Description

The relationship between religion and politics has been highly significant in determining the image and position of women in human culture. What is religion, and what images of women do various religious systems provide? What are the roots of religion in economic and political structures, and what is the place of women in those structures? What does religion have to do with contemporary women's liberation?

The course will address those questions, beginning with a definition of "religion": the sacred and the profane, religious system and religious consciousness. We will then define "woman" as she has been named by religious systems, especially considering the categories of power, sexuality and relationships. We will attempt to account for the negative images and position of women using philosophical and psychoanalytic approaches.

We will then examine religious systems historically, from a materialist perspective. We will examine differences between patriarchal and matriarchal religious systems, focussing on differences in mode of production and political structures and the resulting differences in the roles and images of women.

We will conclude with an analysis of contemporary political issues concerning women, to determine what religious perspectives lie behind issues such as abortion, control of our bodies, equal rights, equal pay. We will work toward an understanding of change, liberation and the women's movement as "religious" phenomena.

Assignments

A. One short paper, (30%) one seminar presentation, (20%) take-home exam (50%)
   or

B. One major research paper (with permission of instructor)

Required Readings

Mary Daly - Beyond God the Father
Mircea Eliade - Myth & Reality
Eli Zaretsky - Capitalism, the Family and Personal Life
E. Clark & H. Richardson - Women & Religion
Mary Douglas - Purity & Danger

A package of reprints will be handed out in class.

Prerequisites:

60 credit hours or permission of instructor. W.S. 302 (Women & Religion) is not a prerequisite; this course does provide a follow-up for those who have taken W.S. 302.