MISSIONAL MAPMAKING

An Art of the Mission-Shaped Church

An Uncertain Journey

The summer of 2007 was a confusing time for many in England. On a terrible day in mid-August Gary Newlove stepped out of his home in Warrington, Cheshire where youth gangs were harassing the people and property of the working class neighborhood. Within minutes Mr. Newlove lay in a comma. The next day this young father died in hospital. This was only one in what now seems like an onslaught of teen gang murders on English streets. In London one young man made the mistake of asking a gang of young men to stop throwing junk at this sister's car. Minutes later he lay dead on the street. In the Midlands a young boy is knifed to death because he refused to join a gang. In Liverpool, a young boy, Rhys Jones, was shot and killed while returning home from a soccer practice in an upscale part of Liverpool called Croxeth.

I was in the UK during the last two weeks of August watching and listening to how newspaper columnists and television reporters and the public were trying to make sense of these terrible events. I heard all kinds of recommendations about how to fix the problem. The demand was for more police on the streets and in the communities or raising the drinking age yet again. More money for urban redevelopment, more education, more programs for young people, more social workers, better health care, more parental responsibility and on and on it went as everyone tried to understand what had happened to produce these awful events. On the day after Gary Newlove's

death I was watching *The Richard and Judy Show*. They had the usual expert analysis and proposals. It all rung hollow! The assumption seemed to be that more money, another set of law and order legislation, another distinguished committee to study would solve the issue. No one seemed willing to admit that confusion and perplexity were the underlying themes of the conversation. But then one person, in his early fifties, asked:

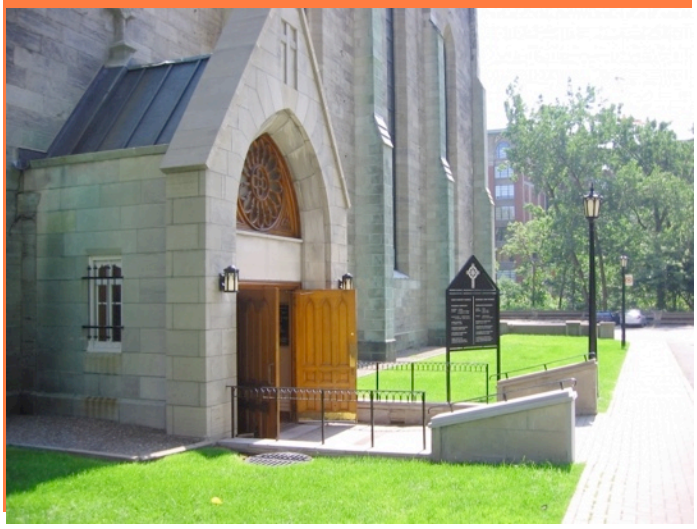
What has happened to us? How did we get here? When I was growing up as a young boy we did lots of things that were wrong but nothing like this. Back then (he's talking about the late fifties and early sixties) we all lived inside a way of knowing what was right and wrong. We all knew the story of Jesus and there was a Christian background. It didn't mean we went to church but we all knew the same story. These kids today have nothing like that anymore! There's no common story shaping us, how did that happen?

Silence!

In that moment was the recognition that we're all living in a confusing, sometimes terrible, time where our maps have been torn up; we're traveling in an unfamiliar land with fragments of maps or we're making them up as we go.

A lot of us are struggling to understand this changed context. Recently, I listened to the torn up maps of a good friend whose thirty-year-old daughter is getting married. My friend, in her late fifties, was raised in a Mennonite community and has lived our her Christian convictions all her life. Her daughter is a wonderful and talented individual with all the strengths and gifts of her mom and dad. But the Christian life of her parents has not 'stuck.' She's marrying an energetic, creative, entrepreneurial young man who isn't interested in God-talk at the wedding ceremony. She tells her mom she and her husband to-be are going to be OK because both have parents whose marriages have lasted the test of time. The assumption seems to be the modeling will stick. Not a bad assumption but it misses some crucial connections. The source of my friend's marriage, the 'sticking together' over so many years, is something deeper. It is the Christian story. She was trying to communicate to her daughter that the story one lives inside matters because it shapes commitments. My friend fears her daughter is marrying without a story and so has no maps within her (except the implicit and now borrowed examples of her parents) by which to navigate the demands and challenges that make a marriage rich and full.

Experienced leaders, good men and women, struggling with contexts where the maps that once worked for them no longer make sense of the situations they now encounter.



A bishop sits with friends at a conference confessing that many of his clergy are anxious and terrified about what they are facing in their parishes. Another, in response, frankly acknowledges she doesn't know how to address a radically new context of her aging, dwindling congregations. The executive minister of a denomination addresses two hundred pastors at a retreat telling them he feels out of his league in addressing the changing cultural context of that West Coast State. These are experienced leaders, good men and women, struggling with contexts where the maps that once worked for them no longer make sense of the situations they now encounter.

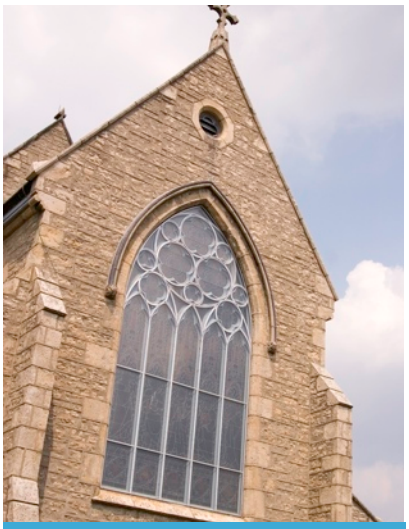
Church When the Maps Have Changed

How do we equip people for the challenges of being God's witnessing community when it feels like the maps that once worked so well no longer apply to the new territory in which we find ourselves? Today, irrespective of age or vocation, we live in a time when our maps prove less and

less reliable guides. The doctor was once a symbol of caring presence and personal attention in a community, a vocation focused on the healing of persons. Rapid and profound changes in technology and economics are changing how medicine is practiced. People wonder what happened to their local GP. A friend, after practicing medicine for thirty years, recently resigned her position because she could no longer deal with the time constraints insurance groups put on her seeing patients, the mountains of paper work she had to fill out and the restrictions on diagnostic treatments mandated by companies focused on the bottom line. This reframing of the meaning of her vocation created unreasonable levels of stress and a profound sadness about role. Parallel shifts across organizations that result in confusion and chaos for workers and leaders alike.

Honest congregational and judicatory leaders are feeling overwhelmed by the changes occurring in our culture. They experience how the maps of leadership and vocation they were given don't correspond to the realities they are facing in local churches and the systems that serve them. One leader put it this way:

When I accepted the call to be the executive pastor of a presbytery (a regional grouping of congregations) in the Presbyterian Church (USA), I was excited, enthusiastic, and full of energy for my new challenge! A little over three years into the position, I was discouraged, frustrated, and depressed. I found myself caught in the downward spiral of a regulatory agency that had no tangible rewards. Dealing with rules, regulations, conflicts, and an unending pile of administrative problems made me feel like the church was a vampire sucking the love of ministry out of my system. I didn't know how long I could continue to function in the role I had felt called by God to fill. I did not see any hope for change on the horizon, and didn't know if I would ever really be able to make a difference in the lives of our pastors and our congregations… I was trained to lead and minister in a world that no longer exists. I learned methodologies and strategies that don't work in today's culture. I did not understand how to really change the culture of a church system…



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So much has changed in North American culture over the past fifty years. At a conference of seminary and theological school presidents in Dallas, one president began his comments with these words: "I am the President of a school that was established to train leaders for a church that longer exists." Churches and leaders are confronted with a world that no longer corresponds to the maps out of which they've been operating.

Journeying Toward Alternative Maps

This book offers a framework for understanding how the maps have changed and proposes ways of developing maps for cultivating local communities of witness and mission. It doesn't offer quick solutions. Most professions and disciplines struggle to discern the nature of leadership in this changed world. A quick look at books on leadership in any airport bookstore make clear the variety of proposals and metaphors presented as guides in a new terrain. We're invited to build the bridge while we cross it, discover blue ocean leadership and distinguish between the spider and the starfish. The multiplication of metaphors and images suggest a search for alternative maps. We're in a world for which few of us were prepared.

Over the past thirty years as a church leader I've sought to understand the changes affecting the church. Twenty-five years ago, as a young pastor in a growing church, I felt something was terribly wrong with how I was functioning as a leader. I had been well trained in three different seminaries and considered myself a well-schooled evangelical Christian. Within eighteen months of my first pastorate among wonderfully generous, patient and understanding people, I figured out how to make a church grow but intuitively sensed I was missing the big questions about the relationship between the church and the people who lived in the community. In my denominational system, I found few who were asking questions similar to

my own. They may have been there, but I honestly found few who would listen or engage in the questions I was asking. (I suspect that in those days I hadn't yet learned to articulate my questions, even for myself, and so my engagements with others in the denomination must have been experienced as attacks and criticisms rather than the eager desire to figure things out I intended.)

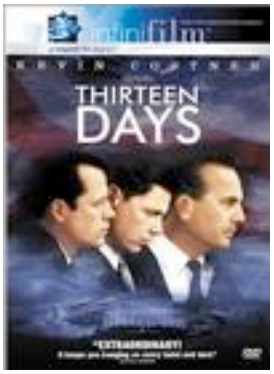
I connected with a network struggling with the questions I was trying to address. The **Gospel and Our Culture Network (GOCN)**[1] is shaped by the work of missiologists like Lesslie Newbigin and David Bosch and its ethos is shaped by the disciplines of missiology. The basis of GOCN is Lesslie Newbigin's question on the first page of his book Foolishness to the Greeks: "What would be involved in a missionary encounter between the gospel and this whole way of perceiving, thinking, and living that we call 'modern Western culture'?"

The network gave me a company of friends and a framework to think about the church in North America. I participated in a writing team seeking to articulate a framework for a North American missional ecclesiology. Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America[2] became the book we wrote together over three years. It invited a dialogue about the church and its mission on this continent.[3] The book's publication made popular the term *missional as well as assisting me to understand why the maps of leadership and church life shaping my imagination no longer matched the reality of the world in which I found myself. The process of writing this book took me deeper into a world that would need alternative maps*. As I was trying to understand what it means to be the church in a context (Canada) where most of my peers, and almost everyone younger than I, had given the Christian story a pass, the missional conversation was a great gift.[4] This basic conviction of the local church as called and sent to be about the mission of God in its context shapes this book.

Our Map's Shape Our Actions

The movie **13 Days**[5] addresses the nature of leadership in critical times. It is the story of the Cuban Missile Crisis, a period in the late sixties when the USA and the USSR came right up to the precipice of global nuclear war over the installation of ballistic missiles in Cuba.

The movie tracks events with some accuracy. The Kennedy Administration must confront the complexities of this grave situation. From the perspective of Kennedy's advisors, every scenario evaluated will ultimately lead to nuclear war.



The situation is extremely complicated. First, contact with Soviet leadership is through back channels. Trying to penetrate the intentions of that leadership is like an enigma wrapped in a cloak of mystery. Second, US military leaders argue forcefully for a full-scale military response at the earliest possible moment. Their instincts and experience convince these soldiers that no other option exists but to strike fast and hard even if this inevitably leads to nuclear war. These military leaders are so locked into these assumptions that they work to undermine Kennedy's directives by creating incidents designed to precipitate Soviet responses thus making war inevitable. Kennedy's challenge is to sift through all these complex elements while, at the same time, deal with a rapidly closing window for effective response to the missiles in Cuba. The missiles will be operational within a matter of days.

A pivotal scene sets the stage for what unfolds. Kennedy is talking with his brother, Bobby, and his political advisor. The President describes reading Barbara Tuchman's, The Gun's of August, an exhaustive study of the causes of World War I. Tuchman's argument, states Kennedy, is that the generals in the Allied and Axis powers all assume they understand the military mind of their opposites. They are convinced they can manage this brief war using the assumptions of the wars they had fought to this point. As Kennedy points out, these generals are operating on assumptions based in the traditions and experiences that they knew. No one questions the conviction that they know how the other operated and how the war should proceed. Because of these assumptions,

the generals are blinded to the fact that the very nature of war has forever changed. Technology, a new idea at the beginning of the twentieth century, creates a situation in which all the rules and common sense assumptions about the nature of war are blown apart. But no one takes cognizance of this changed reality. The generals pursue war according to ways of war established before the technological develops with the result that the people of Europe are dragged deeper and deeper into a conflict more horrible than anyone ever imagined with no way out.

The devastation of World War I radically transformed Europe. The technological innovation that overturned the old assumptions is the machine gun. The generals are not prepared for the effects of this new technology. In the 18th and early part of the 20th century the machine gun was effectively used to colonize in Africa and India. On these continents massive numbers of poorly equipped Africans, Indians and Arabs were, literally, mowed down by a few European soldiers sitting behind a few machine gun placements. The devastation these guns wreaked upon people fighting a war with horses and spears was immense. Empires were created and solidified because no one, other than the Europeans, had the technology. When war breaks out in Europe, the generals and the citizenry joyfully go to war with their machine guns and all their old assumptions intact. But this time the slaughter exacted in the colonies is the slaughter visited on one another. The result is the smashing of Western consciousness in the bloodiest slaughter ever seen in the world to that point.

For Kennedy it is not the machine gun but nuclear bombs and the ballistic missiles. After reading Tuchman, Kennedy seeks an alternative way of engaging a radically new kind of world. He intuitively grasps that the instincts of the generals will lead to disaster – the maps of their world cannot solve the challenges of the new context.

This story is an apt metaphor for the North American church over the past half century. The crisis is the end of functional Christianity as the controlling map of the culture. The emergence of postmodern maps creates a radically different location for churches. Like Tuchman's generals, churches continue to believe they can navigate

The crisis for the North American Church over the past half century is the end of functional Christianity as the controlling map of the culture.

this new terrain with the maps that got them to this place. It's a dangerous illusion! This book traces some of the ways we've formed our maps and propose fresh ways we can become mapmakers in the landscapes of change where we now live.

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1 For more information about GOCN visit the wed site at www.gocn.org. A helpful introduction to the conversation of the network is through some of its earlier books such as The Church Between Gospel and Culture (Edited by George Hunsberger and Craig Van Gelder) as well as Confident Witness – Changing World (Edited by Craig Van Gelder) both are published by Eerdmans.

2 Guder, Darrell (editor) Missional Church (Eerdmans, 1998).

3 See other books in this series through the *Gospel and Our Culture Series* published by Eerdmans.

4 On the Allelon website - www.allelon.org one will find a series of video interviews and essays under the theme *What is Missional Church?* These provide a rich resource for those interested in exploring the missional question further.

5 The movie's title is based on the book by Robert Kennedy, Thirteen Days: A Memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis (New York: Norton, 1968) the comments above are based on the script of the movie rather than citations from Kennedy's book.