

RELS 252

MYSTICISM: THE ESOTERIC AND OCCULT IN WESTERN RELIGIONS

Queen's University School of Religion

Taught by: Chris Coome, PhD Candidate

The purpose of this course is to provide students with a historical overview of Western esotericism, mysticism, and their relation to organized religion and society. Generally, mysticism refers to a sense of the immanence, or experiential nature of the divine, while esotericism, or the occult, refers to a tradition of secret practices and beliefs, such as Kabbalah and Hermeticism. Beginning with their classical foundations in antiquity, this course will cover the development of mystical and esoteric ideas in the middle ages, the Islamic world, Jewish traditions, and the Renaissance. This will be followed by exploring the emergence of organized esotericism in the 18th century, and conclude with the creation of mystical religious movements in the 19th century, such as Theosophy and Traditionalism. Throughout this course, special focus will be given to the tensions and flash-points between the supposedly "obscure" traditions of esotericism and larger social issues. Far from "fringe," questions surrounding mysticism and esotericism have been consistently emblematic of the most pressing social questions of the day. Such issues include: religious tensions between heterodoxy and orthodoxy, the relationship between Christianity and foreign religions, Enlightenment concerns about "reason and revelation," and 19th century reforms surrounding gender, sexuality and economics.

Grading

Participation: 15%

Response papers: two 2-page responses in essay format that bring together readings from at least two different weeks. 10% each (20% total)

Mid-term exam: 30%

Research essay: 35%

Time Commitment per Week

8-10
hours

Prerequisite

Level 2

Required Textbook/Materials

No