

You are receiving this email from Biblical Seminary because you are an alum or friend of the seminary. To ensure that you continue to receive emails from us, add bbarkley@biblical.edu to your address book today.

You may [unsubscribe](#) if you no longer wish to receive our emails.



Missional Journal

David G. Dunbar, President

March 2008, Vol 2. No. 3

[Forward this Issue](#)

Use this link to forward the Missional Journal to a friend.

Click below to access past Missional Journals

[Archived Missional Journals](#)

Blog With Dave

[Share Your Thoughts](#)

Quick Links

[Biblical's Website](#)

[C4ML at Biblical](#)

If you are interested in supporting our vision for seminary education click below

[Institutional Advancement](#)

[Planned Giving](#)

When Missional is *Not* Helpful

Throughout history God's people have experienced cycles of spiritual prosperity and expansion followed by stalled growth and eventual decline. In such contexts, movements of renewal or revival have sprung up as the Spirit of God graciously worked to complete the cycle and restore the vitality of God's people.

I like renewal movements. I grew up in a group that was the result of a powerful moving of the Spirit that began in the British Isles during the 19th century. My love for the Bible, my devotional life, my commitment to the church, and my approach to ministry have been deeply formed by this group. Although I no longer identify myself as a card-carrying member, I am still significantly influenced by what I learned in this tradition and I appreciate the heritage it gave me.

This may help you understand part of what attracted me to the missional church. It too is a renewal movement. I see it as a moving of God's Spirit within the Western church at a very critical time in its history. We find ourselves (most Christians probably agree on this) in a time of decline. Churches in the West are in trouble: internal dissensions, the failure and discouragement of leadership, loss of our youth, widespread negative perceptions of Christians by outsiders, and the death of many congregations. Just the kind of dry-bones situation where the breath of the Spirit often begins to blow!

And this is what energizes me! I turn 60 this year and I realize that my life is quickly slipping away. How wonderful it would be to live into a new era of spiritual vitality and power for the church in North America! I can almost see it. I am impatient for the transformation, and that's where the trouble begins . . .

copyright © 2007 David G.
Dunbar

My way or the highway

I grew up in the protest era of the 1960s. Bob Dylan sang about changing times to an older generation:

Come mothers and fathers
Throughout the land
And don't criticize
What you can't understand
Your sons and your daughters
Are beyond your command
Your old road is
Rapidly agin'.
Please get out of the new one
If you can't lend your hand
For the times they are a-changin'.

I am sure parents who found themselves on the "old road" were less than appreciative of Dylan's suggestion that they buzz off. And with good reason!

I imagine those of us in the missional church movement sometimes sound a bit like Dylan to believers perplexed by massive changes in the church and culture, but not sure "missional" is the way to go. They may hear the message as, "move out of the way," "get with the program," "admit you are wasting your time," or something equally uncharitable.

To them the missional discussion seems like just another way to "diss" the past. When missional leaders point out current problems in the church, they often appear to have an arrogant disregard for what God has already done--as if the Holy Spirit has been totally absent for the last century and nothing of eternal significance has really been accomplished! Good people thus feel attacked and undervalued, their contributions unwelcome and unneeded.

I suspect most renewal movements, whether by intention or misunderstanding, have conveyed such messages. To those who have felt attacked, I apologize. The point is not to discredit the sincere and often productive endeavors of the past, but to ask, "How can we be faithful to the gospel in the new cultural situation of the 21st century?" Of course **any attempt to answer this question involves evaluation of our current situation and some level of critique of the current state of the church.**

And, yes, I admit I am an impatient kind of guy who wants others to get on board yesterday. But I need to remind myself (and my missional friends) that if this is indeed a movement of the Spirit of God, it will make its way among the people of

God with power and certainty.

Triumphalism

Another problem many people detect in renewal movements is a prideful spirit. The term "triumphalism" describes an attitude that assumes the superiority of a particular culture, teaching, organization, etc. In the case of the missional movement some folks have sensed a triumphalist spirit among its proponents, as if we are saying, "This is THE ANSWER, we have found THE WAY, wisdom now resides with US!"

Certainly triumphalism in all its forms is divisive and offensive. To the degree that missional church leaders are guilty of this, we need to repent. Triumphalism is not helpful and does not honor the Lord or his people.

However, I would like to offer a note of caution to those who think the missional church is triumphalistic and who are tempted to dismiss the movement on that basis. **Part of what initially attracted me was the willingness of missional leaders to admit that they did not have all--or even many--of the answers to the problems facing the church today.**

Alan Roxburgh suggests that the current period of highly discontinuous change will not go away any time soon. He estimates that we are two or three generations away from a time of greater stability for the culture *and* the church. During this time "none of us will find clear answers or complete solutions." (*The Sky is Falling!?!* [ACI Publishing, 2005], p. 67.)

We should not conclude from this comment that missional leaders don't know where they are going! **The point is that this discussion is not about having all the right answers, but rather trying to identify the most important questions before the church--and working toward biblically and theologically sound answers.**

For this discussion everyone is welcome at the table: traditional churches, charismatic churches, mega-churches, emerging churches . . . no one is excluded unless they exclude themselves. The challenges facing the church in our generation call for the Spirit-led creativity and commitment of the whole body of Christ. We need to put aside our relatively minor differences to focus on the pressing questions of our day. Faithfulness to our Lord demands this. And, yes, I admit it--I'm impatient!

So let's get on with it!



[Forward email](#)

 **SafeUnsubscribe®**

This email was sent to bbarkley@biblical.edu, by bbarkley@biblical.edu
[Update Profile/Email Address](#) | Instant removal with [SafeUnsubscribe™](#) | [Privacy Policy](#).

Email Marketing by



Biblical Seminary | 200 North Main Street | Hatfield | PA | 19440