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VIA MESSENGER

March 26, 1970

Mr. Edward Fiske, Religion Editor
The New York Times
229 West 43rd Street
New York, N.Y.

Dear Ted:

Mort Yarmon has told me that he has sent you a copy of the Oberammergau press release and a summary of our detailed analysis of the 1960 and 1970 texts. I regard this as one of the most important developments in Jewish-Christian relations during the past year and I hope that you will agree to do a story because it certainly requires your deep understanding and sensitivity to the issues.

The purpose of this note is to share with you some new information which has developed since the press release was sent to you. I think this information incorporated in your story would give it additional strength:

- 1) The American Jewish Committee will meet with officials of the West German Embassy in Washington next Tuesday to discuss the findings of this study with a view toward determining how they can be put to use to help overcome the anti-Semitic impact of the 1970 Oberammergau play:
- 2) Yesterday I sent a letter to Julius Cardinal Doepfner, Archbishop of Munich (who has jurisdiction over Oberammergau) and president of the Roman Catholic episcopacy of Germany. I asked Cardinal Doepfner for an appointment for a delegation of the American Jewish Committee to meet with him during the next two weeks in Munich, if necessary, to

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discuss these findings and also what he and the Roman Catholic hierarchy of Germany can do to assure that the spirit of the Vatican Council Declaration on Non-Christian Religions is not further violated by the 1970 play. You will recall that the Vatican Declaration, adopted in October 1965, repudiated the charge of collective guilt of the Jewish people for the crucifixion of Jesus.

For your background information, I began the discussion regarding the anti-Semitic character of Oberammergau with Cardinal Doepfner when I was present at the Vatican Council II (as the personal guest of Cardinal Shehan of Baltimore, who was then president of the U. S. Bishops Commission on Ecumenism and Interreligious Affairs). Cardinal Doepfner promised that he would intervene in the Oberammergau revision, and on April 2nd, 1968 he wrote me the following:

"May I assure you that as the Catholic bishop for Oberammergau I am endeavoring to see that the forthcoming performance of 1970 will in no way give rise to misinterpretations and hostile sentiments among contemporaries of good will."

We intend to pursue that intention with Cardinal Doepfner when we meet with him, incidentally, during and since Vatican Council II we have met with Leo Cardinal Suenens of Belgium and Franz Cardinal Konig of Austria, both of whom have written to me that they have intervened with Cardinal Doepfner to make the necessary revisions. Copies of those letters are available if you want to see them. We have also met with Kurt George Kiesinger and with representatives of Willy Brandt's government, as well as with officials of the Munich municipality to press for further revisions.

I believe it is accurate to say that we have had the longest history of association with this problem than any other Jewish group, although we have not made as much noise about it publicly.

Frankly, we do not expect much more significant revision of this text to take place between now and May 1970 when the play opens. We do expect, however, that Cardinal Doepfner and perhaps the West German government officials will make a clarifying statement in which they will repudiate the anti-Semitic elements that persist in the play and indicate that this is a commercial as well as a pious production of a small Bavarian village which cannot claim either ecclesiastical or governmental sanction or support. We also expect to distribute copies of our analysis in the German language to thousands of tourists to

Mr. Edward Fiske

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Oberammergau in order to countervail the play's negative influences. Eventually we hope to encourage a respected German playwright and acknowledged Christian theologian to write a new Passion Play that will conform to the latest biblical and historical scholarship which has rejected altogether that negative and anti-Semitic tradition regarding the role of the Jew and the crucifixion.

I'm sending you this because I will be in Washington beginning tomorrow and will be there through next Thursday. If you want to reach me for any background or other information, I will be at the Statler Hilton Hotel in Washington (202-393-100).

Many thanks for all your interest and cooperation. All the best.

Cordially as ever,

Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum, Director
Interreligious Affairs Department
(Dictated but not read)

MHT:MSB



NEWS COMMITTEE

FROM THE

THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE Institute of Human Relations, 165 E 56 St., New York, N Y 10022, PLaza 1-4000

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

MORTON YARMON, Director of Public Relations
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NEW YORK, June 23....The film Jesus Christ Superstar, which is about to be released in the United States and abroad, is "anti-Semitic," "demeaning," and "nothing less than a catastrophe," according to a prominent Protestant educator.

Gerald S. Strober, a Presbyterian authority on intergroup relations in Christian education, has charged that the "rock opera," which depicts the events of the Passion, has "pressed into service every device of cinematic art to spread the old falsehood of the Jews' 'collective responsibility' for Jesus' death."

Pointing out that the idea of Jewish collective responsibility for the crucifixion has been denounced as "historically and spiritually untenable, and is being discarded from church teaching and preaching and from individual belief," Mr. Strober accused Universal Pictures and the producer-director, Norman Jewison, of "exploiting a tradition that has scarred Jews and Christians from the time of the Church Fathers, through the Middle Ages, to the era of Auschwitz."

Mr. Strober, who serves as consultant on interreligious education for the American Jewish Committee, makes his charges in an analysis that the AJC is distributing to religious and civic leaders and others who would be particularly concerned with the issues raised. It is a sequel to a previous analysis that he prepared about the Broadway stage production of Jesus Christ Superstar.

Copies of the study are available without charge by writing to the Interreligious Affairs Department, American Jewish Committee, 165 East 56 Street, New York, N.Y. 10022.

Mr. Strober expressed particular concern about the potential influence of the movie in view of the fact that it will probably be seen by millions of people, in contrast to the stage version, which reached thousands, and also in view of the more intense impact of the film medium.

Only yesterday, the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council, a coordinating body of national Jewish organizations and local Jewish community relations councils, called the film "a singularly damaging setback in the struggle against the religious sources of anti-Semitism."

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Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum, AJC's National Director of Interreligious Affairs, in an introduction to the Strober analysis noted that "Jesus Christ Superstar has received a 'G' rating, which means that masses of impressionable Christian children of Sunday school age will be exposed, in most compelling fashion, to an anti-Jewish presentation of the gospel story without the guidance of an accompanying parent."

Mr. Strober based his findings on a comparison of the film with the New Testament, which, he pointed out, was "the primary source of information about Jesus' life and death." He also examined the printed text of the original "rock opera," as well as the printed text accompanying the MCA record of the film's sound track.

His comparison between the film and the New Testament dealt with five specific categories and events related to the last days of Jesus' life: the Priests, Pilate, the Temple scene, Judas, and the Jewish crowd.

*The Priests. Mr. Strober pointed out that the film portrayed the Jewish priesthood as "satanically evil, contemptuous, callous, sadistic and bloodthirsty." Members of the priesthood were "represented as sinister-looking, leering personages, dressed in forbidding black garb, with weird, onion-shaped black hats," he said, and added:

"The two chief priests, Caiaphas and Annas, speak in menacing or bullying tones; the rest sound like fools. None looks even remotely priestly, or like a community leader whom people could accept as such; none sounds as if he could be possibly acting in good faith."

Mr. Strober cited three specific instances in which, he said, the film was at variance with the New Testament:

. The film shows Caiaphas as "full of arrogant contempt for Jesus and for the people who acclaim him." According to the New Testament, "the expression of contempt is quite unwarranted, since the priests clearly took Jesus most seriously."

. The film implies the priests were responsible for the execution of John the Baptist. In fact, "the gospel accounts attribute John's death solely to King Herod."

. In the film, the priests are taxed by Judas with "having beaten Jesus in the most brutal manner." However, "there is no shred of evidence that Jesus was ever subjected to a purposeful, savage beating by any of the priests or at their order."

*Pilate. "If the film weights the scales against the priesthood over and above what the New Testament accounts warrant, it lightens them beyond all the evidence for the other chief agent in the trial of Jesus - the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate," Mr. Strober declared.

"The very staging and costuming make plain that Pilate is to serve as a noble foil for the evil priests. Whereas they are garbed ominously in black, he comes on in a gorgeous maroon costume, with a wreath around his head. Whereas they shout, he speaks softly. His words and demeanor bespeak reason, patience and compassion."

"The entire portrait of Pilate," Mr. Strober stated, "is designed to minimize his role in Jesus' trial and death, and thereby maximize that of Jesus' Jewish antagonists. It is wildly unhistorical, deriving from the cliches of traditional anti-Jewish Passion plays rather than from the New Testament. All serious scholars today agree, on the basis of Roman and other sources, that Pilate actually was an exceptionally harsh governor even by the far from lenient standards of Roman occupation government. He was notorious for his arbitrary executions, and was eventually recalled to Rome to be tried for oppression."

*The Temple. "The Temple sequence reveals a scene of frenzy and chaos, corruption and lewdness," Mr. Strober asserted. "The holy site is shown populated by prostitutes, drug pushers, and sellers of machine guns — people bizarre in dress and comportment, with no shred of humanity or dignity, and with never a sign of religious feeling. The inappropriate goings-on in the Temple which, according to the gospels, Jesus condemned are fantastically exaggerated."

*Judas. He receives inordinate attention in the film, far in excess of what he is given in New Testament accounts, Mr. Strober said. "It is undoubtedly significant," he added, "that in the film, as in the Broadway opening, Judas is played by a Black man, and that he is represented as a victim of Jewish perfidy."

"Judas is also the focus of one of several scenes in which first-century and 20th-century elements are strangely mixed, suggesting that the 'guilt' of the Jews in Jesus' time somehow carries over into the present," Mr. Strober continued. The episode in which Judas is shown fleeing into the desert, where tanks and low-flying military aircraft threateningly bear down on him, "is not hung on any Scriptural peg. It is not clear whether the tanks and planes are meant to symbolize Roman might, the power of the Jewish authorities, or perhaps Judas' own conscience; but it does not seem far-fetched to suspect that the sequence is, among other things, a caricature of the supposed 'ruthless power' of modern Israel."

*The Jewish Crowd. In contrast to the stage version, Mr. Strober asserted, the film of Jesus Christ Superstar is far more accusatory of the Jewish crowd.

"In the scenes depicting the arrest of Jesus and his trial before Pilate," he said, "the responsibility for his fate, which was earlier assigned to the priests, is shifted to the Jewish people. In a dramatic crescendo, the film now asserts a collective Jewish guilt for the crucifixion."

In the stage version, Mr. Strober pointed out, Caiaphas said to Pilate, "We need him crucified — it's all you have to do." In the film, however, "the crowd twice repeats Caiaphas' words, and much more is made of the mob's chant, 'Crucify him! Crucify him!'"

"It is too late in the day to allow calculated defamation of the Jewish people and their cherished faith to go unchallenged," Rabbi Tanenbaum declared. "Perhaps some day, after the Oberammergau spectaculars and the Jesus Christ Superstars have run their moneyed course, some creative artist will tell the Passion story in a way that will bring honor rather than shame to Christianity."

Mr. Strober, who attended the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, received his B.A. degree from Gordon College, in Wenham, Mass., and an M.A. in Jewish culture from New York University, and is currently a Ph.D. candidate at the latter institution. He served as pastor in the Surrey (N.H.) Congregational Church, and for two years was a member of the staff of an inner city church in Brooklyn, New York. He was a member of the faculty and acting director of the Department of History at Barrington College, Barrington, R.I.

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 men everywhere.

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THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

date September 19, 1973
to Marc H. Tanenbaum
from George Salomon
subject Oberammergau Passion Play

After you left the meeting with Dr. Werner Cahnmann this morning, I asked him whether he had looked into the Oberammergau problem during his stay in Munich. He said he had talked about it to a few people, including a friend who is a retired local forestry official and an acquaintance who is a member of one of Oberammergau's leading families. He also has a connection with one of the Benedictine monks at Ettal Monastery, where the abortive revision of the play for the 1970 performance was written.

It occurred to me that Dr. Cahnmann might be able and willing to help with whatever steps we might take concerning the 1980 performance, supplementing any efforts by Zach Shuster. Cahnmann himself pointed out that for a Jew he was in a relatively good position to discuss the matter with the people there, since he knows the terrain and speaks the local dialect. You may want to make use of his good offices at the proper time.

Oberammergau is not felt to be an important topic in Bavaria, Dr. Cahnmann says. The general public shrugs it off as "one of those folk spectacles"; the Left occasionally ridicules it. In confronting the Oberammergau elders one faces Bavarian stubbornness at its stubbornest, he emphasized. However, he added (I've read this elsewhere) that the play's economic benefits to the village appeared increasingly dubious.

GS

cc: A. James Rudin
Gerald Strober

AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

JUDITH HERSHCOPF BANKI

As Assistant Director of Interreligious Affairs for the American Jewish Committee, Mrs. Banki works with a variety of Protestant and Catholic church groups in the United States and abroad to advance interfaith communication and cooperation and to combat religious prejudice, particularly prejudice rooted in distorted religious teachings. Mrs. Banki has played a major role in condensing, editing and popularizing the findings of Protestant, Catholic and Jewish self-studies of religious textbooks and is frequently consulted by religious educators as they prepare and revise teaching materials. She is one of the pioneers of interreligious dialogue and has both organized and participated in numerous conferences and institutes designed to promote Jewish-Christian understanding.

As Judith Hershcopf, she wrote major articles on the "year in religion" for the American Jewish Year Book and has authored comprehensive analyses of Christian opinion on current issues of concern, such as "Christian Responses to the Yom Kippur War." Her articles have appeared in a variety of church publications, youth, parents and teachers magazines.

Mrs. Banki was previously associated with the radio and television department of the Israel Office of Information as author of a series of documentary radio programs heard over hundreds of stations, and subsequently was associated with the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai Brith where she edited the Christian Friends Bulletin.

She is a cum-laude graduate of the University of Wisconsin and has taken post graduate study at Columbia University, The New School of Social Research, and New York University. She is married and the mother of a daughter.

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OBERAMMERGAU

1960 and 1970

A STUDY IN RELIGIOUS ANTI-SEMITISM

AMERICAN JEWISH
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FOREWORD

In 1970, as in nearly every tenth year for some 300 years, the famous Oberammergau Passion Play is drawing tourists from all over the world to West Germany--and arousing concern among people interested in interreligious understanding.

As performed in years past, the Oberammergau pageant was considered by many to be a vehicle of anti-Jewish prejudice and an obstacle to Christian-Jewish friendship and cooperation. This year, however, the responsible authorities are claiming that the play has been revised so as to erase all gratuitously anti-Jewish elements.

To see whether this goal has been attained, the American Jewish Committee, long concerned with the effect of Passion plays on Christians' attitudes toward Jews, has undertaken a comparative content analysis of the 1960 and 1970 scripts. As far as we know, it is the first line-by-line analysis of these documents. The results are reported in this pamphlet.

The 1960 script was analyzed by Mrs. Judith H. Banki, AJC's Assistant Director of Interreligious Affairs. The 1970 text was studied by Dr. Gerald S. Strober, a Presbyterian educator who serves as Consultant on Religious Curricula to AJC, in cooperation with George Salomon, Senior Editor in AJC's Publications Division.

When the findings first became available, they were submitted to government authorities, church leaders and others in West Germany, the United States and elsewhere. Gratifyingly, this preview appears to have aroused intense interest in various quarters, both lay and clerical.

Thus, as will be detailed below, the West German press, the Catholic hierarchy in Belgium, and a group of distinguished Catholic and Protestant theologians in the United States have all taken a new, more searching look at what is being performed in Oberammergau this year. It is to be hoped that the present full report will stimulate others to do likewise. For, as will be shown in these pages, the revised Passion Play still raises far more questions than it answers.

RABBI MARC H. TANENBAUM
National Interreligious
Affairs Director
The American Jewish Committee

I. THE PASSION PLAY, 1634-1970

Of all the pageants that dramatize the Crucifixion story, 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. The Oberammergau play dates back to 1634, when it was first performed in fulfillment of a vow made during a plague epidemic the year before. 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.

An Anti-Jewish Document

A prominent feature of most Passion plays, past and present, has been a strong anti-Jewish component, focused not only on Jesus' individual Jewish antagonists, but--by implication or explicit statement--on the Jewish people as a whole. A prominent Christian scholar, Bernhard E. Olson, recently commented on pageants of this sort:

The crucifixion drama is ... regarded, not without reason, as having played a prominent part in Jewish disabilities through the centuries as well as providing a major cause of negative attitudes toward Jews today.¹

The Oberammergau pageant is no exception to this rule--a fact fully recognized by the enemies of the Jews. One of the play's strongest admirers in modern times was Adolf Hitler, who stated at the height of the Second World War: "It is vital that the Passion Play be continued at Oberammergau; for never has the menace of Jewry been so convincingly portrayed."² 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 performances 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 19th- and 20th-century-style racism; but it abounds with anti-Jewish religious prejudices and misstatements long established in popular tradition.

The Impact of Vatican II

Until recent decades, the anti-Jewish tenor of the Daisenberger text does not appear to have troubled many Christian consciences. It is perhaps significant that the one critical comment to attract lasting attention in this country during the early part of this century came from a rabbi.³ Attention was focused on the matter

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. The decisive influence here was the Declaration on Non-Christian Religions, adopted in 1965 by the Roman Catholic Church's Second Vatican Council, with which the Church embarked on a new, friendly policy toward Jews and Judaism.⁴

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 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.

For these reasons, the 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 Church "deplores hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism directed against Jews at any time and by anyone."

Current Revisions

The new interest in the Oberammergau Passion Play created by the Vatican Declaration soon led to demands for revision. The municipal authorities of Oberammergau, who exercise sole control over the production, eventually retained a Benedictine scholar at nearby Ettal Monastery, Father Dr. Stefan Schaller, to prepare a new text for the 1970 performance that would conform to the injunctions of the Declaration.

However, in November 1969 it was publicly stated that a text submitted by Father Schaller had been rejected by the Oberammergau officials, reportedly because it was unsatisfactory from a dramatic point of view. In the short time that remained, another revision was undertaken for use in the 1970 performance. The authors of this revision have not been publicly identified.

According to statements by Oberammergau functionaries, the latest text of the pageant no longer contains anti-Jewish elements, except where dictated by the need to follow the Biblical accounts faithfully. Thus, the director of the 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.⁵

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.

II. THE 1960 AND 1970 PASSION PLAYS COMPARED

To assess the validity of the claim that the current version of the Oberammergau Passion Play no longer contains anti-Jewish elements, the Daisenberger text in the original German, as performed in 1960, was compared line for line with the official German script for 1970.⁶ In the analysis below, quotations follow the official 1960 and 1970 English translations, and all page citations refer to those editions.⁷

The present 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 removal of repetitions, or modernization of out-of-date expressions--have been disregarded.

To bring out their full theological significance, the findings are presented under topical headings rather than in the sequence in which they occur in the text.

Characterization of Jesus' Antagonists

As performed in 1960 and earlier, Act II of the Passion Play opened with a four-stanza prologue, which associated Jesus' antagonists--as yet not clearly identified--with the perennial principle of evil:

Up from nethermost Hell, now all the spirits come forth,
Which from Creation's dawn stubbornly have rebelled,
And forever have discord
Sowed against the Divine.

Not the ties of blood, nor the Covenant of the Creator,
Is to the boundless hate still sacred, that this fiend
kindles;
To turn the faith of mankind--
Turn brother against brother ... (1960 p. 21).

The prologue was followed by a tableau vivant (i.e., a scene posed without movement), showing Jacob's sons in the act of plotting against their brother Joseph. The plot was presented as a supposed parallel to the events leading up to Jesus' death:

As against Joseph did Jacob's sons conspire
So shall ye of this fiendish brood,
Full soon for Jesus' death and blood
The fierce, revengeful outcry hear....

O God, destroy this evil band,
Who against Thee now rise up,
And to murd'rous league, in scorn
Of Thine only Son, swear faith ... (1960 p. 22).

In what is the largest and perhaps the most significant single alteration, the 1970 version does away entirely with the prologue and tableau of Act II. In a few other instances, too, opprobrious terms applied to Jesus' opponents generally have been excised or softened. Thus, "these dark-minded [i.e., benighted] men" (1960 p. 94) is replaced by "they" in the new German text, and "murderers" (1960 p. 108) is changed to "enemies," although these changes have not been made in the English translation (1970 pp. 88,98). However, many more vituperative terms have been retained than have been deleted; and even particular characterizations have not been consistently treated. For example, in one place the term "prophet murderess" (1960 p. 38), referring to Jerusalem, is altered to "impenitent sinner" (1970 p. 32); but immediately thereafter, the following words, spoken by Jesus, have been left standing: "She that murdered the prophets will even put to death the Messiah" (1960 p. 39; 1970 p. 34).

Portrayal of the Priests

In today's Passion Play as in that of 1960, the chief enemies of Jesus are the Jewish priests and high priests. They--especially the high priests Caiphas and Annas--are portrayed as vicious, bloodthirsty and sadistic; their enmity toward Jesus is compounded of concern for their own status, jealousy of Jesus' initial success with the people, and gratuitous hate.

The 1970 version removes some of the most diabolical mouthings attributed to priests. Thus, Caiphas and Annas no longer call for the execution of Jesus in these words: "Death to this criminal! This corrupter of Israel!" (1960 p. 70); "With this stammering tongue will I cry for the life and blood of this malefactor and

then descend into the tomb of my fathers when I have seen this evil-doer die upon the cross" (1960 p. 103). No longer does Annas remark after Jesus' death: "It would delight mine eyes to see his body torn by wild beasts" (1960 p. 129). In one case, the word "miscreant" (1960 p. 56), applied by Caiphas to Jesus, has been softened to "false teacher" (1970 p. 50).

Also deleted are some similarly emotion-laden utterances previously assigned to other priestly figures--for example, "After centuries they will speak of us! Yes, death to the Galilean" (1960 p. 82). A reference to the Pharisees who "did not wish to believe --and yet ... were afraid" that Jesus might rise from the dead (1960 p. 133) has been excised. So has a passage in which one of the leaders suggests (with no basis in Scripture) that Jesus might be secretly assassinated; "As a last resort, a hand can always be found that in the dungeon's silence will rid the Sanhedrim [sic] of its enemy" (1960 p. 57).

Yet here again, the revisions are sporadic and inconsistently carried out. Many passages equally offensive and equally un-Scriptural remain. For example, the trial of Jesus is still represented as merely pro forma and shamelessly rigged: "Whether more or less guilty, that matters not" (1960 p. 57; 1970 p. 51). Caiphas still exhorts the people not to relent during the Crucifixion: "The happiest day for the People of Israel! Children, be firm!" (1960 p. 110; 1970 p. 101); and his hatred still extends to Jesus' dead body: "I cannot rest until I have seen that his bones are broken and his body thrown into the pit of the malefactors" (1960 p. 128; 1970 p. 119). Similarly, the high priest Annas still rants: "By my grey hair, I will not rest, until the blood of this deceiver washes out our shame" (1960 p. 55; 1970 p. 49); and the Pharisees, prompted by Caiphas, still shout that the day of the Crucifixion "will be a joyful festival for ever" (1960 p. 124; 1970 p. 115).

With these passages and many similar ones remaining, the characterization of the priesthood is not substantially improved in the 1970 text. It remains a slur on the Jewish leaders of Jesus' time, whose true nature is amply documented in contemporary sources. Furthermore, it is calculated to encourage an unwarranted sanctimoniousness in the audience. The priests (and the other enemies of Jesus) are so caricatured that the spectator cannot identify with them--which is precisely what he ought to do, because according to Christian teaching all men, by their sins, contribute to Jesus' suffering.

The Mob

The priests' bloodthirstiness and their obscene pleasure in Jesus' suffering is echoed by "the people"--the multitude they have assembled to shout for Jesus' death. This crowd sounds like a sadistic lynch mob:

Up and away! Away to Golgotha! Come and see him upon the cross! Oh joyful day! The enemy of Moses is thrown down! Now he receives his reward! So will it be with all who despise the law! He deserves crucifixion! Happiest Pass-over! Now is peace returned to Israel! It is finished with the Galilean (1960 p. 115; 1970 p. 106)!

Drive him with violence that we may get on to Calvary ... Do not let him rest. On, drive him with blows (1960 p. 119; 1970 p. 109).

These utterances, and virtually all other expressions of ferocity by members of the mob, have been carried unaltered from the earlier version of the text into the current one. Yet nothing remotely comparable is to be found in the New Testament. According to the Gospel, the public's reaction was mixed. Luke reports that "the people stood by, watching; but the rulers scoffed at him" (23:35); Matthew (27:39-42) and Mark (15:29-32) quote derisive remarks addressed to Jesus by some of those present, including priests and elders. In short, the Gospel accounts clearly show that some persons responded to Jesus' suffering with indifference or sarcasm. But they contain no indication of frenzied, unanimous blood lust.

The "Traders"

In addition to the priests and the people, the Passion Play conjures up a third group of evil men to take part in the plot against Jesus. The money changers, whom the Gospels mention briefly as having been driven from the Temple by Jesus, are here transmuted into a gang of traders and usurers who play a major role in Jesus' arrest. Bent on both reimbursement and revenge for the losses they sustained when Jesus drove them from the Temple, they serve as intermediaries who induce Judas to betray Jesus.

There is no Scriptural basis for any of this beyond the Temple episode. According to the Gospels, Judas spontaneously went to the priests with his offer of betrayal. The greedy, mercenary traders are modeled, rather, on the figure of the Jewish usurer in the medieval miracle plays.

In the 1970 version, the portrayal of the traders has undergone only trivial alterations. In one place, the words "We will be revenged upon him" (1960 p. 19) have been deleted, but immediately preceding, a similar utterance has been left standing: "Revenge, revenge! This affront shall not remain unpunished" (1970 p. 19). A passage in which Caiphas plays on the traders' vengefulness is also retained (1960 p. 26; 1970 p. 23).

Representation of Jewish Law

Following a prejudice of long standing, the Passion Play falsely pictures Jewish law as the opposite of Christian love. The law is

misrepresented as legalistic, punitive and harsh, and also as vindictive: "Up, Fathers!--the law calls for vengeance" (1960 p. 56; 1970 p. 50). Anathema in the name of Moses--a conception totally alien to Judaism--is threatened for those who refuse to uphold Judaism as interpreted by the priests: "Those who hold to our fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, stand by us. Upon all others the curse, the curse of Moses" (1960 p. 18; 1970 p. 18).

Again in keeping with handed-down attitudes, the universality of Christian love is stressed, while Jewish law is characterized, by implication, as merely tribal. Thus, in the new version Caiphas is made to say:

Now we shall see who will be triumphant! He, with his followers, to whom he ceaselessly preaches love, a love that includeth publicans and sinners, nay, even the Gentiles--or we with this multitude of faithful helpers who observe the law (1970 p. 23).

The passage just cited is one instance where the revision of the text has actually made matters worse. In the previous version, there was no explicit reference to the law; the sentence ended: "... with this multitude that we are letting loose against him" (1960 p. 27).⁸

Similarly invidious is a passage in both the old and the revised text which points out that the amount of money offered to Judas Iscariot as a reward for betraying Jesus is the value set by Jewish law on a slave: "We are directed by the law of Moses. A slave is valued at thirty pieces of silver" (1960 p. 53; 1970 p. 47). The reference appears to be to Exodus 21:32, which sets thirty shekels as the compensation to be paid to a slave owner for a slave gored by an ox. But the sole New Testament passage mentioning the amount paid to Judas (Matthew 26:15) does not refer in any way to this or any other Jewish law. It is hard to see why the point should have been introduced except to suggest that the priests thought of Jesus as no better than a slave.

In one place, both the old and the new text parody the Scriptural rule, "An eye for an eye," traditionally misunderstood by Christians as an example of the supposed ruthlessness of Jewish law. The occasion is the incident during Jesus' arrest where Peter, seeking to defend Jesus by violence, strikes a certain Malchus with his sword and cuts off his ear. Discussing the episode later, a temple guard utters what is evidently meant as a joke: "An ear for an ear" (1960 p. 84; 1970 p. 77).

Repeatedly, the law is invoked to sanction enmity to Jesus. Thus, the high priest Caiphas points to the threat which Jesus supposedly poses to Mosaic law: "Without his death there is no peace in Israel, no security for the Law of Moses" (1960 p. 55; 1970 p. 49); "So Thou art the man who fancies He can bring ruin to our Synagogue and

to the law of Moses?" (1960 p. 77; 1970 p. 70). Whether Caiphas' concern for the law is meant to be sincere, or merely a mask for his arrogance and lust for power, is not clear.

Except for the worsened passage named earlier, references to the Jewish law remain essentially unchanged in the 1970 text. The pageant still insists on the supposed corruption, insincerity and hypocrisy of Jewish religion and religious institutions in Jesus' time.

As a noted Catholic scholar, Father Gregory Baum, has pointed out, these are themes which have been endlessly belabored by Christian authors and have become stock items in the popular literature of every century. In this literature, everything the Gospels say about the enemies of Jesus is taken to apply to all the Jews of his time. In recent years, however, Christian scholars have examined the religious world of Jesus' day with fairness, tracing the various trends of first-century Judaism with their achievements, their shortcomings and their great vitality. As a result, many of Jesus' moral teachings--such as the Beatitudes and the law of love, forgiveness and mercy--have been shown to have parallels, not only in the Jewish Scriptures, but also in the rabbinical writings of Jesus' time.⁹ The revised version of the Passion Play does not reflect any of these insights.

Jewishness of Jesus Obscured

Another, even graver way in which the Passion Play conceals the relationship between Judaism and Christianity is by falsifying the facts about Jesus' Jewishness.

In both the old and the new version of the play, Jesus is represented as renouncing Judaism: "The Old Covenant which my Father made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob has reached its end" (1960 p. 48; 1970 pp. 41f.). There is no basis whatever for such a statement in the Gospel accounts. On the contrary, the Gospels leave no doubt that Jesus always remained an observant Jew. He was raised according to Jewish law (Luke 2:41-52, 2:22-24), directed questioners to the law (Luke 10:25-28), and taught in synagogues and later in the Temple (Luke 4:14-30, 33-37, 19:47-48).

The revised Passion Play actually goes farther in obscuring the Jewishness of Jesus and his early followers than did the old. The 1960 text described at some length the disciples' preparation for the Passover that was to become the Last Supper (1960 pp. 39, 43-44); the 1970 text deletes all of this.

In dissociating Jesus from Judaism, the play exemplifies a misperception common among Christians of all centuries. As Father Baum has observed:

We have been unjust to the Jews in our thought. We have removed the Jews from the origins of Christianity; they

have become for us simply its opponents. Jesus is no longer a Jew; he is simply man, universal, belonging to no people. And yet in spite of his universality, he was a Jew, circumcised on the eighth day, obedient to the Law; he was the Jew of Jews, and if he had not been, we would not now be redeemed. In our imagination Judas is more Jewish than Mary, Caiphas more Jewish than Peter, the spiteful crowd more Jewish than the daughters of Jerusalem weeping for Christ.¹⁰

In its Declaration on Non-Christian Religions (1965), the Second Vatican Council asserted that the Church "also recalls that the Apostles, the Church's mainstay and pillars, as well as most of the early disciples who proclaimed Christ's gospel to the world, sprang from the Jewish people." The play, even in its new version, does not recall these truths.

Allegations of Collective Guilt

The 1960 text of the play everywhere reflected the long-standing notion that the Jewish people as a whole were collectively guilty of Jesus' death--i.e., that all Jews living in Jesus' day knew about him, all turned against him (after some had initially accepted him), and all clamored for his death.

In the 1965 Declaration, the Roman Catholic Church decisively rejects this idea, which has wrought so much misery for the Jewish people over the centuries. The Declaration states that what happened in Jesus' Passion "cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today." How far have the revisers of the Passion Play script complied with this mandate?

Here and there, the revised text seeks to modify the imputation of collective guilt. Thus, in the old version, the populace demanded Jesus' execution with the words: "Pilate must consent--the whole nation demands it of him!" (1960 p. 110); in the new one, "the whole of Jerusalem" has been substituted for "the whole nation" (1970 p. 101). But many other equally objectionable passages have been left standing--most conspicuously in the act depicting the sentencing of Jesus:

Have ye then no mercy,
Oh, ye deceived and misguided people?
No! By frenzy seized, they cry: Away to the cross
with Him (1960 p. 107; 1970 p. 97)!

... Around the Saviour of all, in wrath is raging
A furious, blinded people which ceaseth not its clamour
Till the unwilling Judge
Cries: So take Him and crucify Him (ibid.)!

We have done our duty as subjects of Caesar and delivered
this rebel over to thee. If thou [Pilate] dost not hear

our accusations and the voice of the people, we are free from guilt (1960 p. 113; 1970 p. 103).

The idea that the Jews turned unanimously against Jesus is also retained in a speech in which Pilate assumes that the persons who called for Jesus' death were the same who had welcomed him on his entry into Jerusalem (1960 pp. 111-112; 1970 p. 102). In contrast, a passage in the 1960 text in which a Jew who was not one of the disciples spoke favorably of Jesus just before his arrest and trial has been excised. It occurred in the deleted Passover preparation scene (see "Jewishness of Jesus Obscured," above) and read:

Oh, what joy! I recognise you. Ye are the disciples of the great miracle-worker, who restored my sight. How have I deserved that of all the houses in Jerusalem He should choose mine in which to eat this holy meal? O! Happy man that I am! My house will be blessed by his entrance (1960 p. 44)!

As Biblical scholars have come to recognize, the idea that all Jews rejected Jesus is untenable--if only for the technical reason that the ministry of Jesus in its temporal aspect was a local affair. Few if any of the numerous Jews who were even at that time scattered throughout the far-flung Roman Empire outside Palestine could have known about him. Indeed, given the state of transportation and communication at the time, it seems probable that even in Palestine only a minority had heard of him.

In another sense, too, the message of Jesus was not as easily accessible to Jesus' Jewish contemporaries as the collective rejection idea implies. The Gospels often suggest that in some degree Jesus hid his ministry from the public. He appears to have shared certain key teachings only with the disciples--for example, an eschatological discourse (Matthew 24), the transfiguration (Mark 9:2-10), the explanation of the parable of the sower (Matthew 13:10-16), and numerous predictions of his death and resurrection (Matthew 16:21-23; 17:22-23; 20:17-19; Mark 8:27-33; 9:30-32; 10:22-34; Luke 9:19-22; 18:31-34). His Messianic role was not supposed to be for public knowledge (Mark 8:27-30; cf. Luke 9:18-22).

Indeed, the Gospel reports that even the twelve did not always comprehend Jesus' ministry. Thus, Peter challenged his prediction of his death and resurrection (Matthew 16:21-24); the disciples argued which of them was the greatest (Luke 9:46-50); James and John advocated the use of force (Luke 9:51-56). Not until the very end, at the Last Supper, did even the disciples fully understand the import of Jesus' teaching (John 16:29-30). That being so, how could the man in the street have perceived Jesus' Messianic role and consciously rejected him and it? In the forceful words of Father Dominic Crossan:

... The oft repeated statement that the Jews rejected Jesus and had him crucified is historically untenable and must therefore be removed completely from our thinking and our writing, our teaching, preaching, and liturgy.11

The Jews "Rejected by God"

Jewry's supposed collective guilt in the death of Jesus forms the basis of what is perhaps the most baneful of all anti-Jewish ideas: the notion that the Jews have been rejected or cursed by God. Allied with this notion is the belief that the Old Covenant has been voided by the New, or that the Kingdom of God has been taken from Jewry and given to the Church.

These ideas, too, are sharply disavowed by the 1965 Declaration on Non-Christian Religions, which asserts so firmly that "God holds the Jews most dear for the sake of the Fathers; His gift and call are irrevocable." The Declaration states: "Although the Church is the New People of God, the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures." In support of the contrary view, the Declaration quotes from Paul's discussion of the Covenant (Romans 9:4): "The Church ever keeps in mind the words of the Apostle about his kinsmen: 'Theirs is the sonship and the glory and the covenants and the law and the worship and the promises; theirs are the fathers and from them is the Christ according to the flesh.'"

In the Passion Play of former years, the allegation that the Jews were a rejected people figured conspicuously. The new text makes some attempts to soften it. A passage which used to read, "Therefore, thus sayeth the Lord, / This people I will have no more" (1960 p. 38), is altered to "... This city I will have no more" (1970 p. 32). In similar fashion, "I will cast out this proud nation" (1960 p. 38) becomes "I will cast out this proud city" (1970 p. 33); and "'In this folk' so sayeth the Lord, / 'Have I no pleasure more'" (1960 p. 45) now reads "'In these sinners ...'" (1970 p. 39).

Perhaps more significantly, a one-line appearance by Ahasuerus, the man who, according to legend, would not let Jesus on the way to Golgotha rest on his doorstep (1960 p. 119) and was punished by becoming the "Wandering Jew," has been done away with. Deleted, too, is the following stanza:

Thus too will the synagogue¹² also be thrust away,
From her will the Kingdom of God be taken and entrusted
To another people who shall bring forth
The fruits of righteousness (1960 p. 37).

Yet, as so often, the intent of the revision is inconsistently carried out. Immediately following one of the deletions noted above, the words "A better people He will choose" remain (1960 p. 38; 1970 p. 33). Also retained is a passage in which Jesus is represented as saying to a Jewish audience: "The Kingdom of God shall be taken from you and be given to a nation bringing forth better fruits" (1960 p. 18; 1970 p. 17). The sentence is from the Gospel (Matthew 21:43), but its use is once more characteristic of

the play's highly selective employment of Scripture. Just as the text suppresses evidence of Jesus' Jewishness in order to construct a sharp separation between Judaism and Christianity, so in representing the Jews as cursed and rejected it ignores Paul's discussion of the Covenant, which the Vatican Council singled out as crucial.

Most important, the play retains, with some modifications, a tableau showing the rejection of Queen Vashti in favor of Esther (Esther 1:2)--here represented as a symbol of God's supposed rejection of the Jewish people in favor of the Church:

See Vashti--see the proud one is cast out!
Showing God's purpose for the synagogue ...
"The time of grace has passed away;
I will cast out this proud city,
Even as I live," thus sayeth the Lord
(1960 pp. 37f.; 1970 pp. 32f.).

The "Blood Curse"

In popular anti-Jewish ideology, God's alleged rejection is usually assumed to extend to all present and future generations of Jews. This belief derives mainly from the Gospel report according to which the people themselves invited the responsibility for Jesus' execution by shouting: "His blood be upon us and our children."

The "blood curse" episode rests on a narrow Scriptural foundation, being reported in only one of the four Gospels (Matthew 27:25). Nevertheless, the Passion Play--like countless anti-Jewish screeds through the centuries--makes much of it. In the tableau opening Act XII, the following exchange, left standing in the revised text, occurs:

Chorus: Jerusalem! Jerusalem!
The blood of His Son will yet avenge on you the Lord.
People: His blood be on us, and on our children!
Chorus: Be it then upon you, and on your children
(1960 p. 109; 1970 p. 99)!

Later in the act, Pilate announces: "I am innocent of the blood of this just man. It will rest upon you," and the priests and people respond: "We take it upon us. His blood is upon us and our children!" (1960 p. 114; 1970 p. 104). A few lines further down, Pilate reiterates: "Let it be as ye¹³ have cried aloud: it falls upon you and upon your children!" In the old text, the priests and people thereupon declaim once more: "Good! Let it fall upon us and upon our children!" This last repetition, and only this, has been deleted from the new version.

The Portrayal of Pilate

To provide a noble foil for the priests and other Jewish "plotters" against Jesus, the Passion Play makes a near hero of Pontius Pilate,

the Roman governor who ordered Jesus' execution. Pilate is portrayed as a compassionate man, sincerely concerned about justice. He refuses to believe that Jesus is in any way dangerous: "I have already heard of one Jesus, who went about the land teaching and performing wonderful deeds. But I have never heard of a disturbance caused by him" (1960 p. 92; 1970 p. 85). Indeed, Pilate rather admires Jesus:

I cannot believe that this man has criminal plans in his mind. He has so much that is noble in his face, in his bearing. His speech also testifies to such noble frankness and a nature so highly gifted that he seems to me a very learned man ... (1960 p. 94; 1970 p. 88).

The only fault of Pilate in the Passion Play is that he is too soft--too easily swayed by Jesus' enemies. Thus, the scourging he orders for Jesus (actually Roman standard practice in such cases) is presented as an accommodation to the bloodthirstiness of the Jews: "Perhaps the blind wrath of his enemies will be appeased by the sight of the scourging" (1960 p. 104; 1970 p. 94). Later, when the people are asked to decide whether Jesus or Barrabas is to be amnestyed, Pilate eloquently pleads for the former:

Look well at these two. The one mild of countenance, dignified in his bearing, the picture of a wise teacher--one whom ye yourselves have honored long, not one evil can be laid to his charge ... The other an ugly, savage creature ... a perfect criminal (1960 p. 112; 1970 p. 102).

When Pilate eventually orders Jesus to be crucified, he does so solely under pressure from the cruel Jews--a point underscored in the prologue to the act:

Even Pilate himself is moved to sympathy for Him.
Have ye then no mercy,
Oh, ye deceived and misguided people?

... Around the Saviour of all, in wrath is raging
A furious, blinded people which ceaseth not its clamour
Till the unwilling Judge
Cries: So take Him and crucify Him (1960 p. 107;
1970 p. 97).

All of this is wildly unhistoric--indeed, it turns the truth upside down. The New Testament accounts and other historical sources, such as the writings of Philo and Josephus, contain no hint that Pilate was anything but a particularly brutal governor known for his ruthlessness in putting down disturbances (see the reference to his massacre of Galilean pilgrims in Luke 13:1). He constantly and unnecessarily offended Jewish religious sensibilities, inspired fear in the Jewish leaders and was quite beyond the reach

of any manipulation by them. A letter from Herod Agrippa I to the Emperor Caligula describes him as inflexible, merciless and corrupt, and accuses him of executing men without a proper trial. He was eventually recalled to Rome to stand trial for cruelty and oppression.

The Crucifixion Laid to the Jews

Both the old and the revised texts of the play show Pilate dissociating himself from the crucifixion. He makes the point twice: "So take ye him and crucify him at your peril. I will have nothing to do with it ..." (1960 p. 111; 1970 p. 101); "I am compelled by your violence to yield to your desire. Take him and crucify him. But see! I wash my hands .." (1960 p. 113; 1970 p. 104).

The lines just quoted are derived from the Gospels; but in the context in which they are presented here, they suggest a distorted picture of the Jews' role in the crucifixion. The idea that Pilate yielded to Jewish insistence upon a death sentence contradicts all we know about the political situation and about his overbearing rigidity. The truth is that crucifixion was a Roman, not a Jewish form of execution, and that Jesus was handed over to Roman soldiers, not to the Jews, for execution (Matthew 27:27-31; Mark 15:16-27). Indeed, Jesus repeatedly predicted that he would die at the hands of the Romans (Matthew 20:18-19; 26:2; Luke 18:31). This fact is nowhere indicated in the old text, nor in the revised one.

The Political Background

To understand Pilate's and the Jewish leaders' roles and the relationship between them, one must consider the historical setting in which Jesus' ministry and death took place. The play fails almost completely to do so.

The political realities were: a brutal Roman occupation; an intermittent guerrilla war fought by Jewish insurgents; widespread Messianic expectations among the Jews; fear among the Roman rulers of a large-scale uprising; repressive measures by the Romans, including frequent executions on the cross.

Under these hazardous conditions, the Jewish leaders were responsible to the Roman occupying power for preserving the peace. Obviously, they had to be concerned about any Messianic pretender who might intensify the Romans' fear of a general rebellion. Possible Roman reprisals were what clearly prompted Caiphas to argue, as reported in the Gospel: "You do not understand that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people and that the whole nation should not perish" (John 11:50).

The Passion Play text, both old and new, touches just twice, and most cursorily, on these realities. In one instance, Caiphas

warns: "This man will declare himself King of Israel! Then there will be ... rebellion against the Romans; and they will ... come with their armies to destroy our people and our land" (1960 p. 23; 1970 p. 20). Elsewhere, Caiphas submits the argument recorded in the Gospel of John: "Is it not better that one man die than the whole nation perish? He must die! Without his death there is no peace in Israel, no security for the law of Moses" (1960 p. 55; 1970 p. 49). But in neither case is the argument developed; the priests quickly revert to their usual tack--vengeance and self-seeking.

The Barrabas affair, too, can be understood only in the light of political conditions. The Passion Play script, in both the old and the revised version, fails to do so--although it must be acknowledged that the same is true of nearly all renderings of the incident.

The evidence, as persuasively marshalled by Father Crossan, indicates that Barrabas was a guerrilla fighter against the Romans (the Greek word lēstēs, basically meaning "robber," was also used to signify "insurgent"). The Gospel of Mark suggests that a band of Barrabas' friends or followers (not necessarily a large crowd) asked Pilate to release him, rather than Jesus, whom they may not even have known, and that Pilate resisted the demand because he considered Barrabas more of a threat to the Roman occupation than Jesus. In the Gospel of Luke, written later, the crowd is represented as a mob from the general population, but this cannot be substantiated from Matthew or John; and nowhere in the Gospels is there any indication that the crowd was purposely recruited by the Jewish authorities to shout against Jesus, as suggested in the Passion Play.¹⁴

Summary

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 tableau opening Act II), the revisions are limited to deletions and modifications of emotionally charged individual words or brief phrases. Even this retouching 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:

- The 1970 text, like its predecessor, still draws Jesus' antagonists as fiendish, almost subhuman creatures.
- It misrepresents Jewish religion in Jesus' time as harsh, corrupt and worthless.

- 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.
- It presents all Jews as enemies of Jesus, asserts that 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.
- It falsifies the character and historic role of Pilate, and shifts the role of crucifier from the Romans to the Jews.
- 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' Jewish antagonists cannot be understood.

Contrary to the Oberammergau authorities' claim that any anti-Jewish elements in the text are simply due to the necessity of following the Gospel accounts, many of the anti-Jewish distortions described above rest on traditional or freely invented non-Scriptural ideas and figures. Others derive from a one-sided, highly selective use of Scripture. Taken as a whole, the pageant misrepresents not only certain objective events of Jesus' life and death, but also the meaning given to these events in the New Testament. It disregards both the insights of present-day Catholic scholarship and the Second Vatican Council's injunction to all Roman Catholics to refrain from invidious statements about Jews and Judaism.

III. THOUGHTS FOR 1980--AND BEYOND

The relatively trifling changes made to "update" the Oberammergau Passion Play do not alter this basic truth: The play reflects an ingrained negative attitude toward Judaism and Jewry, perpetuated by certain traditions of Christianity.

An Ancient Tradition Reflected

The Passion Play's distorted presentation of Jews and their role in the life and death of Jesus derives from a tradition which had its beginnings in the preaching and teaching of the Christian Church in its early days, and which became solidified between 250 and 450 A.D. From the third century, Father Edward H. Flannery has pointed out,

... dates the emergence of a teaching not yet fully formulated but clearly enunciated ... that Jews are a people

punished for their deicide who can never hope to escape their misfortunes, which are willed of God. This thesis formed the first seeds of an attitude that would dominate Christian thinking in the fourth century and greatly contribute thereafter to the course of anti-Semitism.¹⁵

The negative tradition with respect to Jews derives some semblance of plausibility from the fact that both the Old and the New Testament contain many passages harshly critical of the Jewish people. What was and often still is disregarded is that these strictures were uttered by persons--Jesus being one of them--who were themselves Jews. In all periods, the Jews have been strongly given to self-criticism; perhaps no other people has so candidly recorded its failings in its official history. But only too often Christians have used these Biblical passages as a stick to beat the Jews with, while claiming Biblical blessings and promises for themselves as successors to the Covenant.

Professor Luc Dequeker of Louvain University in Belgium, a spokesman for the Belgian Catholic Episcopate's National Subcommission for Relations Between Christians and Jews, has put the matter into truer perspective:

Let us ... not only apply to ourselves the positive texts of the Bible; let us, too, listen to the exhortations and prophetic condemnations addressed to the infidels of the people of God, and thus to ourselves also. The sometimes harsh language of the Bible and of Jesus is addressed to our infidelity as well. We can therefore recognize ourselves through the Jews in the Passion Play.¹⁶

In a similar spirit, Father Ralph Gorman points out that Christians should view Jesus' passion contritely from the side of the crucifiers, instead of sanctimoniously condemning the Jews:

The true Christian identifies himself with those who schemed against Christ, clamoured for his death, and crucified Him on Calvary. Looking for the guilty, the true Christian strikes his own breast and acknowledges that it was because of his sins that Christ died ... No man can harbor hatred of the Jews in his heart and be a Christian.¹⁷

Toward a Fairer Image

For centuries, the long-standing tradition of anti-Jewish teaching which underlies the Passion Play obscured the many passages and conceptions in the New Testament that suggest a balanced, much more positive image of Jews and Judaism. Real adherence to Scripture would demand that these elements be taken into account. And, increasingly, they are.

This is true, for example, with respect to religious textbooks and teaching materials. During recent decades, such publications

--Catholic and Protestant, American and European--have been examined for what they teach about Jews and Judaism, and much objectionable material has been found. The reaction of church authorities to these findings has been heartening. The need for change is being recognized and has become a high priority in Biblical and historical scholarship. Revision of the teaching materials themselves is well under way.

The Secretariat for Catholic-Jewish Relations of the United States Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs has recently suggested certain key themes for the attention of Christian scholars and educators. They may be summarized as follows:

- Not only the differences between Catholics and Jews but also their common historical, Biblical, doctrinal and liturgical heritage should be brought out.
- In keeping with the Declaration on Non-Christian Religions, the guilt for the crucifixion should not be laid to all Jews of Jesus' time, or to the Jews of today.
- Christian anti-Semitism should be frankly treated in history teaching.
- Jesus' life and the primitive Church should be studied in the setting of the Jewish religious, social and cultural life of the period.
- The misconception that the Judaism of Jesus' time was decadent, formal and hypocritical, and that Jesus' enemies were representative of it, should be explicitly rejected.
- It should be acknowledged that Judaism remained a living and complex reality after Jesus' time, and that the election of Israel remains permanent, as alluded to by St. Paul (Romans 9:29).
- The usage of the term "the Jews" in the Gospel of John and elsewhere in the New Testament should be precisely explained, so as not to put all Jews unfairly into a bad light, or to suggest that they were rejected or cursed by God.¹⁸

Guidelines for Passion Plays

Even more to the point, the United States Secretariat for Catholic-Jewish Relations has issued a statement on Passion plays, with guidelines for improvement.

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 Declaration on Non-Christian Religions. Writers and producers of such pageants are specifically warned to avoid the following exaggerations and misinterpretations:

- "To conceal the fact that Jesus is a Jew and that His friends as well as His enemies in the drama are Jews;
- "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;
- "To change the 'crowd' before the governor's palace into a screaming 'mob,' as representing all Jerusalem, and indeed all Israel;
- "To depict Pilate, whom historiography has shown to have been a ruthless tyrant, as an innocent and kindly bystander;
- "To highlight those texts of the gospel narrative that are amenable to misinterpretation by uninformed audiences, such as: 'His blood be upon us and upon our children' (Matt. 27:25)."¹⁹

Critical Responses to Date

There are, then, fairly definite standards of what a Passion play ought to be. To what extent are the differences between this ideal and the reality of Oberammergau being noticed? One indication is to be found in reactions to a preliminary summary of the present findings, released by the American Jewish Committee in late March 1970.

In West Germany, the press not only reported the data provided by AJC, but took a generally critical view of the play. For some papers, this critical attitude represented a new departure.

In Belgium, the Catholic hierarchy issued a pastoral letter instructing priests to remind parishioners going to Oberammergau that Jesus taught as a Jew among Jews. Priests also were to explain the objections which the play arouses among Jews, and the problems it creates for Christians. The letter asked "whether Christian circles take the Declaration on the Jewish faith by the Vatican Council seriously," and said Christians must not let the play influence them to hold Jews responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus.

In the United States, seven leading Catholic and Protestant New Testament scholars joined in a statement that vigorously criticized the play. The signers were: Prof. Markus Barth, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary; Dr. John C. Bennett, President Emeritus, Union

Theological Seminary, New York; Prof. Raymond Brown, S.S., St. Mary's Seminary, Baltimore; Prof. W. D. Davies, Duke Divinity School, Durham, N. C.; Prof. W. R. Farmer, Perkins School of Theology of Southern Methodist University, Dallas; Prof. James Sanders, Union Theological Seminary; and Dean Krister Stendahl, Harvard Divinity School, Cambridge, Mass.

The statement noted that scholars like Sister Louis Gabriel had "criticized the play ... as a distortion of the Gospel."²⁰ It asserted that the pageant still contributed to "the great hatred of Christians and Jews, which has ... left a trail of blood and tears down to our time." The statement further called upon all denominations to inform their constituents that "if they see this play they should not view it uncritically" but should look at it in the light of its 17th-century origins and ought to "be aware of anti-Semitic pitfalls."

To the Oberammergau authorities, the scholars suggested that "critical notes be provided" to show "that the anti-Jewish features of the play reflect certain attitudes which ... are no longer to be countenanced." They also offered to help with a basic revision of the pageant if the authorities were willing to undertake one.

An Opportunity Missed

The Secretariat for Catholic-Jewish Relations has defined the true purpose of Passion plays as follows: "To increase in the hearts of their audiences a greater love of God and of men, reminding them that those who played a part in the Passion drama were, in the Christian view, representatives of all of us."²¹

One wishes the 1970 Oberammergau pageant had adhered to this definition instead of falling, as it does, into every one of the pitfalls the Secretariat has cautioned against. As it is, the summer of 1970 finds half a million people viewing a spectacle that differs 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, backed by the prestige of the play and the fanfare attending its production, are being declaimed for all to hear.

Ten years must now go by before there is even another chance for improvement. When will the Oberammergau authorities bring themselves to obey fully the mandate of their church, as enunciated by the Second Vatican Council? All over the world, people of good will await their decision. In the words of Jewish tradition, "May it come speedily and in our time."

NOTES

1. Bernhard E. Olson, Faith and Prejudice (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), p. 195.
2. Adolf Hitler, Secret Conversations, 1941-1944 (New York: Farrar, Straus & Young, 1953), p. 457.
3. Joseph Krauskopf, A Rabbi's Impressions of the Oberammergau Passion Play (Philadelphia: Rayner, 1st ed. 1901; 9th ed. 1934).
4. Cf. Marc H. Tanenbaum and James O'Gara, "The Catholics and the Jews: Two Views," New York Herald Tribune, October 17, 1965 (American Jewish Committee reprint); Marc H. Tanenbaum, "Jewish-Christian Dialogue Spreads," New York World Journal Tribune, October 30, 1966 (American Jewish Committee reprint); Judith Hershkopf, "The Church and the Jews: The Struggle at Vatican Council II," American Jewish Year Book, LXVI:99-136 (1965); LXVII:45-77 (1966).
5. Reported in London Daily Telegraph, November 17, 1969.
6. Das Oberammergauer Passionsspiel ... Offizieller Gesamttext (Oberammergau, 1960; 1970).
7. The Passion Play at Oberammergau ... Official Text for 1960; Official Unabridged Text for 1970 (Oberammergau, 1960; 1970).
8. The official English translation of 1960 has "... with this multitude, filled with hate and revenge, that we are letting loose against him," but the 1960 German version omits the additional words.
9. Gregory Baum, The Jews and the Gospel (Baltimore; Newman Press, 1961), pp. 26f.
10. Baum, op. cit., p. 8.
11. Dominic M. Crossan, "Anti-Semitism and the Gospel," Theological Studies, XXVI:189 (June 1965).
12. "The synagogue" is used as a synonym for either Jewry or the Jewish Sanhedrin--repeatedly in the 1960 text, somewhat less often in the new version. The usage is anachronistic, since the synagogue did not become the basic institution of Judaism until after the destruction of the Temple, in 70 A.D. In the present context it would also seem well suited to cast disrespect on the Jewish religious institutions of today.

13. Thus according to the German texts; the official 1960 English version mistranslates: "... as I have cried aloud...."
14. Crossan, loc. cit.
15. Edward H. Flannery, The Anguish of the Jews (New York: Macmillan, 1965), p. 43.
16. Luc Dequeker, "Oberammergau: Sign of Contradiction or Reconciliation?" Pastoralia, No. 3, February 9, 1970.
17. Ralph Gorman, "Again the Jews," The Sign, May 1960, p. 6.
18. Executive Committee, Secretariat for Catholic-Jewish Relations, Guidelines for Catholic-Jewish Relations (Washington, March 6, 1967), pp. 7f.
19. Executive Committee, Secretariat for Catholic-Jewish Relations, A Statement on Passion Plays, press release dated February 28, 1968, p. 2; The New York Times, March 5, 1968, p. 44.
20. Sister Louis Gabriel, "Oberammergau: The Gospel Distorted," World Council of Churches' Committee on the Church and Jewish People, Quarterly Newsletter, March 1970.
21. A Statement ..., op. cit., p. 3.



