because He foresaw it as future, or as that which would come to pass upon such conditions. III. By the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life; and others foreordained to everlasting death. IV. These angels and men, thus predestinated, and foreordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed, and their number so certain and definite, that it cannot be either increased or diminished."

grace and cannot be considered the result of human effort. Paradoxically, faith is still a task, expected by God, regardless of how one interprets the concept of task. In affirming salvation by grace through faith, neither Luther nor Calvin entirely denied human involvement in salvation. Commenting upon the paradox of salvation as both gift and task in Augustine as well as the Protestant Reformers, Roger Olson says:

> In one of his final treatises, titled *On the Predestination of the Saints,* the bishop of Hippo affirmed unconditional election (absolute predestination) and denied free will that could limit or resist the work of God's sovereign grace in those whom God has chosen to save out of the "mass of perdition." During the Protestant Reformation Luther and Calvin hark back to this later writing of Augustine's. None of them, however, entirely denied the human role of salvation; they simply gave priority to divine grace and attributed even human choices and actions—insofar as they are meritorious—to God.[40]

Although *sola gratia* wonderfully uplifts the primacy of God's grace for the salvation of people, it does not exclude the human task as well as divine gift required for salvation, holistically and realistically conceived. A more holistic and realistic way of conceptualizing salvation is with *solus gratia* rather than *sola gratia*. God's grace is primarily, rather than solely, involved with providing the gift of salvation to people. People still have the task of receiving God's gift. *Solus gratia* does not imply Pelagianism or semi-Pelagianism; on the contrary, it is better described as Augustinianism or semi-Augustinianism. Both of the latter views allow for some degree of both divine gift and human task, despite lingering differences between the two dimensions of salvation.

4. *Sola Fide*

Sola fide is usually identified with the Protestant emphasis upon the doctrine of justification as the primary way for talking about salvation. Using forensic language, the Protestant Reformers talked about a legal declaration made, figuratively speaking, of righteousness imputed to people. God forgives people and counts them as righteous on the basis of their faith in Jesus Christ. God accepts people, apart from all human merit, based solely upon the superabundant merit of Christ's work of satisfaction.

4.1 Spirit of *Sola Fide*

Sola fide makes sense most in the company of *sola gratia*, which emphasizes the primacy of God's grace, God's initiative, and God's sovereignty in the salvation process. It does not mean, however, that people do not have a task associated with reconciliation with God. Certainly salvation is made possible by the atonement of Jesus Christ and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. People are counted as righteous because of the "alien righteousness" of Christ; the impelling cause of it is God alone, through the work of the Holy Spirit. [41]

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[40] Roger E. Olson, *The Mosaic of Christian Belief: Twenty Centuries of Unity and Diversity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 271.

[41] Martin Luther, *Two Kinds of Righeousness*, in *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings*, ed. John Dillenberger (New York: Anchor, 1958), 88.

Faith is not the active cause of justification. Instead it is the means or medium that receives the grace of God in justification. The Word—the Bible—also functions as an instrument bestowed by God and properly received by faith. The same could be said of the sacraments: baptism and the Eucharist. God provides them as the means or medium, and not the cause of salvation.

Justification refers to what God does for the salvation of people, that is, the objective work of Jesus Christ and its effects. Faith refers to the inward, subjective recognition on the part of believers that they are counted as righteous and free from the condemnation of the law. Saving faith accepts the promises of God and the truths of God to the salvation of the believer. It consists of, at least, three components: *notitia*, knowledge; *assensus*, assent; and *fiducia*, trust. Thus, saving faith is not merely intellectual; it is also volitional—a task.

Luther characterizes the believer justified by grace through faith as *simul iustus et peccator,* "both righteous and a sinner."[42] Justification results from imputed rather than imparted righteousness, and people are justified through faith rather than by works. So, it is not because of righteousness as measured by people's merits. Instead people are righteous in God's sight because of the person and work of Jesus Christ. Thus, paradoxically, believers are both righteous and sinner.

4.2 Myth of *Sola Fide*

Christians do not believe that people earn or merit their salvation, even by their faith in Jesus Christ. However, there lingers the idea—the paradox—that, for Christians, salvation is both divine gift and human task. Olson describes it this way:

> In any case, there should be no real doubt that all major Protestant Reformers and their post-Reformation disciples as well as modern Christian theologians affirmed and proclaimed both divine grace and human agency in salvation. Of course they have described that paradox in different ways, and sometimes those differences have caused controversy and division between Protestants—just as they caused the division within Christendom itself during the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century…. Suffice it to say here that Christians all together believe that salvation as reconciliation with God and inward renewal from the corruption of inherited depravity and toward the restoration of the image of God is wholly and completely a work of God's grace while at the same time also an event and process involving human agency.[43]

In *theory*, Protestants sometimes say that, with regard to salvation, 'God does everything, and I do nothing'. Similarly, they say, 'I owe everything to God'. In a sense, these statements are true. Salvation occurs solely through the divine initiation of God. However, in *practice*, they do something; they believe. From some Protestant perspectives, faith is almost entirely a passive experience. More often, faith is thought to be active; it is understood paradoxically as being attributable to God as well as to people. The customary inclusion of the Protestant principle of *sola fide* along with *sola gratia* reveals—in practice—how the task of faith is inextricably bound up with the gift of grace.

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[42] Martin Luther, *Commentary on Romans*, in *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings*, ed. John Dillenberger (New York: Anchor, 1958), 130.

[43] Olson, 272-273.

In practice, people—including Protestants—live as if their faith makes a difference. They do not think that they are earning or meriting salvation through their faith. On the contrary, they have faith in that they do not have to earn and merit salvation. That is their hope, their assurance of eternal life. But practically speaking, they take care to believe in the atonement, provided by Jesus Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Indeed they also take care to live obedient lives, though not to earn or merit salvation.

Even if faith is not considered a human admixture to the formula of salvation by grace, then what of obedience? There has been ongoing debate among Christians, from the time of the 1st century, about the relationship between faith and works. The apostle Paul, of course, argued for salvation by grace through faith:

> For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life (Ephesians 2:8-10, NRSV).

On the other hand, James wrote with a different understanding of the relationship between faith and works. He says:

> What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead (James 2:14-17, NRSV).

James concludes his discussion of how faith without works is counterfeit by saying that such faith cannot save (see also Matthew 25:31-46; Galatians 5:6). Demons know the truth about God, but are not saved (Deuteronomy 6:4). Thus, James says, "You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone" (James 2:24). In fact, nowhere does the Bible say that people are saved by faith alone. It says the opposite; people are saved "by works and not by faith alone."

This debate continued in the Protestant Reformation, most notably by Luther who considered the book of James as an "epistle full of straw." [44] Luther rejected James' statements that works are a necessary evidence of faith. There are, of course, different ways to interpret the words of Paul as well as James. For example, Christians often say that Paul was making universal statements about salvation for all people, especially unbelievers, while James was talking primarily to a believing audience, who were given exhortations to manifest their faith through love. Thomas Oden says:

> The absence of works indicates that faith is not working actively; hence itself is lacking. In distinguishing between active (true) and inactive (false) faith, James was not contradicting Paul, who viewed saving faith as the condition of the sinner's being made whole…. It is difficult to establish that there is a genuine conflict between Paul and James, for Paul is dealing primarily with the justification that God declares with respect

[44] Martin Luther, *Preface to the Epistle of St. James*, in *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings*, ed. John Dillenberger (New York: Anchor, 1958), 19.

> to human sin as viewed in Christ, whereas James is dealing primarily with the way the justified life is made recognizable through acts of love.[45]

Certainly faith and works are inextricably bound up with one another, and we cannot talk about faith for long without also talking about faith working by love, that is, faith that is animated and instructed by love and active in producing good works. In practice, it seems difficult to talk about faith in isolation, as something discussed without reference to faith, on the one hand, and knowledge, assent, trust, volition, and works of love, on the other hand. All dimensions are indicative of faith as gift and task, due to divine and human agency.

Sola fide is a persuasive slogan, emphasizing an essential principle of the Protestant Reformation. However, in practice, a full orbed understanding of faith reflects *solus fide*—primarily faith, rather than faith exclusively, in a reductionistic way. It seems that the Protestant references to the *solas*—scriptura, gratia, and fide—were necessary reactions (or over-reactions) for strengthening the Protestant Reformation from the religious, social, political, economic, and military hegemony of Roman Catholicism and the Holy Roman Empire. Due to necessity, the *sola* principles were understandably reductionistic in order to identify, promote, and defend Protestantism. It was a life or death situation, and desperate times require extreme measures.

However, as effective as the *sola* principles were, they failed to encapsulate the totality of biblical and historic Christian teachings about religious authority and soteriology. From the luxury of distance in time and space, we now understand that religious authority and soteriology are more complex, dynamic, and holistic than what the Reformers articulated. Historically, the *sola* principles are amazing and foundational to Protestantism. However, for a future, modern, or—perhaps—postmodern understanding of religious authority and soteriology, other principles are necessary. The Christian stories of religious authority and soteriology are too multifaceted and paradoxical to be considered in terms of anything 'alone'. *Solus scriptura*, *solus gratia*, and *solus fide* may not be the best ways to conceive of Christianity, but they represent an important corrective to the historic *sola* principles of the Reformation, which need to be reconceived and promoted more effectively. The *solus* principles are more promising ways of understanding and promoting the complex, dynamic, and holistic dimensions of Christianity today.

5. Conclusion

While *sola scriptura* valuably reminds us of the need for maintaining the primacy of scriptural authority, the quadrilateral and its emphasis upon *solus scriptura* provides a better principle of religious authority because it embodies as well as advocates a complex dynamic of relevant authorities. Likewise, *solus gratia* and *solus fide* retain the Protestant Reformation emphasis upon the sovereignty of God and the primacy of divine initiation for the salvation of people. They also convey the essential complexity, dynamic, and holism of salvation described in scripture and affirmed by church history in all its diversity.

Certainly *sola scriptura* and the quadrilateral do not need to be seen as contradictory or competing principles of religious authority. On the contrary, it is best to see them as complementary, properly understanding the historical context and spirit of the two principles. In the same way, *solus gratia* and *solus fide* are not opposed to *sola gratia* and *solus fide* in the sense

[45] Thomas C. Oden, *Life in the Spirit, Systematic Theology: Volume Three* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), 149.

that they advocate a kind of works righteousness or legalism, contrary to the Protestant Reformation. They are complementary in that the *solus* principles affirm the primacy of grace and the primacy of faith, without diminishing the undeniable human dimensions of salvation and the Christian life.

In our present-day world, the benefits of the *solus principles* become increasingly apparent. Christians would do well to utilize them in their ministry as well as theology in attempting to translate biblical truths in ways that are appealing, persuasive, and effective in lovingly interacting with others. If Christians are to meet the complex needs of the world in a way that is faithful to biblical, historical Christianity, then the *solus* understanding of religious authority and soteriology provides the best principles for representing God and God's reign as well as for serving people in the present age.