Association for Bahá’í Studies – Seminar on Religion & Society
April 21 - 23, 2017

Friday, April 21
6:00 – 7:00 pm Dinner
7:00 – 8:00 pm Plenary Devotions and Introductions
8:00 – 9:30 pm Plenary Study of Guidance on Discourse

Saturday, April 15
8:00 – 9:00 am Breakfast
9:00 – 10:30 am Panel: Contributing to the discourse on religion (description below)
10:30 – 11:00 am Morning break
11:00 – 12:30 am One Common Faith Study
12:30 – 1:30 pm Lunch
1:30 – 3:30 pm Article Study: Joseph Camilleri – “Postsecularist Discourse in an “Age of Transition”
3:30 – 4:00 pm Afternoon Break
4:00 – 5:00 pm Article Study cont’d
5:00 – 6:00 pm Presentations on Research in Progress (descriptions below)
6:00 – 7:00 pm Dinner
7:00 – 9:00 pm Presentations on Research in Progress (descriptions below)

Sunday, April 16
8:00 – 9:00 am Breakfast
9:00 – 10:00 am Plenary Reflection
10:00 – 12:00 pm Subgroup Planning
12:00 – 1:00 pm Lunch
Panel Presentation: Contributing to the Discourses on Religion and Society

9:00 am - The panel will, in the context of participation in the discourse on the role of religion in society, explore both the nature of this discourse, and the difference between institutional and individual action in that arena. Each panelist will share experience - from the perspectives of an international institution (Bahá’í International Community, Julia Berger), a national office (Office of External Affairs of the Bahá’ís of Canada, Gerald Filson) and from an individual scholar (University of Toronto, Todd Lawson). These experiences will be shared through the frame of the following questions: how have you/the institution you serve tried to "read" the discourse, how have you approached the generation of content to contribute to this discourse, and in what other ways have you been able to contribute to the advancement of this discourse?

Study of One Common Faith

11:00 am - The goal of the session is to consider some of the insights imparted by the House of Justice about the nature of religion, its role in society today and how it is understood and approached in public discourse. What insights do we glean from One Common Faith that pertain to our participation in fields concerned with religion and society? How does our reading inform the form and substance of the contributions we might make? How does the House of Justice help us understand religion and its role in society? How does the House orient us to the confusion and debates concerning religion in public discourse? Given our subgroups’ focuses on modernity, hermeneutics and the postsecular, what questions and lines of further inquiry does our reading of One Common Faith suggest?

Study of a Relevant Article from the Wider Discourse

1:30 pm – Joseph A. Camilleri’s “Postsecularist Discourse in an “Age of Transition.” In this session, we will read an article from the wider discourse on the role of religion and society. How does this article help us understand the postsecularist discourse? What are the article’s principal arguments? What fundamental assumptions frame its discussion of the topic? How does it understand its key concepts? How does our own conceptual framework allow us to navigate these assumptions, concepts, perspectives, and debates, identify problems, and suggest alternatives?

Presentations of Research in Progress

5:00 pm – Hermeneutics Working Group: Initial Reflections and Questions. Presenter: Kevin Naimi. In this presentation, the initial thinking and questions of the hermeneutics subgroup will be summarized and placed in the broader context of the history of philosophical hermeneutics. The seminal contributions of Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Gadamer, Heidegger, and Ricoeur to this area of inquiry will be discussed. The
presentation will also include reflections on the potential value of this area of inquiry in understanding and contributing to discourses concerned with the role of religion in society.

7:00pm – *Naturalism and the Philosophy of Mind*. Presenter: Aaron Morgulis. The presentation considers two ways that philosophers have understood the place of minds in the natural order. While naturalists have conventionally understood mind to be of the "realm of law" and thus a material phenomenon, a number of important voices have expressed disaffection with the view. The disaffection with naturalism is not merely a moral qualm, but is at the level of explanation. Some argue that naturalism makes the human mind unintelligible, and upholds a dogmatic picture of nature and mind. The presentation will explore a few reasons why some have challenged the intelligibility and viability of the naturalist view of nature and mind.

8:00pm – *Practices of Hipsterism: the dynamics of competing frameworks in analyzing contemporary phenomenon*. Presenter: Tara Rahimi.
This paper will discuss some of the challenges when approaching research in an environment functioning within the framework of materialism and has underlying perceptions of humans as fragmented and inherently selfish individuals. Based on the example of the current phenomenon of hipsterism, the paper will demonstrate that research from a purely materialistic standpoint has great limitations in providing a holistic, comprehensive interpretation of human behaviour. By assuming that there is a neutrality and objectivity to understanding phenomenon in a pure materialistic sense, receptivity in hipsters and an underlying frustration with injustice, and a wish to transform society have not been acknowledged, because they are impossible to detect within the limitations of such a framework.