

CHAPTER
14

Section 4

PRIMARY SOURCE **Joan of Arc's Trial**

In 1429, 17-year-old Joan of Arc led French troops to victory over England. A year later, she was captured by English allies and sent to Rouen, a city ruled by the English king. She was tried by a Church court for heresy. Although given a chance to take back her testimony and live, she chose death. As you read this portion of the trial record, think why the judges gave her the sentence they did.

“Therefore before us your competent judges, namely Pierre by divine mercy bishop of Beauvais and brother Jean Le Maistre, vicar in this city and diocese of the notable master Jean Graverent, Inquisitor of Heretical Error in the kingdom of France, and especially appointed by him to officiate in this cause, you, Jeanne, commonly called The Maid, have been arraigned to account for many pernicious [evil] crimes and have been charged in a matter of the faith. And having seen and examined with diligence the course of your trial and all that occurred therein, principally the answers, confessions and affirmations which you made, after having also considered the most notable decision of the masters of the Faculties of Theology and Decrees in the University of Paris, in addition to that of the general assembly of the University, and of the prelates, doctors and men learned in canon and civil law and in theology who were met together in a great multitude in this town of Rouen and elsewhere for the discussion and judgment of your statements, words and deeds; having taken counsel and mature conference with those zealots of the Christian faith, and having seen and weighed all there is to see and weigh in this matter, all that we and any man of judgment and law could and should observe: We, having Christ and the honor of the orthodox faith before our eyes, so that our judgment may seem to emanate from the face of Our Lord, have said and decreed that in the simulation [pretending] of your revelations and apparitions [ghosts] you have been pernicious, seductive, presumptuous, of light belief, rash, superstitious, a witch, a blasphemer of God and His saints, a despiser of Him in His sacraments, a prevaricator of the divine teaching and the ecclesiastical sanctions, seditious, cruel, apostate, schismatic, erring gravely in our faith, and that by these

means you have rashly trespassed against God and the Holy Church.

“Moreover, although you have very often, not by Us only but also by certain learned expert masters and doctors full of zeal for the salvation of your soul, been duly and sufficiently admonished to amend and reform yourself, and to submit to the disposition, decision and correction of Holy Mother Church, you would not, and cared not to do so, and even in the hardness of your heart stubbornly and obstinately declared that you would not, and on many occasions expressly refused to submit to Our Holy Father the Pope and the holy General Council. Therefore, we declare you of right excommunicate and heretic, being stubborn and obstinate in your crimes, excesses and errors; and we pronounce it meet [necessary] to abandon you and do abandon you to the secular justice as a limb of Satan, infected with the leprosy of heresy, cut off from the Church, in order to prevent the infection of the other members of Christ; praying this same power on this side of death and the mutilation of your limbs to moderate its judgment towards you, and if true signs of penance appear in you to permit the sacrament of penance to be administered to you.”

from Norman F. Cantor, ed., The Medieval Reader (New York: Harper Perennial, 1994), 261–262.

Discussion Questions

Recognizing Facts and Details

1. What “learned expert masters” examined Joan?
2. Why did the judges accuse Joan of being a witch and a blasphemer?
3. **Making Judgments** Based on your reading of this excerpt, do you think Joan was more political than religious? Explain your answer.