Muslim Communities in Europe & North America: A Transatlantic Dialogue on Contextualized Religion

This working group will discuss the nature and significance of a key problem facing Muslim communities in Europe and North America: the challenge of achieving a contextualized understanding of their religion that is suited to the unique circumstances, challenges and opportunities that face religious minorities in contemporary Western societies. The first part of the discussion will provide a brief comparative overview of Muslim communities on both sides of the Atlantic, identifying both points of similarity and differences with respect to demographics as well as socioeconomic issues (such as employment and education) and political questions surrounding civic engagement, identity and discrimination. The next part of the discussion will explore the impetus behind recent efforts to develop responses to these practical issues that are based on the Islamic tradition but specific to context, and identifies some of the key figures and major ideas that constitute this debate. Next, analysis will be offered of the major obstacles that have prevented such efforts from advancing—drawing, where appropriate—on the experiences of other
faith communities, including Christians and Jews, which have met similar challenges. The issues covered here will include questions of representation and legitimacy, the challenge of creating spaces for intra-Muslim discussion and understanding, intergenerational differences with respect to religious life and understanding and the role of institutions and leaders.