

A Reformed Kenotic Missiology for an Imperial Era Powered by AI

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Introduction

I want to frame my response to the WCRC mission statement by offering some thoughts on how Reform missiology in this era of Imperial AI should be rooted in God's woundedness and the pursuit of transformative disruption and resistance, thereby reimagining and redefining mission. I was requested to offer a perspective through the lens of critiquing empire, a concept defined by the 2004 Accra Document as *“The convergence of economic, political, cultural, geographic, and military imperial interests, systems, and networks for the purpose of amassing political power and economic wealth. Empire typically forces and facilitates the flow of wealth and power from vulnerable persons, communities, and countries to the more powerful...”*

Imperial Power mutation from Internationalism to Globalism

Although the document recognised that Empire crosses all boundaries, strips and reconstructs identities, subverts cultures, subordinates nation-states, and marginalises or co-opts religious communities, this description was made during an era clothed with the concept of internationalism that advocates for cooperation among states, opposition to isolation and extreme nationalism, support for international organisations and promotes peace and security through diplomacy.

In 2025, we are now living in the era of globalisation. This multifaceted concept describes the interdependence and integration of the world's economies, cultures, and peoples. It is driven by quantum advances in technological developments through artificial intelligence, along with immeasurable human innovation in communication and transportation. It is within this new world order that understanding the concept of empire is crucial for reimagining new perspectives on the impact of Empire on Reformed mission understanding and practice.

Empire does not need a crown or a flag to keep working.

Empires are forces of political and economic power that never let go; they only change their strategy and paperwork. The imperial strategy is forever one of “Take, dominate, exploit, subdue and discard”, then it mutates. This presentation argues that the rapid pace of development unleashed by artificial intelligence on human life and work represents the most daring expression of the empire's agenda and its relentless pursuit of global dominance over all aspects of life. What then should be the mission response of the Reformed Church community towards this imperial force? At the core of Reformed theology and missiology lies the Sovereignty of God, which contrasts with the presumptuous sovereignty claims of this imperial AI era. Reformed missiology affirms that God's mission includes the margins as a primary focus for engagement. This necessitates the church's missional response, which is rooted in the paradox of Christ's self-emptying and woundedness, opposing the dominant power systems that operate on a dehumanising logic.

Engage with the imperial and hegemonic forces of AI.

The WCRC's mission statement should therefore be more deliberate in outlining effective ways for the church's mission to engage with the imperial and hegemonic forces of AI in this digital age. This imperial force operates through "data colonialism" and "algorithmic bias," where Imago Hominis is projected and celebrated as having sovereign authority, yet in practice, humans are used as commodities for trading to generate profit and control. This runs counter to the missional mandate of treating people as bearers of God's image (Imago Dei).

Reformed Missional Critique has fallen into a deep sleep.

I dare to submit that the Reformed Missional critique of this AI imperial era has fallen into a deep sleep, lacking effectiveness in empowering congregations for radical mission engagement. In this era, facing catastrophic global forces, the Reformed mission must become more kenotic and rooted in Christ's example of suffering and solidarity with the vulnerable as described in Philippians 2:6-11. Unfettered capitalism and white supremacy/ authoritarianism are now fashionable partners with imperial powers terrorising people on the margins of power and forcing them to be silent. The forging of far-right anti-democratic forces has galvanised their powers to weaken democratic institutions and install their one-party state political system in which racial profiling becomes normative, minorities are seen as "enemy within" and critical comments make you an extremist.

Kenotic missional model grounded in Christ's suffering and solidarity with the vulnerable

Given the rapidly changing global political and economic landscape, a Reformed kenotic missional model is grounded in Christ's suffering and solidarity with those who define their identity, vocation, and witness not through imperial power that forcefully controls others, but through vulnerability, relationality, and service. This form of kenotic missional focus includes prophetic witness that challenges the world's pursuit of technological sovereignty and omnipotence. Therefore, the most urgent change in the contemporary Reformed Missional approach is to promote transformative Reformed leadership that is both kenotic and missional.

Reformed kenotic and missional leadership

This agenda should promote leadership that emphasises ethical, moral, and relational practices that uphold human dignity, and utilise technology to support comprehensive human development rather than replace it. Reformed kenotic and missional leadership in this era should adopt prophetic advocacy for justice that fights against the enslaving forms of AI technologies that are programmed through their algorithms to practice biases and inequalities against vulnerable people. I have used the concept of kenosis as the most powerful theological idea that embraces the woundedness of God, which expresses divine power through self-emptying and suffering. It is this servant leadership model that demonstrates humble vulnerability, weakness and solidarity with those who suffer, which I believe is most needed now to address the hegemonic, controlling, and dehumanising logic inherent in the imperial AI world order.

Reformed kenotic missional leadership must, in this era, deliberately navigate the perilous terrain of choosing between the binary options of "fearful avoidance" or "uncritical embrace" of the imperial AI landscape that is transforming how people live, communicate, and learn. The steadfast allegiance of Reformed theology to the sovereign Triune God of hope means that we must recognise the challenges we face as opportunities for mission. We should approach this

with an unwavering, robust, decolonial, and reformed hermeneutical framework, and a critique of scripture necessary to inform our understanding and practice.

Hopeful engagement, not fearful retreat

Finally, I wish to suggest that this WCRC mission document should call upon the churches to return to the priority of systematic instruction in the church's confessions and catechisms that are central to their missional identity, vocation and witness. This Reformed faith requires an informed, radical, and mature discipleship ready to engage in apologetics that appropriately challenge the false sovereignty of this imperial AI world system.

This Reformed kenotic missional reimagining and repositioning must be rooted in deep theological confidence, not fear, because our mission effort is founded on the certainty of the triune God's sovereign plan for all creation that renders impotent all imperial rogue powers that bequeath death. Our Reformed missional discourse makes a mockery of this imperial AI world order and laughs at its notion of power that is based upon might. What we offer to the world is missional service that unmasked the pretensions of the AI Empire as a system of power through self-emptying love, solidarity, and suffering of Christ with the vulnerable and wounded of this world. This kenotic missional alternative does not seek mastery and self-advancement to control and exploit, but rather to offer a humble, loving, and sacrificial stewardship service. Against all odds, it seeks to bear witness to the all-sufficiency of the triune God in this imperial, AI-driven world system, which creates idols to project power.