WOMEN'S STUDIES DEPARTMENT

FALL, 1993

BARBARA BLAKELEY
Lec: Thursday, 9:30-11:20
Tut: Thursday, 11:30-12:20

W.S. 304-3: WOMEN AND RELIGION
Virgins, Whores and Goddesses: Representing Women and the Sacred

Religions may be said to make assertions about Truth, Reality, and Meaning. Among those items about which Truth is told are men and women, body and soul, self and sexuality. Indeed, concern about the gendered self and the sexual body holds a central position in Christian teaching and practice.

What Truth is told, what Reality is constructed, what Meaning is assigned, in these discourses and practices? Among other things, a hierarchy is asserted, of male over female, soul over body, and spirituality over sexuality. The Christian Church has displayed and deployed bodies, produced and proliferated sexualities, and generated subjectivities, thereby constructing a particular vision of "Woman" which is then "naturalized" as created by God. We will begin, therefore, with an examination of some of these discourses and practices, and the "Woman" they construct.

We will then move to a discussion of Feminist Postmodernism. As we reflect on the "Truths" constructed about "Woman", what theoretical framework best equips us, both to understand the processes by which truths are constructed, and to strategize their revision? While rather contentious among Feminists, Postmodernism offers us important resources, analyses and strategies as we address these tasks. Among other things, it provides us some interesting approaches to the Sacred.

Having gained a grasp of Postmodernism's resources, we will look at one set of sources for the re-visioning of "Woman" - discourses about the Goddess. These discourses construct and display new images of women's bodies, selves, and sexuality, where the Sacred itself is presented as female. How adequate, finally, is Postmodernism? We will conclude with these questions.

ASSIGNMENTS:

Tutorial presentation and participation 30%
Short paper (3-5 pages) 20%
Midterm Exam 20%
Research Paper (15 pages) 30%
REQUIRED READING:


RECOMMENDED READING:


Students may apply to the Humanities Program to have this course designated as 3 credits toward their Humanities minor or PBD.