

OUR WHOLE SOCIETY



Identity & Common Ground in an age of Transition

Sponsored by the Canadian Interfaith Conversation

April 29-30, 2019

Toronto

On April 29-30, 2019, the Canadian Interfaith Conversation is sponsoring the fourth conference called “Our Whole Society,” which aims to foster a new dialogue about the changing role of religion in a pluralistic Canadian society. Previously held in Montreal (2013), Vancouver (2015), and Ottawa (2017), and now taking place in Toronto (2019), the gathering brings together leading thinkers from all sectors of society to create a space for meaningful exploration, where a variety of insights can shed light on the place and contribution of religion in a secular age. Past speakers have included leading Canadian thinkers and writers such as: John Ralston Saul, John Borrows, Marie Wilson, and Daniel Weinstock.

2013 MONTREAL

2015 VANCOUVER

2017 OTTAWA

2019 TORONTO

In this conference, we are building on an approach to discourse that seeks to draw on insights from diverse religious and secular traditions of thought to navigate the challenges of constructing a society that is more robust and unified amidst its diversity. Our three sub-themes are: Rethinking Identity, Addressing Extremism and Polarization, and Technology, Values and Society.

Rethinking **IDENTITY**

Rethinking identity: We are living through uncertain times, when established ideas and institutions are under pressure from a variety of social forces. In the midst of our turbulent age, many people are rethinking the basis of our human identity. What does it mean to be human, in a society that is increasingly diverse, in flux, and shaped by new technologies? What can be done to protect human dignity and nobility? How can we find common ground: a basis of shared principles and values that can help us to navigate through rapid changes? How could these principles and values help us to heal our social divisions, address the

injustices of the past, and build communities that can foster ties of solidarity, cooperation and reciprocity between many diverse people?

Addressing Extremism and Polarization: In a society that is increasingly pulled towards the extremes, many are looking to reinforce a common centre of reasonable, respectful discourse. What is the role of religion in this conversation? How does religion become a source of social good, reconciling viewpoints, transcending divisions, and rejecting those who would spread hate in its name? How should religious concepts inform political language and strategies? In what ways should religious and secular actors work together to create a more robust public discourse?

EXTREMISM *and* POLARIZATION

TECHNOLOGY VALUES *and* SOCIETY

Technology, Values and Society: There is also a growing anxiety about a technological future in which people are powerless to make meaningful choices about the development and uses of technology. Many are asking how we can think in new ways about the relationship between emerging technologies, values and society. What values does technology express? What can religion bring to conversations about the role of technology in society? What means should be explored to ensure that technologies are developed and used to serve human and social well-being, rather than the other way around?

This initiative builds upon an effort by the Canadian Interfaith Conversation and a coalition of civil society organizations to foster new contributions to Canadian public discourse. It has included past conferences at McGill University (2013), the University of British Columbia (2015), and Saint Paul's University (2017). These gatherings have brought together civic leaders, academics, public servants, students, religious leaders, lawyers, and engaged citizens to talk about how we can build our whole society. The conversation continues in Toronto in April 2019.