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Medieval Religious Pageantry and Its Modern Revival

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schließenen Landeskirchen, Bruderräte und freien Verbände keinen andern Wunsch haben, als im Gehorsam unter dem Wort Gottes und dem darin an uns ergehenden Auftrage Gottes dem deutschen Volke und seinem Führer zu dienen und bei dem großen Werke des Aufbaus zu helfen. Berlin, den 8. Dezember 1934." (Bez. D. Marahrens.)

Wie aus diesem Schreiben zu sehen ist, hatte sich nun in den vorhergehenden Wochen eine von allen Kreisen der Opposition gegen Müller anerkannte „vorläufige Leitung der Deutschen Evangelischen Kirche“ in Berlin etabliert, an deren Spitze wir nicht den nominell unierten Präses D. Koch, Dönhäusen, sondern den nominell lutherischen Landesbischof D. Marahrens von Hannover sehen, nachdem dieser in der Provinz Hannover seine Gegner besiegt hatte.²⁾

In den Tagen vor Weihnachten blieb alles still.

Wir machten uns im Dezember folgende Aufzeichnung: „Aber der Kirchenkampf ist nicht zu Ende. Die Bekenntnisfront hat weder den Sieg, noch ist sie eine wirkliche Bekenntnisfront. Uniert, reformiert, lutherisch, geht bei ihr durcheinander; ja auch alte Liberale sind dabei. Der Staat wird sie kaum gegen die Deutschen Christen in den Sattel heben. Aber was wird er tun? Wird er überhaupt die finanzielle Unterstützung der evangelischen Kirche zurückziehen, wie Göttsch als 13. dieses Monats in Trier drohte? Will man denn immer noch keine freie Kirche, nicht einmal in den besseren landeskirchlichen Kreisen? Geht der Kampf darum, wen der Staat bezahlen und stützen soll, Deutsche Christen oder Bekenntnisfrontler? — Letzten Endes, was will der Staat? Wird er seine rassistische Weltanschauung als überreligion durchzusetzen suchen oder in nüchternen Weise die Gewissensgrenzen der Christen anerkennen?

„Für die Gewissensfreiheit ist es gut, daß die Deutschen Christen über ihre eigenen Schritte stolpern mußten. Für die Gewissen ist es gut, daß das Jahr 1934 viel Kampf brachte.“

Stuttgart und London.

B. S. J.

Medieval Religious Pageantry and Its Modern Revival.

As every student of the modern drama has learned from the careful research work of Chambers, Creizenach, and particularly of Prof. Karl Young, this form of art had its origin in the liturgy of the medieval Church. During the period from the tenth to the four-

2) Vgl. den Bericht, der bereits in dieser Zeitschrift im laufenden Jahrgang auf Seite 147 ff. über die Bekenntnisynode der Deutschen Evangelischen Kirche vom 18. bis 20. Oktober 1934 in Berlin-Dahlem erschienen ist. Die Beschlüsse über das „kirchliche Notrecht“ sind dort verzeichnet.

teenth century, when many of the gorgeous cathedrals of France, Germany, and England — Notre Dame, and Amiens, and Reims, and Strassburg, and Cologne, and Lincoln, and York, and Westminster — were erected, the minds of the people of these and other countries were intensely religious. In fact, the words of St. Paul as addressed to the Athenians might well be applied to the great majority of the inhabitants of these countries in those centuries: "I perceive that in all things ye are too religious," Acts 17, 22; for their religious zeal, like that of the Athenians, most frequently expressed itself in a mere outward show, which was far removed from the New Testament worship set forth in the well-known words of our Savior: "God is a spirit; and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth," John 4, 24. For religion for most people of these centuries was merely an outward manifestation of the feeling of responsibility and the effort to obtain the mercy of God by good works, without the redemption wrought through the vicarious satisfaction of Jesus Christ.

But the very fact that religion was more a matter of outward form, show, and pomp than of an inner relationship with God by faith produced another phenomenon, which, like the building of the great cathedrals, resulted in the development of a religious pageantry whose elaborateness fills us with amazement, even in these days of theatrical productions whose cost staggers the imagination. All circumstances, both religious and social, favored such a development; for this was incidentally the period of history when the trade and merchant guilds flourished and when special guilds were organized for religious purposes, such as St. Anne's Guild, the Corpus Christi Guild, and others. These guilds became interested in religious pageantry at a very early date, and it was under their fostering care that they reached a prominence and an extent which makes this development one of the most peculiar phenomena in later medieval history.

The religious pageantry of this age was born in the Church, developing from the liturgy of the Mass. The liturgical plays which grew into the great religious pageants of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries owed their origin to a peculiar circumstance. During the Word section of the Mass, in connection with the lections of the day, the choir responded to the reading of the Epistle of the Sunday with a joyful Hallelujah. But owing to the fact that the lector, or reader of the lessons, had to walk back from the Epistle-ambo, or lectern, through the chancel and then over to the Gospel-lectern, the singing of this Hallelujah under circumstances occupied a good deal of time. To fill the awkward pause, the music at this point of the service received many embellishments, so that the Hallelujah was drawn out in a rather tedious manner. Finally it occurred to a member of the St. Gall school of singers to insert a few lines of words suggested by

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the liturgy of the day, with appropriate music, to fill the pause between the reading of the Epistle and the Gospel. These words were at first known as tropes (sometimes also as graduals) and were commonly in the form of a dialog. Thus the trope for Easter, the earliest that has been discovered, had the following form:—

Quem quaeritis?
Iesum Nazarenum (crucifixum).
Non est hic.
Surrexit.

This type form, with the addition of either *Quis revolvat nobis ab ostio* or *Venite et videte*, from the service for Easter Mass, or of both, is found in more than sixty texts, printed by various investigators. This scene served as a nucleus, or core, around which was later built up the entire liturgical Easter play as used, and eventually performed, in the churches. It was at first known as the *Officium Sepulcri*, and in various sections of the Church on the Continent as well as in England additions were made, as the genius of the choirmasters and liturgiologists suggested. In the form of a liturgical play the *Officium Sepulcri* almost everywhere had the following nucleus:—

ANGELI: *Quem quaeritis in sepulcro, O Christicolae?*
 MULIERES: *Iesum Christum Nazarenum, O caelicolae.*
 ANGELI: *Non est hic; surrexit.*
 MULIERES (cum choro): *Alleluia (or: Victimae paschali).*

The beginning thus having been made with the Easter tropes, it was not long before the chief Christmas tropes were treated in the same way. Thus one of the earliest tropes of this type reads:—

In choro cantor solus dicit:
Quem vidistis, pastores? Dicite. Annuntiate nobis: In terra quis apparuit?
Pueri retro altare respondent:
Infantem invenimus pannis involutum, et multitudinem militiae caelestis laudantium Dominum.

There was another form of Christmas trope and liturgical play, which was clearly modeled after the Easter trope, the first line reading: *Quem quaeritis in praesepe, O Christicolae?*

This form of art having been thus established, it was not long before other tropes, especially of festival days, were expanded in a similar way, the liturgy of the Church in most cases furnishing all or most of the text. Thus we find eschatological, or Judgment, plays, in connection with the Advent season; Annunciation and Visitation plays, in connection with the respective festivals of the church-year; the Play of the Shepherds, as the outgrowth of the Christmas trope; the Adoration of the Magi and the Rachel play, in connection with Epiphany; the Play of the Purification of the Presentation, in connection with February 2; the Play of Christ and the Doctors, in con-

nection with the early Epiphany season; the Old Testament plays, in connection with the pre-Lenten season; the Passion plays, in connection with Lent; the Planetus, or the Lament of Mary Magdalene, the Harrowing of Hell, and the Resurrection plays, in connection with Easter; and finally the various Mary plays, in connection with the various festivals devoted to her service. Many of these plays became rather elaborate at an early date, even resulting in processions or smaller cycles of plays which belonged together in historical sequence.

The next step was an attempt to combine plays of some such groups or even a series of individual plays into cycles. Thus the Christmas plays included the Prophet plays as well as the Nativity and the Adoration of the Shepherds. The Epiphany cycle included the Herod and the Magi plays as well as the Slaughter of the Innocents and the Flight into Egypt, with the Christ and the Doctors play. The Old Testament plays began with the Play of the Creation and included plays concerning practically all the foremost patriarchs. The Passion plays comprised all the incidents from the Entry into Jerusalem to the Death and Burial of Jesus. The Resurrection plays began with the Harrowing of Hell episode and eventually included everything up to Pentecost. And the last step was taken in many ecclesiastical centers when a complete series or cycle of plays was constructed. Some of these series were known as Passion plays, in Germany also as *Osterspiele*. Since some communities had these pageant plays in connection with either Whitsun Week or Corpus Christi Day, they were often known as Whitsun plays or Corpus Christi plays, in Germany as *Fronleichnamsspiele*. At the same time many cities or districts kept individual plays or smaller cycles, so that the Christmas plays, or *Krippenspiele* of Germany, have survived in some form or other until this day. Of course, the plays had by this time long ago left the church, the change taking place with the change of the plays to the vernacular. Another factor in this connection will be referred to presently. Of the great cycles of pageant-plays the following became widely known. In England they were the York Corpus Christi Plays, the Towneley Mysteries, the Chester Whitsun Plays, and the Coventry Plays (*Ludus Coventriae*). In Germany the best-known were the *Kuenzelsauer Fronleichnamsspiel*, the *Egerer Fronleichnamsspiel*; then the plays of Alsfeld, Maastricht, Erlau, Wien, Frankfurt, Halle, and elsewhere. In French there were the *Mistere d'Adam*, the *Mistere du Viel Testament*, and the *Provençal Mysteries*.

In the course of time some interesting as well as doubtful and reprehensible by-products and excrescences of liturgical customs, many of them associated with these liturgical and mystery plays, appeared. Thus the first of January became the occasion for the Feast of Fools, with a bishop of fools leading a blasphemous procession in the church-buildings and through the streets of the towns.

In connection with the Epiphany plays the pageants of the star developed, and on the octave of Epiphany the Feast of the Ass was celebrated. In Beauvais the procession included a virgin, who was placed on an ass and brought to the very chancel of the church. Instead of the customary responses the choir-boys on this occasion had the privilege of answering with "Hinham," and it was considered particularly successful if the animal joined in the response. Then a hymn was sung whose first stanza reads: *Orientis partibus Adventavit asinus, Pulcher et fortissimus, Sarcinis aptissimus: He, Sire Ane, He!* With regard to the conclusion of the Mass on that day the famous liturgiologist du Cange writes: *Sacerdos ter hinhinabit, populus vero vice, Deo gratias, ter respondebit: Hinham.*—On Ascension Day the Vesper services were often made a farce in the same way, especially when, in connection with certain responses in the liturgy, "bread from heaven" was thrown down from above, in the form of hostlike cakes or pieces of cardboard, and "water of life" was squirted down from holes in the ceiling. The liturgy and the plays of Pentecost also gave occasion for similar excrescences, especially in the use of a dove to represent the Holy Spirit, of burning lint to represent the fiery tongues, and of the imitation of the roaring, mighty wind on the part of the choir-boys. As early as 1244 Bishop Robert Grosseteste of Lincoln had raised his voice against these abuses, and Wyclif also preached against them. But only in 1444 was the Feast of Fools discontinued, on the strength of a protest from the Sorbonne, and in 1479 a synod of Toledo passed a resolution against "the indecent inventions in the churches."

One might well expect that Luther would treat all liturgical excrescences and abuses with anything but lenience. And that is indeed the case. In his various liturgical writings Luther condemns such abuses and processions as then held, veiling of the crucifix and of pictures, the ass of Palm Sunday, the consecration of fire and of candles, the deposition and elevation of the cross, the representation of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost, the Corpus Christi procession, and many others. Concerning some of these customs Luther conceded that they were not to be condemned in themselves, but that too much emphasis was being placed upon them. (XVI, 987—989.) In the preliminary draft for the *Admonition to the Clerics Assembled at the Diet of Augsburg, 1530*, there is an even more complete list of such dangerous customs and abuses, many of which were associated with the liturgical plays of the various festival days. His list here includes the ass of Palm Sunday together with the *Palmenschiessen* (the throwing of palm-leaves or willow-fronds at the ass), the Harrowing of Hell with its procession, the use of doves to represent the Holy Ghost, and of burning lint to represent the fiery tongues at Pentecost, the *Apparuit* play for Christmas, the procession of St. Michael's chil-

dren (a place of pilgrimage in Normandy), St. John's Fire, the consecration of honey and spices in the celebration of the Assumption of Mary, and many others. To these may be added the spectacle of raising the statue of Christ on Ascension Day, which is expressly mentioned in a church order of Pfalz-Neuburg.

At the same time Luther did not deny that there is a certain educational value connected with such customs and plays (pageants). Even in his *Admonition* of 1530 he states: "This, then, is our opinion: If we can assist in keeping such childish plays as are otherwise not objectionable for the sake of our youth, without detriment to the right, serious chief parts of doctrine, we shall gladly do so." (XVI, 990.) Even more favorable is Luther's comment with regard to the picture and the play of the Harrowing of Hell: "Thus the play was given on Easter Eve for the children. . . . Whatever pertains to such simple, childlike picture, play, and song, that is right, and it pleases me well that the story is thus presented, played, and sung to the unlearned, and let us be satisfied with such simple portrayals, pictures, and songs." (XIII, 1868.) Almost the same words are found in Luther's sermon on the Descent into Hell. (X, 1126.) But the most comprehensive opinion rendered by the Reformer with regard to religious plays or pageants is found in a letter addressed to George Held of Forchheim, dated April 5, 1543, where Luther writes: "This, then, is in brief my opinion. All men are commanded that they should further and propagate the Word of God the Father in every manner in which this can possibly be done, not only with the voice, but also with writings, paintings, statuary, psalms, songs, and musical instruments, as the psalm says (Ps. 150, 4): 'Praise Him with timbrel and pipe; praise Him with the psalter and harp.' And Moses says (Deut. 6, 8, 9): 'And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house and on thy gates.' Moses wants the Word of God to be considered and to be brought before the eyes. *In what way could this be done more easily and plainly than through such presentation?* which, however, should be *serious and restrained, not theatrical*, as they formerly were under Popery. For such representations strike the eyes of the common people and sometimes create a greater impression than the public sermons. I know that in Lower Germany, where the public confession of the Gospel is forbidden, many have been converted and have accepted the pure doctrine through representations concerning the Law and the Gospel. *If such representations (pageants), serious and restrained, I say, are arranged with the good purpose and from zeal to promote the evangelical truth, they are in no wise to be condemned.*" (XXIb, 2856.) Here Luther emphasizes the same principle that he states in numerous places: "Everything else may be omitted, but not the Word, and

nothing should be promoted more than the Word; for that this should be diligently used among the Christians the entire Scripture indicates." (X, 225.) And again: "For [liturgical] ordinances are to serve for the furtherance of faith and of love and not for the detriment of faith. If this is not the case, then they are already dead and have no further value. . . . Order is an external thing; no matter how good it is, it may be abused. But in that case it is no longer order, but disorder." (X, 257.)

If we now look at the modern religious plays, Biblical dramas, and pageants, which are, at least in part, a revival of the medieval idea of pageantry, we find that they have taken a fairly firm hold on many parts of our country. Plays like *Ben Hur*, *The King of Kings*, and *The Sign of the Cross* tried to meet this tendency, as well as *The Ten Commandments* and similar presentations. So far as schools, Sunday-schools, young people's societies, and similar organizations are concerned, we find that the dramatic material of the Bible has made a very strong appeal to increasing numbers. The statement has been made: "It should be remembered at the outset that this form of dramatization is natural and spontaneous and has nothing to do with the artificiality of the theater or with professional acting. It is simply a method of using the natural instincts of the child to bring out vividly the beautiful stories of the Bible and to fix in the mind its divine teaching. . . . At the present time there is a great revival of the use of dramatic representation in the Church through Biblical plays and pageants. Christian people have come to realize that such representations are as far as possible removed from the commercialized theater with its attendant evils. The pageant is being used very widely to promote an interest in missions and church history." (*The Book of Life*, VIII, 47. 51.)

What attitude shall we take with regard to this movement? It seems wise to accept the suggestions made by Luther and the principles laid down by him. This means that religious plays and pageants are to be incidental only, not an end in themselves. They are *under no circumstances to take the place of the Word itself*, but to be auxiliary to its teaching, just as the Bible story is always to serve the Bible doctrine and never to be used for its historical value alone, especially not for adults. And the Biblical and religious dramas and pageants are *not to be theatrical*, as Luther emphasizes, but serious and restrained. To these suggestions and principles we may well add two further points which have been brought to the attention of workers in the field. The first is that the person of Jesus, especially in adult life, should not be presented, since no mere human possesses the ability to present the divine dignity of the Savior and an attempt to do so will almost invariably cause offense to some one in the audience. In the second place, it is not advisable to give even

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Biblical pageants in the church auditorium proper. The chancel in our churches in particular is devoted to the means of grace exclusively, and it should never serve any other purpose. But parish-halls will serve very well indeed, especially since most of them are equipped with a stage and other equipment which makes it easier to stage a dramatic performance. And representations from the great field of church and mission history will certainly be of the greatest value to all concerned, players as well as audiences. While we recognize the value of dramatic performances in the secular field and would encourage the use of good clean plays of this type, it would be highly commendable in many cases if such Biblical plays would take the place of a great many inferior secular plays which are now found in some of our parish-halls.

P. E. KRETZMANN.

Der Schriftgrund für die Lehre von der satisfactio vicaria.

(Fortsetzung.)

Gal. 2, 20: Mit Christo bin ich gekreuzigt. Lebendig aber nicht mehr bin ich, lebendig aber in mir ist Christus; denn was ich nun lebe im Fleisch, im Glauben lebe ich es des Sohnes Gottes, der mich geliebt hat und sich selbst für mich dargegeben.

Mit großem Nachdruck steht der Name des Heilandes voran: Mit Christo bin ich gekreuzigt! Dieser Gedanke ist charakteristisch für die ganze Theologie des Apostels. Die unio mystica war bei ihm keine bloße Theorie, sondern herrliche Wirklichkeit: er war ganz und gar eins mit seinem Heiland. So vollständig war sein ganzes Wesen mit Christo eins geworden, daß er kraft seiner Gemeinschaft mit dem Heilande teilnahm an dessen Kreuzigung. Nicht nur hatte er Herz und Willen dahin gebracht, daß diese das Kreuz Christi auf sich nahmen und ihm nachfolgten, sondern durch die Gnade Gottes war es bei ihm dahin gekommen, daß er die Kreuzigungsschmerzen in sich selber fühlte, daß er wenigstens eine Ahnung davon hatte, was es bedeutete, daß Christus sich für die Sünden der ganzen Welt dahingegeben hatte. Es ist ein ähnlicher starker Ausdruck wie in Phil. 3, 10. Jeder Christ, der durch fortwährende Selbstprüfung die ungeheure Macht der Sünde an sich selber erfahren hat, wird wenigstens zum Teil einen Begriff davon bekommen können, was die Kreuzigungsqual für den Stellvertreter der ganzen Sünderwelt bedeuten mußte.

So völlig ist der Apostel in die Gemeinschaft mit Christo eingegangen, so gänzlich hat er sich im Glauben mit ihm vereinigt und gleichsam mit ihm identifiziert, daß er sogar es wagen konnte zu schreiben: Lebendig aber bin nicht mehr ich. Das eigentliche, das wahre, das geistliche Leben, das er in sich selber fand, war in keiner