

**By Willehad Paul Eckert**

In Freising, a meeting was called to respond to the critics of the Oberammergau Passion Plays, particularly regarding their anti-Jewish tendencies. Representatives from other Passion Plays (such as Erl in Tyrol), theologians and theater personnel participated. Reports on these days of meeting were published under the title: Passion Plays Today? The representatives at the meeting agreed that Passion Plays continue, but that the anti-Jewish tendencies be eliminated.

In Oberammergau, Hans Schweighofer undertook replacing the Daisenberger text through recourse to the 1750 Nova Passio of the Benedictine Ferdinand Rosner from Ettal, which utilized the allegories so appreciated in the baroque period. In 1977 this Nova Passio was impressively performed on the Oberammergau open air stage. This was an experimental performance for those working on the revisions. Three years prior to the regular performance of 1980, it was to serve as an opportunity for further rethinking and revision. A majority of the municipal council did not agree with these efforts of reform. Hence the 1980 presentation remained with the Daisenberger text. But these efforts at reform were not futile. In 1987, ten years afterward, the Oberammergau community producing the play published a documentation on the 1977 performance of the baroque Passion entitled: The Rosner Play. Visitors to the 1990 Oberammergau Passionsspiele also had the opportunity to see the design and the costuming of the Rosner Passion script with the German revised Daisenberger draft.

Meanwhile the History of Bavaria Publishing House planned a publication titled Listen, Behold, Weep and Love: Passion Plays in the Alpine Region, edited by Michael Henker, Eberhard Dünninger and Evamaria Brockhoff, Munich, 1990. The Rosner Passion documentation, as well as that of the Alpine Region Passion Plays, gives evidence of the seriousness with which those responsible for the plays were dealing with the charge of anti-Judaism.

Having seen the 1970 and 1990 Oberammergau performances, I am convinced that they are now attempting to avoid all anti-Jewish tendencies. This is true for the text as well as for the dramatization. Jewish prayer forms have been taken into consideration. The prayer of Jesus and his apostles at the Last Supper for Israel and the nations is particularly impressive. Preparations for the performance in the year 2000 are marked by a similar effort at reform.

There may be concern that future directors of parish theater will be less cautious. This is possible and it is necessary to be on guard. But, today the Christian sensitivity which no longer accepts reference to the charge of "deicide" in a homily also rejects similar representations in a Passion Play.

Just as the earlier Passion Plays were, regrettably, an outlet for anti-Jewish sentiment, theatrical representations of the Passion after the Shoah can and must be an occasion to develop necessary new understandings on the part of Christians.

My point of view favoring a revival of Passion Plays was reinforced by the performance during Holy Week in the square and church of Saint Laurent of Tullins, north of Grenoble. I was impressed by its careful use of text, by the spiritual atmosphere marking the performance, and by the fervor of the audience. In 1995 enthusiasm for the performance spread by word of mouth, resulting in seven sold-out showings. In 1997 there were fourteen performances before 5,500 people who were not mere spectators, but true participants. This 1997 showing involved nearly 180 actors along with approximately a hundred others who worked on costumes, sets, administration and organization.

This venture, begun by Madame and Monsieur Rosand, has resulted in great unity among the eleven parishes around Tullins.

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