

English 201 Heresy Trial: Prosecutors and Defenders

Format: Your main essay should be a full 3-4 pages long not counting the Works Cited page. It should be typed or printed on high quality paper. Optionally, you might wish to create a separate "legal brief"--a 1-2 page list of materials using bulleted or clearly numbered entries to list your major arguments or textual citations. This will allow you and your partners to refer to them quickly during the trial.

Aim for a professional appearance. Use the Modern Language Association format (MLA). You may find it useful to peruse the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 7th edition, for a brief overview. Use no title page for this assignment. In the upper left-hand corner of the first page, please include the following material flush against the left margin: your name, your teacher's name, the course, and the due date (not necessarily the date you finished the work). Here is a generic example:

Jane Doe
Professor Wheeler
English 201-C
10 June 2014

After typing such material in the upper left-hand side of the first page, you should double-space with the return key and center the title of your composition. Note that the title of your own unpublished essay need not be underlined, italicized, or placed within quotation marks. Follow normal MLA conventions for capitalization.

The body of your essay should be double-spaced and left-margin justified rather than fully justified (i.e., your right margin should be a "ragged right," with uneven edges.) Maintain one-inch margins all around the essay. On every page, *including the first*, insert a header with your last name and the page number.

Directions: In medieval times, the church took very seriously the biblical passage from 1 Timothy 2:11: "Let the woman learn in silence. Suffer her not to be a teacher or to have authority over the man. She must not speak [concerning spiritual matters]."

Women who tried to preach or teach others spiritual lessons were often labeled *heretics* in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries because female preachers were associated with *lollardy*. A heretic is one who distorts church law and scripture. If women continued to speak out about religious matters, they could be burned at the stake or face other punishments. Both Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe claim to be religious mystics. They are women who declared they had personal visions sent to them by God. The question then becomes, if they try to tell others about their visions, are they heretics? Are their personal visions compatible with church doctrine--or do their writings pervert established doctrine that conflict with scripture and tradition? What (if anything) would suggest to medieval Christians these visions are divine in nature? What (if anything) suggests they are the ravings of madwomen? What (if anything) suggests they are satanic tricks to mislead the church? These women are

arguably in danger of being accused of heresy, particularly if they challenge the authority of legitimate church officials. Do you think these women are heretics? Are they setting themselves up as female religious teachers? Are they rebelling against ecclesiastical authority by defying male priests?

I am going to divide the class into groups, and we will hold an *inquisition*--a trial concerning heresy to determine whether or not these women should be burned at the stake. The students who sign up for the "Heresy Trial" slots should read through the assigned texts and find passages to use as evidence. They may also refer to Biblical concordances to look up passages dealing with teaching and women, and they may refer to the handouts in class as evidence. For a starting spot, you can find a quick overview of medieval heresies our course handouts on Carson-Newman Online. Look in the 201 materials in folder 08e "High Middle Ages (Mystic Writers)" and more detailed material can be found in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* in the library or at its website, <<http://www.newadvent.org>>.

One group will be the prosecution. It is your job to find material indicating that Julian and Margery are heretics guilty of violating church law in their writings. The prosecution should be very specific in their charges. They may wish to accuse the defendant of several charges rather than one. They should explain which specific heresies they accuse the defendant of and they should present evidence for each charge based on passages in these women's writings.

A second group will be the defense. It is your job to find material that shows Julian and Margery are orthodox in their beliefs and submit to the will of God and the church. The rest of the class will be the jury. They will hear the arguments and then decide whether each woman is innocent or guilty. Unanimous agreement leads to a verdict. Dissension means a hung jury.

The Trials:

We will use a rather unorthodox approach to this trial to ensure class participation. During the first five minutes of class, the prosecution team and the defense team will be given time to consult with other members of their group. They can skim through each other's arguments and select the best ones to present to the jury. (The jury will be composed of the rest of the class.) The prosecution will present its arguments before the jury. The defense will be given a chance for rebuttal. Each team will make closing arguments. The jury will then decide "guilty" or "not guilty" to each charge.

Tips and Relevant Resources:

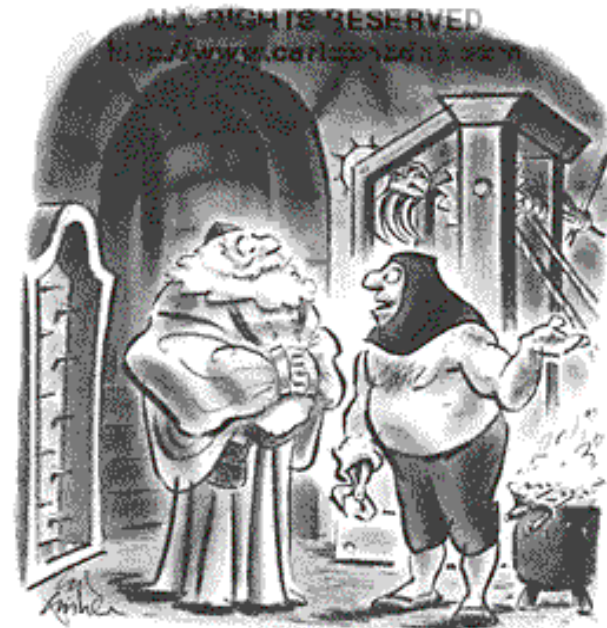
1. The **Primary texts:** Each team should look for "evidence" to use from either Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of Divine Love* in our textbook, pages 289-97, or *The Book of Margery Kempe*, pages 290-312. Treat these books as each witness's testimony. The main part of your trial and your legal brief should focus on specific passages you can quote to the jury and interpret for them. Prosecutors should seek passages in which the women use imagery or doctrine that departs from traditional Christianity to show their heresy. They

should point to specific actions the women take or words they say that show their lack of obedient feminine virtue. The defense team should fashion arguments showing how the teachings of these women are actually compatible with orthodox Christianity and prove that these women's actions show obedience to God rather than defiance of his established doctrinal authority, the Church and priesthood.

2. **A biblical concordance and a Bible:** Biblical concordances are books containing alphabetized lists of all the words appearing in the Bible. They allow scholars to quickly find scriptures dealing with specific subjects or mentioning particular words. You may find it particularly helpful to look up scriptures dealing with "teaching," "women," the nature of Christ and his gender, hazelnuts, or whatever. Such concordances are available in the library or online.
3. **The New Catholic Encyclopedia:** Available in the reference section of the library, this text contains definitions of the standard terminology for heresies and orthodox medieval (i.e., Catholic) belief. An online version is available at <http://www.newadvent.org>.
4. On Carson-Newman Online, I have uploaded a handout that contains a brief overview of the major medieval heresies. This is a good starting spot to skim through before looking for more information in **scholarly books on heresy**. (Anne Hudson's articles and books on Lollardy might be particularly useful, or Michael Lambert's *Medieval Heresy*-see me about loaner copies.)
5. **Secondary materials: scholarly articles.** Critical discussions of the writings by Julian and Margery can be found in JSTOR, InfoTrack, or the International Medieval Bibliography Online at U.T. (Talk to librarians like Ms. Jones or Ms. Williams for help with locally available databases if necessary.) Treat such articles as "expert witnesses" you can quote from in the trial or hold up as evidence.
6. Additional **biographical materials** about these two women's lives as found in books and religious encyclopedia entries.
7. Of particular interest to the prosecution and defense may be the following sections or questions dealing with the readings:

Julian of Norwich: What's this strange idea Julian has about the universe being "something like a hazelnut"? What's this business about Christ being a *mother*? A *lover*? What do we make of Julian's desire to experience death? Are these signs of trinitarian heresy? By medieval standards, does she in any places resort to antinomian beliefs--privileging private revelation over scripture?

Margery Kempe: How do Kempe's "cryings" or "roarings" interfere with Church services? What spiritual beings visit Kempe and where do they appear to come from? What do Kempe's interactions with the Archbishop of York reveal about her obedience to the church and her understanding of church doctrine? What do Kempe's interactions with "the holy anchorite of N." (i.e., Julian of Norwich) suggest about her?



"We're working on a promising new treatment for heresy."