

RGP 3210-6210HS – 2008
Comparative Mystical Traditions
cross-listed to the Theology Department

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COURSE DESCRIPTION: A comparative study of selected mystical traditions of the major world religions. Themes of analysis will include: the nature and forms of mystical experience; perspectives on ultimate Reality; the role of the spiritual teacher or master; spirituality and social action; mysticism and art; disciplines, methods, and ideals of spiritual salvation or liberation. Readings will be drawn both from mystic writers and comparative theorists.

OBJECTIVES: Students will be able to articulate, analyse, and evaluate significant theoretical views of mysticism. They will be able to outline and discuss essential historical, philosophical, and pastoral features of major mystical traditions, especially those of Judaism, Christianity, Lakota Sioux, and Buddhism. They will be able to analyze and discuss critically various comparative questions related to these mystical traditions: perspectives on ultimate Reality; the role of the spiritual teacher or master; spirituality and social action; mysticism and art; disciplines, methods, and ideals of spiritual salvation or liberation. For specific details, see the various class handouts, “Possible Discussion Questions”, distributed for many of the readings.

Required Books:

- John G. Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks*, Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1995 (available at Crux Bookstore, Wycliffe College).
- Saint Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle*, Mirabai Starr, tr., New York: Riverhead Books, 2003 (this edition is not available at Crux, order through Amazon.ca).
- Viradhammo Bhikkhu, *The Stillness of Being* (**available online at** www.buddhamind.info/stillness/)

Reserve Reading: Some required reading selections, listed on the course syllabus (pp. 4-5), will be available on Reserve in the Regis College Library. See the Reserve Reading list (p. 6) of this course outline.

Grading:

A numerical mark will be given for each course requirement. Following the final examination, a letter grade will be assigned on the following number and letter grade scheme:

A+ = 100-90	B = 76-73
A = 89-85	B- = 72-70
A- = 84-80	FZ = 69-0
B+ = 79-77	

Graded Assignments:**For Basic Degree Students:**

40% **Critical Reflection Paper #1; Theories of Mysticism.** The paper should be about 1600 words (6-7 typed pages or so). It is due on **October 16.**

Choose **one** of the following questions:

- 1) Provide a critical-evaluative overview of William James' view of mysticism in "Mysticism", *Varieties of Religious Experience*, Lectures 16 and 17, pp. 292-328.
- 2) Provide a critical-evaluative overview of W. T. Stace's view of mysticism in "What is Mysticism?", *The Teachings of the Mystics*, Chap. 1, pp. 9-29.
- 3) Provide a critical-evaluative overview of John Hick's view of mysticism in "Mystical Experience as Cognition", *Mystics and Scholars*, pp. 41-56.
- 4) Provide a critical-evaluative overview of Karl Rahner's view of mysticism in *Practice of Faith*, pp. 57-84.
- 5) Provide a critical-evaluative overview of Agha Khan's view of mysticism in *The Light at the Center*, chapters 1 and 2, pp. 15-61.

Carefully develop the salient points of the reading; creatively explore significant implications of the reading; provide some critical-evaluative comment on the reading in light of other material developed in class.

55% **Critical Reflection Paper #2.** The paper should be about 1800 words (7-8 typed pages or so). It is due on **December 11.** A choice of questions for Paper #2 will be distributed later in the course. These will pertain to Jewish, Christian, Native, or Buddhist Mysticism.

5% **Class Participation:** attendance, evidence that you are keeping up with the readings, class discussion etc.

For Advanced Degree Students:

- 40% **Critical Reflection Paper #1.** The paper should be about 1800 words (7-8 typed pages or so). It is due on **October 16**. See possible questions listed above for Basic Degree students Paper #1.
- 50% **Critical-Reflection Paper #2**, about 3000 words (11-13 typed pages or so), which explores a major theme of the course (“perspectives on ultimate Reality; the role of the spiritual teacher or master; spirituality and social action; disciplines, methods, and ideals of spiritual salvation or liberation”). The topic is to be chosen in consultation with me. **(due: December 11)**
- 10% **Class Participation:** attendance, evidence that you are keeping up with the readings, class discussion. This includes some extra readings listed on the course syllabus (pp. 4-5 below) and attending one Advanced Degree Seminar, **scheduled the week of November 3-7**, to discuss Michael Stoeber, “Amoral Trickster or Mystic Saint? Spiritual Teachers and the Transmoral Narrative,” G. William Barnard and Jeffrey J. Kripal, *Crossing Boundaries: Essays on the Ethical Status of Mysticism*, New York: Seven Bridges Press, 2002, pp. 381-405. Students will be expected to have read carefully this essay and to bring for class distribution two written questions/issues for possible discussion in the seminar.

Format and Marking Criteria:

- 1) The Critical Reflection Papers should show significant thought and effort. They should be well-developed and polished.
- 2) Format: papers must be **double spaced**, have a **title page**, **page numbers**, and appropriate **margin spacing**. **Footnotes** are necessary if you quote passages or are dependent for your ideas on another writer. Neglect of appropriate notation will result in a significant reduction of your grade, possibly even an “F”.
- 3) Academic Honesty: Documentation for footnotes is necessary, when quoting writers or referring to secondary sources. All material which you quote directly should be noted, as well as any judgments, arguments, and data that you draw from other sources.
 - i. Plagiarism will result in a grade of “F” for the course, and the notification of the Dean of your College.
 - ii. In order to deter plagiarism, I might require an oral defence of papers. Failure to attend the defence will result in an “F” on the paper.

iii. Failure to document properly the sources of your research will involve a significant reduction in your grade, possibly even an “F”. This includes the failure to cite the appropriate books or page numbers of books from which you have quoted.

iv. If the paper makes any major use of work done in another course, submit the work along with the paper. If there is not a significant amount of new work, the grade may be reduced. See me if you have any questions on this.

4) Marking Criteria:

i. Clarity of the paper, in grammatical detail and expression, and in the overall structure. Be sure your paper is drawn together coherently; a strong introduction stating what you will do and how you will do it, and conclusion summarizing what you have done, are essential in this regard.

ii. Substance of the paper, whether it is significant or superficial, rigorous or sloppy. You must take an appropriate objective and scholarly approach, and show some significant understanding of the material and relevant issues.

iii. Accuracy of the paper, where it involves an exposition or explanation of information from books or lecture notes.

iv. Scope of the paper: that is, be sure to develop the significant relevant issues and implications that arise from the problems, issues or themes of the material in question.

v. Conciseness of the paper, in contrast with being wordy or overly elaborate or needlessly repetitive.

vi. Originality of the paper: the analysis should show some critical reflection on the theme or question, whether it is your own or a synthesis of ideas connected to another course-reading or of ideas developed in class discussion. You must show some critical and creative development on your part.

Tentative Syllabus:

Sept. 11 Course Introduction and Defining Mysticism: Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, from David Stewart, ed., *Exploring the Philosophy of Religion*, pp. 18-36 (**R.R.**).

Sept. 18 Defining Mysticism: William James, “Mysticism”, from *Varieties of Religious Experience*, Lectures 16 and 17, pp. 292-328;
(*For AD students*: Agehananda Bharati, *The Light at the Center*, chapter 2, pp. 32-61 (**R.R.**)).

Sept. 25 Defining Mysticism (continued): W. T. Stace, “What is Mysticism?”, Chapter 1 of *The Teachings of the Mystics* (New York: New American Library, 1960) pp. 9-29 (**R.R.**).

- Oct. 2 Defining Mysticism (continued): John Hick, “Mystical Experience as Cognition”, *Mystics and Scholars*, pp. 41-56; John Hick, “The Pluralistic Hypothesis”, in D. Stewart, *Exploring the Philosophy of Religion*, pp. 37-49 (R.R.).
(For AD students: Michael Stoeber, *Theo-Monistic Mysticism*, Chapters 1-2, pp. 1-38 (R.R.)).
- Oct. 9 Defining Mysticism (continued): Rahner, *The Practice of Faith*, pp. 57-84 (R.R.).
(For AD students: Michael Stoeber, “Mysticism and the Spiritual Life: Reflections on Karl Rahner’s View of Mysticism,” *Toronto Journal of Theology*, vol. 17, no. 2 (2001) 263-275 (R.R.)).
- Oct. 16 Jewish Mysticism, The Kabbalah J. H. Laenen, *Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 45-62, 129-141, 176-182 (R.R.); Perle Besserman, *Kabbalah and Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 28-52 (R.R.).
Critical Reflection Paper #1 due.
- Oct. 23 Reading Week.
- Oct 30 I will be out of town. Class will be re-scheduled. Art and Mysticism.
Lawren Harris, “Theosophy and Art”, *The Canadian Theosophist*, Vols. 14 & 15, pp. 129-132 and pp. 161-166 (R.R.).
- Nov. 6 Christian Mysticism St. Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle*, New York: Image Books, 1989.
Advanced Degree Seminar, Nov. 3-7.
- Nov. 13 Christian Mysticism (continued): St. Teresa.
- Nov. 20 Christian Mysticism (continued). Native Mysticism John G. Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks*, Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1995.
- Nov. 27 Native Mysticism (continued).
- Dec. 4 Buddhist Mysticism Viradhammo Bhikkhu, *The Stillness of Being*, course handout or online: www.buddhamind.info/stillness/.
- Dec. 11 (The Thursday after the last class) **Critical Reflection Paper #2 due.**

Books on Reserve Reading in Regis College Library:

- Perle Besserman, *Kabbalah and Jewish Mysticism*, London: Shambhala, 1999.
- Agehananda Bharati, *The Light at the Center: Context and Pretext of Modern Mysticism*, Santa Barbara: Ross-Erikson, 1976.
- Harold Coward and Terence Penelhum, *Mystics and Scholars: The Calgary Conference on Mysticism 1976*, Studies in Religion, Supplements/3, 1977.
- Lawren Harris, “Theosophy and Art”, *The Canadian Theosophist*, Vols. 14 & 15, pp. 129-132 and pp. 161-166.
- Jess Byron Hollenback, *Mysticism: experience, response and empowerment*, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996.
- William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, Liguori, Missouri: Triumph Books, 1961.
- Steven Katz, *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, London: Sheldon Press, 1978.
- J. H. Laenen, *Jewish Mysticism: An Introduction*, David E. Orton, tr., Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.
- Peter Larisey, *Light for a Cold Land: Lauren Harris's Work and Life -- An Interpretation*, Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1992.
- Daniel C. Matt, *The Essential Kabbalah: The Heart of Jewish Mysticism*, San Francisco: HarperSanfrancisco, 2007.
- Karl Rahner, *The Practice of Faith: a handbook of contemporary spirituality*, N.Y.: Crossroad, 1983.
- Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, New York: Schocken Books, 1961.
- Huston Smith, *The World's Religions*, San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991.
- W. T. Stace, *The Teachings of the Mystics*, New York: New American Library, 1960.
- David Stewart, ed., *Exploring the Philosophy of Religion*, fifth edition, Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2001.
- Michael Stoeber, “Amoral Trickster or Mystic Saint? Spiritual Teachers and the Transmoral Narrative,” G. William Barnard and Jeffrey J. Kripal, *Crossing Boundaries: Essays on the Ethical Status of Mysticism*, New York: Seven Bridges Press, 2002, pp. 381-405.
- Michael Stoeber, “Mysticism and the Spiritual Life: Reflections on Karl Rahner’s View of Mysticism,” *Toronto Journal of Theology*, vol. 17, no. 2 (2001) 263-275.
- Michael Stoeber, *Theo-Monistic Mysticism: A Hindu-Christian Comparison*, N.Y.: St. Martin’s Press, 1994.