

Course Description
Vancouver School of Theology

Title: Clothed in God: Women Mystics and the Christian Tradition
Spring 2015

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Purpose:

Mysticism, as Dorothee Soelle defines it, is the seeking of experience of direct union with God. It is not for a few select heroic spirits or mentally unstable visionaries who flee the world, but a call for all of us as human beings to see the divine in our connection and service to the world God loves. This course will explore the lives, art and writing of several women mystics in different historical contexts and from a variety of traditions, bold voices to guide and inspire us in the 21st century. With language and images from domestic chores and administration, child-bearing and mothering, but also erotic desire and friendship, nature and community life, these women give expression to their experience of God. Although full of deep theological insight, many were dismissed by the institutional church. We will encounter, amongst others, some of Macrina, Hildegard of Bingen, Mechtild of Magdeburg, the Beguines, Julian of Norwich, Catherine of Sienna, Hadewijch, Teresa of Avila, Queen Marguerite of Navarre (patron of Jean Calvin), Margaret Fell, Anne Bathurst, Evelyn Underhill, and Mary Oliver. In addition to figures from the western tradition, we will engage lesser-known but important voices from non-western and indigenous cultures. Bring your sense of wonder and your willingness to play.

Competence Objectives: Knowledge and skills objectives, what students will be expected to learn and demonstrate:

To develop and be able to defend a working definition of Mysticism

To describe Eckhart's and Underhill's stages of the mystical life

Describe key themes in the writing of several Women Mystics in the Christian tradition

Identify and discuss influences of women's experiences on theologies, images, and writings of various mystics presented in the course.

Discuss the theology and images of each mystic in relation to her historical context

Engage in and evaluate critically several contemplative practices drawn from the mystics presented in class.

Seek to articulate one's own mystical experiences, in relation to one or more mystics presented in class.

Present an interpretation of at least one mystic as she relates to issues of 21st century Christians.

Examine one contemporary woman Christian mystic.

Format: Teaching style, course format (weekly, weekend, or intensive one or two week)

Class presentations which involve experiential engagement of each mystic in her historical context, which may include lecture, group discussion, small group work, videos, singing, artistic expression.

The course is Wednesday afternoons from 2 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Assignment:

An interpretation of the life and writings of a classic Christian Women Mystic* for the ministry context of the student: e.g. a sermon, a workshop, a retreat presentation; or a written academic paper.

*This may be one of the mystics presented in class, or another; she must be chosen in discussion with the instructor.

It is understood that student class for different levels or different degree programs; expectations will be adjusted accordingly.

Bibliography:**Required:**

Soelle, Dorothee. *The Silent Cry: Mysticism and Resistance*. Fortress, 2001

Selected Articles from the following: Moodle

Gregory of Nyssa. *Life of Macrina*

Harvey, Andrew (ed). *The Essential Mystics*. San Francisco: Harper, 1996

Marguerite of Navarre. *The Mirror of the Sinful Soul: A Prose Translation from the French*

McGinn, Bernard. ed. *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics: Hadewijch of Brabant, Mechthild of Magdeburg, and Marguerite Porete*, 1997

Rolf, Veronica Mary. *Julian's Gospel: Illuminating the Life and Revelations of Julian of Norwich*. New York: Orbis, 2013.

Underhill, Evelyn. *Mysticism*

Underhill, Evelyn. *Practical Mysticism*.

Wesley, Susanna *Letters*

All of the following mystics are available in excellent English Translation in the Series: *The Classics of Western Spirituality*:

Catherine of Siena

Clare of Assisi

Early Protestant Spirituality: Katherine Schuetz Zell

Hadewijch: the Complete Works

Hildegard of Bingen

Johannes Tauler *Sermons*

Julian of Norwich: *The Revelation of Divine Love*

Margaret Fell in *Quaker Spirituality*

Meister Eckhart: Two Volumes of translations

Marguerite Porete *The Mirror of Simple Souls*

Teresa of Avila

October 8, 2014