



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. 1960-1991

Box 41, Folder 10, Oberammergau Passion Play - seminar on  
antisemitism [Munich], 19 November 1978.

# NEWS COMMITTEE

FROM THE

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

Oct. 26-29  
Hyatt Regency Cambridge  
575 Memorial Drive  
Cambridge, Mass. 02139  
617- 492-1234

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*

CONTACT: Natalie Flatow, Press  
Frances Rosenberg, TV-Radio

PRESS ROOM will be posted in lobby

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CAMBRIDGE, MASS., Oct. 27...The American Jewish Committee today announced that a leading Catholic academic institution in Bavaria, West Germany, would sponsor a symposium of Catholic and Jewish scholars in Munich next month on the relationship of the Oberammergau Passion Play to the development of anti-Semitism in Germany and in Christian culture.

The symposium, which will be held November 19, will be sponsored by the Catholic Academy of Bavaria in cooperation with the American Jewish Committee's Interreligious Affairs Department.

Announcement of the symposium was made by Miles Jaffe, Chairman of the AJC's Interreligious Affairs Commission, at the annual meeting of the AJC's National Executive Council. The Council, the agency's highest policy-making body, continues its sessions through Sunday at the Hyatt Regency Cambridge Hotel.

The AJC has long been concerned with the effect of the Oberammergau Passion Play, and derivative Passion Plays given in other parts of the world, on Jewish-Christian relationships, Mr. Jaffe explained. Last July, Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum, AJC's National Director of Interreligious Affairs, and William S. Trosten, AJC Director of Development, met with Dr. Franz Henrich, President of the Catholic Academy of Bavaria, on the Oberammergau Passion Play issue. At that time, the AJC leaders suggested that a dialogue among Catholic and Jewish scholars on the historical and theological issues represented in the Passion Play could prove helpful, and the Academy subsequently decided to sponsor a symposium on the subject.

Rabbi Tanenbaum will present one of the major papers at the symposium. He has also been invited to speak in the village of Oberammergau following the symposium on the religious and historical factors that have contributed to anti-Semitism in Germany and elsewhere. It is believed that never before has a Jewish spokesman been invited to address

MORE.....

Richard Maass, President, Maynard I. Wishner, Chairman, Board of Governors, Morton K. Blaustein, Chairman, National Executive Council, Howard I. Friedman, Chairman, Board of Trustees  
Bertram H. Gold, Executive Vice President  
Washington Office, 818 18th St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20006 • Europe hq 41 rue Paul Doumer, 75016, Paris, France • Israel hq 9 Ethiopia St., Jerusalem, 95149, Israel  
Mexico Central America hq Av. E. Nacional 533, Mexico 5, D.F.

a public gathering in Oberammergau on anti-Semitism and Jewish-Christian relations.

Outlining the significance of the symposium, Mr. Jaffe pointed out that "this will be the first time in the history of the Oberammergau Passion Play, which dates back to 1634, that a German Catholic group of such prestige has taken the initiative in cooperation with a Jewish body to examine the root causes of anti-Semitism engendered by certain accounts of Jesus' death, including Passion Plays. More than 20 years ago, the AJC made an exhaustive line-by-line analysis of the script then used in the play's performance. It concluded that it was a highly anti-Semitic document 'that could not help but contribute to the misunderstanding of Jews and Judaism'."

Mr. Jaffe added that in the past two decades, AJC had been deeply concerned with the issue, including the controversy over which version of the Play was to be produced. Over the centuries, it has been performed in at least five different versions. The Play, which is a major tourist attraction in the German town of Oberammergau, is given once every ten years. In 1970, more than 500,000 people from 113 countries witnessed performances. The next series of performances is scheduled for 1980.

The symposium in Munich will have as its central subject "The Passion of Jesus - Then and Now," and will focus on five major themes:

1. The passion of Jesus in historic perspective, including an examination of the Roman occupation of ancient Judaea and the circumstances of Jesus' trial.

2. The varying interpretations of Jesus' passion in different parts of Christian Scripture.

3. The death of Jesus and the holy will of God, examining the foreordaining of Jesus' death from a theological viewpoint.

4. The Good Friday liturgy, looking at the meaning of the changes that have been made in the service since Vatican Council II.

5. The possibilities and limitations of artistic portrayals of the Passion of Jesus. This will include the historic background of the Passion Play; the relationship of the Passion Play to the current religious climate; and the role of the Passion Play in fostering anti-Semitism throughout history.

Founded in 1906, the American Jewish Committee is this country's pioneer human relations organization. It combats bigotry, protects the civil and religious rights of people at home and abroad, and seeks improved human relations for all people everywhere.

THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

STAFF ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
Meeting of November 27, 1978

Summary

Present

Bert Gold, Chairman  
Morris Fine  
Milton Himmelfarb  
Selma Hirsch  
Abraham Karlikow  
Sonya Kaufer  
Will Katz

Yehuda Rosenman  
James Rudin  
Seymour Samet  
Ira Silverman  
William Trosten  
Morton Yarmon

Absent

Haskell Lazere  
Irving Levine  
Marilyn Rothman  
Philip Shamus  
Phyllis Sherman

Passion Play

Bill Trosten reported on a lay-staff mission to Germany in mid-November in connection with the Oberammergau Passion Play. A theological forum in Munich, at which Rabbi Tanenbaum spoke, included a number of speakers sympathetic to Jewish concerns. A later meeting with various lay groups in Oberammergau revealed widespread ignorance about Jews and Judaism, but growing interest in the issues that have been raised.

Mr. Trosten indicated that the younger people in Oberammergau are not as bound to the Daisenberger text of the Passion Play as their elders, and that this version is bound to be dropped ultimately. A possible compromise may be to produce the 1980 play with the old text and switch to the more acceptable Rosner text for the special 350th anniversary presentation coming up in 1984.

It was agreed that staff would explore possible followup programming in this area.

Immigration Policy

Ira Silverman reported on an interdepartmental staff examination of the "illegal aliens" problem, explaining that the majority favored amnesty for those already in the country, together with a stringent sealing of borders against future illegal entry. The relation of this issue to Jewish immigration concerns will have to be more adequately studied. The staff committee also backed AJC support for the Vietnamese "boat people" and considered needed changes in legislation to aid refugees. The issue will be considered by the DAC at its

Over --

December meeting, with FAD feeding into that discussion. (Bert Gold also reported on various inquiries by laymen regarding Jewish efforts in behalf of the Far East refugees, and on moves to establish an ad hoc group to aid in their absorption and resettlement.)

### Hasbarah

Mort Yarmon discussed recent efforts to encourage improved Israeli Hasbarah in the U.S., particularly with regard to the Jerusalem issue. A new memorandum was prepared on this subject to help raise money in the U.S. and in Israel for the project.

### Cults

Jim Rudin said he had had many media requests for comments about the Jonestown cult disaster in Guyana and explained that he had stressed the importance of finding a safe, legal way for those who want to leave a cult to do so.

SK:mb

78-900-138



## THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

**date** December 6, 1978  
**to** Area Directors  
**from** Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum, National Interreligious Affairs Director  
**subject** BAVARIAN CATHOLIC ACADEMY SYMPOSIUM ON PASSION PLAYS AND  
OBERAMMERGAU SEMINAR ON ANTI-SEMITISM.

BACKGROUND

AJC has been involved since the 1950s in efforts to change the anti-Semitic character of the Oberammergau Passion Play. Our comparative content analysis, Oberammergau 1960 and 1970 -- A Study in Religious Anti-Semitism, focused scholarly attention on the anti-Jewish impact of the play, and led to a decision on the part of some Oberammergau officials to replace the present Daisenberger text with an earlier text (the Rosner script) in which the role of the Sanhedrin and "the Jews" is less central to the drama. As detailed in a memorandum to you of August 1977, that decision was reversed when ultra-conservative factions committed to the Daisenberger text were voted into office in Oberammergau.

In August of last year, an AJC delegation met with key officials of the Roman Catholic Church in Bavaria, German academics, leading editors and radio and TV personalities, and a delegation from Oberammergau. We proposed that the time was past due for a serious, systematic examination by German scholars and church leaders of the Catholic Church's present understanding of Jews and Judaism, and the ways in which passion plays advance that understanding or contradict it. Professor Franz Henrich, director of the prestigious Bavarian Catholic Academy, responded enthusiastically to our proposal. A day-long symposium, sponsored and underwritten by the Academy, took place this year in Munich on November 19. It was followed by an invited visit to the village of Oberammergau. The AJC delegation consisted of: Miles Jaffe, national chairman of the Interreligious Affairs Commission; Richard Weiss, chairman of the AJC Chapter in Los Angeles and a leader in interreligious affairs; William Trosten, director of AJC Development who is fluent in German and who spent years in Bavaria with the American Military Government; Zachariah Shuster, of Paris, consultant in interreligious affairs in Europe; and myself.

### THE SYMPOSIUM

Planned in cooperation with AJC's Interreligious Affairs Department, the symposium, entitled, "The Passion of Jesus as a Spiritual Drama," drew an overflow audience of some 400 Participants came from Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Italy, with particularly heavy representation from Oberammergau. They included a high-level cross-section of academic scholars, theologians, Christian educators, Government officials, civic leaders, and numerous representatives from major German print and radio and TV media, including Der Spiegel, Der Stern, Süddeutsche Zeitung, and Bavarian Rundfunk radio and German educational television.

At the initiative of Prof. Henrich, each of the participants was given a German-language copy of the AJC study noted above, the first line-by-line comparative analysis of the Daisenberger texts. They were also given copies of correspondence between "The Citizens' Initiative for the 1980 Passion Play" and AJC which clearly explained why AJC felt that the Daisenberger text was "structurally anti-Semitic" and needed to be abandoned in favor of a more sympathetic text. A basic document on Judaism that was prepared by us for publication by the Vatican in seven languages in 1975 was also given to each participant.

In his opening remarks, Prof. Henrich disclosed that he had received a letter from Mayor Ernst Zwink of Oberammergau charging that the Symposium was "a conspiracy on the part of the American Jewish Committee and certain Oberammergau people" to undermine the Passion play, and asking that the Symposium not be held. Rejecting that forcefully, Prof. Henrich declared, "The Oberammergau Passion Play cannot be considered the affair only of a village," and stressed the "Christian duty" to apply current historical research and biblical theology to an understanding of the Passion narrative.

Three scholarly papers were then presented. Dr. Bo Reicke, professor of New Testament at the University of Basel, Switzerland, spoke on "The Historical Background of the Passion of Jesus," synthesizing the findings of contemporary scholarship on the Roman occupation of first century Palestine, the actual role of Pontius Pilate as a ruthless Procurator, the Roman institution of crucifixion, the Roman domination of the Sanhedrin and the Sadducees, and the limited role of Jewish leaders in the trial of Jesus.

Dr. Franz Mussner, professor of Biblical Theology at the University of Regensburg, presented a paper, "Who Bears the Guilt for the Death of Jesus? Theological Perspectives." He reviewed the various and often contradictory accounts of the trial and crucifixion found in the New Testament, noting that the Gospels were composed in different times.

Dr. Friederich Kienecher, professor of New German Literary History and Didactic Literature at the University of Paderborn, spoke on "The Passion of Jesus: A Critical Literary Perspective," detailing the folk understanding of the Passion as medieval morality play in contrast to modern literary treatments of the Passion by great creative artists.

Both Professors Reicke and Mussner stressed that, the removal of anti-Jewish references or tendencies in passion plays "is not the same as rewriting the Gospels. In telling the story of the crucifixion, the Gospels held back a good deal of the political, legal, and religious realities of the day, such as the actual rule of the Romans in Palestine, and who was responsible for what. The realities must be considered in order to have a correct portrayal."

They added: "The Gospels themselves are highly conditioned and specialized interpretations of the Passion. One must always consider that the Gospels were written decades after the death of Christ at the time that the young Church was separated from Israel and developing its own faith and independent consciousness. In that process, the Church developed a growing picture of the Jewish people as the enemy, and inevitably made a caricature of the complex reality of the Pharisees."

The scholars agreed. "In depicting the Passion of Jesus, the Jews must now be portrayed with more honesty, with greater respect for their religious traditions, and with greater recognition of their rich traditions of scholarship. We still have a lot of revision to do in telling the Passion accounts. The Catholic Church has taken heed of the decisions of Vatican Council II in revising its Christian education, teachings, and liturgy. There is a whole assortment of passion plays throughout the world, at the head of which is the Oberammergau Passion Play, which have acted as though relations between Christians and Jews have not changed. After Auschwitz, it is a scandal to continue in that manner."

In a surprise appearance, Italian film director Franco Zeffirelli, who produced the widely-acclaimed NBC-TV production, "Jesus of Nazareth," appealed to the producers of the Oberammergau play "as a Christian and a son of Abraham," not to repeat the errors of the past.

A panel discussion which followed included Dr. Hans Schwaighofer, director of the Rosner version of the passion play, Dr. Alois Fink, its editor, Dr. Ernst Maria Lang, a Munich architect born in Oberammergau whose father was director of the play in 1920; and several others, including Rabbi Peter Levinson of Heidelberg and myself. Dr. Schwaighofer underscored the intentions of Father Daisenberger by quoting from his instructions to the director of the first production

of his play in 1860: "Instruct the actors playing the Jewish parts to do so in a manner that is filled with hatred and vileness, those who play Christian parts should do so with love and merciful qualities."

Based on a paper I had prepared on the role of passion plays in fostering anti-Semitism, I traced the portrayal of Jews as the anti-Christ from medieval times, and documented the relationship between the theological image of the demonic Jew and Hitler's portrayal of Jews as "untermenschen."

The symposium was given prominent coverage in the daily and Sunday press, on radio and on educational TV.

#### OBERAMMERGAU

At the invitation of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft of Oberammergau (the several hundred people affiliated with the alternate Rosner production) our AJC delegation went to the village of Oberammergau the next evening, to lecture on "The History of Anti-Semitism and Jewish-Christian Relations Today." The program began with an excellent filmstrip on the subject /"Christians and Jews: The Troubled Brotherhood" by Sr. Suzanne Noffke, O.P., Alba House Communications, Canfield, Ohio / and ended with a lively question period. For many of the villagers it was their first exposure to the history of anti-Semitism in the Christian West, the Holocaust as viewed through Jewish perspectives, and to some basic knowledge about Jews, Judaism and Israel. The reception was warm and appreciative. As a result, AJC was invited to organize a week-long seminar of lectures by Jewish scholars at Oberammergau in the coming year.

#### EVALUATION

These events in Bavaria are important, not only for the future of the Oberammergau Passion Play, but for the future of German-Jewish relations far transcending the play itself.

Certainly the debate over the Oberammergau Passion Play is no longer a controversy between American Jews and Oberammergau villagers. The Munich Academy symposium has shifted the perspective -- now it is German Catholic academicians, theologians and church officials who are demanding that justice be done and that town officials put an end to anti-Semitism and a new sensitivity based on knowledge, and honest dialogue is beginning to develop in Oberammergau itself.

RPR

78-700-86

KATHOLISCHE AKADEMIE IN BAYERN

SYMPOSIUM ON "THE PASSION OF JESUS - THEN AND NOW"

AMERICAN JEWISH  
SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 1978  
ARCHIVES

A PAPER BY RABBI MARC H. TANENBAUM, NATIONAL INTERRELIGIOUS  
AFFAIRS DIRECTOR OF THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE  
ON THE THEME:

"THE ROLE OF THE PASSION PLAY IN FOSTERING ANTI-SEMITISM  
THROUGHOUT HISTORY"

PRESENTED IN GERMAN BY MR. WILLIAM TROSTEN OF THE AMERICAN  
JEWISH COMMITTEE, NEW YORK CITY.

## CONTENTS

- I - THE HISTORIC BACKGROUND OF THE PASSION-PLAY
- II - THE ROLE OF THE PASSION PLAY IN FOSTERING ANTI-SEMITISM  
THROUGHOUT HISTORY
- III - THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE PASSION PLAY TO THE CURRENT  
RELIGIOUS CLIMATE
- IV - THE POSSIBILITIES AND LIMITATIONS OF ARTISTIC PORTRAYALS  
OF THE PASSION OF JESUS



## I - THE HISTORIC BACKGROUND OF THE PASSION PLAY

According to The New Catholic Encyclopedia (published under the Imprimatur of His Eminence Patrick Cardinal O'Boyle, Washington, D. C., 1967), the Passion Play was a genre of medieval religious drama, of relatively late and slow development, which concentrated on the suffering, death, and Resurrection of Christ, and was thus distinguished from the Corpus Christi cycles narrating the entire Biblical story from Creation to Judgement.

In their major study, A History of the Theater, George Freedley and John A. Reeves (Crown Publisher, N.Y., 1955) assert that the ecclesiastical drama began with the elaboration of the Mass itself and seems to have come about first in France. There liturgical dramas were called mystères (mysteries); in Italy they were the sacre rappresentazioni; in England, miracle plays (sometimes called mystery plays); in Germany, Geistspiele.

The dramas of the period were based on "the holy mysteries of the Bible," hence their names mystery plays. The miracles were taken from the events in the lives of the saints, though by the fourteenth century the two were used interchangeably in ordinary speech.

Alongside the mysteries and miracles there existed the moralities, which contrary to popular belief were contemporaries and not successors of the already described forms. Though the word "morality" was not in use at the time, this form was generally termed "moral," "goodly," or "pithy Interlude." The first of which we have knowledge is the Play of the Lord's Prayer which was performed in York before 1384 and until 1582.

The seven vices of Pride, Lust, Sloth, Gluttony, Hatred, Avarice and Anger were portrayed for the instruction of the auditors. The characters in these plays were allegorical and in some instances derived from miracles though they existed along with the liturgical drama.

It is held by scholars that there were no dramatic representations of Christ's death until the early 13th century, when all other types of liturgical play had long been performed. That may very well mean that there was a reluctance in the medieval Catholic church to imitate in a fictive manner "the awesome mystery of Christ's sacrifice, especially since the Mass as the central act of liturgy was itself the actual continuation of that sacrifice." (NCE, p. 1062)

During the 12th century, however, the custom of chanting a long, lyrical planctus, or lament, of the Blessed Virgin become attached to the Good Friday veneration of the cross. The latter ceremony already included the choral singing of the Impropria, or Reproaches of Jesus, (to which references in terms of attitudes toward Jews, Judaism, and the Synagogue will be made later in this paper) and the uncovering of a veiled crucifix with the words "Ecce lignum crucis." In addition to impersonations by clerics of the voices of the Sorrowful Mother, of Christ, or of John, chanting and rubrics of stylized gestures eventually appeared, and such activity was regarded by Karl Young as "genuine Passion drama."

The only extant texts of Passion plays in Latin are the two in the Benediktbeuern MS from the 13th century, and their form suggests a development rather by elaboration of the already existing liturgical plays than by accretion to dramatic lyric, sermon, or narrative poem. The

early vernacular Passion plays belong to the turn of the 14th century in both Germany and France. The typical plan of the vernacular Passion drama is a threefold design:

The Fall (of the Angels and of Man), the suffering of Christ, and finally the Resurrection.

This plan omits virtually all of the Old Testament history except the original sin of Adam and Eve and ordinarily does not include the nativity of Jesus. The life of Christ is taken up at the beginning of his public ministry or at his triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

The earliest surviving German Passion play is found in a St. Gall MS., undated but probably of the early 14th century. Its span of sacred history extends from the marriage feast of Cana to the Resurrection. Of comparable date is the Vienna play, which adds to the St. Gall pattern the narrative of Adam's Fall, thus presenting for the first time the triptych effect of the usual Passion play. Perhaps the most notable feature of the St. Gall text is the presence of a prologue in the voice of St. Augustine, a trace thus appearing of the famous Prophet plays, in which the Church Father summoned a procession of witnesses to the Messiah. Augustine also serves as a commentator in the play, at times interrupting to give a brief outline of coming action and at other times to give a little homily based on a scene just concluded, such as an exhortation to humility after Jesus washed the feet of the Disciples.

The flowering of German Passion plays occurred in the 15th and 16th centuries, which witnessed the expansion of the texts to many thousands of lines and thus to an action requiring 3 days for performance. Among the group of plays that survived this period are the Frankfurt and the Tyrol texts.

The nucleus of the Frankfurt group of plays is the Dirigierrolle, which reveals in skeletal form a very extensive undertaking, from a Prophet play to an Ascension scene, climaxed by an epilogue debate between the allegorical figures Ecclesia and Synagoga. The Frankfurt Passion Play in its turn has served as a point of departure for other Passion plays performed in the same general area, of which the best known are the Alsfeld and the Heidelberg texts. These texts exist in MSS. written shortly after 1500, and the great length of the scenes is attributed to "the loquacity of the characters, which has grown immeasurably from the cryptic speeches in the early plays, and also to the lavish use of comic motifs." (NCE, p. 1063.)

The presence of buffoonery is quite marked in these southwestern German plays, notably in the scenes of merry devils, of Mary Magdalene's worldly life, and even of the counting out and quarreling over Judas' 30 silver coins. Allegory also is used, sparingly but effectively, e.g., in the Heidelberg personification of Death as summoner of Lazarus; Death boasts ironically of his unlimited power and then suffers humiliation in his defeat by Christ's miracle at Lazarus' tomb (John 11:1-46). Also noteworthy in this text is the juxtaposition of prefigurative scenes from the Old Testament immediately before the corresponding events of the New Testament related typologically to them. (Thus the acquittal of Susanna by Daniel (Daniel ch. 13) is staged as a prelude to Christ's encounter with the woman taken in adultery (John 8:1-11.) This method of structuring TYPE and ANTITYPE in sacred history is not widespread in drama. The much later Oberammergau play has something akin this arrangement in a series of tableaux vivants from prefigurative Old Testament events preceding each New Testament scene.

The Tyrol Passion plays from the Eastern Alpine region are distinguished from other German texts by a greater selectivity of incident and by a uniformly elevated tone. Omitting Old Testament material, they begin late in the life of Jesus, with the council of "the Jews" plotting his death.

(The most characteristic plays of the German stage were the Shrove-tide plays, Fastnachtspiel, which centered in Nuremberg, the center of learning and industry throughout the medieval period as well as during the Renaissance. The subject matter was similar to the French farces except for the representation of the peasants in a coarse and ugly light, their virtue and bravery always subject to crude questioning. The fact that these plays were always written by townsfolk may explain the dislike, distrust, and ridicule heaped upon the country people.)

Passion plays on French soil reveal much the same history as do those in Germany. The early vernacular texts are of Burgundian provenance and are all related ultimately to the nondramatic narrative poem, Passion des Jongleurs, written c. 1200.

The really great French Passion plays are those of Eustache Mercadé and Arnoul Greban, both 15th century dramatists, whose gigantic plays were subject to revision and adaptation by later writers, most skillfully by Jean Michel. These French mystères show divergence from the standard German design; although they omit most of the Old Testament narrative, they do include the Nativity and the early life of Jesus. Moreover, they envelop the titanic serial narrative in a unifying framework known as the Procès de Paradis, quite different from the German forms of prophetic prologue and Augustinian commentary.

THE PROCÈS DE PARADIS IS A DRAMATIZATION OF THE DEBATE AMONG RIGHTEOUSNESS, MERCY, TRUTH, AND PEACE AT THE THRONE OF GOD, ALLEGORIZING THE CONFLICT BETWEEN HIS JUSTICE AND HIS MERCY. The allegorized virtues, known in homiletic literature as the Four Daughters of God, are reconciled only when the Second Person of the Trinity undertakes to expiate man's sin; they reappear at intervals in the long cycle, most notably at the return of Christ to heaven, when Justice (Righteousness) at first sulks in a corner but then in a dramatic capitulation accepts the satisfaction made by Jesus.

Performances of Passion plays continued long into modern times. The Catholic Encyclopedia describes the Oberammergau Passion Play as "one of the German dramas still flourishing in a regular presentation every 10th year." The origin of this custom is a well-known series of events related to the Thirty Years' War of the early 17th century. During the devastation of the Bavarian countryside by Swedish troops in 1632, a severe outbreak of the plague occurred, first in the lowlands, spreading gradually to the upland villages, including Oberammergau. After months of such disaster, the town council of this devout Catholic village decided upon a vow; they would sacrifice a year in every decade to the presentation of a Passion play. This promise was made by all the villagers for themselves and their descendants, as an act of penance and petition for deliverance; it is the Oberammergau tradition that no one died of the plague after this solemn religious act.

#### SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

All surveys of the historic evolution of Passion Plays that we have consulted suggest a number of conclusions that affect our approach to the 1980 version of the Oberammergau Passion Play:

- 1) From the 12th century planctus Mariae and the simple Latin plays of the Benediktbeuern MS, to the huge spectacles of the German and French cycles, there has been a very wide diversity of texts of Passion Plays reflecting paraliturgical expressions of popular devotion in a variety of cultural forms;
- 2) From the earliest surviving German Passion Play found in the St. Gall MS. of the early 14th century, there exists a tradition of structuring into the Passion Play a commentary, such as that in the St. Gall text which includes a prologue and commentary by St. Augustine, whose purpose is to lift up the spiritual message of the Passion Play;
- 3) The relationship of Christianity to Judaism, the New Testament to the "Old Testament" (which Jews prefer to identify as "Hebrew Scriptures"), Christian attitudes to Jews and the Synagogue are a persistent problematic in the majority of the diverse traditions of Passion Plays. As we shall elaborate, this polemical tradition of negative and at times hostile portrayal of the Synagogue, the Jewish people, and Judaism begins already in the 12th century in the inclusion of the Impropria (The Reproaches), the dejudaization of the historic Jesus by omitting "virtually all Old Testament history" in the 13th century Benediktbeuern MS, the arraignment of the Ecclesia in sharp and hostile opposition to the Synagoga through the literary method of "type" versus "antitype" found in the Frankfurt group of plays, but especially in the tableaux vivants of the Oberammergau Passion Play. As the New Catholic Encyclopedia indicates, this method of casting the Church in opposition to the Synagogue and of using the "Old Testament" as prefiguration and antitype to the New Testament "is not widespread" in passion dramas, but is a special characteristic of the Oberammergau Passion Play and those derived from it. There are models of other Passion plays historically, such as those of Tyrol, which show "a greater selectivity"

of incident and...a uniformly elevated tone."

4) The New Catholic Encyclopedia's scholars describe the French mysteres as "the really great French Passion plays...which show divergence from the standard German design" in that the Procès de Paradis dramatizes the Passion of Jesus in the form of a debate among the allegorized virtues, Righteousness, Mercy, Truth, and Peace at the Throne of God, allegorizing the spiritual message of the Passion as the conflict between His Justice and His Mercy. Is the Daisenberger text or the Rosner text of the Oberammergau Passion closer to this expression of authentic spirituality which precludes the singling out of "the Jews" as the enemies of God and the murderers of Christ collectively guilty as deicides, and therefore subject to eternal punishment?

## II. - THE ROLE OF THE PASSION PLAY IN FOSTERING ANTI-SEMITISM THROUGHOUT HISTORY

The Dark Ages of Jewish history in Western Europe date from the First Crusade (1096), which began and ended with a massacre. "The men who took the cross," wrote Lord Acton, "after receiving communion, heartily devoted the day to the extermination of the Jews." They killed about ten thousand Jewish people.

When Godfrey of Bouillon, in the summer of 1099, succeeded after a heroic assault in capturing Jerusalem, he spent the first week slaughtering the inhabitants. The Jews were shut up in their Synagogue, which was then set on fire. According to the Roman Catholic historian, Malcolm Hay, in his book, Europe and the Jews, (Beacon Press, Boston, 1960, pp. 37 ff.), Godfrey wrote to the Pope, "Learn that in the Porch and in the Temple of Solomon, our people had the vile blood of the Saracens up to the knees of their horses." And then, said Michelet, sweeping aside the glamor and piety, "and then, when they thought the Savior had been sufficiently

revenged, that is to say, when there was hardly anyone left alive in the town, they went with tears to worship at the Holy Sepulchre."

The peculiarly intense and unremitting hatred which in Christendom - and only in Christendom - has been directed against Jewry above all other "outgroups" can be accounted for, according to both Christian and Jewish scholars, "by the wholly phantastic image of the Jews which suddenly gripped the imagination of the new masses at the time of the first crusades."

In his landmark study, The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Messianism in Medieval and Reformation Europe and its Bearing on Modern Totalitarian Movements (Harper Torchbooks, New York, 1961), Prof. Norman Cohn observes:

"According to the Johannine and Sibylline traditions alike, before the Millennium could dawn, misbelief had to be eliminated. In a sense the ideal of a wholly Christian world is of course as old as Christianity itself. Nevertheless Christianity has usually remained, as it was at its origin, a missionary religion which had insisted that the elimination of misbelievers must be achieved through their conversion. The messianic hordes which began to form in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, on the other hand, saw no reason at all why that elimination could not equally well be achieved by the physical annihilation of the unconverted. In the Chanson de Roland, the famous epic which is the most impressive literary embodiment of the spirit of the First Crusade, the new attitude is expressed quite unambiguously.

'The Emperor has taken Saragossa. A thousand Franks are sent to search thoroughly the town, the mosques and synagogues...The King believes in God, he desires to serve him. His bishops bless the water and the heathen are brought to the baptistry. If any one of them resists Charlemagne, the King has him hanged or burnt to death or slain with the sword.'

In the eyes of the crusading pauperes, Prof. Cohn writes, the smiting of Moslems and the Jews was to be the first act in that final battle which was to culminate in the smiting of the Prince of Evil himself. Above these desperate hordes, as they moved about their work of massacre, there loomed the figure of the Antichrist. As the infidels were allotted their roles in the eschatological drama, popular imagination transformed them into demons. But if the Saracen long retained in the popular imagination a certain demonic quality, the Jews was portrayed as an even more horrifying figure. Jews and Saracens were generally regarded as closely akin, if not identical, but since Jews lived scattered through Christian Europe, they came to occupy by far the larger part in popular demonology. Moreover they occupied it for much longer - with consequences, Dr. Cohn states, which have extended down the generations and which include the massacre of millions of European Jews in mid-twentieth century.

Based on his detailed historic and theological studies, Prof. Cohn asserts that "official Catholic teaching had prepared the way" for establishing the demonic image of the Jew which dominated the imagination of large parts of the Christian masses in the Middle Ages and beyond. Catholic historian Malcolm Hay similarly declares, "The machinery of propaganda was entirely in the hands of the Church officials - preaching, chronicles, mystery plays, and even ecclesiastical ceremonies were the principal agencies available for the dissemination of hate. Preachers dwelt with a morbid and sometimes sadistic realism upon the physical sufferings of Christ, for which they blamed all Jews of the time and all their descendants. For many centuries the Bishops of Beziers preached a series of sermons during Holy Week, urging their congregations to take vengeance on the Jews who lived in the district; stoning them became a regular part of the Holy Week ceremonial."

PASSION PLAY

-11-

The Church, Prof. Cohn observes, had always tended to regard the Synagogue as a dangerous influence and even as a potential rival and had never ceased to carry on a vigorous polemic against Judaism. For generations the laity had been accustomed to hear the Jews bitterly condemned from the pulpit - as perverse, stubborn and ungrateful because they refused to admit the divinity of Christ, as bearers also of a monstrous hereditary guilt for the murder of Christ. Moreover the eschatological tradition had long associated the Jews with Antichrist himself.

Already in the second and third centuries theologians were foretelling that Antichrist would be a Jew of the tribe of Dan. Born at Babylon, he would grow up in Palestine and would love the Jews above all peoples; he would rebuild the Temple for them and gather them together from their dispersion. The Jews for their part would be the most faithful followers of Antichrist, accepting him as the Messiah who was to restore the nation. And if some theologians looked forward to a general conversion of the Jews, others maintained that their blindness would endure to the end and that at the Last Judgment they would be sent, along with Antichrist himself, to suffer the torments of Hell for all eternity. In the compendium of Antichrist-lore which Adso of Montier-en-Der produced in the tenth century and which remained the stock authority throughout the Middle Ages, Antichrist, while remaining a Jew of the tribe of Dan, has become still more uncanny and sinister. Now he is to be the offspring of a harlot and a worthless wretch and moreover at the moment of his conception the Devil is to enter the harlot's womb as a spirit, thereby ensuring that the child shall be the very incarnation of Evil. Later, his education in Palestine is to be carried out by sorcerers and magicians, who will initiate him into the black art and iniquity.

1- In his powerful study, The Devil and the Jews (Yale University Press, 1943, p. 13 ff.), Dr. Joshua Trachtenberg observes that

To the masses, the Jew who appeared upon the stage and in the tales and chronicles and moralized anecdotes, or exempla of the preachers, was not an individual but a type - the pattern after which the entire people was modeled. This Jew often lacked a name; rarely did he own personal characteristics. But more noteworthy still is the fact that a conscious effort was often made to re-present him, even in material dealing with past events, such as Biblical drama and legend, not as a historical figure but as a contemporary Jew with whom the audience was more or less familiar. THE SINS OF JESUS' CONTEMPORARIES WERE DEREGULARLY PILED UPON THE COLLECTIVE HEAD OF MEDIEVAL JEWRY. In more than one German and French mystery play, for instance, we find such stage directions as that the Jews are to be jüdisch gekleidet ("clothed in a Jewish garb") or avec fouelle et bonne cornue ("with Jew badge and peaked cap"), the distinctive dress of the medieval merchants and peddlers. In the Frankfurt Passion Play, the Jews who mock and strike Jesus bear names current in that vicinity until today. When we consider that these plays, though primarily religious in theme, often embodied a social commentary, SERVING AS THE FOREMOST MEDIUM OF FOLK EXPRESSION OF THEIR TIME; so that the audience tended to interpret the scene before them as applying to their own time and their own lot, we can appreciate the direct impact of this posture of the Jew. The manner in which Jesus and the Jews treated Jesus and the Saints in this literature was presented, and understood, as illustrative of the character of the contemporary Jew.

The historical authenticity of these tales was of no importance. THE CHRISTIAN CONSIDERED THEM AS HIS PRIMARY SOURCE OF ENTERTAINMENT AND INSTRUCTION AND WOULD HAVE REJECTED OUT OF HAND (had this occurred to him, which it did not) any suggestion of a critical examination of their veracity. He could no more question them than he could the religious authority which professed them wrapped in the aura of highest truth. "WHETHER WHAT I AM RELAYING IS TRUE OR NOT IS NO CONCERN OF MINE," WROTE A TWELFTH-CENTURY CHRONICLER; "IT IS TOLD THUS, AND THUS IT MUST BE ACCEPTED."

Significantly, when the old eschatological prophecies were taken up by the masses of the later Middle Ages, all these phantasies were treated with deadly seriousness and elaborated into a weird mythology. For just as the human figure of Antichrist tended to merge into the wholly demonic figure of Satan, so the Jews tended to be seen as demons attendant on Satan. In medieval drama, some passion plays, and picture, they were often shown as devils with the beard and horns of a goat, while in real life ecclesiastical and secular authorities alike tried to make them wear horns on their hats.<sup>1</sup> Like other demons, they were imagined and portrayed in close association creatures which symbolize lust and dirt - horned beasts, pigs, frogs, worms, snakes and scorpions. Conversely Satan himself was commonly given Jewish features and was referred to as "the father of the Jews." The populace was convinced that in the synagogue Jews worshipped Satan in the form of a cat or a toad, invoking his aid in making black magic. Like their supposed master, Jews were thought of as demons of destruction whose one object was the ruin of Christians and Christendom - "dyables d'enfer, enemys du genre humain," as they were called in French miracle plays.

And if the power of the Jews seemed greater than ever, their evil-doing more outrageous, their sorceries more baleful, that was but one more sign that the End was indeed at hand. Even the ten lost tribes of Israel, whom Commodianus had seen as the future army of Christ, became identified with those hosts of Antichrist, the peoples of Gog and Magog - peoples whom the Pseudo-Methodius described as living off human flesh, corpses, babes ripped from their mothers' wombs, and also off scorpions, serpents and all the most disgusting reptiles. Medieval dramas were written showing how the Jewish demons would help Antichrist to conquer the world until, on the eve

of the Second Coming and the beginning of the Millennium, Antichrist and Jews would be annihilated together amidst the rejoicings of the Christians. During the performance of such works armed force was needed to protect the Jewish quarter from the fury of the mob. Popes and Councils might insist that, although the Jews ought to be isolated and degraded until the day of their conversion, they must certainly not be killed - subtleties such as these made little impression on turbulent masses swept by eschatological hopes and fears and already, as they thought, embarked on the prodigious struggles of the Last Days.

Hatred of the Jews has so often been attributed to their role as money-lenders that it is worth emphasizing how slight the connection really was. The phantasy of the demonic Jews existed before the reality of the Jewish money-lender, whom indeed it helped to produce by debarring Jews from any gainful economic, civil, or military functions through exclusionary civic and ecclesiastical laws.

When Bernard, Abbot of Clairvaux, was commissioned by Pope Eugenius III in 1145 to preach the Second Crusade, he gained many recruits by announcing that the killing of an infidel would merit a place in heaven. Rudolph, or Ralph, a Cistercian monk who left his monastery at Clairvaux in order to enlist recruits in Germany for the rescue of the Holy Land, told the German masses it was their duty first to kill the enemies of Christ in their own country. Ralph told his congregations that these infidels, violent men, and well armed, were a long way off, and that it was much safer, and equally meritorious to kill unarmed Jews at home. The doctrine was readily accepted by the populace, whose minds for generations, says Malcolm Hay, had been prepared for such ideas by ecclesiastical propaganda. The massacre began, without regard to age or sex, at Spire, Cologne, Mainz, and many other cities in Germany. "Many ecclesiastical

historians," writes Malcolm Hay, "have treated the whole affair (of the massacre of the Jews in Germany) as if it had been merely an unfortunate incident, due to the ignorant fanaticism of single individuals and not as in fact it was characteristic and inevitable in the world of the twelfth century," and subsequent centuries.

That demonology which has fixed the image of the Jews as Antichrist in popular Christian eschatology has persisted to modern times in Germany and elsewhere. In her classic study, The War Against the Jews, 1939-1945, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1975), Dr. Lucy Dawidowicz observes: (p. 9):

"Between 1907 and 1910 Lanz von Liebenfels, an eccentric occultist-racist, published a series of pamphlets - which Adolf Hitler bought and read - called Ostara: Briefbucherei der blonden Mannesrechtler (Newsletter of the Blond Champions of Man's Rights), in which he depicted the struggle between blond Aryan heroes and the dark, hairy ape-men who represent the lower races. All human existence revolved around this struggle, whose central burden was to preserve the purity of Aryan women from the demonic sexuality of the ape-man"

Dr. Dawidowicz continues: (p. 10):

"People living in an anti-Semitic milieu - as Hitler did - already viewed Jews as diseased and filthy creatures, degenerate and corrupting, outsiders beyond fraternity and compassion. Since the society had already branded the Jews as loathsome pariahs, the Jews could then serve the symbolic and pathological needs of the obsessed and guilt-ridden."

In a summary evaluation of the relationship of this theological tradition of anti-Semitism and its critical formative influence on modern German anti-Semitism, Dr. Dawidowicz makes this compelling statement:

"A line of anti-Semitic descent from Martin Luther to Adolf Hitler is easy to draw. Both Luther and Hitler were obsessed by a demonologized universe inhabited by Jews. 'Know, Christian,' wrote Luther, 'that next to the devil thou hast no enemy more cruel, more venomous and violent than a true Jew .' Hitler himself, in that early dialogue with Dietrich Eckhart, asserted that the later Luther - that is, the violently anti-Semitic Luther - was the genuine Luther. Luther's protective authority was invoked by the Nazis when they came to power, and his anti-Semitic writings enjoyed a revival of popularity. To be sure, the similarities of Luther's anti-Jewish exhortations with modern racial anti-Semitism and even with Hitler's racial policies are not merely coincidental. They all derive from a common historic tradition of Jew-hatred, whose provenance can be traced back to Haman's advice to Ahasuerus. But modern German anti-Semitism had more recent roots than Luther and grew out of a different soil - not that German anti-Semitism was new; it drew part of its sustenance from Christian anti-Semitism, whose foundation had been laid by the Catholic Church and upon which Luther built. It was equally a product of German nationalism. Modern German anti-Semitism was the bastard child of the union of Christian anti-Semitism with German nationalism." (The War Against the Jews, p. 23.)

The Daisenberger text of the Oberammergau Passion Play must be viewed against that background.

### III - THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE PASSION PLAY TO THE CURRENT RELIGIOUS CLIMATE

Of all the pageants that dramatize the Crucifixion narrative, the most famous undoubtedly is the Passion Play performed every ten years at Oberammergau, in the solidly Roman Catholic region of Upper Bavaria, in West Germany. Over the centuries, it has been performed in at least five different versions. In modern times, the play and the picturesque mountain

village in which it is performed have become a major international tourist attraction and since the end of World War II, some 1,500,000 people have come to Oberammergau performances. In 1970, according to village officials, some 530,000 people from 113 countries came to Oberammergau to view 102 performances. This indicates that despite its origins as a local village production, Oberammergau's Passion Play now has assumed an unprecedented international importance influencing the image of German Catholicism, of Western Christianity, and of Germany itself in many parts of the world.

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 Protestant scholar, Dr. Bernhard E. Olson, author of the landmark study, Faith and Prejudice (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963, p. 195) commented on this genre of pageants:

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 toward Jews today.

Similarly, a respected Catholic, Father John T. Pawlikowski, O.S.M., writes in his study, Catechetics and Prejudice, (Paulist Press, New York, 1973, p. 100):

A major problem in Christian-Jewish relations...was the blame frequently placed upon the Jewish people as a whole for the death of Jesus. Historians have found that the doctrine of deicide was never officially proclaimed by a church council or by a papal decree. Yet it was widespread among the Christian masses since the time of the early Church and Church authorities rarely took any steps to curb its influence. This charge has led to a history of bitter persecution of Jews by Christians. Most of this terrible history does not appear in textbooks dealing with the history of the Church. Thus, most Catholics are simply uninformed about the long tradition of Christian anti-Semitism, while most Jews are well aware of it.

The Oberammergau Passion Play is no exception to this rule of "providing a major cause of negative attitudes towards Jews today" - a fact fully recognized by the enemies of the Jews. One of Oberammergau's strongest admirers in modern times was Adolf Hitler, who stated at the height of the Second World War (Adolf Hitler, Secret Conversations, 1941-1944, New York, Farrar, Straus, and Young, 1953, p. 457):

It is vital that the Passion Play be continued at Oberammergau; for never has the menace of Jewry been so convincingly portrayed.

Under the Nazi government, the Oberammergau Passion Play was classified as "a racially important cultural document," and on the occasion of the pageant's tercentennial, in 1934, a Nazified special performance represented Jesus and his disciples as Aryan heroes.

The performance in 1950 and 1960 went back to the version used before the Nazi era - a text originally written by a priest named Joseph Alois Daisenberger for the 1860 season. Daisenberger's text is free from the 19th and 20th century-style racism; but it abounds with anti-Jewish religious prejudices and misstatements - as well as demonological and satanic images of Jews as being in league with the Antichrist - long established in the popular tradition described earlier in this paper.

Until recent decades, the anti-Jewish tenor of the Daisenberger text does not appear to have troubled many Christian consciences. Attention was focused on this critical concern only after the Second World War, when in the wake of the Nazi horror the Christian world began to reappraise its attitudes toward Jews and Judaism. That spirit is well reflected in the recently published book, Christology After Auschwitz, by Father Michael B. McGarry, C.S.P., (Paulist Press, New York, 1977, p. 1):

On the Christian side, theologians and Church leaders, in moments of contrition and bewilderment, wonder how such a catastrophe as the holocaust could have happened in a

Christian country, in a nation nurtured and steeped in the Christian tradition. Antisemitism, to be sure, predates Christianity, but never before have men focused such a genocidal fury on the Jews with such an unambiguous goal - the annihilation of the Jewish people.

In an effort to eradicate every form of, and justification for, antisemitism from Christianity, Church theologians and leaders have tried to investigate what could have laid the groundwork for such an expression of hate and utter disregard for human dignity. Some, ashamed at their own Church's silence during the attempt at the "final solution" have pointed to the "unChristian behavior" of the Christian Church. That is, if Christians had been more truly faithful to the teachings of Christ, they never could have given in to the evils of antisemitism.

Others have suggested that the answer is deeper and more radical than a matter of moral behavior - the basis for antisemitism is to be found in the Scriptures themselves, or, if not in the New Testament, in the content of Church teaching and doctrine. Jesus' dispute with Jewish leaders, the caricature of Jewish ritual and synagogue, the "infidelity" of the formerly chosen - these and other anti-Judaistic themes run through the Holy Book of Christians. In recent years, numerous studies have looked carefully at the New Testament to glean from it whether, in fact, the very Scriptures are antisemitic. These investigations come to different conclusions, but at least it can be said, 'Christianity (especially the New Testament) wrongly understood offers a constant temptation for hostility against the Jews and the Synagogue.'

In this reappraisal, the decisive influence has been Vatican Council II's Declaration on Non-Christian Religions, Nostra Aetate, adopted nearly unanimously in 1965 by 2,500 Council Fathers from throughout the world, with which the Roman Catholic Church embarked on a new policy of promoting "mutual respect and fraternal dialogue" between Catholics and Jews.

The Vatican Declaration acknowledges the Jewish roots of Christianity, and emphasizes that the Virgin Mary, Jesus himself and his early disciples sprang from the Jewish people. It states that, even though "Jerusalem did not recognize the time of her visitation" and most Jews did not accept the Gospel,"

God holds the Jews most dear for the sake of the Fathers (the Jewish Patriarchs), His gift and call are irrevocable.

Most important, the Vatican Declaration asserts:

Although the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ, nevertheless what happened to Christ in His Passion cannot be attributed to all Jews without distinction, then alive, nor to the Jews of today... Besides, as the Church has always held and holds now, Christ underwent His Passion and death freely, because of the sins of men and out of infinite love, in order that all may reach salvation.

For these reasons, the Vatican Declaration calls on those who teach and preach not to utter "anything that is inconsistent with the truth of the Gospel and with the spirit of Christ," and states that the Catholic Church "deplores hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism directed against Jews at any time and by any one."

In 1968, Pope Paul VI personally appointed a Vatican Secretariat on Religious Relations with Judaism, which, in elaboration of Nostra Aetate, promulgated in 1975 a document called Vatican Guidelines on Catholic-Jewish Relations. These Guidelines declared that "the spiritual bonds and historical links binding the Church to Judaism condemn (as opposed to the very spirit of Christianity) all forms of anti-Semitism and discrimination, which in any case the dignity of the human person alone would suffice to condemn."

The Vatican Guidelines specify that "these links and relationships render obligatory a better mutual understanding and renewed mutual esteem" in the areas of Dialogue, Liturgy, Teaching and Education, "at all levels of Christian instruction and education," including Catechisms and religious textbooks, the mass media (press, radio, cinema, television), and joint social action. "With respect to liturgical readings," the Guidelines declare, "care will be taken to see that homilies based on them will not distort their meaning, especially when it is a question of passages which seem to show the Jewish people as such in an unfavorable light. Efforts will be made so to instruct the Christian people that they will understand the true interpretations of all the texts and their meaning for the contemporary believer."

The Guidelines add.

Commissions entrusted with the task of liturgical translation will pay particular attention to the way in which they express those phrases and passages which Christians, if not well informed, might misunderstand because of prejudice. Obviously, one cannot alter the text of the Bible. The point is that, with a version destined for liturgical use, there should be an overriding preoccupation to bring out explicitly the meaning of a text while taking scriptural studies into account. (Thus the formula "the Jews" in St. John sometimes, according to the context, means "the leaders of the Jews" or "the adversaries of Jesus," terms which express better the thought of the Evangelist and avoid appearing to arraign the Jewish people as such. Another example is the use of the words "Pharisee" and "Pharisaism" which have taken on a largely pejorative meaning.) The preceding remarks apply to introductions to Biblical readings, to the Prayer of the Faithful and to commentaries printed in missals used by the laity.

The new interest in the Oberammergau Passion Play created by the Vatican Declaration (and the Vatican Guidelines) have led to demands for revision by Christians and Jews. The municipal authorities of Oberammergau, who exercise sole control over the production, have announced that a revision of the Daisenberger text was undertaken for use in the 1970 performance. (The authors of this revision have not been publicly identified.)

According to statements by Oberammergau spokesmen, the latest text of the Passion Play no longer contains anti-Jewish elements, except where dictated by the need to follow the Biblical accounts faithfully. Thus, the director of the 1970 production, Anton Preisinger, has stated,

The text has been thoroughly overhauled, but we cannot change what the Bible says, at times the Bible does use hard words about the Jews. (Reported in London Daily Telegraph, Nov. 17, 1969.)

Similarly, Ernst Zwink, Presiding Mayor of Oberammergau and Chairman of the Passion Play Committee, wrote on February 26, 1970, to the Upper Bavarian Government that the Committee had seriously and honestly striven to "attempt changes and to purge the text of all passages which can be misunderstood, in order to take into account the spirit of the times."

In his letter, the Mayor rejected the imputation that the revised text might still be anti-Jewish in some degree: "The question whether the text is in harmony with the thoughts and wishes of the Vatican Council II, and whether it has anti-Semitic dispositions must be considered as a tendentious distortion." Indeed, he suggested that there was not much that could have been revised "The Daisenberger text (1860) is close to the obligatory basis of the Passion reports in the New Testament and to the views expressed by responsible experts in the field." These experts were not named.

To assess the validity of the claim that the current version of the Oberammergau Passion Play no longer contains anti-Jewish elements, the American Jewish Committee, long concerned with the effect of Passion Plays on Christians' attitudes toward Jews and Judaism, undertook a comparative content analysis of the 1960 and 1970 scripts. Published in German and English under the title, Oberammergau 1960 and 1970: A Study in Religious Anti-Semitism, the analysis compared line-by-line the Daisenberger text in the original German, as performed in 1960 with the official German script prepared for 1970. To our knowledge, it is the first line-by-line analysis of the 1960 and 1970 scripts.

The analysis deals solely with text passages, deletions and modifications that bear on the representation of Jews and Judaism. Changes that were clearly made for dramatic or stylistic reasons only - such as the removal of repetitions, or modernization of out-of-date expressions - have been disregarded.

A copy of this analysis in German is being made available to each of the members of this Symposium for detailed study.

The American Jewish Committee analysis came to these conclusions:

Taken all in all, the 1970 revision of the Passion Play text falls far short of removing all gratuitous anti-Jewish elements. However well-intentioned those responsible for the updating may have been in their desire to "purge the text of all passages which can be misunderstood," the attempt has not succeeded.

Except for one excision of some length (the prologue and the tableau opening Act II which, revealingly, associated Jesus' antagonists with "all the spirits...up from nethermost Hell/Which from Creation's dawn stubbornly have rebelled/And forever have discord/Sowed against the Divine" - images of the Antichrist), the revisions are limited to deletions and modifications of emotionally charged individual words or brief phrases. Even this editing has been so inconsistently carried out that not one of the objectionable themes or ideas in the earlier version has wholly disappeared. Indeed, the characters as well as the story line and its implications are quite unchanged.

1) The 1970 "revised" text, like its predecessor, still draws Jesus' antagonists as fiendish, almost subhuman creatures, thus perpetuating the medieval images of the Jews as "demons of destruction," "dyables d'enfer, enemys du genre humain."

2) It misrepresents Jewish religion in Jesus' time as harsh, corrupt and worthless, thereby violating the Vatican Guidelines' instruction that "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 neighbor (cf. Deut 6:15; Lev. 19:18; Matt. 22:34-40.)"

3) It falsely turns Jesus and his disciples into renegades from Judaism, concealing their roots in the Jewish past and their commitment to

Jewish religion and ethics. That historical caricature is in opposition to the statement of the Vatican Guidelines:

Jesus was born of the Jewish people, as were the Apostles and a large number of His first Disciples...And although His teaching had a profoundly new character, Christ, nevertheless, in many instances took His stand on the teaching of the Old Testament. The New Testament is profoundly marked by its relation to the Old...Jesus also used teaching methods similar to those employed by the rabbis of His time.

4) It presents all Jews as enemies of Jesus, asserts they knowingly accepted the guilt in his death for themselves and their descendants, and maintains that they have been permanently rejected by God for this reason, contradicting the explicit teaching of Vatican Council II and the Vatican Guidelines.

Reflecting major trends in contemporary Christian scholarship which unambiguously rejects the "deicide" canard against the Jewish people, Dr. Eugene Fisher, a noted Catholic educator who is the executive secretary of the Secretariat for Catholic-Jewish Relations of the U. S. National Conference of Catholic Bishops, writes in his book, Faith Without Prejudice (Paulist Press, New York, 1977) under the chapter heading, "Who Killed Jesus?" the following:

The Catechism of the Council of Trent, Article IV, as promulgated in the sixteenth century...shows clearly what has always been essential Christian teaching on responsibility for the death of Christ. Theologically, all humanity bears the blame. It is not one particular group, but the sins of us all that are responsible for his death. The same Council of Trent also declared that the crucifixion was Christ's free decision. "It was the peculiar privilege of Christ the Lord to have died when He Himself decreed to die, and to have died not so much by external violence as by internal assent..."

The New Testament does not present history in our sense of the term. It reveals the meaning of history. As revelation, it is not intended to give us merely a listing of facts and events. Rather it aims to teach us the salvific will of God that underlines all human events. Only in this way is it "relevant" to us: that it reveals to us our own sins and our own salvation. To the question "Who Killed Jesus?" the Christian replies: "I did."

"He (Jesus) himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness (I Peter 2:24).

As Christians, we are saved only to the extent that we identify ourselves as the crucifiers of Jesus.

5) It falsifies the character and historic role of Pilate, and shifts the role of the crucifier from the Romans to the Jews.

This sympathetic portrayal of Pilate contradicts the findings of modern Biblical scholarship which, as Father Pawlikowski has written, "has shown quite convincingly that the death of Jesus was not a plot engineered by the general Jewish populace. As Father Bruce Vawter has insisted, 'there seems to be no doubt that Jewish responsibility has been heightened at the expense of the Roman...In particular, the governor Pontius Pilate as portrayed in the Gospels appears to be credited with a greater degree of disinterested justice in his makeup than other historical sources concerning him would cause us to suspect.'"

Father Vawter also goes on to say that 'a factual history of the trial and death of Jesus has to be reconstructed rather than read from the Gospels ...A great deal of vital background material is missing from the Gospel narratives as they now stand. It must be supplied through auxiliary readings and commentaries.' (p. 107; Catechetics and Prejudice.)

Dr. Eugene Fisher, in his book, Faith Without Prejudice, states:

Contemporary accounts of Pilate show another picture of him. Pilate was so brutal that even Rome could not take him for long, and he was eventually called back by Rome because of excessive cruelty...A letter of the period reveals Pilate's true character. It charges him with "corruptibility, violence, robberies, ill-treatment of the people, grievances, continuous executions without trial, endless and intolerable cruelties."

And Father Pawlikowski concludes,

This situation makes it almost impossible for even the very best of passion plays to entirely avoid a travesty of the Gospel story. We cannot obtain a fully accurate picture of the trial and death

of Jesus from reading the Gospels alone. This is the clear conclusion of the vast majority of modern Biblical scholars.

6) It fails to make clear the background of oppressive Roman rule against which the drama of Jesus' ministry was enacted, and without which the actions of Jesus' antagonists cannot be understood.

The United States Secretariat for Catholic-Jewish Relations has issued a statement on Passion Plays, with guidelines for improvement (February 28, 1968.)

The statement points out that in trying to heighten religious fervor, carelessly written or produced Passion plays can become a source of anti-Semitic reactions, contrary to the spirit of the Vatican Declaration on Non-Christian Religions. Writers and producers of such pageants are specifically warned to avoid the following exaggerations and misinterpretations:

- 1) "To conceal the fact that Jesus is a Jew and that His friends as well as His enemies in the drama are Jews,"
- 2) "To create the impression that most Jews of Jesus' day willed his death, failing to show that the secrecy surrounding much of Jesus' trial was motivated by the large following He had in Jerusalem;"
- 3) "To change the 'crowd' before the governor's palace into a screaming 'mob,' as representing all Jerusalem, and indeed all Israel;"
- 4) "To depict Pilate, whom historiography has shown to have been a ruthless tyrant, as an innocent and kindly bystander;"
- 5) "To highlight those texts of the gospel narrative that are amenable to misinterpretation by uninformed audiences, such as, 'His blood upon us and upon our children' (Matt. 27:25)."

The Secretariat for Catholic-Jewish Relations has defined the true purpose of the 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,

representatives of all of us."

One wishes the 1970 and the proposed 1980 Oberammergau pageants had adhered to this definition instead of falling, as they do, into every one of the pitfalls the Secretariat has cautioned against. As it is, the summer of 1970 found half a million people viewing a spectacle that differed little, not only from its immediate predecessor, but also from what was performed on the same stage in the time of Hitler, who so acutely recognized the harmony between the pageant's anti-Jewish elements and his own anti-Semitic policies. Once more, the old lies, the medieval demonology <sup>portraying</sup> ~~indicating~~ the Jews as the enemies of God and of mankind, backed by the prestige of the play and the fanfare attending its production, are being declaimed for the entire world to hear.

In sum, our study of the texts and those specific changes proposed for the 1970 version, convinces us that the central theme of the Daisenberger text is the collective guilt of all Jews in the death of Jesus. We wish it were possible to eliminate that hostile and defamatory theme from that text. We, and the Christian authorities and scholars who have studied the problem, believe that the removal of that and related themes from the Daisenberger text would be impossible without destroying the text itself.

We have seen the trial production of the Rosner text which we previewed in August 1977 as an honest effort to give artistic and emotional expression to Christian views of human sin, the possibility of human redemption and Jesus' teachings of love and faith. We and most Christians who have studied the history of religious differences between Christianity and Judaism agree that the central theme of the Daisenberger text contradicts all of these teachings while the central theme of the Rosner text does not. It is the right of the Oberammergau Town Council to nonetheless choose to perform

Daisenberger. It would also be the right of both other Christians and Jews to draw their own conclusions about such a decision.

On November 9, 1978, the date of the 40th anniversary of Kristallnacht, His Eminence Cardinal Hoeffner, president of the German Catholic Bishops Conference, issued a public statement in which he declared:

"Today, forty years after the horrible events, should be an occasion for every individual who was alive at that time to examine his conscience and ask himself: 'What have I done then, and what have I failed to do then?'

"And this day is posing to all Christians the question what they are doing today that these things should not happen again.

"In memory of all the victims among the Jewish people in the years 1933-45, I want to assure you that the Catholic Church in Germany, faithful to the Guidelines of Vatican Council II, will counteract in its preachings, instructions, and by all means, antisemitism and all racial hatred, and work for good neighborliness and friendship among Jews and Christians."

All over the world, people of good will await the decision of Oberammergau authorities to obey fully the mandate of their church, as enunciated by Vatican Council II and the German Catholic Conference of Bishops.

MHT:RPR

## Wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiter der Akademie

Hedda Braun, Franz Reger, Dr. Armin Riedel,  
Dr. Pierre Scherer

### Bitte beachten

Wir bitten um Anmeldung auf beiliegender Karte bis spätestens 17. November 1978 an die Katholische Akademie in Bayern, Mandlstraße 23, Postfach 40 10 08, 8000 München 40, Telefon 089/39 10 91. Die Anmeldung gilt als angenommen, wenn unsererseits keine Absage erteilt wird.

Teilnahmegebühr	DM 7,—
Schüler und Studenten	DM 5,—
Mittagessen	DM 8,—

Bei rechtzeitigem Eingang der entsprechenden Beträge auf unserem Postscheckkonto (Katholische Akademie in Bayern, München, Nr. 1465 00-804) senden wir Ihnen die Teilnehmerkarte und den Bon für das Mittagessen zu. Andernfalls können bei vorliegender Anmeldung Teilnehmerkarte und Bon an der Tageskasse in Empfang genommen werden. Um Ihren Wünschen entsprechen zu können, bitten wir jedoch, von der Möglichkeit vorheriger Überweisung Gebrauch zu machen.

### Aus den Publikationen der Akademie

Bd. 85 Dienst an der Einheit. Zum Wesen und Auftrag des Petrusamts (Alberigo, von Allmen, Hoffmann, Kasper, Mußner, Oeing-Hanhoff, Papandreou, Ratzinger, de Vries)  
DM 19,80

Bd. 016 Fortschritt oder Verirrung? Die neue Bibelübersetzung (Biser, Kahlefeld, Knoch, Schwarz, Wandruszka) DM 13,50

#### Neuerscheinungen:

Bd. 87 Weltgestaltung und Gewaltlosigkeit. Ethische Aspekte des Alten und Neuen Testaments in ihrer Einheit und ihrem Gegensatz (Lohfink, Pesch) DM 9,80

Bd. 015 Sind wir noch zu retten? Schöpfungsglaube und Verantwortung für unsere Erde (G. Altner, Amelung, Baur, Dreier, Lehmann, Lohfink) DM 14,50

Bei diesem Forum bietet die Akademie interessierten Eltern die Beaufsichtigung ihrer Kinder (im Alter von 4 bis 8 Jahren) während der Vorträge an. Für Betreuung und Mittagessen wird eine Gebühr von DM 6,— erhoben. Wir bitten um entsprechenden Vermerk auf der Anmeldekarte.



Katholische  
Akademie  
in Bayern

## Die Passion Jesu als geistliches Schauspiel

Zu Oberammergau 1980

## Forum

Sonntag, 19. November 1978  
Kardinal Wendel Haus  
Mandlstraße 23, München 40



Um das Jahr 30 wurde Jesus von Nazareth vor den Toren Jerusalems gekreuzigt. Die älteste Überlieferung dieses Geschehens findet sich in den vier Evangelien, auf die sich die Textbücher der etwa seit dem 14. Jahrhundert vielerorts aufgeführten Passionsspiele berufen. Die heute wohl bekanntesten Passionsspiele werden in Oberammergau veranstaltet und gehen auf ein Gelübde aus dem Jahre 1633 zurück.

Seit den sechziger Jahren wird in Oberammergau und weit darüber hinaus diskutiert und gestritten, ob dieses Passionsspiel in Fortführung einer vielen liebgewordenen Tradition die Textfassung des Pfarrers Alois Daisenberger (1860) beibehalten oder aber die des Barockdichters Pater Ferdinand Rosner (1750) in überarbeiteter Form wiederaufnehmen soll. Hinter der Kontroverse um den Auführungsstil und den Vorwurf antisemitischer Tendenzen stehen grundlegende Fragen, die vielfach zu wenig Beachtung finden: Inwieweit ist es überhaupt möglich, das theologisch zentrale Geschehen des Leidens und Sterbens Jesu in eine adäquate künstlerische Ausdrucksform zu übertragen? Stellen Passionsspiele als geistliche Schauspiele auch heute noch eine sinnvolle Form der Frömmigkeit und Verkündigung dar? Oder sind sie zum reinen Spektakulum geworden? Sind der Freiheit der dramatischen Gestaltung des Geschehens Grenzen gesetzt, insbesondere auch aus der Sicht heutiger Erkenntnisse von Geschichtswissenschaft und Theologie?

Die Katholische Akademie in Bayern nimmt die 1980 bevorstehende nächste Aufführung der Passionsspiele in Oberammergau zum Anlaß, diese wichtigen Fragen mit Vertretern verschiedener Fachrichtungen und divergierender Standpunkte zu diskutieren.

Zu diesem Forum laden wir herzlich ein.

Dr. Franz Henrich

## Programmfolge

Sonntag, 19. November 1978

- |           |  |
|-----------|--|
| 9.30 Uhr  | Prof. Dr. Bo Reicke, Professor für Neues Testament an der Universität <u>Basel</u><br>Die historischen Umstände bei der Passion Jesu   |
| 10.30 Uhr | Prof. Dr. Franz Mußner, Professor für Biblische Theologie an der Universität <u>Regensburg</u><br>Wer trägt die Schuld am gewaltsamen Tod Jesu? Überlegungen aus theologischer Sicht<br>Anschließend Diskussion  |
| 13.00 Uhr | Mittagessen  |
| 14.30 Uhr | Prof. Dr. Dr. Friedrich Klenecker, Professor für neuere und neueste deutsche Literaturgeschichte und Literaturdidaktik an der Gesamthochschule Paderborn<br>Die Passion Jesu. Der Ernstfall des Glaubens als Grenzfall der Kunst   |
| 16.00 Uhr | Zu Oberammergau 1980<br>Podiumsdiskussion mit<br>Dr. Alois Fink, München<br>Dipl.-Ing. Ernst Maria Lang, München<br>Dr. Nathan Peter Levinson, Heidelberg<br>Dr. Franz Rappmannsberger, München<br>Paul Ernst Rattelmüller, Leutstetten<br>Hans Schwaighofer, Oberammergau<br>William S. Trosten, New York<br>Prof. Dr. Josef Georg Ziegler, Mainz |
| 18.00 Uhr | Eucharistiefeier   |