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Joan of Arc in the thought of W.F. Sullivan

ABSTRACT - The event prompted an analysis of the theological politics of Joan of Arc, using historical and documentary research on her person as a starting point. This analysis was correlated with current religion, politics, and law studies.

KEYWORDS - state-religious relations - human rights - peace

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Joan of Arc in the Thought of W.F. Sullivan**

On 11 and 12 December 2023, the University of Insubria at the Como campus held a meeting entitled 'Before the State: The Religious politics of Joan of Arc' as part of the cycle of seminars planned for the Academic Year 2023/2024 of the Doctorate of National Interest in Religious Studies (DREST) for the Law and Religion curriculum.

It was introduced and moderated by Prof. Alessandro Ferrari, the Law and Religion curriculum coordinator at DREST and Professor of Law and Religion.

The event, which PhD students and lecturers attended, opened with a presentation by W.F. Sullivan, Director of the Center for Religion & the Human and Affiliate Professor, Law, Maurer School of Law at Indiana University. The speakers were Luigi Mariano Guzzo, researcher in law and religion and canon law at the University of Pisa, David Durisotto, associate professor of law and religion and canon law at the University of Cagliari, and Daniele Santarelli, associate professor of modern history at the University of Campania "Luigi Vanvitelli".

The primary intention of this seminar was to reflect on the theological politics of Joan of Arc from a broad and experimental point of view of contemporary studies in religion, politics, and law.

In order to encourage a natural conversation, interventions by doctoral students, from which themes emerged, were favored.

The reflection on the figure of Joan of Arc started from the considerations on the minutes of the trial¹ that led to her death sentence.

Interestingly, the interventions brought out common themes for discussion.

First, we dwell on the trial sources that show particular attention to Joan of Arc's clothing, even though she was not always remembered with

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¹ Joan of Arc, as is well known, was tried for heresy and witchcraft. There were no less than seventy counts against her. Recurring in the interrogations were the accusations against the 19-year-old Maiden of Orleans' spirit of insubordination, her short haircut, the overly masculine clothes she wore and which she did not change even when she could. See T. CREMISI, *Il processo di condanna di Giovanna d'Arco*, Marsilio, Venice, 2022.

male's clothes². The Maid of Orleans wore masculine attire, which, according to W.F. Sullivan, symbolized feminine masculinity³ and represented her resistance to the judges' authority.

The spectrum of gender presentation in that world was as great as in any human society and of any gender in human history. Therefore, on the one hand, we must dwell on the fact that this is not a gender issue. Indeed, it is not a question of categorizing Joan of Arc in binary logic or raising her as a manifesto of queer theories.

The term queer should be re-read in a broader key to indicate that her exceptional physical experience of the world and gender was linked to her capacity for practical politics.

Throughout her life, she experienced herself physically and in terms of her political and theological vocation.

In analyzing the figure of Joan of Arc with modern-day 'categories,' one risks arriving at the dangerous drift of anachronism. What is relevant is that probably what we think of as just an offshoot of modernity, such as queer theory, actually already existed, albeit in different forms and ways.

Its charisma cannot be reduced to the categories of modernity, but neither does it relegate it to pre-modernity⁴.

Through this figure, we can see how individual religiosity, which we can nowadays interpret as Joan's ability to act in extreme complexity, shows her ability to negotiate the ambiguities of religion and, more generally, human agency. Her clothes, her relationship with voices, and ultimately, with God created the Maid of Orleans. Moreover, together, they explain his continuing charismatic force field⁵.

² Particularly relevant is the portrayal of Joan of Arc as a traditional aristocratic woman. See J. MASSON, *Histoire memorable de la vie de Jeanne d'Arc appelée la Pucelle d'Orleans. Extraicte des Interrogatoires & responses à iceux, contenus au procès de sa condamnation: & des depositions de 112 tesmoins ouys pour sa justification en vertu des Bulles du Pape Calixte III en l'an 1455*, Pierre Chevalier, Paris, 1612. The author, in this first and only edition, indicates that he consulted all the documents related to the trial, preserved at the Bibliothèque de l'Abbaye Saint Victor les Paris. In particular, 'cette histoire est divisée en 177 petits chapitres. Elle renferme tout ce qu'on sait et tout ce qu'on a pu savoir de cette fille, tant par ses interrogations que par la déposition des témoins. Elle commence à sa naissance, & finit à la sentence d'absolution donnée à Rouen le 7 juillet 1456, par les Jugesdélégués par le Pape' (Techener, *Bibliothèque Champenoise*, n° 1435). The engraved portrait of Joan of Arc in the book was added by Adam.

³ See J. HALBERSTAM, *Female Masculinity*, Duke University Press, Durham-London, 1998.

⁴ Regarding the idea of modernity, see B. LATOUR, *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes. Essai d'anthropologie symétrique*, La Découverte, Paris, 1991.

⁵ This charisma has been qualified as 'democratic', V.W. LYOLD, *In Defense of Charisma*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2018, pp. 6 ss. The Author distinguishes between two

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Joan of Arc does not directly legitimize the French absolute monarchy because this figure also expresses an idea of constitutionalism.

The figure of the Maid of Orleans is best known for her military leadership and role in the Hundred Years' War. Her religious fervor and belief in her divine mission to support Charles VII of France had far-reaching implications for the diplomatic and military history of the time.

Joan of Arc's theological policy was ultimately aimed at achieving peace through religious diplomacy and a horizontal policy that is of particular interest as it emphasizes the interconnection between religion and politics in the context of the modern state.

Indeed, in a modern reinterpretation of the relationship between the state and religious denominations, given secularisation, the two realities need to enter into dialogue on the problems that afflict humanity.

Such constructive dialogue becomes a legally relevant instrument for the pursuit of peace. On the other hand, the interconnection between the subjective religious sphere and the political sphere re-emerges in the post-secular era. The shifting boundaries of the separation of temporal and spiritual power and the episodic conjunction of states and religious denominations have always taken different forms in theory and practice⁶.

In this regard, the seminar emphasized the protection of religious minorities and the possibility for them to enter into fruitful dialogue with states.

In particular, Prof. Sullivan emphasized the universality of the message brought by Joan of Arc, understood in the sense of universal recognition of human rights.

The example brought during the meeting was that of the American experience in protecting minorities, specifically on the black religion⁷.

The hope that emerged was that of an ever greater inclusion that does

types of charisma: the first authoritarian type and the second defined as democratic. The person with authoritarian charisma uses this power for a will already present in his followers, keeping the mediation invisible and ultimately strengthening his social advantage at the expense of others. On the other hand, charisma invites the public to see mediation and all its layers, as in Joan of Arc can be the voices that 'guided' her actions. Democratic charisma is usually small-scale and always contagious and tends to call people towards justice.

⁶ For a more in-depth look at the relation between Church and State see P.C. JOHNSON, P.E. KLASSEN, W.F. SULLIVAN, *Ekklesia: Three Inquiries in Church and State*, in Book series TRIOS, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2018.

⁷ See J.K. CARTER, *The Anarchy of Black Religion: A Mystic Song*, Duke University Press Books, Durham, 2023; J. WEISENFELD, *New World A-Coming: Black Religion and Racial Identity during the Great Migration*, New York University Press, New York, 2016.

not cause black men and women to experience segregation.

All in all, the discussion points that emerged during the seminar were beneficial for interpreting legal and religious studies, particularly with new eyes.

The multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary view offered in the meetings brought about the realization that the scholar is naturally insufficient because, when studying topics related to law and religion, one must be cautious about taking one's position for granted. A given topic may hide issues that are difficult to handle. Therefore, a comprehensive view is required, a complex dimension in which knowledge intertwines and complements each other.