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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...

Enlarging the Moral Imagination

We are introducing two initiatives at the Ronning Centre. Both are central to our mandate. Both will nurture thoughtful public conversation.

The Highest Public Calling: A Conversation on Religion and Public Life will be launched January 27th with our own MLA, Mr Verlyn Olson. In this series of Religion and Public Life Forums we ask those who serve in public office and those who aspired to do so to reflect on the sources of their interest in politics and public service. Many thinkers from Plato to Hannah Arendt have considered politics the highest public calling. I share this view and have often been reminded of it when privileged to hear the best of our politicians reflect on how the call to service entered their life. We invite each of them to reflect on the demanding and difficult issues and themes they face, issues often complex, where citizens holding competing values are tugging at each other and where the stakes are enormously high. We will talk together as well but not in the way political conversation has all too often been shaped. Rather we seek a new kind of conversation, anchored in hospitality and open to thinking together in order to understand the difficult landscape in which policy finds its expression. Over the next few years we will have politicians and those who aspire to public office from all parties, local, regional, and national reflect with us on *The Highest Public Calling*.

Our second initiative is also directed at nurturing a more thoughtful public conversation. Journalists have struggled for many years when editors assign a breaking story that involves religious or competing values. The usual pattern is to talk with the opponents who confront each other on the issue at hand. Only on occasion do journalists have the time to find third party interlocutors who are knowledgeable and bring them into the discussion. It is open to us to help out. We have invited a number of public intellectuals to become Senior Fellows of the Ronning Centre and will be adding many more to our roster. These women and men have a hospitable spirit towards religious perspectives and communities and towards the

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To Be Explored in Five-Part Study Circle

“The Genius of Pietism and the Challenge of Modernity” will be the theme on which a five-part Chester Ronning Centre Study Circle will focus during the Winter season of 2010.

The opening session will trace Norwegian Lutheran Pietism to its roots, as Rev. Professor Cam Harder, of Lutheran Theological Seminary, Saskatoon, addresses the topic “Pietism and Social Transformation of Rural Norway” on 11 and 12 January. Prof. Harder will examine the career of the revivalist lay preacher Hans Nielsen Hauge (1771-1824) in the context of the decimation of Norway’s rural economy at the end of the 18th century, and the influence of his social and spiritual reforming activity. As this influence extended to Lutherans overseas, Prof. Harder will also consider some of its implications for our modern Canadian context.

Rev. Dr Cam Harder is Acting Director of the Centre for Rural Community Leadership and Ministry, as well as Professor of Systematic Theology and Director of Contextual Education at the Lutheran Theological

Seminary in Saskatoon, SK. He has spent fifteen years doing research with rural people and was a parish pastor for twelve years in town and country ministry.

Moving to the Canadian scene, David J. Goa, Director of the Chester Ronning Centre, will address the topic “Spiritual Transformation or Colonization: Pietism, a Prairie Story” on 18 and 20 January. The story of Pietism on the Canadian Prairie and the Great Plains of America is part of the immigrant story. It shares in the gifts and challenges of resettlement and the fears and opportunities of a new world, along with the enormous influence of new religious movements and the learning of a new language in which to express what immigrants hold most dear.

David J. Goa brings to this subject both his personal experience of life in the Norwegian-Canadian community and a broad background as a teacher and writer on religious studies and a researcher on questions of tradition and modernity.

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various other ideologies and interest groups that inform modern civil life. They bring substantial knowledge on one or more of these traditions of thinking and are engaged in considering current issues and themes where competing values are central. They are also people of commitment, a commitment that includes enlarging the moral imagination of all citizens. The Ronning Centre Senior Fellows will be brought into conversation with journalists across the country in a timely manner so the public conversation on deeply demanding issues can take on the thoughtfulness and depth the issues usually demand.

We invite our readers to join us in supporting these initiatives of the Ronning Centre.

— David J. Goa

The Genius of Pietism and

A Pastor Encounters

As one raised among eastern Canadian Lutherans of German descent, what little I knew of pietism was that it was somehow Scandinavian, foreign and forbidding. On the rare occasions when it was mentioned, it was mocked or scorned with terms like fundamentalist, legalistic, harsh. It sounded like a sour way of religion and life that originated with a well-intentioned but misguided man name Hans Nielsen Hauge. I had no idea that my own faith was shaped by pastors and institutions influenced by pietistic German Lutherans whose very existence was the result of the missionary efforts and zeal of pietists in that part of Europe.

When I moved west, I met church “refugees”, who avoided church and shunned “religion”, who spoke of being harmed by stern, judging, shaming experiences among those whom they sometimes referred to as pietistic.



the Challenge of Modernity

Eugene L. Boe will engage with the essence of pietistic worship when he discusses “Pietism and the Sacraments in the Christian Life” on 25 and 26 January. He will describe the understanding of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper and their place in the Christian life as presented in the *Explanations of Luther’s Small Catechism* by Philip Jacob Spener (1677) and Erik Pontoppidan (1737). He will then trace the influence of these teachings in the pietistic movements.

Dr Boe, Academic Dean and Professor of Systematic and Historical Theology at Lutheran Brethren Seminary, Fergus Falls, MN, earned a PhD in theology from Concordia Seminary, St Louis, MO, then pursued additional study in the U.S., Norway, Germany, and Israel. He also serves as pastor at Trinity Lutheran Church, Wendell, MN.

David Goa returns to present the two remaining sessions in the series. “Pietism and the Bible in the New World: Reading for Friendship, Reading for Proof”, on 1 and 2 February, raises the questions: For

those who carried the Pietist vision with them to the New World, was the encounter with American Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism a discovery of soul mates or a re-ordering of the spiritual life and the relationship to scripture? Did they come to a new moral and intellectual landscape far from that of their spiritual ancestors?

Finally, on 8 and 9 February. “A Glorious and Sad Song: The Last Pietist to be Buried on the Prairies” will comprise an evening of storytelling on the gifts found in the patrimony of the Scandinavian experience in Central Alberta, and a reflection on what Pietism and the reaction to it bequeathed to the Church and future generations.

This Study Circle is jointly sponsored by the Chester Ronning Centre, Messiah Lutheran Church, Camrose, and the Canadian Lutheran Bible School, Camrose. Sessions will be held at Messiah Lutheran Church, Camrose, and Trinity Lutheran Church, Edmonton.

Western Pietism

As I listened to their stories, I remembered similar experiences in the east. But there we spoke of the negative influence the temperance movement and of fundamentalism fuelled by radio preachers and revival meetings.

I learned that these, too, had played a strong role in the lives of the people who immigrated to western Canada who called themselves pietists. But as I am learning, this is not a balanced view of pietism. The dialectic dance in which we Lutherans delight to engage one another forced me to look beyond sinfulness and seek the saintly in pietism.

As I live among people whose lives have been shaped by pietism, I encounter people for whom prayer is as vital and natural as breathing, who enjoy studying the Bible together, who generously give of themselves to witness to God’s love in Christ through practical and patient missionary endeavours intended to bring healing salvation to both body and soul in their own community and in communities around the world. It was not by

chance that those who came before them have left a legacy of vital institutions such as Augustana, CLBI, Messiah Lutheran, and the Bethany Group, to name a few, or that they play such active roles in both church and society.

I am learning that authentic piety engages a person in active commitment to holy living that nourishes itself in prayer and Bible and service with and for others and that Hauge was one of many who modelled such living. I am also learning that many who have inherited this legacy are unaware of it; some are even embarrassed to be told that they might be considered pietists.

That’s why I’m looking forward to participating in *The Genius of Piety and the Challenge of Modernity*. This will be an opportunity to uncover what has been hidden, perhaps to recover a few personal stories before age silences those who have those stories to tell, and to discover a genius in piety that still has much to contribute to future generations.

— Rev. Kenn Ward, Senior Pastor, Messiah Lutheran Church, Camrose

MUSLIM SCHOLARS DISPEL

Left to Right: Mrs Farfour, Shaykh Dr Farfour, Shaykh Dr al-Bizem, and Dr Ibrahim Abu-Rabi', the indefatigable interpreter, attended a convivial gathering at the home of David Goa and Anna Altmann



David Goa with Shaykh Dr al-Bizem



Dialogue has been Islam's method of communication from the very beginning, as Shaykh Dr Abdulfatteh al-Bizem, Mufti of Damascus, explained at Ronning Centre Consultations at Edmonton and Camrose on 21 and 22 October. Dr al-Bizem and his colleague, Shaykh Dr Hussam al-Din Farfour, Vice-Rector of the Al-Fateh Islamic Institute in Damascus, visited the Ronning Centre between October 21 and October 26, 2009.

The Prophet Muhammad, Dr al-Bizem pointed out, welcomed opportunities for talks with Christians. He invited one Christian delegation to pitch their tents in the courtyard of the mosque at Medina, and even to conduct Christian worship there, during their conversations. He also sent embassies to the Byzantine Emperor and other surrounding rulers, inviting discussion. The Holy Qur'an forbids coercion in matters of religion, and Muslims are also obliged to follow the example of the Prophet, said Dr al-Bizem. There is a need to draw a distinction between the behaviour of some Muslims and the Islamic reality as found in the original sources. Many distorted images of Islam should be corrected by closer acquaintance – and he admitted that his

MYTHS ABOUT ISLAM

own image of Christianity had changed as a result of actual meetings with Christians. In the end, he concluded, all revealed religions must recognize that they come from one source, God.

Shaykh Farfour, in his address, surveyed the history of Islamic–Christian relations. He observed that in the earliest period of Islamic expansion, Arabs generally welcomed the Caliphate as a liberation from the colonialist rule of Byzantium. They also found the doctrine of Islam closer to their theological views than Byzantine Orthodoxy.

The Muslim authorities, in turn, restored Christian churches destroyed by the Byzantines. Muslim rule saved the Coptic patriarch of Egypt from execution; he was highly regarded by the Muslims, and always consulted on measures affecting Christians.

In subsequent periods, Shaykh Farfour continued, Christians made major contributions to Arabic culture. During the Crusades, the Muslim champion Saladin employed a Christian as his finance minister. The Orthodox patriarch of Antioch, attacked by the Crusaders, moved his see to Damascus for protection.

At the present time Syria is home to members of many Christian denominations, including Protestants who arrived in the nineteenth century. Almost 10 per cent of the population of Syria is Christian. Christians as well as Muslims teach in schools; Christians join with Muslims in business ventures, and live in the same neighbourhoods – there are no ghettos. It is high time, Shaykh Farfour concluded, for everyone to recognize that we are one global human family, and to create a future dominated by ethics.

Shaykh Farfour also enriched the experience of his hearers in a special way by his expert presentation of Sufi devotional chants.

During their time in Alberta, the Mufti and Shaykh Farfour were the guests of the University of Alberta chaplains at a luncheon, attended a banquet in their honour at the Edmonton Islamic

Academy, and met with leaders of various Islamic groups in Edmonton.

Their visit was jointly sponsored with the ECMC Chair of Islamic Studies at the University of Alberta.

— Nicholas Wickenden



Shaykh Dr Farfour enlivened many occasions with Sufi chanting

Mufti Serves as Interface Between Islamic Law, Modern Society

The realization of justice in society is the ultimate goal of Shaykh Dr Abdulfatteh al-Bizem's career.

As Mufti of Damascus, he is the highest authority on Islamic law (*shari'ah*) in the vibrant Syrian capital of 5 million people.

Qualified by intensive studies, including a doctorate from the prestigious Al-Azhar University in Cairo, he works under the auspices of the Ministry of Endowments of the Syrian government.

While visiting the Chester Ronning Centre for the Study of Religion and Public Life in October, Dr al-Bizem described the nature of his work. He is regularly consulted on legal cases, not to decide the cases, but to determine the meaning of the applicable law.

Businessmen frequently ask him about the acceptability of commercial practices. Another important facet of his work concerns divorce; here his first move is to encourage reconciliation, and in this, he adds, he is often successful.



His advice may be sought beyond the Islamic community. A Christian recently sought his help in dividing an inheritance, a subject on which Islamic law provided clear guidelines, while the Christian community followed no definite practice.

In his official capacity he may issue *fatwas* – pronouncements on what is allowable (*halal*) and what is forbidden (*haram*) under religious law. He also carefully keeps track of the large numbers of fatwas emanating from his fellow muftis in Islamic communities all over the world.

There is a lighter side to his vocation – he attends many weddings and other celebrations. It is a good way, he remarks with a characteristic smile, of keeping in touch with people in the community, so that his judgements will accurately relate the precepts of Islamic law to the practices of the modern world.

-N.W.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

2005 Augustana Distinguished Lectures—Booklet

**The Root of War is Fear
Love Your Enemies**

Jim Forest
(\$15.00 + GST)

2008 Augustana Distinguished Visiting Fellow

Lectures—Booklet
Ethical Choices in a Pluralistic World

Roger Hutchinson
(\$15.00 + GST)

2008 Ronning Forum—Booklet

**Jesus for President
Reclaiming Culture for Christ**

Two Lectures
Molly Worthen

2008 Consultation—MP3 CD

**The Trumpet's Uncertain Sound:
War and the United Church of Canada**

Tom Faulkner

Peaceful Human Community the Goal of Islamic Institute

Shaykh Dr Hussam-Eddin Farfour is positive: the message of the Holy Qur'an is a message of peace. In it Allah instructs His followers: "O you who believe, you shall all embrace peace" (Qur'an 2:208).

As Shaykh Farfour also points out, "The word 'Islam' is derived from the Arabic word 'silm' which means peace." Accordingly, the Shaykh, Vice-rector and Director of Undergraduate and Post-graduate Studies of the Al-Fatih Islamic Institute in Damascus, has taken the lead in organizing amicable dialogues between Muslim and Christian scholars. Asked if this understanding of the Qur'an could also be applied to to-day's damaging violent conflicts between Muslim and Muslim, he instantly responds: "Of course!"

Among the five thousand advanced students of Islam in his Institute, he notes, 75 different nationalities are represented. They will be prepared, on graduating, to take up positions of leadership

throughout the Islamic world.

He does not envisage abolition of the different schools of Islamic thought; rather, maintaining respectful dialogue among them.

But the Islamic concept of a peaceful community –



umma – should not be limited to Muslims. We must feel responsible, he says, for all humanity. In the Qur'an Allah declares to His Prophet Muhammad: "We have sent you as a mercy to the whole of mankind" (Qur'an 21:107).

Thus the educational programme of the Al-Fatih Institute is designed to help alleviate all human problems – war and

violence, but also starvation and disease.

Even the non-human environment comes under the protection of Islam, the Shaykh states, quoting for example a tradition that the Prophet Muhammad said: "If the Hour of Resurrection is about to happen while one of you is holding a seedling, let him plant it."

-N.W.

2008 Seminar—MP3 CD

God and Evolution:

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Craig Wentland

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— David J. Goa

Homeblindness

The Swedes speak of *hemmablinda* (homeblind). We often have difficulty seeing clearly the significance of our own cultural life and its religious heart. It then becomes nigh impossible to grasp the significance of our neighbour's ways of holding the world together, the web of significance in which they live. Our own historical experience eludes thick description. Our personal and local world is taken for granted. The work of scholarship, at least in part, is to uncover the significance that resides in the life of local people and places at a particular time. The value of such work is in service to three things. First, it serves to deepen the understanding of culture and the particular historical experience and landscape of meaning of a people. When the work is done collaboratively with the community it deepens their identity. In our world, which is subject to such rapid change, this is a service of the first order. Second, it contributes to our understanding of the variety of ways human beings build a life together. Our sense of place becomes textured with many layers of meaning. Human experience, the genius and dilemmas of life, has many faces, all particular, and what was previously abstract takes on an existential character. Third, our research and documentation adds to the picture of the human community. The new sources of knowledge on tradition, memory, experience, and place are full of stories of particular people, each with particular gifts and challenges. To take the local culture seriously requires this kind of commitment to exploring what has gone into making us who we are even when we have comfortably settled into an identity made up largely of our passionate reactions to the long forgotten.

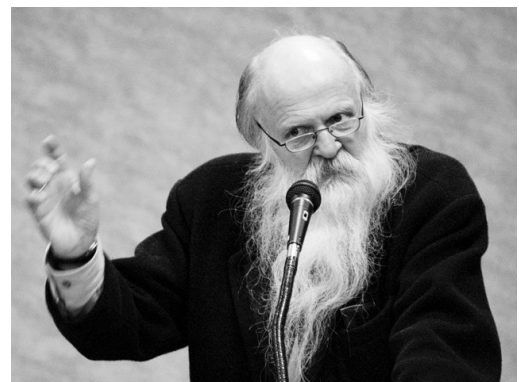
I began to think about *hemmablinda* after the first decade of my field research work in the religious communities of Alberta, work that had taken me into Hindu temples, Orthodox monasteries, and evangelical mission meetings, to the feet of Buddhist gurus and the precincts of fundamentalist Bible camps, and into the memory of pilgrimages to Mecca, Jerusalem, Rome, and Mount Athos. I had spent much of my time with devout people, women

and men with a strong religion, who accepted the disciplines of the faith sometimes grudgingly, sometimes with a fully-welcoming heart. Only after a decade or so of dwelling in the thick world of religious meaning and discipline did my interest in seeking to understand how others understand lead me to explore a way of being that defined itself, at least in part, as a virtuous rejection of strong religion. Here were fine men and women who treasured what united them and had largely forgotten what made them particular. Here the religious language was in large part general in nature, purified of historical memory and the human struggle, and rooted in the ideals of justice for all, unity, and notions of what was commonly good. Here discernible disciplines were minimal, sacred time and space largely a thing of the past and of the "other." Here everyone was officially welcomed to the table and the wounds that were shown were largely those perpetrated by parents, clergy, or other religious leaders, perpetuated by an inhuman moralism or a set of theological ideas that were obviously false given the witness of science. Strong religion was the problem and it was best that its disciplines wither. And, indeed they did.

It is in this cultural landscape that my thinking about self and other has grown. It is here that my

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David J. Goa, Director, speaking at an international conference on human rights.





Deregulated Lives

For some people deregulation seems to be an intrinsically good thing whose merit needs not be discussed. It fits in so nicely with being part of the “free world”. Freedom is what liberal democratic societies are all about, isn’t it? So we deregulate our utilities which allows for “free competition”, which will supposedly benefit all of us. We deregulate airlines. We remove any barriers to trade. We bristle at a “buy American” clause, since that smacks of protectionism – something which we all supposedly know is bad. Rules that protect the environment are denounced as job-killers. Moral rules that want to limit greed in economic activity are equally seen as un-modern. We know restraining rules are bad, because we believe in freedom as the power to do what we want. The only constraint on our economic activities should be “the free market” which turns our freedom to pursue what we want for ourselves into something good.

As both a cause and a consequence of this economic thinking, modernity in the West has seen the drive to live in freedom from external restraints as a key to human development. When a group of people submit themselves to religious authorities or religious disciplines, not just in their private, but also in their public life which includes both the social and the economic, they are often seen as “not catching up with the 21st Century”, as if the century we are in were in itself a moral or spiritual authority. People of “strong religions”, as David Goa calls them, are seen as rule-bound, an anomaly in a liberal democratic society. Their lives are too regulated.

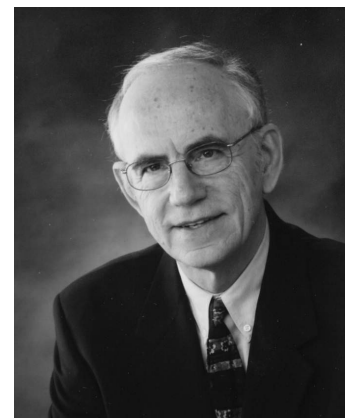
However, are we ever truly “autonomous”? Does the elimination of religion, for example, make us free or at least freer? Autonomy, meaning that we are a “nomos”, a law, to ourselves, is an illusion. Anyone who ignores that they are not isolated individuals, but rather part of a community of people and part of an earth community which sustains every individual, is living dangerously blind to reality. It is from other humans that we

received our life, our nurture, our language, our basic forms of human interaction. And our individual actions always have an impact on people, community, and the land. Another irony in our quest for autonomy, is that if we ignore the natural and moral restraints that living-in-community brings, we will fall under some other law. The amazing conformity to consumerism and its fads or to the “economic laws” that come from the ideology of an endless growth economy are but one example of what Paul Tillich calls heteronomy. Heteronomy is being under some law alien to our true nature as humans. Alien laws, even when – or especially when – they have global reach are always going to be destructive to nature and human communities and to the integrity of the individual. Even our “limitless desires” which many economists hypothesize as being the essence of our human nature can become such an alien law which enslaves us in the world created by our desires – whether or not they are manipulated by the billions of dollars in advertising.

People who try to submit their lives to God through the rules and disciplines of their religion are countercultural in that they do not accept the heteronomy of our economic or cultural laws. Whether they pray five times a day to remind themselves that there more important things in life

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Dittmar Mündel has been a faculty member of Augustana, teaching in Religious Studies and Interdisciplinary Studies, since 1980.



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Homeblindness

own modest attempts to understand cultural identity have been rooted. The centennial of the University of Alberta and in this coming year of Augustana have encouraged many of us to reflect on these places of our habitation. The early words of the writer of Genesis (28:16) invite our deep reflection on our spiritual ancestors, on what they bequeath to us, on our reactions and attempts at recovery and integration:

“God was in this Place and I, I did not know.”

The philosopher Martin Heidegger noted: “The humanistic sciences, in contrast [to the hard sciences], indeed all the sciences concerned with life, must necessarily be inexact just in order to remain rigorous.” Exploring the way others understand their world is always inexact work. And so it is when we think of our own landscapes of meaning as well. Memory, tradition, historical experience, and a sense of place are spheres in which this understanding is shaped. The attempt to replace the methods proper to the humanities with the methods of social science, a struggle that has occupied much of these disciplines over the last fifty years, twisted attempts to understand the human story. The rigour appropriate to the humanities was replaced by quantitative methods in an attempt to ask and answer precise questions. It is not that these questions are unworthy. Rather it is that they are the wrong questions if one wishes to understand how others understand the fields of meaning in which they walk. It is similarly so when we seek self-understanding. For that we have to turn towards the other out of the depth of our own understanding and enter into dialogue. As the anthropologist Clifford Geertz has pointed out, here the novelist is a better model than the sociologist.

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Deregulated Lives

than success and progress or whether they have moral laws that point them to the needs of their neighbours, these laws are seen as signposts to freedom. Yes, they restrain sexual or economic behaviour, but as a way of directing these energies and actions in life-giving, community-enhancing ways. In the Hebrew Psalms the laws are seen as “sweeter than honey and the honeycomb”. They are seen as a way to an abundant life.

Religions when they are diseased also can impose an “alien law”, a heteronomy on the lives of people. This was one of the key areas that triggered the Protestant Reformation of Western Christianity. Martin Luther, in his *Freedom of a Christian*, stated that faith in God is there to free a person from alien laws enforced by guilt. It is also frees a person from “autonomy”, from making one’s own desires into the rule of one’s life. At the same time as a person is freed by faith, that person is bound to their neighbour in love and service. For Luther this life of freedom in relation to God and of being bound to community by the activity of love which cannot be captured in rules is the life under “theonomy”, the rule of God. God’s rule deregulates our lives so we can respond freely to the real people that surround us, our particular communities, and to the land from which we live.

Unfortunately for us the inheritors of the Protestant Reformation which wanted submission to God to be the source of freedom to be responsible in nature and community have often not noticed that the modern freedom to do what we want is not the same as the freedom of faith. So we must examine: Who deregulates our lives and to what ends?

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- 1 Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology, and Other Essays*, translated by William Lovitt (New York: Garland, 1977), 120.
 - 2 Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973) and *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

Chester Ronning to be Recalled in Evans Lectures



Chester Ronning

This term the Chester Ronning Centre will present a special commemoration of the distinguished educator and diplomat whose name it bears.

Dr Brian L. Evans, Professor of Chinese history, emeritus, at the University of Alberta will recall in two lectures Chester Ronning's

exceptional career as politician, then as diplomat.

Chester Alvin Ronning had an unusual background by any standards. The son of Norwegian Lutheran missionaries, he was born in China in 1894, the second of seven children. Chester and his brothers and sisters grew up speaking Chinese.

The Ronnings had decided eventually to settle among the Norwegians living in Alberta, which they did on retiring from their China mission after 11 years. Chester therefore attended the University of Alberta, graduating B.Sc. in 1916.

Three years later, with his wife and daughter, he returned to China to become Principal of a teachers' school in Fracheng, his childhood home. They stayed for six years.

Back in Canada in 1927, Ronning took up the post of Principal of Camrose Lutheran College. He became active in the United Farmers of Alberta, and was encouraged to run in a by-election in Camrose. He was elected and served with distinction in the Alberta Legislature. In the next provincial election, he and most of the UFA lost their seats to William Aberhart's Social Credit Movement.

Like a number of other UFA followers, Ronning joined the newly created Canadian Commonwealth Federation (CCF), becoming its first provincial leader. He stumped the province, giving the CCF message, but all of his later attempts at elected office ended in defeat.

With the onset of the Second World War, Ronning was taken back in the RCAF and spent the war years in Ottawa in a Special Intelligence Unit.

Ronning entered the diplomatic service at the close of the war in 1945. Recruited largely for his

linguistic skills, he was sent to join the Canadian Embassy in Chungking, the wartime capital of the Nationalist Government of China. Ronning's background was quite different from that of other members of the Department of External Affairs. He was to remain in China until the early months of 1951, in expectation of Canada's recognition of the People's Republic of China. Instead, he had to close down the Embassy, then in Nanjing, where it had relocated following the Nationalist Government's return to their pre-war capital.

Following this, Ronning was appointed to Norway as Canadian Ambassador. His appointment to Oslo coincided with the Geneva conferences on Korea and Indo-China (Vietnam) in which he played an important role. Later he served as Canada's High Commissioner to India, from which position he retired in 1964 to Camrose. He was called back to undertake two special missions to Hanoi as part of a Canadian initiative to bring an end to the Vietnam War.

During his time with the Department of External Affairs, and after he retired, Ronning was a tireless advocate for Canada. He died in 1984.

Brian Evans graduated from the University of Alberta in 1954, after which he obtained a PhD in Chinese History from the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London. He introduced teaching of the History of China and Japan, along with Classical Chinese language, at the University of Alberta in 1961. He first travelled to China in 1964 and later served as Cultural Counsellor at the Canadian Embassy in Beijing, 1973–74.

He met Chester Ronning for the first time in 1965, on Ronning's return from a mission to Hanoi. Subsequently, he conducted extensive interviews with Ronning in Camrose and served as a consultant on the film *China Mission* (1980). He has written and lectured in Canada and China on aspects of Ronning's extraordinary career in anticipation of producing a biography.



Dr Brian L. Evans

Verlyn Olson, MLA to Launch New Series on the “Highest Public Calling”



In January 2010 the Ronning Centre will inaugurate, within the context of its Forums on Religion and Public Life, a series of conversations on the highest public calling with those who serve in the political arena.

We shall invite participants to reflect on the place of faith in their formation, on how religious discipline, ideas and values are at work in moulding their aspirations, judgements, and ability to live with “the organized inadequacies of history”. We shall also invite them to think publicly about the complex nature of decision making in the context of competing values and responsibilities.

To launch the series, Verlyn Olson, Member of the Alberta Legislative Assembly for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, will join us at Camrose on the evening of 27 January.

Mr Olson was elected to his first term as an MLA on March 3, 2008. He is Chair of the Private Members Business Committee, Chair of the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Workforce Planning Committee, and is a member of various other committees including the Legislative Review Committee.

He was a partner with the law firm of Andreassen Olson Borth and holds a bachelor of arts in history degree with distinction and a law degree from the University of Alberta. He has a distinguished record of community service in the region including work in the athletic, health care, and educational sectors.

Has Christianity Helped or Harmed the Dalits?

The Dalits, “untouchables”, of India, as victims of the Hindu caste system, have sometimes turned to Christianity as a means of escape. In a Ronning Centre Seminar on 12 January, Jack Waschenfelder will address the issue of “The Dalit Liberation Struggle in India: Christianity as Aid or Hindrance?”. He will describe the caste system as it exists today and Christianity has aided or hindered the Dalits in their quest for liberation from caste oppression.

Dr Waschenfelder will draw on experience from his numerous visits to India over the last 14 years, as well as friendships with Dalit Christians. An Associate Professor of Religious Studies at the Augustana Campus of the University of Alberta, he has been co-leader of the Augustana India Tour for the past 10 years. His research interests include Christian Eco-theologies and Hinduism, and development challenges in present-day India. He lived in India with his family during his sabbatical in 1996–1997.



For full details, please see the Calendar on pages 17-19

How Should Public Spaces Reflect a Plural Society?

Although Simon Lasair’s academic training lies in the area of early Judaism, its literature and culture, he has an ongoing interest in political theory and the role of religion in the public sphere, both ancient and modern.

In a Ronning Centre Seminar on 14 January, Dr Lasair will take up the topic of “Rethinking Public Space in the Light of Emerging Pluralisms”. Specifically, he will explore how public space might be configured in the hope of pointing toward a more diverse realization of Canadian society, using pluralism as its start and end points.

Drawing upon the Hegelian dialectic of the universal and particular, he will argue that a truly pluralistic society must allow particularity to manifest itself in society’s public space. However, this raises the important questions of which particular group will claim hegemony in this public space, and who will referee conflicts when they arise.

Dr Lasair obtained his Ph.D. degree from the University of Manchester and has taught there and at the University of Alberta. He is an active member of the Society of Biblical Literature.

Report to Present Latest Research on Faith-Based Organizations

Faith-based organizations are playing a significant role in the growth of grassroots social economy projects in communities across Western Canada. In a Ronning Centre Seminar on 25 February, Bob McKeon and Martin Garber-Conrad will report on a recent research project which surveyed that role. Under the title “Faith-Based Organizations engaged in the Social Economy” they will describe the different types of faith-based organizations, the different types of social economy activities they are engaged in, and how faith commitments influence social economy initiatives.

Bob McKeon holds a PhD from the University of Toronto and taught at Newman Theological College in Edmonton for a number of years. His focus has been on Catholic social teaching. He is currently heading the Office of Social Justice, Catholic Archdiocese of Edmonton and is a Lecturer at St Joseph’s College, University of Alberta.

Martin Garber-Conrad, an ordained Lutheran minister, has been active in a variety of faith-based organizations, including Edmonton’s primary church alliance working in the inner city. He is the CEO of the Edmonton Community Foundation.

Study Circle on Christianity for Muslims to Promote Interfaith Understanding

The Islamic Academy, Edmonton, will be the host of a Ronning Centre Study Circle on Religion & Public Life on 20 March, entitled “Christianity for Muslims”.

At this Study Circle, four Christians will reflect on key aspects of the Christian faith and their implications for the life of the world. These reflections will open a conversation with Muslims on how Christians understand their revelation and the call to faithfulness that animates their life. There will be ample opportunity to discuss a range of issues and themes of interest to Muslims.

This is a jointly sponsored event with the ECMC Chair in Islamic Studies at the University of Alberta, and David J. Goa, Director of the Chester Ronning Centre, and Professor Ibrahim Abu-Rabi’ of the Department of History and Classics at the University. All are welcome and there is no fee for attending.

Scholars to Commemorate Major Turkish Islamic Reformer

The Turkish theologian Bediuzzaman Said Nursi (1877–1960) nurtured a spiritual reform movement that has millions of adherents and a strong institutional and educational system throughout Turkey.

Nursi argued that Islam must be organically linked to empire in order to preserve its identity in the modern era, fostering a spiritual tradition that has steadfastly survived the secular project of Kemalism.

On March 8 and 9, three internationally eminent scholars will assess the enduring legacy of this singular Islamic thinker. Faris Kaya is a professor at The Istanbul Foundation for Science and Culture; Fred A. Reed, a Canadian journalist specializing in Islamic issues; and Bilal Kuspinar is a teacher and researcher with the Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University.

Bishop Schultz to Explore Meanings of Love and Fear

At a pair of Ronning Centre Consultations on 15 and 16 March, Raymond L. Schultz, retired bishop of the Lutheran Church in Canada, will speak to the topics of “Love and Fear in the Bible” and “Love and Fear in Human Relationships”.

God’s love as merciful lovingkindness finds expression throughout the Bible and constitutes the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. Its antithesis is fear, the unwillingness to engage. It is possible to love enemies, but it is not possible to engage those who fear.

The theological constructs of love and fear in the scriptures provide a background for understanding human relationships. Various popular definitions of love and insights from pastoral counselling provide material for this presentation.

Raymond L. Schultz, a retired National Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, resides in Nanaimo, BC. He currently serves as an adviser to the Council of the Lutheran World Federation and chairs the Council’s Renewal Committee.

Crises to be Addressed At Philosophers' Cafés

The program of Philosophers' Cafés which the Ronning Centre organized this fall, and which have been immensely popular, will continue in the winter with a new series of seven cafés on the theme of "Thinking our Way in a Time of Crisis". To put the theme in the form of a question: when we face this impending "perfect storm" of crises arising from such sources as our profligate use of fossil fuels to energize an extravagant life-style, the sheer number of people now all trying to live that life-style on the same planet, the diminishing availability of fresh water, and the deterioration of the soil we need to grow our food, what does all this imply for the way we think about what it means to live a human life and perpetuate a civilized human community on a finite planet?

The much heralded problems of global warming, "peak oil", water shortages, food shortages, the acidification of the oceans, etc. are interlocked in such a way that they tend to make solutions addressed to just one of them result in one or more of the others becoming even worse. This strongly suggests that a holistic solution is needed, but the human community is so politically fragmented into competing units that this is unlikely to occur by rational planning. In fact, there is the very real danger that violent conflicts will erupt, and in a world that still has nuclear weapons we stand a good chance of radiating ourselves out of existence before the aforementioned crises have taken anything like their full, catastrophic toll.

How did we get into this predicament? What with our marvellous 20/20 hindsight can we now see as the "mistakes" we made on account of our exceedingly myopic foresight, and what are the mistakes we are still making? Some of these lie in the way we have been *thinking* about ourselves and how we live and build communities in our little home called "Planet Earth".

After an initial session spent assessing the enormity of what faces us, this winter's cafés, will address this need to revise our thinking by encouraging those who attend to voice their own ideas and listen to others on the following six topics.

- (1) The first of these is the idea of "progress": How have we been defining it? Is progress an illusion? Should we redefine it or just junk it?
- (2) Second, energy and the economy: Is economic growth necessarily tied to increased energy use? Is economic growth desirable? Is economics a science that should be relied on to guide our policies?
- (3) Third, the natural world as an economic resource: Can we go on thinking of nature this way? How should we change the way we think about our relation to the planetary home we evolved into and will always live in as long we are alive at all?
- (4) Fourth, the good life and happiness: Is living a good life just pursuing happiness? Is happiness just the satisfaction wants? Is there a good life beyond consumption?
- (5) Fifth, the place of a liberal arts education: Do we need it anymore? Isn't it sufficient just to train technical specialists? If we still need it, how do we revise it?
- (6) Sixth, death: Is death, even the sudden, catastrophic death of millions of people, or even the death of the whole human species, something we can accommodate in our conception of ourselves? Is the belief in immortality part of the problem?

As during the fall, the cafés will take place at Steeps Urban Tea House on selected Saturday afternoons from January to April starting at 1 p.m. For each there will be a different "animateur" with some expertise on the topic and skilled at inspiring and channelling the discussion.

Calendar of Coming Events - Winter 2010

For up-to-date information where details are not complete please check the Ronning Centre website or call 780 679 1198

JANUARY

Pietism and Social Transformation in Rural Norway

A CRC Study Circle on Religion & Public Life with Cam Harder (Lutheran Theological Seminary, Saskatoon)

Monday, 11 January, 7:00–9:00 p.m.,

Messiah Lutheran Church, 4810 - 50th Street, Camrose

Tuesday, 12 January, 7:00–9:00 p.m.,

Trinity Lutheran Church, 10014 - 81st Avenue, Edmonton

The Dalit Liberation Struggle in India: Christianity as Aid or Hindrance?

A Ronning Centre Seminar with Jack Waschenfelder (Associate Professor of Religious Studies, Augustana Campus, University of Alberta)

Tuesday, 12 January, 12:30–2:00 p.m.,

M010, Basement of Founders' Hall

Augustana Campus, Camrose

Rethinking Public Space in the Light of Emerging Pluralisms

A Ronning Centre Seminar with Simon Lasair (University of Alberta)

Thursday, 14 January, 9:25–10:40 a.m.

C103, Classroom Building, Augustana Campus, Camrose

Spiritual Transformation or Colonization: Pietism, a Prairie Story

A CRC Study Circle on Religion & Public Life with David J. Goa (Director, Chester Ronning Centre)

Monday, 18 January, 7:00–9:00 p.m.

Messiah Lutheran Church

4810 - 50th Street, Camrose

Wednesday, 20 January, 7:00–9:00 p.m.

Trinity Lutheran Church

10014 - 81st Avenue, Edmonton

Ronning as Politician

A commemorative address by Ronning Centre Distinguished Visiting Fellow Brian L. Evans (Professor of History, Emeritus, University of Alberta)

Tuesday, 19 January, 7:00–8:30 p.m.

Chapel, Faith & Life Centre, Augustana Campus, Camrose

Pietism and the Sacraments in the Christian Life

A CRC Study Circle on Religion & Public Life with Eugene L. Boe (Academic Dean and Professor of Systematic and Historical Theology; Lutheran Brethren Seminary, Fergus Falls, MN)

Monday, 25 January, 7:00–9:00 p.m.

Messiah Lutheran Church, 4810 - 50th Street, Camrose

Tuesday, 26 January, 7:00–9:00 p.m.

Trinity Lutheran Church, 10014 - 81st Avenue, Edmonton

Ronning as Diplomat

A commemorative address by Ronning Centre Distinguished Visiting Fellow Brian L. Evans (Professor of History, Emeritus, University of Alberta)

Tuesday, 26 January, 7:00–8:30 p.m.

Chapel, Faith & Life Centre

Augustana Campus, Camrose

The Highest Public Calling

A Ronning Centre Forum on Religion & Public Life:

A Conversation with Verlyn Olson, MLA for Wetaskiwin-Camrose

Wednesday, 27 January, 7–8:30 p.m.

C014, Classroom Building

Augustana Campus, Camrose

A Confluence of Crises

A Philosophers' Café animated by Dittmar Mündel and

David J. Goa (in Camrose) and Martin Tweedale (in Edmonton)

Friday, 29 January, 8:30–10:00 a.m.

Merchants Tea & Coffee House

4857 - 50th Street, Camrose

Saturday, 30 January, 1:00–3:30 p.m.

Steeps, The Urban Tea House

11116 - Whyte (82nd) Avenue, Edmonton

FEBRUARY

Pietism and the Bible in the New World:

Reading for Friendship, Reading for Proof

A CRC Study Circle on Religion & Public Life with David J. Goa (Director, Chester Ronning Centre)

Monday, 1 February, 7:00–9:00 p.m.

Messiah Lutheran Church

4810 - 50th Street, Camrose

Tuesday, 2 February, 7:00–9:00 p.m.

Trinity Lutheran Church

10014 - 81st Avenue, Edmonton

A Glorious and Sad Song: The Last Pietist to be Buried on the Prairies

A CRC Study Circle on Religion & Public Life with David J. Goa (Director, Chester Ronning Centre)

Monday, 8 February, 7:00–9:00 p.m.

Messiah Lutheran Church

4810 - 50th Street, Camrose

Tuesday, 9 February, 7:00–9:00 p.m.

Trinity Lutheran Church

10014 - 81st Avenue, Edmonton

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Calendar of Coming Events - Winter 2010

For up-to-date information where details are not complete please check the Ronning Centre website or call 780 679 1198

Is the Natural World a “Resource”?

*A Philosophers' Café introduced and animated by Glen Hvenegaard
(Professor of Environmental Studies and Geography,
Augustana Campus, University of Alberta)
Friday, 12 February, 8:30–10:00 a.m.
Merchants Tea & Coffee House
4857 – 50th Street, Camrose
Saturday, 13 February, 1:00–3:30 p.m.
Steeps, The Urban Tea House
11116 – Whyte (82nd) Avenue, Edmonton*

Faith-Based Organizations Engaged in the Social Economy

*A Ronning Centre Seminar with Bob McKeon (Office of Social
Justice, Catholic Archdiocese of Edmonton and St Joseph's College,
University of Alberta) and Martin Garber Conrad
(CEO, Edmonton Community Foundation)
Thursday, 25 February, 12:30–2:00 p.m.
M010, Basement of Founders' Hall
Augustana Campus, Camrose*

Is Economic Growth Always Good?

*A Philosophers' Café introduced and animated by Gordon Laxer
(Professor of Sociology, University of Alberta)
Friday, 26 February, 8:30–10:00 a.m.
Merchants Tea & Coffee House
4857 – 50th Street, Camrose
Saturday, 27 February, 1:00–3:30 p.m.
Steeps, The Urban Tea House
11116 – Whyte (82nd) Avenue, Edmonton*

MARCH

Faith, Harmony, and Dissent

*A Ronning Forum on Religion & Public Life with David King
(Executive Director, The Public School Boards' Association
of Alberta and sometime Minister of Education, Province of Alberta)
Monday, 1 March, 7:00 – 8:30 p.m.
C014, Basement of Classroom Building
Augustana Campus, Camrose*

Islam in Modern Turkey:

The Contribution of Said Nursi

*A Ronning Centre Consultation on Religion & Public Life with
Faris Kaya (The Istanbul Foundation for Science and Culture);
Fred A. Reed (journalist specializing in Islamic issues); and
Bilal Kuspinar (Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University)
Monday, 8 March, 2:00–3:30 p.m.
C167 Main Floor of Classroom Building,
Augustana Campus
Tuesday, 9 March, 7:00–8:30 p.m., The King's University
College, 9125–50th Street, Edmonton*

Changing Our Ideas About Progress

*A Philosophers' Café introduced and animated by Dittmar Mündel
(Professor, Religious Studies and Philosophy, Augustana Campus,
University of Alberta)
Friday, 12 March, 8:30–10:00 a.m.
Merchants Tea & Coffee House
4857 – 50th Street, Camrose
Saturday, 13 March, 1:00–3:30 p.m.
Steeps, The Urban Tea House
11116 – Whyte (82nd) Avenue, Edmonton*

Love and Fear in the Bible

*A Ronning Centre Consultation with Bishop Raymond L. Schultz
(Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada)
Monday, 15 March, 7:00–8:30 p.m.
C014, Classroom Building
Augustana Campus, Camrose*

Love and Fear in Human Relationships

*A Ronning Centre Consultation with Bishop Raymond L. Schultz
(Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada)
Tuesday, 16 March, 7:00–8:30 p.m.,
Trinity Lutheran Church
10014 – 81st Avenue, Edmonton*

Christianity for Muslims

*A Ronning Centre Study Circle on Religion & Public Life jointly
sponsored with the ECMC Chair of Islamic Studies and anchored by
David J. Goa (Director, Chester Ronning Centre) and
Ibrahim Abu-Rabi' (ECMC Professor of Islamic Studies,
University of Alberta) with a panel of special guests
Saturday, 20 March, 1:00–4:30 p.m.
Location TBA*

Please see our website for further details

Is the Good Life the Pursuit of Happiness?

*A Philosophers' Café introduced and animated by Archbishop Lazar
(Abbot, All Saints of North America Monastery, Dewdney, BC)
Friday, 26 March, 8:30–10:00 a.m.
Merchants Tea & Coffee House
4857 – 50th Street, Camrose
Saturday, 27 March, 1:00–3:30 p.m.
Steeps, The Urban Tea House
11116 – Whyte (82nd) Avenue, Edmonton*

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Calendar of Coming Events - Winter 2010

For up-to-date information where details are not complete please check the Ronning Centre website or call 780 679 1198

APRIL

How Should We Rethink the Purpose of a Liberal Arts Education?

*A Philosophers' Café introduced and animated by Roger Epp
(Dean, Augustana Campus, University of Alberta)*

Friday, 9 April, 8:30–10:00 a.m.

Merchants Tea & Coffee House

4857 – 50th Street, Camrose

Saturday, 10 April, 1:00–3:30 p.m.

Steeps, The Urban Tea House

11116 – Whyte (82nd) Avenue, Edmonton

Is it Possible to Find a Comfortable Place for Death in Our Approach to Life?

*A Philosophers' Café introduced and animated by David J. Goa
(Director, Chester Ronning Centre)*

Friday, 23 April, 8:30–10:00 a.m.

Merchants Tea & Coffee House

4857 – 50th Street, Camrose

Saturday, 24 April, 1:00–3:30 p.m.

Steeps, The Urban Tea House

11116 – Whyte (82nd) Avenue, Edmonton

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Edmonton Community Foundation

Mr Robert Klappstein

We have endeavoured to make this list as accurate as possible to 17 December 2009. Please accept our apologies if your name has been omitted or misspelled and please let us know so we may correct our records.



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

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.

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>



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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 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 and support the ongoing work of the Centre
Ronning Centre annual membership fee of \$15.00 will be deducted from your charitable gift

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



UNIVERSITY OF
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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.