

The Christians Kill Jesus Again

Spectacle, Drama, and Politics at Oberammergau

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The Oberammergau Passion Play is an impressive spectacle. The play's typological tableaux and theological music incorporate the play's action into the larger imaginative world of the Christian epic. The tumultuous crowd scenes include the audience in the spectacle. The music and the tableaux script the audience's role and configure the audience as worshipers who watch the sacrifice of Jesus on their behalf. Like spectacle generally, the play is religious, and religion fascinates and frightens. Spectacle is also inherently part of consumer capitalism, and the play is the life of Oberammergau. Nonetheless, the play's theology, voice, and impetus are Christian. In the play, an intra-Jewish debate and Jewish worship ultimately become Christian worship/myth. The play flirts with but does not realize the possibilities of tragic dialogue and dilemma. Interpretation can move beyond the monologue of spectacular myth to find tensions in the play. These include the tension between Jewish roles and Christian voice, between intra-Jewish debate and Christian worship, between politics and theology, and between the villagers of Oberammergau who create the play and the tradition of the (passion) play. In these tensions, lie the hope of dialogue and the hope of resisting the fascinations of spectacular myth, but that hope does not exist for those who remain mere spectators.

1. INTRODUCTION

At a symposium on violence and biblical film at the Franz Hitze Haus (Katholisch Soziale Akademie) in Münster, Germany, I took part in an extended conversation with Reinhold Zwick and Adele Reinhartz about anti-Semitism in Jesus films and in the Oberammergau Passion Play because they planned to attend the 2010 premiere of that play.¹ Reinhold graciously arranged a place for me as well. I was delighted because of the many connections between passion plays and Jesus films,² but assumptions I had about the play's tourist atmosphere, anti-Semitism, and general theological perspective gave me pause. As my wife succinctly put it, why would you want to see someone crucified? We went anyway and saw Jesus crucified by Christians in order to fulfill a vow. Despite my trepidation, I enjoyed the play immensely. I explore my fascination and fear here by reflecting on the play in terms of spectacle, myth, drama, and politics. My reservations are largely related to spectacle and myth; my hopes to drama and politics.

2. RELIGIOUS SPECTACLE

The Oberammergau Passion Play is a spectacle. For many tourists, it is one of the events of a lifetime or at least of a memorable summer vacation. Tourists from abroad typically come to the play by purchasing a costly tour package. Oberammergau itself is tucked into the Bavarian mountains an hour or so from Munich. Those who come to the passion play do so at some cost and with some effort. It is something of a pilgrimage.

In Oberammergau, the play dominates everything. You spend a day or two there looking at the museum, Pilate's House, and various souvenir shops offering the (Christian) wood carvings famous in the area; and then attending the play, which runs for about six hours in two parts, which are arranged around a dinner break. You see the actors in the streets, bars, and restaurants and hear them called by the names of their roles. One evening, I ate in the same restaurant with Jesus and later heard a barmaid excuse herself so that she could make it to the crucifixion on time. She was part of the crowd scene. In fact, hundreds of the villagers are in the play. Few of the others are not involved in the tourist economy surrounding it. The play is Oberammergau.³

The crowd scenes are a crucial part of the play's spectacle. In the triumph, the Roman trial, and the crucifixion, hundreds of people are on the stage.⁴ The crowd threatens to spill off the stage and into the audience, which itself becomes part of the crowd. The rhythmic chants of the mob during the trial and crucifixion compel you to join the action: "*Kreuzige ihn!*" In the performance I saw, the actors had some difficulty in raising one of the crosses. I watched in fascination and found myself alarmed that the crucifixion might not take place. After the deaths, I watched with similar concern as actors mounted rickety ladders to depose the bodies. I had joined the spectacle.

While the crowd scenes are carefully choreographed, they create a sense of chaos, which the presence of live animals on the stage increases. You wonder what might happen. So much is happening that you cannot keep up with the action. Several actors speak at once. They say different things and speak to different issues. People enter and exit throughout the scenes. There is not always a clear focus of action. The result seems larger and more human than something like Jesus films do. The camera of such films typically narrows the action to a monocular vision. The stage of drama has a more dialogic potential, which is best realized at Oberammergau by the crowd scenes.

The large chorus, which provides theological interpretations for each act, also adds to the spectacular effect. The music enchants the human actions by evoking a larger theological world. The chorus also brings the audience into this action by repeatedly exhorting the audience, transforming it into a congregation for which everything becomes a spiritual lesson. In fact, the prologue offers the audience the same salvation which Oberammergau's legend claims the village has received (Stückl and Huber 2010, 9).

Except for the resurrection act, every act also has living tableaux. These frozen scenes come from the Christian Old Testament and provide antitypes for the action that follows. The 2010 tableaux (with their typological connections in parentheses) include the loss of paradise (the triumph; the crucifixion as paradise regained); the crossing of the Red Sea (the anointing); the golden calf apostasy (the temple act); the paschal meal (the Last Supper); Joab's murder of Amasa (Judas' betrayal); the burning bush (Gethsemane); Daniel in the lion's den and the mocking of Job (Jesus before the religious leaders); the despair of Cain (Judas' despair); Moses expelled by Pharaoh (Jesus before Pilate); Egypt's acclamation of Joseph (Pilate's condemnation of Jesus); and the sacrifice of Isaac and the brazen serpent in the wilderness (the crucifixion).⁵ These tableaux situate the play in the Christian epic, whose story extends from creation to consummation. The imagined world they suggest is like those of the mystery cycles or the art of the medieval cathedral. It is a world that envelops its worshipers (see Frei 1974, 1-16).

The types create eerie connections between stories in this epic and thereby imply that a mysterious providence superintends the play's story (see Auerbach 1968, 73-74). The play's presentation in German further intensifies the aura of mystery for those without conversational German (I have only a weak reading knowledge of German). Of course, Oberammergau sells a *Textbook* in German and English (Stückl and Huber 2010). In the afternoon session (from the triumph to the arrest in Gethsemane), you can follow this text. In the evening session, as night falls, the textbook becomes useless, the aura of mystery deepens, and you look to the stage for revelations.

Epic, mystery, enchantment of the ordinary, porous connections between story and ordinary reality, and revelations are all part of the activities of myth-ritual. Of course, spectacle is religious. As Guy Debord (1983, thesis #20) says, "The spectacle is the material reconstruction of the religious illusion ... The spectacle is the technological version of the exiling of human powers into a 'world beyond'; the culmination of humanity's internal separation". Debord criticizes spectacle because it renders its audience passive (Debord 1983, theses #13, 18, 30). The Oberammergau Passion Play does too. It is not merely that the story is so well-known or that the characters in it have only finite possibilities for variation. It is also that the audience's role is scripted. At least, as I have noted, I felt compelled to join the crowd in the spectacle. The prologue spoke to me as one who

needed salvation. The whole repeatedly instructed me to watch Jesus suffer for me.⁶ I was not merely passive. I was a voyeur. I was spectator.

For Debord, spectacle is synonymous with consumer capitalism (Debord 1983, theses #35-53). Clearly, the Oberammergau Passion Play is a matter of conspicuous consumption. Unless you receive a free ticket, it costs to see the passion play. For those on tour from abroad, it costs quite a lot. You make a financial commitment. Further, the play's production is quite extravagant. As Hans Schwaighofer slyly observes: "If the people of Oberammergau were genuinely interested in fulfilling the vow, and only the vow, the play would be performed once, on the Passion Meadow, for free" (cited in Shapiro 2000: 128). Instead, the play is at home in the repetitions of consumer capitalism.

This place in capitalism gives the play its most basic religious quality (see Debord 1983, thesis #20). Religion typically presents itself in and to a culture as productive of life. In a culture of consumer capitalism, "life" is materialist(ic). Although it has the aura of Christian theology, the legend of the play's origin actually describes the villagers' material salvation from the plague. Before the vow, they died. After, they lived. Even if the legend has no historical truth, the play today provides Oberammergau with (much of) its physical, material "life". Succinctly, Oberammergau performs the play in order to live. Oberammergau sells tickets, lodging, meals, and souvenirs to tourists – capitalism's pilgrims – in order to live. It is in this physical, material sense that the passion play is fundamentally religious. Christianity is quite secondary to this more basic matter. One free performance would fulfill the Christian vow.

3. MYTH AND DRAMA

Nonetheless, the play's theology is definitely Christian.⁷ Who else besides Christians crucifies Jesus and invites people to become voyeurs of that act? The typological tableaux, the music, and the direct sermonic address to the audience are quite clear on this point, but the resurrection is the most significant theological/ideological moment. As noted above, the resurrection is the one act with no typological association. It stands alone, unique. It is the play's definitive, miraculous moment.⁸ In the language of drama, it is the *deus ex machina* which untangles hopeless plot complications (specifically the problem of the death of the innocent Jesus).

But, "unique" and "miraculous" reflect the apologetics of Christian theology,⁹ and this language configures the resurrected Jesus as a (divine) Christian figure. In fact, one might say that the Jewish Jesus of the play's early action is resurrected as the Christian Christ.¹⁰ Admittedly, the 2010 play does not dramatize Jesus' exaltation over his opponents as earlier versions did. In fact, the resurrected Jesus appeared on stage so late in the 2010 play that I first thought that the playmakers had opted – perhaps to ameliorate anti-Semitism – simply to announce the resurrection (as in the Gospel of Mark). When Jesus appeared on stage thereafter in glory, I was disappointed, but the dramatic choice is quite understandable. The resurrection is the heart of the Christian myth. In the face of such spectacular "miracles", however, any kind of genuine dialogue – between Jews and Christians for example – becomes impossible.

But, then, spectacle and myth are monologic (Debord 1983, theses #18, 24). In other words, myth is not very dramatic, even though many trace drama's origins to religious rituals and even though drama often represents mythic stories. Unlike myth, drama has the ability to create a dialogue between opposing views. Tragedy is particularly famous for wrenching dilemmas and for protagonists whose strengths are also their fatal weaknesses.¹¹ Thus, Orestes avenges his father's murder but becomes a haunted matricide. Antigone buries her brother but betrays the state. Hamlet avenges his father's murder but ruins Denmark. The drama ends, but the resolution is hardly comfortable.¹² Myth also has competing perspectives, but it harmonizes these binaries through a confusing process of transference and misdirection (see Lévi-Strauss 1978). Myth ensconces one position in power and presents it as "natural" or "given" (see Barthes 1972). At Oberammergau, the spectacular myth renders the Christian perspective a divine monologue.

At first, however, the Oberammergau Passion Play is more dramatic than you might expect. The first three acts afford the opposition almost equal time with Jesus. Even Pilate is on stage by Act 3. Furthermore, the play diversifies its religious leaders. Annas, Caiaphas, Nicodemus, Josephus of Arimathea, and others are developed individual characters. They and the crowds argue about Jesus and about Judaism. The result situates Jesus far more clearly in Judaism than previous versions of the play do and far more clearly than the Jesus film tradition does. Perhaps, most significantly, given previous allegations of anti-Semitism made against

the play, this diversified cast of characters makes it impossible to claim that “the Jews” collectively oppose Jesus.

Ultimately, however, Judas becomes a dupe. Caiaphas becomes obsessed with Jesus’ death. Jewish worship becomes Christian. The celebration of the Exodus becomes a homily on the Eucharist. The Exodus becomes a spiritual deliverance. The kingdom of God becomes a *Himmelreich*. Non-Christians, as a very Johannine Mary says, while holding the body of Jesus, prefer darkness (Stückl and Huber 2010, 117). In short, the dialogue becomes a monologue.¹³

Thus, though the opposition speaks at length at Oberammergau and even though the playmakers bring (Deut. 13) “false prophet” interpretations of Jesus on stage (e.g., Stückl and Huber 2010, 44, 65-76, 97-99), I never felt the tragic dilemma. I never entertained the possibility that those who condemn Jesus might be right to do so. I could not do so because the opposition is itself “Christian”, or, more precisely, Christian theology animates the purportedly Jewish and antagonistic roles. As a result, this opposition lacks its own voice and is but a mask for Christian theology. Accordingly, it is Christians posing in Jewish roles who kill Jesus (yet again) at Oberammergau. For a dramatic dialogue to exist, the audience would need to entertain various ideas for which Christian mythology has no voice: that Jesus has no authority *vis-à-vis* the religious leaders; that he dangerously fans the fires of a potentially suicidal revolt; that a *Himmelreich* does not address the material problems of Roman colonization practically; that Jesus is an obsessed false prophet who will likely lead the people to destruction; and that Jesus should die rather than the people (see John 11:50; Walsh 2005, 165-72). Instead, the theology of the chorus and the miraculous resurrection drowns the opposition and the initial dialogue in the Christian monologue/myth.

4. POLITICS (INTERPRETATION) AT OBERAMMERGAU

Nonetheless, a wilful interpreter can find tensions in the mythic spectacle at Oberammergau. For example, as I have been implying throughout, the Christian myth creates all the characters and actions in the play, but none of the actual roles in the play are Christian, except for that of the resurrected Christ. Historical verisimilitude requires a pre-Christian setting, roles, and story. The performers “play” at being Jews (or Romans). As a result, Jesus’ conflict with (some of) these leaders is not an allegory about Christians versus Jews. It is an intra-Jewish debate (although one voiced by Christians). Ostensibly, it is the young against the old, the country against the city, and the lower classes against the elite’s retainers.

Thus, in the triumph in Act 1, a people’s movement comes to the lair of the older powers-that-be. Jesus’ critique of the temple merchants and cleansing of the temple in Act 3 continues this theme. The class conflict aura is reminiscent of Pier Paolo Pasolini’s *The Gospel according to St. Matthew* (1965).¹⁴ Important differences do, however, exist. Pasolini creates his angry, confrontational Jesus by placing the conflict language of Matt. 10:34 (I come to bring a sword) before the Sermon (Matt. 5-7). Despite the conflict in Acts 1-3, Oberammergau’s Jesus does not come with a sword. Further, while older versions of the play placed the temple act in Act 1, the present play places the temple act in Act 3 and moves Jesus’ religious teaching to the fore so that he arrives with words of comfort (Matt. 11:28), a call to devotion to God’s heavenly kingdom (Matt. 6:25, 33), and an ethic of forgiveness and love (selections from Matt. 5:38-48). The editorial result is exactly the opposite of Pasolini’s and has the opposite effect. Jesus becomes less confrontational and more religious.

The chorus and the living tableaux further minimize suggestions of class conflict. More significantly, they also reduce the emphasis on Jesus’ Jewishness. While Jesus and his disciples do recite the Shema in the temple (Act 3) and eat the Seder (Act 4), the impetus in both cases is toward Christian worship. In the first case, Jesus and his disciples purify existing worship. In the second case, reflections on the Exodus quickly shift to the Eucharist (see John 6). In the play as a whole, the triumph and temple cleansing give way to the resurrected Jesus. What begins as an intra-Jewish debate and as Jewish worship ends as something Christian. Nonetheless, the tension remains between the Jewish beginning and the Christian end of the play. Moreover, the attempt at historical verisimilitude creates a lasting tension. Except for the chorus and the resurrected Jesus, the play has no Christian roles, despite its relentlessly Christian voice.

A further tension then exists between the play’s largely political, human action and the theological character of the chorus and the living tableaux. The gospel passion narratives have a similar bifurcation. For

the gospels, Jesus dies because of (1) the plot of the religious leaders and (2) the divine plan expressed in Jesus' passion predictions and in numerous allusions to Hebrew Bible passages. While privileging the latter in terms of the amount of narrative devoted to it, the gospels mix these plots in order to assert that the evil opposition serves God. In short, the evangelists encase an ordinary crucifixion in God's larger plan. Such is the work of myth (see Barthes 1972).

The play's bifurcation is more decisive than that of the gospels. While the chorus and the living tableaux provide a heavy theological layer for the play's action, that layer is separate from the play's far more human action. While a plethora of religious actions take place (religious debates, the anointing, the Seder), the characters are largely human, and many of their actions are political and flirt with class conflict. The surprising appearance of the angel to support Jesus in Gethsemane (Act 5) says it all. Quite simply, the angel, who has a gospel precursor, stands out in the play's predominantly human action. In fact, when I saw the play, I did not at first recognize the character as an angel. The character wandered rather aimlessly onto the stage while other actions were transpiring, and I thought at first that some actor had missed a cue and wandered onto the stage out of turn.¹⁵

In the theology of the chorus and the tableau (and in the interpretative words of Jesus), Jesus is God's obedient sacrifice. At that level, the Christian myth kills or sacrifices Jesus. At the level of the play's human action, however, Jesus is a victim of power politics (see Schwartz 2007, 166-90). As the play does not develop the tragic possibility that Jesus might deserve death, his death becomes quite disquieting. At this political level, the play's action incites desires for justice/revenge, for Jesus' vindication (see Schwartz 2007, 175). The resurrection answers this desire theologically. At the human, political level, however, the question of who killed the innocent Jesus and who should pay for this crime persists.

In his book on the Oberammergau Passion Play, James Shapiro (2000, 14-15) observes that the gospels easily transform into revenge tragedies, which are perennially popular because the victim triumphs over his oppressors. The *deus ex machina* resurrection (or the gospel) is Jesus' triumph; moreover, earlier versions of the Oberammergau Passion Play showed the resurrected Jesus trampling upon the heads of the religious leaders who had arranged his crucifixion (Shapiro 2000, 15). Speaking in a different context, Fredson Bowers (1971, 278) argues that "the sole possible dramatic development of revenge tragedy", for lesser dramatists than Shakespeare, was "towards the portrayal of villainy". In Bowers' analysis, moral outrage at private revenge further exacerbated this trajectory because revenge belonged to God (and the state) alone (Bowers 1971, 278-82). As a result, that dramatic tradition moved from a concentration on heroes to a focus on villains who eventually find their comeuppance.

In this regard, it is interesting to observe that Caiaphas dominates the political, human action (but not the theological layer) of the play. And, as in the revenge plays that Bowers analyses, he is the villain.¹⁶ Pilate now has a far more prominent and callous role in Jesus' crucifixion than in previous versions of the play. Accordingly, Caiaphas is in the early part of the play simply the beleaguered local leader of a colonized state in danger of losing his position if he does not maintain order. Nonetheless, by the end of Act 3, Caiaphas becomes little more than the plot drive toward Jesus' crucifixion. Instead of a character, Caiaphas is obsession with Jesus' death.¹⁷ Thus, while others talk of imprisoning Jesus, he talks of Jesus' death (Stückl and Huber 2010, 39-40; see John 11:50). Even Annas, who has pressed Caiaphas to deal with Jesus, observes that "the storm in Caiaphas' heart will not abate" until Jesus is dead (Stückl and Huber 2010, 63). At the Roman trial, Pilate asks Caiaphas "to wipe the foam from his lips" (Stückl and Huber 2010, 103). After Jesus' death, Caiaphas insists that Jesus' body be thrown into the pit with criminals, and Nicodemus wonders aloud if Caiaphas will ever stop persecuting Jesus (Stückl and Huber 2010, 115). In the play's action, he never relents.¹⁸

Is this portrayal anti-Semitic? The new play has made a number of changes to avoid such charges. The Jews as a whole do not oppose Jesus who is himself, before the resurrection, clearly Jewish. The infamous blood curse is now gone. Pilate has a clearer, more callous role in Jesus' execution. Further, a play could have a bad character who happens to be a Jew without the play being anti-Semitic. But, Caiaphas is not just a Jew. He is the Jewish High Priest. That troubles. That Caiaphas remains the master manipulator in the Roman trial also troubles simply because that characterization continues the gospel and passion play tradition about the Jewish leaders and because of the anti-Semitism associated with the tradition. Finally, it also troubles that Caiaphas' deployment as a revenge villain effectively arrays him against God (see Bowers 1971, 157-58, 278-82). While that is not clearly anti-Semitism or even Christian supersessionism, it may, given the tradition of passion plays,

echo the old apologetic dynamics of God/Christ/Spirit/Christianity vs. Satan/Caiaphas/Flesh/Judaism too closely for comfort today.

The development of more genuine dramatic tension – for example, the depiction of an obsessed Jesus in conflict with an equally obsessed Caiaphas (think Antigone and Creon) – would move further from the anti-Semitism lurking in the apologetic Christian tradition. While not going quite so far, some historians reflecting on the gospels have been unable to repeat the official Christian story that the Jews killed Jesus. They have found therein too many problems and fictions. Consequently, they tell an altogether different story in which Jesus died on a Roman cross and in which Christians told stories that were increasingly anti-Semitic in order to identify themselves within the Roman Empire (see, e.g., Crossan 1995).¹⁹ Working without the play's (and the gospels') theological explanations, such historians have also been driven to questions of justice. Their reflections, however, do not call for naming and punishing those responsible for Jesus' death. Instead, after the Holocaust, they worry about the injustices done in the name of that Jewish/Christian victim. Consequently, these scholars think of justice with respect to Jesus as a matter of doing justice to his teaching about love and forgiveness (see Schwartz 2007, 166-68). Thankfully, the Oberammergau Passion Play emphasizes precisely this aspect of Jesus' teaching.²⁰ Nonetheless, the chorus, tableaux, and resurrected Jesus lay a different (a superseding if not anti-Semitic) ideology theology over this message. Thankfully, there is an obvious tension – a place where interpretation can prove ethical or not – between this theological overlay and the play's political action.

The final tension in the Oberammergau spectacle worth noting is more positive still. Put simply, the playmakers are not their play. The playmakers create dialogue between themselves and their play as they struggle to enact – and thereby necessarily adapt – their play (see Shapiro 2000, 187-223). They interpret (perform). In interpretation lies the possibility of dialogue and politics. Moreover, in recent years, the playmakers, led resourcefully by Otto Huber, have engaged in serious conversations with critics that have led to significant revisions aimed at eliminating anti-Semitism in the play.²¹

Inevitably, criticisms remain. Perhaps, it is not possible to stage a passion play that is not anti-Semitic (or without elements in which a Christianity miraculously replaces a Judaism). Whether it is possible or not, however, may be as irrelevant as the claim that some accusations of anti-Semitism arise from a desire to delegitimize Christianity (Shapiro 2000, 92). What is pertinent is that the dialogue has raised interpretation, rather than apologetics, to the fore. What is pertinent is that possibilities of justice lie in interpretations and in conversations, not in myth or spectacle. Unfortunately, there is still only spectacle's monologue and passivity for many of the thousands who attend the Oberammergau Passion Play (see Debord 1983, theses #13, 18, 24).²²

ENDNOTES

¹ I would like to thank George Aichele for his helpful editorial comments on this article.

² One of the earliest Jesus films was *The Passion Play of Oberammergau* (1898), but it was actually made on a New York City rooftop. The title's marketing ploy does illustrate early connections between passion plays and early Jesus films, which were often little more than staged scenes from art and (nativity or passion) pageants (see, e.g., *The Life and Passion of Jesus Christ*, 1905; *From the Manger to the Cross*, 1912). Passion play films have continued to appear (e.g., *Jesus Christ Superstar* [1973], *Jesus of Montreal* [1989], and *The Passion of the Christ* [2004]).

³ In earlier times, the theater was enclosed on three sides and the stage was "open" to the outside world providing yet another sign of the porous line between play and village.

⁴ The effect far surpasses crowd scenes in Jesus films, even that of the spectacular Sermon in *King of Kings* (1961), the advertising for which claimed thousands were assembled.

⁵ Critics frequently cite these types, which present the Hebrew Bible as a superseded Old Testament, as evidence of the play's anti-Semitism, although it might more technically be termed anti-Judaism or simply Christian supersessionism. The distinction is probably unnecessary and over-refined, however, for the discussion of a popular spectacle.

⁶ Not incidentally, the suffering Christ is a major feature of the wood carvings available for sale in Oberammergau and of the Church art in the area. See, e.g., the statue ensconced in the baroque chancel at The Wies Pilgrimage Church of the Scourged Savior.

⁷ Theologically, the play resembles Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*. Both concentrate voyeuristically on the sufferings of Christ on behalf of sinners. Both use the Virgin Mary as a lens for this suffering, employ The Stations of the Cross, and support a sacramental theology.

⁸ The healing of Malchus' ear does appear and actors do report other miracles.

⁹ For many Jewish critics, it is the miraculous, salvific death-resurrection gospel that is anti-Semitic, not some particular detail of the passion. See, e.g., Maccoby (1992, 166-67). For a similar critique of the Oberammergau Passion Play, see Krauskopf (1901, 135-51).

¹⁰ It is not that resurrection is unknown in Jewish texts; it is the uniqueness of Jesus' resurrection that moves toward Christianity.

¹¹ Is it coincidental that critics often associate the gospel and Christianity with comedy?

¹² This assertion might seem to oppose Aristotle who famously says that tragedies should engender a catharsis of pity and fear (1992, iv.1-2). Without entering into the long-standing debate about exactly what Aristotle means in this passage, I will instead point to the ambivalence implicit in pity and fear. That pairing describes the "push-pull" between the audience and characters in tragedy that myth's careful creation of and distinction between virtuous and evil characters does not engender. Mythic audiences align comfortably with the virtuous as they side with myth's exorcism of the evil. While his agenda differs from that of this article, Girard also argues that myth is monologic and tragedy is fundamentally dialogic (1977, 39-88).

¹³ Not incidentally, this pattern occurs repeatedly in the Gospel of John.

¹⁴ Both Reinhold Zwick and Adele Reinhartz have told me privately that both Stückl and Huber acknowledge the influence of Pasolini's film on their work.

¹⁵ An angel also appears at the empty tomb. That angel is less surprising as that entire act is the play's *deus ex machina*.

¹⁶ Shapiro (2000, 85) recognizes this point and amusingly notes that if one allows theology alone to explain the passion the unwieldy play would become something like *Murder on the Orient Express*. For a fuller discussion of the Oberammergau Caiaphas, which places the play's interpretation in that character's interpretive history, see the forthcoming book by Reinhartz.

¹⁷ Is such obsession the modern psychological equivalent of demonic possession? The play's portrayal of Caiaphas is reminiscent of those of the Dark Hermit in *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (1965), of Zerah in *Jesus of Nazareth* (1977), of Livio in *Jesus* (1999), and of Satan in *The Passion of the Christ*.

¹⁸ In its vilification of Caiaphas, the play is reminiscent of Cecil B. DeMille's *The King of Kings* (1927). According to reports, DeMille turned Caiaphas into his villain after pre-release complaints about anti-Semitism. While DeMille's Caiaphas is initially more villainous than Oberammergau's (DeMille characterizes him fairly early as caring more for revenue than religion), he does declare himself alone responsible for that which has happened when the temple veil is rent. Oberammergau's Caiaphas makes no such confession. He is merely degradation.

¹⁹ Does this enact a move from mystery (plays) to morality (plays)? Incidentally, while traveling to Oberammergau, I happened to be reading the eerily analogous story in Barry Unsworth's *Morality Play* (1995). In the novel, a fugitive priest joins a group of players who eventually move away from their repertoire of mystery to the depiction of a recent murder as a morality play. Further, as the players enact the official story, which accuses a young girl of the murder of a young boy, they bring to light so many problems in the official story that they unwillingly begin to enact another story, which exposes a powerful culprit and sets the young girl free.

²⁰ Contrast the effect of the absence of such teaching in *The Passion of the Christ*.

²¹ The recent changes impress. Shapiro 2000 has a fine treatment of the dialogue and changes up to that point. The 2010 play seems to respond to the demands for changes in Swidler and Sloyan 1999. For an appraisal less impressed with the changes, see Axelrod 2010.

²² Debord, of course, calls for more than dialogue and conscious interpretation. He calls for the negation of the society of the spectacle—for the resumption of revolutionary class struggle (1983, thesis #203) and for *détournement* ("derailment") (1983, theses #206-209). Could one see Christian Stückl's radical revision of *Die Pestnot Anno 1633* (a play about the legend of the play's origin) in 1988, which included youths throwing down the cross to deny a God who could allow such things, as such a *détournement* of the passion play (see Shapiro 2000: 195-97)? As Shapiro astutely observes, no scene in the passion play itself deals with (the possible *détournement* implicit in) modern incredulity about the gospel (2000, 200-202).

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