

The emergence of the missional church introduces a different way of thinking about the church by joining missiology and ecclesiology. The mark of a missional church is more than the organized activities to spread the Christian faith but the people of God who embody<sup>1</sup> and in turn witness to the missional heart of God. This identity marker generates a renewed understanding of the purpose of the church and thereby the purpose of its mission. The contextualization of being church and of living missional attempts to update the practice of North American ecclesiology in a complex twenty-first century world.<sup>2</sup>

Western theology has not too long ago tended to focus on missiology as the methods of doing missions outside of ecclesiology; i.e., sending out missionaries to go elsewhere in the world to preach the gospel. Missional ecclesiology begins with what God is doing and wants to do in a local context (e.g., neighborhood, community, school) through a local congregation – the church therefore is an unequivocal part of *missio Dei*.<sup>3</sup> In this sense, the sending God initiates the mission.<sup>4</sup> God is a missionary God and God’s mission involves a church sent into the world as a part of his kingdom advancement (Matthew 5:13-16). Consequently, the church is missionary by its nature in God – there is no dichotomy between church and mission.<sup>5</sup> The life of the missional church

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<sup>1</sup> Van Gelder and Zscheile comment: “But what we really believe, that to which we are truly committed, is what becomes *embodied* in those choices that we actually make and the practices in which we engage... This focus on the embodiment of biblical and theological ideas, in which ideas and behaviors are understood as intricately interrelated, is critical to the missional conversation. We behave our way into new thinking, even as we think our way into new behaving.”

Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2011), 5.

<sup>2</sup> Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective*, 1.

<sup>3</sup> Van Gelder, Craig, and Alan Roxburgh. “What is Missional Church?” *Vimeo*, uploaded by Allelon, 23 November 2009, <https://vimeo.com/7788526>.

Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective*, 5.

<sup>4</sup> Van Gelder and Zscheile note, “The ecclesiocentric understanding of mission has been replaced during this century by a profoundly theocentric reconceptualization of Christian mission. We have come to see that mission is not merely an activity of the church. Rather, mission is the result of God’s initiative, rooted in God’s purpose to restore and heal creation. ‘Mission’ means ‘sending’ and it is the central biblical theme describing the purposes of God’s action in human history.”

Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective*, 3.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Gorman writes, “... I will argue that John has a particular missional structure and theme that manifests its understanding of *missio Dei* – the mission of God – and that its missional spirituality is a spirituality of

focuses on every believer living as a disciple in mission with the church as they are together following the Lord, whereby spiritual growth is more than an individual but the body of Christ being built up to participate more fully in God's mission (Ephesians 4:1-13; 1Peter 2:9-10).<sup>6</sup> Missional ecclesiology puts the focus on who the church *is* prior to what the church *does*. This incarnational ministry requires appropriate interpretation of both scripture and culture as well as humble obedience to discern and follow the Spirit's leading, as exemplified by the Apostle Paul, who went from town to town to proclaim Christ as a missionary and cared for new believers as a pastor. This is the same calling and privilege of every congregation in every generation – to interpret anew their culture in light of Scripture and how their church is to live biblically as an alternative to its society.<sup>7</sup>

North American Christianity has experienced some of the most dramatic moves of God from the Great Awakenings to Pentecostalism but has recently seen a shift towards other parts of the world. The missional church can revitalize the spirituality and identity of the North American church in a post-Western and post-modern context. Even though the church is outside the social fabric of life in this post-Christendom culture, the gospel of Jesus Christ that deals with sin and separation from God remains the need of all humanity, so the missional church is called 'for such a time as this' (Esther 4:14, NIV).

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participation in the very life and life-giving mission of God, by which Jesus' disciples demonstrate their likeness to God and become more and more like God."

Michael Gorman, *Abide and Go: Missional Theosis in the Gospel of John* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2018), xvii.

<sup>6</sup> Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective*, 8.

<sup>7</sup> Sebastian Kim and Kirsteen Kim describe, "The call for a mission to Western culture and the context of postmodernity demand new models of 'church,' which tended in North America to refer to the local congregation. 'Missional church' is a response to the challenge of British missionary bishop Lesslie Newbigin's (1986:1) call for 'a genuinely missionary encounter between the gospel and [modern Western] culture.' It involves the 'continuing conversation of the church' from a static institution into an instrument of mission in its broadest sense (Guder 2000). Rather than sending missionaries elsewhere, local churches are urged to become witnesses for Christ in their own culture primarily by their attractive and alternative community life (Van Gelder 2007)."

Sebastian Kim and Kirsteen Kim, *Christianity as a World Religion: An Introduction, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 232.