



THE RELIGION AND DIVERSITY PROJECT/RELIGION ET DIVERSITÉ



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Research Statement

My approach to the study of religion draws upon anthropology, history, and theories of modernity to ask how people and communities become “religious” subjects in purportedly secular times and places. My latest book, *Pathologies of Modernity: Medicine, Healing, and the Spirits of Protestantism*, focuses on how, via tropes and practices of healing, liberal Protestants in Canada went from attempting to cure the sick in a world wracked by wars and the consequences of colonialism, to eventually see the deep ironies of how their own projects of healing were complicit with the evils they sought to exorcise. I argue that a supernatural liberalism enabled the shift from being Protestants who combined biomedicine and evangelism to effect “conversions to modernity”, to understanding themselves as complicit in a Christian, scientific, and oftentimes racist imperialism that was (in the end) pathology dressed in the garb of progress. Another recent project, *After Pluralism*, is co-edited with Courtney Bender, and brings together a range of scholars concerned with the question of how the ideal of “religious pluralism” has shaped the recognition of what counts as religious in scholarly, state, and popular contexts. One of my earlier books is also concerned with questions of religious diversity in unconventional settings: *Blessed Events: Religion and Home Birth in America* considered the ways that women from a diversity of religious affiliations—including conservative evangelicals and Catholics, Orthodox Jews, Old Order Amish, Christian Scientists, mainstream Protestants, and goddess feminists—were united in their conviction that childbirth was not a biomedical, but a “spiritual” event.

In 2008-9, I was a Fellow at the Jackman Humanities Institute of the University of Toronto, working on a new, SSHRC-funded project entitled “The Protestant Sublime: Testimonies of the Spirit in a Scientific Age.” I have also held Fellowships from the Fulbright Foundation and the Humboldt Foundation, the latter of which took me to the University of Tübingen for one year. At the University of Toronto, I helped to develop the Religion in the Public Sphere Initiative as a hub for faculty, students, and community partners interested in questions of religious diversity in public contexts. My graduate students have developed ethnographic research projects that include such topics as: religion within contemporary policies and practices of organ donation (Arlene Macdonald), religious identity among feminist, political activists (Laurel Zwissler), contemporary interpretation of religious texts by Muslim and Jewish women (Shari Golberg), the phenomenon of “progressive Christianity” (Rebekka King), and religious responses to homelessness in urban Canada (Amy Fisher).

<http://individual.utoronto.ca/pklassen>