



**CS 645
Women of Spirit:
A Kaleidoscope of Mystic Journeys**

**Ambrose University College
Winter/2012**

Instructor:	Heidi Grogan	Office:	
Office Hours:	By appointment	Email:	HGrogan@ambrose.edu
Class Times:	Wednesdays & Fridays, 1:00-2:15	Location:	

Required Texts

Ursula King, Christian Mystics: Their Lives and Legacies Throughout the Ages (Hidden Spring/2001)
Mary T. Malone, Women & Christianity (Vol. II), (Orbis Books/2002)

Selections of Required / Recommended Reading (on reserve at the library)

David Perrin, Women Christian Mystics Speak to Our Times (Novalis/2002)
Shawn Madigan, Mystics, Visionaries & Prophets (Augsburg Fortress/1998)
Amy Oden, In Her Words, (Abingdon Press/1994)
Elizabeth Petroff, Medieval Women's Visionary Literature (Oxford University Press/1986)

An extensive bibliography will be provided for students.

Course Description

"The history of mysticism is a history of the love for God."
- Dorothy Soelle

This course engages the colourful stories of women mystics in the history of Christianity who experienced a deep intimacy with God, and who consequently profoundly affected their societies. Since the early church, Christian history is marked by women who, in their devotion to God, challenged the cultural and ecclesial norms of their day. Voices of women in the early centuries are faint, but speak to deep integrity and compassion. In the Middle Ages, women's voices were suppressed; however they found creative ways to claim the authority to interpret scripture and to express their experiences and wisdom; they found the courage to live unmarried or to leave a cloistered life and with other like-minded women to minister to the poor. In the 19th and 20th centuries, strong women engaged social justice issues with a profound understanding of the link between suffering and intimacy with Christ. In

all these ways, women created new models of discipleship in their passion for life in the Spirit. As a collective group their lives embody the deep love of God for humanity.

Students in this course will explore how mysticism is understood in Christian spirituality, and the how the themes of spirituality expressed by these mystics are relevant for us today, including the role of suffering and poverty through devotion to the humanity of Christ, joyful hope and courage in the face of oppression, and the rejection of all forms of lukewarm spirituality.

This course will survey known and lesser known women mystics in the history of Christianity from the early church through to the present day. Key questions addressed by the course pertain to:

- (i) what key themes emerge in women's spirituality through history, and particularly in eras not tuned to hear women's voices;
- (ii) how the lives of the mystics surveyed affected the culture of their day; and,
- (iii) how these women offer a significant models for an authentic spirituality for men and women of our world today.

Students will engage small group discussions in class, so that course learning might be personally applied, and so that students might discover in these mystics a companion for their contemporary spiritual journey. By the end of this course, students will have a deepened understanding of how these women offer significant models for an authentic spirituality for men and women of our world today.

Course Objectives

- To introduce the student to the tradition of mysticism, its definition, components and place in Christian spirituality
- To provide the student with portraits of women mystics since the early church and to the present day, whose mystical journey influenced the Christian story which is ours today
- To acquaint the student with biography and hagiography as genres of historical writing, the influence of courtly love on medieval spiritual writing, and the significance of the contribution of women's visionary writing in the vernacular
- To expand the student's awareness of the cultural and ecclesial obstacles women have faced since the time of the early church, in expressing their full humanity in lives devoted to God
- To explore with the student, the significant role played by men in addressing the above obstacles and in supporting women in employing creative ways of overcoming issues of authority and expression
- To raise the student's awareness of the relevance of a Christian worldview which includes the voices of the women mystics of the historical Church, for contemporary Christians seeking to a spirituality which reflects the transforming power of union with the Trinity

Course Schedule

Week 1 Wed Course Introduction: Mysticism & Christianity, Roots and History of Mysticism

Jan 11 Reading: King, pp. 3-7 and 11-22

Week 1 Fri Hard Choices by Mothers: Martyred in the Arena -- Perpetua & Felicity (3rd C)

Jan 13th Reading: Madigan, pp. 9-24, Oden, pp. 26-37 or Petroff, pp. 60-65 and 70-77 (all on reserve); Malone pp. 105-114

Week 2 Wed The Celtic Narrative of Hospitality -- Brigit of Kildare and (7th C)

Jan 18th Reading: Handout: Madigan, pp. 41-56

Week 2 Fri Medieval Women's Mysticism: Themes of Suffering & Passion, Courage & Joy

Jan 20th Reading: Perrin, pp. ix-xx, 17-34, 37-51; 3-14 (on reserve)

Week 3 Wed Prophet, Preacher, Pharmacist & Composer -- Hildegard of Bingen (12th C)

Jan 25th Reading: King, pp.80-83; Petroff, pp. 138 (bottom)-142, Oden, pp. 107-113 or 151-157 or Madigan, pp.91-108 (all on reserve); Malone, pp 94-102 and pp. 108-120

Week 3 Fri Engaging the Themes of Hildegard's Spirituality: Contemporary Applications

Jan 27th Reading: Perrin, pp. 143-156 (on reserve); "The Visionary" (video)

Week 4 Wed Love Mysticism: Beguine Spirituality -- Mary d' Oignies, Hadjewich & Mechtild of Magdeburg (13th C)

Feb 1st Reading:
Beguines – King, pp. 88-90; (pp. 106 and 117-118 of interest re: "love mysticism")
Mary – Petroff, pp. 171-175 and 179-183 (on reserve); Malone pp. 124-144
Hadjewich – King, pp. 99-10; Petroff pp. 176-177 and 189-200 or Madigan, pp. 166-189 or Oden, pp. 114-120 (all on reserve); Malone pp. 145-149
Mechtild of Magdeburg – King, pp. 91-95; Petroff pp. 207-209 and 212-221, Madigan, pp. 129-137 or Oden, pp. 140-147 (all on reserve); Malone, pp. 163-169

Week 4 Fri Engaging Themes of Mary, Hadjewich & Mechtild's Spirituality: Contemporary Applications

Feb 3rd Reading: Perrin, pp. 71-87 (on reserve); Student Presentation

Week 5 Wed Burned at the Stake: Mystical Heresy & the Inquisition -- Marguerite Porete & Na Prous (14th C)

Feb 8th Reading:
Marguerite – King, pp. 102-104; Petroff, 280-283 and 294-298 (on reserve); Malone, pp. 174-187
Nan – Petroff, pp. 276-277 and 284-290 (on reserve); Malone, pp.203-207; and 209-211

Week 5 Fri Engaging Themes of Marguerite's/Na's Spirituality: Contemporary Applications
Feb 10th Student Presentation

Week 6 Wed Sisters of Grace: the Wisdom of the Cloistered Mystics -- Beatrice of Nazareth, Mechtild of Hackeborn & Gertrude the Great (13th C)

Feb 15th Reading: Malone, pp. 150-154 intro to 13th C
Beatrice – King, pp. 95-99; Petroff, pp. 176 and 200-206 or Oden, pp. 120-126 (both on reserve)
Mechtild of Hackeborn – Petroff, pp. 207-208 (review for context; on reserve); Malone, pp. 155-157
Gertrude – Petroff, pp. 207-211 and 222-230 or Madigan, pp.148-165 (both on reserve); Malone, pp. 154-155 and pp. 158-163

Week 6 Fri Engaging Themes of the Cloistered Mystics' Spirituality: Contemporary Applications
Feb 17th Student Presentation

MID SEMESTER BREAK

Week 7 Wed Fighting for the Privilege of Poverty -- Claire of Assisi (13th C)

Feb 29th Reading: King, pp. 72-7; Oden, pp. 127-139 or Petroff, pp. 231-235 and 242-246 (both on reserve); Malone, pp. 169-173

Week 7 Fri Engaging Themes of Claire's Spirituality: Contemporary Applications
March 2nd Student Presentation

Week 8 Wed Love is His Reason: Trinitarian Theology of Anchoresses Julian of Norwich (14th C)

March 7th Reading: King, pp. 133-137; Madigan, pp.191-208 or Oden, pp. 181-186 (both on reserve); Malone, pp. 226-230, 230-24

Week 8 Fri Engaging Themes of Julian's Spirituality: Contemporary Applications
March 9th Reading: Perrin, pp. xii-iii, 89-106, 109-127 (on reserve); Student Presentation

Week 9 Wed Tending Wounds and Taking on Popes: Peacemaking & Plague Ministry--Catherine of Siena (14th C)

March 14th Reading: King, pp. 83-86; Madigan, pp.208-226 or Petroff, pp. 238-240 and 263-275 or Oden, pp. 187-203 (all on reserve); Malone, pp.174-17 and 187-202

Week 9 Fri Engaging Themes of Catherine's Spirituality: Contemporary Applications

March 16th Reading: Perrin, pp. 55-69 (on reserve); Student Presentation

Week 10 Wed Prayer & Ecstasy, Reformer & Doctor of the Church -- Teresa of Avila (16th C)

March 21st Reading: King, pp. 141-143 and pp. 149-156, *note: see King pp. 153-157 to support this reading*; Madigan, pp.247-265 or Oden, pp. 223-230 (both on reserve)

Week 10 Fri Engaging Themes of Teresa's Spirituality: Contemporary Applications

March 23rd Reading: Perrin pp. 129-142 (on reserve); *note: see King pp. 124-127 to support this reading*; Student Presentation

Week 11 Wed Holy, Burning Tears: Founder of a Movement -- Phoebe Palmer, Sex Trade Abolitionists Catherine & Florence Booth, and Prison Reformer: Elizabeth Fry & Women Quakers (19th C)

March 28th Reading:
Palmer – Handouts: Oden, pp. 282-291; *Saving Souls & Bodies*, Christian History & Biography, Issue 82, pp. 28-31 and *Holiness Fire-Starter*, Christian History & Biography, Issue 82, pp. 16-20
Booth Women – Handout: *Fighting the Other Slave Trade*, Christian History & Biography, Issue 90, pp. 43-45
Fry –via Moodle: A Sermon Delivered by Elizabeth Fry, *Sermons Preached by Members of the Society of Friends*, London: Hamilton, Adams, and Co., 1832, pages 25-28, *What Owest Thou Unto Thy Lord*; [Quaker Homiletics Online Anthology](#), Section Three: [The 19th Century](#), and *Elizabeth Gurney Fry (1780-1845)*. *Note: see King pp. 180-184 on the Society of Friends/Quakers to support these readings*; *Quaker Prison Reformer*, by Bill Samuel, <http://www.quakerinfo.com/fry.shtml>

Week 11 Fri Engaging Themes of 19th Century Women's Spirituality: Contemporary Applications

March 30th Student Presentation

Week 12 Wed A Spirituality of Love, Solidarity and Suffering: Simone Weil, Edith Stein, Mother Teresa & Dorothy Soelle (20th C)

April 4th Reading:
Weil –King, pp. 231-234; Handout - Callahan/Spiritual Guides for Today, pp. 81-95
Stein – King, Stein pp. 226-227; Madigan, pp. 414-433 (on reserve); Handout -- Jones/*Women Saints, Lives of Faith & Courage*, pp. 31-38

Mother Teresa: Handout – Madigan, pp. 415-432 [SEE NEXT PG.]
Soelle -- Dorothee Soelle, Dianne L. Oliver/*Dorothee Soelle: Essential Writings*
(Ambrose library; 10 pgs student's choice)

Week 12 Fri GOOD FRIDAY -- NO CLASS

April 6th

Week 13 Wed Engaging Themes of 20th Century Women's Spirituality: Contemporary Applications

April 11th

Course Requirements and Grading

1. Life of a Mystic: A 5 page paper situating the life of a mystic (student's choice of mystic) alongside the culture and related issues of her day; specifically, exploring the key moments of her life, the images she uses to convey spiritual themes in her writing, her prayer life and church/community life, the influence she had on the church of her day and potential relevancy to contemporary spirituality.

Due Date: February 29th, 2012; 20 % of final grade

2. Autobiographic Mystic Essay: An 6 page autobiographical essay which contemplates the life of the mystic (student's choice of mystic) and the student's own spiritual journey, identifying parallels and differences in life-changing moments, intimacy within the Trinity (or desire for union), and engaging the wider community (social justice). The essay should conclude with questions the student would pose to the mystic if given opportunity, and a reflection on what it means to be "in community" with a mystic of ages past (i.e. learning from strong Christian women who lived in different/similar cultures, and the possibility of friendship across the ages with those who at first seem very different than we are.)

Due Date: March 30th, 2012; 30 % of final grade

OR (In place of the Autobiographic Mystic Essay):

- One assignment (short: creative) summarizing the life and spirituality of a mystic of choice, of a different era than 6 page paper in (2) above. The assignment is to be a creative project, highlighting her life-changing moments, spiritual practices, theological themes, engagement of the wider community (social justice), and a reflection on the relevancy of her life and spirituality for today.

and

- One assignment (short: creative) comparing and contrasting two mystics (instructor will provide a list of choices); the assignment is to be a creative expression, integrating symbols and images used by the mystics to express their spiritual experiences.

* Creative projects can take the form of collage, film, etc. and must be approved by Instructor. Each creative project due March 30th, 2012 and each worth 15% of final grade

3. Critical Reflection Essay: A 6 page critical reflection paper on Malone (course text for seminary students). The paper will specifically focus on how women in the middle ages established their authority – use of visions, place of vernacular writing, role of male clerics, brothers and relatives, etc. – and how mystic of the student’s choice overcame her reluctance to write/the inherent dangers of writing (dangers which the paper will describe and explain). The paper will make note of the consequence of her choice to those she was writing to, indirect beneficiaries in her culture and today. (Recommended secondary resource: E. Petroff)

OR

A 6 page critical reflection paper dealing with the mystics’ understanding of the role of suffering in devotion to the humanity of Christ and in the experience of union with the Trinity. The paper will address how social justice and concern for/solidarity with the poor, play a part in a mystical theology which sees Christians encountering the God of mercy, in the context of community. Students should survey mystics from various centuries in order to provide a comprehensive articulation of how suffering is understood by Christian women whose love for God was expressed at great personal cost.

Due Date: April 11th, 2012; 20 % of final grade

4. Mystic’s Journals & Class Discussion: Attendance and participation in all classes is key to this course. Students will need to come to class prepared, having read the assigned readings or handouts so that they can contribute meaningfully to the classes. Participation will be evaluated based on contribution to class discussion, and submission of Mystic’s Journals.

Mystic’s Journals will be provided to students for reflection on the course readings and lectures, and themes that emerge from class discussion. In these journals, students are invited to creatively engage the issues presented in the course description and objectives (see above), reflecting the spiritual themes and social issues associated with each mystic through metaphor and symbols, as well as various genre and writing techniques which reflect the student’s way of relating to the mystic.

Due Date: April 11th, 2012; 15 % of final grade

5. Presentation of a Mystic & Contemporary Application: Students will have opportunity to choose a mystic and more deeply explore her spirituality, as well as the influence she had on social issues of her day. (Note: students may choose the same mystic selected as the subject for one of the other course assignments.) The key focus of this assignment is demonstrating her relevance to the spirituality and social issues of our current day. To this end, a main part of the presentation will involve a) choosing and researching a contemporary personality of personal interest to the student: a woman or a man who embodies the spirituality, attitudes re: culture/social issues of the mystic, and introducing this person to the class; b) in a creative manner, presenting insights re: the contemporary person, and how he or she might relate to and learn from (or challenge) the mystic. This could take the form of a telephone call transcript, written letter about a political issue, role play (inviting assistance from a classmate), text message dialogue, film, etc.

The instructor will provide co facilitation support, as well as assistance with the project upon request. (Note: there is no written submission requirement for this assignment.)

Due Date: As per schedule (i.e. presentation would occur on Friday, paired with the Wednesday lecture covering the mystic); 15% of final grade

Grading Schedule

Excellent	Very Good / Good	Satisfactory	Minimal Pass
96-100 A+	82-85 B+	68-71 C+	56-59 D+
91-95 A	75-81 B	63-67 C	50-55 D
86-90 A-	72-74 B-	60-62 C-	
			Failure
			<50 F