As a theologically Reformed evangelical believer, I would like to propose a particular way to view missions. Given the proliferation of worldwide ministries, driven by a dizzying array of denominational, independent, and parachurch organizations, Reformed believers need to consider again what our own understanding of missions is. I would like to propose "Reformational" values as a baseline from which we can consider mission, our relationship to it, and our engagement in it.

By Reformational, I mean operating out of an understanding of ecclesiology, theology, hermeneutics etc., that has been profoundly shaped by the core values and world view of the magisterial Reformation. I do not intend to slight Anabaptists, their views have helped inform my Christian perspective in many ways. They are, however, significantly separated from mainstream Reformers.[1] In doing so, I do not insinuate that knowledge stopped there, that in fact would not be a Reformational perspective. The point is that the reformers such as Luther, Melanchthon, Calvin, Bucer, Bullinger, Zwingli and the like represented values that help form my own as I interact with the Word of God. By "Reformational," I do not mean "Reformed" in terms of anthropology and soteriology. Rather, I intend other values of the Reformers that impact most directly on church planting. Five of these are worth a brief mention, **christotelic, connectional, transnational, ecclesiotelically missional, and inter-dependent.** I freely admit that none of the five automatically come to mind, but a careful study of the 16th and early 17th century validates these claims. This also is not intended to represent the resurrection of European or American cultural violence and imperialism. We have a great and growing global church that does not need our importation of cultural forms, such as Charles Kraft's American "christo-paganism."[2] Kraft sees genuine faith enclosed by cultural forms that turn it into religion and, too often, into Western syncretism, "very intellectualized, organized according to foreign patterns, weak on the Holy Spirit and spiritual power, strong on Western forms of

communication (e.g. preaching) and Western worship patterns imposed on non-Western peoples as if it were scriptural." To the contrary, this effort simply resurrects five values that represented the mighty acts of God.[3]

"Christotelic" represents the commitment to believing and communicating a certain understanding of Scripture. It is the story of a called people, but it is also a call to something. It is heilsgeschichte, "salvation history.[4] It is to see all of scripture as a unit moving the reader to embrace Jesus as messiah, redeemer, eschatological king over creation and as the divine Son of God. It is going somewhere, to Christ. Christ is not, therefore, a moment in a larger narrative. He is also not a missing ingredient, completing an otherwise complete plan. He sums up all things in himself. "For all the promises of God find their Yes in him" (2 Cor 1:20). To be Christotelic is also a commitment to see the Bible as a canon, not a man-made collection of various, autonomous texts, but as one story. It is not an encyclopedia, nor is it an anthology. It is interconnected, progressive, and mutually-supportive. It is approached according to the "analogy of faith." Scripture interprets scripture. This is the "heuristic maxim for interpreters".[6] The Bible is revelation itself, not just the 66 building blocks contained within. Finally, it is a recognition that the canon was God's idea not ours. It is a revelation, "God's self-presentation to us."[7] It is to be drawn into the fellowship of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is an act of listening, on our part, not fundamentally of creation. Furthermore, as Webster notes, God's revelation in canon is a work of grace, given the fact that it is an act of reconciliation.

Finally, since people and text are both governed by the communicative presence of the Holy Spirit, the recognition of canon and the redemptive story it describes is an essentially passive act.[8] It is not a human construct we can ignore. It is God-sent. We are called to listen and obey. It, as the Orthodox wisely assert, reads us, we do not read it. As Packer notes, "Interpreted Scripture must be allowed to interpret its interpreters." When it is all said, after all, we are still called to simply accept it, in all

of its parts, and as it is given.

By **connectionalism,** I mean the commitment to the necessary, organic, and institutional interconnectivity of visible bodies of believers. This implies that visible assemblies are connected doctrinally, historically, spiritually, and ideologically. It means, at the most intimate level, they have more in common with each other than they have with any other part of the world around them. At an even more basic level, it also means that they see themselves as less than complete without the others. It stands against an ethos of independence and autonomy. It is the ethos of brotherhood and sisterhood, not of distant relatives or occasional friends. It is the language of true kinship; a repudiation of the Tower of Babel. To be clear, it does not necessitate denominationalism on the grand scale, but it does imply sustained, familial relations with the larger Body of Christ, expressed as webs of functional relationships. In an age of increasing missiological fragmentation and cultural hypersensitivity, it reminds us that God is a God of hospitality who has invited all of us to dine with him at the same table. It is the gathering of the Great Commission lived out

Transnational signifies the commitment to ties of real commitment between bodies of believers that transcend national borders. It goes beyond the national. "International" is shaped by borders. It is not as though "International" is incorrect, rather it is insufficient. As Robert Kingdon has pointed out, Calvinism was from the beginning international, lacking the national ties common to German Lutherans and Dutch Anabaptists.[9] Its growth was fueled by rapidly spreading and growing colonies of refugees, much as Islam in Europe is today. Geneva served as a kind of resource hub, training leaders from all over Europe and a printing house, second only to Paris and Lyon for the French-speaking world.[10] In time, the movement also began to reproduce hubs such as Emden that could more effectively coordinate church planting and missions further north.[11] The networks formed around immigrant communities, empowered as they were by strategically located resource hubs ("mother churches"), galvanized the spread of the Gospel.

Sadly, this has not been the essential habit of European Reformed churches since the mid-17th century. The peace that settled over Europe following the Thirty Years War carried with it a heavy price. Given the fact that European nations emerging in the early modern period still reflected the Constantinian settlement, with state-sponsored religion, each ruler was empowered to determine the religion of his or her domain. Visible, organized churches, including connectional ones, were bounded by their nations' political borders. This, however, was not the case 90 years prior. By the mid-16th century, Geneva, for example was the centre of a vital, expansive church planting, missionary effort that enveloped Northern and Western Europe in a web of interconnected colloquies, synods, presbyteries, and classes. Independent and denominational Reformed bodies all drank from the same trough. Reformed church planters were pioneer church planters and missionaries, well in advance of their Moravian brothers. It took the devastation of the Thirty Years War to snuff out the momentum and replace religious fervour with scepticism. The ever-shrinking globe has provided unique opportunities for this most biblical of values to flourish again.

The **ecclesiotelic missionalism** of the Reformed movement in 16th century Europe refers to the foundational commitment to look out, rather than focus in. Sadly, when we consider what we have become, it is difficult for us to understand that we were not always an introspective expression of faith, an introversion. By missional, I do not mean the necessity of believing communities to send out people that carry out the Great Commission. Rather, I mean missional in the sense that to look out, to be part of God's creative, and re-creative process is essential to the definition of who we are. It is not an activity tacked onto our identity. It is our identity. It is militant faith. We forget that Calvin's Geneva served as a school of missions. This was the life-blood of the faith.[12] Hundreds of missionaries were equipped and sent out by the Reformer. Geneva, in fact, served as the

paramount missionary hub of the 16th century. It is the faith of the missional church that connected the Genevan martyrs in Brazil with Felicity and Perpetua in the early church. It is ecclesiotelic in the sense that the focus is on the creation of faith communities, the biblical concept of church. These are marked by both inner faith and outward structure, governed by biblical forms and norms. Ultimately, this means that our commitment is to the creation of eschatological communities of mission, who also do the same. It is a commitment to a church kinetic. Geneva reported only one "particular" church in 1555. By 1562, there were 2,150.[13]

Interdependent churches locate their identity in the universal Body of Christ. On one hand, they know that they are home in the presence of others. At the same time, they are not, "buckets, sitting on their own bottoms." We are wisely repudiating dependent relationships between western and non-western peoples. Dependency has become a critical hurdle to overcome. The indigenous church principle, the focus of most missional activity since the end of the Second World War, churches that are self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating, underscores the recognition that paternalism represents an act of coercion and, therefore, promotes violence. As John Carter notes, what missionaries would not say that their goal was to work themselves out of a job? [14] Contextualization and its expression, "Insider Movements" also signify western commitments to honour "the other" as being made in the image of God. Equally, we see our own culture representing fallenness, as is every other culture.

On the other hand, we have now come to the place where we are "telling" non-western peoples that they no longer need us, and must be on their own. I wonder if we haven't just replaced one paternalism for another. Whether we tell them they need us, or we tell them they don't, we are still the tellers, not the listeners. It isn't a conversation. It is a speech. In a sense, it is still a vestige of post-colonial thinking. Is it, in fact, biblical not to need others? If Kraft is right to condemn western

"christo-paganism", surely a principle manifestation of it must be our obsession with radical independence. If we tell them that they do not need us, does that not also mean that we do not need others? What may sound like boldness and faith to us, the telling to national churches what they do not need, may sound like paternalism to others. [15] We must maintain that we are to be reflections of Christ to the world, but most of all to each other.

Moreover, if God is Triune, isn't interdependence as a value more congruent than either dependence or independence? The failure to grasp this is to fail to see that the evangelizers need to be continually evangelized. Acts 10-11 is an illustration in point. Peter himself needed to be transformed to take him beyond his Jewish conceptual borders before others could be transformed. The church that results from that transformative action is missional, as it is continually evangelized in an "ascending spiral", from church to mission to church.[16] We always need other voices proclaiming Jesus to us. This is what interdependence means. We always need them. We always need each other, for the life of the world.

Every people group and culture has something to contribute to the universal people of God. Every people group and culture needs redemption; none are fundamentally superior to the others. The shortcomings found within ourselves and our fallen cultural expressions cannot be resources entirely from within. God meets our need through the ministry of others outside ourselves.[17] Would it not be a more mature response to the missionary imperative for different indigenous bodies to partner together, interdependently? To be sure, the three-selves represent a very commendable goal, but only a first step in a longer relationship. Better still, as Carter calls them, are "coactive" ministries, consisting of all sorts of cooperative ventures.[18] Though their nature will be determined largely by the cultural context, the concept of interconnected ministry and mutual commitment does seem to reflect a more coherently biblical position. This does, of course, directly impact traditional goals for indigenousness, but it need not jeopardize contextual

ministry. The coactive participants decide the nature of the relationships, driven as they are by the circumstances and cultural constraints.

Interdependence implies service as well. The call to mission is the call to servanthood. Believers called to serve people of other cultures, are called first and foremost to be their servants, not their masters. Indigenous cultures, in the same way, see themselves as serving outside believers and the churches they represent as well. Interdependence transforms missions by replacing the power and control motifs resident in human nature. The later is, in particular, significant, as control is a principle source of global idolatry. Servanthood serves as a subversion of this manifestation of worldliness. It is thus Christ-like in the way that it shows the one true, saving God to others and because it does, critiques all fallen structures.

Finally, interdependence is a statement of profound humility. It acknowledges need. As such, it is opposed to all forms of pride. It admits a need to find answers outside of ourselves and even outside of our private relations with the Lord Jesus. We can see that God speaks through communities. These are not simply local however, they are global. We are called, as a consequence, to hold to our own positions with fidelity, but also with the knowledge that we have much to learn, both with regard to ourselves and most especially concerning God. We do not need culturally quarantined communities of believers, we need to share ourselves. We do not need to merge our distinctions either. We do not benefit from "vanilla" faith expressions, but we do need to enjoy all of the flavors.

1. Enormous debate has swirled around the different "wings" of the Reformation. Terms such as "left wing" and "radical" each represent opposing poles attempting to describe separatists and Anabaptists. Though Williams' "Radical Reformation" makes the case for seeing them as the Reformation carried to its logical conclusion, I am inclined to see it as a compromise with medieval devotion. As I see it, the magisterial Reformation is the radical Reformation. Therefore, its ecclesiology and theology reflect the Reformation's real frontier.
2. Charles H. Kraft, "Pursuing Faith, not Religion: The Liberating Quest for Contextualization" *Mission Frontiers* (September-October 2005) 10.
3. I do disagree with Kraft and his implications in a number of significant ways. His assumption that he can isolate faith from its cultural form (e.g. "form religion"), betrays naiveté. His own statements concerning western syncretism profile values that, given their contentious nature, can certainly be argued over. His statements also imply that elements of "religion" such as preaching (not merely Western styles of preaching, but preaching in the main) are disposable. By extension, so then would be church, offices, structures, sacraments, etc. I do not agree with his assumptions that these are simply cultural elements that can be freely replaced or discarded.
4.. David L. Baker, *"Interpreting Texts in the Context of the Whole Bible"* Themelios 5.2 (January 1980) 22.
5. Rich Lusk, *"The Christotelic Spiral"* (2004) www.hornes.org.
6. James I. Packer, "In Quest of Canonical Interpretation" *The Use of the Bible in Theology: Evangelical Options* (Louisville: John Knox, 1983) www.geocities.com 3.
7. John Webster, "The Dogmatic Location of the Canon" NZSTh, 43, Bd., S. 17-43.
8. Webster, "Canon" 36.
9. Robert M. Kingdon, "International Calvinism" *Handbook of European History, 1400-1600* Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) 229.
10. Kingdon 235.
11. Far from the stereotypic closed community of relentless authoritarianism, Calvin's Geneva was a church planting dynamo. Some of its concepts such as the resource hubs of Geneva and Emden merit serious missiological study, if not outright imitation.
12. Ray Van Neste, "John Calvin on Evangelism and Missions" *Founders Journal* 33 www.founders.org.
13. Erroll Hulse, "John Calvin and his Missionary Enterprise" *Reformation Today* (1998) www.theology21.org.
14. John F. Carter, "The Indigenous Principle Revisited: Towards a Co-Active Mode of Missionary Ministry".
15. Gerald H. Anderson, "Moratorium on Missionaries?" www.christiancentury.org. The author is the President of the American Society of Missiology.
16. Willem Saayman, "Missionary by its Very Nature" *Southern African Missiological Society*. Originally published in *Missionalia* 11.
17. Mission Issues and Strategy Advisory Group II, "Ten Principles of Partnership: From towards Dynamic Mission: Renewing the Church for Mission" *The Anglican Communion: Mission and Evangelism* (1993) www.aco.org.
18. Carter 3.1. The coactive approach depends on genuine relationships that do not devolve into financial arrangements. These will not necessarily be evident at the start, but will emerge as both parties learn to value the other. Ultimately, the only thing preventing the concept from degenerating into a hopeless naiveté is the inner presence of the Holy Spirit, who moves the centre of gravity from the cultural and social to the spiritual and essential.