**Protestantism and Christian Mysticism**  
The Rev. Dr. Eric M. Parker, Instructor

**Course Description**

Protestantism and “mysticism” have often been viewed at odds with one another, but what this class presupposes is, perhaps they’re not. According to Bernard McGinn, the mystical way of Christianity, the search for “a direct and transformative presence of God,” or what the Anglican priest Martin Thornton termed “a habitual awareness” of God’s presence, is a built-in feature of the Faith. This quest as it is expressed in writing characterizes a particular genre of literature that promotes an authentic experience of the divine presence through reading and inward reflection. Martin Luther was known to cast doubt upon his Medieval predecessors who he claimed were in search of a “theology of Glory” that aimed to storm the gates of heaven through the power of contemplative thought.

Yet Luther also promoted the work of German mystics in the tradition of Meister Eckhart. In recent years, Heiko Oberman has argued persuasively that Luther’s most famous doctrines could be stated in terms used by Medieval mystics. Phrases such as “both just and a sinner” (simul iustus et peccator) and “alien righteousness” (iustitia extra nos) were also stated by Luther in mystical terms of “both grieving and in rapture” (simul gemitus et raptus) and “taken outside of oneself” (raptus extra se). In this class we will read Christian mystics from St. Augustine and Dionysius to Bonaventure and Nicholas of Cusa, with a final foray into the mystical theology of Martin Luther in order to discern the way classical Protestant doctrines were originally thought to be transformative and experiential.

**Course Format**

This course will follow a traditional seminar format, with discussion guided by the instructor. Students will be expected to demonstrate their familiarity with the text(s) in discussion. Students will need to prepare for each class by (1) reading, marking and inwardly digesting (as Cranmer would say) the reading selection for the week, and (2) preparing written notes and questions to propose to the class when prompted by the material in discussion or called upon by the instructor.

Classes will meet via Zoom for two hours each week and will be recorded for later viewing by students who are unable to participate. Additional student participation and instructor interaction can take place on a private discussion board.

**Course Objectives**

Objectives for this course include: (1) to gain a better understanding of the catholicity of the Reformation, (2) by understanding Medieval mysticism on its own terms, and searching for sources of similarity and possible influence on the principles of Protestantism. In that regard, our goal is aimed more at understanding the principles of Protestantism (or Protestant mysticism) as an outgrowth of Medieval devotion. Finally, (3) to deepen our own understanding of the Faith once delivered by examining the parameters of catholic devotion through the writings of its most celebrated authors, with a final foray into the devotional writings of Martin Luther.

**Course Requirements**

1. Weekly readings (due before our meeting each week).

2. Weekly interaction with fellow participants and the instructor in live class sessions.

**Additional Course Requirements for Course Credit:**

1. Weekly (10) 1-page, typed, in 12-point Times New Roman font, reflections which engage with the assigned readings for that day. These may range from a simple digest of the material to an engagement with and reflection upon a single aspect of the reading.
2. One (1) 12–15 page essay exploring a topic approved by the instructor.

**Course Text**

Though most of the texts for this course will be available for free online (links to which will be provided by the instructor), the following are not available online and will need to be purchased (used copies are available for a reasonable price):

*Johannes Tauler: Sermons* (Classics of Western Spirituality)

*Jean Gerson: Early Works* (Classics of Western Spirituality)

**Course Schedule**

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| **Week** | **Dates** | **Discussion Topics** | **Reading** |
| 1 | 4/12 | St. Augustine | *Sermons on the Psalms*; *On the Trinity* (selections TBA) |
| 2 | 4/19 | St. Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite | [*Mystical Theology*; *The Celestial Hierarchy*](https://archive.org/details/theworksofdionys00dionuoft/page/n5/mode/2up) (selections TBA) |
| 3 | 4/26 | St. Bernard of Clairvaux | [*On the Love of God*](https://www.google.com/books/edition/On_the_Love_of_God/ZNowAQAAMAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=bernard of clairvaux&pg=PP7&printsec=frontcover) (selections TBA) |
| 4 | 5/3 | St. Bonaventure | *[The Journey of the Mind into God](http://www.clerus.org/bibliaclerusonline/en/p3.htm" \l "f)* (selections TBA) |
| 5 | 5/10 | Meister Eckhardt | [*Book of Divine Comfort*; Sermons](https://archive.org/details/MeisterEckhartEckhartMeister1260Ca.1329/page/n3/mode/2up) (selections TBA) |
| 6 | 5/17 | Johannes Tauler | Sermons(selections TBA) |
| 7 | 5/17 | Nicholas of Cusa | [*On Learned Ignorance*; *On the Vision of God*](https://jasper-hopkins.info/) (selections TBA) |
| 8 | 5/31 | [*Theologia Germanica*](https://www.google.com/books/edition/Theologia_Germanica/865GAQAAMAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=luther theologia germanica&pg=PA3&printsec=frontcover) | Selections TBA |
| 9 | 6/7 | Jean Gerson | *On Mystical Theology* (selections TBA) |
| 10 | 6/14 | Martin Luther | *Babylonian Captivity*; [*Commentary on the First Twenty-Two Psalms*](https://www.google.com/books/edition/Select_works_tr_by_H_Cole/awC2pLFPHJkC?hl=en&gbpv=1&pg=PP5&printsec=frontcover) (selections TBA) |