

## HIST302: Medieval Europe Reading Questions

### Part I: The Role of the Christian Church in Medieval European Culture and Politics

The Christian Church has been a ubiquitous presence in our course. An institution whose origins reach back to the Classical era, the Church helped make Christianity the dominant faith in the Roman Empire and later survived the collapse of this state to play an influential role in the political and cultural life of Western Europe throughout the Middle Ages. With these thoughts in mind, please take approximately one hour to think through and write a two-paragraph answer for each of the following questions:

- 1) What was the source or sources of the Church's power and how was it used by various Church leaders to exert their influence upon political affairs in Western Europe? Please use examples from the resources to illustrate your answer.
- 2) We might ask similar questions about the role of the Christian Church in the cultural life of Europe. What are some of the examples you would use to illustrate the manner in which the doctrines, resources, and interests of the Church were reflected in the artistic and intellectual affairs of Western Europe during the Medieval era or influenced their development?

#### Answer Guidelines

- 1) Review the events described in subunits 2.3.3, 2.3.4, 3.3.4, 3.3.5, and 3.4 concerning subjects such as the coronations of Pepin and Charlemagne, the Investiture Conflict, and the Crusades, for clues regarding the sources of the Church's power and its consequent ability to legitimize rulers or mobilize large numbers of people throughout the continent. Think about some of the distinctive features of the Church's structure and activities and the types of power that might accrue from them (was its power in Europe limited, for example, by political or cultural boundaries?). Consider the kind of loyalties the Church was able to command and from whom. How did the Church differ in these and other respects from a medieval kingdom and what were some of the threats that its power might pose to the leaders of these states? Consider, finally, some of the developments within Europe and without that served to elevate the Church's standing or influence.
- 2) You could approach this answer from a number of directions. On one hand, there is the basic issue of subject matter. When you go back over the resources dealing with the artistic life of Europe, what are some of the key themes and subjects that appear again and again over time? Which texts, stories, images, and so forth, featured as common points of reference for artists across the continent? Some might even say, given the points alluded to above, that the Christian Church exerted a unifying force on European popular and high culture. Explain this. In addition to subject matter, give some thought also to the people actually engaged in the cultural and intellectual ventures of the period. For example, consider the implications of a statement made by James Hannam in one of our resources from unit 5: "During the Middle Ages, the



education infrastructure of Europe was overseen, if not managed, by the Church.” Where did so many artists and thinkers from the time period obtain their training and education and what types of careers were they often simultaneously engaged in? Review also the sections concerning the origins of the first European universities. There is finally the question of where all this artwork—painting, sculpture, architecture—took place or was displayed. Which types of structures provided the physical sites for so much of the cultural production of Medieval Europe? Who commissioned many of the buildings in which the technological and artistic innovations of the period were expressed? Give thought to all of these issues as you develop your answer.

