

**Essay Assignment #4**  
**MEDVL 1101, Section 102**  
**Aspects of Medieval Culture: Saints, Miracles, and Demons**

**The Final copy of Essay Assignment #4 is due Tuesday, November 16<sup>th</sup>**

**Assignment**

During the past weeks we have discussed the ways in which the medieval papacy played an increasingly important role in determining who could (or could not) become a saint. In the high and later middle ages, the papacy gradually instituted a standardized process of canonization. This process was designed to judge the sanctity of new candidate-saints. Successful saints were canonized through the issuance of a papal bull. For this assignment, you will prepare (and stage) three canonization trials in class on November 16th. Your aim is to convince the pope to canonize your saint (and no one else's!)

You will be divided into three teams of six. Each team will be given a small packet of information about their candidate-saint. This packet will include: 1) a brief biographical sketch of your saint, and 2) a record of interviews of witnesses to miracles your saint is said to have performed. These interviews were collected as part of a papal inquiry into the case of your candidate-saint.

Two members of your group need to be designated as writers of your saint's *Life*. Based on the information provided about the saint and using the *Lives* we have read in class as models, these members need to compose a realistic *Life*. The *Life* should include a description of the saint's childhood, youth, career, daily habits, conflicts, and death. Compose the *Life* in a realistic medieval style. Think about how you might subtly present evidence in the *Life* that will convince the pope that your candidate is, in fact, a saint. Each writer should contribute 3-4 pages, for a finished *Life* that is 6-8 pages long. The writers should select short excerpts from their *Life* to read aloud as part of the trial on November 16<sup>th</sup>.

Two members of your group need to be designated as miracle-writers. Based on the interviews of witnesses, these members need to construct narratives regarding the miracles your saint was said to have performed. These miracle-narratives should be composed in a realistic style, based on other miracle-narratives we have read in class. Each member should produce a total of 2-3 pages of writing, for a total of 5-6 pages. As part of the trial, these members need to present their miracles to the pope and to defend their miracles against the arguments of the *advocatidiaboli*(the Devil's Advocates).

Two members of your group need to be designated as *advocatidiaboli*(Advocates of the Devil). These members need to read the biographical sketch and interviews of witnesses of another group's saint. They should then prepare a brief which casts doubt on the sanctity and miracles of this saint. The brief, written in the form of a letter addressed to the pope, should encourage the papal courtnot to choose this candidate as a saint. Each member should produce a total of 2-3 pages of writing, for a total of 5-6 pages. As part of the trial, these members need to present arguments which cast doubt on the miracles

performed by another group's saint. Think about how you might undermine the credibility of the other group's saint, their witnesses, and their miracles, while at the same time – as a good member of the papal court – communicating your unwavering faith in God, saints, and miracles.

**Note:** All group members need to keep in mind that their writings, like almost all medieval texts, should be designed for oral presentation. Consider the ways in which oral arguments differ from written arguments.

### **In-class Canonization Trial(s)**

The procedure for the trial on November 16<sup>th</sup> will be as follows:

- 1). The pope will enter and take his place.
- 2). The *Life* writers of Group #1 will present short excerpts from their work.
- 3). The miracle-writers of Group #1 will describe the miracles their saint has allegedly performed, based on the interviews of witnesses provided.
- 4). The Devil's Advocates from Group #2 will attempt to cast doubt on the saint and on the miracles that Group #1 has just described.
- 5). After a brief group meeting, the miracle-writers of Group #1 will offer a rebuttal.
- 6). After another brief meeting, the Devil's Advocates from Group #2 will present a counter-rebuttal.

[Repeat steps 2-6 for Groups #2 and #3].

\*Note: Expect questions from the pope and others throughout the trial. Also note that while the writing assignments of the miracle-writers and the Devil's Advocates are slightly shorter, these group members have larger roles in the trial.

**At the end of the trial, each group should hand in: 1) a *Life* of their saint (6-8 pages), 2) narratives of their saint's miracles (5-6 pages), 3) a letter to the pope casting doubt on the saint of an opposing group and his or her miracles (5-6 pages). After careful consideration of the written and oral arguments, the pope will decide whether to canonize your group's saint!**

### **Assessment**

Each pair in the group (the *Life* writers, the miracle writers, and the devil's advocates) will receive the same grade, based on their written essays and / or their in-class oral arguments.

### **Rationale**

This assignment encourages students to think creatively and innovatively about writing and oral presentations. Students will need to consider how to present and structure arguments outside the confines of modern academic discourse. This assignment will also help students familiarize themselves with medieval hagiographic genres and consider the contexts in which medieval saints were written about. In particular, students will have to think in detail about the audience for medieval hagiographic literature and about the nature of skepticism in a medieval Christian context.

