

The Chester Ronning  
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# The Chester Ronning Centre for the Study of Religion and Public Life

## Newsletter

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*From the Director's Desk...*

### Gratitude and Welcome

We are about to begin a new academic year at the Ronning Centre and there are many things to be grateful for and many people to thank and welcome. First is Debbie Smeaton, who for the last few years has worked with skill and effectiveness on behalf of the Centre. The Centre has matured because of her commitment. We have enlarged our programming both on campus and regionally, increased the public's awareness of our work through the media, and established a publication program of note. Everyone who has worked with Debbie has been touched by her grace and generosity, her efficiency and willingness to go beyond normal expectations to ensure quality. She has taken an interest in the Ronning Centre mandate and engaged the ideas with care and vigour. Debbie has taken up a new position with Lakeland College and we wish her well, congratulate Lakeland on bringing her on board with her superb gifts and skills, and welcome her as a friend of the Centre for many years to come.

It is my pleasure to welcome Rebecca Warren as the new Executive Assistant of the Ronning Centre. Rebecca grew up in New York, received her MA in literature from Indiana University and did graduate work in theology at Calvin Seminary. She was an editor at McGraw Hill, has worked in an administrative capacity planning conferences for various institutions and has taught at the university level. She has a longstanding interest in the issues and themes of religion and public life and I look forward to what she brings to our discussions as well as to her consummate skills on the administrative side of our work.

The Ronning Centre has also been the beneficiary of the good work of two other colleagues. Reiner Loewan has documented our various programs and provided the Centre with wonderful photographs and audio recordings. He has made these recordings available on our website so interested people may now listen to most of what we have offered over the last three years. Soon all our lectures and forums will be available. I am very grateful for Reiner's skills and diligence in extending the work of the Centre. Nicholas Wickenden has been a friend and colleague for many years and a friend of the Centre from its early days. He is a fine historian and has a longstanding interest in and knowledge of the history of typography and of the book. Nicholas took over the editorial and design tasks associated with our publications several years ago. They are elegant because of his meticulous care. Each of our authors has been pleased beyond measure.

We thank each of our colleagues and are grateful for what we do together. Our common work has been and is a joy.

— David J. Goa



Faris Kaya's career as a student of Said Nursi's writings reflects the successive stages by which those works have become available.

As a teenager in high school, he was first introduced to Nursi's ideas through an invitation to a discussion

group – the usual setting for such an encounter.

At university he participated in further discussions, generally held in students' homes. Then there was a break as he travelled to England to take his PhD in Mechanical Engineering at the University of Sussex.

Back at the University of Istanbul, he was asked in 1981 to join the Istanbul Foundation for Science and Culture as a volunteer.

Though the Foundation had only existed formally since 1979, its roots extended back some decades to the early group study of Nursi's works. The name of the Foundation had been carefully chosen to give no offence by mentioning religion in still-secularist Turkey.

Now as the Director of the Foundation, Dr Kaya actively promotes the study and teaching of Said Nursi not only in Istanbul but through organizing conferences and forums such as have recently been held in Malaysia, the Philippines, Egypt, Australia, and South Africa.

## The Modern Islam

He composed most of his works in prison or exile and their publication was prohibited for many years, but in the past half century they have emerged from obscurity to energize a vigorous popular movement in many lands of the Islamic world.

The reframing of Islamic tradition by the Turkish scholar and thinker Said Nursi (c.1877-1960) – despite its wide-ranging implications for the role of Islam in the modern world – is still little recognized in Western countries.

To help make its significance better understood was the goal of Ronning Centre Consultations in Camrose and Edmonton on 8 and 9 March 2010.

Speakers were Faris Kaya, Director of the Foundation for Science and Culture in Istanbul, and Rev. Thomas Michel, S.J., professor at Georgetown University in the United States and sometime head of the Islamic department of the Vatican Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, as well as current Director of the Jesuit Secretariat for Interreligious Dialogue in Rome and Ecumenical Secretary for the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences.

The speakers were introduced by Ibrahim Abu-Rabi', ECMC Professor of Islamic Studies at the University of Alberta.

Said Nursi was already in his forties when a dramatic change in his outlook led him to develop his key ideas. He had been appointed a mufti – that is, an authority on the interpretation of Islamic law – during the First World War, but had been captured by Russian forces and sent to Siberia; only after two years of imprisonment did he manage to escape and make his way back to Istanbul.

He already had a thorough education in Qur'anic studies, at which he excelled; but his wartime experiences led him to reject his earlier understanding of *jihad* (holy war) as physical combat, and to replace it with a concept of purely spiritual warfare.

## of Said Nursi

Muslims should present the Qur'an to others, but convince them of its validity only by argument. This was one important difference between what he himself referred to as the "old Said" and the "new Said".

Another was his advocacy of interfaith co-operation; the first Muslim scholar, said Dr Kaya, to take this up. Even false systems, Nursi argued, might have some truth in them. Defining differences through debate could actually promote friendship, while ignorance was an obstacle to this. He did not oppose European ideas as such, but what was *inhumane* in them.

He therefore argued for co-operation of Muslims with pious Christians to oppose what he saw as the real enemy, secularism that left no place for a consciousness of God in daily life. (Even during the war, as a mufti he had taken action to protect Armenian Christians from the violence that threatened them.)

In recognition of his war record, Nursi had been summoned to Ankara in 1923 by Kemal Atatürk, but because of its secularism he refused to serve in the new Turkish regime and retired to pursue study and teaching.

Now considered an opponent of the Turkish republic, Nursi was arrested in 1925 and presently sent into internal exile in western Turkey. Here he began to compose his great work, the *Risale-i Nur*.

The *Risale-i Nur* ("Message of Light") took the form of a commentary on the Qur'an. The door of revelation had closed, Nursi maintained, with the Prophet Muhammad and the Qur'an; the challenge now was to understand the revelation that had already been given.

In the course of his extensive researches on Islamic-Christian relations, Rev. Dr Thomas Michel recalls how he spent some time in Erzerum, in eastern Turkey.



Explaining to his local contacts that he was a "monk" (for which there was an appropriate Turkish word), he rented a flat in the town. It was without furnishings, but once his needs were made known by word of mouth, he was able to obtain first a mattress and then other necessities.

When he left for work he locked the door.

After his return one of his contacts remarked, "You locked the door." This, it was made clear, was not correct behaviour. The local housewives would always keep an eye on the premises to ensure that nothing untoward happened.

So the door remained unlocked – and each day Dr Michel found his flat cleaned and tidied and his dishes washed.

At the end of his time in Erzerum, he asked to meet the ladies who had looked after his place so that he could thank them.

But this, he was assured, was quite unnecessary. They had not been doing it for him – but as Muslims, simply to serve God.

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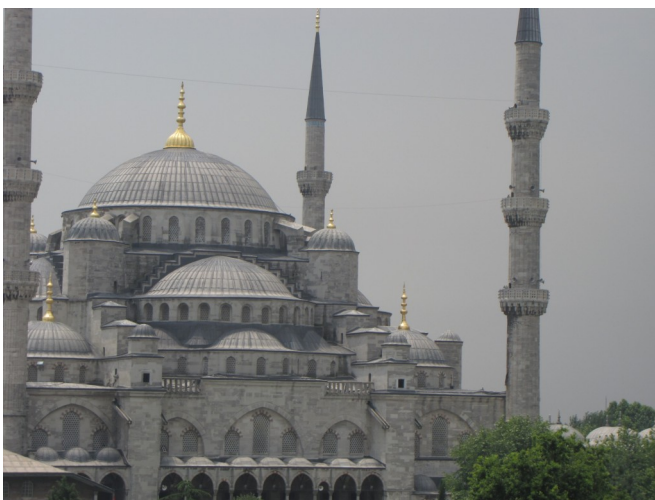
This commentary grew to 60,000 pages. It is the only such commentary, Dr Kaya remarked, not originally written in Arabic but translated into it from the Turkish.

Nursi was not allowed to publish his work; but despite its length it circulated in manuscript among informal groups of interested students. The publication ban was not lifted until the 1950s, not long before his death in 1960. (There was still hostility to his influence, and his burial place remains a secret.) But Nursi did not regard acceptance as a criterion for the value of his ideas.

Though at odds with the Turkish regime, and with good reason to wish to change it, Nursi advised his students against entering politics; he felt political activity could be inimical to personal sincerity—and as Dr Michel observed, personal transformation, including acceptance of the will of a God who revealed Himself as Truth, was at the heart of his understanding of Islam.

There is now no ban on the works of Said Nursi, and the readership of his works is growing, with consequences for Islam and for the world that only the future can reveal.

—Nicholas Wickenden



## At Conference in Istanbul

### Religious Studies Have Healing Potential in Public Life, Says Goa

Ways in which the study of religion can benefit public life in the modern world were the theme of an address by David Goa, Director of the Chester Ronning Centre, at Istanbul recently.

Goa spoke at the “New Voices in Nursi Studies” Conference, sponsored by the Istanbul Foundation for Science and Culture on 27 and 28 June.

“Careful, systematic, and deep study of revelation, the religious life, and the traditions of the human family”, he declared, may “free us from the bondage of our contemporary perspectives”.

Pointing to the threats posed by rival fanatical fundamentalisms, both religious and anti-religious, he maintained that religious studies offered a way to deal constructively with such clashing ideologies.

“When we come to understand opposing positions ... without having them infect us with their particular fears we may have the opportunity to speak a healing word that will enlarge the moral imagination of both sides in so many of the grave and serious arguments of our day”, he said.

Goa also found in religious studies an antidote to the “cultural amnesia” that menaces Islamic as well as Christian societies. The Islamic scholar Said Nursi, he suggested, was concerned about this issue – “that is why he worked so diligently at trying to establish a house of study, a university, and why he wrote so prolifically”.

“Formation in the rich tradition of knowledge”, Goa cautioned, “does not guarantee either the stance of faith or the confidence and ability to speak an illuminating word. Without it, however, one is always a slave to a passionate reaction defined by those one seeks to counter.”

Goa also chaired sessions at which younger students of the works of Said Nursi were able to present their own approaches to his writings in a setting that encouraged lively discussion.



## Eco-Spiritual Ethics in the Holy Qur'an

May Naguib has called many places “home” around the world. Her first twelve years were spent being bathed in Sufi mysticism from her milk-mother and her extended family.

Then, after spending a few years in Europe, her family returned to Egypt, where she finished her primary school being educated by Jesuits. High school brought another move when her family travelled to Qatar, then a dusty enclave on the Persian Gulf. Here she was introduced to the Wahhabi-inspired Islam that had influenced her teachers.

Upon graduation, she was transported back to Egypt for studies in Islamic Law and Political Science at the American University in Cairo. After learning English, she excelled in her studies and was awarded a British Council scholarship to study Political Philosophy at the London School of Economics.

May's academic pursuits were sidelined for a time owing to injuries she suffered in an accident during the Hajj when a quickly spreading fire killed a number of pilgrims. After marrying and settling in Boston she attended Harvard University Divinity School and was awarded a master's of theological studies.

Living in so many different places has given May a global vision for the environment and a deep concern for how we treat the earth. “This is our universe, our planet”, May says. “The one thing we can unite with people from other religions is our concern for the planet. A trust was given to us—the trust of love for the planet.” While she is very concerned about the state of the environment today, May also believes there is hope that we can actually change it, do better in living up to the mandate we have been given to care for the earth. “People of belief *can* make a difference on the planet”, she asserts.



May uses the term “ethics” to approach her research rather than the term “doctrine.” For May, the concept of ethics is more fluid and conversational and can truly connect us to the essence of the message. “Every concept has a voice”, May explains. “We need to understand ethics in a way that allows us to give a voice to the text”.

She believes not enough research has been done on the text of the Qur'an as it relates to the environment and hopes to explore this further in her research.

May is preparing for entry into a PhD program to study more closely the impact of religion on people's perceptions of nature. She will speak this fall in a Ronning Centre Consultation.

—May Naguib and Rebecca Warren



Vangie Bergum,  
Professor Emerita,  
University of Alberta

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*The number of men who ate was about five thousand, not counting the women and children.*  
(Matthew 14:21)

*Around these parts, you can't get by without a son. Girl babies don't count.* (Message from an Unknown Chinese Mother, by Kinran. Reported in *The Economist*, March 6, 2010, p. 77)

To be counted is more than enumeration. To be counted deems that one is important and esteemed. To be counted means that women and girls, as well as men, matter. It is now reported that, globally, there are 100 million baby girls who have not counted: baby girls not born or left to die. In Canada, the counts of missing women are shocking and include women and girls from the Montreal Massacre, Vancouver's Eastside, and BC's Highway of Tears. Not just on the streets and in our homes, women are missing in the academy, the church, and politics. Change is needed.

In 2006 we (Vangie Bergum and Susan Andrews) formed a Think Basket, which is a flexible and open think tank, to discuss ideas of professional and personal interests in relation to the state of the world. Instead of the traditional think tank, which began with the purpose of managing war, the Think Basket strategizes differently, exploring how ideas grow and change and where some fall away.

## Think Basket:

As our reading and discussion continued our attention turned to the universal abuse and killing of women. We followed, in the daily news, the killing of women and their children by strangers, friends, partners, and fathers, as well as military atrocities. In order to understand why such phenomena exist, at least in our home territory, we reasoned that we needed to understand better our culture's idea of love.

What was missing in the matter of missing women, it seemed to us, was an understanding of love as a respect for the living, regardless of age and sex. And if that was the case we needed to understand what love means to our culture. Looking for a place to start we decided to assemble women who were not Plato scholars to read the *Symposium*, Plato's dialogue about love, which is considered by some as a foundational document in Western civilization. Women were not present at the *Symposium* although the wisdom of one woman, Diotima of Mantinea, was delivered by Socrates. Diotima did not speak for herself. The lack of women speakers in Plato's dialogue is of interest.

After Plato, Aristotle indicated that women's association with lower matter (the body) made them inferior and passive, and stood in the way of attaining wisdom. The Apostle Paul and Tertullian of Carthage, Ambrose of Milan, Augustine of Hippo, and Jerome followed in that vein. Martin Luther asserted that women's vulnerability and irrationality prevented them from knowing God, and led to a lack of social and political equality.

We wanted to share our inquiry and so the Think Basket's first project was to reconvene Plato's symposium. This project has involved, so far, three communities: Castlegar in the West Kootenay of British Columbia in January of 2009, Edmonton in June of 2009, and Camrose in February of 2010. It has involved over thirty women in these communities. The enthusiasm of women for the project has kept us going.

# Who Counts?

After Edmonton's "Symposium Reconvened" in June, at the suggestion of Joyce Hendrickson, we approached David Goa of the Chester Ronning Centre. David Goa invited us to meet with women in Camrose to read and discuss the *Symposium* and suggested we also meet with philosophers and other sage community members to discuss the value of such a project.

On February 26<sup>th</sup>, we met at the gracious home of Nola Sharp in Camrose. We read the *Symposium* aloud a page at a time, each taking a turn, in the morning. After the lovely lunch of lefsa wraps and soup, provided by the Ronning Centre, the women were asked to reflect on their first impressions. More discussion followed, prompted by further questions: What do you have to say about love that is not in the *Symposium*? How would having a woman's perspective on love change the understanding of love? Of history? Does woman's experience of mothering, or not mothering, give another understanding of love? The reading and discussion was recorded electronically.

The reconvening of Plato's *Symposium* in Camrose included: Nola Sharp, Pat Prest, Jane Ross, Pat Mader-Mündel, Janet Wesselius, Yvonne Becker, Andrea Dyck, Rhonda Harder Epp, Andrea Kowalchuk, and Marilyn Schwabb. We are most grateful for their generous engagement with the reading and discussion of love.

The following day we met with the philosophers and other wise people: Joyce Hendrickson, Jane Ross, Janet Wesselius, Andrea Kowalchuk, and Martin Tweedale, at David Goa's home where we had most excellent coffee and delectable nibbles. We enjoyed a wide-ranging discussion of Plato and Aristotle and the relevance of their influence to our society and its problems. They encouraged us with amazing generosity. The conversation was also recorded.

The Think Basket now has a fledgling blog: <http://ourthinkbasket.blogspot.com/>, which is a way to communicate with new 'nests' of the Think Basket.



Susan Andrews Grace, MFA

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Future activities could include Reconvening Plato's *Symposium* with other groups (men, different cultural and political groups of men and women); reading Plato's *Phaedrus* or other seminal texts, a proposal to CBC Ideas; perhaps an opera, a conference; and more writing.

The recorded discussions will be transcribed and analysed in the tradition of human science research. Interpretation of a text means to enter into a conversation with it, to direct questions to it, and to allow oneself to be questioned by the text.

Underlying our exploration is the assumption that women and men experience the world differently, and therefore how women describe their experience of love and wisdom can widen previously held knowledge in which women matter and are counted.

We are most grateful to the Chester Ronning Centre for the visibility afforded the Think Basket and the focus we gained from the considered opinions and wisdom of the good people of Camrose and Edmonton.

—Vangie Bergum and Susan Andrews Grace

## The Honourable Flora Macdonald to Report

# Rebuilding Civil Society in Afghanistan

Known for many years as one of the most influential politicians, the Honourable Flora Macdonald served as member of Canada's parliament and held several cabinet positions. In 1979, she was the first woman to be appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs.

In recent years, Ms. Macdonald has turned her considerable talents and energy to international humanitarian work, serving on the boards or advisory councils of several prominent organizations including CARE Canada, Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, Partnership Africa-Canada and Future Generations International.

On 12-13 November, Camrose-based nonprofit Sahakarini and the Ronning Centre will co-sponsor Macdonald for a series of talks on the role of women and her humanitarian work with Future Generations Canada.

While serving as Chair of Future Generations International, Macdonald's interest in Afghanistan inspired her to visit there in March of 2001, while the government was still under the control of the Taliban. There, she learned firsthand of the profound need for the Afghans to rebuild their society, a society that had once been the intellectual and cultural hub of the Persian Empire.

She believed she could best serve this cause by starting a Canadian foundation dedicated to rebuilding civil society in Afghanistan. Thus, Future Generations Canada was born.

The Hon. Flora Macdonald will speak in Edmonton the evening of 12 November, and in Camrose the afternoon of 13 November. She will be the keynote speaker for Sahakarini's Loaves and Fishes dinner, beginning at 6 p.m. at the Norsemen Inn in Camrose.

## SAHAKARINI DESCRIBES ITS GOALS

Our name, Sahakarini, is a Hindi word meaning "co-operation" or "working across". We build solidarity and awareness of global realities within our own community, while also supporting project partners around the world in reaching their goals to build up their communities. Locally we host film festivals and guest speakers, while working together with other community organizations.

We also plan events such as our Loaves and Fishes dinner, and the Hike for HOPE. Internationally we work with partners with a strong rapport in their communities, who serve their people without discrimination.

The goals of our partners vary, but have recently included initiatives addressing health care, safe water sources, human rights and freedom from abuse, edu-

cation, micro-credit, and food security in several different regions of the world. All our partners must demonstrate a strong and conscientious commitment to the people they serve, environmental responsibility, and financial accountability. Everything we do is with thanks to our dedicated international partners, volunteers and board members, various grants and generous donors.

Although we are not a faith-based non-profit, many of our supporters do come from some Christian background, and often our international partners are trained in theology or are local spiritual leaders who happen to have a passion for the development aspects of their faith/work. We've been around since 1979, and we've participated in more than 35 projects in 8 different countries.



## Reflections on Film, Religion, and Theology from the Life of an (East) Indian Jesus Movie

Discussions about the religious or theological significance of the cinema have gained considerable momentum over the last two decades. Once dominated by Western Christian theologians keen to engage with the rest of Western culture, the conversation is now informed by scholars from numerous academic disciplines, faith traditions, and cinematic cultures.

Such methodological diversity has spawned more complex accounts of film's relationship to religion and theology than strictly textual analyses have to offer and has challenged a general bias in the earlier literature toward analyses of Hollywood and European cinema. Recent attention to non-Western cinematic contexts, in particular, has begun to destabilize a Western bias in the conversation and to challenge some of the assumptions that shaped some of the formative contributions to the topic.

For instance, the history of *Karunamayudu* ('Man of Compassion', 1978; *Daya Sagar* in Hindi), purportedly the first all-Indian movie of Jesus' life produced for commercial cinema. Initiated by local filmmakers, the film's production history and content was informed by collaboration with a Roman Catholic communications agency in Andhra Pradesh. The result was a cinematic account of Jesus' life inflected by Catholic devotion, Hindu mythology, and the conventions of South Indian films.

*Karunamayudu*'s success at the box-office is therefore attributable in part to South Indian viewers' widely acknowledged interest in movies about religious figures as well as local Christians' curiosity about the way the local film industry would treat Jesus' story.

For viewers shaped by India's Hindu traditions, who were accustomed to seeing their gods on-screen, *Karunamayudu* offered the possibility of *darshan* with—being in the presence of—Jesus.

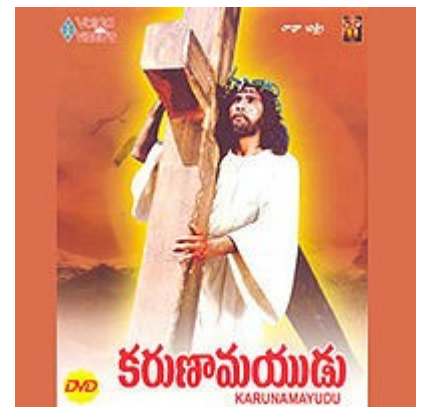
On the other hand, its narrative content alluded both to Western Jesus movies and the social concerns of South India during the decade in which it was produced.

For many Christian viewers the film portrayed a cinematic saviour more akin to their cultural context than the protagonist of Cecil B. DeMille's *The King of Kings* (1927) that had circulated in India for decades.

Before its successful run in South Indian cinemas ended, *Karunamayudu* was discovered by a visiting American evangelical intent on producing his own movie of Jesus' life for India. The film's popular reception among local viewers inspired him instead to acquire the rights to screen it free of charge as an evangelistic tool. In that guise the film has subsequently been dubbed into 14 Indian languages and reportedly been screened by over 130 million Indian viewers.

The very existence of *Karunamayudu* is a reminder that Jesus movies are not exclusive to Western cinema or cultures dominated by Christianity. Nor can the negotiations of religious, theological, and cinematic traditions that marked its production history be aligned with a single faith community. Indeed, the film's distribution and reception histories point to the various roles movies can play in religious practice and devotional reflection. These dynamics in the film's history serve as a reminder that the religious or theological significance of a movie is not isolated to its content but must account for its appropriation in daily life.

—Dwight H. Friesen



Dwight Friesen is a PhD candidate at the University of Edinburgh.

## Director of the Vatican Observatory to Challenge “False Dichotomies”

### Why Science and Faith Matter to Each Other

Two talks on fundamental issues of the relation of science and faith by Father José Funes, director of the Vatican Observatory, will mark the Ronning Centre’s participation in the Festival of Ideas 2010.

Father Funes received his doctorate in astronomy from the University of Padua and specializes in extragalactic astronomy.

He will speak at 10 a.m. on 19 November 2010 in the Chapel at Augustana on “Why Science and Faith Matter to Each Other.”

In this talk, he will unpack the false dichotomies that dominate contentious debates around science and religion and challenge the audience to rethink both.

Also on 19 November, Father Funes will speak at an evening event in Edmonton, at 8 p.m. at the Telus World of Science. He will be joined by astrophysicist and author of more than 14 books, Neil Comins, for an exploration of humanity’s most enduring and fundamental questions: Are we alone in the universe? Why are we here? What gives human life meaning and purpose?

### ABOUT THE FESTIVAL OF IDEAS

A provocative theme, “Truth and Lies: Trust Me” promises to make Festival of Ideas 2010 true to its goal of forging interconnections between the sciences and the arts, and between the University of Alberta and the broader community.

While sponsored by the University and based in Edmonton, the festival will, like the university itself, extend its reach beyond the city’s borders, with events planned in various venues in Edmonton, Calgary, and Camrose. Through the reach of both media coverage and communication technologies, the rich communal experiences of the festival events will be taken to the more distant corners of Alberta (especially the North) and, indeed, the nation and the world.

The success of Festival of Ideas 2008 brought thousands of people—of all ages and walks of life—to Edmonton for sold-out readings, discussion, debates, films and performances on a unifying theme. It was this overwhelming enthusiasm and outright desire for shared intellectual discussion from within the community that prompted the University of Alberta to

proceed with Festival of Ideas 2010 so that, again, students from all school levels, faculty, educators, thinkers, and members of the community at large can engage on a compelling theme.

As was the case in 2008, Festival of Ideas 2010’s success will be based in great part on extensive community partnerships and the generous support of sponsors. Much work is, of course, going on in the background at the moment, and as details about speakers and program events, about partnerships and sponsorships are finalized, more information will be shared widely as the excitement and buzz grow for Festival of Ideas 2010.

Festival of Ideas 2010 programs and events will run on 17–21 November in various venues in downtown Edmonton (including the Winspear Centre, TELUS World of Science, Edmonton Public Library, Enterprise Square, Art Gallery of Alberta and others), on U of A campuses across the province and, through technology, in Alberta’s north, across the country, and around the world.

## Edmonton Philosophers' Cafés Fall 2010

# Staying Human in a Dehumanizing World

The sense that we are being treated as something less than fully human or that somehow we are just becoming less human is common to many people in our culture today. Our cafés this fall will explore some of the areas of life where this feeling most frequently arises and seek to determine how valid this impression is and what are its basic sources.

Topics will range over a wide array of familiar cultural phenomena and institutions. Sometimes, as in the case of the abuse of women or addiction to drugs, the dehumanizing aspect is blatant; in others, like religion and communication technologies, it is more controversial.

We will be exploring both sorts of areas and invite participants to speak openly about their own encounters and impressions. Besides making us more aware of what is happening to us and others every day, the discussions will have the aim of sharpening our sense of what it means to be human, simply by getting clearer about what makes us *less than* human.

As in the cafés last fall and winter, we will have an *animateur* with some expertise introduce the topic, but most of each of the two-and-a-half hour sessions will be given over to comments, questions, stories of personal experiences, arguments and rebuttals by whoever is present.

We will be meeting on selected Saturdays at Steeps Tea House on Whyte Ave where excellent refreshments are available. Note that we will also be running Philosophers' Cafés in Camrose at Merchants Tea & Coffee House. For dates, see the calendar of events beginning on page 13.

Here are the Fall 2010 topics:

Topic 1: *Is psychiatry dehumanizing the mentally ill?*

Possible points of discussion: The effects of psychotropic drugs. The attitudes of psychiatrists toward their patients. Is it possible to lose control of one's mind?

Topic 2: *What are the roots of the abuse of women?*

Possible points of discussion: What are the sources for the dehumanizing treatment of women in many societies? (Could limit this to western society.) What leads to physical violence against women?

Topic 3: *Do the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) tend to dehumanize people?*

Possible points of discussion: The Nietzschean critique of Judaism and Christianity. The atheistic alternative.

Topic 4: *Is "social technology" dehumanizing the way we interact with each other and society?*

Possible points of discussion: The changes wrought by twitter, facebook, iPhones, iPods, etc. on the way we communicate with each other.

Topic 5: *Is consumer culture dehumanizing?*

Possible points of discussion: The effects of mass advertising. Can our desires be dehumanized?

Topic 6: *Are our addictions a way to escape being human?*

Possible points of discussion: Are we being preyed on by pharmaceutical companies in their efforts to sell both over-the-counter and prescription drugs? Do drugs have a legitimate role in helping us cope with the vicissitudes of life, or are they more often just an easy way to avoid reality?

Topic 7: *Is education sustaining our humanity or destroying it?*

Possible points of discussion: Does education aim at producing "organization men and women", i.e. the "human resources" needed by the private and public power complexes? Does education try to control the way people think and feel?

## Religious Perspectives on Civil Life

### Three Traditions to Be Presented in Three Cities

In March 2011, the Ronning Centre will bring three traditions in conversation for a two-day symposium focused on religious perspectives on civil life: the neo-Calvinism of Abraham Kuyper, the Islamic perspectives of Said Nursi, and the Hesychastic tradition of Christian Orthodoxy. The symposium will be held in three cities: Edmonton, Calgary, and Vancouver, and will feature speakers representing each of the three traditions.

Lectures and roundtable discussions will be held on each of the following themes:

1. How does each tradition understand the private sphere, the public sphere and the secular?
2. How do spiritual disciplines central to each tradition prepare the faithful for active citizenship?

3. What lessons can be drawn from a concrete and recent example within each tradition of its way of responding to the struggles found in the communities of another tradition?
4. What are the sources within each tradition that cultivate a life-giving stance towards the other?

This event is being organized in conjunction with the Istanbul Foundation for Science and Culture (<http://www.iikv.org/english.htm>), which was established to study of the thoughts of Said Nursi through such means as discussions, seminars and workshops.



## Previewing His Forthcoming Book

### Jérôme Melançon to Redefine “The Democratic Promise”

We can arrive at a new meaning for democracy, Jérôme Melançon believes, if we allow ourselves to understand that we do not live in a democracy, but rather in a regime made up of many authoritarian institutions and practices, where democracy is allowed and encouraged to thrive, if in a limited manner.

A democratic movement, based on non-governmental forms of power, is then necessary for the struggle for democracy to slowly overcome authoritarianism.

A scholar who studies Canadian politics in the light of political philosophy, Jérôme Melançon has incorporated these ideas in a book, tentatively entitled

*Overcoming Authoritarianism: The Struggle for Democracy in Canada*, to be published by Between the Lines in the Spring of 2011.

Jérôme Melançon teaches political philosophy and Canadian politics at the University of Alberta's Augustana Campus. He is also the author of a PhD dissertation on the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and of a book of poetry, *De perdre tes pas*, to be published shortly at the Éditions des Plaines.

He will present a Ronning Centre Seminar on “The Democratic Promise” on 22 September, 2010.



# Calendar of Coming Events - Fall 2010

*For up-to-date information where details are not complete please check the Ronning Centre website or call 780 679 1146*

## SEPTEMBER

### Dialogue with Atheism

*A Philosophers' Café animated by*  
David J. Goa (Director of the Ronning Centre)  
Friday, 17 September, 8:30–10:00 a.m.  
Merchants Tea & Coffee House  
4857 – 50<sup>th</sup> Street, Camrose

### Is Psychiatry Dehumanizing the Mentally Ill?

*A Philosophers' Café introduced and animated by*  
David Wong (Practising Psychiatrist)  
Saturday, 18 September, 1:00–3:30 p.m.  
Steeps, The Urban Tea House  
11116 – Whyte (82<sup>nd</sup>) Avenue, Edmonton

### The Democratic Promise

*A Ronning Centre Seminar with Jérôme Melançon*  
(Instructor of Political Philosophy, Augustana Campus,  
University of Alberta)  
Wednesday, 22 September, 12:30–2:00 p.m.  
C103, Classroom Building  
Augustana Campus, Camrose

## OCTOBER

### On Religion-less Christianity

*A Philosophers' Café animated by Dittmar Mündel*  
(Associate Director of the Ronning Centre)  
Friday, 8 October, 8:30–10:00 a.m.  
Merchants Tea & Coffee House  
4857 – 50<sup>th</sup> Street, Camrose

### Is Social Technology Dehumanizing the Way We Interact with Each Other and Society?

*A Philosophers' Café introduced and animated by*  
Rebecca Warren (Ronning Centre)  
Saturday, 9 October, 1:00–3:30 p.m.  
Steeps, The Urban Tea House  
11116 – Whyte (82<sup>nd</sup>) Avenue, Edmonton

### Poverty, Philanthropy, and the Quest to Shape an Empire: Gregory Nazianzen and Emperor Julian “the Apostate”

*A Ronning Centre Seminar with Jeremy Siemens*  
(Career Development Facilitator,  
Mustard Seed Street Ministry, Calgary)  
Wednesday, 13 October, 12:30–2:00 p.m.  
C103, Classroom Building  
Augustana Campus, Camrose

### Your Time Has Come: A Theological Trek through the Post-Apartheid Republic

*A Ronning Centre Consultation with Stephen Martin*  
(Associate Professor of Theology,  
King's University College)  
Wednesday, 13 October, 7:00–8:30 p.m.  
Board Room, 2nd floor Forum  
Augustana Campus, Camrose

### The Story that Love Tells: A Christian University's Reading of the Omar Khadr Case

*A Ronning Centre Consultation with Arlette Zinck*  
(Dean, Faculty of Arts and Associate Professor of English,  
King's University College)  
Tuesday, 19 October, 7:00–8:30 p.m.  
Board Room, 2nd floor Forum  
Augustana Campus, Camrose

### Advising the Powerful: John Donne's Moral Suasion at Court

*A Ronning Centre Seminar with Paul Harland*  
(Professor of English, Augustana Campus,  
University of Alberta)  
Wednesday, 20 October, 12:30–2:00 p.m.  
C103, Classroom Building  
Augustana Campus, Camrose

### Christian Millennialism and Political Thought in Alberta

*by Clark Banack (PhD candidate in Political Science at*  
*University of British Columbia)*  
Thursday, 21 October, 12:30–2:00 p.m.  
N111, King's University College  
9125 – 50th Street, Edmonton

### Are Gender Differences a Necessary Part of Our Humanity?

*A Philosophers' Café introduced and animated by*  
Cressida Heyes (Canada Research Chair in Philosophy of  
Gender and Sexuality, University of Alberta)  
Saturday, 23 October, 1:00–3:30 p.m.  
Steeps, The Urban Tea House  
11116 – Whyte (82<sup>nd</sup>) Avenue, Edmonton

*Continued on page 14*

## Calendar of Coming Events - Fall 2010

*For up-to-date information where details are not complete please check the Ronning Centre website or call 780 679 1146*

### **Do You See What I See? Film, Religion, and Theology in the History of an (East) Indian Jesus Movie**

*A Ronning Centre Seminar with Dwight H. Friesen  
(PhD candidate, University of Edinburgh)  
Tuesday, 26 October, 7:00–8:30 p.m.  
Augustana Campus, Camrose*

### **NOVEMBER**

### **Israel and Lebanon: Will There Be a New War Between Israel and Hizbuallah?**

*by Ghada Talhami (Distinguished Visiting Scholar)  
Thursday, 4 November, 7:00–8:30 p.m.  
C103, Classroom Building  
Augustana Campus, Camrose  
Friday, 5 November, 3:00 p.m.  
University of Alberta, Edmonton  
Location TBA*

### **Faith-Informed Public Education: Continuing the Conversation**

*A Ronning Centre Symposium  
Saturday, 6 November, 9:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m.  
Board Room, King's University College  
9125 – 50th Street, Edmonton*

### **Is Consumer Culture Dehumanizing?**

*A Philosophers' Café introduced and animated by  
Monique Nutter, Greater Edmonton Alliance  
Saturday, 6 November, 1:00–3:30 p.m.  
Steeps, The Urban Tea House  
11116 – Whyte (82<sup>nd</sup>) Avenue, Edmonton*

### **Faith, Harmony, and Dissent**

*A Ronning Centre Forum with David King (Executive  
Director, The Public School Boards' Association of Alberta)  
Tuesday, 9 November, 7:00–8:30 p.m.  
Board Room, 2nd floor Forum  
Augustana Campus, Camrose*

### **The Varieties of Irreligious Experience**

*A Philosophers' Café introduced and animated by Sean Moore  
(Assistant Professor of Psychology, Augustana Campus)  
Friday, 12 November, 8:30–10:00 a.m.  
Merchants Tea & Coffee House  
4857 – 50<sup>th</sup> Street, Camrose*

### **Rebuilding Civil Society in Afghanistan**

*by the Hon. Flora Macdonald  
(Distinguished Visiting Fellow)  
Friday, 12 November, 7:00–8:30 p.m.  
King's University College  
9125 – 50th Street, Edmonton  
Saturday, 13 November, 2:00–3:30 p.m.  
Camrose United Church  
4829 – 50th Street, Camrose*

### **Eco-Spiritual Ethics in the Holy Qur'an**

*A Ronning Centre Consultation with May Naguib  
Thursday, 18 November, 2:15–3:30 p.m.  
C101, Classroom Building  
Augustana Campus, Camrose*

### **Why Science and Faith Matter to Each Other**

*by Fr. José Funes (Distinguished Visiting Fellow, Director of the  
Vatican Observatory)  
Friday, 19 November, 10:00–11:30 a.m.  
Chapel, moving to Forum Board Room at 10:30 a.m.  
Augustana Campus, Camrose*

### **Astrobiology: Are We Alone in the Universe?**

*by Fr. José Funes (Distinguished Visiting Fellow,  
Director of the Vatican Observatory) and Neil Comins  
(Astrophysicist and author of 14 books)  
Friday, 19 November, 8:00 p.m.  
Telus World of Science  
11211 – 142 St NW, Edmonton*

### **Do the Abrahamic Religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) Tend to Dehumanize People?**

*A Philosophers' Café introduced and animated by  
Robert Burch (Associate Professor of Philosophy,  
University of Alberta)  
Saturday, 20 November, 1:00–3:30 p.m.  
Steeps, The Urban Tea House  
11116 – Whyte (82<sup>nd</sup>) Avenue, Edmonton*

### **Radical Islamism: From Afghanistan to the Arab World**

*A Ronning Centre Seminar with Ibrahim Abu-Rabi'  
(ECMC Professor of Islamic Studies, University of Alberta)  
Tuesday, 23 November, 7:00 p.m.  
C167, Classroom Building  
Augustana Campus, Camrose*



## Chester Ronning Centre

for the Study of Religion and Public Life

focuses its work on a set of issues and themes that demand our attention whether or not we are religious. In their day, many of the founders of Augustana engaged similar issues and themes that daily flash across every news broadcast and galvanize the attention of today's scholars. The demand is for a more complex attention to be paid to these issues, an attention that is both inclusive and critical.

**Our Purpose** is to cultivate a deep understanding of issues and themes at the intersection of religion, faith and public life and to do so in the public sphere and in religious spheres.

**Our Goals** are to focus the work of scholars on issues and themes where religion, faith and public life intersect and to nurture the public conversation as well as religious understanding of these issues and themes through:

- interdisciplinary research and publications shaping a new community of scholars and public intellectuals;
- thoughtful and ethical reflections which draw on religious sources associated with human rights, our care for the life of the world and our understanding of difference;
- expanding and communicating an understanding of the vital role of religious perspectives and their complex sources as they are brought to bear on public discourse in our communities;
- deepening the understanding within religious communities of the fragile and complex nature of the public sphere in a pluralistic society.

**Our Mission** is to nurture a hospitable context that brings forward the finest thinking of women and men of faith and the depth and texture of their traditions in conversation with public intellectuals and various secular ideologies on the nature and shape of public life in our age of pluralism.

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The following suite of activities shapes the work of the Centre and engages students, scholars, public intellectuals and activists in the following ways:

- the annual Chester Ronning Centre Forum on Religion and Public Life;
- Augustana Distinguished Lectures – an annual event funded by the Hendrickson endowment;
- cafés, study circles, seminars consultations and conferences;
- ongoing research and Ronning Centre publications.

For more information please see  
<[www.augustana.ca/ronning](http://www.augustana.ca/ronning)>

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## Calendar of Coming Events - Fall 2010

### DECEMBER

#### End-of-the-World Literature

*A Philosophers' Café animated by  
Paul Harland (Professor of English, Augustana Campus,  
University of Alberta)*

Friday, 3 December, 8:30–10:00 a.m.

Merchants Tea & Coffee House  
4857 – 50<sup>th</sup> Street, Camrose

#### Is Education Sustaining Our Humanity or Destroying It?

*A Philosophers' Café introduced and animated by  
David Wangler (Professor Emeritus, Department of  
Educational Policy Studies, University of Alberta)*

Saturday, 4 December, 1:00–3:30 p.m.

Steeps, The Urban Tea House  
11116 – Whyte (82<sup>nd</sup>) Avenue, Edmonton

## Friends of the Ronning Centre

Mrs Doris Anderson  
Mr Kenneth and Mrs Bonnie Anderson  
Reverend Raymond A. Christenson  
Ms Muriel Anderson  
Dr Calin-Doru & Ms Cristina Anton  
Mr D'Arcy & Mrs Dena Arial  
Mrs Marion Bennett  
Drs David & Carol Cass  
Mr Paul Childs  
Dr David & Mrs Darlene Dahle  
Edmonton Community Foundation  
Flying Eagle Resources Ltd  
Mr Edward & Mrs Anna Elford  
Rev Vincent & Ms Mary Ellen Eriksson  
Mr Hans Espe & Mrs Sylvia Engen-Espe  
Dr Roger Epp & Ms Rhonda Harder Epp  
Reverend Dr George O Evenson  
Ms Renita Falkenstern  
Mrs Norma Ferguson  
Mr Alan & Mrs Valerie Fielding  
Hon Mr Justice & Mrs Harry D Gaede  
Dr Garry & Mrs Dorothy Gibson  
Mrs Ruth A. Grue  
Dr Joseph F Henderson  
Mrs Joyce Hendrickson  
Dr James & Mrs Sonja Hendrickson  
Pastor Gordon P & Mrs Grace Hendrickson  
Dr Karsten Mündel & Dr Deena Hinshaw  
Mr James and Mrs Agnes Hoveland  
Mrs Marilyn Hoveland

Mr John & Mrs Nancy Howard  
Dr Larry Judge  
Mr Stephen J Kaack  
Mr Sushil K Kalia  
Dr Martin Katz  
Dr Henriette Kelker  
Mr David Ridley & Ms Heather Kerr  
Rev Roger Kett  
Mr David & Mrs Clare King  
Ms Sonya Kunkel  
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Mr Walter & Mrs Sina Lotz  
Mrs Helga Madsen  
Mr Michael A Manning  
Rev Craig Wentland & Dr Paula Marentette  
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Ms Patricia Mader Mündel  
Mr Norman and Mrs Margaret Olson  
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Pastor Kevin Ree  
Reverend Telmor & Mrs T Adelene Sartison  
Rev Allen & Mrs Mary Severson  
Mr Kevin & Mrs Nola Sharp  
Mrs Delores Skaret  
Rev Bob Smith  
Mr David & Mrs Gail Stolee  
Mr Joseph & Mrs Barbara Stolee  
Ms A Marie Tveit  
University of Alberta Chaplains  
Ms Katherine E Ward  
Rev Kenn Ward  
Dr Nicholas Wickenden  
Reverend Vernon R & Mrs Johanna Wishart

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*We have endeavoured to make this list as accurate as  
possible to 6 August 2010. Please accept our apologies  
if your name has been omitted or misspelled and  
please let us know so we may correct our records.*

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## Friends of the Chester Ronning Centre

The *Chester Ronning Centre for the Study of Religion and Public Life* focuses its work on a set of issues and themes that demand our attention whether or not we are religious. We invite you to become a *Friend of the Centre* and join the table of hospitality that brings depth and texture to the discussion of vital questions on points where religion, faith and public life intersect.

*Friends of the Chester Ronning Centre* will receive: Invitations to our conferences, seminars, lectures, forums, cafés, study circles and symposiums — our regular newsletter — notification of our publications, research and public forums — invitations to conversations with public intellectuals and scholars that go beyond the news stories of the day — opportunities to influence and support fruitful research and religious and public conversation on many of the most compelling issues of our day.



**I would like to become a Friend of the Chester Ronning Centre and support the ongoing work of the Centre**  
*Ronning Centre annual membership fee of \$15.00 will be deducted from your charitable gift*

### 1. Gift option:

- ☐ The Ronning Centre Distinguished Visiting Fellows Endowment
- ☐ The Ronning Centre Student Internships
- ☐ The Ronning Centre Annual Fund

### 2. Decide what to give:

#### ONE TIME GIFT:

- ☐ \$ 50
- ☐ \$250
- ☐ \$500
- ☐ \$ \_\_\_\_\_

#### MONTHLY GIFT:

- ☐ \$ 50/month
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#### YEARLY GIFT:

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- ☐ \$2500/year } Number of years \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ \$5000/year
- ☐ \$ \_\_\_\_\_/year

### 3. Payment method:

- ☐ Cash
- ☐ Cheque: Payable to the University of Alberta
- ☐ Direct debit: Please enclose a void cheque
- Credit card:** ☐ Visa ☐ Mastercard

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*The personal information requested on this form is collected under the authority of Section 33(c) of the Alberta Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act for the purposes of updating and maintaining faculty/donor records. Questions concerning the collection, use, or disposal of this information should be directed to the Development Office, Augustana Campus, University of Alberta*

**For more information on giving opportunities to the Chester Ronning Centre for the Study of Religion and Public life please call 780.679.1558**

#### CHESTER RONNING CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF RELIGION AND PUBLIC LIFE

University of Alberta, Augustana Campus  
4901 – 46 Avenue, Camrose, AB T4V 2R3  
[www.augustana.ualberta.ca/ronning](http://www.augustana.ualberta.ca/ronning)



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## BUILDING TOWARD THE FUTURE

**The Ronning Centre Distinguished Visiting Fellows Endowment** provides the Centre with a nimble way of bringing creative thinking on current issues and themes into its work. The fellowships will attract scholars as well as public intellectuals to contribute thoughtfully and constructively to the discussion of the complex themes. James and Sonja Hendrickson in a challenge to our community, continue their pledge to match gifts to this endowment.

*"It is our hope that others will value the work of the Centre and join us in this effort so the endowment can grow to its full potential."* — James & Sonja Hendrickson

**The Ronning Centre Student Internships** provide opportunities for Augustana students to work directly with Centre staff on research projects and program development, expanding their knowledge and understanding while developing the sensitive skill set needed by the next generation of scholars and public intellectuals to engage in the many demanding issues of religion and public life in restorative ways.

**The Ronning Centre Annual Fund and Friends publications** enhance the ongoing work of the Centre making it possible for many to learn and contribute to the understanding of religious perspectives on public life and public understanding of religious perspectives.

**To find out how you can be a part of this visionary endowment and for information on matching funding please contact:**

Bonita Anderson  
Director of Development  
University of Alberta  
Augustana Campus  
1-800-590-9992 ext. 1183  
or 780-679-1183  
bonita.anderson@ualberta.ca



*Photo of Chester Ronning with a young Queen Elizabeth, courtesy of the Noel and Wendy Cassidy Collection.*

## Faith-Informed Public Education: Continuing the Conversation

In the Fall of 2009, the Ronning Centre hosted a public forum on the teaching of religion in our liberal, democratic, pluralist society. The session focused on the role of religion in public education, providing opportunities for panelists to address how faith-based programs came to be integrated into public schools. Speakers highlighted how the faith-informed orientation of their programs continue to enrich our notion of “public” education. Speakers also gave a history of how these programs came into being.

But a number of important questions were left unexplored:

- What does religious knowledge look like?
- How does it fit into curriculum?

- What is Alberta Education doing to help students understand the significance of religious traditions for liberal democracy, civilization and humanity itself?

In this second phase of our discussions, we want to ask these questions. Hence, we will be examining the nature, purpose and place of religious knowledge in public education; specifically curriculum and instruction.

This Fall, the Ronning Centre will be hosting a symposium exploring what this need for an expanding curriculum might look like in a faith-informed setting. The role of religious knowledge in curriculum will be rigorously explored. Given the cultural and religious diversity of school populations, such a conversation is long overdue.

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## RECENT PUBLICATIONS

### NEW!!

February 2009 Augustana Distinguished Lecture  
**Global Crises, Local Churches**  
*Cynthia Moe-Lobeda*  
 with

**Active Hope in the Midst of the  
 Babylonian Captivity of the Rural**  
*Dittmar Mündel*  
 (\$15.00 + GST)

October 2009 Augustana Distinguished Lecture  
**On the Way to Muslim-Christian  
 Understanding**  
*Franz Volker Greifenhagen*  
 (\$15.00 + GST)

2005 Augustana Distinguished Lecture  
**The Root of War is Fear**  
**Love Your Enemies**  
*Jim Forest*  
 Second edition  
 (\$15.00 + GST)

2008 Augustana Distinguished Lecture  
**Ethical Choices in a Pluralistic World**  
*Roger Hutchinson*  
 (\$15.00 + GST)

2008 Ronning Forum  
**Jesus for President**  
**Reclaiming Culture for Christ**  
 Two Lectures  
*Molly Worthen*  
 (\$15.00 + GST)

*Recordings of many Ronning Centre events  
 are now available online. Visit our website at  
[www.augustana.ualberta.ca/ronning](http://www.augustana.ualberta.ca/ronning)*

*This is a Think Basket.*



*What are they thinking about?  
See pages 6-7.*