

Chester Ronning Centre
For the Study of Religion and Public Life

Newsletter

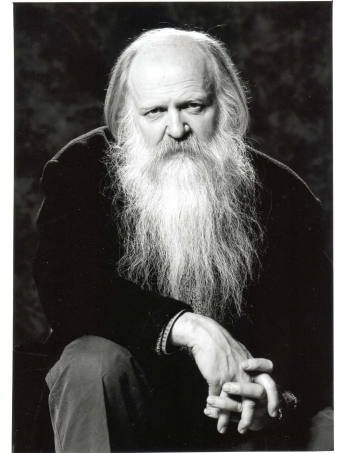
Winter 2007—Vol. 2, No. 1

Director's Note

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On the 17th and 18th of February, we welcome Iain Benson to anchor the second Ronning Forum on Religion and Public Life, this year held in Camrose and Calgary. He will speak on "Living Together with Disagreement: Pluralism, the Secular and the Fair Treatment of Beliefs in Canada Today." Benson has tracked various court cases, including those before the Supreme Court of Canada, in his well-known LexView found on the website of the Centre for Cultural Renewal at www.culturalrenewal.ca, of which he is the Executive Director. Benson has engaged questions of the "fair treatment of beliefs" in Canada in a sustained way in his review and commentary on sixty cases that have moved through the Canadian courts during the last ten years. Whether one agrees with his arguments or shares his philosophical ground, Benson's in-depth contribution to the legal, philosophical, and cultural debate in Canada has been singular. He brings considerable historical knowledge, philosophical complexity, and legal precision to his arguments on how our courts are shaping and reshaping our culture through legal judgements. His arguments are demanding because they are complex and far reaching. They contribute to refining the thinking of all who engage him and to the enlarging of the public discourse of Canada around issues and themes that are likely to galvanize the twenty-first century not only in Canada but in all liberal democratic societies and in those societies that move with increasing rapidity into the modern world.



David Goa,
Director

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The Ronning Forum On Religion and Public Life

Presents

Iain Benson

a leading Canadian public intellectual on

Living Together with Disagreement

Pluralism, the Secular and the Fair Treatment of
Beliefs in Canada Today

Saturday, February 17, 2007, 7:30 p.m.

Faith & Life Centre Chapel, Augustana Campus
4901 – 46 Avenue, Camrose, Alberta

Sunday, February 18, 2007, 3:00 p.m.

Anglican Parish of Christ Church
3602 – 8 Street SW, Calgary, Alberta



Admission: \$10 or donation; students free of charge
Light refreshments and conversation will follow

Canadians are often proud that they are known for their ability to “get along” and for their collective wish to live in peace with one another. How accurate a portrayal of Canada and Canadians is this? Do we, in fact, support the “diversity” we trumpet and the ability to live with disagreements that we profess? Lawyer Iain Benson, who has been involved in many of the leading cases involving equality rights and religious freedom over the past decade, will address these themes.

Iain Benson is the Centre for Cultural Renewal’s Executive Director and manages the research and publication priorities of the Centre. As a barrister and solicitor, Iain practiced privately then became, for some years, the Senior Solicitor for the B.C. Labour Relations Board. He studied at various universities in Canada, Scotland, and England, and has degrees from Queens University, University of Cambridge, and University of Windsor.

His interests and studies cross a variety of areas including philosophy, law, theology, and medical ethics. He practices constitutional and administrative law and has appeared before all levels of court in Canada and as a witness before a wide variety of commissions and House and Senate committees. He has consulted to the governments of Ireland and Canada and advised on a variety of constitutional matters in the U.K. and South Africa. His writings and publications cover a broad range of issues and he has lectured across North America, Europe, Africa, and Saudi Arabia on issues related to health care, constitutional law, and human rights. He is frequently quoted in the press, and has appeared on television and radio, including leading Canadian Broadcasting Corporation programs *Tapestry*, *Ideas*, *Cross-country Checkup*, and *Commentary*. Iain has also appeared on CBC, Listen-Up TV, Radio Free Europe, Reuters, South African Radio, and Church and State Television (USA).

At the invitation of the Canadian Bar Association he gave a paper to the 2006 National Conference, Continuing Legal Education Session on Religion and the State, entitled “The Context for Diversity and Accommodation in the Democratic State: The Need for a Re-evaluation of Current Approaches in Canada.” In addition to the Centre’s ongoing analysis of important legal decisions touching on conscience, religion, and culture (LexView), his writing has appeared in the *Law Times*, *Toronto Star*, *Globe and Mail*, *National Post*, *Calgary Herald*, and a host of regional papers. He has published on “secularism” and the history of our understanding of the “secular,” and some of his writing has been cited as authority by the Supreme Court of Canada and the Constitutional Court of South Africa. He was the editor of Volume VII of *The Collected Works of G.K. Chesterton* (Ignatius Press, 2003).

Augustana 2006 Distinguished Lectures Feature Leading Peace Activist Jim Forest



Jim Forest at Augustana

Jim Forest — peace activist, author of many books, and the current secretary of the Orthodox Peace Fellowship — lives in the Netherlands. He came to Camrose and Edmonton to deliver the first Augustana

Distinguished Lectures for the Ronning Centre.

Jim was the editor of *The Catholic Worker* when Thomas Merton submitted his now famous essay whose key sentences were: “*At the root of war is fear*, not so much the fear men have of one another as the fear they have of *everything*. It is not that they do not trust one another; they do not even trust themselves.” The context of Merton’s analysis of the culture of fear was the Cold War and Jim reviewed for us how government discourse, the media, school rituals of hiding under desks, and the public ritual of building bomb shelters all fuelled the culture of fear. This historical perspective allows us to appreciate the current discourse on “the war on terror” and how if we don’t defeat the Taliban in Afghanistan and the various insurgents in Iraq, then our world will be in grave danger. Fear leads to ideological thinking, which sees all the evil, for example, in Islamic radicals and all the good in Western democracies. Fear hides our public and personal lies from us. Fear creates more and more enemies and puts us into the vicious cycle of making us ever more fearful as we increase our levels of personal or collective security. Jim’s first lecture, “The Root of War is Fear,” leads naturally to the question: *What are the spiritual antidotes to fear?*

If we are called to be peacemakers, then one of the essential tasks is to start with our fear of everything, our fear of ourselves and others. A one-day conference explored various aspects of finding spiritual antidotes to fear. Jim Forest gave a second lecture, “Love Your Enemies as Yourself,” which serves as a fitting expression of what the cure to fear is within the Christian tradition. The cure is faith, which is a trust in Jesus and the path toward being peacemakers that he both teaches and lives. There were in Jesus’ time, just as there are today, real enemies and threats.

Yet Jesus’ response is not the Gospel of John Wayne in which the honest person reluctantly has to pull the gun to kill the people who are evil through and through.

The number of people Jesus killed is zero.

Jesus prays for the enemy which creates a deep connection with the other and a new way of seeing. Since, as Jim Forest points out to us, the “real enemy is us,” we have to pray also for ourselves as part of the ongoing path toward becoming peacemakers. The disciplines of prayer and concrete steps of face-to-face encounters with others, particularly Muslims today, is the path out of fear and toward peace.



Jim’s newest T-shirt

Spiritual Antidotes to Fear Climate of Fear/Commitment to Peace Conference October 14, 2006 By Dittmar Mündel

Conference Sessions

Merton and the Search for Peace
Donald Grayston

*Spiritually Surviving Two Wars
and a Revolution*
Dittmar Mündel

*Mohandas Gandhi, Satyagraha,
and the Living Out of Peace*
Hannah Goa

*African Culture & Merton's
Vision of Peace*
Bitupu-Mufuta Felicien

War and Peace in Thomas Merton
Ross Labrie

Deep Structural Fear
Archbishop Lazar Puhalo

*Exploring a Pedagogy of Peace
through Public Confession*
Sean Wiebe and Mark Daley

*Antidotes to Fear: A
Conversation on Religious
Capacity*
Zohra Husaini, Virindra
Lamba, David J. Goa

*Thomas Merton and George
Grant: Radical Conservatives*
Ron Dart

*Meditation - Akathist: Glory to
God for All Things*
Matthew and Krista Francis

Together with the Thomas Merton Society of Canada, the Ronning Centre held a conference "Climate of Fear/Commitment to Peace." After Jim Forest's keynote address, "The Root of War is Fear," we spent a day considering various spiritual antidotes to fear. If, in fact, the root of war is fear, as Thomas Merton claims, and not simply bad economics or bad politics, then Religious communities and their traditions have a lot to contribute to peacemaking. The popular media tend to represent religions in connection with the causes of violence. They seem to imply that secular and thus "rational" people would solve or resolve the conflicts that exist in the world. So-called liberal or progressive thinkers tend to agree with this line of thinking, but when we listen to "radical conservatives" such as Thomas Merton or Canada's own George Grant, we discover how shallow that discourse is. Very rational people can impose an economic model on the world that destroys rural communities, cultures, and biodiversity. They are managers who have no vision of the common good or of the purpose of human life beyond consuming. As a spiritual antidote to fear, should we thus not discover the vision of community, of rootedness, of inter-connectedness which religious traditions keep alive?



Archbishop Lazar
Puhalo

Religious traditions do have power, but as Hannah Goa pointed out in her workshop on Gandhi's *Satyagraha*, the power is the power of truth, not the power of weapons or power over others. While truth is found more frequently on the scaffold than the throne, there is something in the universe which does not ultimately allow political, economic, or cultural lies to live. The external nonviolent political struggles with the power of truth require the even greater inner and personal struggle to have truth set us free. Spiritual disciplines are the anchors of this inner struggle with truth. Religious communities should seriously explore their capacities for making peace and offering antidotes to fear.

There are many stories to be told and listened to among the various immigrant communities in Canada. So many have ended up here, since they were driven out, up-rooted, displaced by some war or trauma of history. In listening to these stories, we can discover how very ordinary people have survived the tearing up of their social fabric, the loss of a homeland. We will find their spiritual resources and begin to understand why the preservation of their religious communities here in

Spiritual Antidotes to Fear (cont'd.)

Canada is so important to them. We also start to appreciate the many little details in the lives of civilians who must flee and survive that usually do not form part of the media portrayal of war. Civilians are not part of the daily statistics of “casualties,” as if soldier casualties were the most significant. If they are mentioned, they are “collateral damage.” In fact, today soldiers and political leaders are the most likely to survive modern conflicts, whereas civilians, including women, children, and the elderly, are the most vulnerable to starvation, disease, and violent death.



*Fr Dennis Pihach
St Hermans Orthodox
Church*

We left the conference with a deeper appreciation both of the challenges and the resources there are to being peacemakers in an age of anxiety.

Audio recordings of Jim Forest’s sessions can be acquired at <http://www.augustana.ca/ronning> resources. Other conference session recordings may be obtained by calling 780-679-1104.

Relearning Community

A public gathering to talk about the place of our community in a changing world.

Wednesday, January 24
Dr. Roger Epp, “Politics and Rural Communities”

Wednesday, January 31
Dr. Sara Dorow and Dr. Satoshi Ikeda
“Globalization and Our Community”

Wednesday, February 7
Dr. Glen Hvenegaard, “The Link Between a Thriving Environment and Thriving Communities”

Thursday, February 15
Dr. Karsten Mündel, “Choosing Our Own Destiny: A Look at Alternative Communities”

Thursday, February 22
Dr. Dittmar Mündel, “What Do We Mean by Healthy Communities?”

Community of
Viking



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Public Life: Off Limits to “Religion”?

Don Grayston

When I was 15, an aunt of mine told me that I should never discuss sex, religion or politics in polite conversation. I was puzzled by this, because even then I thought they were the three most interesting topics of all time.

Extending this notion to the public sphere, it would seem logical that in addition to inhibiting the public discussion of religion-related matters, as some propose, we should also ban all public discussion of sex and politics. I hope this ridiculous thought goes some distance to demonstrate why the exclusion of religious discussion from public life is not only undesirable but impossible.

Why then do some people hold this position, about religion, at least? Because they fear it will lead to conflict or divisiveness, and for many of us this is something to be avoided at all costs. It really begins in elementary school, in which, unless there is a world religions program (which there is in a few enlightened localities), religion is not mentioned. Discussion of politics is also largely excluded from schools, on the grounds that it could not take place there in a non-partisan way. There is finally some discussion of sexuality in many schools, though it remains controversial.

It only makes sense, then, that adults without the experience of discussion of religion in a neutral context find themselves at a loss, and may be tempted to resolve the matter by banning religion from public reference. We can't do that with politics or sex, of course, because we can't avoid being citizens or sexual beings. So religion, as a voluntary undertaking (we can avoid being “religious”), then becomes the scapegoat — a classic religious image — for our uneasiness with conflict.

Thus how necessary is the work of the Chester Ronning Centre for the Study of Religion and Public Life! Our purpose statement is: “To cultivate deep understandings of issues and themes at the intersection of religion, faith and public life; and to do so in

both the public and religious spheres.” For me this means that public discussion should include both secular and religious perspectives. As Canadians, as citizens, as adults, we need to talk to each other and grow in our understanding of how to work together for the common good.

Donald Grayston, Ph.D.
Grayston serves on the Chester Ronning Centre Advisory Committee. He is a Faculty member (retired) of the Humanities Department, Simon Fraser University, and a Priest (retired), Anglican diocese of New Westminster, BC.



New Publication Release

The Root of War is Fear/ Love Your Enemies as Yourself

*Lectures in print by Jim Forest
2006 Augustana Distinguished Lectures*

Copies are available for \$5.00 from the Centre.
Call 679-1104.



Point & Counterpoint

Pluralism as Gift and Challenge David J. Goa

Cultural pluralism was foundational in Alberta. Yet beginning in earnest in the 1950s, a process of purifying public institutions of their Christian culture began. The legal status of the Roman Catholic school system allowed this community to continue providing education within a Catholic context. However, within the undeclared “Protestant system,” the Christian capital that was taken for granted for the first fifty years was purged. During the first fifty years the Ukrainian community endeavoured to establish a school system suited to its cultural aims and, for a brief time, the Hutterites considered how to have their children educated within the context of their beliefs. The Doukhobors in the Pincher Creek area also ran afoul of the state over the education of their children following 1912.

A new chapter opened in Alberta education following “Regina vs. Elmer Wiebe,” in February 1978. The court judgement dismissed the charges brought against Wiebe under the truancy law when the Holdeman Mennonites at Knee Hill built their own school. The law was rewritten and a number of religious schools were established. In the last fifteen years, some of these schools, including the large system of the Reformed Church and the Talmud Torah Jewish School in Edmonton, have negotiated a move under the public school system umbrella as a way of receiving full funding. A few years ago Edmonton Public Schools consulted me on a request by a school run by a self-declared fundamentalist Church. They quickly received public standing. Several Muslim schools have also entered the field.

A spate of court cases has also proceeded in which the landscape of Canadian law has been reshaped to find ways to account for the particular aspirations of particular religious perspectives. The movement has little clarity and even less realization of the implications of some of the legal judgements. The same can be said for the decisions that have led religious schools to seek a home under the public umbrella and for the officials who provide or deny such status.

There is little philosophical clarity, yet the stakes are high... What is at work in the remaking of the educational landscape of Alberta, indeed, of much of Canada? In the Ronning Forum, Iain Benson will probe the philosophical and legal issues behind the struggle to come to terms with pluralism. To some it would appear that the old order within Canadian civil life, which argued that there is a dichotomy between the religious and the secular, is breaking up. One of the main arguments against this dichotomous view is that secularism is a belief system and needs to be understood as such if we are to come to terms with pluralism. As long as Canadian law defines religious perspectives as private and secular perspectives as public, the argument goes, the only perspectives allowed in the public sphere are those of atheism and agnosticism.

We have a demanding set of questions before us and they are not likely to disappear soon, no matter how much those on either side of the religious-secular divide raise their voices. We need to rethink a far-reaching range of questions at the heart of the secular, religious, and civil life, and we need to do it quickly. How does a liberal democratic society make room in its public sphere for different cultural and religious perspectives? Should it make such room? How are these different perspectives mediated when conflict arises between them? How do we negotiate the terrain between religious values and established civil values, which up until now have been defined as secular and thus free of what needs to be privatized under the banner of religious values? Why should established civil values and their growing reach trump religious values? You, dear reader, may continue the list and join us at the Ronning Forum to bring some depth and texture to the issues that arise when we see the gifts and challenges of pluralism.



Point & Counterpoint



Pluralism and the Search for
Common Ground
Dittmar Mündel

Clearly many religious and cultural groups do not feel that either public education or public policy adequately protect their identity in Canada. They feel that “public education” and public policy in fact promote the ideology of secularism that there is nothing transcendent or divine in life. As a result we see not only a proliferation of religion-based schools, but also a strong increase in home-schooling in Canada. On the one hand, this phenomenon points toward the need to examine what Charles Taylor calls the “politics of recognition.” Many groups, especially minorities, want more than their individual rights protected by law. They want their religion and culture respected and recognized as being a valid expression of social life within the pluralism of cultures in Canada. On the other hand, the proliferation of religious and cultural schools and forms of education raises the question of whether we have anything in common in Canada. The traditional argument for public schools has been that people from diverse backgrounds learn to live with each other when they go to school together. Not to do so would lead to ghettoization and increased misunderstandings between groups. Yet if all the students learn from each other is to succumb to the pressure to adapt to the current fads of the consumer culture, and if they unconsciously learn to acculturate themselves to a society that measures its worth economically and culturally by growing GDPs and student worth by GPAs, then doesn’t it make sense to opt out of the public system?

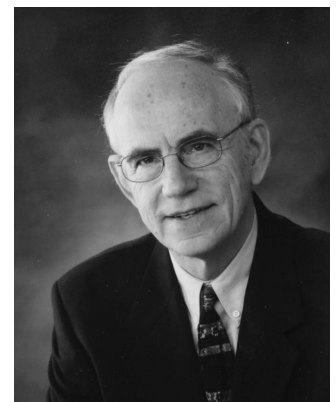
If public schools don’t help students “to live with disagreement,” but rather avoid topics related to sex (beyond reproductive systems), politics (beyond learning about forms of government and parties), and religions or worldviews, then schools are undermining the richness of cultural diversity. Public schooling can often appear like industrial forestry which clear cuts a diverse ecosystem and replaces it with a fertilized and pesticide-treated monoculture.

To learn to “live with disagreement” means listening to each other respectfully

and discovering common tasks and a shared life. This is what a functional, rather than a dysfunctional, family does. Any genuine, complex community has learned to live with disagreement and share a life together. Our tendency in both urban and rural areas today is to associate with the like-minded, to live in our suburbs of shared values.

Living with disagreement means dialogue, rather than avoiding dissent. Dialogue depends on hearing out someone with a different opinion and working toward a “fusion of horizons” as Hans Georg Gadamer puts it. That is, we do not evaluate what the other says on our own terms, but try to enter into their way of viewing and valuing the world. Dialogue does not imply simply “tolerating” what the other says. It means, instead, that we allow ourselves and our assumptions or conclusions to be questioned. Dialogue subscribes neither to relativism — it doesn’t matter what you think or do — nor to the notion that humans ever possess “absolute truth.” But that does not mean that we are not driven toward more truth and living more truthful lives. Gandhi quite aptly calls his autobiography *My Experiments with Truth*. Of course, it is exactly the notions of truth that are, in part, at stake in the disagreements between various religious, secular, and cultural groups. So this is something worth engaging in a dialogue about.

Dittmar Mündel has been a faculty member of Augustana teaching in Religious Studies and Interdisciplinary Studies since 1980. He is committed to experience-based, community-engaged teaching and learning.



Ronning Centre Invited Addresses 2007

Religion Returns to the Public Square April 3

Religious Studies Student Banquet, American Academy of Religion Conference, University of Lethbridge

Who Do You Say I Am in the Public Square? March 17

Ministerial Association of Leduc's annual Mayor's Breakfast

A Conversation on Just War and Pacifism March 17

John Hiemstra and David J. Goa discuss the contemporary challenges of our understanding of war at the Institute for Christian Studies Worldview Conference, 2007, Edmonton

On the Human Nature March 9-10

An Orthodox Institute on the Spiritual Life with Archbishop Lazar and David J. Goa, St Herman's Sobor, Edmonton

A Conversation on Just War and Pacifism March 3

John vonHeyking and David J. Goa discuss the contemporary challenges of our understanding of war at the Christian Studies Worldview Conference, 2007, Calgary

Middle East Conflict: Jewish, Muslim and Christian Perspectives and Responsibilities February 10

A panel discussion with Rabbi Kunin, Shaykh Zak Sheikh and David J. Goa at St George's Anglican Parish, Edmonton

Jesus, the Icon of the Human Nature January 27

A lecture at Christ's Church Anglican Parish, Edmonton

Ronning Centre Coming Events

Relearning Community

January 24 – February 22, 2007

In Cooperation with the Town of Viking, a series of 5 sessions exploring the place of community in a changing world.

Dr Roger Epp, Dr Sara Dorow, Dr Satoshi Ikeda, Dr Glen Hvenegaard, Dr Karsten Mündel, and Dr Dittmar Mündel

Ronning Forum

Living Together with Disagreement:

Pluralism, the Secular, and the Fair

Treatment of Beliefs in Canada Today

February 17, 2007: Faith & Life Centre

February 18, 2007: The Anglican Parish of Christ Church, 3602—8th St SW, Calgary

Iain Benson

Consultations

Islam: Religion versus Practice

March 26, 2007, 5:30 – 7:00 p.m., Faith & Life Centre

Shaykh Zak Sheikh

Seminars

A Scholar at Home in the Rural: Readings

February 1, 2007, 12:30 – 2:00 p.m., Faith & Life Centre

Roger Epp

Globalization Seen Through the Eyes of the Hebrew Prophets

February 2, 2007, 11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m., Faith & Life Centre

Dittmar Mündel

The Death of Theo van Gogh and the Future of Multiculturalism

March 6, 2007, 12:30—2:00 p.m., Faith & Life Centre

John M. McTaggart

Recent Activities of the Centre



Seminars 2006

- January 30 “Science, Faith, and Conservation Research,” *Glen Hvenegaard*
February 27 “In the Shadow of Byzantium: Memory, Ideology, and Religious Resurgence after Ceausescu,” *David J. Goa*
March 20 “Alfred North Whitehead on ‘The Public,’ ‘The Private,’ and the Prehension of Religion,” *Adam Scarfe*
March 27 “Science and Scientism: Limits to Both?,” *Tim Parker*
October 11 “Teaching and Learning on the India Study Tour,” *Varghese Manaloor and Jack Waschenfelder*

Consultations 2006

- 16 January “A Christian Science Understanding of Religion and Public Life,” *Nicholas Wickenden*
23 January “A Hindu Understanding of Religion and Public Life,” *Sushil Kalia*
2 October “Actualizing the Social Conscience of Islam in Public life,” *Karim Jiwani*
10 October “Faith, War, Taxes, and Canadian Responsibilities,” *Dave Hubert*
6 November “Roman Catholic Church on Public Life,” *Julian Hammond and Brian Rozmahel*

Invited Addresses

- 25 November “Religion and Public Life: Why the Right Gets it Wrong and the Left Doesn’t Get It,” *David J. Goa*
21 November “Holy Books, Is Religion the Problem?” *David J. Goa*
19 November “Whose Bible Is It?” *David J. Goa*
17-18 November “Created for Communion/Struggling for Restoration,” *Archbishop Lazar and David J. Goa*
10 November “Peace, Peace Where There is No Peace,” *David J. Goa*
13 & 15 October “Augustana Distinguished Lecture,” *Jim Forest*
14 October “Climate of Fear Conference,” *Various speakers*
7 October “Blessed are the Poor in Spirit,” *David J. Goa*



Resources

The Ronning Centre provides a variety of resources for scholars, journalists, public officials, professionals, and interest groups who wish to deepen their understanding of religion and public life. We strive to enhance the understanding of the place of religion, its gifts and challenges, and the nature and challenges of civil life.

Check out all of our activities and resources at www.augustana.ca/ronning



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.

The Friends of the Chester Ronning Centre provides an opportunity for interested and concerned men and women to join us in a legacy project of the Augustana Faculty — to meet at the heart of compelling contemporary issues and themes and make it possible for many to learn and contribute to the understanding of religious perspectives on public life, and public understanding of religious perspectives.

We invite you to become a Friend of the Centre and join the table of hospitality that seeks to bring depth and texture to many of the compelling issues of our time 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 for the Study of Religion and Public Life

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