THEO 3340 Christian Mystical Texts
Summer 2018
Tues Wed Thurs 6:00pm-9:00pm
May 29-June 28.
Professor Brenna Moore
Office Hours: Tuesday, 3-4:30 and by appointment
Office: Duane 112
To arrange alternate meetings, email is best: brmoore@fordham.edu

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Salvador Dalí, St. Peter’s in Rome (Explosion of Mystical Faith in the Midst of a Cathedral [1960])

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Welcome Aboard!

What are mystical texts? What are we doing here?

Authors of mystical texts claim to have had a particular encounter with the sacred that transcends ordinary human experience. Analyzing these texts presents an opportunity to explore some of the most vexing, fascinating issues in the study of theology and religion today: the problem of expressing what is inexpressible in language; the tensions between individual experience and institutional religion; the relationship between the body and the soul; the impact of mystical experience on one’s life, family, community, and society; the tension between mysticism and politics; the problem of comparing mystical texts across religious traditions, and more. This course will introduce students to these interpretive issues, primarily in relation to mystical writings from Christianity, though we also explore approaches to comparative mysticism, and engage in close readings of a small selection of texts from the Islamic tradition.

Although many of the classic Christian mystical texts are pre-modern, we will spend a significant portion of the semester focused on the modern period, and consider the creative contributions twentieth-century
thinkers have made to the long tradition of Christian spiritual writings. This course satisfies the Sacred Texts and Tradition Requirement of Fordham’s core curriculum.

**Course Requirements**

1. **Participation [10% total]**: Your attendance and your active participation in class discussion are essential. You are expected to have done all the assigned reading for each class session and to come to class (with the readings in hand) having formulated specific questions and/or observations about the reading that you are ready to discuss. More than two unexcused absences during the course of the semester will have an adverse effect on your final grade. For an excused absence, please contact your class Dean and show him or her the proper paperwork, and the Dean will be in touch with me.

This is a totally screen-free class, no laptops, ipads, or cell phones are to be used during class time. Research is showing how powerfully screens inhibit deep learning, so let’s consider our 75 minutes together a rare unplugged block of time in our days! One of the participation requirements include participating in a 12 experiment with silence and writing about your experience. Details forthcoming.

2. **Readings**

   The following books are available for purchase at the Fordham bookstore:

   (These are also widely, and cheaply, available online at any of the major book retailers)

   Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle* (Dover Thrift Additions)


   The rest of the readings are articles located on Blackboard. If you can print them and bring them to class, that is best but if that’s not possible, I’ll pull up readings on our classroom screen so we can all refer to them together. The important thing is to read them before class and come prepared to discuss.

3. **Blackboard Discussion Forum [10% total]**

   You are responsible for posting a total of 5 times on our class blackboard page between the first and last days of class. Everyone post for the first class, “The Science of Mystical Experience,” and the next 4 are up to you. You are responsible of keeping track. Posts should be a reaction, question, observation, critique, appreciation in relation to the assigned the readings. Be sure to engage specifics from the text you’d like to discuss further. To count for one of your 5, they are due before class, by 10:00am.

4. **2 short papers [30% total]**

5. **In class midterm: March 20 [20%]**

6. **Presentations [10%]**

7. **In Class Final [20%]**

**Academic Honesty**

As you by now know, plagiarism is the use of words and ideas that are not your own without explicitly acknowledging the original source. Plagiarism (even unintentional) is considered academic dishonesty
and will be reported to the administration. To avoid plagiarism, simply give the original author credit when you draw upon his or her ideas, and cite facts or information that are not common knowledge, and put direct quotations in quotation marks. Please see me if you have questions or concerns.

**ADA Notice**

Any student who has a documented learning disability must see me during the first week of the course so that arrangements can be made for accommodations for that student. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (1973) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) provide for equal access to education for all qualified persons regardless of the presence of any disabbling conditions.

**Tuesday May 29: Introductions**

**Wednesday May 30: The Science of Mystical Experience and Vocabularies of Our Course**

**On Blackboard:**
- Sara Lazar, “Meditation Experience is Associated with Increased Cortical Thickness” [2005]

**Thursday May 31: Teresa of Avila and the Golden Age of Spanish Mysticism**


**Tuesday June 5: Teresa of Avila**

Purchase book


**Wednesday June 6: Teresa of Avila**

Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle*. Finish

**Thursday June 7: Paper #1 due**

**Tuesday June 12: Ignatius of Loyola and the Golden Age of Spanish Mysticism**

**Blackboard**
- Ignatius of Loyola, *Personal Writings* [short selections]
- Darcy Donahue, “The Mysticism of Saint Ignatius of Loyola,” in *A Companion to Jesuit Mysticism*
- Monika Hellwig, “Finding God in All Things: A Spirituality for Today,” in *An Ignatian Spirituality Reader*

**Wednesday June 13 Jesuit spirituality today**

**Blackboard**
- Kevin Burke, “Mysticism of Open Eyes: Pedro Arrupe.”

**Thursday June 14 Midterm Exam**
Tuesday June 19: Islamic Mysticism (Sufism)
Fatemeh Keshavarz, “The Ecstatic Faith of Rumi,” On Being Podcast, click to listen or read
Carl Ernst, “Spirituality in Practice,” Following Muhammad: Rethinking Islam in the
Contemporary World 163-198

Wednesday June 20: Sufism Continued
Omid Safi, “Is Islamic Mysticism Really Islam?” The Huffington Post [blackboard]
Carl Ernst, “Between Orientalism and Fundamentalism: Problematizing the teaching of Sufism,”
108-123

Thursday June 21: Sufism
Rumi’s Little Book of Life
Paper #2 Due

Tuesday June 26: Mysticism in the Context of War
Simone Weil, Waiting for God

Wednesday June 27: Simone Weil Continued and Presentations
Simone Weil, Waiting for God
Presentations

Thursday June 28: Last Class and Final Exam
Final Exam