Box 41, Folder 9, Oberammergau Passion Play - press clippings, 1980.
WEST GERMAN PRESS REACTION TO OBERAMMERGAU PASSION PLAY

NEW YORK - A survey of the major newspapers and journals published throughout the Federal Republic of Germany reveals that the majority of the West German press is critical of the revised 1980 Oberammergau Passion Play and supports the views expressed by the American Jewish Committee.

The survey, prepared by the Interreligious Affairs Department of the American Jewish Committee, examines articles and editorials in the big-city dailies such as the Suddeutsche Zeitung and Münchner Merkur of Munich, the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Die Zeit of Hamburg, (Die Welt, a nationwide paper with regional editions). Also included were the national newsmagazines, Der Spiegel published by Axel Springer publications; and Der Stern. Small-city newspapers were typified by the Schwangauer Nachrichten, issued near Oberammergau. The popular picture magazine, Bunte, and two church publications, Zur Debatte issued by the Bavarian Catholic Academy and Kirchenzeitung were also surveyed.

Typical of the views expressed by the leading West German publications was that of the Suddeutsche Zeitung, published in Munich and regarded as "The New York Times of Bavaria". In an article written by Hannes Burger, the Munich daily of May 24th writes:

"The 1980 revision has cut many of the controversial passages, as the American Jewish Committee's analysis recognized. But the stubborness of the Oberammergauers and their unwillingness to cooperate with their critics have allowed only a half-hearted revision. No clarifying passages or scenes have been added; the true motives of the Jewish authorities are still not stated; the Jewish law is still misrepresented, as are the political circumstances; Pilate remains a noble soul amid the Jewish fanatics."
"How can one eliminate hatred from the play," the Suddeutsche Zeitung continues, "as long as the agenda of Christians and Jews are ignored, and as long as Oberammergau looks on the play as no one's business but its own, yet wants to keep it the world's leading Passion Play?

"For years the people of Oberammergau did not understand the charge of anti-Semitism; they thought they were simply performing a dramatization of the Gospels. Worse, they not want to understand, and consistently refused to discuss the matter. Else, they might have learned what the critics were trying to do; not to accuse the villagers of anti-Semitism but to show how this and other Passion Plays embody an old anti-Jewish tradition within Christianity. This tradition began with Matthew, reached its apogee in the Middle Ages and was not disavowed until Vatican Council II."

Mr. Berger's article concludes, "Perhaps the likeliest way to save the Oberammergau tradition would be to develop the Rosner text more satisfactorily and try it out again during the 1984 anniversary season. That might give the spirit of reconciliation a sufficient impetus in Oberammergau and beyond."

The Munchner Merkur of May 17th writes: "The new revision has been made to conform with the Second Vatican Council; and suggestions by the American Jewish Committee were also taken into account. Our reviewer has seen the preview and finds that, though the alterations do not help the play, its effect is unchanged."

The Munich tabloid's article, written by Armin Eichholz, adds:

"The naivete with which it adapts itself to Vatican II is touching; by welcoming 'brothers and sisters from the people from which the Savior sprang,' among others - a phrase suspiciously reminiscent of the
saying, 'I like everybody in the building, even Mr. Meyer.' Then it says: 'Far from me be any attempt to apportion the guilt to others' - and that rips right through Daisenberger; for his play is based on the Jews as the primary guilty party in Jesus' death, and no pious view can alter that. After all, how could he know...and so, down to Auschwitz.'

"Too bad for the play. After all, Daisenberger the cleric was no scoundrel when he instructed the actors (in his stage-directions) playing the Jews: '...show these persons in all their malice, rancor and hypocrisy, so that every spectator will be seized by disgust with so shameful a cast of mind.' For he wanted 'to let the innocence, the sublime dignity of the Savior appear in that much more radiant a light.'

"Whether the Rosner alternative would not have had other defects remains an open question. As for the present drama, it is sure to get bad reviews on grounds of art, language, and whatever. It would fare better if it were understood that its effect derives precisely from its unconcern about the criteria that prevail in the outside world."

The Schongauer Nachrichten of May 27th, writes:

"Daisenberger's text rests on the anti-Semitic interpretation of the Gospels in centuries past. Daisenberger used the confrontation of Christ and the Jews as a device to lend dramatic tension and a climax to the Passion. A new play with a different text is suggested because the Daisenberger text lacks substance and cannot be altered. The reviews have been largely negative; they call the production disappointing and boring, and speak of 'sugar candy style' and 'pastry shop decor.'"

In a front-page story, this newspaper also reports that Ernst Maria Lang, a Munich architect and cartoonist, has threatened to sue the Oberammergau municipality for plagiarism and possibly stop the performances.
thereby. Lang charged at an AJC press conference held in Munich on May 24th that the present production uses stage designs, costume designs, and dramaturgic devices originated by his father, Johann Georg Lang, without due credit. The story concluded that Lang's legal action may compel the Oberammergauers to choose the Rosner script for the 1984 anniversary season, "which is also the aim of the American Jewish Committee which has long concerned itself with the Passion Play."

Bunte Illustrierte, the weekly picture magazine, writes:

"Who bears the guilt for Jesus' death? The world's most famous Passion play again prompts vigorous debate. Again "Oberammergau shows a drama which is thought - not only by Jews - to convey the basic religious motivation of anti-Semitism.

"Vatican II has rejected the idea (of Jewish collective guilt in the death of Jesus), but Oberammergau is not yet telling the story accordingly.

"Oberammergau still shows Jesus destroyed by Jewish hatred, not executed by Pilate. The High Priests are portrayed as rapacious demagogues who take pleasure in Jesus' death; Pilate appears as a well meaning weakling pushed around by bloodthirsty Jews.

"For 2,000 years the denigration has been the most deadly of anti-Semitic prejudices. Thus it was natural, the Suddeutsche Zeitung has noted, that concerned Jews should see Oberammergau, the world's best-known Passion Play, as a text case."

Commenting on the reactions of the major German newspapers to the 1980 Oberammergau Passion Play, Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum, AJC's national interreligious affairs director, said:

"The American Jewish Committee is heartened by the overwhelming positive response on the part of the leading German newspapers, religious
and general journals, as well as much of German radio and television, to the views expressed in our several AJC studies regarding the structurally anti-Semitic character of the Baisenberger text as well as by the performance itself. While the Oberamergau pageant may well be a commercial success, owing to the attendance largely by tourists from outside Germany, and this heightened consciousness of repudiation of anti-Semitic ideas and images in this traditional Passion Play suggests that a major educational achievement has been realized in the struggle to uproot the poisonous weeds in certain traditions of Christian folk culture.

"The American Jewish Committee will continue its efforts to raise the sensibilities of enlightened men and women of good will to these teachings of contempt against Jews and Judaism until the Passion Play is fundamentally rethought and reconceptualized. The difference between now and 1960 and 1970 is that there are growing thousands of Christians both within Germany and in many other parts of the world who share our concerns about prejudice and bigotry and join with us in this effort to expunge hatred and misunderstanding that result from these misrepresentations of Jews and Judaism."
In an article by Georg Krieger, the Rheinischer Merkur/Christ und Welt, wrote on May 23:

"In its medieval form the passion play still formed part of the larger view of history as the history of Christian salvation. The origin and meaning of the Cross were seen as being the guilt-ridden implication of all mankind, with Christ's sacrificial death ensuring salvation.

"The historic view of the Biblical tale lost sight of this aspect of the passion. It set its sights on identifying a guilty party and roundly condemned the theocratic leadership of the Jewish State and the Jewish people as a whole.

"The American Jewish Committee, while acknowledging that Oberammergau has tried hard to adapt the Daisenberger text, leaves no doubt that the superficial historic view and its anti-Jewish tendencies can only be eradicated by dispensing with the current text...

"Oberammergau can only hope to progress in the future by dint of joint efforts on the part of both Jewry and the Church."
June 19, 1980

Rabbi Marc Tannenbaum
American Jewish Committee
165 East 56 St.
New York, N.Y. 10022

Dear Marc:

Here is a translated article from a German paper on the Passion Play. I recall our discussion of your recent visit to Oberammergau.

I have not forgotten your suggestion that we meet one day to discuss some possibilities. After several more speaking trips abroad I'll give you a call.

Meanwhile, best wishes,

Sincerely,

Leonard R. Sussman
Executive Director
OBERAMMERGAU'S TEXT FOR 1980

BLOODTHIRSTINESS AND CRIES OF "MURDERERS" ARE NOW SILENCED

Oberammergau -- Pontius Pilate scenes, Herodotus intermezzo and the famous "rage" (Empoeüng) have always been the dramatic highlights of the Passion Play and are responsible to a large degree of its worldwide theatrical success. How do they appear in the text of 1980? That is the subject of our final report on the revised text.

In Daisenberger's text Pontius Pilate is the noble, just Roman who wants to have nothing to do with the death of Christ because "he sees no guilt in him." Because of this and their "bloodthirsty hatred," the Jewish complainants are so hopelessly misrepresented that even Jews in our own century must feel offended.

According to our present understanding of history, Pilate was a devious favorite involved in all kinds of dirt who later fell out of favor with the emperor and was subsequently executed. In the corrected text he appears paler and less sanctimonious -- passages such as "your hateful accusations" or "your personal revenge" or "the blind rage of his enemies" etc. have been removed and serve to soften the contrast. In the same vein, the reference in the Daisenberger prologue to a "maddened, blinded people" who cry for "the martyrdom and the death of the Savior" has been replaced by a softer formulation. Also, the demand for "the blood of our enemy" has disappeared and been replaced with the "sentencing of the Galilean." In the previous text, Pontius Pilate even defended
Christ as the "model of a wise teacher whom you have long revered." This appeal for mercy has also been dropped.

The new version has a passage designed especially to deal with the "reconciliation" with Jewish sensibilities: A few people from the crowd call out "free him -- he is without guilt" before the cries of "crucify him, crucify him" begin. Also, the curse of Pilate "his blood is upon you and your children" has disappeared. The reaction of the "people" to the sentencing -- always a scene of rejoicing in the Daisenberger play has been considerably softened.

The carrying of the cross and the crucifixion are essentially unaltered. Nevertheless, in the Golgatha prologue the "revenge of the godless" has been changed to "merciless" and the "murderers of Christ" has been changed to "enemies." A few peripheral characters and passages have been removed, and in the final scene of the glorification of Christ -- instead of "you savior of sinners who died on Golgatha" it now reads for 1980 "you redeemer of all sinners victorious on Golgatha."

If one takes a balance of the corrections it must be recognized that the assignment and mandate of the Text Committee was very clearly to keep the Daisenberger text and that therefore they could make only cosmetic changes. In making these revisions special attention was given to "defusing" Jewish objections. Therefore, one sees the result of this effort in the form of the shortening and tightening up of the play. And, also, in the attempt to replace unusable and unintelligible idioms without destroying the poetic quality.
Above all, one must never forget that no attempt was made to substantially "reform" the Passion Play. This was neither the assignment nor the intent of the committee.
Passion play inspires a continuing debate

Christ und Welt

Krehimischer Merkur

was conducted in the current appropriate to latter-day considerations of cash flow and turnover.

The high mass was also attended by high-ranking Pietist and Augustinian churchmen.

The cardinal's sermon could only be rated as Church approval of the continued use of the 1989 text, unlikely altered in keeping with present-day requirements.

As far as the style, the cardinal was careful to refer to the text's place on the program. That evening, when the village was more or less back to normal for a Sunday evening, the audience breathed a sigh of relief. Everything was working. There were no technical hitches.

The weather was not up to scratch for the performance. After a clear night, the morning temperature was four degrees, or a little under forty Fahrenheit.

But it was on the show regardless as far as the actors on the open-air stage were concerned. Their only protection was their determination to make a sight of the play, as it were. No one seriously expects amateur theatricals to be absolutely perfect, but what is so fascinating about Oberammergau is the touching gravity of the actors, the comprehensiveness in which the play is put on, and the easy-to-follow structure which all this needs.

Much of the wording is taken straight from the Gospels and has a familiar ring even when it is heard by someone who does not know the Biblical message so thoroughly. Explanations of the link between the plot and the action on the stage also help the audience to appreciate the connection between the Stations of the Cross and references to them in the Old Testament. Historical reality seems to be the story of salvation.

The audience are entirely to experience the play, which is still performed as written by Josef Alois Duerberger 120 years ago, as a victory of unswerving traditionalism over progress and innovation.

But they will probably sense the contradiction between the chorus and the动能. It uses simple choreography and plain clothing for plastic reminiscence of Ancient Greek drama.

The music, on the other hand, is clearly limited in its range of expression to the short span between the late Baroque era, the Romantic epoch, and the Classics.

The music of the Passion device wa written in 1810 and is currently played in a 1950 arrangement by Eugene Pupin. Few changes have been made to the original few were possible. It shows a musical, not a historical text.

The music goes its own way, with cheerful, rich and varied melodies and easy rhythms that are far cry from the appearance, brittleness and dramatic function of the chorus.

The change of cast is inevitable where the play is only performed every 10 years, makes little difference to the overall impression.

The impressive language and gestures of a Virgin Mary who is, perhaps, older than one might expect are unlikely to influence the decision on whether or not to use the Dusenbergel text next time round.

Neither will the lack of dignity and human presence of a sinewy, youthful Jesus and the well-high fatalistic acceptance of destiny as the impression conveyed by his narration.

But the 1989 Oberammergau passion play paves the way for more far-reaching changes than might seem apparent. The Dusenbergel text has already been revised in keeping with the tenets of the Second Vatican Council.

The rewrite was due in part to accusations by the American Jewish Committee that the old text implied a collective guilt on the part of the Jewish people in respect of the death of Jesus.

There can be no doubt that Dusenbergel, who merely revised an earlier text, made an unwitting concession to the Enlightenment, putting paid to the last vestiges of the medieval mystery play in seeking uniform obj.

In its medieval form the passion play still formed part of the larger view of history as the story of Christian salvation, which was the hope of both Jews and Christians.

The origin and meaning of the Cross were seen as being the guilt-ridden implication of all mankind, with Christ's sacrificial death ensuring salvation.

The historic view of the Biblical tale was lost sight of this aspect of the passion. It set its sights on identifying a guilty party and roundly condemned the theological leadership of the Jewish Stain and the Jewish people as a whole.

The American Jewish Committee, while acknowledging that Oberammergau has tried hard to adapt the Dusenbergel text, leaves no doubt that the superficial historic view and its anti-Jewish tendencies can only be exorcised by dispensing with the current text.

The Roman Catholic Church has given its imprimatur to the Oberammergau revised 1980 version, so the Church can hardly be accused of objecting to a new, and deeper look at the theological message conveyed.

Oberammergau can only hope to progress in the future by dint of joint efforts on the part of both Jews and the Church.
Curtain Rises in Bavaria on a Revised

By JOHN VINCOUR 2
Special to The New York Times

OBERAMMERGAU, West Germany, May 18 - In front were the faded orange walls of the temples and a stone stairway leading to dark doors. Behind them, a slash of sky, a far tree, and farther still, a green ridge at the edge of the Alps. With a single step, a man moved from the chorus at center stage and spoke words that in three centuries of Oberammergau Passion plays had never been heard before.

"Greetings to all you brothers and sisters of the people
Who brought forth the Redeemer
Let no one try to find blame in others,
Let each of us recognize
His own guilt in these events."

The lines from the Prologue, a welcome to Jews and an admonition not to blame them for the death of Jesus, were pieces of a difficult reconciliation between the communities who put on the play every 10 years and the Jews and Roman Catholics who told them it was anti-Semitic, a portrayal of a people, 33 years after Hitler, that could in no way be justified.

The strained feelings are not completely gone, the community quietly represents what it sees as outside interference in its traditions, and the others consider that the changeless in the text are incomplete steps toward bringing the play to line with the Vatican's 1965 declaration on the attitude of the church toward Jews. But the play, the first in 93 performances this summer portraying Christ's suffering, crucifixion and resurrection, has changed.

No United Call for Death

It still moves forward with a compelling simplicity - clausrophobic, aching, touching, even passionate. But no longer do Pontius Pilate cry out to the Jews, "The curse of blood on you and your children!

And no longer do the Jews at Christ's condemnation call with one voice for his death

"Free Him!" some of them now shout.

"He is innocent!"

The effect is clear. The Passion play, likely to be seen by a half million visitors this year, has drawn closer to the Vatican edict that states, "Nothing which in any way approaches the notion of Jewish collective guilt should be found in any Catholic medium of expression."

The evolution was not simple. Ten years ago, the version being performed here by a cast recruited from Oberammergau's 4,700 residents was regarded by many of its critics as a barely advanced version of what might have been performed in 1634, when the village started the plays as an act of penance and thanks for being spared from an epidemic. The current text, written in 1890 by a priest, Alois Dalsenberger, had barely been changed over the years and was found by Hitler to be a "convincing portrayal of the menace of Jewry."

$5 Million This Year

In 1970, however, the Vatican withheld its sanction of the play and after attacks on it, notably by American Jewish organizations, thousands of reservations were canceled. More than other arguments, the possibility that the play would no longer be a safe source of income - the village is expected to earn about $5 million from it this year - led to second thoughts.

In 1975, an 18th century version of the play by Ferdinand Rosner, a Benedictine monk, was reworked and two years later, a trial version was staged. The American Jewish Congress sent representatives out who found it free of anti-Semitism, as did Josef Cardinal Ratzinger of Munich. The Sudddeutsche Zeitung, the respected Munich newspaper, said the Rosner version was vastly more artistic an textual to the Dalsenberger text.

But the village did not agree. The town council that adopted the new version was quickly voted out of office by a 3-to-1 margin. The first act of its successor was to restore the old text.

A confrontation again seemed likely. With the possibility of American Jewish groups urging a boycott of Oberammergau, a series of changes were negotiated with the assistance of the Cardinal's office in Munich. About a quarter of the play was cut out, reducing its running time from eight to six hours. But Jesus still shaves the money-changers from the temple and Judas greedily shovels his 30 pieces of silver into a bag at his waist.

"It's All There in the Bible."

The town people have not been enthusiastic about the changes. A reporter asking villagers about them mostly gets shrugs and evasions in reply. "Look," said Hans Maurer, a woodcarver who serves as the play's director, "we don't want to hurt anyone. But it's all there in the Bible. We're just using what it says."

As far as Cardinal Ratzinger is concerned, the issue is essentially resolved. In a sermon in the parish church, he said, "We must hear and read the text of the Passion play with greater sensitivity."

The changes in the play were necessary, he said, to strengthen its message of penance and reconciliation.

This reconciliation was acknowledged, in part, by two executives of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith who were invited to the performance by the Mayor of Oberammergau, Ernst Zwink, and his son played Jesus in today's performance. The organization has produced a booklet in which it discusses detecting errors in Passion plays, notably the one here, that "fly in the face of religious and historical truths."

Objections of B'nai B'rith

Hesodore Freedman, director of the B'nai B'rith national program division, said that great efforts had been made at Oberammergau. "The people here have made an honest beginning," he said. "I would be very disappointed, though, to feel that this means there won't be further changes."

Both Mr. Freedman and Nat Kameny, an associate, said they felt the play still did not underscore clearly enough the Jewishness of Jesus and his disciples. Pontius Pilate, they said, has a tendency to remain an innocent and benevolent bystander in the Oberammergau version, and Judas is still being portrayed with accents that had something of stereotyped anti-Semitism.

Mr. Freedman derided that the play's Jewish critics were being oversensitive,
Passion Play

as some of the villagers seemed to insinuate, "Looking at America," he said, "the survey made in 1993 showed us that about one-third of the population held hostile views of Jews because of the religious teaching they received. Another poll just a bit ago wasn't much better. So a play like this, seen by a half million people, can reinforce negative ideas about Jews. That's hardly oversensitive"

Target of Souvenir Trade

Of the 500,000 visitors, who pay $20 to $30 for a place in the 5,000-seat auditorium, about 90,000 are expected to be Americans. They, according to the West German press, are the target of the souvenir trade.

Beyond the clash over the text, West German commentators and Cardinal Ratzinger have attacked the commercialism surrounding the Passion play—the shops that sell carved angels and crucifixes, and the packaged tours that require at least one meal in town to gain entrance to the theater.

Oberammergau defends itself by saying the money is used to make improvements on village buildings. The Suddeutsche Zeitung, in a particularly cynical article about the village, noted in reply that in years past the classic line in Oberammergau was that "Christ suffered for a new swimming pool."
...BUT MANY JEWISH STILL ARE WARY

The recent years have been a time of change for the Passion Play in Oberammergau. The 1980 production, which was controversial, has been widely discussed in the Jewish community. The American Jewish Committee has put out an 18-page guide designed to help viewers understand the feelings of some Jews toward the treatment of the script. The guide states that although the script has undergone some changes, it is not considered a half-way move that is not far from the heart of the issue.

The guide cautions that while some Jews are still unhappy or unsure of their feelings, the changes are being made. In the guide, several scenes involving anti-Semitism have been cut, as have all anti-Semitic references. Such a reference, for example, is used in the play's first scene. In the guide, the scene is rephrased to its original form, which was not used in the 1980 script.

In addition, for the first time in the play's history, there will be another attempt to use the word "Bloody" to refer to the death of Jesus. Now the crowd is seen instead of being driven away.

Although plans had been made that for 1980 another script, written in 1720 by the Benedictine monk Ferdinand Rother, would be substituted for the play's current version, the changes have not been enough to satisfy some Jews. The American Jewish Congress and the Anti-Defamation League have expressed concern over the changes, but they have also noted that the changes are being made.

Mayor Ernst Zwick was returned to office with some unflattering comments made during his election promise. The play is understood to be a scene where an unruly mob demands a half-way move that doesn't go far enough. The protests come with these words: "Greetings, also to you brothers and sisters of the people from whom the Stratford-upon-Avon is known."

The guide says that the changes are "only" half-way. However, the guide also notes that the changes are "only" half-way. The guide states that although the script has undergone some changes, it is not considered a half-way move that is not far from the heart of the issue.
Traditional Play Stirs Debate Of Passion in Alpine Village

PASSION, From A19

A few feminists in town complain that women have no official say in staging the play, and the American Jewish Committee still is not satisfied with the script.

"The controversy has died for the moment," said reformer Schwalgerhofer. "But that does not mean the idea of reform has been abandoned."

A half-million visitors are expected to net $12 million for the town and its shopkeepers this summer—money that the council has already earmarked for a new guest house and a bypass road.

It seems Oberammergau, which has grown by 600 to a population of 5,100 in the past decade, has a traffic problem. The play will be performed 100 times between May 25 and September 27. Each performance lasts six hours with an intermission for lunch.

Meanwhile, not everyone is happy about the way things have turned out.
Despite efforts to purge the centuries-old Oberammergau Passion Play of anti-Semitic overtones, Jewish leaders are dissatisfied with the result. So both the American Jewish Committee and the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith have produced viewers' guides for tourists traveling to the Bavarian Alpine village to see the play.

The 20-page AJC booklet emphasizes that the play "is a work of fiction, incorporating some episodes from the Gospels, ignoring others and freely inventing scenes and characters with no basis in Christian Scripture. It was written at a time when Christianity was dominated by a profoundly anti-Jewish ideology, and thus the characters and dramatic developments were deliberately drawn to make the Jewish people and their leaders appear as villainous and as evil as possible.

The more concise ADL leaflet, prepared by Roman Catholic scholar Leonard Swidler of Temple University, cites official church statements on anti-Semitism and Jewish-Christian relations as they apply to such dramas.
Religious Play Stirs

4.21.80

Passion Play

By Bradley Graham

Washington Post Foreign Service

OBERAMMERGAU, West Germany

Once every 10 years, the devoted folk in this Alpine village stage a passion play that attracts world attention and scores another victory for living traditions.

During the nine years in between, the villagers act like most others. They gossip a lot, and quarrel.

However, one fierce row recently left the town bitterly divided and proved to be no ordinary rural spat. Sparked by charges that the traditional play was anti-Semitic, a debate raged here that took on the dimensions of an international scandal, drawing in Catholic and Jewish officials and nearly turning a few plowshares into swords.

For the moment, the tension appears to have dissolved with the melting snows, helped along by the sure commercial sense that an angry town is bad for tourist business. But when the curtain goes up next month on the play's 1980 version, more than just the Lord's passion will be reflected in it.

Anchored in a remote valley of the Bavarian Alps, where blotsches of white are still visible atop a circle of craggy peaks, Oberammergau is a picture of pastoral tranquility. The town seems almost to be a painted scene with quaint chalet style houses and religious murals on some buildings.

There is also a veneer of wealth evident in such things as the $8 million town pool, complete with wave-making machine, paid for by the 1970 play performances.

The play, which depicts the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, was first staged in 1634 to fulfill a vow to present it every decade in thanks for the ending of the black plague. With a cast of 600 and another 800 assisting with costumes and staging—all amateurs and local citizens—the play has been presented regularly for more than three centuries except on three occasions when war intervened.

But increasingly since the end of World War II and the Third Reich, the play has been criticized abroad as well as inside West Germany for its
Passionate Debate in W. German Town

apparent anti-Semitic tenor and message

Ten years ago, even the Vatican, committed to a more ecumenical policy, witheld its official sanction. In the United States, about 70,000 tickets and hotel reservations were canceled because the American Jewish Committee and the B'nai B'rith's Antibomb League called for a boycott.

This caused some residents, determined to reconcile pious devotion with profitable tourism, to give thought to making the play less obnoxious.

In a village where one is regarded as an outsider unless all four grand parents are buried in the local churchyard, traditions understandably die hard. Besides, once raised on a diet of Catholic fundamentalism, the crafts men and hucksters here never have considered their play offensive and defiantly reject the notion that they have anything against Jews.

"Nobody here really thought the play was anti-Semitic," said Hans Bizer, a woodcarver and the play's director. "We had been presenting it long before Hitler!"

Erich Schmid, a hotel owner and town council member added, "Anything in Christianity is anti-Semitic if you want it to be."

There had been attempts before the 1960 and 1970 presentations to modify foreign public opinion, by doctoring the current script, written in the 19th century, by Alois Dassenberger, a monk at near by Etatt Monastery. But the efforts had been largely cosmetic and failed to alter the play's student tone or the thrust of its message—collective Jewish guilt for the death of Jesus.

A group of wooted burghers, led by Hans Schwalmhofer, the head of Oberammergau's woodcarving school, dug out from the archives an older, 16th century script written by another Etatt monk, Ferdinand Rosner. Though archaic in form and language—it is written in 9,000 tetrameter verses—it is free of any tinge of anti-Semitism and met the approval of both Catholic and Jewish officials.

The town council also liked and approved of the older script. But a village majority did not. They found its language stilted, its action overly dramatic and its grand style unbecoming the simple tastes of this tiny village.

Besides, they feared that the new version would scare off more old tourists instead of drawing new ones.

So, in 1978, the town voted out the council and elected one that would give them back their play. Faced again with the prospect of a US Jewish boycott, some Oberammergauers joined with Catholic clergy to edit the more objectionable material out of the old text.

Hans, the town's mayor, said, "We want to keep the play, but we don't want to lose it."

The’s-the-of life for Oberammergau Children start appearing in it at age 6, and many look forward to the day they are selected for a leading role.

To search out the best talent, training plays are held during the decade between performances. Being chosen for a main part ranks as the highest honor in town—perhaps a little too high, since some actors have managed to parlay their roles into political and commercial gains.

"A lot of American people who come here stay at the Hotel Alte Post, because they know its own play."

"The play has been a way of life for Oberammergau Children," said Paul Lindel, "From the 16th century, it has been performed every decade."

"We have to keep it going," said Hans Bizer. "For the first time, this line was added to the prologue, "For he is from us all efforts to seek guilt among others."

"Welcome to you, also, brothers and sisters of the race from which Jesus came."

"The play has been a way of life for Oberammergau Children," said Paul Lindel. "From the 16th century, it has been performed every decade."

"We have to keep it going," said Hans Bizer. "For the first time, this line was added to the prologue, "For he is from us all efforts to seek guilt among others."
June 19, 1980

The Chicago Catholic
P.O. Box 11181
Chicago, Illinois 60611

Personal Attention: Mr. A. E. Wall

Gentlemen:

The report by Father James Kill on his viewing of the Oberamrnergau Passion Play (June 6, 1980) was moving and compassionate. If only all those who view the Play had the same feelings as Father Kill! And yet, there is more to be said.

Having studied the text of the Play in advance and having viewed one of the early performances in May on behalf of the American Jewish Committee, I must tell you that to many, the Passion Play remains a source of continued anti-Semitism.

The text of the Play pits Jesus against the Jews as a whole, failing to distinguish in any meaningful way among different groups in the Jewish population, and also minimizing, almost eliminating, reference to the pervasive Roman role in the events of Holy Week. But more disturbing, when one views the production and staging of the Play which should be a message of love and hope for the world as Father Kill so movingly points out - one realizes that it is based on ridicule, stereotypes and caricatures of Jews, and that the beauty of the message has been sullied!

In fixing guilt for the Crucifixion on the Jews as a whole and in presenting Jews as despised people, the Passion Play goes beyond the Gospels, contradicts the teachings of Vatican Council II and rouses base emotions which do no honor to the very message of love and hope of the Passion.
The American Jewish Committee, with all persons of good will, deplores the continued anti-Jewish aspects of the Oberammergau Passion Play. We believe that great events can be presented for their own worth, not at the expense of others.

Sincerely yours,

Robert S. Jacobs
National Chairman
Interreligious Affairs Commission
American Jewish Committee
Another Oberammergau

A 20-page booklet, "What Viewers Should Know About the Oberammergau Passion Play, 1980," has been released by the American Jewish Committee. The play, which was first performed in 1634 and is repeated every 10 years by townsfolk of Oberammergau in upper Bavaria, West Germany, opened on May 25 for the summer.

The AJC says that three of its members who viewed the opening performance charge that "despite cosmetic changes in the script, the Oberammergau Passion Play is still an anti-Semitic spectacle." The AJC prepared the booklet because of its "profound concern for continued Jewish-Christian understanding and cooperation," according to Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum, national director of interreligious affairs of the AJC.

The book, prepared by Judith Herschel Bank, assistant to Rabbi Tanenbaum, emphasizes that the Oberammergau play "is a work of fiction, incorporating some episodes from the Gospels, ignoring others and freely inventing scenes and characters with no basis in Christian Scripture."

Tanenbaum said that the AJC was making copies of the booklet available to sponsors of trips to the Passion Play in order to help sensitize viewers towards any anti-Semitic impact that might result at the 1980 production. Single copies of the book are available free of charge by writing to The American Jewish Committee, 165 E. 50th St., New York, NY 10022.
'Play is anti-Semitic'

New York (NC)

Representatives of the American Jewish Committee and the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith said the 1980 Oberammergau Passion Play is anti-Semitic despite efforts of the West German town's officials, churchmen and producers to eliminate anti-Semitic references in the script.

Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum, AJC national director for inter-religious affairs, said after seeing the play that despite the cuts it presented an emotion-laden portrayal of Jews as collectively responsible for the death of Jesus.

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger of Munich has said, "We must hear and read the text of the Passion Play with greater sensitivity," after the terrible events of the Nazi period.

The Defense Department has ordered a stop to the promotion of military-sponsored tours to the Oberammergau passion play in Germany because of Jewish concerns that the revised play is still anti-Semitic.

Vatican operates in red

London (NC)

The Vatican had a deficit in 1979 of about $25.5 million, about 25 percent higher than anticipated, according to an article in the Sunday Times of London.

"Unless there are radical improvements either in its income or in its financial management, in fact, the Vatican will be in a bookkeeping sense—bankrupt in about five years," said the article, written by Tana de Zulueta and Francesco D'Andrea.

We must be ecumenical

St. Louis (NC)

"You cannot really be Roman Catholic today without being ecumenical," Cardinal Basil Hume of Westminster, England, told an interfaith gathering at the St. Louis Priory. He said Pope John Paul II is "very ecumenical."

The British prelate said he had no inside information but that he believes Pope John Paul II is inclined to pursue unification with the Church of England: "I know quite definitely that he is beginning to push," the cardinal said.

He predicted that with publication sometime in 1981 of the joint works of an 11-year-old organization of Anglican and Roman Catholic bishops, the pope and the Anglican archbishop of Canterbury will form a new commission which may take steps toward reunification.

Pope to visit Brazil

Vatican City (NC)

Pope John Paul II will go to Brazil June 30. The Vatican Press Office confirmed the starting date of the Brazil trip, but did not announce the itinerary for Brazil and said only that the trip will last "about 10 days."
date       June 18, 1980

to         Judith Banki

from       Andrew Baker

subject    Oberammergau

After a fair amount of digging, I discovered that there is a Midwest Region of the American Society of Travel Agents. They publish an occasional newsletter and hold monthly meetings. I talked with their president and a couple of Jewish members of their board about circulating our booklet among them. Their next mailing will not go out until September, but they are meeting today in Chicago. I have arranged for the attached letter along with copies of "What Viewers Should Know..." to be distributed to the twenty-five board members expected to attend. I am also leaving additional copies of the letter for the region's general membership who are invited to a dinner following the board meeting. (One hundred or more are expected.)

I am not sure what will come of this, but I do not think it will hurt. (I have also tried to calm some of the travel agency officials with the promise not to make any additional such request for another ten years.)

Best regards.

cc: Marc Tanenbaum
    James Rudin
    Harold Applebaum
    Susie Schub
    Roger Nathan
June 17, 1980

Midwest Region, American Society of Travel Agents

As you are no doubt aware the Oberammergau Passion Play is the most famous such play in the world. This year nearly one half million people will view it; tickets are already sold out.

The American Jewish Committee had been concerned that the 350 year old play reflected an anti-Jewish bias. Several years ago we began work with the Bavarian Catholic Academy and with the villagers of Oberammergau to seek revisions in the play. The 1980 version reflects these changes. Nevertheless, as welcome as such changes are, we do not believe them to have gone far enough.

We have prepared a booklet for viewers of the play, entitled, "What Viewers Should Know About the Oberammergau Passion Play, 1980;" it analyzes the drama and provides both background information and the commentary of Christian scholars. We will be happy to make these booklets available free of charge through your agencies to anyone traveling to Oberammergau this summer. Our concern is not to discourage anyone from viewing the passion play; rather, it is to encourage mutual respect and understanding.

If you would like additional copies of this booklet, please contact us at the above address. We stand ready to help you.

Sincerely,

Rabbi Andrew Baker
Chicago Director, Interreligious Affairs
NEW YORK, (JTA) – The 1980 Oberammergau Passion Play began in that Bavarian, West German village as the American Jewish Committee warned potential visitors that the play still can be viewed as hostile to Jews. A half million people are expected to see the play this summer which villagers have performed at the beginning of every decade since 1680.

In a 20-page booklet the AJCommittee has prepared for potential visitors to Oberammergau, they were warned that despite “a serious effort to cleanse the play of anti-Jewish polemic and prejudice,” the pageant remains “rooted in a tradition of hostility and contempt toward Jews and Judaism which prevailed for centuries and shaped the attitudes of generations of Christians.”

The booklet, entitled “What Viewers Should Know about the Oberammergau” and prepared by Judith Herscopf Banki, the AJCommittee’s assistant national director of interreligious affairs, was published under a grant from the Nathan Appleman Institute for the Advancement of Christian-Jewish Understanding. It was released at the AJCommittee’s 74th annual meeting.

Text Cut, But Not Rethought

The Oberammergau Passion Play is a work of fiction, incorporating some episodes from the Gospels, ignoring others and freely inventing scenes and characters with no basis in Christian Scripture, Banki said.

She said the play was written with a deliberate effort “to make the Jewish people and their leaders appear as villainous and evil as possible.”

At the time the play was written, Jews were charged with collective guilt for the death of Jesus and regarded as rejected by God for refusing to accept Jesus, Mrs. Banki pointed out. She said today this anti-Jewish theology has been “repudiated by major Christian churches and replaced by policies of respect and understanding.” But she said this has not been reflected in the 1980 Oberammergau script.

“The text has only been cut, not rethought,” Banki said. “The traditional anti-Jewish polemic which shaped the earlier text has not been questioned, nor have the insights of modern biblical and extrabiblical scholarship been incorporated into the dynamics of the play.”
More than just the Lord’s Passion will be reflected in the play

W. German town to unveil its Passion play ______ edited

By Bradley Graham, Washington Post

OBERAMMERGAU, West Germany — Once every 10 years, the devoted folk in this Alpina village stage a Passion play that attracts world attention and scores another victory for living traditions.

During the nine years in between, the village acts like most others. They gloss a lot, and quarrel.

However, one fierce row recently left the town bitterly divided and proved to be no ordinary rural spat.

Sparked by charges that the traditional play was anti-Semitic, a debate raged here that took on the dimensions of an internat. scandal, drawing in Catholic and Jewish officials and nearly turning a few plowshares into swords.

For the moment, the feuding appears to have dissolved. But when the curtain goes up May 29 on the play's 1980 version, more than just the Lord's Passion will be reflected in it.

Snuggled in a remote valley of the Bavarian Alps, Oberammergau is a pachute of pastoral tranquility. There are quaint, chalet-style houses and religious murals on some buildings.

There is also a vestige of wealth evident in such things as the 24-million-town-pool, complete with wave-making machine, paid for by the 1970 play performances.

The play, which depicts the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus, was first staged in 1634 to fulfill a vow to present it every decade in thanks for the ending of the black plague. With a cast of 600 and another 600 costumers, staging and scene changes make it a major operation, involving all amateurs and local citizens.

The play has been presented regularly for more than three centuries except for 18 years during World War II. But it has been criticized for its apparent anti-Semitic bias.

Ten years ago, the Vatican withheld its official sanction. In the United States, about 70,000 tickets and hotel reservations were canceled after the American Jewish Committee and the B'nai Brith Anti-defamation League called for a boycott.

But in a village where one is regarded as an outsider unless all four grandparents are buried in the local churchyard, traditions die hard. The craftsmen and herders here have never considered their play offensive and defiantly reject the notion that they have anything against Jews.

"Nobody here really thought the play was anti-Semitic," said Hans Mayer, a woodcarver and the play's director. "We had been presenting it long before Hitler." Mayer had been a Gestapo policeman before the war.

There had been attempts before the 1960 and 1970 presentations to mollify foreign public opinion by doctoring the current script, written in the 16th century by Alois Dausenberger, a monk at nearby Etten Monastery. But the effects had been largely cosmetic and failed to alter the play's strident tone or the thrust of its message — collective guilt for the death of Jesus.

A few years ago, a group of worried burgheers, led by Hans Schwaghofer, the head of Oberammergau's woodcarving school, dug out an 18th century script — written by another Etten monk, Ferdinand Rosner. Though archaic in form and language — it is written in 9,000 tetrameter verses — it is free of any tinge of anti-Semitism and met the approval of both Catholic and Jewish officials.

The town council also liked and approved of the older script. But a village majority did not. They found its language stilted, its action overly dramatic and its grand style unsuited to the tastes of the town. Besides, they feared that the new version would score off more old tourists than it would draw new ones.

So, in 1978, the town voted out the council and elected one that would give them back their play. Faced again with the prospect of a U.S. Jewish boycott, some Oberammergauers joined with Catholic clergymen to edit the more objectionable material out of the old text.

Gone is Pontius Pilate's demand: "It be on you and your children." The scene of the Pharisees in the Temple, formerly portrayed as a snarling mob, has been toned down to depict a mild crowd.

For the first time, this line was added to the prologue: "Far be from us all efforts to seek guilt among others. Welcome to you, also, brothers and sisters of the race from which Jesus came."

The play has long been a way of life for residents of the community. Children begin appearing in it at age six, and many look forward to the day they are selected for a leading role.

To search out the best talent, training plays are held during the decade between performances. Being chosen for a main part ranks as the highest honor in town — perhaps a little too high, as some actors have managed to perlay their roles into political and commercial gains.

Hoping to diffuse this star cult, the play council chose two casts to alternate in this year's performances.

This should make for some interesting comparisons. Of the two casts, one is traditional, Hochkreuz, 48, who has played the part before, while the other is Rudl Zwanz, 21, the mayor's son and a denial student, who regards Jesus as the ultimate anti-establishment figure.

A half-million visitors are expected to net $12 million for the town and its shopkeepers this summer — money that the council has already earmarked for a new guest house and a bypass road.

The play will be performed 100 times between May 25 and Sept 27. Each performance lasts six hours with an intermission for lunch
NEW YORK (NC) — Representatives of the American Jewish Committee (AJC) and the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith (ADL) said the 1980 Oberammergau Passion Play is anti-Semitic despite efforts of the West German town's officials, churchmen and producers to eliminate anti-Jewish references in the script.

Delegations from both agencies saw the play in its opening days in late May. They plan further efforts to revise the play when it is again produced in 1984, the 350th anniversary of its inauguration.

Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum, AJC national director for inter-religious affairs, said after seeing the play that despite the cuts it presented an emotion-laden portrayal of Jews as collectively responsible for the death of Jesus.

The rabbi said the play makes Oberammergau "the international capital" of religious anti-Semitism.

Cardinal Josef Ratzinger of Munich has said, "We must hear and read the text of the Passion Play with greater sensitivity," after the terrible events of the Nazi period.

But he has called on people to stop making accusations of anti-Semitism which, he said, "is foreign to the historic origin and the spiritual content of the play."

Nat Kameny, chairman of the ADL program committee, who was invited with a delegation by Mayor Ernst Zwink of Oberammergau to a press preview, said that the play contained "no surprises."

He said he felt that the Oberammergau townspeople "have moved several centuries — and still have several centuries to go" in excluding anti-Jewish statements from the text.

The AJC, which has had four meetings with the play's writers, producers and consultants in the last four years, conceded that although many "horrendous" hostile images of Jews had been removed and an "admirable" prologue added, the play is still "structurally anti-Semitic," according to Rabbi Tanenbaum.

"The fact that two million people will have been exposed to its emotion-laden anti-Jewish message since World War II," Rabbi Tanenbaum observed, "suggests that Oberammergau has become the international capital of some of the worst forms of demonic anti-Semitism in the world today."
Protestants Switchations, Study Finds

they gain members through switching, appear to lose even more who leave religion entirely, he said.

Passion Play
Anti-Semitic, Jews Declare

NEW YORK (AP) — A group of American Jewish Committee officials, just back from viewing Germany's Oberammergau passion play, said the 1980 version of the dramatized death of Jesus was "a nightmare of anti-Semitism."

The officials agreed that attempts had been made since the 346-year-old pageant's last performance in 1970 to excuse some blatantly anti-Jewish passages. But they said the changes were not sufficient.

About 80,000 Americans see the play yearly, but Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum, an AJC spokesman, said his organization is not seeking a boycott, but is circulating a pamphlet pointing out the historical and biblical errors in the production.

The Pentagon has ordered U.S. military officials to stop promoting tours to the passion play and similar events." (Both the AJC and the Anti-Defamation League claimed credit for prompting the order.)