

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...*

## Learning and Thinking Together

Throughout the winter term the Ronning Centre is offering some forty occasions to gather and learn and think together about issues of religion and public life. A few highlights of note that you may wish to read more about in the Newsletter:

We continue with our series on pilgrimage towards personal and social transformation in our Religion and Public Life Cafés held at Merchants in Camrose. In Edmonton, at Steeps, the Urban Tea House, the Philosopher's Cafés will explore matters of justice and do so from a variety of perspectives. Is it possible for our concerns for justice to overreach? What about justice and the new doctrine of the responsibility to protect that has, most recently, led to military interventions in Libya? What happens to decency and justice given the reach of modern media? Finally, what is our responsibility to future generations when it comes to environmental justice?

We are delighted to welcome as a Ronning Centre Distinguished Visiting Fellow, Simon Harak, S.J. Professor Harak has devoted his life to understanding military conflict and to nurturing our capacity to "turn swords into ploughshares". He will be with us for a week lecturing and leading workshops on Jesus' teaching of nonviolence. We are pleased to have him in Camrose and to partner with both Trinity Lutheran Church in Edmonton and the Micah Centre at The King's University College for events in Edmonton.

We are also pleased that a series of conversations under the general theme of faith and farming will be held in Armena, Bawlf, Camrose, Millet, and New Norway, a continuation of work Dittmar Mündel has animated over a number of years.

In March we have joined with the Catholic Archdiocese of Edmonton in hosting another Ronning Centre Distinguished Visiting Fellow, Sister Lorelei Fuchs. Professor Fuchs has worked on a great variety of ecumenical issues and themes and will be with us for a rich week of lectures as well as a retreat for women who are working to enhance the relationship of Christians to each other and deepen their common capacity to work on behalf of the life of the world.

—Continued on page 5

## Reflections on a Visit to Germany

In October and November of 2011, my wife Pat and I spent almost seven weeks in Germany, attending conferences, giving workshops, and visiting friends and relatives. This brief travelogue can give some glimpses into “religion and public life” as we experienced them in a few of the places we visited.



Wittenberg with Castle Church. Photo by Dittmar Mündel

### *Luther Lionized, Socialism Sidelined*

Wittenberg. Our first stop was for a conference on “speaking credibly about God: a dialogue with the thought of Paul Tillich”. In 1983, for the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Luther’s birth, the façades of the

## Dynamism and Difficulty in

buildings were being renewed by the German Democratic Republic (GDR) which over the decades had moved from seeing Luther only as a slave to the dukes, to Luther as “Germany’s greatest son”—maybe in part to attract tourists. After the reunification of Germany in 1990, money poured in for thorough repairs of buildings as old as 800 years. Wittenberg was re-branded as “Luthercity-Wittenberg”.

Tour buses were very evident, filled mostly with Germans of all generations, and some with international visitors. Clearly there is much interest to walk the streets where Luther and Melancthon and Lucas Cranach lived and worked.

We enjoyed doing the 12 minute walk on the cobblestoned streets from Luther’s house, the former Augustinian monastery, at one end of the old town, to the castle where duke Frederick the Wise reigned at the other end. No wonder Luther felt he had access to the duke as a protector of the reformation, at the same time as he had to admonish this duke—as well as other dukes—to be a servant to his people.

In the shadow of the castle and the castle church, where its tower has the inlaid words “A mighty fortress is our God”, the Evangelische Akademie Sachsen-Anhalt (“the Protestant Academy”) can be found. A number of weekends each month “religion and public life” conferences are held at the Evangelische Akademie, which employs 27 staff people!

This Academy, similar to those in West Germany, was started in 1947 to assist with rethinking culture, education, and politics in the light of a biblical humanism. The challenge was to break through the mass deceptions about the Aryan race and German destiny; and to develop a civil life and institutions committed to facing reality and being grounded in the depth of existence.

# the European Religious Scene

It struck us that, at least in public, the conference lecturers as well as the participants were quite reticent about the history of “the real-existing socialism” of the GDR of the recent past: the bad and the good. Only at our meal tables, some older pastors and lay people spoke of the loss of the positive sides of the socialist experiment because reunification had meant that the West’s consumer-capitalism was the only supposedly “realistic” option for organizing society and its political-economy. During the conference, Paul Tillich’s early ‘religious socialism’ was hardly discussed, nor were religious thinkers such as Leonard Ragaz, Martin Buber, or Helmut Gollwitzer who all saw that co-operation must overcome competition as a basic way of reorganizing post-war societies.

## *Pervasive Secularism, Paradoxical Theology*

*Berlin.* From Wittenberg to Berlin was a short 36-minute ride by the high-speed ICE train through agricultural land where we passed many wind turbines. Berlin first gained its prominence as the German capital in 1871 with the creation of Germany as an imperial nation-state.

Twenty-two years after the fall of the Berlin Wall it is the site of many renovated and many brand new buildings paid for by a solidarity tax from the taxpayers of the Western German states. Among the showpieces of modern architecture, there is the central train station on three levels mostly out of glass as well as the Potsdamer Platz.

In the middle of the city amongst the many renovated or newly built areas is the haunting “Holocaust Mahnmal” (the holocaust memorial and warning sign). Composed of an array of tilted cement rectangles over several city blocks,



*Holocaust Mahnmal, Berlin. Photo by Dittmar Mündel*

it can remind one of tombstones or the site of a desolated city. The Holocaust museum is underground below this memorial. “Stumbling stones” can also be found on various city streets throughout Germany. These brass paving stones, the same shape and height as the others in the sidewalk, are engraved with the names of Jewish individuals or families who lost their lives in the Holocaust.

Berlin is a city of theatres, of music, of museums, of cultural experimentation and of famous universities and research hospitals. Tourists have begun filling up more and more apartments, as they have become bed and breakfast places, so that former residents of certain areas such as Prenzlauer Berg can no longer afford the rent.

According to a tour guide, who complained that money was being used to restore even more churches beyond the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church and the Berliner Dom (Cathedral), only 14% of people in Berlin belong to either church

or mosque or synagogue and only 2% attend any house of worship. It is a quite thoroughly “secular city”.

It was in Berlin, while sitting in Tegel prison for opposing the Nazi regime and helping to smuggle Jews out of Germany that Bonhoeffer reflected on a world come of age, that is a secular world no longer under the tutelage of the church. The metaphysics or inwardness that a lot of religions assumed no longer can serve as an *a priori*. This is not something to be lamented. It is a reality and a gift of history. So then, he asked himself, is there the possibility of a religionless Christianity in a world come of age? Bonhoeffer concluded with the paradox that we have to live, make our decisions and act in this world without the working hypothesis of God, without some *deus ex machina*, but do so before God. If we dissolve this paradox, we will live a secular life that forgets that neither high levels of advanced education nor reason, nor technology, nor morality nor good intentions were able to oppose the dominant ideology of the time, of Nazism and Anti-Semitism.

Currently the ideology of neoliberalism or of “debt-led growth” seems to hold sway at the Reichstag, in spite of its clear failures, such as the ongoing financial instability, a gradual erosion of the social safety net, and a continuing assault on the environment.

From where would an alternative perspective that cares for all of creation and all of God’s creatures come? Who exposes that the current political and economic reasoning is captive to the illusion that there is no end to growth, in spite of all the evidence to the contrary? Who changes the manipulated desires of the human heart?

### *Peace as Imperative*

*Bad Oeynhausen, Westphalia.* In this small city not too far by train from the giant monument that commemorates the Peace of Westphalia and the end of the Thirty Years’ War of religion in 1648, the Resurrection church has been holding a liturgy for peace every Friday night for many decades using confessions and prayers from Coventry. Learning of this weekly prayer for peace, a nail cross from Coventry was also given to the church.

I spoke there on the need to de-radicalize our relationship with Muslims as a crucial task if we are to work towards a more peace-filled world.

### *Community and Contention among Strangers, Toward a Reappraisal of Scripture*

*Frankfurt am Main.* This is the only city in Germany that has a skyline of skyscrapers that dwarf the churches’ spires. Of course these buildings reaching for the sky are in the financial district. The newest building is the European Central Bank, in whose shadow the “occupy” movement had its camp. Are our skyscrapers the modern equivalents of the tower of Babel?

In Frankfurt, our hostess was the Episcopalian priest of Christ the King Anglican/Episcopalian church. This church was founded here, because Frankfurt was the location of the American headquarters and the Supreme Allied Command after the Second World War. Frankfurt was also the centre from which the Marshall Plan was implemented that helped Germany’s economic miracle to occur. And today it is the hub of finance, marketing, and distribution of goods for continental Europe.

From being a predominantly American church for military personnel and their families, the congregation now has members from more than 30 nations ranging from Malaysia to Nigeria, Great Britain to Jamaica. They love to get together for worship with the Book of Common Prayer: all generations! In both church programs and in worship it was heartening to see so many young people and children present. Before and after the service, the coffee time is also sacred partly because in an English-speaking church an Anglophone has an opportunity to feel at home rather than being always a stranger in a strange land.

And yet all the familiar tensions that have wracked the mainline churches in North America are present in this lovely congregation as well. The priest, who considers herself to be rather conservative and has had positive experiences in the charismatic movement in the U.S., once said a prayer for a gay couple that had announced to the parish that they were married (by the civil registries office)—and as a result about 16 African parishioners left.

So I was invited to do a morning-long workshop on using the Bible spiritually, not as a weapon, but as a life-giving word. I started discussing what David Goa has named the co-dependent twins of literalism and rationalist liberalism that are currently dominant ways of approaching the Bible; and then tried to give a new way of using the Bible that doesn't get caught in this dialectic. As long as the Bible remains mainly a moral code or our security blanket in a changing world, it will not be able to illumine our own hearts and the ideologies to which we cling—to our and the world's detriment.

—Dittmar Mündel



*Occupy Movement in the shadow of bank buildings, Frankfurt am Main.*

*Photo by Dittmar Mündel*

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#### *Director's Desk*

*Continued from page 1*

"The Political Uses and Misuses of Religion" will be the general topic of the Monday evening course offered by the Ronning Centre beginning on January 9<sup>th</sup> in the evening. The overarching inquiry for this course: would a more textured understanding of the place of religion in the public square enhance or diminish civil life? Professor Mündel will join me and a distinguished group of scholars to explore a range of foundational ideas and examples of the use of religion for political purposes, religion as a problem for secular(ist) government and for religious governments, and whether or not religion can also be a gift to the civil life. The public is invited to join in these evenings of thinking and talking together. We hope you may join us for some if not all of the sessions.

—David J. Goa

# Fostering the Great Conversation

It will come as no news to supporters of the Chester Ronning Centre that religious perspectives are an enduring part of public discourse and that a primary challenge facing those who wish to understand, and so help to resolve, current geo-political and other issues is a deep and textured engagement with these perspectives.

Not so long ago, many observers of social trends expected religious commitment to become irrelevant to the social and political choices being forced upon humanity in today's world, if not simply to dwindle to negligible proportions. Now many, if not most, scholars and thoughtful people have come to recognize that the teachings of world religions constitute a rich source of insights that can, and often must, be used constructively by makers of policy.

Every day our news media alert us to vital, "hot-button" issues that demand an appreciation of religious perspectives if they are to be dealt with effectively. Here are just a few:

- How can the fear of Islam and Muslims in Western countries be explained, and how can it be countered?
- How can the fear of the West and particularly of Christians in Muslim societies be explained, and how can it be countered?
- When blasphemy is directed against a religion, what are the appropriate responses?
- How can religious understandings of human nature, suffering, and death help in developing public policies on the development and uses of the new genetic medical science? On decisions that must be made about the end of life in cases of terminal illness?
- When can doctrines and declarations of human rights be accepted as a civil gift, and when may they become

instruments against culture and community?

- How can religious teachings and leadership enlarge our moral imagination so as to promote alternatives to war?
- How can religious teachings enhance humanity's capacity for the stewardship of the natural world and for living together on this fragile planet?
- How can the religious life moderate human appetite, inspire people to set meaningful limits to growth, and encourage a sharing of resources?

The first step toward dealing responsibly with such complex and controversial issues is to establish and disseminate an accurate understanding of what the issues are and imply, taking account of diverse points of view. This is a task in which the Ronning Centre is in a strategic position to engage.

The Centre has already associated with its work a significant number of distinguished public intellectuals in Canada, and to some extent abroad. They have contributed to its consultations and presented their insights in lectures and publications.

How could their talents and accomplishments be mobilized to enhance public awareness more effectively? They are already, in a broad sense, participants in a great ongoing conversation that should in principle draw in all concerned with the interaction between religion and public life.

A logical move for the Centre would be to foster this conversation by instituting a recognized body of Senior Fellows and supporting and sustaining their activity not only as individuals but as a group.

The Centre would provide a setting for them to conduct

- conversation among themselves, and in the academic world;

## *The Ronning Centre Formulates a New Initiative*

- conversation between themselves and leaders in public life;
- conversation between themselves and journalists and other formers of public awareness and opinion.

More concretely, we could envisage the role of our Senior Fellows as including:

*Participating in public forums.* Periodic gatherings of the Fellows in public conversation on difficult and demanding current issues would nurture a hospitable interchange of insights across boundaries of interest and ideology. Through linking with the broadcast media such conversation would both inform the public and provide a valid model for thinking together co-operatively.

*Accessibility through a Religion and Public Life Portal.* A web-based portal established by the Centre would give journalists and other interested parties immediate access to our Senior Fellows and their particular expertise.

*Preparing Ronning Centre Briefing Papers.* Fellows with expert knowledge concerning specific continuing issues would prepare, individually or in collaboration, briefing papers distilling the history and key concepts involved. When a news story broke on such a topic, they would be equipped to release to the media a concise, well thought out commentary on it within 24 hours.

*Participating in Ronning Centre Triage Seminars for Journalists.* We would undertake to organize briefing seminars for the media within 24 hours of a news story breaking. These would be available internationally through webcasts. Journalists would be encouraged to consult with our Senior Fellows to obtain additional in-depth information as they require it.

*Conducting Ronning Centre Symposia for Journalists.* We would also host and pro-

vide stipends for selected journalists to attend symposia where the Senior Fellows would deepen and broaden their understanding of emerging issues in religion and public life.

*Animating a National Conversation on Religion and Public Life.* This could be done by convening from time to time select groups of political leaders across party and ideological lines for conversation with our Senior Fellows on the issues of religion and public life on which they are expected to legislate.

*Joining in Interfaith Conversation on Emerging Issues.* We would build on our current partnerships with religious institutions in the Muslim world to explore the finest thinking within our various religious traditions on emerging issues that challenge the global community.

The Ronning Centre is currently exploring ways and means of establishing a body of Senior Fellows along these lines. This is a major initiative on the part of the Centre, with funding being sought largely through charitable giving. Anyone who would consider becoming a lead donor is invited to contact the Director, who would be pleased to discuss details with all who are interested.

Of course the selection of the Fellows would be crucial. As a collectivity they must encompass something of the diversity of religious traditions and outlooks in the world at large, and individually in their interaction with each other they must exemplify the values of accurately informed, thoughtful, amicable conversation.

Conversation – even the great conversation envisaged here – by itself is never likely to bring about agreement on what to do about deeply divisive issues, but it can surely help us to deal with them in a more civilized, less acrimonious and destructive manner.

*A one-term course at the University of Alberta that will explore the deepest issues in the relationship between religion and the political world*

## **AUREL 271: The Political Uses and Misuses of Religion**

In some countries political leadership privileges a religious tradition.

In others, particular religious communities or all such commitments are suppressed.

In North America, both the political right and left have periodically been informed by and made use of particular religious ideas and issues.

In this course we will explore the relationship of religion to civil life, the challenges and gifts of secular and religious institutions, using both historical and contemporary examples.

Our overarching concern: Would a differently textured understanding of the place of religion in the public square enhance or diminish civil life?

### **FACULTY**

**Rev. Dr Dittmar Mündel**

Professor of Religious Studies and Interdisciplinary Studies

**David J. Goa**

Director of the Chester Ronning Centre

### **WHERE**

C014 Classroom Building,  
Augustana Campus

### **WHEN**

12 Mondays  
at 6.30 p.m.  
Beginning 9 January 2012



*This course is open to the public.  
If you wish to sign up, send your name and email to [rebecca.warren@ualberta.ca](mailto:rebecca.warren@ualberta.ca).  
We'd love to have you join us.*

## **Ronning Centre to Sponsor Discussions**

This Winter, the Chester Ronning Centre in co-operation with a variety of rural congregations is offering a series of sessions that all deal with different challenges facing rural parishes and the rural communities in which they are placed. Each local community is inviting all those in easy driving distance to attend their sessions. Together the sessions show how complex life in rural communities is and what people of faith and other concerned people need to do to respond to the interconnected challenges.

On Saturday January 21<sup>st</sup> from 8:30 to 11:30am there will be a breakfast with a panel at Scandia Lutheran Church in Armena on "Farming Communities and Government Policy: Moving Beyond Ideology". Policy affects the life of a farming community. Farmers face tough decisions that affect their livelihood and the vibrancy of their communities, and negotiating policy adds to the challenge. Politicians face tough decisions as they try to hear and respond to many people and groups with differing agendas.

What contributes to healthy, faithful farming communities? Camrose County Councillor Doug Lyseng and Wetaskiwin-Camrose MLA the Hon. Verlyn Olson will explore with the participants the connections between county and provincial policy and the health of farming communities. Rev. Dr. Dittmar Mündel and Rev. Jim Appleby will speak on faith and hope vs. ideology and fear in our decision-making and invite participants to think about non-ideological ways of approaching the challenges of farming communities.

On Thursday February 23<sup>rd</sup> from 7pm to 9:30pm at New Norway Community Hall the topic will be "Resilience" with Brian Rozmahel, a farmer from Viking, as the speaker. Brian, from his own experience in Viking, will try to



## Confronting Challenges to Rural Society: What is the Role of Faith?

show how small communities can offer hope in troubling times. He will review with the participants some of the threats that we as a society might be facing in a not so distant future and then explore some messages of hope. He will share some of the projects currently underway in Viking to make that community more “resilient” to the stress and shocks that are coming our way.

Wednesday February 29<sup>th</sup> from 7:30 pm to 9 pm at St Peter’s Lutheran Church in Millet, the topic will be *Faith, Farming and Oil*. Since the discovery of oil at Leduc in 1947, our provincial and many home economies, pension funds as well as the whole farming enterprise have become increasingly oil-dependent. Is oil only a good gift of creation or can it, like all good things, also turn from being a blessing to being a curse? Dittmar Mündel will open up our conversation by trying to look at our present situation of oil-dependence through the eyes of the prophets. The prophet Hosea warns us of the social, economic, and religious dangers of confusing the gifts of creation with the Creator.

Thursday March 15<sup>th</sup> from 7:00 pm to 9:30pm in Kingman at the home of Will and Marion Pattison, David Goa will begin a conversation on *How can we Read the Bible in Life-giving Ways in Rural Contexts?* The Bible has frequently been used to split rural communities on “hot button issues” rather than bringing people together as real neighbours who create one community of very diverse people.

Finally, on Saturday March 24<sup>th</sup> from 8:30 to 11:30am at Bawlf Lutheran Church, the issue is *An Ageing Rural Population and its Impact on Rural Parishes and Rural Communities*. Who will farm? Who will do the volunteer work in the community and in congregations? Is there a way



of reversing the trends of rural decline, so more children can farm and diversify the farm enterprises rather than all ending up in cities? What is the strength and integrity of a rural parish and community regardless of the age of its members? These are some of the questions we hope to explore. Shauna Feth and Dittmar Mündel will animate the conversation.

—Dittmar Mündel

### The Christian Responsibility to Muslims

TWO LECTURES BY DAVID J. GOA  
Director of the Chester Ronning Centre

#### Lecture 3: Conversations Ancient and Modern

24 January, 7 pm, Advent Lutheran, Calgary  
25 January, 7 pm, Trinity Lutheran, Edmonton  
26 January, 7 pm, Messiah Lutheran, Camrose

#### Lecture 4: Thinking about the Prophet Muhammad

8 February, 7 pm, Trinity Lutheran, Edmonton  
9 February, 7 pm, Messiah Lutheran, Camrose  
28 February, 7 pm, Advent Lutheran, Calgary

For details, see the calendar on pages 14–16.

*A Christian Community Defies the Law*

## Vancouver Church Offers Sanctuary

“It has changed us forever.”

Rev. Richard Hergesheimer was reflecting on his church’s experience as a place of sanctuary at a Ronning Centre Consultation on 17 October 2011.

It was nothing out of the ordinary when Mikhail Lennikov joined the congregation of First Lutheran Church, Vancouver, in 2008. But it appeared from Rev. Hergesheimer’s account that the church had been preparing for the resulting challenge for years.

He described how it had built up a tradition as a “Reconciling-in-Christ” congregation, one that took to heart Martin Luther’s description of the Christian as “a saint and a sinner at the same time”.

It had sponsored a Rwandan refugee family, and become known as a safe place for such newcomers, black, poor, perhaps illiterate. It had also, after a poll of its congregation, included homosexuals – somewhat to the discomfort of the Africans, but on the principle that it would accept people as they came, without pretence or concealment.

Then on 2 June 2009 Mikhail Lennikov sought sanctuary in the church.

Rev. Hergesheimer outlined the tradition of sanctuary, going back to the Hebrew scriptures that set aside cities of refuge. By the seventh century in Europe Visigothic law recognized churches as places where fugitives would be safe from capture. For a thousand years sanctuary in churches was typically respected, the murder of Thomas Becket in Canterbury Cathedral being one of the rare exceptions.

In 1623 the right of sanctuary was removed from English law, but the tradition continued and with one exception has been maintained in Canada (as in many European countries) as a last-ditch resort when all else fails.

For Mikhail Lennikov there was no apparent alternative.

He had come to Canada from eastern Russia in 1997 as a graduate student in Japanese at the University of British Columbia. Having completed an MA, he began a PhD program. He married a Canadian and applied to stay in Canada.

He honestly reported that as a teenager in Russia he had briefly worked for the KGB as a translator from Japanese. CSIS investigated and cleared him, finding that he was no security risk.

But a new law passed in haste in 2001 after the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center and Washington in the United States threatened him with deportation – to a Federation that had not even existed in Russia when he left, where his Canadian experience would leave him open to prosecution. His appeals reached the ministerial level but stalled.

First Lutheran Church rose to the occasion, finding room for him and his family in their “sanctuary”, now literally a safe place that he could not leave without being arrested and deported. A video presentation enabled the audience at the Ronning Centre Consultation to see the church building and to hear him describe his situation.

Rev. Hergesheimer addressed the issues involved in a church opposing the law. Grant-

## to Russian Facing Deportation

ing refuge, he said, was a biblical imperative. He appealed to the Hebrew prophetic tradition, and to the Gospel which sometimes found right what was wrong according to the law. The church should challenge the state when what the state was doing was morally and ethically wrong.

For the congregation of First Lutheran Church, their offering of sanctuary to people simply wanting to be human meant that their seemingly insignificant church was now making a difference, and Rev. Hergesheimer recalled the Lutheran eucharistic prayer to do as we are able. Decisiveness was not the same thing as certainty; there was risk in making their community a safe place – but there was also joy.

—Nicholas Wickenden



*Reverend Richard Hergesheimer,  
Photo Calgary Herald*

### ❧ TWO RETREATS ❧

#### Jesus and Nonviolence

*Distinguished Visiting Fellow  
Simon Harak, S.J.*

Wednesday, 21 March

9:00 am–1:00 pm

Trinity Lutheran Church  
10014 – 81 Avenue, Edmonton

*Please RSVP for a light lunch by emailing  
[rebecca.warren@ualberta.ca](mailto:rebecca.warren@ualberta.ca)*

Co-sponsored by the Synod of Alberta  
and the Territories of the Evangelical Lutheran  
Church in Canada

#### Ecumenical Women's Retreat

*Distinguished Visiting Fellow  
Sister Lorelei Fuchs*

Thursday, 29 March

10 am–3:00 pm

Trinity Lutheran Church  
10014 – 81 Avenue, Edmonton

*Please RSVP by emailing  
[JHammond@caedm.ca](mailto:JHammond@caedm.ca)*

Sponsored by the Catholic  
Archdiocese of Edmonton  
Co-sponsored by the Ronning Centre

“Civil religion”, in John von Heyking’s terminology, is a key concept for use in understanding the nature and goals of a system of government.

Speaking at a Ronning Centre Seminar entitled “Canada and Civil Religion” at the King’s University College on November 25, Dr von Heyking acknowledged that not all scholars of the theory of government accepted the appropriateness of the term.

Yet there is always, he stated, a need to legitimate the practices of government in terms of ultimate principle. Political thinkers ranging from Plato to Kant and John Stuart Mill had accordingly seen a need for “religion” in the conduct of government.

Von Heyking’s main ideas about this kind of religion – presented with an abundance of examples and incidental comments, and elucidated at a number of points in answer to questions – may be summarized somewhat as follows.

While Plato, in his dialogue the *Laws*, had asserted that good citizens must believe in gods – who cared about human conduct and, being just, could not be bribed by prayer or sacrifice – in the form in which it came down to us from the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, “civil religion” was purely secular, based on an acceptance of the authority of reason. In Canada, this was the type of civil religion reflected in the Charter of Rights and

## John von Heyking Analyses

Freedoms adopted in 1982. It supplanted the constitutional tradition behind the British North America Act of 1867, which had assumed a civilizing and divine mission on the part of the British Empire.

The new civil religion was to be found not so much in the terms of the Charter itself as in the thinking that surrounded it. In true Enlightenment fashion, it envisaged Canada as a site of the progressive unfolding of human potential under conditions of freedom and equality.

As an agent in shaping human identity (a function Rousseau would have recognized), it would promote pluralism, tolerance, and cosmopolitanism, and draw people out of provincialism. It paid no attention to intermediary institutions between an autonomous individual and an all-powerful state, since the state was the embodiment of rationality.

The Charter relied for its application on the judges of the Supreme Court, who were presumed to understand the nature of law, to be non-partisan, and to decide issues rationally. While the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council had previously described Canadian constitutional law as a “living tree”, susceptible to change, but within fixed,

On October 14, 2011, a lively group gathered informally at the home of David Goa to discuss a perceived shift in the evangelical world and what new possibilities it might open up. Participants discussed the role of evangelicals in politics and how that has changed.

Typically in the past, evangelicals in politics identified with just a few moral issues painted with a black-white brush rather than leading the charge around other issues such as greed, treatment of the poor and newcomers. This selectivity of issues meant there was a lack of depth and intellectual discussion and simply a “yes” or “no” on whether a candidate

## Broadening Views in

supported that issue.

Now, there may be a shift toward being less dogmatic and a greater tolerance for pluralism. However, participants wondered whether that was more the case in Canada than the United States.

Together we explored whether some of this perceived shift might be generational in nature. We also noted that denominational loyalty may be less strong in youth than prior generations.

## Canadian “Civil Religion”

natural limits, the post-Charter Supreme Court acknowledged no such limits because there were differences of opinion about what those limits might be.

But though very broad statements were made about the functions of the Supreme Court, in practice, when the Court came to decide concrete cases, it acted more realistically, recognizing, for instance, the freedom of religious organizations to govern themselves. In so doing, it showed up a contrast between “closed” and “open” concepts of civil religion.

The basic ideas of “open” civil religion can be found in the writings of Alexis de Tocqueville, author of *Democracy in America*, and, in the Canadian setting, of Sir John George Bourinot, author of standard works not only on parliamentary procedure but on the rules of order for associations generally.

Where “closed” civil religion emphasizes rationally determinate goals to which the citizenry is expected to advance, “open” civil religion looks rather to the actual process of self-government, a process not always rational.

“Open” civil religion takes into account a variety of relationships, not just the one relationship between the individual and the state. Significantly, Bourinot considered the

foundation of Canadian “responsible” government to be local government. He also demonstrated his understanding of the importance of associations among private individuals, by providing a model for them.

“Open” civil religion recognizes limits beyond which the state should not act. It does not assume knowledge of ultimate human nature (like the Enlightenment) but finds a depth in moral persons that the state should not attempt to touch and cannot even know. Human beings will discover themselves in reciprocal action, working for the good of their fellows; it is the practice of self government that reveals human character.

Open civil religion is harder to understand than closed, von Heyking admitted, but central to its model of politics is friendship. Again this is an idea that goes back to Plato; John Locke sees “acquaintance”, and therefore friendship, as essential for effective government; even Thomas Hobbes (theorist of a supreme state) calls for “compliance” and “affability” in relationships among citizens. A common life among citizens, von Heyking concluded, always has a spiritual or religious dimension. Each action taken includes implicitly the aim of such action. In governing ourselves we are choosing what we shall become.

—Nicholas Wickenden

*John von Heyking is Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Lethbridge.*

## the Evangelical Church

With a new generation come new ideas. Now that the culture wars of the late 90s are a thing of the past, rather than the church explaining the importance of faith to culture, younger evangelicals are letting culture explain things to the church, such as the importance of social justice or climate change.

We discussed some movements such as the emergent church and new monasticism, the gathering of groups of committed believers around liturgy and history and ancient

rhythms of prayer and community. There is a growing hunger for authenticity, a desire to engage issues more deeply than the black-white, yes/no simplicity of evangelicals in the past.

The desire for change, for a deeper, more authentic faith that engages the world of pluralism and the complex issues of our society, is probably one of the strongest identifying features of this shift in the evangelical world, and one of the greatest reasons for hope.

The participants plan to meet together again to continue the conversation.

—Rebecca Warren

## Ronning Centre Cafés for Winter 2012

### At Edmonton

The winter Philosophers' Cafés in Edmonton will focus on the general theme of "What's justice got to do with it?"

*Epicurus: Justice was never anything per se, but a contract, regularly arising at some place or other in people's dealings with one another, over harming and not being harmed.*

*Aristotle: The just is the proportionate.*

When something is taken to be a matter of justice, we hold that considerations of fairness and equity are in play concerning what is to be done, and these may override the fulfilment of our various particular projects, no matter how desirable they may be. What do these considerations amount to? Why should we think they are important? In what sort of situations do they rightfully play a role in our deliberations? Can they under certain circumstances rightly be dismissed? After looking at some philosophical theories of justice, we will think about some particular areas where people often say justice matters but easily differ on what justice demands.

All sessions from 1:00 – 3:30 pm  
Steeps, The Urban Tea House  
11116 – Whyte (82<sup>nd</sup>) Avenue, Edmonton

Café dates and animateurs (for weekly topic and further details, see calendar on pages 15–16):

- 21 January: *Don Carmichael*
- 4 February: *Thomas Keating*
- 18 February: *Steve Bynum*
- 3 March: *Iain Benson*
- 24 March: *Simon Harak* and *Paul Viminitz*
- 31 March: *Jennifer Welchman*

### At Camrose

In the winter term we continue our conversations on spiritual pilgrimage for our Religion and Public Life Cafés in Camrose. The perspectives will vary enormously. Taken together, they will speak both to the gravity of the modern quest for a meaningful life and to the gifts and challenges that accompany both the spiritual life and religious institutions.

All sessions from 8:30 a.m.-10:00 a.m.  
Merchants Tea & Coffee House  
4857 - 50th Street, Camrose

#### A Philosophical Journey Out of Plato's Grip

*Animateur: Martin Tweedale*

Friday, 20 January

#### A Journey to Orthodoxy

*Animateur: Steve Bynum*

Friday, 17 February

#### A Rabbi's Journey

*Animateur: Rabbi Carmit Harari*

Friday, 2 March

#### A Journey to Nonviolence

*Animateur: Simon Harak, S.J.*

Friday, 23 March

#### A Contemplative Journey

*Animateur: Rajan Rathnavalu*

Friday, 30 March

#### A Journey to Presence

*Animateur: Sister Claire, OP*

Friday, 20 April

# Calendar of Coming Events - Winter 2012

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

## JANUARY

### **A Philosophical Journey Out of Plato's Grip**

*A Religion and Public Life Café animated by Martin Tweedale*

*(Dept of Philosophy, Emeritus, U. of Alberta)*

Friday, 20 January, 8:30–10:00 a.m.

Merchants, 4857 – 50<sup>th</sup> Street, Camrose

### **Farming Communities and Government Policy: Moving Beyond Ideology**

*Facing the Challenges in Rural Parishes and Communities*

Saturday, 21 January, 8:30–11:30 a.m.

Scandia Lutheran Church, Armena

### **Justice: Can We Have Too Much of It?**

*A Philosophers' Café animated by Don Carmichael*

*(Dept of Political Science, U. of Alberta)*

Saturday, 21 January, 1:00–3:30 p.m.

Steeps, 11116 – Whyte (82<sup>nd</sup>) Avenue, Edmonton

### **The Christian Responsibility to Muslims: Conversations Ancient and Modern**

*Ronning Centre Occasional Lecture Series by David Goa*

Tuesday, 24 January, 7:00 p.m.

Advent Lutheran Church, Calgary

Wednesday, 25 January, 7:00 p.m.

Trinity Lutheran Church, Edmonton

Thursday, 26 January, 7:00 p.m.

Messiah Lutheran Church, Camrose

### **Iran: Revolution, Reform, and Post-Reform**

*Ronning Centre Research Fellow Lecture by Mojtaba Mahdavi*

*(Dept of Political Science, U. of Alberta)*

Monday, 30 January, 7:00 p.m.

C014, Classroom Building, Augustana Campus

## FEBRUARY

### **Justice and the Responsibility to Protect**

*A Philosophers' Café animated by Thomas Keating*

*(Dept of Political Science, U. of Alberta)*

Saturday, 4 February, 1:00–3:30 p.m.

Steeps, 11116 – Whyte (82<sup>nd</sup>) Avenue, Edmonton

### **The Struggle of the Baha'i Community in Iran**

*Ronning Centre Research Fellow Lecture by Andy Knight*

*(Dept of Political Science, U. of Alberta)*

Monday, 6 February, 7:00 p.m.

C014, Classroom Building, Augustana Campus

### **The Christian Responsibility to Muslims: Thinking about the Prophet Muhammad**

*Ronning Centre Occasional Lecture Series by David Goa*

Wednesday, 8 February, 7:00 p.m.

Trinity Lutheran Church, Edmonton

Thursday, 9 February, 7:00 p.m.

Messiah Lutheran Church, Camrose

### **Obama and Me: Wearing the Mask, Wanting to Scream in the 21st Century**

*A Ronning Centre Lecture with Steve Bynum*

*(Senior Producer, Chicago Public Radio)*

Thursday, 16 February, 3:30 p.m.

King's University College, Edmonton

### **A Journey to Orthodoxy**

*A Religion and Public Life Café animated by Steve Bynum*

*(Senior Producer, Chicago Public Radio)*

Friday, 17 February, 8:30–10:00 a.m.

Merchants, 4857 – 50<sup>th</sup> Street, Camrose

### **Justice and the Media**

*A Philosophers' Café animated by Steve Bynum*

*(Senior Producer, Chicago Public Radio)*

Saturday, 18 February, 1:00–3:30 p.m.

Steeps, 11116 – Whyte (82<sup>nd</sup>) Avenue, Edmonton

### **Resilience with Brian Rozmahel**

*Facing the Challenges in Rural Parishes and Communities*

Thursday, 23 February, 7:00–9:30 p.m.

New Norway Community Hall

### **The Christian Responsibility to Muslims: Thinking about the Prophet Muhammad**

*Ronning Centre Occasional Lecture Series by David Goa*

Tuesday, 28 February, 7:00 p.m.

Advent Lutheran Church, Calgary

### **Faith, Farming, and Oil**

*Facing the Challenges in Rural Parishes and Communities*

Wednesday, 29 February, 7:30–9:00 p.m.

St. Peter's Lutheran Church, Millet

## MARCH

### **A Rabbi's Journey**

*A Religion and Public Life Café animated by*

*Rabbi Carmit Harari (Temple Beth Ora)*

Friday, 2 March, 8:30–10:00 a.m.

Merchants, 4857 – 50<sup>th</sup> Street, Camrose

# Calendar of Coming Events - Winter 2012

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

## Justice and Religious Freedom

*A Philosophers' Café animated by Iain Benson*  
(Senior Associate Counsel, Miller Thomson LLP)  
Saturday, 3 March, 1:00–3:30 p.m.  
Steeps, 11116 – Whyte (82<sup>nd</sup>) Avenue, Edmonton

## State-Imposed Ethics and Religious Teaching

*A Ronning Centre Research Fellow Lecture with Iain Benson*  
(Senior Associate Counsel, Miller Thomson LLP)  
Monday, 5 March, 7:00 p.m.  
C014, Classroom Building, Augustana Campus  
Tuesday, 6 March, 11 a.m.  
King's University College, Edmonton

## Submission and the American Presidency: Tracing the Prehistory of Michele Bachmann and Sarah Palin

*A Religion and Public Life Lecture by Emily Johnson*  
(Graduate Student, Yale University)  
Monday, 12 March, 7:00 p.m.  
C014, Classroom Building, Augustana Campus

## How Can We Read the Bible in Life-Giving Ways in Rural Contexts? with David J. Goa

*Facing the Challenges in Rural Parishes and Communities*  
Thursday, 15 March, 7:00 p.m. at the home of  
Will and Marion Pattison

## Ahmadiyya Muslims: History, Beliefs & Persecution

*A Religion and Public Life Consultation by Mohyuddin Mirza*  
(Member of the Edmonton Ahmadiyya Community)  
Monday, 19 March, 7:00 p.m.  
C014, Classroom Building, Augustana Campus

## Jesus and Nonviolence

*Distinguished Visiting Fellow Simon Harak, S.J.*  
Half-Day Retreat  
Wednesday, 21 March, 9:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m.  
Trinity Lutheran Church, Edmonton  
*A light lunch will be served. Please RSVP.*

## Jesus and Nonviolence

*Distinguished Visiting Fellow Simon Harak, S.J.*  
Wednesday, 21 March, 7:00 p.m.  
King's University College, Edmonton  
*Co-sponsored with the King's Micah Centre.*

## Religious Perspectives on War Profiteering

*Distinguished Visiting Fellow Simon Harak, S.J.*  
Thursday, 22 March, 3:45 p.m.–4:45 p.m.  
C014, Classroom Building, Augustana Campus

## A Journey to Nonviolence

*A Religion and Public Life Café animated by Simon Harak, S.J.*  
Friday, 23 March, 8:30–10:00 a.m.  
Merchants, 4857 – 50<sup>th</sup> Street, Camrose

## Justice and War

*A Philosophers' Café animated by Simon Harak, S.J. and Paul Viminiz*  
(Dept of Philosophy, U. of Lethbridge)  
Saturday, 24 March, 1:00–3:30 p.m.  
Steeps, 11116 – Whyte (82<sup>nd</sup>) Avenue, Edmonton

## Aging and Revitalization

*Facing the Challenges in Rural Parishes and Communities*  
Saturday, 24 March, 8:30–11:30 a.m.  
Bawlf Lutheran Church

## Lectures on Ecumenism

*Ronning Centre Distinguished Visiting Fellow*  
Sister Lorelei Fuchs  
Monday, 26 March, 7:00 p.m., Location TBA  
Tuesday, 27 March, 7:00 p.m., Location TBA  
Wednesday, 28 March, 7:00 p.m.  
Trinity Lutheran Church, Edmonton  
Thursday, 29 March, 7:00 p.m., Location TBA  
*Co-sponsored with the Catholic Archdiocese of Edmonton.*

## Ecumenical Women's Retreat

*Ronning Centre Distinguished Visiting Fellow*  
Sister Lorelei Fuchs  
Thursday, 29 March, 10 a.m.–3:00 p.m.  
Trinity Lutheran Church, Edmonton

## A Contemplative Journey

*A Religion and Public Life Café animated by Rajan Rathnavalu (Student, Augustana)*  
Friday, 30 March, 8:30–10:00 a.m.  
Merchants, 4857 – 50<sup>th</sup> Street, Camrose

## Justice and Future Generations

*A Philosophers' Café animated by Jennifer Welchman*  
(Dept. of Philosophy, Univ. of Alberta)  
Saturday, 31 March, 1:00–3:30 p.m.  
Steeps, The Urban Tea House  
11116 – Whyte (82<sup>nd</sup>) Avenue, Edmonton

## APRIL

## A Journey to Presence

*A Religion and Public Life Café animated by Sister Claire, OP*  
Friday, 20 April, 8:30–10:00 a.m.  
Merchants Tea & Coffee House  
4857 – 50<sup>th</sup> Street, Camrose



## 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.*

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*We have endeavoured to make this list as accurate as possible.*

*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**

### 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
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#### MONTHLY GIFT:

- ☐ \$ 50/month
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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  
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## 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.

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 Memorial Endowment;
- cafés, study circles, seminars, consultations and conferences;
- ongoing research and Ronning Centre publications.

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

