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THE PLACE OF DRAMA IN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

**A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of
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**In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Religious Education**

**by
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the problem. The purpose of this thesis is (1) to discover and to present from history the origin and development of religious drama in the Christian church; (2) to discover the place of religious drama in the Christian church today and to present its values and method as a teaching instrument in the life and work of the Christian church.

The need. There is a need of presenting historically the place of religious drama in the Christian church, its origin, development, decline and present day revival. The need of religious drama in the work of the church has been recognized since the beginning of this century among religious educators. A large number of plays and pageants have been written.¹ Protestant denominations have established special departments in order to give leadership training courses in religious drama. These courses are now being presented in seminaries, universities, colleges, institutes, training schools, conventions and camps.² The church is now

¹ Overton, G. S., Drama In Education, New York: The Century Company, 1926, p. 6.

² Candler, Martha, Drama In Religious Service, New York: The Century Company, 1922, pp. 116, 117.

undertaking the task of providing a trained leadership in the use of drama.³ It has been estimated that there are 10,000 religious drama groups and movements within or connected with the church.⁴ The guidance of these groups, their training and the provision of sound religious materials presents a real challenge to the religious drama educator. The need today is to wisely direct these youth in their God-given instinct of play into a genuine devotional Christian experience.⁵

Definitions of terms used. W. Carleton Wood in his book, The Dramatic Method In Religious Education states,

Educational dramatics, whether phrased as religious or creative, has for its high aim the artistic portrayal of life as it really is, woven with joy and grief, achievements and disappointments, gains and losses, aspirations and disillusionments; and through this means, of inspiring both player and audience to face resolutely life's perplexing problems and solve them in terms of nobler living.⁶

Professor Fred Eastman of the Chicago Theological gives the following definition of religious drama;

In the beginning it was somehow felt that a religious drama must talk much about religion, and about Christ and the church; it must use biblical characters and to a

³ Overton, op. cit., p. 44.

⁴ Candler, op. cit., p. xii.

⁵ Boyd, C.A., Worship In Drama, Chicago: The Judson Press, 1924, p. 4.

⁶ Wood, W.C., The Dramatic Method In Religious Education, New York: The Abingdon Press, 1931, p. 8.

large extent biblical stories. But in the course of the years we have come to see that what makes a play religious is not the material it deals with but the total effect of the play upon the audience. If a play sends an audience away exalted in spirit, with a deeper sense of fellowship with God and man, it has been religious. But if it does not have that effect, it is not religious although its characters are biblical and its story is taken from the Bible itself.⁷

The church may be defined as a distinct body of believers having as its function that of bringing its members and the world to know Jesus Christ and His life and teachings. Betts maintained that this may be accomplished through the curriculum which is capable of supplying "the necessary knowledge, . . . the right appeal to the motives which lie imbedded in the emotions, and . . . the opportunities for realizing of ideals through their expression in action".⁸

Preview of the thesis. The problem will be introduced in Chapter I by presenting the state of the Christian church in the medieval ages, the early development of religious drama and a description and definition of the plays presented within the church at that time. Chapter II will give the development of the religious drama as the performances moved outside of the cathedrals and the study of the element of comedy and its effect upon the religious drama.

⁷ Eastman, Fred, Drama In The Church, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1947, p.

⁸ Betts, G. H., The Curriculum of Religious Education, New York: The Abingdon Press, 1924, p. 297.

The morality play, Puritan influence, the decline and struggle of the religious drama to the present day, will constitute Chapter III. Chapter IV will give the place of educational dramatics in the church, types used and definitions, and the values and methods in presenting religious drama. A summary and stated conclusion of the research will constitute Chapter V.

Origin and Development Of The Medieval Religious Drama

Church background. The fall of the Roman Empire gave rise to the Feudal Period. During this period there was a continual struggle for political domination between the Feudal Lords and the Popes. The Popes were usually the most successful. However, it was hard for the church to compete against such strong forces.⁹ Domination of the Roman Church was universal extending over the whole of Europe.¹⁰ "It became the most important institution of medieval times", as it touched the intricate concerns of every man and woman. It provided a deep bond of unity among the people because of its power not only as a church but also as a school, university, hospital, and charitable institution.¹¹ Every man was in the church and was bound by its religious ideals. The church authorities were the only means of salvation or of an escape from an eternity in torment. To go against the authorities meant excommunication which would involve severance from all worship services, confession, communion, baptism, marriage and burial rites. Prayer would be useless. This weapon had a powerful hold upon the people and it was necessary to

⁹ Fuller, Edmund, A Pageant Of The Theatre, New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1941, p. 72 ff.

¹⁰ Young, Karl, The Drama Of The Medieval Church, Volume II, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933, p. 118.

¹¹ Millett, F. B. and G. E. Bentley, The Art Of The Drama, New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1935, p. 34.

maintain it in ~~order~~ to preserve the church.¹²

The mass was the same everywhere and had been for generations. To the common people who could neither read nor write,¹³ the Latin liturgy had become a monotonous form of worship, unintelligible and impersonal in its meaning. Devout priests recognizing this deficiency, diligently sought means whereby they might more effectively bring home the central truths of the scriptures and stir within the people a new enthusiasm for the church.¹⁴

Early medieval tropes. The first step towards their aim of "fortifying the unlearned people in their faith," was to insert into the mass a song sung by several chanters impersonating Biblical characters. This was in contrast to the previous custom whereby one singer told the whole story.¹⁵ Antiphonal singing, which is suggestive of dramatic dialogue,¹⁶ and pantomime aided the vested priests in portraying the Biblical story more vividly to their congre-

¹² Fuller, op. cit., p. 72.

¹³ Young, op. cit., p. 118.

¹⁴ Miller, N. B., The Living Drama, New York: The Century Company, 1924, p. 63.

¹⁵ Cheney, Sheldon, The Theatre, New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1945, p. 141.

¹⁶ Eaton, W. P. The Drama In English, New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1930, p. 12.

gations.¹⁷ The officiating priest read the narrative part while those assisting read, sang and acted the other parts.¹⁸ Dignitaries such as bishops or heads of monasteries do not appear to have taken part in the performance but presided over the minor members of the clergy as they performed according to their "major orders".¹⁹ These tropes were at first hardly more than a few phrases of the Latin Bible text, gradually developing into whole episodes or incidents.²⁰ They were a part of the mass itself originating in connection with the Easter celebration and were popularly known as resurrection tropes.²¹ The speeches of the characters were that of the Latin Vulgate,²² unintelligible to the people except for the aid of the dramatic. This new element greatly increased their interest in the services and also presented the life of Christ more realistically.²³

St. Ethelwold, A Bishop of Winchester during the ninth century, drew up a document entitled, Concordia

¹⁷ Cheney, op. cit., p. 141.

¹⁸ Eaton, op. cit., p. 14.

¹⁹ Young, op. cit., p. 403.

²⁰ Cheney, op. cit., pp. 141 ff.

²¹ Galey, C. M., Plays Of Our Forefathers, New York: Duffield and Company, 1907, p.

²² Young, op. cit., p. 404.

²³ Nicoll, Allardyce, The Development Of The Theatre, New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1937, p. 62.

Regularis. This document contains a valuable description of one of the most important and well known early tropes.

This Easter morning ceremonial is known as the Quem

Quaerites:²⁴

While the third lesson is being chanted, let four brethren vest themselves. Let one of these, vested in an alb, enter as though to take part in the service, and let him approach the sepulchre without attracting attention, and sit there quietly with a palm in his hand. While the third respond is chanted, let the remaining three follow, and let them all, vested in copes, bearing in their hands thuribles with incense, and stepping delicately as those who seek something, approach the sepulchre. These things are done in imitation of the angel sitting in the monument, and women with spices coming to anoint the body of Jesus. When, therefore, he who sits there beholds them approach him like folk lost and seeking something, let him begin in a dulcet voice of medium pitch to sing quem quaeritis. . . And when he has sung it to the end, let the three reply in unison . . . At the word of this bidding let those three turn to the choir and say, Alleluia! resurrexit Dominus. This said, let the one, still sitting there and as if recalling them, say the anthem . . . And saying this, let him rise, and lift the veil, and show them the place bare of the cross, but only the cloths laid there in which the cross was wrapped. And when they have seen this let them set down the thuribles which they bare in that same sepulchre, and take the cloth and hold it up in the face of the clergy, and, as if to demonstrate that the Lord has risen, and is no longer wrapped therein, let them sing the anthem, . . . and lay the cloth upon the altar. When the anthem is done let the prior, sharing in their gladness at the triumph of our King, in that having vanquished death he rose again, begin the hymn Te deum laudamus. And this begun, all the bells chime out together.²⁵

This trope is significant in that it shows the advance

²⁴ Eaton, op. cit., p. 14.

²⁵ Galey, op. cit., pp. 17,18, Chambers, Mediaeval Stage, II, 15, 308.

of the pantomime, interjected song, and dramatic dialogue into the ecclesiastical ceremony.²⁶ Here in the chancel of the church at the foot of the altar religious drama is born.²⁷ In time these tropes became separated from the regular service, being presented by themselves, and came to be associated as an "accompanying dramatic ritual".²⁸

The growing elaboration of the dramatic ritual. It is not possible to trace all the steps of the early beginnings of religious drama. However, we do know these dramatic incidents or episodes were widely imitated and spread rapidly from one church to another.²⁹ From the tenth century to the thirteenth was the most decided growth. As the need was felt the dramatic form was enlarged.³⁰ The dialogue parts were extended for dramatic effects by the use of liturgical pieces from the choir-books plus passages from the Bible and eventually verses were composed imaginatively.³¹ The context, staging, acting and the addition of characters

²⁶ Ibid., p. 17.

²⁷ Loc.cit.

²⁸ Nicoll, op. cit., p. 62.

²⁹ Millett, op. cit., p. 37.

³⁰ Matthews, Brander, The Development Of The Drama, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1924, p. 119.

³¹ Young, op. cit., p. 399.

sprang from the resurrection trope. In this elongated form and close association with the liturgy they ceased to be tropes and became known as liturgical dramas³² or simply religious drama, sacred or ecclesiastical drama. From this "offshoot . . . budded plays of the whole crucifixion, the burial, and the harrowing of hell, for the close of holy week".³³ Soon the Christian Church had so arranged its calendar that all the events of the life of Christ were portrayed within the year.³⁴ Thus, less and less in the use of the song and the further elaboration of versified speech, the ceremonial trope developed into scenes of the "great drama of the Passion". In the thirteenth century, we have found in the records the complete Passion play which was presented in Siena and in 1220, a complete play of the Resurrection.³⁵ As the Easter play expanded into a Passion play so the Christmas service expanded into a Nativity play. The natural progression of the church dramatics was to show those events in the Scriptural history which led up to the birth and death of Christ. A Creation play was called for and next an Adam and Eve drama of the fall. Having progressed this far there was nothing to prevent the priests

³² Fuller, op. cit., p. 74.

³³ Galey, op. cit., p. 21.

³⁴ Matthews, op. cit., p. 119.

³⁵ Galey, op. cit., p. 22.

from presenting all of the Biblical events of the Old and New Testaments from the Creation to the Last Judgment, as far as they could find place in the services of the church.³⁶

Mystery and miracle plays. Close successors to the early liturgical dramas were the mystery and miracle plays. These terms have been used interchangeably by various writers of the medieval drama. By mystery it is usually meant "a cycle of the life and passion of Christ". For example the play of the Nativity is referred to as a Christmas mystery and the play of the Resurrection is referred to as an Easter mystery. The word was first derived from the French, *mysterium*, meaning secret, pertaining to the portrayal of the "Incarnation and Redemption, the Secrets of the Kingdom of God".³⁷ Fuller has given the unique origin of the word mystery in his work, A Pageant Of The Theatre:

When the productions passed out of the hands of the priests and were taken over by the trademen's guilds they were called 'mysteries,' from the Latin word, *ministerium*; the old French word, *mester*; and the old English, *misterie*, all meaning 'trade.'³⁸

The term miracle was so named because of the miraculous nature of the stories. Another term used is "saints'

³⁶ Eaton, op. cit., p. 20.

³⁷ Hase, Karl, Miracle Plays and Sacred Dramas, Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1880, p. 23.

³⁸ Fuller, Edmund, op. cit., p. 77.

plays",³⁹ that is, religious plays based on the lives of saints.⁴⁰ These two plays, mystery and miracle, are practically the same and there is very little difference in the form and content.

The medieval writers major concern in their field of religious education was to make the teaching of the plays very plain to the ignorant congregation. For this reason, there is found much needless repetition, and "the expounding of Christian doctrines in long . . . passages . . . which sadly interrupt the action. . . to drive the moral home". They are far from being rich in literary value. Some of the greatest events of the Bible are presented in a very realistic and crude manner. However, in this way of presentation they did succeed in making the medieval audience realize the humanity of the Biblical characters and that was their main objective. Their theory was sound as may readily be recognized by their presentation of the Passion Play.⁴¹

The annual performances of the mystery dramas on the day of the Corpus Christi festival had much to do with bringing them to "fruition". This festival was held the first Thursday after Trinity Sunday, in accordance with a

³⁹ Loc. cit.

⁴⁰ Cheney, S., op. cit., p. 144.

⁴¹ Tatlock, S. P., and Robert G. Martin, ed., Representative English Plays, New York: The Century Press, 1916, p. 4.

decree made by Urban IV in 1264 and sanctioned by the Council of Vienna. The plays had so expanded in context and elaboration in staging that it was difficult to spread them out over the ecclesiastical year. They were brought together into one body of cycles and presented one after another, so that in one day from sunrise to sunset, the people would see the complete scriptural account from Creation to the Judgment. Sometimes it took two or more days as there were many plays in one cycle.⁴²

There are now four outstanding cycles ranging over a period from 1328 to the time of Queen Elizabeth.⁴³ They are: the York, the Chester, the Townley (sometimes called Wakefield), and the Coventry,⁴⁴ so named because of their place of presentation. Each has its own particular characteristics and all cover about the same ground in the Scriptures. It is almost impossible to infer that one man created all the plays in a cycle. The York cycle has forty-eight episodes and may have been in the developing process for years, therefore, the work of many people.⁴⁵ The Chester cycle is the oldest known of the four English cycles.

⁴² Eaton, W. P., Drama In English, New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1930, pp. 25,26.

⁴³ Fuller, op. cit., p. 78.

⁴⁴ Miller, N. B., The Living Drama, New York: The Century Company, 1924, p. 68.

⁴⁵ Tatlock, S.P., and R. G. Martin, op. cit., p. 5.

It is to be concluded that the mystery and miracle plays did concentrate the developed liturgical drama into a cycle which gave the religious drama a greater sense of unity at this time within the church.⁴⁶ Chapter II will deal more specifically with the mystery and miracle play as it develops more elaborately outside of the church.

Early medieval staging. At first there was no thought of scenery as it was entirely unknown to medieval people. They were seeking to portray that which was happening only on the day they were celebrating. Even when incidents had developed into sequences, it was the action itself which was most important to them.⁴⁷ The earliest properties used were the sepulcher and crucifix. On Good Friday the crucifix was laid in the sepulcher which was a box-like space before the altar of the church and on Easter morning it was raised from its grave in the midst of singing by the priests. It was at first decreed that this elevating of the crucifix should take place behind closed doors because of its sacred symbolism but in due time it came to be presented in public and Christ came forth in a living form.⁴⁸ As the Easter trope expanded into a Passion play, the acting was performed

⁴⁶ Eaton, op. cit., pp. 25, 26.

⁴⁷ Matthews, op. cit., p. 131.

⁴⁸ Hase, op. cit., pp. 9, 10.

in the open space in the center of the platform. Medieval churches were not crowded with pews, as today, but had a wide free floor space for the congregation.⁴⁹ As more space was needed with the enlargement of the plays, the actors took advantage of this free space in setting up their stations. As in the cycle of the Nativity, a manger was set up near the altar and a short distance from this scene was a throne for Herod.⁵⁰ Each of these set places came to be known as a station, or locality, the acting being performed in front and between these several stations. As the content of the cycles were further developed, more stations were used and the acting would extend to the doors.⁵¹ There were no divisions into acts or scenes and stage properties were of the simplest kind. The use of music often made a natural stopping place otherwise the players stopped whenever they chose to do so.⁵² Churchmen traveling about left reports of what they had seen and their suggestions were soon imitated.⁵³ Some of these developments have been loosely recorded but it is certain that they moved slowly over a period of several centuries.

⁴⁹ Millett and Bentley, op. cit., p. 36.

⁵⁰ Matthews, op. cit., p. 131.

⁵¹ Cheney, op. cit., p. 142.

⁵² Nicoll, op. cit., p. 120.

⁵³ Millett and Bentley, op. cit., p. 37.

Acting in the religious drama within the church. The religious drama performances were at first regarded very seriously by the actors as well as the congregation. Before beginning a performance, it was the custom for the whole troupe to kneel upon the stage and to sing the hymn, Veni Creator Spiritus, in the Latin or vernacular version, and to close the performance with a "pious counsel and an admonition" and to sing Te Deum. At times the whole congregation would join in.⁵⁴

"Picturing to illiterate people was the first aim of the religious drama." Acting in the medieval drama was at first ritualistic, but as the plays matured and expanded, acting became crudely realistic.⁵⁵ All the players which were required for the performance came on the platform at the same time, even the ass appeared when required for a scriptural part. Each actor was supposed to be invisible until the proper time to present himself. Occasionally, the action was going on at various parts of the platform at the same time, words being spoken in one place and the action being carried on in another.⁵⁶

A herald often introduced the play by a prologue of the description of the action when it was not sufficiently

⁵⁴ Hase, op. cit., p. 28.

⁵⁵ Cheney, op. cit., p. 144.

⁵⁶ Hase, op. cit., p. 21.

clear to the congregation. He would sometimes appear in the dress of an angel or that of St. Augustine, a teacher in the western church. It was his duty to "admonish the spectators to silence".⁵⁷

At first the costume of the players was the ordinary priests gown and the dramatic effect was given by their processing in and out.⁵⁸ Later, the bearing of sacred emblems by the priests and the use of "golden crowns and crusted robes" heightened the dramatic effect.⁵⁹ Realism is further increased when the angels wear wings and bear candles, and when shepherds carry staffs and wear the ordinary dress of the day.⁶⁰

In the beginning of the twelfth century, laymen and scholars were permitted to take part in the miracle and mystery plays. They borrowed the priestly garments for impersonations, played the women's parts and were the first to require fancy costuming. Common people found parts to play such as the Israelites in the wilderness or the Jews at the crucifixion and great numbers flocked to offer their services. Sometimes the caste included half the town where the performance was being acted, while the other half of the

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 22.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 9.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 10.

⁶⁰ Young, op. cit., p. 402.

town looked on. "A solemn trumpet-call summoned all who wished to join in the representation for the honour of Christ or the good of their souls." It was then necessary to sign a paper in which they swore "on pain of death or the forfeiture of their goods", that they would carefully study their role and appear at the set time of performance.⁶¹ The speaking parts were extemporaneous or transmitted orally from one group of actors to another. The writers and managers of the earliest plays were monks unknown to us today. Authors of the mystery and miracle plays are also unknown but it may readily be concluded that they were churchmen.⁶²

Summary. In many respects the medieval ages were not so dark as has been usually taught. For it was through the medieval church that the discovery of the value of the dramatic element as a teaching instrument was first recognized. It was then, out of the need of bringing the services close to the ignorant common man that religious drama was born. The first true dramas were observances of holy days and were met with an unusually warm response. Little rituals, such as the introit, lesson or paraphrase were the beginning of the new growth of religious drama. The trope developed into the liturgical drama and from the liturgical drama to a series

⁶¹ Hase, op. cit., p. 18.

⁶² Gardiner, H. C., Mysteries' End, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1946, p. 120.

of sacred dramas. These series formed into the great series of the Nativity, the Resurrection and the Passion, the Ascension to the Second Coming of Christ. One harmonious cycle developed, slowly and gradually and the mystery and miracle plays were the result. Beyond this point, which covered two or three centuries, the drama was unable to progress. The themes and characters of the stories were limited to the Scriptures and its language limited to the Latin.

This new growth in religious drama was not confined to England alone, but was more or less common to all of Europe. It was without the boundaries of a nationality. This study from this point and on through the thesis, will be confined to the historical research of religious drama as it developed in England.

CHAPTER II

RELIGIOUS DRAMA AND THE ELEMENT OF SECULARIZATION

The transition of the religious drama from the church to the church yard. With the development and elaboration of the plays, the church proved to be too small. The playing space had extended from the front of the altar to the doors and was "overflowing" to the aisles. Thus with the interest of the people, the church was unable to hold them all. For these reasons the religious drama was moved from the chancel of the church to the churchyard where a larger playing space and a good elevation were to be had.¹ Here the drama remained for a long time religious. Soon, however, secular elements crept in, the Latin language turned to the vernacular, and laymen actors and men of the community began to take part until they finally dominated them. The oft repeated Biblical stories became too familiar losing their respect and reverence by the people. Bits of everyday life were worked into the plays to entertain the crowds until the responsibility soon came to be connected with the community rather than with the church.²

¹ Fuller, E., A Pageant of the Theater, New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1941, p. 75.

² Millett, F. B. and Gerald Eades Bentley, The Art of the Drama, New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, Inc., 1935, p. 37.

The ecclesiastical authorities began to question this method of religious education because it was becoming too great a force in the lives of the people. Criticisms became so prominent that the clergy quit managing and acting in the dramas. How far the church aided in getting the drama out of the church is not known. It took several centuries as the reaction of the church varied in various places and the process of secularization has roughly been estimated as taking place from 1100 to 1300.³ The fourteenth century, then, marked the decided change from cathedral to porch and from priestly domination to secular control.

Further developments in the mystery and miracle plays.

When this transition did take place the mysteries and miracles were presented in the open air. Expansion and elaboration were seemingly necessary in order to meet the requirements of the new performance. The platform was set up in some prominent public place. Seats for the dignitaries of the church and city officials were set up along the sides while the central area was free for the eager crowd. The surrounding houses were appropriately used as "private boxes". The unusually long platform, estimated to be 150 feet long and fifty feet deep was so arranged as to be lined with "stations" or "mansions" at the back and a large free

³ Nicoll, Allardyce, The Development of the Theater, New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1937, p. 63.

space for the acting in front.⁴ Stretching from heaven on the right to the mouth of hell on the left, the "mansions" were arranged along the stage. Doors, walls, the altar, columns, a throne, a golden gate and a tank of real water with a boat floating on it, were background settings for scripture incidents. The actors moved from one station to the other as the action was required. A mere wave of the hand could dismiss centuries. The unity of time and place seems to have meant little to the medieval mind. The Christ child may be laid in the manger in the morning and hung on the cross in the evening. At a later development the Passion was presented in twenty-five series over a period of days. "The first day saw the acting of the story of Mary's parents; the fourth day, the birth of Jesus . . . the eighteenth, the last supper, and the orchard scene; and so on."⁵

The most prominent representations on the platform at that time were heaven and hell. The devil was to them a very personal and real being who is forever striving to defeat the will of a personal God. Both of these characters were represented openly and boldly before the audience, God on His high throne and the devil escaping from hell-mouth

⁴ Matthews, Brander, The Development of the Drama, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1924, p. 134 ff.

⁵ Hase, Karl, Miracle Plays and Sacred Dramas, Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1880, p. 21.

to work his evil among men.⁶ Edmund Fuller in his work, A Pageant Theatre, describes the most impressive and popular of all the stage creations, hell-mouth:

As big as a house loom up the jaws of a fearsome dragon. They constantly open and shut with a crunching sound. Lurid flames, fireworks, and jets of steam shoot forth from the jaws. From within issue screams of apparent anguish and torment. Scenes kin to those of a torture chamber are revealed through other openings. Many red devils, armed with pitchforks, harry the unfortunate spirits or rush forth in various guises to tempt the virtue of the characters in the drama, or to drag some doomed soul struggling and screaming into the fearful jaws.⁷

Other wonders were thundering and lightning, seas of real water with live fish, spring flowers, trees bearing fruit, real and artificial, the appearance of people from simply nowhere and their disappearance, the changing of water into wine and the multiplying of the five loaves and two fishes. Here we meet for the first time descriptions of the mechanical spectacular effects, "the secrets of heaven and hell being so mystifying that the populace could take them as miracles."⁸

Most of the authors were compilers, adding and subtracting episodes as they desired. At times he rewrote what he borrowed but there is no individuality nor harmony of

⁶ Cheney, Sheldon, The Theatre, New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1945, p. 160.

⁷ Fuller, op. cit., pp. 68, 69.

⁸ Cheney, op. cit., p. 160.

literary style. One type of literature of the later medieval ages is the group admonitions. Women, feasting and the relationship between husbands and wives has been the most popular subject for these materials and have given us light as to the typical and colorful life of the times. From the play Noah, we learn the position of the medieval woman: "No man hath more wealth than he that hath a good woman to his wife, and no man hath more wor, than he that hath an evil wife, cursing, and jangling, chiding and scolding, drunken, lecherous and unsteadfast."⁹

Because of the mass of uneducated people, they were unable to tell whether the material used in the presentations were purely Scriptural or whether they were from the apocrypha, canonical books or legends of the saints. These furnished new material for the plays. Among the most notable were The Fall of Lucifer and the Blessed Mary stories. The Mary stories were adopted from the French plays to whom a special feast day had been dedicated. She does not usually speak but takes part in the pantomime action and is always the center of interest.¹⁰ There developed at this time a number of secular organizations or "literary fraternities" throughout the towns and villages which produced and carried

⁹ Carey, Millicent, op. cit., p. 62.

¹⁰ Young, Karl, The Drama of the Medieval Church, Vol. II, Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1933, p. 225.

on these Mariolatry dramas. The Virgin came to be worshipped rather than the Christ, she became "the most lovable of mortals as queen of beauty, as goddess-musician . . .". These plays produce the "wonder" element. Satire makes itself most prominent--"often grossly indecent".¹¹ The sacred along with the element of vulgarity seems to appear enjoyable to the mind of the medieval audience. The wondrous effects have little to do with the worshipful side of the presentations as they are overstressed. They have retained some elements of the earlier mystery and miracle plays, but it is readily recognized that the religious drama has come to another transitional period.

The element of comedy. In the beginning of the thirteenth century there emerged the festival of the Holy Innocents. This included choir boys and a selected leader, known as the Little Bishop, Scholar's Bishop, or Boy Bishop. It was his duty along with his "child dignitaries" to perform all the services of the ritual.¹² The Boy Bishop exchanged places with the bishop, the canons, archdeacons etc., exchanged places with the choir boys. The service was performed in Latin and in the same manner as first performed in the church. Irreverent elements began to appear; the real

¹¹ Cheney, op. cit., p. 164.

¹² Hone, W., Ancient Mysteries Described, London: William Hone, Ludgate Hill, 1823, p. 43.

dignitaries were turned into candlesticks and other altar properties, the Boy Bishop blessed the congregation and preached a sermon.¹³ An elaborate supper followed, with a parade up and down the streets and a dance concluding the ceremony. It gave the people "an opportunity to behold the rising generation in the trappings of maturity and dignity, or in the performance of more or less amusing buffoonery."¹⁴ This mock ceremony was the first appearance of the element of comedy within the religious drama and marks a decisive turning point.

Another comedy element entering during the early part of the thirteenth century was the ass. His earliest appearance seems to appear in the festival where the "flight of the Virgin into Egypt was commemorated." The most beautiful girl in the city was chosen to represent the Virgin Mary. With a child in her arms she was placed upon an ass and in a procession led through the streets and into the church. There in the chancel the mass was performed. The creed, Gloria Patri and other parts of the service all ended with "Hin-ham, Hin-ham" imitating the braying of the ass. The priest concluded the service by singing three brays and the audience braying in reply. Hymns were sung during the

¹³ Gayley, Charles Mills, Plays of Our Forefathers, New York: Duffield and Company, 1907, pp. 55, 57.

¹⁴ Hone, op. cit., p. 166.

service in praise of the ass.¹⁵

These performances were at first religious in intention but soon became "boisterous and licentious travesties of sacred rites." These and similar exercises seem to indicate attempts on the part of the leaders of the church to substitute for the pagan spectacles some sort of theatrical entertainment which would be in accord with the Christian spirit.¹⁶

On New Year's day the Feast of Fools, a mock ceremony of the clergy, was celebrated. Mock ecclesiastics dressed ridiculously and so entered the church to perform the service with a crowd following. The Bishop or Pope of Fools performed the service while other "ecclesiastics" sang indecent songs in the choir, ate rich puddings on the corner of the altar and played dice upon it while the "priest" celebrated mass.¹⁷

These were the principle mock festivals of the clergy and records have been found of them extending as late as 1645. The church protested but their popular acceptance and usage caused them to "hold their ground." Though the majority of the scenes were scriptural, scenes from the

¹⁵ Gayley, op. cit., pp. 42, 43.

¹⁶ Ballinger, M. F., A Short History of the Drama, New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1927, p. 115.

¹⁷ Hone, op. cit., pp. 158, 160 ff.

Apocrypha crept in and together there is a strange mixture of the sacred as well as the "profane" Biblical element.¹⁸

The devil was often presented in a very amusing manner. With tail, horns and hoofs he went about his special business of "fetching souls" and wheeling them off in a wheel barrow into hell.¹⁹ This devil is the favorite of all the religious characters. He is a wily fellow as may readily be seen in this excerpt from the book, The Drama In English by Walter Eaton:

Adam and Eve are now evidently either on the church step or more likely, the bare ground, between Paradise and hell mouth, and with hoe and spade they pretend to till and plant corn. Weary with toil, they sit down to rest, gazing longingly at Paradise and beating their breasts. Then the Devil comes and plants 'thorns and thistles in their tillage.' Seeing the thorns, they bewail their lot still more, 'beating their breasts and thighs and betraying grief by their gesture.' And Adam begins a lament. Again comes Satan, with assistant devils, put Adam and Eve in chains, and drags them off to hell, where the other devils grab them at the doors, and then cause a great smoke to arise, and 'call to each other with glee in their hell, and clash their pots and kettles, that they may be heard without.'²⁰

We cannot, however, overemphasize the humorous element in the plays and exclude their more serious side. The good and evil spirits were very real to the medieval audience and the "sallies" of the devil may have aroused much

¹⁸ Hone, op. cit., p. 43.

¹⁹ Matthews, op. cit., p. 119.

²⁰ Eaton, Walter P. The Drama In English, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1930, p. 21.

fear and uneasiness in the hearts of the people.

All the parts were taken by men and there were some parts which always brought forth a laugh, such as, the devil, Herod, Pilate and Noah's wife. Noah's wife is a typical "shrew" who refuses to leave her spinning wheel and gossiping to enter into the ark. She is finally carried in, "struggling and kicking--she gives Noah a sound cuff on the ear."²¹ In conclusion, there is a speech by God delivered to all on the faithfulness of Noah with a promise of no more floods. There is the sermon element here, despite the obvious "fun and farce," that is, instructing Noah and his wife in the dangers of the shrewish tongue. Many of these burlesque passages were taken from scenes of everyday life and were designed for edification.²²

A distinction must be made then between the comedy elements. Intended humor is to heighten the dramatic effect and give the element of surprise. Unconscious humor may be used to better explain the points of the Bible story in a more realistic manner.²³ The dramatist may choose to make his production as nearly like the life of the common people of his day as possible. Noah's ark built like the ships of

²¹ Miller, N. B., The Living Drama, New York: The Century Co., 1924, p. 68.

²² Gardiner, H. C., Mysteries' End, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1946, p. 4.

²³ Carey, op. cit., p. 144.

medieval times is an example of this. Some of the scenes stand out in a sharper contrast in their sacred setting. In the Wakefield Second Shepherd's play we have the following examples; the shepherds offer the infant Christ gifts of berries, a bird and a tennis ball.²⁴

As the management of the plays fell into the hands of the guilds they became more spectacular. Gradually the Comic element replaced the serious sacred performances and the main effort of the presentations was to entertain at any cost. Vulgar scenes crept in and sacred passages were made ridiculous. The drama of the middle ages reflects the times in which it was written, the tastes and interests of the audience for which it was produced. It has lost its primary aim, that of "fortifying the people in their religious faith."

The morality play. Brander Matthews in his study of the morality play, defines it as "an attempt to dramatize a sermon" whereas the mystery play attempts to dramatize a text.²⁵ The morality play was mainly a religious drama teaching method to warn the people "by precept and example". The cast was not of Biblical characters but of "allegorical figures" which represented virtues and vices. ". . . their

²⁴ Millett and Bentley, op. cit., p. 95.

²⁵ Matthews, Brander, op. cit., p. 142.

intent was not to teach graphically the Scriptures and the basis of Christian faith but to teach ethical lessons, to establish ideals of conduct."²⁶ An allegory is a figurative description, that is, the real characters are presented under the guise or form of something else in order to give the real characters more force and interest.²⁷ Some of the traditional characters were, Virtue, Faith, Christian, God, the Devil, Vice, Hope, etc. In almost every morality the vices change their names to such as Private Wealth, Human Genius, etc. Although such personified ideas had no power over the hearts of men, the moral lesson was derived from them in connection with a popular story or legend.²⁸ To the authors who composed these moralities and to those who witnessed them, God and the Devil were just as real as "a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." He had but one desire and that was "to herd his ignorant flock of listeners together on the straight and narrow path to Heaven."²⁹

The morality gave special opportunity for "invention"

²⁶ Mackenzie, W. R., The English Moralities From The Point of View of Allegory, Boston and London: Ginn and Company, 1914, p. 202.

²⁷ Childs, Jessica, Building Character Through Dramatization, New York: Rowe, Peterson and Company, 1934, p. xxiv.

²⁸ Hase, op. cit., p. 28.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 185.

and this was one advance step towards secularization of the religious drama. The earliest dramatic presentation of the morality was the Lord's Prayer in 1390 and the first regular morality in English is The Castle of Perverse.³⁰ It is one of the best in its class, while most of the moralities became "disfigured" (through attempts to appeal to the lower class). This one has kept consistent all the way through in portraying the true characteristic of the morality--the struggle of the soul.³¹ A synopsis of The Castle of Perverse, taken from The English Moralities From The Point Of View Of Allegory by W. R. Mackenzie is given here:

Man, trying to lead a clean and virtuous life, is constantly tempted by the fashionable vices of the day and is hampered, as well, by the original sin in his own nature. He succeeds for a time in overcoming temptation, but when the devil puts false and evil thoughts in his heart he becomes confused and unable to discriminate between right and wrong. Then he falls into vicious ways and persists therein, refusing to avail himself of God's mercy, which is extended to all men. But eventually he comes to himself. Remorse for his sins takes hold on him, and in despair he meditates suicide. He is preserved, however, from this fate by a realization that God's mercy is infinite, and is extended even to the sinner who, in strict justice, should be sentenced to eternal punishment. With a grateful knowledge of his indebtedness to God he now resolves on a life of piety for the future, and definitely renounces the sins in which he has wasted so many years of his life.³²

There are comedy elements in the morality as well

³⁰ Gayley, op. cit., p. 282.

³¹ Miller, op. cit., p. 70.

³² Mackenzie, op. cit., p. 69.

as the mystery and miracle plays. Representatives of the characters playing vice play "merry quips, gives, and practical jokes." Vices are best characterized by "carnal conversation and ungodly acts." The morality writers readily recognized that Vice did not always appear as a horrible monster but that he also was an amusing and companionable fellow as well. The loftier the theme, the greater the grotesque element.³³

The negative side of the moralities was the monotonous effect received by the lack of genuine characterization.³⁴

³³ Matthews, op. cit., p. 144.

³⁴ Hase, op. cit., p. 49.

The Guild System

From the middle of the fourteenth century the government of the cities and towns of England was changing into the hands of the guilds. A guild was an organization of craftsmen, or tradesmen.³⁵ The goldsmith's guild included not only the employees in the goldsmith shops, but also the bankers and jewelers of the community. The guild was under strict authority from the city government. Membership in the guild meant payment of dues, regulated wages and hours for working conditions, regulated conditions of manufacturing and the levying of prices charged for their products. Violation to these regulations meant the payment of heavy fines or the forfeiting of his business. The medieval guild system is much like our trade unions today, however, the medieval guilds were much more powerful and wealthy. The city officials were usually those who had risen to power within their own particular guild. In this manner, then, they were overseers of every phase of city life.³⁶

These guilds performed functions which were social and religious as well as commercial and political. They provided for the aged, fatherless, and sick. Each guild would appear en masse at the church, make regular contri-

³⁵ Fuller, op. cit., p. 77.

³⁶ Millett and Bentley, op. cit., pp. 35, 36.

butions to the service, and take part in the religious festivals.³⁷ There was much friendly rivalry among them, each considering his guild as great an organization as the church.

The Corpus Christi day had been established by Pope Urban IV as a special occasion for presenting the religious plays. Various records bear witness to the carrying out of these orders. Gayley in his book, Plays of Our Forefathers, gives the following regulation:

The guilds . . . 'shall have their plays and pageants ready henceforth on every Corpus Christi Day in fashion and form according to the ancient customs of the town of Beverley, to play in honour of the Body of Christ, under the penalty of 40 shillings for every craft that fails.'³⁸

The guilds, then, adopted this day as their holiday, and assisted the church in the presentations by a procession through the town.³⁹ Still, in another way the guilds came to the aid of the church by taking over the religious dramas which had been growing in disapproval with the church authorities. By this time the plays had developed into a series of twenty-five to fifty plays with many acts. The guilds were soon adding pageantry to their productions, making their performances more "sumptuous" than the church had ever before aspired.⁴⁰

³⁷ Gayley, op. cit., p. 102.

³⁸ Loc. cit.

³⁹ Tatlock, J.S. and R.G. Martin, Representative English Plays, New York: The Century Press, 1916, p. 3.

⁴⁰ Millett and Bentley, op. cit., p. 38.

Each guild was responsible for his own productions, entirely financing and staging his own particular play. They were genuinely community activities, each man contributing to this production according to his skill. The bakers and butchers would enact the Last Supper, the Wedding Feast at Cana, and the Feeding of the Five Thousand. The fishermen would enact and supply the products for the Miraculous Draught of Fishes; the guild of the shipbuilders and seamen would present the play of Noah and the Ark;⁴¹ the tanners and plasterers would enact and present the drama of God creating the heavens and the earth; and the cooks and innkeepers enacted the play of the "Harrowing of Hell" because they were in the habit of taking things out of the fire.⁴² The guilds took pride in presenting their plays, not only from the religious viewpoint, but also for the opportunity it gave to advertise their work.

The guild pageant. In order that a large number of people might see their plays, the stage was put on wheels. These "movable platforms" were called pageants, derived from the word pagym meaning wagon stage.⁴³ The word pageant at first meant scaffold, "the scene acted upon it." Later, as

⁴¹ Fuller, op. cit., p. 78.

⁴² Millett, op. cit., p. 38.

⁴³ Curtis, E. W., The Dramatic Instinct In Education, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1941, p. 196.

the procession developed, the word became connected with the other parts of the procession as well as the impersonations. They were two stories in height, the lower story being used for the dressing-room and the upper story being used for the stage. Temporary stands were sometimes built for the crowds which gathered.⁴⁴ The performance started very early in the morning. One record of the York performances in 1415 states that the plays should begin between four and five o'clock in the morning. One writer says:

To a medieval town the performance of a mystery was an event of immense interest. . . The magistrates ordered all the shops to be closed, and forbade all noisy work. The streets were empty, the houses locked up, and none but solitary armed watchmen, specially engaged for the occasion, were seen about the residences. All were gathered in the public square.⁴⁵

The players had processions and played in every street, beginning first at the abbey gates, from there to the church, and then before the mayor's house, and so on through the streets until every street had a pageant playing at the same time. When the first pageant ended, word was carried to the other pageants that they might move up. They were divided into as many pageants as there were companies or guilds.⁴⁶

In some productions, two wagons appeared together,

⁴⁴ Gayley, op. cit., p. 101.

⁴⁵ Nicoll, op. cit., p. 130.

⁴⁶ Gayley, op. cit., p. 100.

and when more space was needed, the actors spread out on the surrounding ground, as was noted in one record of staging, ". . . Herod shall rage on the pagym (wagon) and also on the ground."⁴⁷ Larger audiences could see the pageant better as the pageant stopped in several places. The best places were, of course, before the windows of those who gave most liberally to the performances. To see the performance for a whole day, the people packed into one place and remained until they had watched every play from the "Fall of Lucifer to Doomsday." In Chester, a performance such as this took three days.⁴⁸ In the country, the wagons lined up in one place and gave their performances while the audience moved from station to station as the Biblical stories developed successively.

Scenery, costumes and financing. Each guild was responsible for the staging and financing of his production. The large expenses were usually paid by some nobleman, "public spirited benefactor," citizen or the guild alone. A collection would be taken at the time of the presentation. A tax had to be paid by each pageant, called pageant silver, to the pageant master.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Fuller, op. cit., p. 87.

⁴⁸ Millett and Bentley, op. cit., p. 3.

⁴⁹ Miller, op. cit., p. 136.

The audiences on these "gala occasions" were not only the craftsmen's family and people of the surrounding territory but kings and noblemen as well. "Lords and ladies assisted sometimes with money, sometimes with the loan of pointed hose and silken gowns and other properties."⁵⁰ Each guild was in competition with the others to make his production the most impressive and elaborate. Costuming ran into quite an extensive display and there were certain patterns of dress which were characteristic throughout all the Corpus Christi plays. God usually wore a white coat and had his face gilded. Herod, carrying an elaborate scepter is represented in helmet and painted mask, dressed in a blue satin gown. The devil, carries a club, dresses in black leather, and wears a mask. In the Chester cycle he wears "archangelic" feathers, but they are "all ragged and rent."⁵¹ The wagons and costumes were kept up and elaborated from year to year.

Guild actors. The Corpus Christi plays required hundreds of actors and many hours of rehearsal and work. They were the ordinary humble peasants, and tradesmen "with an absolute lack of self-consciousness, with conviction and often with grace."⁵² W. P. Eaton gives the following

⁵⁰ Gayley, op. cit., p. 113.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 107.

⁵² Cheney, op. cit., p. 168.

interesting account of the guild actor in his book, The

Drama In English:

The actors were paid for their services, but they were in no sense professionals. They were true amateurs; carpenters, butchers, goldsmiths 364 days in the year, and actors by--and for--the grace of God on the 365th day. One actor received three shillings, fourpence, for playing God; another got fourpence for hanging Judas, and a like amount for crowing like a cock. Two 'worms of conscience' divided sixteen pence, and Noah got a shilling, but his wife only eightpence.⁵³

The actors and stage hands were paid for their services but there was a fine for a bad performance, disturbances or for the forgetting of lines.⁵⁴ The plays had extended to such length that some actors had to learn 2,500 lines. They were written in long verse which had to be spoken in a distinct manner in order to be heard and understood by the people. Rivalry was keen between the guilds because of the close association. The play was to them, "an expression of devotion as well as an opportunity for artistic creation. They undoubtedly worked hard and faithfully to make their . . . dramas as effective as they could."⁵⁵

Authors. After 1311, when the collective mystery and miracle plays were changed into the hands of the guilds,

⁵³ Eaton, op. cit., p. 21.

⁵⁴ Miller, op. cit., p. 136.

⁵⁵ Eaton, op. cit., p. 27.

they were called, Corpus Christi plays. The authors are for the most part unknown, but it is concluded that they were collaborators through the centuries. It has been suggested that they were the clergy, town clerks, school teachers, college professors and students, poets or even the actors themselves.⁵⁶ From the fourteenth century to the sixteenth century these plays were widely extended because of records which have been found in many of the towns.⁵⁷

Summary. This secularization came primarily because of the circumstances of production. This change of locality and the use of the vernacular made the decisive turning point of the secularization of the religious drama. The crude, elaborate realism of the outdoor setting gave quite a different mood unconsciously. The humorous element and the sacrilegious celebrations entered into the one time sacred ceremonies. The use of the canonical books, apocrypha, Virgin Mary stories and the legends of the saints, played a large part in the secularization of the religious drama. The special opportunity for invention in characterization of the morality presented an open door for secularization. The guild undertook in sponsoring the plays, but in time they became too elaborate and burdensome for the guild and the decline of the religious drama was well on its way.

⁵⁶ Gayley, op. cit., p. 93.

⁵⁷ Cheney, op. cit., p. 165.

CHAPTER III

THE DECLINE OF THE RELIGIOUS DRAMA

In almost all the towns in England, it was the guilds who bore the cost of the production of the dramas. They also had their own plays and pageants for their own private festivals and as has been noted, many a miracle play was performed in honor of their patron saint. The pageants grew more expensive and burdensome year by year and gradually lost their "lustre" and faded out of existence. There were few performances after 1600.¹ The most important result of all these performances was that it developed a love for the secular drama and shaped it into a better literary form. There were no theaters, professional companies nor playwriters during the opening of the sixteenth century, but at the close a striking contrast had taken place. Wm. Shakespeare was at the height of his career, professional theaters, and actors and playwriters were successfully making their living by the drama alone. Printing had also developed during this period, making a way for a larger amount of the dramas to be printed.²

As the secular themes continued to develop, the church turned again to its original opinion. The intrusion

¹ Gardiner, H. C., Mysteries' End, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1946, p. 30.

² Eaton, W. P. The Drama In English, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1930, p. 50.

of women actors into the secular drama was strictly against the belief of the church. Actors were called "common players, masterless men and evil disposed" which seemed even less in keeping with Christianity.³ Actors were rejected from taking the sacraments on their death beds unless they solemnly promised they would take up their old profession upon their recovery. Those dying without recovery were known as suicides and in this manner they were excluded from the church. Although the church could not draw any definite laws from the Scriptures against the dramatic performances, they formed a long list of moral arguments to defend their cause. The church was seeking means to protect the souls of men and from this point on there were many controversial issues raised.⁴

The Puritan influence. William Shakespeare, genius of the age, wrote secular dramas,--"he sounded every depth but one of the human heart, and reproduced in permanent form what he found there." He never touches religion only in a general way. In the midst of this new growth of secular drama the Puritans who then ruled Parliament began to condemn the "spectacles". They considered that Christians should not

³ Cheney, Sheldon, The Theatre, New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1945, p. 289.

⁴ Hase, Karl, Miracle Plays and Sacred Dramas, Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1880, pp. 177, 178.

take God's time for worldly amusements, that he should have no pleasure in such "vain delights." His pleasures must lie in attending the house of the Lord and in prayer and Scripture reading. Every player who continued to act, despite the decree which had been made by them, was to be whipped by the hangman and every one caught watching the "spectacle" was to be fined five shillings. Crimes for which the drama was now accused of by the Puritans in printed materials and sermons were: "emptying the churches, perpetuating pagan customs, distorting truth, showing forth profane, seditious and bawdy stories, . . . causing God to visit the plague on London, leading youths into idleness and extravagance, etc. . . ." In Sheldon Cheney's book, The Theatre, Stephen Gosson, a Puritan of 1582, has written the general opinion of the drama at that time:

The beholding of troubles and miserable laughers that are in Tragedies, drive us to immoderate sorrow, heaviness, womanish weeping and mourning, whereby we become lovers of dumps, and lamentation, both enemies to fortitude. Comedies so tickle our senses with a pleasanter vein, that they make us lovers of laughter, and pleasure, without any mean, both foes to temperance. What schooling is this? Sometime you shall see nothing but the adventures of an amorous knight, passing from country to country for the love of his lady, encountering many a terrible monster made of brown paper . . . When the soul of your plays is either mere tribles, or Italian bawdery, or wooing of gentlewomen, what are we taught?⁵

In 1632, William Prynne, a zealous Puritan wrote an

⁵ Cheney, op. cit., p. 289.

eleven hundred page book against the immoralities of the secular theater, however, he soon had to make "amends" for this work. King James was fond of the drama which was readily seen because of the large sums he spent for dramatic entertainment at court. He attended in person the performances and gave special attention and gifts to the companies and actors. The Queen and her ladies were practicing on a play by Walter Montagu. The Queen was to act a part for "her recreation and the exercise of her English." The crux of the difficulty was that Prynne's book was published a day before the Queen's performance. His book contained the following challenge: "Dares then any Christian woman be so more whorishly impudent as to act, to speak publicly on the stage (perhaps in men's apparel and cut hair) in the presence of seemly men and women?"⁶ He further concluded that they were "notorious whores." Prynne was brought into the court of High Commission for this act and was condemned to life imprisonment, plus a fine, a brand on his cheeks and his ears cut off.⁷

The Court gave the theater a certain standing by attendance of its noblemen. This was protection to them as well as an inspiration to the dramatists. However, if the drama seemed in any way to evoke an issue of criticism,

⁶ Albright, E. M., Dramatic Publications In England, New York: D. C. Heath and Company, 1927, pp. 20, 21.

⁷ Cheney, op. cit., p. 290.

they were not tolerated. Later all issues became political.⁸

A little later the outstanding remarks from the Quakers and the revival sermons of the Methodists were presented on the stage for the "delectation of the worldly-minded". Luther was asked for his opinion of these dramatic presentations. He stated, "Christians need not entirely shun comedies because occasionally coarse expressions and knavish deeds are found in them, as for this cause some might even refuse to read the Bible." During 1525, he invited Spalatin to his home where a comedy was to be presented by trained students. He further stated that these presentations and the memory of what they represented were impressed upon the boys' minds and that their trust in Christ was strengthened. He even went so far as to say that the books of Judith and Tobit may have been original dramas which had gradually been converted into prose form.⁹

Drama continued in this same controversial way until 1642 when the Puritan law closed all the London theaters. However, the drama continued in the universities as an educational instrument in both Latin and English. The Puritans succeeded in keeping the theaters closed for eighteen years, thus making an end of drama production of this type.¹⁰

⁸ Loc. cit.

⁹ Hase, op. cit., p. 188.

¹⁰ Millett, F.B. and Bentley, G.E., The Art of the Drama, New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1935, p. 42.

During this time actors were whipped and painting, sculpturing, and festivals were forbidden. The religious works of Milton, who was a devoted Puritan, wove a thread of propaganda between the Restoration and the Renaissance.¹¹ Again after eighteen years productions began again. There had been semi-private performances of plays but most of the Elizabethan playhouses had been destroyed, the old drama companies had broken up and many of the actors had died. As a result of eighteen years under Puritan rule, the drama of the Restoration (1660-1700) writes for a new type of audience. Theaters are seldom filled now, due to the character of the plays written for the Restoration theater. They were written for and about the courtiers and so attracted only the "fashionable wits and their parasites".¹²

The Puritan influence in America. The procedure in the motivation of the drama into America is not definitely known. The Puritan influence, however, with its spirit of opposition is widely felt in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. One author states that the first play presented in America was in Williamsburg, Virginia by the Hallam Company from England. Here, the Elizabethan drama group was highly received. From Virginia they traveled to Boston where

¹¹ Miller, N. B., The Living Drama, New York: The Century Company, 1924, p. 137.

¹² Eaton, op. cit., p. 61.

their reception was quite frigid. Sewall (known in connection with Witchcraft) led a crusade against their dramatic presentations. The clergy and civil authorities became involved over the issue and as a result a law was passed which authorized the theaters to open. The statute, however, forbade the Saturday night or Sunday performances. This was the beginning of the matinee in America. The Hallam company then went to Philadelphia, where they again met with confliction. The Quakers carried a petition to the governor requesting him to stop these public performances. On the other side were the supporters of the drama petitioning the governor for these performances. The final outcome was permission for the dramas . . . "if nothing immoral or indecent was presented."¹³

The controversies over the dramatic presentations continued. The mysterious burning of the Southwark Theater in Pennsylvania in 1821 caused many people to believe it was an expression of God's displeasure. As a consequence a bill was presented to the State legislature to forbid the further erection of playhouses. General Anthony, leader of the crusade, made his plea that the "playhouses be stricken out inasmuch as the stage was universally recognized as an efficient engine for the improvement of morals."¹⁴

¹³ Overton, G. S., Drama In Education, New York: The Century Co., 1926, pp. 39, 40.

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 41, 42.

Civil and religious authorities will always continue to be concerned. Clergy and laymen are no longer one in their opposition to the stage. The usual position of the clergy today is that they openly denounce the secular drama as an entertainment but heartily support it as an educational method in the religious education field.

The revival of religious drama. The oldest and most impressive of all the mysteries was the Passion of Christ. It took a more definite form in the fourteenth century and has continued to be performed down through the centuries.¹⁵ In this Passion the medieval church had the greatest dramatic subject of the ages, that of the life, death and resurrection of Christ.

Ever since the seventeenth century, the little town of Oberammergau has had its traditional Passion play. It has been said that it originated because of a plague which was sweeping the land and threatened the little town.¹⁶ A solemn vow was made to perform the Passion Play once every ten years if the dreaded plague was withheld.¹⁷ Later years have caused its irregular performance because of wars, etc. Some contend that it had its start as early as the twelfth

¹⁵ Nicoll, A., The Drama of the Theater, New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1937, p. 136.

¹⁶ Miller, op. cit., p. 66.

¹⁷ Eaton, op. cit., p. 37.

century mystery cycle of the Passion. This is debatable, however. The place of the original presentation was the church or the churchyard, but in 1830 the performance was transferred to the Passion Platz. This is a large theater built especially for the performance in order to hold the crowds which come from the world around. The peasants have been technically trained through the years. Several years before the performance of the Passion a school called the School of the Cross was held. At these times the scenes from the Old and New Testament were portrayed. The actors selected for the Passion Play have at first acted dramas of the secular nature in the old school house in order to prepare themselves for their greater performance.¹⁸ The total number of actors said to be cast in the play is around four hundred and fifty to five hundred. A performer may characterize the same character more than once or change to as many other characters as he is capable of interpreting. The peasants of Oberammergau are little effected by the popularity of their work. They have had absolute faith in themselves in that they can produce realistically the historical events in the Passion of Christ. "Ancient faith seems at home in that pure air under the shadow of the peaceful hills."¹⁹

Other performances of the Passion Play have been

¹⁸ Hase, op. cit., p. 88.

¹⁹ Loc. cit.

attempted in other places such as in Tyrol, Brixlegg and at Batzen in Germany but with not the amount of success as the Oberammergau Passion Play.²⁰

The American Passion Play has been produced in Hollywood, California. Also we find today that the churches are using more and more in some form the medieval mystery and miracle plays in an adapted form. A celebration of the Nativity has been an annual event at Pomfret, Connecticut. The Drama League of Colorado Springs, Colorado has very effectively produced the Christmas mystery. The Freiburg Passion Play has been brought to America and produced here.²¹ A group of the Oberammergau players have settled in South Dakota and are presenting the Passion Play as it was performed in Europe. Tradition has played a large part for the Fassnocht family who has played the leading roles. Everyman, a medieval morality play, has been the most recent revival. Many churches, schools and clubs have produced it successfully. Though we do not care to think of it in such terms, the play, Green Pastures is a typical medieval mystery play of the purest kind, only in terms of the American negro.

Religious drama is far from being dead today. All over the world and in our own country we are seeing the

²⁰ Loc. cit.

²¹ Fuller, Edmund, A Pageant of the Theatre, New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1941, p. 91

survival and revival of these ancient mystery, miracle and morality plays along with our new adaptations of them.

Summary. As the secular element continued to develop, the church turned again to its original opinion. The drama was banned for eighteen years during the Puritan rule. The result was a new drama. Many controversies arose as the drama was introduced into America. Puritans, Quakers, clergy and other opposers sought means of keeping the drama subdued. Two courses of the drama branched out of these controversial issues, the secular and the religious. Since this last century there has been a revival of the Passion Play and adaptations of the mystery, miracle and morality plays. Today, religious drama is coming into a new field all its own.

CHAPTER IV

THE PLACE OF RELIGIOUS DRAMA IN THE CHURCH

The aim of using drama in the service, is to make it as nearly perfect in producing a spirit of devotion and worship as possible. In order to produce this, all must be well planned. Every actor is to "hide" himself in his characterization and realize he is being used as a tool in God's hands. The performance is not to be that of an amateur affair, neither is it to be a show or an opportunity for professional actors to exhibit themselves as "artists". The audience and the participants in the drama must feel that the presentation is a form of worship. When this point of view is kept in mind during the process of production, there can be no questions as to its outcome. Elements of dramatic activity such as, facial expression with body gestures and movements, costumes and a simple setting readily give force to the lesson that is being taught through the drama. In this manner the drama may be a powerful reinforcement to the religious service.

It must be a place where the devotional spirit coheres with the presentation. It must be a large place of power and prominence, a place where "in some way . . . the message of the drama will reach and thrill the largest possible number of worshippers."¹

¹ Debenham, A. H., Religious Drama, London: Mowbray and Company, 1936, p. 12.

The theater versus the church. Charles A. Boyd in his book Worship In Drama, says of the dramatic instinct:

This is a God-implanted instinct and since it, like other instincts, demands opportunities for expression and since it is the church's business and its supreme opportunity to minister to the whole of life, it naturally follows that there must needs be a place for dramatization in the church.²

Because of the popular and close association of drama with the theater today, it is the natural reasoning that drama has no place in the church. Our study of the medieval drama has revealed to us that the drama of the Biblical stories were first portrayed in the chancel of the church. Therefore, the production of a religious drama is a natural part of the work of the church today.

The key note of religious drama is its sincerity. The action of a drama must come from motives that are deep and true. The theater is permeated with superficiality, as there is continual striving for effect in presentation and staging. Religious drama is naturally effective for it is the result of a true emotion. The theater is concerned with the techniques of a production. Often in the theater, the lower instincts of human nature such as sex, are portrayed in a distorted manner. In religious drama, the techniques are subordinated to the acting and to the material which must be made understandable. In attempts to portray life

² Boyd, Charles A., Worship In Drama, Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1924, p. 6.

as it really is: "woven with joy, and grief, achievements and disappointments, gains and losses, aspiration and disillusionments; and through this means of inspiring both player and audience to face resolutely life's perplexing problems."³

In the professional field of drama the main objective is to entertain and make money. If the play does not appeal to the general crowd which attends the theater, the producer will not consider it for production. In the educational dramatics, the main objective is to benefit the participants and then the audience.⁴

The correct use of terms in the production of a religious drama will help in establishing the right atmosphere for the religious production. It is better to use the words "presenting of drama", "participants", and "platform", rather than the words "putting on a play", "cast", or "stage". Carefulness is the keynote in order to avoid criticism and also in helping to create the atmosphere in the religious drama. If it is spoken of as a "show" the psychological effect will be imprinted on the minds of the participants. It is necessary that the setting of the drama be one that denotes simplicity and retains the worshipful appearance of the church sanctuary. Curtains and footlights give a theatrical look to the presentation and should be avoided as

³ Ehrensperger, Harold, Conscience On Stage, Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1940, p. 28.

⁴ Boyd, op. cit., p. 10.

much as possible.⁵

Educational dramatics. The church has been slow, but is now recognizing the potentialities of using drama as an educational method in the guidance and training of youth. Educational dramatics are still in the experimental stage and the increased interest in these last few years, has helped it to form principles more specifically. Some authors have put the stress upon the audience as being the most necessary consideration. Others use the drama in order to attract the people to the church service, laying the stress on the publicity as being the most important consideration. This view is true, but it is the least of all the values for educational dramatics. Those who teach children with the creative method say that the participant is the only necessary consideration. Anita B. Ferris states in her work, Following the Dramatic Instinct:

Educational dramatics does not attempt to train actors, it develops human beings. It deals, not with a 'talent,' but with a universally active instinct; it practices the player in living, not in the technique of an art; it summons him to activities as a man, not to commercial, industrial, or art obligations. It makes of him a citizen, training toward universal brotherhood; it does not specialize him as a craftsman or use him to help along the success of an experiment in entertaining.⁶

The element of play which brings about an illusion is

⁵ Boyd, op. cit., p. 9

⁶ Wood, W. C., The Dramatic Method In Religious Education, New York: The Abingdon Press, 1931, pp. 196, 197.

classified as dramatic. This not only includes physical activities but mental and spiritual activities as well and these in turn, involve imitation and imagination. This play element is readily recognized as an important factor in education. It is an important function of every phase of life. If thwarted, it will seek to find satisfaction in either wholesome or unwholesome ways regardless of the outcome. Curtis defines it as "a push of the ego . . . a demand for the expression of the personality."⁷ The greater the monotony in the everyday routine, the greater the demand for a change. Drama stimulates every phase of life and leaves an indelible imprint on the mind forming habits in thought as well as action. The theater is alert to meet this need, in that its productions satisfy youth in their craving for curiosity and love for excitement. Pageantry And Dramatics In Religious Education by W. V. Meredith, stresses the importance of the proper guidance of the dramatic impulse:

When we begin to study the self, we realize the important place the dramatic impulse assumes in determining future relationships and conduct. It is the impelling force stimulating and supporting numberless activities, physical and spiritual, whether or not we are conscious of the fact. In many respects, we are puppets on the stage of life, pulled by the strings of environment, limited only by natural make-up. Being such, the true educator is he who takes from the hands of chance the strings, and directs action so that there will be personal development and tragedies. This can be most successfully accomplished through applied educational

⁷ Curtis, Elnora Whitman, The Dramatic Instinct in Education, New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1914, p. 196.

dramatics.⁸

The play spirit is one of the basic characteristics of educational dramatics. It is a natural method of teaching for the whole attention of the person performing is lost in his impersonation. The result is that he receives the advantage of the experience without going through the dangers which the same experience would bring in real life.

How may we test the method of dramatization as an effective teaching instrument? Only by the influence or reaction of the participants. The inner being will unconsciously take on the change, growth or development and will soon be showing itself in some outward form.

The values of educational dramatics might be summed up as: bringing new and high ideals into the minds of the participants, setting the imagination free, awakening the aesthetic nature of the participants and helping the participants to freely express themselves in their own personality.

Types of religious drama. It is no easy task to classify religious drama. Those seeming to come under one head are found on closer investigation to belong to still another category. Fred Eastman has placed the religious drama into five categories: the prepared play, the dramatized Bible story, the pageant, the visualization and the

⁸ Meredith, William U., Pageantry and Dramatics in Religious Education, New York: The Abington Press, 1921, p.53.

liturgical drama. In their presentation, they must always be adapted to meet the needs and the scope of work in the individual church.⁹

The prepared play. This type offers the best opportunity for using a large graded group together. It is a well constructed "composition acted out by actors on a stage at a certain time and presenting a human problem which is amplified and finally satisfactorily solved by the three elements of the drama, action, characterization, and dialogue."¹⁰ Krows, in his book, Playing For Profit, gives the purpose of a good play:

A play should be represented visually, should command attention, arouse interest, and evoke sympathy; it should be a complete subject in itself, with all parts belonging; it should concentrate its action on or have the action develop from the fortunes of one character primarily; its story should show that characters involved in opposing circumstances exercising his will to be rid of them, carrying the play to the outcome of this struggle either favorable or unfavorable to the character, but always constructive in its end.¹¹

This plan may well be applied to a play with Biblical characters or one with a modern setting. The term "direct" usually means taking a story from the Bible or its original place and interpreting it in the form of a play with impersonations performed on a platform in the setting and words

⁹ Eastman, Fred and Louis Wilson, Drama In The Church, New York: Samuel French, 1933, p. 27.

¹⁰ Wood, op. cit., p. 112.

¹¹ Boyd, op. cit., p. 74.

closest to the Scriptures. The term "indirect" is a play in which the characters are either abstractions or types, or persons outside the Scriptures in which the moral lesson is inculcated by analogy or parallelism.¹²

The place of performance falls into two classes, those given in the church chancel and those produced in a hall. There is a difference in opinion among religious drama authors, some feeling that the religious play should be given in the church and nowhere else. There is no doubt, that some plays are more suitable for the chancel and vice versa. Debenham contends that plays with small casts and of a personal intimated nature "in which the action and the dialogue are more important than the mystical, poetical or artistic effect," should be presented in a hall. On the other hand plays with large casts including angels, choruses, choric speaking choirs or, in general, that which lends itself to big productions are best suited for the sanctuary. Many plays, however, are suitable to both chancel and hall.¹³

Dramatizing the Bible story. This type of dramatization is used very effectively as a teaching method for the children's division of the church. It may be defined as the "impromptu dramatization" of the child's interpretation of the teacher's presentation. The child can only imitate that

¹² Debenham, op. cit., p. 12.

¹³ Loc. cit.

which has impressed him the most. The child will develop his thinking in terms of motivation, memory, and detailed observation. Self-consciousness is often an unsurpassable barrier between the child and his social life. Such a one may be a good thinker and usually is a good listener. He is constantly seeking an outlet for his emotions. At a certain age this craving for expression may find its outlet in a dream world of his own. The right teacher will seek to guide this natural tendency. Dramatization used in this way will serve as a very helpful teaching method up through the junior age level. E. E. Miller, in The Dramatization of Biblical Stories points out the method of procedure:

- (1) Tell the story, emphasizing the essential parts.
- (2) Let the children divide the story into pictures or scenes.
- (3) Let volunteers from among the children act out one scene as they think it should be done, using their own words.
- (4) Develop criticism by the other children with suggestions for improvement.
- (5) Let volunteers from among the children act out one scene as they think it should be done, using their own words.
- (6) Let each of the other scenes be worked out in the same manner.
- (7) See that every child has the chance to try out many parts.
- (8) Play the story through many times. Change it often according to criticism, until the children recognize the result as a product of their best effort.
- (9) With the help of the children change the words into Biblical form.
- (10) Let the group assign definite parts to be learned for the final performance.¹⁴

¹⁴ Eastman, op. cit., p. 29.

Pageant. The pageant encourages group teamwork, "the sense of responsibility, group spirit, enthusiasm, and ambition, traits of attention, concentration, and punctuality." These are excellent in religious discipline and training.

The play is primarily concerned with characters, whereas the pageant is combined primarily with ideas. It is a series of single related events, usually portraying some phase of history, or development of some institution or a social movement. Each one of these events is climatic in itself. The pageant will be more massive and spectacular and use more characters. It is usually the combination of both color and sound, making it very effective. In the program of the church, the pageant may be used to celebrate some anniversary or special holiday. The pageant should have a clean cut theme which is carried through by each episode developing and enriching it. Esther Willard Bates states that "the wealth of all forms of art should contribute to it, and that such forms be "synchronous and interrelated whenever such combinations serve to enrich the content without confusing or clogging it." The masque, festival, processional are developed from the pageant.¹⁵

The Liturgical drama. The first chapter of this study has shown the origin of liturgical drama. The term

¹⁵ Wood, op. cit., p. 125.

used today means practically the same as it did in the medieval ages; however it is now written and produced wolely for the chancel of the church. Pantomine, tableau, anti-phonial singing, instrumental music, symbols, simple lighting and little scenery are the general characteristics which enhance the presentation of the liturgical drama. (The play may also fall into this category.) Many mystery and miracle plays have been revised and fittingly adopted for presentation in the chancel. Of all the types of religious drama this type has the greatest possibilities of promoting the devo-tional atmosphere.¹⁶

Visualization. The chief characteristic of this classification of plays is information. Temperance, mission, safety movement or propaganda plays of other branches of religious or social movements are some of the topics used. Usually this kind of material is very unartistically handled and does not have much depth or religious appeal with the audience. Occasionally one will find a cleverly composed drama of this type, which may be very appropriate and ser-viceable.¹⁷

Surveys. Fred Eastman, professor in the Chicago Theological Seminary made a recent survey of the 276 churches

¹⁶ Eastman and Wilson, op. cit., p. 27

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 34.

in Chicago using drama in their church program. The study revealed that 216 were producing religious plays and out of those 216 churches, 647 pageants and dramas were produced in one year.

Another survey was made in 364 churches of sixteen states of the middle west. These results are tabulated in his book, Drama In The Church.

In answer to the question, 'For what purpose does the church produce dramas?' 290 replies checked the words, 'For the inspiration of the audience'; 110 checked the words, 'For the education of the players'; 66 checked the words, 'To raise money'; while 24 checked, 'For entertainment and other purposes.' Religious dramas were further considered of two kinds; biblical and non-biblical. A third category called non-religious dramas was added so that the classification could be complete. Of the 947 plays produced the churches reporting them classified 318 as 'biblical,' 425 as 'non-biblical but religious,' and 125 as 'non-religious.' The remaining 79 were not classified. When were the plays given? Most of them were presented at the Sunday evening worship service; some at the young people's meeting, and a few at the meetings of the Ladies' Aid, men's club, and other gatherings. Among the special days on the church calendar, Christmas drew the largest percentage, Easter next, and Children's Day, third. But only 40 per cent of all the plays were produced on special occasions; the rest in connection with regular services of the church. Apparently most of this dramatic production has been done without special equipment, for only 30 per cent of the churches reported that they had a permanent stage, curtains, and lights, and only 18 per cent more reported that they had these as temporary facilities.¹⁸

The above figures reveal that the churches are recognizing the importance of the religious drama as an educational instrument. It was found that much of the material used is

¹⁸ "Present State of Religious Drama in the United States", F. Eastman, Christian Century, 58:286-7, February 26, 1941.

of poor quality, inadequate equipment or given under guidance of one inadequately trained for the directing of religious drama.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary. For six hundred years from the beginning of the dramatic incident in the ninth century to the procession of The Corpus Christi plays in the fifteenth century, the drama in England has been religious. It has been found that the dramatic presentations were used as an educational method in order to teach the common, uneducated people the Scriptures. Disowned by the church because of the secular elements which had distorted the presentations, the drama was transferred first into the hands of the laymen and then into the hands of the guilds and community. During the Elizabethan period, the religious drama completely lost its significance, and a new secular drama took its place. The Puritan rule of eighteen years succeeded in supressing almost altogether. The most productive and important period in the history of the drama came to an abrupt close. A new drama was the consequence. Its reception in America was first opposed because of the Puritan influence; however, through many controversial issues, it finally came into its own.

Today, the drama is divided into two courses, the religious drama of the church and the secular drama of the

theater. In the medieval plays this conclusion cannot be drawn, for the sacred plays in their later development often contained forcical and irreverent situations, while the so-called secular plays carried with them the degree of sermonizing.

Conclusion. The attempt has been made to show that out of the need of bringing the services and Scriptures close to the people in the medieval ages, the religious drama slowly arose. Today, religious drama has once again been called to the service of the church as a means of teaching spiritual truths. It has been found that churches are using drama extensively and that there is great value received from it not only as a teaching instrument but also as filling the need aesthetically and emotionally in the lives of the young people. Religious drama must be a part of the educational responsibility of the church provided that the program is centered in the right aims. In consideration of the knowledge gained through this study of history, namely, the place of drama in the Christian church, it has been found that it is not a place of entertainment, but as an educational function. Given, then, an opportunity to function in religious education, it should have a range for expression in class instruction, departmental and church worship.

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