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Box 6, Folder 4, "Passion Play", Undated.



PASSION PLAY

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- 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 Improperia (The Reproaches), the dejudatization 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 prefigurement 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 mystères 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 unrelenting 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 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 Jew 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 with 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 ^{or usurer,} 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

That demonology which has fixed the image of the Jew as Anti-Christ dominated the medieval world into which was born Martin Luther in 1483. In that medieval world, there was an unending piling up of vile epithets and accusations and curses, the consistent representation of the Jew as the ~~xxxxxx~~ spitome of everything evil and abominable for whom in particular the unbounded scorn and contumely of the Christian world were reserved. As Dr. Joshua Trachtenberg describes it in his study, "The Devil and the Jews," to the medieval mind in which Luther was nurtured, "the Jew was not human, not in the sense the Christian was. ...He was the devil's creature. Not a human being but a demonic, a diabolic beast fighting the forces of truth and salvation, with Satan's weapons. One might as soon expect the devil himself to submit of his own free will to Christ as the Jew. And against such a foe, no well of hatred was too deep, no war of extermination effective enough until the world was rid of the menace." (p.12)

Given that reality - a reality which the contemporary mind finds ^{difficult} ~~impossible~~ to identify with since the imagery of Satan is regarded far more as a metaphor ^{of evil} than a theological ^{reality} fact - it is all the more remarkable that Luther as an orthodox Christian, a former Augustinian monk, could have passed through a philo-Semitic period of sympathy for Jews.

That early Luther pro-Jewish phase, as ~~xxx~~ well as his far more fateful later vehemently anti-Jewish phase, have been fully documented in the superb essays on Luther and the Jews by such major Lutheran scholars as Prof. Franklin Sherman, Prof. Mark U. Edwards, Aarne Siirala, E. Gordon Rupp, and by such Jewish scholars as R.^h Lewin, Haim Hillel Ben-Sassoon, Uri Tal, among others.

As we know, in 1523, only a few years after his break with the Papacy in Rome, Luther's treatise, That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew,

was published. It was greeted with enthusiasm by Jewish readers throughout Europe. While the essay was written mainly as a rejoinder to Catholic charges that Luther denied Mary's virginity before and after Christ's birth, he went beyond a refutation of these charges to explain the reasons from Scripture that led Luther "to believe that Christ was ^a/Jew born of a virgin." Along the way, Luther had hoped that he might "entice some Jews to the Christian faith."

Employing his gifts of ridicule and satire in this instance on the Jews' behalf, he wrote:

"For our fools, the popes, bishops, sophists, and monks -- the crude asses' heads -- have hitherto so treated the Jews that anyone who wished to be a good Christian would almost have to become a Jew. If I had been a Jew and had seen such dolts and blockheads govern and teach the Christian faith, I would sooner have become a hog than ^(a sow) a Christian. .

"For they have dealt with the Jews as if they were dogs and not men. They were able to do nothing but curse them and take their goods. When they were baptized, no Christian teaching or life was demonstrated to them, rather they were only subjected to papistry and monkery. When they saw that Judaism had such strong scriptural support and that Christianity was nothing but twaddle without any scriptural support, how could they quiet their hearts and become true good Christians?"

Luther concluded his treatise with the following comments and recommendations:

"Therefore, I would request and advise that one deal gently with them and instruct them from Scripture; then some of them may come along. Instead of this we are trying only to drive them by force, slandering them, accusing them of having Christian blood if they don't

stink, and I know not what other foolishness. So long as we thus treat them like dogs, how can we expect to work any good among them? Againk, when we forbid them to labor and do business and have any human fellowship with us, thereby forcing them into usury, how is that supposed to do them any good? If we really want to help them, we must be guided in our dealings with them not by Papal law ~~but~~ by the law of Christian love...If some of them should prove stiff-necked, what of it? After all, we ourselves are not all good Christians either?"

messiah
It is not difficult to understand why Jewish leaders in Germany and elsewhere perceived this Luther as a thunderbolt of light illuminating their otherwise darkened medieval landscape. Earlier, in 1510, during the controversy over the banning of Hebrew books that rocked Europe, young Martin Luther had sided with the great Christian Hebraist, John Reuchlin (uncle of Philip Melancthon) over against the fanatic Dominican and former Jew, John Pfefferkorn.

In light of this essay and for other more fundamental reasons, both Christian and Jewish scholars have observed that "the Protestant Reformation has many times been characterized as a Judaic movement... Both in ideas and through its most important representatives, the Reformation had Judaic inclinations. The zeal of Christian scholars for the study and use of the Hebrew language, the tendency to revolt from the complex and arid system of Catholic scholasticism to the seeming simplicity of Jewish dogmas, the effort to recover ^{for} the Bible its former centrality in Christian life, were a few of the many indications of a Judaizing motif in the Reformation." ("Martin Luther's Debt to Jews and Judaism, Jewish Influence on Christian Reform" p. 617)

The Papist enemies of Luther lost no opportunity to brand him

as a "Jew" and a "Jewish-patron." His doctrines, especially with reference to his polemics against idolatrous images and the worship of relics, won for him the title of "Semi-Judeus" or "Half-Jew". He is included by an ecclesiastical apologist in an "Elenchus" of heresies among the "Iconomachi," or opponents of Cross-Worship who are comparable in the eyes of the Church to the Jews.. Luther is also made responsible for the growth and spread of definitely Judaizing sectaries: the Church pointed to the Jewish sympathies and doctrines of the Anabaptists as a result of Lutheran principles; when the Sabbatarian movement of Moravia became known in Germany, the Papists sought to make capital for themselves by impugning the integrity of Luther's Christianity, which, they said, permitted a believer to practice circumcision, observe the Mosaic Law, and in every other way Judaize.

In a sense, one scholar observes, "Luther's attitude, at least in the early years of his pro-Jewish views gave justification to these charges. We find him on one instance saying of the Jews.

"They are blood relations of our Lord; therefore, if it were proper to boast of flesh and blood, the Jews belong to Christ more than we. I beg, therefore, my dear Papist, if you become tired of abusing me as a heretic, that you begin to revile me as a Jew."

Twenty years later, in 1543, Luther published "his harshest and most notorious attack on the Jews, his "On the Jews and Their Lies." In the intervening period, as Dr. Mark Edwards notes, Luther had written one treatise on the Jews, his 1538 Against the Sabbatarians, which was aimed at halting Jewish proselytizing among Christians. By the 1530s, the central issue for him was the proper interpretation of the messianic passages ⁱⁿ the Old Testament. By this time Luther had become highly concerned that other Protestant exegetes of the Old Testament

were relying too heavily on Rabbinic exegesis of the Old Testament, which denied Christological interpretations. As both Sherman and Edwards observe, in his first Psalms lectures (1513-1515), there is contained in essence the whole burden of his later charges against the Jews. ~~These treatises~~ Luther appropriated all of the Old Testament in the service of the New. He believed that the Old Testament figures lived with faith in the coming Christ, and therefore the Old Testament patriarchs and prophets were reckoned righteous ~~thru~~ through this faith in the messiah. The Jews, Luther asserts in these lectures, suffer continually under God's wrath and they are paying the penalty for their rejection of Christ. They spend all their efforts in self-justification, but God will not hear their prayers. Neither kindness nor severity will improve them. They become constantly more stubborn and more vain. Moreover, they are the active enemies of Christ; they blaspheme and defame him, spreading their evil influence even into Christian hearts. As for Jewish efforts to interpret Scripture, these, Luther asserts, are simply lies. They forsake the word of God and follow the imaginations of their hearts. It would be quite wrong, he concludes, for Christians to extend tolerance to those who hold such views.

These treatises

On the Jews and Their Lies and his Vom Schem Hamephorash, published later in 1543, are trying experiences for Jews, and especially for Rabbis. Calumny, abuse, and inventive fill the pages of these lengthy anti-Judaic tracts. After rejecting Jewish claims to be the chosen people, and repudiating Rabbinic exegesis of Scripture, Luther writes.

"But their accursed rabbis, who know better indeed, so wantonly poison their poor youth and common people and turn them from the truth. For I believe that if such writings were read by the

the common man and the youth, they would stone all their rabbis and hate them worse than we Christians do."

Then for nearly 200 pages, Luther rails against the Jews in his powerful, lusty style, with a torrential outpouring of passion and hatred that makes the diatribes of his predecessors seem languid, and that perhaps no one else, ~~perhaps~~, has matched to this day, except for Nazi propagandists.

"Know, O adored Christ, and make no mistake, that aside from the Devil, you have no enemy more venomous, more desperate, more bitter, than a true Jew who truly seeks to be a Jew."

A few months later, in his Vom Schem Hamephorash, Luther's curses become even more frenzied. Here ~~xxxxx~~ he is not concerned with the Jews' usury and graft, but only with captious reasoning and their witchcraft. In the preface, Luther specifies that he is not writing to convert the Jews but merely to edify the Germans: "...so that we Germans may know what a Jew is...For it is as easy to convert a Jew as to convert the Devil. A Jew, a Jewish heart, are hard as wood, as stone, as iron, as the Devil himself. In short, they are children of the Devil, condemned to the flames of hell."

From his list ~~list~~ of indictments, Luther concludes his treatise on The Jews and Their Lies, with a series of recommendations to secular authorities on how to deal with the Jews. Their synagogues and schools should be burned and whatever would not burn should be buried. Their homes should be destroyed. All their prayer books and Talmudic writing should be taken from them. Their rabbis should be forbidden to teach. Their safe-conducts on highways should be revoked. Their usury should be forbidden and their money taken from them. Some amount could be returned to converts to Christianity so that they might support themselves.

They should be put to work in the fields so that they earned their living by the sweat of their brows. Better yet, they should be expelled after a portion of ~~xx xxxxx~~ their wealth had been confiscated. Luther rejected angrily the argument that the Jews were an indispensable financial resource to governments. The benefit failed to outweigh the blasphemy and harm done by the Jews. It was the duty of secular authorities, Luther insisted, to implement these recommendations. It was the ~~amrxx~~ duty of the ecclesiastical authorities to warn and instruct their congregations about the Jews and their lies.

Dr. Edwards summarizes the significance of these treatises in an interesting way. He writes. "It is these remarks, and the general vulgarity and violence of several of the treatises that make these treatises so notorious and so offensive. Neither the vulgarity nor the violence is unique. Luther's attacks on papal opponents are at least as vulgar and violent. So, too, are his attacks on the Turks and Islam. What is unique, or at least different, is the relative helplessness of these particular [✓]targets of Luther's wrath. Catholics could take care of themselves and give as well as they got. The Jews were in a totally different situation. They were at the mercy of their Catholic or Evangelical rulers. If these rulers chose to heed Luther's harsh recommendations, there was precious little the Jews could do to protect themselves. It is not Luther's fault that very few Evangelical rulers followed his advice. He must [✓]bear responsibility for the attempt, even if it was largely unsuccessful."

On one level, Dr. Edwards is justified in saying that "the attempt...was largely unsuccessful," and that is acknowledged by a premier Jewish historian, Dr. Leon Poliakov.

In his classic "History of Anti-Semitism," Dr. Poliakov observes (p.225) that "these savaged texts...during his lifetime enjoyed only a limited circulation and which subsequently, until Hitler's advent, were practically hidden under a bushel." In a footnote, Poliakov indicates that Against the Jews and Their Lies, in Luther's lifetime went through two editions; the Schem Hamephorash (part of which was later destroyed) three. On the other hand, Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew was reprinted nine times during the first year after its appearance. During the following centuries there were few reprintings of these pamphlets. In the 19th and 20th centuries they were to be found only in the editions of Luther's complete works, until the appearance under Hitler of many popular editions, widely circulated among the people.

Keeping that data in mind, it is essential to understand that Jewish historiography regards Luther's anti-Jewish polemic as fateful for Jews down to our own time. Thus, in her classic study, *The War Against the Jews, 1939-45*, 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: Newsletter of the Blond Champions of Men's Rights* (Briefbucherei der blonden Mannesrechtler) 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."

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"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."

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23

~~PASSION PLAY~~

"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.

That synthesis of Christian anti-Semitism and German nationalism had corrosive effects on the conscience of millions of German Christians, leading the majority of the German nation to blind obedience to a murderous state.

Reading Richard Gutteridge's essay on "German Protestantism and the Jews in the Third Reich," (based on his book "Open Thy Mouth for the Dumb! The German Evangelical Church and the Jews, 1879-1950), we experience the overwhelming dehumanizing consequences of that demongological tradition. He writes

"In the first months of 1933, when Hitler had still to feel his way with care, there was an opportunity for the Church to have its influence upon the manner in which the Third Reich should develop, particularly as the Party claimed to be based upon 'positive Christianity' - whatever that might mean - and Hitler solemnly declared Christianity to be 'the unshakeable foundation of the moral and ethical life of the German people.' The vast majority of the Church leaders and the clergy serving under them were eager to enter into the new order and to make their positive contribution there. On Easter day, to give an example, Protestant churchgoers throughout Bavaria were told from the pulpit that the new State was reintroducing government according to God's laws and that the glad and active cooperation of the church was advocated in the task of creating a genuine Volksgemeinschaft in which the cause of the needy and oppressed would be promoted. There was a paucity of concern as to what would be the fate of the Jews and others who would be treated as outsiders. It was widely felt, that, if certain Jews found themselves at a disadvantage, it was a fair readjustment of balance. It would

be regrettable if there cases of violent and cruel treatment, but after all a revolution had taken place, excesses were unavoidable, but things would surely settle down."

Dr. Gutteridge documents a number of protests from individual church leaders but then states: "These were individual protests. The Church as a whole kept silent. No Bishop, Church government or Synod spoke out in public at this time on behalf of the persecuted Jews. Hitler and his associates had good reason to be satisfied that the Church would not make overmuch trouble."

Forty years have passed since the end of the Nazi holocaust. It is a positive, even hopeful sign, that many church leaders - foremost among them the Lutheran churches in Germany and America, have begun to confront that past in its full terribleness and moral challenge.

We might all take heart from the message issued by the council of the Evangelical Church in Germany, a grouping of regional Lutheran, Reformed and United churches in the Federal Republic of Germany, which declared on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Adolf Hitler's assumption of power on January 30, 1933, the following:

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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