



THE JACOB RADER MARCUS CENTER OF THE
AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES

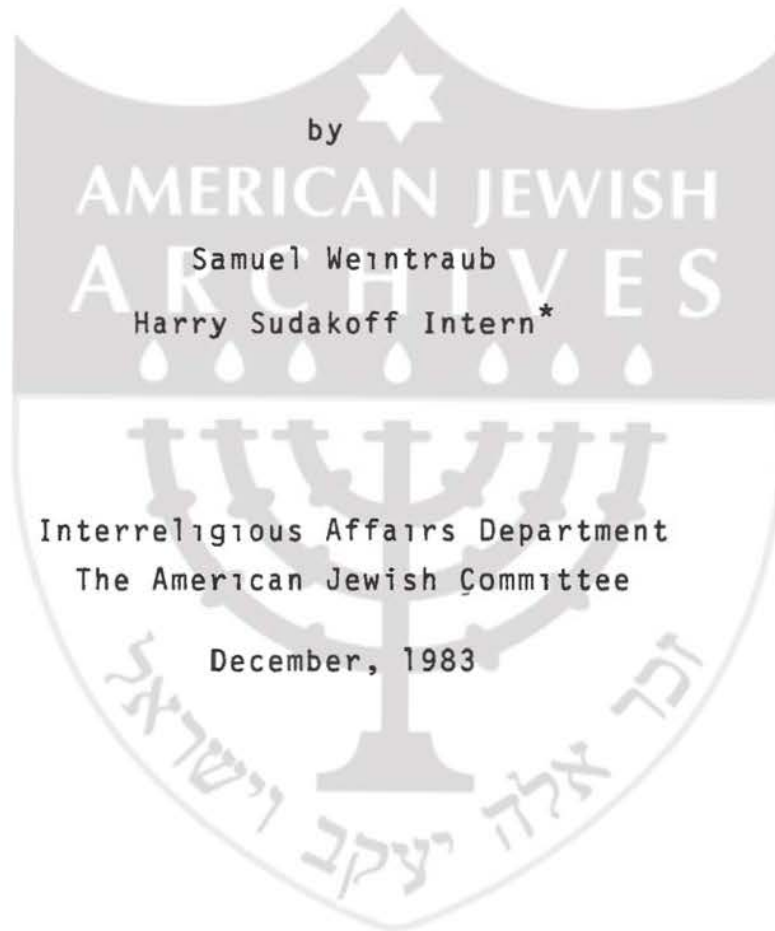
Preserving American Jewish History

MS-603: Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum Collection, 1945-1992.

Series C: Interreligious Activities. 1952-1992

Box 41, Folder 6, Oberammergau Passion Play, 1981-1984.

PASSION PLAYS
in the
UNITED STATES



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION	1
BLACK HILLS PASSION PLAY Spearfish, South Dakota and Lake Wales, Florida	5
VAL BALFOUR PASSION PLAY Heritage Productions, Richmond, Virginia	7
THE GREAT PASSION PLAY Eureka Springs, Arkansas	14
FALL CITY PASSION PLAY Fall City, Washington	20
HOLY FAMILY PASSION PLAY Union City, New Jersey	22
WORLD OF LIFE FELLOWSHIP PASSION PLAY Schroon Lake, New York	24
CONCLUSION	26
NOTES	28

INTRODUCTION

The Passion Play is a genre of medieval religious drama which concentrates on the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus. As Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum of the American Jewish Committee remarks in a study of Passion Play history,¹ the earliest extant texts of these dramas are from 13th Century Europe, when they appeared as elaborations of pre-existing liturgical plays. These dramas flowered in the 15th and 16th Centuries, particularly in France and Germany, and began to evolve lengthy scenes, lavish staging, and intricate internal structures. Certain plays expanded to thousands of lines and required several days to perform. These more elaborate dramas have inspired a variety of later, modern Passion Plays whose public performance and international influence continue to this day.

As a study of the American Jewish Committee concluded.

A prominent feature of most Passion Plays, past and present, has been a strong anti-Jewish component, focused not only on Jesus' individual Jewish antagonists but--by implication or explicit statement--on the Jewish people as a whole. A prominent Christian scholar, Bernard E. Olson, recently commented on pageants of this sort, "The crucifixion drama is . . . regarded, not without reason, as having played a prominent part in Jewish disabilities through the centuries as well as providing a major cause of negative attitudes towards Jews today."²

The anti-Jewish elements of these Plays are expressed in several recurring themes

(1) The Jewish antagonists of Jesus--and by implication all Jews--are depicted as degenerate, loathsome, almost subhuman creatures. The Jewish priests in particular are hateful and bloodthirsty, zealous in defense of their own privilege, and obscene in their pleasure over Jesus' suffering. These priests lead a corrupt religion, whose vindictive legalism is juxtaposed to Christian love, mercy and universalism.

(2) The crowd before the Roman Governor's palace becomes a Jewish "mob," echoing their priests' sadism. They--and again by implication all Palestinian Jews--clamor for the death of Jesus. Gleefully, they welcome responsibility for his execution, upon themselves and their descendants. Thus, Jews are judged to be collectively guilty of deicide, and permanently rejected by God.

(3) These plays either obscure or deny the Jewish background of Jesus and the apostles. Their commitment to Jewish religion and ethics is concealed, indeed, many plays represent them as total renegades from Jewish traditions.

(4) The most damaging perversion of history involves the characterization of Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor who ordered Jesus' execution. Pilate, who responsible historiography has described as a ruthless tyrant, is pictured as a fair, lawful ruler who was unfortunately swayed by Jewish pressure to order the crucifixion. Thus, the role of crucifier, and responsibility for the deicide, is handily shifted from the Romans to the Jews.

(5) The use of Christian Scriptures is one-sided and highlights texts with real or potential anti-Jewish import, to wit: "His blood be upon us and upon our children" (Matt 27 25). Generally, the plays neglect New Testament passages which suggest more positive images of Jews and Judaism.

(6) There is a dangerous tendency to sever the story of Jesus from its historical context in first century Palestine. Thus, the plays dissociate the life of Jesus and the primitive Church from their setting in Jewish religion and social life. Similarly, they fail to present the realities of Roman oppression, which are necessary to understand both Jesus' ministry and the actions of his Jewish antagonists.

The following paper surveys the 20th Century development of Passion Plays in the United States. Virtually all of these plays follow European models, and several represent Americanized versions of the famous 17th Century Passion Play of Oberammergau, in Upper Bavaria, West Germany. The thoroughgoing anti-Jewish bias of the Oberammergau has been criticized by the American Jewish Committee in a series of expert studies³ and by leading Catholic and Protestant scholars.⁴

In their actual staging, these plays widely vary. Some productions are local and Church-based, utilizing amateur actors and modest technical facilities. Others are lavish,

professional productions with world-famous principals, spectacular dramatic effects, national tours, and sophisticated commercial management. We first turn our attention to the latter.



BLACK HILLS PASSION PLAY

Spearfish, South Dakota and Lake Wales, Florida

The Black Hills Passion Play is the oldest major American production. Based on the Lunuen, Germany Passion Play, it was first performed on the American stage in 1932. In 1939, its company settled in the Black Hills of South Dakota, where, at the town of Spearfish, an elaborate amphitheatre was constructed for summer performances. In 1952, the company began playing a winter season in central Florida, where a second amphitheatre was built at Lake Wales.

"Black Hills" now appears annually in both its summer and winter homes. In 1982, for example, the production ran in Lake Wales from February 15 to April 19 and in South Dakota from June 6 to August 29. Both seasons involve three weekly performances, starring Joseph Meier as Jesus. Meier, who also acts as producer, was born in Lunuen, where his ancestors for generations performed in Passion Plays. Meier himself has portrayed Jesus for some 8000 American and European audiences. At Spearfish and Lake Wales he is supported by a cast of 250 players on a two and one-half block long stage.

The Black Hills brochure boasts of the company's

years of study and research of all phases pertaining to the historical events [including] . . . Jewish laws and the laws of occupation imposed upon the Jewish people by the Roman conquerors. . . . The Passion Play is now well established and accepted as an American institution. It offers to the American people

a place where racial and denominational differences are without meaning, a place where beauty and power are revealed . . . [my emphasis]

Jewish observers have reached different conclusions. Arthur Teitelbaum, of the Miami Anti-Defamation League (ADL), reported in 1981 that his office had received complaints about the play since the early 1960's. Allegedly, the Black Hills production repeats the classic Passion Play inventions, to wit All Palestinian Jews willed Jesus' death, Pilate is an innocent bystander, fair and just but weak-willed; and Jesus has no connection to Jewish beliefs or practices. Teitelbaum also claimed that the ADL tried repeatedly to talk to Meier, but "made very little headway."⁵

In 1982, Ms. Edith Ballanoff, President of University Women of Los Angeles' University of Judaism, saw the play at Spearfish. Her impressions, as related in a January 15, 1983 letter to Judith Banki at National AJC, included

[Pontius Pilate was depicted] as a just and kind man, while the priests were mean and unfeeling. When Pontius suggested that Jesus be flogged and they demand he be crucified . . . one does get the feeling that the Jews on stage represented all Jews then. . . . It was painful to see our priests depicted so bloodthirsty and cruel

Jesus was depicted as a tall, handsome, kindly, gentle, good person with a beautiful voice. His hair was a medium brown color, his beard neat and short. He wore a white long robe, tied with a white belt, and wore a red cape at times. His mother also wore a long white robe, with a blue cape. The priests were short and stocky, wore darker colors, had full dark beards and, to our chagrin, wore silly looking "Mickey Mouse" hats. Their voices were hard and cruel.

As its informational offices, the 1981 Lake Wales brochure lists Passion Play Amphitheatre, Box 71, Lake Wales, Florida 33853 (813/676-1495) or the Greater Lake Wales Chamber of Commerce. The 1982 Spearfish brochure lists Black Hills Passion Play Office, Spearfish, South Dakota 57783 (605/642-2646).

VAL BALFOUR PASSION PLAY

Heritage Productions, Richmond, Virginia

The Val Balfour Passion Play, sponsored by Heritage Productions of Richmond, Virginia, is reputed to be the American drama least offensive to Jews. However, as will be demonstrated below, the Balfour play has far from abandoned the anti-Semitism of its European model, the Oberammergau.

The play was adapted thirty years ago by the late Val Balfour as a two and one-half hour Americanized version of the ten-hour Oberammergau. In 1953 Balfour began mounting productions in Eastern communities, frequently under the local sponsorship of the Junior Chamber of Commerce. Eventually, Balfour's company adopted a schedule whereby they performed through the summer at Strasburg, Virginia and

toured from October to Easter over the United States and Canada.

Officially, Heritage appears to appreciate Jewish sensitivities. In a "History of the Passion Play," Val Balfour wrote

It must be remembered that Jesus was a Jew 2000 years-ago. The masses admired Him because of His doctrine of love and hope, and because He healed their sick. . . . The powerful feared He would overthrow their authority, so they took Him to Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor, who alone could sentence a man to death. Had the final sentence been passed by the Hebrew Sanhedrin (which was at the time politically corrupt), the punishment would most likely have been death by stoning, since Crucifixion was a Roman punishment. . . .

Similarly, another Heritage statement declares

In the play--at the suggestion of various Rabbis and members of Jewish communities . . .
 --Jesus is constantly addressed as Rabbi
 --The Jewishness of Jesus and the apostles is brought out
 --Any offensive lines are not used such as "His blood be upon us and our children"
 --The mob is divided between those who wish to crucify Jesus and those who are "for him"
 --Jewish priests are shown as not villains but concerned to save their country from Rome

Further, according to certain ADL leaders, Heritage has expressed understanding of Jewish concerns, partially revised its script, and agreed on occasion to distribute ecumenical Passion Play "guidelines" at its performances. A 1982 ADL memorandum reports that Balfour's widow Anne, who plays Mary Magdalene, "has been conscientious in trying to rid the script and performances of the potential for misunderstanding in interpreting the role of Jews."⁶

Still and all, these claims of openness and sensitivity are belied by three matters (1) contradictory statements within Heritage literature, (2) negative reactions of Jewish and Christian viewers, and (3) the resistance of Heritage staff to external evaluation of the play's script.

We have quoted Balfour's "History of the Passion Play" to indicate his apparent exoneration of Jews from the deicide. However, the Heritage literature packet in which the "History" appears also contains directly contradictory information. The "Synopsis of the Play," for example, reads.

[The High Priests] are determined to arrest Jesus and put Him to death. . . . Jesus is brought before them, questioned, and, upon His admittance that He is the Messiah, is accused of Blasphemy and condemned to be crucified.

The "Synopsis" continues with the false and pernicious assumption that Pilate was merely the instrument of a mad Jewish mob

Pilate again tries to release Him, when the mob storms the palace demanding that Pilate "Crucify Him." Pilate gives the mob a choice between Jesus and Barabbas. The mob calls "Give us Barabbas." His firmness shaken, Pilate frees Barabbas and condemns Jesus.

Indeed, according to several Jewish and Christian viewers, the Heritage play fits squarely into the anti-Jewish Oberammergau tradition, imputing deicide to all Jews, and rationalizing the "complicity" of Pilate. For example, on January 16, 1980, Macon Telegraph reporter Jane Oppy, a non-Jew, wrote a review entitled "Jesus' Story Deserves Better than Passion Play." The review followed a

controversial Macon Jewish community protest, which compelled a local bank to withdraw its sponsorship of a local Heritage tour (January 15-18, 1980).⁷ Ms. Oppy was apparently one of the few Macon journalists to support the Jewish protest, which other editorialists deemed an ill-founded attack on religious and artistic freedom. Her trenchant review--which deserves to be quoted at length--analyzes the play's content and staging, and disproves the supposed pro-Jewish "sensitivity" of Heritage

. . . the concerns of the Jewish community about the role of Jews in the death of Jesus appear to have been well founded.

Though the Balfour version, according to company management, was highly modified to assure that the Jews got a fair shake, the full responsibility for the decision to crucify Jesus in this play is laid on the shoulders of the plotting, power hungry scribes and Pharisees

If we are to believe this interpretation of what happened it is the Priests, not the Romans, who run Jerusalem. Only when the High Priests convince Pilate, a pale, sickly, petulant excuse for a ruler, that his failure to act "may ruin my prestige with Caesar" does he give the order to crucify.

True, Balfour did insert into the play one sympathetic Pharisee, Joseph of Arimathea, who argues for Jesus's life on more than one occasion. And there are a few extras in the crowd who yell "free Jesus."

But the defense by Joseph . . . is weakly presented. In fact, the more subtle element of staging is the clue to the real anti-Semitism of this play.

The High Priests, in their resplendent garb and their more stagy voices, are the only ones in the play besides Jesus, the Merchant Dathan, and Judas who look and talk like professional actors.

Most significantly, in the scene in which the High Priests and Pilate argue over what shall be done with Jesus, it is the Priests, not Pilate or Jesus, who are the central figures⁸

More recently (January 1983), the Balfour version appeared at Atlanta's Fox Theatre, where it was reviewed,

separately, by April Levine of AJC's Southeast Office and Joel Breshin of Southeast ADL. Their conclusions parallel Jane Oppy's and offer specific criticisms as well.

Ms. Levine, to begin with, found certain improvements over the more-objectionable aspects of past plays. For example, the Heritage version affirms the Jewishness of Jesus and avoids grotesque costuming of Jewish characters. Nonetheless, "the indictment of the Jews for Jesus' death remains pervasive." The Sanhedrin members "were overwhelmingly corrupt and greedy and would be satisfied with nothing less than a death sentence," for which they will "pay well from the Temple treasury." "Most disturbing was the portrayal of the Romans" . . . Pilate is a "spineless wimp with noble intentions but utterly manipulated by the shrewdness of the Jews." So sensitive and fair-minded are the Romans that one soldier at the Crucifixion confesses, "Truly, he is the son of God."⁹

Mr. Breshin's analysis is similar to that of Ms. Levine. ". . . While there seemed to be an attempt by the producers to curb obvious anti-Semitic statements," he wrote, "the anti-Jewish themes and stereotypes of deicide, conspiracy and greed as well as historical inaccuracies were projected" Any positive revisions are "weak at best, and lost among the anti-Jewish messages" which include, primarily, the responsibility of the priests for the Crucifixion, the connection of the priests with power

and greed, and the repeated implication that Jesus was "sacrificed" for the security of the Jewish nation.¹⁰

Finally, Heritage's putative regard for Jewish feelings is belied by their reluctance to share their script with religious leaders. This unwillingness is justified by various--and occasionally conflicting--rationale. In 1979, for example, Elizabeth Hurd of Heritage wrote Rev. William H. Harter, a Presbyterian minister in Chambersburg, Pa., that Heritage had "only the working scripts used by casts and technicians and [has] never had a script prepared for reading." A few months later, during the Macon controversy, Mrs. Elizabeth Hamner, Executive Director of Heritage, acknowledged the existence of a script but told a local reporter that it was "Company policy that we do not give [it] out " The same reporter was told by Anne Balfour that she would be "happy to give out a copy, but didn't have one."¹¹ At another point in the Macon episode, Mrs. Hamner cited copyright laws in again declining to share a script. Finally, exasperated with Macon Rabbi Robert Kravitz, who asked three times for the script, she told the Macon Telegraph, "If he wants a script, all he has to do it read the Bible!"¹²

A similar pattern appeared more recently in Buffalo, where Heritage performed from October 27-31, 1982, under the sponsorship of the Buffalo Council of Churches. Rev. Robert E. Grimm, BCC Executive Director, requested a script

from Mrs. Hamner. He was rebuffed repeatedly, and finally received a copy only ten days before the performance. While pleased with the script's "evident effort . . . to bring balance," Rev. Grimm offered detailed criticisms similar to those mentioned above, including implications of collective Jewish guilt and the veritable exoneration of Pilate.

Finally, the ADL, despite their appreciation of Anne Balfour, also indicated during the recent Atlanta tour that they had waited for years before receiving the script.¹³

In conclusion, then, despite some improvements, there is no evidence for any fundamental changes in Balfour's original condensation of Oberammergau. Lacking such evidence, and given the aversion of Heritage to external evaluation, one must concur with a group of Atlanta Jewish and Christian leaders who declared before the Fox Theatre performances

This version of the Passion Play, based on the Oberammergau original, remains rooted in that tradition of hostility towards Jews and Judaism which prevailed for many centuries and shaped the anti-Jewish attitudes of generations of Christians. According to this tradition, Jews were held collectively guilty for the death of Jesus and the entire people is held responsible for His death. . . .

It would have been an act of justice and reconciliation if the producers of the Val Balfour Passion Play had taken the teachings of the major Church authorities today more fully to heart. Christians as well as Jews are poorer for the failure to use this opportunity for healing rather than prolonging hatred.

Val Balfour portrayed Jesus until his death in 1974. In 1978--evidently after several temporary performers--the role was assumed by former TV actor Mark Bexley. Bexley currently tours with a permanent Heritage cast of 100, which is supplemented by local extras.¹⁴

According to 1979 Heritage literature, "Passion Play Headquarters" are Heritage Productions, 3213 Archdale, Richmond, Virginia 23235 (804/272-6180) and, secondarily, Media Dimensions of Richmond, Inc., 3212 Cutshaw Avenue, Richmond, Virginia 23230 (804/359-9409). The "Summer Home" of the Play is listed as Strasburg, Virginia 22657 (703/465-3688). While at Strasburg, the company performs at the Passion Play Garden Theatre, and is sponsored by the Shenandoah Valley Outdoor Drama Association "as a community service." Finally, an ADL memorandum from April 1968 indicates that "Heritage Corporation Productions" were at least at one time managed by Consolidated Concerts Corporation of New York.

THE GREAT PASSION PLAY

Eureka Springs, Arkansas

The Great Passion Play, founded in 1968 by the late Gerald L. K. Smith, is the one major American Passion Play

which is deliberately and maliciously anti-Semitic. The production is managed by the Elna Smith Foundation--established by Smith in his late wife's memory--and is staged in an amphitheatre on an (Ozark) mountain near Eureka Springs. The mountain, renamed "Mt Oberammergaw," is also home to other (equally tawdry) Foundation "Sacred Projects," which include a seven-story high "Christ of the Ozarks" statue, a "Christ Only Art Gallery," and a Bible Museum "that contains a few pages from a Gutenberg."¹⁵

Our discussion of the Smith Passion Play will be facilitated by some introductory mention of its two principal founders, Gerald L. K. Smith himself and Charles F. Robertson, Smith's business manager, who succeeded him after his death in 1976.¹⁶

Gerald L. K. Smith was a pillar of the extremist religious right for decades. His virulent anti-Semitism and racism inspired H. L. Mencken to call him "the goriest, the deadliest and damndest orator ever heard on this or any other earth" In the 1930's he organized against FDR ("We're going to drive that cripple out of the White House"), flirted with the pro-Fascist Silver Shirts, and finally settled in Detroit, where, through Henry Ford's patronage, he preached anti-union demagoguery in radio broadcasts. His activism in the America First Party unfortunately earned him some "respectability", when asked in 1955 by a Congressional committee for his views on immigration, he cited

Albert Einstein as the sort of foreigner federal laws should bar.

Charles Robertson, currently head of the Smith Foundation, preserves the tradition of his mentor. He told one interviewer that the television series "Holocaust" had been in bad taste. "One of the biggest lies of our time," he claimed, "is that six million Jews were slaughtered." Later, in the same conversation: "Let's face it. The Negroes are fresh from the jungle, and they have brought with them many of the same characteristics."

The Great Passion Play reflects all too faithfully the bigotry of its founders. One need look no further than its souvenir program for a hint--unfortunately only a hint--of its crude anti-Semitism.¹⁷ The program contains several offensive photographs, presumably of the actual production. One, captioned "Jesus is Accused in the Court of the Sanhedrin," portrays the Sanhedrin members as swarthy, loutish men with heavy, dark beards and comical hats. Behind them--in a vulgar insinuation of sexual promiscuity--a young woman lies seductively on a couch. In another photograph, "A Repentant Judas Tries to Return the Thirty Pieces of Silver," the unshaven, and obese priests mock Judas' contrition. In comparison, throughout the brochure, Jesus and the apostles are depicted as fair, well-groomed and devout young men.

The text of the program, which provides a synopsis of the play, is equally obnoxious.

There is fear and frustration in the Jewish Sanhedrin. . . . Afraid that their power and wealth might be reduced or even lost altogether . . . the Sanhedrin begins to scheme against a certain Galilean who was attracting large crowds . . . [after the betrayal by Judas] inspired by the goadings of the Sanhedrin, an angry mob reaches the Garden of Gethsemane . . . Pilate . . . bows to the will of the people. After washing his hands publicly he . . . lets them have their way with the Nazarene

A fuller assessment of the play's malevolence is offered by the reactions of independent viewers.

In August 1968, three weeks after the production opened, Milton Ellerin and Billy Stern of the American Jewish Committee saw a performance. Their evaluation addressed the play's implications about Jews

. . . . the Jews are wholly responsible for decide . . . then and now This comes across primarily in three ways

(a) The narration and the action stress the perfidy, evil, hypocrisy and cunning of the Sanhedrin. There is one wholly gratuitous scene in which the venerable old graybeards, not content with reviling and taunting Jesus, fall upon him physically and beat him bloody, all gleefully getting into the act.

(b) Herod and Pilate come off as innocents and dupes, unwilling accomplices in satisfying the blood lust of the Jews. Again and again Pilate, a good clean American boy, points out to the Jews that Jesus is innocent of any crime, and again and again he is persuaded, threatened and cajoled by the wily High Priest while in the background the bloodthirsty Jews chant "Crucify him--crucify him!"

(c) The theme of the culpability and damnation of "the whole Jewish people" permeated the play but it is made loudly and stereophonically clear in Pilate's execution order. . . . the anti-Christis are always "the Jews."18

The play has received no more favorable a reaction from

sensitive non-Jewish viewers. Patrick Owens, reporting for Newsday in 1980, concluded

What it says over and over again in its crude comic book fashion is that the Jews killed Jesus. "My Kingdom does not belong to this world," Christ says in the passion play. "If I were king, my supporters would be fighting to save me from the Jews."¹⁹

Similarly, in 1973, Sister Margaret Ellen Traxler, Executive Director of the National Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice, judged the Play

strikingly unfaithful to the Gospel narrative. . . . The sacred writers did not intend indictment of history upon their people because they could not anticipate the distortion and scapegoating in which Christians, especially Gentile Christians, would so prejudiciously indulge.²⁰

Sister Traxler was particularly appalled by the Great Passion Play's shabby mixture of anti-Semitism and sexism

Another discrimination is shown against women. Not only are the two Marys shown without grace or gentleness, but the Sanhedrin scenes depict women lounging on the couches in seductive poses. Again, this is inexcusable and bears no historical validity.²¹

National Jewish organizations became intensely concerned with Smith projects in 1969-70, when the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council (NJCRAC) and its constituents tried to reverse a federal grant for road improvement around Mt. Oberammergaw. Since then, despite continued complaints of Jews and Christians, the play's anti-Semitism has endured. A. I. Botnick, director of New Orleans ADL, said in 1978 that one sexually offensive

anti-Semitic scene had been "cleaned up years ago but nothing else . . . had ever been " Meanwhile, over two million people have seen the play, with Church members and Sunday School children coming "by the busload from a dozen states."²² In 1978, the last year for which figures are available, the Passion Play and other Mt. Oberammergau enterprises grossed one million dollars ²³

A brochure for "The Great Passion Play and Allied Sacred Projects," printed in 1971, identifies the Foundation as an IRS-approved "charitable, non-profit organization." Charles F. Robertson is listed as Secretary-Treasurer of the Foundation, whose address is Mt. Oberammergau, Eureka Springs, Arkansas 72632. Passion Play principals include Robert A. Hyde, Director, Patricia Hyde (evidently Hyde's wife), Assistant Director, Charles Robertson, Coordinator, and Gunda Robertson (Robertson's wife), Public Relations. An intriguing and suspicious note informs the reader "Due to the sacred nature of the production, and because they are aware of human frailties in relation to the Divine personage of their portrayals, all cast members wish to remain anonymous."

FALL CITY PASSION PLAY

Fall City, Washington

The Fall City Passion Play, according to founder and producer Rev. George Pratt, is the only regular Passion Play on the West Coast.²⁴ The Play has been produced annually since 1959, with approximately seven performances from mid-March to Easter. To date over 53,000 people have seen this Passion Play.

By the standards of the national companies, the Fall City production is modest. Rev. Pratt engages professional directors, but amateur actors. The 1981 season, for example, which ran at the Fall City High School gymnasium, involved bank secretaries, auto mechanics, and plumbers.

In February 1981, at the request of Seattle AJC Director Arthur Abramson, Judith Banki of National AJC evaluated a script of the Fall City Play. Ms. Banki, author of several expert studies of the Obérammergau,²⁵ discerned a "conscious effort to minimize" the anti-Jewish overtones, but nonetheless "some serious anti-Semitic implications." Her Fall City analysis, after stressing that "the script alone cannot convey the overall impact of the drama," noted

First, the positive elements

--Jesus is set within the Jewish community of his time. His Jewishness is clearly established

--The hatred of Roman rule with its attendant cruelties is shown in the play, although the universal longing for liberation from Roman occupation could be expanded in a few key passages with very helpful effects. . . .

--Some attempt has been made to show the variety of political and religious ferment of the time .

--The play affirms clearly that Jesus' suffering and death were part of G-d's plan. (This theme might be stressed again in one or two key scenes.)

As for the negative elements

--There is an unnecessary (and unscriptural) harping on the motive of financial gain throughout the play, but particularly with reference to the chief priests. This . . . plays upon one of the most vicious and persistent anti-Semitic stereotypes. . . . The genuine political hazards amid which [the chief priests] had to maneuver--the Zealots on one side and the cruelty of Roman oppression on the other--should be made more explicit. The theme of financial gain should be dispensed with entirely.

--The characterization of Pharasaic Judaism as being nothing more than rigid legalism is another venerable stereotype which has been completely discarded by contemporary Christian scholars .

--By lumping priests and Pharisees together, the play seems to implicate the Pharisees in Jesus' death.²⁶

The evaluation concludes with suggestions for textual improvement, which are both highly detailed and potential valuable, as Rev. Pratt has expressed an interest in making changes according to AJC critique.

While the Fall City Play has, apparently, no permanent office, for ticket information the Seattle Times of March 15, 1981 listed Snoqualmie Falls Forest Theater, 4620 S W. Graham Street, Seattle.

HOLY FAMILY PASSION PLAY

Union City, New Jersey

The Holy Family Roman Catholic Church of Union City, New Jersey sponsors an annual Passion Play, with about nine performances from late February until Easter. A 1978 advertisement proclaimed "64th Consecutive Season . . . The Nation's Oldest and Most Authentic Passion Play . . . America's Oberammergau! . . . No one of any age should miss it." Indeed, almost all performances are weekend matinees to encourage youth attendance.

The Union City Play drew Jewish criticism in March 1967 when several American Jewish Congress leaders viewed a production. Their subsequent evaluation lambasted the play's "crude and blatant anti-Semitic atmosphere" and was quoted by Rabbi Arthur J. Lelyveld, then Congress President, in a letter to The Most Reverend John J. Carberry, Chairman of the Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

In the Play, Judas is presented as a caricature identical with Julius Streicher's stereotype of a Jew in Der Stuermer

The priests (Jews) are depicted as brutish louts, cunning and corrupt,

The climax is the Crucifixion, accompanied by an electrical storm whose terrible lightning and rolling thunder constitute a magnificent spectacle . . . and which reduced many of the children in the audience to hysteria. . . .

The entire production is a searing, hate-filled indictment of Jewry. The Jews are satanic, the Christians are divine disciples of the Lord Jesus.²⁷

The Catholic journal Ave Maria, in supporting the Jewish protests about the Union City Play, editorialized, "It is a bitter paradox that the very reenactment of the central event of Christian love and salvation should have become a powerful vehicle for the intolerance and hate which contradict what Christ means."²⁸

While the Holy Family pastor, Msgr. C. M. Weitekamp, at first refused to respond to the Congress statement, outside criticism was eventually effective. An American Jewish Committee memorandum of the following year (1968) reports that "representations to church authorities have resulted in a revised script, used for the first time in the current production." A concurrent ADL memo mentions the deletions of anti-Jewish references, and the agreements of Newark archdiocese officials to make "major changes "

The Holy Family production occurs at Park Theatre, a Church property in Union City. For Passion Play information, the 1978 advertisement lists Passion Play Box Office, 530 - 35th Street, Union City, New Jersey 07087 (201/867-6535).

WORLD OF LIFE FELLOWSHIP PASSION PLAY

Schroon Lake, New York

In Winter 1980-81, a Passion Play presented by the World of Life Fellowship, Schroon Lake, New York, came to the attention of national AJC through Mr. Paul E. Thomas, a Christian attorney who summers at Schroon Lake. Mr. Thomas had seen the play and wrote the AJC to express his concern and inquire about Passion Play expertise. He shared as well his correspondence with the Play's director, Rev. Jack Wyrzten.

In his first letter to Rev. Wyrzten (July 30, 1980), Thomas described his reaction to the World of Life production

. . . the net effect of the evening was one of shock and deep disappointment, for we witnessed . . . a thoughtless, insensitive perpetuation of an ancient and horribly destructive myth of the killing of Jesus Christ, a Jew, by the Jews. As one raised a Christian, who still cherishes the teaching of the loving Jesus, I must condemn those distortions of Christ's teachings and life that make a mockery of his religious philosophy. The anti-Semitism that the World of Life's version of the Passion Play encourages is not only anti-Christian but is contrary to the stated beliefs of Christian and non-Christian world religious leaders who reexamined this myth as part of the ecumenical movement of the 60's and declared it false and harmful.

Rev. Wyrzten returned a smug and defensive reply (August 17, 1980)

As you know, we born-again, Bible-loving Christians are always the best friend that the Jews ever had. We have always defended Israel. I have had the privilege of pointing a lot of Jews to the Messiah. Jews are going to the same hell Gentiles go to if they're not

born again, and throughout the Passion Play we try to bring out the fact that it was our sins which nailed Christ to the cross . . . It was the Jewish sanhedrin who cried out for His blood. . . . It was the Gentiles who actually nailed Him to the cross.

Yours on the Victory Side,

Jack Wyrzten

The World of Life Passion Play evidently includes several countries on an annual international tour. 1980 World of Life stationery letterhead announces "Our 40th Year of Reaching Youth with the Gospel of Christ" and lists Jack Wyrzten and Harry Bollback as Directors. The International Office address is given as World of Life Fellowship, Inc., Schroon Lake, New York 12870, and a Canadian Office is listed as World of Life Fellowship (Ontario), Inc., Box 511, Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5P6. The telephone number for "International headquarters, Bible Institute and Camps" is (Schroon Lake) 518/532-7111.

CONCLUSION

Despite some softening, the American Passion Plays, in their treatment of Jews and Judaism, are faithful reenactments of their European models. By their scripts and staging, they convey the traditional anti-Jewish themes the decadence of First Century Palestinian Jewry, the eternal guilt of all Jews for the deicide, the isolation of Jesus and the primitive Church from their Jewish background, the whitewashing of Roman responsibility for the crucifixion, etc. Moreover, the sponsors of these productions show varying degrees of openness to Jewish and other external critique. Some are sympathetic to such evaluation, while most are inaccessible or grant intermittent and grudging cooperation.

Meanwhile, thousands of Americans annually view these plays, whose enduring popularity rests on several factors. First, these dramas have both traditional religious meaning and contemporary appeal as morally edifying family entertainment. Moreover, the national tours employ professional promotion and are often endorsed by respectable local Church organizations, Chambers of Commerce, Arts Councils, et al. The community-based productions, meanwhile, have become proud city or regional traditions in their own right.

Responding strategically to these plays raises various issues of public policy. Some productions present problems

in interreligious relations, especially when they are sponsored by respected Church bodies. Others involve issues of Church and State, as when religious or civic authorities try to organize play attendance as a public school activity. Controversies about several productions have also raised questions of religious and artistic freedom. Finally, one must bear in mind the economic benefit which many performances bring to their surrounding communities.

Whatever the problems in responding to these Passion Plays, it is clear that they continue to trouble American Jews and Christians. The preceding survey had described some of this concern, by both religious individuals and institutions. Perhaps the most hopeful development in this regard is the serious reconsideration of Passion Plays by leading Church organizations. In 1968, for example, the U.S. Secretariat for Catholic-Jewish Relations of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a detailed statement on Passion Plays with guidelines for improvement. The statement defined the true purpose of Passion Plays as follows: "To increase in the hearts of their audiences a greater love of God and of men, reminding them that those who played a part in the Passion drama were, in the Christian view, representative of all of us." In the same vein, it is hoped that Christian and Jewish concern will turn these plays from hatred and contempt to the power of love and possibility of redemption, again, for all of us.

NOTES

¹Marc H. Tanenbaum, "The Role of the Passion Play in Fostering Anti-Semitism Throughout History", Paper prepared for "The Passion of Jesus - Then and Now", Symposium at Katholische Akademie, Bayern, (West Germany), November 19, 1978.

²"Oberammergau, 1960 and 1970: A Study in Religious Anti-Semitism," (New York: The American Jewish Committee, 1970), p. 3 and Bernhard E. Olson, Faith and Prejudice (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), p. 195.

³"Oberammergau: 1960 and 1970..." and Judith Herschcopf Banki, "The Oberammergau Passion Play: The Revised 1980 Text, Progress and Problems (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1979) and "What Viewers Should Know About the Oberammergau Passion Play, 1980", (New York: AJC , 1980).

⁴"Oberammergau, 1960 and 1970...", pp. 21-2.

⁵Barbara Coenson-Roth, "Passion Play Charged with Anti-Semitism", (Central Florida?) Heritage, February 27, 1981.

⁶"A Very Wrong Time: American Version of Passion Play to be performed here this month", Buffalo Jewish Review, October 8, 1982.

⁷Pam Keene, "Pressure from Jewish Community Makes Backers Drop Passion Play", The Macon Telegraph, December 30, 1979, p. 1A.

⁸Jane Oppy, "Jesus Story Deserves Better than Passion Play", The Macon Telegraph, January 16, 1980, p. 5B.

⁹April Levine, "Val Balfour Passion Play - Preliminary Discussion", (internal AJC memorandum), February 11, 1983.

¹⁰Joel Breshin, "Val Balfour's Original American Version, Oberammergau Passion Play", (internal ADL memorandum), February 2, 1983.

¹¹Jane Oppy, "Objections to Play Center on 'Anti-Semitism' ", The Macon Telegraph, January 3, 1980, p. 1B.

¹²Terry D. Aronoff, "Jewish Critics Skip Opening of Passion Play", The Macon Telegraph, January 16, 1980, p. 1B.

¹³Joel Breshin, "Jews Still to Blame", Southern Israelite, December 11, 1983.

¹⁴Billy Cheney Speed, "Apostle Marc Baxley awaits turn as Christ", Atlanta Journal, January 22, 1983.

¹⁵Patrick Owens, "The anti-Semitic legacy of Gerald Smith", Newsday, September 20, 1980, Part II, p. 2.

¹⁶Information in these two biographies rests largely on Owens, "The anti-Semitic legacy...".

¹⁷"The Great Passion Play, and Allied Sacred Projects", Souvenir Program (Eureka Springs, Ark.: Elna M. Smith Foundation, 1971).

¹⁸Billie Stern, "The Arkansas Passion", (internal AJC memorandum), August 9, 1968.

¹⁹Owens, "The anti-Semitic legacy..."

²⁰Sister Margaret Ellen Traxler, SSND, "Report on the Passion Play in Eureka Springs, Arkansas", (internal memorandum), National Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice, pp. add one - add two.

²¹Ibid., p. add two.

²²Owens, "The anti-Semitic legacy..."

²³However, not all is rosy at the Elna Smith Foundation. As of September 1980, Roland Lee Morgan, a cousin of Smith who ran his anti-Semitic political arm, the Christian Nationalist Crusade, had taken Charles Robertson to court, alleging mishandling of the Foundation. One of the facts to emerge in the suit was that Robert Hyde, Director of the Play and its Gerald Smith-selected Jesus, received one third of its gate receipts.

²⁴Introductory description of Fall City Passion Play from Ray Ruppert, "Passion Play: Fall City drama to open 22nd annual run", Seattle Times, March 15, 1981.

²⁵See Note #3.

²⁶Judith H. Banki, "Fall City Passion Play", (internal AJC memorandum), February 24, 1981.

²⁷"The Guidelines and the Passion Play", The Dialogue (National Conference of Christians and Jews), June 1967.

²⁸"Oberammergau in Union City", editorial, Ave Maria, April 15, 1967.

TRANSLATION:

Dear Rabbi Tanenbaum

Please forgive my not answering your letter in English. My translator has died. Thank Heaven for your letter. I thought that Mr. Friedman would have shared with you the material I send to him. Unfortunately that didn't happen. Obviously I did not want to bypass you.

Professor Mussner and I have taken great pains to deal with the request. Rabbi Doctor Peter N. Levinson recognized our "exceptional goodwill." He hopes that in the course of time without renewed or immediate pressure on the responsible parties that there will be further improvements "attachment I."

I am concerned by the answer of Mr. Friedman. I must leave it to him whether he considers it correct, once again to approach the responsible parties at Oberammergau. I would, however, be thankful if their goodwill as well as ours would be recognized.

Mussner and I approach our assignment with pleasure and believe that we have fulfilled it. From our standpoint we see no reason to open up the matter once again. We have neither the competence nor the assignment. We have followed the churchly way. That has led to a result that would not have otherwise been possible.

It is a shame that you are coming in October. That is my vacation time. If I am not on a hiking tour, I will be not far from Regensburg. Perhaps we can at least meet, so that you will not have to look very far for me. I am sharing with you my office telephone number. - They will either be able to reach me or will hear from me daily. With warm and respectful greetings.

Telephone number 0941/5699-106

KARL FLUGEL

Beilage 2

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Executive Vice-President
BENJAMIN R. EPSTEIN



June 28, 1983

Bishop Karl Flügel
Postfach 110163
D-84 Regensburg 11
West Germany

Dear Bishop Flugel:

I trust this letter finds you well, and I wish to inform you that I have read with interest and disappointment the materials you were kind enough to share with me regarding the steps taken by the Ecumenical Committee of the German Bishops' Conference to eliminate the anti-Judaic references in the Oberammergau Passionsspiel.

In brief, let me state that we are deeply appreciative of your personal efforts and those of Professor Mussner and Archbishop Wetter in effecting some additional changes; however, a careful review of the materials and the suggested changes clearly indicates that the overall action is disappointing. Of Professor Mussner's 22 recommendations, 14-1/2 were followed and 7-1/2 were not (ironically, of those followed, 5 had no bearing on the matter of anti-Judaism). Further, of the 28 recommendations made by Professor Swidler, 23-2/3 of the suggestions were not incorporated in any proposed change. Let me emphasize that all of Professor Swidler's recommendations focused on the anti-Judaism of the 1980 Oberammergau text.

These recommendations it appeared to us were bare minimums, and surely you can understand why we could not be satisfied with anything less than what was proposed. Almost three years ago we urged the Oberammergau people to go beyond the negative minimums and to engage whatever resources and talents might be necessary to make the 1984 Passionsspiel not only a first-rate religious, dramatic and musical production, but one that would be totally free of the anti-Semitic and anti-Judaic elements which characterize the Play in its present form.

In addition, if the Play is to be true to our knowledge of the times in which it is set, it should depict the Jewishness of Yeshua and his followers and should exhibit a sensitivity to all his followers and thereby foster love, not hate, between Jews and Christians.

It is also unfortunate that by now the long-standing and customary ecumenical practice of involving both partners in the very beginning and at all steps along the way in our efforts to resolve this problem was not followed. No Jewish experts or representatives were consulted in this entire revision procedure for the 1984 production, even though the late Mayor Zwick specifically requested that a detailed written list of recommended changes be sent to him, which we did, after the Summer, 1980 production was completed so that they might be considered for incorporation in the 1984 production.

June 28, 1983

May I call to your attention a Press Release No. 4, May 7, 1983, by the Oberammergau Press Service as follows: "The Passion Play Village Oberammergau has still not forgotten the charges of anti-Semitism which in 1970 led to a temporary boycott with the result that in August/September often whole sections of the Passion Playhouse remained empty." Later, Press Release No. 5 of the Oberammergau Press Service of May 18, 1983, stated: "It was confirmed by a team of theological experts that the text (of the 1984 Passion Play) is in accord with the insights of the Council (Vatican II) and is free of all possible anti-Judaism...The Oberammergau people can now with assurance begin the auditions for the Jubilee Passion Play 1984 since the text has been unanimously approved by all experts."

Needless to say we are deeply troubled with the outcome of the discussions to date, and it appears to us that it would be useful if not imperative that we have the occasion to meet directly with Oberammergau Spielleiter Hans Maier and Burgomeister Frank Hofman in an effort to implement the minimum changes we had recommended. If such a meeting is feasible and in a setting in which we can reasonably anticipate a positive response, Professor Swidler, a team of Catholic and Jewish experts from the United States, and I would be prepared to meet with Oberammergau officials.

Regrettably, if there is no interest in working out some rapprochement the Jewish community and supportive Catholic and Christian groups would be compelled to voice their criticism publicly. I do hope you can use your good offices or those of Archbishop Wetter to facilitate such a meeting.

With warmest regards.

Sincerely,


Theodore Freedman

TF/mj

cc: Archbishop Frederick Wetter
Professor Franz Mussner
Burgomeister Frank Hofman
Mr. Hans Maier
Msgr. Jorge Mejia
Dr. Eugene Fisher
Professor Leonard Swidler
Dr. Werner Nachmann
Rabbi Dr. Peter N. Levinson

June 28, 1983

Herrn
Bischof Karl Flu gel
Postfach 110163
D-84 Regensburg 11
West Germany

Sehr geehrter Herr Bischof Flu gel,

ich moechte Ihnen mitteilen, dass ich sowohl mit Interesse als auch Enttaeuschung das Material zur Kenntniss genommen habe, welches Sie mir freundlicherweise bezueglich der Schritte zur Verfuegung stellten, die das oekumenische Komitee der deutschen Bischofskonferenz unternahm, um antisemitische Aeusserungen aus dem Oberammergauer Passionsspiel zu entfernen.

Lassen Sie mich zunaechst sagen, dass wir Ihre persoenlichen Anstrengungen sowohl auch die Professor Mussners und Erzbischof Wetters, einige zusaetzliche Aenderungen zu erreichen, sehr schaeetzen; nichtsdestotrotz zeigt eine sorgfaeltige Pruefung der Manuskripte und vorgeschlagenen Veraenderungen, dass das Gesamtergebnis recht enttaeuschend ist.

Von den 22 Vorschlaegen Professor Mussners wurden 14 1/2 angenommen, 7 1/2 jedoch nicht (ironischerweise hatten 5 der akzeptierten Vorschlaege keinerlei antisemitische Bezuege). Zusaetzlich wurden 23 2/3 der 28 vorgeschlagenen Empfehlungen Professor Swidlers in keiner der beabsichtigten Oberammergauer Bearbeitungen beruecksichtigt. Lassen Sie mich betonen, dass alle Vorschlaege Professor Swidlers sich auf die Anti-Judaismen des Oberammergauer Texts 1980 bezogen.

Es scheint uns, dass alle diese Empfehlungen ueber das Mindestmass an Textveraenderung nicht hinausgehen, weshalb Sie sicher verstehen werden, dass wir mit weniger als dem Vorgesprochenen nicht zufrieden sein koennen. Vor fast drei Jahren draengten wir die Oberammergauer, ueber dieses Mindestmass an Veraenderungen hinauszugehen und alle moeglichen Kraefte freizusetzen, die das Passionsspiel nicht nur in eine erstklassige religioese, dramaturgische und musikalische Form zu bringen vermocht haetten, sondern es auch von jeglichen antisemitischen und anti-judaeischen Elementen zu befreien in der Lage gewesen waeren, welche das Stueck in jetziger Fassung charakterisieren.

Soll das Passionsspiel unserem Wissen ueber die Zeit, auf die es sich bezieht, gerecht werden, so sollte es das Juedischsein Yeshuas und seiner Anhaenger mit einer Sensibilitaet veranschaulichen, die Liebe und nicht Hass zwischen Juden und Christen ermutigt.

Ungluecklicherweise wurde die inzwischen eingebuegerte und uebliche oekumenische Praxis, beide Partner von Anfang an in alle Schritte in unseren Anstrengungen, dieses Problem zu loesen, einzubeziehen, nicht verfolgt. Juedische Fachleute oder Repraesentanten wurden nicht in diesem Revisionsverfahren fuer die Auffuehrungen 1984 zu Rate gezogen, obwohl der ehemalige Buergermeister Zwink betont darum ersuchte, ihm eine detaillierte Liste der empfohlenen Veraenderungen zuzuschicken - was wir taten, nachdem die Auffuehrungen im Sommer 1980 stattfanden, damit die Vorschlaege fuer eine Aufnahme in den Spieltext 1984 bedacht werden konnten.

Ich moechte Sie auf die folgende Presse Veroeffentlichung No 4, 7.Mai 1983, Oberammergauer Pressedienst, aufmerksam machen: " Das Passionsspieldorf Oberammergau hat immer noch nicht die Anschuldigungen des Antisemitismus vergessen, die 1970 zu einem voruebergehenden Boykott fuehrten - mit dem Ergebnis, dass im August/September oft ganze Teile des Passionsspielhauses leer blieben." Spaeter stellt man in der Presse Veroeffentlichung No 5, Oberammergauer Pressedienst, 18.Mai 1983 fest: " Es wurde von einer Gruppe theologischer Fachleute bestaetigt, dass der Text(des Passionsfestspieles 1984) mit den Einsichten des Konzils(Vatikan II) uebereinstimmt und jetzt frei aller moeglichen Anti-Judaismen ist... Die Oberammergauer Bevoelkerung kann nun mit Vertrauen die Proben fuer das Jubilaeumspassionsspiel 1984 beginnen, da der Text von allen Fachleuten einmuetig anerkannt worden ist." (Uebersetzung n.d. amerik. Text)

Es ist unnoetig zu sagen, dass wir zutiefst verstoert sind bezueglich des Ergebnisses der bisherigen Gespraechе, und es erscheint uns nuetzlich wenn nicht zwingend, dass uns die Gelegenheit gegeben wird, direkt mit dem Oberammergauer Spielleiter Hans Maier und dem Buergermeister Frank Hofman zusammenzutreffen, um zu versuchen, die Minimalveraenderungen, die wir empfehlen, durchzufuehren. Sollte diese Begegnung ausfuehrbar sowie in einem Rahmen moeglich sein, in dem wir in angemessener Weise eine positive Reaktion erwarten koennen, so waeren Herr Professor Swidler, eine Gruppe katholischer und juedischer Fachleute aus den Vereinigten Staaten und ich willens und vorbereitet, mit den zustaendigen Offiziellen in Oberammergau zusammenzutreffen.

Sollte bedauerlicherweise kein Interesse daran bestehen, neuerliche Annaeherungen in die Wege zu leiten, so sehen sich die juedische Gemeinde sowie unterstuetzende katholische und christliche Gruppen gezwungen, ihre Kritik in der Oeffentlichkeit zu artikulieren.

Ich hoffe sehr, dass Sie Ihre guten Vermittlungsmoeglichkeiten oder diejenigen Herrn Erzbischof Wetters benuetzen koennen, diese notwendige Zusammenkunft zu erleichtern.

Mit herzlichen Gruessen



Theodore Freedman

AMERICAN JEWISH
ARCHIVES

TF/mj

cc: Erzbischof Frederick Wetter
Professor Franz Mussner
Buergermeister Frank Hofman
Herrn Hans Maier
Msgr. Jorge Mejia
Dr. Eugene Fisher
Professor Leonard Swidler
Herrn Werner Nachmann
Rabbiner Peter N. Levinson

u

Prof. Dr. F. Mußner

Regensburg, 13. 7. 1983

The American Jewish Committee

Mr. Rabbi M. H. Tanenbaum

165 East 56 Street

New York

N.Y. 10022

Sehr geehrter Rabbi Tanenbaum!

Vielen Dank für Ihren Brief vom 21. Juni 1983. Das von mir entworfene und von der Ökumenekommission der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz genehmigte Papier, das im Mai die Grundlage für unser Gespräch mit Vertretern von Oberammergau in München bildete, wird Ihnen Herr Weihbischof Flugel zusenden. Die Oberammergauer sind auf fast alle Textverbesserungsvorschläge eingegangen, nur leider nicht auf die Entfernung des Satzes "Sein Blut komme über uns und unsere Kinder!". Ich habe dann nochmals in einem Brief an den Spielleiter darum gebeten, daß der Satz aus dem Textbuch gestrichen werden möge, bekam aber bis heute keine Antwort.

Ich selbst bin entschlossen, mich nicht mehr weiter mit Oberammergau zu beschäftigen. Ich habe das Meine getan. Ich habe in München den Oberammergauern auch vorgeschlagen, sie möchten einen vollkommen neuen Text für das Passionsspiel erstellen lassen, worauf sie aber nicht eingingen. Vielleicht werden sie es aber doch eines Tages tun, wie ich hoffe, aber ganz gewiß nicht mehr für 1984.

Ich bin im Oktober in Bad Birnbach zur Rheumakur. Ich danke Ihnen aufrichtig für Ihre Segenswünsche für mich und erwidere sie ebenso für Sie, verbunden mit sehr freundlichen Grüßen.

Ihr sehr ergebener

Franz Mußner

7/20/83

Dear Rabbi Tanenbaum,

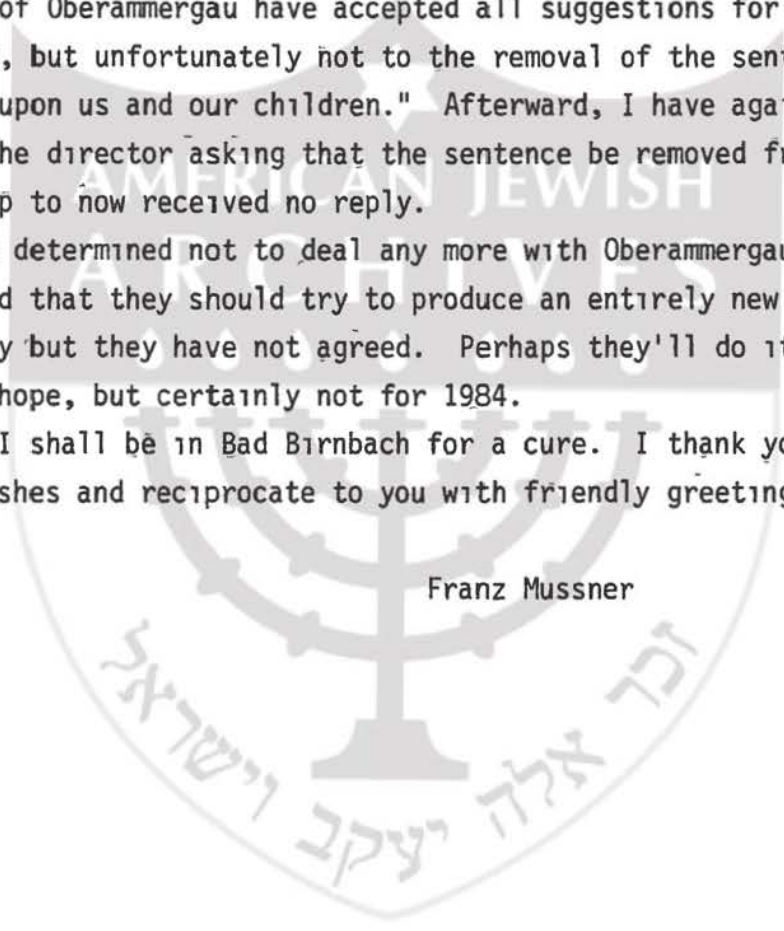
Many thanks for your letter of June 2, 1983. The paper which I drafted and was approved by the Ecumenical Commission of the German Bishops' Conference and which is the basis for our discussion with representatives of Oberammergau in Munich will be sent to you by Bishop Flugel.

The people of Oberammergau have accepted all suggestions for improvement of the text, but unfortunately not to the removal of the sentence "this blood fall upon us and our children." Afterward, I have again sent a letter to the director asking that the sentence be removed from the text-book, but up to now received no reply.

I myself am determined not to deal any more with Oberammergau, I have done what I could that they should try to produce an entirely new text for the Passion Play but they have not agreed. Perhaps they'll do it some other time, as I hope, but certainly not for 1984.

In October I shall be in Bad Birnbach for a cure. I thank you sincerely for your wishes and reciprocate to you with friendly greetings,

Franz Mussner



NEWS

FROM THE

COMMITTEE

aje

THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE Institute of Human Relations, 165 E 56 St., New York, N.Y. 10022, (212) 751-4000

The American Jewish Committee, founded in 1906, is the pioneer human-relations agency in the United States. It protects the civil and religious rights of Jews here and abroad, and advances the cause of improved human relations for all people.

MORTON YARMON, Director of Public Relations

FOR RELEASE AFTER 9 A.M.
TUESDAY, MAY 22, 1984

MUNICH, WEST GERMANY, May 22...A high level interreligious delegation which viewed the opening performance of the Oberammergau Passion Play yesterday asserted that the play "remains marred by a deep and pervasive anti-Jewish orientation." The delegation, sponsored by the American Jewish Committee, included leaders of the organization and two prominent Christian scholars: Roman Catholic author and theologian, Professor Eva Fleischner, and the Rev. Dr. William H. Harter, a Presbyterian Church leader. The delegation, which was led by Rabbi A. James Rudin, the AJC's National Interreligious Affairs Director, and Mimi Alperin, the Chair of the AJC's Interreligious Affairs Commission, called for stronger efforts to "eradicate defamations of Jews and Judaism that persist in the drama, despite revisions of the text."

Rabbi Rudin declared that the 1984 Passion Play script is "fundamentally flawed and still perpetuates the pernicious myth that Jews are eternally guilty for Jesus' crucifixion." A disclaimer at the outset of the drama that all should see their guilt in the events to follow is, Rabbi Rudin said, "undermined by the play itself, which focuses on Jewish machinations, largely ignores Roman oppression, and whitewashes Pontius Pilate."

The American Jewish Committee has had a long history of involvement with the Oberammergau production. It has published three notable studies of the Passion Play's text, has sent delegations to meet with Oberammergau town officials in 1977 and 1980, and has conveyed its concern about the anti-Jewish elements of the drama to German and American church leaders.

-more-

While there have been well-meaning efforts to cleanse the drama of blatant and vicious stereotypes, the delegation noted, the play continues to "reduce the Jews of Jesus' time to a caricature. They are depicted as malicious antagonists of Jesus, dominated by corrupt and cynical leaders and driven by a harsh, vindictive Law. No positive interaction between Jesus and his people is portrayed, and the fact that Jesus was a Jew teaching other Jews is distorted and suppressed. An artificial and un-Biblical opposition is created between Jesus and his people, heightened by details of casting and costume. Responsible scholarship of the New Testament has definitely rejected such caricatures."

Dr. Harter, member of the World Council of Churches Consultation on the Church and the Jewish People; member of the National Council of Churches Committee on Christian-Jewish Relations, and pastor of the Falling Spring Presbyterian Church, Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, stressed that "Christian leaders and educators have a responsibility to instruct our people that the drama as it unfolds in Oberammergau is not a true or just enactment of the Passion story." He noted that the play "is highly selective in the New Testament episodes it chooses to dramatize," that it ignores other Scriptural passages, and that it "departs entirely from Scripture in significant ways."

Prof. Fleischner, author of The View of Judaism in German Christian Theology Since 1945 (pub. 1975), and Professor of Religion at Montclair State College in New Jersey, called attention to the 1974 Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration "Nostra Aetate," issued by the Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, which state:

"Judaism in the time of Christ and the Apostles was a complex reality, embracing many different trends, many spiritual, religious, social and cultural values.

The Old Testament and the Jewish tradition founded upon it must not be set against the New Testament in such a way that the former seems to constitute a religion of only justice, fear and legalism, with no appeal to the love of God and neighbour."

"The Oberammergau Passion Play falls far short of the standards called for by Vatican II and these guidelines," she asserted.

Kurt Kelman, of Great Neck, New York, a member of AJC's Interreligious Affairs Commission who is fluent in German, said: "I found the play even worse than I had feared. The ill will, hostility, triumphalism and sheer manipulation are pervasive. It translates the millennial teaching of contempt into an emotional crescendo, from an intellectual exercise into demagogic incitement."

In addition to Rabbi Rudin, Ms. Alperin, Mr. Kelman, and the Christian scholars, the delegation included: Irving B. Levine, Boston, Massachusetts, member AJC's Interreligious Affairs Commission, and Rabbi Alan Mittleman, Program Specialist, AJC's Interreligious Affairs Department.

The group noted that passion plays in past centuries legitimated medieval Jewish disabilities and violent outbreaks against Jewish communities. In Hitler's Germany, this medieval legacy took on especially tragic dimensions. While Christians have sought to uproot teachings of contempt against Jews since World War II, they said passion plays represent a particular problem because of the powerful emotional impact of the passion drama.

The American Jewish Committee is this country's pioneer human relations organization. Founded in 1906, it combats bigotry, protects the civil and religious right of people here and abroad, and advances the cause of improved human relations for all people everywhere.

A, EJP, REL, CP, PP, COL, FOR, GER, Z
RTV-N, EP, ED, ED-L, ITF-W, R, F, IS, IS-C, JN, JL

THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

Memorandum

date April 13, 1984
to Marc Tanenbaum
from James Rudin
subject

Here is the final double spaced draft of Sam Weintraub's report, "Passion Plays in the United States." The report will be issued at the Annual Meeting on Thursday morning, May 3rd.

Please note that the text has not been proofread. If you have any suggestions or comments, please share them with me by Thursday morning, April 19th, since the final manuscript must go to the word processor at that time.

Many thanks for your cooperation.

AJR:FM

Enclosure



INTRODUCTION

For decades the American Jewish Committee has been deeply concerned about the anti Jewish aspects of the Oberammergau Passion Play. Usually performed once every ten years in Bavaria (there are special performances in 1984 to mark the 350th anniversary of the Play), the AJC along with Christian scholars has published extensive analytical studies of the Oberammergau production. These studies clearly document the anti Jewish character of both the script and the staging of the Play.

Usually overlooked, however, are the annual performances of Passion Plays within the United States. Often based on the Oberammergau model, these American Plays attract large audiences of men and women who believe that what they see on the stage is historically accurate and theologically sound. But instead, as Samuel Weintraub indicates in this study, the six American Passion Plays "convey to hundreds of thousands of Americans pernicious anti Jewish stereotypes..."

The persistent presence of these stereotypes in the American Passion Plays must be addressed by both the Christian and Jewish communities. Contemporary scholarship has given us new and important insights about the Jewish community of first century Palestine. In addition, deep mutual respect and genuine interreligious understanding has developed between Christians and Jews within recent years. Unfortunately, the American Passion Plays are like wild weeds growing in a garden of religious

pluralism.

In presenting this study, the AJC urges that serious attention be given to the critical problem: the negative images and anti Jewish attitudes that are often transmitted to an audience by the American Passion Plays. Although there are differences among the six Plays analyzed in this study, nonetheless, they all perpetuate a negative attitude towards Jews and Judaism.

This study was conceived by Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum while he was the AJC's National Interreligious Director. Mr. Weintraub, the study's author, is the Harry Sudakoff Interreligious Intern, a program that was established in Mr. Sudakoff's honor by George and Arlene Hecht of Sarasota, Florida.

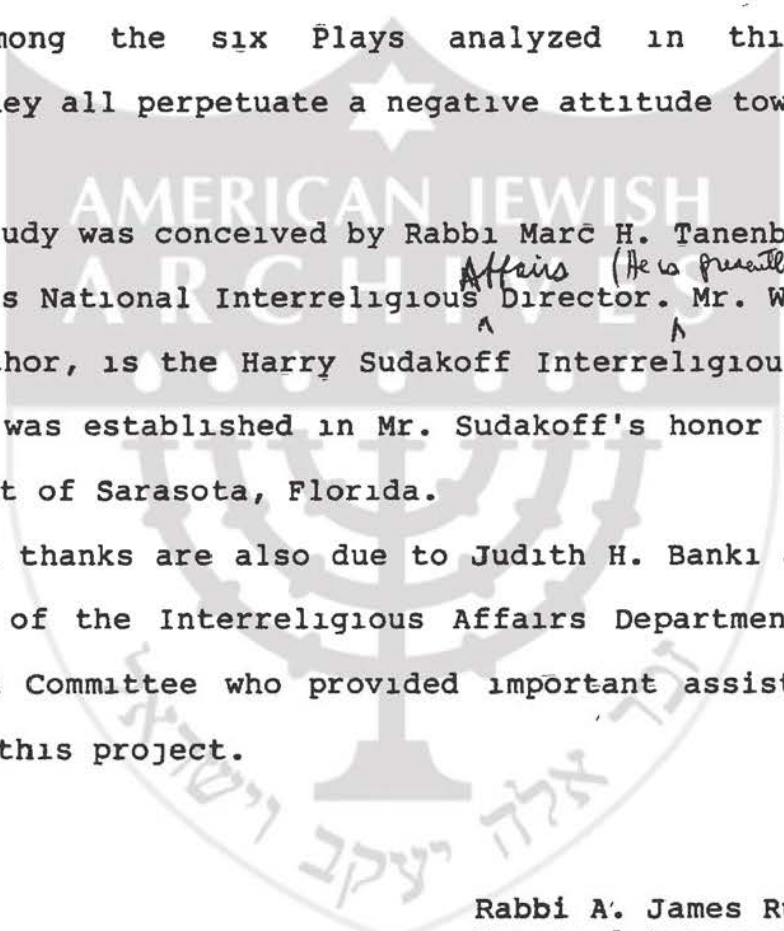
Special thanks are also due to Judith H. Banki and Rabbi Alan Mittleman of the Interreligious Affairs Department of the American Jewish Committee who provided important assistance and cooperation in this project.

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(of interreligious relations)





INTRODUCTION

The Passion Play is a genre of medieval religious drama which concentrates on the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus. As Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum of the American Jewish Committee remarks in a study of Passion Play history,¹ the earliest extant texts of these dramas are from 13th Century Europe, when they appeared as elaborations of pre-existing liturgical plays. These dramas flowered in the 15th and 16th Centuries, particularly in France and Germany, and began to evolve lengthy scenes, lavish staging, and intricate internal structures. Certain plays expanded to thousands of lines and required several days to perform. These more elaborate drama have inspired a variety of later, modern Passion Plays whose public performance and international influence continue to this day.

As a study of the American Jewish Committee concluded:

A prominent feature of most Passion Plays, past and present, has been a strong anti-Jewish component, focused not only on Jesus' individual Jewish antagonists but--by implication or explicit statement--on the Jewish people as a whole. A prominent Christian scholar, Bernard E. Olson, recently commented on pageants of this sort, "The crucifixion drama is. . . regarded, not without reason, as having played a prominent part in Jewish disabilities through the centuries as well as providing a major cause of negative attitudes towards Jews today."²

The anti-Judaism of these dramas, although derived from the New Testament, is actually heightened in the transition from Bible text to Passion Play. Typically, the most anti-Jewish sections of a Passion Play are those relating to the trial and death of Jesus. It is important to recognize how complicated the Gospel narratives are concerning Jesus' last days. The four accounts differ widely from one another. For example, Mark, Matthew, and Luke place Jesus' arrest on the night of the Passover. In John it occurs before Passover. In John Jesus is brought first to Annas, then to Ca^aiphas, then to Pilate. In Matthew he is brought only to Caiaphas, and then to Pilate. In Luke no details of a Jewish trial are given at all, and Jesus is brought before

Pilate and Herod Antipas. In John the involvement of the Pharisees is briefly mentioned, in the others only the priests and scribes are implicated.

Such contradictions alert us to the fact that the Gospels were written generations after the event and have the oral traditions of the earliest Christian communities as their sources. Furthermore, the evangelists were not interested in writing factual, historical accounts of Jesus' last days. They were not historians in the modern sense, but men of faith who were preaching in their communities. They were interested in the meaning of Jesus' life. The Gospels are not historiography but faith literature. It is a mistake therefore to treat the passion narratives as simple reportage of what actually occurred, yet that is precisely what Passion Plays do. The plays harmonize the contradictions, difficulties, and nuances of the New Testament narratives into an artificial, seamless whole. Passion Plays never simply retell the story, they reinvent it.

It is important to recognize then that the authors of these plays pick and choose the scriptural materials which best suit their own theological and literary needs. They sent them into a new creative context, often with considerable poetic licence. The authors must take moral and theological responsibility for their new creations and not embrace the fallacy that they are simply retelling "Bible truth."

There are at least six anti-Jewish themes that are developed and enhanced by the Passion Plays.

(1) The Jewish antagonists of Jesus--and by implication all Jews--are depicted as degenerate, loathsome, almost subhuman creatures. The Jewish priests in particular are hateful and bloodthirsty, zealous in defense of their own privilege, and obscene in their pleasure over Jesus' suffering. These priests lead a corrupt religion, whose vindictive legalism is juxtaposed to Christian love, mercy and universalism.

(2) The crowd before the Roman Governor's palace becomes a Jewish "mob," echoing their priests' sadism. They--and again by implication all Palestinian Jews--clamor for the death of Jesus. Gleeefully, they welcome responsibility for his execution, upon themselves and their descendants. Thus, Jews are judged to be collectively guilty of deicide, and permanently rejected by God.

(3) These plays either obscure or deny the Jewish background of Jesus and the apostles. Their commitment to Jewish religion and ethics is concealed; indeed, many plays represent them as total renegades from Jewish traditions.

(4) The most damaging perversion of history involves the characterization of Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor who ordered Jesus' execution. Pilate, whom responsible historiography has described as a ruthless tyrant, is pictured as a fair, lawful ruler who was unfortunately swayed by Jewish pressure to order the crucifixion. Thus, the role of crucifier, and responsibility of the execution, is handily shifted from the Romans to the Jews.

(5) The use of Christian Scriptures is one-sided and highlights texts with real or potential anti-Jewish import, to wit: "His blood be upon us and upon our children" (Matt. 27:25). Generally, the plays neglect New Testament passages which suggest more positive images of Jews and Judaism.

(6) There is a dangerous tendency to sever the story of Jesus from its historical context in first century Palestine. Thus, the plays dissociate the life of Jesus and the primitive Church from their setting in Jewish religion and social life. Similarly, they fail to present the realities of Roman oppression, which are necessary to understand both Jesus' ministry and the actions of his Jewish antagonists.

The following ^{study} paper surveys the 20th Century development of Passion Plays in the United States. Virtually all of these plays follow European models, and several represent Americanized versions of

Controversial
the famous 17th Century Passion Play of Oberammergau, in Upper Bavaria, West Germany. The thoroughgoing anti-Jewish bias of the Oberammergau Passionspiele has been criticized by the American Jewish Committee in a series of expert studies³ and by leading Catholic and Protestant scholars.⁴

In their actual staging, these plays vary widely. Some, such as the Fall City and Holy Family Play, are local and Church-based, utilizing amateur actors and modest technical facilities. Others are lavish professional productions with world-famous principals, spectacular dramatic effects, national tours and sophisticated commercial management. This category includes the Black Hills, Val Balfour, Word of Life Fellowship and "Great" Passion plays. We will consider the more elaborate productions first.

BLACK HILLS PASSION PLAY

Spearfish, South Dakota and Lake Wales, Florida

The Black Hills Passion Play is the oldest major American production. Based on the Passion Play in Lunuen, Germany, it was first performed on the American stage in 1932. In 1939, its company settled in the Black Hills of South Dakota, where, at the town of Spearfish, an

elaborate amphitheatre was constructed for summer performances. In 1952, the company began playing a winter season in central Florida, where a second amphitheatre was built at Lake Wales.

"Black Hills" now appears annually in both its summer and winter homes. In 1982, for example, the production ran in Lake Wales from February 15 to April 19 and in South Dakota from June 6 to August 29. Both seasons involve three weekly performances, starring Joseph Meier as Jesus. Meier, who also acts as producer, was born in Lunuen, where his ancestors for generations performed in Passion Plays. Meier himself has portrayed Jesus for some 8000 American and European audiences. At Spearfish and Lake Wales he is supported by a cast of 250 players on a two and one-half block long stage. In both locations the play is sponsored by civic and church organizations, and draws about 150,000 viewers per season.

The Black Hills brochure boasts of the company's years of study and research of all phases pertaining to the historical events [including] . . . Jewish laws and the laws of occupation imposed upon the Jewish people by the Roman conquerors. . . . The Passion Play is now well established and accepted as an American institution. It offers to the American people a place where racial and denominational differences are without meaning; a place where beauty and power are revealed... (my emphasis)

Similarly, in a recent phone conversation, Josef Meier stressed that the Black Hills Plays was a "strictly American interpretation, not based on the Oberammergau...It does not deal with the subject matter in the same manner as European Plays." Specifically, "anti-Semitism is absent in this production which is merely a recording of historic facts."⁴

Jewish observers have reached different conclusions. In 1981 the Miami Anti-Defamation League (ADL) office reported it had received complaints about the play since the early 1960's. Allegedly, the Black Hills production repeats the classic Passion Play inventions, to wit: All Palestinian Jews willed Jesus' death; Pilate is an innocent bystander, who is fair and just but weak-willed; and Jesus has no connection to Jewish beliefs and practices. Teitelbaum also claimed that the ADL tried repeatedly to talk to Meier, but "made very little headway."⁵

In 1982, Ms. Edith Ballanoff, President of University Women of Los Angeles' University of Judaism, saw the play at Spearfish. Her impressions were related in a letter to Judith Banki at National AJC:

[Pontius Pilate was depicted] as a just and kind man, while the priests were mean and unfeeling. When Pontius suggested that Jesus be flogged and they demanded he be

crucified . . . one does get the feeling that the Jews on stage represented all Jews then. . . . It was painful to see our priests depicted so bloodthirsty and cruel

Jesus was depicted as a tall, handsome, kindly, gentle, good person with a beautiful voice. His hair was medium brown color, his beard neat and short. He wore a white long robe, tied with a white belt, and wore a red cape at times. His mother also wore a long white robe, with a blue cape. The priests were short and stocky, wore darker colors, had full dark beards and, to our chagrin, wore silly looking "Mickey Mouse" hats. Their voices were hard and cruel.

In response to an AJC request for a script in January 1984, Meier claimed that because of frequent revisions no script of the Play was available. He did agree to send AJC descriptive brochures and literature, which have not yet been received.

Finally, the 1981 Lake Wales brochure lists Passion Play Amphitheatre, Box 71, Lake Wales, Florida 33853 (813/676-1495) or the Greater Lake Wales Chamber of Commerce, as its Office of Information. The 1982 Spearfish brochure lists Black Hills Passion Play Office, Spearfish, South Dakota 57783 (605/642-2646).

VAL BALFOUR PASSION PLAY

Heritage Productions, Richmond, Virginia

The Val Balfour Passion Play was developed thirty years ago by the late Val Balfour as a two and one-half hour Americanized version of its European model, the ten-hour Oberammergau Play. In 1953 Balfour began mounting productions in Eastern communities, frequently under the local sponsorship of the Junior Chamber of Commerce. Eventually, Balfour's company adopted a schedule whereby they performed through the summer at Strasburg, Virginia and toured from October to Easter over the United States and Canada. Balfour himself portrayed Jesus until his death in 1974. In 1978--evidently after several temporary performances--the role was assumed by former TV actor Mark Bexley. Bexley currently tours with a permanent Heritage cast of 100, which is supplemented by local extras.⁶

The Balfour Play is reputed to be the American drama least offensive to Jews. Indeed, officially, Heritage appears to appreciate Jewish sensitivities. In a "History of the Passion Play," Val Balfour wrote:

It must be remembered that Jesus was a Jew 2000 years ago. The masses admired Him because of His doctrine of love and hope, and because he healed their sick. . . . The powerful feared He would overthrow their authority, so they took Him to Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor, who alone could sentence a man to death. Had the final sentence been passed by the Hebrew Sanhedrin (which was at the time politically corrupt), the punishment would most likely have been death by stoning, since Crucifixion was a Roman punishment. . . .

Similarly, another Heritage statement declares:

In the play--at the suggestion of various Rabbis and members of Jewish communities

--Jesus is constantly addressed as Rabbi. . . .

--The Jewishness of Jesus and the apostles is brought out. . . .

--Any offensive lines are not used such as "His blood be upon us and our children". . . .

--The mob is divided between those who wish to crucify Jesus and those who are "for him". . . .

--Jewish priests are shown as not villains but concerned to save their country from Rome. . . .

Heritage has also partially revised its script, and agreed on occasion to distribute ecumenical Passion Play "guidelines" at its performances. A 1982 ADL memorandum reports that Balfour's widow Ann, who plays Mary Magdalene, "has been conscientious in trying to rid the script and performances of the potential for misunderstanding in interpreting the role of Jews."⁷

Still and all, these claims of openness and sensitivity are belied by three matters: (1) contradictory statements within Heritage literature, (2) negative reactions of Jewish and Christians viewers, and (3) the resistance of Heritage staff to external evaluation of the play's script.

We have quoted Balfour's "History of the Passion Play" to indicate his apparent exoneration of Jews from the crucifixion. However, the Heritage literature packet in which the "History" appears also contains directly contradictory information. The "Synopsis of the Play," for example, reads:

[The High Priests] are determined to arrest Jesus and put Him to death. . . . Jesus is brought before them, questioned, and, upon His admittance that He is the Messiah, is accused of Blasphemy and condemned to be crucified.

The "Synopsis" continues with the false and pernicious assumption that Pilate was merely the instrument of a mad Jewish mob:

Pilate again tries to release Him, when the mob storms the palace demanding that Pilate "Crucify Him." Pilate gives the mob a choice between Jesus and Barabbas. The mob calls "Give us Barabbas." His firmness shaken, Pilate frees Barabbas and condemns Jesus.

Indeed, according to several Jewish and Christian viewers, the Heritage play fits squarely into the anti-Jewish Oberammergau tradition, imputing responsibility to all Jews, and rationalizing the "complicity" of Pilate. For example, on January 16, 1980, Macon Telegraph reporter Jane Oppy, a non-Jew, wrote a review entitled "Jesus' Story Deserves Better than Passion Play." The review followed a controversial Macon Jewish community protest, which compelled a local bank to withdraw its sponsorship of a local Heritage tour (January 15-18, 1980).⁸ Ms. Oppy was apparently one of the few Macon journalists to support the Jewish protest, which other editorialists deemed an ill-founded attack on religious and artistic freedom. Her trenchant review--which deserves to be quoted at length--analyzes the content and staging of the play, and disproves the supposed pro-Jewish "sensitivity" of Heritage.

. . . the concerns of the Jewish community about the role of Jews in the death of Jesus appear to have been well founded.

Though the Balfour version, according to company management, was highly modified to assure that the Jews got a fair shake, the full responsibility for the decision to crucify Jesus in this play is laid on the shoulders of plotting, power hungry scribes and Pharisees.

If we are to believe this interpretation of what happened it is the Priests, not the Romans, who run Jerusalem. Only when the High Priests convince Pilate, a pale, sickly, petulant excuse for a ruler, that his failure to act "may ruin my prestige with Caesar" does he give the order to crucify.

True, Balfour did insert into the play one sympathetic Pharisee, Joseph of Arimathea, who argues for Jesus' life on more than one occasion. And there are a few extras in the crowd who yell "free Jesus."

But the defense by Joseph. . . is weakly presented. In fact, the more subtle element of staging is the clue to the real anti-Semitism of this play.

The High Priests, in their resplendent garb and their more stagy voices, are the only ones in the play besides Jesus, the Merchant Dathan, and Judas who look and talk like professional actors.

Most significantly in the scene in which the High Priests and Pilate argue over what should be done with Jesus, it is the Priests, not Pilate or Jesus, who are the central figures. . . .⁹

More recently (January 1983), the Balfour version appeared at Atlanta's Fox Theatre, where it was reviewed, separately, by April Levine of AJC's Southeast Office and Joel Breshin of Southeast ADL. Their conclusions parallel Jane Oppy's and offer specific criticism as well.

Ms. Levine found that there were certain improvements of the more objectionable aspects of past plays. For example, the Heritage version affirms the Jewishness of Jesus and avoids grotesque costuming of Jewish characters. Nonetheless, "the indictment of the Jews for Jesus' death remains pervasive." The Sanhedrin members "were overwhelmingly corrupt and greedy and would be satisfied with nothing less than a death sentence," for which they will "pay well from the Temple treasury." "Most disturbing. . . was the portrayal of the Romans": Pilate is a "spineless wimp with noble intentions but utterly manipulated by the shrewdness of the Jews." So sensitive and fair-minded are the Romans that one soldier at the Crucifixion confesses, "Truly, he is the son of God."¹⁰

Mr. Breshin's analysis is similar to that of Ms. Levine. ". . . While there seemed to be an attempt by the producers to curb obvious anti-Semitic statements," he wrote, "the anti-Jewish themes and stereotypes of deicide, conspiracy and greed as well as historical inaccuracies were projected" Any positive revisions are "weak at best, and lost among the anti-Jewish messages" which include, primarily, the responsibility of the priests for the Crucifixion, the connection of the priests with power and greed, and the repeated implication that Jesus was "sacrificed" for the security of the Jewish nation.¹¹

Finally, Heritage's putative regard for Jewish feelings is belied by their reluctance to share their script with religious leaders. This unwillingness is justified by various--and occasionally conflicting--rationales. In 1979, for example, Elizabeth Hurd of Heritage wrote Rev. William H. Harter, a Presbyterian minister in Chambersburg, Pa., that Heritage had "only the working scripts used by casts and technicians and [has] never had a script prepared for reading." A few months later, during the Macon controversy, Mrs. Elizabeth Hamner, Executive Director of Heritage, acknowledged the existence of a script but told a local reporter that it was "Company policy that we do not give [it] out." The same reporter was told by Anne Balfour that she would be "happy to give out a copy, but didn't have one."¹² At another point in the Macon episode, Mrs. Hamner cited copyright laws in again declining to share a script. Finally, exasperated with Macon

Rabbi Robert Kravitz, who asked three times for the script, she told the Macon Telegraph, "If he wants a script, all he has to do is read the Bible!"¹³

The same pattern was followed in Buffalo, where Heritage performed from October 27-31, 1982, under the sponsorship of the Buffalo Council of Churches. Rev. Robert E. Grimm, BCC Executive Director, requested a script from Mrs. Hamner. He was rebuffed repeatedly, and finally received a copy only ten days before the performance. While pleased with the script's "evident effort...to bring balance," Rev. Grimm offered detailed criticisms of the implications of collective Jewish guilt and of the veritable exoneration of Pilate.

Most recently, Ann Balfour of Heritage explained in a march 1984 correspondence with AJC that she has no script available for analysis. She claimed, however, that ADL had been consulted, implying that the script is without offense. (In fact, in 1983 Joel Breshin wrote that ADL has waited for years for a script, and that Ann Balfour exaggerated Heritage's cooperation with the ADL.)¹⁴ Mrs. Balfour further maintained that Heritage had worked closely with the Jewish community for 30 years "to remove anything that might not be sensitive to Jewish feelings...We are sincere in our efforts in this direction and many Jewish people have expressed their appreciation to us."¹⁵

Despite some improvements, however, there is no evidence for any fundamental changes in Balfour's original condensation of the Oberammergau. Lacking such evidence, and given the aversion of Heritage to external evaluation, one must concur with a group of Atlanta Jewish and Christian leaders who declared before the Fox Theatre performance.

This version of the Passion Play, based on the Oberammergau original, remains rooted in that tradition of hostility towards Jews and Judaism which prevailed for many centuries and shaped the anti-Jewish attitudes of generations of Christians. According to this tradition, Jews were held collectively guilty for the death of Jesus and the entire people is held responsible for His death. . .

It would have been an act of justice and reconciliation if the producers of the Val Balfour Passion Play had taken the teachings of the major Church authorities today more fully to heart. Christians as well as Jews are poorer for the failure to use this opportunity for healing rather than prolonged hatred.

Val Balfour Passion Plan Headquarters are Heritage Productions, 5911 Westover Drive, Richmond, Virginia 23225 (804/320-8095). The "Summer Home" of the Play is Garden Theatre, Strasburg, Virginia 22657 (703/465-3688). While at Strasburg, the company is sponsored by the Shenandoah Valley Outdoor Drama Association "as a community service."

THE GREAT PASSION PLAY

Eureka Springs, Arkansas

The Great Passion Play, founded in 1968 by the late Gerald L. K. Smith, is the one major American Passion Play which is deliberately and maliciously anti-Semitic.¹⁶ The production is managed by the Elna Smith Foundation--established by Smith in his late wife's memory--and is staged five times per week from May through October. Performances are held in an enormous amphitheatre on an (Ozark) mountain near Eureka Springs. The mountain, renamed "Mt. Oberammergau," is also home to other Foundation "Sacred Projects," which include a seven-story high "Christ of the Ozarks" statue, a "Christ Only Art Gallery," a "Christian Wood Carvers Gallery," and a Bible Museum "that contains a few pages from a Gutenberg."¹⁷ Also, currently under construction is a twenty million dollar "New Holy Land," with life-size replicas of Jesus' shrines, and an artificial Sea of Galilee and River Jordan.

Gerald L. K. Smith, the founder of the Great Passion Play, was a pillar of the extreme religious right for decades. His virulent anti-Semitism and racism inspired H. L. Mencken to call him "the goriest, the deadliest and damndest orator ever heard on this or any other earth..." In the 1930's he organized against FDR ("We're going to drive that cripple out of the White House"), flirted with the

pro-Facist Silver Shirts, and finally settled in Detroit, where, through Henry Ford's patronage, he preached anti-union demagoguery in radio broadcasts. His activism in the American First Party unfortunately earned him some "respectability"; when asked in 1955 by a Congressional committee for his views on immigration, he cited Albert Einstein as the sort of foreigner federal laws should bar.

Charles Robertson, who succeeded Smith after the latter's death in 1976, is the current coordinator of the Smith Foundation. Robertson has preserved the tradition of his mentor, as for example when he told one interviewer that the television series "Holocaust" had been in bad taste. "One of the biggest lies of our time," he claimed, "is that six million Jews were slaughtered." Later, in the same conversation, he remarked: "Let's face it. The Negroes are fresh from the jungle, and they have brought with them many of the same characteristics."¹⁸

The Great Passion Play reflects faithfully the bigotry of its founders. One need look no further than its 1981 souvenir program for a hint--unfortunately, only a hint--of its crude anti-Semitism. The program contains many offensive photographs, presumably of the actual production. The Chief Priests, Sanhedrin members and "Pharisees" are portrayed as swarthy, loutish men with heavy, dark beards and comical hats. They are both terrified and scornful of Jesus' popular appeal and Gospel of love. With a vengeful persistence they compel Pilate--a handsome, pleasant but weak-willed ruler--to give them Jesus. Then, at

long last, and with great gusto, they execute his Crucifixion. In comparison, throughout the brochure, Jesus and the Apostles are depicted as fair, well-groomed and devout young men.

The text of the program--which provides a synopsis of the Play --relies on a one-sided, anti-Jewish selection of New Testament passages:

....the Chief Priests and lawyers were bent on making an end of Him....They wanted to arrest Him, but they were afraid of the people, who looked on Jesus as a prophet....(After Pilate remits the case of Jesus to Herod) the Chief Priests and lawyers appeared and pressed the case against Him vigorously...(After Herod returns Jesus to Pilate) The Chief Priests and their henchmen shouted, 'Crucify Crucify'...Then at last, to satisfy them, he handed Jesus over to be crucified... The (Jewish) crowd answer back 'His blood be upon us and on our childrens'...and they crucified Him there...and their rulers jeered at Him, 'He saved others; now let Him save Himself....

The reactions of independent viewers have also stressed the Great Passion Play's malevolence. In August, 1968, for example, three weeks after the production opened, Milton Ellerin and Billy Stern of the American Jewish Committee saw a performance. Their evaluation addressed the play's implication about Jews:

. . . the Jews are wholly responsible for deicide. . . then and now. This comes across primarily in three ways:

(a) The narration and the action stress the perfidy, evil, hypocrisy and cunning of the Sanhedrin. There is one wholly gratuitous scene in which the venerably old gray-beards, not content with reviling and taunting Jesus, fall upon him physically and beat him bloody, all gleefully getting into the act.

(b) Herod and Pilate come off as innocents and dupes, unwilling accomplices in satisfying the blood lust of the Jews. Again and again Pilate, a good clean American boy, points out to the Jews that Jesus is innocent of any crime, and again and again he is persuaded, threatened and cajoled by the wily High Priest while in the background the blood-thirsty Jews chant "Crucify him--crucify him!"

(c) The theme of the culpability and damnation of "the whole Jewish people" permeated the play but it is made loudly and stereophonically clear in Pilate's execution order. . . . the anti-Christ's are always "the Jews."¹⁹

The play has received no more favorable a reaction from sensitive non-Jewish viewers. In 1973, Sister Margaret Ellen Traxler, Executive Director of the National Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice, judged the Play

strikingly unfaithful to the Gospel narrative...The sacred writers did not intend indictment of history upon their people because they could not anticipate the distortion and scapegoating in which Christians, especially Gentile Christians, would so prejudiciously indulge.²⁰

Sister Traxler was particularly appalled by the Great Passion Play's shabby mixture of anti-Semitism and sexism:

Another discrimination is shown against women. Not only are the two Marys shown without grace or gentleness, but the Sanhedrin scenes depict women lounging on the couches in seductive poses. Again, this is inexcusable and bears no historical validity. ²¹

Patrick Owens, reporting for Newsday in 1980, concluded:

What it says over and over again in its crude comic book fashion is that the Jews killed Jesus. "My kingdom does not belong in this world," Christ says in the passion play. "If I were king, my supporters would be fighting to save me from the Jews." 22

Despite these and other complaints of Jews and Christians, the Great Passion Play's anti-Semitism has endured. A. I. Botnick, Director of New Orleans ADL, said in 1978 that one sexually offensive anti-Semitic scene had been "cleaned up years ago but nothing else...had ever been." Meanwhile, over three million people from 48 countries have seen the play, with Sunday school children coming "by the busload from a dozen states." The Eureka Springs Chamber of Commerce currently publishes a large colorful brochure promoting Foundation projects with other Ozark tourist attractions, including resort motels, amusement parks, folk jamborees, arts and crafts fairs, etc.

Finally, in a recent phone conversation, Mr. Marvin Peterson, Assistant Foundation Coordinator, was asked about the Great Passion Play's attitude towards Jews and Judaism. Peterson offered:

It's not based on the Oberammergau...The concept we used is to take the Biblical presentation of the last week of Christ on earth through the Ascension... That way we leave

out saying (the interpretation) is Catholic or Protestant or Christian... That way if you want to question it you've got to question the authority of Scripture.

When asked for a script, Peterson explained that the Passion Play script is reserved exclusively for the cast, following the request of the Play's original Director, Robert A. Hyde.

The 1981 brochure identifies the Elna M. Smith Foundation as an IRS-approved, nonprofit organization. After an introductory tribute to Gerald L. K. and Elna M. Smith, the brochure lists Foundation principals as Charles F. Robertson, Coordinator, Elna M. Smith Kobe, Curator/Consultant, Gunda Robertson, Publicity, Donald M. Robe, Reservations Representative, and Kenneth Faulkner, (Passion Play) Director. A footnote informs the reader: "Due to the Sacred nature of this production all cast members are reminded of the humbleness in relation to the Divine personages they portray and wish to remain anonymous." The Elna M. Smith Foundation address is P.O. Box 471, Eureka Springs, Arkansas 72632 (501-253-8559)

WORD OF LIFE FELLOWSHIP PASSION PLAY

Schroon Lake, New York

Word of Life Fellowship, Inc. (WOL) is an independent, international evangelical organization headquartered in Schroon Lake, New York. The Fellowship is intensely missionary, and maintains a network of Bible Schools, children's camps, radio broadcasts and dramatic religious productions in the U.S. and 23 other countries, including Germany, England, Spain, Portugal, Japan, the Philippine Islands, Australia and several Latin American nations.

Within the United States, WOL arranges, annually, the tours of three Scriptural dramas. These are written and directed by Fellowship Co-Director Harry Bollback, and typically include an eight-day Passion Play tour before Easter, and two fifty-day tours dramatizing various Scriptural books. In 1983-4, for example, the Fellowship sponsored a seven week fall tour presenting the Book of Daniel--which traveled from New York to California--and an equally long winter tour (from New York to Florida) of a musical dramatization of Revelations. The Passion Play will be performed about twelve times from Palm Sunday through Easter Sunday, with productions in New York (possibly in the Meadowlands), Philadelphia (Convention Center), Washington, D.C. (Civic Center) and on to Lynchburg, Va.

In a recent phone conversation, Tour Coordinator Bert Britt said that all Fellowship Plays are "based on Scripture... and (taken) right from the Bible." Despite this literalism, Bollback's dramatic style is innovative. The Revelations and Daniel Plays, for example, involved a commentary by a "Bible Teacher," multi-media techniques, and child actors. The Passion Play, which has run since 1979, is particularly nonconventional or, according to Bollback, "contemporary." It is produced as a musical, and features a running narration by a Twentieth Century "news commentator." Bollback claims: "I make it like 'Hey, it's happening now!' to make them feel this 2000 year old story is vital now. Our (Passion Play) version is different and says 'I have an important message to tell you and it's happening now!'"

In Winter 1980-81, the WOL Passion Play came to the attention of national AJC through Mr. Paul E. Thomas, a Christian attorney who summers at Schroon Lake. Mr. Thomas had seen the play and wrote the AJC to express his concern. He also shared his correspondence with Fellowship director Rev. Jack Wyrzten.

In his first letter to Rev. Wyrzten (July 30, 1980), Thomas described his reaction to the Word of Life production

. . . the net effect of the evening was one of shock and deep disappointment, for we witnessed . . . a thoughtless,

insensitive perpetuation of an ancient and horribly destructive myth of the killing of Jesus Christ, a Jew, by the Jews. As one raised a Christian, who still cherishes the teaching of the loving Jesus, I must condemn those distortions of Christ's teachings and life that make a mockery of his religious philosophy. The anti-Semitism that the Word of Life's version of the Passion Play encourages is not only anti-Christian but is contrary to the stated beliefs of Christian and non-Christian world religious leaders who reexamined this myth as part of the ecumenical movement of the 60's and declared it false and harmful.

Rev. Wyrzten returned a smug and defensive reply (August 17, 1980):

As you know, we born-again, Bible-loving Christians are always the best friend that the Jews ever had. We have always defended Israel. I have had the privilege of pointing a lot of Jews to the Messiah. Jews are going to the same hell Gentiles go to if they're not born again, and throughout the Passion Play we try to bring out the fact that it our sins which nailed Christ to the cross. . . . It was the Jewish sanhedrin who cried out for His blood. . . . It was the Gentiles who actually nailed Him to the cross.

Yours on the Victory Side.

Jack Wyrzten

Typically, Word of Life Plays are sponsored by local Churches who share the group's fundamentalism. A public auditorium is usually sought, to appeal to those who, according to Britt, "have never accepted Christ as Savior." Word of Life then assumes full financial responsibility for the production. "The local Churches then don't get stuck with the expenses," explains Bollback, "but they get the people out." At the performance, a "free-will offering" is solicited to cover production expenses.

The three annual Fellowship Plays involve 110 volunteer cast members, or "Collegians," who are chosen by competition from the Fellowship Bible Institute, a one-year School at Schroon Lake. On tour they sleep in homes, youth centers and churches, and act as their own stage crew. Each year features a new cast, revised Passion Play and new Scriptural Plays for the longer tours. Since their opening season in 1975, these plays have attracted over half a million people, representing primarily Protestants but also a large Catholic minority. The Passion Play was seen by 36,000 people in 1982, 27,000 in 1983, and WOL organizers hope that 1984 attendance will reach 60,000. The Fellowship is also currently negotiating a prime-time, international TV showing of the Passion Play in April.

WOL literature lists the International Office address as Word of Life Fellowship Inc., Schroon Lake, New York 12870, and a Canadian Office as World of Life Fellowship (Ontario), Inc., Box 511, Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5P6. The telephone number for "International headquarters Bible Institute and Camps" is (Schroon Lake) 518-532-7111. Along with Bollback, George Theis also serves as Co-Director.

FALL CITY PASSION PLAY

Fall City, Washington

The Fall City Passion Play, according to founder, writer, and original director Rev. George Pratt, is the only regular Passion Play on the West Coast. The Play has been produced annually since 1959, when its initial production involved Rev. Pratt and a small group of Fall City United Methodist Church members. Today the Play includes a fifty-member cast, and the eight annual performances around Easter attract about 1500 people. Thus far over 53,000 people have seen this Passion Plan.²³

By the standards of the national companies, the Fall City production is modest. Performances are held at the Fall City Grade School Gymnasium, and feature an entirely volunteer and amateur cast. Leading members for example include a bank secretary, utility crewman, care mechanic, accountant and plumber.

An anti-Jewish bias in the Fall City Play is apparent, firstly, in a souvenir brochure, "The Fall City Passion Play," published in 1982. There, several photographs of the production portray Pharisaic leaders as villainous and vengeful. In one, for example, two Pharisees dressed with prayer shawls and covered heads huddle over an open (Torah) Scroll. The accompanying caption reads: "As news of Jesus spreads, the Pharisees worry that he will challenge their authority. They vow to silence him before he leads the people astray."

Anti-Jewish stereotypes were also noted by Judith Banki of national AJC in a 1981 evaluation of the Fall City script. Ms. Banki, author of several expert studies of the Oberammergau,²⁴ discerned a "conscious effort to minimize" the anti-Jewish overtones, but nonetheless "some serious anti-Semitic implications." After stressing that "the script alone cannot convey the overall impact of the drama," her analysis observed.

First, the positive elements:

--Jesus is set within the Jewish community of his time.
His Jewishness is clearly established.

--The hatred of Roman rule with its attendant cruelties is shown in the play, although the universal longing for liberation from Roman occupation could be expanded in a few key passages with very helpful effects...

--Some attempt has been made to show the variety of political and religious ferment of the time. . . .

--The play affirms clearly that Jesus' suffering and death were part of G-d's plan. (This theme might be stressed again in one or two key scenes.)

As for the negative elements:

--There is an unnecessary (and unscriptural) harping on the motive of financial gain throughout the play, but particularly with reference to the chief priests. This. . . plays upon one of the most vicious and persistent anti-Semitic stereotypes. . . . The genuine political hazards amid which [the chief priests] had to maneuver--the Zealots on one side and the cruelty of Roman oppression on the other--should be made more explicit. The theme of financial gain should be dispensed with entirely.

--The characterization of Pharasaic Judaism as being nothing more than rigid legalism is another venerable stereotype which has been completely discarded by contemporary Christian scholars

--By lumping priests and Pharisees together, the play seems to implicate the Pharisees in Jesus' death.²⁵

Mrs. Banki's evaluation concluded with detailed suggestions for textual improvement, and in 1981, Rev. Pratt expressed an interest in making changes according to this critique. In recent years, however,

Rev. Pratt--now serving Seaview United Methodist Church in nearby Seattle--has taken a less active role in the Play. He has for instance been succeeded as Director by David S. Moore. Moore is Artistic Director of the Snoqualmie Falls Forest Theatre, a local performing arts center founded in part by the Passion Play troupe.

While the Fall City Play has no permanent office, ticket information is available through the Snoqualmie Falls Forest Theatre and Family Park, P. O. Box 516, Bellevue, Wash., 98009 (206-222-7044).

HOLY FAMILY PASSION PLAY
Union City, New Jersey

The Holy Family Roman Catholic Church of Union City, New Jersey sponsors an annual Passion Play, with about nine performances from late February until Easter. A 1978 advertisement proclaimed "64th Consecutive Season . . . The Nation's Oldest and Most Authentic Passion Play . . . America's Oberammergau! . . . No one of any age should miss it." Indeed, almost all performances are weekend matinees to encourage youth attendance.

The Union City Play drew Jewish criticism in March 1967 when several American Jewish Congress leaders viewed a production. Their subsequent evaluation lambasted the play's "crude and blatant anti-

Semitic atmosphere" and was mentioned by Rabbi Arthur J. Lelyveld, then Congress President, in a letter to The Most Reverend John J. Carberry, Chairman of the Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops:

In the Play, Judas is presented as a caricature identical with Julius Streicher's stereotype of a Jew in Der Stuermer;

The priests (Jews) are depicted as brutish louts, cunning and corrupt;

The climax is the Crucifixion, accompanied by a electric storm whose terrible lightning and rolling thunder constitute a magnificent spectacle . . . and which reduced many of the children in the audience to hysteria. . . .

The entire production is a searing, hate-filled indictment of Jewry. The Jews are satanic; the Christians are divine disciples of the Lord Jesus.²⁶

The Catholic journal Ave Maria, in supporting the Jewish protests about the Union City Play, editorialized, "It is a bitter paradox that the very reenactment of the central event of Christian love and salvation should have become a powerful vehicle for the intolerance and hate which contradict what Christ means."²⁷

While the Holy Family pastor, Msgr. C. M. Weitekamp, at first refused to respond to the Congress statement, outside criticism was eventually effective. An American Jewish Committee memorandum of the following year (1968) reports that "representations to church authorities have resulted in a revised script, used for the first time in the current production." A concurrent ADL memo mentions the deletions of anti-Jewish references, and the agreements of Newark archdiocese officials to make "major changes."

There has apparently been no serious reevaluation of the Play since 1968. In a January 1984 phone conversation, Mr. Doug Gettel, the Play's Managing Director, said that he would try to provide the AJC with a script, but that there was probably none available. Thus far none has been received.

The Holy Family production occurs at Park Theatre, a Church property in Union City. The theatre was originally built for the Passion Play, and is now being renovated into a Performing Arts Center for religious and general community use. Mr. Gettel serves as Managing Director and Theatre Coordinator, while the cast and supporting personnel are volunteers from the parish. According to Gettel, audiences range from 200 to 1300 people, and include Church, Sunday School, and senior citizen groups. Many viewers see the Play every year, and some come from as far as Upstate New York and Pennsylvania.

The Passion Play Box Office is located at the Holy Family Church,
530 - 35th Street, Union City, New Jersey 07087 (201-867-6535).

CONCLUSION

Despite some softening, the American Passion Plays, in their treatment of Jews and Judaism, are faithful reenactments of the Oberammergau and other European models. Every year, by their scripts and staging, these power dramas convey to hundreds of thousands of Americans pernicious anti-Jewish stereotypes, viz.: Jews are anti-Christ, damned collectively and eternally for the crime of deicide; Jews, and especially Jewish religious leaders, are identified with conspiracy, sadism and greed; and Jewish law is rigid and heartless, deserving only of replacement by the separate, superior Christian Gospel of love.

This anti-Jewish bias of these Play does not preclude the sincere intention of many Passion Play viewers. For many, these plays have traditional religious meaning, and contemporary appeal as morally edifying, family entertainment. In addition, the community-based productions have become proud parish or city traditions.

Nonetheless, and especially given the repudiation of anti-Judaism by major Christian bodies over the last generation, the perpetuation of such hostile and contemptuous prejudice is inexcusable. Fortunately, some American Church organizations have criticized the anti-Jewish bias of these Plays. In 1968, for example, the U.S. Secretariat for Catholic-Jewish Relations of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) issued a detailed statement on Passion Plays with guidelines for their improvement. Other American Christian leadership groups should also reconsider these Plays and define proper and faithful lessons from the Passion narratives. As the NCCB statement declared, the true purpose of these Plays should be "to increase in the hearts of their audiences a greater love of God and of men, reminding them that those who played a part in the Passion drama were, in the Christian view, representative of all of us." In the same vein, it is hoped that increased Christian and Jewish activism will turn these plays from hatred and contempt to the power of love, and the possibility of redemption, again, for all of us.

U051-IAD (Passion Plays)

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April 12, 1984

FOOTNOTES

- 1
Marc H. Tanenbaum, "The Role of the Passion Play in Fostering Anti-Semitism Throughout History," Paper prepared for "The Passion of Jesus - Then and Now," Symposium at Katholische Akademie, Bayern (West Germany), November 19, 1978.
- 2 "Oberammergau, 1960 and 1970: A Study in Religious Anti-Semitism," (New York: The American Jewish Committee, 1970), p. 3 and Bernhard E. Olson, Faith and Prejudice (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), p. 195.
- 3 "Oberammergau: 1960 and 1970..." and Judith Herschcopf Banki, "The Oberammergau Passion Play: The Revised 1980 Text, Progress and Problems" (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1979) and "What Viewers Should Know About the Oberammergau Passion Play, 1980," (New York: AJC, 1980).
- 4 "Oberammergau, 1960 and 1970...", pp. 21-2.
- 5 Barbara Coenson-Roth, "Passion Play Charged with Anti-Semitism," (Central Florida?) Heritage, February 27, 1981.
- 6 Billy Cheney Speed, "Apostle Marc Baxley awaits turn as Christ," Atlanta Journal, January 22, 1983.
- 7 "A Very Wrong Time: American Version of Passion Play to be performed here this month," Buffalo Jewish Review, October 8, 1982.
- 8 Pam Keene, "Pressure from Jewish Community Makes Backers Drop Passion Play," The Macon Telegraph, December 30, 1979, p. 1A.
- 9 Jane Oppy, "Jesus Story Deserves Better than Passion Play," The Macon Telegraph, January 16, 1980, p. 5B.
- 10 April Levine, "Val Balfour Passion Play - Preliminary Discussion," (internal AJC memorandum), February 11, 1983.
- 11 Joel Breshin, "Val Balfour's Original American Version, Oberammergau Passion Play," (internal ADL memorandum), February 2, 1983.
- 12 Jane Oppy, "Objections to Play Center on 'Anti-Semitism',"

- The Macon Telegraph, January 3, 1980, p. 18.
- 13 Terry D. Aronoff, "Jewish Critics Skip Opening of Passion Play," The Macon Telegraph, January 16, 1980, p. 18.
 - 14 Joel Breshin, "Jews Still to Blame," Southern Israelite, February 11, 1983.
 - 15 Ibid.
 - 16 Patrick Owens, "The anti-Semitic legacy of Gerald Smith," Newsday, September 20, 1980, Part II, p. 2.
 - 17 The Great Passion Play, and Allied Sacred Projects," Souvenir Program (Eureka Springs, Ark.: Elna M. Smith Foundation, 1971)..
 - 18 Information in these two biographies rests largely on Owens, "The anti-Semitic legacy...."
 - 19 Billie Stern, "The Arkansas Passion," (internal AJC memorandum), August 9, 1968.
 - 20 Sister Margaret Ellen Traxler, SSND, "Report on the Passion Play in Eureka Springs, Arkansas," (internal memorandum), National Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice, pp. add one - add two.
 - 21 Ibid., p. add two.
 - 22 Owens, "The anti-Semitic legacy..."
 - 23 Introductory description of Fall City Passion Play from Ray Ruppert, "Passion Play: Fall City drama to open 22nd annual run," Seattle Times, March 15, 1981.
 - 24 See Note #3.
 - 25 Judith H. Banki, "Fall City Passion Play," (internal AJC memorandum), February 24, 1981.
 - 26 "The Guidelines and the Passion Play," The Dialogue (National Conference of Christians and Jews), June 1967.
 - 27 "Oberammergau in Union City," editorial, Ave Maria, April 15, 1967.