



Chester Ronning Centre  
for the Study of Religion and Public Life

## Annual Report

July 1, 2019 – June 30, 2020



Dr. Darren Dochuk, "God and Black Gold," Fall 2019

**Prepared by:**

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(Director)

and

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Administrative Assistant)



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Dr. Ingrid Mattson, “Engaging with the Living Tradition of Islam,” Winter 2020

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## Note from the Director

What to say in 2020? No matter how one looks at it, this will be a year noted in history. The beginning of a new decade; the emergence of a novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic; mass protests over social, economic, and environmental injustices; democracy in North America being tested perhaps like never before—we have seen all of that and more in 2020.

In early March of this year, the University of Alberta closed its campuses due to the COVID-19 pandemic. From March to May, the University forged ahead with its



Dr. Ian D. Wilson, Director

academic programs, but all courses were delivered online. Students left University housing and returned to their families' homes, and staff were required to work remotely. (And campuses remain basically closed as I write this note during the Fall 2020 term, with only limited resources available for students on site, and very few University staff working in their offices and labs.) In this situation, we were required to cancel the balance of the Centre's public programming for the 2019–20 academic year.

It was fitting, though, that those events which we were able to host in 2019–20, before the pandemic hit, touched on the importance of the historical past and the impacts of that past on our present lives. The historical foci of our programming in 2019 and early 2020 now seem especially prominent, given the historical weight that this year will likely carry as we move forward in time. In Fall of 2019, for example, we learned from Dr. Darren Dochuk (University of Notre Dame) that religion, particularly evangelical Christianity, played an outsized—but often unrecognized—role in the rise of the twentieth-century oil economy, and that it continues to play a vital role in that economy today. And in January 2020 we learned from Dr. Ingrid Mattson (Huron University College, Western University, Ontario) how the modern academy's negative understanding of Islam has impacted Western society, but also how Islam and the academy might work together today and in the future, as partners with a common purpose rather than as rivals at odds. As you'll see in the following report, all of this year's guests and events, in one way or another, touched on how key moments in the past led us to where we are, and how we might move forward from the positions in which we find ourselves.

In the midst of this trying year, we also had to say goodbye to Diane McGall, the Centre's Administrative Assistant and Program Coordinator. In February, she took a position at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, where she is now Administrative and Project Coordinator in the

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Office of the Vice-Provost and Dean of Student Affairs. Diane and I started our work at the Centre at nearly the same time, back in 2016. We had to learn our new positions simultaneously, which often presented challenges, but which eventually led to the formation of a truly strong team. Her contributions were essential to the Centre's successes during the last four years, and they have built a solid foundation for our continuing work. I'm very grateful for her time at the University of Alberta, and I was sad to see her leave the Centre. But, ultimately, I'm very happy for Diane. She grew up in Ontario and is a Queen's alum. With the move, she's now just a short drive away from her parents, siblings, and extended family. It was a wonderful opportunity for her.

After Diane's departure, it was something of a miracle that we were able to fill her position quickly and successfully just as the pandemic hit and campuses closed. In the Spring, Kim Wiebe joined the Centre as its new Program Coordinator and Administrative Assistant. Kim has a wealth of experience in administrative support, communications, and marketing, including positions at Duke University, McMaster University, and Canadian Mennonite University. Before joining the

Centre, Kim worked at the Augustana Campus as the Program Support Specialist with the Faculty of Nursing, and before that as an Executive Assistant in the Augustana Dean's Office. I'm thrilled to have Kim with us at the Centre. Her strengths have enabled us to carry on with our work, basically without interruption in the face of 2020's challenges.



University of Alberta – Augustana Campus

So, in the midst of great flux and with another new year on the horizon, we look forward to things ahead. But how will we move on from this year? As we

move forward, and look back, what historical insights might we gain from 2020? It is difficult to say in the moment—history has a way of not revealing its lessons for some time. But in any case, with no real end to the pandemic in sight, we are working to revise the way we approach public programming at the University, to retool our educational models, and at the Chester Ronning Centre to facilitate ongoing research and constructive dialogue in relation to religion and the public sphere. I thank you for your continued support in this difficult time, and I look forward to the day when we can gather together in person again, to learn with and from one another, hopefully soon.

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## Advisory Committee

The Chester Ronning Centre operates with the support of an active advisory committee. The 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. Members are invited by the Dean of the Faculty in consultation with the Director of the Centre. This year, we said goodbye to Dr. Daniel Sims, member of the committee since 2017, who took a new position as Associate Professor and Chair of First Nations Studies at the University of Northern British Columbia. Congratulations to Dr. Sims on his new job!

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.



Paul L. Gareau, Ph.D. – Faculty of Native Studies – Dr. Gareau is Métis and French-Canadian from Bellevue near Batoche, Saskatchewan. He is a former Research Fellow for the Rupertsland Centre for Métis Research at the UofA, and currently he serves as President of the Canadian Society for the Study of Religion. His research is grounded in critical theory and methodology relating to the social, political, and cultural impacts of religion on identity formation. His academic publications and community research projects explore the Métis experiences of religion and Métis peoplehood, the influence of Catholicism on early and later modern identity, the legacy of colonial discourses on Indigenous and ethnocultural minorities, and the experiences of rural spaces.



Gail Stolee is a Camrosian with long standing personal and professional ties to Augustana. She is a member of Messiah Lutheran Church and a community volunteer with an interest in social justice.



Nakita Valerio is an award-winning writer, academic, and community organizer. She completed graduate studies and work as a research assistant in History and Islamic-Jewish Studies at the University of Alberta in 2017, as well as a research fellowship on Islamophobia and anti-Semitism for the Tessellate Institute in 2018. She is currently working on a national study of the challenges facing Muslim youth in Canada as a research fellow with the Institute for Religious and Socio-Political Studies.



Joseph Wiebe, Ph.D. – Augustana Faculty (Religious Studies) – Dr. Wiebe teaches Religion and Ecology with an interest in ethics, imagination, and community. His ongoing research interest is on the influence of settler colonialism on environmental imagination and religious identity. His first book, *The Place of Imagination* was 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.

## Centre News and Key Initiatives

### Successful Augustana Partnerships

This year, the Centre partnered with faculty and staff from several different departments at the Augustana Campus and across the University. It was our pleasure to work with the Augustana Department of Fine Arts & Humanities, Augustana Indigenous Student Services Office, Augustana Students Association, and Jeanne & Peter Lougheed Performing Arts Centre, to present a variety of engaging, public events for the community in Camrose. Highlights included:

#### *Dr. Tom DuBois (Fall 2019)*

“Sacrality and the Landscape in the Nordic Middle Ages: Indigenous Studies Perspectives” (cohosted with Dr. Ingrid Urberg and the Augustana Department of Fine Arts & Humanities, with support from the Scandinavian Trade and Cultural Society Endowment).

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Dr. DuBois, a folklorist from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, suggested that we draw on Indigenous understandings of sacrality in North America to help contextualize and explain religious conflicts over sacred spaces that we find in Old Norse texts. Indigenous ideas of the sacred can give us a basis for understanding the Old Norse materials. The Old Norse, too, can help us understand that notions of sacred landscape are very ancient and were once widespread in the European context. These beliefs were rather exceptionally and problematically abandoned and suppressed in European culture as a result of the particular ways Christianity was formulated and spread in Europe's medieval era.



Dr. DuBois

### *Dr. Ingrid Mattson (Winter 2020)*

“Engaging with the Living Tradition of Islam” (cohosted with the UAlberta Muslim Students Association [North Campus], with support from the Jeanne & Peter Lougheed Performing Arts Centre).



Dr. Mattson

Dr. Ingrid Mattson (Huron University College, Western University, Ontario) visited the Augustana Campus in January. For many centuries in the Western academy, Muslims and their faith have been objects of study. Islam was understood to be a religious or civilizational rival, or as an unenlightened tradition that would eventually succumb to and be absorbed into Western modernity. But then the objects of study came to life. In her lecture, Dr. Mattson discussed how the traditional Western, academic study of Islam and the living tradition of Islam can be mutually enriching and can flourish together. This enriching educational relationship, she argued, is ultimately beneficial for our society today.

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## *Adrian Stimson (Winter 2020)*

“The Shaman Exterminator: HUBRIS,” artist talk and performance (cohosted with Dr. Erin Sutherland, with support from the Department of Fine Arts & Humanities, University of Alberta President’s Fund, and Jeanne & Peter Lougheed Performing Arts Centre).

Adrian Stimson is a member of the Siksika (Blackfoot) Nation in southern Alberta. Adrian has a BFA with distinction from the Alberta College of Art and Design and MFA from the University of Saskatchewan. He considers himself to be an interdisciplinary artist, and he exhibits nationally and internationally. His performance art looks at identity construction, specifically the hybridization of the Indian, the cowboy, the shaman and Two Spirit being. Buffalo Boy and The Shaman Exterminator are two reoccurring personas in his work.



Stimson



Stimson as “Buffalo Boy”

Over two days in February, Stimson visited the Augustana Campus to give the talk, “Living Artfully” and to perform “The Shaman Exterminator: HUBRIS” at the Jeanne & Peter Lougheed Performing Arts Centre.

## *nîpawistamâsowin: We Will Stand Up (Winter 2020)*

Film Screening and Discussion (cohosted with Dr. Megan Caldwell and Dr. Daniel Sims, with support from the Indigenous Student Services Office, Jeanne & Peter Lougheed Performing Arts Centre, and National Film Board of Canada).

Sensitively directed by Tasha Hubbard, *nîpawistamâsowin: We Will Stand Up* follows the family of the late Colten Boushie—a young Cree man who was fatally shot by Gerald Stanley in Stanley’s Saskatchewan farmyard, in 2016—as the family demands justice from Canada’s legal system.





at Augustana, Dr. Batlan made extensive and significant contributions to the Centre and to academic life on campus. The inaugural International Fellows Conference, “Religion and Law in Canada and the U.S.” (Spring 2019), which Dr. Batlan organized and hosted, brought prominent scholars and lawyers from across North America to Camrose, to discuss the complexities of religion and legal frameworks. Moreover, she taught two courses at Augustana, published the article “One Nation under Christ” in the *Journal of Church and State*, and completed her book manuscript on Christian attempts to amend the U.S. Constitution.

In the spring of 2020, after an international search, we appointed our next Fellow, Dr. Sharmin Sadequee. Dr. Sadequee earned her Ph.D. in Anthropology from Michigan State University and comes to us from Kennesaw State University in Georgia. Her topic of research is Islamophobia in the context of North American settler-colonialism. We look forward to welcoming Dr. Sadequee to the Augustana Campus in January 2021.



Dr. Batlan

## Distinguished Visiting Fellows

*Dr. Darren Dochuk, University of Notre Dame (Fall 2019)*

“God and Black Gold: Ernest Manning, American Evangelicalism, and the Religious History of Pipeline Politics and the Oil Sands in Mid-Twentieth Century Alberta”



Dr. Dochuk

Dr. Dochuk gave two public lectures during his visit to Camrose. The first took place at the Camrose Public Library. In Alberta, discussions of pipelines and the oil sands have typically focused on matters of labor, economics, and environment. Yet Dochuk demonstrated that religion must be foregrounded in these discussions too, especially when we consider the longer history of the oil industry in the province. Drawing on an illustrative case study of the Great Canadian Oil Sands, Ltd., and the powerbrokers behind it—men such as

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Alberta Premier Ernest Manning, American oilman J. Howard Pew, and evangelist Billy Graham—Dochuk showed how religious beliefs and institutional networks were crucial to the birth and growth of the oil business in Alberta.

## “Anointed with Oil: How Christianity and Crude Made Modern America”

Dr. Dochuk’s second lecture was an academic talk delivered at the Lougheed Centre on the Augustana Campus. Oil has always enchanted Americans, inspiring them to think about their society’s future in sacred terms. When missionary son and magazine publisher Henry Luce coined the term “the American Century” in 1941, he did so fully aware of how his fellow citizens drew special assurance from their nation’s dominant possession of the black stuff. He was also fully aware of the outsized role US oil companies and oilmen were to play in the expansion of American influence in the post-World War II era. Here Dochuk drew on arguments from his recent book, *Anointed with Oil* (Basic Books, 2019), to show how oilmen were vanguards of liberal internationalism and global development; they were attuned to the crucial ideological and institutional roles that religion would play in their infiltration of foreign soil.



*Dr. Joel Thiessen, Ambrose University; and Dr. Sarah Wilkins-Laflamme, University of Waterloo (Winter 2020)*

## “None of The Above: Nonreligious Identity in Canada”

Nearly one-quarter of Canadian adults say they have no religion. Who are they? Why, and where, has this population grown? Drs. Thiessen and Wilkins-Laflamme explored these questions in February at Augustana, in a talk delivered at the Lougheed Centre. They have researched these issues against the backdrop of three theoretical frameworks in the sociology of religion: stages of decline; individualization and spiritualization; and polarization. In their work, they’ve observed that a gradual decline in religious identification has happened across time and family generations in Canada, at different rates in various contexts.



Dr. Thiessen



Dr. Wilkins-Laflamme

In their talk, they presented both quantitative and qualitative data, gleaned from extensive surveying of different Canadian populations and from personal interviews with individuals from a variety of demographics. This research, along with other insights into the American context, has now appeared in print, in a brand-new book published by New York University Press and distributed in Canada by the University of Regina Press: *None of the Above: Nonreligious Identity in the US and Canada* (2020).

## Programming Details and Statistics

Total Events: 9

Total Attendance: 645

Video recordings of Chester Ronning Centre events can be viewed on our [YouTube channel](#).

### Distinguished Visiting Fellow Lectures (supported by the Distinguished Visiting Fellows Endowment)

“God and Black Gold: Ernest Manning, American Evangelicalism, and the Religious History of Pipeline Politics and the Oil Sands in Mid Twentieth-Century Alberta”

Dr. Darren Dochuk, University of Notre Dame

Oct 15, 2019 – Camrose Public Library

80 attendees

“Anointed with Oil: How Christianity and Crude Made Modern America”

Dr. Darren Dochuk, University of Notre Dame

Oct 16, 2019 – Jeanne & Peter Lougheed Performing Arts Centre

60 attendees

“None of the Above: Nonreligious Identity in Canada”

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Dr. Sarah Wilkins-Laflamme, University of Waterloo; and Dr. Joel Thiessen, Ambrose University  
Feb 20, 2020 – Jeanne & Peter Lougheed Performing Arts Centre  
70 attendees

## Additional Lectures and Dialogues

“Engaging with the Living Tradition of Islam”  
Dr. Ingrid Mattson, Huron University College, Western University  
Jan 31, 2020 – Jeanne & Peter Lougheed Performing Arts Centre  
60 attendees

“Living Artfully”  
Adrian Stimson  
Feb 3, 2020 – Wahkohtowin Lodge, Augustana Campus  
80 attendees

## Performances, Shows, and Exhibits

“The Appeal of John Bunyan”  
9<sup>th</sup> Triennial Congress of the International John Bunyan Society  
Aug 15, 2019 – Anglican Parish of Christ Church, Edmonton  
80 attendees

“The Shaman Exterminator: HUBRIS”  
Adrian Stimson  
Feb 4, 2020 – Jeanne & Peter Lougheed Performing Arts Centre  
100 attendees

Screening of *nîpawistamâsowin: We Will Stand Up*, with special guest Jade Tootoosis  
Discussion moderated by Dr. Daniel Sims  
Feb 19, 2020 – Jeanne & Peter Lougheed Performing Arts Centre  
100 attendees

## Receptions, Discussions, and Book Clubs

Coffee and Conversation: Darren Dochuk’s work on religion and oil in North America  
Oct 9, 2019 – Chester Ronning House, Augustana Campus  
15 attendees

## Select Grants and Funding for Special Projects

Annual Grant from the Wendy Cassady Memorial Foundation, to support the International Fellows Program. \$70,000.

Government of Alberta Anti-Racism Grant (2019-2020): “Building Inclusive Communities in Rural Alberta.” Primary Investigator: Dr. Lars Hallstrom (Director, ACSRC). Co-Investigator: Dr. Clark Banack (Senior Research Associate, Chester Ronning Centre and ACSRC). \$25,000.

University of Alberta KIAS Cluster Grant (2019-2022): “Alberta Political Culture Project.” Primary Investigator: Dr. Jared Wesley (Political Science, UofA Faculty of Arts). Co-Investigator: Dr. Clark Banack (Senior Research Associate, Chester Ronning Centre and ACSRC). \$70,000.

## Finances (as of 2020 Fiscal Year-End)

<b>Current Funds</b>	
<i>Centre Annual Fund</i>	\$33,572
<i>Spirit of the Land Program Funds</i>	\$11,839
<i>International Fellows Fund</i> (supported by the Wendy Cassady Memorial Foundation)	\$149,888
<b>Endowment Balances (Market Values)</b>	
<i>Distinguished Visiting Fellows Endowment</i>	\$804,446
<i>Hendrickson Memorial Endowment</i>	\$121,615
<i>Yang Endowment</i>	\$17,680

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## Publications, Presentations, and Ongoing Projects

Over the years, the Centre has published a number of its visiting scholars' lectures and essays. Those publications are accessible, free of charge and in PDF format, online at the Centre's website: <https://www.ualberta.ca/augustana/research/centres/crc/publications>

### 2019–20 Staff Publications

Ian D. Wilson (Director)

2019. "The Emperor and His Clothing: David Robed and Unrobed before the Ark and Michal." Pp. 125–141 in *Dress and Clothing in the Hebrew Bible: "For All Her Household Are Clothed in Crimson"*, ed. Antonios Finitis. Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 679. London: T&T Clark.

Clark Banack (Senior Research Associate)

Forthcoming. "Ethnography and Political Opinion: Identity, Alienation, and Anti-Establishmentarianism in Rural Alberta." *Canadian Journal of Political Science*.

Forthcoming. Coauthored with Ufuk Topkara. "Religious Diversity and Practice in Secular Society: Comparing Canada and Germany." In B. Moshkovits, R. Ohliger, and T. Triadafilopoulos (eds.), *Model Canada, Model Germany? A Transatlantic Comparison*. Frankfurt and New York: Campus.

### 2019–20 Staff Presentations

Ian D. Wilson (Director)

2019. Panel and workshop on "Memory and Vision." Joint session of Israelite Prophetic Literature, Writing/Reading Jeremiah, Theological Perspectives on the Book of Ezekiel, Formation of Isaiah, Prophetic Texts and Their Ancient Contexts, and Book of the Twelve Prophets. Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting. San Diego, California. November 23–26.

2019. "History/Prophecy: Isaiah and the Remembering of Israel's Past." Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting: Formation of Isaiah program unit. San Diego, California. November 23–26.

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2019. "The Importance of Biblical Studies." Messiah Lutheran Church, Camrose. October 27.

2019. "Chester Ronning's Legacy." Messiah Lutheran Church, Camrose. October 20.

2019. "Remembering Kingship: Samuel's Contributions to Postmonarchic Thought." Congress of the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament. University of Aberdeen, Scotland. August 4-9.