

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY  
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES  
DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES  
RELIGIOUS STUDIES 443 L01  
COMPARATIVE MYSTICAL TRADITIONS  
WINTER 2010

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INSTRUCTOR:	Anne White, Ph.D.
DAY AND TIME	MW 14:00 -15:15
OFFICE:	SS 1322
OFFICE HOURS:	MWF 11:00-11:50
TELEPHONE:	403-220-3285 or 403-220-5886 (main office)
E-MAIL ADDRESS:	<a href="mailto:awhite@ucalgary.ca">awhite@ucalgary.ca</a>
WEBSITE:	Blackboard

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**REQUIRED TEXTS:**

J. H. Laenen, *Jewish Mysticism: An Introduction*, Louisville: Westminster John Know Press, 2001.  
Steven Fanning, *Mystics of the Christian Tradition*, London: Routledge, 2001.  
Margaret Smith, *Muslim Women Mystics*, Oxford: Oneworld, 2001.  
Plus Webnotes.

**RECOMMENDED BUT NOT REQUIRED READINGS:**

Moshe Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998.  
Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness*, Mineola: Dover Publications, Inc., 2002.  
Coleman Barks, *The Essential Rumi: New Expanded Edition*, New York: Harper Collins, 2004.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

Renowned contemporary mystic Evelyn Underhill wrote in her work entitled *Mysticism* that “the most highly developed branches of the human family have in common one peculiar characteristic. They tend to produce – sporadically it is true, and often in the teeth of adverse external circumstances – a curious and definite type of personality; a type which refuses to be satisfied with that which other men call experience, and is inclined, in the words of its enemies, to ‘deny the world in order that it may find reality.’” Through the use of three separate texts, this course is designed to introduce the student to some of the great mystical concepts within the Abrahamics (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) that still contribute to concepts of reality in the twenty-first century. In Judaism, students will be presented with materials from the time of the Prophets of Israel, through to Jewish mystical traditions such as Merkavah and later Kabbalah in their various forms, and then to the emergence of Hasidism and its doctrines. In Christianity, the information will cover Jesus and the early Christian mystics, the medieval mysticism of Abbess Hildegard of Bingen, St. John of the Cross, Hadewijch, Marguerite Porete, and several others, together with the modern insights of contemporary mystics Evelyn Underhill and Edith Stein. In Islam, the work of great female mystic Rabia al-‘Adawiyya will be analyzed, together with a study of Sufism and its influence on modern female Muslim mystics. In addition to this, some of the work of Al Ghazali, Ibn ‘Arabi and Rumi will also be reviewed. At the completion of the course students will have a comprehensive understanding of some of the great spiritual thinkers of the Abrahamic tradition whose experiences demonstrate the energies and potentialities of the human spirit.

**COURSE OBJECTIVE:**

To enable students to organize and evaluate various historical events and religious concepts as perceived and interpreted through mystics and their mystical traditions.

**SELF DIRECTED STUDY:**

Students are encouraged to read web notes and the assigned pages of text before each lecture, and come prepared to ask questions.

**COURSE METHODOLOGY:**

(i) Analysis of mystical perspectives placed within socio-historical contexts; (ii) examination of specific mystics contextualized in and through their specific writings; (iii) discussion of selected documentaries for contextual background.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

Feb. 8	- Section Test – Judaism	20%
Apr. 14	- Term Paper - Topics to be discussed in class Ten pages, double spaced, one inch margins. CHICAGO STYLE FOR PAPER (MANDATORY) Bibliography – not more than two websites, six text or academic journal sources, cover page (name, student ID, course number title)	40%
Registrar Scheduled Final Exam		40%

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**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:

Percentage grades are calculated as follows:

<b>A+</b> 96-100	<b>A</b> 90-95	<b>A-</b> 85-89
<b>B+</b> 80-84	<b>B</b> 75-79	<b>B-</b> 70-74
<b>C+</b> 65-69	<b>C</b> 60-64	<b>C-</b> 55-59
<b>D+</b> 50-54	<b>D</b> 45-49	<b>F</b> 44 or less

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**Academic Honesty:**

Students should be familiar with the University regulations regarding academic honesty.

See University Calendar.

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COURSE SCHEDULE:

READINGS:

NOTE THAT ALL LECTURES WILL HAVE ACCOMPANYING WEBNOTES POSTED ON BLACKBOARD. PLEASE ACCESS THESE BEFORE LECTURES.

Abbreviations: Jewish Mysticism (JM); Mystics of the Christian Tradition (MCT); Muslim Women Mystics (MWM)

**JANUARY**

**11, 13**

Chap 1-2  
JM

Introduction to Jewish mysticism.  
The centrality of the "Word of the Lord."  
The Prophets of Israel.  
Ancient Jewish mysticism - Markavah

**18, 20,**

Chap 3-4  
JM

Kabbalah: Classical, Lurianic and Sabbatian.  
Basic concepts – sefiroth, symbolism, the Zohar.  
Ecstatic traditions, apocalyptic and eschatological ideas.  
Messianism, the breaking of the vessels, reincarnation.  
Mysticism and magic.

**25, 27**

Chap. 6  
JM

Hasidism: The Ba'al Shem Tov and Dov Baer.  
Hasidic doctrine, the role of magic.  
Relation between Hasidism and earlier mystical currents.

**FEBRUARY**

**1, 3**

The language of Jewish mysticism. The connection between word and content.  
Documentary.

**8**

**Section test – worth 30 points (75 minutes' duration).**

**10**

Chap. 1, 2  
MCT

Introduction to Christian mysticism: Jesus and the early Christian mystics – The Desert Mothers and Fathers.  
The Eastern Church.  
The role of the Holy Spirit.

Webnotes

**14-21**

**READING WEEK NO CLASSES**

**22, 24**

Chap. 3  
MCT  
Webnotes

The Middle Ages - Hildegard of Bingen, Julian of Norwich, St. John of the Cross, Hadewijch, Marguerite Porete. Ruusbroec. Francis of Assisi.

**MARCH**

**1, 3**

Chap. 4  
MCT  
Webnotes

Mystics in Early Modern Europe – Catholic and Protestant perspectives.  
The French, Spanish and German traditions.  
Mme. Jeanne Guyon, St. Ignatius, the Anabaptists and Munzer.

**8, 10**

Webnotes

Modern Mysticism: Sadhu Sundar Singh, Evelyn Underhill, Thomas Merton, Saint Teresia Benedicta (Edith Stein) Simone Weil.

- 15** Documentary
- 17**  
Webnotes Islam: Introduction to mysticism – Sufism. Cultural, religious context, and text.
- 22, 24**  
MWM Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya, of Iraq - 8th Century Islamic Saint  
Webnotes Extracts from *Doorkeeper of the Heart: Versions of Rabia*.
- 29, 31**  
Part II Rabi'a's teachings and writings.  
MWM Rumi's teachings and writings.  
Webnotes.
- APRIL**  
**5, 7** Al Ghazali's *Niche For Lights* and the formation of mainstream Sufism  
<http://muslim-canada.org/niche1.html>  
Ibn 'Arabi's *Journey to the Lord of Power*,  
<http://www.unc.edu/depts/sufilit/AL-ARABI.htm>
- 12, 14**  
Part III Women mystics in Islam  
MWM Documentary.
- RESEARCH PAPER TO BE HANDED IN – April 14.**