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PASSION PLAYS IN THE UNITED STATES:
THE CONTEMPORARY OUTDOOR TRADITION

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Theatre

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this dissertation is to trace the development of the outdoor passion plays in the United States, comparing their content and approach with the continental medieval tradition and analyzing how effectively the current American plays are modifying their presentations to meet the expectations of today's modern society.


Based on an overview of medieval passion plays, the St. Gall play emerged as the model play for comparison, prompting observations concerning the opening scenes, primary content, character development, Roman Catholic
influence, and concluding passages. Applying Horace's dictum that drama to be effective needs to teach and please allows for an examination of how these plays are maintaining that balance or are shifting more toward entertainment-oriented methods and strategies that appeal to modern American audiences.

The outdoor passion plays today face some major questions regarding the lack of professionalism, poor dramatic quality, and anti-Semitic scenes. The plays also compete with adverse weather conditions, television, cinema, and an entertainment industry that thrives on complex technology. While The Black Hills Passion Play remains true to its medieval heritage, other plays are adapting their presentations to attract larger audiences and to stay solvent. As the plays move further into the area of entertainment, will the educational value be lost?
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION: PASSION PLAYS IN AMERICA

Oh ye Children of God,
Ye, who live and breathe in His infinite love,
Open your hearts, and receive with childlike confidence His great message. . . .

That which you will experience today, Oh People Treasure well within your hearts;
Let it be the Light to lead you--
Until your last day.¹

With the notes of the organ fading into the cool, summer evening, the words of the prologue resound through the Black Hills of South Dakota as the actor portraying the role of the Christus (Christ) introduces the oldest American outdoor passion play. A hush falls over the audience, and for the next two hours and fifteen minutes scenes from the life of Christ unfold before the eyes of onlookers. In 1932 Josef Meier, founder of The Black Hills Passion Play, penned these words that convey the drama's universal message of hope and light in a dark world.

That giver of light Jesus Christ and the New Testament story of his passion--the events occurring in the last week of his life on earth--are known by anyone who has received religious instruction in Protestantism, Roman Catholicism, or Judaism. The figure of Christ, who walked on earth and

¹ Black Hills Passion Play, Souvenir Program (Spearfish, n.d.) N. pag.
was according to scriptures the perfect son of God, has long intrigued believers and non-believers alike as many in their quest for spiritual enlightenment have found comfort and inspiration in reenactments of the Biblical narrative. Even in contemporary times, the events and emotions of Jesus' last days hold powerful fascination. Classic movies such as The Robe (1953), Ben Hur (1959), and The Greatest Story Ever Told (1965) still appeal to audiences today, and as each generation learns the beatific story of Christ, the desire to experience a presentation of his life—whether in film or theatrical form—continues unabated.

This study examines the religious story of Jesus' life as written and presented in the outdoor American drama. While a dissertation has been written on the development of one such play, no study has examined this dramatic and theatrical form in a comprehensive fashion. In an unprecedented way, this work presents detailed information on all eight currently running passion plays in the United States; it traces the historical background and development of each outdoor drama over the past sixty-five years. This study also documents the physical plants of the dramas and their production apparatus. Guiding this analysis, however, is a focus on the means and ends of the passion plays, that is, the extent to which theatrical entertainment has been utilized for the purpose of religious instruction.
Throughout this work comparisons are drawn between the medieval passion play and its contemporary American embodiment. While one present day production may seek to follow closely the medieval tradition, others veer away from the traditional form and seek a more contemporary approach. Many productions make adaptations which keep abreast with the changing times and appeal to modern audiences. Nonetheless, whether one regards the medieval or contemporary passion plays, it is clear that the intent of such works involves educating the audience about the life of Jesus Christ and the gospel that he preached. Some of the currently running plays embrace a more inspirational approach; some set forth a strong, persuasive, evangelistic challenge. Regardless of the specific rhetorical strategy, each seeks to portray the story of Christ's life in the most entertaining way possible, and obviously some of the plays are more successful at accomplishing this end than others. The following study will thus address how the American passion play tradition has succeeded in fulfilling the basic requirement of dramatic art—to teach and to please.

This dictum of dramatic art first appeared in the treatise/poem "Ars Poetica," written by the Roman poet Quintus Horatius Flaccus (65-8 BC). For years this work was accepted as the primary discussion of classical poetry and dramatic art. Written around 20 BC, Horace's work...
post-dates Aristotle's "Poetics" by three hundred years; critics believe that Horace probably had no knowledge of Aristotle's writing.² It was Horace's treatise, however, that was most consistently followed as a guide for literary criticism throughout the ensuing centuries. Even with renewed interest in Aristotle in the 1500s, critics considered the two writings and their theories complementary.³ In the areas where differences proved intractable, "the problem was usually resolved by bending Aristotle's ideas to fit the more familiar ideas of Horace."⁴

The rules of Horace played a major role in writings from both the Renaissance and Neoclassic periods. Though the unities and the rigors of decorum are often not heeded today by conventional theater practitioners, the "Ars Poetica" still offers keen insight into the objectives of the dramatist and the rudimentary functions of dramatic art itself. As one commentator has noted, "While Horace lacks the penetrating depth of Aristotle, he excels in practical advice drawn from personal experience, and has proved

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⁴ Hardison 3.
invaluable to poets who have studied him."\(^5\) And, thus, his work will serve as a guide for this study.

Of most interest and significance to this discussion are the applications Horace makes to playwriting. The poet gives three important observations. In the early part of his treatise he stresses appropriateness especially in subject matter, language, and character development. Briefly stated, originality is allowed the artist as long as conventions are respected. Horace writes: "not so that harsh may mate with gentle, serpents be paired with birds, lambs with tigers. . . . In short . . . let it be simple and consistent."\(^6\) Both in using language and in choosing appropriate subject matter, it should be in the power of the author to handle his material with ease and command.\(^7\) Finally, Horace maintains that the development of characters must be consistent and fitting with nature; "if you would have me weep, you must first of all feel grief yourself."\(^8\) In all three of these areas Horace stresses decorum and its constraints.

The second observation made by Horace occupies the center section of his treatise. Horace there dictates a

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\(^7\) Horace 68.

\(^8\) Horace 70.
set of rules which must be followed if a drama is to be successful: all spectacular and offensive scenes should be kept offstage; plays should be written in five acts; gods should not be introduced into the plays unless appropriate, scenes should have no more than three actors speaking, and the chorus should serve to move the action along rather than comment about it. While most of the rules relate more to Rome's classical dramatic tradition, two prove valuable in analysis of the passion plays: those involving offstage scenes and the introduction of a god into the action.

Finally the third and most renowned aspect of Horace's treatise involves his twofold injunction to the dramatist. According to Horace, for the artist to succeed he must write "to profit or to please, or to blend in one the delightful and the useful." In other words, effective drama must both teach and entertain. Specifically, Horace observes that "the man who mingles the useful with the sweet carries the day by charming his reader and at the same time instructing him." This desire to teach and please is the primary intention of today's American passion plays.

This key principle of Horace's "Ars Poetica" sets the premise for this discussion of passion plays, both medieval and American. Several basic questions are then addressed.

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9 Horace 74.

10 Horace 74.
First, how did the medieval religious dramas succeed in following Horace's tenets? Second, and more important to this discussion, is the matter of how effectively the American passion play has succeeded in satisfying its audiences. Have these plays successfully taken the biblical account of the gospel of Christ and created pleasing, theatrical, dramatic presentations which simultaneously evangelize and teach their audiences? Answers to such questions are not easy to objectify, but a range of variables—including the length of time the production has played, attendance records, and the extent of the given production's professionalism—provides a basis for evaluating the validity and success of each of the eight American passion plays and allows one to draw conclusions about their role in the American entertainment industry.

Outside of this study's inquiry into the rhetorical end and means of this unique theatrical form, the work recommends itself on a number of counts. This project merits attention in its preservation and documentation of information concerning the outdoor passion plays being performed in America from 1992-1996, and for that matter, this century. At no other time has this information been compiled. Preserving this material not only provides a general survey for anyone interested in passion play performances in America over the past five years, it also
serves as a collective resource for any individual or organization seeking to inaugurate a passion play production in another area of the country. In essence, this study serves as a reference point for all future productions and adaptations.

In addition, many managers of these outdoor religious dramas have seen only a limited number of the other passion play productions, and to my knowledge none has seen all eight. In providing a survey and analysis of all the United States' productions and their rhetorical methods, this study enables anyone interested in religious drama—including individual managers—to see how the approaches of the various productions compare.

Since religious dramas represent one of the divisions in the American outdoor theatre organization, this study importantly demonstrates how the passion play participates in and contributes to the genre of the outdoor entertainment industry. And in assessing how the modern American passion play has departed from the medieval tradition, the study highlights adaptations and innovations used to augment the modern plays' entertainment value. Attention is given to media devices, technological displays, and updating of biblical languages. Such strategies beg questions concerning the commercialization of the religious dramas and their ability to convey their evangelical message.
American Outdoor Drama

Outdoor passion plays such as The Black Hills Passion Play, rooted in the European medieval tradition, and depicting the events of Christ's last week on earth—including the Triumphal Entry, the Last Supper, the Trial, the Crucifixion, and the Resurrection—did not exist in America until this century. Then in 1932 Josef Meier toured the United States with the Luenen Passion Play. Eventually Meier changed the name to The Black Hills Passion Play and permanently settled in Spearfish, South Dakota during the summer of 1939.

With its United States premiere, Meier's play took its place in a new genre of drama in America, the outdoor historical drama. Only two years before the production of The Black Hills Passion Play, the first outdoor historical drama, written by Paul Green to commemorate the 350th anniversary of the first European child born in America, The Lost Colony (1937) opened in Manteo on Roanoke Island, North Carolina. Since that first "symphonic" work, i.e., drama "sounding together"—music, spectacle, song, pantomime and dance—outdoor theatrical productions have increased steadily in the United States. Green himself wrote around twenty of the outdoor dramas and was in the


process of writing another at the time of his death in 1981.\footnote{Paul Green-The Playwright, America online, Internet, 8 August 1997.}

Green also contributed the first significant scholarly work on outdoor dramas, *Dramatic Heritage* (1953), in which he relates his own involvement in the development of this symphonic form. Two works by Mark Sumner, *A Survey of Outdoor Drama Production Techniques* (1968) and *A Selected Bibliography on Outdoor Drama* (1981), also prove valuable resources for those interested in producing outdoor dramas or those researching the history of the genre. Several dissertations have been written on the subject, but only two have been helpful for the purpose of this study. In 1974, James Campbell Wright submitted his dissertation on *The Development of the Black Hills Passion Play in Spearfish, South Dakota and Lake Wales, Florida*. In compiling the work, Wright interviewed the founder of *The Black Hills Passion Play*, who was in good health at the time and freely contributed information.\footnote{This is not true today. The administration tightly controls anything that is said or published about the play and all aspects related to it. Cast and crew must be very careful with any comments they make.} The second dissertation, written in 1983 by Bettye Choate Kash, entitled *Outdoor Historical Dramas in the Eastern United States*, discusses the general development of twelve outdoor
historical dramas operating in the United States, including the first, The Lost Colony.

While the outdoor passion plays are not a specific outgrowth of the historical drama as created by Paul Green, they exist as a component of the North American outdoor drama industry, which also includes many Shakespearean festivals. In an interview with director Scott Parker, current director of the Institute, Sumner related that the outdoor historical drama represents a huge epic play, using a mix of styles, including pageantry, all to do the same things that an indoor play does. . . . The aim of outdoor drama is, of course, the aim of all drama, except that, in doing it outdoors, it puts it on a grand scale—the natural setting, the combination of several art forms on the stage—to enhance all the emotions connected to the play.  

Given the guidelines set forth by Mark Sumner, former director of the Institute of Outdoor Drama, the passion plays certainly meet the criteria for outdoor dramas.

The Black Hills Passion Play, with its dramatic medieval text, large cast, colorful song and dance, and grand set (staged on a hillside setting), clearly belongs in the wider outdoor drama movement in the United States. The popularity of this specific production has been evidenced in its robust attendance figures. In fact, in 1953 Meier, in an effort to extend the public accessibility, built a second amphitheatre for winter

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15 Parker 6-7.
seasons in Lake Wales, Florida. Now sixty years following the first performance in Spearfish, this passion play still draws thousands of spectators each season.

Other outdoor passion plays have appeared in various regions of the United States—some written by contemporary authors—and interest in organizing new passion play productions continues. According to Johanna Meier, director of The Black Hills Passion Play and daughter of the founder, numerous individuals call each year seeking information on the production of passion plays.\textsuperscript{16} While The Black Hills Passion Play is not the only such piece in America, it is the only one that traces its roots to the medieval continental tradition; it is also the only one to declare its purpose as that of "religious education."\textsuperscript{17} Other passion plays have departed from the medieval tradition, seeking to convey a more contemporary American sensibility. Nonetheless, such productions still seek to teach and spread the story of the gospel, despite their emphasis on entertainment values.

The organizations that produced each of the dramas examined in this study maintains membership in the Institute of Outdoor Drama (IOD), an organization of the outdoor theatre entertainment industry established in 1963.

\textsuperscript{16} Most recently a group from Iowa expressed an interest in establishing a passion play. Johanna Meier, director Black Hills Passion Play, personal interview 10 June 1996.

\textsuperscript{17} Black Hills Passion Play, Questionnaire from author, 1994.
The Institute consists of the general managers and directors of the ninety-six outdoor dramas, and serves to encourage the livelihood and development of outdoor drama.\textsuperscript{18} Importantly, this advisory and research agency of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill notes and lists the eight outdoor passion plays discussed in this study.\textsuperscript{19}

Staged for paying audiences in amphitheatres designed to seat between nine hundred and six thousand spectators, the plays are marketed for local, regional, and national audiences and rightfully assume their place in the ranks of the country's more renowned outdoor dramas.


\textsuperscript{18} "Number of IOD Theatres Increases at Average 10\% Per Year," \textit{US Outdoor Drama Newsletter} (Chapel Hill: Summer 1997) 3.

maintains the highest average attendance (225,513 in 1995).20

While all of these outdoor religious dramas deal with the same biblical content, their differences warrant examination. What has made each production unique? What has made each successful or unsuccessful in teaching and pleasing audiences today? By examining the methods and strategies employed by these outdoor passion plays, this study offers commentary upon the yoking of religious instruction and theatrical entertainment. It addresses the basic question: how has the story of Christ's passion been made into effective theatre pieces that draw thousands of viewers each year?

Before turning to this question and specific analysis of the eight outdoor passion plays in the United States, it is important to establish a general background of the passion play, its scholarship, its medieval context, and its evolution in twentieth-century America.

Survey of Scholarship on Medieval Theatre

Although the production history of passion plays in the United States is less than a hundred years old, the tradition of passion plays dates back to medieval times in Great Britain and Europe. Until recently, only a few historical accounts of medieval drama existed. However, within the last twenty-five years research in medieval

20 The Great Passion Play, Questionnaire from author, 1996.
theatre studies has become a popular area of investigation. Recent studies—while ranging widely in their investigations and methods—have been informed by a common motive, that is, the reassessment or reevaluation of existing materials on medieval theatre.\textsuperscript{21} As a result, the 1980s witnessed an increase in available works on medieval drama.

The new research departed from the types of analysis prevalent in the early 1800s. In that era historical analysis of the medieval theatre was primarily text centered; however, by the late 1800s this approach declined. Influenced by the evolutionary theory popularized in Charles Darwin's \textit{Origin of the Species} (1859), scholars pursued a new approach to the study of medieval drama.

In France, L. Petit de Julleville led the way with the publication of \textit{Les Mystères} between 1880 and 1886. According to theatre scholar Ronald Vince, de Julleville introduced an explanation of medieval theatre development that would be widely accepted for years—that the Latin liturgy evolved into the vernacular drama that eventually moved into the streets. In addition Vince noted the increased importance of spectacle in the medieval theatre.\textsuperscript{22}

\begin{footnotesize}

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After de Julleville, other scholars published historical research following the same evolutionary perspective. Among the most well-known are the discussions of the English medieval theatre by E. K. Chambers in *The Mediaeval Stage* (1903), an examination of the French theatre by Gustave Cohen in *Histoire de la mise en scène dans le théâtre religieux français du moyen-age* (1906), and the work of American Karl Young in *Drama of the Medieval Church* (1933).

Although Young arranged the liturgical dramas chronologically based on an evolutionary-informed logic, his documentation still provides the basis for the study of the medieval plays today. With specific reference to the passion plays, Young opined that combining the drama of the passion and the resurrection "suggests the possibility that the Passion play was conceived originally not as an independent invention, but as an enlargement of the Easter play. . . ." 23 The discovery of the Montecassino script in 1936 would question the validity of this statement.

In 1946 *Mysteries End*, published by H. C. Gardiner, a Catholic priest, redirected the focus of scholarship on the medieval theatre. Gardiner's analysis shifted attention away from the evolutionary development of theatrical forms and challenged those scholars who advocated that the

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23 Karl Young, *The Drama of the Medieval Church*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1933) 537.
earlier religious dramas did not die out; rather, Gardiner contended that Protestant rulers and Reformation leaders suppressed the plays. Although his Catholic loyalties evidenced itself in Gardiner's work, subsequent research justified Gardiner's observations, and a renewed interest in medieval theatre resulted in a reevaluation of past discoveries.

While the work of the revisionists, those scholars reevaluating medieval drama, superseded much of the previous research, the canon of medieval drama, as defined by Karl Young and E. K. Chambers, remained a foundation for the reinterpretative efforts. However, new evidence and examinations of medieval theatre practices entered scholarly discussion. Glynne Wickham's *Early English Stages* (1959) gave novel attention to the stage practices of the period. Evaluations of actual records of performances, descriptions of productions and icons, and new discoveries of medieval texts, have led scholars away from a methodology based in literary analysis; examination of medieval theatrical performance came to the fore.

Evidence of this approach is the work of A. M. Nagler, *The Medieval Religious Stage: Shapes and Phantoms* (1976), which discusses the existing texts, records, stage plans, and pictoral representations of medieval religious dramas;

the work also essays to create reconstructions of selected performances. Also important to the study of theatrical practice in the passion plays are critical works by Grace Frank, *The Medieval French Drama* (1954) and Sandro Sticca, *The Latin Passion Play* (1970).

The 1980s witnessed a proliferation of medieval studies, with the publication of numerous discussions, reevaluations, and translations of material relevant to the study of passion plays and medieval drama. Two works by Ronald W. Vince proved equally important. *Ancient and Medieval Theatre: A Historiographical Handbook* (1984) was written "to provide an analytical survey of the principal written and artifactual evidence for the history of the ancient and medieval theatres;"²⁵ his second work *A Companion to the Medieval Theatre* (1989) is a lengthy reference guide detailing the various performances of medieval drama between 900 and 1550.

Another valuable research tool for the study of medieval religious drama appeared in 1983—*The Staging of Religious Drama in Europe in the Later Middle Ages: Texts and Documents in English Translation*. Edited by Peter Meredith and John E. Tailby, this work compiles all the "available descriptions, stage directions, and records of religious plays of the Middle Ages from all over Europe in

²⁵ Vince, *Ancient* ix.
modern English translations." Two other works making significant contributions to medieval studies also appeared in the 1980s. John R. Elliott's *Playing God: Medieval Mysteries on the Modern Stage* (1989) provided a discussion and listing of contemporary English performances of these religious plays. Also relevant to English medieval theatre is a compilation of essays edited by Marianne Briscoe and John Coldeway, *Contexts for Early English Drama* (1989).

By the 1990s works relating to the study of medieval religious plays appeared less frequently. However, in 1992 John Wesley Harris published his *Medieval Theatre in Context: An Introduction*. While not a scholarly work, the book does "set the medieval stage firmly in the context of the society that produced it"; Harris examines "contemporary social attitudes, particularly those of the Church." Focused primarily on the English drama, the *Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, edited by Richard Beadle, was published two years later. Of all the books written in the last twenty years, the most valuable tool for the researcher of European medieval drama is Eckehard Simon's *The Theatre of Medieval Europe: New Research in Early Drama* (1991). This highly important work

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analyzes and evaluates the current research in medieval theatre (for both English and European drama) and includes an extensive bibliography listing over 750 resources.

Continued reassessment of extant materials and discovery of new texts and artifacts will allow historians to continue their inquiry into the theatre of this period—an era once known as the dark ages. These scholarly works to date, nonetheless, are instrumental in assessing the success of the medieval plays in educating their viewers in religious doctrine while entertaining them through spectacular presentation. Such research allows us to discern the theatrical devices and dramatic strategies at work in the medieval drama. In identifying the successful methods of medieval production, we can isolate what practice remains effective in contemporary American productions.

**History of the Passion Play**

The passion play itself is rooted in the liturgical drama that emerged in Europe during the latter part of the tenth century. The liturgical form preceded the more elaborate development and stagings of religious dramas outside the church that were occurring by 1300. Church drama, in fact, traces its beginnings back to the "trope," an embellishment of the liturgy practiced in the monasteries, that enhanced worship and ecclesiastical instruction with its dramatic aspect. The trope, recorded
in the *Regularis Concordia* (965-975) and prepared by Ethelwold, Bishop of Winchester, for the instruction of Benedictine monks, included the *Visitatio Sepulchri* at the end of the matins in Roman ritual. This six line Latin sequence, complete with detailed staging instructions, relates the visit of the Marys to the empty tomb following the resurrection of Christ. While the *Visitatio Sepulchri* or *Visit to the Sepulchre* proved to be the most common liturgical dramas, others related Old and New Testament personages and events, including Isaac, Daniel, the Nativity, and Lazarus. Each of these liturgical pieces drew dramatic material from biblical narratives, bringing sacred stories to life in a way that at first only for the clergy instructed and delighted.

Early criticism attempted to trace the development of similar liturgical dramas from one single trope within the liturgy; however, Sandro Sticca, Latin passion play scholar, argues that multiple origins contributed to the play's development, creating parallel, but separate versions that owe their remarkable similarity to the extensive communication existing between different monasteries and churches, and their clergy, and

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30 Young ix.
primarily to their having a common origin in the Roman liturgy and Bible.\textsuperscript{31} Common subject matter explains the similarities rather than a single source.

For more than two hundred years the liturgical dramas played an integral part of church ritual. While more than four hundred texts of the \textit{visitatio} exist, scholars have found very few plays dealing with the crucifixion and last days of Christ on earth.\textsuperscript{32} Eventually, the scope of the plays expanded to include more than Christ's resurrection; dramatizations began to portray events in Christ's life prior to and including the crucifixion. Young argued that the Roman Catholic emphasis on the crucifixion in the mass rendered such dramatization unnecessary.\textsuperscript{33} However, as worshippers experienced liturgical dramas (focused on the resurrection), their desire for further theatrical innovation seemed to grow. They probably wanted more than a liturgical celebration of the mass and wished for a dramatic presentation of the passion as well.

For years scholars believed that the passion plays \textit{Ludus Breviter} and \textit{Ludus de Passione} (1200-1225), found in the monastery of Benediktbeuern, Bavaria, or the \textit{Carmina Burana} manuscript were the oldest extant examples of the

\begin{itemize}
\item Young 239.
\item Young 492.
\end{itemize}
form. According to Young, no dramatization of the passion existed before the beginning of the thirteenth century.\textsuperscript{34} However, three years following the publication of his seminal work, the discovery and publication of the twelfth century Montecassino Latin Passion text (c.1150) by D. M. Inguanez established it as an earlier text, disproving Young's claim.\textsuperscript{35} Since 1936 this newly discovered fragment has not only provided valuable information concerning the development of the Latin passion play, it has also served as a basis of comparison between the passion play and other forms of continental drama.

No one is certain how these passion plays actually developed; speculations abound, but absolute claims cannot be proved. Scholars of the late 1800s believed that the plays emerged from the \textit{Planctus Mariae} or lament of Mary at the foot of the cross. By the early 1900s some held that the plays derived directly from simple dramatizations of the biblical accounts in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; still others contended that the passion plays introduced the Easter plays.\textsuperscript{36}

Though the invention of the passion play remains a matter of some conjecture, it is clear that congregations enjoyed the liturgical dramas and desired more biblical

\textsuperscript{34} Young 492.

\textsuperscript{35} Sticca 51-53.

dramatizations. Despite the effectiveness of presentations within the church, which included the use of mansion staging, the walls of the sanctuary proved too confining. As a result the plays eventually moved outside the church.

A variety of factors explain this shift. First, the audiences outgrew the churches, forcing the presentations into larger open spaces (this enabled the church to teach and entertain in a broader manner). By focusing on the visual portrayal of the divine Christ and his relationship to mankind, these open-area stagings, with elaborate sets and special effects, attracted larger crowds to receive the biblical message.

A second reason for the move concerns the language used in these performances. The vernacular had infiltrated the formal Latin of the church, and as a result the purity of the liturgical play was being compromised. By moving outside the church, authorities could hide the adoption of the vernacular, an adaptation that enabled the church to purvey religious instructions in a form with greater mass appeal.

The third possible reason for the relocation stems from the church's recognition that the didactic profits from the pleasing. And as the entertainment aspect claimed greater prominence, the plays were turned over to the laity, who assumed responsibility for the productions through the sponsorship of various trade guilds, towns, and
universities. \textsuperscript{37} With this transfer, more elaborate staging and effects were incorporated into the productions. Particularly effective were special effects, i.e., water, blood, trap doors with secret passages, and pyrotechnics. Some special effects dramatized miracles, generating a "sense of wonder" and "religious awe." \textsuperscript{38}

Certainly many factors contributed to the increased popularity of the passion plays: one should, however, recognize the role of theatricality in the rise of the form. Through their use of energetic performance spaces, vernacular dialogue, and captivating special effects, the plays educated the public in religious matters while engaging audiences with highly appealing theatrical plays.

With the support of the general public, medieval drama rose to its height in England, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and Switzerland between 1350 and 1550. In Italy performances occurred in Siena (1200—which until the discovery of the Montecassino fragment was thought to be the oldest passion in Italy), Padua (1243), Cividale (1298), \textsuperscript{39} Rome (1460-1539) and Revello (1494). \textsuperscript{40}

In addition to the accounts, miniatures, and frontispiece of the Passion of Valenciennes (1547), some of

\textsuperscript{37} West 17.


\textsuperscript{39} Sticca 52.

\textsuperscript{40} Beadle 22.
the most concrete evidence from city records, promptbooks, rehearsal procedures and expense receipts remain from performances in France, at Mons (1501) and Romans (1509). 41

Texts and references to numerous performances of passion plays at St. Gall (c. 1330), and Frankfurt, Germany (1493), and Vienna, Austria (1505), along with the stage plans of Alsfeld (1501), Bozen (1514), and Villingen, Germany (1595), and Lucerne, Switzerland (1583) have proven immensely helpful to medieval scholars and attest to the breadth of the performance form during that time. 42

Compared to the amount of research related to the plays in Italy, France, and Germany, the information on Spain is limited, but references to performances in Valencia (1415), Barcelona (1424), Lérida (1456), Elché (1625) and other cities confirm the presence of the religious dramas, though the form in Spain developed later than the plays of other countries. 43 In Spain most of these performances were presented in conjunction with the Feast of Corpus Christi.

Instituted in 1264 by Pope Urban IV and endorsed in 1311 by Pope Clement V, the Corpus Christi feast commemorated the presence of God on earth through the


42 Nagler 6-7, 16-18, 29-49, 97.

sacrifice of his Son, as symbolized in the Eucharist. Presented sixty days after Easter, this popular religious celebration featured a procession in the city led by town leaders who carried the Host through the streets, stopping at various points along the route until they reached the church. From this outdoor church celebration, the processional plays, or cycle plays probably evolved.\footnote{Tydeman 99.}

In England popular vernacular religious drama developed into cycle plays. Not passion plays as such, these short religious dramas or episodes combined to cover a great range of biblical events, from the Fall of Satan to the Judgment. The presentations utilized processional staging rather than one fixed open-air locale, like many of the continental plays. Fortunately, the availability of complete texts from the four cycles of the York, Chester, Towneley, and \textit{N} town Plays have provided valuable insight into the performance of such religious drama in England.\footnote{Beadle 20-21.}

The entertainment value of the English cycle plays increased as performances of the plays evolved and proliferated. Records reveal that trade guilds assumed both the production and financial responsibilities for the mounting of lavish and spectacular productions, bringing the Corpus Christi play to the height of popularity in the
fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. "While the cycle plays thrived in England, elsewhere in Europe Corpus Christi drama is the exception, for Passion plays dominated the field of religious theatre. . . ."47

The Church initially intended for the passion plays to teach the laity about the life of Christ and to indoctrinate worshippers in the tenets of the faith. In doing so church leaders sought the most effective means of entertainment available. By moving the playing space out of the church, adapting the texts to the language of the people, incorporating spectacular special effects, and permitting community involvement, the church had effectively translated the story of Christ, his crucifixion, and his resurrection into a highly digestible theatrical fare.

Although the chief purpose of the passion plays was to teach and please, the changing political and religious attitudes both in England and on the continent affected the subsequent production of these religious dramas. The Reformation movement challenged the Roman Catholic church and called for an ever-increasing rejection of the mediation of creatures between the soul and God, particularly when these creatures, in

46 Vince, Ancient 99.
47 Tydeman 102.
representing the saints and holy things, could be misunderstood as incentives to idolatry. . . .48

Leaders who either embraced Protestantism or sought to avoid conflicts with the Reformers withdrew support of the religious dramas in Germany, France, and Italy, especially after the abuses of religious plays were cited by the Council of Trent (1545-63).49 In England, too, the Protestant monarchs worked to repress the form. Upon the death of Henry VIII in 1558, Elizabeth I ascended the throne and immediately banned religious dramas; thus, by 1600 the larger share of such drama had vanished.

During the Renaissance, interest returned to the classical style of the Greeks and Romans. As a result audiences "began to demand a new type of play, involving a shift away from medieval symbolic narrative towards psychological realism, and this trend was perhaps the last nail in the coffin of the religious drama."50

Religious Drama After the Middle Ages

Despite the fact that these religious dramas no longer flourished in England or on the continent, they did not die out completely. As early as 1634, another religious drama appeared, one that portrayed the significant events in the life of Christ during the last week of his life on earth—the passion play of Oberammergau, Germany. With its

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48 Gardiner 95-96.
49 Gardiner 243.
50 J. W. Harris 194.
decennial performances, this play has become the most well-known of the European religious dramas today.

The passion play of Oberammergau was first staged in 1634. Fearful of being destroyed by a plague that was annihilating surrounding villages, the people of the town urged the city council of Oberammergau to seek a solution. Its only answer—beseech God's help. The villagers vowed that if they were saved from the plague, they would perform the Passion of Christ every tenth year.\textsuperscript{51} Vows such as this were not uncommon at that time, but the Oberammergau vow is significant in that it is still being honored 365 years later.

Elsewhere during the 1700s and 1800s religious dramas no longer played a major role in their respective societies. Only a few locales continued with religious festivals and dramas. In addition to Oberammergau, one drama in Spain, the Mysteri de Elché continues to play yearly over two days on the Feast of Assumption in August.\textsuperscript{52} Not truly a passion play, the Mysteri is rather a music drama relying primarily on Apocryphal accounts.\textsuperscript{53} Although


\textsuperscript{52} N. D. Shergold, \textit{A History of the Spanish Stage from Medieval Times until the End of the Seventeenth Century} (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967) 76.

\textsuperscript{53} Vince, \textit{Companion} 22.
possibly based on a medieval text, the extant scripts can only be traced back to the seventeenth century.\textsuperscript{54}

Other passion plays have also been performed or written during the twentieth century. For example, performances of a passion play written by Father van Delft began at Tegelen in the Netherlands in 1931. While a new text and revisions have been introduced, this play continues to be produced every five years.\textsuperscript{55} In France one well known revival of a passion play was celebrated in 1951, when Pierre Aldebert directed a production of Arnoul Gréban's \textit{Le Vray Mistère de la Passion} in front of Paris' Notre Dame Cathedral.\textsuperscript{56}

In England, too, since 1951, medieval plays have found staging; successful performances of the York mystery plays, under the direction of E. Martin Browne for the Festival of Britain were instrumental in encouraging other revivals. Prior to that time, very few English mystery plays were performed; however, since then numerous revivals of these works have been produced: \textbf{Cornish Passion Play}, 1969, \textbf{Chester Mystery Plays}, 1973, \textbf{Coventry Mystery Plays}, 1978, and \textbf{The Wakefield Cycle}, 1980. Also between 1977 and 1985, \textsuperscript{54} Ronald E. Surtz, "Spain: Catalan and Castilian Drama," \textit{The Theatre of Medieval Europe: New Research in Early Drama}, ed. Eckehard Simon (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991) 193.


\textsuperscript{56} \textit{Le Vray Mistère de la Passion}, Souvenir Program (Paris, 1951) N. pag.
London's National Theatre featured the performance of *The Passion*, incorporating several scenes from the York and Wakefield mystery plays in repertoire.\(^5\) Translated by Tony Harrison and directed by Bill Bryden and Sebastian Graham Jones,\(^5\) this production proved to be one of the most successful productions at the National Theatre.

**Early Passion Plays in America**

The professional production of passion plays in America is a relatively new theatre practice. Salmi Morse (1826-1884), a Jew who converted to Christianity, wrote and produced the first professional passion play in the United States when *The Passion* opened in San Francisco in 1879. Unlike *The Black Hills Passion Play*, this production did not use a medieval text nor was the play successful. Morse seems to have been a restless man with many undertakings: he was a garment merchant in New York, a hotel manager in Australia, a gold seeker and rancher in California, and a land surveyor in Santo Domingo. His activities usually involved get-richquick schemes.\(^5\) Yet Morse claimed that he wrote *The Passion* in order to present a dramatic treatment of Christ's life that was less anti-Semitic than

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the Oberammergau play. His obsession to produce this work cost him thousands of dollars and ultimately left him penniless.60

A few weeks after the March 3, 1879, opening of The Passion at San Francisco's Grand Opera House, the production was closed when James O'Neill (1847-1920), the popular romantic actor of the 1880s, was arrested for "impersonating Jesus Christ in violation of a city ordinance."61 The designer and director David Belasco (1854-1931) along with ten other members of the production were also arrested for their involvement. Discouraged, but not defeated, Morse and the leading players moved to New York the following year in an effort to revive the play on the east coast.

Financed by "Lucky" Baldwin, a well-known San Francisco entrepreneur, The Passion prepared to open. The cast of 600—headed by O'Neill and directed by Belasco—performed before elaborate sets enhanced by spectacular lighting effects.62 Nevertheless, The Passion failed again. Criticisms of Morse's motives, the script's content, and the play's production quality all contributed to the piece's ultimate failure. After months of efforts to produce The Passion in New York, local authorities allowed

60 Nielsen 55.
61 Nielsen 105.
62 Nielsen 64-67.
only one complete rehearsal to be viewed by an audience. Religious leaders as well as powerful governmental officials adamantly renounced the play, charging Morse with "moral degeneracy" and "immoral" behavior for writing a play depicting Christ's last days on earth. Given the accusations and following court trials (widely reported by newspapers and magazines), Morse for a time appeared to be the most despised man in America. In February, 1884, after four years of legal battles, a passerby along the banks of the Hudson River discovered the body of Salmi Morse. No one knows whether he chose to end his life, or if he fell the victim to one of the hundreds who despised him.

After Morse's death, O'Neill tried three times—in 1889, 1891, and 1896—to revive The Passion, but to no avail. Ironically, The Passion was surreptitiously presented for public consumption. Rich G. Hollaman, owner of the Eden Musée Wax Museum, obtained a copy of The Passion, borrowed the production's costumes from his friend, Morse's former partner, Albert G. Eaves, and filmed a staging of the piece. Between December 1897 and January 1898, only one year after O'Neill's last attempt to produce The Passion, Hollaman filmed the play on the snow-covered

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63 Nielsen 6.
64 Nielsen 4.
roof of the Grand Central Palace Hotel in New York. Promoted as the "Oberammergau Passion Play," the movie received rave reviews from the public and the same newspapers that only a few years before had condemned the script.\(^6\)

Attitudes toward religious productions relaxed as the country entered the 1900s. An American producer, in fact, offered cast members of the famous Oberammergau play five thousand dollars each to come to New York to perform.\(^6\) Quite possibly this change of attitude was facilitated by a California State Supreme Court decision declaring that freedom of speech protection should be extended to dramatic scripts.\(^6\) Moreover, the influence of Ibsen's realistic exploration into modern social attitudes led playwrights to explore heretofore unacceptable topics, including those dealing with religious matters.\(^6\) In particular reference to the passion play, this attitudinal shift may have occurred simply because the despised Jewish playwright, Salmi Morse, was no longer associated with the passion.

Numerous religious dramas appeared after the turn of the century. In 1901 *Nazareth*, written by Clay M. Greene, opened in Santa Clara, California; a year following a piece

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\(^{66}\) Nielsen 230-231.

\(^{67}\) Nielsen 228.

\(^{68}\) Nielsen 225.

\(^{69}\) Nielsen 226.
entitled Mary Magdala played in New York. Seven years later another passion play premiered in San Francisco. This play, unlike The Passion received an enthusiastic response.70

In 1920 Christine Wetherill Stevenson's The Pilgrimage Play, opened in California. Only the latter half of this piece was devoted to the events of the passion; the first half of the drama presented Christ's ministry in Samaria, Galilee, and Bethany. This play first opened in a wooden outdoor theatre in Hollywood's El Camino Real Canyon. After a fire destroyed that structure, the play moved into its permanent facility on the same property as the Hollywood Bowl.71 This outdoor production ran successfully for many summers until the mid 1960s.72

Four years after the opening of The Pilgrimage Play, Delmar D. Darrah (1868-1945) determined to produce a passion play in the Midwest. In 1924, The American Passion Play opened at the Scottish Rite Temple in Bloomington, Illinois. Initially sponsored by the Fraternal Order of the Scottish Rite, this indoor production--written and directed by Darrah--followed the Belasco approach and utilized extensively detailed, realistic settings.

70 Nielsen 221, 228.

71 The Pilgrimage Play, Souvenir Program [Hollywood: n.p., n.d.].

72 Julio Gonzalaz, director Music Center Archives, Los Angeles, telephone interview, 28 February 1996.
Conscious of the negative public attitudes passion plays had sometimes encountered, producers of The American Passion Play demonstrated caution in their depiction of the Christ figure and in their first year of operation opted for a translucent life-like figure that could be lighted from within for the resurrection and ascension scenes. In this manner the company avoided using an actor in the role of the deity. However, following the success of the show, the producers in the next year discarded the figure, and an actor played the role of Christ throughout the play. The Scottish Rite continues to offer ten to fifteen performances of the play for two months each spring.

This 1924 passion play did not experience the fate of Morse's 1879 effort in San Francisco; rather, this production drew thousands. While Morse's passion play had been condemned for its indelicacy regarding the presentation of scripture and divinity onstage, audiences readily accepted the Bloomington production. Their approval may be attributed to the fact that no professionals were included in the cast of 250. By casting volunteers who viewed the drama as a means of presenting Christ's story, the production avoided charges of secularization.

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74 Tucker 160.
In summary, the passion play is a relatively recent phenomenon in the United States; however, since its acceptance at the turn of the century, scores of productions have been staged, including *The Black Hills Passion Play* imported from Germany. Communities, churches, and private organizations have mounted these religious dramas in a variety of venues, including city streets, churches, and civic auditoriums. Some organizations have constructed permanent amphitheatres and have developed the presentations into yearly outdoor religious entertainment, playing from two to six months a year. One of the earliest outdoor religious dramas, *The Book of Job*, by Orlin Corey, ran successfully for twenty years in Pineville, Kentucky (1958-1978). Though not a bona fide passion play, this religious piece received both national and international recognition\(^\text{75}\) and proved a predecessor to seven of the currently running outdoor passion plays.

In general, today's American outdoor passion plays follow the medieval continental tradition, depicting the life of Christ in a manner that both instructs and entertains. Playwrights and directors are constantly modifying texts and incorporating new stage techniques in order to expand their audiences.

Utilizing a dramatic language (rather than authorized scriptural translations) that echoes today's common speech, sacred productions appeal to a wider audience. Special effects and computer technology further enhance the shows' audience appeal. These strategies are not only informed by the desire to teach the multitudes the story of Christ; they aim at maximizing the entertainment value of the production and gaining a share of the tourist market like other outdoor dramas.

As stated earlier, no document has been devoted to gathering information on the American outdoor passion play. This project has thus demanded library research, personal interviews, and on-site investigation. The project commends itself both as a scholarly study and a personal chronicle of American passion plays in performance.

After acquiring a list of the active outdoor passion plays from the Institute of Outdoor Drama, I began my research by contacting each of the passion plays through correspondence and telephone conversations and requesting information on their productions. Once the list of productions had been finalized, I created a general survey questionnaire which I mailed out to each of the productions in June, 1994. All of the passion plays except Worthy Is the Lamb responded with information. Following the receipt of the information I compiled a spreadsheet, charting and comparing all of the facts and statistics received. Two
summers later, in 1996, I mailed out an update for information and received responses from all but *Worthy Is the Lamb* and *Jesus of Nazareth*. In addition to the questionnaires, I visited each of the eight outdoor passion play locations, attended all of the productions, and conducted interviews with various personnel. Much of this information pertaining to the years 1992-1996 will be related in Chapter Two.

Upon attending the productions and seeing the efforts firsthand, I discovered that the plays employed a variety of approaches and methods. After observing the productions, I compiled a scene comparison chart which visually organized the major scenes presented by each of the shows. I discovered that all of the passion plays, medieval and American, consider key scenes necessary for education and instruction: the Triumphant Entry, Last Supper, Garden of Gethsemane, Trial, Crucifixion, Resurrection, and the Ascension.

Realizing how *The Black Hills Passion Play* was directly informed by the medieval passion plays, I researched the scholarship on medieval dramas to find a model for comparison with its American counterpart. That research resulted in the selection of the St. Gall passion play; I applied the same procedure of charting its major scenes with those in the American passion plays, and
recorded the information into the discussion in Chapter Three.

While *The Black Hills Passion Play* aligns most closely with the medieval practice, the other plays I viewed in varying degrees follow the same tradition of teaching and pleasing; yet they emphasize entertainment values and modern day packaging to differing degrees. In essence, most of the American passion plays seek to commercialize their productions, incorporating scenic technologies and special effects. Faced with competition from television, movies, computers, and the various venues of the entertainment industry, these theatrical productions are laboring to fuse biblical instruction with secular entertainment. I examined each of the productions and their "adaptations," compiling the findings in Chapter Four of this work.

A commentary upon today's American passion play and its future in the outdoor drama movement concludes this study. While public attitude toward the depiction of Christ on stage has changed since that first production of *The Passion* in 1879, passion plays can still beg concern and questions regarding their professionalism, dramatic quality, and sometimes anti-Semitic orientation. Despite these issues, the underlying motive of these efforts remains "to teach and to please," and these dramas continue to prosper, with new productions appearing frequently.
CHAPTER II
DEVELOPMENT AND MAJOR FOCUS OF THE EIGHT CURRENT OUTDOOR PASSION PLAYS IN THE UNITED STATES

In addressing the question of how contemporary American passion plays fulfill Horace’s dictum—to teach and to please—it is fruitful to assess the ways in which medieval plays succeeded as theatrical entertainments and to note the degree to which these American counterparts have followed in their footsteps. Central to this inquiry is the founder’s purpose for the drama’s inception, the organizational structure of the producing group, and the theatrical apparatus available for the staging of these religious dramas. By examining the production contexts of passion plays, both medieval and contemporary, one can gain much insight into the elements that allow sacred drama to function effectively as popular entertainment.

During the latter part of the Middle Ages (1300-1500), medieval drama was greatly impacted by the flourishing trade guilds and religious organizations. Once the religious dramas moved outside of the church, these trade guilds common in England and brotherhoods common on the continent often underwrote the expenses for the theatrical
events and functioned in an important way as a producing agent.¹

The guilds themselves were informed by numerous alliances and affiliations, both religious and economic. Trade guilds of course represented various crafts and occupations, i.e., the bakers guild, joiners guild, shipbuilders guild, etc. Often these organizations, whose members were merchants, tradesmen, and administrative personnel of the towns, assumed the sponsorship of the plays or various pageant scenes within the plays.² Their responsibilities were multifarious and diverse. According to medieval scholar Glynne Wickham, even with the information and records available,

> it does not help the historian to provide a short and concise account of how it [play] was organized, financed and stage-managed. . . . Students must accept the fact that while it may be possible to define in some detail and with some claim to accuracy what occurred in one city. . . . the information supplied by the one may very well appear to contradict that supplied by the other.³

As a result exceptions exist for many of the practices.

But as a general rule, the plays were projects of community effort, with merchants, tradesmen, and religious

¹ A general accounting of the history of the medieval theatre is given in Oscar G. Brockett, History of the Theatre (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1991) 93-97.

² An excellent discussion of the organization and staging of the passion plays may be found in Chapter 2, The Drama of Christ Crucified in Glynne Wickham, The Medieval Theatre (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1974) 66.

³ Wickham, 68-69.
leaders assisting in the mounting of the productions. From working with wardrobes and properties, to actual rehearsals, townfolk invested in the realization of the event, and the success of the plays was the direct result of the city's unified efforts.

The theatrical settings for these plays assumed a variety of forms depending on the areas available for performance. From the pageant wagons rolling down the streets of English villages to the elaborate mansions lining the raised platform stage of Valenciennes, from the crowded market place of Lucerne to the circular plateas of Cornwall, different passion plays utilized differing staging practices. Churches, tents, or other nearby buildings often served as dressing areas for the performers; audiences positioned themselves variously around stage events.

This chapter will relate the histories of each of the eight outdoor passion plays currently operating in the United States and will intermittently comment on how elements of the productions have followed patterns common to the medieval period. The discussion will focus on the various plays' origination, those involved in the dramas' development, and each production's relative status among the other passion plays in the outdoor theatre.

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4 The most detailed discussion of medieval staging may be found in A. M. Nagler, The Medieval Religious Stage: Shapes and Phantoms (New Haven: Yale UP, 1976).
organization. The chapter will also document the physical setting and facilities used by each producing group during the period from 1992-1996. At no time has the material on each of the plays before been assembled in a collective unit.5

A dissertation on The Black Hills Passion Play offers the most detailed information on any one of the outdoor religious plays; it was, however, written some years ago (in 1974). Two other plays have generated limited historical information, each with a chronicle of its production and development as a chapter in a booklet on the respective outdoor dramas. For example, information on The Great Passion Play comprises a brief chapter in a booklet written by Gerald L. K. Smith which covers all the projects he initiated in Eureka Springs; the short section on The Louisiana Passion Play is printed in a six page pamphlet on passion plays. The rest of the plays either include a short historical summary in their playbills or nothing at all. Thus, the material in this study, provides more extensive information about the outdoor American passion play than anything else in print.

The following sections will vary in length due to the differing degrees to which managers and directors were willing to share information. While some of the personnel

5 In 1985, Bettye C. Kash compiled a reference work on twelve of the outdoor historical dramas in America.
were most cooperative and prompt in providing information, others offered very little or no assistance. All of the information recorded has been obtained through personal interviews, correspondence, printed promotional materials, survey questionnaires, newspaper and magazine articles, and first hand observation. At the end of the chapter I will assess the compiled data and offer observations as to how effectively the passion plays have been in teaching and pleasing American audiences of today.

I. The Black Hills Passion Play

Historical Development

The outdoor passion play tradition in America originated with the work that is the most well known today, The Black Hills Passion Play of Spearfish, South Dakota. Not only is this play significant for being the oldest, it also holds the distinction of being the only outdoor drama at the present that offers two full seasons in two different locations: in the Black Hills of South Dakota (summer), and the orange groves of Lake Wales, Florida (winter).

The Black Hills Passion Play opened its permanent facility in South Dakota during the summer of 1939. Performances of the play actually premiered seven years earlier in 1932, when the twenty-seven year old founder and director Josef Meier moved the Luenen Passion Play, with its troupe of German actors, from his hometown of Luenen,
Westphalia, a small town in northern Germany, for relocation in the United States.  

This particular passion play originated in the Cappenberg Monastery in 1242. First spoken in Latin and performed by the clergy, the play was presented by the monastery annually during the Lenten season. Over the years the text of the play shifted to the German vernacular, "as the language of the common people crept in through their [the congregation's] chanting and singing."

Eventually the script became the property of one family in Luenen—the Meiers. Before Josef (who at ten weeks of age began his career with the play as the babe in the manger) six generations of the family performed the role of the Christus. Upon his father's retirement from the role, Josef assumed the part of the Christus until political changes in the German government threatened the life of the play.

As the political oppression of religious groups increased under Adolph Hitler's reign, Meier pursued his dream of relocating the play in a country where such

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6 Mathison 3.


8 Johanna Meier, e-mail to the author, 5 Dec. 1996.


persecution and prejudice would find no quarter.\textsuperscript{11} The prospect for seeing that dream's realization brightened considerably when Meier received an invitation from a theatrical agency in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Josef immediately began to organize a road tour of the United States.

Translating the play into English and abridging it to meet more acceptable time limits for American consumption proved the initial challenge for the young man. The German production ran eight to ten hours; its length varied depending on which scenes were being performed.\textsuperscript{12} Meier condensed the English version to two and one quarter hours. After months of extensive rehearsals (and having gained sponsorship of the Masonic Order), Meier brought the German troupe to Pittsburgh for the \textit{Luenen Passion Play}'s first performance in 1932.\textsuperscript{13}

As political unrest remained unchecked in Germany, the troupe continued its American and Canadian tour. Following Hitler's ban of religious drama in 1934, Meier sought even more diligently to establish a permanent location that the passion play could call home.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{11} Emme 6.

\textsuperscript{12} Johanna Meier, personal interview, 18 April 1992.

\textsuperscript{13} Meier, e-mail, 5 Dec. 1996.

The road tours continued for six years before this quest was realized. During those years Meier's company, traveling by railroad and trucks, performed the play in every major city in the United States, often performing up to five times a day, beginning at 11:00 a.m. and going late into the evening. According to Meier's daughter, "The actors never left the theatre, and the time between the performances was just long enough to empty and clean up, similar to what is done in movie theatres now." During this period, representatives of several locales expressed interest in providing a home for the production, including Los Angeles, Malibu Beach, Philadelphia, the Blue Ridge Mountains and the Ozarks.

Meier wished to locate in an area of natural beauty, stable weather and acceptable environmental conditions; however, he encountered difficulties with each of the possible locales. Either the area was too populated (detracting from the natural beauty he desired), the weather too unstable (a critical factor when performing outdoor productions), or the humidity too conducive to insect infestation (which would make audiences miserable).

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17 Meier, e-mail, 5 Dec. 1996.
Finally, in the fall of 1938, a group of businessmen invited the production to Rapid City, South Dakota in the hopes of attracting the company to their region. Located in the rugged Black Hills of the southwestern part of the state, this area offered a natural beauty and summer climate that appealed to Meier. However, "Rapid City wanted him to address the Woman’s Club in costume and ride down Main Street on a donkey, which he felt was an inappropriate concept for the production." Upon learning that Meier was no longer interested in settling the production in Rapid City, another group of individuals from the Spearfish Chamber of Commerce invited him to consider their town. Following a performance in Rapid City, several commerce members drove Meier sixty miles west to the small town of Spearfish for a visit to Mrs. Newton’s apple orchard. As the story is related in the playbill:

They stood at the bottom of a steep incline and could clearly hear a group of children playing at the top of the hill. The acoustics and the natural slope of the hillside made the spot ideal for an amphitheatre location.

Meier immediately began plans for the passion play’s first season in its new location; he no longer billed the production as the Luenen Passion Play from Germany but The Black Hills Passion Play of America. On June 18, 1939 the

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19 Meier, e-mail, 5 Dec. 1996.
20 Meier, e-mail, 5 Dec. 1996.
21 BH, Commemorative 7.
first performance of The Black Hills Passion Play played before an audience of 1,132.22

The first year in Spearfish the production drew an audience of 15,677; but the next summer saw the numbers drop. Meier realized that the validity of the passion play depended upon more vigorous promotion. Once again he set out on a road tour, a western tour to Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota, Missouri, Washington, and Oregon. Meier's efforts paid dividends, for the 1941 attendance figures surpassed those of the successful inaugural season.23

Though audiences received the production enthusiastically, the possibility of war threatened the very life of The Black Hills Passion Play. By 1942 the United States had entered World War II, and the country faced gas rationing and travel restraints. At the end of that season Meier, decided to close temporarily the Spearfish facility; for the next five summers the amphitheatre remained silent.

Once the decision to close the theater was made, Meier sought to tour the show, feeling "that the passion play was a morale building institution to carry on during the war."24 He appealed to Senator Francis Case from South Dakota, and

23 Mathison 4.
subsequent government assistance provided the company extra rations for gasoline and tires. While some believed that closing the summer facility was tantamount to ringing the death knell for the production, the decision to tour, to the contrary, boosted The Black Hills Passion Play's national profile. Articles featuring the play appeared in the New York Times (14 September 1947), Time magazine (18 November 1940), and the Saturday Evening Post (cover story 24 April 1943).

During a time of material distress, enthusiastic crowds packed theatres in cities throughout the United States. Whenever the company departed a city, Meier delivered the same message time and again: The Black Hills Passion Play of Spearfish, South Dakota will one day reopen. True to his word, Meier reopened the permanent amphitheatre production at Spearfish in 1948, playing to a summer audience total of 26,000. Performances have continued since that time to the present, with the recent completion of the play's fifty-eighth season.

From an opening season attendance of 15,677 (in 1939), the audience totals reached 50,000 by 1952. A year later the central Florida town of Lake Wales constructed an amphitheatre that could serve as the passion play's winter

25 Meier, e-mail to the author, 21 February 1997.

26 BH, Commemorative 9.

27 Mathison 6.
home. For the last forty-three years the company has performed in Lake Wales from the middle of February through the middle of April, returning back to Spearfish for the twelve weeks of summer performances in June, July, and August.

With the success and demands of two annual seasons in two different locations, the road shows, which had early on contributed so much to the play's national exposure, were discontinued in 1954. After more then twenty years the company touring record was impressive: the "troupe had performed in 643 cities in 46 states, plus 24 cities in 6 Canadian provinces." Today, The Black Hills Passion Play is the only one of the ninety-six United States outdoor dramas to enjoy two playing seasons.

Meier himself has received numerous awards and recognitions over the years. In 1965 he was knighted by Pope Paul VI "for his contribution to intensifying the Christian faith." In 1986 the West German government awarded him with the Bundesverdienstkreuz, the highest civilian award granted. This was in honor of his "selfless contributions" to keep the German heritage alive for Germans and Americans, and for his help in restoring a church in his home town of Luenen, West Germany, which was damaged during World War II.

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28 BH, Souvenir n.pag.

29 Mathison 6.

30 BH, Commemorative 3.
In addition, upon his retirement in 1991, Meier's nine thousand performances as the Christus and his wife's eight thousand performances as Mary established records in the American theatre for most performances by an actor and actress in a single role.\(^\text{31}\)

Another honor was bestowed in the fall of 1994 when the Institute of Outdoor Drama recognized Josef Meier, at the age of ninety-one, with the Mark R. Sumner Award for his contributions to outdoor drama (only three had been given previously). In the words of Scott Parker, Director of the Institute of Outdoor Drama, "his lifelong dedication to the quality and integrity of that drama has in countless ways fostered the entire outdoor drama movement. We are honored to recognize his significant and lasting contribution."\(^\text{32}\)

From the outset Josef Meier considered religious education the primary purpose for *The Black Hills Passion Play*. In 1982, when asked about the future of *The Black Hills Passion Play*, he expressed hope that Spearfish would "retain a deep affection for the production and the moral obligation to see it grow spiritually." Continuing he moreover stated that *The Black Hills Passion Play* "must not be operated as a business. If used for commercial


exploitations, this facility will die like a vine without water."33 According to the play's mission statement (composed by Josef Meier):

The Black Hills Passion Play seeks to provide an institution of spiritual and cultural service by utilizing the exceptional medium of classical theatre, to provide a continuing economic pillar for the community, and to preserve and contribute to the sustaining principles of Christian life and values for individuals of all backgrounds.34

The religious purpose remains to date the primary focus for the play. Over the last fifty-nine years, however, times have changed, and the administration's perceptions have broadened to encompass multiple goals and challenges.

Physical Facilities

The Black Hills of South Dakota provided the backdrop for the amphitheatre constructed by Meier in 1939, and the former twenty-eight acre cow pasture of Mrs. Newton was transformed into the site of a functional outdoor theatre. In the first few years the facilities were meager, with backless benches constructed of pine planks nailed into oak posts sunk into the sloping hillside; two outhouses served as restrooms.

By 1941, the addition of general dressing rooms provided more space for the extras, new stables sheltered the livestock, and a ticket office served the needs of the public. Stadium-type chairs were installed in 1950. This

33 Mathison 6.

34 Black Hills Passion Play, Questionnaire from author, 1994.
upgrading decreased the audience capacity from 8,000 to 6,500, but provided viewers far greater comfort.

As attendance increased, a new visitor's center opened in 1976 housing the box office, administrative offices, a museum of the passion play, a travel center, and gift shop. And the last few years have witnessed a general remodeling that includes handicap facilities, nurseries for young children, upgraded sound and lighting systems, and computerized ticketing. In addition, ample parking areas for over one thousand cars, buses, and recreational vehicles have increased the convenience aspect of the theater.

Meier designed one of the most impressive stages and sets of his day when he recreated a Jerusalem street scene. The stage, hailed as the largest outdoor stage in the world, is 650 feet long, or the length of two and one half blocks. Building facades that line the stage vary in height from forty to fifty feet.35

The simultaneous staging format represents several locales: looking from stage right to stage left one sees the city gate of Jerusalem, the house of Mary and Martha at Bethany, Pilate's palace, the great center stage, the Temple, the Sanhedrin council room, the Garden and Tomb, and finally Golgotha. One area, located in the middle of the stage though not representative of any specific area,

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is a large multifunctional space used for the Prologue, Herod's Court, the Last Supper, the Scourging, and the Ascension.

In designing the amphitheatre for Lake Wales, Florida, Meier followed the same basic floor plan but made appropriate adjustments for the smaller stage. This amphitheatre seats 3,500, and the stage stretches 350 feet, only half the size and length of the Spearfish stage.

In Lake Wales, the ticket office, personnel offices, and a small archival display of passion play memorabilia are located at the back of the amphitheatre. Here, too, is housed the organ, which is played live for every performance. The lighting and sound systems also are situated in this area. Restrooms and a small concession stand are provided for the public.

While the natural beauty of orange groves functions as a wonderful backdrop for the stage, the smaller platform and the flat terrain forced Meier to make some modifications in the stage set. Instead of having the Garden and Tomb stage left, they were stationed stage right, shifting the house of Bethany to stage left. Meier furthermore faced a problem mounting the Crucifixion scene due to the site's lack of hills (which in Spearfish serve as relief). He compensated by placing the Crucifixion scene in the large center stage.
The amphitheatre seating area follows the same rectangular format in both locations. While the stage area curves in a semicircle fashion, the seats follow the natural slope of the land, permitting clear visibility from all vantage points. In addition, a small rain shelter covers a portion of the seating area.

II. The Great Passion Play

Historical Development

In the thirty years following the opening of The Black Hills Passion Play, the United States would become involved in World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. Not until 1968, a year of great upheaval in United States history, with student protests, riots, and assassinations, would another outdoor passion play begin operation. Located in a small, peaceful town in the heart of the Arkansas Ozarks, The Great Passion Play of Eureka Springs opened under the auspices of the Elna M. Smith Foundation, a non-profit organization incorporated by Gerald L. K. Smith and his wife.\textsuperscript{36} Unlike Josef Meier, Smith, an ordained minister and political activist, could not boast of any long line of connections with an existing passion play, nor was it his lifelong desire to open a passion play in the area. Instead, he dreamed of erecting a pure white

\textsuperscript{36} The Great Passion Play, Souvenir Program (Eureka Springs: Elna M. Smith, 1994) N. pag.
statue of Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{37} Possibly he had seen pictures of
the Christ of the Andes or a similar statue and had from
that source drawn his inspiration.\textsuperscript{38}

Residents of Los Angeles but frequent vacationers in
the Ozarks, the Smiths in 1963 purchased and renovated a
quaint castle that had been built outside of Eureka Springs
just after the Civil War.\textsuperscript{39} Once that project was
completed, Smith moved to Eureka Springs and resumed his
search for the perfect location for the statue. While
scouting a tract of land for a friend, he, his wife, and
Norman Tucker, a realtor, visited the area that would later
be called Magnetic Mountain.\textsuperscript{40} Within a matter of minutes
Smith decided to erect the great statue on this site.

Preliminary work began immediately, and the project
progressed under the direction of two prominent sculptors,
Emmet Sullivan, assistant to Gutzon Borglum, creator of the
Mt. Rushmore monument, and Adrian Forrette, Jr. In 1966,
as the statue was nearing completion, Smith mentioned to
Forrette that the area around the statue would be a perfect
location for an amphitheatre, where a play about Christ's
last week on earth might be performed.\textsuperscript{41}

\textsuperscript{37} Gerald L. K. Smith, \textit{The Miracles on the Mountains} Rev. Ed.

\textsuperscript{38} Bob Foster, personal interview, 20 May 1992.

\textsuperscript{39} GP, Souvenir n. pag.

\textsuperscript{40} Smith, \textit{Miracles} 1990, 10.

\textsuperscript{41} Smith, \textit{Miracles} 1990, 55.
Noting Smith's interest, Forrette quickly responded by recommending the services of a close friend, the playwright Robert Hyde, considered at the time to be the finest director of outdoor drama in America.\textsuperscript{42} Within a short period of time Hyde submitted a script, designer sketches, and a cost analysis for the undertaking. Although Smith was preoccupied with the statue, he commissioned Hyde to proceed with the play, and in 1967 construction of the facility began on the nearby mountain slope, which provided a natural beauty comparable to that of the Jerusalem countryside.

Following a year of intense preparations, \textit{The Great Passion Play} launched its first summer season of fifty-six performances on July 15, 1968. Under the direction of Robert Hyde, the cast of eighty performed before 28,852 spectators that first year.\textsuperscript{43} Since its opening, the play has run each subsequent summer and played to over five million viewers. Today it is recognized by the Institute of Outdoor Drama as the largest attended outdoor drama in the United States.\textsuperscript{44}

Initially, Smith primarily intended the play to honor the last days in the life of Christ, the statue of whom had

\textsuperscript{42} Smith, \textit{Miracles} 1990, 55.

\textsuperscript{43} \textit{The Great Passion Play}, Questionnaire from author, 1994.

been erected. Like Meier, he viewed the play as a vehicle for religious education and instruction. But unlike Meier, whose life had been devoted to the passion play, Smith incited some skepticism due to his character and eclectic political activities. His close working and personal relationships with Henry Ford and Huey P. Long led many to resent his association with the deity of Christianity. 45 Smith was, in fact, standing beside Huey Long when the governor was assassinated in the state capital at Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and he was present in the hospital room when Long expired. 46 A few days later, at the request of the family, Smith delivered Long's funeral oration. 47

Such contention notwithstanding, the passion play in the Ozarks succeeded, and even after Smith's death in 1976, The Great Passion Play continues to thrive. Ancillary attractions have added to the site's appeal. Prior to his death Smith introduced several other projects: the Sacred Arts Center with over a thousand works of art depicting Christ (four hundred pieces were from Smith's own private collection), the Smith Chapel (housing over six thousand Bibles in 625 languages), the Woodcarving Gallery, and the


46 Gerald L. K. Smith, Besieged Patriot (Eureka Springs: Elna M. Smith, 1978) 120.

47 Smith, Besieged 121.
New Holy Land, featuring life sized replicas of significant sites in the Holy Land.48

Despite the interesting array of attractions, the theatre facility remains committed to its religious mission. Bob Foster, former General Manager of The Great Passion Play, stresses the point and relates:

everyone without exception in administration feels that our sole purpose is to put forth the gospel of Jesus Christ and a contemporary drama that will enhance and lift up the name of Jesus in our world. . . . We do not seek to exalt our founders, we wish to honor them with dignity and respect for what they achieved and what they planted here.49

Physical Facilities

The size of the amphitheatre for The Great Passion Play in Eureka Springs, Arkansas falls midway between the theatres of The Black Hills Passion Play. It was Smith's dream that The Great Passion Play would play in a theatre of impressive size and stature. This dream met realization when Smith purchased land for the amphitheatre in 1967. Plans moved quickly under the direction of Robert Hyde. Construction began that same year, and the first performance was given on the new stage in July, 1968.50

Incorporating the sloping hillside into the design, Hyde set the stage against the backdrop of the Ozark

48 Souvenir n. pag.


Mountains. Upon entering the amphitheatre, nestled between two hills, one is quite surprised at the enormity of the set. The 4,100 seat auditorium steps down a steep incline; however, the seating sections are easily accessible with the necessary handicap access. All the seats are stadium style (with backs). The seating arrangement is rectangular, like that of The Black Hills Passion Play, though the performing area is more complex and three-dimensional. This multi-level stage measures five hundred feet long and four hundred feet deep.51

A unified set represents the Jerusalem street layout. Whereas the stage setting for The Black Hills Passion Play represented seven distinct locales, The Great Passion Play integrates the various building units into one three-dimensional set. These are permanent multi-level structures that house the speakers of the sound system; they have withstood extremes in weather since 1968.

Farthest down stage right is the Gate to Jerusalem. From right to left is the Market Place, Pilate's Judgment hall, the Temple, the Via Dolorosa, the Upper Room, the Sanhedrin Court, and Herod's Palace the farthest stage left. In the upstage area is the Garden of Gethsemane, stage right, Simon's house, the Tomb, and Golgotha stage center. The two areas of the set are linked together through the gate to the city and the Via Dolorosa.

51 GP, Souvenir n. pag.
Near the back of the theatre stands a small rain shelter that serves as protection from summer showers that develop quickly. In 1995, however, the rain shelter proved ineffective when a sudden storm dropped golf-ball size hailstones, sending ten audience members to the local hospital with minor cuts and injuries.52

Dressing rooms and tunnel entrances are found both underneath the amphitheatre seating and behind the set. The lighting and sound systems are computerized, operated from an area at the top of the amphitheatre. While the play is sometimes criticized for using a pre-recorded track, the capacity of the system to amplify sound (and pitch it variously around the stage) adds to the authenticity of the dramatic action. For example, in scenes where the characters cross from one end of the stage to another, the sound actually moves along with the actor.

Box office and concessions area are located at the back of the theatre. Immediately in front of the box office is a large paved parking lot for buses, with ample parking spaces for cars on the outer rim. Adjacent attractions are within easy walking distance of the ticket office. Across the parking lot is the Sacred Arts Center, a Christian art gallery, the Bible museum, the New Holy Land and Tabernacle, a buffet restaurant, and the

Orientation Center, which houses offices and a large gift shop. Also, the Christ of the Ozarks Statue and its attendant chapel can be reached in a short walk.

III. The Living Word

Historical Development

Six years after the opening of The Great Passion Play, Frank Roughton Harvey (Roughton is his surname; Harvey is his stage name), a Methodist minister from Sandersville, Georgia, and his wife, Hazel, fulfilled their dream of building an amphitheatre for a passion play in the tradition of Oberammergau. Inspiration for this project first stirred in 1957 when Harvey toured the United States as an actor with the American Version of the Oberammergau play, a production under the direction of Val Balfour that was performed at the Akron Baptist Temple in Ohio. At that time Harvey felt called to set aside his professional aspirations and organize his own group of players for the performance of a passion play.

Harvey returned to his hometown, married Hazel Creasey, then enrolled in Candler School of Theology at Emory University in Atlanta. In preparing for the


56 Behold, Atlanta n.pag.
ministry, Harvey drew upon his acting experience while learning the basics of Christian hermeneutics. He memorized the Sermon on the Mount and began presenting dramatizations in area churches.57 Opportunities for this presentation abounded, resulting in over six thousand performances in the United States and around the world. Harvey toured his work in Europe, Korea, Thailand, and Okinawa; he also performed at military bases and hospitals for the troops in Vietnam.58

While enrolled at Emory, Harvey undertook the composition of a play on the life of Christ, learning much about Biblical archaeology in the process. He traveled abroad to the Holy Land to study archaeological finds, he also visited the amphitheatres of Greece and Rome. It was his plan to one day design a set for a passion play that would give the appearance of authenticity, evoking the Holy Land in a strong, effective manner.59

While finishing his work at seminary, Harvey accepted a position at Andrew College in Cuthbert, Georgia, where he served as an instructor in Bible and drama. There he staged the first performance of his passion play indoors in 1963, under the title The Greatest Life Ever Lived.60 Later

57 Behold, Atlanta n.pag.
58 Frank Roughton Harvey, telephone interview, 22 January 1997.
59 Behold, Atlanta n.pag.
60 Harvey, interview 22 January 1997.
he would adapt this play for outdoor production and entitle it *Behold the Man*.

Harvey's continued interest in religious drama eventually led him back to school. He had completed a Bachelors degree at Asbury College in Speech and Drama. At this time he proceeded to the University of Georgia with the aim of obtaining a Master of Fine Arts Degree in Drama. For his Masters project he designed and constructed a model for an outdoor passion play, a design that he would eventually employ for his production of the *Living Word* in Cambridge, Ohio.

At this point Harvey had both a script and a design for a passion play, but no amphitheatre. Shortly thereafter, Scott Grant, a friend of Harvey's who had become intrigued by the possibility of producing such a religious drama, formed an organization that backed Harvey's plan and helped realize the construction of a facility for the presentation. Indeed, the outlook for the passion play appeared to brighten.

Then in 1968, the same year that *The Great Passion Play* opened in Arkansas, Harvey was presented with his greatest opportunity yet—to produce *Behold the Man* in the Atlanta Fulton County Stadium. Stirred by the racial

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61 Harvey, interview 22 January 1997.
63 *Behold*, Atlanta n.pag.
unrest following the assassination of Martin Luther King, Ray Moore, a Christian newsman in Atlanta, expressed before a small fellowship group his concern regarding the antagonism and animosity plaguing the city. Harvey was a member of this group and in attendance that day.\textsuperscript{64} Wondering what might be done to alleviate the tension in the city, Moore and Harvey considered that the production of a great passion play—\textit{as a community effort}—might achieve some positive results.\textsuperscript{65}

The ensuing production of this script, \textit{Behold the Man}, sponsored by a non-profit organization, the Christian Council of Metropolitan Atlanta, involved the combined efforts of thousands. Dr. William Holmes Borders, a highly regarded sixty-three year old African-American pastor of the Wheat Street Baptist Church, played the role of Christ. The cast numbered over five hundred.\textsuperscript{66} Robert Shaw, renowned choral musician, conducted a two thousand voice volunteer choir. The choir performed as the audience gathered into the stadium prior to the production and supplied transitional music as a means of sustaining the religious mood of the production while scenes were changed.\textsuperscript{67}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textit{Behold}, Atlanta n.pag.
\item Roughton 3.
\item \textit{“That New-Time Religion,” Newsweek} 30 September 1968: 68.
\item Frank Wells, \textit{“Over 45,000 Laud ‘Behold,’” Atlanta Constitution} 16 September 1968: A1+.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Over 45,000 spectators attended the performance that Sunday evening of September 15, 1968, and the ten thousand dollars earned (over expenses) was donated by the Council to the city of Atlanta for the care of the needy. According to Frank Wells, writer for the *Atlanta Constitution*, "After the performance the general comment heard was that it would have to be performed again so that more than one stadium full of Georgians could see it." In face of the work's unquestionable success, the city sought to reprise the production in six months. Harvey believed another production so soon after the first would be unwise; however, he consented. Assuming that the second performance would sell itself and prove as successful as the first, Harvey obtained no financial backing. He secured a $21,000 bank loan for the purchase of additional lights and scenery improvement. Harvey's initial trepidation was unfortunately justified. Only a few thousand attended this second production, and Harvey discovered himself $57,000 in debt.

Over the next few years, Harvey paid off this debt and returned to school for his Doctor of Philosophy degree; he also moved to the rural town of Cambridge, Ohio, so that

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68 Roughton 4.

69 Wells A1+.

70 Roughton 4.

his children could enjoy living on a farm. All the time he continued to investigate various communities, plumbing their interest in supporting a passion play. He also collected anything that could be used for props and costumes, accumulating enough material to fill five forty-foot vans.\textsuperscript{72}

Upon learning of the play's success in Atlanta, the Council of Christian Communions of Greater Cincinnati and the Catholic Archdiocese of Cincinnati—in the spirit of ecumenism and common censure of racial barriers—commissioned Harvey to produce \textit{Behold the Man} in their city. On May 21, 1972, with Dr. William Holmes Borders once again performing the role of Christ, the production played in Cincinnati's Riverfront Stadium.\textsuperscript{73} While the religious community hailed the performance as a success, Harvey himself did not concur; to him the effort lacked the spark and degree of community effort he had witnessed in Atlanta.\textsuperscript{74}

Despite these high profile performances, the passion play seemed unable to find a permanent home. But in August, 1974, while flying with her husband to Georgia, Hazel Harvey suggested that the amphitheatre should be erected in Cambridge, right on the back hillside of the

\textsuperscript{72} Roughton 6.

\textsuperscript{73} \textit{Behold the Man}, Playbill (Cincinnati, 1972) N.pag.

\textsuperscript{74} Harvey, interview, 22 January 1997.
couple's ninety-two acre farm.\textsuperscript{75} Having never considered using the rough, uncleared land for such a purpose and knowing the expense involved in constructing an amphitheatre, Harvey at first hesitated; however, upon further consideration he consented to this place, and construction soon began on a new amphitheatre for his play, which assumed the new title, \textit{The Living Word}.\textsuperscript{76} This was not the only change attending the production. The author also added "Harvey" as a stage name because so many promotional and marketing spots on radio and television kept mispronouncing Roughton.\textsuperscript{77}

Volunteers from the community completed most of the work the first year, donating building materials, equipment and labor, ensuring that the amphitheatre would be ready for the first performance in the summer of 1975.\textsuperscript{78} That first season (one month in duration) reached an attendance of six thousand, with most spectators drawn primarily from the local area.\textsuperscript{79} Since that opening season the play has continued its annual summer performances and has significantly upgraded its facilities.

\textsuperscript{75} Roughton 1.
\textsuperscript{76} Roughton 8.
\textsuperscript{77} Harvey, interview 22 January 1997.
\textsuperscript{78} Roughton 9.
\textsuperscript{79} \textit{The Living Word}, Questionnaire from author, 1994.
As with the earlier passion plays, the express purpose of *The Living Word* was the presentation of Christ's life, especially his experience of the passion. Beyond that end, this production fulfilled an individual's personal dream. Unlike Smith, who understood the drama only as a spectator, Harvey, the writer and director, knew first-hand the power of the dramatic medium. Through the dramatization of Christ's last week on earth, he believed that the gospel message could be conveyed in a singularly effective fashion. This production followed an evangelical end but also served to crown Harvey's achievement in realizing this long-held theatrical vision.

While Harvey spent almost twenty years searching for a permanent home for his passion play, after ten years of running the piece in Cambridge, he moved from the farm and brought in other personnel to manage the play. From the beginning Harvey did not want the production to revolve around a man--himself. By 1984, he believed that the play was strong enough to continue on its own as a community project. Also, facing expenses for his daughter's first year in college, he decided to sell the property to the passion play and let the board members determine its future direction. He has remained on the Board of Trustees but

This production has never drawn numbers comparable to those of *The Black Hills Passion Play* or *The Great Passion Play*. Still, having completed its twenty-second season, the production continues to attract a respectable audience, drawn mostly from the local and regional area. Shunning promoting itself to a wider market, the production has evinced disinterest regarding any possible national profile, and hence it remains one of the lowest attended of the American passion plays.

**Physical Facilities**

The twelve hundred seat amphitheatre of *The Living Word* production is built on terrain that is less hilly than that of *The Black Hills Passion Play* or *The Great Passion Play*, yet the stage itself conveys a greater sense of realism. The seating area is semicircular in shape. Wide, slightly-inclined concrete levels allow audience members to sit in folding chairs provided by the production and placed variously about the area. A separate building houses the gift shop and administrative offices, while a small structure at the back of the audience area serves as the site for light and sound control.

The scenery units stretch along a two hundred foot cement and cinder block stage, but the hills used for the

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81 Harvey, interview 22 January 1997.
Sermon on the Mount, the Garden, Golgotha, and the Tomb add another two hundred feet to the sides. Given Harvey's extensive study of Biblical archaeology (in preparation for his Master of Fine Arts project), it is no wonder that the set for this play is considered the most authentic and realistic of the passion plays.

Most of the current passion plays place the Temple stage center, since it was the focal point of Jewish life in biblical times; however, because Jerusalem was under Roman government, with Pilate exercising near tyrannical rule, Harvey chose to highlight the center stage area with a large, simulated marble unit of the Fortress Antonia, Pilate's residence.

From the palace, moving stage right, one finds a two-story unit; the first level reveals the exterior of a simple house in Bethany, while steps lead to the upper room on the second level. In preparing this set piece, Harvey modeled the locale upon Leonardo da Vinci's famous painting of the Last Supper, and the room appears much like the one in the artist's depiction. Similarly, The Black Hills Passion Play stages this scene to resemble the Leonardo painting; however, it is played center stage in front of a simple painted backdrop.

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82 LW, Souvenir, 1996 21.
83 LW, Souvenir, 1996 19.
84 LW, Souvenir, 1996 20.
Continuing stage right from the Bethany house, one discovers the very elaborate and colorful, gold and purple court of Herod, complete with authentic designs copied from one of Herod's palaces in Masada. Next to this piece, the main Jerusalem gate leads out to Golgotha and the tomb.

Stage left of Pilate's palace is the Sanhedrin council chamber. According to Harvey's research, this circular building, known as the "Chamber of Hewn Stone," served as the meeting place for the Jewish governing body. Next to the council chamber stands the Temple. Harvey researched the historical structure then built this unit one quarter the size of the building that existed during the time of Christ. The altar for sacrifices and the laver for washing have both been positioned in front of the Temple. The gate stage left of the Temple leads out to the hillside used for the opening scene of the Sermon on the Mount and the later Garden of Gethsemane scene.

IV. Jesus of Nazareth

Historical Development

Jesus of Nazareth opened in Puyallup, Washington, outside of Tacoma in 1981 and is distinguished as the only passion play produced under the sponsorship of a specific church, that is, Tacoma's Covenant Celebration Church. The

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85 LW, Souvenir, 1996 19.
church maintains both its sanctuary in Tacoma and the AmphiTheatre in Puyallup. Not surprisingly, most of the performers are associated with the church.88

Written and directed by Stephan Munsey, a minister from Chicago, Illinois, Jesus of Nazareth was first performed in Jackson, Mississippi.89 Indoor performances of this play have also been presented in fifteen other cities around the country, but its permanent outdoor home is in Washington.90 Stephan Munsey first produced the play in 1974, the same year The Living Word first began its production season. Over the past twenty-three years, Jesus of Nazareth has attracted audiences totaling over a half a million.91

Covenant Celebration Church built the AmphiTheatre for the express purpose of producing Jesus of Nazareth. A published mission statement relates the church's fundamental motivation: "to present the gospel of Jesus Christ . . . and to have a professional drama for the enjoyment of all who attend." The statement also emphasizes the desire to provide "the Christian and secular community a holistic experience. . . ."92 In sum, religious


89 Jesus of Nazareth, Souvenir Program (Puyallup: Covenant Celebration Ministries, 1995) N. pag.


91 JN, Souvenir n. pag.

education and community involvement constitute the fundamental purpose of the production.

Physical Facilities

Jesus of Nazareth's 3,500 seat Amphitheatre was constructed in Puyallup, Washington on forty acres of wooded property owned by the Covenant Celebration Church. The church itself is located in Tacoma, ten miles from the production site. At the back of the inclined audience area stands a building housing offices and the technical controls for the production. Just to the right of the building is an open area used for the selling of souvenirs and T-shirts.

The semi-circular stage area is 250 feet wide; its central Temple set stands two and one half stories tall. When lit, this off-white structure easily draws focus center stage, especially when the dome glows in the dark of the crucifixion scene.

Immediately stage right of the Temple is the marketplace, with Pilate's balcony and the Sanhedrin Chamber directly above it. Farther right is the upper room, used for the Last Supper. At the most extreme stage right one sees past the gate of the city to Golgotha.

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93 Jesus of Nazareth, Souvenir Program (Puyallup: Covenant Celebration Ministries, 1993) 14.

94 JON, Souvenir, 1993 n. pag.
Stage left of the Temple is a set piece not found in any of the previously mentioned plays. It is Peter’s house, which is used as the backdrop for the marriage scene, a scene involving the chase of Barabbas, and a scene relating the news of the resurrection. His house is located beside a pond used for the baptism of Christ. The garden tomb for the resurrection is the farthest stage left structure, situating it directly opposite the hill of the crucifixion.

The variety of structures in the set make Jesus of Nazareth visually interesting; however, many of the walls are painted without texture resulting in a flat, two-dimensional look.

V. The Louisiana Passion Play

Historical Development

In 1984, the fifth American outdoor passion play opened in Calhoun, Louisiana. After attending a performance of The Great Passion Play in Eureka Springs, Dr. James Burns dreamed of producing a similar entertainment in Louisiana.  

95 A practicing minister, Burns claimed to share the same inspiration as his predecessors: "to present a dramatic re-enactment of some of the major events from the life of Christ; to involve Christians of

the surrounding communities in a combined effort; and to attract tourists to the area."  

In seeking an assistant to help with the writing and direction the script, Burns encountered Mark Hutto, who had already been involved with passion play work for several years. Hutto had been an assistant director and actor in the 1981 Jerusalem Passion Play directed by Francisco de Araujo.  

Once preparations were completed, the APOCALYPSE Passion Play opened in a temporary amphitheatre at the entrance to Roselawn Memorial Gardens cemetery in Calhoun, Louisiana June 4, 1984. The timing for the premiere was deliberately set to take advantage of the crowds traveling south to the World's Fair in New Orleans that year. Located just off Interstate 20, the site was a prime location for drawing tourists.

Like some of the other passion plays, this play also later changed its name. The word apocalypse means revelation, with specific reference to the last book of the New Testament, but Burns chose to use the word "as an

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96 The Louisiana Passion Play, Press Release (Ruston: North Louisiana Creative Arts, 1994) N. pag.

97 LP, Press n. pag.

98 The Louisiana Passion Play, Souvenir Program (Ruston: North Louisiana Creative Arts, 1994) N. pag.

99 LP, Press n. pag.
acronym for A Picture Of Christ As Loving, Yielding, Personal Savior Eternal.\textsuperscript{100}

In keeping with his stated purpose, Burns later changed the name to The Louisiana Passion Play to "give the play an identity with the state of its origin and to stake its claim in the huge tourist industry in Louisiana.\textsuperscript{101} Burns currently promotes the play as Louisiana's Number One Outdoor Drama. It is, in fact, the state's only outdoor drama.

Between 1984 and 1991 the production was performed exclusively in Calhoun; Burns, then relocated the production in Choudrant, Louisiana. However, when extensive rains damaged the prospective site, the influx of financial support ceased, and all the plans came to a halt.\textsuperscript{102} The passion play lost three summer seasons. Not until 1994 did the play reopen, this time in an area outside Ruston, Louisiana.

Physical Facilities

The physical aspect of The Louisiana Passion Play was the poorest of any of the productions currently in operation. In its haste to reopen, the play shortchanged its viewers. The set had been shoddily constructed and

\textsuperscript{100} \textit{LP}, Press n. pag.


\textsuperscript{102} \textit{LP}, Souvenir n. pag.
was, in fact, incomplete. The parking area was strewn with shovels, wheel barrows, cinder blocks and other construction material. Portable toilets served as restrooms. The entrance area and concession stand, which hawked a passion play drink, also appeared make-shift. A small gift shop set up in one end of the construction trailer sold sundry souvenir items, including T-shirts, mugs, fans, and plaques with Christian quotations.  

Unpainted, exposed cinder blocks made up most of the set with a small unit of temporary stadium bleachers placed alongside. The center piece of the set was a long, flat cinder-block wall that ran parallel to the bleachers, downstage of the hill, which was used for scenes involving the teaching ministry of Jesus, the Crucifixion, and the Ascension. The unit functioning as the tomb was built just to the right of the hill. The temple and Pilate’s porch were placed at an angle far stage right, while on the extreme stage left was Simon Peter’s house, with stables below and an upper room above for the Last Supper.  

VI. The Witness

Historical Development

Already home to The Great Passion Play, Arkansas provided the location for another passion play in 1986.


This project developed in the Hot Springs area, a site known for its mineral springs and health spas. The original play, a musical, was written by Jim and Carol Owens of Lyndell, Texas. Ministers from churches in Soviet Bloc Europe, many of which were closed to biblical presentations at the time, called on the Owens to write a musical production for evangelistic purposes. While American ministers themselves could not enter the Iron Curtain countries, their music could. For a year The Witness toured England then moved behind the Iron Curtain and on to Asia.\textsuperscript{105}

Hot Springs National Park had constructed the Mid-America Amphitheatre for the presentation of the outdoor drama\textit{ Hernando DeSoto, Conquistador}. Though that production failed, the park and tourism departments nonetheless continued the upkeep of the facility.

Judy McEarl, artistic director of The Witness, had traveled through the Hot Springs region with the production for several years performing for civic groups and church organizations. One local resident who had seen The Witness production, Marnett Dennis, contacted the Hot Springs Chamber of Commerce with the idea of staging the production in the empty amphitheatre. Betty Lynch of the Chamber referred her to Pat Reed of the area hospitality

\textsuperscript{105} "Volunteers Make 'Witness' Successful," \textit{Sentinel-Record} [Hot Springs] 29 June 1988: 12-A.
association. Reed subsequently assumed the position of public relations director for the production and after two years of making contacts with civic leaders and receiving endorsements, she booked the park's amphitheatre for the premiere performance of The Witness Labor Day weekend, 1985.  

In only six weeks, volunteers built a multitude of costumes and completed the set for the show's opening. An audience of three thousand attended the first three performances of The Witness that Labor Day weekend. Following the show's success, two performances were presented the next Easter, and plans for a summer season were launched. On May 24, 1986, the first summer season of The Witness officially opened. Commenting upon the purpose of the production, Reed stated: "the participants are doing this for the ministry of the musical, as well as for the good of the city of Hot Springs and its tourism industry."  

That season the production played to capacity crowds, and such audiences have been sustained over the last ten years. During that time, new material was introduced to the show, songs penned by current artistic director Judy McEarl.  

106 Pat Reed, personal interview, 19 August 1995.  
107 Arkansas Department of Parks & Tourism, Press Release (Little Rock, 1986) 29.  
Physical Facilities

The Witness is performed on a small semi-circular stage in the Mid-America Amphitheatre. The 1,300 seat theatre provides ample space for the technical systems, ticket and administration offices, and concession area (which sells mugs, T-shirts, cassette tapes and postcards). While the postcards can serve as a good promotional tool, the noticeable misspelling on one card's front proves quite distracting.110

The choice of set structures is limited, comparable to those of The Louisiana Passion Play; however, this set presents a more finished appearance. Flats designed to look like the wall of Jerusalem stretch across the upstage center area. To stage right, the wall extends into the marketplace area that leads to the poolside dock. To stage left the wall leads into the hill of Golgotha and the garden tomb.

This staging, like that of Jesus of Nazareth, utilizes flat painting and thus presents an artificial look, especially evident in the pool used for the disciples' scene and the baptism of Jesus. Surrounding this fan-shaped pool area are banks of rocks which unintentionally gives the impression of a backyard pool with its pale-blue

109 The Witness, Questionnaire from author, 1996.

110 The bold caption printed on the picture of the scene of the disciples beside the pool reads "Fisher's of Men."
color and sparkling water. Since this production does not have its own permanent theatre, the set is temporary and must be struck at the end of each summer season.

VII. Worthy Is the Lamb

Historical Development

In 1988, two years after the first season of The Witness, another musical passion play premiered, this one on the Atlantic coast. Worthy Is the Lamb ranks third in attendance out of the eleven outdoor dramas in North Carolina, the birthplace of outdoor drama in the United States. The banks of the White Oak River (at the edge of the Croatan National Forest near Wilmington) provide the backdrop for the amphitheatre and its Jerusalem setting.

The guiding force behind this production, J. T. Adams, acted in numerous capacities—performer, playwright, and composer. A native of Fort Worth, Texas, Adams studied music and served on the faculty of East Texas State University. In addition to his academic preparation, Adams' professional experience included work with well-known performers Jimmy Durante, Ethel Waters, and Ralph Carmichael. Several of his songs were recorded by Pat Boone, Brook Benton, and Tom Jones. Adams originally conceived Worthy Is the Lamb as an Easter cantata. Adams, however, realized that Worthy Is the Lamb would achieve its

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greatest potential if developed into a stage production. Encouraged by the many positive responses his choir received after performing the Easter cantata for a Mobile, Alabama, television station in 1964, Adams rewrote the work into a musical passion play. Assisted by his wife, Judy, Adams designed the production's set, costumes, lighting, and special effects.

Following the play's completion in 1983, opportunity knocked, and the Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce invited Adams to present Worthy Is the Lamb at the Tarrant County Convention Center during the Easter season. Eight thousand people attended the performance, prompting Adams to consider seriously finding a permanent home for the play.

One year later, in the summer of 1984, Kingdom Properties, Inc., a group of Christian businessmen from Mineral Wells, Texas, was formed. The corporation wished to record the soundtrack for Adam's musical and acquire a permanent facility for the show. In August 1984, using musical performers from the British Broadcasting Orchestra and the Royal Philharmonic, along with professional Shakespearean actors, Adams completed the Worthy is the Lamb soundtrack.

112 WL, Souvenir, [1988?] n. pag.
113 WL, Souvenir, [1988?], n. pag.
In the protracted course of negotiations and fund raising, a group from North Carolina invited Adams to bring Worthy Is the Lamb to a new river-bank amphitheatre that had been designed and built for the outdoor drama Blackbeard's Revenge. Following that play's demise, Crystal Coast Amphitheater, Inc., another group of Christian businessmen, purchased the theatre with the idea of establishing a Christian retreat center. Upon learning that Adams was in search of a permanent home for Worthy Is the Lamb, this group contracted with the author to bring his play to Swansboro, North Carolina. Adams accepted, and the musical opened on June 17, 1988.

Physical Facilities

The North Carolina coast serves as the backdrop for the production of Worthy Is the Lamb. The Crystal Coast Amphitheatre, a permanent theatre seating 2,100, provides an exceptional, high-quality facility for this outdoor production. A welcome center greets the visitor at the main entrance, where the general offices, gift shop, and concession stand are located. Outside the center is the picnic area and boardwalk leading to the amphitheatre.

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Standing atop the hill, one views the three hundred foot stage against the backdrop of the White Oak River and Croatan National Forest. The three permanent set units were constructed to scale for this production: Pilate's Hall, the Jerusalem Temple, and Herod's Palace. The Temple occupies the stage center area. Moving stage right, one sees a small hillside, then Pilate's Hall, and farthest stage right, a fishing village with replicas of biblical-era boats floating in the waterway.

Stage left of the Temple stands a replica of Golgotha or Calvary and the Garden tomb area in Israel. Farther stage left is the structure of Herod's palace.

VIII. The Promise

Historical Development

The most recent of the American passion plays is also a musical—The Promise. This work opened one year later (1989) at Glen Rose, Texas in the new facility originally planned for Adams' Worthy Is the Lamb. In December 1984, two years before Adams left Kingdom Properties, David Sanders was named President and CEO of Kingdom Properties. Despite Adams' departure, Sanders continued

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118 WL, Souvenir 7.
119 WL, Souvenir 7.
120 The Promise, Questionnaire from author, 1994.
his efforts to locate a suitable site for an outdoor theatre, but he faced the challenge of finding a new script for this undertaking. Sanders, along with other prominent figures from the Dallas/Fort Worth area, wished for a passion play that would present a "loving, laughing, approachable Jesus to the world in a casual, outdoor environment."121

Following months of work, Sanders in 1988 successfully negotiated with the Somervell County government to build an outdoor theatre on land that Kingdom Properties had donated to the county, a property just south of Dallas/Fort Worth.122 In return, the county agreed to lease the theatre to the organization every weekend from June through October for a period of fifteen years for the production of a passion play.123

The next year Sanders negotiated with Dr. Jan Dargatz and Word, Inc. of Dallas, Texas, internationally recognized publisher of Christian books and music, to develop the script for The Promise.124 Dargatz, along with David Humphrey (executive producer), Gary Rhodes (music producer), and Michael Meece (director) collaborated on the

121 The Promise, Souvenir Program (Glen Rose: Promise Productions, 1993) N. pag.
122 PR, Questionnaire.
123 PR, Questionnaire.
124 PR, Questionnaire.
script. Sanders also contracted noted scenic designer Peter Wolf not only to design the Texas Amphitheatre but to assist with lighting and staging.\textsuperscript{125} Irene Corey, internationally recognized costume designer, created the costumes.\textsuperscript{126}

Upon completion of the negotiations, every aspect of this production moved forward at a rapid pace. Construction began on the amphitheatre in August, 1989; \textit{The Promise} premiered in November. From an initial attendance of 250 theatergoers, the crowds have steadily grown to an average nightly attendance of 1,500.\textsuperscript{127}

Ultimately \textit{The Promise} would receive a distinction enjoyed by no other outdoor passion play. Soviet President Boris Yeltsin invited \textit{The Promise} to perform in Moscow's Kremlin Palace Theatre in the spring of 1993.\textsuperscript{128} The cast and crew of two hundred, presenting the first passion play performed in Russia in eight hundred years, played before an audience of fifty thousand. Upon attending the final performance and witnessing the seven curtain calls, Yeltsin extended a return invitation for the next year.\textsuperscript{129} The

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[125]{FR, Souvenir n. pag.}
\footnotetext[126]{FR, Souvenir n. pag.}
\footnotetext[127]{FR, Questionnaire.}
\footnotetext[128]{Tom Bass, personal interview, 3 July 1992.}
\footnotetext[129]{Institute of Outdoor Drama, \textit{US Outdoor Drama Newsletter} (Chapel Hill: U of NC, Summer 1993) 4.}
\end{footnotes}
Promise has subsequently received invitations to perform in Israel and Australia. This newest outdoor passion play continues to gain renown and continues to attract large audiences to its home theater in Texas.

Physical Facilities

The newest of the passion plays, The Promise is housed in the Texas Amphitheatre on twenty-seven acres outside Glen Rose, Texas. Broadway designer Peter Wolf, noted for work on The King and I, designed both the amphitheatre and the set for The Promise.130 The Greco-Roman style stage consists of forty-two foot walls and arches with a central arch reaching six stories above a tri-level playing area of four thousand square feet.131 Separating the audience from the stage area is a 175 foot semi-circular waterway that is used for the scene of Christ's baptism and the disciples' fishing on the Sea of Galilee.132

The production's only permanent set piece is the main central unit, the three-dimensional structure of a hill. The piece serves as the setting for the nativity scene, the raising of Lazarus, and the resurrection of Christ; it also provides an exterior backdrop for other scenes. Moveable kiosks are rolled in for the garden of Gethsemane, the Sanhedrin council, and Pilate's hall. All of the set

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130 PR, Souvenir n. pag.

131 Alicia Parrish, Texas Amphitheatre: Tap Into Its Market. N. pag.

pieces are expertly designed and constructed. Changes occur very quickly and quietly. Altogether these elements contribute to a most visually exciting production.

Having drawn this material on each of the outdoor passion plays together, this survey offers itself as a valuable resource for anyone wishing to conduct further study into the American passion plays. Most of the organizations and personnel were quite helpful and delighted to cooperate in providing information.

One individual, Mark Pedro, former director of The Living Word, proved most cordial in providing assistance and materials. He has extensively studied the passion plays of this century, having performed in and directed many of them. His archive covers a variety of passion plays--those performed by churches and civic organizations, movie depictions, as well as the outdoor productions. Whenever a particular outdoor drama responded with little or no information to my queries, I contacted Pedro to see if he had any documented information.

Although most of the general managers were cooperative, Shirley Page of Worthy Is the Lamb and Linda Nelson of Jesus of Nazareth did not follow through with documented information even after numerous requests. Especially disappointing were the requests denied by Page, which sought background material on the scripting of the Worthy Is the Lamb production and contact information for
communication with the wife of the composer, J. T. Adams. Also in the case of *Jesus of Nazareth*, I could only obtain sketchy details regarding its inception from Nelson.

In conclusion, from the information amassed concerning the organization and physical properties of the eight passion plays, what factors emerge pertaining to the presentations' attempts to teach and entertain in an effective manner? By examining several key areas, one can indeed assess how successfully these dramas fulfilled the Horatian dictum.

Initially, the American plays developed from one particular individual's vision. Whether it was Josef Meier's dream to bring a passion play to the United States, or Hazel Roughton Harvey's vision of having a passion play performed on her own farm property, or the Owens' desire to present the story of Christ to those behind the Iron Curtain, each production's creator aimed to develop a dramatic presentation that would both inspire and provide religious instruction on the life of Jesus Christ.

In addition, two of the productions go beyond the aim of simple instruction by advocating a persuasive presentation of the gospel. Both *Jesus of Nazareth* and *The Great Passion Play* thread a strong gospel message throughout the plays. In *Jesus of Nazareth* the audience is drawn in to the performance experience through the entertainment of the play and then is presented with a
powerful evangelical message. In that church-supported production, the action is suspended after Jesus is condemned to die and before he is led to Calvary. At that point a minister comes onto the stage, preaches a short five minute message, then leaves the invitation open for anyone who would like to learn more about the Christ to seek assistance from a counselor after the show. The action then resumes.

The Great Passion Play uses a more subtle tactic and simply makes an appeal over the public address system following the last scene asking anyone wishing to know more about the Christ to seek out one of the volunteers at the back of the amphitheatre after the performance. In both of these productions instruction and inspiration serve as engines for an overt evangelistic agenda.

But with the desire to instruct, the desire to profit— in the commercial sense—is also sometimes evident, and, though not a strong motivating factor in all of the productions, it is nevertheless present. Of all the productions, The Black Hills Passion Play has most closely followed its mission statement in providing religious instruction. Meier's desire was to bring the passion play to a country where religious freedom lived. The amount of money earned by the presentation was for him a far lesser concern, and his family in ensuing years has attempted to remain true to Meier's wishes.
Thus, while each of the plays was originally organized for the purpose of religious instruction, their survival dictated at least a minimal amount of income generation. All eight of the passion plays continue to exist as non-profit organizations; however, some of the productions have embraced a more commercial approach, with any profits reinvested in the organization itself.

The production that has probably come closest to transforming itself into an entertainment venue is The Great Passion Play. From the inception of the work, the wealthy Gerald L. K. Smith sought to make the life of Christ into a spectacular presentation, whether in the form of a statue, the production of a drama, or the re-creation of a model of the Holy Land. Although The Great Passion Play no longer subsists on funding from the original Elna M. Smith Foundation, that initial financial stability allowed for the realization of such various projects. More recently income from tickets and gift shop sales have been used to cover expenses or turned back into the organization.

While the aims of all the founders of these productions involved religious instruction, each has to a degree interjected entertainment devices into his respective production—some more than others. This emphasis can be seen in the productions' physical facilities as well as the locale choices, the types of
stages employed, and the availability of auxiliary services.

The facilities in a subtle but very real way contribute to the degree of pleasure experienced by the audiences. In almost every situation the organization has tried to select a rural area away from the distractions of the city. None of the dramas operate in large cities although several are only a short distance from urban areas. The settings generally are located in idyllic rolling hills away from the hustle and bustle that would distract from performances. However, those productions near the big cities, i.e., Dallas, Orlando, and Tacoma, enjoy a larger market due to their proximity. Moreover, the productions in Spearfish, Eureka Springs, and Hot Springs enjoy the benefits of being located in high-traffic tourist areas.

In the choice of locale, some organizations have chosen more wisely than others. The productions that emphasize the rural aspect of Jerusalem due to their locations include The Black Hills Passion Play, The Great Passion Play, and The Living Word. With the trees, hillsides, and open acreage, audience members feel as though they have returned to the Jerusalem of Jesus' day.

Of course, each of the productions have claimed that they transport their audiences to biblical times, but the locales do affect the degree to which spectators suspend
their disbelief. *The Louisiana Passion Play* exhibits the worst locale choice, which certainly distracts audience members and limits the pleasure they experience. Set in a small field along a busy state highway in the town of Ruston, the production suffers from the continual noise of cars and trucks passing. Such distractions keep the audience aware of the artificiality of the experience. *Jesus of Nazareth* in the town of Puyallup, Washington, is also located along a state highway; however it is set farther away from the road, and the noise does not interfere to as great a degree.

Not only do the locales contribute to the pleasure of the performance, but the stages and settings play an important role as well. *The Witness, Worthy Is the Lamb,* and *The Promise* have admirably selected locales in parks or unpopulated areas; nevertheless, the settings convey a heightened sense of theatricality. While at times quite pleasing, the simpleness of the sets in *The Witness,* or the elaborate staging and lighting systems *Worthy Is the Lamb* and *The Promise,* remind spectators that they are indeed viewing a theatrical performance.

As for the stage area, all of the productions (except for *The Witness*) utilize a large space between the stage and the audience that gives the impression of a Jerusalem street. But in a few productions, like *The Living Word* and *Worthy Is the Lamb,* the set itself follows a semicircular
arrangement; the playing space extends into the audience area. This arrangement appears to more effectively pull viewers into the action of the scenes more. In essence, these audience members enjoy a sense of participation and instantly become the crowd members in Jerusalem.

Although the setting for *The Great Passion Play* is quite realistically displayed in its multi-level Jerusalem setting, the audience feels distanced for the events of the play. With the great gap between the audience and the set itself, along with the elevation of the seating necessitated by the sight lines of the three-dimensional set, the audience experiences less aesthetic and emotional pleasure.

The auxiliary services, the third aspect of the physical facilities, also contribute to the enjoyment of the spectators. Most of the productions have built or leased amphitheatre areas that are accommodating and appropriate for the performances; however, some of the productions need to upgrade areas such as restrooms, concession areas, ticket offices and parking arrangements. Because the vast majority of viewers have visited other entertainment venues, i.e., theme parks or other major tourist attractions, they have come to expect first class accommodations from anything billed as a public production or entertainment.
Of the current productions, the facilities of The Black Hills Passion Play in an orange grove in Lake Wales, Florida need the most extensive upgrading. Nothing appears to have been improved since the facility was first constructed; with Disney World, Epcot, MGM and Sea World only a few miles down the road, the contrast is more noticeable. The Black Hills Passion Play site sustains a 1950s ambiance in its ticket office, its small concession area, and restrooms. While the organization may be trying to avoid changing with the times, an audience member's initial encounter makes him feel that he is attending an outmoded and outdated event. Such constraints limit both the instruction and pleasure of the presentation.

The other production that faces major problems relevant to their facilities is The Louisiana Passion Play. As mentioned earlier, the physical facilities for this production were very poor. By producing the play in an unfinished set (with piles of trash around) with temporary stadium bleachers, the audience's expectation of a quality performance was dashed before the production even began. Second rate auxiliary spaces did nothing to offset this impression. While the show itself may have been partially successful in instructing its audience the amenities were far less than pleasing.

On the other hand, The Great Passion Play, The Witness, Worthy Is the Lamb, and The Promise all maintain
first-class complexes. From offering a shuttle to the amphitheatre from the parking lots (as do The Great Passion Play and The Witness) to operating pleasant gift shops and concession areas, these productions immediately make a good impression on the audience members, even before the productions begin. Upon meeting such commodious services, audience members are already at ease and ready for the show's instruction/entertainment.

One final factor that impacts how the audiences receive a production involves the company's casting policy. In some productions professional actors are hired; however, most use volunteers from the community. These amateurs are then placed under the tutelage and guidance of a director, who may or may not have received theatrical training. All of the casts are interdenominational, representing the spectrum of denominations from evangelicals to Mormons. As evident by such casting, the productions themselves have become ecumenical events.

Most of these productions operate as community efforts, and pleasure and education are received by both participants and spectators. And while the productions themselves may not be performed in the most professional way possible, they are looked upon with pride by those involved. Horace himself said that he would "not stumble
at a few blemishes that are due to carelessness or that the weakness of human nature has failed to guard against."\textsuperscript{133}

To conclude one may ask, based on the development and physical facilities of the eight productions, which outdoor passion plays best fulfill Horace's dictum of combining the delightful and the useful? From the examination thus far, one finds that The Great Passion Play, Worthy Is the Lamb, and The Promise exhibit the greatest advantages. These productions seek to present a quality production in a pleasing facility. On the other hand, The Black Hills Passion Play of Lake Wales and The Louisiana Passion Play present the poorest quality and suffer from dilapidated physical facilities.

The information in this chapter surveys the general development of each of these eight plays. But much more can be gained from further study. Investigations could be conducted in several areas—for example, the matter of how each production has been received in the surrounding community and how each play has affected outlying areas. Also of interest would be a comparison of volunteer casts with paid casts and the degree to which salary affects performances. In addition, if one could access the financial statements of each production, it would prove interesting to learn how the monies generated by the more

financially successful productions are being turned back into the organizations (or being spent). Certainly, many areas of inquiry regarding the American outdoor passion play recommend further study.
CHAPTER III

COMPARISON OF THE CURRENT OUTDOOR PASSION PLAYS WITH THE EUROPEAN, CONTINENTAL TRADITION

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the ways in which the medieval passion plays sought to teach their audiences the biblical story of Christ while entertaining them as well. Examining the materials and methods of the medieval productions will make it easier to assess properly the American versions of the passion play. But before evaluating the strategies and devices, it is helpful to understand how the medieval passion play developed, how its pattern, structure and methods emerged, and how it was received by its medieval audiences.

How did the plays adjust their presentations to meet the expectations of the audiences? How did they keep their traditional material fresh and appealing? Only after investigating such matters and establishing a basic model of the medieval religious drama can we begin to evaluate how the American plays have followed or deviated from the medieval traditions. Elements to be assessed include the selection of scenes, plot development, the choice of characters, the use of the vernacular, and incorporation of special effects.
First, a model text must be chosen for reference. Determining the most appropriate model, though, involves an extensive examination of the plays available. Although an in-depth discussion of medieval drama is not the focus of this dissertation, before evaluating the American productions, an understanding of the content and construction of the passion play scripts written in the continental tradition is necessary. To make absolute statements pertaining to all the medieval passion plays would pose an impossible task, since, as indicated earlier, only a few extant fragments, texts, and translations are available (and exceptions to general practices can always be found). Nonetheless, the study will select a representative medieval passion and utilize it for reference.

The term passion play may be defined several ways. The most literal or strictest interpretation limits the scenes depicted to those events occurring during the week of Christ's Crucifixion. Karl Young observes that the continental passion plays, as opposed to the English cycle plays, limited their content to these incidents developed in the gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.1 While this is true for most of the earlier extant continental scripts, later passion plays stepped beyond the narrow parameters and included other scenes from the Old Testament and

1 Young 516.
apocryphal works—albeit, the major portions of the plays remained devoted to episodes of the Passion week.

The first step in determining a rudimentary passion play model involves tracing the play's textual development. Unfortunately, early fragments permit only limited observations. We do know, however, that scenes depicting Judas' betrayal, the Last Supper, the trial, the Crucifixion (with the Virgin's Lament), and Joseph of Arimathaea's request do appear in each fragment, suggesting a nucleus of inclusive scenes.

Looking at the complete French scripts from the fifteenth century provides more insight into the content of passion plays at the time of their greatest popularity. The earliest script opens with the New Testament scenes of Christ's entry into Jerusalem and continues through the significant events of the passion week, including episodes about Mary Magdalene, the Last Supper, the garden, the trial, the Crucifixion, and the announcement of the resurrection to Peter. By regarding these scenes in

2 The French passion plays La Passion de Semur, La Passion D'Arras by Mercadé and Le Mystère de la Passion by Arnoul Greban are primary examples of these additional scenes. Grace Frank, The Medieval French Drama (Oxford: Clarendon, 1960) 176-184.

3 This reference is to the Montecassino script and the Carmina Burana manuscript. Sticca 134-137.

4 Additional scenes including the call of Peter and Andrew, the raising of Lazarus, the conversion of Mary Magdalene, and Procula's dream would be found in one of the Latin plays, but not in all three. Sticca 139.

5 La Passion du Palatinus was written in the fourteenth century. Frank 126-127.
addition to those discovered in the fragments, one may observe the passion play formula taking shape. Each of the scenes involves significant gospel material; yet most also have a principle dramatic moment that generates a strong audience appeal.

The later French plays also focus primarily on the life of Christ and passion episodes; however, two plays stand as exceptions. One includes scenes from the Creation, while another depicts scenes in Heaven where the Trinity discusses the redemptive plan for mankind; a later sequence shows Christ's welcome home after the resurrection. At this time a new structure also emerged as the play was divided into four major sections—the depiction of Christ's early years, his life's ministry, the passion, and the resurrection and ascension. This design not only characterizes most of the medieval passion plays but remains evident in many of the American passion plays of the twentieth century.

The two most famous fifteenth century French passions, the La Mystère de la Passion by Arnoul Greban and the Passion by Jean Michel, follow much of the same pattern. Greban, however, incorporates a limited amount of Old Testament material; Michel, conversely, eliminates Old Testament material. 

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6 La Passion de Semur departs from the typical passion week structure to incorporate material on the Creation. Eustache Mercadé framed La Passion d'Arras with scenes from Heaven and divided the play into four sections.

7 Frank 176-180.
Testament passages and focuses instead on the person of Christ, from his Baptism to the crucifixion. This framework includes the basic features of Christ's life necessary to maximize the play's dramatic potential and the gospel story's spiritual appeal. We will see that the American plays closely follow the direction taken by Jean Michel in the French passion play.

Elsewhere in Europe, specifically Germany, the St. Gall Passion emerged as another text exemplifying the continental drama's focus on the life of Christ. Like the episodes in Michel's play, the majority of scenes in this German play are drawn from Christ's ministry, combined with the trials and crucifixion.

Although it may be surmised that the writers of the passion plays simply followed the scriptural references and chronology for their texts, other explanations are possible. As in the case of the St. Gall passion play, the author may have borrowed a text from another locale and edited it for his own purpose. Obviously the writers of religious drama soon discovered that certain scenes played better than others and were more effective in both their didactic and entertainment appeal.

While examples of passion plays using Old Testament material do exist, research on the French, Italian, and

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8 Vince, *Companion* 137.

9 West 40.
German practices supports the general claim that the continental plays primarily focused on the events of the passion week.\textsuperscript{10} We may assume that the same held true for passion plays in Spain, though the lack of edited extant scripts limits the discussion.\textsuperscript{11}

In England the same focus on the passion week is also reflected in the Cornish cycle, the ordinalia, which does not follow the pattern of the episodic English cycle plays. It differs from the cycle plays primarily in its three-part division (as opposed to numerous episodes), and in its structural use of prologues and epilogues.\textsuperscript{12} The ordinalia has also followed the form of the later continental plays with its interlocking of characters and episodes that focus on the overall theme of redemption.\textsuperscript{13} This fluid story progression likewise mimics the continental drama.\textsuperscript{14}

Finally, the ordinalia resembles the continental plays in its focus on the life of Christ. It takes up Christ's story with the Temptation, a scene that well portrays the


\textsuperscript{11} Surtz 195.

\textsuperscript{12} Frank 181-184.


divinity of Christ and his power over Satan, and it ends positively, with the Resurrection and Ascension of Christ (rather than the last judgment). Whereas the purpose of the English cycles was to convey the scope of sacred history from Creation to the final Judgment, the joyous and triumphant ending of the Ordinalia declares that Christ's mission has been fulfilled and that man's guilt has been absolved. This uplifting ending stirred audiences and effectively taught the audience the biblical account of the Resurrection and Ascension through its exceptional dramatic qualities. Consequently, the Ordinalia more closely adheres to the pattern of the continental passion plays than the English cycle plays.

Differentiating between the scope and content of the English Corpus Christi plays and the continental passion plays is made more difficult because of the numerous exceptions and the new evidence that challenges past examinations. Formerly, medieval scholars focused more on national boundaries; however, with renewed interest in the period and in the revival of medieval plays, such parameters are being redefined. Robert Potter, medieval drama scholar, opines that


16 These are frequently noted and updated by Peter Greenfield in Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama.
new ecumenical circumstances . . . are compelling us to consider our English dramatic texts as part of a wider and more complex tradition, more truly representative of the international reality of late medieval European culture.\(^{17}\)

As a result, no longer can a play be categorized as a "typical" English Corpus Christi play or a "typical" continental passion play.

Thus, we may use generalizations about the scope and content of the plays to our specific purposes, knowing full well that no exact formula exists. Nor may we assume that the organization of scenes in one particular play can lead to deductions pertaining to other similar plays. It is with this understanding that this study evaluates the passion play tradition.

In general terms, the English Corpus Christi plays encompass a larger range of scenes, providing more opportunities for the various guilds to participate in the productions. These plays opened with Old Testament scenes of the Creation and Fall, and concluded with scenes of the Judgment or Doomsday destruction—obviously such scenes are inherently and profoundly dramatic. These plays focus on teaching God's cosmological plan of salvation for mankind and thus required a wider range of material. However, the fact that some of the plays followed this outline does not necessarily mean that was true for all. In a recent medieval theatre survey John Wesley Harris notes that

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\(^{17}\) Potter 41.
it must be realized that the English play cycle, bound together by theological intention, figura, and the seven ages theory of sacred history, was merely the favoured form of the British Isles, and by no means the only way in which a cycle of Biblical plays could be constructed.\textsuperscript{18}

The Catholic influence also proved a determining factor in the selection of scenes for the English cycle plays. When the leadership of England shifted toward Protestantism with the ascension of Queen Elizabeth to the throne in 1558, the elimination of the cycle scenes like the "Assumption of the Virgin" soon followed.\textsuperscript{19} In short, those scenes that expressed Roman Catholic dogma were suppressed, accounting for another difference between the Corpus Christi plays and the continental passion plays.

While the "typical" religious plays of England taught audiences by focusing on a broad spectrum of episodes concerning man's place in sacred history, the "typical" continental passion plays focused more narrowly, emphasizing Christ's suffering for mankind. Rosemary Woolf, English theatre scholar, makes an important observation about the English cycle plays and the later passion plays of Europe:

\begin{quote}
a new form has undoubtedly emerged: it is neither a play on the history of the Redemption, nor a Passion play of the traditional kind (which, as we have seen, should begin at some
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{18} J. W. Harris 105.

\textsuperscript{19} V. A. Kolve, \textit{The Play Called Corpus Christi} (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1966) 52.
point in the ministry of Christ), but a play on the life of Christ.\footnote{Rosemary Woolf, \textit{The English Mystery Plays} (London: Routledge, 1972) 66.}

In both instances religious instruction was cast in an entertaining form.

Whatever the formula used by the passion plays in the medieval period, the performances were successful in both their profit and delight. Although information on the medieval continental plays is not easily accessible, some well-documented accounts refer to passion play performances at Mons (1501), Valenciennes (1547), and Lucerne (1583).\footnote{For more information on the documentation available for these performances, see Ronald W. Vince, \textit{Ancient and Medieval Theatre: A Historiographical Handbook} (New York: Greenwood, 1984) 103-105.}

City records, prompt books, manuscripts and stage plans allow us glimpses of these later passion performances, which were often very long, yet quite entertaining.

Especially notable in the records are references to the use of special effects, i.e., in the Mons play Christ and the devil were raised to the top of the Temple, and in the Valenciennes play an entire prison tower was raised.\footnote{J. W. Harris 155.}

This incorporation of special effects no doubt appealed to the audience delight in spectacle. Furthermore, with an increased focus on Christ’s suffering, instances of on-
stage beatings and scourgings became more realistic in their presentation.\textsuperscript{23}

Despite such documentation, full texts of the plays are not readily available. In Mons, for example, it is assumed that the text was Greban's, yet some additions from Michel's play may have been added. And in Lucerne, only a fragment exists. Basically, we can only assume that certain biblical scenes were included to instruct the audiences in the story of Christ's life, death, and resurrection.

Based then on general information relevant to the selection of scenes, this study has found that the American passion displays more similarities to the continental passion play than the English cycles (with the Cornish Ordinalia the principal exception).

At this point my study will examine an English translation of the early fourteenth century St. Gall Passion and discuss how the continental passion play effectively instructed and entertained its medieval audiences. This analysis will be supplemented by occasional comments about the Oberammergau passion play.

The principle reason that the Oberammergau script is not being used as the passion play model stems from the fact that the play is actually an amalgam of three different texts compiled in 1634; portions of two fifteenth

\textsuperscript{23} West 21.
and sixteenth century passion plays from Augsburg and one
sixteenth century play from Weilheim make up the text.\textsuperscript{24}
Thus, though the Oberammergau passion play is medieval in
its tone and content, it is not considered a true medieval
work. For this reason the Oberammergau passion, written in
the seventeenth century, does not genuinely represent the
passion plays performed at the height of the medieval
period.

One must acknowledge, however, that most of the
American passion play producers view the Oberammergau play
as a standard reference point when they discuss their
current productions. This is because Oberammergau is the
most well-known passion play, enjoying a tradition of
performance that spans 350 years, bringing in thousands of
tourist dollars each year. As a result, producers seek
success by imitation or association. By claiming that
their contemporary productions are "like the Oberammergau
passion play," the organizations hope to bolster attendance
and assure acclaim for their own plays.

In overlooking the Oberammergau passion play as this
study's principle reference, it is important to understand
the reasons for selecting the St. Gall play as the best
"example" of a medieval play. One reason relates to the
length of the play. Larry West notes that this piece can

\textsuperscript{24} Eric Lane and Ian Brenson, \textit{The Oberammergau Passion Play}

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be performed in one day, probably making it one of the shorter passion plays.\textsuperscript{25} (Later plays lasted much longer).\textsuperscript{26} As the outdoor passion plays in America average two to two and a half hours, the St. Gall play more closely approximates that running time (the Oberammergau play lasts around six hours, allowing for a lunch break between the two acts). The St. Gall play, moreover, represents a shorter transitional play that spans the gap between the early liturgical dramas and the later vernacular plays.\textsuperscript{27}

The second reason for using the St. Gall play involves the scenic structure of the work. For example, the St. Gall play, like most of the American plays, uses no scenes from the Old Testament but rather begins the play with the miracle of Christ turning water into wine.\textsuperscript{28} (Conversely, the Oberammergau play frequently incorporates Old Testament tableaux).

A third matter relates to the tone of the scenes in the St. Gall play. During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when the secularization of the passion plays peaked, humor played a significant role in the entertainment success of the plays. While there are a few moments of humor in the St. Gall play, the piece follows

\textsuperscript{25} West 38.

\textsuperscript{26} The passion play at Valenciennes in 1547 lasted twenty-five days. Vince, \textit{Companion} 367.

\textsuperscript{27} West 38.

\textsuperscript{28} West 52-53.
the earlier tradition and maintains an overall seriousness.29 This reverent attitude generally characterizes most American passion plays, whose writers have also limited opportunities for comic effects.

The fact that the principal scenes in both the St. Gall and the American plays rest primarily on the gospel accounts also argues for the St. Gall play as an appropriate reference. Some writers of medieval passion plays introduced material from other passion play scripts, in essence, retooling their scripts from parts of others. As mentioned earlier, the Oberammergau play verifies this practice.30

However, according to West, it cannot be determined that the author of the St. Gall play drew upon additional sources: "In the end, the only sources which can be substantiated are the Gospel accounts themselves and liturgical ceremonials . . . ."31 While the American plays may take some liberties with the biblical account, all the plays consider Scripture their exclusive source. In this regard, both the St. Gall and American passion plays appear less diluted by non-biblical depictions and anecdotes.

What then do the St. Gall play and their contemporary American passion plays hold in common? Can an effective

29 West 48, 78, 90-91.
30 Lane 28.
31 West 40.
dramatic formula emerge that inculcates its audience in the principles of the faith while simultaneously providing intrigue, suspense, and spectacle?

Based upon my study of these plays, I have determined five aspects of the plays that can serve as critical touchstones: the content of the opening scenes, the choice of scenes included for presentation, the character development, the presence or absence of the Roman Catholic influence, and, finally, the framing of the play's conclusion. Have the choices made by the St. Gall play and the American plays enhanced their didactic purpose, and have these choices provided means for increasing the work's entertainment value? What can we learn about the plays aims and goals vis-à-vis teaching/evangelizing as a result of such analysis?

In approaching this component of my study I examined the text of the St. Gall translation along with scripts, video tapes, and personal observations of the American plays. Unfortunately, some of the American passion plays did not make their scripts/scores available. The Louisiana Passion Play, The Living Word, and The Promise supplied scripts, while The Great Passion Play, Jesus of Nazareth, and Worthy Is the Lamb provided video tapes. In addition, The Living Word and The Promise sent copies of video tapes. However, neither The Black Hills Passion Play nor The Witness were forthcoming with scripts or scores. Direct
references to these plays will thus be based on my personal observations of their performances.

A dominant element in the scripting of a passion play concerns the selection of material for the play's opening. Choices in this matter provide an important clue to the aims of the productions and thus merit close examination. One point quickly becomes clear—the more the plays diverge from the traditional passion play model at the beginning, the more they will depart later on. In short, understanding how each of the American passion plays formulates its opening illuminates the production's overall goal, methodology, and direction.

Representing the continental tradition, the St. Gall play opens with a prologue by the character, Augustine, who declares the purpose of the play and introduces the first scene with a direct address to the audience:

Hear now, o holy Christendom: today you shall witness how the Creator of all the world, with signs visible, thereunto with holy teachings and with great suffering, wandered upon the earth and was tortured for your sake.32

From that point, the play immediately moves to New Testament scenes, one depicting the first recorded miracle of Christ turning the water into wine at the marriage in Cana, and the second emphasizing the ministry of John the Baptist, the harbinger of Christ.33 This strategy--

32 West 51.
33 West 51-53.
offering a prologue followed by scenes of Christ's ministry—characterizes most, although not all, of the American plays. While the use of prologues is quite common, the content and mode of presentation vary considerably.

In contemporary performances, the prologues may give a monologue to the audience, present selected passages of scripture from either the Old or New Testaments, or supply narrative historical background pertinent to the play. Monologues are employed by both The Black Hills Passion Play and The Witness. Of the two, The Black Hills Passion Play more closely follows the St. Gall, play using a character to address the audience directly. In The Black Hills Passion Play's prologue, Christus, the traditional name of the Christ figure, encourages the audience to "strengthen thy belief in the divinity of God!"\(^{34}\) The introduction segues into a bustling street scene depicting Jerusalem on the morning prior to Christ's Triumphal Entry. Without reference to Christ's early ministry, the play focuses exclusively on the events of the passion week. The Witness follows a different strategy. In this work Christ is presented through the eyes of Peter, and it is then Peter who appears onstage before the opening scene and presents a monologue relating his relationship with the

\(^{34}\) Black Hills Passion Play, Souvenir Program (Spearfish, n.d.) N. pag.
Christ and exposition on Jesus' life story (including his birth and childhood).

Another use of the prologue is evidenced in certain American productions when select passages from scripture are quoted and used to launch the play's narrative line. These excerpts may be prophetic passages from the Old Testament (The Louisiana Passion Play) or verses from the New Testament (The Living Word). In the case of The Louisiana Passion Play, the passages from Psalms and Isaiah emphasize the despair of man as he searches for hope in a troubled world.\(^{35}\) Words of salvation come from the prophet Isaiah, who foretells Christ's lineage, circumstances of his birth, and his name.\(^{36}\) Only then does the focus turn to Bethlehem, when the prologue leads into the scene of Mary and Joseph searching for the evening's quarters.

The Living Word uses pre-recorded opening verses from the Gospel of John to establish the theme of the production, that is, Christ as the Word, the Living Word—God in the flesh.\(^{37}\) The verses serve as a transition to the nativity tableau followed by a depiction of the young Jesus teaching in the temple.\(^{38}\) Immediately following, the dialogue of the play commences with a scene similar to that

\(^{35}\) Psalm 69:1-3.

\(^{36}\) Isaiah 11:1; Isaiah 7:14; Isaiah 9:6.


found in the St. Gall play—John the Baptist preaching to the people on a Judaean hillside.39

The third type of prologue used in the American productions conveys narrative historical background. Worthy Is the Lamb introduces the performance with a recorded prologue that tells of the Jews in the city of Jerusalem and their hope for the (long-awaited) Messiah as prophesied in the Old Testament.40 The play focuses on their anticipation of the Messiah who will release them from Roman oppression and emphasizes that the worthy Lamb, Jesus Christ, came to give spiritual freedom to His people. As the prologue ends, townsfolk fill the streets of the city, attentive to their morning chores of selling, trading, and washing, and, as in the St. Gall play, John the Baptist enters the city proclaiming the coming of the Christ.

But the prologue is only one means of initiating the passion play's movement. Other American plays jump immediately into the action of a scene. Sometimes, this involves an event from the biblical period; other times a contemporary situation is used. Three of the productions use this "in the middle of things" method to seize audience attention: The Promise, The Great Passion Play, and Jesus

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40 Worthy is the Lamb, videocassette, Great Commission Production Company, n.d.
of Nazareth. In The Promise, the opening combines a prologue and dramatic action. After passing an old cemetery, a grandfather accompanied by two grandchildren begins discussing the life cycle of birth and death. The discussion then shifts to the most anticipated birth of all time—the birth of the Christ—then to the prophets in the Old Testament who foretold his coming. During their discussion the prophets Jeremiah, Isaiah, Micah, and Zechariah appear and issue their prophetic messages; this is the only Old Testament scene incorporated into any of the American plays. The scene of Christ's nativity then follows the prophesies.

The Great Passion Play begins with Roman soldiers on their morning watch while the city of Jerusalem awakens. The soldiers anticipate that the arrival of Pontius Pilate may create a stir in the city. Without any references to the prophets or birth of the Christ, the play thrusts the audience into an immediate situation of tension and unrest.

Jesus of Nazareth starts with the most action-packed scene of the various productions as the criminal Barabbas and his band of thieves jump a Roman soldier and steal his money. This occurrence sets up a series of theatrically

42 Jeremiah 23:5-6; Isaiah 7:14-15; Micah 5:2,4; Zechariah 9:9-10.
related events that carry throughout the production. Once the opening chase leaves the hillside, focus shifts to the priests in the Sanhedrin counsel expressing their concerns about the Christ who is creating unrest among the Jews. 

Thus, we see that the American plays begin either with a type of prologue or move immediately into an opening action sequence. By and large, most of the American plays, like the St. Gall play, begin with New Testament material, with five of them making a reference to the nativity of Christ. This allusion manifests itself in the form of actual scenic dramatizations, as in The Promise and Worthy Is the Lamb, or a simple tableaux vivant, as in The Living Word, The Witness and The Louisiana Passion Play.

Since both The Black Hills Passion Play and The Great Passion Play primarily focus on the passion week of Christ's life, the nativity scene is unnecessary. Jesus of Nazareth, though it covers more than the events of the passion week, begins with the preaching of John the Baptist and does not trace the life of Christ from his birth.

Given these various alternatives, how do the opening scenes help define the intent and subsequent course of the production? In light of the above examples, it is apparent that both the prologues and the opening action scenes have their own advantages. The prologues work either to provide

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44 Jesus of Nazareth, videocassette, Covenant Celebration Church, 1993.
exposition for the story, which some of the audience members may not know, or to define more clearly the theme and direction of the play. In both instances, as in the St. Gall play, the prologue functions as a rhetorical device that most often teaches more than it pleases.

On the other hand, the plays that begin with action scenes assume that the audience is already familiar with the biblical story and present very little, if any, exposition. In these productions, as observed in the above examples, greater emphasis falls on the entertainment aspect. It is hence no coincidence that the three plays which use this method for opening the production are also the ones that incorporate the most special effects: The Promise, The Great Passion Play, and Jesus of Nazareth.

While both opening strategies are effective, for the contemporary audience, the latter catches the interest and attention better than a prologue. Although the prologue is a more traditional method of opening a passion play, it is a rhetorical device that seems outdated, and, in this light, it may have lost its usefulness. Certainly, the other productions capture audience interest more effectively.

A second major decision for producers of the passion play concerns the subject, number and order of the scenes that follow. Once the opening scene has been established, a logic of ensuing scenes must be evident. According to
West, most of the medieval passion plays used the following scenes (though not necessarily in this order):

1. Jesus' meal at the home of Simon the Pharisee.
2. Representative miracles of Jesus, most frequently the raising of Lazarus from the dead.
3. Jesus' entry into Jerusalem.
4. The Jews in counsel in several scenes throughout the play.
5. Judas' betrayal of Jesus.
6. The Last Supper.
7. Jesus' capture.
8. Peter's denial of Jesus.
10. The crucifixion.
11. The burial.
12. One or more Easter play scenes.\(^{45}\)

The St. Gall play incorporates all these scenes along with a few others prior to the passion week. After the preaching of John the Baptist and the baptism of Christ, the action of the St. Gall play shifts to the temptation of Christ in the wilderness.\(^{46}\) Following the temptation, the author presents a number of scenes from Christ's ministry that precede events of the passion week: the calling of the disciples, the confrontation with the woman taken in adultery, the repentance of Mary Magdalene, the anointing of Christ's feet with oil, the healing of the blind man, and, finally, the raising of his friend Lazarus from the tomb.\(^{47}\)

\(^{45}\) West 22.

\(^{46}\) West 55-60.

\(^{47}\) West 61-75.
Following the initial scenes in *Jesus of Nazareth*, *The Living Word*, *The Promise*, and *Worthy is the Lamb*, Christ is introduced, as in the St. Gall play, by having John the Baptist proclaim that one will follow him who shall be greater—Jesus the Christ. After their announcement, scenes follow depicting the ministry and miracles of Christ. In this way, John the Baptist and the background information he provides help set the stage for Christ's appearance and ministry.

As noted, most of the American plays' opening scenes allude to Christ's ministry on earth. And all of the plays devote some scenes to the ministry and miracles, albeit at different junctures within the scripts. Often these scenes of Christ's ministry focus on his compassion and humanity, while the scenes of his miraculous power establish his sovereignty and deity.

In selecting the scenes dramatizing Christ's ministry, *The Living Word*, *Worthy Is the Lamb*, and *The Promise* include excerpts from the Sermon on the Mount, as Christ blesses the children and instructs his followers.48 Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well occurs in *The Living Word*. *The Great Passion Play* and *The Living Word* depict Christ's meeting with Nicodemus, who inquired how he might enter the kingdom of God. Such scenes provide insight into the compassion of Christ and the purpose of

his ministry on earth. In both *The Promise*, and *Worthy Is the Lamb* Jesus displays his depth of love and emotion evidenced when he weeps at his friend Lazarus' tomb.

As important as the portrayal of Christ's compassion is the portrayal of his humanity. Christ exhibits a spectrum of emotions, including wrath and grief. Certain scenes presented in each of the plays emphasize this point. When Jesus drives the money-changers from the Temple, and when he rebukes the Pharisees who want the woman taken in adultery stoned, audiences see Christ's anger and the emotion that counterpoints his grief at the tomb of his friend.

Just as necessary in the productions are scenes that validate Christ's deity and sovereignty. Christ's miracles are thus highlighted. While the St. Gall play includes the first recorded miracle—Jesus turning the water into wine, the American plays more often foreground the healing of the blind beggar or the casting out of the legions of demons from the Gadarene. These miracle sequences lend themselves to stage histrionics far more than the water/wine business—involving only the splashing of water

49 John 3:1-21; 4:5-42.
50 John 11:1-44.
and pouring of wine—and give opportunity for the use of spectacular visual and scenic effects.

Each of the American plays incorporate Christ's ministry and miracles into the opening scenes. Similar to the St. Gall Passion Play, the American productions dedicate approximately one third of the playing time to these preliminary scenes, then two thirds to the passion and resurrection. Exceptions are The Black Hills Passion Play and The Great Passion Play, which only briefly refer to scenes from Christ's ministry.

Since both plays focus on the passion week, each incorporates miracles that occurred around the time of the triumphal entry, or immediately thereafter. In The Black Hills Passion Play the Christus heals the blind man before walking to the temple, where he casts out the money changers. In a similar way, after his triumphal entry in The Great Passion Play, Christ proceeds to the temple followed by the masses of adults and children. Upon reaching the steps he first gathers and blesses the children, heals the sick, and restores sight to the blind beggar (before cleansing the temple of the money changers).³³

The passion week in the St. Gall play begins like the majority of the medieval passion plays, with the triumphal

entry of Christ into the city of Jerusalem. These scenes following Christ's arrival include all of those listed by West: the scourging, Pilate's wife's dream, Joseph of Arimathaea's request for the body of Christ, and the Ascension of Christ. While the first two scenes primarily supply exposition, the last one certainly allows opportunity for a pleasing experience generated through its dramatic presentation for the audience.

In a similar fashion, the American plays closely follow the events of the passion week evidenced in the medieval plays (compiled from the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John). Each of the plays follows the biblical chronology, incorporating scenes of the triumphal entry, the last supper, Gethsemane, the Sanhedrin Court, the trial before Pilate, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection, and Ascension. These are the familiar elements of Christ's story, and the American audience expects to see such events on stage. In the production of the American passion play, the sequencing of these episodes alternates between those which teach and those which entertain.

The most noted differences in the scenic structure of the passion plays appear in the interim between the Gethsemane and Crucifixion scenes, specifically, Christ's trials before Pontius Pilate and the eccentric Herod.

54 West 80.

55 Appendix.
Antipas, and the ensuing scourging. The scene when Christ comes before Herod, recorded only in the gospel of Luke, appears on stage much altered from the biblical account. Most of the American plays make reference to Herod; however, only a few of them actually develop scenes with him on stage. The Black Hills Passion Play, The Great Passion Play, The Living Word, and The Promise are the only plays that include scenes where the soldiers bring Christ for an interrogation before the eccentric Galilean ruler. The scripture records that Christ said nothing to Herod; thus the scene is dramatically effective only when the strength of Christ's silence contrasts to the words of Herod.

Other plays handle the scene differently. In both Jesus of Nazareth and Worthy is the Lamb, Pilate makes a passing remark that Christ should be taken to Herod, but nothing happens. Pilate simply continues speaking to the crowd which has gathered, accusing Christ of blasphemy. Another approach to the scene is found in The Louisiana Passion Play. In this work, Pilate sends Christ to Herod, but the audience does not witness the encounter; instead, after only a few lines of dialogue, the soldiers return


57 JON video; WL video.
with Christ reporting Herod's refusal to act on his behalf.\textsuperscript{58}

Scenes of the scourging of Christ also vary with the productions. While The Black Hills Passion Play reveals only a tableau of a Roman soldier poised with a whip in his hand, ready to scourge the fully clothed Christ, The Promise, The Great Passion Play and The Louisiana Passion Play stage the scene with Christ being stripped of his robe and beaten.\textsuperscript{59} In The Great Passion Play and The Louisiana Passion Play, soldiers tie Christ to a whipping post; then he is forced to drag the wooden cross upon his back as he makes his way to Golgotha.

Examination of these episodes suggests that the productions select a cross section of scenes that both teach and entertain in varying degrees. All the passion plays have chosen the most familiar scenes, those that are expected by the audiences; however, some of the plays have included unanticipated scenes that enhance either the instruction or the entertainment. For example, scenes including the Sermon on the Mount, the Samaritan woman, and Nicodemus put greater focus on indoctrination and evangelism, since the content of the scenes articulates the

\textsuperscript{58} James Burns and Mark Hutto, The Louisiana Passion Play, script (Calhoun, LA: 1993) 28-29.

\textsuperscript{59} GPP video.
gospel in a straightforward way as the plan for man's salvation.

Conversely, the scenes of Lazarus' resurrection, Herod Antipas' interrogation, and Jesus' miracles offer more opportunities for entertainment. In announcing how Lazarus died, then showing him come back to life, the play dazzles its audiences. Similarly, the histrionics of the eccentric Herod and the fantastic quality of the miracles contribute to a theatricality that pleases the audience. (The next chapter will note how these scenes also lend themselves to the use of special effects).

In general the America passion plays have tried to honor the biblical account and balance teaching with entertaining. Nevertheless, some productions have become rather enchanted with the apparatus of scenic technology. In some cases, the technical capacity of the production informs the content and sequencing of episodes. Those plays more inclined to "dazzle" develop the scenes which provide the opportunity to do so. Conversely, the productions that do not have the sophistication or the expertise avoid certain scenes and downplay the use of special effects.

Thus far we have seen how both the American plays and the St. Gall play in their opening scenes, and in their choice of principal episodes, have created drama that simultaneously instructs and delights. A third aspect that
illuminates the rhetorical aims of the passion plays concerns the selection and development of specific characters.

Some scripts allow for very little character development outside of the scriptural accounts, while others extrapolate in a liberal fashion. The St. Gall play demonstrates very limited character development and does not range far beyond the New Testament accounts. The roles of Mary Magdalene, Martha, the blind man, and Rufus, nonetheless, exhibit a minimum effort towards character complexity.60

Through the incorporation of original dialogue and the creation of new characters, several of the American passion plays have embellished the gospel narratives. For example, The Black Hills Passion Play develops the character of Judas Iscariot by adding a monologue spoken directly to the audience (after he has betrayed Christ to the high priests and received the thirty pieces of silver). In this speech, he tries rationalizing his decision but soon admits his grave mistake. Believing that he cannot expunge his guilt, he removes the rope belt from his waist and exits to hang himself.61 This method of presenting Judas to the audience is profoundly didactic and thus is in keeping with the

60 West 45-46.
rhetorical aim and purpose of this medieval-based script and production.

Further character investigation is also evident in one of the more contemporary American passion plays, *Jesus of Nazareth*, which creates a story line for the character of Barabbas that runs throughout the play. From the opening moments when he attacks a Roman soldier, Barabbas is seen inciting trouble, stealing and urging the crowds to insurrection against the Roman rulers. These episodes, while not directly drawn from scripture, reveal the sinister doings of Barabbas and help establish the diametric contrast that appears between him and Christ when Pilate calls for the release of one prisoner. The people call for the malefactor Barabbas instead of Christ, even though Pilate acknowledged Christ had done no wrong.

The full impact of the Barabbas narrative reaches a climax when he appears on the hillside of Golgotha at Christ's crucifixion. As the Roman soldiers nail Christ to the cross, Barabbas furtively scales the hill to look at the man who took his place. In one of the most poignant moments in any of the outdoor passion plays, a Roman soldier recognizes Barabbas, seizes him, and orders him to take a good look as they nail Christ to the cross, for the one on the cross should have been him. These lines stand

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as the most powerful and emotionally charged of any in the production. Fictional yet plausible, the series of events in the life of Barabbas adds freshness and novelty to the passion play. This character no doubt contributes much to the emotional effectiveness of the piece.

The Promise is another American play that utilizes a character in an unexpected manner. Surprisingly, this character has no lines whatsoever—it is Satan, whose malignant force is present on stage from the temptation of Christ to the resurrection. According to the biblical account, when Christ repudiated the lies of Satan in the wilderness, the devil "departed from him for a season." In The Promise, Satan returns to the stage following the temptation and works his pernicious ways through the remaining scenes. The audience does not hear him speak, though it senses his demonic presence and recognizes his relationship with those who denounce Christ or reject his teachings, i.e., Judas Iscariot, the Sanhedrin Council and Peter.

As the play progresses, an increasingly more confident Satan tempts Judas to betray Christ and prompts Peter to deny Christ. Finally, filled with all the pride of his anticipated triumph, he dances with joy at the Crucifixion.

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65 The Promise, by Jan Dargatz, Glen Rose, 3 July 1992.
After the Resurrection, however, Christ confronts Satan and through his divine power exiles Satan from the stage.66

The Promise also develops a group of characters in a way not found in any of the continental passion plays, or in any of its American counterparts. The play incorporates contemporary characters—a grandfather and his two grandchildren—who serve as narrators and establish a link between the events of the historical past and current everyday happenings (this device will be discussed at more length in the next chapter).

The Witness also employs a non-traditional strategy when it presents the passion of Christ as seen through the eyes of the disciple Peter. By developing the character of this figure, who so adamantly claimed steadfast devotion to Christ yet eventually denied him, the play invites the audience to experience the full range of Peter's emotions. Viewers first share his thrill while following Christ as a devoted disciple; they then, also, suffer his distress and agony following his infamous denial.67

Like Jesus of Nazareth and its use of the Barabbas figure, The Witness weaves a plausible narrative involving the character Peter within the recorded events of the New Testament. It differs from Jesus of Nazareth in that the

details and events of Christ's life receive less emphasis and attention.

Examination of the character development in the passion play leads to several conclusions. Those plays limiting themselves only to that which is recorded in scripture cannot be as creative in their presentations. While it is true that the plays may be less traditional in their approach when compared to the character depictions in *The Black Hills Passion Play*, the imaginative use of actual or fictional figures generates interest and frequently gives the audience a focal point to which it can relate. Although these plays teach about the life of Christ they also engage their audiences in a different way and thus shed new light on a very familiar story.

The American passion plays that attempted novel characterizations maintained a very high interest level throughout their performances. In fact, the unique treatment of such characters sparked many positive comments. Provided that writers cleverly meld such innovative devices with the traditional passion story, this method of presenting biblical material can continue to work well. Currently, *The Promise* is the production that uses this strategy most effectively.

The fourth touchstone concerns the manner in which the respective passion plays handle Roman Catholic content or traditions. While possibly not as important as other
rhetorical matters, the issue of Catholicism merits consideration, especially in light of America's cultural makeup.

The historical roots of the passion play can be traced back to the Roman Catholic Church, the dominant religious instruction during the medieval period. As such, the church desired to promulgate biblical doctrines and utilized the drama as a means for doing so. But Roman Catholicism has never been the principal religion in America. As mentioned earlier, medieval playwrights often included liturgical elements, i.e., the 'Depositio,' 'Elevatio,' and 'Visitatio.' For the most part these Romans Catholic elements in the medieval drama have not been as integrated into the American plays, a feature that marks the greatest point of difference between the medieval passion play and its contemporary counterpart.

Mary's lamentation at the cross often appears as one of the most characteristic liturgical elements in the passion play; however, West notes an irregularity in regard to the St. Gall play. This passage, along with other specific passages in the 1953 edition of the St. Gall play did not exist in the original. This observation leads to the conclusion that not all of the medieval plays included this very common liturgical element.69

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68 West 40.
69 West 37.
Of all the American passion plays, only *The Black Hills Passion Play* uses Roman Catholic imagery to any significant degree. But there are obvious reasons for this proclivity. Not only did the play originate in a Catholic monastery in Germany, but its translator Josef Meier was a devout Roman Catholic.\(^70\) Of special distinction in *The Black Hills Passion Play* is the lengthy lament of the Virgin Mary at the cross, which is reminiscent of the planctus in other continental medieval plays.

Another traditional Roman Catholic element of the continental plays is seen when Christ pauses to address the daughters of Jerusalem on his way to Golgotha; at this point, the woman of Turin steps forward to wipe his face with a cloth, and the imprint of his blood-stained features remains on the shroud.\(^71\) This scene, too, appears in *The Black Hills Passion Play*.

In the other American plays there is no notable emphasis on the lamentation of Mary at the cross. Some give her a brief passage of dialogue, but most only present her quietly sobbing with grief. Neither is the scene with the woman of Turin presented in the other contemporary American plays.

The Roman Catholic trappings are also de-emphasized due to the contemporary passion plays' ecumenical approach.

\(^{70}\) Meier, e-mail, 5 Dec. 1996.

\(^{71}\) BH, performance.
By adhering to a scripturally based text devoid of supplementary liturgical material, American productions have been able to reach a more diversified audience and increase the plays' entertainment value. Dismissing constraints of the Roman Catholic scenes, the plays have avoided the liturgical formality and offer a more audience-friendly product.

One can understand why these scenes have been limited or omitted when regarding the affiliation of the producing organization. Except for The Black Hills Passion Play, the plays are under the leadership of men and women from denominations other than the Roman Catholic Church. These individuals are members of Methodist, Baptist, Community, and Church of Christ denominations; some have non-denominational associations.

Although these plays do not include the Roman Catholic elements, most of the productions allow the involvement of performers from diverse religious backgrounds, and a broad spectrum is evident, from Roman Catholic to Mormon.

The fifth and final aspect of discussion, and the most important as far as Christianity is concerned, involves the selection for the concluding scenes of the plays. Passion plays on the life of Christ do not end like many other plays, that is, with the death of the main character; instead, these passion plays end with the resurrection of the principal figure. This concluding scene is essential
to the heart of Christianity, and because of its importance no passion play production can properly end without it. But due to the delicate nature of this scene unwise choices can easily undermine the entire experience of the production.

Returning to the St. Gall model, we note that the medieval play concludes with the Ascension. After the women discover the empty tomb, two of them leave to inform the disciples. Once Peter and the disciples realize that Christ has risen, Christ appears before them. The dramatist includes no lines of dialogue for Christ; however, the stage directions indicate that he exits to paradise.

Each of the American plays also ends with the Ascension of Christ; none of them include a Judgment or Doomsday scene. It is not the purpose of the plays to teach or preach that the end of the world is coming but that Christ the Messiah was crucified and resurrected to give hope to believers who live in this present day. In this light, the Ascension takes priority and is in fact mandatory for the plays to have the moral and inspirational impact that the productions intend.

In keeping with the medieval tradition (and in contrast with the other American plays), The Black Hills

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72 This is a distinct departure from the English cycle plays which ended with the judgment of the world.

73 West 122.
Passion Play gives Christ no dialogue in the Ascension scene. There is no obvious reason not to include dialogue since the parting words of Christ are recorded in the gospels, but The Black Hill Passion Play is committed to the medieval tradition and its closing tableau. Again, this decision emphasizes the didactic focus of this particular production.

Of all the plays, The Great Passion Play grants Christ the largest ascension speech. In this work, Christ leads his people to the top of the hillside before he ascends to heaven; there he encourages his followers and disciples to spread the gospel. 74 The lines combine several passages found in the Gospels (most from the book of Matthew); however, the lines are not directly quoted from the scriptures but are paraphrased. 75

The same passage from Matthew is used in the final scenes of Jesus of Nazareth, Worthy Is the Lamb, and The Promise. Two of the plays use combinations of passages. While The Louisiana Passion Play also concludes with the words of Christ, the writer takes selections from Luke and Acts in which Christ promises to rise the third day and challenges the disciples to spread his message to Jerusalem, Judæa, Samaria and the ends of the earth. 76

74 GPP, performance.

75 Matthew 28:18-20.

Living Word concludes with passages from Matthew and Luke that declare a similar message, but without the command to go into the specific regions.\textsuperscript{77}

Thus, all of the plays end with a message of hope based on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. While not everyone who attends these plays may have received religious instruction about Christ's ministry, they cannot help but be inspired by his life. Not only does the concluding scene uplift and inspire, it also encourages viewers to continue living their lives in the anticipation that he will return as he promised his followers.\textsuperscript{78}

Outside of its inspirational aspect, this final scene also holds great potential for entertainment. Except for The Black Hills Passion Play, all of the American plays attempt to theatricalize the Ascension, either by making it appear that Christ is ascending, or by actually creating the effect through the use of pulleys. The productions, it seems, strive to see how believable they can make this stage business appear. While some manage it effectively, others do not. When that happens, the impact of the instruction is lost as is the viewing pleasure (more will be noted about this in the next chapter).

While only The Black Hills Passion Play is solidly rooted in the medieval tradition, the other plays have


\textsuperscript{78} John 14:1-3.
followed a similar line of development consonant with continental passion plays. This chapter has examined the American passion plays vis-à-vis the fourteenth century St. Gall play, with the aim of assessing strategies and devices used in the service of teaching and pleasing; from this examination the following conclusions can be drawn.

To begin, we have seen that in the matter of content both the model medieval play and the American plays deviate little regarding the series of events portrayed (other than those in the opening scenes). All of the productions uphold the importance and value of instructing the audience in basic Christian tenets. Each of the plays has closely adhered to the accepted scriptural account, using the same basic scenes in the life of Christ, including his resurrection and ascension. This lack of deviation stems from the fact that none of the productions have ever sought to introduce material outside of the biblical account—for example, other events in Christ's life based solely on conjecture.

So while the purpose and basic content of the plays are the same for all the productions—to teach audiences and inspire them to follow the Christian tenets—the plays differ in the strategies they use to convey these teachings. Several plays begin with a strictly scriptural opening, while others choose introductions that allow more
dramatic presentation. By doing so they immediately capture the interest of the audience and entertain them.

Overall, the plays opening with more highly formalized passages present Christ’s story with more reverence and seriousness of purpose than those choosing a more novel approach (with an eye to entertain). This becomes more evident in consideration of choices pertaining to language or the textual methodology (discussed in the next chapter).

On the other hand, several of the plays have constructed scenes and enhanced supporting characters which capture attention and create a sense of novelty in the production. This is verified by those plays that have respectively developed the roles of Barabbas, Peter, Satan, and the grandfather; they have effectively capitalized on this strategic use of characters in both performances and advertising and promotional materials.

The plays, moreover, differ in their treatment of the passion plays’ principal characters. Those that are based solely on biblical account and closely use dialogue found in scripture are limited in dramatic development; however, those productions that have allowed greater creativity in their character portrayals better capture the audience’s attention and successfully bridge the gap between teaching and pleasing. Even Horace noted that “a play . . . with characters well drawn, even though it be void of charm,
force or artistic skill, delights the populace and holds their interest. . . . "  

In addition, the various passion plays have handled Roman Catholic material in different ways. Since Roman Catholicism was the dominant authority during the heyday of the passion plays, it was of course then unnecessary to adjust scenes so as not to offend the masses. But today's passion plays are performed before more diversified audiences and thus require appropriate adaptations. Close examination of the texts indicates that all but one of the American plays have departed significantly from the traditional model and eschew Roman Catholic references.  

Breaking with the Roman Catholic tradition allows the plays more freedom. Not associating with any one specific denomination permits the passion plays to reach out to larger audiences and greater numbers (with less fear of offending). In making this adjustment, the plays have become more accessible and thus more pleasing. This tactic helps bolster ticket sales and works to ensure the financial security and continuance of the production.  

Finally, then, what differentiates the medieval play and the American plays? Basically, the matter comes down to the degree of desire to teach and to please, or the balance of the two. While the medieval crowds could become rowdy during the performances, in general, they respected

79 Horace 74.
the church and were willing to receive religious instruction heretofore governed by the clergy and those schooled in Latin.

Having lived in a society where basic religious ideas are freely expressed, audiences today, while never behaving raucously during passion play performances, have lost much of their respect for the church and the things of God. Given the secular diversion of contemporary culture, current passion plays lean more toward entertaining the audience (as they teach about the church). Some plays have felicitously blended both elements together, while others have faltered in their attempts; some, in fact, present second-rate productions which labor to please.

The next chapter will examine these presentations more closely, looking into the ways the passion story is treated and mounted on stage. The chapter will note how the entertainment value of the productions is enhanced through various staging choices; in the process of this examination, we will discover what makes the American outdoor passion play a contemporary performance spectacle.
CHAPTER IV
TREATMENT OF THE STORY AND MODIFICATIONS
MADE FOR MODERN AMERICAN AUDIENCES

Despite the fact that the medieval passion plays were written for a different time and period, not only are they still performed every year, but they continue to draw large audiences. What accounts for this long-lived popularity? The preceding chapter noted the format of the medieval passion plays and how the American passion plays have followed a similar method for teaching; however, it is evident that the contemporary plays are becoming more concerned with the entertaining ways the plays can be presented. How are these American passion plays adapting their scripts and staging to appeal to Americans in this twentieth century culture and are they actually evangelizing and educating people, or are they merely providing entertainment? Is it possible, then, that the blending of the teaching and pleasing aspects of drama is being sacrificed for sensationalism and spectacle?

In considering the stage methods utilized in today's productions, it is important to realize that the medieval plays also used numerous entertainment devices. Commenting on the theatrical elements of the medieval cycle plays, one scholar observed that "sheer spectacle plays a vital role
in this drama. It acts as a metaphor for divine power and glory. . . .”¹ Such spectacle demonstrated itself in costumes, set pieces, scenic devices, and special effects.²

Bright colors appealed to medieval audiences, and the costumes reflected this sensibility. Certain colors often symbolized some association, i.e., the common signifier for black was evil or death. Traditionally, colors of blue and white, emblematic of purity, were used in the Virgin Mary’s costumes. In addition to color, masks played important roles and distinguished key figures; for example, a gold mask represented God, a hideous mask for the devil, and sometimes a red mask for Herod. Devils and angels appeared throughout these productions. While the devils usually wore masks and wings with their costumes, the angels dressed more simply in gowns decorated with golden wings.³

Not only was the spectacle evident in the costumes but also in the sets, specifically the mansions or stations. These were selected locations that provided backdrops or acting areas for the performers. Mansions of Heaven and Hell were usually placed on opposite ends of a fixed stage, with other earthly settings situated between, i.e., Jerusalem and Pilate’s hall. The continental plays

¹ Beadle 48.

² For a concise discussion of the effects used in the cycle plays, see Chapter 12 in John Wesley Harris, Medieval Theatre in Context: An Introduction (London: Routledge, 1992).

³ J. W. Harris 146-148.
primarily used stationary settings; the frontispiece of the Valenciennes Passion of 1547 serves as the principal evidence of this practice. From the sketch it is clear that the mansions were colorful and elaborate.\(^4\) The medieval scholar J. W. Harris has estimated that the stage was one hundred feet long and that the mansion for Heaven rose eight feet into the air, with a circular area atop it surrounding God's Throne.\(^5\)

The medieval plays also used numerous scenic devices, including tunnels, trap doors, and flying machines. Trap doors and tunnels allowed for quick escapes for actors or surprise entrances which, of course, added to the spectacle. They also permitted special effects; in one production Chambers records that "in Paradise a fountain and 'fyne flowers' suddenly spring up..."\(^6\) Such stage tricks notwithstanding, some of the most interesting devices involved flying mechanisms. Records tell of an entire prison tower being lifted into the air at Valenciennes; at Romans six angels were flown on a cloud.\(^7\) It is evident that these medieval productions incorporated devices to entertain the audiences through spectacular scenic effects.

\(^4\) Nagler 85.

\(^5\) J. W. Harris 120.


\(^7\) J. W. Harris 141.
The use of other special effects abounded in medieval productions. Many used pyrotechnic devices. Mansions were commonly outfitted with such equipment; for example, "the hell mouth was provided with fire, a windlass, and a barrel for the earthquake."8 Lighting devices were also used for some performances, as noted in Chester.9 And sound effects of thunder commonly accompanied scenes in Heaven and Hell.10 The use of all this stage machinery raised the entertainment value of the presentations, and audiences came to expect and demand such spectacle.

To what degree are the American plays of today following this aspect of the medieval tradition? Before examining current modifications and how they are being implemented, we must address several basic questions. First, why is this religious drama similar to those of another period still being performed? Part of the answer lies in the productions' rudimentary desire to present a dramatization of the message or mission of Christ. No one interviewed from the productions ever specified any major purpose other than the wish to spread the message of Christ, albeit some looked on the play as an evangelistic tool, while others considered its educational service.

8 Chambers 142.
9 Beadle 53.
10 J. W. Harris 145.
For the larger part of American society, presenting the story of Christ is an accepted, wholesome thing, and in so doing, these individuals and organizations are in a way performing their own good works for others to see. Not only are the dramas being performed so that audiences can feel more inspired, but the performances also allow the Christian participants to do what they believe is expected of them. And as long as Christianity/Judaism remains a part of our American culture, dramatizations of the story of Christ will continue.

A second basic question relates to the audience—who actually attends these passion play performances? It is clear that in staging these passion plays in a more relaxed, less formal setting than a church, these productions attract a variety of people (not just church members). For example, Bob Foster, former general manager of *The Great Passion Play*, noted that people who have never darkened the door of a church will frequently attend the play in Eureka Springs.\(^{11}\) This is not an isolated situation, because the same observation was made at each of the other productions. In abundant instances, people attend who are truly seeking answers about life and have heard the name of Christ. They consider that they may find peace and contentment if they come to see a play on his life. In other cases relatives concerned about the

\(^{11}\) Bob Foster, personal interview, 20 May 1992.
religious welfare of family members or friends will invite them to these passion plays in an effort to broach the topic of religion, hoping that the message of the production will inspire that individual.

There are also those who come to appease their consciences, or to pay their once a year token-respect to religion. This group may include those from the community who support the production through advertising and promotion (and who in turn profit from the play's existence). And there are those in the audience who attend out of mere curiosity—at least once.

These audience members cover a wide spectrum of socioeconomic backgrounds, from the well-educated professionals to blue-collar workers and families. The more sophisticated productions and those productions closer in proximity to major urban centers draw a higher caliber audience. For example, the audience attending The Louisiana Passion Play in a rural area some distance from any major city is comprised of more local, common people. On the other hand, the first-rate production of The Promise attracts a middle to upper-class audience in the metropolitan Dallas/Fort Worth area, while The Great Passion Play and The Black Hills Passion Play attract all types of individuals in high-traffic tourist areas.

The vast majority of audience members do, however, have some religious connection, although they are not
necessarily fundamentalists; more often they are ecumenicists spanning a cross-section of denominations.

Given such a diverse audience composed of people with different beliefs and non-beliefs, what then are the aims of these productions? As stated before, with each of them is the foremost desire to communicate accurately the message of Christ and Christianity. In essence, the presentation of his story is perceived as a mission of religious instruction, coupled with a promotion of moral principles. However, other underlying aims are also evident.

A key motivation is the desire to stay solvent, and in order to do so each production must continue to attract steady audiences. This means that the productions continually expand and improve the entertainment value of their shows in order to please the diverse audiences. To do this, the plays often, although not always, use special effects and technological methods designed to compete with the movies, videos and computers that have become a steady diet for most Americans today.

Based on these observations, a fourth question naturally arises: how does this passion play of another era function in American culture? First, as noted in a previous chapter, the outdoor religious plays function alongside Shakespearean plays and historical plays as a genre in theatre known as outdoor drama. But more
importantly, the play functions as a reminder of the religious roots that inform the foundation of American society.

America is not medieval Europe, yet passion plays continue in performance. We Americans of the 1990s live in an age of technology and electronic knowledge which changes and multiplies every day. What happens on one side of the world one minute is broadcast to the rest of the world in a matter of seconds. Yet, with this vast amount of complex information available at the click of a button, multitudes still attend passion plays.

The nature of society has certainly changed from what it was around the turn of the century. At that time there seemed "to have been a pervasive innocence, a kind of pandemic provincialism and naïveté," which no longer exists. Changing social, moral, and religious attitudes along with complicated, hectic lifestyles have contributed to our peculiar contemporary sensibility. These changes are most apparent in the areas of technology, mass media, multiculturalism, gender concerns, and religion itself.

Unquestionably, the change having the most profound effect on American society involves the advancement of technology, especially in the computer industry and the ease of access not only for adults but for children.

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Current events, entertainment, and information can be obtained immediately with a click of a button. With new programs and advances appearing each day, high-tech companies are continually providing Americans technological innovations and challenges.

Closely linked with the advance of technology is the mass media. Dictating so many of our attitudes towards politics, world events, and life in general, the media have been complicit in leading the country into an entertainment-oriented culture. For some people, "entertainment has developed into an immense and imperious agency that is propelling America toward a dangerous insipidity, a condition in which smash hits and winning teams become major sources of inspiration." As a result, one notes a prevalent desire for instant gratification a feature so characteristic of today's American society.

Issues of multiculturalism also contribute to the attitudes of today's society. No longer is America considered the melting pot of various nationalities; instead, it reflects a diverse cultural pluralism which enables each to make its contribution. Lawrence Levine writes:

Diversity, pluralism, multiculturalism have been present throughout our history and have acted not merely as the germs of friction and division but as the lines of continuity, the sources for the

13 Corwin 264.
creation of an indigenous culture and the roots of a distinctive American identity.\textsuperscript{14}

America's acceptance of various beliefs and religions permits the passion plays to continue; in essence the plays provide an example of one cultural religion.

Issues of equality and gender differences also mark our times. While women gained the right to vote back in 1920, they have continued to struggle for equality in the workforce and other places of leadership. In many arenas, questions concerning the nature of the woman's role remain unresolved. It is often imperative for the woman to work in order for families to meet financial obligations. Divorce rates have concomitantly climbed.\textsuperscript{15} The American family has been affected as women have gained new insights "in the realm of personal freedom, self-realization, and autonomy."\textsuperscript{16}

Finally, as regard for the basic family unit has experienced changes, so have attitudes toward religion; "even its enemies pay religion the compliment of having to take an attitude toward it."\textsuperscript{17} At one time religious life

\textsuperscript{14} Lawrence Levine, \textit{The Opening of the American Mind: Canons, Culture and History} (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996) 119-120.


\textsuperscript{16} Chafe 335.

in America was limited to a few prominent denominations—Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. However, reflecting the growing multicultural influences of United States society, scores of religious organizations exist (one finds recorded up to twelve hundred in America).18 "Yet whatever the professed beliefs, the overwhelming aim of religion in America has been to endow temporal existence with meaning."19 And it is to this end that the American passion plays have directed their energies.

Such background features of American culture highlight certain questions. How are these plays adapting to the contemporary audience of the 1990s, and what are their expectations? Are these passion plays effectively using methods or strategies to entertain the audiences? In essence, in order to thrive in today's culture American passion plays must do more than teach the story of Christ. Consequently, these productions have augmented their entertainment aspect by making modifications in several key areas—textual language, character depictions, delicate/controversial issues, special effects, and methodology of presentation.

Although each production deals with the same storyline—the life of Christ—the language chosen for the text varies from one play to the next, and how the text is

18 Marty 399.
19 Marty 408.
treated significantly affects the way the plays are produced. In general the plays tend to use scripts with either traditional, historical language or updated, contemporary language. Those using the more traditional texts sometimes attract audiences who have a more devout religious background, while the more modern adaptations appeal to a wider spectrum of viewers.

Based upon a 1242 text, The Black Hills Passion Play follows the most formal, traditional method of presentation, one which reflects a genuine respect and reverence for divine authority. This type of textual presentation especially appeals to people whose religious backgrounds are rooted in liturgical formalism, i.e., Roman Catholic, Episcopalian, and Lutheran.

The Black Hills Passion Play text, whose English diction reflects a stilted German translation, invariably sets up a "time-period" barrier that may limit the impact of audience communication. Viewers may attribute a sanctimonious tone to the presentation or be unfamiliar with the "thee" and "thou," the "whilst" and the "saith," along with sentences of unusual structure and syntax. Johanna Meier, the producer/director admits the text is outdated by current standards, but she has no desire to make any changes: "we wouldn't update Shakespeare because it's a classic; same is true for us."20 Because The Black

Hills Passion Play is the only production with such a textual heritage, it wishes to maintain that status by employing a rather simple, traditional, and stylized form of theatrical presentation with limited special effects.\textsuperscript{21} Those involved have no desire to adapt the script but rather to retain the historical "authenticity" of the text.

Other traditional scripts—relying heavily on the King James translation of the Bible—are used by both The Louisiana Passion Play and Worthy Is the Lamb. However, in these plays the text is pre-recorded, and given the organizations' financial constraints, changing the script and producing another soundtrack would be prohibitive.

The simple recording of The Louisiana Passion Play's script, which uses non-professional actors, sometimes produces humorous responses in places when regional dialect comes through. Employing a taped soundtrack prepared for a previous location (with a different stage size), the production suffers lengthy dead spots where the actors at times rush to get to a specific place on the stage on cue—such distractions provide an unintended comic effect.\textsuperscript{22} The audiences come expecting a text that is easy to follow, but, as a result of these production problems, they experience a show with no sense of momentum or continuity.

\textsuperscript{21} Meier, letter, 18 July 1995.

\textsuperscript{22} The Louisiana Passion Play, by James Burns and Mark Hutto, Ruston, 23 July 1994.
The audience encounters one kind of difficulty with *The Louisiana Passion Play* script; a different problem arises in *Worthy Is the Lamb*, which commissioned professional actors in England to record the soundtrack. For many spectators the accent adds to the "refinement" and quality of the text, yet this also alienates the audience from the production as the standard American dialect goes unheard.

In other instances, plays update the language of their texts in order to be understood by the average audience member (or the non-church individual). Although the text of *The Great Passion Play* is also pre-recorded, it modernizes the language, giving it more relevancy to today's audience. This script, which was written for the play's first production in 1968, reads like scripture from the New King James Version. The choice of familiar, vivid, and concrete words, coupled with a more modern syntax, aids in the understanding and lends a sense of accessibility to the story, for audiences churched or unchurched. This more contemporary text presented in a realistic setting is enhanced through numerous special effects which capture the supernatural events of the passion week.

Using an even more contemporary language are *The Living Word, Jesus of Nazareth, The Promise*, and *The Witness*. *The Living Word*, whose original script has been updated to include passages from the Jerusalem Bible and
the New International Version, still approaches the presentation in a traditional, realistic manner.\textsuperscript{23} Also, the use of common, everyday language and syntax is most noticeable in the action-packed Barabbas story line of \textit{Jesus of Nazareth}. Utilizing a very familiar, down-to-earth text is \textit{The Witness}, especially since the story is told from the perspective of a fisherman, the disciple Peter.

Finally, the newest play, \textit{The Promise}, with a text written in 1989, also reflects the language of contemporary culture, incorporating dialogue similar to recent scripture translations (like the New International Version), and by adding modern day characters into the script. The lyrics and music of the songs suggest a contemporary musical style.

As for the textual choices, both the traditional and contemporary may be acceptable and have their respective positives and negatives. For \textit{The Black Hills Passion Play}, whose principal aim emphasizes teaching more than entertaining, the more formal and traditional style is appropriate. Conversely, all of the productions that update their texts, in effect bring the language of scripture down to the level of the people (rather than bringing the language of the people up to the level of

\textsuperscript{23} \textit{The Living Word}, by Frank Roughton Harvey, Cambridge, 11 August 1995.
scripture). This same strategy was used in the medieval dramas, and overall it has been effective in most of the American plays using this approach today. These plays attract younger audiences and evince more ecumenical appeal; they also draw those who have limited or no religious background and do not understand the formal language of religious texts. *The Promise, The Witness,* and *Jesus of Nazareth*—which employs contemporary language—were especially successful attracting large audiences.

The American passion plays have also modified the portrayals of key characters and the symbolic actions to make the productions more entertaining and appealing to today's audiences. These adaptations have sometimes involved depicting less the deity of Christ than the humanity of Christ. Some modifications have also been introduced in the passion plays involving supporting characters, i.e., Peter or Barabbas. Some incorporate contemporary characters in the historical scenes; one introduces a non-human character--Satan. With each of these instances, the change was made to give a freshness to the presentation, to capture the audience's attention, and to capitalize on a "unique" element for the purpose of promotion.

While adaptations regarding the portrayal of Christ are probably the least noticeable in these outdoor dramas, some adjustments have been made. Because Christ is viewed
as deity, writers have been loath to traduce certain parameters set forth in scripture. Each of the productions physically portrays Christ using broad, open gestures. Some productions underscore His compassion and humanity through frequent touching. In addition, they all include scenes with Christ performing miracles and establishing his deity; yet other scenes show Jesus experiencing hunger, weakness, and thirst, revealing his humanity. In keeping with the traditional text, The Black Hills Passion Play presents the most formal and aloof characterization of Christ, while The Promise, with its updated, contemporary text, focuses on Jesus' humanity with his frequent laughter, touching, and hugging of his followers. Whether he is teaching the people or performing miracles, the Christ figure exhibits the mingling of divinity and humanity, leading audiences to discern something magical in his touch.

The scene of the Last Supper most strongly conveys Christ's humanity, as it begins with Christ washing the apostles' feet, the sign of Christ's humility and servant spirit. However, departing from the traditional scene, The Living Word sets the washing of feet at the street-level entrance to the upper room as the disciples are preparing to enter the building. By having Christ kneel outside at the foot of the steps, this production presents an alternative image of what might have happened that evening.
While Christ declares his purpose for performing this deed in all of the presentations, the significance of the act is stressed more in The Black Hills Passion Play and The Promise—the washing as a sign that the apostles were to minister to others in the same spirit of humility. Both of these productions allot more time to this sequence. The Black Hills Passion Play generates the greatest dramatic tension with Christ solemnly and methodically washing each apostle's feet, including those of Judas.

Following this gesture, Christ encourages the apostles to continue his ministry and proceeds to elevate the bread and cup, reminding the audience of the Jewish Passover celebrations, as well as the Catholic mass. Handling the scene in this manner justifies the presentation to those who accept Judeo-Christian teaching.

Christ then gives the bread to the disciples, who break off pieces as tokens of the body of Christ (that would be broken in a few hours), and passes the cup of wine that symbolizes the blood that would also be shed. All the productions have approached the actions of Christ in this scene with respect and reverence, since the Last Supper is commonly regarded as the most important sacrament of the church.

Christ is characterized by the frequent use of open gestures, those imploring the people to come to Him. This also includes the upward gesture reminding all of His
Father's presence in heaven. Often, especially in *The Black Hills Passion Play* and *The Living Word*, the images and poses appear dictated by paintings and icons of the past, i.e., Leonardo da Vinci's "The Last Supper" and the "Pieta." Producers know that these images are commonly held in the minds of the viewers and that they satisfy audience expectations.

For the majority of viewers, even in face of the secular aspect of our society, the name of Jesus Christ is familiar, and most are aware of his birth story (Christmas) and the story of his death and resurrection (Easter). Even if they do not know the complete story, they are still intrigued when offered something new or different, an element that provokes them to think beyond the commonly known passages of scripture. Such a strategy encourages the audience to imagine the parts of the story not recorded in scripture that may very well have occurred.

Following this approach, three of the plays have adapted their scripts by focusing parts of the storyline on characters other than Christ. *Jesus of Nazareth*, *The Witness*, and *The Promise* use an innovative approach to the story. *Jesus of Nazareth* focuses on Barabbas, the thief and rabble rouser whom Pilate released to the Jewish people. Although nothing in scripture records Barabbas' words or actions, this script shows Barabbas in numerous
situations, including his return to Calvary where he watches the one die who took his place.

From the outset the audience is alerted that this will not be an ordinary retelling of the Christ story. Instead of a prologue foretelling the arrival of a Messiah, the play begins with a chase through the streets of Jerusalem after the criminal Barabbas attacks an innocent person traveling along the hillside. Both the energy of the race and the opening dialogue with Barabbas alert the audience that this presentation will differ from the traditional approach to the story. And for the tastes of today's audience the novel or thrilling is important. This characterization of Barabbas allows the audience knowledge of another character, silent in scripture, yet important to the story of Christ's crucifixion.24

The Witness also develops its plot from the perspective of another character important to the story of Christ. Peter, the common fisherman whose words are frequently recorded in scripture, plays such an integral role in this presentation that he almost takes away from the principal figure of Christ. By selecting Peter, the author of The Witness approaches the story from the new point of a common laborer of the period, emphasizing scenes in the life of Christ that allow Peter's interaction.

24 JON, performance.
This choice invites the audience to imagine what it was like to walk along the streets and experience the everyday problems of past times. Once again, the imagination of the audience is engaged in its assessment of such hypothetical scenes. As with Jesus of Nazareth, this novel approach to the story line gives the presentation its unique quality, rather than offering a mere retelling of the scriptural story.25

The Promise takes the most radical departure from the scriptural account by introducing three contemporary characters (and one supernatural one) into the play. Billy, Lisa, and their grandfather draw the world of the present together with the historical world. Following a contemporary story line—the trio look for dinosaur tracks in the opening scene—these three characters reflect on the events of scripture, specifically God's creation of the world and the prophesies foretelling the coming of a messiah. As the characters discuss such biblical matters, the historical characters appear and events unfold. What might be a hackneyed flashback device works as a most effective means of communication. For the rest of the play, these three participate in the historical action when they are not advancing their own story line. No effort is made to disguise them; rather, they remain modern day

characters experiencing the past historical world of the era chronicled in scripture.26

For example, when the three decide to rest for the evening, Mary and Joseph proceed to the cave where Christ is born. The angels, shepherds, and wise men, along with the family unit enter to greet the Holy family. There the grandfather crosses the barrier of time, takes the infant from his mother and plays with him. In another scene, the family, searches for the missing Christ child at the temple; later they join the crowds to listen to the Sermon on the Mount. They watch Christ perform miracles. The family unit even invites Jesus and his disciples to join them around the campfire, where Peter eventually denies Christ.27 Then with the crowd, the trio follow Christ up the road to Calvary and they eventually witness the resurrection.28

Each time these characters appear, not only do they inject a sense of the contemporary world, they allow every viewer to feel like he or she is standing near, watching the events of Christ's life unfold. As audience members we identify with these characters; then we transport ourselves back in time to each of the scenes.

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26 Promise, performance.
27 Promise, performance.
28 Promise, performance.
The other character added into *The Promise* is the supernatural Satan. He initially appears during the Temptation of Christ then disappears for a brief time (as is indicated in scripture). Seeking to visualize this concept, the director, Mike Meese, returned Satan to the stage as an "invisible" non-speaking character.

This character modification produces the most profound effect on the audience. The portrayal of Satan does not fit any preconceived notions of how the devil might look (as a red creature with a tail, running around with a pitchfork); the character does not speak, but he exerts a tremendous influence over the audience. Scriptural accounts note that Satan was a beautiful creature, yet most people are unaware of that beguiling aspect. This beautifully costumed creature subtly moves about the stage intriguing the audience. Given today's fascination with the activities of cults, witches, and demons, this depiction of Satan appears all the more enticing.

Moving in and out of the crowds with cat-like stealth, Satan appears unnoticed by the performers. As the conspiracy against Christ intensifies, Satan attracts more attention and aligns himself with the enemies of Christ, whether they are the members of the Sanhedrin or Peter (who denied Christ) or the traitorous disciple Judas. Satan also controls the betrayal scene in the Garden of

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29 *Promise, performance.*
Gethsemane and follows Christ to the mount of the Crucifixion. There he gloats, breaking into a devilish laugh of triumph, and runs freely over the deserted set as Christ utters his final words. The power of the scene electrifies audience members who have never before imagined scenes like this occurring during Christ's life.

Only after Christ exhibits his dominance over death in the Resurrection does Satan encounter his fate. When Christ reappears to greet his followers, he senses Satan's presence and turns to regard the cowering Satan, who flees from the scene. With his exit, the oppression of the demonic power disappears. At that point, the audience—so long captivated by Satan's presence—experiences a release of tension and bursts into shouts and applause at his departure. Without question, this silent figure creates a highly compelling force on the stage, and by incorporating this abstract figure along with the contemporary family, The Promise offers the most imaginative character adaptations of any of the American passion plays.

What are the positive and negative aspects of using these approaches? First, by confining the character portrayals to those key figures whose words are already recorded in scripture, the passion plays likely meet the spectators' expectations and do not offend any sensibility. This approach is most evident in the production that

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30 Promise, performance.
stresses teaching over entertaining—The Black Hills Passion Play. However, once new characterizations (or lines) are introduced into the plays, the risk of offending some religious purists increases.

Despite this risk, the use of new characterizations allows for greater creativity, and such novel approaches translate into greater mass appeal. In the presentation of a story that many individuals have heard repeated time and again, the addition of new, albeit conjectural, material works to interest and engage the viewer. The three principal plays incorporating such twists to the story maintain high attendance figures; the shows introduce this perspective to the story of Christ while teaching and entertaining their audiences.

In both situations, that is, with or without original devices or adaptations, the plays can succeed. The central question is not whether one is good or another bad; rather, which appeals to the target audience? For The Black Hills Passion Play, teaching is the principal aim. Conversely, the goal for the three productions using additional characters involves entertainment and maximizing crowds. As far as appealing to today's viewers, the plays that attempt new approaches prove the most successful.

A third area in which the passion plays are modifying their productions concerns their handling of delicate or controversial issues. In the past, the numerous issues
relevant to the role of the Jews in Christ's death went unexamined. But today's audiences, so conscious of political correctness, cause the productions to be very cautious in their treatment of scenes involving responsibility for the trial and death of Christ. The most controversial issue facing the passion play today relates to potential anti-Semitic accusations from those who attend the productions. As a result, the productions try to be true to the text of Scripture, without offending the Jewish population.

A useful document issued in 1985 provides significant insight and criteria helpful in evaluating the performances of the American passion plays, especially in its relationship to anti-Semitic problems. Twelve years ago the Vatican Commission for Religious Relations, in collaboration with Jewish leaders, published a work on the correct way for the Roman Catholic church to present the Jewish people in its preaching, a way that would prove acceptable to both faiths.31

Three years later (March 22, 1988) the Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs National Conference of Catholic Bishops, in a similar move, issued a publication developed for the purpose of establishing guidelines for the proper integration of

31 The document, Notes on the Correct Way to Present the Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis of the Roman Catholic Church was issued on June 24, 1985 by the United States Catholic Conference.
Jewish and Christian doctrine into a passion play production. The document, referred to in this paper as the Criteria, addresses the problems of "avoiding caricatures and false oppositions," in addition to being sensitive to the "difficulties and sensitivities in historical reconstruction based on the four gospel accounts." What scenes then require the most modification to avoid such controversy? The first addresses the matter of who must bear the responsibility for Christ's death. This scene derives from the famous passage in Matthew, where in response to Pilate washing his hands of the innocent blood of Christ, the people cry "His blood be on us, and on our children." The concern here stems from the portrayal of the large mob scenes, in which the Jews collectively as a race appear guilty of wishing Christ crucified. According to the Criteria,

if one cannot show beyond reasonable doubt that the particular gospel element selected or paraphrased will not be offensive or have the potential for negative influence on the audience for whom the presentation is intended, that element cannot, in good conscience, be used.

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33 Criteria 5,10.

34 Matthew 27:24-25.

35 Criteria 12.
Thus, by omitting this one sentence uttered by a crowd member, the productions avoid portraying the Jews in a bad light; however the truth of Scripture is compromised.

When presenting the plays then, who or what may serve as the guilty party responsible for Christ's death? Does the matter rest solely on the shoulders of Pilate or are the members of the audience just as guilty? According to the Criteria: "The major dramatic or moral focus on any dramatization of the event for Christians--[should be] a profound self-examination of our own guilt, through sin, for Jesus' death. . . ."\textsuperscript{36}

Another area in which the productions must move cautiously involves the way in which Pilate is portrayed. While the four gospels all highlight his role in sentencing Christ, they provide various details in their discussions. The gospels agree that Pilate found "no fault" with Christ, yet the ruler gave in to the request of the Jewish people to release Barabbas and crucify Christ. Nevertheless, Pilate, as a representative of the Roman government, was himself legally responsible for passing the death sentence.\textsuperscript{37} Thus, the presentations avoid charges of anti-Semitism by revealing Pilate a political official who sentences Christ to death. Keeping the audiences reminded of the Roman guards' presence in Jerusalem, and by

\textsuperscript{36} Criteria 3.

\textsuperscript{37} John 18:28-19:22.
frequently referencing Pilate as the Roman governor, the productions direct responsibility away from the Jewish community.

In light of past and/or potential problems, the plays appear more sensitive to the issues today. Two of the more modern plays, The Great Passion Play and The Promise, acknowledge making changes following litigations with the Jewish leaders regarding their productions. Specifically, The Great Passion Play eliminated the "blood curse" phrase from its production.38

Organizers of The Living Word note that only isolated comments have been made about some scenes.39 This lack of controversy may be attributed to the fact that the play's author consciously sought to avoid delicate matters by submitting the script to three different Jewish committees for approval.40 Additionally, a note in the program expressly states that "it should be evident from our representation of the events in The Living Word that we repudiate anti-Semitism in all its forms."41

The Louisiana Passion Play most directly addresses the sensitive issue of portraying the Jews by including a clarifying statement in its play bill:

38 GPP, Questionnaire.
39 LW, Questionnaire.
40 Harvey, interview 22 January 1997.
41 The Living Word, souvenir program (Cambridge, 1996) 3.
[the play] in no way intends to bring any harsh feelings or blame upon the Jews as a people. What is portrayed here is from the scriptural record, and points no finger at anyone who was not a part of the plot. It is our belief that anyone who uses the scripture to emphasize Jewish responsibility for the death of Jesus is using a very weak argument to make his case.42

Because of this disclaimer, the play makes no modification in its script and leaves in the blood curse that so concerns Jewish critics of the passion play productions.

Even The Black Hills Passion Play, which uses the oldest script, has made minor adjustments to avoid such problems. Johanna Meier summarized her thoughts about anti-Semitism difficulties in a manner which, I believe, reflects the approach of each of today's productions:

Although we have endeavored to be aware of and correct historical inaccuracies, there is still a level of sensitivity among certain Jewish groups who perceive any dramatic representation of Jesus as being anti-Jewish.43

Since the remainder of the productions did not respond to the research questionnaire on this point, it is assumed that they have not encountered (or addressed) any problems with anti-Semitism.

One other area that proved a delicate issue in the past relates to the portrayal of Christ, especially following the resurrection. Because Christ resurrected no

42 The Louisiana Passion Play, Souvenir program (Ruston: North Louisiana Creative Arts, 1995) N.pag.

43 BH, Questionnaire.
longer represents God in flesh but deity itself, audiences around the turn of the century had a difficult time accepting that a human could play the role (e.g., the case of the Salmi Morse production). But as noted earlier, by the time of The American Passion Play (1924), such a portrayal went unquestioned. Today's audience attitudes have continued to broaden in respect to what religious matter can be presented on stage. The fact that a mortal is portraying deity raises no major questions.

In these three problem areas—the treatment of the Jews, the role of Pilate, and the portrayal of Christ—each of the productions has had to decide on the best approach. Advantages and disadvantages exist on both sides. For example, if a production primarily seeks to entertain more than teach, it will seek to avoid any difficulties which could raise questions or bring negative publicity to its production. However, to do this successfully, sections of the scripture must be treated as though they never occurred. Essentially, this is the way in which certain plays deal with multicultural audiences and avoid uneasy questions. On the other hand, if a production's principal aim leans more toward teaching than entertaining, the show is likely to retain all scenes and dialogue so as to accord with the events recorded in scripture.

As far as the treatment of Pilate is concerned, the more guilt placed upon his shoulders means that less falls
upon the Jewish people. Most of the productions strive to attribute culpability to the Roman government, a strategy often evident in Pilate's costuming. In today's anti-bureaucratic culture, making the government into a scapegoat finds a receptive audience. By playing up the concept that the government crucified Christ, the sentencing is certainly more palatable to the general public. Although the productions do not present untruths, in their effort to avoid multicultural confrontations, they often modify or manipulate their presentations.

Finally, the human portrayal of Christ no longer appears to be the issue it once was. There is a greater tolerance level today, especially as numerous religious traditions gain visibility in a multicultural America. Also, with the acceptance of religious movies depicting Christ, like The Greatest Story Ever Told and The Last Temptation of Christ, and stage musicals such as Jesus Christ Superstar and Godspell, only very conservative groups tend to question the characterizations. This tolerance has allowed the productions the freedom to portray the Christ figures as they wish, without being overly concerned with adverse audience reactions.

All of the productions seek to teach viewers about the life of Christ, and none of them sees a difficulty in casting a person to play the role. Any other approach would prove ludicrous. As it is, these plays are
effectively presenting the story and entertaining the audience through the presence of a figure who can do miracles, die on a cross, and rise from the dead.

The fourth area in which the American passion plays have made modifications for today's audience involves the upgrading and adapting of stage elements. In an attempt to keep up with the audiences' desire for sophisticated, spectacular effects, a desire fed by the media industry, the plays have added more special effects and have upgraded their technology. The modifications have affected four areas of staging: set design, stage lighting, special effects and costuming.

In keeping with the platform stage design used frequently in the medieval period, The Black Hills Passion Play continues tradition and uses a set with several locales or mansions placed parallel to the audience. A similar arrangement is also used by The Louisiana Passion Play, Jesus of Nazareth and The Living Word. Of these plays, the setting for The Louisiana Passion Play proves the most unsatisfactory. At the time of my on-site visit, the set—constructed of unpainted cinder blocks—was unfinished and certainly not ready for a production season.44

However, several of the set designs depart from this arrangement, offering more creative approaches for the

44 LPP, performance.
audience delectation: for example, The Great Passion Play's three dimensional reconstruction of the city of Jerusalem. But compared with the other productions, the setting for The Promise has made the most modifications and created the most visually entertaining scenic design. The flexible setting allows for numerous set pieces to function in a variety of ways while at the same time exhibiting a stylish, Hollywood appearance.

Instead of using structured mansions or realistic houses, The Promise's set incorporates kiosks, selective settings rolled in on tracks, a turntable mounted with three platforms integrated into the hill unit in the upstage area, and a moat filled with water. These sets, whose changes are quickly made, function quite effectively and well convey a sense of different locales. For example a tree rolled in from stage right serves variously as the carpenter shop for the young Jesus, the place for the children to gather around the feet of Christ, and even the Garden of Gethsemane. In another scene, a kiosk for the merchants serves as a street site for general trading; it later becomes the porch of the Temple where the money changers sell animal sacrifices. The turntable functions as the stable, Lazarus's tomb, and Christ's tomb, while the area on top serves as Golgotha and the mount from which Christ ascends.

45 The Promise, by Jan Dargatz, Glen Rose, TX. 3 July 1992.
Another unusual element of the set is the moat that is utilized in a variety of ways. At one time it is the Jordan River for the baptism of Jesus; another time it is the Sea of Galilee where the fishermen pull in their nets weighted with an abundance of fish. It also serves as the rough sea where Christ stills the storm. Three other productions incorporate the use of water in the sets: Worthy Is the Lamb has constructed a small pool of water on stage right for the Sea of Galilee scene, and in Jesus of Nazareth, a pond stage left is used for Christ's baptism and Barabbas' fight scene. The Witness has also installed a very small pool to serve as a boat dock and locale for the baptismal scene.

As for the setting of the Last Supper, The Promise again has created a most unique picture. Whereas most of the other productions seek to emulate in some way the Leonardo da Vinci painting, this production has designed a rolling platform that has the appearance of a small simple room in a Jewish home. In this intimate setting, Christ washes the feet of the disciples—Judas excepted—who seat themselves around the table in anticipation of learning more from their master.\footnote{\textit{Promise}, performance.} From this description, it is clear that The Promise exudes a more polished look, one that disregards the traditional mansion-scene format.
Changes in stage lighting indicate how passion play productions have incorporated visual modifications for today's multi-media-fed audiences. Once again The Black Hills Passion Play sets a traditional standard, with basic lighting and simple effects. The newest plays conversely go beyond general illumination and manipulate effects for the sake of the spectacular. This is clearly evidenced in the way that the resurrection scenes are handled.

Since The Black Hills Passion Play has placed so much emphasis on the "authenticity" of its script, its didactic approach has predicated the avoidance of any stage practice that would detract from the text. In the estimation of the play's organizers, the use of spectacular lighting effects would blur the drama's focus. However, the production still experiences problems, despite the simplicity of its approach. During the resurrection the sudden burst of light, joined with the sudden removal of the stone from the tomb, did not prove inspiring, but rather humorous. The abruptness startled the audience; in this case, the simplicity of the effect detracted from the significance of the lighted presence of the living Christ.

Two other plays, The Living Word and The Louisiana Passion Play, also use fewer lighting effects, but not for the reason that governs the production aesthetic of The Black Hills Passion Play. For these two plays, limited lighting systems prove constraining. Both plays fade up a
small spotlight on the entrance to the tomb, with The Louisiana Passion Play, the lowest attended\textsuperscript{47} and probably the least funded, using just household floodlights planted in the ground for illumination and effects. Instead of enhancing the production, the floodlights cast extreme shadows on the characters' faces, creating an eerie, death-like appearance. When the actors walk through the lights at various times, large shadows reflect onto the set.\textsuperscript{48} Trying unusual effects with these simple instruments is quite problematic, and strained efforts often distract the audience and prove intrusive.

The Great Passion Play, The Promise, and Jesus of Nazareth, all much newer productions, deliver the most spectacular lighting presentations in their treatment of the resurrection scenes. These productions introduce the most spectacular scenes at that point, because it is the moment when Christ proves that he is God. Thus, the staging must effect a sense of transcendent reality, and for such shows the more spectacular the lighting effects, the better. The audience wants to be dazzled by something exceptional; movies and videos regularly deliver such an experience, and to provide nothing in the way of the unusual and extraordinary would disappoint. Many examples


\textsuperscript{48} LPP. performance.
illustrate the passion plays' dependence on spectacular lighting and effects.

The Great Passion Play, incorporating sound, smoke and red light from the tomb (fading up into a brilliant explosion of white light when the stone rolls away), creates cold chills as it mesmerizes its audience. The deliberate build does not startle the audience, for they literally feel the rumblings from within the earth and experience the power of an intangible force as the lighting effects commence.\textsuperscript{49} After the resurrection, this production continues playing with lighting effects by using several scrims in important scenes to convey Christ's deity and ability to appear and disappear quickly, i.e., the vanishing of Christ after breaking bread at the disciple's house following the walk down the road to Emmaus, and the sudden appearing of Christ in the midst of Thomas and the other disciples gathered in an upper room. Through the expert use of the lighting effects with the scrims, both Christ's disappearance and appearance are effective and believable.\textsuperscript{50}

The Promise also uses a rumbling effect in conjunction with an explosive burst of light from the tomb. The tension of the performance and the music prepare the

\textsuperscript{49} GPP, performance.

\textsuperscript{50} The Great Passion Play, by Tom Jones, Eureka Springs, 29 October 1995.
audience for this high-energy moment. In addition, a beautifully attired angel suspended above the empty tomb is brilliantly lit as he sings the news of Christ's resurrection. It is Jesus of Nazareth, however, that presents the resurrection with the most dazzling effects pleases its audience members who love lighting displays and theatrics. The production projects a Disneyland look with lights glowing and flashing in the temple dome, culminating with spectacular effects in its pyrotechnic display.51

The use of scenic devices and special effects reveal the lengths or extremes to which productions will go to create spectacle and entertainment. In appealing to the audience's love of excitement, novelty, and even gore, some of the productions seem to have compromised their primary focus on teaching. Instead of being concerned with presenting the inspiring story of Christ, a few of the productions appear more interested in presenting a show spectacular enough to compete with the products of Hollywood. This tendency is evident in the productions' handling of the scourging, the Crucifixion, and primarily the Ascension.

People frequently attend movie productions, especially horror movies or slasher films, that offer thrills and titillation. In an oddly similar vein, most of the passion

plays have begun portraying as vividly as possible the brutality of the scourging and Crucifixion. Little is left to the imagination.

Most noticeable is the excessive amount of stage blood used by The Great Passion Play, The Promise, and The Louisiana Passion Play. These productions have adapted their material to satisfy the audience's desire for carnage by having Christ in a red-stained costume. The Promise, like The Great Passion Play, makes great use of blood-drenched costumes. Stripped of his robe, Christ endures the scourging of the Roman soldiers. By the time the soldier stops the beating and the crowd disperses, Christ's back drips with blood. The mantle that is thrown over his shoulders sticks to him, and the blood seeps through. This play also marks Christ's death in the Crucifixion with numerous lighting and sound effects.

While the Crucifixion scenes are illuminating vis-à-vis the motives of the production, the feature that best reveals the manipulations and modernizations is the Ascension. It is indeed a theatrical challenge to convincingly depict Christ rising from the earth and disappearing into the clouds. Audiences anxiously await this moment in the play, wondering how the productions will

52 The red blood at one time significant of the blood of animal sacrifices now covers the costume as the blood of a human sacrifice.

53 Promise, performance.
present this scene. The plays have experimented with a variety of methods, from expensive flying machines to simple pulleys.

Often it appears that each production seeks to create something unique for its presentation. With the Ascension coming at the end of the play, the companies realize that this last scene on stage can make or break a production; it will be the scene the audience best remembers. Most productions invest this moment with great spectacle, with some of them purchasing special effect devices that allow them to fly the Christ figure. By employing this high-tech equipment, the productions communicate that they can produce spectacular effects as well as any high-tech, theme park stage or movie production.

The most spectacular of the Ascension scenes occurs in The Great Passion Play. Through the use of an elaborate, hidden pulley system, Christ is raised up diagonally along the hillside to disappear into the trees. The theatrical devices effectively create the sense of a supernatural power beyond human explanation. By adding this special effect, the production attempts to recreate in the audience the tingle of surprise and disbelief that the followers of Christ felt upon seeing this astonishing event unfold. The scene is endowed with more believability since the pulley system is harder to detect, and it satisfies the audience
fairly well. However, because the scene is so far away on a hillside, it is difficult to see.

The Louisiana Passion Play follows the most simple approach. For this scene their production has driven a large pole, about the size of a telephone post, into the ground and nailed a small platform to it. At the moment of the Ascension, Christ stands on that small platform while a person hidden in the darkness behind the cross operates a small pulley that raises Christ up. The impression is quite contrived and conveys no sense of believability.

Other presentations have also attempted less sophisticated techniques in an effort to create the supernatural without the expense of special equipment. For example, The Living Word lights Christ standing on a hillside in a very small pin-spot, surrounded by a group of followers who slowly go down on their knees with their hands uplifted to heaven. Surprisingly, this technique works fairly well, giving the impression that Christ is ascending.

The Black Hills Passion Play, as expected, follows an austere approach. The scene depicts a simple tableau of Christ on a hill surrounded by his followers. This moment works for the audience because there have been no preceding special effects to suggest that something unusual might conclude the play. And for this company, the insertion of

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54 LPP, performance.
an effect merely for its entertainment value would depart from the overall purpose of teaching.

Developing the spectacle for passion play productions has both advantages and disadvantages. For the productions seeking to teach more than entertain, the lack of the spectacle forces audience members to use their imaginations and to reflect on what it must have been like for those who witnessed the actual deeds of Christ. Conversely, by using numerous spectacular effects, other productions are able to entertain the audience well and, like today's movies and television, leave very little to the imagination. Frequently such productions attract the curious spectator who merely wants to experience the special effects.

Apparent, too, is the older, traditional sensibility evident in The Black Hills Passion Play. For years the church objected to the secular theatre and its artificiality in general, much less to the use of the dramatic to present the gospel story. With the influence of the elder founder of The Black Hills Passion Play still playing a significant role in the outlook of this production, the desire for "show" in and of itself has little place. However, the newer productions have assimilated more liberal attitudes and have encouraged and capitalized on the artifice. Still, the spectacle used by these productions is effective only in so far as it favorably compares with that found in movies and other
professional performances. When the spectacle falls short the plays seem second rate and shabby, and the productions would probably be better served by focusing on teaching rather than entertaining.

Another modification made for American audiences involves costuming. The guiding factor evident in most of the productions is the availability of materials and labor to make costumes that look like "stage" costumes or "authentic" costumes. Overall the costume choices used in the productions fall into three categories: the traditional, the simple, and the authentic. The greatest impact, though, is made on the audience when the costumes appear authentic, sewn from textured materials characteristic of the biblical period (rather than flat, bold-colored fabrics that appear purchased from the local dollar store).

The Black Hills Passion Play chooses costume styles and colors according to the traditional garments used in the medieval productions; costumes are not upgraded for the purpose of creating a more flashy appearance.55 As Johanna Meier explains: "There are traditionally two women accompanying Mary the Mother, who are dressed identically; the two thieves always wear red sashes on their costumes, etc. These are strictly traditional characteristics."56


No departure is made from the accepted practice of outfitting Christ in a white tunic with dark blue mantle, and Mary wears the white tunic with the pale blue shawl and hood. Pilate, elaborately attired in red and gold armor or the Roman toga, and the eccentric Herod, in his red and black robes, command our attention as the play's authoritative figures. Of course the villain Judas carries a purse of money that immediately identifies him as the treasurer of the disciples, and he is dressed in dark colors.

Although claiming to adhere strictly to the traditional medieval costumes, this production has modified the look of the priests' hats. Until recently the hats were designed with two ear-like pieces and a small point on the sides; not only did they present a Disney World look, but the horned appearance was "found to be offensive to some segments of the Jewish community."57

Generally, the characters wear costumes of solid colors, presenting a flat picture on stage; yet, this look is in keeping with the simplicity of design for this production. Fortunately, the textures of the materials prevent the garments in The Black Hills Play from appearing inexpensive or tawdry.

However, some of the productions have suggested the costumes of the period by selecting cheap, boldly colored

materials. This design choice is especially noticeable in Jesus of Nazareth and The Witness, where the simple, inexpensive fabrics convey the sense of players in a church pageant more than the citizens milling around Jerusalem two thousand years ago. The costumes are pleasing but sometimes produce an unintended comic tone.

The costumes that most significantly impact the audiences are those that have been historically researched and thus convey the highest degree of reality and authenticity, e.g., those designed by Harvey for The Living Word. However, The Promise also takes a realistic approach to costuming by using specific Jewish pieces, like the prayer shawl, but they also branch out and appeal to audiences by their use of creative and visually stimulating designs. While Christ is still costumed in a white tunic, he also wears a white-striped mantle and a white skull cap typical of those worn by Jewish men. Mary, however, appears in a totally different costume—a medium rose-colored tunic with a pale pink shawl and mantle. Departing from the tradition of costuming Mary in blue, Irene Corey has dressed Mary no differently from other Jewish women. She wears no special attire, and in looking for her in a crowd, no one would distinguish her as the one chosen by God to be the mother of Christ.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Promise, performance.
This same departure from traditional practice is evident in what Corey has chosen for Judas. His costume attracts special notice because it is the most colorful. He wears a costume of lavender, purple, and rose (rather than a dingy, dark robe). His own desire for wealth and fashionable clothes is strongly communicated to the audience. No one could ever suspect this young man of committing a wicked deed; his costume thus successfully creates the facade of innocuousness needed to disguise his villainy.59

Finally, Corey has explored new design territory for passion plays in her creation of the costume for the "invisible" Satan. Outfitting him in a red suit with horns and tail would, of course, be a caricature and indeed prove ludicrous. Since Satan creates such a powerful visual force on stage, his costume must adequately contribute to this alluring impression. In this production, Satan wears an ankle-length cape of red, with the ends attached at the wrists. The inside of the cape is decorated with an intricately beautiful design of black, purple, and gold, which matches the short, simple-cut tunic and straight-legged pants. The figure loses the appearance of a man, conveying instead something indescribable and abstract. When he slinks around and crouches "invisibly" in scenes, the dark red cape exudes a malevolent aura, but when he

59 *Promise*, performance.
succeeds in tempting others to commit evil deeds, or when he gloats at Christ's death, he spreads his arms as an eagle and reveals his magnificent beauty. This follows the passage of scripture which indicates that Lucifer or Satan was one of the most beautiful angels. Appropriately, the headpiece worn by Satan is a large, rolled red headband, similar to the halo associated with angels.

There is no question that the modification of costumes in this newest production appeals to the desire of the audience for high theatricality. The realistic yet lavish costumes give the production a sense of showmanship and panache not found in the others. The audience enjoys the grand style, and that is what this production delivers.

Costume design in the passion play productions depends chiefly on three factors: the extent of costume research into the period, the budget for the purchase of materials, and the overall look of the production determined by its aesthetic and rhetorical aims. Easily accessible materials are usually less expensive and give a flashy, high-energy look (Jesus of Nazareth and The Witness) or in one case a cheap look (The Louisiana Passion Play).

On the other hand, the productions whose costumes reveal extensive research convey more credibility in their presentations. The effect is not so much of a story being told, but a truth being taught; the integrity of the

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60 Isaiah 14:12; Ezekiel 28:17.
production is bolstered by its attention to authenticity and detail. The productions using realistic costumes educate the audience in the customs and styles of the biblical period and make a stronger impression. The costumes for the other productions simply look like wardrobe pieces used in any ordinary church pageant and have no significant impact on the spectator's experience.

The final area in which modifications have been made can be seen in a cluster of concerns, all related to the product's quality, style, and ancillary support of the shows. These modifications may be seen in the promotional materials, the style or genre of presentation, and the professionalism of the productions.

With today's advanced technology and the ready availability of inexpensive software programs, it is necessary that the passion play productions print brochures and promotional materials that appeal to a visually oriented consumer. While it is important for each of the plays to accomplish the basic task of advertising, each one's strategies to attract spectators—including promotional materials and souvenir programs—often indicate the focus of their production. For example, the shows focusing more on visual spectacle usually publish the most elaborate and colorful brochures. With one exception, the performances drawing the largest crowds are those that
mount the most spectacular productions and distribute the nicest promotional materials.

The Black Hills Passion Play, the exception, ranks second or third among the passion plays in audience attendance each year; yet in keeping with the simplicity of the production, the organization uses a one color brochure with a format that has been used for years (only dates or minor details of the production are changed). Since this passion play has resulted to such a degree from one man's achievement, as late as 1992 all of the scenes included in the brochure showed Josef Meier playing the Christus, even though he retired in 1990.61 Recently, however, some of his pictures, though not all, have been replaced with those of Roger Iwan, the actor currently playing the role.62

The playbill, too, has not been updated; the one I purchased in 1992 is identical to the one sold in 1996. Although it is in color, the printing looks older, and certainly does not give the impression of the computer-generated layout we are so used to seeing in today's publications.

Simple promotional materials are also used by The Louisiana Passion Play, Jesus of Nazareth, The Living Word, and The Witness. Often one element of the advertisement

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61 Black Hills Passion Play, brochure, (Spearfish, 1992).

62 The Original Black Hills Passion Play, brochure, (Spearfish, 1996).
will be in color, while the rest will be monochromatic. For example, while the postcard advertisement of The Louisiana Passion Play is in color, the show's souvenir playbill is black and white with gray-tone pictures; only the cover image of the crucified Christ is in color.\(^{63}\) As has already been noted, its brochure bills The Louisiana Passion Play as "Louisiana's #1 Outdoor Drama," yet, no other outdoor dramas are currently produced in the state, and anyone attending the production would not be impressed with this disclaimer.\(^{64}\) A monochromatic playbill is also used for The Living Word.

At least these plays make the effort to print some tangible document to place in the hands of the audience. Those attending The Witness, however, may be disappointed to find that no playbill or printed list of cast members is distributed. People expect this from theatrical productions, and I found myself wanting to read something about the production or learn the names of the performers. It is no wonder, then, that these productions record the lowest attendance of the eight plays. No doubt this want of popularity in part may be attributable to the unremarkable advertising, which is not as visually

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\(^{63}\) *The Louisiana Passion Play*, souvenir program, (Ruston: North Louisiana Creative Arts, 1994).

\(^{64}\) *The Louisiana Passion Play*, card, (Ruston, 1994).
appealing as other attractions competing for the tourist market.

Overall, the plays yet to be mentioned publish the most attractive and professional-looking promotional items; their materials use color extensively and evince quality printing. They select similar styles and formats for their brochures and souvenir programs. For example, The Great Passion Play production, whose gold-embossed materials strike one as the most elaborate of all the productions' promotional matter, coordinates the design of its brochure with the souvenir program, which is filled with color pictures of the entire cast and over fifty scenes of the play.65 And in Texas, the program published by The Promise is replete with photos and stories from behind the scenes, as well as pictures from both the Glen Rose and Moscow performances.66

Audiences enjoy these visually stimulating brochures and playbills with the basic production information. They also appreciate the human interest elements that are often included. While probably not the principal reason, the productions seeking to satisfy this desire continue to draw large crowds. The plays whose marketing directors are

65 The Great Passion Play (Eureka Springs, 1996).
66 The Promise, souvenir program, (Glen Rose: Promise Productions, 1993).
obviously staying up with current trends are helping attract a steady stream of spectators.

A second area of concern that bears attention concerns the style or genre adopted by the producers of the passion play. Four new outdoor passion plays have begun since 1984, three of which are musicals; the other one, *The Louisiana Passion Play*, is a drama. This latter play is struggling to survive, while the others are doing quite well. Obviously, audiences have long been captivated by the "American musical," and this predilection has prompted the passion plays to essay the musical format. They are now seeking to entertain the religious audience.

Such productions utilize all the trappings associated with musicals: choreography, chorus numbers, and special effects. As a result of this emphasis on showmanship, the inspirational message of the play is sometimes lost. The play progresses until the moment when all action is suspended to allow the chorus to break into song, or when the audience gets distracted with spectacular effects.

These characteristics are indeed evident in *The Witness*, *Worthy Is the Lamb*, and *The Promise*. Of the three, *The Promise* exemplifies all the glitz and flash of a New York musical. Although it still conveys a very strong inspirational message, much of the power of the production comes from its high energy, emotionally charged musical presentation. This, coupled with lavish costumes and
special effects, makes for an unforgettable and entertaining production. The performance succeeds not only in satisfying the audience's desire to see first-rate theatrical effects, but in doing so it also engages them in a unique religious experience. Those who attend this production spread the news about the marvelous experience of The Promise.

Both Worthy Is the Lamb and The Witness, musical presentations originally performed as church cantatas, do not achieve the same effect. This is probably due to two reasons: first, the scores were not written as theatrical presentations, and, second, neither production uses many special effects. Of the two, Worthy Is the Lamb is stronger in its visual design and special effects presentation. The pre-recorded soundtrack of British actors, however, detracts from the production. While The Witness is stronger in its live performance, the visual presentation seldom rises above that of a church pageant.

Not only can the elements of the musical contribute to the loss of inspirational effectiveness, but the impact is weakened when the plays are produced poorly rather than as professionally as possible. The matter of professionalism, the third and final area to be addressed, is also the most obvious problem for many of these shows.

While all the productions claim a desire to dramatize Christ's life in the best way possible, many content
themselves with productions of inferior quality. One of the main reasons stems from the fact that so few professional performers are used. In casting volunteer talent, the quality of the productions can only be as good as the volunteers recruited to play the roles that season. Thus, the inconsistency in the presentations from year to year can be quite extreme.

Of the productions, only The Black Hills Passion Play recruits "professional" actors. Its representatives go to the Southeastern Theatre Conference Auditions to recruit theatrical personnel to play the major roles, and as a result twenty-three of their performers are considered professional actors. Although she indicates these are professional, they are really college theatre students auditioning for roles. The Promise is the only production using a few equity actors.

All the other plays are content with conducting local auditions, or with simply using members of area churches who volunteer. Sometimes individuals continue to play the same roles year after year. This can prove a real asset in so far as the experience of the cast members is concerned, but it can also be a major drawback when the person expects to play the part each season (and is an inadequate performer). In such cases the director may hesitate to replace this actor to avoid hurt feelings.

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One modification that compensates for this obvious weakness in performances is the use of the pre-recorded soundtrack. While soundtracks do allow for greater consistency in presentation, if the performers are not at the peak of alertness, the outcome can be humorous. When the nonverbal and verbal aspects of the presentation do not coincide, the result undermines both the intents of teaching and pleasing.

Given the size of some of the amphitheatres and the performers' lack of dramatic experience, this staging device is the only method that seems to work. But it by no means proves as dramatically satisfying to the audience. In fact, an article on The Great Passion Play appearing in a recent theatre publication noted that "the most troubling aspect of the Passion Play is its pre-recorded soundtrack." Three of the outdoor productions have selected this method of presentation: The Louisiana Passion Play, Worthy Is the Lamb, and The Great Passion Play. Of the three productions, only The Great Passion Play was satisfactory.

The second time I saw The Great Passion Play I sensed that this use of pre-recorded sound worked for the audience; however, the first time it did not, and I walked away unimpressed. During the second performance the cast's

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sense of timing coincided with the soundtrack, and the
dubbing succeeded. I commented to the general manager
about the contrast between the two performances. He
attributed the difference to a change of directors. The
director of the first production had never been in the
position of playing a role in the production; the second
director had actually played the role of Christ for several
years and understood first-hand the problems and
difficulties encountered when working with a pre-recorded
production.69

While some productions, in seeking to satisfy the
theatrical expectations of the audiences, have chosen
soundtracks, others remain committed to live performances.
A select few of these organizations can successfully
perform a dramatic presentation, but the others opt for
second-rate presentations due to the lack of talent.

This want of professionalism also carries over into
the matters of lighting, costumes, and set design, when
untrained volunteers supervise these areas. Although some
naive audience members may enjoy the production simply
because it is telling the story of Christ, anyone with
theatrical background and training will see the evident
weaknesses and problems.

The desire for a professional quality production is
admirable; however, it is often unattainable. These plays

69 Bob Foster, personal interview, 30 October 1995.
are not drawing the crowds they would wish, and they are thus not financially able to support a quality production or upgrade their facilities. In an effort to provide additional revenues, numerous souvenirs, T-shirts, video tapes, etc., are being made available to the spectators. 

Evidenced by the increase in sales, the plays are increasingly developing into commercial ventures. Even though they claim to be non-profit organizations, they still promote the productions in such a way as to gain as many tourist dollars as possible. In moving away from the purpose of teaching, the plays are highlighting the entertainment product with an eye to financial profit. It is thus evident that the American passion plays are by and large approaching their productions with strategies that maximize their entertainment value.

But which productions are most successful presenting the best performances? Without doubt, The Promise best exemplifies the show with the highest entertainment qualities. It incorporates a contemporary score and text, novel characterizations, colorful authentic costumes, spectacular sets, numerous special effects, and an overall flashy production design. Two other plays, Jesus of Nazareth and The Great Passion Play, also effectively entertain the audience through their many special effects and unique lighting designs.
On the other hand, The Louisiana Passion Play was the least effective production. While attempting to entertain its audience, the show's mediocre production negatively reflected upon the story it was trying to present. But standing true to its tradition is The Black Hills Passion Play, whose primary intent is to teach, not to entertain. Although it ranks low for entertainment value, the historical significance of the play and the quality of its teaching are so strong that the lack of "entertainment" does not hamper its presentation.

In conclusion, the American passion plays are fashioning themselves to the expectations of today's audience who want to be entertained. The producers of the plays still consider the religious component the most important element, but its degree of significance has been waning over the last few decades. As long as they maintain religious productions which entertain, they also hope to educate their audiences. If, however, they cease to entertain, will there be a future for the outdoor passion plays in America?
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION: FUTURE OF OUTDOOR PASSION PLAYS IN THE UNITED STATES

With each new generation, as long as religion and faith play a significant and integral role in American culture, the story of the passion of Christ will be retold. Not only will the story be read from the Bible or preached from the pulpit, dramatizations of Christ's life will continue to serve as tools for disseminating his inspirational message. However, the productions may have compromised their mission to instruct given the recent turn of the passion plays to the maximization of their entertainment value.

Around 20 BC Horace determined that drama, to be effective, must both profit and delight. By following a sense of decorum and appropriateness in relation to the subject matter, character development, and language, the dramatist would likely achieve this end. Are the dramatizations of the passion effectively teaching and pleasing the audience? To what degree do the passion plays fulfill the Horatian dictum?

The continental medieval plays certainly succeeded on both fronts. They focused on the New Testament story of Christ and educated people in the basic tenets of...
Christianity. Much of the material was unfamiliar to the masses since religious instruction given in the churches was read in Latin. Usually the plays began with prologues designed to instruct the people in the background of the play or to emphasize what they were to learn from the presentation itself. The play also limited the development of characters outside of scriptural reference and focused on teaching a simple storyline. But the special effects were in no way simple; the medieval plays included elements to add visual interest to their presentations, and indeed they successfully entertained their audiences.

The American plays like the medieval plays teach the same principal scenes, all taken from scriptural accounts, including the Triumphal Entry, Last Supper, Gethsemane, Trial, Crucifixion, Resurrection and Ascension. Of course, the focal points are the Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Ascension. The American plays also approach the text in an instructional way.

As the medieval passion plays developed, they moved outside and adopted the vernacular, the language of the common people. Is this same phenomenon occurring today? Medieval plays first performed in Latin were translated into the common language so that more people would understand the Christian message; today this is indeed the procedure being followed. For many of the productions, if they can modernize the language and remove the "thee's and
thou's," the texts can be understood by more viewers. For the majority of the plays, the authorized, more formal King James text has been pushed aside in favor of modern versions that are written in an accessible language. Although the contemporary plays follow the medieval tradition by using the language of the people, the modernization may lead to a possible lessening of the reverence and respect of the divinity—bringing it down to the level of humanity.

In another area, American passion plays, like their medieval counterparts, depend on community involvement. As the guilds and towns rallied together to mount the passion plays of the medieval period, so are communities today coming together in a spirit of cohesion working for the good of the church and society. Without the support of the trade guilds, the medieval plays would not have survived; so too, without the support of communities for backstage volunteers, cast, and promotions, the American plays would also face their discontinuance.

But it is apparent that the American outdoor passion plays are truly "American" rather than medieval. Except for The Black Hills Passion Play, the outdoor passion plays have been written by contemporary American writers. These authors compiled scripture passages from the gospels, sometimes using the King James Version, but then adapted the texts using their own words or those of modern
translations. In doing so, they have embedded their attitudes into the texts, and invested scripture's stories with a modern sensibility. In this way, contemporary man has refashioned the content of scripture to reflect his own visions and interpretation.

In this process of updating the medieval form, has the American passion play fulfilled its purpose of drama to teach and to please? The answer is yes; however, the current productions are doing more to entertain than instruct. Through the modifications of textual language, character depictions, controversial issues, special effects and production values, the current passion plays are reaching the American audiences and meeting their expectations, even though American culture is changing.

As long as Christianity plays a part in American society, the plays will continue to modify and adjust to attract greater audiences. Although the message of Christianity is the underlying focus, the adaptations being made by the productions that are most successful are geared toward developing an innovative and entertaining approach.

Some of the changes relevant to the character depictions are also contributing to a departure from the original focus of the passion plays. Whereas the purpose of the medieval performances was to elevate and exalt Christ, especially during the Corpus Christi celebrations, some of today's plays are taking away from that focus by
creating other character roles that are granted considerable stage time and focus. In doing so, the production may less likely offend as the story of Christ is subordinated.

And what about controversial issues? The plays have obviously succumbed to outside pressures in our culture from both believers and non-believers. As productions buckle under and dumb down scripture passages to avoid offending various members of society, they are departing from the total biblical presentation of the passion play. There is no indication that the medieval passion plays sought to side-step these issues, and if today's productions would tactfully handle the scenes in question, the problems could be ameliorated.

However, by ignoring and eliminating scripture passages to avoid offense, the productions are backing down to man's wishes rather than truthfully relating the scripture text. This is in no way condoning discrimination against the Jews; however, the scenes in question can be portrayed carefully in order to avoid the appearance that Pilate gave in to the wishes of a blood-thirsty Jewish mob. There were many Jewish believers who did not participate in this action, and the plays can portray this without ignoring select passages.

But the passion play productions, in order to operate in our American society, will continue to make changes so
that they can eliminate any possibility of actions and lawsuits that might close them down or bring about unfounded accusations of discrimination.

Additionally, many of the plays have invested in equipment that permits them to produce numerous special effects. From smoke machines to advanced pyrotechnic displays, from floodlights and sheets to complex lighting systems and scrims, from simple pulley devices to sophisticated flying equipment, all of the productions except The Black Hills Passion Play are seeking to stay up with the trends and spectacle produced by Hollywood. And the productions seeing great success are those using as many effects as possible. American culture has been primed to thrive on the visual, and these companies know that in order to exist it is imperative that they create the most visually stimulating productions possible in a live theatrical setting. As the passion plays continue to do this, they will survive in our culture.

Finally, in the area of professionalism, only the plays whose quality of productions are on a standard acceptable to the discriminating tastes of our multi-media-dictated society can survive. In assessing the eight American passion play productions, there is no question that the weakest performances are struggling, especially The Louisiana Passion Play. Unfortunately, that production does not rise above the level of a simple church pageant in
its selection of performers, staging, lighting and facility. Unless it drastically upgrades its production, it will not succeed. Performances like this not only make a sad commentary on religion, they speak ill of the outdoor drama movement and theatre itself.

The majority of audience members that attend today's passion plays usually have some knowledge of the life of Christ. Although many of the plays continue to claim that their chief purpose is to instruct, because of the familiarity of the audience with the plays' content, they need not focus as much attention on teaching. As such, the plays are becoming entertainment oriented, often competing for the best special effects. However, when compared to million dollar theme parks and amusement complexes the outdoor passion plays will always fall short.

The dramas that meet audience expectations—for both profiting and entertaining—and those staging the plays in a professional manner are seeing consistent attendance numbers or steady growth. With each passing year, most of these productions have added features or updated the productions in some way, and in doing so, they have succeeded.

The passion play productions' mission of presenting the story of Christ's life remains secure as long as society is tolerant of religion. To continue attracting crowds, however, it necessitates making adaptations to
satisfy the ever-changing tastes and the desire for entertainment evident in our American culture.

By using these strategies, most of the American outdoor passion plays have blazed a path of their own rather than follow the formal tradition of the medieval plays. In doing so, they have developed productions which attract audiences not concerned with the accuracy of the history in the presentation, but instead are captivated with the visual elements and everyday language used in the performances. This is all done in an effort to attract greater numbers and to gain an edge on the tourist market. The bottom line then is that these productions will take any steps necessary to make their performances interesting and exciting in order to maintain operation and stay solvent.

While the stated purpose of these productions has been to provide religious instruction, that purpose may have been overshadowed by the spectacular in order to make more money. Although each of the plays is run by a non-profit organization, several of them use other means of gaining revenue to help with production expenses: guided tours, museums, and gift shops. An examination of the financial statements and the distribution of monies by the passion plays is another area for future study.

Even though all of these areas may serve together to produce a successful American passion play, other factors
could work to endanger these productions in the future. Chapter One addressed the outdoor passion play and its place in the outdoor drama genre. In general these passion plays have provided steady growth figures and have made a definite contribution to the outdoor drama industry, especially since the largest play in the organization is The Great Passion Play. But it is also possible that, while the outdoor passion plays will survive due to the nature of the presentation, they may encounter other problems generally associated with the outdoor drama industry.

Such plays will continue to face competition from the multi-media-oriented entertainment industry, and although the American passion plays are making more entertaining adaptations, they will always face severe competition. An Institute of Outdoor Drama Advisory Council member Marion Waggoner, producer and director of the outdoor drama Tecumseh, wrote that "there are numerous competitive factors (theme parks, videos, casinos, etc.) which force the outdoor drama movement to constantly review its method of operation."¹ Thus, all the outdoor productions, religious or otherwise, face continual pressure to upgrade the quality. Those plays not willing to make the necessary adjustments will jeopardize existence.

¹ Marion Waggoner, "Has Outdoor Drama Lost Its Way?" US Outdoor Drama Newsletter (Chapel Hill: Summer 1995) 3.
Another common problem, one faced by both the medieval and American productions, concerns the weather, a variable that is of course, uncontrollable. Depending on the area of the country, productions may encounter extreme temperatures, abnormal amounts of rainfall, hail, flooding, or even hurricanes. For example, during the summer of 1996, the coast of North Carolina was struck by two hurricanes, Bertha and Fran, which inflicted attendance losses on both The Lost Colony and Worthy Is the Lamb.²

Then some problems can result from a combination of forces as was faced by The Promise last year. Recently, severe winds destroyed the 1,600 square foot environmental canopy erected over the stage and production areas, forcing the cancellation of twenty-four performances.³ But assuming that these uncontrollable forces do not curtail the productions, the passion plays—with keen management and the willingness to adapt—should be able to continue.

For many, the need to see dramatizations of Christ's life story is important. Such enactments bring the abstract and supernatural down to earth in a tangible way. Even believers often have difficulty comprehending the nature of Christ's deity as one who performs miracles. However, by visually portraying these occurrences before an

² Hardy 2.

audience, the black and white print of scripture suddenly takes life, becoming real to the spectator.

If the outdoor passion play in the United States continues as a unique, Americanized production, teaching and entertaining, while making all the necessary adaptations to stay up with current trends (as well as overcoming the standard problems facing outdoor dramas), what does the future hold? Where are the passion play productions headed?

First of all, as movie, video, computer, and internet technologies advance, the productions already incorporating special effects will need to update their equipment so as to keep up with the media innovations. Some productions will be successful, while others will not. Secondly, the American passion plays will encounter major problems if they continue to rely on non-professional or volunteer performers. Audiences will accept untalented performers only so long, especially if viewers are accustomed to seeing other professional play performances or movie productions. If the weaker performers remain unable to meet the expectations of the audiences, the attendance numbers will drop.

Thirdly, and the most disturbingly, adaptations may result in the continued downgrading of the language used in the texts. By lowering tone and style so that the words may be understood by all (and by playing up storylines with
secondary characters) the passion plays sacrifice much of the reverence and respect for the Christ and the passion story of the Bible. One hopes this trend can be checked, without losing any more of the story's focus upon the deity. If this happens, the passion story will eventually evolve into a drama concerning the life of a good man (instead of a divine being), and the gospel message will be muted in the glitz of entertainment.

Ten years from now it will be interesting to conduct another study on the passion plays to see what changes have occurred. Will the plays still be the same, or will more entertaining modifications and adaptations be required to the extent that the plays will no longer be recognizable as passion plays on the life of Jesus Christ--divinity? Time and the American audience will tell.
WORKS CONSULTED

Books and Dissertations


219

Holy Bible. King James Version. 1611.


**Articles and Essays**


"Volunteers Make 'Witness' Successful." *Sentinel-Record [Hot Springs]* 29 June 1988: 12-A.


**Pamphlets and Brochures**


*Parrish, Alicia. Texas Amphitheatre: Tap Into Its Market.*

Souvenir Programs / Playbills


Scripts, Scores


Unpublished Materials


Meier, Johanna. E-Mail to the author. 5 December 1996.


*Paul Green-The Playwright*. America online. Internet. 8 August 1997.


Roughton, Hazel. "*The Living Word Outdoor Drama.*" ts. Cambridge.


Interviews


Gonzalez, Julio. Telephone interview. Director, Music Center Archives, Los Angeles. 28 February 1996.


Performances


Videocassettes


Recordings


APPENDIXES
A. Outdoor Passion Plays 1996

**Black Hills Passion Play**
Amphitheatre Affiliates, Inc.
Box 489 SUMMER
Spearfish, SD 57783
(605) 642-2648 Administration
(605) 642-2646 Box Office
Box 71 WINTER
Lake Wales, FL 33859
(813) 638-1508 Administration
(813) 676-1495 Box Office
Guido della Vecchia, Gen. Manager
Johanna Meier, Director

**The Great Passion Play**
Elina M. Smith Foundation
PO Box 471
Eureka Springs, AR 72632
(501) 253-8559 Administration
1-800-822-PLAY Box Office
Bob Foster, Gen. Manager
David Bland, Artistic Director

**Jesus of Nazareth**
Covenant Celebration Church
1819 East 72nd Street
Tacoma, WA 98404
(206) 848-3411
Linda Nelson, Gen. Manager
Steve Munsey, Artistic Director

**The Living Word**
6010 College Hill
PO Box 1481
Cambridge, OH 43725
(614) 439-2761
Doris Snyder, Gen. Manager
Mark Pedro, Artistic Director

**The Louisiana Passion Play**
3010 S. Vienna (US 167 S)
Ruston, LA 71270
(318) 255-6277
1-800-204-2101
James Burns, Gen. Manager
Kevin Cannady, Artistic Director

**The Promise**
Promise Productions, Inc.
PO Box 927
Glen Rose, TX 76043
(817) 897-4341
David Sanders, Pres / CEO
Mike Meese, Artistic Director

**The Witness**
Witness Productions, Inc.
P.O. Box 6434
Hot Springs, AR 71902
(501) 760-1159 Box Office
(501) 623-9781 Administration
Judy McEarl, Director
Pat Reed, Public Relations

**Worthy Is the Lamb**
Passion Play Productions, Inc.
Crystal Coast Amphitheatre
P.O. Box 1004
Swansboro, NC 28584
(919) 393-8373
1-800-662-5960
Shirley Page, Gen. Manager
Judy Adams, Artistic Director

**Institute Of Outdoor Drama**
University of North Carolina
CB# 3240 NationsBank Plaza
Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3240
(919) 962-1328
Scott J. Parker, Director
Cindy Biles, Editor
B. Sample Outdoor Religious Play Questionnaire

Please verify the following information making corrections as needed and filling in the blanks. Thank you so much for taking time to assist me in this project!  

Black Hills Passion Play, Amphitheatre Affiliates, Inc.  
Box 489, Spearfish, SD 57783 SUMMER  
Box 71, Lake Wales, FL 33859 WINTER  

Phones: (605) 642-2648 SD; (813) 638-1508 FL  

General Manager______________________________________________________  
(Name) (Phone)  

Playwright__________________________________________________________  
(Name) (Address) (Phone)  

Artistic Director_______________________________________________________  
(Name) (Address) (Phone)  

(Please list any other administrative management positions on the back.)  

Founder______________________________________________________________  
Occupation__________________________________________________________  

Date of Origin________________ Place of 1st Performance__________________  
(town, location)  

Primary purpose for beginning production______________________________  

Focus of production today______________________________________________  

Target Audience______________________________________________________  

(please attach any audience demographic studies you may have done)  

Do you have a permanent amphitheatre?________ Number of seats______________  

Number attending 1st Performance________ Number attending 1st Season________  

Highest number at a Performance________ Number attending 1993 Season________  

Performance Days____________ Average attendance at a performance__________  

Number of performances 1st Season________ Number of performances 1993 Season________  

Number of rehearsals prior to performance________ Length of performance________  

Size of the town or community______________________________  

Number in Cast________ Number of primary roles________ % Cast returning________  

Number with theatrical training? Directors________ Performers________  

Number professional actors________ Number of cast members paid?________  

(Actors Equity, etc.)  

Original Financial support?________  

(Endowment, foundation, church, private gifts, ticket sales)  

Primary Financial support today__________________________________________  

% Operating expenses covered through ticket sales__________________________  

Type of production: Drama________ Musical________  

Means of production: Fully pre-recorded Soundtrack with performers in pantomime________  

Music pre-recorded; spoken or sung lines live________  

Nothing pre-recorded; all parts delivered live________  

If you have faced any problems with governmental suppression (local, state, or federal), artistic limitations, anti-Semitic accusations, infringement on religious freedom, or censorship, please briefly note these on the back of the paper.
C. Outdoor Passion Play Update 1993-1995

In order to complete the information for my dissertation on the passion plays, please fill in the following information. **Make corrections as necessary.**

Thank you so much for assisting me in this project!  

Charles F. Meek
Black Hills Passion Play, Amphitheatre Affiliates, Inc.,  
Phones: (605) 642-2648 SD;  (813) 638-1508 FL
Box 489 Spearfish, SD  57783  
Box 71, Lake Wales, FL  33859

Positions on record:

Any other managerial positions:

Ownership: Corporation?  ________________  Non-Profit?  ________________
             Church?  ________________  Other?  ________________

Attendance 1st Amphitheatre Perf.  ________________  Date of 1st Performance  _______
1st Season Attendance  ________________  Number of Performances 1st Season  _______
Record Perf. Attendance  ________________  Date  _______
Size of Community  ________________  Amphitheatre: Own  __  Lease  __  Other  __

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Number of performances and length of season planned for 1996 __________________________

Other plans for 1996 Season __________________________

If in the last year you have faced any problems with governmental suppression (local, state, or federal), artistic limitations, anti-Semitic accusations, infringement on religious freedom, or censorship, please briefly note these on the back of the paper.
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witness</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>13,355</td>
<td>10,650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worthy</td>
<td>38,585</td>
<td>39,133</td>
<td>37,176</td>
<td>34,711</td>
<td>23,734</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Institute of Outdoor Drama.
### E. U. S. Outdoor Drama Attendance 1992

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drama</th>
<th>Attendance</th>
<th>Performances (# remaining)</th>
<th>Rainouts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black Hills Passion</td>
<td>69,100</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Passion Play</td>
<td>289,212</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus of Nazareth</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living Word</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana Passion</td>
<td>CLOSED</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promise</td>
<td>55,483</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witness</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worthy Is the Lamb</td>
<td>38,585</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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1 As of 15 October 1992 by the Institute of Outdoor Drama.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drama</th>
<th>Attendance</th>
<th>Performances (# remaining)</th>
<th>Rainouts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black Hills Passion</td>
<td>53,353</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Passion Play</td>
<td>229,977</td>
<td>115(17)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus of Nazareth</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living Word</td>
<td>9,763</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana Passion</td>
<td>CLOSED</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promise</td>
<td>55,545</td>
<td>39(4)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witness</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worthy Is the Lamb</td>
<td>39,133</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 As of 28 October 1993 by the Institute of Outdoor Drama.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drama</th>
<th>Attendance</th>
<th>Performances (# remaining)</th>
<th>Rainouts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black Hills Passion</td>
<td>63,000</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Passion Play</td>
<td>208,792</td>
<td>110(22)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus of Nazareth</td>
<td>41,000</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living Word</td>
<td>9,737</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana Passion</td>
<td>3,959</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promise</td>
<td>46,980</td>
<td>33(8)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witness</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worthy Is the Lamb</td>
<td>37,176</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 As of 26 October 1994 by the Institute of Outdoor Drama.
## H. U. S. Outdoor Drama Attendance 1995

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drama</th>
<th>Attendance</th>
<th>Performances (# remaining)</th>
<th>Rainouts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black Hills Passion</td>
<td>56,800</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Passion Play</td>
<td>201,093</td>
<td>112(17)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus of Nazareth</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living Word</td>
<td>8,711</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana Passion</td>
<td>2,728</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promise</td>
<td>70,020</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witness</td>
<td>13,355</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worthy Is the Lamb</td>
<td>34,711</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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1 As of 9 November 1995 by the Institute of Outdoor Drama.
### I. U. S. Outdoor Drama Attendance 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drama</th>
<th>Attendance</th>
<th>Performances (# remaining)</th>
<th>Rainouts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black Hills Passion</td>
<td>62,868</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Passion Play</td>
<td>161,333</td>
<td>102(27)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus of Nazareth</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living Word</td>
<td>12,689</td>
<td>38(2)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana Passion</td>
<td>2,793</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promise</td>
<td>26,820</td>
<td>18(2)</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witness</td>
<td>10,650</td>
<td>29(8)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worthy Is the Lamb</td>
<td>23,734</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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1 As of 7 November 1996 by the Institute of Outdoor Drama.
J. Basic Information from Questionnaire
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INFORMATION</th>
<th>BLACK HILLS S/LW</th>
<th>GREAT PASSION</th>
<th>LIVING WORD</th>
<th>JESUS OF NAZARETH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Place of 1st Perf.</td>
<td>Spearfish, SD: Lueneo, SD</td>
<td>Eureka Springs, AR</td>
<td>Cambridge, OH</td>
<td>Puyallup, WA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Founder</td>
<td>Josef Meier</td>
<td>Gerald L. K. Smith (d. '76)</td>
<td>Frank Roughton Harvey</td>
<td>Steve Munsey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Director / Translator</td>
<td>Politician, Minister</td>
<td>Professional Theatre</td>
<td>Pastor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perm. Amphitheatre?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capacity</td>
<td>6,500 / 3,600</td>
<td>4,100</td>
<td>1,200</td>
<td>3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st Perf. Attendance</td>
<td>1,132</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Record Attend / Date</td>
<td>6,713 / 8/10/93</td>
<td>4,262</td>
<td>1,200</td>
<td>2,240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Night Attend</td>
<td>900</td>
<td>1,700</td>
<td>1,208</td>
<td>1,242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996 Attendance</td>
<td>84,853</td>
<td>225,513</td>
<td>8,711</td>
<td>8,763</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994 Attendance</td>
<td>86,000</td>
<td>247,974</td>
<td>9,277</td>
<td>40,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993 Attendance</td>
<td>90,889</td>
<td>249,724</td>
<td>9,763</td>
<td>4,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st Season Attendance</td>
<td>14,852</td>
<td>28,852</td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td>15,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Perf. 196 Season</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Perf. 1994 Season</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Perf. 1993 Season</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Rehearsals</td>
<td>2 weeks</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of Performance</td>
<td>Drama</td>
<td>Pre-Recorded</td>
<td>Drama</td>
<td>Drama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Recorded/Live?</td>
<td>Everything Live</td>
<td>Pre-recorded</td>
<td>Live perf.</td>
<td>Live perf.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance Length</td>
<td>2:15</td>
<td>2:05</td>
<td>2:00</td>
<td>2:30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curtain Time</td>
<td>8:15 / 7:30</td>
<td>8:30 (Sep-Oct 7:30)</td>
<td>8:05</td>
<td>8:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size of Community</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>14,000</td>
<td>50,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size of Cast</td>
<td>100-160</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>50-100</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Primary Roles</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Primary Returning</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Actors?</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Theatrical training</td>
<td>2 Dir; 22 perf.</td>
<td>1 Dir; 2 perf.</td>
<td>5 perf.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporation?</td>
<td>Amphitheatre Affiliate</td>
<td>Elna M. Smith Found</td>
<td>LW Outdoor Drama, Inc</td>
<td>Covenant Celebrate Ch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Financial Sup.</td>
<td>Ticket Sales</td>
<td>Tickets, Gifts, Food</td>
<td>Ticket Sales</td>
<td>Ticket Sales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Original Financial Sup.</td>
<td>Ticket Sales, Subscript.</td>
<td>Elna M. Smith Found</td>
<td>Ticket Sales</td>
<td>Ticket Sales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Covered by Tickets</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ticket Prices A, S, Ch.</td>
<td>$7.14; C half</td>
<td>$10.50 / 12.50; C half</td>
<td>$10.00; C $6</td>
<td>$10.12; S $20; C half</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target Audience</td>
<td>Tourists, Relig. Service</td>
<td>Church, Groups, Family</td>
<td>Gen. public, church</td>
<td>Unchurched</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INFORMATION</td>
<td>LOUISIANA</td>
<td>WITNESS</td>
<td>WORTHY IS LAMB</td>
<td>PROMISE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place of 1st Perf.</td>
<td>Calhoun, LA</td>
<td>Hot Springs, AR</td>
<td>Swansboro, NC</td>
<td>Glen Rose, TX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Founder</td>
<td>James Burns</td>
<td>Jim &amp; Carol Owens</td>
<td>J. T. Adams (d. 9/93)</td>
<td>David Sanders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Pastor</td>
<td>Music Director</td>
<td>Playwright, Comp., Perf.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perm. Amphitheatre?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capacity</td>
<td>900</td>
<td>1,300</td>
<td>2,100</td>
<td>3,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st Perf. Attendance</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>900</td>
<td>250</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Record Attend / Date</td>
<td>1,018 / 4/26/87</td>
<td>900 / 4/86</td>
<td>3,600</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Night Attend '95</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>430</td>
<td>1,836</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995 Attendance</td>
<td>2,728</td>
<td>15,060</td>
<td>72,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994 Attendance</td>
<td>3,036</td>
<td>12,138</td>
<td>70,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993 Attendance</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>11,746</td>
<td>68,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st Season Attendance</td>
<td>9,317</td>
<td>39,133</td>
<td>68,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Perf. 1995 Season</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>44</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Perf. 1994 Season</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>43</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Perf. 1993 Season</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>42/44 (2 rain out)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Perf. 1st Season</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Rehearsals</td>
<td>12 - 15</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of Performance</td>
<td>Drama</td>
<td>Musical</td>
<td>Musical</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Recorded/Live?</td>
<td>Pre-recorded</td>
<td>Live</td>
<td>All pre-recorded</td>
<td>Pre-rec music; live per.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance Length</td>
<td>1:47</td>
<td>1:22</td>
<td>2:20</td>
<td>2:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curtain Time</td>
<td>8:30 (8:00 Sep)</td>
<td>8:30 (7:30 Sep)</td>
<td>8:30</td>
<td>8:30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size of Community</td>
<td>20,000 city; 42,000 par.</td>
<td>35,000</td>
<td>2,500</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size of Cast</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Primary Roles</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Cast Returning</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Actors?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Theatrical training</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 Dir. 1 Performer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Financial Sup</td>
<td>Gifts, ticket sales</td>
<td>Ticket sales</td>
<td>Gifts; ticket sales</td>
<td>Gifts; ticket sales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Original Financial Sup</td>
<td>Private gifts</td>
<td>Churches</td>
<td>Private Gifts; investments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Covered by Tickets</td>
<td>85 - 90%</td>
<td>80 - 90%</td>
<td>80 - 90%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ticket Prices A, S, Ch</td>
<td>$5, $5, $1</td>
<td>$8, $7, $4</td>
<td>$11, $9, $6</td>
<td>$10.15, $1, $8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target Audience</td>
<td>Church, Senior tours</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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K. Scene Comparisons
## SCENE COMPARISONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BLACK HILLS</th>
<th>GREAT PAS.</th>
<th>JESUS NAZ.</th>
<th>LIVING WORD</th>
<th>LOUISIANA</th>
<th>PROMISE</th>
<th>WORTHY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prologue</td>
<td>Prologue</td>
<td>Prologue-Riverbank</td>
<td>Prologue</td>
<td>Prophets</td>
<td>Trip to Bethlehem</td>
<td>Nativity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nativity</td>
<td>Nativity</td>
<td>Nativity</td>
<td>Nativity</td>
<td>Nativity</td>
<td>Inkeeper scene</td>
<td>Prophets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prologue</td>
<td>Prologue</td>
<td>Baptism of Jesus</td>
<td>Prophets</td>
<td>Prophets</td>
<td>Prophets</td>
<td>Jesus teaches, heals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San. discuss JBapt.</td>
<td>JB heralds Jesus</td>
<td>JB heralds Jesus</td>
<td>JB &amp; Herod</td>
<td>Jesus teaches, heals</td>
<td>Jesus teaches, heals</td>
<td>Jesus teaches, heals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sermon on Mount</td>
<td>Sermon on Mount</td>
<td>Sermon on Mount</td>
<td>Sermon on Mount</td>
<td>Sermon on Mount</td>
<td>Sermon on Mount</td>
<td>Jesus teaches, heals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanhedrin discuss</td>
<td>Sanhedrin discuss</td>
<td>Sanhedrin discuss</td>
<td>Sanhedrin discuss</td>
<td>Sanhedrin discuss</td>
<td>Sanhedrin discuss</td>
<td>Sanhedrin discuss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage &amp; Dance-H</td>
<td>Barabbas Chase</td>
<td>Talks to Nicodemus</td>
<td>Calls three Apostles</td>
<td>J.B. sent to prison</td>
<td>J.B. accused Herod</td>
<td>J.B. accused Herod</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triumphant Entry</td>
<td>Triumphant Entry</td>
<td>Triumphant Entry</td>
<td>Triumphant Entry</td>
<td>Triumphant Entry</td>
<td>Triumphant Entry</td>
<td>Triumphant Entry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanhedrin Council</td>
<td>Sanhedrin plots</td>
<td>Sanhedrin reacts</td>
<td>Sanhedrin reacts</td>
<td>Sanhedrin reacts</td>
<td>Sanhedrin reacts</td>
<td>Sanhedrin reacts</td>
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VITA

Charlene Faye Monk was born to J. Charlie and Ilene Pennington Monk on August 5, 1951. She and her younger sister Priscilla were born and reared in High Point, North Carolina. After graduating in 1969 from High Point Central High School, she attended Bob Jones University in Greenville, South Carolina, receiving her bachelor of science degree in Speech Education in 1973. For the next two years she continued her education at Bob Jones University, pursuing her interest in theatre and completing a master of arts degree in Dramatic Production. For her final project she wrote and directed a religious drama on the life of Martin Luther.

After graduation in 1975, Charlene accepted a position on the speech faculty at Maranatha Baptist Bible College in Watertown, Wisconsin. In 1977 she received an invitation to join the speech department at Pensacola Christian College and moved to Pensacola, Florida. There she has taught courses in Fundamentals of Speech, Voice and Diction, Oral Interpretation, Acting, and Directing. In addition to the teaching responsibilities she has directed more than thirty productions of classical, contemporary, and religious dramas, musicals, and opera. Some of the productions include Much Ado About Nothing, Romeo and

In the summer of 1989, Charlene began her doctoral studies in theatre at Louisiana State University while continuing her teaching responsibilities at Pensacola Christian College. She completed her doctor of philosophy degree in May, 1998. Currently she serves as a faculty member in the Speech Department of Pensacola Christian College.
DOCTORAL EXAMINATION AND DISSERTATION REPORT

Candidate: Charlene Faye Monk

Major Field: Theatre

Title of Dissertation: Passion Plays in the United States: The Contemporary Outdoor Tradition

Approved:

[Signatures of Major Professor and Chairman, Dean of the Graduate School]

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

[Signatures of committee members]

Date of Examination:

April 6, 1998