Course Description:
In the spirit of dialogue and inquiry, this advanced seminar provides an in-depth exploration of the field of comparative mysticism. After discussing the various meanings of the term “mysticism,” an overview of the field of comparative mysticism and its methodological foundations will be offered. We will discuss the major horizons of the field, as well as the main families of interpretive models in the field: typological, perennialist, constructivist, feminist, neo-perennialist, evolutionary, contextualist, postmodern, pluralist, and participatory. Topical sessions will address five contemporary areas of inquiry in the study of mysticism: (1) the intermonastic dialogue, (2) mysticism and gender, (3) embodiment and erotic mysticism, (4) the ethics of mysticism, and (5) psychedelic research and mystical experience. Students select two mystical traditions, authors, notions or phenomena and compare them applying one of the models studied or their own comparative approach. Students are encouraged to approach the study of mystics and mystical texts from an empathic, participatory, and contemplative perspective.

Summary of Educational Purpose:
The main purpose of this course is to deepen students’ knowledge of classic and contemporary approaches to the study of mystical phenomena and comparative mysticism. An additional objective is to guide students in the selection of the most appropriate comparative approach for their research interests.

Learning Objectives:
After completing this course, students will be able to:
1. Appreciate the complexity of the philosophical, epistemological, and psychospiritual issues raised by mystical phenomena.
2. Have a clear understanding of the main models, challenges, and debates in the contemporary study of comparative mysticism.
3. Compare mystical traditions, authors, notions, and phenomena with empathy, critical discernment, rigor, and sophistication.

Statement on Diversity:
As a subfield of Religious Studies, the study of comparative mysticism has been dominated by male white Western scholars since its inception. All efforts have been made to incorporate in this seminar the voices of female scholars and alternative perspectives that have become available in recent years. In this regard, the seminar includes feminist approaches to the study of mysticism, a topical session on gender and
mysticism, and a case study on the mysticism of African American women. In addition, the Course Reader not only presents critical perspectives on Western orientalism, but also contains readings and sample papers by Indian, Japanese, and Chinese scholars. Further references on these and/or other areas of inquiry in relation to the course can be provided in class upon request.

**Attendance Policy:**
Attending classes is a required element of active course and classroom participation. Students who miss more than 2 classes (excused or unexcused) will be required to repeat the class and/or be given a NP grade, unless absences are caused by extraordinary circumstances (see below) and instructor assesses that students can recover missed class activities and continue participating in the course in an informed and productive manner. If an absence is unavoidable, students need to notify the instructor via email before the class or, if practically impossible, immediately after. In all such cases of absence, students are expected to recover the missed class, for example, by asking other student to audio record class with the instructor’s permission, meeting with a teaching assistant if available, or, as minimum, meeting with other student before the following session. Tardiness and early leaving of the class meetings are not acceptable. At the instructor’s discretion, students may be permitted to deviate from these rules on the grounds of illness necessitating confinement for 24 hours or more, a death in the family, or other extreme emergencies, with written verification of the emergency situation if requested to do so.

**Learning Activities:**
1. Cognitive/Didactic (lecture): 40%
2. Practical/Applied (dialogue, presentations): 40%
3. Experiential (meditative inquiry, group process): 20%

**Level of Instruction:**
PhD level / MA students only with consent of the instructor

**Criteria for Evaluation:**
1. Mid-term paper (1-2 pages): 10%
2. Final Paper (20-24 pages): 50%
3. Class participation and presentations: 40%

**Grading Options:**
Letter Grade, Pass/Fail, or as allowed by the department

**Required Texts:**
3. Course Reader, available at Simply Brilliant Press (110 Sutter Street, at Montgomery Street. Tel. 866.488.5889;
email: Greg@SimplyBrilliantPress.com. (Note: Students taking the seminar as research course may be given extra handouts on the comparative method).

Assignments:
1. **Mid-Term Paper**: (1-2 pages)
   This assignment should take the form of an outline and/or narrative summary of the final paper. For example, students can submit a preliminary abstract and sections breakdown of final paper (including subsections, if necessary).

2. **Final Paper**: (20-24 pages)
   A research paper comparing two (or more) mystics, mystical traditions, notions or phenomena. Optionally, incorporate aspects of your personal experience in support of your main thesis. *Note:* Students taking the seminar as research course need to include section on methodology in the final paper.

3. **Presentations:**
   Students give a presentation on their comparative research project. Presentations should be linked to final essays.
Course Schedule and Reading List
Comparative Mysticism

INTRODUCTION

Jan 30. Introduction: Mysticism and You
Introductory overview of the course. Participants’ introductions. Etymology and genealogy of the term “mysticism.” Preliminary definitions.

Readings:

METHODOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Feb 6. Entering Mysticism
Grounding our research interests in our lived inquiry: What does “mystical” mean to you? Why is mysticism important in your life? Mysticism or mysticisms? The classic unio mystica. Armchair versus participatory approaches: From students of mysticism to scholar-mystics.

Readings:
- Kripal, Jeffrey J., “Mysticism.”
- Soelle, Dorothe, “We Are All Mystics.”

Feb 13. Comparative Mysticism: An Overview

Readings:
- Paden, William E., “Comparative Religion.”
- McGinn, Bernard, “Comparativist and Psychological Approaches to Mysticism.”
- Parsons, William B., “Themes and Debates in the Psychology-Comparativist Dialogue”
- Rao, Srinivasa, “Comparative Metaphysics: Means or end?”
- Arico, Carl, “The Lectio Divina Tradition: Lost and Found.”
Special Topic: Typological Approaches to Comparative Mysticism
- Rawlinson, Andrew, “A Mode of Experiential Comparative Religion.”
- King, Mike, “Articulating Spiritual Difference.”


Readings:
- Sheldrake, Philip, “Interpreting Spiritual Texts.”
- Staal, Frits, “Effort, Doubt, and Criticism.”
- Cousins, Ewert H., “Methodology for Mysticism.”
- Kripal, Jeffrey J., “Roads of Excess,” “Palaces of Wisdom.”

Case Study: Orientalism and Jung

INTERPRETIVE MODELS IN THE STUDY OF MYSTICISM

February 27. Traditionalist/Perennialist Approaches

Readings:
- Stoddart, William, “Frithjof Schuon and the perennialist school;” “What is mysticism?”
- Schuon, Frithjof, “The perennial philosophy.”
- Quinn, W. W., “Hermeneutics of the Tradition.”

Case Study: Traditionalist Perennialism and Perspectival Perennialism
- Loy, David, “Enlightenment in Buddhism and Advaita Vedanta: Are Nirvana and Moksha the Same?”
Mar 6. Constructivist/Feminist Approaches

Readings:
- Raphael, Melissa, “Feminism, Constructivism, and Numinous Experience.”
- Lanzetta, Beverly, “Feminism and Mysticism: Foundations.”
- Jantzen, Grace M., “Conclusion: Mysticism and Modernity.”

Case Study: The Construction of Buddhist Mystical Experience

Mar 13. Neo-Perennialist/Evolutionary Approaches

Readings:
- Forman, Robert, “Introduction: Mystical Consciousness, the Innate Capacity, and the Perennial Psychology.”
- Wilber, Ken, Excerpts from Integral Spirituality.
- Ferrer, Jorge, “

Case Study: Structuralist Neo-Perennialism
- Cousins, Lance, “The Stages of Christian Mysticism and Buddhist Purification: Interior Castle of St Teresa of Avila and The Path of Purification of Buddhaghosa.”

*MID-TERM ASSIGNMENT DUE!*

Mar 20. No class, Spring Break! 😊

Mar 27. Postmodern/Contextualist Approaches

Readings:
- Cupitt, Don, “Introduction: The Mysticism of Secondarieness.”
- Herman, Jonathan, “The Contextual Illusion: Comparative Mysticism and Postmodernism.”
- Stoebel, Michael, “Constructivist Epistemologies of Mysticism: A Critique and a Revision.”

Case Study: Buddhist Nirvana, Yogic Samadhi, and Christian Spiritual Marriage
April 3. Pluralist/Participatory Approaches

Readings:
- Ferrer, Jorge and Sherman, Jacob, “The Participatory Turn.” (PT, pp. 34-44, 72-78).
- Robinson, Oliver, “Mixed Messages in Participatory Spirituality: A Response to Jorge Ferrer’s Article.” (and my response)

Case Study: Participatory Spirituality and Western Mystical Traditions

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN THE STUDY OF MYSTICISM

April 10. The Interreligious and Intermonastic Dialogue

Readings:
- Clarke, J. J., “Religious Dialogue.”
- Lanzetta, Beverly, “Communion that Surpasses Words.”
- Teasdale, Wayne, “What is Inter-Spirituality?” Opening the Heart of the World: Toward a Universal Mysticism.”

April 17. Mysticism and Gender

Readings:
- Stoddart, William, “The Masculine and the Feminine.”
• Wawrytko, Sandra A., “The ‘Feminine’ Mode of Mysticism.’
• Lanzetta, Beverly, “Via Feminina and the Classical Spiritual Journey;” “Via Feminina as Radical Mysticism;” “Contemplative Feminism: Transforming the Spiritual Journey.”
• Jacobs, Janet L., “Religious Experience among Women and Men: A Gender Perspective on Mystical Phenomena.”

**Case Study: Mysticism and African American Women**
• Bostic, Joy R., “Mystical Experience, Radical Subjectification, and Activism in the Religious Traditions of African American Women.”

**April 24. Embodiment and Erotic Mysticism**

**Readings:**
• Ferrer, Jorge, “What Does It Mean to Live a Fully Embodied Spiritual Life?”
• Donnelly, Dorothy H., “The Sexual Mystic: Embodied Spirituality.”
• Wade, Jenny, “Divine Union: One with God.”
• Lanzetta, Beverly, “Wound of Love: Feminine Theosis and Embodied Mysticism in Teresa of Avila.” (PT)
• Kripal, Jeffrey J., “Secret Talk: Heroic Heretical Heterosexuality.”

**Case Study: Sri Ramakrishna’s Erotic Mysticism**
• Burnett, David, “The Erotic Mysticism of Sri Ramakrishna.”

**May 1. The Ethics of Mysticism?**
The relationship between the mystical and the ethical. Must enlightened mystics be moral? Participatory spirituality and moral perennialism. Students’ presentations.

**Readings:**
• Kripal, Jeffrey J., “Debating the Mystical as Ethical.”
• Barnard, G. William, “Debating the Mystical as Ethical: A Response.”
• Kripal, Jeffrey J., “In the Spirit of Hermes: Reflections on the Work of Jorge N. Ferrer.”

**Case Study: Adi Da (Da Free John)**
• Feuerstein, Georg, “The Many Faces of Da Love-Ananda (Da Free John).”
• Stoeber, Michael, “Amoral Trickster or Mystic–Saint? Spiritual Teachers and the Transmoral Narrative.”

**May 10. Psychedelic Research and Mystical Experience / Conclusion**
Readings:

• Zaehner, Robert T., “Mysticism Sacred and Profane.”
• Smith, Huston, “Do Drugs Have Religious Import?”
• Partridge, Christopher, “Sacred Chemicals: Psychedelics Drugs and Mystical Experience.”
• Merkur, Daniel, “The Unitive Phenomena.”
• Ferrer, Jorge, “Grof’s Neo-Advaitin Perennial Philosophy;” “A Participatory Account of Grof’s Consciousness Research.” (RTT, pp. 80-83, 149-151, 216-217n32)
• Ferrer, Jorge, “Teaching the Graduate Seminar in Comparative Study of Mysticism: A Participatory Integral Approach.”

Final Paper Due!
Course Reader Contents


**Comparative Studies Samples**


Research Bibliography

1. Universalist/Perennialists Approaches


2. Contextualist/Pluralist Approaches


3. On the Perennialist/Contextualist Debate

P = Perennialist emphasis
C = Contextualist emphasis


**Instructor:**

**Jorge N. Ferrer, Ph.D.** is core faculty in the East-West Psychology Department at the California Institute of Integral Studies. Jorge is the author of *Revisioning Transpersonal Theory: A Participatory Vision of Human Spirituality* (SUNY Press, 2002) and co-editor of *The Participatory Turn: Spirituality, Mysticism, Religious Studies* (SUNY Press, 2008), which was the focus of a panel at the 2010 American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting and spurred another panel on “Contemplative Studies from a Participatory Perspective” at the 2011 American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting. His integral participatory approach to the teaching of mysticism has been featured in the anthology, *Teaching Mysticism* (Oxford University Press), edited by William Parsons.