



THE RELIGION AND DIVERSITY PROJECT/RELIGION ET DIVERSITÉ



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**Biography**

Bill James is Professor Emeritus of Religious Studies at Queen's University in Kingston, Canada. He received his PhD in 1974 from the University of Chicago in the field of Religion and Literature. For thirty-five years he was a member of the Department of Religious Studies at Queen's University where he taught in the areas of Religion and Culture, Religion in Canada, and Modern Religious Thought. He has been a Visiting Professor at the University of Toronto and on four occasions at Kwansai Gakuin University in Nishinomiya, Japan, as Visiting Professor of Canadian Studies.

For seven years he was the Book Review Editor of *Studies in Religion /Sciences religieuses*. On two occasions he was on the board of the Canadian Corporation for Studies in Religion. He has held various executive positions in the Canadian Society for the Study of Religion including that of President, 1996-98, and in the Eastern International Region of the American Academy of Religion.

Bill James's most recent book is *God's Plenty: Religious Diversity in Kingston* (2011). His previous books include *Locations of the Sacred: Essays on Religion, Literature, and Canadian Culture* (1998), *Religious Studies in Ontario: A State-of-the-Art Review* (with Dan Fraikin and Harold Remus, 1992), and *A Fur Trader's Photographs: A. A. Chesterfield in the District of Ungava, 1901-04* (1985). He has presented about three dozen conference papers and is the author of almost thirty articles published in edited collections or refereed journals. Among his better-known articles—and perhaps most exemplary of his scholarly focus—are “The Canoe Trip as Religious Quest,” published in *Studies in Religion* in 1981, and “Dimorphs and

Cobblers: Ways of Being Religious in Canada,” reprinted in Lori G. Beaman, ed., *Religion and Canadian Society* (2006).

### **Research Statement**

Over the years my research has mostly been in the general area of Religion in Canada, with a special emphasis on the religious implications of Canadian fiction. The focus has been largely contemporary, with special attention to the religious implications of so-called “secular” culture. Some of the specific projects outlined below provide an indication of how that research focus has been manifest.

### **Religious Diversity in Kingston**

From roughly 2003 to 2010 my research project was “Religious Diversity in Kingston,” supported by a SSHRC Standard Research Grant and employing more than a dozen Research Assistants. The fruit of that project is a book, more than 500 pages in typescript, *God’s Plenty*, currently under review for publication. This book represents a unique attempt to map the religious landscape of an entire city early in the twenty-first century. Through the employment of a kind of “backyard anthropology,” utilizing site visits and more than one hundred interviews, the effort here is to chart the current state of religion in a mid-sized Canadian city. The book engages such diverse fields as history, ethnography, the sociology of religion, literature, aboriginal studies, interfaith dialogue, religion and public life, and the phenomenology of religion.

### **Religion and Literature**

Much of my teaching and research has made use of literary materials, especially fiction, with a view to understanding the religious dimensions of Canadian novels—not just in fiction’s handling of explicitly religious materials, but in the totality of its worldview—and how, in turn, religion is shaped through fiction. This is the intersection of the religious meaning of literature and the literary meaning of religion. In the larger scheme of things religion as a product of human creativity and the search for meaning connects with the imagination in many of its projective manifestations, including the worlds of art and culture. My *Locations of the Sacred* (1998) offers ten essays exploring these methodological implications as well as offering some specific examples and detailed interpretations of the texts embodying this kind of approach.

### **Religion and the Secular**

Novelist Douglas Coupland has a character in *Life After God* wonder into what cracks the religious impulse spills in lives that are “post-religious.” Accordingly, I have been interested in what might be termed secular correlates of religion—e.g., sports, politics, hobbies, and various groups. Sometimes such areas are viewed as forms of implicit religion. Along these lines my experience of living in Japan, where so much of life is centred in ritual, for extended periods of time over the past twenty years have made me question the western interpretation of religion as entailing belief in some form. In addition, because most

Japanese follow two or more religions, I have become interested in various aspects of religious hybridity or eclecticism—the mixing and matching of different religions—in the West.