

Spiritual Struggles in Film, Part 2: The Interpersonal, Demonic, and Moral Struggles in Carl Dreyer's "The Passion of Joan of Arc"

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Faculty Disclosures

- Francis Lu has listed no financial interest/arrangement that would be considered a conflict of interest.
- Julie Exline and Ken Pargament are grateful for funding support from the John Templeton Foundation, #36094.

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Earlier presentations

-July 26, 2022 presentation on Spiritual Struggles by Ken Pargament

-Oct. 31, 2023 presentation of Spiritual Struggles in Film, Part 1

- <https://spiritualityandhealth.duke.edu/index.php/education/seminars/>

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Agenda

- Spiritual Struggles
- Joseph Campbell on myth, suffering, and transformation
- St. Joan of Arc
- The film: The Passion of Joan of Arc
- The director: Carl Theodor Dreyer
- Preview of 5 film clips in context
- Mindful viewing of films
- 5 film clips (20 minutes)
- Post-viewing processing of the film experience including Ken and Julie's comments on 3 types of spiritual struggles.

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A Definition of Spiritual Struggles (Pargament & Exline, 2021, 2022)

- Spiritual struggles refer to experiences of **tension**, **strain**, and **conflict** about sacred matters.
- They can focus on the supernatural, the self, or other people.



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Spiritual Struggles

- Divine Struggles
- Ultimate Meaning Struggles
- Doubt Struggles
- Interpersonal Religious Struggles
- Demonic Struggles
- Moral Struggles

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Interpersonal Religious Struggles

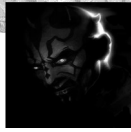


- Conflicts with other people or institutions re: religious issues
- Sample items:
 - had conflicts with other people about religious/spiritual matters
 - felt hurt, mistreated, or offended by religious/spiritual people
 - felt angry at organized religion

(RSS: Exline, Pargament, Grubbs, & Yali, 2014)

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Demonic Struggles




- Belief that devil or evil spirits are attacking us or causing negative events
- Sample items:
 - worried that the problems I was facing were the work of the devil or evil spirits
 - felt attacked by the devil or by evil spirits

(from RSS: Exline, Pargament, Grubbs, & Yali, 2014)

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Moral Struggles



- Struggle to follow moral principles; guilt about moral failures
- Examples:
 - worried that my actions were morally or spiritually wrong
 - felt guilty for not living up to my moral standards

(from RSS: Exline, Pargament, Grubbs, & Yali, 2014)

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Joseph Campbell on Myth

- “The images of myth are reflections of the spiritual potentialities of everyone of us. Through contemplating those, we invoke their powers in our own lives to operate through ourselves.”
- “Myths tell us how to confront and bear and interpret suffering, but they do not say that in life there can or should be no suffering.”

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Campbell on Transformation

- “One thing that comes out in myths is that at the bottom of the abyss comes the voice of salvation. The black moment is the moment when the real message of the transformation is going to come. At the darkest moment comes the light.”

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St. Joan of Arc

- St. Joan of Arc lived from 1412 until 1431.
- In 1920, Joan was canonized and a French national holiday on the 2nd Sunday in May established.
- A peasant girl who, believing that she was acting under divine guidance, led the French army in a momentous victory at Orléans that repulsed an English attempt to conquer France during the Hundred Years' War.

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St. Joan of Arc

- She felt herself to be guided by the voices of St. Michael, St. Catherine of Alexandria, and St. Margaret of Antioch outside the church hierarchy and doctrine.
- Captured a year afterward, Joan was put on trial and burned to death by the English and their French collaborators as a heretic in 1431.

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The Passion of Joan of Arc

- Opened April 21, 1928, in Copenhagen entirely silent with no musical accompaniment.
- In the latest Criterion Blu-ray edition, there are 3 optional soundtracks including Richard Einhorn's 1994 oratorio "Voices of Light."

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The Passion of Joan of Arc

- It has appeared on Sight & Sound magazine's top ten films poll five times: as #7 in 1952 and 1972, as #10 (Critic's List) and #6 (Director's List) in 1992 and as #9 in 2012 (Critic's List).
- One of 45 films on the Vatican's 1995 "Some Important Films" list.
- On Roger Ebert's "Great Movies" list.

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The Passion of Joan of Arc

- Cinematography used extreme closeups of faces without makeup.
- Editing was rapid montage.
- Joan was played by Maria Falconetti, a French stage actress, who appeared in only 3 movies, this being her last one.

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Carl Theodor Dreyer

- 1889-1968
- Danish
- Made 14 feature films.
- He described this film as "a hymn to the triumph of the soul over life. It is not a film intended for film theorists. It is of universal human interest intended for a wide popular audience with a message for any open human mind."

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Carl Theodor Dreyer (1926 interview)

- "Of central importance of all art and of all things human, the human face has the greatest interest. It is, so to speak, a declaration of the content of the soul and in its delicate shifts one can read the delicate emotions which words and gestures are incapable of expressing. The significance of the cinema as a new art form resides in the ability to represent and conserve these shifts of facial expression."

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Carl Theodor Dreyer

- Of the face of his actress Marie Falconetti, he said "I found on her face exactly what I was looking for in Joan: a rustic woman, very sincere, who was also a woman who has suffered."
- "In Falconetti, who plays Joan, I found what I might, with very bold expression, allow myself to call 'the martyr's reincarnation.'"

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Film structure by location

- Opening and Chapel: characters and conflict stated. Interrogation begins.
- Solitary cell: Interrogation continues. Joan is offered a letter of abjuration admitting her violating of Church doctrine to save her life.
- Torture chamber: Joan threatened and faints.
- Solitary cell: Blood-letting. Sacrament offered for signing a letter of abjuration.

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Film structure

- Outdoors by the chapel's cemetery: She reluctantly signs a letter of abjuration disavowing her spiritual experiences to save her life. She is sentenced to life imprisonment.
- Solitary cell: Denouement. Joan's final rejection of the signed letter signals that she has chosen her death.
- Outdoors: Joan is burned at the stake. The onlookers revolt against the English.

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Film clips in context

- **1st clip:** A manuscript described as the transcript of the 1431 trial in Rouen, France. She has been captured and standing trial. 22 historical sessions of interrogation is compressed into one day in the film.
- The judges (commentary: "diabolically cunning, heartless cynicism hidden behind hypocritical compassion") led by the Bishop of Beuvais, Pierre Cauchon, of the Catholic Church and theologians from University of Paris who aligned with the English Earl of Warwick and soldiers who have conquered this part of France. They are interrogating her to trick her into contradicting herself or say something that is blasphemous.

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Film clips in context

- She is on trial for not accepting religious authority that rejects the authenticity of her claims of visions and voices that she experiences as direct revelations of God's will, thus bypassing the church even for salvation.
- Joan must choose to either stay true to her experiences and risk her life by opposing the church OR confess her errors in believing her visions and voices from God either directly to the judges or signing a letter of abjuration.

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Film clips in context

- **2nd clip:** In the solitary cell, the judges ask:
 - "Did God promise that you will go to heaven?"
 - "So, you are certain of salvation, and do not need the church?"
 - "Are you in a state of grace?" is repeated twice as an underlining of this question.
- If Joan says "no," she contradicts and undermines her previous testimony of genuine revelations from God. If she says "yes," her statement is blasphemous and heresy, since no one can be saved without the church.

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Film clips in context

- **3rd clip:** In the torture chamber, the judges say:
 - “We know your revelations are not from God, but from the Devil. Don’t you see it’s the Devil has obstructed your thinking to betray you.”
 - Joan is offered the letter of abjuration to sign.
 - “If you refuse, the church will abandon you, and you will be alone. Alone. ALONE.”

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Film clips in context

- **4th clip:** In the solitary cell, the sacrament is offered if she signs the letter of abjuration.
- Judges: “Can’t you see you offended God by your stubbornness to refuse the sacrament.”
- Joan: “I love ... God with all my heart. You say that I am sent by the Devil. It is not true. It is you who are sent by the Devil to make me suffer. You. YOU.”

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Film clips in context

- **5th clip:** In the solitary cell, her hair is cut. She takes back her signed abjuration letter. She asks the judges to return.
 - Joan: “I betrayed God to save my life.”
 - Judge: “But before the people, you admitted you were led by the Devil. You still believe you are God’s chosen one?”
 - Joan: “Yes...God moves in mysterious ways. Yes, I am His child.”

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Film clips in context

- Sympathetic aide assigned to prepare her for her execution: “Your Victory?”
- Joan: “My martyrdom.”
- Sympathetic aide assigned to prepare her for her execution: “Your Freedom?”
- Joan: “Death.”

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Mindful Viewing of Film

- I invite you to experience all the film clips from a contemplative space starting with your way of silent centering.
- Be present with full attention to what you see, hear, and feel while looking for what moments of the film that move you deeply.
- Let go of premature analyzing, mind chatter, and distracting multi-tasking.

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Mindful Viewing of Film

- Post-film viewing process
 - 1’: Observe silence and reflect on your experience of the film clips.
 - What scenes or images moved you deeply? What did you see? What did you hear? What did they show you?
 - 3’: Journal your viewing experience.

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Mindful Viewing of Film

- Post-film viewing process
 - Try to type in the Chat one moving moment so we all can read what others have experienced.
 - Group discussion about the moving moments--
What did we learn from our experience of the film clips?
 - Ken and Julie will comment on the interpersonal, demonic, and moral struggles.
 - Questions/comments by Chat or live on screen
Please be concise.