Reading your Community
Towards an authentic encounter with a Canadian Context

Glenn Smith,
M.A; D.Min.; D.Hon.

INTRODUCTION

In 1983, I left a ministry to university students to give direction to the ministry with which I presently am involved in Montreal. It is interesting for me to reflect back on how a relevant missional theology of the city evolved through that change. One day, as I was looking out the window from the sixth floor of our office, I asked myself a question that initiated a reflection that continues to this very day. *"I wonder what is being done in my city to incarnate the Good News with people who work in the downtown core, Monday at 8 am until Friday at 5 pm."* Much to my chagrin, I learned that very little was happening. I began to read about ministry with people in the marketplace and saw the relationship to the needs of urban ministry. At that same time, I was reading in Jeremiah. Having been raised in the context of a family that placed a high priority on the Bible and the Church, I am not sure how many times I had read that particular book. But in that cold winter of 1983, the words of chapter 29:1-7 took on a new meaning. As God Almighty had called those 10,000 exiles to seek the *shalom* of the foreign city, I began to see that the social and spiritual needs of Montreal could not go by me easily. So began the reflection and the action that have informed my life over this period. The context was shaping how I listen to the Bible. I had to join with others to pursue a contextualized action and reflection.

For a number of years, I have been inviting students, audiences and readers to join me on the 19 kilometre trip that I make every day from my home in the inner suburbs of Montréal to my office in the downtown core. It provides a context for the themes that inform this chapter. The themes include the social context in which we live our daily lives and our common ecclesial traditions rooted in the Bible, Christian history and theology. But this chapter is also about reflecting on the mission of God in our Canadian communities. Systematic theologians warn us that too much emphasis on social context threatens to reduce the universal truth of Scripture. On the other hand, pastors, practitioners and evangelists warn us that "too much" theology often seeks to disguise itself as a universal truth-claim and takes us away from "the real work of the Gospel." I believe that contextual theology done in the framework of a biblical theological hermeneutic seeks to situate itself between these two ends of the spectrum while heeding the warnings of the two. God is Alpha and Omega; but Jesus became a first-century Jew and lived and laboured

primarily in cities of Palestine in the era of second temple Judaism.[1] We will return to this very issue at the conclusion of this chapter.

I walk out the door of my home into an amazingly cosmopolitan neighbourhood, called Chomedey. In the homes on my street I can hear several different languages being spoken, symbolizing a diverse array of cultures. What was once a former European immigration has now shifted to a truly global movement. When I first began thinking about my neighbourhood I was struck by the linguistic plurality. Today, the "Islamisation" of Chomedey is very real. As I stride toward the bus stop, I pass the only Protestant Church and then I cut through the parking lot of the Roman Catholic parish. Forty years ago, both Churches were full for weekend services. The United Church had a Sunday school that taught over 200 children. The exodus of Anglophones from Montréal has decimated the congregation. Today, 40 gather on Sunday at 11 a.m. for worship. The Roman Catholic parish once celebrated 45 masses each week. In 2008, they sold the diminished parish to an immigrant Armenian Orthodox congregation. The local mosque is a half a block down the street.

These remarkable religious changes remind me that my neighbours are much more concerned with their own pursuits and the development of a personal value system rather than that offered by ecclesiastical structures. All things religious have been marginalized in Montréal.

A 12-minute bus ride takes me to the Metro (the subway) where I now enter another world, the metropolis of Montréal. It is one of the largest French-speaking cities[2] in the world and the hub of a social transformation, better known as the Quiet Revolution that altered the very face of Quebec.

The subway takes me into the heart of the city, but through several different "Montréals." I pass under *student Montréal,* which includes four major universities and 30 community colleges or *CÉGEPS* and 40 professional and technical establishments. Montréal has the most students per capita of any city in North America. The population of student Montréal, in and of itself, would make it the 13th largest city in Canada.

Montréal is also a *hurting city,* with hundreds of people living with AIDS, a reported 238,000 people on the welfare rolls and some 9,000 adolescent prostitutes. Harvest Montréal, the organization that orchestrates food distribution among the poor, gives out 35 tons of food a day to 150,000 people a week. If you look at the issue chronologically one sees that the Montréal gap with Toronto has been closing since 1960. Yet in 1995, this CMA had the highest rate of poverty in Canada at 27.3% and still a full 9% higher than in the rest of Québec by 2000. With the new Market Basket Measure, Montréal was showing an economic improvement for the poor. My

---

[1] Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003) reminds us that the issue of universality and particularity is essential to mission and to how we read the Bible. As C.S. Lewis reminded us in Pilgrims Regress, this is "the tether and pang of the particular."

[2] In the CMA of Montréal, 68% of the population speak French, 12.5% speak English and 19.5% are identified as allophones.

Metro companions seem oblivious to this reality: workers with a secondary school leaving certificate have an average income of $23,562 while a university grad earns double that amount, $41,277. In a city where better than 50% of kids drop out of high school, the future does not look bright!

As we swing through parts of *ethnic Montreal,* I am reminded that the 200,000 elementary and secondary students in the five school boards of Montréal represent 168 countries.

At the McGill Metro stop, I am literally pushed out of the Metro car. Some 750,000 people call this "home" throughout the working week. This is *business Montréal*. The Census Metropolitan Area generates 76% of the entire Québec economy.

Several years ago, I began to do an interesting exercise with my students in a course I teach on urban ministry. The class begins by visiting a rather large ethnic grocery store, Inter-Marché that is about a kilometre from the faculty building. The store has a huge inventory of foods from several different countries, arranged in aisles that represent the continents. Haitian food covers a third of the Caribbean aisle. At one point, 45 different flags hung from the ceiling, all contributed by the customers of the store. Inter-Marché is a success because the owner realized Montréal is changing and his store better adapt to new realities. He does a booming business.

However, in the same neighbourhood we also visit a Church building with its English-only sign: "We worship God every Sunday at 11 am." It does not take great teaching skill to lead the discussion that evening on the nature of pastoral leadership in a changing situation. They suddenly want to know how to "exegete the neighbourhood," much like they have learned to study a biblical text.

This chapter is an attempt to contribute to the corporate reflections of congregations across Canada, as together we seek to articulate a missional theology in our Canadian contexts. It is an attempt to formulate a (biblical and cultural) hermeneutic that will help practitioners take the categories of "place" and "space" more seriously, however challenging this might be. The chapter is divided into two sections. The first section presents the hermeneutic of reading the context and the Biblical text together and raises the question of contextualization and transformation. In the second section we look at how to study a Canadian community.

ORIENTING OUR ACTIONS

Since "discovering" Jeremiah 29, I learned that this one text would never inform all that is the mission of God in a community. Harvey Conn taught me well (I trust). I remember him saying, "Picking one biblical text to sum up my view of urban ministry is an assignment too awesome and dangerous for me. Too awesome because wherever I turn in my Bible it shouts 'urban' to me. Too dangerous because the text I select could leave out a piece of the picture too crucial in another text and distort the whole. We need a hermeneutic serious enough to link Genesis to Revelation in the unending story of Jesus as an urban lover and the Church as God's copycat." I realized that I needed to keep studying the biblical texts!

At the same time several authors, speakers and teachers began to shape my ministry practice. Many authors invited me to pursue a fresh encounter with our culture, taking the social category of "space" seriously. I learned that understanding the social imaginaries[3] of the context is critical to pursuing the mission of God. But I live in a "place", which is contextually specific. *Place is space with historical meanings, different identities, varied societal preoccupations.*[4] For example, I live in the city where philosophical postmodernism[5] was first coined and studied as a social and philosophical expression. This subject is of utmost importance to *The Gospel and our Culture Networks* around the globe. But I live in a different place than most people talking about the theme. The unending story we find ourselves in always needs to be woven into the fabric of each place a little differently.

The basic purpose of theological and missiological reflection has never really changed. It is the reflection of the people of God upon God's story in human history in light of their own circumstances. Missional theology is *God in dialogue with his people in all their thousands of different situations.* Yet how does a journey through a Canadian community help us to both read our communities and read the narrative of Scriptures in our situation?

In the context of this chapter, what do I mean by missional theology? When we talk about a novel, we refer to it as "fictional literature". The noun, "fiction" becomes the adjective "fictional". It is same thing with the wonderful word "mission". When it is used as an adjective, we say "missional", like a church which is dedicated to mission.

But I call it an accordion word – the more air you pump into it, the more noise it makes! At the core, in spite of all the noise, there are four key ideas:

- First, we are affirming that God is *missionary* in His character – Being in action. Mission is first and foremost about God through Jesus is active in His creation by the work of His Spirit. Yes, God is love, just, holy…He is also missionary!

---

[3] I am intentionally making the distinction between the theoretical notion of worldviews and the deep ideas that inform life that we call social imaginaries. I am grateful to Charles Taylor for the distinction that I have not always made in my writings. I have tended to fuse the two notions.

[4] As I am writing this chapter, Montréal is opening a new hall for the Montréal Symphony Orchestra, inaugurated on September 7, 2011. In the words of the Chief Conductor, Kent Nagano, "A sense of *place* figures in the hall's success." In talking about the first symphony the orchestra would interpret he wrote, "We felt that the first sounds that were heard in the new concert hall should be Canadian and more than that, they should be Québec." I have been intrigued to watch how a world-class composer has woven classical music into the fabric of the city. One of his first symphonies was a tribute to the Montréal Canadiens hockey team!

[5] In 1979, Le CRÉPUQ (Conseil des recteurs et principales des universités du Québec) requested a report on "knowledge in the most highly developed societies." Montréal was the context from which Jean-François Lyotard wrote the book, *La condition post-moderne*, Collection «Critique », Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit.

- When we use the word "missional", we are reaffirming the Gospel – Jesus is LORD. A king has a kingdom; the Good news is about the LORDSHIP of Jesus over all His creation, in our lives, in His Church and over our cities!
- When we use the word "missional", we are admitting that we live in a new period in our history. Some people call this, "Post-Christendom" – a period where Christianity and the Church are no longer at the centre of our culture. We may grieve our loss, but we also need to think and act in fresh ways.
- When we use the word "missional", we are affirming that the Church by its very nature as a people of living the implications of the Gospel is sent into our neighbourhoods and cities.

Although each of these four points is critical to reading a community, it is the fourth point that is critical to this chapter.

Two themes, one purpose

Some people may take this trip downtown and ask the question, *"Where is the Church?"* and then rush to critique her lack of significant involvement in the complexities of the community. In the midst of the plurality and the competing social imaginaries that a practitioner runs into on a weekly basis, I would rather ask the questions, *"What will the Church look like?"* and "*How will the Church reflect biblically about the city and pursue relevant mission in her context in the years ahead?"* As I began to reflect about this, I soon realized that there are two issues that inform contextual ministry practice and help us to understand what the Church will look like.

First, consider the theme of **social context with a twin focus**. Many people do cultural studies and wrestle with (the sociology of) place. On a different track, other practitioners try to get their heads around the demographics that make up their communities. In this chapter, I want to help the practitioner put these two foci together so that in examining the community as a "place" we are also learning to look very closely at the social imaginaries that are reflected in the urban context and the statistics.

It is obvious that practitioners need to be able to comprehend these social imaginaries of a community in order to reflect about the spirituality in their particular context. These are much broader and deeper than the intellectual schemes people may entertain when they think about social reality in a disengaged mode. They are the ways in which people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations which are normally met."[6]

These are primarily lenses through which we imagine our social surroundings. Rather than being a theoretical concept held by the elite, a social imaginary is shared by a large group of persons.

---

[6] Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004) 23. (See also page 115.) In his magnum opus, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2007), Taylor further develops these concepts in Chapter four. (See page 171.)

Generally speaking, they are the series of presuppositions that groups of people hold, consciously and unconsciously, about the basic make-up of the community, relationship, practices and objects of daily life, whether they are of great signification or of little importance. They are like the foundations of a house - vital but invisible. The make-up of the social imaginary is based on the interaction of ultimate beliefs and the global environment within which one lives. They deal with the perennial issues of life like religion and spirituality and contain answers to even simple questions such as whether we eat from plates or how to launder our clothing.

We should be careful not to confuse culture and social imaginaries, although they are in constant relationship with one another. Culture, is foremost a network of meanings by which a particular social group is able to recognize itself as such through a common history and a way of life. This network of meanings is rooted in ideas (including beliefs, values, attitudes, rules of behaviour), rituals and material objects including symbols that become a source for identity such as the language we speak, the food we eat, the clothes we wear, the way we organize space. This network is not a formal and hierarchical structure. It is defined in modern society by constant change, mobility, reflection and ongoing new life experiences. This is opposed to traditional societies where culture was transmitted from one generation to another vertically within the community structures. Modernity still transmits some aspects of culture like language and basic knowledge and vertically through the bias of the school system but once this is done, the horizontal transmission of culture through friendship, peers and socio-professional status and social networking become more important.

These social imaginaries may be studied in terms of four features: characteristic stories; fundamental symbols; habitual behaviour of the residents; and a set of questions and answers. These presuppositions interact with each other in a variety of complex and interesting ways. By studying the intersection of these big themes, the practitioner can unearth the perspectives of the context under study.

Communities often reveal their imaginaries by the cultural network they produce and constantly reproduce in social interactions, objects and symbols: from dollars to Metro tickets, from office towers to streetcars, from pottery to poetry, from places of worship to sacred texts, from emblems to funerary monuments, from stadiums to crosses. Symbols provide the hermeneutic grid to perceive how the world is and how we might live in it: these symbols provide a vision *of* reality and a vision *for* it. Symbols describe the typical behaviour of a society and vice versa: the celebration of important events, the usual means of dealing with dissonance, and the rituals associated with birth, puberty, marriage and death. And in many communities, their symbols and characteristic behaviour are also focused in stories. Furthermore, the answers to fundamental questions such as “Who are we?” “Where are we?” and “What are the problems we face and how will we solve them?” give us great insight into the perspectives of a community.

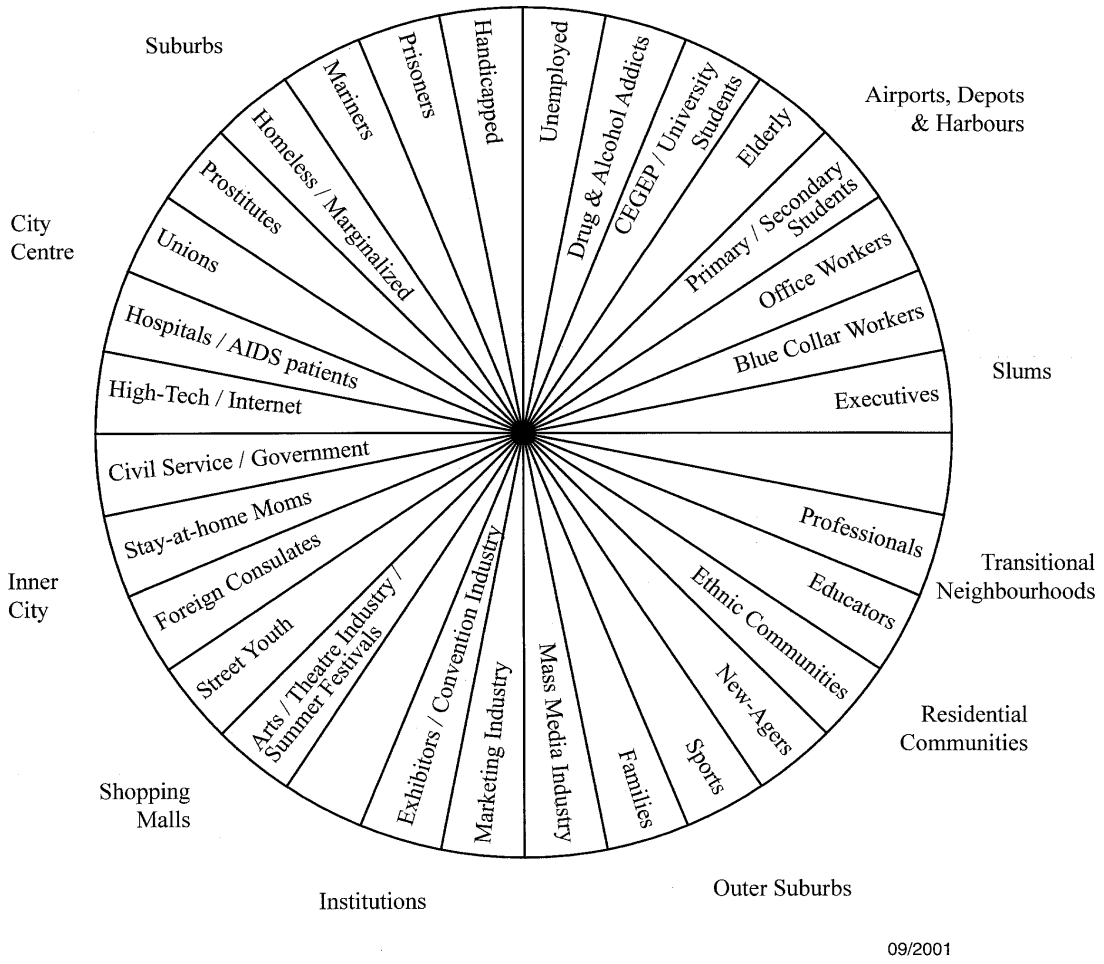
Max Stackhouse helps us understand this first theme of social context by raising several foundational questions. “How do we know a context when we see one?” “How big is a context?” “How long does it last?” “Who is in it and is out of it, and how do we know?” In

reality, the complexity of the city means we constantly ask these questions. The following representation of urban contexts seeks to take into account most of the factors that determine context.[7]

Rather than studying a community with a typical map that might locate neighbourhoods as those found on the periphery of the wheel, try to see your community as spokes in the wheel. In other words, rather than doing a geographical analysis, think about the functional groupings in a context. This wheel represents many of the social networks, each with their own world and life perspective in my community. Which ones could you identify in your city?

[7] I am grateful to my dear friend, doctoral advisor, mentor and colleague, Ray Bakke for the idea on this representation. He first presented it to me when I was completing my D.Min studies in 1990. We have played with it ever since in urban courses and consultations around the globe. It helps the urban practitioner to understand that a city is about functions and roles, not just geography.

Organizational and Population Segments of an Urban World - Montréal



To study a community, an attentive practitioner can use a transformational analysis of the culture so as to understand how social structures and human behaviour interact and influence a city. This method is an excellent tool for the Christian practitioner who desires to study the following: the knowledge and practices of people; the manner they use their freedom to dominate, to transform, to organize, to arrange, and to master space for their personals pursuit so as to live, to protect themselves, to survive, to produce, and to reproduce. To do this one must master dominant tendencies so as to grasp where we have come from and where we are going as a society and what the mission of God in this culture will look like.

The description for cultural analysis that the author proposes, implies that a small group mandated to study their context needs to take seriously the fact that social activity is culturally and historically specific. Community hermeneutics allows us to understand or decode the polarity between social structure and human agency, which is constantly at work in a metropolitan area. Social institutions—the basic building blocks of a city because of their far-reaching spatial and temporal existence—are used by human agents to create urban systems and metropolitan structures. Human actions are constrained by these structures but are also enabled by them. In attempting to understand a city, neither the subject (the human agent) nor the object (society and social institutions) has primacy.

By grasping this geography of spatial functions, we are looking at issues (the social dynamics, problems, needs and aspirations,) that are culturally and historically specific. Like the city itself, these issues reflect the prevailing values, ideology, and structure of the prevailing social formation. A useful analytical, social, and theological purpose is served by the empirical recognition that community issues are manifest in geographical space. This implies that the resulting description will detail issues "in" the city as well as issues "of" the city. (For example, an issue *in* urban space would include the consequences of population density in a census district in Ville St-Laurent that has 11,536 people per square kilometre versus the Census Metropolitan Area of Montréal norm of 847. An issue *of* urban space includes attention to the socio-economic factors that go hand-in-hand with such population concentration.)

To pursue this analysis, the practitioner will need to bring:

- a high sensitivity to the local specifics and to micro details in the context.
- a concern for the larger worldview influences (understood as the macro issues).
- a synthesis beyond a simple homogenisation of the data.
- a true appreciation of the differences between cities, regions, and even neighbourhoods so that one can appreciate the specifics of the area in the light of mission of the Church in the situation.

Doing this transformational analysis can take many forms. As we are seeking the reasons for the spatial differences of human activity in our communities we will need tools of analysis. The new urbanism suggests transect studies. Within the framework described thus far it is important to examine Census Canada data on five sets of numbers:

- household revenue (lines 1525-1547 of the 2001 Census data. Lines for 2006 are somewhat different. We use 2001 as the baseline as it was a complete census.);
- ethnicity including immigration patterns (lines 400-734) and language spoken at home (lines 225-380);
- rates of scolarity (lines 1356-1397);
- issues related to family structure: age structure (lines 6-43), birth rates, number of children per household (lines 82-89), celibacy (line 45) etc;
- current rates of religious affiliation (lines 1675-1709).

The second theme that informs community research is our **Christian traditions**, meaning our study of the narratives of Scriptures, history and theology. Now the hermeneutical process becomes a true exchange for practitioners between gospel and context. We come to the authoritative message with an exegetical method to understand a biblical theology of place. We ask, "*What does God say through Scripture regarding this particular context?"* This initial dialogue sets us out on a long process whereas the more we understand the context, the more fresh readings of the Bible will arise. Scripture illuminates life. But life also illuminates Scripture! This dialogue must also include the practitioners' perspectives and that of the community in which they base their initiatives.

Biblical and social hermeneutics conceived in this fashion represent a holistic enterprise in which the Holy Spirit guides the interpreters to a more complete reading and understanding of Scripture and a more complete understanding of the context. There is an ongoing, mutual engagement of the essential components of the process. As they interact, they are mutually adjusted. In this way, we come to Scripture with the right questions and perspectives. This results in a more attentive ear to the implications of the exegetical process and an ensuing theology that is more biblical and pertinent to the culture. As we move from the cultural context through our own evolving worldview to the Bible and back to the context, we adopt increasingly relevant local reflection and initiatives. As we listen to Scripture and walk through our various situations in life, we are faced with a question. *"How can we hear and apply God's word in our cities and neighbourhoods?*" In reality, the complexity of our communities means we constantly ask these questions. Holding text and context together is vital as we continue in an era of rapid urban growth, urbanization and globalization.

WHAT IS CONTEXTUALISATION AND TRANSFORMATION?

Literally, the word, contextualisation, means a 'weaving together'. For our purposes, it implies the interweaving of the Scriptural teaching about "place" and the Church within a particular human situation, called a context. The very word focuses the attention on the role of the context in the theological enterprise. In a very real sense, all doctrinal reflection from the Scriptures is related in one way or another to the situation from which it was born, while addressing the aspirations, concerns, priorities and needs of the local group of Christians who are presently doing the reflection.

The task of contextualization is the essence of theological reflection. The challenge is to remain faithful to God's revelation and the historic texts of Scripture while being mindful of today's realities. An interpretative bridge is built between the Bible and its context to the circumstances of the local group of Christians who are doing the reflection. The first step of the hermeneutic exercise involves establishing what the text meant at the time it was written: what it meant "then". The second step involves creating the bridge to understanding the text in meaningful terms for the interpreters today: what it means *"*now". The final step is to determine the meaning and application for those who will receive the message in their particular circumstances as the present day interpreters become ambassadors of the Good News: what it means "here". *Contextualization is not just for the one communicating, nor about the content that will be*

passed along. It is always concerned about what happens once we have communicated; about the ultimate impact of the message on the audience.

For what purpose does the practitioner pursue contextualization? Why listen to both the present context and Christian tradition, including our study of the Scriptures, Church history and theology? Increasingly, we hear the use of the word *transformation* as a term that encompasses all that the Church does as followers of Jesus in God's mission in the city. But what does this mean? What does it entail?

Increasingly we realize that this quest is fraught with "pot-holes".

Inspired by John de Gruchy's reflections, I would suggest that a transformed place is that kind of community that pursues fundamental changes, a stable future and the sustaining and enhancing of all of life rooted in a vision bigger than mere urban politics. He adds that "it is an open-ended multi-layered process, **at once social and personal**, that is energized by hope, yet rooted in the struggles of the present.[8]

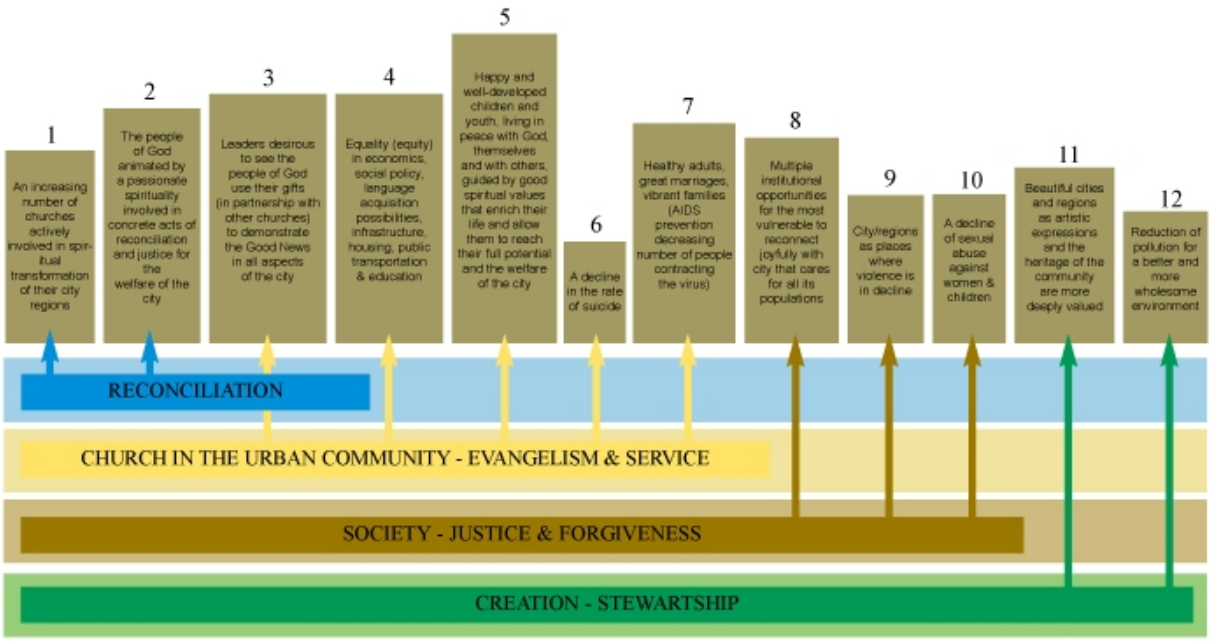
Because our purpose is to look at how transformation might take root in a Canadian community, we will need some subjective indicators rooted in the social imaginary of Canadian residents. The author proposes a model from community faith-based initiatives rooted in the Biblical notions of peace and well-being. The model comes from the work of Christian Direction, an urban ministry located in Montréal, Québec.

[8] John W. de Gruchy, *Christianity, Art and Transformation: Theological Aesthetics in the Struggle for Social Justice.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 3.

KEY INDICATORS OF A TRANSFORMED CITY

What would a city look like that has been transformed by Jesus Christ and his kingdom values?

Christian Direction has chosen these 12 indicators for the cities of Québec and La Francophonie that inspire our vision for a transformed city.



Transformation means that the community is moving with increasing awareness and intentionality towards this vision of peace and well-being. In light of contextual realities we have adopted the following schema and the 12 indicators as a vision of what our transformed city (of Montreal, for instance) would look like. These indicators are rooted in four tracks underneath the city scope. They represent God's concern for all of life beginning with the congregation that embodies shalom and reconciliation. Subsequently these communities demonstrate the Good News in their neighbourhoods in word and deed. They are deeply concerned about justice and forgiveness in society. But as stewards they are concerned for the whole created order. To realistically measure the vision, we have articulated 12 indicators of the type of transformation congregations are pursuing. These address contextual concerns in our city. This has obviously been inspired by the eight UN Millennium Objectives. However the schema lacks the rigour of the 18 MDG targets and 32 MDG indicators. Accompanying these indicators are baselines rooted in research on the state of life in the city. Congregations work together to pursue the welfare of the city.

This vision seeks to help congregations participate in the transformation of the city, particularly in an era of broken relationships and the holistic understanding of poverty. So as to measure

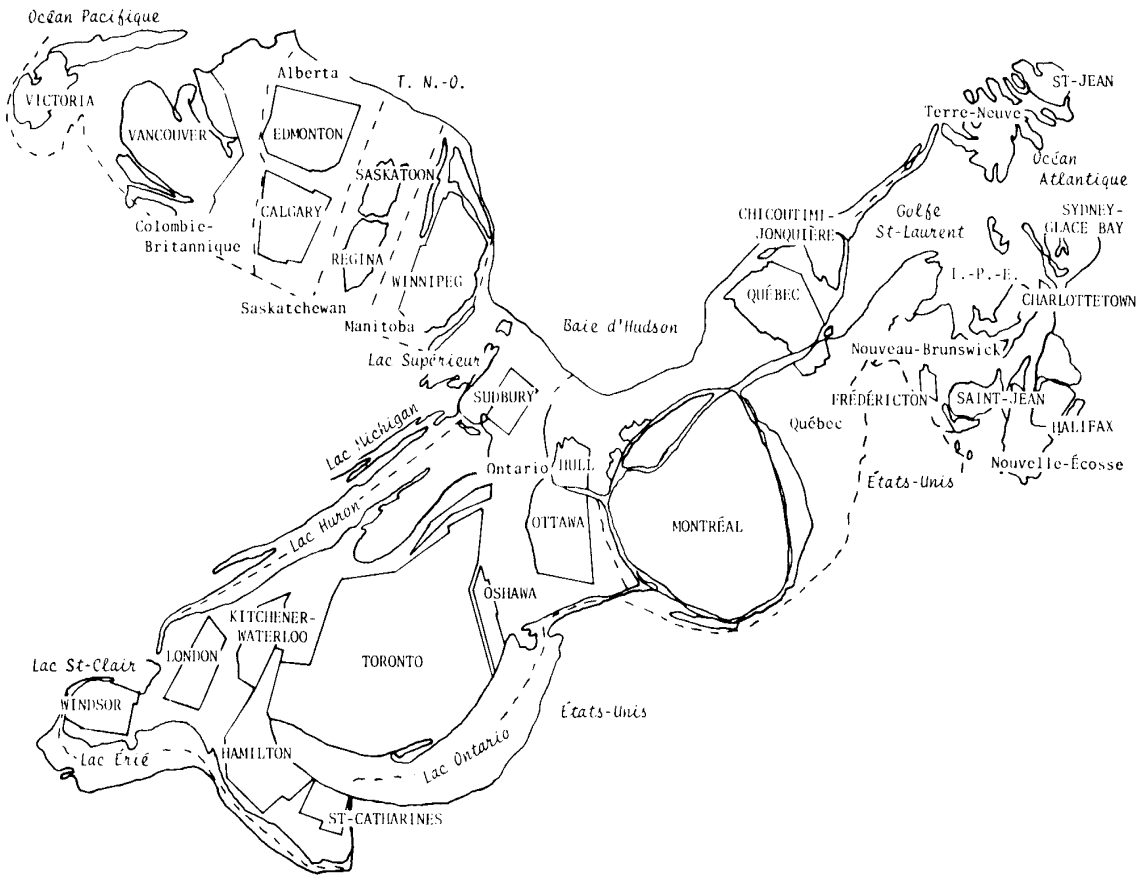
these territorial social indicators, we employ objective measures from primary field surveys and secondary census-based data sets. So, for example, Indicators 4, 5 and 6 can be measured by a blend of documentation from both sources. However, they include subjective social indicators that describe the way people perceive and evaluate conditions around them. So, for example, Indicators 7, 8 and 12 are highly dependent on an individual's perceptions and aspirations of the context in relationship to the indicator. As the reader will see, worldview/social imaginary indicators rooted in the religious, spiritual and transcendent experiences of congregations are included in the presentation. Indicators 1, 2,3,5,7 and 11 touch on these aspects of "the city in the mind".

THE FIRST STEPS TO COMPREHEND ONE'S CONTEXT

In this discussion of reading your community and specifically in the era of municipal fusions in Canada, there are three issues that must be considered. First, one needs to consider the principal dimensions of change that have affected this country over the decades. This includes the vast increase in the size of urban areas, including four major components: population, employment, capital investment, and infrastructure. Second, we need to understand the emerging polarized social landscape that is touching every area of urban life. Finally, we must take note of the increasing poverty in our Census Metropolitan Areas.

In the last section of this chapter, we will first examine this Canadian context that informs the "reading" and then the author will propose twenty steps that congregations can use to study their context.

The first dimension of change effecting Canadian communities is the vast increase in population, employment, investment and infrastructure. It is remarkable how the urban landscape has evolved throughout the history of the country. At Canadian Confederation in 1867, less than one in five citizens lived in towns and cities of 1,000 or more population. By 1924, Canada was considered an urban nation by Statistics Canada, as better than 50% of the population lived in an area of 1,000 people or more. In 1965, the country was truly metropolitan as 50% of the population lived in cities of 10,000 people or more. Now, there are 140 urban centres, occupying less than 3% of the land. In the three largest urban centres—Vancouver, Toronto, and Montréal—we find 35% of the population occupying 0.8% of the land. It is for this reason that I say, *"The urban system of Canada is Canada."* This isodemographic map of Canada illustrates this reality.



Most maps represent distances, regardless of how many people live in different places. An isodemographic map is different in that the square kilometres are represented by the proportion of people who live in cities. Montréal, Toronto and Vancouver appear large as they represent better than one-third of Canada's population. Rural areas with small populations (Northern Alberta, Québec and Ontario) are tiny for corresponding reasons.

Three processes are at work. First, urbanization happens because of the natural growth as the number of births exceeds the number of deaths. Second, the migration of large numbers of people from rural areas to the city increases the population. It is estimated that better than 40% of urban growth is from this process alone. Finally, mergers, or the incorporation of peripheral areas into one city metropolis, are causing cities to grow. This is certainly true of the Canadian urban landscape.

At first glance the analysis is striking. For years urbanologists spoke about the North American city, combining Canadian and American cities in their analysis. However, if one applies the urban method we propose, it becomes obvious that Canadian cities are distinct. In our URBAN

FORM, Canadian cities are more compact in size and therefore considerably denser in population. In TRANSPORTATION and TRAVEL, Canadian cities have four times fewer freeways, relying 2.5 times more per capita on public transportation. (Interestingly, Americans own and operate 50% more motor vehicles than Canadians.) URBAN POPULATIONS represent more ethnic diversity, higher incomes, and more "traditional family" units. Canadian middle-income families show more propensity to stay in the central city. In monetary terms of URBAN GROWTH and DECLINE, Canadian cities are more stable, perhaps because URBAN SAFETY is much more in evidence. Finally, URBAN GOVERNMENT is radically different between the two countries. However, in URBAN FISCAL POLICY, American cities depend on property taxes for only 27% of their total revenue in contrast to 52% for Canadian cities. U.S. cities have more access to local sales taxes and income taxes and receive greater state and federal transfers than Canadian cities.

The emerging polarized social landscape that is touching every area of urban life takes into consideration both the pluralities and the secularity of our Canadian communities. Plurality is defined as the coexistence of different entities with relative harmony of civic peace. However, there are various dimensions of plurality: cultural plurality, religious plurality and relativism.

That Christians in Canadian communities face diversity on multiple levels is a fact that few individuals would contest. During the past 50 years, people from more and more diverse ethnic origins, with different religious beliefs and lifestyles have come to live in our communities and share our public culture. The growth of this diversity will continue in the years ahead, especially in cities.

Cultural plurality refers to the presence of an increasing number of peoples from other countries or ethnic backgrounds. For example, among the 200,000 students in the five boards of the Montréal Island School Council there are 168 countries represented. A former European immigration has shifted to a truly global movement.

Much confusion exists in our country between cultural and religious plurality. For example, the move to "get religion out of the school" in large part is driven by people who think that the increasing ethnic plurality necessarily assumes religious plurality. However, the demographics in Québec schools for example show otherwise. Ninety percent of the province's 1,037,826 students register as Roman Catholic or Protestant. Even in Montréal, with the ethnic diversity just described, 71 percent of the students register as Roman Catholic or Protestant.

Plurality also has another dimension - often referred to as relativism. In Québec, after 1960, at the level of one's basic assumptions about how the world operates, a Roman Catholic world view began to give way to what we now call relativism. Today, society encourages us to be "tolerant" and in all our thinking to see that there are several ways to believe and to behave and all are equally true.

The third dimension of change effecting Canadian communities is poverty. It is not just about economics. Poverty is about relationships. Poverty is a broad concept including economic, social,

emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual realities. It is often intergenerational. As we will see, it affects peoples' identity (social exclusion, absence of harmony in life and well-being) and their vocation (deprivation at every level of life including one's ability to participate in the welfare of the community). The causes of poverty can be traced to *"inadequacies in the worldview"* These inadequacies are in actual fact a web of lies beyond the mere cognitive level of deception. This intricate web leads people to believe that their poverty or social status is somehow divinely sanctioned or a factor of fate. People sense that they have no choices.

Therefore, the central tenet of my argument leads us to affirm that communities evolve within the social imaginaries of the societies within which they are located. In spatial and architectural forms they are manifestations of deeply rooted cultural processes that encompass economic, social and religious/worldview elements as well.

The Twenty Steps

These twenty steps can be divided into two sections. The first ten steps allow a congregation to understand its context. They are helpful to start different types of ministries with the community. Steps 11-20 are more useful for those considering various church extension initiatives.

These steps are best undertaken by teams – usually ecumenical "task forces" that try to understand their community context. After the "exegesis" or community assessment, it will be important to prioritize the initiatives that congregations will undertake.[9]

1. Compile a list of significant historical events that inform the city's identity. These could be specific, historic conflicts that took place such as a war or dispute, specific unifying events such as the city coming together to fight a massive fire, specific decisions that leaders made such as the building of a community centre, or something that happened that gave people hope, such as a person doing something heroic or selfless, etc. These will provide clues to the best way for the church to focus its energy.

Study the growth patterns of the city. One can find this information in libraries, city councils, museums, bookstores, local newspapers and on local Web sites.

- Why is the city growing (or why did it grow)?
- Who are (were) the immigrants to the city?
- Where did they come from and where are they settled?
- Where are they employed?

[9] In Québec, Christian Direction has worked with congregations in 10 different cities and boroughs to implement these steps. If the reader would like a copy of one of the studies, consult the web-site: www.direction.ca.

2. Understand clearly the sections or zones that make up the city:

- Downtown
- Blue collar neighbourhoods
- Ghettos
- Ethnic neighbourhoods
- Industrial zones
- Commercial areas

Examine census maps if they are available. Find out from city planners and real estate offices where city populations are expected to move, where commercial and industrial zones will develop, and which areas are slated to undergo major changes.

Isolate the sectors of your larger community using the representation of the city from the first section of this chapter. This represents the functions of a city.

3. Study the neighbourhoods: their ethnic, social and economic composition, religious affiliations, occupational patterns, younger and older populations, concentrations of the elderly, young professionals, singles, problem groups, to understand a neighbourhood you must walk the streets, talk to people, insiders and outsiders. Census data is important but onsite observation is best. People groups criss-cross in the city. Probe to discover the dominant influence in a neighbourhood: ethnic identity? Social class? Undertake a participant-observer approach.

What is the extent of social contact between the people groups? Is social contact increasing? Take time to chat with residents and pedestrians in the area. Ask them what are the most significant changes they see or experience in the neighbourhood.

When walking the streets, watch for the impact of these population shifts on the neighbourhood.

Many congregations use prayer walks as a way to learn more about their city-region.

4. Determine and analyze the power centres in the city - the political figures, the police department, business leaders and the Chamber of Commerce, religious leaders.

Who controls the media? (TV, radio, newspapers)

Who controls commerce, finance? The schools and the arts?

What are the religious\moral commitments of the power people?

5. Analyze the felt needs of specific people groups within the city. You are looking for indications of receptivity and “keys” which may unlock doors to homes and hearts. Felt needs vary from group to group. In some communities, such things as personal illness, loneliness, physical

hardships, insecurity in terms of housing, property rights, and the threat of losing one's dwelling are very real. In other neighbourhoods the felt needs may be entirely different.

Addressing felt needs is essential to holistic strategy. From the felt needs, the practitioner moves to peoples' ultimate needs and shows how Christ meets both.

6. Examine the traffic flow of the city. Just as successful advertisers know where to place their signs, practitioners need to know where to begin their ministries, where they can readily be seen and reached.

- Find out where each of the following is located:
- Community services centres
- library
- police stations
- fire stations
- city hall
- shopping centres
- sports facilities

7. Seek to discover how news and opinion spread in the city, and in particular groups. Mainly through conversation? By radio, TV? Who are the idea-people, the opinion-makers? Subscribe to the weekly publication in the area. Read it faithfully.

8. Examine the relationship between city-dwellers and the rural, small-town communities outside the city. Do certain segments of the urban population maintain strong ties with their rural cousins? Is there a lot of travel and visiting between city and village? What are the present immigration patterns from the countryside? How might the urban-rural interaction be used for the spread of the gospel and multiplication of churches? Most of this information is available in the census data that your country keeps in census files.

9. Ministries and churches in the city - locate them on a map; identify them by denomination, size and age. What transformational ministries and social services are already taking place through these ministries and churches? Reflect on what the church map shows.

10. Analyze the various types of existing churches. Common types as found in many cities are:

- "Old First"
- Cathedral church
- “City-centre” churches
- Peoples' churches (large auditoriums, drawing numbers from all over the metropolitan area)
- University church
- Storefront churches

- Ethnic language churches
- Suburban churches
- Special purpose churches (use the wheel on page seven for ideas)
- "Renewal" churches, the fastest growing in many countries; they are usually newer, independent
- House or Cell churches (some people refer to these as organic churches)

11. Find out the growth patterns of the various churches - attendance, membership, and rate of growth. Try to determine the nature of the growth is it by transfer, conversion, or by births? One can often locate this information by chatting with congregational leaders.

12. Inquire about church extension efforts and church closures in the past several years. Which churches have closed? Why? Who has started new churches, and why and where did they succeed? Learn all you can from them.

13. Who is planning to start new churches? Where and among which people groups? Find out all you can from church and mission sources as to what is being planned for the city.

14. Strategies - what has been tried in the past, what has failed, and what was effective in starting churches and stimulating growth? Analyze the information you receive. In the light of recent church growth studies, what has been done right in this city, and where ought things be done differently?

15. Christians and non-Christians - where are the Christians located (which may not be where they attend church)? Identify areas of the city where relatively few Christians live.

16. Identify Christians in positions of influence in the city - in business, politics, the media, education, entertainment, and sports. Analyze their potential for wider spread of the gospel and assistance in planting churches.

17. List and analyze the para-congregational ministries operating in and to the city. How might each contribute something to the overall strategy? Are there some you may want to avoid because they might have a negative influence on church multiplication?

18. Make an inventory of all possible personnel resources that might be tapped for the carrying out of your church planting strategy. For example, are there bible school or seminary students available to help with door-to-door calling? Could interns be borrowed from existing churches to help younger congregations?

19. Evaluate all known methods for church extension in light of what you know about this city, its history, people, existing churches, and particular characteristics. What methods have proven effective elsewhere, appear appropriate for this city or at least some of its communities, and are within the capabilities of your resources.

20. List and evaluate the community agencies (private, religious and civic) that are designed to meet particular needs (literacy, overnight shelter, emergency food and clothing, etc.) and consider how their help can be incorporated into your overall strategy.