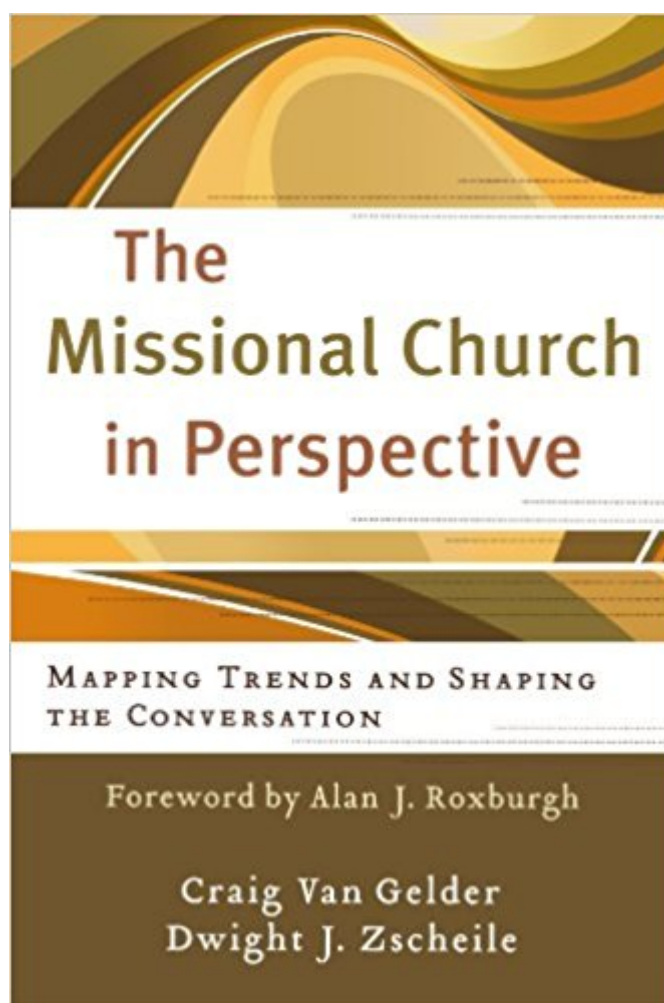


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# The Missional Church In Perspective: Mapping Trends And Shaping The Conversation (The Missional Network)



## Synopsis

In this book, two leading ministry experts place the missional church conversation in historical perspective and offer fresh insights for its further development. They begin by providing a helpful review of the genesis of the missional church and offering an insightful critique of the Gospel and Our Culture Network's seminal book *Missional Church*, which set the conversation in motion. They map the diverse paths this discussion has taken over the past decade, identifying four primary branches and ten sub-branches of the conversation and placing over one hundred published titles and websites into this framework. The authors then utilize recent developments in biblical and theological perspectives to strengthen and extend the conversation about missional theology, the church's interaction with culture and cultures, and church organization and leadership in relation to the formation of believers as disciples. Professors, students, and church leaders will value this comprehensive overview of the missional movement. It includes a foreword by Alan J. Roxburgh.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Extending the Missional Church Conversation "The term 'missional' has been adopted by a wide variety of traditions and attached to many add-on programs. This book brings much-needed clarity to a confused picture. It is no rehash of familiar material but rather breaks new ground and leaves the reader with an appetite for more!"--Eddie Gibbs, Fuller Theological Seminary "This book is the most precise, informed, and uncompromising parsing to date of the history of the concept of

'missional' both as a sensibility and as a form of praxis. Like all good historical analyses, it provides not only a basis for understanding where we have been but also a well-honed tool for considering where we may need and want to go next."--Phyllis Tickle, author, *The Great Emergence*"Concertgoers are familiar with the cacophonous roar that precedes great orchestral performances as musicians tune their instruments. When the conductor takes the stand, however, these same instruments--now focused on a musical score--produce music. *The Missional Church in Perspective* provides sheet music for all those who want to participate in the missional symphony. The book's scholarship and synthesis qualify it to be a common score for us all."--Reggie McNeal, Leadership Network"This book is a veritable morphology of the term 'missional.' As such it provides both conceptual tools with which to assess the impact of missional ideas on the Western church and a map that helps us chart possible future trajectories of what is clearly one of the most important movements in our times."--Alan Hirsch, Forge Mission Training Network"A helpful and well-researched work that traces and evaluates streams within the missional church conversation, showing a wide awareness from evangelical, mainline, and historical sources. I have found a new required textbook for my missional church class."--Ed Stetzer, LifeWay Research; missiologist"It is a rare book that can clearly and cogently describe a highly complex field while also setting a bold course for the future. *The Missional Church in Perspective* does precisely this. I have little doubt that it will serve as a centerpiece for the missional conversation for the next decade and beyond."--Jack Reese, Abilene Christian University

Craig Van Gelder (Ph.D., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and University of Texas at Arlington) is professor of congregational mission at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. He is the author or editor of a number of books, including *The Essence of the Church*, *The Ministry of the Missional Church*, *A Field Guide for the Missional Congregation*, and *The Church between Gospel and Culture*. Dwight J. Zscheile (Ph.D., Luther Seminary) is assistant professor of congregational mission and leadership at Luther Seminary and serves as associate rector at St. Matthew's Episcopal Church in St. Paul, Minnesota.

*The Missional Church in Perspective* is the first and only book that explores the development of the term missional by noting the broad historical and theological contributing factors and thoroughly exploring the recent literature. It is a must read for anyone who uses the term or regularly reads authors who do so. While the co-authors work as a team throughout the text, Van Gelder takes the lead for the first part (chapters 1-3) allowing Zscheile to do so for the latter part (chapters 4-6)."Part

1: The History and Development of the Missional Conversation" serves as the book's greatest contribution to the understanding of the term mission. Van Gelder is uniquely qualified to explore the varied usage of the term, since it was popularized as the result of a book he contributed to: *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (1998). In addition to exploring and critiquing the 1998 text, Van Gelder charts the recent literature as a part of a missional tree. In that illustration, the 1998 book serves as the trunk; church and missions/mission Trinitarian missiology, *missio Dei*, reign (kingdom) of God, church's missionary nature, and missional hermeneutics serve as the roots; and the recent literature are grouped by theme to serve as the branches: discovering, utilizing, engaging, and extending. Each branch and its associated subbranches are explored in relation to the "biblical and theological themes" that inform them and in relation to recent literature that is representative of it (p.69). "Part 2: Perspectives That Extend the Missional Conversation" seeks to apply the wealth of information in the first part to the contemporary church through chapters focusing on theological frameworks, engaging culture, and church life and leadership. While Zscheile offers numerous helpful insights that enable readers to understand how the missional church should be embodied, this section does not significantly extend the missional conversation by introducing new or controversial possibilities. Instead, it offers data points to encourage readers to think more about concepts and, ideally, to engage others in that conversation with the intent to act upon those discoveries. So What? In the introduction, Van Gelder and Zscheile suggest the recent missional church literature includes four common themes: (1) God is a missionary God who sends the church into the world. (2) God's mission in the world is related to the reign (kingdom) of God. (3) The missional church is an incarnational (versus an attractional) ministry sent to engage a postmodern, post-Christendom, globalized context. (4) The internal life of the missional church focuses on every believer living as a disciple engaging in mission (p. 3-4). Given its rapid development and widespread usage, the term missional church is likely to be one most North American Christians will hear often in the coming years.

This is a sequel of sorts to the seminal work, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Gospel & Our Culture), which was written in 1998 by members of the Gospel and Our Culture Network (GOCN). The original volume wrestled with the question of how the church relates to the world in a post-Christendom, postmodern culture. Its authors did not see mission as something the church does, but rather as central to its very identity: what the church is. The Triune God is a missionary God who sends the church to participate in his mission to the world--the *missio Dei*. Thus, to be a Christian is to be a missionary. *Missional Church* sold quite well

for an academic book that intentionally avoided pragmatics, techniques and strategies. It popularized the term "missional," which has since become a buzzword. The current volume seeks both to clarify the past conversation, especially the way it has morphed and splintered in the intervening years, as well as to shape future conversation. Van Gelder, who authored the first three chapters, was a contributor to the original volume; Zscheile, who wrote chapters four through six, is his colleague at Luther Seminary. The authors achieve their purposes for the book. They identify the historical and theological origins of the missional conversation, filling some gaps that existed in *Missional Church*. They demonstrate how some of the divergence of thought that exists today among various missional authors can be traced back to theological tensions that existed between the authors of the previous book. Finally, they advance the discussion by bringing new insights from Trinitarian theology to bear on the question of the *missio Dei*. As the subtitle suggests, they do map the trends and shape the conversation. The book has several strengths. First, the authors have mastered the secondary literature. They are familiar even with the subtle nuances of other authors who are writing on this topic, which allows them to define key terms in the most precise way. This brings a certain level of clarity to a topic that can be confusing, especially for neophytes. A second strength of the book lies in its theological integration. Despite the postliberal bias that is evident, the exercise of pondering how the doctrine of the Trinity impacts the *missio Dei* is surely a fruitful one--even if Van Gelder and Zscheile go too far in places or base their arguments on theological assumptions not shared by most evangelicals. A third strength can be found in their willingness to invite further discussion. They do not criticize sharply those who disagree with them, but rather encourage further dialogue on the subject. By demonstrating such an irenic spirit, they are modeling the very principles for which they are arguing. Nevertheless, the book is marred by some weaknesses, some of which are serious. First, their approach to Scripture is not satisfying for evangelicals who are accustomed to the Bible being cited authoritatively. For Van Gelder and Zscheile, the Bible is a narrative of God's mission to his creation, and theology is an act of imagination. For significant portions of the book, they do not cite Scripture at all but simply allude to theology. How postmodern of them! Second, they build on the works of twentieth-century neo-orthodox and liberal theologians, without proving that those approaches are to be favored over other, more evangelical, approaches. For instance, the authors assume Moltmann's view of God's relationship with creation without bothering to prove that it is correct (112-13). What they mean by reconciliation (116-17) is not the same thing that evangelicals take that term to mean. Third, their emphasis upon the relational nature of the Trinity, as emphasized in the Orthodox tradition over and against the more monistic view of God common in the West, almost smacks of tri-theism (107-09).

Perhaps their greatest weakness is a view of culture that is more sanguine than the biblical text would warrant. Such a positive view of unredeemed mankind has perhaps the unintended effect of minimizing the Gospel and downplaying the need for conversion, regeneration, repentance and faith. It is interesting that Van Gelder and Zscheile place such a heavy emphasis on the doctrine of the Trinity, so that other doctrines, like Christology and Soteriology, are downplayed or virtually neglected. Why should the doctrine of the Trinity trump the rest? The authors play other doctrines against each other too, such as when they claim that an emphasis upon Christology in mission actually diminishes the role of the Spirit (80, 84). How so? They make the assertion, but do not prove it. The most helpful part of the book for me was the section on hospitality and reciprocity (132-35). Zscheile points out that, despite its neglect in the West during the modern era, hospitality occupies a significant place in Scripture and church history (132). It is rooted in the doctrine of the Incarnation. Zscheile uses Luke 10:1-12 as an illustration of how Jesus wanted his disciples to receive hospitality from the very people that they were trying to reach. Despite the fact that he identifies these people as Samaritans (which is unlikely; cp. Matt 10:5-6), his point is still valid--when a missionary receives hospitality from a stranger, it puts the missionary in the vulnerable position. *The Missional Church in Perspective* is an academic book, written by missiologists for missiologists. It promises to be as influential as its predecessor. Those interested in the missional debate can scarcely ignore it. Those who are already fluent in "missional" will appreciate the historical and theological background here, as well as the contribution that the authors make to the ongoing conversation regarding the *missio Dei*. However, those who are not familiar with the missional conversation--and the twentieth-century theological developments that undergird them--will likely be lost, especially if they have not read the former volume, *Missional Church*. They may want to begin with a book like *Introducing the Missional Church* by Alan J. Roxburgh before jumping into this volume.

Probably the best resource available for understanding the current status of the "missional conversation." I personally appreciated the authors' descriptive assessments more than their directives -- i.e. as to the way the missional conversation SHOULD go. Their breakdown of "discovering," "engaging," and "expanding" the missional perspective seems to preference the "advanced level" that they see themselves and their friends occupying. But these are minor annoyances. It's a GREAT book for understanding how and why "the missional turn" has taken place in the current Christian context, and where the multifarious and variegated literature that uses the term "missional" (in different ways!) actually fits in the overall map of the conversation(s). Very

helpful.

Good book, sort of, it gives interesting insight into the foundations of the Missional movement but I feel its pretty limiting to a singular perspective of approaching this movement and lacks an understanding of the spiritual movement and spiritual formation practices that impacted the church and helped push it forward into this reign of God. It's seemingly more of a reaction against evangelicalism verses a concept of restoration to the church's holistic purpose. I also feel their understanding of the true essence if the emerging church movement is lopsided.

A solid historical review the evolution of the adjective "missional" when referring to the structure and activities of the church in light of its new context in contemporary North America. It was especially helpful to me as I had only a dim awareness of the debate over this terminology for the last 20 years or so. Well written and not pedantic.

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