

The Episcopal Theological School at Claremont  
EP 164: Mystical Theology  
Spring Semester 2017  
Instructor: Michael J. McGrath, Ph.D.  
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### **Course Description:**

In Christian mysticism we find both the starting point of theology and a practical guide for Christian living. The course will study the origins of mysticism and its development in the Christian tradition, as well as its contemporary forms (particularly the present-day emphasis on the mystical as political), for the sake of awakening our lives to the presence of God and opening our lives to this tradition's transformative influence.

One key problem that the course will address: presently, in our churches and in our daily lives, we tend to think of spirituality and theology as distinct categories of faith, the former having to do with experiences of God in our lives, the latter with doctrinal belief. The course will challenge this tendency to separate the two by demonstrating that the spiritual life, fueled by the love of God and love of neighbor, presupposes a theological context, and that an effective theology must find expression in the spiritual life. The goal of the course, then, is to envision the mystical and the theological as forming a unified whole, thus offering a way to integrate theology and spirituality, both doctrinally and in the practice of Christian living.

### **Texts:**

William Johnston, *Mystical Theology: The Science of Love* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1995)

Bernard McGinn (ed.), *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism* (Modern Library, Random House, 2006)

Mark A. McIntosh, *Mystical Theology: The Integrity of Spirituality and Theology* (Blackwell Publishing, 1998)

Aristotle Papanikolaou, *The Mystical as Political: Democracy and Non-Radical Orthodoxy* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2012)

### **Learning Objectives:**

- Identify and acquire knowledge of the main figures and writings that make up the mystical tradition in Western and Eastern Christianity.
- See the writings of the Christian mystics as a key source for the articulation of Christian theology, both in terms of doctrinal belief and social action.
- Achieve an integration of theology and spirituality
- Achieve a more contemplative practice of the sacraments and, overall, a more contemplative Church.
- Gain a greater awareness of the transformative presence of God in our lives.

**Grading:** Based on class participation, one class presentation (a pastoral application), and a course paper (about 15 pages in length).

**Course Outline:**

Jan 14 Introduction to the Course

**Foundations of Christian Mysticism**

Jan 28 McGinn, Preface, Introduction  
Johnston, Introduction, chs. 1-3  
McGinn: (Origen et al.) 3-26, 79-85; (Athanasius of Alexandria, Evagrius Ponticus) 47-59; (Dionysius) 281-89; (Clement of Alexandria et al.) 309-15

Feb 11 Johnston, chs. 4-6  
McGinn: (Augustine) 191-96, 316-23; (Gregory the Great) 324-26, 365-73, 519-24; (Bernard of Clairvaux) 27-34, 221-24, 256-61, 434-37, 525-28; (Cloud of Unknowing) 262-68, 535-39; (Gregory Palamas) 208-12.

**Integration of Theology and Spirituality**

Feb 25 McIntosh, chs. 1-2  
McGinn: (Maximus the Confessor) 408-11; (Julian of Norwich) 238-45; (Hadewijch of Antwerp) 102-4; (Mechthild of Magdeburg) 202-7; (Marguerite Porete) 172-79; (Hildegard of Bingen) 331-35; (Catherine of Siena) 540-44; (Bonaventure et al.) 149-54, 162-71.

March 4 McIntosh, chs. 3-4  
McGinn: (Therese of Lisieux) 389-93; (John of the Cross) 72-77, 213-20, 384-88, 460-64; (Meister Eckhart) 35-40, 395-6, 412-20, 427-29, 438-43, 495-500, 529-34; (John Tauler) 105-9, 180-83, 379-83; (Henry Suso) 231-37; (John Ruusbroec) 444-50.

**Practices of Mysticism**

March 18 Johnston, chs. 11-17  
**Presentation Proposal**

March 25 McIntosh, chs. 5-7  
McGinn: (William of Saint-Thierry) 197-201, 253-55; (Theresa of Avila) 110-17, 357-59, 451-59; (Madame Guyon) 41-46, 501-8; (Simone Weil) 246-50.

April 8 Papanikolaou, Introduction, chs. 1-2  
Johnston, chs. 18-19  
McGinn: (Thomas Merton) 545-51.

April 22 Papanikolaou, chs. 3-5, Conclusion.

May 6 Presentations and Conclusions  
**Paper due: Postmark May 19, 2017**