

Passion Plays Can Distort Gospel, Official Says

By Tracy Early
New York (NC) — A warning that passion plays can "distort the central message of Christianity" was given at the annual meeting of the American Jewish Committee by Eugene Fisher, executive secretary of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' Secretariat for Catholic-Jewish Relations.

By making scapegoats of the Jews, passion plays can obscure the Gospel message about the responsibility of all humanity for the Crucifixion, said Fisher.

Fisher appeared at a press conference May 3 in New York to release a critique of six American passion plays by the AJC interreligious affairs department.

He said that he had not viewed any of the six, but that on the basis of scripts he had seen of several passion plays he would "tend to concur" with the AJC critique.

Rabbi James Rudin, AJC interreligious affairs director, said the AJC had directed major attention to securing changes in the play presented at Oberammergau, West Germany, which is usually enacted once each decade. The Oberammergau play is having an extra production this year to mark its 350th anniversary.

Rabbi Rudin said the American plays, which he called "wild weeds in the garden of interreligious understanding," deserve attention because they are pre-

sented every year and reach large numbers of people.

The six plays covered in the AJC survey were the Black Hills Passion Play, presented in both Spearfish, S.D., and Lake Wales, Fla.; Val Balfour Passion Play, a touring production based in Richmond, Va.; The Great Passion Play in Eureka Springs, Ark.; Word of Life Fellowship Passion Play, a touring production based at Schroon Lake, N.Y.; Fall City Passion Play in Fall City, Wash., and Holy Family Passion Play in Union City, N.J.

Samuel Weintraub, a student at Jewish Theological Seminary in New York and intern at the AJC interreligious affairs department,

conducted the study on the basis of individual reports, media accounts, publicity materials and telephone interviews. The AJC had previously evaluated the Fall City script, but Weintraub was not able to get scripts from the others.

Fisher said that although only one of the six plays — the one produced by Holy Family Church in Union City, N.J. — was explicitly Catholic, all of them tended to be influenced by the one put on in the "very Catholic town" of Oberammergau.

Fisher said that he did not oppose passion plays as such, and cited as unobjectionable one reportedly produced by Hopi Indians of the Southwest and scripted with reference to their own history.

Rabbi Rudin said he would be part of an AJC delegation attending the May 21 opening of this year's Oberammergau play.

In summarizing the critique of the six American passion plays, Weintraub said they developed at least six anti-Jewish themes:

- Depiction of the Jewish antagonists of Jesus as "degenerate, loathsome, almost subhuman creatures;"
- Depiction of the crowd before the Roman governor's palace as a Jewish "mob;"
- Obscuring or denying the Jewish background of Jesus and the apostles;
- Descriptions of Pontius Pilate as a fair ruler swayed by Jewish pressure even though "responsible historiography" has shown that Pilate was "a ruthless tyrant;"
- Use of Scripture in a one-sided manner which highlights real or potential anti-Jewish texts, and
- Dissociation of the life of Jesus and the primitive Church from their setting in Jewish religion and social life.



Mrs. Marge Fenicchia was chosen by the Women's Club of St. Philip Neri Church to honor the Blessed Mother as May Queen. Mrs. Fenicchia has been an active member of the parish for many years. Chairperson of the event, held yesterday, was May Wright.

CWV Auxiliary Meets in Albany

The Catholic War Veterans Department of New York Auxiliary will meet May 17-19 at the Turf Inn in Albany.

Prior to the convention, President Mary A. Schiralli will conduct the regular monthly auxiliary meeting. The convention will nominate and elect officers, hold a memorial service and a luncheon honoring Ms. Schiaralli. A banquet will close festivities.

Social Planned

The Divorced Catholics Groups of the Diocese of Rochester are sponsoring a social fundraiser, 9 p.m., Friday, May 25 at Guardian Angels School, 2059 East Henrietta Road. A donation of \$5 is requested and the proceeds will help to subsidize families attending the annual Single-Parent Christian Family Camp, Aug. 26 through Sept. 1 at Camp Stella Maris. For more information a 24-hour "info line" tape can be called at (716) 225-9102.

More Anti-Catholic Nonsense

Vatican Controls FBI

By NC News Service
 A new anti-Catholic pamphlet, "The Pope's Secrets," published by the Tony and Susan Alamo Christian Foundation, claims that the Vatican controls the United Nations, White House, Congress, Supreme Court, Internal Revenue Service, FBI, law enforcement and most of network radio and television.

It also claims that Jesuits carried out the assassinations of Abraham Lincoln and John F. Kennedy.

"The Vatican is posing as Snow White, but the Bible says that she is a prostitute, 'the great whore,' a cult," the lead line on the pamphlet states.

The pamphlets appeared about two months after posters claiming the Vatican owns and controls much of the news media began showing up around the United States. Tony Alamo, pastor of the Arkansas-based foundation, has declined to say whether his organization was responsible for those posters, but he said that "I love what's on the posters."

Alamo's new pamphlet claims that "68 percent of the Vatican's clergy are guilty of homosexuality, lesbianism and fornication."

The pamphlet says that "because of Abraham Lin-

coln's many exposes of the Vatican, he was put to death, just as he foretold. Yes, assassinated by the Jesuits under Rome's instructions."

John F. Kennedy's assassination by Jesuits also was ordered by Rome, the pamphlet claims.

"Jim Jones, a Roman Catholic Jesuit deacon posing as a Christian, was sacrificed, (not with poisoned Kool-Aid) murdered, along with his flock by the Vatican to make the world look narrowly and suspiciously upon innocent Christian retreats," according to the pamphlet.

The entire 8,000-word pamphlet was printed April 27 as a paid advertisement in a chain of community newspapers in Dade County, Fla. The pamphlet was reproduced on 2 1/2 tabloid pages at approximately \$1,000 per page.

Grant and Michael Miller, publishers of the newspapers, sent a telegram of apology to Archbishop Edward A. McCarthy of Miami. "No one in the layout department questioned the content of the advertisement," they said.

"It has never been, nor will it ever be the position of this newspaper to be prejudiced against any group of people, regardless of their race, creed or religion."

Susan Alamo died of cancer April 8, 1982 and since then her followers have been stationed at her coffin at the Alamo headquarters praying for her resurrection.

Records Broken

Athletes from Our Lady of Mercy competed in the sixth annual His and Her Track and Field Invitational at Franklin High School, Saturday, May 5.

Maureen Paonessa broke her own 800-meter run school record by a second earning a fifth place ribbon for her 2:29.8 time. Katie Fitzsimmons ran a 2:50 time in the 800.

Donna DeKing reached the semi-finals with her performance in the 200-meter dash. Sophomore Bethany Parrinello decreased her 100-meter dash time by almost a half-second, recording a 13.16 seconds. Karen Mueller in the 400 and 400-meter hurdles recorded 64.82 seconds and 74.53 seconds, respectively.

Women's Retreat

The Notre Dame Retreat House is offering a retreat for women, "The Good News of Reconciliation - Being at peace with the Lord, within yourself, and with others," June 9-11. For information and reservations call the retreat house at (716) 394-5700.

Vocations Night

The Sisters of Mercy have invited women who wish to become better acquainted with the lives and ministries of the Sisters of Mercy to a Eucharistic liturgy, 7:30 p.m., June 6 at St. Rita's Convent, 1008 Maple Dr., West Webster. The event is sponsored by the congregation's Vocations Team. Further information is available by calling Sister Sheila Stevenson, (716) 244-2175.

Diocesan Directors Meet Nationally

Some 250 delegates attended the 48th annual meeting of the National Conference of Diocesan Directors of Religious Education (NCDD) in Kansas City, MO, April 29-May 3. The theme was "Family and Parish: Catechizing Communities."

The NCDD represents 85 percent of the dioceses in the United States. Sister Mary Ann Binsack of Rochester is a member of NCDD and attended the meeting. The NCDD is organized with an executive secretary, four officers and a board of directors. Sister Susanne Hofweber, OP, is the current executive secretary who maintains an office in Washington, DC. The officers are Msgr. Thomas Ivory, Newark, NJ, president; Father John Hilbert, Erie, Pa, vice president; Sister Betty Tranel, S.sp.S., Jackson Miss, secretary; and

Father Michael Piovane, Allentown, Pa, treasurer.

Major speakers were Dr. John Richard Fowler director and counselor at the Judson Family Center, Minneapolis, MN; Father Thomas Sweetser, SJ, codirector of the Parish Evaluation Project with headquarters in Chicago, Ill.; Mrs. Gaynell Cronin, director of Religious Education at St. Theresa's Parish in Briarcliff, N. Y. and Holy Name of Mary Parish in Croton, N. Y., consultant for J. & G. Consultants and editorial consultant for Areal Lettres; Father Raymond B. Kemp, secretary for Parish Life and Worship for the Archdiocese of Washington. Father James Dunning, coordinator for the North American Forum on the Catechumenate served as facilitator of the conference.

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