

— Reformists vs. Traditionalists —  
An Interview with Otto Huber on His Efforts  
to Reform the World's Oldest  
Religious Melodrama: The *Passionsspiele Oberammergau*

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### Introduction

The *Passionsspiele Oberammergau* is unique among “Passion Plays”<sup>1</sup> because of its long history. Since 1634, with few exceptions, it has been performed once every ten years (as well as on significant anniversary dates) fulfilling a promise to God made by the town’s elders in 1633. There were many Passion Plays being performed before and around the time the Oberammergau Passion Play first started, but none have continued for as long as it has. The year 2010 marks the forty-first season since the occasion of the first Passion Play some 376 years ago.

“Passion Plays” that depict the last three days of Jesus’ life were quite common during the Middle Ages.<sup>2</sup> Many villages and towns around the annual Easter holiday would perform these theatrical productions as a way to remind people to be pious and to retell the story of how Jesus met his final demise at the hands of the Romans.<sup>3</sup> It was widely believed in early Christianity that in order to prove one’s religious devotion and pietistic reverence to the Creator, some type of outward demonstration of faith was needed. Also, Passion Plays served to remind people of the story of the Passion, with many communities regularly performing the Passion of Christ during Lent (the forty days leading up to the Easter holiday). This signifies the period of time that Jesus spent in the desert, enduring constant temptation by Satan, before beginning his public ministry.

Historically, Passion Plays often had a polarizing message that pitted the “wicked Jews” against the “suffering Christians.” (Mork, 153) After all, it was commonly believed that the Jews killed Christ, and thus, forever they should be reviled for this. Of course today, this archaic attitude seems illogical, if not silly, because an entire people cannot be blamed for the actions of a few zealots from over two millennia ago. Besides, Jesus of Nazareth was a practicing Jew at the time of his death; all of his Disciples and followers were Jewish, including his family —

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<sup>1</sup> “Passion” in English has at least two meanings: 1) emotion and 2) suffering. The Passion Play encompasses both of these meanings.

<sup>2</sup> Popular early on in the history of Christianity, especially within the Catholic tradition, the majority of Passion Plays developed in the Tyrol region of what is now Austria. The “Passion of Christ” depicts the period from Good Friday through the resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday, portraying his entrance into Jerusalem; his trial at the hands of the Romans; his suffering and crucifixion; and finally his resurrection.

<sup>3</sup> After Jesus was accused by Jewish priests who were threatened by his sudden popularity among the masses, they demanded that he be arrested and tried in a Roman court. He was attracting quite a following (some believed he was the Messiah), which caused the Jewish priests to become alarmed, worrying about their own place in society and in maintaining religious control over the masses.

parents, Mary and Joseph, and his siblings.

The movement which became the religion of Christianity, and the idea of Christians as followers of the movement, did not occur until much later. Sadly, however, it remains today that certain negative stereotypes do persist and unfortunately discriminatory attitudes are perpetuated which have their roots in the early condemnation of the Jewish people dating back to the time when Jesus lived.

Passion Plays, then, also traditionally served to emphasize the culpability of the Jews, albeit erroneously but surreptitiously, by fostering a belief that Jews are to blame for Jesus' death. Further exasperating the situation, Passion Plays routinely depicted Jews as sinister and evil in the majority of Passion Plays performed throughout Christianity's tumultuous history. The Oberammergau Passion Play was no different. From its inception in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, until modern times, a number of aspects of the Oberammergau Passion Play followed the traditional belief that the evil Jews were responsible for Jesus' death and it was the religious responsibility of the virtuous Christians to reinforce this message through these melodramas.

This blatant anti-Semitism continued within the Oberammergau Passion Play until well after World War II. This anti-Semitism with regards to certain aspects of the play persisted in less obvious forms until the 1990 season when a group of "reformists" within the Oberammergau Town Council (the entity in charge of monitoring and promoting the play) finally outnumbered the "traditionalists," hence being able to truly reform and affect sweeping changes to the script and costuming which traditionally cast Jews disparagingly.

Leading the reformists was a very unassuming, but passionate individual named Otto Huber. His tireless work and desire to make the Oberammergau Passion Play as historically correct as possible, while taking into account the scriptures from which it is based, is a feat that has given him adoration from supporters and scorn from critics and detractors. This paper consists of an interview with Otto Huber, a man with whom I had the rare and most fortuitous opportunity to spend the larger part of a June morning during the 2010 season. During our discussion, he related his role in reforming the play, revising the script and the difficulty he had with making changes in the face of much opposition by traditional forces within the village council.

## Historical Background

After neighboring villages and hamlets located in the Bavarian Alps had been decimated by a plague<sup>4</sup> that was sweeping the entire geographical area, the town elders of the small village of Oberammergau met to make a heartfelt plea to God to spare their village further from the wrath of death that had touched so many.

In the year 1633 the villagers of Oberammergau, in the Bavarian Alps, were peacefully hoping to avoid the ravages of the Thirty Years' War, which was tormenting their country. As if the murderous bands of soldiers were not bad enough, the war brought with it an outbreak of the plague. No one knew at the time exactly how the plague was spread, but it was clear to everyone that once the epidemic entered a village it would create a painful death for a large proportion of the population within a few days. (Mork, 153)

The town elders decided to meet and ask God to spare their little village further from this hideous

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<sup>4</sup> It is not certain which plague was responsible for all the deaths around this time period in the area. Likely, rather than the "Bubonic Plague" (or "Black Death") it was the "Pneumonic Plague" that was spreading so rapidly. (Leonard, 2)

disease. In exchange, the elders promised to perform a Passion Play every ten years for an eternity. God listened as no other person died of the plague. The townspeople made good on their promise to God and in 1634 performed the first Oberammergau Passion Play.

Over the years, the play's schedule was adjusted so that (except in times of crisis) the play was performed on zero-numbered years, and instead of merely being a production for the home town folk, it became an international attraction which was of major economic significance to the village and surrounding area. But to be a part of the production and the performance, one still had to be from the village. No one is exactly sure what text was used for the play in 1634, but we do know that several different texts were used over the next 150 years, and fragments of full editions of them have been preserved in local archives. During the early nineteenth century the play was established more or less in its current form by two local priests, father Weis and Father Daisenberger, and the music to accompany it was composed by the village schoolmaster, Rochus Dedler. In the twentieth century it was performed in 1900, 1910, and was planned for 1920. The problems surrounding the First World War and the overthrow of Imperial Germany caused the rescheduling of the 1920 play to 1922. A regular performance followed in 1930 and a special 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary production took place in 1934, one year after Hitler took power. The 1940 production was in the planning stage when World War II began, and it was cancelled. Productions resumed after World War II in 1950, 1960, 1970, 1980, 1984 (the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary), and 1990. (Mork, 154)

The 2000 production incorporated many changes which dealt with the issue of anti-Semitism. The "blood Curse" from Mathew 25 was completely removed, a menorah was placed upon the table during the Passover Seder, and Jesus was referred to as Rabbi numerous times which emphasized his stature within the Jewish community and made clear his "Jewishness." The 2010 production continued to promote the previous reforms and changed the order of the play to demonstrate more concretely the "hope" that Jesus was bringing to the people by emphasizing the oppression of being occupied by the Romans.

### Otto Huber Interview

[Author's Note: The following is a partial transcript and summary (with detailed notes) of an interview conducted with Otto Huber on June 9, 2010 at his home in Oberammergau, Germany. The text is largely in its original form with minor corrections to grammar in order for it to read more fluidly.]

TJL: Having grown up in Oberammergau, how has the Passion Play been a part of your life — first as a child and now as an adult?

*When I was 3-years-old... I have a picture which was in the book by Jim Shapiro.<sup>5</sup> At that time, I went to the Passion Play theater, my grandfather was a good actor and was a well respected person. And so, when I was 13-years old, it was fun.<sup>6</sup> My*

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<sup>5</sup> Mr. Huber is referring to the book *Oberammergau: The Troubling Story of the World's Most Famous Passion Play* by James Shapiro (Pantheon Books: NY, 2000). A photograph depicting a young Otto Huber alongside his grandfather, Hugo Rutz (as Peter), is found on page 53. [See Figure 1.]

<sup>6</sup> "As a thirteen-year-old he had appeared in a few of the play's celebrated tableaux vivants — scenes in which the curtain is raised to reveal the actors standing frozen, as if in a painting." (Shapiro, 18)

*grandfather died in 1960. And that was a little bit of an experience [to realize] how much he was involved in the Passion Play.*

Otto Huber has had a lifelong connection to the “Passion Play.” Having been born and raised in Oberammergau, it has been an integral part of his and his family’s lives for generations. In fact, one very important rule that is strictly adhered to is that the play be performed and done by only those who were born in Oberammergau or who have resided there for at least 20 years. Perhaps this, in part, is what makes the Oberammergau Passion Play so unique and special—it takes a village, literally, to create and produce a production of this magnitude.

Many villagers who have smaller roles in the play leave their “day” jobs at variously appointed times during the play’s performance to bustle through the medieval streets of Oberammergau in order to be on stage at the right moment for their particular parts; immediately upon finishing their roles, they rush back to their jobs to resume the work that is their livelihood.

Mr. Huber runs a small hotel to house pilgrims not only during the performance years, but as a part of his livelihood. Like his fellow villagers, the Passion Play is an entity in itself that has become so intertwined in the lives of the village that between performance years, much work and preparation occurs to ensure its success every ten years. Even though his association with the play began when he was but a small child, his real work started when he was approached by some who felt the play needed updating and modernizing when he was a young adult.

*Around 1960, this was of course around the time of Vatican II,<sup>7</sup> and so everyone said “this is an old play of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and it doesn’t correspond to the modern approach of the story, so you should get a completely new version of the story.” There were 100% traditionalists [on the town council] who said we should not change one iota.<sup>8</sup>*

*And then after a certain time, there was an important German composer, Mr. Carl Orff,<sup>9</sup> and he knew that in 1750 there was maybe the most outstanding literary version of the Oberammergau Passion Play; it was written by Rosner<sup>10</sup> and this thing had [nearly] 9,000 verses—and Rosner, by the way, brought in the “living tableaux’s”<sup>11</sup>—he didn’t call them living tableaux, he called them “meditations” because he wanted to have a balance of drama, meditation, drama, meditation, and so*

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<sup>7</sup> *The Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican*, better known as “Vatican II,” convened between the years 1962 and 1965 to debate a number of issues facing the modern Catholic Church. Of particular interest to the Oberammergau Passion Play, the Vatican II categorically declared that the entire world’s Jewry—past, present, and future—are not responsible for Jesus’ crucifixion. [See Appendix 3 for the actual text from the decree of Vatican II.]

<sup>8</sup> Throughout the interview, Mr. Huber repeatedly voiced his frustration with the process he had to go through in order to revise and change the play. Of course, he would not have an opportunity to do so until the 1990 performance season, when “reformers” finally outnumbered the “traditionalists.” A few minor reforms were made, but not until the 2000 season did the more substantial reforms occur.

<sup>9</sup> Even though the old text remained for the 1970 play season, nonetheless attempts to reform the play took on a new life (even though, in the end, the efforts made came to nothing). Among these early reformers was Mr. Carl Orff, along with A.J. Lippl, A.M. Miller, S. Schaller, and R. Raffalt. Between the years 1969-1989, a push to eliminate anti-Semitic elements within the play was actively pursued by a growing reformist camp from within the village. (“Chronology of the Passion Play 2000,” *Passionsspiele Oberammergau 2000*, Press Kit.)

<sup>10</sup> A Benedictine monk from the Ettal monastery, nearby to Oberammergau, Ferdinand Rosner set out in 1750 to make the most comprehensive rewriting of the play in nearly a century. (Shapiro, 61)

<sup>11</sup> “Rosner’s greatest innovation was his masterly use of versification, including the introduction of alexandrines for the choruses. While he kept to the sequence and plot line of the old play, his use of music and his systemization of the tableaux vivants into regular prefiguration scenes—six sets of three tableaux in succession—utterly transformed the flow and rhythm of the play.” (Shapiro, 61)



on.<sup>12</sup>

The tableaux vivants used in modern performances and renditions of the play date back to Father Rosner's concept of allowing a short, meditative break to occur during the performance. In the 2000 version of the Passion Play, as well as in the 2010 season, the tableaux vivants play an important role in offering biblical background to the Gospels on which the play is based. For example, in the 2010 Passion Play, the first tableaux vivant depicts "Paradise Lost" where Adam and Eve are banished from the Garden of Eden by God (*Passionsspiele Oberammergau* 2010, 9) and the second tableaux vivant, "Moses leads the Israelites through the Red Sea" (*Passionsspiele Oberammergau* 2010, 19), offers attendees an opportunity to comprehend visually these biblical episodes in order to gain an understanding of the alleged events that occurred throughout the Old Testament that have a historical connection to the final Passion of Christ.

*I became in 1962, a scout, or a Catholic Youth, and after some time, I became a leader of the group, and then a leader in the Oberammergau parish troop. And then suddenly the young priest who was responsible for the youth had to go away to Munich, and he gave me something like a "heritage," he said, "Otto, you have a clear mind, clear brain, you know...you must renew the whole thing by going back to the meaning of the whole thing. Try to bring it forward."<sup>13</sup> That's what I did, again and again, but it wasn't so easy back in 1970. I did a little bit of criticism, in a way which was quite clever what I said. The leader of Passionsspiele back in 1970 was an old Nazi [Anton Preisinger]. He didn't understand what I said and threw me out of the play and this was typical for the 1970s.<sup>14</sup>*

This episode with the director, Anton Preisinger, only fortified Otto Huber's desire to change the script of the play. After locating an old Passion Play script from 1740—which included the music and meditations used at the time—Huber began to embark upon some self-training in how to rewrite and adapt text from the script. This endeavor was met with a certain level of success which encouraged him to dig deeper into not only the history of the Passion Play, but into the theological questions which surrounded the play.

*Then in the 80s, there was a real earthquake in the city council, a complete change of generations and suddenly there was a young generation there, and some of them came out of the Catholic Youth from when I was a leader there. So they still had confidence in me, and they called me and they called me... "Otto, can you come back to Oberammergau to continue the whole thing."*

*In the meantime, there was a committee [to initiate] a dialogue [to deal] with the*

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<sup>12</sup> Otto Huber commented, "And the 9,000 verses—if you look at a Shakespeare play it mostly has around 5,000 verses, so they needed two days for the performance. And so, the problem was that Mr. Orff was a really good composer, and a man of theater, and he said to the people of Oberammergau 'maybe you should try instead of the 19<sup>th</sup> century version, the 18<sup>th</sup> century version is more powerful.'" (Personal interview, 2010)

<sup>13</sup> The young parish priest whom Otto Huber refers to here was Father Hamburger.

<sup>14</sup> As Shapiro points out in his book, there was "no love lost between Preisinger and Huber." (19) To illustrate the conservatism surrounding the play by the traditionalists, Otto Huber related a story regarding Christian Stückl's grandfather who was denied the part of Jesus back in the 1960 version because he was married, at the time, to a Protestant—a non-Catholic. The part went to Preisinger, the ex-Nazi that Otto Huber refers to in the above text. [See Shapiro, 18-19]

*anti-Semitic, anti-Jewish issues.<sup>15</sup> ...The playwright of 1980 and 1984<sup>16</sup> was Mr. Hans Maier, and he was a wood carver but a very simple man. You have to understand in the Protestant tradition, to read the Bible was natural, but in the Catholic tradition, it took until 1942 when the Pope said, “OK, Catholics read the Bible,” because [church leaders] knew how hard [it was to understand] the differences between the four Gospels that were written 2000 years ago. It was a different time and you can’t read it the same way as a gothic novel of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. I think maybe the Pope had a right at that time to say to Catholics, “I will write the homily or something and don’t read too much of the scriptures.” The people of Oberammergau didn’t have a good understanding of the scriptures. A funny example is when Christian Stückl once went to a neighbor and asked, “Could you please give me a Bible?” And she gave him the Passion Play of Daisenberger.<sup>17</sup>*

*So, in 1984, Mr. Maier was a really friendly man; and a good Catholic; and went to church—but his understanding was that the Passion Play must not be an outstanding art form but it must only be done by pious people...by true believers. Which meant Jesus must not be a good actor but he must be a strong believer. It doesn’t work like this.*

At this point in the interview, Mr. Huber’s frustration showed when he talked about the inflexibility of the “traditionalists”: “They always had the idea that we have to keep 100% tradition...and I cannot stand them in many ways. From outside Oberammergau was a place where nothing would change; don’t change your behavior because this is against Oberammergau.” (Personal interview, 2010) The tide began to change, however, as more reformers were elected to the new city council in 1984 (which outnumbered the traditionalists who preferred to keep the play exactly as it was). The council’s reformist faction, though, was somewhat divided between those who were supporters of Christian Stückl and those who were backing Otto Huber. It was amicably resolved when Otto Huber yielded the directing of the play to Christian Stückl:

*So, the question was who should be the first Play Director? And maybe I am the softer person, and I thought, “Oh, he was here the whole time and I was away...” so, the most important thing to be a theater director is really to know the people and to know who is able to do what.*

*So, I was a little bit of the specialist for the whole message of the play, as well as, let’s say, for the ideology and for the hermeneutic questions. And he was the one who knew the people and [who] could be this and that.*

*Our tasks included a few changes in 1990 and this was a real challenge; we were quite*

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<sup>15</sup> Frustrated with a lack of willingness by the villagers of Oberammergau to remove anti-Semitic elements from the play after the Vatican II ruling in 1965, American Jewish organizations called upon attendees to boycott the play in 1970 which helped to bring the issue of anti-Semitism embedded within the text of the play to the forefront, forcing the Oberammergau elders to address the issue. [See Appendix 1 for an abbreviated chronology of the play.]

<sup>16</sup> The year 1984 marked the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of the original play’s production. On anniversary years — like 1934 when Hitler attended the play and remarked so positively about its treatment of the Jews — the village will include a special performance.

<sup>17</sup> Joseph Alois Daisenberger (1799-1883, priest in Oberammergau since 1845), made some revisions to the script and directed the Passion Play in 1850. He wanted the play to be understood and enjoyed by the common folk, hence his desire to reform the script. [See Appendix 1.]

*young — Christian was 27 or 28 and I was 43... so now I am 63, and in 2000 I was 53...so this was a real challenge for two youngsters for the first time and we had so many problems with the city council...*

TJL: Does the City Council have to approve everything that is changed in the Play?

*They have to approve everything. They have funny things, for example, since 1933 there has to be a special play done about the beginning of the Oberammergau Passion Play. The question is why is it they have made this vow? I think this vow was done as a background of a certain theology. They really thought that every plague was a punishment of God so you can find many tableaux's with the idea of a punishing God. He has to punish humanity down there or punish sinners. And so how do we get rid of the punishment [aspect]?*

*There is either Mary showing her breast saying "I gave my milk to your son," and so on. And there's another one, Sebastian, "I take all the errors on my breast," as well as other saints, and so on. And then the main contrast, Jesus is kneeling there and he is shown as the Jesus in the Passion. He is portrayed as a representative of humanity. He took on his shoulder all this punishment for humanity. This is a theology which is extremely interesting, but extremely hard to understand somehow for people today...it is not so easy. Sometimes it goes together with the Lutheran idea of justification by faith.*

*The War of Thirty Years started in 1618, so at the moment it was after 15 years of war... maybe they were a little bit exhausted after 15 years of war. The same thing, this was a very cruel war.*

*Before the Thirty Years War, there was a population of 17 million in what we now call Germany; after this war, there were 4 million — from 17 back to 4 million. You can find places around Oberammergau where there were formally villages and they died out completely. There is now forest where there was a village before.*

*So, I can understand them, they were really like, "God we are dying." So, one approach was maybe that God has forgotten that his son has taken everything on his shoulder and we have to remind him. So, look here God, what this town has done for you.*

*And there was an idea that it was not to remind God but to somehow repeat it.<sup>18</sup>*

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<sup>18</sup> Mr. Huber continued on discussing this idea of a collective feeling of "Catholic guilt." He referred to it as a "blood and soil tradition" relating the attitude of Leo Weismantel, a man from outside the village who was asked by some of the town leaders to write a new "blood and soil" play (a new script to portray the beginning of the plague from which the original promise to God was made by the town elders back in 1633). However, his play text was not used. Mr. Weismantel had received an important award for a drama he wrote previously, but according to Mr. Huber, he did not have a good theological background. Weismantel concentrated on the "sinful" aspect of humanity, emphasizing carnal sins of the flesh and reiterating how God was punishing the people for their earthly indiscretions. The message was simple: Stop sinning. (Personal interview, 2010)

*So Christian [Stückl] tried to find a way...using an expression [of art]...how can there be a God if humanity has to suffer? How can there be a God and look at this?<sup>19</sup> The Oberammergau parish, the council—the parish has its own council—and there were still a few traditionalists, members of the city council, and they could not understand the whole suggestion.*

*And they said, “This Mr. Stückl is the end of Oberammergau!” It was interesting, we had worked for many things, and we had made changes to avoid anti-Jewish elements...and there was this really wonderful, talented young man [Christian Stückl] in Oberammergau who had done a stage design for several new performances of Dvorak and 19<sup>th</sup> century Wagner, and so on. And he is a strong man. He was then working in Berlin as an artist and he had done a stage design, and this new stage design had been accepted by the Oberammergau City Council.*

Change is often difficult in the best of times, but when considering trying to change an institution with a history and tradition as old as Oberammergau’s Passion Play, the task to make even the slightest changes in not only the script, but in the set design and directing, was met with vociferous opposition.

Mr. Huber related a story to illustrate the type of nonsensical opposition he and Christian Stückl encountered in trying to reform parts of the Passion Play. A traditionalist, who was an ex-Nazi, was blinded during the war in an exercise to test a soldier’s courage. As a young soldier, he was told to hold a live grenade after the pin was pulled for as long as he could before it would explode. Obviously, he held on to it a bit too long and was blinded by the explosion.

This ex-Nazi was a well-respected man around the village with a number of supporters, but he was against the new set design created by the young Christian Stückl. When pressed as to why he was against the new set design, he replied: “Because I don’t like the color.” The joke being the ex-Nazi was completely blind and could not see colors anyway. Mr. Huber’s point was quite clear: The remaining traditionalists were against anything new because it meant change.

As a reformist, Otto Huber had a difficult task in choosing which changes should be done initially, and which ones could be dealt with in future revisions of the script. With much pressure from American Jewish organizations to omit anti-Semitic language, props, and staging from the 2000 version of the play which had been often times emphasized in traditional versions of the play, he needed to choose his battles carefully and strategically.<sup>20</sup>

*For example, in the 90s we wanted to get rid of Mathew: 25,<sup>21</sup> the blood curse. We said in the Gospel of Mathew, this blood is so much of a purifying blood; ...the blood of re-consecration...that is too sophisticated [to portray] on the stage that people never will understand it. Also, the reception of this blood sentence over the centuries was so*

<sup>19</sup> See Appendix 4 for an essay written by Christian Stückl and his struggle to find common ground between the art form and the theology of the Gospels in his stage direction of the Passion Play.

<sup>20</sup> In previous versions of the play, costumes portraying the followers of Jesus and Jews on stage were starkly different—the followers of Jesus wore lighter, friendlier tones with Jewish characters assuming more sinister colors and designs. Also, the headgear of the Jewish priests was horned-miters which seemed to suggest that Jews had horns, making them appear devil-like. These costuming aspects (style of clothing and horned-hats) were used through the 1984 performance year, and beginning in 1990, were changed to more sensitive attire that was less melodramatic in pitting Jews against the Gentiles. Of course, logically, none of the traditional choices for costuming made any sense because at the time of Jesus, they were all Jewish; Christianity was not a movement until well after Jesus’ crucifixion. (Leonard, 3-4)

<sup>21</sup> The Gospel According to Mathew, Chapter 27; verse 25: “Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be upon us, and on our children.” (Holy Bible, King James Version, Mathew 27:25)



*awful that we should just get rid of it.*

*There were three meetings of the City Council to talk about this. So you can see how hard it was to bring something forward. And at the end of it they had asked the Bishop at the time, and he said, "Oh, this sentence must stay in the Passion Play, but I will write an article about it in the textbook." But nobody read it... about 6 pages.*

*So, Christian did the staging, and in the moment when they should have said this sentence, there was so much noise that nobody could hear it. This was the 1990 play. I only told you this story to make you understand how great a challenge it was to create something new against the wishes of the traditionalists and the City Council.<sup>22</sup>*

*Then there came so many changes...after the year 1990. If the traditionalists had been a little bit more clever, more elegant somehow, they could have found another agreement for the question: Can the women of Oberammergau have the same right as the men? In the Catholic Church, only priests, men, are allowed to perform the important roles. They thought the Passion Play would be something similar when Passion Plays started in Europe around 1200. Oberammergau did not invent them.*

*I haven't looked at the history of those places, but the first time we know of a lady being in a Passion Play, was 1530 in southern Tyrol. The men did all the female parts. And in Oberammergau, it was a little shadow of this. So women were only allowed to be in the play until they were 35—and only if they were not married! So often, Jesus was 45 years old and his mother was only 20 years old. This was an unnecessary miracle in my opinion.*

*The women in 1990 asked for the same rights [as men] and this actually was not so easy...because women have more time to be in the play than men...so we could fill Jerusalem three times with the women of Oberammergau. So then there was the question of did there live men, too?*

*The traditionalists refused any agreements so they went to the court of Munich, a Bavarian court, and the decision was Oberammergau is public domain, and they have to follow the same rules as for any other public institution.<sup>23</sup>*

At this point, Mr. Huber gives some historical background to the religious leanings of the people who were traditionally from Oberammergau. Until World War II, basically everyone was Roman Catholic. Once the war ended, and many displaced people began to migrate to the village, the

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<sup>22</sup> Finally in the 2000 version and onward, the "blood curse" sentence was completely deleted from the script's text. It was very clever, though, how the reformists buried the sentence in the clamor and cacophony of a huge crowd scene where it would largely go unnoticed. This is an example of how the reformists introduced changes gradually and in clever ways in order to proceed with their long-term agenda of making more noticeable changes.

<sup>23</sup> The courts ruled favorably to allow women to participate equally in the play as men, which also included other minorities and people of different faiths (or no faith) to participate if they fulfilled the residency rule. Previously, only the most pious—true believers—were allowed to act in the play even if they had no ability. Today, potential actors have auditions and the best possible actor is given the part of a particular role.

population not only doubled in size but was much more diverse in terms of religion and ethnicity.

*From this moment, not only the believers — there was a time when there were only Catholics — then there was a change when Protestants could be in the play, too. Especially, Protestant critics about the Passion Play could have a better impression and since, I think, 1970 or so, all those Protestants were in the Play. I have to say that before that there was only one Protestant lady in Oberammergau in 1930. And the Protestants, they came only after the War [WW II].*

*In Oberammergau, in 1945 to 1946, we had 2000 inhabitants born in Oberammergau — all of them Catholic — and we had 2,500 refugees. So, 100% had to be integrated. There were many Protestants, and so in the 1950s we built a church for the Protestants. But, for example, in Bavaria they wanted to keep the Old Catholic traditions. So for example, when I was a pupil, at school, there were 8 Catholic classes and there was a special Protestant class in Bavaria.*

*From the 1970s on, Protestants were in the play. In 1990, for the first time, a Protestant [was cast in] a main role, as the Prologue. Since this decision, now everybody who is born in Oberammergau or who has lived here for 20 years is allowed to be in the play. Even if you are atheist...there are some Muslims in the play...and so on.*

*But you can see, in 1990 to 2000 to 2010 — the years where I had the responsibility — and in 1990, it was really a great effort to reform; in 2000 we were more clever, and again in 2010, we had more experience in thinking and in doing theater...both, but especially Christian who is a leader of a theater in Munich, had done a lot of Shakespeare and so on. So from 1990 to 2010, changes, changes, changes.*

TJL: In comparison to the previous performance in 2000, in what ways has the current 2010 play changed?

*Many, many, many. I think that one of the things is when Jesus and the Jews entered Jerusalem,<sup>24</sup> a great hymn... “The one who comes in the name of the Lord”... it was not clear why they were singing for him. What were their hopes? [In the previous 2000 version] he got off his donkey and threw the tables in the temple...it was not clear that this was the act of a prophet who says you have to focus on God — take away all the money, all the goats, etc — all that was not the center...God is the center and that was not clear.*

*You can find in the four gospels, four different versions of the moment when Jesus enters Jerusalem. In John, it is chapter 12; and in Mathew he goes to Jerusalem, and he throws the merchants out of the temple; in Mark he comes to Jerusalem, enters Jerusalem, and then goes away to Bethany or somewhere and comes back again.*

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<sup>24</sup> See Figure 2. Also, in Figure 3, a menorah is prominently placed on the Passover Seder table which serves to emphasize the Jewishness of Jesus and his Disciples.

*That's when he throws the merchants from the temple.*<sup>25</sup>

*We thought, maybe we should bring the throwing out of the merchants in another act...so we brought it to the third act. And in the first act, we have to make it understandable why there was hope because of Jesus. Or maybe people know less and less about his messages and I think that is a general change in theology...this idea that Jesus took on his shoulder all the punishment of God for humanity. This brings, somehow, an automatic redemption. We are redeemed automatically.*

*When Jesus came to Israel, he did not say you are redeemed and continue to live...go on, go on, and do the same thing. You have to change your life; you have to change your ideas. You have to change your relationships with your brothers and with God. He was really demanding.*

*Do you know, we look at a certain time, for example, Gandhi, when he comes to India and all the British soldiers are around? ...So when you look now at the first scene, there are Roman soldiers around and this is a part of the situation why Israel waited for a Messiah because he should have helped them to get rid of the occupiers.*

*And there are moments where there are words from the Sermon on the Mount and Jesus inspires self-confidence: "You are the light of the world; you are the children of your father in heaven, so you behave like your Father." So, the moment where he shows mercy towards the sinner, for example, the adulteress...that is the first act.*

*The third act, when he has thrown out the merchants from the temple, the last time in 2000 we looked to show a moment of prayer, and we took a Psalm, there are a number of Psalms, which are about pilgrims entering Jerusalem. We used one of them, but in 2010 we didn't think it was clear enough. So, maybe we should use a prayer, and a prayer which the Jews and the Christians can pray together: "Shema Israel".*

*And another thing is, in the dialogue of the olden days, you can always find or see the conflicts of Jesus and the political conflict between Jesus and the Romans. And they don't want to look at the religious conflict.*

*And so in the four Gospels there are only religious conflicts, until the end and then they said he should be punished by death and then they bring him to Pilot. So Pilot, and the Romans, only appear at the end of the story.*

*At the beginning of the story, it is the Romans who are making the laws. So, Pilot arrives in the third act. He says to Caiaphas, "You are responsible for law and order in the city and if this young preacher brings chaos to the city then you will lose your job and I will bring my soldiers and you will see what happens." So in the following acts, it can be understood why Caiaphas says, "It is better that one man dies, than that the whole nation suffers."*

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<sup>25</sup> Jesus entered Jerusalem on what is now Palm Sunday (the Sunday before Easter Sunday) and is mentioned by all four Gospels Mark 11:1-11; Matthew 21:1-11; Luke 19:28-44; and John 12:12-19). (Holy Bible, King James Version)

*These are a few of the changes...and some changes really tried to make the historical situation more understandable. And it has consequences for the question of the guilt of the Jews when you can see the Romans and Pilot at the beginning; and it makes it clearer that Jesus is not an enemy of the law, like it is shown in the Letter of Paul, where he is against the law.*

It is clear during our conversation that Mr. Huber is quite concerned about the future of the play and how it will be carried on with future generations of Oberammergau villagers. He mentioned that he is heartened by young people in the village who say they can identify with the current version of the play. He very much wants the youth of Oberammergau to be actively involved so they will maintain interest in the story and a desire to continue the tradition into the next millennium. "The young generation must take over the questions and they have to find their solutions; they have to take on the task." (Personal interview, 2010)

Certainly, Otto Huber, along with Christian Stückl, are leaving a huge legacy that will endure for generations to come. Both have fought to reform all aspects of the play, and have made many enemies in the process. Although they have very different personalities, they both believe in what they are doing and that it is for the good of the local and world community. The accurate portrayal of the last days of Jesus' life, based on the Gospels of Mathew, Mark, Luke and John, cannot be altered completely or interpreted correctly without risking losing the theological and spiritual aspects of the play and alienating those who feel offended by some of its depictions. To scores of believing Christians and faithful pilgrims, the Bible is the inerrant word of God and is the only truth. The interpretation of this literary work, however, shall always be debated and revised as humankind evolves.

*I am quite proud as I have written many verses for the lyrics for the choir...and all of these words which I have written have inspired the composer to write wonderful music. And I think that Oberammergau is not only a historical drama, it is a mystery play. And I think that many touching moments are in the music. I think some of the most inspiring messages are found in the music. There is a lot of new music and we took away a lot of stupid things regarding Judaism and Judas [to make it more acceptable and less divisive]. And this is kosher...not only kosher but persuasive, somehow.*

*Christian [Stückl] is much more interested in politics than I am. For me, the high priest talks too much. I would like to get rid of some of these sentences. So that is the difficulty. You know, we have so many people in Oberammergau who would like to be in the play. So it is so nice to bring them to the high council and everybody has one sentence to say. Everyone is proud to be in the play. So it is very difficult to bring everyone in and make it shorter.*

*Maybe we will gain a more adequate understanding of what happened — not only in a historical way, but in a spiritual way. Sometimes, I said to my Jewish dialogue's partner, "I will be more interested in a spiritual dialogue than to be in one where the American organizations like ADL<sup>26</sup> feel they must act as policemen and we the criminals...and I don't like [the Play] to be controlled by policemen.*

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<sup>26</sup> ADL=Anti Defamation League.



*The stupid thing is when there is someone coming only to argue about historical arguments and not accepting anything that is in the Gospels. If somebody comes and says the four Gospels are completely a collection of errors, and you should get rid of them — and some of them really ask us to change completely — so as I have said several times, we went very far [with our revisions], so maybe you should go and see the Pope and ask him to change a few parts...*

*I think it is so wonderful when I go to Mass in Oberammergau, and the church is completely filled with people coming from all over the world. When you go to Rome they, too, are coming from all over the world, but only the Catholics. In Oberammergau, maybe there are less people than in Rome, but they come from really different religions and backgrounds. So somehow you feel the universal brotherhood of Christians here in Oberammergau. I think this is wonderful.*

## Conclusion

As the interview came to a close, we took pictures and exchanged addresses. Mr. Huber had to then prepare to go to the theater to give an English presentation to pilgrims before the afternoon's performance. He alternates between acting in the role of "Prologue" on one day, and assisting the director, Christian Stückl, with organizing the actors backstage to make sure all is in order and in the right place at the correct time.

The next day, as I sat in the huge, open-air theater watching the play for the second time (I attended the 2000 performance, as well), the enormity of what Mr. Huber had accomplished finally became clear. The reforms to the play itself and the revisions to the text of the play were indeed triumphs. It took much courage and determination, strategically, to implement the types of reforms that he was instrumental in doing over a thirty year period.

Although not all view his work as being triumphant, as a number of Jewish organizations would still like to see further and deeper reforms made to the play,<sup>27</sup> the question arises as to how much of the historical record according to the Gospels can be altered without risking changing the whole story and purpose of the play? As Otto Huber humorously offered in the interview, perhaps these critics should take their grievances to the Pope. Not much more can be changed as the most basic script of the play available is the Holy Bible.

Regardless of the critics who maintain there is still blatant anti-Semitism present in the current production, it is my opinion — when comparing the script to past historically archived scripts and when considering the conservative atmosphere within the City Council during the time the traditionalists ruled the play with an iron hand — the sensitivity the newest version offers to these important issues which affect and are important to world Jewry are evident in the numerous reforms which have been adopted. I am sure that Mr. Huber would be the first to admit that future reforms to improve upon the changes already made is welcome and inevitable.

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<sup>27</sup> The Council of Centers on Jewish-Christian Relations formed an Ad-Hoc Committee to report on the 2010 Oberammergau Passion Play script. On May 14, 2010 the committee released its findings: "Negative Impressions — The team expressed varying degrees of concern about aspects of the 2010 script in three main categories. (1) Some of the script's interlacing of Old Testament scenes with New Testament ones with 'living images' recalls perennial demeaning depictions of Judaism; especially problematic is the Golden Calf episode from Exodus 32. (2) The Temple priesthood is inaccurately depicted as primarily concerned with "purity of doctrine." Typical debates of the time over Torah observance are thus inaccurately made into capital offenses, resulting in Jesus anachronistically being called 'heretic' and 'apostate.' (3) Caiaphas, the script's principal antagonist, as well as Annas, are unnecessarily and baselessly portrayed as fanatics driven to see Jesus crucified. As a result the depiction of Pilate is somewhat skewed as well. In short, Jewish opponents of Jesus are unjustifiably depicted in such extreme terms as to risk impressing on the audience a negative image of the entire Jewish community. We also noted other negative features in the script." (Boys, p. 1)

Interestingly, the reforms have forced Oberammergau to embrace the 21<sup>st</sup> century by bringing to the forefront a variety of outdated customs and traditions regarding the role of women in the play, the acceptance of non-Catholics and even non-believers to participate in the play.

It will be interesting to see what reforms lie in future performances. As society evolves, and people's attitudes toward social and moral issues change, so will the Oberammergau Passion Play evolve and change. However, there will have to be people with the same fortitude and determination as Otto Huber and Christian Stückl to ensure the play remains valid, well-grounded, genuine and legitimate. And above all, it should offer those who see it a sense of hope—the primary goal of both Otto Huber and Christian Stückl in this newest production of this age-old story.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1

**Passionsspiele  
Oberammergau  
2010**

## CHRONOLOGY OF THE OBERAMMERGAU PASSION PLAY

### 1633

It all started with a vow during the Plague. In the Thirty Years' War, the Black Death, the Plague, came to Oberammergau in 1632. Eighty deaths from the Plague were recorded in the register by 1633. The chronicle reports that in this time of suffering, the six aldermen and twelve parish representatives met and vowed to hold the Passion Play every ten years. At the time, passion plays were widespread in Europe. More than 250 plays are documented between 1500 and 1800 in Bavaria and Austria.

### 1634

(1<sup>st</sup> year of performance) The Passion is acted out at Pentecost at the graveyard by the church, by 60 to 70 performers.

### 1662

Date of the oldest preserved copy of the Oberammergau Passion Play script. Most of the 4,902 verses come from two older plays which were already combined before 1634:

1. a mediaeval passion play (second half of the fifteenth century), a written copy of which was found in the Benedictine monastery of St Ulrich and Afra in Augsburg.
2. the Reformation Passion "Tragedi" by the Augsburg meistersinger Sebastian Wild of 1566, circulated as a printed copy.

**1674**

(5th year of performance) Scenes extended by the Weilheim Passion by the priest Johann Älbi (1600, 1615)

**1680**

(6th year of performance) Switch to performances every ten years

**1690**

(7th year of performance) Oldest preserved municipal bill lists 'spendings for the Passion Play': 45 gulden (florins) and 45 kreutzer

**1700**

(8th year of performance) Directed by and rhymes improved by the prebendary Thomas Ainhaus.

**1720**

(10th year of performance) Preserved parts of the script revised by P. Karl Bader (1662-1731) reveal a stage with a Baroque backdrop.

**1730**

(11th year of performance) Revision by the Augustinian monk Anselm Manhart of Rottenbuch (1680-1752) who introduces the allegorical figures of Envy, Greed, Death and Sin as Jesus' opponents. Two performances. Deficit: 84 gulden.

**1740**

(12th year of performance) Script revision by the Augustinian monk Clemens Prasser of Rottenbuch (1703-1770).

**1750**

(13th year of performance) 'Passio Nova' by the Benedictine monk Ferdinand Rosner of Ettal (1709-1778), with complete new religious and design arrangement using the stylistic vocabulary of Baroque theatre. The allegories are integrated into the story: Jesus is at the centre of a dramatic struggle between God and the powers of hell. Rosner's text is widely circulated in Bavaria and makes Oberammergau an example for other plays.

**1760**

(14th year of performance) Two performances with 14,000 spectators.

**1770**

All passion plays banned in Bavaria. Oberammergau is also refused permission despite intense efforts.

**1780**

(15th year of performance) Sole privilege for Oberammergau after Rosner's Passion is revised by the Benedictine monk Magnus Knipfelberger of Ettal (1747-1825). He restricts the appearances of hell to musical interludes and calls the play 'The Old and New Testament' to avoid mentioning the topic of the Passion.



**1790**

(17th year of performance) Privilege renewed. The drop to 3,000 spectators connected to the Napoleonic Wars leaves a deficit of 205 gulden.

**1800**

(18th year of performance) To reduce municipal debts, the 1800 Passion Play is continued with four performances.

**1801**

Minister Maximilian, Count of Montgelas, declares the Oberammergau Privilege is revoked. No performance.

**1811**

(19th year of performance) The ban on the Passion Play was lifted in 1811 after a new script was submitted written by the Ettal priest, Dr Ottmar Weis (1769-1843), concentrating on the Gospels, the central idea of reconciliation, with the allegorical, mythological and legendary elements removed, and with contemporary theology, prose, realism and wordy, moralistic interpretations of the examples set. Music composed by the Oberammergau teacher Rochus Dedler (1779-1822). This music for the tableaux still plays a major role in determining the character of the play today

**1815**

(20th year of performance) Special performances in thanks for the end of the Napoleonic Wars. The script continues to be revised by Weis and the music by Dedler. A new Empire-style stage is acquired by prebendary J.N. Unhoch (1762-1832) flanked by Houses of Annas and Pilate and side streets. New decorations.

**1830**

(22nd year of performance) King Ludwig I approves the play on condition that the stage is no longer erected in the graveyard. Stage is moved to the northern edge of the village. In the new theatre there is room for an audience of 5,000, although only about 13,000 spectators come to the ten performances. Goethe publishes the enthusiastic letter sent to him by S. Boisserée about the Passion Play in the magazine 'Chaos'.

**1840**

(23rd year of performance) 35,000 visitors. This rise is due to newspaper reports from 1830. Reviewers such as G. Görres, I. F. Lentner, L. Steub, E. Devrient, M. Deutinger and J. Sepp discovered the Passion Play and made it widely known.

**1850**

(24th year of performance) Direction and individual changes to the script by Joseph Alois Daisenberger (1799-1883, priest in Oberammergau since 1845), who, in the spirit of his teacher J. M. Sailer develops a richly effective way of teaching the common folk, using historical and dramatic works, among other things. An elected 'Passion committee' organizes the plays. The first French and English reports on the play appear.

**1860**

(25th year of performance) In 1858, Daisenberger revises the script at the request of the directors and taking into account reviews from 1850. He gives priority to the Gospel of John and tries to

bring out the drama of the Passion. Instead of Weis's updating, he opts for universality; instead of realism, idealization; instead of politics, psychology (*e.g.* in the case of Judas). Based on antique and classical tragedy (structure, motifs), on the other hand he tries to add common appeal by introducing legends (Saint Veronica, Ahasuerus) and stories related to the Way of the Cross (*e.g.* Jesus meeting Mary).

### **1870**

(26th year of performance) Daisenberger writes prologues to the tableaux in the rhythm of ancient odes. However, the municipality does not accept his proposal to write the Passion in verse. The play, interrupted by the war, is continued in 1871. 40,000 visitors, including Crown Prince Edward of England.

### **1880**

(27th year of performance) Number of visitors rises to 100,000. The extension of the railway line to Murnau makes arrival easier. Thomas Cook discovers Oberammergau for the flourishing tourist trade. Guests include the composer Anton Bruckner and Georg II, Duke of Meiningen, who influenced the historicized theatre style of the time. Costumes made at the Munich court theatre.

### **1890**

(28th year of performance) Stage reconstructed by the internationally renowned Munich theatre technician Carl Lautenschläger (separation of side houses, Neo-Renaissance façade, technical modernization), seating partly covered, new production in the style of court theatre with naturalistic, historicized stage sets and costumes. 124,000 spectators at 40 performances.

### **1900**

(29th year of performance) Roof built over entire auditorium with an iron framework. 4,200 seats. Audience of 174,000. The Allgemeine Zeitung newspaper writes: 'Oberammergau sees guests from all over the world; three gentlemen even arrived from China. In the church offertory box there are coins from Egypt, India, Hong Kong, the USA, Mexico, Brazil and Peru'.

### **1922**

(31st year of performance) The consequences of the war mean the play is shifted from 1920 to 1922. Johan Georg Lang is elected as director.

### **1930**

(32nd year of performance) Stage rebuilt and new production created by Georg J. Lang (1889-1968), who directed the play from 1922-1960. The clear, ascetic, monumental style of the stage fits with the artistic concentration of the stage sets, and are accompanied by impressive direction of large casts. The auditorium is extended to seat 5,200.

### **1934**

(33rd year of performance) Special play to commemorate 300-year anniversary. Hitler visits the Passion Play. The new rulers claim the play for themselves, saying it emanates from the blessed power of the homeland. Hitler declares it 'of importance to the Reich' and Cardinal Faulhaber grants an official ecclesiastical commissioning, the 'missio canonica'.

### **1940**

The Passion Play is dropped due to the war

**1950**

(34th year of performance) Music revised by Prof. Eugen Papst. 480,000 visitors including Federal President Theodor Heuss, Federal Chancellor Konrad Adenauer and the highest representative of the Allies, Dwight D. Eisenhower.

**1960**

(35th year of performance) Oberammergau is accused of a negative portrayal of Judaism by Christian and Jewish critics. The Abbot of Ettal, Dr Johannes M. Höck, makes slight corrections to the script but basically, the 1930 production is repeated almost unchanged.

**1970**

(36th year of performance) There is growing call for the Daisenberger script to be rewritten in Oberammergau. Cardinal Döpfner calls upon people to change their views. In his words, it is not about 'the guilt, or even the collective guilt, of the Jews, but about the failure even of the new Israel, of the church'. Anton Preisinger directs the play. The old script remains. All attempts at reform fail. In America, Jewish organizations boycott the play.

**1975**

The municipality gives Hans Schwaighofer the task of putting on a performance based on the Rosner script.

**1977**

After seven months of rehearsal with about 700 committed participants, there are eight performances which enjoy a very positive reception by the public and critics. At a citizens' referendum following this, however, the majority chooses against using the Rosner production for the 1980 performances.

**1980**

(37th year of performance) After major disputes within the village about the correct form for the Passion Plays, the sculptor Hans Maier directs the play based on the Daisenberger script. Some small changes are made to the script.

**1984**

(38th year of performance) Special play to commemorate the 350-year anniversary. New generation enters the municipal council, yet the Daisenberger version of the script is chosen for the 1990 play. Then, however, in 1986, comes the surprise selection of the youngest director of the play ever: the 25-year-old sculptor Christian Stückl.

**1990**

(39th year of performance) Stückl brings in a young generation of actors in the main roles. Disputes over his direction soon assume dramatic proportions; he only just escapes being voted out. After a collection of signatures by conservative forces, the committee does withdraw its consent for the set by A. Kraut, which had already been approved. In the run-up to the Passion Play, a script commission, led by Prof. Rudolf Pesch, looks for solutions to answer ongoing queries from the Anti-Defamation League to stop the defamation of the Jewish people. The question of whether married and older women can perform receives a positive response from the provincial High Court. 480,000 visitors.

**2000**

(40th year of performance) Directed by Christian Stückl, the greatest script reform comes about since 1860. Along with the deputy director Otto Huber, Stückl attempts to eliminate the anti-Judaism in the play. The main point, however, is to give the figures more individualism. Not to restrict Jesus to his suffering, but instead to portray him as a strong fighter for his faith. In an amazing community achievement, almost 2,000 new costumes and 28 new sets are created, designed by the Oberammergau set designer Stefan Hageneier. Markus Zwink, who was already the musical director in 1990, rearranges the Dedler music. 520,000 visitors

[Source: Press Information Kit: *Gemeinde Oberammergau 2010*.]

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2010

**Appendix 2**

**Biography of Otto Huber,<sup>28</sup> Deputy Director and Dramatic Adviser,  
*Passionsspiele Oberammergau 2010***

- 1947 born in Oberammergau
- 1957-66 Benediktiner-Gymnasium Ettal
- 1967-68 study of Romance languages and literature in Besançon
- 1966-1974 study of the history of German literature, theology, Romance languages and literature and theatre studies in Munich
- 1968-1969 establishment of a Passion Play working group in Oberammergau
- 1972 prefect in the Benedictine monastery of Schäftlarn
- 1974-1976 probationary teacher in Passau
- 1976-1985 teacher of French and German at the Gymnasium in Lauingen/ Donau; various school productions including Brecht "Dreigroschenoper" ("Three Penny Opera"), Molière, 18th cent. Good Friday play.
- 1988 election as Deputy Director of the 1990 Passion Play in Oberammergau
- 1989-1990 participation in the exhibition about passion plays in the Alpine region ("Hört, seht, weint und liebt! Passionsspiele im Alpenraum"), author of the foreword to the illustrated book "Passion Oberammergau 1990"
- 1990 Deputy Director and speaker of the prologue
- 1991-1997 teacher of German and French and director of drama at the Staffelsee-Gymnasium Murnau; various productions including Horváth "Italienische Nacht" and Weis "Marat/Sade"
- 1995 production of the "Beggars Opera" by John Gay/John Pepusch in the Kleines Theater Oberammergau
- 1998-1999 revision and adaptation of the text of the Passion Play
- 1999 organization of the film retrospective "Von Oberammergau nach Hollywood. 100 Jahre Jesus im Film"
- 2000 Deputy Director and Dramatic adviser, prologue
- 2001/02 Sophocles "Electra", dramatization of Horváth's "Jugend ohne Gott" ("Youth Without a God")
- 2006 hotelier in Oberammergau

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<sup>28</sup> See Figure 4.



2007 Benatzky's "Herzen im Schnee"

2008 appointment as deputy director and dramatic adviser for PassionPlay 2010

[Source: Press Information Kit: *Gemeinde Oberammergau 2010*.]

### Appendix 3

#### Excerpt from Vatican II Declaration

The following quotation is taken from the official Vatican website. It clearly states the Catholic Church's desire to reject any and all forms of anti-Semitism.

True, the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ;(Cf. *John*. 19:6) still, what happened in His passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today. Although the Church is the new people of God, the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures. All should see to it, then, that in catechetical work or in the preaching of the word of God they do not teach anything that does not conform to the truth of the Gospel and the spirit of Christ.

Furthermore, in her rejection of every persecution against any man, the Church, mindful of the patrimony she shares with the Jews and moved not by political reasons but by the Gospel's spiritual love, decries hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone.

Besides, as the Church has always held and holds now, Christ underwent His passion and death freely, because of the sins of men and out of infinite love, in order that all may reach salvation. It is, therefore, the burden of the Church's preaching to proclaim the cross of Christ as the sign of God's all-embracing love and as the fountain from which every grace flows.

—*Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, NOSTRA AETATE*,  
Proclaimed by His Holiness Pope Paul VI, on October 28, 1965

[Retrieved on September 10, 2010 from:

[http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decl\\_19651028\\_nostra-aetate\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html)]

## Appendix 4

### The Oberammergau Passion Play 2010 “Who do you think that I am?”

[Editorial note: *The following essay was written by the 2010 director of the Oberammergau Passion Play, Christian Stückl. In it, he poignantly relates the difficult task he personally faced in revising and directing the play in such a way that it not only conveys accurately the Gospels, but will do justice to the human and historical Jesus—a young Jew who had strong beliefs and opinions—and not only the divine Jesus—the Son of God—which is how he is largely portrayed and regarded today by believing Christians all over the world.*]

This question that Jesus asked his disciples also provides us in Oberammergau with our greatest challenge every ten years. Of course everybody can think of some words to answer this question: beaten, scourged and crucified or the Redeemer, the Saviour, the Forgiver of Sins. Our heads are full of images and most of these have been influenced by the 19th-century Nazarene movement of German Romantic painters: the shepherd with the lamb on his shoulders, long, generally blond hair and, of course, sandals. These are words that I have heard and images I have had in my head ever since I was a child, and even today I have my problems with them. Even today I ask myself: who was or is he really?

During my search for him I came across the young Jew, known in Hebrew-Aramaic as Jeshua, about whom we can read that, at the tender age of twelve, when in Jerusalem with his parents, asked questions in the temple that a child of his age does not normally ask. His parents who had lost him in the crowd, found him in the temple among the learned, listening to them. He soon got into conversation and started to ask questions. In the Gospel of Luke it says: “And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers” (Luke 2:47). Even at an early age, even though we know nothing about his youth, he seems to be filled with great ideas. The message of the Kingdom of God, a kingdom that is marked by God’s gift of love to the world, a love that offers forgiveness and is there for everyone, is at the heart of his proclamation. This idea impels him to be among people. And with increasing clarity he seeks out a new path to follow. The words “Repent ye” become the central message of his teachings. Jesus expresses most concisely the need to rethink radically in his Sermon on the Mount, when he says that, for him, there is no commandment more important than that of love, of a love of God and other people. But what is so special about his words? Haven’t we heard them thousands of times before and haven’t they become devoid of meaning?

Jesus, the young Jew, was speaking in an Israel governed by Rome, in a world full of social contradictions based on suppression and exploitation. The ruling Sadducees cooperated with the Romans who quashed any uprisings. Pontius Pilate, as we now know today, had countless insurgents crucified—the priests themselves being predominantly concerned about their own image. Those who didn’t obey were disciplined. The people yearned to be liberated from Roman oppression, from heavy taxes and slavery; they yearned for a king, a Messiah on the throne of the

Jews. It was in such a world, in such a situation that Jesus of Nazareth spoke the unconditional commandment of loving one's neighbour, a commandment that is valid for all, for beggars, slaves and prostitutes, as well as for the much-hated Roman soldiers and their commander Pontius Pilate, who had thousands of Jews executed. Jesus' proclamation was for a new image of mankind. For him, we are all equal in God's eyes and our lives will be judged by how we treat our neighbours. Jesus' call to a radical rethinking, his "Repent ye", is a call to put a stop to hatred and counter-hatred, violence and counter-violence.

He speaks to the priests as a believer and a Jew: "Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord; ...there is one God; and there is none other but he: And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices (Mark 12:29, 32-33). He makes it quite clear to them that rituals cannot buy God's love and that it is not just a question of keeping to traditional rules and regulations. With the words: "You have omitted the weightier matters of the law that God has given us through Moses, judgment, mercy, and faith" (see Matthew 23:23) he banishes the thought from all those who believed he wanted to distance himself from Moses and the Commandments or who believed that he and his disciples wanted to proclaim their own teachings. The powers-that-be at that time considered his words an attack on their position. Jesus clashed more and more with the authorities — a clash that ultimately led to his death.

For me, Jesus is not a suffering servant of God, not a sacrificial lamb. For me, Jesus is an argumentative young Jew who was nailed to the cross for proclaiming a message that is still valid today.

These thoughts were the driving force behind our revision of the text for the Passion Play for 2010. We want to show a Jesus who, with unflinching steadfastness, stood for the belief he had in his god who is also the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob — namely the God of the Jews.

Over a period of many months, more than 2,000 amateur actors, singers and musicians from Oberammergau have been rehearsing; hundreds of new costumes have been made and a new stage-set built. For everyone in Oberammergau, 2010 revolves around the 41st Passion Play season. After all the effort that the people of Oberammergau have been proud to demonstrate over 376 years — since making the vow that launched the Passion Play tradition in 1633 — we hope that something of the spirit comes across as described by St. Luke at the end of his gospel: "And all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned" (Luke 23:48).

Christian Stückl  
Director  
April 2010

[Source: Press Information Kit: *Gemeinde Oberammergau 2010*.]

### List of Figures



Figure 1

“Hugo Rutz (as Peter) and his grandson, Otto Huber, 1950.” (Shapiro, 53).



Figure 2

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





Figure 3

Jesus of Nazareth, preparing for the Passover feast (Last Supper) with his disciples. Please note the Jewish menorah prominently placed upon the table, an addition from the 2000 performance of the play. [Permission granted by *Gemeinde Oberammergau* to reproduce this photo by Brigitte Maria Mayer.]



Figure 4

Otto Huber, June 9, 2010, Oberammergau, Germany. [Photo by author.]

