

## The Crime at Compiegne

Proving herself to be a good deal more than ordinary, Jeanne d'Arc, the Maid of Orleans and patron saint of France, united her nation at a critical hour in history and decisively turned the Hundred Years' War in France's favor, forever ending England's dreams of hegemony over France. The crimes and eventual triumph of this most amazing young woman are better understood when applied to Dostoevsky's "extraordinary man" theory.

Dostoevsky's theory, as written in *Crime and Punishment*, claims that all of mankind is divided into two basic categories, the "ordinary" and the "extraordinary." Where the "ordinary" masses are "by nature conservative, staid, live in obedience and like being obedient," the "extraordinary" few "all transgress the law... for the sake of an idea." It is this idea or "new word" that calls the "extraordinary" man to "allow his conscious to...step over certain obstacles" in order to fulfill this idea.

Jeanne's "new word" was that of the call of Heaven. At only 13, Jeanne began hearing voices that were sometimes accompanied by visions. She was convinced that these voices were those of St. Michael and the early martyrs St. Catherine of Alexandria and St. Margaret. These voices exhorted her to help the Dauphin, later Charles VII, king of France, recapture the city of Orleans and thereby win the Hundred Years' War against England. Jeanne succeeded in convincing Charles and his board of theologians that she had a divine mission to save France. Approving her claims, she was granted a small detachment of troops to command. Dressed in armor and carrying a white banner that represented God blessing the French royal emblem, the fleur-de-lis, she led the French to a decisive victory over the English at Orleans.

Having accomplished this miraculous feat she convinced Charles to risk the journey to Rheims in order to hold coronation ceremonies in the cathedral there, according to the custom of the kings of France before him. Jeanne again triumphed. In the eyes of the people the cowardly and lethargic Dauphin became the king of France and regained legitimacy and the loyalty of Frenchmen everywhere as a consequence of the ceremonies. Charles, still irresolute and hesitant, delayed and missed the moment for riding the psychological crest and driving the English from his land. Instead of acting, he vehemently opposed any further campaigns against the English. Therefore, it was without royal support that Jeanne conducted a military campaign against the English at Compiegne, near Paris where she was finally captured and convicted of the crime of answering to God before the king and the Roman Catholic Church. Jeanne directly disobeyed the king and was responsible for the murder of hundreds of Englishmen.

Dostoevsky claims that as an "extraordinary" woman, that this transgression was her duty, as was the shedding of the blood of "ordinary" people. Dostoevsky goes on to say that "most of the benefactors and founders of mankind were especially terrible blood-shedders," and Jeanne's crime in no way diminishes her extraordinary nature. In fact, it only serves to further illustrate it. According to the theory, if Jeanne had not gone on to Compiegne and disobeyed the king, she would cease to be extraordinary because she would not be fulfilling her calling, her "new word." Where Dostoevsky's theory falls through is with his assertion that "the act of carrying out a crime is always accompanied by illness." Jeanne was never ill that history has recorded except to be dubbed insane and a heretic by the English. Perhaps illness would have befallen her if she had been allowed to live; she was burned at the stake only days after her capture.

Dostoevsky's statement that "those who are a tiny bit off the beaten track...by their very nature cannot fail to be criminals" seemed to be written especially for Jeanne. As a female in the early 1400s, Saint Jeanne managed to break two stereotypes rigorously supported by the Roman Catholic Church of the day, that God could speak directly to the people, even a peasant like Jeanne, and that

God not only showed himself to women, but that he also could command the "inferior sex" to serve Him gloriously. Until this time, it was commonly held that God spoke only to the Pope and to the king, and that it was only men of noble birth who could serve Him best. Twenty-five years after her death, the church pronounced her innocent of all charges, but it wasn't until 1920 that the Roman Catholic Church acknowledged her call from God.