

JOAN OF ARC AND THE PROBLEM OF VIOLENCE - Jerry 1900

The charity of Joan of Arc is truly a mystery for those to whom charity means giving alms or being spontaneously affectionate. Joan receives a divine mission to organize the French forces, consolidate politically the kingdom, and "boot out" the foreign oppressor. She responds with a whole-hearted obedience and an inspired zeal. She succeeds in part but the intriguing and compromising of the pacific Dauphin Charles, who wishes to avoid shedding blood at all costs, prevent her from fully accomplishing her task, while the nobles discuss pacts and treaties. Joan, guided by her voices, afire with compassion for the poor of the kingdom on whom "God had pity" continues her crusade with hopelessly inadequate means. She comes to the defense of the "good people" of Compeigne, abandoned by the Dauphin to their ^{lot.} and there falls prisoner. Abandoned and alone, she is subjected to all sorts of humiliations for months on end. She finally dies at the stake with ~~the name of Jesus~~ on her lips after having known the ultimate humiliation, of having denied her mission in a moment of panic through "fear of the fire." After her death her charred and naked body is exposed to the crowd before being totally cremated and dispersed to the winds. Several years later the English are definitely "booted out." The Church enrolled Joan in the canon of the Saints, on May 9th, 1920.

Joan is a figure absolutely unique in the history of Christianity. Her entire public life, her acts, many of her words, were directly inspired by her "voices." In other words she acted and often spoke directly under divine inspiration, except for the several occasions in which she disobeyed the voices—as near the end, when they remained silent so that she might enter in all truth into her identification with her abandoned Master. Joan's case can only be compared to the prophets; there is absolutely no other precedent. Other saints have known occasional moments of inspiration, but never in the whole history of Christianity has an entire mission been directly inspired. This fact gives to the words and acts of Joan a singular importance; it is, as it were, God speaking directly through her.

Joan is called and sent to the Dauphin because "God has pity on the Kingdom of France" and "sent me to console the poor and needy," Those whose ^{lives were} life was made a nightmare of terror and misery by the invading armies. First scandal: bad getting mixed up in politics and taking the side of the oppressed. Joan asks for armed men to relieve the seige of Orleans. The Dauphin hesitates, examines the case, the voices urge Joan on with impatience, and this impatience to act, to relieve the poor will be a trait of Joan's inspiration throughout her mission. I find this impatience of God's compassion reflected in that of Joan extremely poignant and eloquent. It is as though God can no longer tolerate the sufferings of His little ones, as though He recognizes the sufferings of the days of His Flesh and remembers their bitterness.



Yet God respects His "second causes -- He will do nothing without His creatures. Joan is examined by the theologians of Poitiers. One tells her that if God has decided to relieve the sufferings of the Kingdom of France He has no need of her nor of the armed men she is asking. Joan's reply is magnificent in its simplicity: "In the name of God the armed men will do the fighting and God will give the victory." So much for a certain type of false spiritualism.

There's a whole theology behind Joan's reply and it's worth meditating on. The remedy is applied directly to the ill. The evil is socio-political and violent -- so is the remedy prescribed by God Himself.

It is ^{current} preaching nowadays to stress individual conversion and prayer and all will go well. The world will be a better place to live in. That is only partially true. The evil is in structures, in collective situations and the solution must also be socio-political. We will not be dispensed from proportioning an adequate response on the level which corresponds to the need. There's a form of "abandon" to God which is just a dimension of our responsibilities.

A further scandal, the divinely inspired solution is violent. In fact there's a constant tension between Charles, who has a horror of bloodshed and seeks to avoid it through treaties, pacts, compromises and Joan's impatience to "boot out" the English by force, by swift and immediate violence. Charles seeks to avoid war -- the inspired virgin urges it. What to make of all that?

I think that there are two basic things to keep in mind. If I am free to follow the counsel and example of Jesus and not resist violence and to finally, offer my life in ^{union} with His Passion for the liberation of my brothers (more of that later) I am not free to so dispose of the life of my brother in the same way; in fact I have a duty to defend his life. If my neighbor entrusts me with the protection of his house and daughters and a group of thugs try to break in to rape the girls, I'm not free to open the doors and offer their sufferings to Jesus. I have a duty to defend them with the most efficacious means. Oppression is a form of violence.

It can be just structural or structural and physical at the same time. If I am free to accept, to suffer this violence passively myself I have a duty to defend my brother against it by the most efficacious and adequate means. In certain cases passive resistance, a collective non-violent solution can be the most effective; in other situations such a solution can be an invitation to mass suicide.

The same can be said of violence; its value depends on its possibility of success, of obtaining an effective liberation. To contribute to disarm, demobilize my brothers and leave them without defense before the oppressor is just as criminal as to contribute to a suicidal uprising which will provoke a massive and brutal repression.

So much for theory. In reality the experience of Chile was an attempt to bring about a social change badly needed by non-violent means. The people were forbidden the means to defend themselves and it cost them dearly; a balance of forces might have prevented the slaughter which took place and still continues. It is also an indication of the means the oligarchy will not hesitate to use to defend its privileges. The fact is that in Latin America the military machines financed by generous and disinterested U.S. aid are almost exclusively designed to repress the poor masses. the international wars this continent in recent years have been almost entirely on behalf of U.S. or European business interests and a local capitalism. In the face of such a situation it is difficult to see any solution other than violence -- not through any pre-conceived theory ^{or} exaltation of the principle of violence in itself but simply because the rich and powerful don't understand any other language.

Joan, guided by her voices, recognized a similar situation. Treaties, diplomacy, negotiations, politics would all be used by the enemy oppressor to prolong his abuse of the poor of France. There was only one language possible, only one means possible. Joan delivers ^{battle} ^{enthusiastically,} boldly, and rejoices wholeheartedly in her victories -- yet she always first summons the enemy to leave peacefully, to go home, and she suffers their laughter and insults until she's convinced that there's no other way; she nurses their ~~the~~ wounded and weeps over their dead and defends the prisoners against unnecessary violence. Her violence is perfectly Christian,

necessary and sufficient, firm and unwavering. It is the fruit of a great love.

Before the assembled bishops and theologians and nobles in Rome, Joan replies to the objections still made today by these same people to the Christians whose love for the poor is too great. Her voices encourage ^{her} "Answer these men boldly" - and her voice rings out, eloquent and relevant.

"There can be peace with the English until they return to their own country which is England." At Orleans she had written to the enemy "I will make peace with you most gladly if you accept my conditions which are that you shall leave France in tranquility and pay what you owe"

She is accused of having claimed from God a mission which involved the shedding of blood.

/ "My mission was to deliver the Kingdom of France. I was ready to make peace (under her ^{intransigent} conditions) and was prepared to fight only if that could not be brought about."

"Then God hates the English?"

"I know nothing of any hatred or love which God may bear to the English, but I do know that God will give the victory to the French."

"You wanted to kill the English."

"I wanted them to go home and so told them and they will do so before 7 years, save those who are slain here."

Joan's inspiration is pure. Her war is a true revolutionary war for the liberation of the poor yet the bishops and theologians and nobles who down through the ages have blessed and encouraged the slaughter and destruction of innocents in the struggle of the mighty for money and power condemn Joan as a heretic.

Joan in her prison is not entirely abandoned by her voices yet they became rarer and rarer. She is, however, entirely abandoned by her friends and delivered over to those who hate her. She suffers the most degrading humiliations. Perhaps most of all is her sense of frustration and helplessness. She has maintained an absolute confidence in her voices, in her mission and in her ultimate victory and she is reduced to impotence. Her voices bid her wait on God's word but her desperation is such that she tries to escape, leaping from a 70 foot tower. She beseeches her voices to allow her to join her friends at Campeigne, to die with them there if die she must. Her voices forbid her. Little by little Joan enters into the depths of the mystery of the cross, through obedience without at first understanding, assured of a final victory and condemned to an immediate disaster.

Thus Joan learned, as we all must learn, that there is only one adequate answer to the mystery of evil -- that given by the crucified Hypostasis. All evil that we can feel, experience, witness is a manifestation of the mystery of iniquity whose depth can only be measured by the Divine Love it negates. We, in our turn, can only face up to the mystery of evil in the measure of



our union with the Passion of Jesus. That we must never forget nor lose sight of. The political commitment of a Christian must open up to a contemplative dimension. To a contemplative vision of human history, of the communion of the saints, of the Heavenly Jerusalem we are preparing the world to receive and of the fecundating mystery of the cross. This is not by any means a defeatist attitude nor should it sap the strength of the political engagement. On the contrary it is a force and hope which gives a transcendental seriousness to our action. The evil and injustice in society, in social structures, should be combatted with the appropriate means on that level but the ultimate victory over sin is through the death of Mary's poor son. In our turn, the greatest proof we can give of our love for our friends is to lay down our life for them; it is also the greatest proof of our love for justice, imitating and uniting ourselves to the Passion of the Son of Justice. In the social and political order we seek efficacy -- yet the efficacy is ultimately suspended to the mystery of the Crucified Saviour and our identification to Him in which is wrought and the Salvation of the world. It is a paradox which we cannot elude.

Joan's voices so impatient during her campaigns, now urge resignation and tell her to wait on the word of God. For Joan the transition is difficult; she does not "resign" herself in the sense of accepting death and apparent failure passively. During her



interrogations she admits that she tried to escape and "would certainly do so again"... is it not permissible for any prisoner to do as much." Her desire to continue the struggle is such that in the cemetery of St. Omer she recants "through fear of the fire", and certainly with the hope of somehow being delivered to resume her former mission. Joan is ^{severely} chastised by her voices: "God sends word to you by us of ^{the} great pain he ^{has} felt in the treason in which you have ^{acquiesced} in making recantation and revocation in order to save your life. For saving your life you are now damned." Joan reaffirms her mission and accepts the now envitable death as "penance once and for all" for her denials. She does not seek death nor failure -- but once it is inevitable she assumes it in union with Jesus crucified.

Joan's entry into the death of Jesus is so transparent that the onlookers are paralyzed with awe, fear and reverence. She prays at length for her friends, for the poor and needy she was sent to console. And she asks pardon from all present. She dies crying the name of Jesus and whimpering from the pain.

She was 19 years old and it was shortly after midday. Five years later Paris falls. 21 years later the last Englishman is booted out.

¡¡ HAN MUERTO REVOLUTIONARIOS

VIVA LA REVOLUCION!