This course explores forms of disconsolation, of suffering together with forms of consolation in some strands of Christian writing and experience in the English Reformation. While many sources of affliction in human life pervade all cultures, the ways in which people seek to bear them belong to specific and very different histories. But so too do some forms of affliction. One of these is the Reformed doctrine of Election, teaching about predestination and reprobation. Medieval theologians certainly had discussions and debates "De Praedestinatione" (e.g., Aquinas, Summa Theologiae I. 23; William of Ockham, Tractatus de praedestinatione et de praescientia Dei et de futuris contingentibus); and by the time of the Reformation the teaching on this topic was extraordinarily varied and contested. But the doctrine received a new emphasis and location in Reformed Christianity—with far reaching consequences. In our wide-ranging explorations of disconsolation and consolation in Reformation writing we will give sustained attention to this topic.

The scope of questions in this course encourage us to work across conventional divisions between theology, ethics, history and psychology. But our approach will center on close reading of particular texts, often ones that are extremely demanding—intellectually, rhetorically, and affectively. Whatever ideas people in the class may have about the Reformation, whatever understanding may be gained in seminars, must be tested out in relation to the minute particulars of the texts we are studying. (Our approach should be antithetical to Brad Gregory’s recent and much-discussed grand narrative, The Unintended Reformation). So this course should contribute to hermeneutic and exegetical skills as well as to our engagement with the diverse kinds of writing and experience within Reformed traditions. As for Christian doctrine as it is studied in systematic theology: you will not find it in this course. For the writings we study and the approaches we espouse encourage us to explore the meaning of such doctrines in the lives and experiences of early modern Christians and their communities.

We will set out with some especially relevant areas of Calvin’s Institutes of Christian Religion in its final edition (1559). Why Calvin? Because Calvin’s work was a decisive force in the theology of the strikingly eclectic Church of England, and, therefore, in many people’s experience of Christian living/discipleship in late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England. So before the first class students must have read and reflected on the Institutes III, chapters 2-4 and 21-24. Come prepared to discuss your reading and ruminations in relation to the themes of this course. And, of course, don’t feel obliged to confine your reading of the Institutes to these chapters: ones that include discussions of faith, certainty, doubt, assurance, the alleged inadequacies of medieval practices of penance and Calvin’s doctrine of election. While the set text for this class is the one volume translation by Henry Beveridge you are welcome to use the two-volume translation done for Classics of the Reformation (McNeill and Battles).

From Calvin we will turn to an immensely rich and demanding work of allegorical poetry, Edmund Spenser’s “Legend of Holiness,” the first book of his great and unfinished work, The Faerie Queen. This is available in numerous editions: the one by A.C. Hamilton contains the most attention to theological issues and allusions (Longman).
After Spenser’s poem we will read a long and very popular work published in 1601 by the minister Arthur Dent: *The Plain Man’s Pathway to Heaven; wherein every man may clearly see whether he shall be saved or damned*. You can print the 1601 edition from EEBO or get the facsimile of the 1859 edition (modernized) of the 1601 text (Forgotten Books). Some may perhaps be interested to compare this work with an earlier dialogue by the most influential English Calvinist divine, William Perkins: *A Treatise tending unto a declaration, whether a man be in the estate of damnation or in the estate of grace…* (Many editions—use EEBO). Although this is a symptomatic and fascinating text, we won’t be reading it in class—Dent will suffice for our engagement with this genre.

From Dent we will consider two prose works and some short poems by an extremely learned convert from Roman Catholicism who became Dean of St. Paul’s, John Donne. From his prolific prose output we will only study his *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* and the sermon known as *Death’s Duel* (published together as an Ann Arbor paperback). The divine poems we will consider can be found in any edition of the complete poems of Donne (such as the one published by Penguin).

From the minister of the Church of England we turn to someone who grew up in that church but separated from it during the English Civil Wars: John Bunyan. We will read his *Grace Abounding*, and I would like you to do so in the paperback edition by John Stachniewski, *Grace Abounding: With Other Spiritual Autobiographies* (Oxford World Classics).

After Bunyan: the revolutionary Protestant John Milton. A great poet, theologian (who wrote a work of systematic theology in Latin, *De Doctrina Christiana*), political orator and theorist, defender of the regicide and ensuing republic, innovative theorist of divorce… Our set text here is *The Complete Poetry and Essential Prose of John Milton*, edited by William Kerrigan, John Rumrich and Stephen Fallon (Modern Library). We will begin our study of Milton with two poems on the death of two young men in the late 1630s: one in English (*Lycidas*) one in Latin (*Epitaphium Damonis*—the set text includes a good translation). The Latin poem was devoted to the closest friend Milton ever had. For me, working with Milton’s writing is an immense privilege, pleasure and challenge, an experience I hope at least some of you may come to share. In this course we will concentrate on his poetry including the long poems but with special attention to the final poems he chose to publish in one volume, *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*. Our set text includes a translation of selections from *De Doctrina Christiana*, and we will consider some of the chapters most obviously relevant to the preoccupations of this course.

The set texts have been cited in the above description. As adjuncts to these, I commend the following:

John Stachniewski, *The Persecutory Imagination*
Nicholas Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists: The Rise of English Arminianism c. 1590-1640*
Gordon Campbell and Thomas N. Corns, *John Milton: Life, Work, and Thought*
Patrick Collinson, *The Religion of Protestants: The Church in English Society 1559-1625*
Note on class format and expectations and grading
This class is a seminar so attendance and participation are mandatory. Laptops (and other electronic devices) are not to be used in class. A seminar is a dialogic form of learning, very different to a lecture class. In my experience, laptops act as an impediment to the kinds of attention and communication I consider essential to a flourishing seminar.

The grade will come from one essay of not more than 25 pages to be handed in during or before the final class.