RELIGION AND CULTURAL MEDIATION IN EARLY MODERNITY

Conference sponsored by the McGill Centre for Research on Religion (CREOR)
Montreal, 3 and 4 March 2012
Coronation portrait of Queen Elizabeth I

Elizabeth was crowned and anointed at Westminster Abbey on 15 January 1559.

National Portrait Gallery, London
PROGRAMME

SATURDAY, 3 March

10h00  Registration begins (Birks Building, McGill University)
10h45  Formal Greetings
       Professor Torrance Kirby
       Director, Centre for Research on Religion, McGill University
       Dr Matthew Milner
       Postdoctoral Fellow, Department of English, McGill University
       and member of CREOR

11h00  First Session—Images and Iconoclasm
       Chair: Robert Tittler
       Professor of History Emeritus, Concordia University

11h00—11h25  Tomasz Grusiecki
       PhD candidate in Art History, McGill University
       Iconoclasm and Iconophilia in Early Modern Poland:
       Mediating the Use of the Images

11h25—11h50  Ivana Vranic
       PhD candidate in Art History, McGill University
       ‘Thou Shalt Not’: Limits of Verisimilitude and Devotional
       Practices in Italian Terracotta Passion Groups (1450-1530)

11h50—12h15  Olenka Horbatsch
       PhD Student in Art History, University of Toronto
       Between Icon and Idol: The Reformed Religious Image in the
       Dutch Republic

12h15—12h40  Discussion

12h40—13h30  Luncheon in the Birks Foyer

13h30  Plenary Lecture
       Robert Tittler
       Distinguished Professor of History Emeritus, Concordia
       University and Adjunct Professor of Art History, Carleton
       Portraiture, Memory, and Religious Identity in Post-
       Reformation England

14h15—14h30  Discussion

14h30  Second Session—Word and Image
       Chair: Matthew Milner
       Postdoctoral Fellow, Department of English, McGill University

14h30—14h55  Joshua Hollmann
       PhD Candidate in Religious Studies, McGill University
       The Face of Jesus turned toward the Prophet Muhammad:
       Nicholas of Cusa’s De pace fidei and De visione Dei
14h55—15h20  **Michael Barrow**  
PhD candidate in Religious Studies, McGill University  
*Unknowing: The Cloud of Unknowing: Forgetting Contemplation in Early Modern England*

15h20—15h45  **Eric Parker**  
PhD candidate in Religious Studies, McGill University  
*Mediation of Law and Gospel: a reassessment of Lucas Cranach’s Painting ‘Gesetz und Gnade’*

15h45—14h10  **Discussion**

14h10—16h30  Tea in the Senior Common Room

16h30  **Third Session—Life and Death**  
Chair: Maggie Kilgour  
Professor of English, McGill University

16h30—16h55  **Lara Apps**  
PhD candidate in Early Modern History, University of Alberta  
*The Judgment of God: Using Suicide to Combat Atheism*

16h55—17h20  **Richard Greydanus**  
PhD Candidate in Religious Studies, McGill University  
*The Light of Life: the spread of artificial street lighting in seventeenth-century Europe*

17h20—17h45  **Greg Bouchard**  
PhD candidate in Modern History, McGill University  
*Making a Pagan’s Death: David Hume’s Self-Fashioning in his Final Days*

17h45—18h10  **Discussion**

18h15—19h15  **Vin d'Honneur** in the Birks Foyer

19h30  **Conference Dinner** at Thomson House, 3650 McTavish

**SUNDAY, 4 March**

9h00  **Fourth Session—Sacraments and Hermeneutics**  
Chair: Torrance Kirby  
Professor of Ecclesiastical History, McGill University

9h00—9h25  **Cheryl Petreman**  
PhD candidate in History, University of New Brunswick  
*Confirming Christ’s physical presence in the consecrated host*

9h25—9h50  **Shaun Ross**  
PhD candidate in English Literature, McGill University  
*Eucharistic Imagery in Donne’s Secular Poetry*

9h50—10h15  **Rebecca Coughlin**  
PhD candidate in Religious Studies, McGill University  
*Action, Contemplation, and Prayer: Ignatius Loyola’s Spiritual Exercises mediating the Areopagite*
10h15—10h40 Discussion
10h40—11h00 Coffee in the SCR

11h00 Fifth Session—Music and Song
Chair: Julie Cumming
Professor of Music, McGill University

11h00—11h25 Justin Irwin
PhD candidate in Modern History, McGill University
‘Mellodious sounds, sweet mirth, and Musick rare’: Benjamin Keach and the spiritual use of carnal forms

11h25—11h50 Anna Lewton-Brain
PhD candidate in English Literature, McGill University
Music as Mediator in Seventeenth-Century Settings of John Donne’s Verse

11h50—12h15 Concluding Discussion

12h15 Luncheon in Birks Foyer

CONFERENCE STEERING COMMITTEE
Torrance Kirby, Director, McGill Centre for Research on Religion
Matthew Milner, Postdoctoral Fellow, McGill University

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
The Conference Steering Committee thank the following for their generous support:

Faculty of Religious Studies, McGill University

CREOR
McGILL CENTRE FOR RESEARCH ON RELIGION
CENTRE DE RECHERCHE SUR LA RELIGION

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada
Conseil de recherches en sciences humaines du Canada
Albrecht Dürer, *Adam and Eve* (1504)
ABSTRACTS

Lara Apps, PhD candidate in Modern History, University of Alberta

The Judgment of God: Using Suicide to Combat At heism

In 1704, West Ham vicar John Smith published The Judgment of God upon Atheism and Infidelity, an account of the ‘irreligious life’ and suicide of George Edwards, a young atheist from his parish who had recently shot himself. Smith sees Edwards’ suicide as symptomatic of a wider malaise among atheists at the end of the seventeenth century. He means to convince atheists of the error of their ways and to bolster Christians’ faith against atheists’ ‘Impious Principles.’ Smith presents Edwards’ arguments for atheism and then counters them, in the process covering all of the major atheist and anti-atheist themes of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Smith then criticizes practical atheism, or the immoral conduct of professed Christians, arguing that it leads to speculative, or intellectual atheism and, thus, to miserable lives like that of George Edwards. Drawing on the insights of Alan C. Kors’ Atheism in France, 1650-1729, my paper will engage in a close reading of The Judgment of God, showing how the work mediates faith and true Christian behaviour through atheism and irreligious behaviour, and how Smith’s exploitation of Edwards’ suicide mediates learned debates about atheism for a general reading public.

Michael Barrow, PhD candidate in Religious Studies, McGill University

Unknowing The Cloud of Unknowing: Forgetting Contemplation in Early Modern England

The Cloud of Unknowing is a masterpiece of late medieval literature, but its teachings are hardly confined to the Middle Ages. Its theology is primarily apophatic in nature, and, therefore, it has well-established theological history that harks back to the early Church and beyond it. Moreover, these teachings have been mediated and re-interpreted throughout the history of the Church. Of these re-interpretations, the medieval Dionysian theologians have had the greatest impact on The Cloud. Now considered chief amongst the Dionysian theologians, The Cloud’s author continues the process of mediating apophatic theology. For The Cloud was written during the latter half of the fourteenth-century in England and, historically speaking, finds itself at the cusp of the early modern period. During this time, England was already experiencing an extraordinarily unsettled period of socio-religious upheaval. Although still unabashedly religious and wholly imbued with the Christian Church, the coming dawn of the Renaissance and the dark clouds of the Reformation could be seen on the horizon. Interestingly, with the Reformation there is a significant change in the expression of mysticism in England. Consequently, vigorous contemplative expressions, like The Cloud, disappeared. It is the purpose of this paper, then, to discuss The Cloud in its historical context and how its apophatic theology contributed to the disappearance of similar mystical expressions as it was mediated to the early modern period.
Greg Bouchard, PhD candidate in Modern History, McGill University

*Making a Pagan’s Death: David Hume’s Self-Fashioning in his Final Days*

This paper examines aspects of David Hume’s death, specifically his efforts to shape his public image at the end of his life, within the broader history of early modern funerary monuments and autobiography. Hume exerted an extraordinary amount of control over the artefacts he would leave behind, composing an autobiography entitled My Own Life, publishing it posthumously alongside his previously-withheld Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, and commissioning his own funerary monument. The latter was a grand spectacle: a towering neoclassical mausoleum perched on Edinburgh’s horizon erected by the famed Scottish architect Robert Adam. Containing no inscriptions other than Hume’s name and birth/death dates, it left later generations to form their own judgement of Hume without the weight of tradition. Hume sought a ‘pagan’ death, dying a proud atheist and letting his memory live on through secular relics. My paper looks at precedents for his death, drawing comparisons with figures like John Toland, John Evelyn, and Michel de Montaigne, who in various ways reflected on their impending passing and exerted control over their memory. I argue that Hume’s death captures the concept of the afterlife merging with a modern sense of ‘fame,’ just then beginning to shift from its early modern predecessor, where one could create one’s identity in an increasingly open marketplace using culturally resonant symbols that might just as well be Christian or pagan.

Rebecca Coughlin, PhD candidate in Religious Studies, McGill University

*Action, Contemplation, and Prayer: Ignatius Loyola’s Exercitia Spiritualia mediating the Areopagite*

The *Spiritual Exercises* of St Ignatius of Loyola is a manual of spiritual activities: of meditation, contemplation, and prayer. Its aim is to instruct an exercitant in the proper exercise of these activities for the purpose of aligning the soul with the will of God, and, ultimately, achieving salvation (*Spir. Exer.* [1]). Ignatius’ approach to salvation in the *Exercises* has its roots in the religious practice, belief, and mysticism found in the work of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. Themes emerging in Ignatius’ work of participation in God’s plan for Salvation; of imitation of the divine, especially the life of Jesus; and of prayerful praise and reverence for God all have their source in medieval mysticism and practice. These themes can, in turn, be traced to ideas found in the mystical and ecclesiastical texts of the Areopagite. This includes especially the focus in the *Spiritual Exercises* on the role of the church as mediator, including the particular mediating function of the liturgy and religious objects, and Ignatius’ emphasis on contemplation as an active participation in God’s saving work. Drawing out the Dionysian foundations of Ignatius’ thought sheds new light on the way that medieval mysticism was taken up and transformed in the early modern period.

Richard Greydanus, PhD Candidate in Religious Studies, McGill University

*The Light of Life: the spread of artificial street lighting in seventeenth-century Europe*

Examination of the rapid adoption of artificial lighting in the latter seventeenth century in major cities across Europe serves to problematize the usual modes through which the narrative of secularization is told. The spread of artificial light enabled a detachment of rhythms of social intercourse from the natural rising and setting of the sun, which has alternatively been cast in a celebratory narrative of technological mastery over nature or sensationalistic narratives of the dark of night populated by things praeter-, super-,
and un-natural. It will be argued that insufficient attention has been paid to the devolution of Christian beliefs about the New Jerusalem, upon which the sun will never set, onto actual urban centers with the introduction of street lighting, whose purpose was to make streets safe by eliminating violent crime and other moral disorders. I will explore changing symbolic associations between the pairing of light and darkness and virtue and vice with the introduction of artificial lighting into older analogies drawn from natural sunlight to the light of God and/or of reason. The express aims of late 17th century urban planners are set against the early modern tradition of utopian literature, especially Johann Valentin Andreae’s *Reipublicae christiano politanae descriptio* (1619).

**Tomasz Grusiecki, PhD candidate in Art History, McGill University**

*Iconoclasm and Iconophilia in Early Modern Poland: Mediating the Use of the Images*

Iconoclasm in sixteenth-century Poland and its impact on visual culture is a black hole in historiography. Based solely on the analysis of a handful of texts by Protestant iconoclasts and Catholic iconophiles, Tomkiewicz famously asserted in 1955 that many individuals were involuntary subjects of the debates between these two camps. For instance, Bishop Chancellor Wolski, inspired by Jesuit preaching, ordered his collection, full of ‘raunchy paintings’, to be destroyed. Tomkiewicz speculates that there must have been many other instances of this sort. Indeed there are not many sixteenth- and seventeenth-century still-lives and history paintings surviving in Poland today. However, there is counter-evidence to the putative theory that the Counter-Reformation in Poland impeded the crystallisation of the modified concept of painting understood as a new category within the classification of knowledge. As princely courts in other Catholic countries in Europe (various Italian states, France and Flanders), the Vasa Royal Court formed a potent local tradition of picture collecting. Moreover, contemporaneous household inventories and poetry allow us to think that lay images existed even in less wealthy households. Despite the physical act of iconoclasm by Wolski, the destruction of mythological imagery must have paradoxically had iconophilic repercussions. By observing the decree of the Church, Wolski took part in attempts to re-create and re-establish the public reverence of the cultic image. A public act of destruction was absolutely necessary in this context. An example of a high court official adhering to the Counter-Reformation order had to be communicated publically in order to create a powerful incentive for other potential converts. But, the lay image did not disappear in early modern Poland. I will thus examine how the religious debate between the iconoclasts and iconophiles can be discussed in a connoisseurial context as the basis for the new functions of the painted image.

**Joshua Hollmann, PhD Candidate in Religious Studies, McGill University**

*The Face of Jesus turned toward the Prophet Muhammad: Nicholas of Cusa’s De pace fidei and De visione Dei*

This paper explores Nicholas of Cusa’s (1401-1464) ‘Word-Icon’ metaphysic of Christian-Muslim dialogue in two of his most famous texts: *De pace fidei* and *De visione Dei* (1453). These works convey Cusanus’ unique conceptualization of the Word of God as an Icon of understanding both humanity and religious peace. In *De visione Dei*, Cusanus employs the late-medieval cultural artifact of the all-seeing icon of the face of Jesus. The same image is cited and abstracted in the interreligious dialogue *De pace fidei*. Jesus, the Word-Icon of God, is the mode of seeing, object of understanding, and the mediator
of Cusanus’ complex concept of the interrelatedness of Islam and Christianity. The Word of God as Icon reflects the face of all humanity and enlightens seekers of the peace of faith, especially the prophets of God which, for Cusanus, includes the Prophet Mohammed, thus representing a profound reconfiguration of late-medieval religious beliefs. While De pace fidei and De visione Dei are often interpreted as unrelated in style and substance, this paper seeks a reconfiguration of interpretation.

Olenka Horbatsch, PhD Student in Art History, University of Toronto

*Between Icon and Idol: The Reformed Religious Image in the Dutch Republic*

This paper explores the role of sacred images in the visual culture of the newly formed, predominantly Protestant Dutch Republic (1648-1669). The significance and popularity of earlier representations of the relic of St. Veronica’s veil in northern Europe are compared with images of Moses holding the Tablets of Law in the Dutch Republic. The Sudarium and the Tablets were considered acheiropoieta (not made by human hands), and were both mediated to the public through a divine intercessor. Artistic representations of both subjects thus not only signified God’s presence, but also referenced the function of religious images as replicas of an original relic or artifact. This case study will demonstrate how the Protestant visual tradition depended on earlier Catholic images in formulating its own material religion. Scholarship on Post-Reformation religious art emphasizes the Protestant rupture in the status and function of religious imagery, and the subsequent emergence of an entirely new art. However, by looking at Protestant assimilations, adaptations and manipulations of late medieval visual culture, this paper contends that these precedents were crucial in the formulation of a distinctly visual tradition. While the status and function of religious imagery did indeed undergo a drastic shift, examining the formal continuity between Catholic and Protestant visual practices sheds light on the Dutch process of configuring a distinct visual language, one which represented and adhered to new ideas, beliefs and practices.

Justin Irwin, PhD candidate in Modern History, McGill University

*Mellodious sounds, sweet mirth, and Musick rare: Benjamin Keach and the spiritual use of carnal forms*

Writing in 1675, Benjamin Keach put into the Devil’s mouth an endorsement of “Mellodious sounds, sweet mirth, and Musick rare” as among the benefits of a conversion to Roman Catholicism. The suggestion Keach goes on to make in this passage is that that music, art, and outward beauty appeal to the carnal impulses of the atheist. But despite his apparent distrust of art’s seductive quality, Keach wrote and had printed dozens of poems and several collections of hymns. This willingness to engage with and make use of such mediums in the literary culture of the English Restoration demonstrates not only a desire to make spiritual use of carnal forms, but, as I will argue in my intended paper, a means through which a minority religious group made use of the print medium to claim a space for itself within the culture of the Restoration. Claiming space within the world of print and literature may be seen as a strategy of engagement with, as opposed to separation from, a sometimes hostile and generally incompatible majority. I aim to make this analysis with a focus on the poetry and hymns of Benjamin Keach, the scope of this paper being limited to the claiming of space in the world of print, rather than through communal behaviour of congregations such as singing, prayer, and sermons.
Anna Lewton-Brain, PhD candidate in English Literature, McGill University

Music as Mediator in Seventeenth-Century Settings of John Donne’s Verse

‘Harmony added to this Hymn has raised the Affections of my heart, and quickened my graces of zeal and gratitude.’ John Donne thus described (as reported by Izaak Walton) the effect that his poem, ‘A Hymn to God the Father,’ had on him when he heard it set to music. Donne, it seems, felt that his ‘Hymn’ found its fullest expression when sung.

John Hilton’s setting of this hymn is the only contemporary musical setting of a Donne poem known to scholars today, and yet it is a late addition to a substantial corpus of early seventeenth-century musical settings of his poetry. Before Donne became the great sermonizing Dean of Saint Paul’s, his poetic career was already linked closely with music, in particular with the popular form of the air, or lute song. The first instance of Donne’s poetry in print was Alfonso Ferrabosco’s setting of ‘The Expiration’ in Ayres (1609), and more soon followed from John Dowland, Orlando Gibbons, and William Corkine in 1612. In Donne’s time, his poetry seems to have been most readily encountered through song. Donne’s insistence on the theological significance of aurality in his sermons as well as the aural imaginativeness of his poetry attest to his belief that sound, and musical sound in particular, offers a unique mode of spiritual transcendence.

In a 1624 sermon, Donne preached ‘The Organ that God hath given the natural man is the eye; he sees God in the creature. The Organ that God hath given the Christian is the ear; he hears God in the Word’ (Sermons 2:114; similarly 9:82-9). His poetry reflects this doctrine of the spiritual significance of sound, heard and performed, just as his diction evinces careful attention to sound, and even his secular poetry is not unrelated to his theological insistence on the aurality and orality of the Word. Donne, like many of his time, invoked the Pythagorean-Platonic doctrine of the music of the spheres, so that the universe constitutes ‘an excellent song’ of God (Sermons 1:289-90), and both literary prosody and musical settings in general reflect that (See Donne’s ‘Upon the Translation of the Psalms,’ lines 27-39). In Donne’s view, music mediates between the physical and metaphysical realms on both micro- and macro-cosmic scales; it penetrates the individual body and attunes the individual soul, just as it mediates between earthly and heavenly order (musica mundana). This essay will examine a selection of early seventeenth-century musical settings of Donne’s verse in the light of these musical mediations.

Eric Parker, PhD candidate in Religious Studies, McGill University

Mediation of Law and Gospel: a reassessment of Lucas Cranach’s Painting ‘Gesetz und Gnade’

In this study I focus on Lucas Cranach’s painting unofficially referred to as ‘Gesetz und Gnade’ which was supervised by Martin Luther. I compare Luther’s definitions of ‘abstract’ and ‘concrete’ faiths in his Lectures on Galatians with the Law/Gospel division as it appears in the painting. I’ll argue that, contrary to many modern interpreters, the painting does not present a stark contrast between Law and Gospel, as if Luther and Cranach thought the Gospel abolishes Law. Rather I analyze Gesetz und Gnade through the analogy of the two faiths mentioned above and Christ’s two natures, demonstrating that Luther used the christological analogy and that Luther intended the painting to ‘mediate’ the reality of a life lived simultaneously under Law and Grace.
Religion and Cultural Mediation in Early Modernity

Cheryl Petreman, PhD candidate in History, University of New Brunswick

Confirming Christ’s physical presence in the consecrated host

The Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation was difficult for lay folk to grasp. The idea that bread and wine were transformed into the actual body and blood of Christ conflicted with personal experience. To allay doubts some preachers repeated and embellished stories of host desecration, an imagined crime involving the theft and abuse of consecrated hosts. It was widely believed that since God was physically present the host would bleed or cry out to protest such treatment and alert Christians to its predicament. Between the mid-thirteenth and sixteenth centuries, Jews were sporadically accused of acquiring and desecrating hosts. Having confessed under torture to witnessing the expected miracles, they were then expelled or eradicated. After the Reformation, Anabaptists challenged these accusations by purposely desecrating hosts to demonstrate that they were just bread. Since few Jews were left in western Europe, new ‘witnesses’ were sought by those fervent Catholic and Lutheran preachers who still craved empirical verification of transubstantiation. Thus, ‘witches’ were made to confess to having desecrated the host as part of their pact with the devil. Witches were thought to abuse the host in a deliberate insult to Christ or (seen as a powerful relic) to make magical unguents.

Shaun Ross, PhD candidate in English Literature, McGill University

Eucharistic Imagery in Donne’s Secular Poetry

Literary historians of the early modern period in England have tended to ascribe to the theological developments of the Reformation an almost necessary teleological movement towards secularism. This kind of narrative has generally suggested that, in the early modern period, ideas about sacramentality, and with them, conceptions of the immanence of language, began to be destabilized and eventually abandoned altogether. Regina Schwartz, for example, in her recent book Sacramental Poetics at the Dawn of Secularism: When God Left the World (2008), reads the ubiquitous eucharistic imagery in the poetry of John Donne as reflective of a traumatic disjunction between the believer and a God who is no longer bodily available in the transubstantiated eucharist. So it is that when Donne writes in ‘Twickenam Garden,’ ‘But O! self-traitor, I do bring/The spider Love, which transubstantiates all’ (5-7), he uses eucharistic imagery to mark a fundamentally unfulfillable desire. In this paper, however, I want to argue that, read in conjunction with Donne’s other presentations of the sacrament, these images in his so called ‘secular’ poetry cannot be interpreted simply as an elegiac nostalgia for a ‘Catholic’ sense of the relationship between signifier and signified, but rather draw on a variety of competing theological models of participation in the eucharist to explore similarly variegated paradigms of poetic affect.

Ivana Vranic, PhD candidate in Art History, McGill University

‘Thou Shalt Not’: Limits of Verisimilitude and Devotional Practices in Italian Terracotta Passion Groups (1450-1530)

By mimicking human scale, gesticulation, physiognomy, movement, emotive expression and garb, groups of eight Biblical figures representing scene of Christ’s Passion have a physical presence in dozens of parish churches across Northern Italy. The verisimilitude of these life-size, terracotta figures induces the viewer into an embodied, sensory experience of a blurring of boundaries between nature and artifice, subject and object, and icon and idol. Pious viewers in the 15th and 16th centuries would have prayed to
these groups upon which they would receive indulgences—precisely the kinds of behaviour defined by Protestant reformers as idolatry. Focusing on the material and physical characteristics of six Passion groups produced 1450-1530 by different artists in Milan, Bologna and Modena, my paper contextualizes the groups within the theological debates over the role of art in mediating piety during the Reformation period. As I hope to suggest, these groups stopped being produced long before the Council of Trent (1545-1563), which impelled a reformation of religious art in Italy more generally with the publications of the Papal edict on sacred images. This raises critical questions central to my paper: did the Church, their primary patron, raise concerns about the group’s verisimilitude? And more importantly, was this a form of iconoclasm?