WOMEN'S STUDIES PROGRAM

FALL 1991

BARBARA BLAKELY

Lec. Tue. 13:30-15:20
Tut. Tue. 15:30-16:20

W.S. 304-3

WOMEN AND RELIGION
OUR BODIES, OUR SOULS, OUR LIVES:

THE CONSTRUCTION OF SEXUALITY IN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

Religions may be said to make assertions about Truth, Reality, Meaning, and Value. Among those items about which Truth is told are men and women, body and soul, self and sexuality. Indeed, concern about the gendered self, the spiritual soul and the sexual body are visibly important in Christian teachings and practice.

What Truth is told, what Reality is constructed, what Meanings and Values are assigned, in these teachings and practices? A "natural" hierarchy is asserted, of male over female, soul over body, spirituality over sexuality, and these entities are defined through polarization against each other. It has commonly been asserted that, through this hierarchy and polarization, the Christian Church has oppressed women, suppressed the body and repressed sexuality – what Michel Foucault calls the "repressive hypothesis." We will use Foucault's work to test a more subtle hypothesis, that the power of the Church has, instead, produced and proliferated sexualities, deployed and displayed bodies - in ways which have significant implications for women.

Having grappled with Foucault's method, we will then examine the teachings of the early Christian tradition regarding bodies, souls and selves. We will test Foucault's hypothesis concerning the effects of these discourses, and we will see exactly what Realities are constructed.

We will conclude with a study of contemporary women's spiritualities, particularly "the search for the Goddess." These are intentionally Feminist discourses, constructing and displaying new images of women's bodies, souls and selves. We will evaluate their usefulness to women in building new spiritual and political Realities.

REQUIRED READING

Brown, Peter. The Body and Society
Gadon, Elinor W. The Once and Future Goddess

ASSIGNMENTS

30% Tutorial presentation and participation
20% Short paper (3 - 5 pages)
50% Research paper (15 pages)

Prerequisite: 60 credit hours or WS 100