The Capital of Closed Churches

Heritage Buildings as Social Entrepreneurship in Quebec

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Abstract *Across North America, historic churches are rapidly closing. The problem is especially acute in urban areas where these buildings often house community organizations. Graham Singh, an Anglican pastor and non-profit CEO in Montreal, is promoting a solution: remake churches into community hubs. For Singh and his team, hubs are an opportunity for Christians to leverage their primary asset – tax-free land – and become full partners in the public sphere. Based on anthropological fieldwork, this chapter argues, first, that more scholarship should consider social entrepreneurship as a key area where religion and market meet, beyond much-studied neo-Pentecostal growth churches and prosperity gospel. Instead, Singh and his team are working to define entrepreneurship as social by dint of its physical embeddedness in historic churches. Doing so, they consciously adapt cutting-edge financial trends by positioning hubs as a smart real estate investment for private investors with social purpose goals. In this view, church property, supported by private investment, becomes central to reinvigorating Christian influence in the public sphere. In keeping with the theme of this volume, this chapter's second contribution is to suggest that community hubs might therefore be considered an intriguing new social form within North American Christianity, which derives value from its location at the border of historically religious forms (heritage churches), economic forms (corporate investment), and the public sphere.*

Keywords *Christianity, economy, finance, heritage, material religion, public sphere, Quebec, social entrepreneur*

1. Introduction

Montreal is a city of churches. While many religious congregations meet in storefronts or suburban new builds, the city is best known for large neo-gothic structures graced with steeples and stained-glass. Those are the churches to which Mark Twain (1881: 3) referred when, upon visiting Montreal, he famously quipped: "This is the first time I was ever in a city where you couldn't throw a brick without breaking a church window." Ever the satirist, Twain was exaggerating. But he was right in identifying this feature as particular to an urban environment that had been built by French Roman Catholics and expanded by British Anglicans. Both groups prized the construction of ornate stone churches that, once ritually consecrated to God, were pictured as eternal.

More than a century later, many such churches now figure in a growing crisis across North America and Western Europe. Historic churches are rapidly closing as dwindling congregations cannot afford to maintain them. Across Canada, ten thousand churches are slated to close within the next decade, which comprises more than a third of the churches currently owned by denominations; the situation is especially acute in Quebec (Okesson 2020: 207).

Enter Graham Singh. He is Rector of St. Jax, a Montreal Anglican Diocese plant in a church inaugurated as St. James the Apostle in 1864. Since Singh arrived in 2015, St. Jax has grown, by his estimation, into the largest Anglican parish east of Toronto with about 250 weekly worshippers. More importantly for Singh, the building is now a community hub run by a non-profit called Centre St. Jax – a system he believes will contribute to making churches financially solvent and socially vital. In 2018, Singh founded another non-profit, Trinity Centres Foundation (TCF), to support innovative financial solutions along the St. Jax model. His work is thus divided into three overlapping branches in which several people, including Singh, circulate: St. Jax, the parish where he serves as pastor; Centre St. Jax, an autonomous administrative organization that manages rentals and the community hub; and TCF, where Singh serves as CEO.

In their introduction to this volume, Maren Freudenberg and Astrid Reuter position "social forms" as a key conceptual framework in sociological studies of religion. At base, these forms refer to structures of social interaction, which, as they note, derive from a heuristic proposed at the turn of the twentieth century, initially by Max Weber (1958 [1905]) and elaborated by his friend, theologian Ernst Troeltsch (1931 [1912]). Troeltsch's model identified three forms of organi-

zation: church, sect, and mysticism. Over the intervening century, sociologists have refined, rejected, and reclaimed the typology. For example, sociologist of religion Lorne Dawson applauds its universal applicability, which he sees as the goal of any (social) science "with its regulatory ideals of generalization, theory construction, empiricism, and even prediction" (2009: 534). Other contemporary sociologists, wrestling with how the legacy of these ideal analytical types correspond with empirical realities, have responded by multiplying variants of the social form to include aspects such as community, event, and market exchange. Sociologists have also studied how social forms blend, especially in organizations that, as Freudenberg and Reuter put it during a workshop on social forms in Bochum, Germany, in March 2023, are located on the border between social fields, such as religious charity organizations where economic logics compete with religious ideas and semantics.

While as an anthropologist I have little at stake in this debate, it provides an opening to examine Graham Singh's model of overlapping churches and non-profits, which is certainly located on the border between social fields. More particularly, Freudenberg and Reuter's invitation to think about the competition between economic logics and religious ideas provides an opportunity for me to reflect on the economic component of Singh's work. Sociologists have pioneered an approach to economics that, paraphrasing Freudenberg and Reuter at the workshop in Bochum, is the quantification of an originally economic idea that is religiously reinterpreted. What they mean is that sociologists have taken statistical data about churches and interpreted it through the lens of free-market competition. As an example, they note sociologist Robert Wuthnow's metaphor of "church shopping" in U.S. Christianity (2007) referring to how people seek out churches that suit them rather than retaining membership in the same institution as their parents. Another example, especially prevalent among sociologists of North American religion, is the market exchange metaphor introduced and widely circulated as a "new paradigm" in the 1990s (Jelen 2002) to explain how denominational churches differ from historic and state-funded churches across much of Europe. This metaphor-come-theory of religion proposed that denominationalism created free-market church competition, which resulted in more choices (supply) that has led to higher rates of attendance (demand). I am certainly not the first to express reservations about this model (for example, Gauthier and Martikainen 2016). Like other critics, I find troublesome the assumption that capitalist competition strengthens socio-religious commitments and, further, that one can quantify church 'health' based on the number of members or attendees.

Singh and his team likely agree with me on the first point and, as I discuss below, they certainly agree with me on the second.

Instead of using economic metaphors as an analytical tool, therefore, I am interested in studying empirically through anthropological field work how Christians, like Singh, consciously adapt market logics to the religious sphere. And this process is not one-way; it speaks to cutting-edge trends within investment circles too, as funders and private investors seek to prioritize "impact investing" and "social purpose" goals. This chapter offers a preliminary discussion of Singh's work based on research being carried out in Montreal by myself and post-doctoral researcher Sam Victor, along with our graduate student assistants Alexandre Duceppe-Lenoir and Sophie Ji. We began preliminary fieldwork in autumn 2022 and more focused fieldwork in March 2023. In this article, which I am writing in August 2023, I mainly draw on my early field notes related to TCF, some of Victor's field notes about St. Jax (as cited in the text), and my review of the St. Jax/TCF team's quite prodigious output on social media and the web.

More generally, I make the case that scholars of religion should devote more attention to social entrepreneurship as a key area where the blurred edges of religion and market meet. Positioning Singh as entrepreneur serves to expand the category beyond what anthropologists and other scholars of contemporary Christianity have called the "pastorpreneur" (Jackson 2004, 2011; Klaver 2015; Jennings 2017). The neologism, which combines "pastor" and "entrepreneur", refers to a (nearly always) male pastor who valorizes risk-taking individualism in his quest to build a mega-church. It fits snugly within a broader emphasis on neo-Pentecostals, growth churches, and the prosperity gospel that is typical of how scholars of religion discuss money and faith. Such ministries generally either operate without owning a building or they construct one in a hyper-modern style (Lehto 2020). A heritage building like St. Jax has no place in this literature, which is understandable since pastorpreneurs, as they have been defined, view attachments to such structures as irrelevant or even a problematic sign of stagnation. Clearly, then, neither the pastorpreneur nor metaphors of market competition are sufficient to capture the less intuitive kind of economic logic Singh's project suggests. As I show, his entrepreneurship is embedded in neoliberal capitalism, but it rejects a growth or prosperity model. Nor is it place-agnostic. Instead, Singh and his fellow travelers are working to define innovation and entrepreneurship as social by dint of its physical embeddedness in place. In keeping with the theme of this

volume, I suggest that community hubs might therefore be considered an intriguing new social form within North American Christianity.

2. Introducing St. Jax

I borrow the phrase in my title – "the capital of closed churches" – from Graham Singh, who used it with respect to Montreal in a newspaper profile on his work (Schwartz 2021). Capital can refer to a primary location, which is what Singh meant, but it also refers to wealth in the form of money or other assets. This intersection of location, money, and assets is at the heart of Singh's work to address a church crisis in Canada.

Like most historic Anglican churches, a decade ago St. James the Apostle had a small standing congregation of older parishioners. The building was grand – a relic of a period when 80 per cent of Canada's wealth was controlled by people living in the neighborhood – and it is legally designated as a heritage site. While this designation adds social value, it creates an added economic burden as maintenance is more difficult and expensive. The congregation repeatedly asked Montreal's Bishop Mary Irwin-Gibson to fund repairs. The Bishop was unwilling to continue draining Diocesan coffers, yet she saw value in retaining the church and its land because of its location in one of the busiest sections of downtown. The area is characterized by shopping, tourism, and high-rises housing thousands of students, especially new arrivals from Asia. The land itself, the primary asset for most historic churches in Canada, is worth millions and the church benefits from a full property tax exemption.[1]

In 2015, Bishop Irwin-Gibson temporarily suspended operations at St. James and recruited Reverend Graham Singh, a Canadian working in England, to pastor a new church. Singh is deeply influenced by Holy Trinity Brompton (HTB), the UK church where he was trained at the cutting edge of the Anglican missional movement. Its ethos celebrates historic buildings but does not shy away from closing them if they cease to serve a congregation's mission. Besides being an expert in church planting, Singh also has a strong interest in social finance, having participated in Oxford Business School's

1 Properties designated for religious use are exempt from taxation in Canada. Historic churches are grandfathered into this system but newer congregations in Montreal often fail to qualify because they do not own their own property or because city officials are unwilling to authorize exemptions for storefronts and other spaces.

Impact Innovations program. A year later, under Singh's guidance, St. James re-opened as St. Jax, a zippier and more bilingual name recalling "Jacques" (the French version of James). Most of the old congregants left and St. Jax, the parish, now shares its space with multiple partners, notably a circus troupe that performs in the sanctuary. Post-doctoral researcher Sam Victor vividly describes his first impression of the space in his fieldnotes:

> The vaulted wooden ceilings, the wooden paneling and ornamental carving, the storied engravings of the names of notable figures dating back to the nineteenth century, all contributed to what Graham likes to call the "wow effect." […] The absence of pews (folding chairs instead) and the black plywood stage juxtaposed the weighty historic feel of the rest of the space with a [sense] of temporariness, informality, dynamism, incompleteness, etc. Also, circus rigging was affixed to the wooden beams in the center of the ceiling…further adding to the porousness between backstage/production and front stage/performance.

In many ways, Singh embraces the ambiguity between a historic building with a "wow" factor and that informal and dynamic feel. It bespeaks his larger ethic.

Church sharing is hardly novel, and many congregations rent or donate space so it can be used by other congregations, charities, and non-profits (Alcoholics Anonymous is ubiquitous). Yet Singh's model differs from the norm in a few ways. First, he emphasizes the value of high-end profit-generating renters, not just the non-profits that church congregations normally identify as the ethically correct target group for their space. St. Jax rents space on a sliding scale, with events hosted by banks, for example, helping to subsidize other groups' use. Singh's ultimate goal is not that the host congregation essentially underwrites other groups' use of the space, but that the church itself – as a collective hub – becomes self-sustaining. For Singh, a hub does more than generate money: it serves a spiritual purpose by making the church accountable to the needs of the wider public. As he sees it, Christians have an important spiritual message to contribute to society but, because of the dismal recent history of the (mainly) Catholic Church in Quebec, all historic churches need to be given "permission", as Singh often puts it, to re-enter the public sphere.[2] Remaking churches into shared hubs responds to the community's needs and therefore

2 I have heard Singh use this word multiple times in conversation as well as in more formal sessions at TCF over the course of fieldwork.

gives Christians a license to become full partners in reimagining how to right societal wrongs, such as colonization (in which Singh recognizes Christian culpability), urban blight, and social isolation. Singh views hubs as an ethical imperative if churches are going to share their privileged status as major landholders, compounded by their exemption from property tax.

Shortly after reopening St. Jax, Singh founded Trinity Centres Foundation. As a non-profit, TCF aims to make land and buildings into positive assets for communities – both for the church congregations that own them and for the communities around them. Not surprisingly, one of TCF's favored solutions for historic churches with economic woes is the community hub. However, Singh and his team are not only speaking to Christian congregations. They also position community hubs as a smart real estate investment for private individuals and funders who want to broaden their portfolios to include "social impact" investments. In sum, Singh views Christian real estate, supported by private investment, as integral to retaining (or creating) Christian influence as an ethical guide in the public sphere. In this respect, the community hub, as a new social form, derives its value from its surprising location at the border of historically religious forms (heritage churches), economic forms (corporate investment), and the public sphere. Just *how* Christians will guide the public seems to be of less importance to Singh at this point than beginning the process of gaining permission, as he puts it, to sit at the table again.

3. Entrepreneurship, including that which is social

A social entrepreneur is usually defined as someone who meets people's needs through the marketplace, including generating income for shareholders, but with the primary goal of doing "good" rather than turning a profit. While this category of activity would seem to lend itself to analysis through studies of religion, very little recent social scientific work unites religion and entrepreneurship. Most relevant studies come from the fields of sociology, economics, management, and business. Scholars of religion, including anthropologists, have written little on the subject, and there is criticism of their as-yet "unreflective use of the term social entrepreneurship" (McVea/Naughton 2021).

Based on my survey of recent articles on religion and entrepreneurship, this critique is correct.[3] Most relevant studies define entrepreneurship as an individual's "predisposition" and "skills to create a business" and/or be self-employed (Paiva et. al. 2020: 2). In adding "social" to their analysis, they make the basic point that entrepreneurial work should be better framed in socio-cultural contexts, which includes religion (Dana 2010). As "depositories of values" (Dana 2009: 87), religions help complicate the classical economic assumption that rational individuals always maximize profits amid mechanical market forces. Though I concur with the general sentiment, this literature creates a confusion of terms: because it considers religion to be *ipso facto* "social", it assumes that religiously motivated entrepreneurship is always 'social entrepreneurship'. Thus, most studies I surveyed simply asked how an individual's beliefs (a "social factor") helped or hindered their economic activity, mainly small-scale businesses (Rundle/Lee 2022).[4]

Only 15 per cent (n=7) of studies in my survey used the definition of social entrepreneurship that is widely accepted in other fields, referring to balancing "business viability" (Kimura 2021) with socially useful outcomes (McVea/Naughton 2021). This definition accords with Graham Singh's goal to create self-sustaining and even profit-generating church buildings. Some studies also suggest that to be considered a "religious" entrepreneur, one must manifest one's beliefs at work (Roudy et al. 2016; Kimura 2021). A more intriguing definition, via a study of Belgian Catholicism, sees social entrepreneurship less as integrating a pre-existing set of beliefs into one's work and instead defines it as a set of personal qualities that can be developed much like spiritual expertise: it is "the capacity to deal skillfully with uncertainties, to experiment on a small scale, to collaborate in a co-creative way, to gather scarce resources, to allow failure, and to dare to draw critical lessons" (Vandewiele 2021: 133–34). The emphasis on small-scale experimentation, co-creation, and failure is very

3 Based on my analysis of a database compiled by my research assistant Alexandre Duceppe-Lenoir. It contains 48 social scientific articles published from 2018–2022 he found with the search terms "social entrepreneur*" and "religion" (Scopus, EBSCO, ATLA, Google Scholar). Nine other articles date from 2010–2017. The earliest, from 2009, corresponds with the first wave of studies on social entrepreneurship in business and associated fields.

4 Most studies conclude that religion motivates entrepreneurship by building networks, creating hope and confidence, and justifying economic actions (Agarwal/Jones 2022; Tovar-García 2022; Paiva et. al. 2020).

much in keeping with the St. Jax ethos adapted from the Anglican missional movement.

Neo-Pentecostal and Charismatic Christians are of significant interest to scholars; nearly a third of the articles (n=14) in my survey focused on these groups and many others mentioned them in passing. No other religious group appears as often. As (often) independent congregations focused on growth, these churches fit easily with discussions of branding, marketing, and the sociological 'marketplace' metaphor, noted above, that is structured largely on Evangelical forms of Christianity proliferating in a 'market' of religious choices. CEO pastors who build growth-oriented megachurches become the "obvious" example of the "market logic" of North American Christianity (Gorski 2022). The subset of this literature that emphasizes entrepreneurship focuses on economic self-determination and risk-taking, especially among pastors who plant, market, and grow new churches (Foppen et al. 2017).[5] Religious Studies scholar Mark Jennings (2017: 243), using the neologism "pastorpreneur", criticizes these pastors as celebrating "the risky neoliberal individual" to valorize innovation, creativity, and economic risk as a godly model of leadership in service of church growth. In this literature, African case studies dominate (Agyeman/Carsamer 2018; Nyamnjoh/Carpenter 2018; Gusman 2021; Resane 2022), which anthropologist Séraphin Balla (2021) suggests is due to the rise of Pentecostalism during a continent-wide economic collapse in the 1990s: the pastors' success seemed so remarkable in this context that it prompted scholarly interest.

While St. Jax is not an Evangelical or Pentecostal church, its model shares aspects of the neoliberal economics that characterize these "personalised and embodied" ministries (Klaver 2015: 149). By neoliberalism, I mean the idea that everything is potentially marketable, including oneself as a personal brand and "human capital" (Brown 2015: 36). A gifted leader who emphasizes collaboration, Singh is nevertheless highly attuned to how his qualities – young, non-White, bilingual – represent St. Jax and TCF, especially in the media. He prizes professional-quality photos and good marketing. He leverages

5 In the case of pastors, scholars imply that 'entrepreneurship' is social because it builds religious institutions. Studies on lay people imply it is social because religious values and networks support their (non-church) economic activities. In contrast to studies of Christianity, relevant work on Islam rarely focuses on leaders. It emphasizes laypeople, often those with little formal economic power, notably women (Karimi 2018; Ouragini 2019; Senda 2019) and/or migrants (Hüwelmeier 2013; Gusman 2021).

his personality – gregarious, entrepreneurial, innovative – to grow the St. Jax/TCF brand (my word, not his). Beyond Singh's personal style, however, his model is sharply differentiated from how scholars describe the "CEO pastor" and pastorpreneur. These paradigmatic types are often associated with digital platforms, emphasize church growth without limit, and are place agnostic. The last point refers to how places, let alone a specific building, are rarely viewed as integral to the work. As one guide to church planting puts it, "steeples and stained glass" merely burden Christians with costs and the weight of history (Ringdal 2022: 56). Innovation and entrepreneurship are about being modern, nimble, digital, and constantly growing out of one building and into another – if one has a building at all. Theologically, this model is adapted to independent Evangelical churches, especially to those that are newly established. It is much less compatible with historic congregations where church buildings are an important legacy and, as Singh argues, a key asset for social and financial innovation. Thus, Singh suggests an economic logic that is less intuitive, at least for social scientists studying Christianity.

4. The St. Jax Model of Social Entrepreneurship

The St. Jax and TCF model adapts components of social entrepreneurship to suit the challenges faced by many traditional mainline churches in North America. The TCF website described its goal as "applying a new social business model that generates both societal and economic value…enabling church properties to continue to facilitate positive change, while maintaining a secure financial future."[6] Church properties are essential in this process. Economically, Centre St. Jax generates value in part by renting church space for high-end activities at market rates to generate a self-sustaining financial system. Because church congregations often lack the expertise to negotiate in the real estate market, TCF also creates economic value through its consultancy arm: congregations in financial crisis can hire TCF to guide them through negotiations with buyers. These services are not free (initial assessments run from $15.000 to $20.000), but the promise is that professional consultants will help congregations attain their goals. One TCF recommendation is that congregations and denominations retain the land as an income-generating asset, even if the church building is sold. Working through TCF, Singh is also trying

6 Cf. https://trinitycentres.org/en/about-us.

to create a market for private investment. His hope is that high-end investors and philanthropic foundations will invest in historic church buildings as part of diversified "social impact" portfolios. This strategy exists more generally – it is sometimes called "purpose-driven property investment" – but Singh wants to include churches as a viable, and even crucial, generator of social impact.

As TCF's website notes, economic viability is twinned with societal value. For example, when Centre St. Jax rents at market rates, it provides deep discounts for renters, such as other churches and non-profits, that it sees as generating social value (what it calls its "Robin Hood policy").[7] When private investors make profits on their social impact portfolios, it provides infusions of capital so churches can carry on as community hubs, which, as I noted, Singh views as part of churches' ethical responsibility to share their space with a wider public. Ironically, then, private real estate investors become the key to saving churches from being sold and made into private real estate, which (for Singh) negates the building's capacity to act for the public good. Selling churches to developers is an outcome so frequent for buildings in lucrative urban areas, like St. Jax, that I have heard TCF members refer to condominium developers as "wolves circling their prey."

The St. Jax/TCF model is rooted in the social goals typical of social entrepreneurship. It also accords with how entrepreneurship values innovation, audacity, and risk-taking. This factor deserves more scholarly attention. For example, a recent study of Silicon Valley argues that its entrepreneurial culture replaces more traditional religious commitments by providing analogous feelings and attachments (Chen 2022). However, while it discusses the 'pastoral' model of leadership in Silicon Valley where entrepreneur CEOs inspire devotion from "faithful disciples" (ibid.: 42), it only implies that innovation might have spiritual value in these circles. Scholars have more directly discussed innovation and risk-taking – gendered as masculine virtues – in the context of studies of Evangelical/Charismatic Christian pastors cited above. In TCF's case, it emphasizes church communities rather than individual leaders, promising to help groups find "innovative new ways of delivering services, while advancing social inclusion and revitalizing communities and local neighbourhoods."[8] At TCF's eight-week introductory course for church board members, which I attended, Singh and his co-convenor Dave Harder repeatedly made explicit the link between innovation and risk taking. In every

7 Cf. http://stjax.org/our-story.

8 Cf. https://trinitycentres.org/en/about-us.

session, they pushed participants to forget the "fears" holding them back from taking the risks required to think "outside the box" about the future of their church buildings.

Sam Victor, post-doctoral researcher on this project, first alerted me to the importance for Singh of Holy Trinity Brompton's missional approach. His insight is useful in the context of entrepreneurship as well. Being "missional" is an orientation that developed among British Anglicans in the 1980s and spread to North American Evangelicals (Bielo 2011: 269). Holy Trinity Brompton, where Singh trained, is a flagship of this approach and it lists "audacity" as its first value.[9] St. Jax is also positively referred to as "audacious" by missional Christians with ties to Singh (Okesson 2020: 207). At a basic level, this orientation refers to being a missionary in one's own society, which missional Christians define as a secular, post-modern one. In North America, this view translates into harsh criticism of conservative, (often) suburban white Evangelicalism and its megachurches for being inauthentic and ineffective (Bielo 2011: 278). Missional Christians hold innovation in high regard, which leads to the idea that one must sometimes reject received norms and rules to make an impact. The main purpose is evangelism; one "breaks the rules" of secular society by creating clever communication strategies to spread the Gospel. These strategies – "ambient" forms, as per Matthew Engelke (2012) – aim to meet people where they are (that is, outside church buildings). They are often irreverent and fun, but their main distinguishing feature is how they generally avoid talking directly about God or church. For example, in one of his first acts as St. Jax pastor, Singh dressed up in a blue bunny suit and frolicked with spectators at the St Patrick's Day parade, posing for photos with a sign that read "#More Than The Bunny / #Plus qu'un lapin." As coverage in the local news noted, he did this "without bringing in notions of church or Jesus" – which Singh would argue is precisely why it did, in fact, succeed in drawing people for Easter Sunday worship (Schwartz 2021).

In our conversations, Victor applied this basic concept from missional Evangelicalism to the less intuitive realm of heritage governance. For Singh and his team, the same positive valuation of cleverness and innovation helps structure their approach to managing relations with bureaucratic partners in the municipality and government-funded heritage councils. The St. Jax team often view these partners as stifling creativity since pragmatic bureaucrats rarely share their visionary plans for revitalizing religious heritage across

9 Cf. https://htb.org/story.

North America. More specifically, the Quebec heritage council often manages the local projects it funds by imposing strong restrictions, such as mandating that churches work with approved, and more expensive, contractors for repairs.[10] Clever ways around some of these systems include, for example, partnering with a circus that can apply for government arts grants for which religious organizations are not eligible. In 2023, these funds paid for improvements to the church, including new bathrooms. Another workaround was how the team slotted the bathrooms into a preexisting hallway that did not significantly alter the church's interior, allowing them to skirt the need for a building permit which is a difficult bureaucratic undertaking in a heritage building.

Innovative solutions also serve missional teams well within their denominations where pastors fall under the aegis of larger structures, such as an Anglican Diocese.[11] Singh demonstrated this ethos at a luncheon with leaders from Montreal's Catholic Archdiocese.[12] In response to one of the invitees, he suggested that Catholic Canon Law was unduly restricting churches from becoming community hubs. "We need to find workarounds", he urged, with "a package of short cuts" through which "clever" Catholic leaders could find ways "to bend Canon Law". He illustrated with an example from his work in the UK where, as church planters, they faced an Anglican rule to prevent removing the pews. Missional church planters dislike pews since they view them as too 'churchy' and less open to mixed uses (Singh immediately removed all the pews when he arrived at St. Jax). In the UK case, the clever workaround consisted of relying on Archdeacons' capacity to grant a temporary license to remove 20 per cent of a church's pews at one time.[13] Singh and his fellow church planters would request a license, remove 20 per cent of the pews, then wait six weeks and approach the archdeacon to authorize another temporary

10 The Federal government is more hands off and private foundations can be flexible negotiation partners. Singh hopes to grow the latter funding stream, which is more amenable to tackling innovative society-scale questions.

11 The current Montreal Bishop supports Singh completely and it is she who recruited him. The situation could shift with a new Bishop, which points to the tensions of operating within an episcopal system. That said, it is a fiction that any entrepreneur acts alone; there are always social pressures and opportunities (Dana 2009).

12 The lunch, which I attended as part of my fieldwork, took place at St Jax church on May 11, 2023.

13 An archdeacon is a senior Anglican clergy member responsible for the buildings in multiple parishes.

license until the church was emptied. It took longer, but they were able to skirt the official Diocesan rule. Thus, a certain amount of subversion is a virtue if it accomplishes what Singh and his team view as socially productive ends.[14] At the luncheon, however, Singh's suggestion did not resonate: the Catholic leaders – likely because they lacked the missional esteem for audacity – responded that Canon Law posed no problem as far as they were concerned.

5. Land as Privilege and Asset

The most important aspect of social entrepreneurialism is the 'social', which as I have noted in my brief literature review is severely undertheorized in studies of religion. Perhaps a reason for this lacuna derives from emic – that is, Evangelical Christian – perspectives on the social: from this vantage point, all Christian activities related to Evangelism are 'social' insofar as it addresses a pressing societal need for salvation. Singh agrees that salvation is important, but he defines his project in keeping with more widely accepted views that the "social" in social entrepreneurship refers to something other than Christian witness. Singh also distinguishes his model from more typical "church sharing" where congregations rent out space merely to pay the bills. Instead, he views property as a privilege and an asset for historic congregations, through which they can make social impacts.

Singh's emphasis on property derives partly from his training at Holy Trinity Brompton (HTB), where missional Anglicanism orients it toward historic buildings. By contrast, the missional movement adapted by non-denominational Evangelicals, as is most typical in North America, values physical places insofar as they create opportunities for Evangelism but does not value historic buildings per se (Bielo 2011). Of its church planting mission, HTB writes, "Historically significant and beautiful Anglican churches – often facing closure – have been restored and are now home to vibrant, growing, worshipping communities that have significant impact on their local areas."[15] With HTB, Singh shares an emphasis on historic buildings as the impetus for vibrant communities that impact the wider culture. However, HTB's goal of "evangelizing the nation and transforming society" takes place in a country where it is the established and majority church (represented on the same webpage by photos of a

14 Wording in this sentence drawn from Sam Victor's fieldnotes.

15 Cf. https://htb.org/story.

visit from none other than King Charles).[16] For Anglicanism in Canada the situation is complicated. It was never the established church and it always catered to a privileged minority. In Montreal, this is especially true. Singh is highly aware that he speaks within a historic French Catholic-majority culture that has traditionally viewed the English as its colonizers. He is also explicit about representing a colonial system that divested indigenous people of land, which is a key public issue in Canada. As a result, Singh creatively adapts HTB's focus on churches in a Canadian context to emphasize justice and access as social values.

Singh views societal ills, including power differentials between white settlers and indigenous people or more recent immigrants, as being partly redressed if historic churches, like St. Jax, come to think of their access to untaxed and centrally located space as a privilege that it is incumbent upon them to share. These privileges are not available to more recently arrived religious groups that cannot afford to buy land or qualify for property tax exemptions under restrictive government policies (on similar difficulties in Europe, cf. Cao 2022: 4). Singh also recognizes that historic churches stand because of the land and labor of others, including indigenous people, who were never part of the historically white, affluent, Anglophone congregation at St. James. Justice is making sure others now have access to the space, which, for Singh, makes real estate into a medium through which a traditional Anglican (and Catholic) concern with place can become a cross-denominational, and non-religious, Canada-wide issue about justice. It also signals another difference from missional Evangelicals who emphasize access to leadership for people traditionally excluded – for example, women, recent immigrants, or African Americans. The purpose is to make congregations internally stronger in order to, ultimately, focus outward on attracting more adherents. Singh agrees on the need for more diverse leadership, but his focus is not on growing a congregation; it is on reorienting church buildings outward as a widely usable resource. As a result, TCF rejects classic indicators of church 'health' based on the number of members or attendees. It also rejects the church growth model that scholars often criticize as a "market logic" (Gorski 2022). In TCF's investing school, for example, Singh and Harder urge church board members to change what they call the "limiting" or "doom" mindset that merely equates church success with questions such as, how do we get more families and how do we grow our numbers? Instead, they urge a "wonder" or "delight" mindset

16 Cf. ibid.

that asks, how can we serve our neighbors' needs, especially in terms of space? With this mindset, church health and success are measured according to how well congregations share their land and buildings with others.

However, land is not only a privilege: it is also churches' main financial and social asset. TCF calls for "the development of inclusive social ecosystems, leveraging the land wealth of Canada's faith communities as a foundation."[17] The website describes one impetus for Centre St. Jax as a "new way […] to revive an older idea of a church's role in society, which is to provide for the temporal needs of the community, but to do so in a radically open and inclusive manner."[18] Scholars are often less sanguine. For example, sociologist Danièle Hervieu-Léger bases her analysis of France on the Weber/Troeltsch triad from which Freudenberg and Reuter derive the concept of 'social form' in this volume. Hervieu-Léger (2002: 102) contrasts newer 'sect-type' religious groups in France with an established 'church-type' (Catholicism) that uses its inherited hold over territory to magnify "the fiction of being all-encompassing". Power is obviously at stake in the context I have been discussing as well. After all, Christians are not proposing to give over land and walk away. In fighting privatization, they are reviving the foundational role of church in "social ecosystems", as TCF puts it. By retaining historic structures *in situ*, Christian iconography, history, and presence remain vital in the urban landscape. By opening the building to those who have been traditionally excluded – albeit without asking them to join the congregation – these users are interpolated into a Christian story.

However, unlike Hervieu-Léger's model that sees the main source of tension as intra-religious (that is, between 'sects' and a dominant 'church'), St. Jax demonstrates how 'church' itself may in fact be a shifting constellation of churches, non-profits, diocesan actors, private investors, and philanthropic foundations – all of which become stakeholders by dint of their social and/or financial investments in a single building. In his assessment of St. Jax, pastor and missiologist Greg Okesson calls it "a place with multiple expressions of church" (2020: 215).[19] If we think in terms of social forms, it is a constellation on the border of many social fields. With such a complex structure, it is

17 Cf. https://trinitycentres.org/ecosystem.

18 Cf. http://stjax.org/en/home.

19 Singh recommended Okesson's book to me as largely reflecting his own point of view. The two are also close colleagues, Singh having started a ThD at Asbury Seminary where Okesson serves as Provost.

no surprise that St. Jax is unlikely to solve the tension between property as social justice and church asset. In fact, leaving room for ambiguity is how the St. Jax model succeeds. It can become multiple things for multiple people and – in good entrepreneurial fashion – embraces change as a constant.

6. Concluding Thoughts

The St. Jax model is located on what this volume calls the border between social fields. Historic church buildings are the tangible remnants of an era when 'church' (the ideal type in Troeltsch/Weber's sense) was not far from the empirical reality in Quebec. The community hub might thus be considered a new social form that aims to reconfigure 'church' as a constellation of people and projects in response to contemporary society's negative valuation of religion's public role in Quebec. Hubs also address a pragmatic issue at the heart of the church building crisis in North America: these historic structures benefit from central locations and tax exemptions yet are enormously expensive for dwindling congregations to maintain, especially if they are heritage sites. Sociological models that assume North American religious success mimics economic supply and demand ('strong' churches are defined by the number of individuals seeking membership) would dismiss these historic churches as moribund relics. By contrast, Singh's entrepreneurial model recruits the market – mainly in terms of real estate rentals and private investment – to fund heritage churches and thus secure historic Christianity's enduring, but evolving, public influence.

Devoting more attention to social entrepreneurship, and more carefully defining the 'social' in this context, offers a novel way for scholars of religion to explore the permeable border of religious and economic social forms. Identifying Singh as an entrepreneur helps broaden the category beyond the current emphasis in studies of Christianity on what scholars have called "CEO pastors" and "pastorpreneurs". As noted, the St. Jax model harnesses market logics embedded in neoliberal capitalism, most obviously in terms of private investment, but rejects the church growth and prosperity gospel movements to which anthropologists and sociologists so often turn to study Christianity and the market. Singh's entrepreneurial embrace of audacity and innovation colors his outreach as a pastor, his work with partners in the heritage sector, and his integration of cutting-edge trends where private investors seek "impact invest-

ing" or "social purpose" goals. Singh's ambition for TCF is to position it as "one of Canada's most significant social purpose real estate investment offerings."[20]

The St. Jax/TCF model foregrounds property as a key privilege and asset of historic Christian congregations. In this respect, it contributes to the sociological project of identifying how new social forms emerge in response to changes in thinking about religion. In Quebec, such changes have been drastic since the 1960s, resulting in a massive reorganization of institutional religious forms. The St. Jax/TCF model also contributes to the ongoing interest among anthropologists of Christianity to understand how historic churches, notably Anglicanism and Catholicism, reposition themselves as publicly relevant within the countries where they are historically rooted by using material spaces and objects in ways that are "ambient" (Engelke 2012; Kaell 2017) and "banal" (Oliphant 2021). Singh's model adds a new twist to this ongoing conversation as it makes private rentals and investment into a major basis for retaining church buildings as public spaces. Another twist lies in how it counsels congregations to devolve control over their buildings to the larger community in order to reinvigorate the power of Christianity as a partner for social good within the putatively secular city.

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