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THE DEMONIZATION OF JEWS AND JUDAISM
IN WESTERN CHRISTIAN CIVILIZATION

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(This paper is based on a study of "The Role of the Passion Play in Fostering Anti-Semitism Throughout History" first presented on November 19, 1978, at a Symposium sponsored by the Katholische Akademie in Bayern.)

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I - 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 Millenium: 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 Millenium 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 had 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."

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.

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 pictures, 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. 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 Millenium, 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 (News-letter 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."

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

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:

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 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.

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