

***The Oberammergau Passion Play:***  
**An Interview with Professor Gordon Mork, PhD**

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**Introduction**

The following interview (with notes, appendices, and figures) took place on June 29, 2000 in a small village outside of Munich, Germany. The day before this interview, Professor Mork and I, together with other scholars, viewed the performance of one of the world's most most well-known and unique stage productions: *The Oberammergau Passion Play*. I had an opportunity to sit down with Dr Mork to discuss in detail some of the more enigmatic aspects of the play which he has researched and written about over the past couple of decades. His knowledge and expertise in the area of German history, as well as his research and publishing work focussing upon the anti-Semitic elements found in prior productions of the Oberammergau Passion Play, are evidenced in his deliberate, but thoughtful commentary on the subject.

First performed in 1634 as a talisman against a plague which was wiping out entire communities, the villagers of the small German hamlet of Oberammergau performed the Passion Play as "payment" to God for sparing their village. Since its inception and humble beginnings 366 years ago, the people of Oberammergau have regularly performed this play (with few exceptions) for a total of 40 seasons.

Over the centuries, the Oberammergau Passion Play has changed somewhat, been updated periodically, and has even been occasionally reinterpreted. [See Appendix 1 for a detailed chronology of the history of the passion play in Oberammergau.] To this day, however, it still adheres strictly to a very literal interpretation of the events in Christ's life between Palm Sunday--when Jesus entered Jerusalem [See Figure 1.]--until his crucifixion and subsequent resurrection on Easter Sunday. [See Appendix 6 for an overview of the new (2000) version of the Passion Play text.]

**The Interview**

TL : When did you first become interested in the Oberammergau Passion Play?

GM : Well, I heard my parents talk about the Passion Play. They had seen it in 1960 when they were in Europe. So, I thought that it would be an interesting thing to do as an historian, to attend this important festival. In 1984<sup>1</sup> my wife and I worked out an arrangement with the Tippecanoe County Historical Association [Indiana, USA] to do a tour for them to the play. So, that was the way we become familiar with it, and it was shortly after that when I let my colleagues know that I was doing this. Please note that as I was doing this, several people raised concerns, particularly some of my Jewish friends

who said, "Don't you know that it is an anti-Semitic play?" And I said, "Well I did not realize that and I think it is something that needs to have some research."<sup>2</sup> So, I applied for a research grant to the Indiana Council for the Humanities, and got a research grant from them. At the same time, I was developing my expertise on this play so that I could lead the group to Germany to see the play.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, I was also doing research addressing the question of anti-Semitism in general.

TL : The year 1984 marked the 350th year anniversary.

GM : Yes, that's right. The 350th anniversary since the first play was given in 1634.

TL : When did the people of Oberammergau begin putting it on in even years?

GM : 1680. And I really don't know why. It was quite early, and why they went to the zero-numbered years, I honestly don't know.

TL : Could you give a brief historical outline of the Passion Play.

GM : The reason that the Passion Play was first given in Oberammergau, according to local traditions — and I have to say that because they are not well documented — was that a plague had broken out — this was during the Thirty-Years War — and it looked like the entire population of the village might be wiped out.

TL : By the Bubonic plague?

GM : Well, to be honest, we don't know exactly whether it was the Bubonic or Pneumonic plague because we don't have a good medical description of it. But it was a serious plague and people were dying from it. And under these circumstances then, according to the tradition, the town fathers gathered around the crucifix and promised to put on this play once every ten years if God would preserve their village from destruction by the plague. And according to tradition, no one else died of the plague from then on, and so in the next year, 1634, they gave the first production of the play. And at that time, they did it — I believe — only once, by the villagers for the villagers. It was basically a pious religious service in the form of a play. So, it has changed significantly from that all the way up to the year 2000 when performances are given all summer long and well into the fall.<sup>4</sup> Incredibly, something like half-a-million visitors now come to see the play.

TL : Historically, are there scripts of all the plays that have gone on since that time? If not, how far back do they have actual documents?

GM : Back into the 1600s we have only fragmentary scripts; from the 1700s forward, we have a pretty good record; and then we have printed scripts from the late 1800s on to the present.<sup>5</sup>

TL : How common were the passion plays at that time? Were they quite common or rather rare?

GM : Passion plays were *very* common in early modern Europe, so common in fact that Oberammergau was nothing special. Oberammergau, however, maintained the tradition when it fell by the wayside in other villages and communities, so that by the time you get to the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, passion plays were either abandoned or actually banned by the government or by the church, and only Oberammergau persisted. There continued to be some passion plays elsewhere in Europe, and of course, there are even versions in the United States that, in a way, are copying Oberammergau. But they are now very rare, particularly ones that go back this far.

TL : How has the current 2000 Passion Play changed with regard to the last Passion Play you saw in 1990; and from 1990 how did that one change from the one in 1984?

GM : Up until 1984, the people in charge of putting on the play in the village were largely traditionalists, and so they used a version of the play that was changed only a very little bit from the play of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Then in the 1960s, the Catholic Church made important revisions in its theology, particularly regarding the alleged guilt of the Jews for the killing of Jesus Christ. At this time, Oberammergau found itself under pressure from both Catholic and Jewish groups to make changes for the 1970 play. Well, Oberammergau did not do so, nor did they make very many changes — a few minor changes in 1980 and 1984.

TL : What kind of changes?

GM : There were some parts of the text in the 1960 play that really pounded home certain anti-Jewish themes. A line that might have been said once or twice in 1980 was said five or six times in previous versions. But the most important example of this is the so-called "blood curse" line. The blood curse line is actually from the book of Matthew<sup>6</sup>, and when the people in the square are called up before Pontius Pilate, they are calling out to crucify Jesus. They are said to have called out, "His blood be upon us and all our children." In the older versions of the play, that particular line was emphasized again and again, and was sung by the choir, and it was also repeated by the crowd. By the time you got to 1960 and 1970 the line was still used, but it was no longer repeated with such vigor...similarly in 1980 and 1984. In 1990, the reformers were developing an influence in the play, and they tried to get rid of the line. They could not get rid of the blood curse line entirely, but what they did do was to really submerge it in the hubbub of all the stage action — huge crowds of hundreds of people on stage. Now, in the year 2000, that line has been dropped from the play entirely.

TL : How have the costumes changed over the years?

GM : The costumes have changed a fair amount. Costumes, of course, are very expensive. You have hundreds of people on stage, and all in specially designed costumes, so there was a tendency to reuse costumes again and again. One of the more interesting visual aspects of it was that the idea of presentation in earlier times was to distinguish the costumes between "Christians" and "Jews." Well, in a way that makes no sense because Jesus, and all his disciples, and Mary, and so on, were all Jews. But still the costumes made them look different than the Jewish traders and members of the Jewish council or the Jews who were in the streets. High priests of course have special costumes — they are after all high priests, so they have priestly costumes. So they are not going to look exactly like common people; they are the aristocratic leaders of the religious community.

Well, over the years, particularly the headgear has changed. No one knows exactly what kind of headgear high priests wore, so it was really all up to the artistic direction of the people doing the play. So, for a while in the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and earlier 20<sup>th</sup> century, the high priests wore large hats — almost helmets — with large pointed miters on each side. Some people said it looked like they had horns, and they referred to them as the "horned hats." This of course is a sensitive matter because there were, and indeed there still are, a few people in the world who think that "Jews" have horns. Of course that is silly, and

the costume designers claimed that these hats were really not horned hats...they were just sideways miters on peoples' heads. But nevertheless, the horned-miters were used through 1984, but were banned in 1990. Then there were entirely new headgear — very large, elaborate, round hats which were worn by the high priests by the council in the year 2000<sup>7</sup>.

TL : What were the most distinguishing differences, historically, that are in contrast to how it is currently being performed?

GM : I suppose overall, a couple of things. One is the way the traditional play was written. It created a melodramatic tension between "good Christians" and "bad Jews." And this of course could be used to feed people's prejudices about Jews. Nowadays, the play is designed in such a way to emphasize the Jewishness of Jesus, and in a way that you didn't have a distinction between Christians and Jews because there were no Christians during that time in history. Christianity only developed after Jesus' death and resurrection. So, what you have instead now is a quarrel, a conflict between different groups of Jews in Jerusalem and near by. So it is presented not as Christians against Jews or Jews against Christians, but rather various groups of Jews trying to determine what was right for them and their religion. Jesus is of course the leader of one of these groups, and from his Judaism comes what we know today to be "Christianity."

TL : Could you talk a little bit about the term "rabbi" and how it is used in the 2000 play compared to the way the term was used before?

GM : Up until 1984, there was a figure in the play that was very angry and a sleazy character who was given the name in the play as "rabbi," and this rabbi was really out to get Jesus and to see that Jesus was killed.

TL : Was this Caiphas?

GM : No, this is not Caiphas; Caiphas is a high priest and has a somewhat different role. This rabbi character was a much more unpleasant character. Caiphas, of course, has his own agenda, there is no doubt about that; he wants to get rid of Jesus for political reasons.<sup>8</sup> But the rabbi character was really bad, and had no sense of high-minded political purpose at all, but rather was just sort of in it for vengeance and took great glee in the brutality of Jesus' suffering. Well, since this is the only person in the play up until 1984 referred to as rabbi, real rabbis — Jewish rabbis — took great offense to this, as well they might. By the time you get to the changes of 1990, that character who had been called rabbi is now given a different name — the name of Arcalaus. He is still there — a toned down version — but he is still there. Interestingly, however, he is no longer called the "rabbi." Whereas the word rabbi — which really means "teacher" — is used as a way of addressing Jesus by his disciples. And so this emphasizes again the Jewishness of Jesus, because Jesus was, in the terminology of the Bible, a rabbi; that is to say, a teacher.<sup>9</sup>

TL : Traditionally, what was Jesus called then, if he wasn't called rabbi prior to this?

GM : If you read the King James version of the Bible you will see him called "teacher."

TL : But didn't they called him the Christ?

GM : Oh, yes, now in the play itself the tendency was to keep referring to Jesus as "Christ" or "the Christ." And technically, theologically, he doesn't really become the "Christ" until after his resurrection. So it is a fine point of theology perhaps, but still it is best to think

of Jesus as the human side, whereas Christ refers to the divine side.

TL : As an expert having studied and researched the Oberammergau Passion Play for twenty years or more, what changes do you foresee in the future renditions of the Passion Play from the perspective of someone who has researched it in detail, and are quite familiar with it?

GM : It is very difficult to say, and I could just say that historians study the past and don't like to predict the future. I did in fact raise this question with Otto Huber<sup>10</sup> who was the deputy director of the play and did most of the rewriting of the play for this year. [The director of the 2000 play was Christian Stückl.<sup>11</sup>] You can tell he is already thinking about things that might be different in the future. And not just because of the Jewish issue; different in the sense of ways to make the play more dramatic, more attractive. He is very concerned, for example, that a great many young people seem uninterested in the play. They don't go to the play. They think it is for retired folks. And Otto really thinks that the play ought to be done in such a way that young people — not only from Oberammergau itself where they are directly involved on stage in the play, but people from all over Germany and indeed all over the world — might want to come and attend it to learn from and profit intellectually and spiritually from the play. Gee, how can they do that? I don't know. They are not going to make it into *Jesus Christ Superstar*, but still they may try to search for ways that will broaden the appeal, particularly to the younger people.

TL : Do you have any parting comments that you would like to say?

GM : Well, a couple of things, I suppose. First of all, I want to thank you for inviting me to comment on these kinds of things. Secondly, I have been studying this for some time, but I really don't consider myself a great expert; there are people far more expert than I. I have been collecting books and indeed hauling some of them around for this tour on the bus and back and forth to my room. So there is really a lot of very good literature on this, a lot of well-written materials. Some of it is somewhat polemic; some of it is basically designed for tourists. But others of it are really pretty good, solid scholarship, so anybody who wants to go into this in great depth can. There are bibliographies out there; there are books; there are pamphlets; and there are scholarly publications in both German and English, and I would welcome other people to look at them and think about these topics themselves.

TL : Do you have any project on the horizon?

GM : I do not have a clear project now. I completed one project in time for the play this year.

TL : Could you give the title?

GM : It is called *The Homes of Oberammergau* by Eliza Greatorox.<sup>12</sup> That book was written by an American woman in 1871 describing the play and her experiences in Oberammergau and includes the etchings she made of Oberammergau in that year. It's a charming book, and Purdue University Press has republished it with myself as editor and with Otto Huber, Deputy Director of the play in Oberammergau, writing an afterward.

TL: Thank you very much for talking with me today.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Although the Oberammergau Passion Play is usually performed every ten years (on years corresponding to the decade), commemorative performances occur when a milestone anniversary is involved. The year 1984 marked the 350th anniversary since the first performance in 1634. [See Appendix 1 for a detailed chronology of the Oberammergau Passion Play 2000.]

<sup>2</sup>Dr Mork has written extensively on the subjects of anti-Semitism, the Holocaust and the Oberammergau Passion Play. For a poignant and scholarly explanation of anti-Semitism within the Oberammergau Passion Play, please read "'Wicked Jews' and 'Suffering Christians' in the Oberammergau Passion Play" in *Representations of Jews Through the Ages* by Gordon R. Mork (ed. by Leonard Jay Greenspoon), Omaha, NE: Creighton University Press, 1996, pp.153-169.

<sup>3</sup>Professor Mork has led 'Study Tours' to Germany to view the Oberammergau Passion Play performance on three occasions : 1984, 1990, 2000. This author participated in the 2000 study tour sponsored by Purdue University's Department of History and Center for Lifelong Learning. The 2000 study tour group viewed the Oberammergau Passion Play performance on Wednesday, June 28, 2000.

<sup>4</sup>The 2000 performance included vividly colored and beautifully designed costumes, as well as elaborate stage settings. [See Figures 1-7.] Also, see Appendix 2 for a brief outline of the history of the play.

<sup>5</sup>See Appendix 1, "Chronology of the Passion Play" for a detailed listing of the play's chronology.

<sup>6</sup>The Gospel According to Mathew, Chapter 27, verse 25 : "Then answered all the people, and said, His blood *be* on us, and on our children." (Holy Bible, King James Version, Mathew 27: 25)

<sup>7</sup>See Figure 3 for a view of the new headgear worn by the priests in the 2000 version.

<sup>8</sup>See Figure 3 to see the actor, Peter Stückl, portraying Caiphas in the 2000 performance of the Oberammergau Passion Play.

<sup>9</sup>The Gospel According to Saint John, Chapter 1, verse 38: "Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, 'what seek ye?' They said unto him, Rabbi [which is to say, being interpreted as teacher or Master], 'Where dwellest thou?' (Holy Bible, King James Version, John 1: 38)

<sup>10</sup>Otto Huber was the Assistant Director and Literary Advisor for the Oberammergau Passion Play 2000. For specific information regarding Mr Huber's credentials and background, see Appendix 3; also see Appendix 4 to review Otto Huber's dossier. Figure 8 shows Mr Huber with Dr Mork after the Oberammergau Passion Play performance for June 28, 2000 (outside the theater).

<sup>11</sup>Christian Stückl was the Director for the Oberammergau Passion Play 2000. For specific information regarding Mr Stückl's credentials and background, see Appendix 3; to review his dossier, see Appendix 5. Figure 9 shows Mr Stückl talking to an audience member after the play's performance for June 28, 2000 (outside the theater).

<sup>12</sup>Greatorex, Eliza, (edited by Gordon R. Mork). *The Homes of Oberammergau--A Series of Twenty Etchings, Together with Notes from a Diary*. West Lafayette, Indiana : Nota bell Books (an imprint of Purdue University), 2000.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1

PASSIONSSPIELE  
OBERAMMERGAU  
2000

### CHRONOLOGY OF THE PASSION PLAY 2000

(numbers in brackets indicate performance years)

- 1633 During the plague the village council of the Six and the Twelve vow to perform the "Tragedy of the Passion" every 10 years. (The Catholic reform movement encouraged Passion Plays: over 250 plays are documented in Bavaria and Austria in the period 1550-1800, and 40 between 1600 and 1650 alone).
- 1634(1) The Passion is performed in the graveyard beside the church.
- 1662 Copy of the oldest surviving text of the Oberammergau Play. Most of the 4,902 lines originate from two much older plays which were combined before 1634:  
1. a medieval Passion Play (second half of the 15th century), the manuscript of which was found in the Benedictine Monastery of St. Ulrich and Afra in Augsburg, and which in turn uses plays from Tirol and earlier writings on the Passion (e.g. "Extendit manum");  
2. The Passion "Tragedi" of 1566 by Sebastian Wild, a Mastersinger of Augsburg; this was inspired by reformist principles and being published was widely known; Wild, in turn, used as a model the humanist play "Christus Redivius" (1543) by the Oxford reformer Nicolas Grimald.
- 1674(5) Addition of scenes from the Weilheim Passion by the parish priest Johann Älbl (1600, 1615, originating from an Alemanic Passion of the 15th/16th century).
- 1680(6) Adoption of system of performing the Play in the first year of each decade.
- 1700(8) Play directed and rhymes improved by Fr. Th. Ainhaus.
- 1720(10) Surviving parts of the text revised Father Karl Bader of Ettal (1662-1731) indicate a baroque stage with wings.
- 1730(11) Adaptation by the Augustinian Anselm Manhart (1680-1752) of Rottenbuch, who introduced the allegorical figures of Envy, Avarice, Death and Sin as Jesus' enemies and expanded the traditional artistic device of "freezing" the action, which served the purpose of meditation, into a series of motionless "tableaux vivants". From 1730 to 1760 the Play was directed by Fr. Max Erlböck (1690-1770).

- 1740(12) Text revised by the Augustinian C. Prasser (1703-70).
- 1750(13) The "Passio nova" by the Benedictine Ferdinand Rosner (1709-78) of Ettal, the first completely revised version from the religious and artistic point of view, in the formal language of the sacred baroque theatre: the allegories are included in the action, the motionless contemplation scenes are changed into "living pictures" from the Old Testament and the parables of Jesus (8,457 verses!).
- 1770 All Passion Plays prohibited in Bavaria. No performance.
- 1780(15) Privilege for Oberammergau after Rosner's Play was revised by the Benedictine M. Knipfelberger (1747-1825). He reduced it to 4,809 verses, confined hell to musical interludes, brought in innovations in the spirit of a new epoch.
- 1811(19) As a result of Montgelas' prohibition in 1801 the Play was not given until 1811 after the submission of a new text by the monk Dr Othmar Weis (1769-1843), priest of Ettal. This text concentrated on the gospels and the central idea of atonement, removed the allegorical, mythological and legendary elements, introduced contemporary theology, prose style, realism and wordy, moralising interpretations of the tableaux and reference to social conflicts. Music composed by the Oberammergau teacher Rochus Dedler (1779-1822).
- 1815(20) Special performance after the end of the Napoleonic Wars. Further extensive revision of the text by Weis and of the music by Dedler (continued until 1820): expansion of the scene of the traders and the crowd scenes (including addition of the "Entry into Jerusalem"), borrowings from the literature of the time. A new stage was built in the Empire style by Father J. N. Uuhoch (1762-1832) with flanking "houses" of Annas and Pilate and side streets. New scenery.
- 1830(22) Stage transferred from the graveyard to the northern edge of the village. Between 1830 and 1850 the Play was discovered from the Romantic viewpoint by S. Boisserée, G. Görres, I. F. Lentner, L. Steub, E. Devrient, M. Deutinger, J. Sepp and others, and became widely known. (Approx. 13,000 spectators).
- 1840(23) Rearrangement of the Resurrection Scene. (Approx. 35,000 spectators).
- 1850(24) First production and some amendments to the text by Joseph A. Daisenberger (1799-1883), priest of Oberammergau from 1845, who, in the spirit of his teacher, J. M. Sailer, was very active in the field of educating the people and wrote a number of historical and dramatic works. The performances were organized by an elected "Passion Play Committee". First French and English reports on the Play.
- 1860(25) In 1858 Daisenberger revised the text at the government's wish and to take account of

the criticism made in 1850, mainly by J. Sepp. Daisenberger gave preference to the Gospel of St. John and tried to show the drama in the Passion. He aimed at timelessness instead of the updating by Weis, at sublimity and idealisation instead of realism, at the psychological element instead of the political (e.g. in the case of Judas). Guided by the antique and classical tragedy (structure, motives), he aimed on the other hand at popularity by the incorporation of legends (Veronica, Ahasuerus) and incidents on the Way of the Cross (e.g. Jesus meeting with Mary), by the use of old Passion texts, by warm-heartedness, vivid language and simple symbols (cross as tree of life).

1870(26) In 1868 Daisenberger wrote prologues to the tableaux vivants in classical ode metres. However, his proposal for a verse play was not accepted by the village, nor was the text in verse by J. N. Sepp. After interruption by war, performances continued in 1871.

1880(27) Increasing numbers of visitors. Also signs of self-assertion by the Church in the struggle between it and the State under Bismarck. Costumes made by the Munich Court Theatre.

1890(28) Stage rebuilt by C. Lautenschläger (separation of side houses, neo-Renaissance front, technical modernization), part of the seating area was roofed over, new production in the style of the Court Theatre with naturalistic, historic sets and costumes.

1900(29) Remainder of the seating area roofed over (174,000 visitors).

1922(31) Performances to make up for 1920, when the Play was not given owing to the aftermath of the War.

1930(32) New construction of stage with modern stage technology and new staging by Georg J. Lang (1889-1968) who directed the Play from 1922 to 1960. The simple, ascetic, monumental style of the stage is matched by the artistic concentration of the sets, with impressive handling of the crowd scenes. Extension of the seating area.

1934(33) Jubilee performances. Cardinal Faulhuber gives the official teaching of the Church, the "Missio canonica". No performances in 1940 owing to the War.

1950(34) Music revised by Prof. E Papst (480,000 visitors).

1970(36) Director A. Preisinger. The old text remains. Attempts at reform by A. J. Lippl, A. M. Miller, C. Orff, S. Schaller and R. Raffalt among others, come to nothing. 1969-89 several revisions of the text to eliminate anti-Judaisms.

1977 The Rosner version is tried. H. Schwaighofer's proposed reform (1750 text).

- 1984(38) Jubilee performances. 1980/84 stage sets redesigned by the director H. Maier. Text revised by Fr. G. Rümmelein of Ettal.
- 1990(39) In 1984 there had been a change of generation in the town council, yet at the same time a decision against Rosner in favor of Daisenberger in 1990. Then the surprising selection of the youngest director of all time: the 27-year-old sculptor, Christian Stückl.

In preparation for the Passion Play, a text commission under the direction of Prof. Rudolf Pesch sought new solutions in response to ongoing questions from the Anti-Defamation League for the Prevention of Anti-Semitism (again prepared by Swidler and Sloyan). The question of whether married and older women might be cast was affirmatively decided by the regional court. Stückl cast a young generation of players in the leading roles. The controversy over his direction occasionally took on dramatic proportions, and his dismissal was prevented by a narrow margin. In any event, the committee withdrew its agreement for an already approved set design by A. Kraut on the heels of a signature campaign on the part of conservative forces. (480,000 audience members).

- 2000(40) The struggle for the proper form of fulfilling the task — in the traditional or more contemporary way — continued. This turned Oberammergau into the Bavarian community with the most referenda.

No 1: whether Rosner or Daisenberger should serve as the basis for 2000 was decided in 1996 in favor of the latter.

Nos. 2 & 3: the question of whether Stückl should remain as director was decided in the affirmative in 1997, the other, whether Dr. Rudolf Zwink, representative of the conservative camp, should become director, was defeated.

No. 4: religious affiliation and the German nationality are no longer a precondition for participation

No. 5: whether the outside of the Passion Play Theatre should be decorated traditionally or in a simpler, more modern style in wood — in this referendum the first solution prevailed in 1997. In the same year, an agreement was also struck with the Catholic Church. The Cardinal of the Archdiocese of Munich and Freising would assume a patronage if a guarantor to be determined by him approved of the production, in particular as far as the text was concerned. Likewise, in 1997, the town council commissioned Christian Stückl to prepare a new production for which Stefan Hageneier was to design the settings and costumes, Markus Zwink arrange the music and Otto Huber rework the text. The results of this work were incrementally presented in 1997 and 1998 to the town council, as well as the parish priest and the theologian appointed by Cardinal Wetter, Prof. Ludwig Mödl. In each case, all elements were unanimously accepted.

(Source: Press Information Kit: *Gemeinde Oberammergau 2000.*)

APPENDIX 2

PASSIONSSPIELE  
OBERAMMERGAU  
2000

**THE OBERAMMERGAU PASSION PLAY 1634-2000**

In the Holy Year of 2000, the famous village of Oberammergau will be stepping into the cultural spotlight along with such major events as the Expo in Hannover. About a half-a-million people are expected to follow the attraction of the Passion Play, to experience the enchantment of this legendary presentation. The reason is a 350-year-old tradition of bringing the Play of the Suffering, Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ to the stage every ten years. The source of this custom is an oath sworn by the citizenry of Oberammergau in 1633 in hopes of escaping the plague.

For the 40th presentation of this tradition-rich play, it has been newly staged in keeping with the times by Christian Stückl. Then, as now, tradition continues to play a major role, but the primary consideration is to present the Oberammergau Passion Play 2000 at the highest level of theatrical art. Thirty-eight year old Christian Stückl had already been selected to direct the Passion Play back in 1990, and has brought out productions in recent years at Munich's *Kammerspiele*, as well as in Frankfurt and Vienna. He is the most favored candidate to succeed to the post of artistic director at the *Volkstheater* in Munich in 2002.

Josef Alois Daisenberger's Passion Play script, dating back to 1860/70 has been newly revised by assistant director and literary advisor, Otto Huber, in conjunction with Christian Stückl. Jesus is no longer the passive sufferer, but has become a controversial prophet. Jewish religious rituals have found a place in the familiar sequence of events, and the individual characters have been given more individual personalities. The women, for example, are more frequently heard from than in earlier versions, and Mary Magdalene even proclaims the Easter message in a largely new version of the closing monologue.

Since 1997, set and costume director Stefan Hageneier has been working, not only on the new sets, but also on the costumes for the more than 2,200 amateur performers. Last year he even made a special trip to India to purchase the fabrics for the handsome garments. It has been a full seven Passion Play seasons, in other words seventy years, since the costumes were completely new. Preparatory to his work with the Passion Play Stefan Hageneier has enjoyed a prominent international career, working, for instance, in Brussels, Zürich, Vienna and Hannover, with such eminent directors as Robert Wilson, Simone Blattner and Christian Stückl.

Markus Zwick, the Oberammergau conductor, music educator and musical director of this 40th Passion Play, has composed new versions of much of the Passion Play music adapting the original Rochus Dedler score to accommodate the extensive alterations in the text and dramaturgy created for the 2000 season. The music functions as an intermediary between the

partially newly created *tableaux vivants* from the Old Testament and the actual events portayed on stage, all taken from the history of Christ's suffering. The chorus and soloists enter together with the narrator of the Prologue and comment on the inner connection between the initial example and the theatrical scene to follow.

Another event casting the tradition-rich Oberammergau in a new light is the exhibition project "14 STATIONS" by Robert Wilson. The American artist's light and sound installation reflects his approach to the fourteen Stations of the Cross on Jesus' *via dolorosa* from his condemnation by Pontius Pilate to his being laid in the tomb. Wilson has developed his own form of language, by combining archetypal images in his installation with elements of contemporary art. One particular attraction for the audience results from the tension between the individualistic Way of the Cross *tableaux* and the live performance of the Oberammergau Passion Play.

(Source: Press Information Kit: *Gemeinde Oberammergau 2000.*)

APPENDIX 3

PASSIONSSPIELE  
OBERAMMERGAU  
2000

**THE OBERAMMERGAU PASSION PLAY 2000**

**Play in 11 Scenes**

**Text** Text by Joseph Alois Daisenberger (1799-1883), written in 1860/80, in a new version by Otto Huber and Christian Stückl. Largest scale revision since 1860. The play depicts the last five days in the life of Christ, from Palm Sunday to Easter.

**Music** Rochus Dedler (1777-1822), composed in 1820, in a new arrangement by Markus Zwink.

**Directed by** Christian Stückl, born 1961 in Oberammergau

Principal director of the Oberammergau Passion Play 1990, former director at the Munich Kammerspiele, works as free-lance director, *inter alia* at the Schauspielhaus, Vienna; Schauspiel, Bonn, Schauspielhaus, Hannover, Styrian Autumn Graz, principal director of the Oberammergau Passion Play 2000.

**Assistant Director  
and**

**Literary Advisor** Otto Huber, born 1947 in Oberammergau

Teacher of German, French and drama at the Staffelsee Gymnasium in Murnau. Assistant director of the Oberammergau Passion Play 1990, fundamental of the Passion Play text, Assistant director and literary advisor of the Oberammergau Passion Play 2000.

**Musical Director** Markus Zwink, born 1956 in Oberammergau.

Musical director of the municipality of Oberammergau, musical director of the *Classicale*, Oberammergau, new arrangement of the Passion Play music, head conductor of the Oberammergau Passion Play 2000.

**Setting**

**and Costumes** Stefan Hageneier, born 1972 in Oberammergau

Set and costume designer at the Munich Kammerspiele, since 1993 free-lance costume and set designer, among others, with Robert Wilson, Luigi Nono and

Christian Stückl. Exhibition projects with Robert Wilson, *inter alia* at the ART Cologne and in the Villa Stuck, Munich.

Set and costume designer of the Oberammergau Passion Play 2000 and artistic project director of Robert Wilson's "14 Stations" exhibition in Oberammergau.

**Photo rehearsal** May 17, 2000, 11:00 A.M

Scenes released for photography: "Entry into Jerusalem" to "Last Supper".

**Public rehearsals** May 13, 14, 16, 18 and 20, 2000

**Première** May 21, 2000, starting at: 9:30 A.M.

**Performances** May 21 to October 8, 2000, five times a week.

79 main performances (Monday, Wednesday, Friday, Sunday)

25 repeat performances (Saturday or Thursday)

**Timing** Starting time: 9.30 A.M., ends at: 6:15 P.M. (three hour lunch break)

**Audience** Some 500,000 people will attend the Passion Play, app. 60% from the United States

## **Passion**

**Play Theatre** Capacity: 4,700 seats under roof cover

Renovated 1998/88 at a cost of DM 15,000,000

— newly designed exterior facade

— seating renovated

— under-floor heating

— completely renovated on-stage technical equipment

(Source: Press Information Kit: *Gemeinde Oberammergau 2000*.)



APPENDIX 4

PASSIONSSPIELE  
OBERAMMERGAU  
2000

**Otto Huber**

Literary Advisor and Assistant Director  
In Charge of the Film Retrospective: "From Oberammergau to Hollywood"

- |           |  |
|-----------|--|
| 1947      | Born in Oberammergau   |
| 1957-1966 | Benedictine Secondary School in Ettal Monastery  |
| 1964-1966 | Youth Work with the Oberammergau Catholic Youth Organization under Fr. Dr. Stephan Schaller  |
| 1966-1974 | Studied the history of old and new German literature, Romance languages, theatre studies at Ludwig-Maximilian University in Munich. Attended lectures in theology, philosophy, Bavarian history.<br>Student theatre : Marivaux : <i>Le jeu de l'amour et du hasard</i> ("The Game of Love and Chance") |
| 1967-1968 | Exchange scholarship: studies in French language and literature at the University of Besançon<br>Staged Dürrenmatt's "Romulus the Great" at the University of Besançon   |
| 1968-1969 | Founded a Passion Play work group in Oberammergau  |
| 1972      | Prefect in the Benedictine Monastery boarding school in Schäftlarn   |
| 1974-1976 | Practice teacher at the Leopoldinum in Passau and the Secondary School in Icking   |
| 1976-1975 | Taught French and German at the Academic Secondary School in Lauingen on the Danube; School theatre with stagings of Brecht and Weill: "The Threepenny Opera", Mozart's "Bastien and Bastienne", Molière : <i>Les précieuses ridicules</i> ("The Affected Young Ladies"), "Valentiniaden" (Cabaret)    |
| 1982      | Script editor and director of the Lauingen Good Friday Play of 1746 : "Samson, Who Killed More Enemies in Dying than in Living; Jesus, Who Through His Death Triumphed Over Death and the Devil"   |
| 1985-1987 | Fellowship from the Cusanus Works for a thesis on the subject: "Changes in the Structure and Function of the Oberammergau Passion Play"  |

- 1988            Elected Assistant Director of the Oberammergau Passion Play
- 1989-1990      Took part in an exhibition at the House of Bavarian History, entitled : "Listen, Look, Weep and Love! Passion Plays in the Alpine Region" in Oberammergau  
Wrote the foreword and edited the text of the illustrated book : "Oberammergau Passion 1990"
- 1989            Activity as Assistant Director and Speaker of the Prologue in the Passion Play
- 1991-1996      Taught German, French, dramatic interpretation at the Staffelsee Secondary School in Murnau: school theatre with stagings of Horváth: "Italian Night", Weiss: "Marat/Sade", Marlowe: "Dr. Faustus", Turrini: "Battle for Vienna"
- 1998            Staged Gay/Pepusch: "The Begger's Opera" in the small theatre in Oberammergau.
- 1997-1998      Rewrote the text of the Passion Play for Oberammergau
- 2000            Assistant director of the Oberammergau Passion Play

(Source: Press Information Kit: *Gemeinde Oberammergau 2000.*)

APPENDIX 5

PASSIONSSPIELE  
OBERAMMERGAU  
2000

**Christian Stückl**

-Director-

- |            |  |
|------------|--|
| 1961       | Born in Oberammergau   |
| 1981-1984  | Apprenticed to a wood sculptor   |
| 1981       | Set up a theatre group in Oberammergau   |
| 1981-1990  | Works:<br>Molière: <i>Le malade imaginaire</i> ("The Imaginary Invalid")<br>Sebastian Sailer: "The Biblical Comedies"<br>Ben Jonson: "Volpone"; Georg Büchner: "Woyzeck"<br>William Shakespeare: "A Midsummer Night's Dream" and "Twelfth Night" |
| 1987-1988  | Assistant director at the Munich Kammerspiele under Dieter Dorn and Volker Schlöndorff   |
| 1987       | Elected director of the Passion Play 1990  |
| 1988-1990  | Passion Play 1990 in Oberammergau  |
| 1991       | First production at the Munich Kammerspiele Werner Schwab: "Decimation of the People or my Liver is Meaningless" (world première). Theater Heute: New Director of the Year 1991 for the aforementioned production                                |
| 1992-1996  | Four years as director at the Munich Kammerspiele William Shakespeare: "Much Ado About Nothing"<br>Christopher Marlowe : "Edward II"<br>Kerstin Specht: "Carceri" (world première)<br>Bernard Marie Koltes: "Quai West" and "Roberto Zucco"      |
| 1994       | Theatre work in India, William Shakespeare: "A Midsummer Night's Dream"<br>Nataka Kamathaka Rangajana, Mysore<br>Further work in Oberammergau, William Shakespeare: "As You Like It" and "Romeo and Juliet".                                     |
| since 1996 | Free-lance director  |
| 1995       | Vladimir Sorokin: "Dysmorphomania" (world première), Schauspielhaus, Vienna.   |

Awarded the City of Vienna's "Kainz Medal" Encouragement Prize for the 1997/1997 theatre season for his production of "Dysmorphomania"

- 1996        Elected director of the Passion Play 2000 by popular referendum
- 1997        Jasmina Reza: "Art, Schauspiel, Bonn"
- 1997        Martin Walser: "Kashmir in Parching" (world première)  
             Settings: Stefan Hageneier, Badisches Staatstheater, Karlsruhe
- 1997        Daniel Call: "Mr.Dainart" (world première), Settings: Stefan Hageneier, Bonn
- 1997        Botho Strauss: "Ithaca", Schauspielhaus, Frankfurt
- 1998        Werner Schwab: "Escalation: Vulgar", Settings: Stefan Hageneier, Vienna
- 1998        Martin Wall: "Plague 1633" (world première), Settings: Stefan Hageneier, Literary  
             Advisor: Otto Huber, Music: Markus Zwink, Oberammergau
- 1998        Alexander Wiedner: "Sergei" (world première), Styrian Autumm, Graz
- 1998        Martin Baucks: "Dirty Dogs" (world première), State Theatre, Hannover
- 1999        Botho Strauss: "The Similar Ones", Schauspielhaus, Frankfurt
- 2000        Director of the Oberammergau Passion Play

(Source: Press Information Kit: *Gemeinde Oberammergau 2000.*)

APPENDIX 6

PASSIONSSPIELE  
OBERAMMERGAU  
2000

ON THE NEW VERSION OF THE PASSION PLAY TEXT

1. The content of the **Oberammergau Passion** is limited to the depiction of the events between Palm Sunday and Easter.

Apart from the cleansing of the Temple, the reasons why Jesus provoked enmity can only be discerned from deeds and words, which took place before the time depicted in the play. These elements have been added, e.g. **words from the Sermon on the Mount**, which helps us understand why Jesus became a sign "which was contradicted".

In contrast to earlier plays, in which the **contradiction of Jesus** came almost exclusively from the **ranks of his opponents**, it is now made clear — in keeping with the Gospels — how difficult it was even for the disciples and their relatives to understand him ("Others have a house, a family, a position in the community. You have nothing, nothing at all! A wandering preacher! What do you live on?") or how he provoked contradiction with his unheard-of-claim on his followers ("Whosoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me."), his understanding of himself as "Son of God", his "unrealistic" message.

2. In contrast to historical Passion Plays, which are primarily geared toward provoking compassion and only depict Jesus passively taking his leave and suffering, scenes have now been added which show **Jesus as a belligerent prophet**, as "God's bondman", who is "consumed by his zeal for the House of his Father", who declares war on all **misuse of religion as an instrument of power**, all **users of people** and all **estrangement**.
3. Since 1960, in an effort to eliminate anti-Jewish bias, the role of the money-changers in the Temple has been considerably truncated and with it the dramatic "motor" of the play hamstrung. In place of the conflict with the money-changers, the conflict is now directed toward the representatives of clerical power, especially by the insertion of a scene oriented toward Matthew 23.
4. The Oberammergau Passion Play, with its structure of a change between meditative, musically defined **prefigurations** (examples from the Old Testament) and **dramatic scenes**, has an effective rhythm. Diverse changes nevertheless serve to enhance the dramatic development.

To keep the play from becoming a dull "Meditation on the Mount of Olives", **more antithetic and controversial elements** have been brought into play.

For example, immediately before the **love signs of foot washing, bread and wine**, we have set the **apocalyptic speech** about the time "in which love grows cold" and the **speech to the court** about those who allow the least of their brothers to lack for love.

The **characters** that are **parts of larger groups**, especially the **apostles** and **council members** have been given more individual personalities.

Some of the **main chatacters** have been more sharply depicted. The role of Pilate has been revised to the **more correct historical image** of a callous occupier with little or no understanding for the Jewish religion.

The female roles, such as **Mary** and **Mary Magdalene**, previously used purely to portray compassion, have been extracted from the stereotype of teary-eyed sentimentality. In this new version, the Magdalene, as "**apostola apostolorum**" in a largely rewritten closing monologue, **proclaims the Easter message**.

5. New **tableaux vivants**. **Jesus' struggles with a priestly caste tending toward self-deification** follows **Moses' struggle** with the people **dancing around the golden calf**; the **Last Supper**, the dramatic moment of the Passover Seder, follows the **Exodus from Egypt**; **Jesus' lonely struggle** with the burden of his mission (**Mount of Olives**) follows the analogous scene of **Moses with the burning bush**; prior to the **interrogation of Jesus by Annas and Caiaphas** and the scene **when he is ridiculed** we have placed "**Daniel in the lion's den**" and "**The sorrows of Job**"; **Pilate's blindness toward Jesus** is prefigured in **Pharaoh's blindness toward Moses**.
6. Several **text changes** in previous years were geared toward the elimination of anti-Semitic undertones or to take into account the fact that **Jesus, Mary and the apostles** all lived in accordance **with Jewish religious tradition**. When elements of the Pesach ritual have now been taken into the Last Supper, or when Jesus, then later Mary, quote from pilgrimage psalms in Jerusalem, this also attests to the way in which the new discovery of the Jewish roots of the Christian faith is perceived as an enrichment.

(Otto Huber)

(Source: Press Information Kit: *Gemeinde Oberammergau 2000*.)

## List of Figures

1. Jesus of Nazareth, coming from Jericho on a pilgrimage for the Passover feast, enters Jerusalem with his disciples. [Permission granted by *Gemeinde Oberammergau* to reproduce this photo by Brigitte Maria Mayer.]

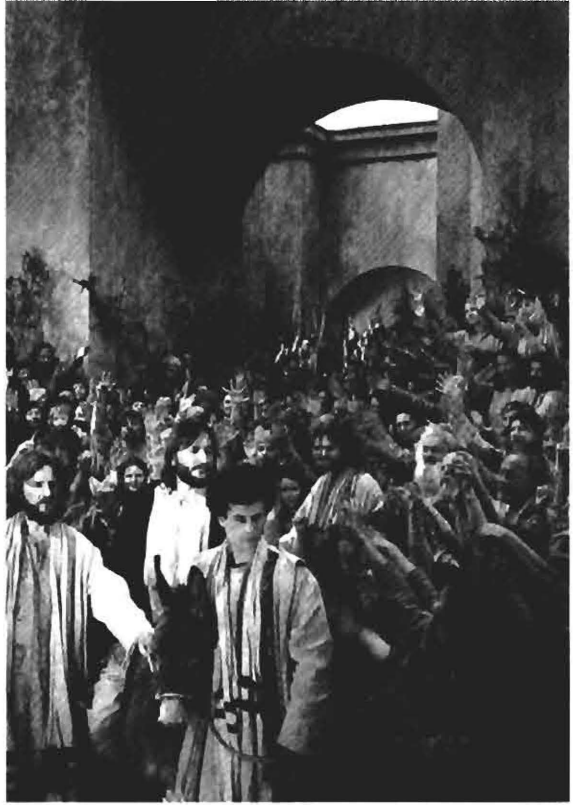


Figure 1

2. The Last Supper. [Permission granted by *Gemeinde Oberammergau* to reproduce this photo by Brigitte Maria Mayer.]



Figure 2

3. This scene depicts Judas pleading with the council members to set Jesus of Nazareth free, throwing to the ground the 30 pieces of silver he was given as payment to betray Jesus. [Permission granted by *Gemeinde Oberammergau* to reproduce this photo by Brigitte Maria Mayer.]



**Figure 3**

4. Scene depicting Jesus being mocked by Herod where Jesus is called "the King of Fools". [Permission granted by *Gemeinde Oberammergau* to reproduce this photo by Brigitte Maria Mayer.]



**Figure 4**



5. Jesus is flogged mercilessly by the Roman soldiers and crowned with thorns.  
[Permission granted by *Gemeinde Oberammergau* to reproduce this photo by Brigitte Maria Mayer.]



Figure 5

6. This *tableaux vivant* depicts Adam and Eve being banned from the Garden of Eden.  
[Permission granted by *Gemeinde Oberammergau* to reproduce this photo by Brigitte Maria Mayer.]



Figure 6

7. Director of the Oberammergau Passion Play, Christian Stückl, directing the actors in the scene where Jesus drives the money changers from the temple. [Permission granted by *Gemeinde Oberammergau* to reproduce this photo by Brigitte Maria Mayer.]



**Figure 7**

8. Professor Gordon R. Mork (leader of the Purdue University Study Tour for the History Department and Center for Lifelong Learning) and Otto Huber (Assistant Director and Literary Advisor for the Oberammergau Passion Play 2000), June 28, 2000; photo by author.



**Figure 8**



**Figure 9**

9. Christian Stückl, Director, the Oberammergau Passion Play 2000, June 28, 2000; photo by author.