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BLUEPRINT

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“Violence is Never the Will of God ST. JOAN OF ARC: A Warning to End the Constantinian Era”

By Fr. Emmanuel Charles McCarthy, Center for Christian
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*There is no notion of a warrior God who will lead the people in a historical
victory over its enemies in the New Testament. ---Pastoral Letter on
War and Peace National Conference of Catholic Bishops (1983)*

If one may be permitted to begin an essay with an anachronism, then Joan of Arc is the incarnation of the spirit of Don Quixote. Both pursue an impossible dream with pure hearts. The single-minded willingness of each to give all and to accept all, up to and including humiliation and death, in order to make his or her dream a reality is the noble stance from which heroism, legend and masterpieces of literature proceed. Many such people exist in the world and in world literature. Joan of Arc and Don Quixote are two of them. In their respective domains they both cut a righteous and violent swath through history on behalf of their dream. Both with moral certainty endure much suffering, and with moral certainty both leave much suffering and death in their wake.

This article does not address the historical question of whether Joan of Arc is as much a fictional character as Don Quixote. Whether Joan ever existed or whether, if she did exist, how much of what is said of her is fact and how much is French nationalistic and ecclesiastic fiction, is not the subject under consideration here. This article also does not consider any of the questions and possibilities that have been raised regarding psychological illnesses or malfunctions, e.g., temporal lobe seizures, that could account for the visions and voices that Joan experienced as being real and external to herself, as well as, account for her religious zealotry. Finally, this article does not deal with the political topic of why Joan of Arc is not canonized by Church authorities until almost 500 years after her execution by Church authorities, but is canonized immediately after France's less than noble ordeal in World War I. So to be clear, the presupposition of the following reflection is this: Joan of Arc is a saint.

Canonization

“The day we know a truth is the day God calls us to begin to live it.”

A saint is by definition a person who has died and who is in heaven with God. Canonization simply states, but states infallibly, that a particular person has been saved by Jesus Christ and is in heaven. It does not state infallibly what in the person's life should be imitated and what should be rejected. Only Jesus, God who became human, is without sin. The New Testament refers to Him as “the Sinless One.” (In Catholic theology, Mary, Jesus' mother is also regarded as sinless by a special act of God called *prevenient grace*.) But, all other human beings, including all saints, are sinners. Therefore the ultimate norm, by which it is discerned in a saint's life what is worthy of imitation and what is not, is whether a thought, word or deed of a saint is consistent with the will of God as revealed by the Sinless One, Jesus Christ. Dorothy Day, who is considered a saint by many, notes that following a saint in what he or she does, that is not Christlike, is not the way to heaven.

Joan of Arc, although she is canonized almost 500 years after her death (death, 1431, canonization, 1920), is a saint, at least as of the day she is canonized. But, she is not a saint for what she did or for the character traits she exhibited that are not in conformity with the explicit Way that Jesus reveals as the will of God. She is a saint because as far as she, as an illiterate teenager could understand the will of God as revealed by Jesus, she embraces it with heroic zeal. If all literate Christians followed the will of God as it is clearly and unambiguously revealed on the pages of the New Testament by Jesus' words and deeds, with the same level of fidelity and total surrender as Joan of Arc did, the world and the Church would be utterly different than they now are. If every Christian-who could read about the Nonviolent Jesus in the Gospels and about the Way of Nonviolent Love of friends and enemies that He unreservedly teaches to His followers-were to commit his or her will to the same

level of fidelity to Jesus as Joan did, the world and organizational Christianity would be infinitely better off than they are now and the Father would be known and loved far, far beyond what is presently the case.

Many saints-canonically declared and otherwise-believed, said and did things in their time, e.g., burned or endorsed the burning of Jews at the stake, owned slaves and religiously endorsed slavery, that in no way can be considered consistent with God's will as revealed by Jesus. Yet they are saints because of the heroic fidelity with which they committed their wills and lives to what they thought was consistent with Jesus' teachings. God does not and cannot expect a person to act on a truth of Jesus of which he or she is not aware through no fault of their own. God wants a person to follow his or her conscience to the extent that he or she knows truth at a particular time, while continually seeking a deepening of Gospel truth and leaving error behind.

The Gospel is ultimately about God and God is of infinite depth. Therefore, there is no moment when any Christian can say, “I know it all now.” As St. Edith Stein writes: “The day we know a truth is the day God calls us to begin to live it.” Before that day a person is not expected to live that truth, indeed cannot live it. Truth not known is truth that cannot be chosen-and hence truth for which an individual is not morally responsible for before God.

The Norm of Holiness

So, praised be Jesus, that Joan of Arc is in heaven and for all the others who are “There.” Nevertheless, the ultimate norm of sanctity for the Christian in the context of human existence remains Jesus Christ, who is Holiness Itself become human. The violence-riddled life and spirit of Joan of Arc does not trump the nonviolent life and Way of Jesus for the Christian. All saints are ex-sinners (minus

one) and partially ignorant-so it must be carefully discerned what in each saint's life is worthy of imitation and what is not. This is accomplished by measuring the whole and the parts of the respective saint's life ultimately by the standard set by Jesus. Joan of Arc is not a saint for leading people into slaughtering other human beings in order to make some man a local political powerhouse. She is not a saint because she is able to destroy people in battle with a competence that equaled that of her notoriously brutal comrades in arms and companions, such as, La Hire (The Rage) and Gilles de Rais (Bluebeard, the serial killer of young boys). Joan is not a saint for responding, that she would cut off his head "God willing," when asked about one of her childhood neighbors who sympathized with her enemies. She is not a saint for participating in these activities because no literate person in his or her right mind who reads the Gospels could picture Jesus engaging or directing others to engage in such activities. Therefore, it would be impossible to imitate or to follow Him by engaging in such human behavior. Such activities cannot be the Way of sanctity, cannot be the Way to heaven.

Jesus explicitly rejects violence and enmity, and explicitly declares that His Kingdom is not of this world. If Christians want to burn witches with a clear conscience and simultaneously want to say they are followers of Jesus Christ, all they have to do is show that Jesus would have burned witches! So also is the case for Christians who want to drop napalm bombs on people with a clear conscience, or who want to engage in capital punishment or abortion or violence and enmity of any kind for any reason-including the establishment or maintenance of a kingdom of this world or its boss. If a Christian can truthfully picture Jesus killing people in order to put or keep a political big shot on a throne, then he or she can kill people for this reason. But, if a Christian cannot see Jesus doing this,

then this is an act that is morally not permissible for him or her-even if told to do it by an angel or saint. Jesus, not any saint or angel, let alone any philosopher or theologian, is the final Word on sanctity, on God's Will and on God's Way to God.

The Christian in his or her unique personhood is chosen to sincerely and truthfully imitate Christ, to love as Christ loves (§1970 and §2822 Catechism of the Catholic Church), to be Christ in the time and place he or she occupies at this moment. Imitation of anyone else, including saints, is spiritually valid for the Christian only to the extent that it is also in conformity with the imitation of Jesus Christ. Killing people in order to put a dauphin on the throne is not something that the Jesus of the New Testament could ever be seen doing or teaching His disciples to do or teach-contrived and long standing Constantinian theological theories of the "Divine Right of Kings" notwithstanding.

Jesus is clear, He comes not to do His own will but the will of His Father. Therefore, any honest desire to imitate Christ must begin with the personal commitment of will to conform one's will to the will of the Father. How does the Christian know the will of the Father? The ultimate and definitive expression of the Father's will, that is of the will to "be done on earth as it is in heaven," is Jesus (§1970 and §2822 Catechism of the Catholic Church).

However, intense nurturing from childhood by other Christians and various Christian institutions can hardwire into a person's consciousness the willingness to execute Jews who refuse to become Christian. Likewise, such nurturing can so deeply imprint on a person's conscience the belief, that this behavior is consistent with doing the will of God as revealed by Jesus, that the person simply "takes it for granted" that killing recalcitrant Jews is the right, good and holy thing to do.

If the person has no way of validating whether this nurturing is in fact consistent with following Jesus, e.g., he or she is

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illiterate or has no access to a vernacular edition of the New Testament, then he or she has no moral option-if they are to be faithful to Jesus-other than to kill Jews. For it is the only way such people know of doing the will of the Father as revealed by Jesus. The basic disposition of faith of such persons is to do all that Jesus wants of them. Their sincere prayer is, "Here I am Lord, I want to do your will!"

Spiritual Child Abuse

The axial spiritual problem in Joan of Arc's life-and it continues as a most grave problem to this very day in all the churches-lay with those who were responsible for nurturing in her a Christlike consciousness and a Christlike conscience, with those who were to guide this "little one" in "putting on the mind of Christ." They nurtured one fundamental truth of the Christian life and of the imitation of Christ very well, namely, absolute obedience to the will of the God when it is known. They then sowed in this soil of absolute obedience all the seeds of holy homicide that were necessary for her to believe that she could savage other Christians who did not want the son of the prior political boss as the new political boss. She therefore was able, with moral certainty, to spiritually and psychologically see herself chosen by God to be a holy homicidal king-maker. Operationally, as has been the verifiable case for the entire 1700 year history of homicide-justifying Constantinian Christianity, those responsible for her religious conscience wound up nurturing absolute obedience to evil masquerading as sanctity.

Joan of Arc and all the other poor, little souls, who honestly and wholeheartedly desired to follow Jesus, but who over the centuries have been the helpless victims of this manipulative Constantinian homicidal nurturing by the Churches-nurturing that owes nothing to anything Jesus ever said or did-certainly are judged by the Lord on the basis of desiring to follow Him. These little victims of spiritual abuse, manipulation

and exploitation cannot be made responsible for the rape of their innocent consciousnesses and consciences by the generation of Christian leaders and teachers who formed them. This malformation of the mind of Christ in a human being by those charged with his or her religious development is outright spiritual child abuse, which is every bit as destructive to the life of the person as is physical or sexual child abuse. As the victim of physical or sexual child abuse has no way to defend himself or herself against it, so also the victim of spiritual child abuse is powerless in the face of it. And as is the case in all forms of child abuse, its horrid consequences are long-term and its victims almost never have access within their world to the means necessary to understand and correct the damage done to them. If anything, the adults who damage innocent children calculatingly reinforce, perpetuate and justify for their own preservation, the ugly power of evil that they have planted and let loose in the child.

It is reckless, to the point of being chilling, to see the blasé attitude, displayed almost universally-by those who have climbed to positions of power in the mainline and evangelical Churches-toward teaching that something is consistent with the Way of Jesus that Jesus repudiated. It is reckless, to the point of being chilling, in the face of Jesus' explicit command and commission to those He calls to school others in the mind of Christ, namely, "to teach them to obey all that I have commanded" (Mt 28:20). It is reckless, to the point of being chilling, given Jesus' teaching in Matthew (18:5-6), Mark (9:42) and Luke (17:1-2): "Anyone who welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me. But anyone who is an obstacle to bring down one of these little ones who have faith in me would be better drowned in the depths of the sea with a great millstone round his neck." To nurture a "little one"-who is putty in an adult religious leader's hands-in such a way, that the child comes to

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believe that Jesus teaches that he or she should be ready, if called upon, to become a homicidal agent, for a Church's or state's excursion in human slaughter as a means of conflict resolution, is a spiritual abomination.

But God knows, and only God knows, what the Christian really desires at his or her core. If the heart and the soul of a person truly desire to do God's will as revealed by Jesus, but his or her mind has been irrevocably corrupted by the ignorance or malice of others, what should this person's eternal destiny be? Is communion with God not fundamentally established in time and in eternity through the commitment of a person to freely will what he or she believes God wills for him or her—no more, no less? Are not Jesus' words in Gethsemane to the Father, "Thy will be done not mine," still the sine qua non for authentic love of God? If through no fault of his or her own a person is in error about the content of God's will as revealed by Jesus, but desires with his or her whole heart and soul and mind and strength to know God's will and do it, can she or he go to heaven? Yes! Can she or he still be a saint? Yes! Is it pastorally sound for a Church to publicly canonize such a man or woman? Not usually!

"Blind Guides" and Conscience

Yet, there are many insights into the truth of the Gospel for the present and for the future to be drawn from the life, excommunication, death, subsequent popularity and belated canonization of St. Joan. Bishop Fulton Sheen reflects that, "Perhaps, we are all saved by our ignorance." Maybe, Jesus' prayer on the cross, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do," is what saves not only Joan but also her high-ranking Church executioners—and untold others of us. After all, it is a prayer that at first glance is said on behalf of the individuals, Romans and Jews, who think they are doing the right thing by torturing and

murdering Him. But could Jesus not have also been saying it on behalf of every human being who has done something evil believing it to be good.

Many involved with Jesus' crucifixion were probably morally certain that they were carrying out God's will. Bishop Pierre Cauchon, who oversaw Joan of Arc's execution, was a conscientious killer for Christ's sake. Joan was a conscientious killer for Christ's sake. Joan probably physically killed far more people than the Bishop. Are both equally doing evil? Are both saints—one canonized, the other anonymous? Were both their minds malformed as children, whether by ignorance or malice, by the Church authorities and members of their respective Christian cultures who were their spiritual nurturers? Take away Cauchon's episcopal ornaments and Joan's paranormal experiences and ask, "How many Christians have been and are presently spiritual facsimiles of Bishop Cauchon and Joan?" How many have been victims of what I referred to earlier as spiritual child abuse—the corrupting an innocent mind and heart under the auspices of nurturing the mind and heart of Christ? Of course, Cauchon was literate. He could read in the Gospels what Jesus said and did. But, religious and cultural nurturing can brainwash people, can steal their right minds from them. It can blot-out avenues of perception and convolute the meaning of the most straightforward, simple, imperative sentence. "Love your enemies," or "Love one another as I have loved you," can be interpreted in such minds to mean that one is free to splash napalm on someone's face or choke a person to death because he is a Jew who refuses to become a Christian. The ground zero truth is that Cauchon was a killer for Christ and Joan was a killer for Christ, and both apparently sincerely believed, because of their Christian nurturing, that they were doing what Jesus wanted of them.

And what of all those other Christians across the prior seventeen

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centuries who sincerely believed they could kill their fellow Christians, or others, and still be following the Way of Jesus? Where are they now? And, what of all those Christian nurturers and indoctrinators, -bishops, priests, ministers, deacons, elders, etc.,-who participated in hardwiring a neural network of Christ-endorsed holy homicide in the minds of those who relied upon them for the truth of Jesus and His Way? Where are they now? For the most part are the Churches today primarily nurturing Bishop Cauchon-like Christians and Joan of Arc-like Christians or Jesus Christ-like Christians? Who is most responsible before God for the destruction of one of the Father's beloved sons or daughters? Is it the one who squeezes the trigger or the one who teaches that squeezing the trigger is consistent with following Jesus and His Way? Or, is it the Baptized Christian who sits quietly by and says nothing as evil is presented and nurtured as the Way of Jesus?

Art and the Truth of Constantinianized Christianity

A pastoral suggestion: Take some time to ponder-perhaps many times over-Carl Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc*. Although a silent film, it is widely considered the most profound artistic presentation of the spiritually horrifying world, life and death of Joan of Arc. However, Dreyer understands his film to be "a hymn to the triumph of the soul over life," that is, life as it presently is in the human situation, which includes life in the institutional Churches. I suggest the film because it is a remarkable access road into the terrible mystery of the life of St. Joan and, by extension, into an aspect of the terrible mystery of Jesus' crucifixion for the salvation of the world. It is soul sickening to behold this artistic revelation of the abhorrent and lethal mix of religion, violence, power-politics, ignorance coupled with the self-exculpating spiritual hypocrisy of the professional religious

class, as it self-righteously crushes a child of its own creation and in its own image. *The Passion of Joan of Arc* shines an exposing light on the dark side of our own Christian era, an era shot through with that form of material "bad faith" known as Constantinian Christianity.

If one knows anything of the grotesque institutional history of violence-drenched Constantinian Christianity in any of its incarnations-Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant or Evangelical-his or her heart will be filled with sorrow for the historical Joan behind the Joan on the screen. The viewer's heart will be equally full of sorrow for all the other victimized "little ones" whose innocent minds and love of Jesus have been exploited and deformed by religious rulers over the millennia, e.g., the legions of unknown PTSD war veterans across history. But, by the design of Providence, which knows the hidden chambers of each soul and hidden desires of each heart, the real and brutalized St. Joan is still active in human history and in Church history.

She is active as a spiritual microscope which permits those who have eyes to see-and who wish to look below the perfumed, cosmeticized and ornamented surface-skin of institutionalized Constantinian Christianity-to view the ugly and violent anti-Christic powers and spirits that govern so much of it, and which have been normalized as consistent with His Way. But, what is also made visible via the lens of St. Joan is the enormity of the betrayal that so much of Constantinian Christianity in its Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant and Evangelical forms represents, as it exuberantly places itself before all humanity as a witness to the truth of Jesus and His Way-despite being unrepentant of its history and continued espousal of holy homicidal violence in the name of Jesus.

A Warning. Finally, what this film and, hopefully, this entire reflection, should make transparent to the Churches, and indeed to all people everywhere, is the following warning. Religious faith,

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tied to a God in whom there is violence and cruelty, and therefore to a God who can be imitated, followed, obeyed, magnified and glorified by violence and cruelty, or by the fruits of “successful” violence and cruelty, is one of the most destructive forces within the human condition. Violent monotheism in all its religious incarnations is a man-made untruth that has in the past and will continue in the future to ceaselessly bring down upon humanity the judgment of a violent and cruel existence, largely devoid of authentic knowledge of the God. In light of Jesus' revelation about God and God's Way, violent monotheism is the ultimate expression and verification of the spiritual dictum, “Corruptio optimi pessima” (“The corruption of the best is the worst.”). Violent theism is an idea of God, that since the stone age has created hell on earth for billions upon billions of the Father's/Mother's sons and daughters-and all under the banner, “Deus Vult!” (God wills it!).

Jesus came to expose, invalidate and liberate all humanity forever from the death-dealing, spirit-corrupting, soul-enslaving, life-destroying falsehood of violent monotheism in which it is ensnared. Jesus is nonviolent because God is nonviolent. Being consubstantial with the Father and the Holy Spirit, the Will and the Way of Jesus must be the Will and the Way of the Father and of the Holy Spirit, that is, it must be the Will and Way of God. His Will and Way must therefore also be the Will and Way of those who are made in the image and likeness of God, that is all the People of God.

Jesus came, by the same Providence that keeps St. Joan's presence among us as an appalling religious caveat concerning the ancient and decrepit deception of violent monotheism-an appalling caveat applicable to almost every religion and professional religious leader on the planet. In other words St. Joan is providentially still with those, who reside in time and space and who are

made in the image and likeness of God, in order to help them. By being a paradigmatic witness to the chaotic evil that the falsehood of violent monotheism lets loose in the Churches and in the world-even among, maybe especially among, those whose hearts are unreservedly committed to doing God's Will-Joan's presence organically demands, at a minimum, an immediate end to this Age of Constantinian Christianity-that form of Christianity that does not teach and live what Jesus taught and lived in relation to violence and enmity. Beyond this, however, the continued explicit presence of her destructive and tragic Christian story within the movement of Church history is a plea from God for the Constantinianized Churches of Christianity, and indeed for all humanity and for all religions, to see and to be motivated to proclaim by word and deed the Good News about God which Jesus reveals, namely, the Good News of the Nonviolent God, the true God in whom violence and cruelty have no part.

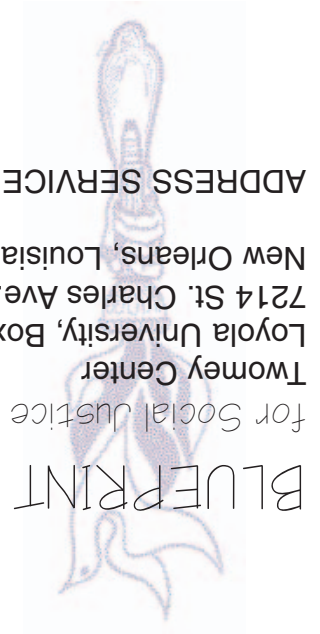
To dream what we might consider impossible dreams is often the Way and the Will of God. This is so because “impossible” is not a word in the Divine Dictionary. Nothing is impossible for God. But, to dream of accomplishing impossible dreams-or any task-by violence is never, never the Way or the Will or the Dream of God-if Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of the living God, the Word (Logos) of God “made flesh” (Jn 1:1-14).

Let no one, regardless of nationality, social standing, gender, educational background, race, color, creed, or religion, deceive you on this matter-not even an “angel of light” (2 Co 11:14; Gal 1:8).

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In this Issue

**“Violence is Never the Will of God
“T. JOAN OF ARC: A Warning to End the Constantinian Era”**
By Fr. Emmanuel Charles McCarthy,
This provocative reflection on St. Joan of Arc warns that religious faith, tied to a God in whom there
is violence and cruelty, is one of the most destructive forces within the human condition.



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