

## Having Faith in the City : Religion and Urban Expertise in the Twentieth Century

On many levels, the modern city represents a challenge for organized religions. This session aims to study how religious groups and individual actors developed, on both sides of the Atlantic, a body of knowledge to rise up to this challenge. In other words, it proposes to explore the different ways in which religion guided or influenced the development of urban expertise in the twentieth century, as well as the ways in which the burgeoning social sciences influenced how religious actors viewed and dealt with the modern city. This notion of urban expertise is defined here a minima as the production of a rational body of knowledge that is to be used to guide responses to moral, social, political or even economical and technical problems and crisis. This notion encompasses a great variety of approaches. To make sense of this variety, we propose two main axis of analysis.

First, we seek papers that identify and study the individuals and the institutions that are at the center of the development of this urban expertise. Who are those experts – clerics or laymen – that try to understand and explain the urban phenomena through religious lenses ? Which are those institutions that foster this body of knowledge on cities and the urban environment ? What are the networks and channels that take shape to spread this expertise within and between religions ?

Second, we seek papers that explore the different ways in which this body of knowledge was put to use. A defining characteristic of this religious urban expertise is probably the fact that it was generally guided by moral imperatives and aimed at creating a more “humane” urban environment. Of course, there are important debates as to the legitimacy of this body of knowledge. How scientific and rational was this religious urban expertise? Did it really distinguish itself from the more prescriptive discourses and practices associated with the nineteenth-century ?

Papers that compare multiple cities or religious affiliations, both within and across nations, are especially welcome. Through this, we hope to show that, whether it achieved its goals or not, there was a complex attempt by organized religion to tame or at least better understand urban modernity through the tools used by other experts of urbanity and urban problems.

**Keywords:** Religion; Expertise; Experts; Social Sciences; Modernity

**Period:** 20th Century

**Type:** Main Session

**Session organizer(s):**

Harold Bérubé (Canada) - *Université de Sherbrooke*

Olivier Chatelan (France) - *Laboratory of Historical Research Rhône-Alpes*