



Chester Ronning Centre
for the Study of Religion and Public Life

Annual Report

July 1, 2017 – June 30, 2018

Prepared by:

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and
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Contents

Message from the Director – 3

Centre News and Key Initiatives – 4

Programming Highlights – 7

Programming Details and Statistics – 10

Select Grants and Special Project Funding – 13

Finances – 13

Publications and Presentations – 14



Message from the Director

This has been an academic year of major milestones and new beginnings at the Chester Ronning Centre, of drawing on the past and looking to the future. In my first year as Director, we commemorated the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, examining the tradition of reform and situating Luther's 95 Theses within a wider view of ongoing Christian history. We also talked extensively about the concept of "peace," especially as it relates to the long and intertwined histories of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. As prominent sociologist and scholar of religion Atalia Omer reminded us, peace cannot simply be made—peace must be built. In other words, to attain peace, past conflicts must cease, of course, but peoples in conflict must also reframe (or reform, as it were) the ideological, social, and political structures in which and by which they live their lives, in order to bring about peace that lasts well into the days and years ahead. True peace is sustaining peace. It marks the end of conflict but also builds capacity for imagining and living new futures with each other.

We began the year, at the Augustana Alumni Weekend in September, reflecting on the legacy of Chester Ronning himself and on the mission of this Centre that bears his name. Ronning is famous for his diplomatic work, which took him (back) to China and to India, to Norway and to Vietnam, but he was first and foremost an educator—a grade-school teacher and college principal devoted to ideals of inclusive and democratic education. For Ronning, democracy was not only a form of government, but a way of social life, and education was the foundation of such life. He was a lifelong learner who recognized that there are many sides to a story, and that there is always "still so much to learn." Thus, the Centre aims to engage religion and its import in the public sphere with a critical stance, whether in relation to the history of the Reformation, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, or Canadian Supreme Court cases, to cite a few examples. Toward the end of the year, we hosted a remarkable event at Augustana that demonstrated that stance, speaking to the importance of democracy and education alike. NSA whistle-blower Edward Snowden addressed an audience of more than 1,500 persons, declaring that, in today's age, as economic exploitation "ravages every corner of the earth," critical thinking and the liberal arts "have never mattered more." We need, he said, "to teach people not just facts but how to think ... not just how to structure experiments but how to structure societies." Religious communities and concerns are, without doubt, central to social structures and issues around the globe. The Chester Ronning Centre, with its focus on interdisciplinary research, critical teaching, and ethical reflection, is positioned well to be a main venue for crucial conversations about religion and public life in our present day, and in the days to come.



Dr. Ian D. Wilson

Director of the Chester Ronning Centre

Centre News and Key Initiatives

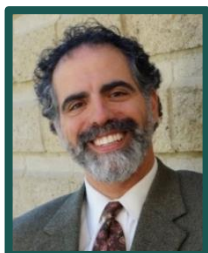
Advisory Committee

The Chester Ronning Centre operates with the support of an active advisory committee. Members are invited by the Dean of the Faculty in consultation with the Director of the Centre. One new member, Gail Stolee, was appointed this year. The advisory committee's mandate is to support the work of the Centre and its Director, provide advice and community feedback, and assist in fundraising. Appointments are for a three-year term, renewable.

Current Advisory Committee Members:



Brandon Alakas, Ph.D. – Augustana Faculty (English) – Dr. Alakas teaches courses on classical and medieval literature. His long-standing interest in Latin literature in particular is fueled by his research on monastic culture. He has published on Latin historiography but his current work examines devotional literature written immediately before the English Reformation.



Rabbi Kliel Rose – Beth Shalom Synagogue, Edmonton – Rabbi Rose was born in Jerusalem to a rabbinical family and grew up in Winnipeg, Canada. Kliel earned a BA in Judaic studies from Gratz College, in Philadelphia, after which he studied at the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS). As a student, Kliel served a number of congregations in New York and one community in London, England, under the auspices of Masorati Olami. He was ordained in 2004.



Daniel Sims, Ph.D. – Augustana Faculty (History/Indigenous Studies) – A member of the Tsay Keh Dene First Nation, Dr. Sims currently teaches History and Indigenous Studies at Augustana. Prior to joining the faculty at Augustana, he taught as a sessional at the University's North Campus in History and Native Studies. His research primarily focuses on native-newcomer relations in Western Canada, with a particular emphasis on the law, environment, and economy.



Gail Stolee is a graduate of the University of Alberta in Arts, Education and Library Science. She worked for the Edmonton Public School Board, for Camrose Lutheran College, where she was also a member of the Board of Regents, and for Augustana University College. Her community involvements include Rotary, Sahakarini (a local international development NGO), the Nordlys Film and Arts Festival, and Messiah Lutheran Church.



Nakita Valerio – Alberta Muslim Public Affairs Council – Nakita Valerio is an academic, activist and writer. She has completed graduate studies in History and Islamic-Jewish Studies at the University of Alberta, where she received a number of awards and fellowships. Nakita is the co-founder of Bassma Primary School in El Attaouia, Morocco, and the Director of Public Policy with the Alberta Muslim Public Affairs Council.



Joseph Wiebe, Ph.D. – Augustana Faculty (Religious Studies) – Dr. Wiebe teaches Religion and Ecology with an interest in ethics, imagination, and community. Wiebe’s ongoing research is on the ways land shaped Mennonite and Métis identities within different religious and political contexts. His first book, *The Place of Imagination* was recently published by Baylor University Press (2017).



Rev. Markus Wilhelm – Glory Lutheran Church, Sherwood Park – Rev. Wilhelm attended Camrose Lutheran College, has studied in Germany and served Lutheran congregations in British Columbia and in Calgary, Edmonton, and Sherwood Park, Alberta.

Community Service Learning (CSL)

We continue to work closely with Augustana’s CSL program. This year, through an Environmental Studies/Religion and Ecology course, 17 students completed a CSL placement with the Chester Ronning Centre. Working alongside Diane McGall (the Centre’s Administrative Assistant) and Raj Rathnavalu (Spirit of the Land Program Coordinator), the students helped organize the sixth annual Spirit of the Land Conference, contributing to practical aspects of the conference, including tech support, space set-up, and registration. More importantly, they facilitated round table discussions with community members, connecting their Augustana course content with visiting speakers’ presentations and local community interests.

Chester Ronning Lecture on Religion and Diplomacy

The second annual Chester Ronning Lecture on Religion and Diplomacy took place in November. This annual lecture, made possible by the Distinguished Visiting Fellows Endowment, focuses on

contemporary issues in religion and international politics, honouring Chester Ronning's diplomatic career and its legacy. This year's lecturer was Dr. Atalia Omer, Associate Professor of Religion, Conflict, and Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame. Dr. Omer's presentation examined how the emergence of anti-occupation Jewish social movements in the U.S. (and globally) has influenced narratives about Israel and Palestine. She discussed how various stakeholders participate in controlling, policing, and subverting such narratives. Her lecture outlined ethnographic research that will appear in her forthcoming book *Days of Awe: Reimagining Jewishness in Solidarity with Palestinians* (University of Chicago Press). In addition, Dr. Omer visited Director Ian Wilson's "Theories of Religion" class, conducting a lively conversation with students about the contemporary study of religion in universities.

International Fellows Program and Postdoctoral Fellow

An initiative begun by former Director David Goa, and made possible by the Wendy Cassady Memorial Fund, the International Fellows Program aims to connect public intellectuals with students, faculty, and community members on local, national, and global levels. Every other year, the Centre will bring nationally and internationally recognized intellectuals to the Augustana Campus of the University of Alberta for a conference, to engage students, faculty, and the general public. These guests will participate in outreach activities such as conducting lectures, seminars, and workshops; and will prepare op-ed and briefing papers on current issues pertinent to the intersection of religion and public life. Their activities will engage the following communities:

- public and private universities (Canadian and international)
- various religious communities
- civic/governmental agencies and organizations
- journalists and other members of the media

Beginning in July 2018, the Centre will employ a Postdoctoral Fellow to help facilitate the International Fellows program. The Fellow's primary task will be to organize the biennial conference and to work toward publishing and disseminating research that emerges from the conference. In addition, the Postdoc will work closely with the Centre's staff to organize public lectures, workshops, student discussion forums, and similar events that will connect and engage interested persons from various arenas in the public sphere. The International Fellows, too, will help strengthen and broaden the impact of the Centre's other initiatives, including our Distinguished Visiting Fellows program and online publication series. Rather than being a stand-alone initiative, the International Fellows will be thoroughly integrated into the Centre's research and programming agendas, expanding the Centre's influence provincially, nationally, and internationally.

Programming Highlights

Video recordings of Centre events can be viewed on our YouTube channel:

www.youtube.com/user/ronningcentre

“Justice for (W)all? Judicial Interference in Religious Decisions”

Patrick Hart addressed the recent case *Wall v Judicial Committee of the Highwood Congregation of Jehovah’s Witnesses*. In this case, the Supreme Court was tasked with answering an important question: when is judicial interference in religious affairs warranted? Mr. Hart is a Ph.D. candidate in Religious Studies at the University of Alberta, and is a civil litigation lawyer at Jackie Handerek & Forester, in Leduc, Alberta.

“Your Faith on Feminism: Intersectional feminist theology responds to the climate of fear”

Dr. Aruna Gnanadason and Ani Zonneveld discussed what it means to be a feminist from the perspectives of their own religious traditions. Dr. Gnanadason served the World Council of Churches for twenty years, in various leadership roles; and Ani Zonneveld is founder and president of *Muslims for Progressive Values*, a faith-based, grassroots, international human rights organization.



Ani Zonneveld (left) and Aruna Gnanadason (right)
Fall 2017

“Two Friends, Two Faiths: Peace Resources in Islam and Christianity”

As part of a series of dialogues organized by A Common Word Alberta, Dr. Chris Huebner and Dr. Mohammad Ali Shomali talked about concepts of peace in Islam and Christianity. Dr. Huebner is Associate Professor of Theology and Philosophy at the Canadian Mennonite University, and Dr. Shomali is founding Director of the International Institute for Islamic Studies in Qum, Iran.

“Prosperity Gospels in the Age of Trump”

In this talk, which was cosponsored by the Augustana Dean’s Office, Dr. Kate Bowler explored the history of the prosperity gospel and its unlikely rise into a global and media-dominant movement, most outrageously expressed in the presidency of a reality show star. Dr. Bowler is Assistant Professor of the History of Christianity in North America at Duke Divinity School.

“*Ecclesia semper reformanda est:* The Reformation and the Tradition of Reform”

On October 31, 2017—the 500th anniversary of Luther’s 95 Theses—Dr. Geoff Dipple and Dr. Brandon Alakas reflected on the tradition of reform within Christianity. Dr. Dipple is Professor of History and Chair of Social Sciences at the Augustana Campus; and Dr. Alakas is a member of the Centre’s Advisory Committee and Assistant Professor of English at the Augustana Campus.

2018 Distinguished Visiting Fellow (supported by the Distinguished Visiting Fellows Endowment)

Dr. Christine Mitchell, our 2018 Distinguished Visiting Fellow, addressed the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action, and discussed how certain Canadian laws and institutions are based on a colonial desire to eradicate Indigenous peoples from the land. Dr. Mitchell said we can trace this desire for Indigenous erasure, in part, back to biblical conquest narratives. In her lectures she explored possibilities for repudiating these texts while still respecting a biblical heritage. Dr. Mitchell is Professor of Hebrew Scriptures at St. Andrew’s College, University of Saskatchewan.

The Sixth Annual Spirit of the Land Conference: “Next Generation Thinking: Hopeful Economics for the 21st Century”

This year, the conference explored themes of social enterprise and sustainable land design. Key note speakers included: Shaun Loney, author of *An Army of Problem Solvers: Reconciliation and the Solutions Economy*; Hannah Cree, co-founder of Common Good, a movement aimed at ending poverty through social enterprise; Marc Soberano, founder of Building Up, a movement that combines social innovation with clean energy to train and employ people facing barriers such as poverty or a criminal record; and Sylvia McAdam, one of the four founders of the Idle No More movement. Rob Avis, owner of Verge Permaculture, a globally-recognized and award-winning design, consulting and education company, also spoke and led a workshop.

“The Future of Faith-Based Education in Alberta”

In this talk, Dr. Clark Banack discussed the concept of state-funded faith-based schools within liberal democracies. The last few years have witnessed significant public debate with respect to Alberta’s subsidizing religious schools. Dr. Banack addressed “how we got here,” before delving into some recent and ongoing political and legal developments that have the potential to fundamentally alter Alberta’s approach to faith-based education. Dr. Banack is Adjunct Professor of Political Studies, as well as Research Associate with the Alberta Centre for Sustainable Rural Communities and with the Chester Ronning Centre, at University of Alberta, Augustana Campus.

“An Evening with Edward Snowden on Security, Public Life, and Research” (made possible by the Distinguished Visiting Fellows Endowment)



*Edward Snowden addresses 1,500 people via live-stream
Winter 2018*

Via live-stream, NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden discussed perspectives on security, public life, and research. How we perceive religious practitioners and the way political policies intentionally target their communities influences our opinion on the appropriate uses and limits of mass surveillance. Is it possible in an age of mass surveillance to have a public life that is democratic, safe, and in which all people have freedoms of religious expression without prejudice?

“Responding to Snowden: The Religious Self in light of Technology and Public Policy”

Following Edward Snowden’s live-stream talk, a panel of experts addressed issues surrounding tech culture and the question of what is (or should be) public, and what should be private. In particular, they focused on implications of these matters for religious communities in our contemporary society. Panelists included: Dr. Daniel Sims, Assistant Professor of History and Indigenous Studies, University of Alberta, Augustana Campus; Dr. Tara Milbrandt, Associate Professor of Sociology, University of Alberta, Augustana Campus; Housseem Ben Lazreg, Director of External Affairs, Alberta Muslim Public Affairs Council; and Dr. Kevin Haggerty, Professor of Criminology and Sociology, University of Alberta, North Campus. The panel was organized by Dr. Michelle Bakker, a research associate of the Chester Ronning Centre.

Programming Details and Statistics

Total Events: 16

Total Attendance: 2,500

Distinguished Visiting Fellow Lectures

“Does the Bible justify genocide? If so, do we have to listen?”

Dr. Christine Mitchell – St. Andrew’s College, University of Saskatchewan

Feb 27, 2018

40 attendees

“What to do with all these Canaanites? A settler-Canadian reflection on biblical conquest stories”

Dr. Christine Mitchell – St. Andrew’s College, University of Saskatchewan

Feb 28, 2018

40 attendees

Chester Ronning Lecture on Religion and Diplomacy (2nd Annual) – supported by the Distinguished Visiting Fellows Endowment

“From Zion to New York City: Religion, Violence, and the Practice and Theory of Peacebuilding”

Dr. Atalia Omer – University of Notre Dame

Nov 28, 2017

60 attendees

Spirit of the Land Conference (6th Annual)

“Next Generation Thinking: Hopeful Economics for the 21st Century”

Nov 3-5, 2017

130 attendees

Dialogues and Panel Discussions

“Justice for (W)all?: Judicial Interference in Religious Decisions”

Dialogue with Patrick Hart – cosponsored by the Augustana Alumni Office

Sept 14, 2017

50 attendees

“Chester Ronning’s Mission, Then and Now”

Dialogue with Dr. Ian D. Wilson – cosponsored by the Augustana Alumni Office

Sept 24, 2017

40 attendees

“Your Faith on Feminism: Intersectional feminist theology responds to the climate of fear”

Dialogue with Dr. Aruna Gnanadason and Ani Zonneveld

Oct 20, 2017

60 attendees

“Luther: Rebel, Genius, Liberator?”

Film screening and panel discussion with Pastor Dean Rostad, Rev. Markus Wilhelm, Rev. Dr. Deborah Ann Taylor, and Rev. Jacques Vaillancourt – cosponsored by the Augustana Alumni Office

Oct 24, 2017

100 attendees

“Prosperity Gospels in the Age of Trump”

Dialogue with Dr. Kate Bowler – cosponsored by the Augustana Dean’s Office

Oct 27, 2017

100 attendees

“Two Friends, Two Faiths: Peace Resources in Islam and Christianity”

Dialogue with Dr. Chris Huebner and Dr. Mohammad Ali Shomali – cosponsored by A Common Word Alberta

Oct 30, 2017

60 attendees

“*Ecclesia semper reformanda est*: The Reformation and the Tradition of the Reform”

Dialogue with Dr. Geoff Dipple and Dr. Brandon Alakas – cosponsored by the Augustana Alumni Office

Oct 31, 2017

70 attendees

“Being Fruitful and Multiplying: Creation Museums as Symbolic Spaces”

Dialogue with Dr. Jim Linville

Feb 21, 2018

40 attendees

“The Future of Faith-Based Education in Alberta”

Dialogue with Dr. Clark Banack – cosponsored by the Augustana Alumni Office

Mar 14, 2018
110 attendees

“An Evening with Edward Snowden on Security, Public Life, and Research”

Live-stream discussion with Edward Snowden – cosponsored by the Kule Institute for Advanced Study, and the Office of the Vice-Provost & Associate Vice-President (Information Services & Technology)

Mar 27, 2018

1,500 attendees (between the two live-stream locations in Camrose and Edmonton)

“Responding to Snowden: The Religious Self in Light of Technology and Public Policy”

Panel discussion with Dr. Daniel Sims, Dr. Tara Milbrandt, Housseem Ben Lazreg, and Dr. Kevin Haggerty

Mar 28, 2018

40 attendees

“Land Values and Living Values: Exploring the impacts of land ownership trends on rural communities and environments”

Dialogue with Dr. Nettie Wiebe – cosponsored by the Office of the Chancellor

June 4, 2018

60 attendees



Select Grants and Special Project Funding

- \$70,000 – Gift from the Wendy Cassady Memorial Foundation, to support the International Fellows Program
- \$5,000 – Shell Enhanced Learning Fund, to support student involvement with the sixth annual Spirit of the Land Conference (grant writer and student volunteer Annika Olesen)
- \$2,880 – University of Alberta Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Institutional Grant, to support research and programming in collaboration with the Camrose & District Centennial Museum (Research Assistant Gavin Wilkes)
- \$2,880 – University of Alberta Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Institutional Grant, to support Director Ian D. Wilson’s research concerning interpretations of prophetic literature and history (Research Assistant Dariya Veenstra)
- \$2,000 – Kule Institute for Advanced Study Dialogue Grant, University of Alberta, to support research and programming in collaboration with the Alberta Centre for Sustainable Rural Communities (collaborators Lars Hallstrom and Clark Banack)

Finances (as of 2018 Fiscal Year-End)

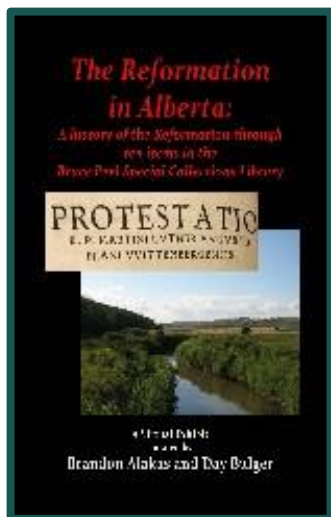
Current Funds	
<i>Centre Annual Fund</i>	\$27,719
<i>Spirit of the Land Program Funds</i>	\$21,035
<i>International Fellows Fund</i> (supported by the Wendy Cassady Memorial Foundation)	\$123,044
Endowment Balances	
<i>Distinguished Visiting Fellows Endowment</i>	\$703,194
<i>Hendrickson Memorial Endowment</i>	\$114,729
<i>Yang Endowment</i>	\$13,513

Publications and Presentations

This year, we continued moving the Centre's publications to an electronic, online and open access format. Anyone with internet access can now download publications of our visiting scholars' lectures and essays, free of charge, at the following site:

<https://www.ualberta.ca/augustana/research/centres/crc/publications>

2017-18 Centre Publications



The Reformation in Alberta: A History of the Reformation through Ten Items in the Bruce Peel Special Collections Library

A virtual exhibit curated by Dr. Brandon Alakas, Augustana professor and member of the Centre's Advisory Committee; and Day Bulger, Augustana student and research assistant

In marking the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, Brandon and Day gathered a collection of ten seminal works housed at the Bruce Peel Special Collections Library at the University of Alberta. Each of these books has played an important role in the history of the Reformation. By thinking about them individually, we can more easily recognize the multiple competing voices that contributed to this pan-national debate about belief, salvation, and the role of the institutional church. These books also remind us of the critical role new communications technologies played in sharing emerging ideas and challenging old orthodoxies. As the works in this exhibit demonstrate, print played a fundamental part in driving this international debate.

2017-18 Staff Publications

Ian D. Wilson (Director)

2017. "Isaiah 1-12: Presentation of a (Davidic?) Politics." Pp. 50-71 in *Tzedek, Tzedek Tirdof: Poetry, Prophecy, and Justice in Hebrew Scripture*, ed. Andrew Gow and Peter Sabo (Brill).

2017. Review of *My People as Your People: A Textual and Archaeological Analysis of the Reign of Jehoshaphat*, by Chris McKinny. *Journal of Theological Studies* 68, pp. 250-53.

2017. Reflection on Reformation 500 Programming at Augustana, with Geoff Dipple and Brandon Alakas. *Sixteenth Century Journal* 48, p. 1054.

2017. "Religious Neutrality?" *The Camrose Booster* (Dec 12), Second Thought, p. 18.

Clark Banack (Senior Research Associate)

2017. "How Bill 24 may hurt the NDP and help Jason Kenney." *Edmonton Journal* (Nov 10).

Forthcoming. "Women and Politics in Alberta under Alison Redford." In *Reaching the Top: Women as Provincial and Territorial Leaders in Canada*, ed. Sylvia Bashevkin (UBC Press).

2017-18 Staff Presentations

Ian D. Wilson (Director)

2017. "Chester Ronning's Mission: Then and Now." Augustana Alumni Weekend, University of Alberta. September 24.

2018. "Community Memory and Imagination: What Saith the Scriptures?" St. Joseph's College, University of Alberta. March 15.

2018. "What's in a Name? Language and the Philosophy of American Political Discourse," with Janet Wesselius. Augustana Humanities Café, University of Alberta. March 23.

2018. "Oil and Water? The Intersection of Religion and Public Life." Southminster-Steinhauer United Church, Edmonton. April 11.

2018. "My Prophet Ate My Homework or: Ezekiel as Prophetic Archive." Canadian Society of Biblical Studies Annual Meeting. University of Regina. May 26.

Clark Banack (Senior Research Associate)

2017. "State Support for Religious Schools across the Canadian Provinces." European Consortium of Political Research Annual Conference. Oslo, Norway. September.

2018. "The Future of Faith-Based Education in Alberta." Chester Ronning Centre Dialogue / Augustana Lunch and Learn. University of Alberta. March 14.