



THE RELIGION AND DIVERSITY PROJECT/RELIGION ET DIVERSITÉ



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Biography

Christopher Helland received his doctorate degree in sociology of religion from the University of Toronto in 2004. He was a SSHRC Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Goresbrook Institute before taking a tenured stream position at Dalhousie University in 2005. He has a number of publications examining the relationship between the Internet and religious activity and is currently completing a book on this topic for Oxford University Press. Selected publications include: *Online Religion/Religion Online and Virtual Communitas* (2000); *Surfing for Salvation* (2002); *Popular Religion and the World Wide Web: A Match Made in (Cyber)Heaven* (2004); *Online Religion as Lived Religion: Methodological Issues in the Study of Religious Participation on the Internet* (2005); *Diaspora on the Electronic Frontier: Developing Virtual Connections with Sacred Homelands* (2007); *Canadian Religious Diversity Online: A Network of Possibilities* (2008); *Online Religion in Canada: From Hype to Hyperlink* (2011).

Research Statement

My current research activities explore the relationships that have developed, and are developing, between new media and religious beliefs and practices. My central questions focus upon the impact of the Internet and World Wide Web on issues of religious authority and control, religious information seeking behaviour, social shaping/spiritualizing of technology, ritual activity, pilgrimage, and popular religious expression.



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Christopher Helland will be doing fieldwork in Leh, Ladakh, India in July. He will be working closely with The Office of His Holiness the Dalai Lama as Tibetan Buddhists from around the world participate in a special three week Kalachakra Ritual. Helland is examining the transfer of sacred rituals as they are put online and is exploring how new media is used to communicate the “sacredness” of the event to the thousands of people that cannot make it to Northern India for the physical ritual but will be participating nevertheless through the Internet. Canada has one of the largest Tibetan Diaspora communities outside of Asia and for many of these people in Canada; online ritual activity has become an important supplement to their religious practice. While doing his field work, he is also going to be the official blogger for Tricycle Magazine on the event (<http://www.tricycle.com/about>) and will be writing an article for a special issue of the magazine examining “Digital Buddhism.”

Dr. Helland has been invited to participate in a three year project at the University of Colorado, Boulder Center for Media, Religion and Culture examining “public religion in the digital age.” The Project has gathered a Working Group of scholars from the fields of religious studies and media studies to develop theory, research, and knowledge-building about the way religion is evolving today in and through modern means of communication. The Project recognizes that today’s digital media environment, which can be described as creating a situation of “hypermediation” through its speed, ubiquity, and social-media circulations, changes not only religion, but also changes the conditions of scholarship about religion. The Henry Luce Foundation has funded the project and Dr. Helland is looking forward to the wonderful opportunity to collaborate with top scholars in the field at a dynamic research center.