Religion in Literature, Music, Art, and Performance: Bibles and Bodies

Some of the fiercest debates in Christianity have been about the Bible. What does it say? What does it mean? Equally fierce debates have centered on the body. Do Christians need to be baptized? Why? How? Do they need to partake of the Eucharist or communion? Why? How? In this course we'll explore these questions when they were matters of life and death debates: in sixteenth century Europe when Protestant Christianity challenged Catholic dominance. This conflict about biblical interpretation and ritual acts ushered in the modern era and remains significant today. In this course we'll analyze the strange, often cataclysmic, and sometimes comic conflicts between Catholics and Protestants in sixteenth century Europe alongside the argument for the enduring importance of Christianity's paradoxical emphasis on the importance of both Bibles (an authoritative text) and bodies (and their participation in ritual acts). Sources will include works from Protestant and Catholic opponents as well as theoretical work about ritual, belief, and modernity. Assignments include regular weekly posting, two short papers on specific texts, a final take-home exam and a final research or creative project.