

The Condemnation and Rehabilitation Trials of Joan of Arc

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"I will maintain what I have always said at my trial. And if I were to be condemned and saw the fire lit and the wood prepared and the executioner who was to burn me ready to cast me into the fire, still in the fire would I not say anything other than I have said. And I will maintain what I have said until death." Joan of Arc testifying at her heresy trial on May 24, 1431, one week before her conviction and execution.

INTRODUCTION

Joan of Arc stated her case unequivocally: she was sent from God. As a prophet for French liberation in the Hundred Years War, Joan drew many followers among her countrymen. She also drew much controversy and the scrutiny of the Catholic Church. Joan underwent three examinations by the Church in a period of twenty-eight years, in 1429, 1431, and 1450-1457. Three separate panels of churchmen conducted the proceedings. Two took place while she was alive and the third after death. Three different outcomes resulted. In the first, 1429, she was endorsed as a good Christian and useful to her kingdom in its struggle against the English. In the second, 1431, a major upset occurred and she was condemned as a heretic and burnt at the stake. Finally, in the third, 1457, the condemnation was overturned and Joan was exonerated of heresy and proclaimed a holy woman. Following is an overview of the three proceedings and suggestions for understanding the turbulent and brief life of this unusual young woman.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Joan of Arc (1412-1431) was born in Domrèmy, France during the long war between France and England over the French kingdom. The struggle divided the French people into two camps, Burgundian (pro-English) versus Armagnac (pro-French). At age seventeen in early 1429, Joan left her peasant home and pledged her life to the Armagnac cause. While the Burgundians fought on behalf of the English king, Henry VI, the Armagnacs rallied around the dauphin Charles as true heir to the French throne. Joan, overcoming numerous obstacles, gained an audience with Charles in March 1429 and appealed to him for resources to lead the fight against the English at Orléans. The English had besieged that French city for a number of months, since October 1428. When Joan met the dauphin, the citizens of Orléans were starving, despairing and verging on surrender. Joan boldly announced her mission as coming from God. Charles wondered what to make of her. Seeking the counsel of advisors, he sent her to the city of Poitiers for examination by a panel of clergymen.

THE EXAMINATION AT POITIERS AND VICTORY AT ORLÉANS

This was Joan's first examination by the Church, a series of hearings about her faith that lasted three weeks. The panel of clerics questioned Joan about her upbringing, her "voices" from heaven, and her plan to save France. Joan was also physically examined by several women and found to be a virgin, just as she claimed. The clergymen found her to be a good Christian and pure in motive, and returned her to Charles with their blessings to make use of her. What was there to lose? Unfortunately for modern historians, the transcript of the hearings at Poitiers is lost.

In one of European history's most remarkable events, the French armies under Joan drove the English out of Orléans on May 8, 1429. Joan accomplished her mission. She was also intent however on establishing the legitimacy of Charles as king. Her second goal was to crown Charles at Reims, the traditional site of French coronations. Proudly carrying her battle-standard, Joan took a prominent place in the procession in July 1429. Charles VII officially assumed the throne of France and the political tide waxed in favor of the Armagnacs. Freedom for the French people was now becoming tangible. Those moments were the apex of Joan's success.

Less than a year later however, Joan's fortunes changed. In a losing battle against Burgundians at Compiègne in May, 1430, Joan was captured and imprisoned. After two failed attempts to escape from enemy hands, Joan was turned over to Pierre Cauchon, a Burgundian and Bishop of Beauvais in whose diocese she was seized. Cauchon brought Joan to a trial of the Inquisition, ostensibly for matters concerning her faith. Joan's days of glory were now over, and her days of trial had begun. Joan now faced her Burgundian enemies on a battleground of Church doctrine.

THE CONDEMNATION TRIAL

This trial took place in the city of Rouen located in Normandy in northwest France, one of the last strongholds of English control in France in 1431. Joan had spent eight months in prison before interrogations commenced in February of that year. The trial had numerous violations in ecclesiastical court procedure. For example, during the trial, she was fettered in chains and guarded in the castle by men where the proceedings took place. Canon law stipulated that a defendant in a case of the Church ought to be held in an ecclesiastical prison, (generally less severe than a secular prison) under the watch of same-sex guards. Joan did not have defense counsel as stipulated by canon law. Cauchon had offered her an adviser from among those present, but Joan refused, recognizing that all present were allies of the English. Joan's refusal was a welcome convenience for Pierre Cauchon.

This Pierre Cauchon, formerly rector of the University of Paris, summoned support for the trial from Burgundian allies among the clergy, including faculty members of the university. Sixty or so theologians and clerics served as assessors in the trial, though rarely were all participants present at the same time. Cauchon conducted the trial sessions along with the Deputy Inquisitor of France. Under the guise of charitably saving her soul

Cauchon built a case against her. Jean D'Estivet as "promoter," i.e. prosecutor, drew up a brief in the form of seventy articles prior to the interrogations.

The trial was conducted and transcribed in French by court recorders, then subsequently translated into Latin for the official record. A complete second-generation copy of his French minutes is found in the "Orléans" manuscript, MS 518 located at the Bibliothèque Municipale d'Orléans. W.S. Scott's *The Trial of Joan of Arc* is the standard English translation of the Orléans manuscript, and is used here in this essay. The original manuscript of the Latin translation is lost. However, three copies of the original signed and sealed by Pierre Cauchon survive.

At the first public session on February 21, 1431, Joan was informed that she would be tried concerning the Christian faith. The bishop required that she swear on the Gospels to tell the truth concerning all that she knew. Joan balked. She agreed to tell the truth concerning everything but the matter of her revelations from God. Cauchon proceeded with the trial despite Joan's resistance. Disclosure of her revelations became a nagging source of contention during the three months of interrogations. Under pressure, Joan complied.

At the second public session, Joan explained that at age thirteen she received her revelations from God in the form of a voice accompanied by a light. After hearing the voice three times, she knew it was that of an angel. The voice taught her how to behave, that she should go to church, and that she must go into France to save the kingdom. Joan was asked whether the voices came directly from God or through an intermediary. Joan at first evaded the query. Later, she stated that the voices were those of Saints Catherine and Margaret, and that she also received instruction from St. Michael, the archangel. In subsequent sessions the examiners interrogated Joan on the physical appearances of her angels and saints, whether they wore crowns, whether they smelt pleasant, whether they touched her, what language they spoke and what they taught her. Joan however insisted on keeping her visions to herself as much as possible. At one session she responded in exasperation, "I am not going to tell you everything, for I have not permission; and also my oath does not touch that; but I do say to you that it is a beautiful voice, righteous and worthy; otherwise I am not bound to answer you." Joan asserted a strong sense of personal freedom in faith. Her freedom however was a strict obedience to the command of God as she experienced it.

The matter of her man's dress was an additional source of strong disagreement between Joan and the tribunal. Joan reasoned that since she lived among men, it was reasonable that she dressed like one. The examiners strongly rebuked her on this issue several times. Joan resisted changing her dress as long as possible. It was only in the closing days of the trial after the threat of torture that she put on a woman's dress.

Joan's revelations and dress were key points of discussion in the trial, and a number of

other topics were touched upon as well. The twelve articles of condemnation drawn up by the faculty of the University of Paris covered the following points of discussion: 1) the revelations and apparitions of angels and saints; 2) a miraculous "sign" that Joan had given to the dauphin Charles that she was sent by God; 3) her confidence in the advice and teachings of her angels and saints; 4) her predictions of future events; 5) her men's dress; 6) her tactics in war; 7) the treatment of her parents in leaving home without their knowledge; 8) the act of leaping from the tower in Compiègne; 9) her assurance that she would go to heaven; 10) her assertion that God is on the side of the French and not the English; 11) her vow of virginity to her angels and saints without counsel of a priest; and 12) her unwillingness to obey the Church on earth. Joan was declared guilty of wrongdoing on all counts.

During the final week of the trial after being shown instruments of torture, Joan relented, put on women's dress, renounced her voices and promised obedience to the Church. She signed the following abjuration:

I JEANNE, CALLED THE PUCELLE, A MISERABLE SINNER, AFTER I RECOGNIZED THE SNARE OF ERROR IN WHICH I WAS HELD; AND NOW THAT I HAVE, BY GOD'S GRACE RETURNED TO OUR MOTHER HOLY CHURCH; IN ORDER THAT IT MAY BE APPARENT THAT NOT FEIGNEDLY BUT WITH GOOD HEART AND WILL I HAVE RETURNED TO HER; I DO CONFESS THAT I HAVE GRIEVOUSLY SINNED, IN FALSELY PRETENDING THAT I HAVE HAD REVELATIONS FROM GOD AND HIS ANGELS, SAINT CATHERINE AND SAINT MARGARET, ETC.

AND ALL MY WORDS AND DEEDS WHICH ARE CONTRARY TO THE CHURCH, I DO REVOKE; AND I DESIRE TO LIVE IN UNITY WITH THE CHURCH, NEVERMORE DEPARTING THEREFROM.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF MY SIGN MANUAL,
Signed JHENNE +

Several days later however, Joan resumed wearing men's dress and expressed regret that she had renounced her voices. The court pronounced her a relapsed heretic and sent her to her death on May 30, 1431.

The condemnation trial provides a window on the world of a young but powerful woman in the Middle Ages. In the name of the Church, the freedom of this lay woman and the institutionalized authority of the clergy parleyed for power. Executed as a relapsed heretic, Joan died in disgrace and infamy in the eyes of the Church. However, she would be vindicated twenty-five years later when a new Church trial, the nullification trial, was called to order. By then the Hundred Years War would be resolved in favor of Joan's

camp, the supporters of Charles VII. His subjects would memorialize Joan as a holy woman for succeeding generations. The condemnation trial was one moment in the turbulent life of a highly controversial figure, but the story continued.

THE RETRIAL (known also as THE REHABILITATION TRIAL or THE NULLIFICATION TRIAL)

Upon the reconquest of Normandy in 1449 by Charles VII, Joan's supporters rallied. Popular outcry demanded an investigation of her trial. Charles himself had every reason to justify Joan, for the validity of his kingship was at stake. Joan had escorted him to be anointed at the cathedral at Reims after her victory at Orléans and he owed his crown to her. If Joan were a heretic, what did that make him? The archives in Rouen were opened and the papers of the condemnation trial delivered to the king's counselor Bishop Guillaume Bouillé for a preliminary investigation. So began the rehabilitation process that was conducted in the years 1450-57 and culminated in the official decision to nullify the condemnation.

The ecclesiastical process was established as *via extraordinaria nullitatis*, "the extraordinary means of nullification," derived from Roman law and transmitted through Gratian. It was a procedure by which a dissatisfied litigant or his/her advocate might challenge a legal decision. Normally employed while the litigant was still alive, in the case of Joan it was her surviving family--her mother Isabelle and her two brothers Jean and Pierre who presented themselves as the unfairly injured party. The family's name had wrongly suffered and they sought rehabilitation. Since the Church had conducted the condemnation trial, only the Church could conduct the nullification trial. Papal approval was necessary to carry out the investigation. Nicolas V (1447-1455) and Calixtus III (1455-58) complied. The Inquisitor of France, Jean Bréhal engineered the new trial. An extensive process of interviewing eyewitnesses and gathering legal opinions was conducted over the course of six years. The unique dossier of legal documents from this process has not received the attention by historians it deserves and provides the subject for the remainder of this essay.

Two original manuscripts of the rehabilitation trial are extant, each bearing the signatures of the official notaries. They are MS 5970 of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris and Stowe 84 of the British Library in London. MS 5970 alone is complete. The hefty dossier of documents, nine chapters, was preserved in Latin. There are no traces of original French minutes and to date no complete English translation is available. Only excerpts of the eyewitness interrogations appear in English translation in Pernoud's *The Retrial of Joan of Arc*. The present essay draws from the Latin edition published by Pierre Duparc, 1977-1988.

Chapter One contains the rescript submitted to delegates of the pope by Joan's family. The trial officially opened on November 7, 1455 at Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. The grieving Isabelle, Joan's mother, bowed low with groans and sighs before the Inquisitor

of France, Jean Bréhal who represented Rome. The rescript requested that the previous trial be pronounced null and void. A number of irregularities were cited and included the impassioned partiality of the judges, the rigor and violence of the imprisonment, malevolent behavior on the part of guards, insidious questions that had nothing to do with the subject of the trial, threats, falsified articles, the abjuration obtained by violence, and fraudulent verdicts.

Chapter Two of the dossier assigned judges and notaries to the case and ordered that documents pertaining to the previous trial be handed over. Chapter Three consisted of a statement that changed the process from an open inquisition to a directed accusation against Pierre Cauchon. In Chapter Four, 101 challenges to the procedures of the condemnation trial were spelt out. Chapter Five reported the eyewitness testimonies gathered by the traveling tribunal in 1456 of which more will be said below. Chapter Six cited the immoral conduct of the accused. Chapter Seven identified the bases in canon law that nullified the trial. Eight legal consilia provided by prelates who judged the first trial comprised Chapter Eight. The ninth and final chapter ordered public display of the documents that pronounced the nullification.

The testimonies in Chapter Five were gathered in 1456 by a tribunal that traveled to the sites where Joan had lived or visited. The condemnation trial lacked eyewitness testimonies, one of its procedural violations. The eyewitness testimonies of the nullification trial are among the most fascinating documents that survive the Joan of Arc tale. The interrogations were conducted over a period of several months in a sequence that roughly followed the chronology of Joan's life: Lorraine (her birthplace), Orléans (her first battle victory), Paris (numerous of her later acquaintances lived there), and Rouen (the place of her heresy trial and execution). The eyewitness interrogations were held in locations popularly favorable towards Joan. The condemnation trial had been stacked against Joan, and now the nullification trial tipped the balance in her favor. Joan's supporters put in the final word.

For two weeks in Lorraine, the tribunal interviewed Joan's childhood friends and associates. A key point concerned her upbringing and personal conduct, about which all witnesses attested that she was an exemplary Christian. Much attention was also directed to the matter of the "Fairies' Tree" in Domrémy and its nearby spring. Popular legend among the local folk in Lorraine had it that the waters at this tree possessed healing powers. The assessors at Rouen suspected paganism connected with this tree and insinuated that Joan conjured evil spirits there, an accusation that she firmly denied. Joan's companions defended her and testified concerning the yearly rite in spring for all village youth to picnic, sing and dance at the tree. According to the testimonies, Joan played there with the other youth but was never known to have conjured spirits there or even visited the tree alone.

Next, the tribunal visited Orléans for three weeks. Joan was much beloved by the people

of that town whom she had liberated from the English. The chief witness was the knight Jean Dunois, known as the Bastard of Orléans, who had fought valiantly on behalf of Charles VII against the English. Dunois and Joan had worked together to raise the siege of Orléans in May, 1429. Dunois ardently defended "la Pucelle" "the Maid"-- and applauded her military prowess. He believed that she had divine powers. "Asked if he believed that Joan was sent by God, he answered that he believed that Joan was sent by God and her activity in battle was divinely inspired rather than humanly."

In Paris for six weeks, nineteen individuals including several assessors from the heresy trial and several military companions gave their testimonies. These reports gave a detailed account of Joan's daily activities from the time she left home in 1429 to the day she was executed in 1431. The portrait that emerges is of a devout and disciplined young woman single-minded in purpose. She ate sparingly, confessed frequently and attended mass daily. On the battlefield she planned strategy, carried a standard and encouraged the troops. The condemnation verdict declared Joan to be bloodthirsty, but the testimony of her military comrades indicated that she hated blood and even comforted an English soldier as he lay dying. Jean Tiphaine, a priest and master in arts and medicine and canon of Saint Chapelle in Paris, remarked that Joan conducted herself beautifully at the trial, that she spoke prudently and wisely and demonstrated much courage. He reported that an important Englishman had quipped at the time, "She is truly a fine woman. If only she were English!"

The final nullification hearings took place at Rouen where witnesses gave detailed accounts of their participation in the condemnation trial of 1431. Guillaume Manchon, official court notary, stated that he had been forced to participate in the condemnation trial and dared not go against the order of the English king. He testified that secret notaries were concealed behind curtains. They recorded Joan's responses to the interrogations in the worse possible light and urged Manchon to alter his minutes to match their own. Manchon had refused however. He reported that the trial had been a set-up and the judges would not have treated Joan in the same manner had she been English.

Manchon's assistant notary reiterated that the trial against Joan was clearly motivated by hate on the part of the English. Colles spoke poignantly of the final moments of Joan's life as a heart-wrenching event:

He stated that the following Wednesday Joan was taken to the Old Market in Rouen; Nicolas Midi had the sermon there, and the sentence of relapse was pronounced by the lord Bishop of Beauvais; after the pronouncement of the sentence, she was taken immediately, without further sentence or trial, to the executioner to be burnt. While she was lead there she lamented piously, invoking the name of Jesus, and almost all who were present were unable to hold back their tears.

Colles reported also that Cauchon inspired hatred on the part of many people on that day,

and subsequently died suddenly in a barber's chair, and thus was justice served.

The eyewitness testimonies of the nullification trial disarmed the accusations of the condemnation trial and restored Joan's name to good standing. Companions from each stage of her life remembered her as virtuous, strong, and according to some, a gift from God. Now the official task of arguing the nullification remained.

Inquisitor of the faith Jean Bréhal examined the illegality of procedures. These included the following: lack of defense counsel, the youth of the defendant, mortal hatred on the part of her judges, leading questions intended to entrap her, the secular rather than ecclesiastical prison, the location of the trial, omission of evidence favorable to her case and omission of eyewitness testimonies.

Bréhal drew together eight legal opinions from an assortment of prelates who examined the condemnation trial transcript and composed a summary of their reflections. Bréhal synthesized the material and wrote a *recollectio*, a compilation of arguments that favored Joan. Bréhal's piece justified Joan's mystical experience as the freedom of God to choose his prophet in the world and make himself known on his own terms. Through Joan God demonstrated the prerogative of divine freedom to select a lowly instrument to proclaim his great glory and power.

Bréhal considered carefully the matter of Joan's visions. According to traditional doctrine on the discernment of good and evil spirits four components must be examined in the believer: time, place, mode, and purpose or end. Concerning time, Bréhal explained in Joan's defense that she was thirteen-years-old when she first received a vision--the number "13" having sacred significance. Thirteen is $10 + 3$, ten being the number of the Ten Commandments and three being the number of the holy Trinity. Thirteen therefore, according to Bréhal, is a number of divine perfection. Concerning time of day, Joan heard the voices at the hour of mass in the morning and at mid-day and vespers, the hours of Christian prayer. As for place, just as an angel appeared to Christ in a garden, so too did the angel appear to Joan in a garden. Moreover, the angel came from her right side (the side of righteousness) and from the direction of the church.

With respect to mode, Bréhal laid out a three tier typology of spiritual substances derived from Augustine. The Christian experiences divine revelations in one of three possible ways. First is the intellectual and spiritual mode in which neither bodies nor physical images are seen, but through incorporeal means God's will is intuitively perceived by the mind. This is the most excellent mode. Second is the mode by which God signifies something symbolically through images appearing in ecstasy or sleep. Third is the corporeal mode by which God reveals divine secrets in tangible, outward form. This last mode is the form in which Joan experienced her divine revelations. Joan had experienced specifically the faces of Michael the archangel and Saints Catherine and Margaret. Bréhal

argued the face is superior to the lower body for, in the words of Proverbs 17:24, "On the face the wisdom of knowledge shines." Finally, as to the purpose or end of revelations, Bréhal stated simply that they ought to reveal God's secret mysteries and be congruent with God's character, which was fully evident in Joan's report.

In sum, the rehabilitation trial exposed the corruption and malice evident in the procedures and verdicts of the condemnation. The rehabilitation explicitly "assumed the best" about Joan. The freedom of God to demonstrate power through a weak and humble servant was a key argument. Bréhal cited Paul in the New Testament, "God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong," (1 Corinthians 2: 27).

CONCLUSION

Why did this young woman, Joan of Arc, evoke the profound reactions that she did? Taken together, the trials of condemnation and rehabilitation reveal strong tensions over personal and social liberty in medieval society. The theme that runs throughout these examinations again and again is freedom--freedom in three senses, the political freedom of a people, the spiritual freedom of the individual and the perfect freedom of God. At the Poitiers hearings, Joan's mission to liberate the French people was in the foreground. Strong hopes for political freedom from foreign domination ruled the discussion. At the condemnation trial, Joan's own spiritual liberty was at stake. Her freedom to converse with God in her prayer life apart from the mediation of the Church was bitterly contested. And finally, at the rehabilitation hearings, belief in the freedom of God to save his people was foundational. Moreover, the heart of the matter was faith in God's freedom to choose a simple young woman, instill in her a passion for human freedom and grant her the power to make it real.

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