



Call for Proposals:

THE POLITICS OF CONVERSION: MARTIN LUTHER TO MUHAMMAD ALI

*A conference co-presented by the Newberry Library and The Early Modern Conversions Project
Newberry Library, Chicago, September 14-16 2017*

Religious conversion is a highly personal phenomenon—Augustine under the fig tree has the company of the voices of children and a found biblical verse, Luther spends days in solitary conversation with Paul’s Letter to the Romans, Cassius Clay is in dialogue with one or two sympathetic interlocutors. Yet conversion, as personal as it often is, can also ramify outward into the world with great force, galvanizing new communities, breaking old ones, and changing the political world utterly.

Early modernity sees conversion come into full flower as a sublime instrument of imperial power—a way for sovereigns to exercise control over their subjects’ souls as well as their bodies, whether those subjects are Iberian Jews or Muslims, French Protestants, English Catholics, or the First Nations peoples of the Americas. Conversion also becomes in the period a surprisingly potent instrument of resistance to the power of the State or the Church, a way for subjects such as Bartolomé de las Casas, Anne Askew, or Luther himself to stand out against the powerful and even to begin to create new conversational publics.

The year 2017 is the 500th anniversary of the nailing of the 95 Theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg. To mark this momentous event in the long history of the politics of conversion, the Center for Renaissance Studies at the Newberry Library and the Early Modern Conversions Project at McGill University’s Institute for the Public Life of Arts and Ideas are proud to announce a major conference, “The Politics of Conversion—Martin Luther to Muhammad Ali,” and are pleased to invite scholars across the disciplines and with historical focuses especially in the period of the Reconquista and the Reformation and/or in the 20th and 21st centuries to submit proposals for individual presentations or panels.

Since the questions at the heart of the conference are of shared interest to people inside and outside the academy, “Politics of Conversion” will also feature an ambitious public education and exchange program where artists, scholars, and public intellectuals take part in searching and exciting performances and presentations that will take conference participants of all kinds toward a deeper understanding of how early modern conversions changed the politics of the past and opened pathways to the political cultures of modernity.

The conference will coincide with the opening of a major gallery exhibition at the Newberry—“Religious Change and Print, 1450-1700.”

We are now inviting proposals for individual presentations (20 min. + 10 min. Q&A). Proposals should be approximately 250 words in length and should provide a brief explanation of how the proposed paper relates to the focus of the conference. Please submit all proposals to conversion.iplai@mcgill.ca by February 28, 2017. An adjudication committee will review all submissions and arrive at decisions by mid-April.