

# Missio Dei refuting the *pactum salutis*

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The doctrine of *pactum salutis* has in the past sparked serious theological debate and has often been rejected because of its contradictions with Reformed orthodoxy. Among other early church fathers and theologians, the *pactum salutis* is found in the writings of Augustine of Hippo, Thomas Aquinas and Martin Luther. This doctrine is closely related to, or possibly overlaps with, the doctrine of predestination, as both involve the belief that God has already determined the object of his salvation. It has been criticised for, among other things, its denial or insufficiency of Trinitarian understanding and its pro-Subordinationist character. The refutation of this doctrine may be warranted, particularly when viewed in the light of contemporary missiology, particularly the *Missio Dei* perceptions that arose from the 1952 IMC conference in Willingen. As there is little or no research examining the rationality of the *pactum salutis* on the basis of or in the light of the *Missio Dei*, this article draws on the available missiological literature to refute its coherence, relevance and authenticity.

**Contribution:** This article made a significant missiological contribution to the field of Christian theology, analysing the validity of *pactum salutis* against Reformed orthodoxy and consequently rejecting it as incompatible with the objectives of *Missio Dei*.

**Keywords:** *Missio Dei*; Trinity; theology; Willingen; missiology; *pactum salutis*.

## Introduction

The *pactum salutis* (Latin for: covenant of salvation) refers to the pretemporal trinitarian covenant. Although not accurately rendered in the literature, the broad antecedents of the *pactum salutis* appear in the works of pioneering Protestant reformers such as Martin Luther (1483–1546), John Calvin (1509–1564) and more so in the work of Johannes Oecolampadus (1482–1531) (Muller 1968:12). However, this teaching became starkly evident in the works of theologians such as Peter Bulkeley (1583–1659), David Dickson (1583–1663), Johannes Cocceius (1603–1669) and Herman Witsius (1636–1708). From the outset, this doctrine met with much criticism and rejection because of its apparent contradiction with other central Christian tenets, particularly Reformed orthodoxy (Beach 2002:105). Among the early contemporary Reformed theologians who spoke out strongly against this doctrine are Herman Hoeksma (1886–1965) and Karl Barth (1886–1968), to name a few. Hoeksma is among those who have argued that this doctrine turns out to be subordinationism in character by presupposing an unequal covenant between God the Father, as though a master to God the Son, who is presented as though a servant (Woo 2015:15). According to Beach (2002), Karl Barth dismissed this teaching as mere mythology, which falsely prescribes a breach between the eternal purpose of God, firstly, as the beginning of all things, and secondly, as the intra-Trinitarian covenant (Beach 2002:105). In addition, *pactum salutis* has been criticised for its legalistic language, which gives the impression of contractual reciprocity between two independent parties (Woo 2015:176–177). Karl Barth held that this doctrine gave the impression that God the Father and the Son were distinct legal parties establishing a pre-temporal agreement on salvation, worse to the exclusion of God the Holy Spirit (May 1959:21–28). Similarly, Hoeksma contrasted *pactum* with the biblical concept of covenant, arguing that it [*pactum salutis*] is littered with conditions, agreements and promises or evokes the sense of legal transactions, all of which appear to be legally binding, but far from the accepted character of a biblical covenant in which Godhead is imbued with divine authority (Woo 2015:178–179).

In relation to Reformed orthodoxy, as the greater part of this contribution is intended to show, *pactum salutis* neglects the authenticity of the biblical sequence of events relating to creation, the comprehensive doctrine of the Trinity in relation to the participation of God the Holy Spirit, Christ's humanity and lastly the predominantly acknowledged understanding of the doctrine of predestination. Although considerable research has been undertaken in the past to examine the validity of this teaching in the light of other broader Christian teachings, further examination warrants serious rebuttals when viewed in the light of the *Missio Dei* or emergent understanding

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from the perspective of the Conference of the International Missionary Council (IMC) held in Willingen, Germany, in 1952. To this end, and given that there is little to no research examining the rationality of *pactum salutis* based on the *Missio Dei*, this article relies on available missiological literature to refute its legitimacy. This is to be achieved by firstly introducing what is meant by *pactum salutis*, secondly discussing the beginning of the *Missio Dei* in the observation of the creation account in the Bible and then the orthodox understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity and predestination.

## **Pactum salutis**

*Pactum salutis* can be described as a theological expression encompassing the inner-Trinitarian agreement for the salvation of the elect by two members of the Godhead (Williamson 2018:260). Put differently, *pactum salutis* points to the ad intra-Trinitarian engagement regarding the ad extra work of salvation (Muller 2007:15). Although later proponents of this doctrine sought primarily to trace its basis to Calvin's thought, it has been found to be in stark contrast to Calvin's theology when viewed as a whole and particularly as one which consistently sought to guard against the error of disrupting the triune essence (Hedberg 2011:7; Partee 2008). Furthermore, one can counter that any doctrine that purports to possess the pre-temporal knowledge of the inner-Trinitarian covenant contradicts Calvin's theology as it is prefaced with Scripture as the only platform upon which God reveals His nature in three distinct but inseparable Persons of the Trinity. Consequently, after Calvin's elimination as a proponent, it is still a difficult task to identify from the pool of early church fathers the proponents of the *pactum salutis*. More generally, however, the available literature on this subject points to the work of the German Protestant reformer Johannes Oecolampadius (1482–1531), who in 1525 attracted controversy as he sought to distinguish between the carnal and spiritual covenants (Fisher 2013; Greaves 1968; Poythress 1992). In his 1648 work entitled 'Summe of Saving Knowledge', David Dickson (1583–1663) referred to this doctrine by stating that:

God having freely chosen unto life a certain number of lost mankind, for the glory of his rich Grace did give them before the world began, unto God the Son appointed Redeemer. (Dickson 1648:2b)

However, the *pactum salutis* as signifying the pre-temporal inner-Trinitarian redemption covenant seems to have particularly gained popularity in the 17th century through the writings of men such as Thomas Blake (1597–1657), Samuel Rutherford (1600–1661), Johannes Cocceius (1609–1669), John Bunyan (1628–1688), James Durham (1622–1658) and perhaps more particularly the works of Herman Witsius (1636–1708) focusing upon arranging systematic theologies of redemption covenants (Beach 2002; Woo 2015, 2018). This observation is substantiated by Muller in stating that: 'the notion of the *pactum salutis* was already known in the seventeenth century, as is evident from the *De oeconomia foederum* (1677) of Herman Witsius' (Muller 2007:12). Similarly, scholars such as Fesko (2004) have pointed out that the virtual presence of this doctrine can be traced back

to the 17th-century Westminster Creed, written in 1647 (Fesko 2004:1).

As noted similarly by Muller (2007), this teaching purports to manifest the plan of salvation by the triune God as eternal and prior to the problem of sin. In the words of Muller (2007): 'It manifests God's redemptive plan as eternal and as something far more than a reaction to the problem of sin' (p. 15). Historically, proponents of this doctrine have framed it in the Christological context, which is the agreement between the Father and the Son (Jesus Christ) who agrees to become the mediator of salvation. Holmes (2017) describes it as an event in the primeval time when God the Son demonstrated an act of submission in the Father's purpose of temporal salvation (Holmes 2017:97). In other words, the suggestion here is that the salvation of the elects was guaranteed long before the world was created in eternity and even before sin befell the world in Genesis 1–3. According to Schirmacher (2017), the elect consists of the believers and especially the Church as part of the eternal covenant that existed between the Father and the Son (Schirmacher 2017:19). As correctly recited in Buys (2020), Van Drunen and Clark (2007) referred to it as a primordial agreement between the father and the son, by which the father promises salvation and the son volunteers to earn it for his people by becoming the incarnate of the Father (Buys 2020:2; Van Drunen & Clark 2007:168).

## **Missio Dei and creation**

The five *solas*, namely *sola scriptura*, *solus Christus*, *sola fide*, *sola gratia* and *solus Deo Gloria*, form the core that largely distinguishes Protestant theology from other theologies, particularly from the theology of the Roman Catholic Church in the 16th century. Typically, the *sola scriptura* comes first on the list of these *solas* and for good reason, as it is the fundamental principle on which Protestant theology is built (Barth [1932–1938] 2010; Dreyer et al. 2013; Frame 2010). *Sola scriptura* posits that Scripture alone is an infallible source of authority in matters of theology, including but not limited to the question of creation. Accordingly, the knowledge of God as Creator and the sequence of events necessitating salvation derives directly from the creation account in Genesis. As noted in Wendel (2002), Bishop Hilary of Poitiers reinforced the significance of *Sola Scriptura* on the basis of Calvinism and stated unequivocally: 'Leave to God the privilege of knowing himself; for it is he only who is able to bear witness of himself who knows himself by himself by himself alone'. He further recites Calvin's clear words saying:

No one can have even the least taste of sound doctrine and know that it is of God, unless he has been to this school, to be taught by the Holy Scripture. (Wendel 2002:152–153)

The resulting belief according to *sola scriptura* also provides that time together with the universe is a created unit, as the first verse of the Bible clearly says: In the beginning God created heaven and earth (Gn 1:1). Furthermore, the creation account tells how God first professed his creation to be very good before its original uprightness could be wrecked by the fall (Gn 1:12, 18, 21, 25, 31), which manifested in human

disobedience lured by Satan in the form of a serpent (Gn 3:1–24). Consequently, all of this led to a series of human rebellious behaviours recounted in the first 11 chapters of Genesis and retrospectively culminating in Genesis 6:6 where God began to regret ever having created humankind. Consequently, for decades before and after the 1952 Willingen Conference, the authoritative word in Scripture not only provided direction, but affirmed Christian reflections on God's creation, salvation, missionary theology in general and the idea of *Missio Dei* in particular.

Theological reflections on the biblical development of salvation culminate in the understanding that the *Missio Dei* was made necessary by the catastrophic consequence of disobedience [the Fall] that enslaved God's good creation to human wickedness. The sequence of events as given in Scripture, beginning with the account of the perfect creation, human sin signifying the Fall, essentially tells a story of the beginning of the *Missio Dei*. Put another way, the *Missio Dei*, when interpreted firmly in accordance with the biblical order of events following the perfect state of creation, essentially describes how the triune God consistently fulfils the mission of rescuing humankind from such enslavement. The primary mission of saving human creation is directed towards the restoration and attainment of the all-encompassing kingdom of God as the secondary objective of the *Missio Dei*. Bosch (2011) recited Beker (1980) and said similarly of all creation as destined to be restored in the all-encompassing kingdom of God:

Rather, it is the proclamation of a new state of affairs that God has initiated in Christ, one that concerns the nations and all of creation and that climaxes in the celebration of God's final glory. (Bosch 2011:79)

Consequently, the creation account and the sequence of events as recounted in Scripture are central to understanding the basis and essential objectives of the *Missio Dei*.

## Pactum and creation

Arguably, it is unthinkable that any Christian doctrine could have knowledge of a predetermined forensic or imaginary point in time that predates what has been established as the beginning of time before God's creation. Although the *pactum salutis* remain an attempt to provide insight into the inner-Trinity works, this is not enough to open the window for Gnostic type of wild imaginations and presuppositions about who God was prior to being revealed in scripture. Essentially, discoursing about the pre-temporal Trinity in the manner that is suggested by the *pactum*, separates the persons of Christ (the Son) as fully God and fully human by merely emphasising his divine office. The mere fact that the chaotic state in which God began His creation is presented prior to the 6-day creation account narrated in the book of Genesis will surely throw into regrettable chaos any theological attempt to discern the pre-temporal inner-Trinitarian treaties or *pactum* so to speak. Contrary to the theological justification outlined above, which presents the transition from perfect creation to human sin as constitutive for the *Missio Dei*, what

is most questionable about *pactum salutis* is the primeval treaty by persons of the Trinity, which irreconcilably prerequisite the very commencement of creation with the desire for salvation.

The *pactum salutis* is arrived at as consequence of the intra-Trinitarian deliberations or considerations, which, as already mentioned, expressly include God the Father and Son to the exclusion of the Holy Spirit (Williamson 2018:260). However, that does reinforce that the primary concern here is to guard against the constant manoeuvring of heresies that continue to deny the true divinity of Jesus Christ, effectively giving the impression that at some point he was not inherently God but was only created at some point of the creation. In speaking of God the Son but having no human capacity, the *pactum* seems in many ways to sympathise with Arianism, which implies that Jesus Christ became God or was only adopted as a son at a later date of creation. Similarly, through classification, *pactum salutis* emboldens adoptionism of Nestorians, whereby Christ is not viewed as essentially God incarnate but was only adopted for temporal purposes after the primordial Covenant. Against such tendencies, the Sixth Ecumenical Council held that Jesus Christ had two eternal wills, one divine and one human, the twofold nature that existed in pre-creation. All in all, perhaps the most relevant conclusion to be drawn out of this is that, given that mankind could possess knowledge of God the Creator of all things, through Scripture alone [*Sola Scriptura*], any doctrine of which *pactum salutis* is a part, which purports to have some peripheral specialised knowledge of who God is or was beyond the confines of Scripture must be discarded. In fact, God the Creator is understood only according to his revealed nature in Scripture, in which God the Son was identified with the hypostatic nature as fully human and fully divine, essentially supplanting the misunderstood son of *pactum salutis*, imperfectly covered with divine glory devoid of human nature.

## Missio Dei and Trinity

The doctrine of the Trinity was formulated by the Church over several centuries before it could be accepted as the core foundation upon which other Christian doctrines are found. The term Trinity itself is not found in the biblical language but was first used by Tertullian towards the end of the 2nd century and consequently received widespread acceptance as a central Christian doctrine in the 4th and 5th centuries (Ferguson 2009; McGowan 2009). Although this doctrine grew out of several historical inputs, key to its historical development are two seminal Christian councils, first the Council of Nicaea (AD 325) and the Council of Constantinople (AD 381) (Ayres 2010; Dünzl 2007). Central to this Niceno-Constantinopolitan teaching are the assertions that while God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit remain distinct, they are inseparably equal, eternal and consubstantial (Fortman 1999; Richardson 1958; White 2016). Consequently, the inseparable threefold character of God [triune God] provides the basis in which all theology is constructed, including *missio* theology as encompassing His saving



mission [*Missio Dei*]. Correspondingly, the entire salvation history expresses the sending of the triune God embodied in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The *Missio Dei* is based in its entirety on the missionary model of the triune God or, so to speak, on the mission of the Trinity. This fundamental understanding of mission theology has consequently led missiologists such as Cronshaw (2020) and Youn (2018) to declare without a doubt that *Missio Dei* is *Missio Trinitas* (Cronshaw 2020:119; Youn 2018:225). There is no doubt that the pre-to-post-Willingen perspectives of the *Missio Dei* have consistently preserved the integrity of the Trinitarian dogma in the whole of missionary theology. In fact, the interrelatedness between the term *Missio Dei* and the doctrine of the Trinity in the missiological literature is emphasised by important scholars such as (Engelsviken 2003:482). Bosch (2011) decorously maintains that far prior to gaining popularity as the upshot of the 1952 Willingen Conference, the theological expression in the form of the Latin word '*missio*' was used linguistically during the initial construction of the doctrine of the Trinity to express the sending of the Son and that of the Holy Spirit principally by the Father and the Son (Bosch 2011:233). The doctrine of the Trinity, which inseparably consists of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, forms the basis for mission theology, in which God-self is sent with the Father first sending the Son and consequently the Son and the Father sending the Holy Spirit. The *Missio Dei* is thus constituted by or on the basis of the inseparable continuous mission of God Himself in the form of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

## **Pactum salutis and Trinity**

Although the doctrine of the Trinity has no explicit biblical basis as noted above, for years it has been widely accepted as a profound interpretation of the biblical testimony of God that is consistent with Christ's earthly ministry, his death and resurrection, leading to the consequent invocation of the Holy Spirit as the third person of Trinity. Without a doubt, the aspect that makes the *pactum salutis* to be more questionable or attractive of criticism is the idea of pre-temporal agreement between two persons of Trinity instead of or in contradiction to the teaching of inseparable triune God consisting of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. In other words, the most potent critiques emerge from those who argue that the *pactum* is not sufficiently Trinitarian in its exclusion of the Holy Spirit as the third person of Trinity. They argue that by attributing the covenant only to God the Father and God the Son, this doctrine not only precludes the role of God the Holy Spirit in planning the world's salvation but also disrupts the unity of the Trinity. This has consequently led to some scholars such as Williamson (2018) finding it difficult to define it in clear language, resorting to merely writing: 'the covenant of redemption is essentially understood as an agreement involving two or more members of the Godhead'. In fact, he further acknowledges as historical fact that most scholars have formulated it Christologically, identifying only the Father and Son as the contracting parties

(Williamson 2018:259). Thus, this doctrine is guilty of sub-trinitarianism by ignoring the uniform centrality of the triune Persons in the context of redemption. Rather than accepting the inseparability of members of the Trinity, it somehow suggests that God the Spirit is in some ways the foot-dragger in the work of *Missio Dei*. What is problematised by this critique is the inconsistency or tendency to split the unity of the triune God and even giving the impression that Trinity persons would have to sit around a table to reach a redemptive covenant compromise as if there is no agreement by virtue of their unity. Another problematic supposition that comes with this doctrine is the distillation of the Sonship as the key mediator who is to ensure that salvation is achieved through perfect obedience to the Father's will. Indicating this defect, Duby (2017) writes: 'The covenant accordingly imports an emptying [*exinanitio*] of the Son toward assuming the form of man' (Duby 2017:43). In other words, while preserving the synchronicity of the triune Persons, it is also important to preserve the distinctiveness or special role of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, lest they be reduced to nothingness in the context of salvation history. Thus, while inseparably remaining in full cooperation, the Father embodies the supreme Creator, the Son is sent as mediating Redeemer and the Holy Spirit as the Comforter. Thus, when taken together in the light of Trinity doctrine, these criticisms are not entirely unfounded, for they reveal inconsistencies in the *pactum* and reject tendencies to fabricate relational dynamics or the inner workings of the Trinity. This doctrine effectively not only contradicts the Trinitarian sending order but rejects the commonly accepted theological rationale behind the doctrine of the Trinity.

## **Missio Dei and salvation**

*Missio Dei*, or Mission of God, was initiated with divine intent to achieve salvation for the world. This means that God's mission has salvation as its primary purpose. This is correctly observed in Engelsviken (2003), which cites George F. Vicedom's argument and emphasises that God's revelation in His mission is concerned with, or for the sake of, human salvation (Engelsviken 2003:483). However, while salvation is the final goal of the *Missio Dei*, this alone does not limit or ignore the *βασίλεια* [*basileiā* – kingdom of God] as the desired state after the missionary work of salvation. In other words, salvation is the key that opens doors for the kingdom of God to prevail. Viewed from the perspective of symbolic redemption in Noah's account, mission involves his obedience in building the ark to save his family from the flood and consequently for them to live in [God's shalom peace] a harmonious kingdom of God, essentially a state opposed to that of sinful world that existed before the flood. Similarly, the church of Christ has the responsibility of undertaking missional acts that will result in obtaining the Kingdom of God. This view is perhaps confirmed by Smith (2002) when he states:

The world needs Christian people living among people, sharing in the reality of their lives and taking co-responsibility with them to change what needs to be changed so that the kingdom can come in its fullness. (p. 19)

Similarly, Guder (2009) alludes to the fact that mission first involves apostolic processes such as witnessing of faith, discipleship, healing, atonement, and other processes that precede the inauguration and consummation of God's kingdom (Guder 2009:67–68). It can then be argued that the *Missio Dei* emphasises divine activities aimed at attaining salvation in its fulness so that the kingdom of God can manifest itself in the whole world.

From the perspective of *pactum salutis*, however, salvation is treated as a kind of pre-planned liberation of the triune God to be invoked in the event of human failure before it manifests itself (Muller 2007:15). Considering God's innate attributes of being omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent (Robson 1983:21–24), this could well be true, as it rightly suggests that God, through his divine attributes, foresaw the destruction of his own creation long before its manifestation and made salvific plans to excellently counteract the disaster damage. From this perspective, the plan of salvation becomes a divine insurance or an important means of mitigating risk in the event of destruction. This assurance [preplanned salvation] aims to support and mitigate human destruction at every step of the life cycle of God's creation. However, the doctrine of *pactum salutis* raises concerns about limiting the plan of salvation to the chosen few (Williamson 2018:259), as opposed to the total salvation envisaged by the *Missio Dei*. This would effectively mean that God planned salvation for a portion rather than all creation. This undermines the *pleroma* [πλήρωμα] (Markus 1954:193–224) or the totality God's powers to plan a holistic mission to redeem His own creation from destruction. As if countering this doctrine, George (2013) states conclusively that:

*Missio Dei* establishes God's realm throughout the creation. This kingdom perspective is one of wholeness. The fullness of the triune God which overflows into the world results in a fulness of parts, participants, and places in one holistic mission. (p. 297)

In the larger scheme of things, any knowledge or reflection on God's planned salvation leads to asking who the beneficiary will be thus opening the way the discussion of what is meant by predestination as discussed in the next few sections.

## **Missio Dei and predestination**

Conceivably, it can be said with some certainty that, of the bulk of Christian doctrine, the doctrine of predestination is one of the least coherent, least understood and at the same time the historically constant subject of intense study. Consequently, the centrality of this doctrine covertly underpinned the missionary theology that emerged from the Willingen Conference. However, this discussion can be deferred to a much later section, which will focus solely on the derivation of predestination from the aforesaid conference. It is important at this point to place the understanding of this teaching closer to the context that would have largely sensitised the convictions of Willingen's companions and the resulting perspectives. As mentioned, there is very extensive literature on predestination, riddled with wild disagreements among Christian scholars from

pre-Augustinian times to the present day (Mozley 1855; Rist 1969; Wetzel 2001). Predestination, as understood in this paper, is soteriologically rooted doctrine that is more concerned with the fate of individuals, nations or groups of people whom God has chosen or is said to have chosen for the eternal salvation. What might help in this regard would be to understand predestination not overtly, but from the perspective of human corruption and salvation prospects, which happened to establish its relevance.

Understood from the perspective of the Willingen Conference, the *Missio Dei* in relation to the doctrine of predestination or election is not an end in itself but expresses unreserved human salvation as its central objective rather than the uniqueness of the church or its connection with salvation. In other words, based on the historical development of the Willingen Conference and its consequent commitments, missionary theology embraced more universal than formerly restrictive ecclesiastical salvation. Certainly, it became clear to the participants and the follow-up of the Willingen conference that the triune God, when active in the mission of salvation, does not make a special selection of certain groups of people as exclusive finalists of grace. Contrasting with what had previously prevailed, the rehabilitated understanding was that God's grace is equally available to all people, regardless of their perceived moral correctness or religious affiliation. Every single person, be it a politician, an accountant, a prostitute, a devout Christian, Jew or Gentile, all have an equal opportunity, either personally or as a group, to benefit from God's unlimited grace and consequently be saved.

## **Pactum and predestination**

The *pactum's* predestination has been unsustainably masked behind the teachings of Calvin, particularly by the post-Reformation English Calvinist Puritans in the 16th and 17th centuries who desirously took on the role of purifying the Church of England of Roman Catholic practices. In recent decades, most scholars have accused the Puritans of hijacking and misrepresenting Calvin's pure understanding of predestination (Bosch 2011:263–264; Cherry 1965:333; Packer 1966:149–175). As a result, several groups, including but not limited to Puritans and proponents of *pactum salutis*, boldly reiterated the misconception of predestination, as if repeating Calvin's original position, which they believed needed neither examination nor verification (Marsden 1970:91–105; Stafford 2013:184–202). Contrary to the Willingen Conference's understanding of the *missio Dei*, this teaching seems to suggest that Christ is only for the church and not for the whole world. Williamson (2018) gravitated to the theological objections by stating:

[T]he main idea is nonetheless clear. In his eternal being, the Triune God formally agreed to secure the salvation of those chosen in Christ before the creation of the world (Eph 1:4). (Williamson 2018:261–262)

This doctrine ostensibly posits that the triune God illogically decided from eternity that some would be saved from sin

while the rest remain irrevocably condemnable. In essence, the reasoning behind this doctrine asserts that or purports to have it in good authority that the Triune God consented in the pre-temporal actuality to bestow grace on some while the rest must be condemned eternally to sinful condition. Bosch (2011) reconciled the understanding of predestination with Calvin's genuine thoughts and consequently warned that his rigid presentation as it is from the perspective of *pactum salutis* will certainly invalidate the very prospects of mission (Bosch 2011:263). This means that as soon as it is unduly emphasised that predestination is only for God's elect as done in the *pactum salutis*, those who are not considered elect will see no point in repenting or engaging in mission, thereby crushing Mission itself and distracting the Great Commission. In every respect, the language employed by this doctrine is better suited to encompassing absolute predestination than any other uncertain doctrine ever attested in Church history. By all indications, strict or absolute predestination has always been prone to rejecting any optimistic hope of total salvation and has increasingly been embraced by those within the church than those outside. To this very end Bosch stated: 'it was almost as if pastors and theologians feared that the world might improve' (Bosch 2011:255). From the perspective of this doctrine, election is grounded and conditioned far more by the static eternal will of the triune God than by human earnest repentance, undeservedly rendering Christ's mediation redundant.

## Conclusion

The central goals of the *Missio Dei* are total salvation and the attainment of the universal kingdom of God, both of which refute the doctrine of *pactum salutis* as shown in this article. Against the endorsement or promulgation of *pactum salutis*, this article drew on the available missiological literature to observe the sequence of creational events as presented in Scripture as constituting the cause or beginning of the *Missio Dei*. Secondly and thirdly, the Reformed Orthodox doctrines of Trinity and Predestination are contrasted with, or used to refute, the understanding of *pactum salutis*. Consequently, the understanding of the *Missio Dei* from the perspective of the 1952 IMC-Willingen Conference, or its resulting scholarship, as was the aim of this work, refutes the *pactum salutis* as incompatible with the main goals of the *Missio Dei*, particularly the desire for total salvation. While *pactum salutis* limits the pre-determined salvation to a chosen few, *Missio Dei* encompasses the complete salvation of all human creation.

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