Introduction

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I will never forget the email I got from Heather Shipley inviting me to create a Facebook page for the Religion and Diversity Project student caucus. It was no problem to create the page (https://www.facebook.com/RDPStudents/) but accepting the invitation from Heather, the Project's manager, was a big deal. It was my formal entry into the Religion and Diversity Project, a research program funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada on issues of religious diversity in Canada and abroad from a variety of perspectives including religion, law, communication, sociology, history, political science, education and philosophy, under the direction of Lori Beaman at the University of Ottawa. For seven years, scholars associated with the Project explored the questions:

1. How are religious identities socially constructed?
2. How is religious expression defined and delimited in law and public policy?
3. How and why do gender and sexuality act as flashpoints in debates on religious freedom?
4. What are alternative strategies for managing religious diversity?

Religion has become a prominent topic in public discourse, politics and international affairs, and for most of the contributors to this book the Religion and Diversity Project was a big deal because it provided a magnificent training milieu for our academic careers.

The Religion and Diversity Project consisted of a core team of thirty-seven established researchers of international repute, their graduate students, and staff. Through team meetings, workshops, public lectures, and conferences we got to know each other personally, learn about and share our research interests, take part in training opportunities, apply for research funding, expand our scholarly networks, engage in

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critical conversations about key questions and controversies in the field, and collaborate on projects. Intense scholarly exchange was always evident as members of the Project wrestled with concepts that were either new to them or being considered in new ways. The fact that scholars were bringing perspectives from multiple national contexts—the issues that accompany religious diversity change depending on particular social, political and economic realities—made our academic exchanges themselves exercises in negotiating diversity. Much of the research that is the basis for the chapters in this book was funded by the Religion and Diversity Project. This edited collection provides a glimpse of some of the fruits of the Religion and Diversity Project largely from the perspectives of emerging scholars of religion in Canada.

Exploring Religion and Diversity in Canada: People, Practice and Possibility is organized according to themes and traditions related to religious diversity, from education to health care, from Christians to Muslims. Throughout the book, the contributors highlight concepts that are important in their fields of expertise. Although I will highlight a few of the concepts related to religion in this introduction, it is important to read and think about them in the chapters themselves in order to better understand how the concepts are used in relation to particular individuals and religious groups, or specific situations and contexts.

The category of religion has become problematic, given the mutually influencing and changing nature of religion and society. Many scholars of religion are asking critical questions about what should be the focus of our investigations. I interviewed James Spickard a few years ago as part of a series of short videos of scholars, religious leaders, and adherents speaking about religion that Nancy Nason-Clark and I created as teaching and learning resources <http://religionanddiversity.ca/en/projects-and-tools/projects/linking-classrooms/linking-classrooms-videos/>. Spickard suggests that there are at least six stories that indicate what is going on in the study of religion today: (1) religion is disappearing; (2) religion is becoming more conservative; (3) religion is increasingly congregational in form; (4) religion is more individualized than ever before; (5) the religious sphere is a marketplace offering different forms of religion to consumers; and (6) religion is globalized. At first glance, some of these stories appear to be contradictory—which is why coming to a critical understanding of religion in its contemporary manifestations is complex. In order to simplify things somewhat, I suggest that there are at least three trends in which elements of Spickard's six stories are embedded that contribute to the problematization of the category of religion. The advent of a global, networked, information society (Castells 2000) has contributed to two opposing trends, the process of homogenization of cultures and religion as well as the increasing heterogeneity of religious beliefs and practices. A third trend, related to the first two, is the rise of non-religion, as increasing proportions of people do not affiliate with any religious tradition or describe their beliefs and practices as religious or spiritual.

The homogenization of culture and religion means that in several ways religions are becoming more alike. Technological innovations enable people and information to travel rapidly around the globe. Using the internet, Canadians can easily access information about religion, particularly non-Christian religions. Our awareness of different religions is heightened as the religious diversity of our society increases due to immigration. For many students, the university is a much more multicultural

and multi-faith space than was their local high school. Religious groups and individuals always adapt their practices to the social contexts of which they are a part. There is evidence that religious minority groups in Canada are reshaping aspects of their practices to conform to those of the Christian majority (Beyer and Ramji 2013). The adaptation of religious practices by minority groups can be understood as an effect of the pressure of Christian hegemony but it can also be viewed as strategic. Religious minorities seize opportunities to adapt to the congregational form which characterizes Christianity in order to position themselves favorably in relation to state policies on multiculturalism, religious freedom, and human rights as well as in relation to public opinion. Many Canadians associate Christians with regular attendance at churches and therefore expect that Hindus and Buddhists will worship in their temples and Muslims will visit their mosques on a weekly basis.

The homogenization of religion, however is not simply benign. Colonization is a violent project of cultural and religious homogenization through which Christianity and its values and practices are imposed on the colonized (Chidester 1996; Peterson and Walhof 2002). I write about the colonization process in the present tense, because it is ongoing and evident in the ways that public rhetoric and state interventions continue to distinguish between good and bad religions (Orsi 2005). Good religions are given state support such as the right to establish faith-based schools, but the state intervenes to curb bad religions such as banning certain religious symbols in the public sphere. Mainstream media sources reinforce the designation of good and bad religions when their reporting paints all members of a religious group with the same brush. News tends to focus on outliers within religious groups, usually the most conservative or radical, giving the impression that religions are essentially disruptive or destructive forces in society. If higher education has a role to play in the process of the homogenization of religions, this can be a constructive role in teaching that all religions have within them beliefs and practices that can be used for good or ill. Given my area of expertise is the intersection of religion and domestic violence, I think we can evaluate the social impact of religious practices and beliefs based on whether or not they are a source of harm or a source of liberation.

We have access to information on religion via the internet 24/7. This means that individuals and groups with the resources needed to spread information about religious teachings and practices are challenging the traditional authority of religious leaders. Individuals and groups can access information on religious teachings and practices with relative ease and are drawn to forms of religion that have widespread appeal. In this way, the religious marketplace caters to desires of the masses through their smart phones and iPads. To paraphrase McLuhan, the medium has become the message—religious seekers can surf the internet anywhere and anytime looking for forms of religion that fit with their lifestyle. This can contribute to the homogenization of religion, toning down its critical social function, especially those elements that critique consumerism, violence and environmental degradation.

Given the social pressures to conform, the rising heterogeneity of religious groups and the increasing diversity of religious beliefs and practices within religious traditions can be understood as forms of resistance to the global trend of cul-

tural homogenization. Despite those that predict the disappearance of religion, religion continues to be a salient aspect of collective and individual identities. The internet and technological innovations have led to the proliferation of and widespread access to information about particular religious groups that would otherwise remain obscure. New religious movements are arising all the time. And although unmediated access to religious information can lead to the popular appropriation of religious messages and practices, it is also used to strengthen individual and collective commitment. Not only can religious people access sacred texts, commentaries, prayers, and music online but they can connect with other people in their religious group or with those who have similar spiritual goals through social media if they cannot do so face-to-face. In the face of seemingly unlimited choices, some people are choosing to limit their choices in order to follow strict forms of religious practice, such as Orthodox Jews or Salafi Muslims (Davidman 1991; Inge 2017). Individuals and groups choose to purposely foreground their religious identities in the face of social conditions in which the promises of science and democracy have not been fulfilled. Conservative or fundamentalist religious identities provide firm guidelines, stability and truth in an era of uncertainty and growing social inequality.

Religious groups can broadcast and podcast their services so that individuals can feel part of a congregation even if they cannot or choose not to physically participate. This is related to the phenomena called "believing without belonging" or "vicarious religion" (Davie 2007). Some people feel that religious groups have a role to play in society but they might only engage with religion periodically like when they want a religious wedding ceremony or funeral. Even leaders of secular states turn to religious language and practices in dealing with public tragedies such as terrorist attacks or mass shootings. Beyond congregational walls, home-centered faith sharing or spirituality groups can supplement or become the core of some people's religious practices. In these intimate gatherings, individual understandings of religious teachings can deepen and group members can hold one another accountable to maintain religious practices, especially if they are counter-cultural. This resistance to the homogenization of religion, especially in its institutional forms, is especially evident amongst women, whose religious beliefs and practices have historically been marginalized (Holtmann 2011) or take place under the radar of religious leaders (Gervais 2012). Some women who work for gender equality draw upon the resources of their faith traditions in order to address social problems such as domestic violence (Nason-Clark and Clark Kroeger 2010; Nason-Clark and Kroeger 2004).

Several chapters in this collection employ the concept of lived religion or everyday religion in order to capture the reality of day-to-day religious beliefs and practices of people in contrast to institutionally prescribed teachings and norms (Ammerman 2007; McGuire 2008). McGuire (2008) argues that this is not a new phenomenon—what constitutes authentic religious belief and practice has been contested throughout history. Questions of religious authenticity always involve power struggles. Lived religion is evidence of the healthy dialectic between individual and collective agency and religious and political institutional structures. That

is why the subtitle of this book is *People, Practices and Possibility*—religion (and non-religion) as it is actually lived and practiced by Canadians is dynamic. Change is inevitable and exciting because it means that deep equality is possible (Beaman 2014). Widespread access to information about religion today has increased people's ability to craft their own approaches to religion without any necessary connection to or censure from religious institutions. Wise religious and political leaders who are aware of the power of the people, so to speak, are adapting accordingly.

This brings me to the concept of spirituality and its relationship with religion. During my Catholic theological studies, I learned that the relationship between religion and spirituality is like the relationship between bones and flesh— one needs both to be a healthy and whole person. Religion is associated with the structuring of religion—its rules, roles, texts and symbols—while spirituality is associated with the practicing of religion—one's body, emotions, thoughts, self-awareness, and sense of connection to others and the sacred. It makes sense that an institutionally grounded school of theology would promote this kind of understanding but sociological research concerning peoples' everyday religious practices indicates that the association between religion and spirituality is not so straightforward. Some people who describe themselves as deeply spiritual may or may not have a connection to a religious institution or group. Others who identify as members of a religious group may not engage in any kind of intentional spiritual practice. There are a range of possible combinations of religion and spirituality between these two examples.

The increasing number of people who do not identify with any particular religious tradition is the third trend in the contemporary study of religion. This group is of interest to scholars of religion because it is diverse and growing. Religious "nones" are comprised of atheists, non-theists, agnostics (those who have yet to decide where they stand about religion and the sacred), the spiritual but not religious, and those who do not attribute their beliefs and practices to religion yet whose lives resemble those of religious people. It is perhaps this group of people that are most impacted by the contemporary dynamics between religion and society—the opposing trends of homogenization and differentiation of religion. Perhaps they are even playing a role in driving these trends. In countries of the West, the domination of public discourse by the perspectives of politics, economics, and science (technology), has shoved religion to the side and many agree that is where it belongs. As consumers in a highly diverse religious marketplace, many people exercise their choice not to be religious. They reject, or at least choose not to use, religious or spiritual language to describe or give order to their everyday lives.

All of the chapters in this text will help you to further explore these complex trends within the academic study of religion. The structure of each chapter is similar in order to help facilitate your learning. The chapters include a real-life story based on empirical research. The stories we tell help us to make sense of our lives. In telling a story, religious and non-religious people assemble the different elements that arise from the relationships and situations that fill their days into a coherent whole. Stories are particularly appropriate when it comes to religion, because all religions are rooted in stories—meta-narratives and myths that have helped to explain some of the big questions in life such as: Why are we here? What should our relationship

to others be like? What should I do with my life? And what happens after we die? Religious people understand their personal stories to be intertwined with larger religious narratives (Ammerman 2014).

In addition to highlighting key concepts, each author refers to statistical data in her/his chapter. These data, most often that collected by Statistics Canada, provide a snapshot of the population in relation to religion. Statistics help us to identify broad patterns of religion in society and are a good contrast to the rich details provided by individual and collective stories. The combination of qualitative and quantitative data in each chapter of this volume provide different perspectives on religious diversity. Differing perspectives on particular religious issues or traditions are important in understanding the complexity of religion. Each chapter addresses some of the current challenges and future opportunities in the author's field of inquiry.

All of the contributors are concerned about the dissemination of our research findings on religion and are aware of the multiple opportunities that people have for learning. Thus, this text has a focus on teaching and learning about religious diversity. Its electronic format is important so that it is widely accessible and affordable. The chapters include questions for critical reflection so that readers can begin to integrate the new information provided. It is hoped that these questions will assist in interrogating some of the assumptions or stereotypes that students have about religion. Students can also consult the online and print resources listed at the end of each chapter if they are interested in furthering their learning about a particular issue or religious/non-religious group. Some of the online resources are hosted on the Religion and Diversity Project website: <www.religionanddiversity.ca> and were created specifically for the study of religious diversity. The resources include short video clips of scholars, religious leaders, and adherents speaking about religion; photo essays; instructions on "how to" link classrooms using technology; a guide to organizing a religious leaders panel; and examples of assignments such as mapping the religious diversity of urban spaces.

The availability of print and multi-media learning tools recognizes that there are a variety of ways that learning takes place. It usually begins with tapping into what people already know—their personal experiences, opinions, and knowledge about religion and religious people. Many of the questions for critical review throughout this book are designed to encourage self-reflection. Online visual resources can also stimulate reflection through the juxtaposition of familiar images alongside the unfamiliar. For example, a photo essay on same sex marriage combines traditional symbols such as flowers and rings with feminist theory texts. Another example is the *Stained Glass Story of Abuse* on the RAVE Project website <www.theraveproject.org> which brings together the beauty of traditional stained glass with the ugliness of domestic violence. It is when personal knowledge and assumptions are made explicit that the starting point for further learning and change can be identified.

The chapters in this book cover a diverse range of religious traditions, themes, and issues concerning contemporary religious diversity in Canada. Four of the twelve chapters focus on a single religious group. Steve McMullin explores the changes taking place in evangelical Protestant congregations in Chap. 7. This is one group of Christians that is experiencing growth in the midst of widespread decline

in mainstream Christian denominations. One of the denominations struggling with declining participation by its Canadian-born membership is the Catholic church. Chap. 8 features the findings of Paul Gareau's research on Catholic youth and their involvement in a program that is part of the church's attempts to revitalize a countercultural Catholic identity. This exploration of the identity formation of religious youth shines a light on the complex relationship between institutions and individuals. Jennifer Selby introduces readers to the lived religious practices of a young Muslim woman living in Newfoundland and Labrador in Chap. 10. This case study serves as a springboard for better understanding the unique challenges that Muslim Canadians face on a daily basis in a post 9/11 world. Selby's work highlights the ongoing social and political pressures of colonialism and their impacts on members of religious minorities. Although atheists are, strictly speaking, not a religious group, they are the exclusive focus of Steven Tomlins' research presented in Chap. 11. An increasing number of Canadians are identifying as religious "nones" on our national census. Tomlins helps to unpack this census category by means of examining historical legal cases and an ethnographic study of everyday atheists in Ottawa, Ontario.

The other chapters are organized according to themes and issues and position these in relationship to the diverse religious traditions being practiced throughout the country. In Chap. 2, I write about the role that religious social networks play in the lives of immigrant women who have recently settled in the Maritime provinces on Canada's east coast. The chapter highlights the role that formal and informal social networks play as Christian and Muslim women navigate life in a new society. Social networks assist them in dealing with the realities of becoming a visible minority and/or religious minority, experiencing discrimination, coping with shifting gender roles in their families, and living with religious diversity. Nancy Nason-Clark takes up the issue of domestic violence in families of faith in Chap. 3. She explains the unique vulnerabilities of religious women to victimization as well as the story of how violence and abuse become part of religious men's lives. The chapter highlights the important role that religious leaders can play both within their congregations and as part of a community-wide response to the problem of domestic violence. Nason-Clark's research addresses a gap in scholarship that has designated religion as part of the problem of domestic violence. She argues that religions have resources that can be harnessed to assist victims and perpetrators in the process of change, accountability and social justice.

In Chap. 4, Heather Shipley addresses the hot button issue of religion, gender and sexual diversity. Her chapter is based on the findings of the Religion, Gender and Sexuality among Youth in Canada project—research that reveals the complex diversity of young Canadian's identities. Youth identities are religiously diverse and involve a range of gendered identities as well as an array of choices concerning sexual relationships. Each of these identity categories are dynamic and mutually influencing as the young adults engage in a process of figuring out who they are. Van Arragon's work on religion and education is presented in Chap. 5. A longtime educator and administrator, he invites readers to ask critical questions about the regulation of religion by the state within educational systems in Canada. This chap-

ter will be of particular interest to those training to be teachers as he skillfully reminds readers about the religious dynamics at play in and outside classrooms whether or not religion is the subject matter. Another significant location of religion in Canadian public life is its intersection with health care and this is the focus of Chap. 6 by Lisa Smith. Religious narratives become even more salient to individuals and groups during times of crises and this is certainly the case when people require medical care. Smith raises questions about the religious definitions of health and well-being and their implications for those who provide public health care in Canada. Again, this chapter could be helpful for those training to be health care workers.

The negotiation of religious diversity is the issue addressed by Amélie Barras in Chap. 9 in which she explores the concept of reasonable accommodation in case law and its movement into public discourse in Quebec. Using an example from her qualitative research with Muslims, Barras suggests an alternative framework for the negotiation of religious diversity.

It is fitting that Lori Beaman, the catalyst behind most of the research presented in this book and to whom all of the contributors are grateful, is the author of the concluding chapter. Beaman writes about the goals and design of the Religion and Diversity Project and how the work unfolded in ways that were unforeseen, as is often the case with collaboration and research. Beaman's assessment of the fruits of the Project over the past eight years incorporates the contributions of the authors of this text. She also describes research on religious diversity that is not included in the collection but which readers can learn more about by visiting the Project website. Finally, Beaman points to the future and describes emerging scholarship on the growth of non-religion, including her comparative research on religious and non-religious people involved in the protection of sea turtles—fascinating!

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