

## **Comparative Mysticism: Renewing a Neglected Project**

At the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, mysticism was frequently approached in a comparative perspective that assumed there to be some unitary 'mystical experience' underlying the varieties of religious and doctrinal expression. On this view, a Christian, a Buddhist, a Hindu, or a Sufi all had the 'same' experience and only differed in their manner of expressing it. For a variety of reasons this approach had fallen into disrepute by the end of the century and in many quarters had been declared illegitimate. Nevertheless, dialogue between faiths would seem to be significantly imperilled if no shared experiential or practical points of unity can be identified. Drawing on the more complex models of religious life developed in the last 40 years, the conference seeks to renew the project of a comparative study of mysticism and in doing so to offer resources for both teaching and research in theology and religious studies.

Each panel will be devoted to a specific theme and will explore convergences and divergences in the different expressions and interpretations of these themes in a selection of three religious traditions. Because of the aims of the conference, the concluding session will be given greater space than is usual so as to identify the major findings that need to be carried forward.

### **Day 1.**

#### **2-2.30 Welcome and Introduction: George Pattison**

#### **2.30-3.30 pm Opening Keynote: Bernard Mc Ginn "The Nothingness of God in Jewish and Christian Mysticism"**

Tea

#### **4.00-5.30 Papers (3 x 20" + 20" discussion)**

##### **1. Nothingness:**

Rob Faesen (Leuven) 'Nothingness in Russbroec and others'.

Kate Kirkpatrick, 'Nothingness and (No-)Self in Simone Weil and Keiji Nishitani'.

Jane Clarke and Charles Verey (presented by Jane Clark), 'Dom Sylvester Houédard; mysticism in the wider ecumenism'

##### **2. Psychology**

Paul Bishop 'Can analytical psychology provide a framework for a comparative approach to mysticism?'

Simon Magus, 'The Place of Snakes or Seraphs? *Mysticism, Esoteric Hermeneutics and Παράνοια*'

Abdulla Galadari, 'Mystical Experience across Traditions: A Psychological Evaluation'

### **3. Methodology**

Jennifer Griggs, 'Methodology in the Academic Study of Mysticism'

Markus Maria Wagner, "Common Core Paradoxes: The Dialectic of Activity and Passivity as a Tool for Comparative Mysticism"

Elizabeth Roberts, 'Union and uniqueness'

### **6.00-7.00 Papers (2 x 20" discussion)**

#### **1. Poetics**

Margaret Douglas, "'Cast a cold eye": Faith and the Six Counties'

Sue Yore 'The fusion of Christian and Hasidic mysticism in Denise Levertov's poetic vision.'

#### **2. Messianism**

Graham McGeoch, 'Marxism, *Mística* and the struggle for land reform: What is the secret to the Mystical Experience of the Landless Workers' Movement in Brazil?'

Miroslav Griško, 'Revealed Law and Messianic Survival'

### **3. Methodology**

Charles Orzech, 'What is Buddhist Mysticism?'

Minlib Dalh, 'The Poetics of unio mystica of Two Women Mystics'

### **Day 2**

**9.15-10.45 Keynote 2. William Franke "Apophatic Paths from Europe to China." Response: V. Williams**

10.45 Coffee

### **11.00-12.30 Papers (3 x 20")**

#### **1. Methodology**

Louise Nelstrop, 'Evelyn Underhill'

Rachel Lyon, 'Imitatio as Method: Catherine of Siena's self-articulation in text'

John Willmetts, 'Maurice Nicoll and the Kingdom of Heaven: Gurdjieff's 'Work' and the Gospel as mystical Christianity'

#### **2. Love**

Jessica Frazier, 'God from the World, like Flavour from Spices: Love Mysticism in Hindu and Platonic Traditions'

Yazid Said, 'Loving and Knowing God: reflections from Imam al- Ghazālī (d.1111)'

Sander Vloebergs, 'The School of Love. Challenges for Contemporary Theology'

### **3. Mystical Theology**

Christopher Malcolm Knauf, 'Meister Eckhart, Marguerite Porete and the soul who wants nothing: An exercise in intertextual comparison.'

Axel Marc Oaks, 'Mysticism from Text to World: Metaphor as Theophanic Perception'

Thomas Rushton, 'The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church': The apophatic theology of Vladimir Lossky'.

12.30 Lunch

### **14.00- 15.30 Papers (3 x 20")**

#### **1. Nothingness**

Robert McGuire 'Madhyamaka Pluralism – *śūnyatā* as a universal truth'.

Michael T. Miller, 'The Emptiness of Selfhood: The doctrine of self-annihilation and *unio mystica* in the Medieval Kabbalah'

Ufuk Ozturk 'The experience of *fanā*' and *baqā*' in the *Manṭiq-uṭ-Ṭayr* of Farīd ud-dīn 'Aṭṭār (d.1221)'

#### **2. Women**

Fumiko Yoshikawa, 'Address Pronouns in *The Book of Margery Kempe*'

Navneet Samuel, 'Women of Wonders: Mysticism in the early and medieval times in the Middle East.'

Einat Klafter, 'Two Tales of one City: The Sanctity of Rome in the texts of Margery Kempe and St. Birgitta of Sweden'

[NB This session may be extended to allow for discussion of papers]

#### **3. Inner Experience**

Elif Emirahmetoglu 'The Wisdom of the Heart: The Role of Invocation in the Realization of the Absolute according to Ibn Arabi and Shinran Shonin

Bishoy Dawood, 'Imageless Prayer: The Syncretism of Evagrian Hesychasm in the Context of Buddhist Mindfulness Practice'

Ahmad Karimi, 'The Possibility of Mystical Experience in the Shade of Soul Purification, Rereading Avicenna's Philosophical View'

3.30 Tea

### **3.45-4.45 Papers (2x 20")**

## **1. Material Culture**

Owen Coggins, 'Weight Beyond Common Measurement': An Ethnography of Comparative Mysticism in the Reception Culture of Drone Metal Music

Sara Kuehn, 'The materiality of spiritual ascent in the Late Antique and early medieval Near East'

## **2. Sufism**

Maryam Musharraf, 'Mystical Intoxication and Wine Symbolism in Islam and Christianity'

Lloyd Ridgeon, 'Mystics between heaven and earth: the Sufi case of Awhad al-Din Kirmani'

## **3. Methodology**

Peter Tyler, 'Christian Mindfulness: A Mystical Dialogue?'

Richard Gault, 'Mysticism: top-down, inside-out.'

### **17.00-19.15 Boyd Orr Building**

**Astaire Seminar: 'Wandering Souls'**

### **Day 3 Yudowitz Room**

#### **9.00-10.00 Keynote 3 Jane Shaw (Stanford) Comparative Mysticism**

#### **10.10. -11.40 Papers (3 x 20")**

##### **1. Nothingness**

Simon D. Podmore, 'Abyss Calls Unto Abyss': *Tzimtzum* & *Kenosis* in Jewish & Christian Responses to the Problem of Evil

Zhao Dong, 'Bridging the Chan and Christian Mysticism of Emptiness in the *Heart Sutra* and the *Gospel of John*: Toward a Syncretic Comparative Theology'

Maria Exall, 'Annihilation and Virtue; can we have an ethics of nothingness?'

##### **2. Love**

Pascal Held, 'Perceptions on 'love' (*ḥubb*) and 'passionate love' (*'ishq*) in sixth/twelfth-century mystical Islam.'

Georgiana Huian, 'Ardour: Mystical Meanings of the Fire Imagery in Augustine's *Confessions*'

Pablo Argárate, 'The Holy Spirit. Light and Fire and His Role in the Mystical Union with God in Pseudo-Macarius' 50 Spiritual Homilies'

##### **3. Theism/ Non-theism**

Saeko Yazaki, 'Dogen and Al-Ghazzali'

Stewart Yarlett, 'Emerging Quaker Views in the Theism vs. Non-Theism Debate: A Comparison with "Deconstructive" Notions of Religio-Ethical Experience'

Muhammad Akrami, 'God Realization through Different Religions: A Study into Mystical Experiences of Sri Ramakrishna'

11.40 Coffee

**12.00 Finegan/Mulligan (performance: 15")**

**12.20 Summing-up followed by Plenary discussion of results and ways forward.**

**13.00 Conclusion**