

Mulling over *Soli Gloria Dei* on the Reformation's anniversary

How can we live for the glory of God alone?

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For a long time I only thought there were three *solas*. Three Reformation rallying cries: *Sola Gratia!* *Sola Fide!* *Sola Scriptura!* Grace alone. Faith alone. Scripture alone. It didn't seem to me that you could add to these.

But somewhere along the line I learned that there were two more: *Solus Christus* (Christ alone) and *Soli Gloria Dei* (To the glory of God alone.)

I am considering that fifth *sola*. What does it mean to live for the glory of God alone?

I'm tempted to picture a particularly religious life, because there is a part of my unconscious brain where I think that of course, a particularly religious life gives glory to God. And that could be the particularly religious life of someone who is a clergy person or an educator, someone who lives in a monastery and prays without ceasing, literally. Or it could be the particularly religious life of someone who has goes to Bible studies all of the time, or volunteers at the church, or sings Christian songs, or works for justice.

But then I think about it some more. And while I think that singing Christian songs and praying and working for justice are all important things, and while I even admire those who live in monasteries where they pray and make delicious soup (I imagine) and pray and welcome visitors, I don't think that's what it means to live for the glory of God alone.

And I'm not so sure that I'm very good at it.

I am thinking about Jesus words in Matthew 6, "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear." I am thinking about how Jesus encourages us to look at the lilies

of the field or the birds of the air. The lilies and the birds live for the glory of God without thinking about it, just by being what they are. They fly and they feed their young; they wave in the wind, they bloom and they fade. They just live.

I've been thinking lately that to live for the glory of God alone is something like this—it is not so noble or self-conscious. It is to glory in the God who created us, and the world. It is to notice things, small things, the tiniest flowers in the yard (which are weeds), the way the sun feels on a cool day, to look up at the stars on a dark night.

I'm not very good at it.

Instead, I confess, I'm anxious. My worst times are Saturday nights and Sunday mornings, as I am getting ready for church. I'm worried about all of the things that could go wrong, whether my voice will squeak on the high notes or whether anyone will show up, mostly things I can't do anything about. I wake up in the middle of the night and I can't fall asleep because I'm anxious, and I think, "It should not be this way. I love worship. I love worshipping. Why am I feeling this way?"

Maybe next time I feel this way in the middle of the night I should go out in the dark and look up at the stars.

I live just north of Houston, and one of the surprises in this new house is that it is just like living in the country. When it's clear, I can look up and see the stars. I have not seen the stars for many years.

To live for the glory of God alone. What does it look like? I remember once having a conversation with women from one of my churches. They were not sure whether fifth graders should have Holy Communion. Their proof? They had overheard a conversation between two girls after they had received the sacrament. "It was good!" the girls said to one another. The woman thought they were not taking communion seriously enough. But I thought the girls were right. *It was good!* They were tasting the bread, and they were glorying in it.

Maybe that's what it looks like to live for the glory of God. Maybe it looks like wonder, and maybe it looks like laughter. Maybe it looks like the tears you let stream down your face when you are overwhelmed by sorrow, or joy. Maybe it looks like singing at the top of your lungs, even when your voice squeaks. Maybe it looks like hitting bottom, maybe it looks like being raised up. Maybe it looks like tasting

bread, and knowing it's good.

That fifth sola. It's our whole lives, lived in God, with God, from God.

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