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SPHS 1250 Introduction to Gender and Mysticism

What is mysticism and how does gender affect mystical experience? This class surveys writings by mystics in order to explore how gender affects mystical experience and thought. This class is especially intended for people in ministry so that they may prepare workshops, retreats, and sermons using the spiritual writing by mystics. Among the mystics discussed are Hildegard of Bingen, Mechthild of Magdeburg, Angela of Foligno, Francis of Assisi, and Thomas Merton. Classes will be taught through conversational lecture and discussion. Evaluation is based on participation, critical book review, and a final project which will be presented in both oral and written form.

Learning Objectives

- Students will be able to read primary sources analytically to use in both academic and pastoral work.
- Students will practice applying historical evidence for ministerial application today.
- Students will learn to read primary sources within their historical context.
- Students will be able to read secondary sources critically, discerning the thesis and argument of a scholar or other author.
- Students will be able to apply the same critical and analytical skills to other materials such as movies, websites, and art.
- Students will be introduced to a wide variety of life stories—biographical and hagiographical—of mystics and will be able to determine the difference between hagiography and biography.
- Students will have opportunities to practice oral presentation skills so that they are comfortable speaking in small and large groups.

Required Reading

- Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism, 1200-1350*

- Ariel Glucklich, *Sacred Pain. Hurting the Body for the Sake of the Soul.*
- Angela of Foligno. *Complete Works.* Ed/trans Paul Lachance. Classics in Western Spirituality
- Mechthild of Magdeburg. *The Flowing Light of the Godhead.* Trans Frank Tobin. Classics in Western Spirituality
- Meister Eckhart. *Selected Writings.* Trans. Oliver Davies. (Penguin Books, 1994)
- John of the Cross. *Selected Writings.* Trans. Kieran Kavanaugh, Classics in Western Spirituality

Assignments

- Attendance at class is assumed.
- Active and pertinent participation in class discussion is expected.
- One critical book review of Ariel Glucklich, *Sacred Pain* (750 words or 3 pages) due in class on Thursday, November 5. This should be modeled on book reviews found in an academic journal like *Church History*.
- One Pastoral Project incorporating themes covered in class and approved by professor **OR** one academic research paper (15-20 pages) based on an analytical research question approved by professor.
- One oral presentation of the pastoral project OR research project. (Length of time is dependent on class size).

Overview of Classes

September 10: What is Mysticism? The complexities of studying Mysticism today. Defining legitimate mystical experience; distinguishing from mental illness, boundary issues, exploitation.

Film Clip Dateline 1999: Audrey Santo

September 17: Conversion and Mysticism: Francis of Assisi and Clare of Assisi Various Definitions. Historically, how has gender affected the mystical experience and the social influence of the mystic? The role of mysticism in personal conversion. The public reception of mystically induced conversion: ridicule or glorification, or both?

Read for today McGinn, pp. 1-112.

Film Clips from *Brother Sun, Sister Moon*; *Francesco*

September 24: Conversion and Mysticism, II

The role of mysticism in personal conversion. The challenges and tensions caused by conversion. Autobiography and Memoir as genres to convey mystical experience.

Read for Today: Angela of Foligno, *Memorial*, pp. 123-218.
Recommended, Angela of Foligno, Introduction; McGinn, 113-152.

October 1: Lifestyles and Mysticism: Lecture includes discussion on ways of life as means of support systems for mystical experiences: Beguines, anchoresses, tertiaries vs. monastic communities with some discussion of Hildegard of Bingen.

Read for Today: McGinn, 153-319.
Film Clip: *The Anchoress*

October 8: Passionate Yearning For God: Mechthild of Magdeburg
Discussion of poetry /mixed genre of literature to convey mystical experience.

Read for Today: Mechthild of Magdeburg, pp. 39-176

October 15: Meister Eckhart:
Guest Lecturer, Jeff Cooper, Ph.D. Candidate (GTU, Christian Spirituality)
Read for Today: TBA

October 22: Meister Eckhart: Circular Influence of Mysticism
Read for Today: TBA

October 29: No Class Reading Week

Read: Glucklich, *Sacred Pain*
Write a critical, analytical review (3 pages, 750 words) of Glucklich's Book, *Sacred Pain*.

November 5: The Experience of Pain and Mystical Ecstasy

Due in Class: Analytical Book Review of Glucklich's, *Sacred Pain*
Bring your copy of Angela of Foligno. We will read together and discuss some passages from the *Instructions*, esp. with respect to Glucklich's thesis and argument on self-inflicted pain.

November 12: Joy and Suffering: The Dark Night of the Soul
What does John of the Cross say in the Dark Night v. how has this image been used?
Academic/personal integrity when adapting (or changing) a mystic's thought.

Read for Today: John of the Cross, *The Dark Night*

November 19: Mysticism, Forms of Prayer, and Leadership

Mystical experience leads to active leadership: examples include Rose of Viterbo, Joan of Arc, and Thomas Merton

In class reading of Thomas Merton

Film Clip: *The Messenger*.

November 26: No Class Meeting; Thanksgiving**December 3: Student Presentations****December 10 Student Presentations**