

Mystics, Mysticism and Ourselves as Mystic-Prophets with Matthew Fox

August 24, 31, Sept 7, 14, 21, 28

There are many reasons to study the mystics. Among them are these: To bring alive the mystic in ourselves, for we are all mystics at least potentially. (We were all mystics as children, unless of course, it was driven out of you.) To develop the mystic in oneself more deeply. If the “prophet is the mystic in action,” as William Hocking wrote over a century ago, then it would seem we cannot develop our prophetic vocation without enriching the mystic in us. Jung says “it is to the mystic that we owe what is best in humanity”—why then would we ignore the “best in humanity” when humanity is on the brink of extinction at this time of climate change, war, political and religious extremism, and more?

Jung also says that “only the mystic brings creativity to religion itself.” Why would we ignore the mystic when religion needs deep reinvention? The mystic is the lover, the prophet is the warrior. Both constitute adult spirituality and our special has to evolve rapidly out of adolescence and into adulthood. Mystics take us to the edge of consciousness—to recover and deepen the mystic in us is to journey to the edge of consciousness. It is an adventure. Welcome aboard!

In this class we will consider a number of pre-modern or medieval mystics as well as some contemporary ones. We will see how they live out the Four Paths of Creation Spirituality with courage and insight, wonder and creativity, and urge us to do the same. This is an overview but hopefully substance will be the name of the game for an adult mystic lives a life of substance, one of a “radical response to life,” as we shall see.

Classes 1 and 2: CS Mystics on the Via Positiva

The Via Positiva, our experience of Awe and wonder, joy and gratitude, reverence and thanksgiving, are the springboard to one’s spiritual life. “Awe is the beginning of wisdom” notes Rabbi Heschel. We will explore how the creation centered mystics explore and celebrate the Via Positiva or, as Eckhart puts it: “If the only prayer you say in your whole life is ‘Thank

You,' that would suffice.” Our guides will include Mary Oliver, Thomas Aquinas, Hildegard of Bingen, Meister Eckhart, Julian of Norwich, Thomas Merton, Thomas Berry

Class 3: CS Mystics on the Via Negativa.

The Via Negativa includes silence and, emptying (kenosis) and suffering and grief. What is common to both silence and suffering is *letting go and letting be*. It also includes the Apophatic Divinity which is “the God who has no name and will never be given a name.” (Eckhart). We will explore the Via Negativa as found in Aquinas, Eckhart, Merton, and Julian in particular.

Classes 4 & ½ of 5. CS Mystics on the Via Creativa

From the emptying in the Via Negativa is born creativity. (Eckhart: “Even though a man, I had a dream that I was pregnant with nothingness—and out of this nothingness God was born.”) M. C. Richards: “There lives a creative being in each of us and we must get out of its way for it will give us no peace until we do.” All the creation mystics are rich in creativity. Art as meditation is an important spiritual practice in CS and it has been called “the way of the prophets.” We will share Hildegard, Aquinas, Eckhart, Julian, Merton, Oliver on their amazing teachings and modeling urging us to our creativity.

Classes 5.5 and 6: CS Mystics on the Via Transformativa

What do we ultimately give birth to? What is our creativity for? For Healing and for celebrating and bringing joy and justice alive. We will explore the deep teachings of CS mystics about compassion and celebration, justice, and *the prophetic task of interfering with injustice*. It is rare to find a CS mystic (beginning with Jesus) who did not get in trouble with state or empire or church or any other institution in a time when justice and renewal was called for. Prophets speak truth to power and often pay a price. We are called to be both mystics and prophets, that is the meaning of adult spirituality.

Readings:

1. *Christian Mystics: 365 Readings and Meditations* (required)

Choose any one or two of these books to read in depth: All are by Fox except the last one:

2. *Meister Eckhart: A Mystic-Warrior for Our Times*

3. *Hildegard of Bingen, a Saint for Our Times: Unleashing Her Power in the 21st Century*

4. *Passion for Creation, The Earth-Honoring Spirituality of Meister Eckhart*
(formerly *Breakthrough*)

5. *Sheer Joy: Conversations with Thomas Aquinas on Creation Spirituality*

6. *The Tao of Thomas Aquinas: Fierce Wisdom for Hard Times*

7. *Julian of Norwich: Wisdom in a Time of Pandemic...and Beyond*

8. *Illuminations of Hildegard of Bingen*

9. *Meditations with Meister Eckhart*

10. *Passion For Creation: The Earth-Honoring Spirituality of Meister Eckhart*

11. *Hildegard of Bingen's Book of Divine Works, Songs & Letters*

12. *A Way To God: Thomas Merton's Creation Spirituality Journey*

13. *Creativity: Where the Divine and the Human Meet*

14. Mary Oliver, *Devotions: The Selected Poems of Mary Oliver*

Learning Outcomes:

1. Deepen your own mystical journey through the Via Positiva and Via Negativa with these CS mystics as your guide.
2. Deepen your own prophetic journey through the Via Creativa and Via Transformativa with these mystics as your guide.
3. Deepen your vocation by applying the Four Paths to society at large via your work; your citizenship and political commitment including but not limited to: education; art; ecology and climate change; religion; or whatever you feel called to minister to at this time.
4. Who, what, is calling you? Whom are you called to serve at this time in your life? These mystic/prophets will assist you to work from a deep place and draw forth the mystic/prophet in you and challenge you to deepen your courage and your joy.

Class time will be roughly 60 minutes lecture; 30 min small groups; 30 min q and a.