



Chester Ronning Centre
for the Study of Religion and Public Life



Prepared by:

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Note from the Director

How will we move on from 2020? I asked in my note in last year's annual report. That calendar year was unlike any other in recent history, and yet here we are in 2021, facing many of the same challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic continues (as I write this note, we are now in our fourth "wave" of infections); and intense political debates—concerning the pandemic, social injustices, the climate, our democratic processes, among many other issues—remain unsettled and unsettling, in Canada and across the globe. As we are learning, the challenges of 2020 will stretch well into the third decade of this third millennium, and the path ahead looks hazy at best.



Centre Director Ian Wilson, with Founding Director David Goa and Founding Associate Director Dittmar Mündel, in conversation on Zoom

In these uncertain times, the Chester Ronning Centre remains committed to its mandate to facilitate research and constructive dialogue in relation to religion and the public sphere. Since its inception, the Centre has thrived by hosting public forums at which we can learn from *and with* some of the world's leading thinkers on religion. Sitting down to talk with someone, in person, is an

indispensable and irreplaceable part of learning, and that kind of educational experience is the foundation of the Centre's operations. Although we could not host events on campus during the pandemic, this past year we did our best to mimic that kind of in-person interaction through Zoom webinars. And although the online format will never fully replicate in-person gatherings, it did have its advantages. Our events reached international audiences in real-time, for example, allowing University of Alberta alumni and other participants from around the world to interact directly with our distinguished (virtual) visitors, something the Centre had not achieved before the pandemic. Over the course of last year, live webcasting became commonplace, a tool utilized by school classrooms, religious communities, and university research centres alike.

The academic year to come, 2021-22, may end up being much the same. It may continue to be difficult or even impossible to host events on campus, as long as this virus remains a critical threat to our lives. One positive takeaway from this past year, however, has been technological advances and the increased capacity to connect online. At the Centre we will continue to utilize that technology, to meet you where you are at, in order to carry on with our pursuit of understanding religion and its import in our world. I invite you to check out last year's highlights,

below, to catch up on programming you may have missed, and to reflect on the year that was. Thank you again for supporting the Centre, the Augustana Campus, and the University of Alberta. I look forward to seeing you all again soon.

Ian D. Wilson, Ph.D.

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.

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. When not reading or writing about monks, Brandon tries to make time for his excessive number of hobbies, which include language learning, cooking, and

running.



Paul L. Gareau, Ph.D. – Faculty of Native Studies – Dr. Gareau is Métis and French-Canadian from Bellevue near Batoche Saskatchewan, Canada. He is an assistant professor in the Faculty of Native Studies and past Research Fellow for the Rupertsland Centre for Métis Research at the University of Alberta. 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 late modern identity, the legacy of colonial discourses on Indigenous and ethnocultural minorities, and the experiences of rural spaces. His research focuses on the Métis, Indigenous religiosity, youth, gender, la Francophonie, and rural Canada.



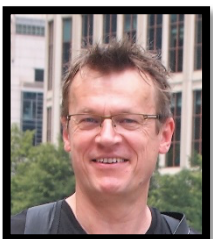
Gail Stolee is a graduate of the University of Alberta in Arts, Education and Library Science. She worked for the Edmonton Public School Board, Camrose Lutheran College where she was also a member of the Board of Regents, and Augustana University College. Her community involvements include Rotary, Sahakarini (a local international development NGO), the Nordlys Film and Arts Festival, and Messiah Lutheran Church. Gail has been an active participant in the programs of the Chester Ronning Centre since its inception. She has a strong commitment to lifelong learning and service, and to making the best research and thinking accessible to the general public. She also especially loves being a grandma, travelling, and reading.



Nakita Valerio is an award-winning writer, researcher, and Muslim community organizer based on Treaty 6 territory, Amiskwacîwâskahikan (Edmonton, Canada). Nakita is honoured to be the Research Director for the Institute for Religious and Socio-Political Studies (I-RSS), serving both Muslim and research communities across Canada. She is a graduate in history and Islamic-Jewish studies from the University of Alberta and has been a research fellow with the Tessellate Institute, I-RSS, the Edmonton Council of Muslim Communities (ECMC) and Mercy Mission Canada (MMC). Nakita also acts as an academic strategist/mentor for graduate students in the disciplines of history, religious studies, sociology, and social work. She has worked as an academic copy-editor in the social sciences and humanities since 2014. Nakita serves as an advisor to the Chester Ronning Center for the Study of Religion and Public Life at the University of Alberta Augustana Campus.



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 to bring a variety of engaging, public digital programming to audiences in Camrose and beyond. It was our pleasure to work with the University of Alberta Office of Alumni Relations, Office of Advancement, Augustana Office of Advancement, University of Alberta Faculty of Native Studies, Augustana Department of Fine Arts & Humanities, and the Jeanne & Peter Lougheed Performing Arts Centre.

Distinguished Visiting Fellows

Rev. Nontombi Naomi Tutu (Fall 2020)

In the past six years, more and more Canadians are learning about the ongoing impacts of residential school systems and about missing and murdered Indigenous women in our society. We are also living through a pandemic, climate change, and widespread political strife. In response to these issues and crises, we invited the Rev. Nontombi Naomi Tutu to visit the Centre and speak with us about truth and reconciliation.



Rev. Tutu is a race and gender justice activist and an ordained clergy in the Episcopal Church. Born in South Africa, where she grew up under apartheid, she is the daughter of Archbishop Desmond and Nomalizo Leah Tutu. She has taught at several universities in the U.S. and served as program coordinator for the historic Race Relations Institute at Fisk University, where she was part of the institute's delegation to the World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa. Her work focuses on bringing groups together to learn from and celebrate their differences and to acknowledge their shared humanity. She is currently Associate Rector at All Saints' Church, Beverly Hills, California.

The Centre teamed up with University of Alberta Alumni Relations to host Rev. Tutu as part of their Alumni Week(end): Campus to Couch Edition. She joined us for two virtual gatherings: the webinar [“Truth and Reconciliation in a Time of Crises”](#); and a [conversation over coffee](#) with

Centre Director Ian Wilson. In advance of the events, we created an exclusive [animated short](#) in collaboration with Rev. Tutu, to share her story.

Sarah Hurwitz (Fall 2020)



A graduate of Harvard College and Harvard Law School, Sarah Hurwitz is the author of *Here All Along: Finding Meaning, Spirituality, and a Deeper Connection to Life—in Judaism (After Finally Choosing to Look There)* (Random House, 2019). From 2009 to 2017, Hurwitz was a White House speechwriter, starting out as a senior speechwriter for President Barack Obama, and then serving as chief speechwriter for First Lady Michelle Obama. She worked with Mrs. Obama to craft widely-acclaimed addresses – including her 2016 Democratic National Convention speech and her political speeches during the 2016 campaign cycle – and traveled with the First Lady across America and to five continents. In addition to her speechwriting, Hurwitz also

worked on policy issues affecting young women and girls as a senior advisor to the White House Council on Women and Girls.

During her virtual visit, Hurwitz sat down with Centre Director Ian Wilson for two conversations. They [discussed her work in the White House](#) and how that work intersected with her religious life, and they [talked about her rediscovery of her Jewish heritage](#) and how that journey led her to write a book about Judaism.

Temi Odumosu, Ph.D. (Fall 2020)

Temi Odumosu is Senior Lecturer in Cultural Studies at Malmö University in Sweden. Her research and curatorial practices are concerned with colonial archives/archiving, slavery and visibility, race and visual coding in popular culture, postmemorial art and performance, image ethics and politics of digitization. Overall, she focuses on the ways art can mediate social transformation and healing. She is also currently a member of the research network The Art of Nordic Colonialism: Writing Transcultural Art Histories. During her virtual visit to the University of Alberta, Odumosu spoke about



her interdisciplinary research practices and experiences, as well as her engagement with contemporary postmemorial art.

In a special Centre webinar, “How Do We Heal from History? Art, the Cultural Commons, and Social Change”—cohosted by the Augustana Department of Fine Arts & Humanities—Odumosu addressed the toppling of monuments, “blackouts” of digital spaces, and calls for institutional reckoning in museums. In her talk, she promoted artist-visionaries whose methods and imaginings might serve us on the journey toward decolonization and justice.

Hannah M. Strømme, Ph.D. (Winter 2021)



Hannah Strømme is Senior Lecturer in Biblical Studies at the University of Chichester, U.K., where she researches the influence and impact of the Bible in contemporary culture. In March, she made a virtual visit to the Centre, to share some of her recent and groundbreaking work in biblical studies.

In her lecture, [“Biblical Assemblages in the European Far Right,”](#) she discussed how Bibles—or bits of Bibles—have made appearances in European far-right circles in the last decades. In speeches, party literature, on websites, social media sites and on posters, Bibles are invoked and biblical texts are at work. Taking the far-right terrorist attacks in

Norway on July 22, 2011 as a starting point, Strømme examined the role Bibles play in far-right European circles. Following the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, her talk focused on how far-right groups do not simply interpret the Bible—they “assemble” Bibles in their milieux that inform their ideologies.

Lori Beaman, Ph.D. (Winter 2021)

Lori Beaman, Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Ottawa, is currently the Principal Investigator of the Nonreligion in a Complex Future (NCF) Project. The project’s primary focus is to study the relationship between increasingly complex diversities created by growing nonreligious populations and institutions, and to build an evidence base from which to identify models for living well together in complex, diverse, and inclusive societies.



During her virtual visit to the Centre, Beaman gave the lecture [“World-Repairing Work and Living Well Together in the New Diversity.”](#) Her talk presented current demographic data in Canada, to demonstrate the diversity of our society; and she provided numerous examples of how, as the consequences of climate change become increasingly clear, humans are finding creative and innovative ways to address it through collaborations that transcend boundaries, manifest deep equality, and focus on similarity rather than difference.

Paul Bramadat, Ph.D. (Winter 2021)



Paul Bramadat is director of the Centre for Studies in Religion and Society and teaches in the Department of History and the Religion, Culture and Society Program at the University of Victoria. His research explores the ways we imagine religion and spirituality when we talk about diversity, health, security and civil society.

His lecture, [“Religion and Beyond in Contemporary Vaccine Hesitancy.”](#) was timely, addressing a hot-button issue amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Normally, scholars and laypeople explicitly or implicitly distinguish between "cultural" and "religious" forms of vaccine hesitancy. Given the urgent public health dilemmas we currently face, it is worthwhile to reflect on some of the shared roots of these phenomena. Bramadat considered a number of questions in his talk: from the vantage point of a hesitant individual and community, what sort of world is being imagined as the problem, and the solution? What can the study of religion contribute to our understanding of vaccine hesitancy in general and hesitancy related to COVID-19 vaccines in particular? Or, to look at this matter from a different angle, what do we learn about religion/spirituality by thinking about "conspirituality"?

Additional Programming Highlights



110 Years of Augustana

2021 marked the 110th anniversary of the Augustana Campus! Alumni, staff, faculty and community members gathered virtually for programming throughout the month of June, to share memories and to celebrate the anniversary. In addition to the events noted below, the Centre collaborated with the Augustana Office of Advancement, the Faculty of Native Studies, and the Jeanne and Peter Lougheed Performing Arts Centre to present the ImagineNATIVE Film Festival's 2021 selection of short films.

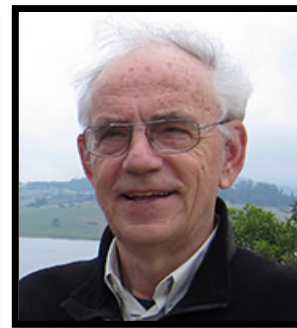
Chester Ronning's Mission: Then and Now

As part of "Augustana 110," Centre Director Ian Wilson sat down with University of Alberta alumnus and award-winning filmmaker Tom Radford, to [chat about the legacy of Chester Ronning](#) and how it continues today. Radford shared his experience working with Ronning, who had a great influence on his own career and ideas. We also hosted a free (virtual) screening of Radford's film *China Mission: The Chester Ronning Story*. The Jeanne and Peter Lougheed Performing Arts Centre cohosted the screening, which included an exclusive introduction from Radford.



Religion & Public Life: In Conversation with David Goa and Dittmar Mündel

Also in conjunction with "Augustana 110," we were thrilled to welcome back David Goa (Founding Director of the Centre) and Dittmar Mündel (Founding Associate Director) for a [conversation with current Centre Director Ian Wilson](#). They chatted about the early history of the Centre and about their work at Augustana during the Centre's formative years.



International Fellows Program and Postdoctoral Fellow

An initiative begun by former Centre 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. Additional details about the program are available on [the Centre's website](#).

To facilitate the program, the Centre employs a Postdoctoral Fellow. The Centre's current Fellow, Sharmin Sadequee (Ph.D., Michigan State University) began her appointment in 2021. Sharmin is a cultural anthropologist and her research interests include Islam and Muslim communities in relation to modernity and modern states. She is particularly interested in these issues as they relate to race, religion, social movements, secularism, science and modern law. Her teaching in anthropology and religious studies engages questions of cultural and religious diversities, both theoretically and cross-culturally. In addition to organizing the International Fellows conference (on Islamophobia) and other Centre programming, she is working on her first book manuscript, which examines the social and legal life of Islam and Muslims in American secularism. It is an ethnographic study of how the U.S. secular security state governs, manages and regulates Muslims and Islam in and through various legal and social spaces; and how Muslims organize, challenge, and address racialized state overreach through social justice and human rights claims and practices. She looks forward to facilitating conversations at the Centre about Islam, Muslim communities, and Islamophobia in both Canadian and U.S. contexts.



Programming Details and Statistics

Total Events: 12

Total Attendance: 1100

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

Distinguished Visiting Fellow Lectures

(Supported by the Distinguished Visiting Fellows Endowment)

“Truth and Reconciliation in a Time of Crises”

Rev. Nontombi Naomi Tutu

September 24, 2020 – Zoom Webinar

290 Attendees

“How Do We Heal From History? Art, the Cultural Commons, and Social Change”

Temí Odumosu

October 29, 2020 – Zoom Webinar

115 Attendees

“A Jewish Journey in the White House”

Sarah Hurwitz

November 19, 2020 – Zoom Webinar

80 Attendees

“Biblical Assemblages in the European Far Right”

Hannah M. Strømme

March 11, 2021 – Zoom Webinar

50 Attendees

“World-Repairing Work and Living Well Together in the New Diversity”

Lori Beaman

March 30, 2021 – Zoom Webinar

90 Attendees

“Religion and Beyond in Contemporary Vaccine Hesitancy”

Paul Bramadat

April 22, 2021 – Zoom Webinar

65 Attendees

Augustana 110 Events

“Chester Ronning’s Mission: Then & Now” with Tom Radford

June 8, 2021 – Zoom Webinar

45 Attendees

“Religion & Public Life: In Conversation with David Goa and Dittmar Mundel”

June 10, 2021 – Zoom Webinar

65 Attendees

Performances, Shows, and Exhibits

Screening of *China Mission: The Chester Ronning Story*

June 9 – Online screening, Jeanne & Peter Lougheed Performing Arts Centre

85 Attendees

ImagineNATIVE Presents: Short Films Focus

June 23 – Online screening, Jeanne & Peter Lougheed Performing Arts Centre

148 Attendees

Receptions, Discussions, and Book Clubs

Coffee and Conversation: with Rev. Nontombi Naomi Tutu
Friday, Sept. 25 – Zoom Webinar
35 attendees

Coffee and Conversation: with Sarah Hurwitz
Friday, November 20 – Zoom Webinar
30 Attendees

Select Grants and Funding for Special Projects

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

Finances (as of 2021 Fiscal Year-End)

Current Funds	
<i>Centre Annual Fund</i>	\$39,561
<i>Spirit of the Land Program Funds</i>	\$11,889
<i>International Fellows Fund</i> (supported by the Wendy Cassady Memorial Foundation)	\$119,063
Endowment Balances (Market Values)	
<i>Distinguished Visiting Fellows Endowment</i>	\$975,775
<i>Hendrickson Memorial Endowment</i>	\$147,153
<i>Yang Endowment</i>	\$21,359

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](#).

2020–21 Staff Publications

Ian D. Wilson (Director)

2021. "Remembering Kingship: Samuel's Contributions to Postmonarchic Culture." Pp. 63–80 in *The Book of Samuel and Its Response to Monarchy*, ed. Sara Kipfer and Jeremy Hutton, with Regine Hunziker-Rodewald, Thomas Naumann, and Johannes Klein. Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament 228. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag.

2020. "Ezekiel as a Written Text: Archiving Visions, Remembering Futures." In *The Oxford Handbook of Ezekiel*, ed. Corrine Carvalho. New York: Oxford University Press. [Pre-print publication: <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190634513.013.26>; Print version in press]

2020–21 Staff Presentations

Ian D. Wilson (Director)

2021. "The History of Prophecy: The Book of Isaiah as Archive." Pacific Northwest regional meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature: Hebrew Bible program unit. Delivered online. May 22.

2021. With Geoff Dipple, "*The Worms Prophets: An Exercise in Radical Exegesis*." North America Luther Forum. Delivered online. April 17.