

Fall 9-1-2004

## RELS 370.01: Mysticism - Perfect Fools: Divine Madness and Holy Folly from Plato to Dostoevsky

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**Perfect Fools: Divine Madness and Holy Folly  
from Plato to Dostoevsky**

RELS 370  
Mysticism  
TTh 9:40-11:00  
LA 106

Autumn 2004  
Paul A. Dietrich  
LA 101A; x2805  
Hours: MWF 9-10

In this course we will consider: Plato's discourse on divine madness in the *Phaedrus* and the revalorization of Plato's ideas in later medieval and renaissance Platonism (Ficino, Pico, Cusa and Bruno); eros, ecstasy, enthusiasm and metamorphosis in classical literature and the religions of the ancient Mediterranean basin (Euripides, Diogenes, Ovid, Lucian and Apuleius); St. Paul's notion of holy folly in the history of Christianity with emphases on the early Desert Fathers, the Byzantine (Symeon the Fool) and Russian traditions (Dostoevsky and *The Way of the Pilgrim*); knights errant from *Parzival* to *Don Quixote*; Franciscans (St. Francis of Assisi, Jacopone da Todi, Angela of Foligno, Ramon Lull), Dominicans (Meister Eckhart, Henry Suso) and Passion mysticism; medieval women mystics (Marie d'Oignies, Christina Mirabilis, Margery Kempe); folly, satire, folk wisdom (Sebastian Brant) and renaissance art (Bosch, Bruegel), philosophy (More, Erasmus), literature and drama (Shakespeare); folly and the Age of Reason (Angelus Silesius, Grimmelshausen, Surin, Voltaire).

**Required Reading**

Selected materials on ERES (Password: "Fools")  
Henry Suso, *The Exemplar* (CWS, Paulist)  
Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe* (Norton)  
Sebastian Brant, *The Ship of Fools* (Dover)  
Erasmus, *Praise of Folly* (Penguin)  
Cervantes, *Don Quixote* (Penguin)  
Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Idiot* (Vintage)

**Course Syllabus**

1. Introduction. Holy Folly and Crazy Wisdom in World Religions
2. Divine Madness in Classical Antiquity: Dionysiac mysteries, Platonic frenzies, Diogenes and the Cynics, Ovidian metamorphoses, Lucianic satire, Apuleian asininity
3. Folly and Wisdom, Human and Divine, in the New Testament: Jesus and Paul
4. The Christian Counter-Culture: The Fool in the Desert from the Desert Fathers to Leontius' *Life of Symeon the Fool*
5. God's Fools – the Franciscan Troubadours - St. Francis of Assisi, Jacopone da Todi, Ramon Lull
6. The Knight Errant as Fool – Wolfram of Eschenbach's *Parzival*
7. The Fool as Servant of Lady Wisdom – Henry Suso and German Passion mysticism
8. Dominican Dionysian Mysticism - Meister Eckhart and his School

9. Medieval Women Mystics: Marie d'Oignies, Christina Mirabilis, Angela of Foligno, Mechthild of Magdeburg, Hadewijch of Antwerp, Margery Kempe, Joan of Arc, Maria Magdalena de Pazzi
10. The English School: *Cloud of Unknowing*, Richard Rolle
11. The Fool in Medieval Art and Culture: Court Fools, Troubadours and Artists: Hieronymus Bosch, Pieter Bruegel, and Rabelais
12. Folly and Folk Wisdom: Sebastian Brant's *Narrenschiff*
13. Learned Ignorance and Madness in Renaissance Platonism: Nicholas of Cusa, Marsilio Ficino, Pico della Mirandola, and Giordano Bruno
14. Dame Folly, Satire, and *philosophia Christi*: Thomas More and Erasmus's *Praise of Folly*
15. The Spanish School: Jesuits and Carmelites – SS Ignatius Loyola, Teresa of Avila, and John of the Cross
16. Cervantes' *Don Quixote*: the Hero-Fool
17. The Fool on Stage: Shakespeare's Fools (*King Lear*, *Twelfth Night*, et al.)
18. Metaphysical and Baroque Folly: Donne and Crashaw
19. The Pilgrim Fool in a Broken World: Angelus Silesius' *The Cherubic Wanderer* and Jakob Grimmelshausen's *Simplicius Simplicissimus*
20. Jean-Joseph Surin and the Devils of Loudon
21. Folly in the Age of Reason: Voltaire's *Candide* and William Blake
22. St. Seraphim of Sarov and *The Way of the Pilgrim*
23. Full Circle: *Imitatio Christi* and Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*
24. Conclusion and Review.

Nov. 2 Election Day – Holiday

Nov. 11 Veterans' Day - Holiday

Nov. 25 Thanksgiving - Holiday

### **Course Requirements**

1. Attendance and participation are crucial (10% of grade). Three absences (or persistent tardiness) will lower your grade one letter grade. Six absences will result in failure of the course.
2. Completion of assigned reading in a timely fashion is also a necessity. Occasional quizzes may be needed to encourage you in this regard.
3. There will be a midterm exam on Thursday, October 14 and a final exam on Monday, December 13 (10-12). (40% each)
4. A term paper or research paper on an approved topic may be submitted in lieu of the final exam. Due on Monday, December 13. (40%) Evidence of plagiarism will result in failure of the course.

For those who elect the P/NP option, the equivalent of a "C" is necessary for a "Pass".