



CREOR
CENTRE FOR RESEARCH ON RELIGION
McGill University

CERC PARTNER
TORRANCE KIRBY
Director of CREOR

FORMS OF CONVERSION:

**RELIGION, CULTURE, AND COGNITIVE ECOLOGIES
IN EARLY MODERN EUROPE AND ITS WORLDS**

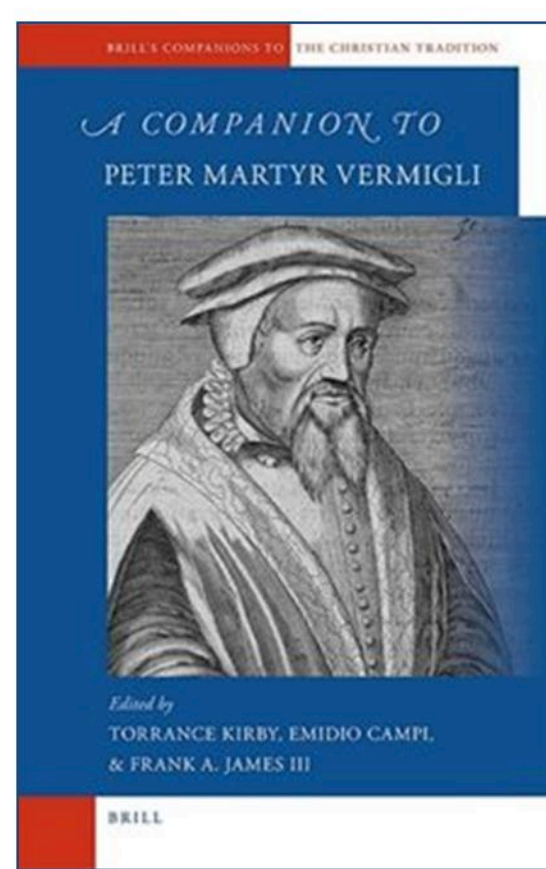
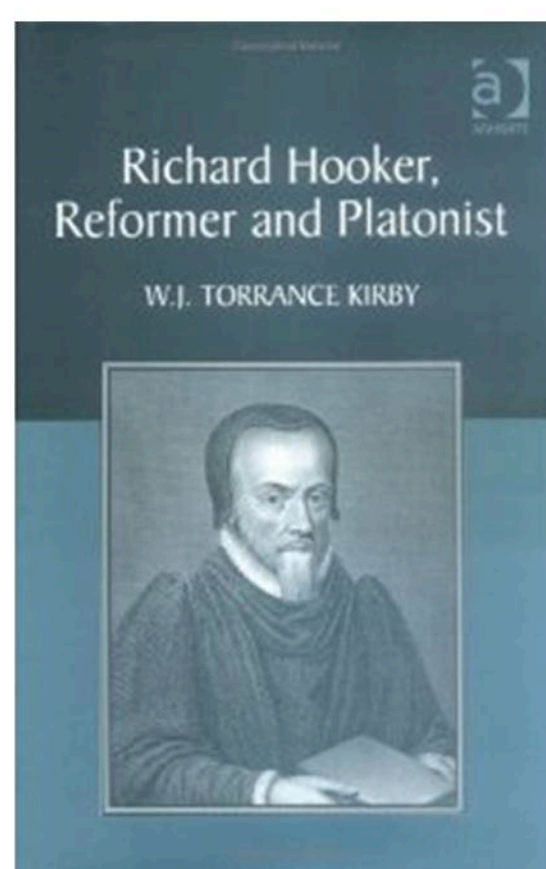
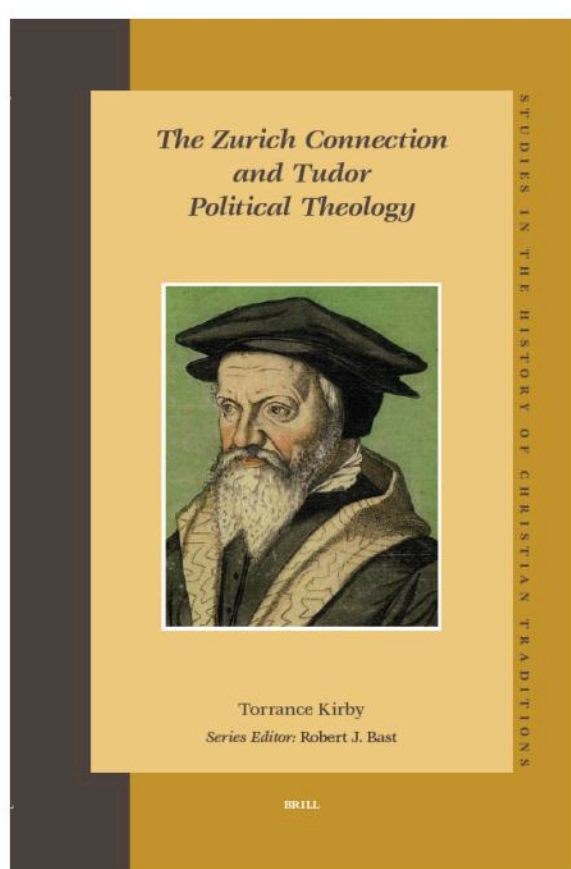
Whether it is an awakening to a new faith, a sex change, or the re-engineering of human beings as bio-mechanical 'cyborgs,' conversion is a source of fascination, a promise of newness, and a focus of anxiety for people in the 21st century. **Forms of Conversion** will seek to develop an historical understanding of conversion that will enlighten modern debates about corporeal, sexual, psychological, and spiritual kinds of transformation. The project will study how early modern Europeans changed their confessional, political, and even sexual identities. These subjective changes were of a piece with transformations in their world--the geopolitical reorientation of Europe in light of emerging relations with Islam and the Americas; the rethinking of the knowledge of Antiquity and the Middle Ages; the reimagining of God. We propose that the best entry for understanding these momentous changes, from which early modernity emerged and which constitute the seedbed of the modern world, is by way of a network of phenomena that we call 'forms of conversion.'



Led by **Paul Yachnin**, Tomlinson Professor of Shakespeare Studies at McGill, the project is partnering with seventeen research centres in Canada, the USA, England, and Australia, including **CERC** at UBC, **CREOR** at McGill, **CRASSH** at Cambridge University, and the **Folger Institute** in Washington, DC. The partners will work together toward a rethinking of early modern Europe as an 'age of conversion.' The undertaking will enliven and enlighten our understanding of the European past in terms of a case-based theory of conversion and a purpose-built interdisciplinary methodology. **Forms of Conversion** will involve younger scholars, other scholars, and members of the public. The four artistic partners, including the

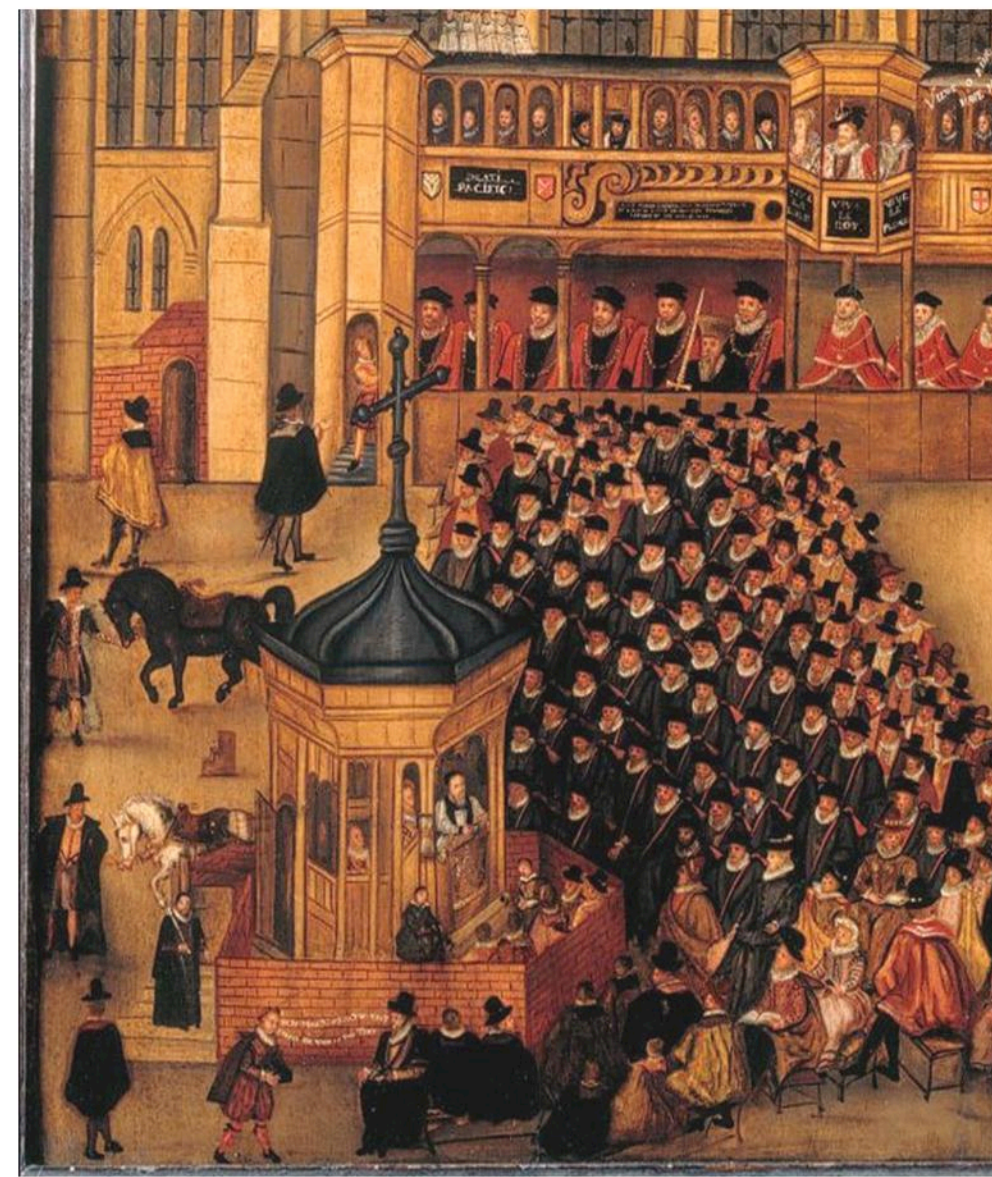
Stratford Shakespeare Festival and the **Festival Montréal Baroque**, will develop themed concerts and performances and take part in workshops that will inspire audiences to think creatively and historically about the possibility that we might be entering a new great age of conversion.

Torrance Kirby is Professor of Ecclesiastical History and **Director of the Centre for Research on Religion** at McGill where he has been a member of the Faculty of Religious Studies since 1997. He received a DPhil degree in Modern History from the University of Oxford in 1988. He is a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society, a life member of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge and the Centre of Theological Inquiry, Princeton. His publications include *Philosophy and the Abrahamic Religions*, co-edited with Rahim Acar and Bilal Baş (2012), *A Companion to Peter Martyr Vermigli* (2009), *A Companion to Richard Hooker* (2008), *The Zurich Connection and Tudor Political Theology* (2007), *Richard Hooker and the English Reformation* (2003), and *Richard Hooker, Reformer and Platonist* (2005).



**PAUL'S CROSS AND THE CULTURE OF PERSUASION
IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND**

A **CREOR**-sponsored conference on the theme **Paul's Cross and the culture of persuasion, 1520–1640** was hosted at McGill University in mid-August 2012. Twenty-seven papers were presented on diverse aspects of this famous pulpit in the life of early-modern England with respect to the prominent role played by preaching at Paul's Cross in shaping England's early-



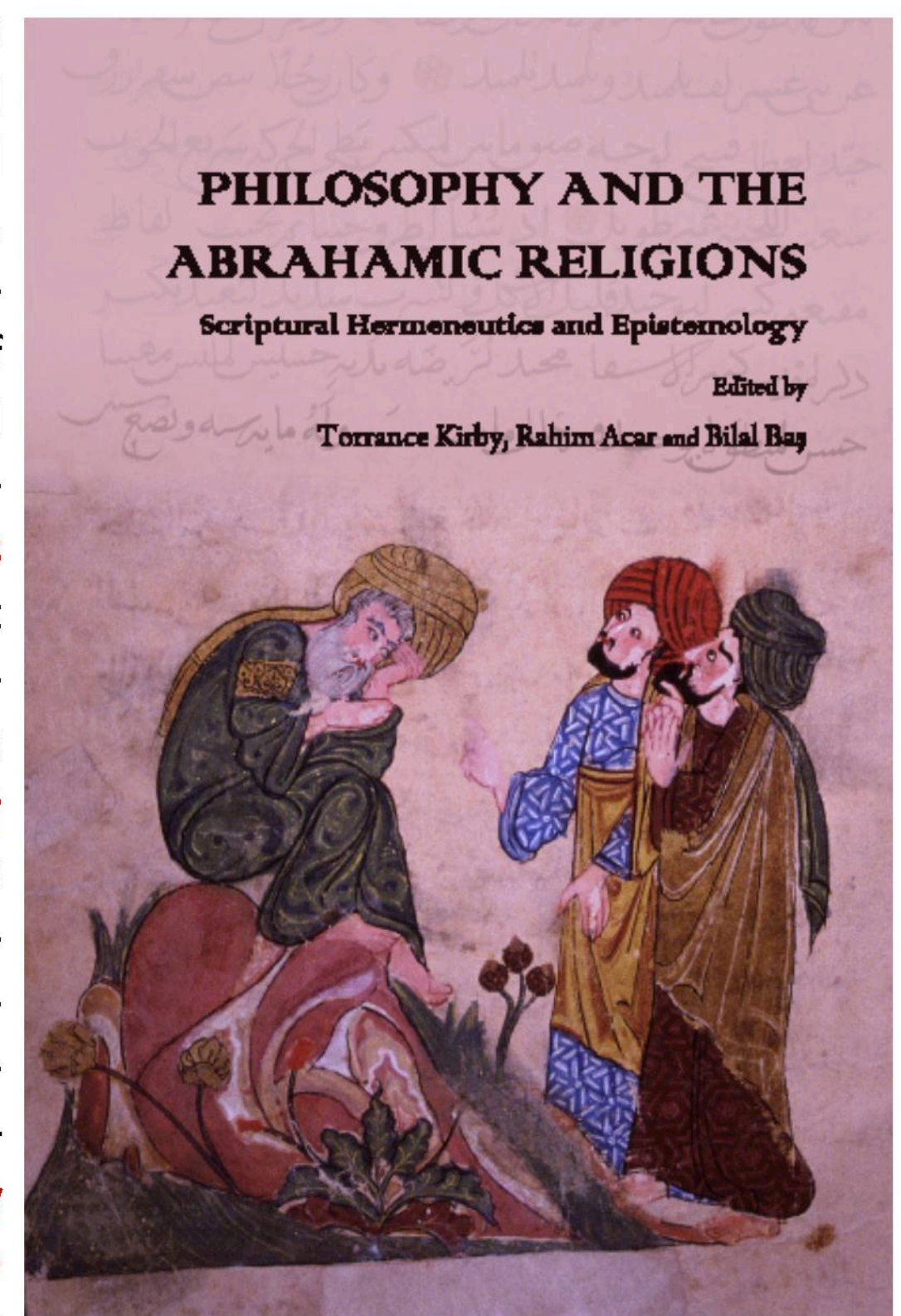
modern religious and political identities. A principal goal was to initiate a thorough reappraisal of the formation of sixteenth-century popular opinion on the hypothesis that Paul's Cross sermons played a vital role in the growth and development of a nascent 'public sphere' in Tudor and early-Stuart England. Professor **Peter McCullough** of Lincoln College, Oxford delivered the Plenary Address. Funded by a **SSHRC** Workshop Grant, the conference concluded a three-year research project (also funded by **SSHRC** through a Standard Research Grant) jointly undertaken by **Paul Stanwood** of the University of British Columbia, **Mary Morrissey** of the University of Reading, **John King** of Ohio State University, with **Torrance Kirby**, current Director of **CREOR**, as Principal Investigator. The conference proceedings will be published by Brill in 2013.

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PHILOSOPHY AND THE ABRAHAMIC RELIGIONS

A conference jointly sponsored by the **Centre for Research on Religion** and the Faculty of Theology at Marmara University, Istanbul on the theme 'Philosophy and the Abrahamic Religions: scriptural authority and theories of knowledge' was held in Istanbul in December 2010. The conference steering committee comprised members of both institutions and included

Carlos Fraenkel (McGill, Philosophy and Jewish Studies), **Bilal Bas** (professor of Religious History at Marmara and recent PhD graduate of the Faculty of Religious Studies at McGill), **Rahim Acar** (professor of Philosophy and PhD Harvard, where he was supervised by **Robert Wisnovsky**, currently at McGill's Islamic Institute), **Bilal Kuspinar** (Ahlia University, Bahrain), and **Torrance Kirby** (FRS and current director of **CREOR**). Thirty-three papers were



presented by scholars from various universities in Canada, Turkey, the USA, England, Ireland, and Israel. The conference proceedings were published by Cambridge Scholars Press in December 2012.

ABOUT CREOR

The **Centre for Research on Religion (CREOR)** is one of McGill's many academic research centres, but one of only a few in the Humanities, and the sole one in the field of Religious Studies. The Centre is an inter-disciplinary and inter-faculty entity drawing on the expertise and research interests present in the Faculties of Religious Studies, Arts, Education, Law and Medicine, and other faculties at McGill University, such as Management and Music, as well. **CREOR** is based in the Faculty of Religious Studies of McGill University, and collaborates with researchers from other Montreal institutions and from universities and colleges around the world.

CREOR includes individual scholars, research units and research teams covering Buddhism, Christianity, East Asian Religions, Humanism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and new Religious Movements, as well as the Comparative Study of Religion and Inter-faith Studies. Research projects may be in the hands of one or more scholars from the Faculty of Religious Studies and from the other universities, faculties, departments, units, and centres. **CREOR** builds on past cooperation on the level of teaching and individual cooperation with the Faculties of Arts (Catholic Studies, East-Asian Studies, History, Islamic Studies, Jewish Studies), Education (Counselling Psychology), Law (Comparative Law, Ethics), Montreal Neurological Institute, and Medicine (MUHC, Centre for Healing). Cooperation will be extended to other faculties and departments, such as the Faculty of Management and the Faculty of Music, as well as to other Canadian and international universities. The Centre has established an active collaboration with the Faculty of Theology at the **University of Zurich** and **Marmara University**, Istanbul.