



CREOR

McGILL CENTRE FOR RESEARCH ON RELIGION

CENTRE DE RECHERCHE SUR LA RELIGION

Conversion and Modernity

The notion of “conversion” is commonly taken to denote a specifically religious phenomenon. In its broad definition, however, conversion refers to a “turning” with respect to position, direction, or destination which results in a recasting of basic orientation. “Conversion” can signify a fundamental alteration of character, a change of nature, form, or function, that is to say, a process of turning or being turned towards or even into something else, as in metamorphosis. Conversion can enable an elemental transformation of perspective in both real and metaphorical space. The origins of secular modernity can be traced back to an occurrence of shared cultural conversion, a turning or radical shift in orientation with respect to the widely assumed “horizon” of knowledge and meaning—in Greek *metanoia* or, as some have recently termed it, a conversion of “cognitive ecology”. The cognitive and cultural shift which gives rise to modernity is customarily associated with intellectual, religious, and aesthetic movements designated by historians as “Renaissance”, “Reformation”, and “the Baroque”. With an emerging modernity manifold forms of conversion have translated the horizon lines of knowledge and redrawn the world-pictures of individuals and whole communities. In short, our theme takes as its premise that modernity itself can be viewed as the manifestation of a broadly based “conversion” of world-view. In tracing the birth of modernity the phenomenon of religious conversion provides an effectual point of departure for a wider discussion of diverse “forms of conversion”—geographical, socio-cultural, material, linguistic, literary and artistic, human-animal, sexual, cognitive and affective, as well as religious. By treating these forms of conversion across disciplinary boundaries as a nexus of movements, translations, and transformations, we hope that these lectures will contribute to developing an understanding of religious, cultural, and cognitive change that will in turn provide insight into the emergence of the modern world.

In a lecture series sponsored by the McGill **Centre for Research on Religion** and scheduled for autumn 2012, we propose to address the theme **Conversion and Modernity**. Seven one-hour lectures followed by half-hour periods of open discussion will be delivered at the Faculty of Religious Studies, 3520 University Street, on Wednesdays in October and November 2012, at 5:30 pm. Contact: Torrance Kirby, Director of **CREOR**, torrance.kirby@mcgill.ca

3 October	Paul Yachnin Tomlinson Professor of Shakespeare Studies McGill University	Animal Dreams: Conversion and Metamorphosis
10 October	Mark Vessey Professor of English and Principal of Green College University of British Columbia	Erasmus and the Conversion of Latin Letters
17 October	Iain Fenlon Professor of Historical Musicology King’s College, Cambridge University	First Encounters: Music and Ritual in Early Spanish America
24 October	Douglas Hedley Reader in Hermeneutics and Metaphysics Clare College, Cambridge University	Reflection and Conversion: Neoplatonism and early-modern Philosophy of Mind
31 October	Bronwen Wilson Professor of Art History University of East Anglia	Moving Pictures: Sketchbook of a journey from Vienna to Istanbul
7 November	Sarah Beckwith Professor of English and Theatre Studies Duke University	Shakespeare, Sacraments and Conversion
14 November	Emidio Campi Professor of Church History Emeritus University of Zurich	The Italian convert: Marquis Galeazzo Caracciolo and the English Puritans
21 November	Allan Greer Professor of History and Canada Research Chair in Colonial North America McGill University	Kateri Tekakwitha: the Mohawk who Converted the Jesuits