

Trial of Jeanne D'Arc (1431 AD)

Source: Barrett, W. (1932) *The Trial of Jeanne D'Arc* (New York: Gotham House)

http://www.joan-of-arc-resource.com/condemnation_trial/last_day.php

Background: Jeanne D'Arc (1412-1431 AD), known in English as Joan of Arc, is a French national hero. Her followers and enemies knew her simply as the "Maid," which signified her status as an unmarried young woman. She was declared a Roman Catholic Saint in 1920.

Joan was a farm girl who grew up in the eastern part of France in the region now known as Lorraine. As a nineteen-year old young woman, she led a French army involved in the Hundred Years' War (1337-1453). Joan claimed, and her followers believed, she was inspired by a divine voice. However the English and some French opponents charged she served the devil.

After troops under her command successfully broke the English siege of the city of Orleans, Joan was captured by French forces allied with the English. She was turned over to the English for trial as a heretic and witch. Joan was tried in an ecclesiastical or church court in the city of Rouen, convicted, and executed by being burned alive. Amongst the evidence presented against Joan was that she wore men's clothing and cut her hair short.

This play is a dramatic rendition of her trial based on a report prepared by Peter Cauchon, the Bishop of Beauvais, who was the judge at her trial. The trial took place over the course of months. In this play statements and events have been condensed into three scenes. The characters include the Bishop of Beauvais, Joan d' Arc, John Beaupère, a professor of sacred theology affiliated with the University of Paris, who questioned Joan at the trial, other church officials who were involved in the trial.

Historians continue to debate the importance of Joan's role in the Hundred Years' War. Whether she played a significant role in the war or not, her life, the trial, and her death tell us much about European society at that time.

Preliminary Questions

1. Who was Joan of Arc?
2. Why is she considered a French National hero?
3. In your opinion, why was she put on trial, convicted, and executed?

Scene 1. The Trial

Guillaume Colles (Priest of the diocese of Rouen): Joan of Arc is suspected of heresy in matters of Christian faith. Her acts and sayings have wounded our faith, not only throughout the kingdom of France, but also through all Christendom. We resolved that Joan of Arc should be summoned and heard upon the articles made against her concerning the faith.

Nicolas Taquel (Priest of the diocese of Rouen): Joan, commonly called The Maid, has thrown off the bonds of shame. She wore with brazenness immodest garments belonging to the male sex. She is accused of performing, speaking about, and disseminating many things contrary to the Catholic faith.

Peter Cauchon (Bishop of Beauvais): Maid Joan, we require under penalty of law that you repeat the oath you took yesterday and swear absolutely to tell the truth.

Joan: I took the oath for you yesterday. That should suffice you quite well. If you were well informed about me, you should wish that I were out of your hands. I have done nothing save by revelation.

John Beaupère: Are you a Christian?

Joan: I was baptized in the church of Domremy and I confess sins to a priest two or three times a year.

John Beaupère: Will you recite the Our Father for the court?

Joan: Only if I am allowed to take confession.

John Beaupère: In your girlhood did you learn any female arts?

Joan: Yes. I learned to sew linen cloth and to knit. I am as good as any woman in Rouen when it comes to knitting and sewing.

John Beaupère: Did you wear men's clothing?

Joan: I confessed that I wore men's dress and carried a sword. It was altogether necessary to change my women's clothes for men's to remain safe.

John Beaupère: Do you believe you are in God's grace?

Joan: If I am not, may God put me there. If I am, may God so keep me.

John Beaupère: When did you first hear your voices?

Joan: When I was thirteen years old I first heard a voice from God. At the time I was greatly afraid. This voice came about noon in summer in my father's garden after I fasted the day before. I seldom heard the voice without a light.

John Beaupère: How do you know it is the voice of God?

Joan: The voice seemed worthy. I believe it was sent by God. After I heard it three times I knew that it was the voice of an angel. It always guided me well. It taught me to govern myself well, to go often to church, and that I must leave home and defend France and end the siege of Orleans. I never asked the voice for a reward except the salvation of my soul.

Questions

1. What charges have been made against Joan D'Arc?

2. What does she claim in her defense?
3. In your opinion, why are the church officials so suspicious of Joan?

Scene II. The Verdict

Peter Cauchon: You have said that from the age of thirteen years you have had revelations and apparitions of angels, and that they have often spoken with you and told you many things set forth at length in your trial. We declare that it is all false, seductive, pernicious, that such revelations and apparitions are superstitions and proceed from evil and diabolical spirits.

Jean Graverent (Inquisitor of Heretical Error): You have said that you wore and still wear man's dress at God's command. You even wear your hair cut short above the ears, without keeping about you anything to denote your sex, save what nature has given you. The clergy declare that you blaspheme against God, that you transgress divine law, Holy Scripture and the canons of the Church, that you think evil and err from the faith.

Brother Jean Le Maistre (Vicar [agent] of the Lord Inquisitor): You have said that if the Church wished you to disobey the orders you say God gave you, nothing would induce you to do so. The clergy declare you to be unbeliever in the unity and authority of the Church and obstinately erring from the faith. Your soul will be condemned to eternal punishment and perpetual torture and your body will come to utter destruction.

Joan: As for my words and deeds, which I declared in the trial, I will maintain them. If I am condemned and I see the fire and the sticks and the executioner ready to kindle the fire, and I were in it, I would say nothing else and would maintain until death what I said in the trial.

Nicolas Midi (Master of Theology): Most diligent care must be taken to prevent the foul contagion of this pernicious leprosy from spreading to other parts of the body of Christ.

Hardened heretics must be separated from the midst of the just, rather than permit such pernicious vipers to lodge in the bosom of Our Holy Mother Church. Joan, commonly called The Maid, is denounced as a rotten member who must be cast out of the unity of the Church, cut off from her body, and given over to the secular power.

Questions

1. What is the finding of the court?
2. What is Joan's response?
3. In your opinion, what do we learn about 14th century European society from this trial?