

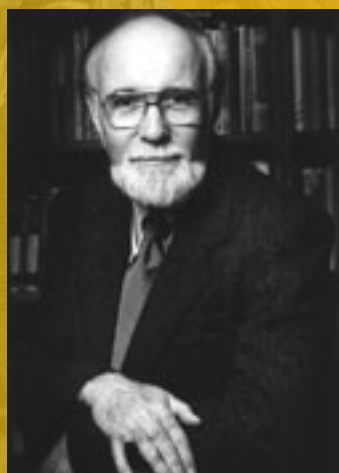
# DR. BERNARD MCGINN

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## PAUL AND DANTE: PILGRIMS TO THE INFINITE

The Jewish apocalypses of the last centuries B.C.E. introduced the concept of a heavenly journey to encounter God into the biblical tradition (e.g., 1 Enoch 14). The first autobiographical account of such a journey is found in Paul's brief enigmatic passage about being "caught up to the third heaven" to hear "things that cannot be told" (2 Cor. 12:2-4). The Pauline text became a keystone in the history of the Christian mystical tradition, analyzed by authors from the East (e.g., Origen, Gregory of Nyssa) and the West (e.g., Augustine, Bernard of Clairvaux, Thomas Aquinas). What had Paul experienced? How could he communicate it to others upon his return? Few mystics dared to equate themselves with Paul. Dante, both in the "Letter to Can Grande della Scala" and throughout the *Paradiso*, says that he has experienced what Paul did—and come back to tell what he could of what he saw. What are we to make of Dante's claim about making the most ambitious pilgrimage of all?

B. McGinn



Bernard McGinn works in the history of Christianity and the history of Christian thought, primarily in the medieval period. He has written extensively in the areas of the history of apocalyptic thought and, most recently, in the areas of spirituality and mysticism. He is a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and of the Medieval Academy of America. Past-president of the International Society for the Promotion of Erigenian Studies, the American Society of Church History, and the American Catholic Historical Association, he is member of the board of The Eckhart Society. The author of some 150 articles in scholarly journals, he has been the editor or co-editor of ten books, including two volumes of the works of the German Dominican theologian and mystic Meister Eckhart and (with John J. Collins and Stephen J. Stein) *The Continuum History of Apocalypticism* (2003). The most recent of his fifteen books is the fourth volume of a projected six-volume series on Christian mysticism in the West

**Saturday, April 2, 2011**

**11:00-12:00**

**Woodburn Hall 101**