The thirteenth century Flemish mystic Hadewijch of Brabant articulates a searing, fierce, and often bewildering vision of love. To open oneself to love is to risk being drawn into an abyss, a “deep, insurmountable darkness.” The lover becomes a wanderer, an exile, lost. Even to the extent of finding oneself completely forsaken. In this talk, I will consider what it meant for Hadewijch and other late medieval mystics to incorporate this vision of love into a sustained contemplative practice. I will consider also its possible significance for those engaging in contemplative practice today, especially in response to experiences of absence, exile and loss.

Douglas E. Christie is Professor and Chair in the department of Theological Studies at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. He is the author of The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism and The Blue Sapphire of the Mind: Notes for a Contemplative Ecology, both published by Oxford. From 2013 to 2015, he lived in Córdoba, Argentina where he helped to found the Casa de la Mateada study abroad program. He is currently at work on a book entitled The Dark Silence, which explores how classic apophatic mystical traditions might help us address the sense of overwhelming darkness that is such a deep part of this contemporary historical moment.