

Van Gelder, G & Zscheile, DJ 2011. *The Missional church in perspective: mapping trends and shaping the conversation*. Grand Rapids: BakerAcademic. Xx + 186pp. Paperback. ISBN 987-0-8010-3913-3.

This book attempts to provide an overview of what has come to be known as the missional church conversation in North America during the past decade. It begins with a discussion of the 1998 publication of *Missional church* and seeks to show how the conversation has developed in North America since the publication of this work. It also points towards perspectives that might extend this conversation.

Although some developments connected to the missional conversation outside the North American context are mentioned, this book explicitly recognises its North American context, and seeks to understand the conversation as it developed within this context. It is an important publication for those seeking to understand the North American missional conversation, and for those around the world seeking to continue participating in this dialogue.

The introduction and the first two chapters will assist those not familiar with the missional conversation to understand its basic approach. It is written in such a way as to be accessible to those outside the conversation, but will also help those who are familiar with the conversation to get a clearer picture of the key elements underlying many of the publications over the past ten years. It gives particular attention to a critical evaluation of Missional church.

Chapter three seeks to provide a map of missional perspectives. It lists a large number of books and online resources, categorising them into four branches and 10 sub-branches. This map is developed around the question of agency, “the extent to which one starts with the mission of the church and the extent to which one starts with the mission of God” (:69). This chapter might be one of the most important contributions made by the book, but the distinctions can be difficult to follow if the reader is not familiar with the literature being discussed, since the branches are discussed in a highly cursory fashion.

The second part of the book seeks to extend the conversation outlined in chapter 3 through an in-depth reflection on questions of the Trinity, culture and congregational practice within the missional church conversation. One chapter is devoted to discussing each of these.

Chapter four introduces to the dialogue the critique that has been levelled against Missional church, namely that perspectives on the Trinity from the Eastern tradition were not sufficiently reflected upon. While incorporating this broader tradition of Trinitarian theology it contributes to the 20th century discussion on Trinitarian theology and Trinitarian ecclesiology by reflecting on mission, and emphasising that ecclesiology and missiology cannot be separated.

From the Trinitarian perspective developed in chapter four, chapter five then proceeds to a missional engagement of culture within the 21st century globalised world. Focussing on the North American context, the chapter focus the discussion on a mission to Western culture. The chapter makes a rich contribution to missional reflection on culture, with a strong emphasis on creation. It also engages with the argument in *Resident aliens*, which has been influential in the missional conversation, and enters into critical dialogue with their approach in seeking to provide a way forward for the missional church in public.

Chapter six then concludes by drawing from the preceding work into a picture of what a missional church might look like in practice. It reflects on questions such as discipleship, church leadership and organisation, and church renewal and planting, reaching a conclusion on what a missional church would mean for these aspects of the church.

The focus on the North American context makes this work a valuable contribution, and the authors' sensitivity in acknowledging their own embeddedness within this context contribute to the book being helpful in understanding interlocutors from the North American context involved in the

missional conversation. Yet the book fails to sufficiently reflect on the important questions of power and empire associated with this context and its relation to the globalised world, and particularly on the question of the church's embeddedness within the systems of power in the North American context, that of the United States in particular.

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