

Spring 2016

CENTER
FOR
CATHOLIC
AND
EVANGELICAL
THEOLOGY



Dear Friends and Colleagues:

The founding directors of the Center for Catholic and Evangelical Theology (CCET) are Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson, along with LaVonne Braaten, of blessed memory, and Blanche Jenson — pillars of CCET all of them. Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson served as Co-Directors for the first twelve years, followed by Michael Root for the next ten years. There is a great chapter in Carl Braaten's theological autobiography, *Because of Christ*, on the founding and the early years of CCET.

Carl Braaten, Robert Jenson, and Michael Root are all theologians — important, even historic theologians. I follow them as Executive Director, but I am not a theologian. I am simply a parish pastor — though a pastor formed by my great teacher Robert W. Jenson. I have been serving Immanuel Lutheran Church in New York City for twenty-four years now. Glad to say, CCET continues to have splendid theological leadership through our Program Director, Victor Lee Austin, through *Pro Ecclesia* journal editor Joseph Mangina, and through the theological talents of our Board of Directors and Associate Directors.

CCET has done many good things through the years, including sponsoring colloquies, seminars, and study groups. Through it all, to this day and onwards for as long as God is willing, CCET does two principal things: We publish the important ecumenical journal of theology *Pro Ecclesia* and we host an annual theological conference. This year's conference is "The Emerging Christian Minority." The conference is being held at Loyola University, Baltimore, starting at 7 p.m. Monday, June 6, and continuing until about noon, Wednesday, June 8. You can register for this conference at the CCET website: <http://www.e-ccet.org/conferences/registration-form-for-the-2016-conference/>. There is a conference description at the end of this newsletter.

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Also, we plan to publish the lectures in book format, as we have done for each of our conferences. Recent conference books can be found on the “Books of the Center” tab on the CCET website: <http://www.e-ccet.org/books-of-the-center/>

To borrow a line from CCET Board Chair Andrew Archie, these CCET theology conferences are the best things going for clergy. I believe they are a joy for theologians too. At these conferences we get to hear esteemed theologians from across the ecumenical church—theologians all committed to the apostolic faith of the church and its classical traditions. They lecture to us and are available for questions, being mindful that many people in the audience are parish pastors, albeit pastors earnest about theology. For many of us, the CCET conferences are a good part of the annual rhythm of our lives, often with fellowship with old friends, and always with a great orientation to the theological topic for the year.

Following in this newsletter are greetings from Program Director Victor Lee Austin and *Pro Ecclesia* editor Joseph L. Mangina’s splendid banquet address from last June. Also, we include a note about LaVonne Braaten, who died December 7, 2015. As Carl once told me, without his dear wife LaVonne, “there would never have been a CCET.”

Greetings from Program Director Victor Lee Austin

It is hard to understand our present “location” as North American Christians; as in so many other facets of contemporary life, it seems that nearly every assumption we have lived by is being questioned. With the help of the CCET Board, we are gathering in June an ecumenical group of eminent theologians. Some will speak to us from their context of having been a minority (Jewish, or Orthodox); others will draw wisdom from our tradition (scriptural hope, Augustine); others will analyze the phenomena of persecution and secularity, asking how to proclaim and live the Gospel today. These are surely, already, questions that each of us has asked. I hope you can join us as we ask them together.

Dr. Joseph L. Mangina’s Banquet Address

Pro Ecclesia Annual Conference

Catholic University of America, June 15-17, 2015

It was seventeen years ago that my wife and I packed the car and said good-bye to idyllic, rural, pagan Ithaca in the state of New York for hip, urban, and equally pagan Toronto in Ontario, Canada. We were embarking on a great adventure as I took up a new position as assistant professor of theology at Wycliffe College. Two children, three books, and several student generations

later Toronto is still our home. Wycliffe is a theologically rich and diverse environment, perfect for my own work in being both internally and externally ecumenical. We are ecumenical internally in that, while we are an Anglican seminary whose chapel worship reflects the rhythms of Morning and Evening Prayer and Holy Eucharist, we provide hospitality to students from

a wide range of churches and traditions—in particular, many younger evangelicals. We are externally ecumenical in that we belong to the Toronto School of Theology, a happy mix of institutions from Roman Catholic, Anglican—one more Protestant, the other “high church”—Reformed, and United Church traditions. (Why does Toronto have two Anglican seminaries, the great Canadian medievalist and historian of doctrine Eugene Fairweather was once asked? He answered: Because we can’t afford three.)

As a transplant from the United States to Canada I am often asked to describe the difference between the two cultures. There are some obvious markers, of course, that distinguish life north of the 49th parallel. Hockey instead of baseball; parliamentary democracy as opposed to a strong presidency; guaranteed health care that avoids the complexities of Obamacare (although the Canadian system is often misunderstood; it’s a creature of the provinces, not the federal government, and it’s a public/private mix). More broadly, there is a civility of discourse that’s often missing in American public life, especially here along the banks of the Potomac. Canadians tend not to shout at each other. Perhaps this comes of a nation that was created not by a revolution but by an act of the British Parliament. English Canadians are a people who refused to be part of a revolution. French Canadians are a people who refused to be English. Indigenous Canadians are people who have, well, endured. It is a messy narrative, not the sort of which national

myths are easily made.

Canadians themselves will sometimes say they lack a strong national identity, but don’t you believe it. Canadians know who they are; it’s just that they are generally too polite to advertise it. Moreover, theirs is a society marked by a strong streak of humor and self-ironization. Some years ago the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, or CBC, ran a contest to come up with a slogan that would serve as the Canuck equivalent to the expression “as American as apple pie.” You can imagine the possibilities. “As Canadian as hockey.” “As Canadian as maple syrup.” “As Canadian as the Mounted Police.” Besides being much too obvious, these proposals lacked the necessary ironic touch. The winning entry was not wanting in this regard. The winning entry was: “as Canadian as possible, under the circumstances.”

That is, I would submit, an extraordinary utterance, as pregnant with meaning as a Zen koan. On the one hand, it is a declaration of policy: we will endeavor to be as Canadian as possible. On the other hand, it acknowledges limits: life is marked by “circumstances,” which often conspire to frustrate, reshape, or otherwise complicate our projects. Note that among the implied circumstances is living next door to the economic and cultural Leviathan that is the United States. The saying suggests that while we cannot do everything quite the way we would like, we can do many things, and perhaps more creatively and interestingly than if the limits were not there.

Well, where is he going with all this, you are probably wondering by now, since we obviously didn't come to Washington to get a lesson in Canadiana? True enough; and be assured that I cite the slogan and its attendant attitude merely as a parable. Change just one word, and the cultural motto becomes a theological interrogation: what would it mean, we can ask, to be "as Christian as possible, under the circumstances?" What are the possibilities of Christian existence in our time? What sort of future has the catholic and evangelical tradition of the church in a world like ours? How do we preach the gospel under the present "circumstances"? These are questions that go to the heart of the mission of the Center for Catholic and Evangelical Theology; they are why we exist. To be as Christian as possible, under the circumstances, is the question that has always confronted us Christians in a world we do not control, but that we believe to be God's world, groaning for liberation and desperately in need of hearing the good news. What would it mean for us to be "as Christian as possible, under the circumstances," in North America in 2015?

Let's begin with the first, and to my mind easier, part of the saying: being "as Christian as possible." The reason this is easy is that we have no choice in the matter. To use that wonderful British expression, "there is no help for it"—literally no help, because Christianity is not a matter of self-help such that we might, but then again might not, avail ourselves of it. I think that in this gathering I may be permitted to quote Martin Luther's views on the matter:

I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith; even as He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. (Luther, *Small Catechism*)

The freedom of a Christian is not a humanly generated freedom, just as the possibility of being a Christian is not a human constructed possibility. It is the Spirit who makes Christians. But here's the thing, the Spirit makes them—makes *us*—and sets us in a world of freedom that is more than we can could ever ask or imagine. We are a people under a mandate: to be as Christian as possible. That should be something we evangelical catholics and catholic evangelicals can agree on. Notice, however, that just because we are evangelical catholics and catholic evangelicals we know that our mandate is not to be Christian for its own sake. Being Christian is not the enactment of a religious identity or the actualizing of a lifestyle preference. Rather, we are Christian because we have been called, gathered, enlightened, and sanctified for a particular form of service to God under the "circumstances" of this passing aeon.

What are these circumstances, exactly? One of the most frequently and passionately rehearsed slogans we have heard in recent decades is that we live in a time that is post-Christian or post-Christendom. And of course it is quite

true. There is nothing subtle about it: in my own neighborhood in Toronto, three of the local mainline congregations (Presbyterian, Baptist, and United) have either folded or decamped for the suburbs in the time we've lived there. The Baptist church across the street has been carved up into seven upscale condominiums, each of which goes for a cool \$750,000. The other church buildings have been similarly "repurposed," as the developers like to say. The Anglican diocese of Toronto is undergoing an alarming decline in numbers. One of our bishops acknowledged in conversation recently that over the next five years 100 parishes in our diocese—that is, nearly half—need to be shut down or merged (which doesn't mean they will be). The bishop can't say that publicly, of course, but the demographic writing is on the wall. I am sure many of you can tell similar stories from your several contexts.

The response to this state of affairs is a great deal of talk about evangelism, evangelization, and being "missional." Now, I am all for mission. The church is a *missio*, a great act of sending that has its origin in the Father's sending of the Son for the life of the world. Only if the church is, essentially, a people who are sent as witnesses, they had better have a sense of what they are witnesses *to*. You know, of course, what you get when you cross a Unitarian with a Jehovah's Witness? Someone who shows up on your doorstep for no particular reason. That had better not be our model of missionality. To be as Christian as possible, under our post-Christendom circumstances, will require *more* by

way of fundamental theology and hard-won doctrine rather than less. The church may still attract people by being a kind of haven in a heartless, relentlessly competitive world, assuaging the bruised souls of postmodern seekers. There are many worse reasons for people to walk through a church door. But if we are going to keep them—and even more, if we are going to feed them—we will need to offer them something more than respite from the rat race. We will need to offer them nothing less than God—the God of Paul, and Augustine, and Thomas, and Luther, and Barth, and Thérèse of Lisieux. If the church talks mainly about herself, her mission is doomed; both the pagan outside and the believer within will hear the hollowness at the core of the message. But if she can talk about God—the one God, the triune God, the God of grace—then her witness will stand a decent chance of being heard.

One of the privileges I have as editor of *Pro Ecclesia* is that people send me books. Free books! It is an academic's dream. Two of the books I've received lately are hefty tomes in every sense. One is Katherine Sonderegger's *Systematic Theology I*, and the other is *Beloved Community: Critical Dogmatics After Christendom* by our own Paul Hinlicky. In terms of intellectual style and conceptual approach they could not be more different. Kate is an Anglican, Paul a Lutheran. Kate is a Barthian as refracted and corrected by Aquinas, while Paul is an evangelical catholic with a strong apocalyptic streak. Kate is insistent on beginning with the unity of God, while

Paul is equally passionate about beginning with the triune persons, for how else can the gospel story be told? Kate risks modalism for the sake of divine simplicity; Paul problematizes simplicity for the sake of Cyrillean Christology. Philosophically speaking Paul is a Piercean pragmatist, while Kate is, well, something of a Platonist who happily embraces “classical metaphysics”; indeed I suspect that Anglican theologians are very often Platonists at heart. I hope that I have whetted your appetite for reading these remarkable works, which exemplify the kind of deeply traditioned theology that runs deep in *Pro Ecclesia’s* DNA. Both will be the subject of review symposia in upcoming issues of the journal. I know you would not use this fact as an excuse for not reading the books themselves; I certainly have never done that.....

Yet whatever their disagreements, Hinlicky and Sonderegger are at one in the conviction that God, the living and true, is worth wrestling with for His own sake. God does not have to be made more “interesting” for apologetic purposes, because there is—*intrinsically*—nothing more interesting than God. That is why it is worth writing dogmatics in such a careful, attentive way, in lively dialogue with Scripture and tradition. For both these theologians, being as Christian as possible means being as theological as possible and *therefore* as worldly as possible, given that this world is, was, and always will be God’s world. I cannot stress that last point too strongly. This world, this creation, belongs to God. Therefore we do not have to

choose between being “faithful to the earth,” as Nietzsche put it, and being faithful to the Lord of heaven and earth. If you confess the Creator—but that means truly confessing Him!—you get the earth thrown in with the bargain.

Another way of saying this is that the “circumstances” in which we find ourselves will always be God’s circumstances. If there is a temptation for us evangelical catholics, it may well be to succumb to the false notion that the world is or has become truly a godless place, and that it is our task to re-introduce Him to it. Not so. The world remains God’s world, no matter the folly and fecklessness of sinful human beings. And the church remains God’s church: that is something we can count on, whether we are Catholic or Evangelical or Orthodox or Pentecostal. Our affirmation of both the church and the world is based not on any kind of optimism, much less confidence in ourselves, but on our faith in the God who refuses to abandon us. In one of the many interviews he conducted in the last decade of his life, Karl Barth made the point beautifully:

It is not we who must care for the dear God, but he who cares for us. In every respect we must take that into account, and live without anxiety on that basis. He cares for us, and he cares for our church and our communities. He sees to it that his truth does not fall to the ground, but rather that it remains on the lampstand. (*Gespräche*, 426)
Biblically speaking, the lampstand is of course the church (cf. Revelation 1). And the church is upheld. What a lovely, powerful thought that is: the

church is upheld. And therefore we can live without anxiety. What if we made *that* a common Christian goal as we approach 2017—churches and communities marked by freedom from anxiety, because sustained by the one Barth calls “the dear God?” That is something the world might actually sit up and notice.

The church is upheld, then, whatever the circumstances, because the circumstances are always God’s circumstances, subject to His gracious and providential rule. And that in turns gives us the freedom to be as Christian as possible—truly, madly Christian, perhaps we could say. These are interesting times to be a Christian. We all know the (supposedly) Chinese proverb about living in interesting times. There is always a kind of “interesting” we could do without. Yet faith in God’s providence, and still more faith in the gospel, insures that we can view the times given to us not as our enemy but as our friend. The time between the ascension and the second coming of Christ is “the time of the church,” and it is a good time, even if it pales in comparison with what God has in store for us.

So what does a little quarterly journal with a purple cover have to do with all this? The title of the journal is *Pro Ecclesia*, “for the church.” And that is what we try to be: a small but, in its

own way, significant contribution to the church and its witness in the present circumstances, the present times. The journal and the work of the Center are modest enterprises. We don’t try to do everything. But we try to do a few things really, really well. We uphold a vision of a church visibly united, in a time when it would be easy to accede to a comfortable ecclesial invisibility and *de facto* congregationalism. We make the gospel of Jesus Christ central, in a time when both the antinomian *and* Pelagian impulses are strong in both church and world. We try to be a home for good theology, in a time when theology is so often and sadly devalued. A student reported to me a conversation with a classmate who said: “Why do I have to take Systematic Theology? I just want to get out there and evangelize.” *Pro Ecclesia* exists as a firm but gentle rebuke to that outlook. We are “a journal of catholic and evangelical theology,” in service to the church, as the church is in service to Christ and his gospel.

I feel deeply privileged to play a role in this, our common enterprise. Thank you for your part in it. Keep reading, keep contributing, and keep spreading the word about *Pro Ecclesia*. And keep on with the task of being “as Christian as possible, under the circumstances,” in your particular outpost of the kingdom.

To subscribe to the journal of theology *Pro Ecclesia*, please see the *Pro Ecclesia* tab on the Center for Catholic and Evangelical Theology website: <http://www.e-ccet.org/pro-ecclesia/>

In Memoriam: LaVonne Braaten



Lavonne Braaten, age 85, passed away Sunday, December 6, 2015. Lavonne was born July 11, 1930 in Wallingford, Iowa to Lloyd and Olivia Gardner and was raised on a farm. She graduated from Waldorf College in Forest City, Iowa. After that, she continued her education at St. Olaf College, Alliance Francaise in Paris, Elmhurst College and De Paul University.

In 1951, she married Carl Edward Braaten. They have four children, Craig Braaten of Waterford, Wisconsin, Martha Memmesheimer of Peoria, Arizona, Maria Davy of Chicago, Illinois and Kristofer Braaten of Chicago, Illinois. They have eleven grandchildren and four great grandchildren.

Lavonne was a music major and sang in choirs at Augustana Academy, Waldorf College, St. Olaf College, Paris and Heidelberg. In 1969, she started her own health foods business in Chicago and for twenty years owned and

operated six stores. When she retired in Northfield, Minnesota, she provided the start-up money to found, with her husband and Robert and Blanche Jensen, an ecumenical organization, the Center for Catholic and Evangelical Theology, and served as its treasurer for 15 years.

When the Braatens moved to Sun City West, Arizona, Lavonne learned the Norwegian art of Rosemaling and served as president of the Rosemaling Club. She was also a member of the Pottery Club.

As a world traveler, she enjoyed collecting souvenirs and works of art from the thirty countries she visited with her husband, emeritus Professor of Systematic Theology at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, Illinois.

The memorial service for LaVonne was held at Lord of Life Lutheran Church, Sun City, Arizona on December 20, 2015. Longtime CCET Executive Director Dr. Michael Root was one of the speakers at this service.

The 2016 CCET Theology Conference



CENTER FOR CATHOLIC AND EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

An Ecumenical Conference for Clergy and Laity
June 6-8, 2016, Loyola University, Baltimore, Md.

“The Emerging Christian Minority”

What we are experiencing is the emergence of a deeply fissured world that seems strangely, perhaps suddenly, other to our world of not that long ago. In this conference we seek to see clearly how to understand our present situation, to diagnose how we got here, and perhaps most of all to see how best to proclaim the Gospel and to claim the freedom to do so—in short, how best now to act faithfully.

2016 Conference Speakers

MONDAY EVENING (JUNE 6)

David Novak, University of Toronto

Advice on Being a Millennially-Despised Minority

TUESDAY MORNING (JUNE 7)

Paige Hochschild, Mount St. Mary's University, Emmitsburg, Maryland

Realist Engagement in the Midst of a Crumbling Empire: Augustinian Thoughts

William T. Cavanaugh, DePaul University, Chicago, Illinois

Is It Good to Be Persecuted?

TUESDAY AFTERNOON

Kathryn Schifferdecker, Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota

A Tree Planted by Streams of Water: Scriptural Lessons on Hope

Anton Vrame, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese in America

American Orthodoxy: A Minority that Came of Age

(Continued, next page)

WEDNESDAY MORNING (JUNE 8)

Robert Hendrickson, St. John's Cathedral, Denver, Colorado

Keeping up with Tradition: Preaching and Pastoring as an Emerging Minority

Joseph D. Small, University of Dubuque Theological Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa

The Gospel in "A Secular Age"

Banquet Speakers (Tuesday evening):

Gregory Fryer,
Executive Director, CCET

Victor Lee Austin,
Program Director, CCET

For more information and to register:

<http://www.e-ccet.org/conferences/>

Donations to CCET

A note from Executive Director Gregory Fryer

In my opinion, the Center for Catholic and Evangelical Theology is a strong blessing on earth. It is a blessing for simple parish pastors like me and for ecumenical theologians across the world who are committed to the apostolic faith and its classical traditions.

The Center depends very much on gifts, since neither *Pro Ecclesia* nor our theology conferences make much money. In fact, sometimes the theology conferences lose money. All of us who work with the Center appreciate any support you can give. If you would like to give a contribution, please make out your check to "CCET" and mail it to this address:

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Thank you.