AGENDA

PRAYER TO THE HOLY SPIRIT (All)

I. HISTORICAL CONTEXT (Paul Pham)
   a. THE AUTHOR OF THE CLOUD OF UNKNOWING?
   b. WHEN DID THE AUTHOR WRITE THE CLOUD OF UNKNOWING?
   c. WHAT WAS HAPPENING THEN?
   d. WHERE DID HE WRITE?
   e. WHO ARE THE AUDIENCES?

II. BRIEF INTRODUCTION (Paul Pham)

III. Marie will do part II of the book report (Maria Mendez-Nunez)
Come Holy Spirit!
Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love.

Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. And You shall renew the face of the earth.

O, God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy His consolations, Through Christ Our Lord, Amen.
The author remain anonymous

A reflection of his humility

To search the content, sources and authorship of the Cloud of Unknowing might seem a futile exercise.

Scholars have been able to figure out a great deal about the author’s historical context, his sources and his spiritual heritage.

Several scholars point to his being a priest and a contemplative monk, likely a Carthusian.
Who are the Carthusians?

- The Carthusian Order,
- Also called the Order of St. Bruno,
- A Roman Catholic religious order of enclosed monastics.
- Founded by Saint Bruno of Cologne in 1084
- Includes both monks and nuns.
- Has its own Rule, called the Statutes.
Carthusian is derived from the Chartreuse Mountains;

Saint Bruno built his first hermitage in the valley of these mountains in the French Alps

The motto "The Cross is steady while the world is turning."
The Carthusian monastery is a community.

They pass the greater part of their life in their cell where they pray, and work.
Drew from several rich currents of the Catholic contemplative heritage, principally from Scripture.

Almost a hundred citations to Scripture Including Psalms

Also a significant number from the Canticle of Canticles,

Also understandable given the monastic predilection for a contemplative and mystical reading.
New Testament:

- Sixty-five references to the Gospels
- Twenty-three references to the Pauline Epistles.
Liturgical references to the Divine Office,

References to Patristic and Medieval contemplative authors, such as Bernard and Richard of Saint Victor.

References to Augustine and Gregory the Great;

Utilization of the contemplative theology of Thomas of Aquinas.
Fourteenth-century
A troubled and dark time.

The Papacy in the period of the "Babylonian Captivity" in Avignon, France

Cause of scandal for English Catholics.

The Avignon Papacy lasted with seven popes resided in Avignon, France:

1. Pope Clement V: 1305–1314
2. Pope John XXII: 1316–1334
3. Pope Benedict XII: 1334–1342
4. Pope Clement VI: 1342–1352
5. Pope Innocent VI: 1352–1362
6. Pope Urban V: 1362–1370
7. Pope Gregory XI: 1370–1378

In 1376, Gregory XI back to Rome and died there in 1378.
The Great Schism of Western Christianity was a split within the Roman Catholic Church from 1378 to 1417. Three men simultaneously claimed to be the true pope. The schism was ended by the Council of Constance (1414–1418).
WHAT WAS HAPPENING IN THE FOURTEENTH-CENTURY?

The diagram illustrates the papal succession and the location of the papal residence during the fourteenth century. The timeline spans from 1378 to 1418, with notable popes including Gregory XI, Urban VI, Boniface IX, Clement VII, Benedict XIII, and Martin V. The diagram also indicates periods when the papal residence was in Avignon or Rome, with a brief period at Pisa.
The prologue points that the author simply addressing, to an individual whom he knew and wished to help,

An essay previously written for beginners in the Dionysian contemplative method of prayer,

Offering specific advice as to whether the novice was being called to this form of contemplation and the rule of life demanded for its practice.

According to Dr. Hodgson, the audience was not a scholar which introduces in five chapters (35-39): “... there are certain preparatory exercises which should occupy the attention of the contemplative learner: the lesson, the meditation and the petition.”
There are no scriptural citations in Latin: a fact that may indicate a lack of theological proficiency on the novice addressee.

A young man, only twenty-four when he began to read the Cloud of Unknowing;

His learning may equally be that of a beginner.

According to Richard Methley, the individual audience was already a Carthusian when he received his personal copy of the Cloud of Unknowing,

At least have finished his novitiate since the author insists on being his personal director: "I make no secret, as you see, of the fact that I want to be your spiritual father; indeed I do, and intend to be so."
WHO ARE THE AUDIENCES?

- The author has adapted a copy of his highly individual introduction to and commentary on the Mystical Theology for a particular audience:
  - One just undertaken the life of a solitary,
  - Or who has entered the Carthusian Order after spending some years as a Benedictine or a Cistercian
Widely recognized as a classic of Medieval Catholic spirituality.

Clifton Wolters has written: "This book is one of the devotional classics of the English Church, and perhaps the greatest of them all. No one who reads it can fail to catch something of its splendor and charm."
Dom David Knowles writes of the author that he is "perhaps the most subtle and incisive, as well as the most original spiritual writer in the English language."

Evelyn Underhill writes of the work: "It springs from an age when English mysticism was in full flower. This is the pure doctrine of mysticism."
Thomas Merton highly praised the writer.

Johnston writes that an early-on translation into Latin of the Cloud, might well have influenced a range of continental contemplatives and mystics, including John of the Cross.
BRIEF INTRODUCTION

- The contemporary "centering prayer" movement, has been significantly influenced by the Cloud;

- Basil Pennington affirmed that centering prayer is simply a repackaging of the Cloud.
The Cloud in key texts of the Jewish scriptures revealing the Divine Presence (see for instance Exodus 13:21ff.; 14:19ff.; Psalms 18:10, 104:3; Judges 5:4; Ezekiel 1:4, etc.).
In the New Testament:

- From the cloud that the Father speaks at Christ's transfiguration (Matthew 17:5; Mark 9:9; Luke 9:34),

- Jesus ascends into a cloud at the end of his earthly ministry (Acts 1:9).

- Jesus will return in the clouds of heaven (Matthew 26:64; Mark 14:62).
Such images are mere metaphors, intended to point to the ineffable Mystery. Thus he writes: \textit{Do not think that because I call it a "darkness" or a "cloud" that it is the sort of cloud you see in the sky, or the kind of darkness you know when the light is out. I do not mean that at all. By "darkness" I mean a lack of knowing for you cannot see it with your inward eye. For this reason it is called a cloud, not of the sky, of course, but of unknowing.}
The Cloud describes his monologistic prayer: *Think no thought about God. A naked intention directed to God alone is wholly sufficient. If you want this intention summed up in a word, to retain it more easily, take a short word, preferably of one syllable, to do so. The shorter the better, more in accord with the Spirit. A word like God or Love. Choose which you like, or perhaps some other, just so it is short, and fix this word to your heart so that whatever happens it will not go away. With this word you are to press down all thoughts under the cloud of forgetting so that if any thought press upon you and ask what you would have, you respond with nothing else than this. And if you would go on to analyze learnedly the word, tell yourself rather that you will stick with the word as is, and not taken apart in pieces.*
Offers a caveat, evidence of his great humility

He hesitates to give specific recommendations to his disciple, and for two reasons:
- The first is this: I dare not rely on my own view and assert that it is absolutely true;
- the other is that your inner make-up and your capacity for all the things your letter speaks of are not as well known to me as they ought to be if I am to give you adequate advice.

Spiritual directors in all traditions might be so aware of their limits!

General approach to ascetic practices. He says to line them up on the one side, put their opposite on the other, and choose something in the middle, between fasting and eating, silence and speaking, solitude and community, etc.
But of course you will ask me what that "something" is. It is God, for whose sake you are quiet if you should be quiet, for whose sake you speak if you have to speak, for whose sake you fast if you ought to fast, and so on. Then choose God, and you will speak by your silence, and there will be a silence in your speech, you will be fasting while you eat, and eating when you fast, and all the rest.

This middle way, is the author's way "to be One with God," the God who is known and loved by unknowing. AMEN.
The Life Styles

• Active 1) To perform good and honest bodily works of mercy and of charity. Ex: Martha

        2) Meditate on a man’s wretchedness, the Passion of Christ, and the joys of Heaven

• Contemplative 3) the dark cloud of unknowing Ex. Mary

Mary disconsolately cried after Jesus’ death, despite the ministering of angels, because “[h]er thought was that whoever truly seeks the King of Angels will not be content to settle for angels” (XXII:1)
Who is called?

• All who have forsaken the world and give themselves to contemplation.
• The preferable path is that of the contemplative.

“For the sign of a perfect lover is not only that he loves the thing he loves more than he loves himself, but also, in a sense, that he hates himself on behalf of the things he loves.” (XLIII:1)
"For, when you begin it [this path of contemplation] you will find that there is at the start but a darkness; there is, as it were, a cloud of unknowing. You know not what it is except that you feel in your soul a naked intent toward God." (V:4)
God is “incomprehensible” with the power of knowledge provided man, but He “may be comprehended fully, but by each in a different way” through the power of love. (IV:6)

You are not to use your mind or imagination.

The darkness “is a lack of knowing that includes everything you do not know or else that you have forgotten, whatever is altogether dark for you because you do not see it with your spiritual eye.” “[F]or this reason it is not called a cloud of the ari, but rather a cloud of unknowing that is between you and your God.” (IV:18)
Aren’t you farther from God with a cloud of unknowing?

No! “[T]o the extent that anything is in your mind other than God, you are that much further from God” (V:2)
“Memory of thought concerning any creature that God has made, or of any of their deeds, is a kind of spiritual light; for the eye of your soul opens upon it and becomes fixed upon it, as the eye of the archer is fixed on the spot at which he aims. And to the extent that anything is in your other than God, you are that much further from God.” (V:2)
VIRTUE IS A DESIRE FOR GOD HIMSELF.

- **Meekness** consists in knowing yourself and being filled with a superabundant love for God. The former is imperfect meekness, and enables the later to follow.

- **Charity** is “love of God for Himself above all creatures” (XXIV:2). One with pure charity “believes that all those who bring him pain and do him harm in this life are his full and special friends” (4).
Reading, Thinking, Prayer

- Reading and listening provides the framework for the later two.

- For those laboring in this path, meditations and prayers come spontaneously.
“It is necessary only that you meditate on the word SIN or on the word GOD, or on any comparable word that you may prefer, not analyzing or interpreting them with refinements of learning, but simply considering the qualities of the words with the earnest intention of increasing your devotion.” (XXXVI:2)

Do not consider the word intellectually, but rather, as a whole “lump” (XXXVI:3).
“When these prayers are in words, as they very seldom are, they are only in very few words” (XXXVII:2).

“short prayer pierces heaven” (4)

Cry out “Sin, sin, sin! Out, out, out!” (XL:2) This will pierce the intruding thoughts and aid one in stomping them down into the cloud of Forgetting.
“nowhere physically is everywhere spiritually”

Then, “no matter where the thing on which you are consciously working may be, you will surely be there in spirit” (LXVIII:2).
The division that is in a man’s nose physically separating one nostril from the other is a token of the fact that man is to have spiritual judgment and is to distinguish the good from the evil, the evil from the worse, and the good from the better before he gives any full judgment of anything that he has heard or seen done or spoken about him.