Religion is a very powerful institution which defines and oppresses women, by its images and texts. Religion is also a moving personal experience which can transform and liberate individuals and communities.

How can religion be both of these things, both oppressive and liberating? In understanding the role religion plays in women's lives and history we will first define it. What is it, how does it work, how does it change over time, how does it influence us?

We will then look at some aspects of religion as an institution - its images and doctrines. What are the images of women in Western Christianity? Especially, what does Christianity say about sexuality and power? Power and sexuality have been defined negatively for women: why is this? We will try to understand these negative definitions using the resources of psychoanalysis and existentialism. And we will try to understand the link between religion's fear of sexuality, and aspects of women's oppression, such as pornography.

We will then look at the positive side of religion and examine feminism as a religious experience. Here we will take a method of reflecting on and analyzing religion and apply it to the women's movement, e.g. consciousness raising and political organizing. Does it make sense to regard feminism as a religious experience?

Readings: A reading packet will be available at cost.