

## **HSSP 4335 Gender and Mysticism**

Tuesdays, 7:10-9:40 p.m. Mudd 101

Spring, 2006

Dr. Darleen Pryds

Franciscan School of Theology/GTU

tel. 510-848-5232 ext. 21

available by appointment

[dpryds@fst.edu](mailto:dpryds@fst.edu)

<http://courseweb.fst.edu/Pryds>

This advanced History seminar explores the implications of gender on the experience of mysticism throughout Christian history. We will explore together the differences in how female and male mystics experience unity with God and the differences and similarities in their authority and limits placed on their authority in the wake of special attention received on the basis on their fame as mystics. Special attention is given to the medieval mystical tradition but examples from the span of Christian tradition will be discussed, up to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Students will be responsible for using methodologies appropriate for the discipline of History.

Term Project: The crux of this course is built around the preparation of a term project. Students in Ph.D., MA and MTS programs will prepare a major research project using methodologies appropriate to the discipline of History, which will result in a research paper of 20-25 pages and a 20 minute oral presentation. Pastoral degree students will prepare a term project related to the class topic that can be authentically used in their future ministry. The written pastoral project should be at least 10-15 pages; the oral presentation of the pastoral project will be 20 minutes.

The project is included in the course requirements so that each participant has the opportunity to explore in-depth a topic of special interest to them that is not formally included in the syllabus of readings and lectures.

**All topics—for both the research paper and the pastoral project--must be approved by the professor.**

Evaluation will be based on:

- Thoughtful and active participation in class discussion, including active discussion on reading assignments (100 points) **Learning objective:** *students will develop skills for succinct and clear oral presentation of material and discussion of ideas. This is a skill needed in pastoral and academic careers.*
- Two book reviews—one oral, one written:
  - one oral book review on a book of your choice (with approval of professor) (5 minutes) [the oral book review should be on a book should be related to your project]. (50 points) **April 11, 18. Learning objective:** *students will learn the fundamental difference between a book report and an analytical book review; students will learn how to prepare a succinct and logical presentation of a published book; students will learn how to present criticism (both positive and negative) in a respectful, academic way.*
  - every student will write a book review (5 pages, double spaced, i.e. 1250 words) of Glücklich, Sacred Pain. **Due in class April 4. No Extensions. Learning outcome:**

*students will learn how to analyze succinctly in writing an academic book; students will learn how to offer respectful and balanced criticism of an academic study.*

- Term paper/pastoral project (200 points) [length and nature of the project depends on degree program] **Due in class on May 9 No Extensions.** *Learning objective: students will learn how to manage research over an extended period of time; students will learn how to present the findings and conclusions of their research in a formal written format, using standard English and logical development of an argument (for research paper) or pastoral goal (for pastoral project).*
- 20 minute oral presentation of project (100 points) **Scheduled for April 25-May 9 (and 16 if needed)** *Learning objective: students will learn how to succinctly and logically present a project they have worked on for an entire semester; time management is of utmost importance in this assignment; students will practice giving a professional quality presentation including visual/audio aids if warranted.*

Regular class attendance is assumed, as is the timely fulfillment of each of these requirements. No extensions given without prior consent of the professor. That means that all written assignments are due during class on the due date. Late papers are severely penalized. Any requests for extensions must be made before the due date and must be due to reasonable cause. **All papers must be submitted in hardcopy. No computer attachments are accepted.**

All written assignments should be written in correct, standard English. Any papers with more than 5 grammatical/spelling errors may be returned ungraded and counted as late until it is edited and resubmitted. Please contact the professor if this presents a challenge. There are plenty of resources around to help!

### **Required Reading:**

Bynum, Caroline. Holy Feast, Holy Fast. The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women

Glücklich, Ariel. Sacred Pain. Hurting the Body for the Sake of the Soul

McGinn, Bernard. Flowering of Mysticism. Men and Women in the New Mysticism, 1200-1350

Reader available at Copy Central on Hearst Ave.

### Week One: Jan. 31

Defining Mysticism; introduction to the Discipline of History; how to read primary texts  
Historical Background of Christian Mysticism

READ in class: General Introduction to B. McGinn, The Presence of God. A History of Western Christian Mysticism; brief passage from Angela of Foligno (d. 1309); selected passages from “The Messages of the Blessed Virgin Mary through Nancy Fowler” (c. 1996)

FILM CLIP: The anchoress

### Week Two: Feb. 7

Medieval Urban Mysticism and its Vestiges Today

READ: : Marina Warner, “Blood and Tears”; McGinn, Introduction, chapters 1-3, pp.1-152; Passages from “The Book of the Blessed Angela of Foligno” [Angela of Foligno found in Reader]

FILM CLIP: Francesco; Brother Sun, Sister Moon

Week Three: Feb. 14

Women Mystics of the High Middle Ages

READ: McGinn, Chapters 4-6, pp. 153-318; class discussion will also include discussion of texts by medieval mystics found in Reader.

FILM CLIP: The anchoress

Week Four: Feb 21

**N.B. Class will begin at 7:00 in the GTU Library Computer Lab! Required Session on Research Skills led by Kris Veldeer.**

Women and Food

READ: Bynum, Holy Feast, Holy Fast; class discussion will also include discussion of texts of medieval mystics found in Reader.

FILM CLIP: Agnes of God: Stigmata scene #1 (linked to feeling “fat”)

Week Five: Feb. 28

Medicalization of Mysticism, A Modern Phenomenon

Depression, Coma, Anorexia, Schizophrenia, Disassociation

READ: Bynum, Holy Feast, Holy Fast; Kathleen Biddick, “Genders, Bodies, Borders: Technologies of the Visible” [Biddick found in Reader]

FILM CLIP: Agnes of God: Stigmata scene #2 (linked to suppressed memory of abuse)

Week Six: March 7

Pastoral Approaches to Spiritually inspired Anorexia

Guest Presentation: Andrea Kanelopoulos, Founder and Director of “Find Your Voice” a non-profit organization to support people with eating disorders

(<http://www.findyourvoice.org>).

Week Seven: March 14:

Medicalization of Mysticism, cont.

The Controversies in Creating Mystical Meaning in Medical Tragedies.

READ: Paula Kane, “‘She Offered Herself up’: The Victim Soul and Victim Spirituality in Catholicism”; <http://www.littleaudreysanto.org>;

<http://worcesterdioocese.org/news/communications/releases/audrey.html>

FILM CLIP: Dateline Episode on Audrey Santo

Week Eight: March 21:

Medicalization of Mysticism, cont.

Depression and The Image of the Dark Night of the Soul: Misuses of John of the Cross's Dark Night

READ: Linda Leonard, "The Dark Night of the Soul"; Emmanuel Ghent, "Masochism, Submission, Surrender"; John of the Cross, "Dark Night of the Soul" [all readings found in the Reader]; and begin reading Glucklich.

March 28: No Class Reading WeekWeek Nine: April 4

Mystics, Self-Inflicted Pain and Suffering

Discuss Glucklich

DUE in class: Written Book Review of Glucklich

Week Ten: April 11

Feigning Mysticism

Oral Book Reviews

FILM CLIP: The X-Files

Week Eleven: April 18

Politicizing Visions: Visionaries and Political Empowerment

Oral Book Reviews

FILM CLIP: The Song of Bernadette; The Passion of Joan of Arc

Week Twelve: April 25

Mysticism and Popular Culture

Oral Presentations

FILM CLIP: Mondo Elvis;

Week Thirteen: May 2

Oral Presentations

Week Fourteen: May 9

Oral Presentations, and Final Conclusions

All Final Papers are due today in class.

Week Fifteen: May 16: (if needed)

Oral Presentations and final conclusions

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**Miscellaneous Recommended Books and Articles  
Related to Gender and Mysticism**

N.B. The scholarly literature on mysticism is extensive. This list is by no means exhaustive, nor does the appearance of any book here necessarily indicate the professor's approbation of the piece. Instead it is suggestive of the materials I will make use of in class lectures.

Daniel Bornstein and Roberto Rusconi, eds. Women and Religion in Medieval and Renaissance Italy (University of Chicago Press, 1996)

Anne Fadiman, The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down. A Hmong Child, Her American Doctors, and the Collision of Two Cultures. (Noonday Press, 1997)

Robert Fuller. Stairways to Heaven. Drugs in American Religious History. (Westview Press, 2000)

Jerome Gellman, Mystical Experience of God. A Philosophical Inquiry. (Ashgate, 2001)

Patrick Henry, ed. Benedict's Dharma: Buddhists Reflect on the Rule of St. Benedict (New York, 2001)

Amy Hollywood, The Soul as Virgin Wife: Mechtild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete, and Meister Eckhart (University of Notre Dame, 1995)

-----, Sensible Ecstasy. Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History, (University of Chicago Press, 2002)

Richard Kieckhefer, Unquiet Souls. Fourteenth-Century Saints and Their Religious Milieu (University of Chicago Press, 1984)

Cristina Mazzoni, Saint Hysteria. Neurosis, Mysticism, and Gender in European Culture (Cornell University Press, 1996)

Bernard McGinn, The Foundations of Mysticism. Origins to the Fifth Century. (Crossroad, 1991)

-----, The Growth of Mysticism. Gregory the Great through the Twelfth Century. (Crossroad, 1994)

Francoise Meltzer, For Fear of the Fire. Joan of Arc and the Limits of Subjectivity (University of Chicago Press, 2001)

Alexander Nava. The Mystical and Prophetic Thought of Simone Weil and Gustavo Gutierrez. Reflections on the Mystery and Hiddenness of God (State University of New York Press, 2001)

Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff, Body and Soul. Essays on Medieval Women and Mysticism (Oxford University Press, 1994)

Evelyn Underhill. Mysticism. (Image Books, 1910, 1990)

Richard Trexler. Gender Rhetorics. Postures of Dominance and Submission in History (Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1994)

Rosalynn Voaden, God's Words, Women's Voices. The Discernment of Spirits in the Writing of Late-Medieval Women Visionaries. (York Medieval Press, 1999)