

AJC CLAIMS GERMAN PASSION PLAY OPENING MAY 18 IS STILL HOSTILE

NEW YORK: The 1970 production of the Oberammergau Passion Play, scheduled to open in Germany on May 18, will contain fewer overtly anti-Jewish references than did the 1960 version, but the pageant remains fundamentally hostile to Jews and Judaism.

This is the overall finding of a comparative content analysis of the 1960 and 1970 scripts, just completed by the American Jewish Committee and made public by its President, Philip E. Hoffman.

The results of these textual studies - believed to be the first systematic, line-by-line content analysis of the Oberammergau play to be undertaken in this country -- were communicated to West German ecclesiastical and governmental authorities by the American Jewish Committee, which plans to publish the analysis shortly in German, French, Spanish, and English.

While many grossly anti-Jewish words and passages have been removed in revising the pageant for this year's performances, other equally objectionable material has been left in, the study concludes. Moreover, the study finds that the entire story line and the underlying conceptions of the play, unchanged in the new version, clearly violate the policy adopted in 1965 by Vatican Council II in its Declaration on Non-Christian Religions.

"That Vatican action," Mr. Hoffman recalled today, "adopted as it was by the overwhelming majority of the Council Fathers, repudiated any form of Christian teaching that would perpetuate the myth of collective Jewish guilt for the death of Jesus, and any corollary teachings that would directly or indirectly nurture hatred or prejudice against the Jewish people or Judaism."

Both during and after Vatican Council II, American Jewish Committee representatives discussed the issue of anti-Jewish references in the Oberammergau Passion Play text with a number of church and government officials, among them Julius Cardinal Dopfner, Archbishop of Munich and Freising (the Archdiocese in which Oberammergau is located) and President of the Roman Catholic Episcopacy of Germany; Archbishops Franziskus Cardinal Konig of Vienna and Leo Jozef Cardinal Suenens of Malines and Brussels; the late Augustin Cardinal Bea in Rome, the chief architect of the Vatican Council's Declaration on Non-Christian Religions; and Kurt George Kiesinger, former West German Chancellor. All of them, Mr. Hoffman stated, have at various times indicated a desire to purge the play of its anti-Jewish references.

Mr. Hoffman added that the

1970 text did not bear out the claim, made recently by Oberammergau officials responsible for the pageant, that the new text merely followed the obligatory Gospel reports of the Passion. On the contrary, the AJC study continues, the script still abounds with distortions of Scriptural passages and with non-Scriptural elements.

The American Jewish Committee's study concludes that the Oberammergau pageant remains "permeated by an anti-Jewish bias which not only distorts the facts of Jesus' history but also obscures those passages of the New Testament that offer a basis for balanced and positive images of Jews and Judaism." Moreover, the study adds, the 1970 version of the pageant "retains a negative picture of first-century Judaism, presents an invidious portrayal of the Jewish people as Jesus' opponents, and shifts the responsibility

for deciding on the crucifixion from Pontius Pilate to the Jewish people. In doing so, the play resists any serious accommodation to the scholarly findings of contemporary authoritative Biblical and historical research."

The content analysis was conducted by the Interrelig-

ious Affairs Department of the American Jewish Committee, directed by Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum. The 1960 script was analyzed by Mrs. Judith H. Banki, Associate Director, the 1970 version by Dr. Gerald S. Strober, a Presbyterian educator who serves as Con-

sultant on Religious Curriculum to the American Jewish Committee.

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