

## Jefferson Quick, Timely Reads

### **Mysticism of Joan of Arc Examined: *Patron Saint of France helped inspire nation's liberty***

By: Reverend Charles Brock

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What an extraordinary woman (or teen-ager) and how badly she was treated. From age 13, she saw visions and heard voices of the saints. In her words: “When I was 13, I heard a voice from God to help me to govern myself. The first time, I was terrified. The voice came to me about noon: it was summer, and I was in my father’s garden. ... I saw it many times before I knew it was Saint Michael. ... He was not alone, but duly attended by heavenly angels. ... He told me Saint Catherine and Saint Margaret would come to me, and I must follow their counsel; that they were appointed to guide and counsel me in what I had to do, and that I must believe what they would tell me, for it was at our Lord’s command.”

Later, the guidance from her voices changed. Saint Michael visited more often, outlining a plan which involved the young girl liberating her country. Joan’s response showed her attempt to make sense of what she was being told to do: “And I answered the Voice that I was a poor girl who knew nothing of riding and warfare.” [1] Joan eventually came to this understanding: “Since God had commanded me to go, I must do it. And since God had commanded it, had I had a hundred fathers and a hundred mothers, and had I been a king's daughter, I would have gone.”[2]

In her visions, “Saint Catherine and Saint Margaret had rich crowns on their heads. They spoke well and fairly, and their voices are beautiful – sweet and soft. The name by which they often named me was Jehanne the Maid, Child of God. They told me that my King would be restored to his Kingdom, despite his enemies. They promised to lead me to Paradise.” [3]

At the age of 16, she asked a relative to take her to the nearby town of [Vaucouleurs](#), where she petitioned the garrison commander for an armed escort to take her to the

French Royal Court at [Chinon](#). She made the journey through hostile Burgundian territory disguised as a male soldier, a fact that would later lead to charges of the unbiblical “cross-dressing” against her, although her escort viewed it as a normal precaution. (That was a later charge against her, but also the outrage that a woman was doing a “man’s job.”)

Joan's first meeting with [Charles](#) took place at the Royal Court in the town of Chinon in 1429, when she was 17 and he 26. After arriving at the court, she made a strong impression on Charles during a private conference with him.

After years of one humiliating defeat after another, both the military and civil leadership of France were demoralized and discredited. When the Dauphin Charles granted Joan’s urgent request to be equipped for war and placed at the head of his army, his desperate decision must have been based on the knowledge that every other option had been tried and failed.

Charles’ advisers were worried that unless Joan’s [orthodoxy](#) could be established beyond doubt – that she was not a heretic or a sorceress – Charles’ enemies could easily make the allegation that his crown was a gift from the devil. To circumvent this possibility, the Dauphin ordered background inquiries and a theological examination at [Poitiers](#) to verify her morality. In April 1429, the commission of inquiry “declared her to be of irreproachable life, a good Christian, possessed of the virtues of humility, honesty and simplicity.” “To doubt or abandon her without suspicion of evil would be to repudiate the [Holy Spirit](#) and to become unworthy of God's aid,” they declared. They recommended that her claims should be put to the test by seeing if she could lift the siege of [Orléans](#) as she had predicted. [4]

Joan arrived at the [besieged city of Orléans](#) on April, 29, 1429. The English retreated from Orleans the next day, and the siege was over.

Eventually, the English army withdrew from the Loire Valley and headed north. Joan urged the Armagnacs to pursue, and the two armies clashed southwest of the village of Patay. A rout ensued that decimated the main body of the English army and Joan’s followers killed or captured most of its commanders.

The French army accepted the conditional surrender of the Burgundian-held city of [Auxerre](#) on 3 July. Other towns in the army’s path returned to French allegiance without resistance. [Troyes](#), the site of the treaty that tried to disinherit Charles VII, was the only one to put up even brief opposition but they capitulated after a bloodless four-day siege.

Joan wrote a letter to the English offering peace which included an offer to jointly defeat the Muslims and perhaps begin a new crusade. She wrote, “If you join her right, you may still join her company,



where the French will do the fairest deed ever done for Christianity.”[5] It was summarily rejected.

The capital Reims accepted defeat and opened its gates to the army on July 16, 1429. The consecration of Charles took place the following morning. Although Joan and the Duke of Alençon urged a prompt march toward Paris, the royal court preferred to negotiate a truce with Duke Philip of Burgundy. The duke violated the purpose of the agreement by using it as a stalling tactic to reinforce the defense of Paris. The French army marched past a succession of towns near Paris during the interim and accepted the surrender of several towns without a fight. The French [assault at Paris](#) ensued on September 8. Despite a wound to the leg from a [crossbow bolt](#), Joan remained in the inner trench of Paris until she was carried back to safety by one of the commanders. [6]

Despite these successes, Joan was eventually captured and imprisoned. She was tried by the English and their French supporters at Reims, convicted of heresy and unpatriotic behavior, and subsequently at age 19 was burned at the stake. Dereliction, not for herself, but for France.

Aside from her visions, her mysticism was like Moses and Jesus in that she claimed she was sent from God. The saints were intermediaries. She tried to gain political and religious freedom from an illegal occupier of her homeland and help reform France from its “many sins and flashy ways.” Eventually, France did manage to gain that liberty, and most people later credited Joan with starting that process. She was made a saint in the 20th century and is one of the Patron Saints of France.

References:

[1] In Her Own Words pg 7

[2] In Her Own Words pg 11

[3] In Her Own Words pg 7

[4] See The Poitiers Conclusion, Deborah A Fraioli, Joan of Arc – The Early Debate, Boydell Press, 2000, p 206-7

[5] Lettre aux Anglais, in Fraioli op cit p 208

[6] *Joan of Arc*, Wikipedia (edited)

Joan of Arc Photo: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/sofi01/14485730658>

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