



Call for Papers for:

RE-CONFIGURING THE APOPHATIC TRADITION IN
LATE MEDIEVAL ENGLAND

10-12 SEPTEMBER 2025

Plenary speakers:

Marleen Cré, Université Catholique de Louvain
Ryan Perry, University of Kent

Nicholas Watson, Harvard University
Katherine Zieman, Université de Poitiers

an international conference at the University of Lausanne, Switzerland

Running alongside the well-known medieval tradition of cataphatic or affirmative mysticism, is a second contemplative tradition, termed apophatic or negative, which seeks to erase sensory perceptions and strip away all that can be known about God, leading the disciple instead towards a place of darkness and cognitive obscurity. This conference will explore this tradition of apophatic theology, ultimately derived from the Syrian writings of Pseudo-Dionysius and mediated through Thomas Gallus, Richard of Saint-Victor, Hugh of Balma, and others, in late medieval England. It will give due weight to its best-known exponent in Middle English, the anonymous *Cloud*-author, but will also broaden the net to consider the possibility of an English apophatic tradition within which the *Cloud*-author plays a key but by no means singular role.

Paper topics might include:

- discussions of texts from the *Cloud*-corpus in relation to new developments in the understanding of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century religious culture in England. Papers focused on the minor treatises of the *Cloud*-author are particularly welcome.
 - the apophatic dimensions of other late medieval insular authors (Walter Hilton, Julian of Norwich, Richard Methley etc.), anonymous religious texts, compilations, and codices.
 - apophatic theology by continental mystics such as Guigo II, Jan van Ruusbroec, Marguerite Porete, Heinrich Suso, Catherine of Siena, Hendrik Herp, circulating in England and in some cases translated or adapted into Middle English.
 - the presence and influence of pseudo-Dionysian commentary and translation in late medieval England by scholars such as Hugh and Richard of Saint-Victor, Thomas Gallus, Robert Grosseteste, Albertus Magnus, Hugh of Balma etc.
 - cultures of apophatic production, reading and reception within monastic foundations, ecclesiastical, lay, and metropolitan venues.
 - the reception and afterlife of English apophatic theology in the Tudor Reformation and seventeenth century, together with its preservation and repurposing in continental Catholic environments (Augustine Baker, Serenus de Cressy, Benet Canfield etc.).
 - the literary, religious, philosophical, and psychological reception and repositioning of medieval English apophatic mysticism from the eighteenth century to the present day.
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If you are interested in applying to give a 20-minute paper, please send a 250-word abstract and brief CV to christiana.whitehead@unil.ch by **30 November 2024**. Details at <https://wp.unil.ch/apophatictradition/>

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