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CHRIST AS A DRAMATIC CHARACTER

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

John Phillips Speary, Jr., B. A. E., M. A.

* * * * *

The Ohio State University
1977

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank Victoria, my wife, for her loving support; Dr. Bowen for his efforts and encouragement; Greg Wallace for his editorial assistance; Leslie Tudor and Deborah Flower-Smith for their help in typing and proof-reading; and all of my brothers and sisters for their prayers and concern.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION
CHRIST AS A DRAMATIC FIGURE

Consider these dramatic protagonists: a young Jewish boy on a pilgrimage to the Holy City comes to realize his destiny involves reforming the faith of his ancestors; an intense, country priest rejects the affection from a girl who has loved him since they were children and causes her to plot for his downfall; an aging and penitent monk is confronted by the fanatical spokesman for a radical sect which he had inspired unintentionally many years before; a gentle, yet mercurial clown leads his troupe of friends through a series of games until he is turned over to the authorities by a disenchanted follower. Disparate as they may be, all of these are different approaches to the characterization of Jesus, the Christ, taken by four twentieth century playwrights.

More plays have been written concerning the life and character of the Nazarene preacher over the course of theatre history than any other figure. However it was not until the twentieth century that a significant portion of those scripts broke out of the rigid mold of a traditionally
reverent approach to the subject matter. Before the 1900's, the majority of plays about Jesus were pageant-like coordinations of major Biblical incidents strung together with little regard for the creation of fully dimensioned characterization or dramatic continuity. Over the past several decades there has been an increasing number of serious attempts by skilled dramatic artists to explore more freely the dramatic potential of the founder of the Christian faith. The attempts have covered a wide range of views of the focal character. Jesus' identity has been presented in such disparate ways as being on one extreme little more than a myth perpetrated for the self-serving goals of those who profess to be his followers to on the other extreme being unquestionably the human incarnation of God and the only means by which mortal man can receive a relationship with God. It is the aim of this study to analyse various major dramatizations of the life of Jesus and his influence on contemporary characters in the first century A.D. The study presents the range of dramatic alternatives taken by the playwrights included. Both the specific and common

difficulties found in the scripts are discussed in order to ascertain the nature of the dilemmas inherent in trying to turn this vastly influential, yet highly controversial historical figure into a stage persona. Problems in taking different philosophical stances to the available historical sources are examined as well as the aesthetic crises found in attempting to create a full drama from those sources. Despite the many efforts to present Jesus on stage, little success has been found in this century for the Nazarene as a dramatic subject. In evaluating both the failures and the isolated successes, the study conjectures on possible dramatic principles which might yield more bountiful fruit for future attempts at presenting Christ as a dramatic figure.

This study ventures inescapably into the threatening and largely uncharted regions of religious drama. The exact significance of religious drama to general theatrical scholarship has been a point of painful controversy in recent years. However, it has only been in the past century and a half that the critical view of literature has attempted to detach itself not only from a religious framework but also from the acceptance of any subjective construct of philosophical and moral beliefs. That insistence on a clean

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separation of aesthetic form from the moral and thematic implications of content, most strongly exemplified in the New School critics, is a major factor in making the discussion of religious drama so problematic. More so than with other generic classifications determined by subject area, the field of religious drama demands a critical approach which recognizes the inextricable bond between its aesthetic form and its philosophical content in order for any discussion of the area to be of any practical merit.

An initial block to the resolution of controversy concerning religious drama's nature and significance has been scholars' apparent inability to arrive at an acceptable and comprehensive definition of "religious drama." Harold Ehrensperger ties his concept of religious drama to the principal motivations of the focal characters in the conflict. By his definition, active characters must be presented in conflict situations which test their faith and/or beliefs as those beliefs apply to their life experiences. Religious drama is thereby afforded a broader range for possible choice of conflicts than might be assumed if the definition were restricted more narrowly to types of behavior directly

addressing a God figure.

In his article, "Towards a Definition of Religious Drama," Roderick Robertson is more limiting in his attempt to come to a workable synthesis of contemporary critical viewpoints on the issue. Robertson states that a fundamental assumption in religious thought is "the existence of two orders of reality," the first being the physical world we see and the second being the spiritual, invisible realm. Working from that basic view, the religious believer holds the possibility of experiencing both the levels simultaneously. A fundamental presupposition is that an active and fruitful relationship with a God figure is possible and preeminently desirable. As such, the logically highest aspiration of man is to know God. Such is a central principle of Biblical Christian thought as discussed in such works as Knowing God by Packer, The God Who Is There by Schaeffer, Pro Existence by Middleman, and The Liberation of Planet Earth by Lindsey. The attempt to dramatize the life and character of Jesus Christ, the founder and central figure of the Christian faith, may be seen as a specific channel of pursuing the experience of knowing God.

Robertson divides religious drama into three basic types of plays which make that prerequisite recognition of the

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transcendency of the spiritual level of existence. His first type includes the drama which demonstrates man's limited experience in a state of being unrelated to God, "the Drama of Religious Alienation." The second type he designates as "Drama of the Religious Experience." This type may be seen as corroborating the Una Ellis-Fermor definition of religious drama as including only those plays dealing with the "heroic contest rising into exultation and passing on, in a few rare cases, into beatitude." Robertson's final type is the "Drama of the Religious Hero." The majority of plays which portray the life of Christ will fit into at least one of those three classifications. Most fall into the "Drama of Religious Experience" in that they demonstrate the experience of either a historical or fictitious character who is affected spiritually by contact with or knowledge of Christ. Many of the plays may be classified as "Drama of the Religious Hero" in their use of Jesus as the dramatic protagonist. At this point, a central distinction between religious drama and traditional religious experience must be emphasized. That distinction is cited by T.S. Eliot in his discussion of the Mass as drama. He asserts that

5 Robertson, 104.


7 Robertson, 104.
in drama the role of the audience is that of observer while in religious experience the audience participates. 8

Numerous books, dissertations, and articles have been written on the nature and functions of religious drama dealing with it at a general level of study. Two representative works are Religious Drama: Means and Ends and Conscience on Stage, both by Harold Ehrensperger and addressing principally the church drama practitioner. Other works in the field include Creed and Drama by W. Moelwyn Merchant, Discovery in Drama by Clifford Frazier and Anthony Meyer, and Religious Drama: Medieval and Modern by T.S. Eliot. A dissertation dealing with the subject in a more limited focus is "Problems of Religion and Myth in Modern Drama: 1914-1950" by Donald Hugh Dickinson. While espousing specific viewpoints towards the issue of definition, these and other examinations of the problems of religious drama deal primarily with plays which are non-Biblical in content.

As suggested by the content of Dickinson's work, a prevalent approach toward the field has been to view plays with Christian themes as dramatizations of mythic experience. This approach has surfaced with varying degrees of general acceptance since the appearance of Frazer's The Golden Bough

with its resultant myth-ritual school of criticism. The underlying assumption of the myth-ritual critics that all religious beliefs owe their origin to human imagination rather than historical events is rejected as a critical bias in this dissertation. This dissertation is written by a Biblical Christian author who accepts the core source material found in the Bible as both historical and spiritual truth. This issue of critical bias will be dealt with in greater depth below.

Works dealing specifically with the dramatic portrayal of Christ are few in number and very limited in depth. Two volumes which deal briefly with some of the plays studied here are Biblical Drama in England from the Middle Ages to the Present Day by Murray Roston and Religion in Modern English Drama by G.D. Weales. The first of those books focuses primarily on plays written before 1900. Plays written since the beginning of this century are discussed in a cursory manner. The second work deals largely with secular dramas which have religious thematic implications. The plays found in this study which Weales analyses are presented by him only in a synoptic manner. The majority of scholarly works concerning plays using Christ as a character are studies of medieval dramas. Just one example of such a study is P.E. Penniger's "The significance of the Corpus Christi plays as drama with particular reference
to the Towneley cycle."

Dissertation studies of the contemporary aspects of the field are more rare. The only scholarly work which is concerned specifically with the general topic of this dissertation is "Dramatic Portrayals of Christ" by Donn Brian Murphy. That short study (303 pp.) is vast in its scope (it purports to treat all plays and films in history up to 1964 which deal with Christ.) It is therefore little more than a superficial categorization of more than 450 scripts considered with only passing critical reference to individual works. The work catalogues various dramatic approaches and devices in a historical overview, never delving into the specific techniques and problems of characterization particularly in scripts from the twentieth century. Two other dissertations have been written analysing the portrayal of Christ in other art forms. "The Representation of Christ in Popular American Fiction" by Allene Stuart Phy is a study examining the appearance of Christ figures and portrayals of the life of Jesus in several popular American novels. Particularly interesting are its conclusions which credit the studied works to undue generalization of theological content

9Murphy.

and indifference to central spiritual issues. Robert F. Schweitzer wrote "The Biblical Christ in Cinema," a study of the portrayal of Jesus in contemporary popular films.\textsuperscript{11}

The only major book available in the area is \textit{Christ and the Fine Arts} compiled by Cynthia Pearl Maus which is an assortment of poems, short stories, and illustrations constituting both a synoptic portrayal of Jesus' life and the implications of his divinity.\textsuperscript{12} A curious, rather insignificant volume is \textit{Christ in the Drama} by Fred Eastman. It is a charming, yet naive attempt to demonstrate the personal influence of Christ on various contemporary playwrights.\textsuperscript{13} Mr. Eastman's enthusiastic assumption of the Christian convictions of various major playwrights does not survive a careful examination of the various scripts' content.

This dissertation will be a study of plays which deal in part or in their entirety with treatments of Biblical source material. Such studies of twentieth century literature are relatively scarce. Other than Roston and Weales' works mentioned above, there is a precedent for analysis of

\begin{center}
\textsuperscript{13}Fred Eastman, \textit{Christ in the Drama} (New York: Macmillan, 1947).
\end{center}
the area found in "Bertolt Brecht's Use of Bible and Christianity in Representative Dramatic Works" by G.N. Garner, and "Some Aspects of Biblical Influence upon Absurdist Theatre of Beckett, Ghelderco, and Arrabal" by J.M.Z. Anderson. However, the plays in those works obviously do not have plots which were derived primarily from Scripture.

Only plays written and published in the twentieth century in the United States and Great Britain will be discussed. All the plays treat the life of Jesus Christ and his influence on contemporary characters in the first century A.D. On the basis of the author's stated intentions, the production and publication history of the script, or by implication drawn from the aesthetic nature, dramatic content, and/or technical demands of the script, plays which appear to have been written for exclusive use as part of an institutional church function have not been considered. The plays studied in this work were written originally for commercial, aesthetic, or philosophical purposes apart and/or in addition to the didactic religious purposes of those scripts which could be classified as strictly church drama.

Not all of the plays which meet the qualifications above may be classified easily as religious drama according to the definitions given earlier. Several of the scripts either ignore or deny actively the recognition of spiritual experience centered in a God figure inherent to religious drama. However,
the fact that not all the scripts may be categorized clearly as religious drama by no means makes a coherent analytical viewpoint towards the scripts impossible. Working from the assumption that Jesus Christ was a historically verifiable person, the study emerges as one which examines the attempt to dramatize a historical figure about whom the primary source materials are limited, yet unusually thorough and historically accurate in portrayal. Jesus' historical position as an enormously influential figure in the course of Western civilization makes the selection of him as an example of the dramatization of a historical figure justifiable. However, for those plays that qualify as religious drama, his status as the founder of the Christian faith makes him a suitable example for the analysis of characterization in that genre also. The examination of the theological viewpoint and philosophical presuppositions made by the playwright in building the characterization of Jesus must be part of such an examination. That thematic analysis of fundamental issues of human experience gives the discussion of the different approaches to the characterization much greater depth and texture than is possible with almost any other historical figure.

The study focuses on the various approaches taken in portraying dramatically the character of Jesus drawing from the Biblical records of his activity and influence
in the first century A.D. Certain plays included in the study are fictionalized more markedly than others, but they all are tied fundamentally in the construction of plot to select incidents in the Biblical narrative of Christ's life. The analysis of each script follows a consistent critical pattern which utilizes standard processes of analyzing the theatrical acting potential of a dramatic characterization. Each individual analysis opens with a brief summary of the play which includes a basic plot synopsis and a short initial discussion of the specific approach to the character taken in the script. The analysis includes specific contrast of the use of documentable historical material and fictionalized material in the individual work. Critical attention is given to the apparent degree to which that fictionalized content may be poetic license or historical conjecture and what the intent and impact of the content's inclusion is for the work.

The major body of the analysis focuses on the characterization of the Jesus figure in the script. Standard questions of what the character says and does, how he characterizes himself, how he is regarded by other characters, and what direct commentary the author makes on the character will be the logical source of analysis. The effectiveness of the characterization is then assessed emphasizing the elements of consistency, use of language as reinforcement of
of specific characterization, and the apparent actability of the character as written. Closely allied to that character analysis is a discussion of the theological content of the script and its implications in the characterization of Jesus. Such considerations as God's nature, man's relationship to God, man's moral and ethical nature, and particularly Jesus' identity and theological function are discussed. In dealing with a character who has such a preeminent view of his relationship with a God figure, it is appropriate and inevitable that such aspects be discussed in order to understand how the persona operates. Each individual analysis concludes with a summary of the conclusions drawn from the factors above.

The study suggests that the maximum possibility for success in characterizing Christ lies somewhere in between two polar extremes of approach. The more a script tends to disregard or refute the original thematic theological tenets of the Biblical source portrayal, the more prone the work is to internal inconsistencies and an inability to support credibly a workable characterization of the central figure. At the other extreme, a slavish attempt to limit the characterization strictly to the historical details of events and dialogue presented in Scripture will not yield a successful theatrical script because the Bible is basically a literary narrative rather than theatrical
drama. The most successful attempts are those which draw the core plot material from the Biblical accounts, amplifying it for the sake of theatrical effectiveness while not violating the original philosophical content of the source material.

At this point, it is important to further acknowledge what has already been mentioned above—the critic's Christian bias. I am an actively Christian theatre student. I accept Jesus Christ to be the living Son of God and the founder of Christianity. Such a bias however will not deny the necessity for more than adequate intellectual support for the various assumptions used in the study's methodology. Also, I do not intend to approach the analysis of scripts which are overtly or inadvertently non-Christian with the vengeful glee of a little boy shooting fish in a barrel. T.S. Eliot wrote that criticism of any form of literature (even beyond the narrow restriction of religious literature) which purports to separate completely literary from religious judgements is self-deluding. Both our literature and our philosophical or religious experience is involved inherently in human behavior. If our criticism of literature does not bear some relation to our judgement towards standards of human behavior, it is then operating on a sterile, esoteric level almost inapplicable to human experience.\(^\text{14}\) However, as suggested

\(^{14}\text{T.S. Eliot, p. 24.}\)
by C.S. Lewis, the final aesthetic judgement of a religious work must use the same principles of the relationship between form and content applied to all other works or it is invalid.

I have attempted to judge the plays in this study from aesthetic standards while noting the dimension of theological content as seemed necessary. The study is as objectively verifiable as is possible within the framework of certain basic assumptions of the nature of human experience (as is any aesthetic critical analysis.) I find it necessary ethically to acknowledge openly the basic spiritual perspective of the writer of this study.

The analyses of scripts have been organized in this study by a categorization according to common characteristics in general approach to the subject. However initial attention is given to the establishment of the original source material for the history of Christ's life—namely the New Testament Gospel accounts and commentaries in the Biblical epistles. A concise survey of the Biblical portrayal of Christ's personality is presented. That survey has been supplemented with the inclusion of a harmony of the historical actions of Jesus found in the four gospels.

Among the scripts included, those which present Jesus as a protagonist and which accept at least in significant

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part the Gospel accounts are the first discussed. That chapter is followed by one which treats a group of scripts approaching the character as a mythical figure more than a historical reality. Attention is then given to a set of plays whose authors purport to refute the claims made by Biblical tradition that Jesus claimed to be the Christ, the Son of God. A large number of plays in which Christ does not actually appear but in which he is seen to wield an active and strong influence are analysed. Those scripts fall into two divisions. Among them, there are those which present Jesus' impact in his role as mortal man's savior and those which reject his godship but view his impact as a strong moral teacher and/or radical. The final chapter of analyses deals with Jesus Christ Superstar and Godspell, two contemporary attempts to use conventions of the musical theatre to present Christ on stage.

The study concludes with a section of summary and conclusions. General and striking specific problems of characterization among the scripts are cited. The final summation discusses more fully prevalent difficulties among the plays such as the determination of the focus for the conflict, achievement of a workable continuity, and the amplification of the available source material to dramatic advantage. Problems of internal inconsistencies of content and the need to cope with the dominant audience expectations
for the character are presented as they relate particularly to the various authors' adherence to the original intent of the source material. A listing of the Gospel events used in each of the scripts is presented as a means of indicating the authors' varying reliance on Scriptural material. The paper is concluded with a conjectural projection of possible dramatic approaches to the character of Christ.

Those guidelines for future attempts to put Jesus on stage were proposed in relation to findings drawn from the success and failures of the plays studied here. The conclusions to the study may be of some future assistance to attempts to theatricalize one of history's most fascinating yet problematic dramatic properties.
CHAPTER TWO
CHRIST AS A HISTORICAL FIGURE

If we are operating from the premise that in writing a play about the life of Jesus Christ one is dramatizing that historical personage, it is necessary to examine the historical evidence available concerning that figure's life and character. Unlike many historical characters, the accessible amount of documentable resources for Jesus of Nazareth is rather small (although by no means unusually so for an individual from such an ancient epoch.) However, the extent to which the record of that man's life is detailed concerning the prime years of his activity is certainly unusual. Judging from instances of events from the available historical record being used in the plays studied here, one must assume that all the authors to varying degree were influenced in their dramatizations by those accounts. The only primary sources available concerning the life of this itinerant Jewish preacher are found in the New Testament accounts, as are the most generally accepted secondary sources dealing with his history. There is a curious critical resistance to admit the historical veracity of those sources. Undoubtedly arising from the theological content
which is inherent in the historical records, the controversy surrounding the acceptance of available data about Jesus as a historical figure is unparalleled in the case of any other ancient personage. However one must assume some degree of credence has been given to those sources by even the most skeptical of the playwrights studied here. Each script contains at least several instances of events, specific dialogue, and recognizable aspects of Jesus' personality obviously derived from one if not several of the Gospel accounts. We therefore have in all cases playwrights who have relied to some degree on available records to create their dramatization of the historical character. It is consequently necessary to examine the portrayal of Jesus which may be derived logically from a straight reading of the accounts. The characterization which emerges from the Gospel accounts provides a common starting point for the dramatization of Jesus to which the playwrights have adhered or from which they have diverged.¹

The portrayal of Jesus of Nazareth which is available in the Gospel accounts is extremely detailed and fruitful

¹The issue of the historical veracity of the New Testament accounts is one which underlies inevitably any discussion of Jesus' personality in the Gospels. However, it is not a prerequisite issue for the discussion here. Therefore a brief discussion for the interested reader of the evidence and issues involved is included in Appendix A.
for examination of the dramatic potential of this historical figure. There are detailed chronologies given of the individual's activity focusing principally on the last three years of his controversial adult ministry. The amount of recorded conversation involving the young preacher and both his opponents and supporters is extraordinary for a person from such a remote period and locale. It is possible to analyse the historical data of Jesus' actions, his speech, and the behavior of his associates towards him so that a sense of the identity and personality of Jesus as portrayed in the Scripture is readily accessible. This chapter presents an overview of that evidence and its inherent implications in terms of its applicability to dramatic characterization. Concentrating first on the identity of Jesus particularly in his self-espoused relationship to God and his fellow men, there is then a more specific discussion of various aspects of Jesus' personality as a functioning historical individual. A final short section examines the portrayal of Christ's character in the other books of the New Testament which would be possible influences on the view of Jesus for a modern writer referring to the Biblical accounts. Various Biblical references will be given to substantiate each of the purported Scriptural assertions and/or implications.

In dealing with the identity of Jesus of Nazareth as presented in the Gospels, it is apparent that here was a man
who had a detailed and fundamentally consistent concept of his own identity. The Gospel Jesus lends himself to a dramatic characterization with a firm self-image rather than one searching for his identity. Also indigenous to the identity of Jesus is his seemingly paradoxical status as both a human being and a manifestation of God simultaneously, a view maintained throughout the New Testament. The concept is most pointedly presented in John's Gospel with the most explicit reference being in verse 10:30 when Jesus told the Jews in Jerusalem that "I and the Father are one." His self-proclaimed status as God is concurrent mysteriously with his humanity as indicated by his personal references as being the "Son of Man" as in John 3:13,14 which is an early prophecy of his mortal end. This simultaneous existence as God and man is a spiritual mystery but is central to an assessment of the identity of the Biblical Jesus. However, this is probably the most difficult dimension of Jesus' persona to capture and control onstage. Ultimately Jesus' divinity is a more suitable topic for dramatic discussion than a manageable aspect of a dramatic characterization. The most striking title given to Jesus by himself and the New Testament writers is "Son of God." This is the self-appellation chosen by Jesus in his John 3 discourse which is his most detailed discussion of his life purpose. Even Satan, Jesus' spiritual adversary, refers to
him by the title during Jesus' temptation in the wilderness as recorded in Matthew 4:3 and Luke 4:3. It is not sound to suggest that this historical figure did not regard himself as operating in the unique dual status of man and God. As such, a dramatic Jesus may be allowed certainly to view his behavior as existing simultaneously on a human and supernatural plane.

The first eighteen verses of the Gospel according to John is the most concentrated instance of an editorial discussion given as to the identity of Jesus by any of the four Gospel authors. In this Gospel, Jesus is identified as having eternally existed as the "Word" of God, a being simultaneously co-existent with God and specifically responsible for the creation of all other entities. That aspect of eternal co-existence with God is asserted personally by Jesus in a later confrontation with a group of Pharisees presented in John 8:14-58. John identifies Christ as the source of life for man which is then equated with "light." Presumably that life and light imagery deals with the revelation("light") of Christ available to man whereby salvation and redemption from sin ("Life") may be received.

2John 1:1-3 (All Biblical quotations throughout the dissertation will be taken from the New American Standard Version unless otherwise noted. That translation was prepared by the Lockman Foundation, La Habra, California in 1960.)

3John 1:4
This assumption is supported by Jesus' similar use of the terms in his discussion of his earthly purpose in John 3 mentioned above. John indicates that it was inherent in Christ's mission to humanity that he would be rejected by the faithless world. John further states Jesus' role as the source for mankind's salvation when he refers to Jesus' function of granting adoption of humans into the status of "children of God." Jesus explained his life-granting power at the Feast of the Jews in Jerusalem as recorded in John 5, particularly verses 21 and 22. John's discussion of Christ's identity also presents the paradoxical nature of the human incarnation of the divine Christ in the form of the man Jesus who "became flesh and dwelt among us." The theological dimensions discussed above may seem so abstract as to be intimidating to the prospective playwright. However, they provide a strong framework of imagery for the dramatic portrayal of Jesus.

Even at his birth and during his childhood, Jesus' unique status as man and God was evidenced. Mary, Jesus' mother, was informed by an angelic messenger that her child would be the "Son of God." At the time of Jesus' nativity,

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5 John 1:14.
6 Ibid.
7 Luke 1:35.
a host of angels appeared to a group of shepherds outside Bethlehem and informed them that the child was the Christ, their Lord. He would be the Saviour of mankind. Simeon, an old man of faith present at Jesus’ circumcision, proclaimed that the child would be the source of salvation he had long awaited. In the isolated account of Jesus as a twelve year old boy with his parents on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem there is further evidence. This is the first instance in which Jesus refers to God as being his Father and the appropriate focus of all his actions. This reference to the Godhead as his "Father" may not be discounted as a typical form of Hebraic address to their Lord and thus places Jesus in an unusual perspective. The revelation of his divinity and the instances of other individuals bearing witness to that identity are an intriguing source for dramatic action found in the Gospels.

A strong example of such witness to Christ's identity and function comes from John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin. That controversial wilderness preacher taught about the coming Christ who would have the power to baptize men in the Holy

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Spirit and fire. John the Baptist introduces the concept of Jesus as the world's judge in the metaphor of the Christ separating the good from the bad in the harvest. John recognized Jesus as being more worthy to baptize him and thus indicates his acknowledgement of Jesus' status as the Christ. The climactic identification of Jesus before the beginning of his ministry came in his baptism by John when the voice of God came from the heavens proclaiming Jesus to be His beloved son. This witness directly from God is complemented by the witness of John who proclaims Jesus to be "the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

Early in his ministry, Jesus was identified by his followers as being the Messiah or the Christ which is the spiritual role which was later always associated with Jesus' name throughout the other New Testament writings. When Andrew saw Jesus' baptism, he told his brother Simon that Jesus was the Messiah ("Christ" being the equivalent Greek term.) The name literally means "the anointed one" and refers to the

12 Matthew 3:12; Mark 1:7-8; Luke 3:16.
14 Matthew 3:14.
16 John 1:29.
17 John 1:41.
the expected man extensively prophecised in the Old Testament who was to come to serve as the supreme prophet, the perfect high priest, and ruler of the kingdom of Heaven. The Christ was the chosen one of God who according to Jewish prophecy would serve as the intercessory reconciliator of man with God.

Andrew believed on his first sight of Jesus that he was the man sent from God to serve that function. The first instance in which Jesus acknowledged his belief that he was the Messiah was to a Samaritan woman at a public well on his journey through Samaria into Galilee. He later agrees with Peter's testimony of his Messianic identity in a meeting with his disciples. Although Jesus did not explicitly state that he was the Christ at the Last Supper, he does tell the disciples that he wants them to know and believe that "I am He." The most dramatic occasion for Jesus' assertion of his status as the Christ comes at his trial before Caiaphas when he answered the question, "Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?," with the simple reply, "I am and you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power and coming with the clouds of

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heaven." This obviously was a man who believed in a personal role in the divine fulfillment of Jewish prophecy. The contrast between Jesus' conception of the Messianic role and the popular Jewish view of the office is an excellent source for dramatic conflict.

Numerous other identifiable roles which may be dramatized are associated with this central status as the Messiah in the portrayal of Jesus. As part of his Messianic office, Jesus professed to function as a prophet. There are numerous instances of Jesus presenting prophecies on a variety of subjects although the majority of them deal with his persecution, death, and resurrection or events that will be associated with the second coming of Christ. Not only did Jesus present himself as a giver of prophecy but also as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Other than the purported fulfillment of the general Messianic tradition found in the ancient Scripture, Jesus also claimed to have fulfilled a whole range of more detailed prophecies. These ranged from the nature of his execution to the various aspects of his arrest. Several of the events which fulfilled pro-

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22Mark 14:61,62.

23John 2:19; Mark 8:31; Matthew 24; Luke 21:5-36.

24John 3:13-14; Matthew 26:56; Mark 14:49.
 prophecy can give added texture to a dramatic action if they are presented in that light.

Inherent in the role of the Christ is the balance between Jesus' seemingly mutually exclusive roles as judge of the world and saviour of mankind. In such passages as Matthew 13:41,42 and Luke 13:1-5, Jesus points out his involvement in a judgement of the world in which evil is separated from good and thereafter eliminated. However, he suggests that this judgement is not his immediate function but one assigned him by God at an undetermined future date. He asserts that his immediate earthly purpose is to insure the accessibility of reconciliation of man to God and thus eternal salvation to mortal souls. This saviour role is discussed most eloquently by Jesus in the John 3:16-21 passage in which he states "For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world; but that the world should be saved through Him." Inherent in this claim of the power to impart salvation is Jesus' ability to bestow a resurrected immortality on human beings. There is also present an element of judgement even in passages which promote the saviour role, a judgement that will fall on those individuals who do not believe in the truth of Jesus' claims. In

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25 This concept is reinforced by both John 5:21-22 and Luke 23:43.
practical dramatic terms, a playwright could use this dichotomy in Jesus' nature through the contrast of his forgiveness of penitent individuals and his condemnation of self-righteous persons.

There are several other descriptive identifications that Jesus applies to himself which are affiliated to his Messianic role. In John 5:45, Jesus characterizes himself as the bringer of a new covenant or spiritual contract of salvation which extends and fulfills the earlier Mosaic covenant with the Jewish nation. Jesus claimed at various points in his teaching to be the only means by which man could achieve a positive relationship with God.\(^2^7\) He also uses a series of images which portray him as being capable of meeting all the needs of mankind. Notable among those images is his assertion to be "the bread of life," God's perfect provision for spiritual sustenance.\(^2^8\) There are several occasions in the Gospel of John in which Jesus presents metaphorical descriptions of his identity as related to his overall Messianic role. In John 10:14, Jesus describes himself as the "good shepherd," who tends the chosen flock of the Lord redeemed through faith in


\(^{2^8}\) John 6:35.
Jesus' Christhood. Perhaps the most comprehensive assertion of identity made by Jesus is found in John 14:6 when he tells his disciples that "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me." In this self-assessment, Jesus presents his self-image that maintains that he alone is the source, means, and content of any possible worthwhile dimension to human experience. These doctrinal claims are most significant to a dramatic characterization in their establishment of the strength and scope of Jesus' self-image.

Intrinsic to the claims of Messianic authority made by Jesus were certain physical and spiritual powers manifested by him during his ministry which provide a wealth of potential dramatic incidents. Jesus was a miraculous healer of disease and physical handicaps as evidenced by his handling of ailments such as paralysis, blindness, and leprosy.²⁹ He was capable of raising people from the dead as most notably with his friend Lazarus as described in John 11. He had power over the demonic realm which enabled him to serve an exorcist function.³⁰ Jesus even commanded power over the forces of nature as demonstrated by his calming of the sea.³¹

³⁰Mark 5:8-13.
Jesus insisted that he had a preemptive power over the authority of the Rabbainic tradition as in the dispute over the Sabbath rules. Given his role as saviour of mankind, central among his powers was his ability to grant forgiveness for man's sins against God. An early example of Jesus' act of forgiveness is found in the healing of the paralytic in Matthew 9:2-7 or the protection of the woman caught in adultery in John 8:4-11. The physical and spiritual prowess of Jesus as the Messianic persona were witnessed—ultimately and climactically by Jesus' triumph over death in his resurrection and his ascension into Heaven. Given the range and magnitude of the powers credited to Jesus in fulfillment of his Messianic role, the bases for his claim to have overcome the world is apparent. The problem of presenting miracles onstage will be discussed later.

In limiting a designation of Jesus' identity to strictly human attributes, Jesus emerges by self-assertion and behavior as a distinguished Jewish moral teacher who taught a new doctrine of faith as a means of reaching God rather than the previously assumed necessary series of righteous actions. He

33 Matthew 28:5-7; Mark 16:5-7; Luke 24:5-7; Acts 1:9-11.
34 John 16:33.
was not educated formally beyond the basic Scriptural training given to all young Jewish boys.\textsuperscript{35} His adult profession had apparently been originally that of a small town carpenter.\textsuperscript{36} Jesus was very much a Jew in his dedication to Hebrew law and tradition including the observance of Passover pilgrimages and his citation of the Levitical call for complete love for the Lord God.\textsuperscript{37} The most comprehensive evidence for Jesus' devotion to Judaic law is found in his Matthew 5:19 statement of the necessity for all those under the law to observe completely the Mosaic law in order to receive heavenly reward. His authority in the discussion of the Scriptures gave him a reputation as a meritorious synagogue teacher.\textsuperscript{38} In fact, Jesus viewed his role as a teacher as more important than that of a healer.\textsuperscript{39} Despite his grounding in Mosaic tradition, Jesus was radical in his presentation of a newly revealed doctrine of faith over works, a teaching that is presented in various of his speeches.\textsuperscript{40} These strictly human attributes are vital to the creation of a dramatic Jesus who is not too heavily mystical.

\textsuperscript{35}John 7:15.
\textsuperscript{36}Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3.
\textsuperscript{38}Luke 4:15.
\textsuperscript{39}Mark 1:38.
\textsuperscript{40}Matthew 7:21-23; 13:23, John 6:29; Mark 9:23,24.
However, the identity of Jesus is by no means limited to a strictly human level in the Gospel accounts and it is unlikely that his identity in a drama should be either. There is clearly the portrayal of a man whose self-image involved a dual status as both God incarnate and divinely commissioned human being. With the perspective of such claims and their accompanying powers in mind, it is now feasible to move on to an overview of the personality dimensions of this Palestinian carpenter/preacher who claimed to be the fulfillment of a whole heritage of ancient prophetic offices.

In the fourth chapter of "Hebrews," the author describes Jesus as God incarnate in human form who thus was able to relate fully to mortal man's experience. However, Jesus claimed to operate on a level of perfection unachieved by any other human being. Jesus is portrayed as "one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin." 41 Given the Scriptural definition of "sin" as falling short of the glory of God which is the standard of perfection, Jesus may be therefore viewed as being a perfect individual according to the Biblical accounts. 42 This all-inclusive and unique status of perfection which is claimed for Jesus in the Gospels is the controlling center of his personality

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41 Hebrews 4:15.
42 Romans 3:23.
as demonstrated in them. If this perfection is assumed in a dramatic characterization, there may be difficulties in establishing any progression of character. Depicting the inevitable clash between Jesus' compassionate righteousness and the imperfection of his environment may be dramatically workable however. As portrayed both by Jesus and the editorial authors' comments, the major factor involved in Jesus' maintenance of a perfect standard was his zealous desire to exist in a completely obedient relationship to his Father, the Godhead. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus always maintains a completely subservient dependence upon what he perceives as God's will.

The other basic personality attributes depicted in the Scriptural Jesus are all seen as being logically resultant from his perfect obedience to God. The Nazarene was not always bluntly assertive of his self-proclaimed identity and powers. However he would and frequently did take various means to present himself as God made as man. Fundamental to the dynamics of his personality were the charisma and personal spiritual authority which he projected continually and to which his contacts were drawn. That magnetic authority is an underlying factor in Jesus' mastery as a teacher. Since teaching was a major adult activity for Jesus, much can be discerned about his character from his attributes as a teacher. The Biblical Jesus is an eloquent teacher who
meets with unusual success in responding to the needs of his individual listeners. Particularly evident in his teaching as in his general behavior were his keen intelligence, spiritual and emotional sensitivity, and picturesque, almost literary wit. Those characteristics surface not only in dealings with his supporters but also his opponents. Although frequently not aggressive in the face of adversity, Jesus always demonstrated marked strength of purpose in dealing with antagonistic forces. He does not shy from presenting his uncompromising views of man's willful imperfection.

Not only did the Biblical Jesus view himself as a teacher to his listeners but also as a servant. This is evident particularly in his relationship with his disciples. In both his serving and his leading, Jesus always personally maintained and called for in his followers a completely virtuous standard of behavior. As depicted by the evangelist writers, Jesus was the perfect human demonstration of all God-given moral virtues such as love, justice, honesty, and humility. Involved in the complete fulfillment of those virtues, the Jesus of the Gospels evidenced a strongly motivating concern for the welfare of mankind on all levels of existence. These personality traits are the most useful tools in the Gospels for formulating a dramatic characterization for Jesus. Each of these prominent, playable character
dimensions will be demonstrated by significant Scriptural examples.

Even as a twelve year old on his pilgrimage to Jerusalem with his parents which Anderson dramatizes in Journey to Jerusalem, various personality traits which would be later present in his adult behavior are depicted. Basic to that episode is Jesus' already emergent identification of God as his Father. It is an amazingly authoritative assertion for a young Jewish boy. In staying behind at the Temple after his parents' departure, Jesus demonstrated a great interest in the intricacies of the Rabbainic and scribal teachings. That knowledge coupled with his depth of spiritual understanding which was already apparent even in his childhood would become a major factor in his teaching skill as an adult. Also apparent in his delay in his parents' absence is the sometimes enigmatic detachment which Jesus would later show towards his blood relations. The Gospel explanation given for this here and elsewhere is that such behavior was justified if it was necessary to Jesus' perception of his dedication to God's purposes. Evident in his dealings with the scribes as a child were the courtesy, charm, and insight which were present in the adult Jesus.\textsuperscript{43} All that is then included in the Gospels about

\textsuperscript{43}Luke 2:46-51.
Jesus before the beginning of his adult ministry some eighteen years later is Luke's brief explanation, "and Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man." 

According to Jesus' self-witness, he regarded his obedient relationship to God to be the most important guideline to his behavior. That obedience is used as the character's central motivation in Ferris' Tempted in All Points. As Jesus viewed himself, this obedient dedication demanded a complete dependence on the Father's actions as when in John he says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner." Jesus claimed that all his knowledge came from his Heavenly Father. Because of that dependence, Jesus felt responsibility to give credit to God for all his personal achievements as in his giving of glory to God in connection with his healings. There are numerous instances in which Jesus would even justify his

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45 John 5:30.
46 John 5:19.
47 John 5:20.
48 Matthew 5:19; Luke 8:25; Mark 4:40.
resistance to take a specific action because he was waiting on God's appointed time for that action to take place. This is most strikingly apparent in his delay in ministering to the dying Lazarus so that it would be a more effective witness to God's glory. 49 Jesus is presented as following the guidance of God as revealed to him through the Holy Spirit. All three Synoptic writers state that Jesus went into the wilderness to fast at the beginning of his ministry as a result of the Spirit's leading. 50

Jesus was dedicated to what he saw as God's purpose despite the personal inconvenience, suffering, or ultimate mortal sacrifice that was involved. 51 If pursued in a play, the dedication to God's purpose may have great credibility to some viewers while being utterly enigmatic to others depending on their individual spiritual assumptions. Even early in his ministry, Jesus showed he was aware of his forthcoming suffering and death. Yet he never refers to the coming threat with grudge or repulsion in any of his prophetic references. 52 Instrumental in his espoused relationship with God was Jesus' appreciation of prayerful

49 John 11:46.
50 Matthew 4:1; Mark 1:12; Luke 4:1.
52 John 2:19; Matthew 10:16-18; Mark 8:31-33; Luke 9:22.
communication with Him. That value is evident in his repeated desire to withdraw privately to pray and obviously in his teaching of prayer to his disciples.\(^53\) Inherent in his view of his relationship to God were an appreciation of God's creation and maintenance of a balance in Nature. Jesus also taught trust in God's insured provision for man's needs, both physical and spiritual.\(^54\) Although his obedience to God was always a straightforward, simple tenet for his behavior, it can become a plaguingly complex issue in a dramatic persona.

Jesus was faithful in his observance of what he regarded typically as a Jew to be God-given moral law found in the Old Testament.\(^55\) He did not view himself as a challenge to the Old Testament laws and prophecy but as a fulfillment of them.\(^56\) Allied to his sense of dedication to God's standard and purpose, Jesus expected of himself and all his followers a completely preemptive devotion to his Father and to himself as God's earthly spokesman. That devotion involved even the severing of basic human commitments to family and friends if necessary.\(^57\) The elements discussed above may be crafted to

\(^{53}\text{Mark 1:35; Luke 10:1-4.}\)

\(^{54}\text{Matthew 6:26-30; John 14:17-26.}\)

\(^{55}\text{Matthew 8:14; Mark 1:40-44.}\)

\(^{56}\text{Matthew 5:17.}\)

\(^{57}\text{Matthew 4:17; Mark 1:15; 6:12.}\)
make a theatrical Jesus seem like either a self-righteous conservative or a demanding radical.

Although he certainly dealt earnestly with human, earth-bound problems and concerns, Jesus led a life which was focused markedly on heavenly aspirations rather than worldly values. In a confrontation with the Pharisees recorded in John, Jesus clearly states his other-worldly self-view when he says, "You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world." His indicative teaching in Matthew 6:19-21,

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\text{Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where thieves break in and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also,}
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demonstrates clearly Jesus' focus of attention. Obviously the Nazarene's mind was set on Heaven and not on Earth. The tendency toward an excessively other-worldly quality is one of the major dangers in dramatizing Jesus.

A major aspect of Jesus' behavior which is richly indicative of his personality and is allied closely to his devotion to God is the extent to which he asserted his view of his

\[58\text{Matthew 10:37,38; Mark 3:31-35; Luke 9:60-62; John 12:18.}\]
identity and exercised his superhuman powers. The progressive revelation of his identity with its accompanying internal and external tensions is a strong source for dramatic action. Although on various occasions he did claim bluntly to be the Messiah, he was also reticent under numerous other circumstances to proclaim himself or to be proclaimed as the Son of God. This hesitation, which would seem almost to make his Messianic role a secret for a major part of his ministry, reflects an aversion to the rise of the wrong kind of celebrity around his identity. It would be an uncomprehending and counterproductive recognition for his purposes to which a self-enforced anonymity would be preferable.

However under situations particularly where rejection of his identity were clearly affronts to God’s will, Jesus was neither unaware nor reticent to the possibility of his powers. Many times he would choose to manifest his power and identity through the performance of miraculous signs such as healings, exorcisms, raising of the dead, and controlling forces of nature. However, Jesus did not do those

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60 John 5:13; Matthew 8:4; Mark 1:40-44; Luke 19:38-39.
61 John 3:15; Matthew 8:26,27.
miracles for his own glory but so that God might be honored by the witnesses of them. An example of this is when he prays to God in John 11:42 about Lazarus' resurrection as a demonstration "that they may believe that Thou didst send me." Jesus acknowledges frequently and even asserts his identity as a divine being. This assertion is a major implication in his body of prophecy of a future when he would return to earth and establish the Kingdom of God. Jesus' self-image portrayed him to be the only means by which man could achieve a positive relationship with God. Because of that concept, he required a completely sacrificial devotion from those who professed to believe his claims. The sacrifice included the separation from family and sacrifice of material possessions. Jesus esteemed himself as having divine powers and attributes, but they were not used for the purpose of personal advancement but only the advancement of God's goals as he perceived them. A common dramatic use of that discrepancy between Jesus' powers and his use of them comes in the prompting by his

63 John 4:25, 26; 5:17, 18, 23.
64 John 5:25-28; Matthew 24.
66 Matthew 10:37, 38; 13:45, 46.
disciples to seize military power as in *Judas Iscariot* and *Jesus: Tragedy of Man*.

Despite Jesus' desire to avoid excessive notoreity, his charismatic presence and projected spiritual authority made him a very attractive, yet controversial ancient celebrity. His simple, but effective, influence over men's wills is evident in the enthusiastic support he received immediately from those he called as disciples. 67 Such was his reputation that a woman who had been sick for twelve years believed without even seeing Jesus that she would be healed by even the slightest contact with him. 68 If one dramatizes the Biblical Jesus, his charisma will be a vital element. The one major area where Jesus asserted repeatedly his personal spiritual authority over another was in dealing with the representatives of the priestly traditions prevalent at the time. Concerning such issues as the observance of the Sabbath, Jesus stated his right to discern the proper execution of God's law over the popular contemporary traditions. 69 Largely due to the two factors of his charismatic appeal and his evident authority through spiritual insight, Jesus was a celebrated teacher of his day. 70 The conflict between Jesus

and the Jewish establishment is the most obvious, potential dramatic conflict in the Gospels.

It is logical to examine the nature of Jesus' teaching approach to reveal aspects of his personality that could be shown in stage action. Jesus viewed his role as teacher to be his most important, immediate function in serving God's purpose. In response to the preoccupation with healing apparent in the crowds, Jesus at one point tells his disciples, "Let us go somewhere else to the towns nearby, in order that I may preach there also; for that is what I came out for." Jesus was a resourceful and eloquent teacher. He had a consistently masterful command of metaphorical address as demonstrated by his continual use of parables. He was also deft at taking the content of a specific experience and using it as an example of the spiritual implications (such as in his teaching of the disciples in relation to a recent confrontation with the Pharisees in Matthew 15:12-14). As particularly recorded in John's Gospel and exemplified by the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew, Jesus would use long, eloquent discourses as a means of covering a great deal of necessary spiritual revelation in

71Mark 1:38.

72John 4:34-37; Matthew 7:13-27; Mark 4:33-34; and Luke 10:30-35 are select examples.
a short concentrated span. When dealing in an instructive manner with the antagonistic Pharisees, Jesus was able to employ formidable skills of logical argument. His reasoning for the necessary separation of himself from Satan in Matthew 12:22-37 is a striking example. Jesus' teaching seems to have occurred both in spontaneous brief exchanges and in long, more formal addresses to large crowds. His ability to command attention effectively in unamplified outdoor talks to crowds of as many as five thousand indicates that he must have had much technical skill in his teaching.73

Although teaching was the central adult activity for Jesus, it should undoubtedly be used sparingly in a play to avoid static rhetoric.

An interesting aspect of Jesus' teaching is that he often dealt with content that he knew was well beyond the understanding of his disciples, let alone his more casual listeners.74 This tendency provides for interesting interplay between secondary characters. However, he did make a practice of explaining the content of his teaching to his intimates. In a principal explanation of his use of enigmatic parables, Jesus told his disciples that it was the purpose of

73Mark 6:44.
God that many be taught much that they were not presently ready to understand.\textsuperscript{75} Apparent throughout Jesus' teaching is his awareness and understanding of man's limitations and weaknesses. He was aware that his performance of miracles was a necessary complement to his teaching to elicit belief.\textsuperscript{76} He realized that men would usually focus primarily on their physical rather than spiritual needs.\textsuperscript{77} Jesus did not view his ministry in isolation from all other contemporary concerns but as operating with a definite religious relevance. This is evident particularly in his view of John the Baptist's ministry. Jesus began a specific Galilean ministry in relation to the implications of John's arrest.\textsuperscript{78} He also viewed John the Baptist as the major contemporary sign of his coming.\textsuperscript{79} A primary consideration in Jesus' teaching was his concern not to unduly impress spiritual truths upon people before they could possibly deal with them.\textsuperscript{80} This principle is most apparent in his process of gradual revelation to the Twelve during their period of discipleship. It was not until after his resurrection that he viewed them as being

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{75}Luke 8:10.
  \item \textsuperscript{76}John 4:48.
  \item \textsuperscript{77}John 6:26,27.
  \item \textsuperscript{78}Matthew 4:12; Mark 1:14; Luke 4:14.
  \item \textsuperscript{79}John 5:33-35.
  \item \textsuperscript{80}Matthew 17:9; Mark 9:9.
\end{itemize}
ready to receive full illumination of the Scriptures from him. Jesus was a dynamically skilled teacher who had a great sense of responsibility to his students.

Involved potentially in a dramatic Jesus' personality were his characteristic intelligence, spiritual and emotional sensitivity, and resourceful wit which also surfaced in his teaching and elsewhere in his behavior. Even as a child, Jesus amazed religious authorities with his spiritual insights.\(^81\) That insight into the knowledge of the Torah and the Talmud was apparent in his calm ability to resolve complex issues arising from problematic passages of Scripture.\(^82\) An example of his resourceful knowledge of the Bible comes in Jesus' dealings with Satan during the wilderness temptation. He drew upon various Old Testament passages that counteracted specifically the claims of the tempter.\(^83\) There are a number of instances in which Jesus had foreknowledge of different individuals' identities, personal histories, and characters. Jesus perceptively and prophetically called Simon, the disciple, "Peter" (or the "Rock") on their first meeting.\(^84\) He uses his foreknowledge

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\(^81\) John 1:42.


\(^83\) Mark 2:2-10; Luke 2:3-12.

\(^84\) John 1:42.
of the Samaritan woman's marital status as a sign of his Messianic identity.\(^85\) Also apparent in Jesus' behavior is a keen discernment of individual and collective men's character. This point is generalized when John writes of Jesus' perception of his followers, "He did not need anyone to bear witness concerning man for He Himself knew what was in man."\(^86\) That discernment enabled him to anticipate the responses of certain individuals and groups such as his prophetic expectation of his rejection in his home, Nazareth.\(^87\)

A repeated evidence of his insight was in his recognition of true faith in those who came to him for healing.\(^88\) Jesus' wit was demonstrated frequently in isolated instances but is most apparent in his use of parables. There are instances in which Jesus seems to comment humourously on a situation as in the "camel through the eye of a needle" image used for rich men getting into the Kingdom.\(^89\) The insight and wit of the Biblical Jesus could give a stage Jesus a well-textured, sympathetic humanity.

Jesus' wit and sensitivity to the dimensions of a situation were vital agents in his handling of adverse circum-

\(^85\)John 4:42.  
\(^86\)John 2:25.  
\(^89\)Matthew 19:24
stances, particularly in his frequent dealings with the hostile Jewish officials. A basic premise operating in his personality which is important to this discussion is his active willingness to stand in opposition to attitudes, behavior, and situations of which he did not approve. Jesus was opposed consistently to religious hypocrisy as a gross manifestation of a general lack of faith. There are numerous situations involving scribes and Pharisees in which Jesus pointed out flaws and deceits inherent in the individual's spiritual character. Notable are his attack on temple commercialism in John 2:14-17, mercenary self-righteousness in Mark 3:1-6, and religious exhibitionism in Matthew 6:1-8. He even on occasion chided his followers in situations where their lack of faith was apparent as in the calming of the stormy sea. Jesus also functioned consistently in opposition to the ethnic and social prejudices of his Jewish colleagues. An interesting example of his rejection of such attitudes is found in his use of a Samaritan as a heroic protagonist in the parable recorded in Luke 10:30-35. In general, Jesus was frankly critical of men's worldly desires which distracted them from focusing clearly on God.

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91 John 5:44-45.
wrongs are some of his actions which can be theatricalized more easily.

There were three major groups which gave Jesus resistance. The conflict with each of these groups has dramatic potential. The first were his family and friends at home in Nazareth. When they came to retrieve him from Capernaum, he reacted with a characteristic, simple response that those who are related by faith are more strongly tied than those related by blood.\textsuperscript{92} The majority of hostile hindrance to Jesus' teaching came from the Jewish officials in power, the scribes, the Pharisees, and Sadducees. Jesus dealt with their baiting questions and self-righteous condemnation in a variety of ways. As in his justification against their challenge to Sabbath healing, Jesus often challenged in a calm, yet shrewd manner with his own insightful questions which struck personally at their own faith and values.\textsuperscript{93} However his patience was not limitless with these men, and he was given to blunt and pointed rebukes of specific aspects of the officials' hypocrisy. The most extensive attack of the practice of the Jewish hierarchy is in the major "woe to you" passages in Matthew 23 and Luke 11. Such responses

\textsuperscript{92}Luke 8:19-21.
\textsuperscript{93}Matthew 12:10-14; Mark 3:1-6; Luke 6:6-11.
were indicative of his tiring of the willful rejection of the truth of his identity long after he knew it had been proven amply. This is demonstrated when Jesus told the Pharisees and scribes that "an evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign" and that he was witnessed amply by the events in the Old Testament. Strongest is his response to the apparent lack of faith in the exorcising of a young demoniac when he said, "O unbelieving generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you?" Jesus departed from his usual calm authority to use more aggressive rebukes and threats when they seemed appropriate to the situation. Those threats ranged from a more gentle cajoling of his listeners with prophecy of disaster as in Matthew 10:15 to his shocking "get behind me, Satan" rebuke to Peter's resistance to the necessity for Jesus' mortal sacrifice.

The other group in resistance to Jesus' work was the nation of Israel which as a whole did not accept his Messianic identity. In reaction to this national lack of faith, Jesus taught that the Jewish people who did not accept his

95 Mark 9:19.
96 Mark 8:33.
divinity would be rejected as in his parable of the wedding feast. Not only did men's rejection of him elicit anger but also deep grief on occasion. Mark records that Jesus became grieved at the Pharisee's "hardness of heart" when he healed the man's withered hand. It should be noted that Jesus typically was gently firm and encouraging to those who dealt with him in an open, receptive way regardless of their social acceptability as evidenced by his association with taxgatherers, prostitutes, and other undesirables.

At the point of his greatest opposition (during his arrest, trial, and ultimate execution), Jesus was passive in the face of adversity. This passivity is a source for dramatic irony in the treatment of his Passion. He opposed a violent reaction from the disciples. In the trials before Pilate, Herod, and the Sanhedrin, he is either silent or quietly asserts his authority from God. Never during the mocking that preceded and accompanied his execution did he threaten or condemn. In fact his most striking acts of forgiveness (of his persecutors and the crucified thief) come during the period of supreme suffering. Also

98 Matthew 9:10-11.
99 Mark 3:5.
100 Matthew 26:52.
interesting is that Jesus' only suggestion of fear recorded in the Gospels comes in his private prayer to the Father in Gethsemane when he asks three times for God to take the responsibility of the sacrifice away from him. So great was his anguish at that point that it is recorded that he sweat blood. Yet even in this point of stress, Jesus makes the ultimate submission to God's will by accepting his coming sacrifice. This man, who dealt with fierce opposition with shrewd logic until he was pushed past endurance, only experienced fear in the private facing of imminent death.

Not only did Jesus function as a spiritual leader but also viewed himself operating in the role of a servant. A central sustained activity which involves this variant role for Jesus was his involvement with his disciples. The contrast between Jesus' roles as both master and servant is an intriguing dramatic possibility. The same man who allowed his followers to refer to him as "Master" also humbled himself at the last Passover they shared by ceremonially washing their feet. Jesus had chosen his twelve most intimate followers from a variety of backgrounds as with Peter,

104 John 13:5-16.
a fisherman, Simon, a zealot, and Matthew, a taxgatherer. A major portion of teaching was addressed specifically to the disciples. His discipling of those men consisted partially of progressive revelation of the central spiritual truths and moral principles that were the core of Jesus' message as a teacher. Jesus appointed his disciples to serve him in turn as associate ministers and gave them not only commission to preach but also to perform miracles. 105 Jesus demonstrated his deep concern for his followers by seeking to prepare them thoroughly for the various complexities of their appointed ministries. His instructions are extensive, detailed, and encouraging. 106 He did not hide difficult matters such as his coming death from them but attempted to prepare them for the hardships that they would individually and corporately experience. Jesus taught them as much as their limited spiritual views could assimilate. 107 The guiding principle of his dealings with his disciples was his deep love for them. His love which was evident throughout his ministry became even clearer as his life came to a close. John describes Jesus' attitude towards them when he

106 Matthew 10:5-42.
writes, "Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He should depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end."\(^{108}\) Even at that point in facing his betrayal, Jesus was concerned for the welfare of his followers in their inability to face the stress of sudden catastrophe.\(^{109}\) In what is referred to as the High Priest's prayer, Jesus prayed as an intercessor for the spiritual safety of his followers as he finished his oration to them at the Last Supper.\(^{110}\) In the midst of that discourse, Jesus expressed the degree of his love for his followers when he said, "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends, if you do what I command you."\(^{111}\) Here is a man who offers love conditionally in exchange for obedience, but extends the gift of that love to the greatest degree to which he is able. Jesus' relationship with his disciples should not be ignored as a means of revealing a dramatic characterization.

The concern evidenced by Jesus for his disciples was extended into a deep compassion for the spiritual, emotional,

\(^{110}\) John 14-17:26.  
\(^{111}\) John 15:13,14.
and physical welfare of mankind in general. Jesus was not a stoic isolationist but an active public individual who was not wary about socializing. In fact, his socializing evidenced obviously his compassion for the less fortunate and more problematic elements of society. Jesus dealt with all people who were open to his aid whether or not he broke popular ethnic and social prohibitions by having contact with them. An obvious aspect of his active concern for mankind was in his healings. It is important to note that Jesus healed only those who had faith in the power of God manifested in him. As demonstrated in his healing of the lame man, Jesus showed his respect for the fundamental right of free choice in all men even when their will chose against their personal good. Just as he respected free will, Jesus had a general respect for every individual which resulted in his encouragement of every open individual who sought his help. It was important to Jesus to meet men's immediate crucial needs even if they were physical, not spiritual. A good example of that desire to help his fellow

113 John 4:49-54; Mark 1:23,24.
114 John 4:4-9; Mark 9:9-13.
115 Matthew 9:28,29.
117 John 5:8; Matthew 10:16-18.
man is given in the story of the miraculous feedings of the crowd in the wilderness. Jesus did not feel compassion for men on a detached intellectual level but actually was emotionally involved. A poignant example is Jesus’ reaction to Lazarus’ death when John writes simply, “Jesus wept.”

There are numerous examples throughout the Gospels of incidents in which Jesus’ concern for man is evident whether it be towards social outcasts, spiritually downtrodden individuals, persecuted followers, or innocent children. Jesus’ compassion and concern can be used as guidelines for his interaction with other dramatic characters.

Jesus’ personality is presented in the Gospels as being perfectly virtuous. A life that was ruled by the two laws which he considered to be all inclusive, total love of God and love of neighbour as self, was resplendent with admirable selfless qualities. The beatitudes found in Matthew 5 and Luke 6 are an interesting summary of the human virtues which Jesus valued as worthy of heavenly reward and which he lived in his daily existence. In those lines of comforting the faithful, Jesus lauds humility (“poor in spirit”), compas-

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119 John 11:35.
sionate emotional commitment ("mourn"), forbearance ("gentle"), spiritual openness ("hunger and thirst for righteousness"), mercy, innocence of motivations and actions ("pure in heart"), non-aggressive reason and uncompromising virtue ("peacemakers"), and strength in the face of unrighteousness and persecution. These and other attributes such as personal integrity, generosity, and his general loving nature characterize Jesus' personality. Jesus' vision was that he functioned in the world as God's loving instrument of forgiveness. He saw himself as having been sent into the world not to judge it, but to provide a means for reconciliation with God. 121

In order to glean other evocative images for a stage Jesus, let us survey the portrayal of Christ's character found in the other writings of the New Testament. As presented by both Jesus and his disciples, Jesus is recognized clearly throughout the rest of the New Testament as the Christ, the incarnate God and Saviour of the world. Paul discusses Jesus' sacrifice as the necessary means by which man was reconciled to God through the forgiveness of his sinful nature. 122 The sacrificial purpose is seen to

121 John 3:16,17.
122 Romans 3:25.
have been for all mankind, not only for Jesus' direct associates.\textsuperscript{123} The New Testament writers also demonstrate clearly a belief in Jesus' resurrected immortality.\textsuperscript{124} Both Peter and Paul discuss Jesus' roles of God and sinless man which was the means whereby men were saved.\textsuperscript{125} The relationship between the risen Christ and his followers as represented by the Church was portrayed as a dynamic loving one like a marriage.\textsuperscript{126} Jesus is viewed as a living saviour who will return eventually to assert his rightful power on earth and rule a perfect kingdom from which sin will be eliminated.\textsuperscript{127} The immortal status of Jesus Christ is expressed in the concept of his living in the spirits of believers in him.\textsuperscript{128} Jesus' portrayal in the epistles may be useful particularly to a playwright who wishes to take a more metaphorical approach to the character.

There are several isolated passages among the writings which are particularly indicative of the New Testament view

\textsuperscript{123}Romans 5:8.
\textsuperscript{124}Romans 6:9.
\textsuperscript{125}Romans 8:3; I Peter 1:19.
\textsuperscript{126}Romans 7:2.
\textsuperscript{127}I Corinthians 15:25.
\textsuperscript{128}Galatians 2:20.
of Jesus Christ. There is a passage in the second chapter of Paul's letter to the Philippians in which he discusses the process by which Christ relinquished his full status as God and had accepted incarnation in the servitude of a man in order to be obedient to God to the point of death. That sacrifice had thus entitled him to glorification by the Godhead over the whole creation. 129 "Hebrews" author, probably Paul, describes Christ as the High Priest of Christianity. He was the perfect minister who had replaced himself for the traditional offering as the complete sacrifice for man's debt of sin to God. 130 Peter's most concise description of Christ is as follows:

While being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross; that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for His wounds you were healed. 131

John emphasizes Christ's role as a perpetual advocate for man's sins to insure God's forgiveness. 132 In "Revelation," John gives direct revelation from Christ as to his future

129 Philippians 2:5-10.
130 Hebrews 2,3,4,5, and 7.
131 I Peter 2:23,24.
132 I John 2:1.
role as the world's judge. In a self-description that climaxes the portrayal of Christ's identity and character in the Bible, John records Jesus as saying, "I am the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."¹³³ None of the New Testament portrayals outside the Gospels challenge anything presented in them. The other New Testament writers present logical, theological extensions of the characteristics portrayed there.

Given the evidence in these historical accounts of the person, Jesus of Nazareth, a strong and self-assertive personality emerges clearly. Here was a young Jewish moral teacher who viewed himself to exist as God and man. He was to be both the completely obedient Son of the Heavenly Father and the perfect servant of all of men's needs. He claimed to be the only means by which man could achieve a positive relationship with God. If one accepts the data recorded here as historically valid, it leaves the playwright with three basic alternative views as to what the Biblical Jesus was. If his claims were true then he was all that he continually purported himself to be. If his claims were false then he was either a con man or a madman because he was either

lying or was crazy. If he was a con man, then he attempted to create a personal, ego-serving following through making outrageous spiritual claims. If he was a madman, then he was a poor unfortunate suffering from fantastic delusions of grandeur which brought about his tragic destruction. It would be treading on thin ice of dramatic credibility to assess him as a great moral teacher in either of those two cases. It is jarringly incongruous for a moral teacher and example to lie consciously or be insanely self-deluded about such a major aspect of his self-image. Also, it is difficult to view him as an angry, young advocate of a humanistic earthbound brotherhood because that assumption can not be supported by the body of his teaching. It is fascinating to see how each of the playwrights included here has dealt with this underlying, almost inescapable set of alternatives. The basis of any accurate dramatic view of who and what Jesus of Nazareth, known as the Christ, was and what his short controversial life meant must rely heavily on the New Testament accounts as the only reliable primary or secondary sources.
CHAPTER THREE
CHRIST AS A SPIRITUAL PROTAGONIST

Throughout the twentieth century, numerous playwrights have attempted to dramatize the historical and spiritual phenomenon centering in the life of Jesus of Nazareth and have used him as the protagonist in their dramatic conflicts. Some of the plays have taken a reverential approach to the subject and consequently the scripts function as devout enactments of the recorded Biblical events. Others take a more liberal view of the nature and significance of Jesus' identity and ministry, often in an apparent attempt to make the ancient material more accessible to a modern sensibility. The common denominator of the scripts discussed in this chapter is the use of the Christ figure as the protagonist of the action. However the manner in which they utilize that subject stimulus covers a broad stylistic range and yields a variety of theatrical and thematic results.

Traditional Passion Plays

The majority of dramatizations of Christ's life written prior to the twentieth century reflect the characteristics of the medieval mystery play. Basically the plays make simple
attempts to depict the Gospel events as they literally appear in the Bible. Usually secondary characters' behavior is fictionalized and extended for simple entertainment value as in the nearly farcical treatment of such minor characters as the shepherds at the Nativity or the soldiers at the Crucifixion which is found in many of the medieval scripts. In all of the primitive Christ plays, the central activity of Jesus is regarded with slavish reverence. The usual divergence from literal scriptural transcription is only present as a means of driving home a didactic theological point.¹

Most twentieth-century scripts discussed here have moved away from that pageant-like approach to the content. However there are notable commercial hangovers of the archaic approach which are worthy of reference because they are indicative of the most conservative stance on handling Jesus' life. The two that I will mention are The Black Hills Passion Play which was revised in 1932 by Josef Meier from a medieval German cycle drama and The Pilgrimage Play, Life of Jesus Christ by Christine Wetherill Stevenson, a pictorial pageant that traces the course of major events in the Biblical account.

The Meier work has been produced annually in Spearfish, South Dakota since 1938. The script is written for staging in an outdoor medieval mansions setting and covers the span of activity from Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday through his ascension into Heaven some fifty days later. There are over twenty scenes in this pageant drama which runs over two and one half-hours in length. The play opens with a didactic prologue in which the white-robed Christ figure exhorts the audience to appreciate the spiritual significance of the events they are about to see. With heavy emphasis on the spectacle of crowds, live animals, period costuming, and archaic ritual, the play follows faithfully the Gospel accounts of the events of the Passion week, particularly Judas' betrayal and the various trials of Christ. The script reflects the author's desire to depict succinctly the series of "greatest hits" events rather than explore the content of any of them. The only meagre exception is the handling of Judas. In limiting Judas' motivation entirely to a level of greed, Meier has chosen one of the simplest motivational options for getting Judas to his climactic action. He has however attempted to give Judas some human

credibility through his insertion of a soliloquy for the disciple. As evidenced by the attempt to recreate the visual effect of such paintings as Da Vinci's Last Supper, Meier is concerned overridingly with the devout physicalization of the Passion events for solemn emotional effect, but he has no apparent desire to illumine their content significantly through dramatic development.

The other script is even a more obvious example of the stifling, impersonal spiritual approach to the life of the Nazarene. The Pilgrimage Play Life of Jesus Christ by Stevenson was a professionally produced pageant given in an amphitheatre adjacent to the Hollywood Bowl since 1920. The play is nothing more than a scriptural transcription of dialogue read in accompaniment to the scenic display of tableaux vivants based on familiar religious paintings. Such plays as Wetherill Stevenson's and Meier's waste the potential of historical dramatization as a means of vitalizing recorded events by depicting the humanity of the experiences involved. Those plays function as little more than elaborate visual aids for the simple reading of the Scripture.

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3 Wright, p. 22.
4 Murphy, p. 215.
other scripts discussed here take less of a slavishly devout
tack towards the subject matter and are therefore to
various degrees more successful in theatricalizing the
character of Christ.

The Dark Hours by Don Marquis (1925)

Marquis' dramatization of the climactic events of the
Passion week make a significant step away from the pageant­
like approach taken by the scripts just discussed. However,
in his insistence on giving his Jesus only dialogue which
appears in the Gospel accounts, Marquis has not moved rad­i­
cally towards the sweeping fictionalizations of the Christ's
activity, which are present generally in scripts which depict
his life. Marquis gives justification for his close adherence
to the specifics of the Gospels in his notes that constitute
the afterword to the published script. The authors considers
his play to be an "orthodox version" of the events portrayed.\(^5\)
Not only does this make the play valid historically, but he
feels it is also the proper thing to do for dramatic inte­
grity.\(^6\) Marquis is not dogmatic in insisting that respect
for the historical veracity of the Biblical records is the
only justification for the use of the details included there.

\(^5\)Don Marquis, The Dark Hours (New York: Doubleday, Page,

\(^6\)Ibid.
He suggests that even if one were to view the Gospel writings as the manifestation of a mythic tradition a playwright should not violate in any major way the content of those writings. There must be a rationale tied to theme and character behind the specific form and content of the Gospel accounts which are so markedly consistent in their portrayals. If that internal consistency and pattern are disrupted significantly then the vital significance of the story is jeopardized particularly in terms of logical progression of events and consistency of character. Marquis also claims to maintain his artistic integrity in his effort to "show what I pretend to show," i.e.- if he purports to dramatize the life of Jesus, he will be faithful to the only available primary source records of that individual's life. Because of this adherence to the content of the Gospels, Marquis has created a much more consistent characterization for his Christ figure and has presented a drama which is much more solid in its dramatic progression than are the majority of plays discussed here. The Marquis script stands in contrast to the other scripts which are so inconsistent in their mixture of certain passages directly involving Christ drawn straight from the records and others which are only fictional.

7Marquis, p. 152.
8Ibid.
However Marquis has made another decision in his theatrical approach to the subject which handicaps severely the dramatic effectiveness of his script. The protagonist, Jesus, never appears physically on stage although his voice is heard clearly offstage through the major portion of the play. This decision was prompted by Marquis' anxiety about the difficulty of portraying theatrically the mix of humanity and Divinity which Jesus embodied. Because of the subtle complexity of the spiritual/physical balance in the human phenomenon which was Christ, Marquis is certain that an actor representing Jesus visually on the stage could never satisfy audience expectations. He therefore chose to avoid the situation by keeping the Nazarene offstage. However, the actor and director still will be faced with the challenge of satisfying the audience preconceptions in the vocal characterization. Also, the elaborate manipulations of the scene mechanics used to keep Jesus hidden though heard are often awkward and obtrusive. Those machinations sometimes result in interesting experimentation with the use of crowds as groups of individual participants and with the use of multiple scenes played simultaneously.

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8 Marquis, p. 152.

9 Ibid., p. 153.
Despite those occasional interesting effects, there are instances in which Marquis' efforts to conceal his protagonist are humourously awkward.

It should be noted that the problem of an audience's reverential expectations for the character of Jesus in 1925 has become undoubtedly less of a serious concern in the popular theatre of a society which has drifted away from an adherence to conservative Christian practice. The contemporary ability to dramatize Jesus on stage not only physically but also in a manner which does not cater to a traditional Biblical view without mass outrage and commercial disaster is demonstrated clearly in *Godspell* and *Jesus Christ Superstar* which are discussed in a later chapter. Also, Marquis has used the offstage voice of Jesus so extensively that a director could eliminate the convention of not showing Christ with relative ease and free the play from that awkward restriction while maintaining its intriguing experimental elements.

Marquis has written a drama in five scenes which begins the evening before Christ's crucifixion and ends with his death on the cross. The plotting of the play adheres so closely to the Gospel account of the events it is worthwhile only to note the manner in which Marquis has crafted the details to theatricalize them and has included fictional activities of other characters to fill out the fabric of his
dramatization. The first scene presents Caiaphas, the high priest, and Annas, another Pharisee, examining their case against Jesus in conference with various witnesses at Caiaphas' house. In an offstage counterpoint to Judas' interview with the priests, Jesus teaches and heals various members of his crowd of followers. The events that are described in the Bible as taking place in the Garden of Gethsemane before, during, and after Jesus' arrest constitute the second scene. The trial of Jesus before the Sanhedrin at Caiaphas' house supplies the focus for scene three, while scene four presents the subsequent trial by Pilate. The final scene of the play depicts the recorded events of Jesus' crucifixion.

The various dramatic devices which Marquis employs throughout the play emerge in the first scene in his crafting of the process whereby the Pharisees prepared to execute the legal demise of Jesus. Apparently Marquis is concerned with portraying the specific views of Jesus' character and significance held by his various contemporaries in that so much of the action of the first scene involves the lengthy testimony of characters who had contact with and/or interest in Jesus. Particularly striking in this scene are the descriptions of the Nazarene given by Caiaphas, Judas, and Mary Magdalene, all of whom serve as major reference points to the character of Christ throughout
the play. The playwright establishes in considerable detail the environmental circumstances surrounding the betrayal and execution of the Nazarene. This aim is shown in the first scene in the discussion by Caiaphas and Annas of the Messianic tradition in Judaism and the teacher's significance to the political situation in Roman-occupied Palestine. Although the length of their discussion makes the dramatic development of the scene somewhat static, the discourse gives the actions of the Hebrew officials a strong consistent base of motivation and also establishes a more fully detailed sense of the context in which Jesus operates. There is an obvious note of melodramatic emotional appeal introduced in the first scene in Marquis' handling of his subject matter. An example of that appeal is found in the interaction between Malchus, one of Caiaphas' officers, and a beggar who will serve as a witness. After Caiaphas orders that the peaceful old man be cared for, Malchus abuses him villanously for no immediate dramatic reason other than to establish a stronger feeling of distrust and dislike for the Jewish officials. However this Malchus goes through the most drastic character transformation during the subsequent scenes so that this scene serves as an important initial character indicator in addition to its dramatic emotional appeal. Marquis uses a pattern of showing cruel persecution of sympathetic characters throughout the play
to sustain an active audience empathy.

Two other major devices used by Marquis throughout the play are present in the first scene. The author uses the varied reactions of the crowd as a choral means of vivifying the environment in which the events take place. With the long sequences of short interjections which appear throughout the play, Marquis employs his crowds, usually effectively, as a multi-faceted mass character involved integrally in the action. In the first scene, Marquis uses an offstage chorus singing psalms of celebration for the Passover as a thematic counterpoint to the conversation between Caiaphas and Annas concerning their responsibility to the people and Jesus' importance for the Jewish nation. Later in the scene, the crowd is used in an expositional, environmental role when Jesus comes teaching and healing into the street outside the priest's house. A director can use the texture of Marquis' crowd dialogue to varied emphatic effect in giving a more detailed sense of Jesus' significance to and interaction with the people to whom he ministered. A short excerpt from one of those sequences demonstrates Marquis' technique:

- Let me get to him, let me get to him! ...
- That one there, that is Lazarus ...
- She is healed, he hath healed her; she walks...
- That is Lazarus ... that tall man is Lazarus ...
-She is walking . . . she can walk . . .
-He hath healed her . . .
-Master, Master, heal me, Master . . .
-That is Lazarus whom he raised from the dead . . .

Obviously the primary function of such passages is to tell the audience what is happening to Jesus hidden from their view. However, even if a director were to decide to dispense with Marquis' convention and show Christ, the use of the crowd could be very effective. A director could use those choral passages to considerable theatrical effect if he avoided a plodding, mechanical execution of them and used techniques of vocal overlapping or varied degrees of emphasis.

Marquis' other major technique used in scene 1 is that of two scenes playing simultaneously for the creation of a dramatic counterpoint of related situations. In this scene, the interview between the distraught and disillusioned Judas and the priests is played against the offstage ministry of Jesus to the anxious crowd. The immediate contrast of the two scenes establishes rather effectively the tension between the teacher of sacrificial love and his frightened and confused disciple.

\[10\text{Marquis, p. 33.}\]
In the second scene set in the Garden of Gethsemane, Marquis' convention of concealing Jesus handicaps most greatly the potential effectiveness of his drama. Practically the entire physical action of the scene is restricted to being overheard. Unfortunately, the convention undermines the dramatic effectiveness which he has achieved in the final direct contact between Jesus and his disciples. There is a strong emotional appeal made in the interaction between the teacher and his followers who evidence a naive inability to stand the pressures of the coming persecution. Marquis makes deft use of the dramatic irony of the audience's knowledge of the suffering facing the characters in contrast to the disciples' lack of understanding of what Jesus is trying to tell them. The only major difficulty for visualizing the entire action of the scene, which includes a simple, effective presentation of the garden prayer, would come in presenting the Jew's healing of Malchus' ear when Peter attacks the officer during Jesus' arrest.

In the trial of Jesus before the Sanhedrin in scene 3, Marquis uses various of his conventions to great advantage. The playwright presents the offstage, but overheard testimony of the prosecuting witnesses in simultaneous contrast to the onstage comments and reactions of Jesus' supporters and opponents. The author draws upon various Biblical accounts of events in Jesus' ministry as excellent sources
for testimonies concerning the Nazarene. The writer uses the story of Lazarus' resurrection, the exorcism of the Gadarene demoniac, the Sabbath healing at Bethesda, and the forgiveness of the woman caught in adultery as content for testimonies which give an effective survey of the range and character of Jesus' ministry. During each of those stories, there are parallel comments made by the mocking crowd of Jesus' deriders and his small band of followers who have come to see the proceedings. Marquis presents an intriguing contrast between the various supporters' reactions. Peter is distraught because he had been kept from fighting to defend Jesus by his own command. Peter's attitude coordinates well with Marquis' use of the three denials of Christ which occur during the course of the trial. John the disciple is an effective foil for Peter because John has unflagging faith both in Jesus' divine power and in the necessity of the persecution. Mary Magdalene is the most aggressively emotional member of the group. She serves as a bridge between the courtyard and courtroom scenes when she interrupts the proceedings with a verbal attack on the Pharisees. Malchus is the chief demonstration of the impact Jesus can have on a man. Whereas Malchus was the leader of the arresting force, Marquis employs him effectively as a sympathizer to the disciples and an unexpected proponent of Jesus' cause when the officer is moved deeply by Jesus' simple compassion and healing.
Judas continues to be almost hysterical in his lack of comprehension of his involvement with Jesus' situation. Used both for the offstage Sanhedrin and the onstage characters, the crowd dialogue technique appears throughout the scene. Its use climaxes dramatically in the chorus of "Crucify him!" which is a powerful background to Peter and Judas' anguish at the fate of their leader.\footnote{Marquis, p. 112.}

The structuring and dramatic development of the fourth scene is very similar. Marquis dramatizes the trial before Pilate which seals Jesus' fate by using the parallel scenes inside and outside the court. He shapes passages from Scripture as testimony. There is a powerful use made of the mass character of the crowd as their enthusiasm to achieve vengeance against Jesus builds to the point of physical violence against his defenders. Marquis shows the impact of the mob action on Pilate's decision to great motivational effect. Marquis once again ends the action with an overpowering mob chorus, this time shouting "to Calvary!"\footnote{Marquis, p. 139.} He has used the environmental pressures as a dramatic means of showing the momentum that sweeps his characters to the climax.
Scene 5 consists of the events recorded in the Gospels as occurring during Jesus' crucifixion. Marquis is wise to let the simple incidents of Jesus' addressing different individuals carry the dramatic force of the catastrophic climax without unnecessary crafting. He uses the mocking crowd to appropriate melodramatic effect as a jeering, villainous force opposing the suffering protagonist. Once again, the playwright's convention of concealing Christ would make the scene too static visually. However it is undeniably difficult to visualize adequately the horror of the crucifixion for the sustained length of the whole scene. Marquis' concentration on Jesus' sayings from the cross builds simply, yet effectively to a very emotional conclusion when Jesus' death triggers catastrophic natural repercussions and thereby panic in the crowd of observers. The play ends with the author's basic thematic assertion witnessed by the centurion's statement found in the Gospels, "Truly, this was the Son of God!"\textsuperscript{13}

Marquis is more concerned with presenting a portrayal of Jesus that is harmonious with the Gospel accounts than any of the playwrights discussed here. Therefore the personality which emerges in the characterization is allied

\textsuperscript{13} Marquis, p. 151.
closely to the one described earlier as apparent in the Bible. Marquis is keenly aware of the difficulty of theatricalizing the juxtaposition of humanity with Divinity that Jesus embodied. Marquis views the central issue and driving force to his drama to be Jesus' unique claims to be the Son of God. As portrayed in the Gospels, Jesus' divinity is a central issue of his teaching. It is an issue that is difficult to avoid if a playwright relies substantially on Scriptural material to dramatize Jesus' situation. Marquis' decision to use the King James dialect for his dialogue is an understandable reverential decision given his period of writing. However, it is unnecessarily archaic and stilted in its dramatic effect of shaping the characterization. Marquis' Jesus would portray effectively the authoritative and compassionate Divine teacher in his period of maximum personal stress if he were freed from the single detriment of stage concealment. He is a compelling dramatic character whose characterization emerges with a consistent logic and solid motivational base.

Tempted in All Points by Ralph Hall Ferris (1915)

This earlier play also is concerned with presenting a portrait of Jesus that is faithful to the apparent Gospel

\[14\] Marquis, p. 154.
intent. Ferris chooses to emphasize particularly Jesus’ devotion to what he perceived to be God's will as the guiding force behind his behavior. This characteristic sense of devotion has been illustrated as being central to the Biblical Christ's personality in the earlier chapter. However, Ferris is different from Marquis in the extent to which he strives to make melodramatic points through fictionalization of Christ's situation. The playwright has created a fairly ordinary, yet complex tension of conflicting interests centering in a young aristocratic woman, Ruth, who is in love with Jesus. In the elaborate pull between Jeshua, as Ferris calls him, Ruth, and two of her suitors, Judas and a Roman officer, Aemilianus, Ferris' portrayal of the Messiah seems to be entrenched firmly in the tradition of nineteenth century melodramatic realism. The play is divided into three acts with each act concluded by a corresponding vision that demands overwhelming use of theatrical spectacle. Ferris' aspirations to dramatize the conflict of his Messianic protagonist almost become buried in an elaborate superstructure of local color, comic diversions, romantic machinations, and visual extravagance. Consequently, the secondary characters of Ruth and Judas who are intended to shed light on the character of the protagonist end in distracting and obscuring the dramatic vision of his struggle.
The first act is entitled "The Messiah appears" and is set in "The Garden of the Strangers," described as a semi-public pleasure garden below Mount Hermon near Caesarea Philippi. In this first scene Ferris introduces the relationship between Ruth, a consort of the Romans in Jerusalem, and Judas Iscariot, who is presented as a young nobleman and successor to King David's patriarchal office. That turbulent romantic relationship is played against the disillusionment which Judas feels with his passive leader, Jesus, who refuses to claim a militaristic Messianic role. Jeshua is shown in conference with his disciples in an intriguing dramatic exchange in which he attempts to make them appreciate the necessity for his suffering and eventual martyrdom instead of the political conquest to which they aspire. Ferris draws from various Gospel accounts of Jesus' interaction with the disciples to construct his compact conversation. The antagonism Ruth feels towards Jeshua because he has spurned her romantic attentions is introduced rather ambiguously in a brief confrontation between the woman and the Nazarene. Ferris uses Ruth's hostility toward Jesus and her influence on Judas as the major motivation leading to Judas' betrayal. As the first vision, Ferris

15Ralph Hall Ferris, Tempted in All Points (Boston: Gotham Press, 1915), p. 11.
concludes this act with a broadly modified version of the Transfiguration recorded in Matthew 17 and Mark 9 in which the voice of God pronounces Jesus to be His Son. In Ferris' version both Ruth and Judas witness the pivotal spiritual event.

Problems that run throughout Ferris' drama are already prominent in the first act. He pays a great deal too much attention to building a sense of local color through the manufacture of secondary irrelevant situations. In this act, there is a long introductory section between Abigail, Ruth's maid, Malachi, Abigail's father, and a wandering merchant. The sequence is long and chatty and only serves to introduce the figure of Jeshua briefly as a topic of local interest. This passage and similar one in the other two acts are intended to provide comic byplay for the central melodramatic conflict. However, at best they are only weakly comic and intrusive to the major action. The preoccupation which Ferris has with surface realistic detail is apparent particularly in his long descriptions of the appearance of characters and locales. Although they are strongly reminiscent of Shaw's elaborate physical descriptions, they are much inferior in quality. Generally the script seems much more novelistic than theatrical in its attention to detail in appearance and inconsequent behavior. The demands of the vision require cinematic technique to approximate the intended
effects. Ferris has spent so much attention on the externals of his personal dramatic vision that the human potential of his characters is neglected generally. The move from the melodramatic realism of the major section of the act to the pageant-like symbolism of the vision is disjointed. There seems to be a fairly ordinary melodrama operating here which is being strained for spiritual profundities.

Act 2 begins as a complex representation of the various factors involved in the interaction between Jesus and the Jewish Temple hierarchy at the time of the last Passover. Ferris shows Ruth in conspiratorial conference with Annas, her uncle and the priest, against Jeshua. The scene is played against the overwhelming, detailed backdrop of the interaction of the various people present in the Temple for the Passover celebration. During this opening section, Ferris keeps almost all of the physical action offstage including Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, his clearing of the Temple merchant, and Caiaphas' sacrifice of the Passover lamb, which is a vague foreshadowing of Jesus' subsequent sacrificial death. Eventually Jeshua appears and is seen in a series of representative situations which Ferris has modified from Scripture, most notably his handling of the Pharisaic questions concerning his spiritual authority and the payment of political tribute. After a long stretch of unwieldy crowd scenes, Ferris arranges conveni-
ently for Jeshua and Ruth to be left utterly alone in this most public of places for a scene in which the distress Ruth feels about their past relationship becomes clearer. The scene ends with Ruth's rage at the man for not meeting her romantic needs. Then follows the second vision which is even more monumental than the first. Set in the Golden City of the New Jerusalem, the Last Judgement is played out before the White Throne. Ferris bases his speculative dramatization principally on the sheep and goats parable in Matthew 25:31-46. The author places Judas on the side of the righteous men and Ruth falls on the side of the condemned. However in the chaos which ends the vision both characters flee before the execution of the sentence. It is an impressive vision if it were possible to stage. However it serves little obvious, immediate dramatic purpose other than to reassert Jesus in his heroic role and the cursing Annas in his villanous role with Ruth and Judas caught ambiguously in the tension between them.

Until the arrival of the crowd to arrest Jesus well into the act, the final act set in the Garden of Gethsemane is a series of melodramatic two-character confrontations which serve to bring Ferris' complicated love plot to a climax. There is an unnecessary opening sequence in which the comically frightened Abigail complicates her lady's wait for Jeshua's arrival to the garden. For little purpose other than to clear the stage for the next entrance,
Abigail abruptly leaves. Aemilianus, Ruth's Roman lover, makes his first appearance. He protests his love for her and gains her pledge to do anything for him if he will leave her alone in the garden. The next visitor is Judas who comes to prepare for his teacher's arrest. Ruth learns from him that Aemilianus is involved in Jeshua's arrest and that Judas and the Jewish officials intend to execute him quickly. In a short scene, Jesus arrives with the disciples. After commending them for their sacrificial dedication to him, he comforts and encourages them to be faithful through the coming trials. The melodrama of the fictionalized situation moves towards its climax when Ruth confesses her involvement in his betrayal to Jesus. Jesus forgives her gently and refuses her pleas for him to leave. There then follows a typical enactment of the arrest which emphasizes Jeshua's quiet dignity in the arrest and his opposition to Symeon Peter's attack on the officers. After he is taken away, Judas and Ruth are faced with the hollowness of the motivations which prompted their betrayal. Judas denounces her involvement with the Romans. She is grieved deeply for having brought about Jesus' suffering and is comforted weakly by Abigail. The major action has reached an emotional pitch which has only mediocre melodramatic impact manifested in Judas who love has been spurned and Ruth who has betrayed a man she desired.
Ferris presents a complex portrayal of the crucifixion as the final vision. The intricate interplay between Jesus on the cross and the crowd present is intended to resolve the protagonist's situation. Played against a chorus of mockers led by Caiaphas and Annas, Jesus' response to the arrogant and the penitent thieves crucified beside him is the major action of the scene. The scene climaxes with Ruth's realization that Jesus is the lord of her life and not just the object of her affection. An angelic ode of praise for the martyred Messiah concludes the scene with a didactic explanation of Jesus' spiritual significance. If that final theological message is intended to be the major thematic thrust of the script, the rest of the play has been too convoluted melodramatically to account for it.

The overriding aspect of Jesus' character in Ferris' characterization of him is his total dedication to serving the purposes of his divine father. It is the professed motivation which he gives for his behavior in the two principal relationships that Ferris uses in this dramatization. Jeshua leads his disciples into personal turmoil rather than political victory because it is necessary for the fulfillment of God's plan for his mission. He also says that he had rejected Ruth because attention to a woman did not serve God's purposes even though he had desired it. This Jesus is kind and compassionate, but he is clear and
unshakeably firm in his devotion to his central focus. The manner in which Ferris portrays Jeshua's calm dedication to God's plan makes the character very otherworldly. His strict limitation to a spiritual focus makes his responses to practical situations seem more appropriate for a spirit than a human being. Audiences would have a difficult time relating to this mystical character strictly on the basis of their own experience. On his first entrance, Ferris describes him as,

a man of thirty or there about, while suggesting a peasant king, is perceptibly superior to his companions in culture, reserve, and forcefulness, such a one, in fact as ancient Israel's peasant prince may have been. His air of quiet repose is the calm of a vigorous and masterful will, perfectly sure of itself and therefore neither hurrying or lagging in effecting its ends. But what is still more striking is the irresistible impression that this will is controlled by a deep sorrow for and understanding of human weaknesses and aspirations, and one feels the searching beauty of his look, forgetting his spare beard and rather ordinary features. 16

Such a combination of abstract spiritual dimensions with external, physical details would not make the characterization more playable but would rather make it more difficult if not impossible for an actor. Nonetheless, the central motivation

16 Ferris, pp. 36-37.
of this Jesus is consistently as clear as when he states in the first vision, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me and bring his work to its completion." The play's aspirations would seem to be to show the tragic triumph of a will completely focused on performing God's purposes no matter what the worldly cost. From that perspective, the script fails basically because Ferris attempted to illustrate the conflict by using a cliched melodramatic situation that unnecessarily complicates and obscures it.

The Road to Emmaus by James Forsyth (1958)

Forsyth's simple three-act drama suffers even more chronically from the author's excessive reliance on manufactured material to the detriment of the treatment of the central actions of Jesus. Although the playwright uses both the Christ and several of his followers as characters, the impetus for much of his dramatic action comes from the weakly comic actions of two fictional Greek carpenters, Adano and Theo. However the focus of the play always seems intended to be on the risen Jesus. Because Forsyth limits his Jesus figure to one brief appearance, the majority of the play is handicapped by an absent protagonist. Forsyth's approach is awkwardly melodramatic and results

^Ferris, p. 58.
in a play which presents its subject with little dramatic insight or credibility.

The action of the play provides a dramatic framework in which the central event of Jesus' appearance to some of his disciples on the road to Emmaus is played. However that pivotal justification for the play's existence takes place offstage and therefore is revealed strictly through narration. In order to create a full three-act play, the author must manufacture a great deal of fictional action to flesh out that simple narrated event. Although he does spend some time in portraying the post-resurrection dilemmas of John, Thomas, Peter, and Mary Cleopas, the majority of the play's action concentrates on fictitious figures. Two Greek carpenters, Adano and Theo, serve as comically melodramatic figures in their abortive attempts to capture Jesus for a bounty by tracking the movements of his disciples. A simple, sympathetic contrast is established in the innocent faith of Josephus, a young boy who has contact with Jesus at Emmaus. Basically, little thematic or dramatic purpose is served by such a treatment of the event.

As far as Jesus' character is concerned, the play is consistent to itself in giving that aspect a simplistic treatment. Jesus is seen here only in his brief exchange with Mary Magdalene in the Tomb Garden. In that passage, Jesus speaks in archaic quotations from Scripture in incon-
gruous contrast to the more contemporary dialogue of his colleagues. Forsyth's Jesus is a mysterious, virtually disembodied spirit who is distanced both from the audience and other characters. Although his presence provokes a sublime peace among his faithful followers, the play sheds no light on the reason for that beatific faith. To attempt to dramatize and thereby demonstrate such a phenomenon might have been a worthy effort for Forsyth. However, none of the characters are developed to sufficient extent as to give any insight into the individual experience of either belief or disbelief. Forsyth's play is only a shallow historical fictionalization of a Gospel event. It relies so much on a weak fictional development, it thereby trivializes both its history and the individual experiences of its fictional agents.

Three other plays of the twentieth century which draw largely upon events from the Gospels and present Jesus in a protagonist role are *The Son of Man* by B. Russell Herts, *Dear Judas* by Robinson Jeffers, and *Son of Man* by Dennis Potter. Each of these scripts diverges drastically in its intent from the original thematic thrust of the Gospel accounts and consequently modifies severely the content and purpose of the events it selects. Herts presents a Jesus who desires not deification but rather to have a lasting
impact as a radical thinker and moral teacher. Jeffer's Jesus is caught in a mystical struggle which involves the torment of the man's spiritual identity as his death is replayed throughout eternity. The most recent of the three, Potter's *Son of Man*, portrays a manic depressive, self-proclaimed Messiah whose delusions of grandeur are mixed turbulently with a recurrent identity confusion.

**The Son of Man** by B. Russell Herts (1916)

In the notes concerning his life of Jesus, B. Russell Herts demonstrates that he is operating from a very different perspective on the aesthetic assumptions involved in dramatizing Christ than was Don Marquis. Herts' aspiration is to make "a work of art that should exhibit the world's greatest figure in a fresh and vital and inspiring way to the people of today."\(^{17}\) However he does not feel that the dramatization of Jesus necessitates any adherence to the specifics of the available historical data concerning him. Discounting the importance of issues such as the Biblical veracity, Jesus' divinity, or even his historical existence, Herts views the worthy task to be that of creating a speculative dramatization supplying a source for "the beauty and idealism which has been associated with Jesus' name

throughout modern history." He therefore has allowed himself "the greatest possible liberties" in plotting his action and building his characterization. Concerned with contemporary relevance, Herts aspires to modify the image of his Christ and thereby to make it conform to the scientific and intellectual developments of modernity. Consequently Herts has constructed a Jesus who has a very mystical psychology. He has given his character's personality a naturalistic source in the conditioning by his mother's spiritual world view. Herts takes that personality through an elaborate, largely fictionalized modification until it arrives at its final self-sacrificial stage. Among the authors discussed here, Herts takes the broadest liberties with the historical accounts and ends up with the story of a fictional Jewish martyr whose situation generates moderate dramatic interest. However Herts claimed originally to be illuminating the content of the historical Christ phenomenon. His play is too inadequate dramatically and too inconsistent thematically to come up to that initial thematic aspiration.

Herts establishes the basis for his creative interpretations of Jesus' situation in the first act. Set in 22 A.D.

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18 Herts, p. 9.
19 Ibid., p. 10.
20 Ibid., p. 28.
in Nazareth, the act attempts to present a rationale for Jesus' decision to begin a ministry while keeping his motivations separate from any sense of divine necessity or mission. Even before he has begun a public ministry, Jesus already is the foe of the Jewish establishment at least in Nazareth. They view him as a religious/political anarchist and radical. In a surprising plotting decision, Herts has Pontius Pilate present as a concerned friend from Jesus' young adulthood. Pilate functions as the realistic, if not entirely objective, gauge of Jesus' behavior. Pilate expresses a concern in each act relevant to the possible consequences of Jesus' ministry at that point. He views Jesus' attitudes as dangerously antagonistic to the conventional structure of the small town religious hierarchy and offers to take Jesus with him to Jerusalem. Herts tries to humanize his Jesus by showing his power with illness and emotional and spiritual crises not to be miraculous in the least. Herts uses particularly an incident in which Jesus calms a woman thought to be possessed by bolstering her self-image with assurances that a divine love exists within her to show Jesus as a deft psychologist rather than a supernatural healer. It is an understandable character dimension for one who seeks to conform the Biblical Christ to a modern scientific view.
The major thrust of Herts' first act is to ground the aspirations and spirituality of his Jesus in his unusual spiritual and emotional relationship with his mother. This Jesus has an almost worshipful love for Mary. This dedication to her is presented as particularly significant given Jesus' emotional innocence and childlike openness as suggested in such a speech as,

Beautiful mother, dearest one! Oh, how I love the world today! Every speck that fills the air, and the beams of glory that cast glow upon glow on the world. I would romp with every child of Galilee, tear across the meadows and hillsides, loving the beasts of the fields and the flowers and ferns, and all that gives life and joy to the children of men. 21

This passage demonstrates a rather naive emotional enthusiasm characteristic of his personality which Jesus later describes as the "bursting soul of youth." 22

Mary claims credit for having shaped her son into the almost frantic lover of mankind that he is. Herts has striven to give Jesus' compassion for human dilemmas a simple psychological base when he has Mary say,

Jesus, from all the ages have I carved thee; from all experience of all mothers; from all loves and all desires; from the vile lusts of David's concubines, and from the unknown glory of Isaiah's passion. All of this is in you. All that a mother

21 Herts, p. 29.
22 Ibid., p. 32.
could drain off from the impulses that made her seek the stars; that came like blinding furies sweeping across desert sands—such things are thickened in your blood; such things and countless other hopes and fears and loves I have uprooted from the ages and planted bleeding in your heart.23

The Jesus this Mary has produced is self-dedicated to "help man in the world."24 For some unrevealed reason, this man holds the optimistic belief that his life will hold special impact throughout history. When seen in relation to his diffuse, naive behavior, that assumption not only seems dramatically improbable but rather pathetically self-deluding. The major problem with Herts' specific scientific motivation for Jesus' actions is that it becomes too self-consciously metaphysical and poetically abstract as represented above in Mary's speech. Herts tries to make the spiritual dimension of his Jesus more accessible to the modern scientific view. However, his scientific stance is so nebulous and mystical that his Jesus becomes even more enigmatic.

By Act 2, Jesus emerges clearly under Herts' heavy hand in his ministry with the tensions which will eventually precipitate his downfall. Herts makes a strong point

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23Herts, p. 32.
24Ibid., p. 29.
of picturing Jesus as an almost superhumanly charismatic speaker whose teaching commands not only the attention of all human listeners but even of the natural world as well. He is a gentle, passive speaker whose teachings of a Utopian world in which there is no evil ironically elicits violent mob responses from his crowds of listeners. This Jesus has emerged as a strong political influence because of his command of popular support. He is forced to decide about his religious and political aspirations both by his disciples who clamor for immediate revolt and by the priests who seek to bargain for a share of his following. The Jesus of Herts' second act is not such an innocent leader dedicated to meeting human want. He has become a powerful charismatic leader with an otherworldly perspective who oddly does not really know to what it is that he aspires. As he sends his followers before him into Jerusalem, he has a recurrent premonition of his eventual martyrdom.

The tension between the Jewish desire for revolution and Jesus' decision to take a pacifist response builds in the third act. Herts begins to draw more heavily on teaching recorded in the Gospels in this act. However, it is confusing in its effect. It is difficult to discern the character's behavioral logic by examination of his single discourse. Herts has made a disjointed compilation of various Scriptural passages into a single teaching. The
argument that emerges is neither internally coherent nor seemingly relevant to the character's situation. Suddenly this Jesus is promising his listeners the possibility of eternal life, but in the context of his previous abstract references to God and man's spiritual nature one is bewildered to know where this promise has surfaced from and to what it specifically refers. In reaction to the impracticality and incohesiveness of his teaching, the disciples led by Peter take over the Messianic ministry for themselves and cause a riot in the Temple. This conveniently leaves Jesus facing the repercussions of the revolutionary movement he has precipitated unintentionally.

The final act is concentrated on Jesus' attempt to justify to his disciples the necessity and significance of his martyrdom. He states, "Because I am now to die in the midst of my life, my work will live as a gentle breath, cooling the brow of the mighty men throughout the ages." Even when his old pragmatic friend Pilate offers to stall the Jewish officials while he makes an escape, Jesus refuses because he is obsessed with the necessity of his demise. Suddenly the mother Mary surfaces with encouragement for her son about the need for his self-destructive mission.

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25 Herts, p. 70.
The drama ends with Jesus blessing his followers before he is led away by Roman guards.

Jesus' position in this act solidifies the portrait given him by Herts throughout the play. We are presented with an eccentric, impractical itinerant philosopher who feels an obsessive love for mankind which emerges from an extreme, impressionable devotion to his mother. His teachings are abstract and disjointed at best and seemingly misunderstood and/or disregarded by his listeners. His impact is of only fleeting political significance, apparently no more than a minor embarrassment to the political and religious establishment. It can only seem ironic that someone nineteen hundred years later should identify this character as the "world's greatest figure." In his attempt to make his Jesus scientific and modern, Herts has constructed a rather pathetic, self-deluding, and self-victimizing martyr who will elicit sympathy, but hardly the intended inspiration.

Dear Judas by Robinson Jeffers (1929)

Jeffers has constructed a verse drama which presents a metaphorical struggle between the spirits of Jesus, Judas, Mary, and, to a much lesser extent, Lazarus. That conflict is set in a timeless framework in which the turmoil of those spirits is shown as unending and unfulfilled. The play
contains passages of marvelous narrative and descriptive poetry. It is also intriguing because of its symbolist conventions in which the majority of the physical action is played out either in dumb show or is suggested by the actions of a single character. Jeffers' Jesus is a spiritual being caught in a dilemma of identity. He believes himself to be a superior being, but he must build and maintain his self-image through an intangible faith in his innate power to command his destiny. The portrait of Jesus given is dynamic particularly in the depiction of his mental process of settling upon his self-assessment. However the major flaw with the play is the difficulty in securing the exact significance of the unsettled time framework of the action. Other than the fact that Jeffers views the actions to operate outside of the normal dimensions of past and present, Jeffers' imposition of that premise on the actions of his combatants never is used to a clear dramatic purpose.

The action of the one-act play is set in the Garden of Gethsemane in the eternal present. Jesus and Judas are there as spirits who haunt the garden in a perpetual reenactment of the events of the betrayal. There is a fascinating, yet ultimately too ambiguous, fluctuation in their interaction between that which is happening for the first time and those events which are being reenacted. The central
conflict for Judas is that the disciple was always plagued with too deep a sense of grief over other men's sorrow. Judas' progression towards the betrayal is a fulfillment of Jesus' promise that Jesus will save him by having him do the "cruelest thing imaginable." 26 Jeffers uses a dumb show to theatricalize the events of the arrest that frames the personal introspection of motives in the two major characters.

The Woman who is identified with the Night comes and is used to establish the recurrent theme that all men are caught in a net of fate. This philosophical image seems to be at the center of all the major characters' conflicts. It is apparent particularly in Jeffers' crafting of Jesus, a man who wants desperately to hold command of his own destiny. Early on, Jesus asserts arrogantly to Judas that he had come to view himself as the Son of God through his understanding of prophecies, personal visions, fasting, and John's baptism. He is bitter towards his mother for having concealed his identity from him. In an exchange between Judas and the Woman who is revealed to be the mother Mary, Jesus is characterized as full of self-deluding pride in his insistence on exalting himself in Jerusalem in a bloodless revolt. In corroboration of Judas' assessment that Jesus is

deluded by praise, the Christ rambles about his aspirations for power which are to be culminated in his self-proclamation in Jerusalem. There is an internal struggle apparent but it seems to be one between false modesty and raging self-exultation. Pictured by Jeffers in a blaze of self-glory, Jesus' protest, "It is not my desire/ But even a bitterness to me to be called a kin; yet to this purpose I was born," seems hollow when set against his later assertion, "I tell you that if these people should dare be silent the very stones of the pavement would shout Hosanna."27

As described by Judas, Jesus' attack on the Pharisees and his scourging of the Temple merchants were only petulant lashings out in disappointment for not receiving the recognition he felt due him. Jeffers seems to be presenting a Jesus who considered himself God because individuals such as Judas had made him their "God."28 He is a spectacular, yet potentially dangerous person whom listeners regard "With fear/And fascination, like birds charmed by a serpent."29 Judas' motivation for betrayal is his desire to put a stop to Jesus' egocentric disregard for the nation's welfare which he jeopardizes.

27 Jeffers, p. 10.
28 Ibid., p. 25.
29 Ibid., p. 29.
Jeffers creates an effective pivotal exchange between Jesus and Mary. Confronted with her arrogant, almost power-mad son, Mary attempts to warn him of Judas’ betrayal. But he is too infatuated with his persuasive powers as he says,

Did you not see me use them at pleasure? Sting them with words until the stones jumped in their hands./ And show the other side of my heart and conquer them?30

Jesus is disoriented temporarily when he learns that the story of his virgin birth was only a lie to avert the shame for Mary’s sin. However, his hubris reasserts itself and, as he forgives his mother’s sin, he insists that he has a “faith that is the fountain of my life.”31 With the strength of that faith, he will surely conquer, he thinks. His pride is shown by Jeffers to extend from his present through the future when he fairly raves about possessing men’s souls and lives through their worship of his death on the cross.

This Jesus is strongly aware of the role of God (as an impersonal force of fate) commanding all men’s lives. He comforts Judas with the necessity of his act of betrayal, insisting that “it is the honor of all men living to be dupes of God.”32

30 Jeffers, p. 31.
31 Ibid., p. 35
32 Ibid., p. 44.
The slavery to that inevitable fate is the core of forgiveness in this Jesus' view. In a mystical enactment of the prayer in the Garden with his disciples acted by mutes, Jesus views himself pulled by the necessity of fate to confront the demands of the World (embodied by Rome). He sees His blood sacrifice as an inevitable appeasement of the World and fleetingly considers himself to be just another victim trapped in the fatalistic net. However Jeffers' Jesus senses triumph through his lasting impact which involves the horrible demands of the religion he has inspired. He is exultant in that he has known the glory of God in his lifetime. He sees that all men are driven by God towards His, not their, desired end.

After Jesus' arrest and removal from the action, Jeffers jarringly shifts his major focus from the relationship of Jesus and Judas to a concentration on Mary in her reaction to her son's situation. Insistant on his physical triumph, she progresses through disbelief that "Your son/ Has chosen His tools and Made His own death, he has chosen a painful death in order to become a God." Jeffers has picked too convenient a device in his sudden insertion of Lazarus into the action. The man conveniently ties up the major thematic and dramatic loose ends by reconciling Mary to the spiritual triumph of her son's fate and Judas to the necessity of his

Jeffers, p. 48.
function in the fatalistic plan. Lazarus speaks for Jeffers in proclaiming that Jesus will be worshipped as a God because he has chosen and made his own fate.\textsuperscript{34} The play ends with Lazarus’ assessment of Judas’ suicidal end of his grief as an expression of praise to “God after the monstrous manner of mankind.”\textsuperscript{34}

Jeffers has written a play that has compelling speculative portraits of the internal struggles of his major characters. He has placed them in an alluring theatrical framework of illusory dumb show and pantomime. However the work fails because of the uncontrolled vastness of its aspirations. He has imposed an intriguing, but finally perplexing time flexibility on the action which confuses the dramatic resolution. Have these spirits really died and, if not, then what is the significance of their repeated demises? Yet his protagonist, Jesus, who is portrayed as the sole master of fate, is never convincingly built as a heroic victor but rather as an arrogant megalomaniac in the greater portion of the play’s action. There are vaulting spiritual implications attached to the struggle of the combatants who operate generally on a surprisingly ordinary human level. That uncertain flux between finite humanness and infinite spirituality makes the play a worthwhile, yet unsatisfying, dramatic exercise.

\textsuperscript{34}Jeffers, p. 49.
Son of Man by Dennis Potter (1970)

Potter presents the most distinctly modern and cynical view of the nature of the Christ phenomenon of any script discussed here except possibly Jesus Christ Superstar. That rock opera's hero interestingly is similar in many respects to the characterization of Potter's Jesus figure. He is depicting Jesus as the manic-depressive itinerant preacher who chooses a plan for self-glorification that finally leads him to self-destruction. Potter's eccentric Jesus is given to bursts of irrationality usually tied to his masochistic pursuit of some sort of universalist experience of God. Potter's script suffers from too many scenes and often only cursory development of individual elements. However it is an interesting representative of a modern socio-psychological rationalization for the phenomenon that precipitated the Christian movement.

Potter immediately establishes his viewpoint on Jesus' character in the first and third scenes which present Jesus in his wilderness period of fasting and, in this case, self-abuse. This Jesus is clearly a confused individual whose actions would seem to be compelling only in the sense of their insane curiosity. Potter draws a jabbering, crazed Jesus who sits huddled on the ground saying,
Is it me? ... Is it? Is it time? TIME?
(Silence. He huddles closer into himself. Then he lifts his head, like one listening.)
Time. Time for—I HEAR YOU.
(Pause)
I am listening. I am—oh, speak. Speak! Please my father. Speak to me. Speak to me—e! My God, My God! God of Abraham and Moses—(he babbles.) He is coming. It is time. It is time . . . time . . .
time . . . time . . . time . . .
(The word, repeated over and over, "dies into him.
He sinks down into himself, virtually comatose.)

Later, in scene 3, Jesus is at the brink of collapse and takes his hallucination of tasting bread in a stone as a sign that he is called to a Messianic role. Potter's Jesus is a wild man who responds to his crazed self-realization with "a shrill, harsh, almost demented laugh."

Potter spends a great deal of time in establishing a socio-political climate in which the ramblings of such a deranged character could have been regarded with worshipful reverence. He shows the Roman persecution of a zealot agitator who cries out for political and religious reform to a crown of peasants. In this incident, Potter makes unwise use of a trance-like response from the crown as they mechanically chant, "He-is-coming, He-is-coming."

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36 Ibid., p. 25.
37 Ibid., p. 13.
Potter uses such crowd responses throughout in a manner which is inconsistent given his realistic psychological detail in the handling of individuals. The playwright lingers on the degradation of the Jewish state to establish a receptive environment for his irrational protagonist. A strong example is scene 4 in which the complete action is that of a leper dragging himself by a stick through a street until he finds a scrap of garbage and eats it.\(^{38}\)

There is a great deal of interplay between Pilate, as an aggressive, and cruel military tyrant and Caiaphas, as the compromised, self-serving head of the Jewish establishment. To establish the necessary relationship between the two sides that will facilitate Jesus' quick demise, Potter has a scene in which Pilate concedes the covering of Roman standards in Jerusalem if the Jewish officials will pledge to put down any religious unrest that would provoke revolt. It is also important to note that Potter makes a point that radicals proclaiming themselves to be the Messiah were commonplace. This is a dangerous element for him to introduce in that it undermines the final impact of his drama. He never presents any credible suggestion of why therefore Jesus' impact should have been any greater than those other short-lived agitants. Foreshadowing of Jesus' fate is present in the later

\[^{38}\text{Dennis Potter, } \text{Son of Man} \text{ (London: Andre Deutsch, 1970), p. 9.}\]
crucifixion of a would be Messiah as a public demonstration ordered by Pilate. Potter also uses the blatant visual motif of a cross in the background for a recurrent emphasis of Jesus' impending martyrdom.

The relationship between Jesus and his intimates (Potter only uses five disciples) demonstrates the appeal of the man to his followers. He seems to have the unsettling and exotic appeal of an insane person as he confronts them with his broken conversation and bizarre forcefulness.

Peter: I said-- what you staring at?
Jesus: You.
Peter: Well don't.
Jesus: Why not?
Peter: Makes me feel uncomfortable.
Jesus: Why?
Peter: What?
Jesus: Why?
Peter: You've got a cheek. I'll thump you one in a minute . . .
Andrew: Peter-- looks like-- Peter!
Jesus: You can hit me if it makes you feel more comfortable.
Peter: For God's sake!
Jesus: Do not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.
Peter: Now look here--
Jesus: Do not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.\(^39\)

Like many other dramatic Jesus figures, this one is disarming but he is unusual because he principally is that way because of his disorienting irrationality. Potter's Jesus does not have sincere authority or compelling compassion evident in

\(^{39}\) Potter, p. 23.
other Christs. This Jesus is unflagging in his demand of commitment from the simple lower class workers, Peter and Andrew. Forcing them into a prayer of dedication, he sweeps them along into an almost whimsical decision to follow him.

In the later portrayal of Jesus' relationship with his disciples, the fascination with his crazed torment comes to the fore as their principal motivation for following Jesus. This teacher is strangely compelling in his personal turmoil as when Andrew describes his sight of Jesus' praying,

He was choking on bile and— and-- blood.

And as I looked-- as I-- he-- I saw him topple into his own spew.

And-- and he looked straight in front of him. He didn't look up. Not up. Just straight in front of him-- and-- like it was you or me he was talking to-- he said 'Father-- please, Father. Let me be just a man!'

(Pause)

I will follow him to the ends of the earth. 40

There does not seem to be much doubt about the psychological instability of the character, but such testimony from his followers seems to suggest a fundamental instability in the disciples as well. The devotion to such a hapless, tormented figure as this is more comparable to the fascinated dedication to a Charles Manson villain than to a saintly hero.

40 Potter, p. 34.
As the play progresses, Potter seems more interested in reestablishing the climate for his protagonist's sudden end than in concentrating on gradually developing a full characterization for him. There is a scene in which Caiaphas ridicules both the Roman oppressors and the Jewish revolutionaries. That scene is followed by another in which Pilate orders the immediate suppression of a revolutionary movement in Samaria. Potter inserts a melodramatic scene in which a weak member of a file of Samaritan prisoners is beaten to death by a gang of Romans.

The first act ends with a sermon delivered by Jesus in the hills of Judah. As Potter describes him,

> Jesus is, as it were, in full flight, as though he has been speaking for some time. His physical strength and charisma have obviously grown. He speaks with tremendous urgency . . . sometimes still, sometimes jiggling on the balls of his feet, a natural orator.  

The logical question is just when and by what means did Jesus make this growth given his previous fascinating, but hardly composed behavior. Potter supplies Jesus with a modified version of the Sermon on the Mount as his address. There is a markedly modern flavor to Jesus' use of establishing a sense of corporate openness by ordering his listeners to have brief physical contact amongst themselves. Moving from an emotionally stimulating opening in which the disciples antiphonally chant a call for revenge, Jesus focuses his address

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41 Potter, p. 38.
on the radical philosophy of loving forgiveness of one's enemies. Included in the address is a portion of the Beatitudes but those Scriptural quotations as well as the rest of the teaching are invariably skewed towards the goal of forwarding his pacifist's doctrine. The speech is effective dramatically in and of itself but is unsettling as a jump in the development of the protagonist.

The second act returns its initial attention to the situation in Jerusalem as Jesus' ministry becomes an issue of interest in the city. Pilate is amused while Procula is intrigued by news of the Nazarene gaining support with his "love your enemies" philosophy. Caiaphas views Jesus as an impertinent, blasphemous charlatan who must be stopped before his pacifist views hurt Jewish freedoms. He assigns Judas to investigate despite Judas' interest in the teacher's gentle philosophy.

In a scene in which Jesus both chides and encourages his disciples, the radical change in Jesus from a scattered neurotic to a would-be manipulator of the masses is depicted in greater depth than it was at the end of the first act. Jesus has become very deft in his manipulation of crowd response; the use of parables being one of his principal techniques. Although he is still given to an occasional introspective question of his own identity, Jesus lashes out
at Peter particularly for not taking his mission seriously enough. As indicated by his statement, "I want my words to echo along the edges of the whole world! The whole wide world--do you hear me?" Jesus now wants to have fame and power over men's lives on a grand scale. A different prideful almost fatalistic element is introduced in Jesus' strange behavior. He becomes hysterically amused over the irony of man using God's provision of trees to make his fellow man suffer on the hewn wood of the cross. When Judas comes to join them, Jesus overrides his followers' suspicions because he is delighted with the rumors from Jerusalem that he is to be the Messiah. He now seems to view himself on a purposeful course of action which is aimed towards death. The wild irrationality of the earlier Jesus reemerges strongly in his explanation of how God's purposes consume him, "Oh, oh, He burns inside me! The Lord God is in my head and in my eyes and in my heart and in my mouth." In a startling flux between hysteria and composure, Jesus proclaims himself the Messiah and then orders the disciples to announce his arrival in Jerusalem.

This building psychological tension in Jesus explodes as he enters the Temple in which he "becomes possessed,"

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42 Potter, p. 59.
43 Ibid., p. 68.
and his mind wildly careens through trancelike stream of consciousness rambling about God being in all things. "I see you I really see you see you at last all colour all dark all light all shade full empty now on the tide of the sea the curling of a leaf . . . ."\(^4^4\) Such behavior even shocks the disciples who nonetheless dutifully support him. After confronting the moneychangers and merchants, Jesus switches suddenly to promising the crowd an unspecified new life. Assuming that he has established a sufficiently volatile climate about the Jew to justify their enthusiasm for him, Potter has mob support rise steadily in intensity for his protagonist. If Potter has intended to create a schizophrenic, charismatic leader who draws his listeners to fascinated obedience through the sheer spectacle of his irrationality he has succeeded. He presents the content of Jesus' teaching and purpose for his ministry in a radical context of crazed fanaticism.

A series of scenes follow in which the inevitability of the officials' opposition to Jesus is presented. Pilate is certain that Jesus' popular support is more dangerous than Barabbas' violent threats. Caiaphas insists that Jesus be arrested through Judas' work as a political precaution.

\(^4^4\) Potter, p. 76.
Potter undercuts the Pharisee's position by having him wonder if Jesus might be the Messiah.

Potter's Jesus is much more alone in Gethsemane than any other dramatic Jesus figure. Here is a character in personal torment trying to deal with the driving inner compulsion that propels him to death. Potter gives no sense of communication with a responsive higher force who gives his crisis purpose. The lonely, distraught man sees only the inexplicable inevitability of his death and tells the disciples not to resist his arrest. He seems almost amused by Judas' betrayal and tells him not to worry about the consequences.

In the trials, this Jesus baits his prosecutors to condemn him. He refuses completely to respond except by laughing at the Sanhedrin. With Pilate, he is descending and subsequently flippant in his calm response to Pilate's rage. Finally he is reduced to a whimpering mass of suffering when he is beaten brutally. In the climax at Golgotha, Potter has Jesus suffer great agony on the cross. But still the question arises, "Is it me-e?" Potter gives Jesus two of the Gospels sayings from the cross, "Father, Father, why have you forsaken me?" and "It

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45Potter, p. 96.
is accomplished." However we can not dismiss the previous self-contained torment of this manic-depressive eccentric who has brought himself to destruction for no professed tangible reason other than perhaps self-destructive fame. In that context, Jesus' final words have impact because of their enigmatic import rather than because of a clear-cut significance.

Potter has written a play which has a certain cinematic sensibility in its rapid succession of images. The play has—thematic attributes of effective modern existen­tialist drama. The approach taken in this script raises the pressing issue which was raised originally in Marquis' notes for The Dark Hours. What is the author's rationale for the historical position of Jesus particularly given the audience expectation and the documentable evidence? Presumably one would dramatize the life of Christ to try to lend some insight into the content of the phenomenon that his life presented. Part of that approach would seem necessarily to take into account the magnitude of the impact that his life has had on the course of human history in the nearly two thousand years since his death. It is a consider­ation that is inevitable in the minds of audience

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46 Potter, p. 96.
members regardless of their personal religious conviction. Because of that dimension to the Christ phenomenon, it is possible for a playwright to so craft the elements of the story as to make that lasting impact almost absurdly ironic. Potter's portrait of Jesus is such a case. Because he undercuts so consistently Jesus' impact on his contemporaries, the play has most credibility as a dramatization of the rise of some self-destructive manic leader who has dramatic, yet short-term impact such as a Manson. This dramatic Jesus does not even muster enough authority or shrewd self-control to have the magnitude of a Hitler or a Stalin. He seems hardly a figure that would have been regarded as the central focus of moralistic ideals and spiritual fulfillment for some two thousand years. Potter has drawn an interesting portrait of an influential psychotic. As a dramatization of Jesus of Nazareth, it is most worthwhile as a representative of a distinctly contemporary cynical view of a radical philosophical or mystical phenomenon.

Another approach to the dramatization of Christ's life is the focusing on his nativity and childhood. Three twentieth century playwrights have produced works that deal with Jesus solely before his adult ministry began. The most significant is Maxwell Anderson's Journey to Jerusalem, a play employing the story from Luke of Jesus at
the Temple when he was twelve years old. The play is a dramatization of the first recognitions by the man of his Messianic role. *Seed of Adam* by Charles Williams is a poetic nativity play which emphasizes Jesus in his role as the redeemer of man's fall in original sin. The third play, *Bethlehem*, by Laurence Housman, is a very traditional recreation of the nativity story of the shepherds and the wise men. It is a drama in which the Virgin Mary functions as a prophetic spokesperson for the infant Jesus. Because these plays deal with Jesus well before the major thrust of his life ministry, they will receive lesser attention here than the other plays that discuss the adult Christ.

*Journey to Jerusalem* by Maxwell Anderson (1940)

Anderson's play was written at the beginning of World War II in Europe as an indirect response to contemporary militaristic demonstrations of modern man's loss of faith in his spiritual identity. The author expressed a concern that contemporary society was moving away from an appreciation for its great arts and religious traditions. Those were the bases for society's value of human worth and dignity. He asserts pointedly that the play is not intended to serve as a didactic persuasion towards specific Christian doctrine. However, Anderson suggests that in the story
of the child Jesus' experience during Passover in Jerusalem lies an effective dramatic metaphor for man's searching for a foundation to his identity centered in a personal spiritual meaning. It is towards that end that this whole drama is shaped.

The three-act drama tells in fairly elaborate terms the story of Jesus going with his parents to the celebration of the Passover when he was twelve years old. In his discussions with the scribes and Pharisees at the Temple, there is the first recognition made of his unique identity as the Son of God, although that realization is primarily significant only to the boy and his parents at the time. To promote dramatic interest Anderson introduces a rather melodramatic conflict in his emphasis on the paranoid searchings for the Messiah by the corrupt and broadly villainous ruler, Herod Antipas. That dimension to the plot serves to provide major dramatic crises in the first two acts. In the first act, the identity of Jesus, known as Jeshua here, must be suddenly and yet carefully concealed as the family enters the city because soldiers are searching for a child who fits Jesus' description. Then, in the second

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act, Jeshua is saved from capture through the fatal heroics of a sympathetic Zealot who tried to protect his young friend whom he knows to be the Messiah. Both of those events function fairly well to provide compelling dramatic tension as the central, personal revelation of the boy's identity progresses. The use of the Herod stimulus in the third act is less effective. Herod orders the abusive enslavement of Hebrew men to build his new palace in the hope that it will precipitate a revolt in which the Messiah will be exposed and thereby become vulnerable. However, when the officer forces Jeshua's family to work for Herod, the situation results only in the boy's submission along with the rest of the family. Anderson's effort yields only a simple recognition of the coming of a change in that national situation.

In both of those first two crises, Anderson utilizes a fictional character, Ishmael, who serves as a major agent for the execution of the necessary circumstances. Ishmael is a rather shallow character who has been placed in the action to help in externalizing the central revelation Jeshua must make in the play. Whereas Jeshua's parents are apprehensive to reveal their knowledge of Jesus' identity because of the possible repercussions, Ishmael forces the issue and catalyzes the revelation. Ishmael is a renegade rebel who has been certain that he
would see the Messiah before he died. When he recognizes in the boy the attributes required, he insists on presenting the role to the lad so he may look towards his adult spiritual role. Although the presence of Ishmael is functional dramatically, it is denied the status of a well-rounded characterization because of the limited dimension accorded to the character by Anderson. Ishmael is little more than an aggressively impulsive radical who is capable of acts of heroism because of the untempered enthusiasm with which he acts.

The major thematic action of the play lies in the middle act in which Jeshua is at the Temple. He makes a deep impression on the Sanhedrin with his lucid insight into the identity and character of the Messiah as found in the scriptural prophecies. Jeshua is unusually mature and polite in his address to the priests. Two interesting dimensions of his view of the Messiah are presented. Jeshua believes that the Messiah will be primarily a military leader as do the other Jewish characters. However, that view is soon modified with the intervening insight from Ishmael. Jeshua also insists repeatedly that the Messiah will be a finite human being who will be able to act extraordinarily only because of unusual personal assistance from God. This is a specific interpretative manipulation of the Messianic office by Anderson which is opposed
to the Biblical view of the simultaneous identity of the Messiah as man and God. Jeshua begins to realize that he will serve this Messianic role when he learns of a prophecy in the book of Micah that says the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, a fact hidden by his parents during his youth. As means of foreshadowing his later ministry in opposition to the Hebrew establishment, Jeshua says that he does not sense the presence of God in the Temple but he blames that feeling on his own youthful understanding. The exchange between Jeshua and the Sanhedrin is the most satisfying passage in this otherwise somewhat superficial melodrama.

In the second scene of the act, the certainty of his Messianic identity is further presented particularly through the actions of Ishmael. Although his parents eventually agree to tell him the reason for their flight into Egypt after his birth, it is left to Ishmael to prompt Jeshua's acknowledgement of the truth of the visions that he had as a little boy. Ishmael refers to the "suffering servant" passages in Isaiah to explain to Jeshua that the Messiah must first suffer sacrificially before he achieves his triumph. His conquest is to be of men's hearts and minds in a faith of love. Although Jeshua is apprehensive about the prospect of suffering, Ishmael assures him that he will believe and understand when he is older. Their
contact is disrupted abruptly by Anderson's reassertion of the Herodian threat in the attack by a centurion that ends in Ishmael's death.

The weakest aspect of Anderson's dramatic development comes at the end. After he has completed his portrayal of Jeshua's search for a spiritual identity with reasonable success, he then imposes a dramatic statement of the individual's need to have faith in human dignity and to oppose injustice. Consistent with the previously established separation of the Messiah from a direct tie to divinity, Anderson has Jeshua respond humanistically to Herodian abuse. He tells his mother,

There's to be no help come down from God. Our help must come from within, from our hearts, from those who are willing to die rather than accept injustice. I must determine truth according to my soul and speak it and die for it-- hoping somehow it will prevail long after I'm dead.48

In the decision to present such an ambivalent self-image in terms of the lasting impact of his ministry in this and other plays, the Jesus figure is given less of a firm base of self-confidence than found in the Biblical Jesus: certainty of longrange impact through the work of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps in regards to this aspect, personal uncertainty is more serviceable dramatically than firm resolution would be. The play's conclusion

48 Anderson, p. 103.
centers on the reading of a passage from the apocryphal book of Enoch which suggests the need for national freedom and the necessity for individual faith. That resolving action stands as a gratuitous assertion of the author's personal political concern that operates outside the basic confines of his established dramatic character action. Nonetheless Anderson has constructed a workable dramatic speculation of the elements involved in the young Messiah's self-image.

**Seed of Adam** by Charles Williams

This short one-act play serves as a poetic examination of the metaphysical elements involved in the entry of the Christ persona into the stream of humanity. The plot is confusing in its abstraction but basically centers on the interaction between Jesus' parents, both direct children of the fallen Adam, and the three worshipping kings who represent different aspects of the human experience. Before the house of Adam who functions as an everyman father figure of mankind, Mary, Joseph, and the Holy Child are sought by two kings, one representing Wealth and the other Knowledge. Both are derided by a chorus of mankind for following wrong courses to Paradise. The betrothal of Mary to Joseph and the anunciation by Gabriel of her blessed pregnancy (which is performed here in Hebrew) are reenacted symbolically. Mary identifies her union with
the God-force of Love. The third king who represents death through sin comes with his mother, Hell, to search for the Child. Adam is transformed into Octavius Caesar and orders a census which counts the dead of the ages. He comments that Jesus was never numbered among the dead. Afterwards there is a balletic attack by the death forces on Mary and Joseph in which the husband but not the wife is defeated. The third king explains that he has been victorious as death over mankind until now Christ has brought a new lasting source for life. The play ends with a long poetic litany of praise for the triumph of everlasting life in the Christ's life and sacrifice.

Generally this script makes for pleasant poetic reading but would be a plaguingly abstract work as a theatrical experience. The flux that takes place in the use of the Adam metaphor is particularly confusing. There is too much florid development of imagery towards no active effect particularly in the explanation of individual metaphysical roles. The most successful theatrical element is the use of dance to present large physical action such as the fighting. In total effect, the play is obscure in its dramatic action and appears only to function as an excuse for a litany of praise that ends it.
Bethlehem by Laurence Housman (1927)

Of all the twentieth century scripts discussed in this study, this work by Housman is probably closest to the medieval tradition of the handling of the Jesus story as a mystery play. The action of the play portrays briefly the adoration by the shepherds and kings of the Christ child. Both events are overlapped so that they present a compact cumulative effect of praise for God's provisions in Christ.

There is an opening chorus of greeting and explanation followed by a short pastoral scene in which the stereotypical characters of the shepherds are introduced. There is a sense of obligatory transition from fear to joyful acceptance in their reaction to the news that Gabriel and a chorus of angels bring of the Christ's nativity. The three kings arrive seeking Love, Knowledge, and Peace respectively and are then guided by Gabriel to Bethlehem.

With the adoration of the child first by the parents and then by the visitors, the most significant aspects of the play's approach emerge. Both Mary and Joseph regard the baby entirely in his role as God and evidence no sense at all of his identity as their human son. Mary becomes the focus and guide of attention. Their adoration

of her, separate from regard for the Child serves to almost deify her in an intercessory role between mortals and God. This is very apparent in the repeated insertions of the "Hail Mary" litanies chanted by the characters as part of their addresses to her. Housman gives Mary supernatural significance when he has the mother heal one of the blind shepherds as a reward for his faith. Both the shepherds and the kings ask for Mary's prayers for them, insisting that they can achieve God's blessing through her intervention. The action of adoration ends with Mary serving as a spokesperson for the Christ, granting them eternal life in a passage of poetic imagery which foreshadows both Jesus' institution of Communion and his sacrificial martyrdom. Before closing the play with a carol of praise calling for faith in the "Maid and the Holy Child," Housman clears the playing area by having Joseph take his family into Egypt at Gabriel's instructions.\textsuperscript{50}

A play such as this that stands so firmly in the medieval tradition presents more of a tableau vivant than a human drama. The characters are limited almost entirely to spiritual symbolism rather than personal identities. The play functions more as a religious

\textsuperscript{50}\textit{Housman, p. 178.}
ritual than as a dramatic entertainment. The formality and the use of archaic poetic speech place the experience into a distanced past alien to the immediate situation of the viewer. Such an effort emphasizes only the mystical spiritual dimension of Christ while neglecting any dimension of his human experience. Such an approach is distinctly different from the psychological treatments of Jesus found in most of the plays discussed here.

It is apparent that the issues of the writer's concepts of melodrama, tragedy, and historical validity should be dealt with for critical clarity before there is anymore of the discussion of specific scripts. Those three concepts which imply unintentioned negative connotations easily require explanation. In this study, the sense of "melodrama" is not pejorative. A melodrama is a play which involves a dramatic action setting a heroic protagonist agent against a villanous agent (often in the case of these plays a group rather than an individual.) The conflict between the two agents may be seen to embody a clash between idealistic representations of good and evil. The antagonist agent is the prime mover of the action in his attacks on the protagonist. Traditionally, the melodramatic protagonist is triumphant in defeating his villanous opponent. A tragedy is not an inherently more successful type of play. However, for aesthetic
consistency and unified effect, there are elements of tragedy which are mutually exclusive of those of melodrama. A tragedy involves the protagonist in a self-initiated conflict against the antagonistic agent. The protagonist suffers in the action which uses an error in his judgement or fundamental flaw in the protagonist as a major impetus for the conflict. Although the character suffers some sort of loss (often death), there is a clear sense of moral triumph in the protagonist's success at coming to grips with his identity and/or moral/ethical situation. The problem with many of the scripts discussed here and elsewhere in the study (principally Tempted in All Points and The Son of Man here) lies in the mixture of both melodramatic and tragic elements without the fulfillment of the potential of either form. Too often the plays have melodramatic characterizations and developments but end with what seem to be intended as tragic resolutions.

In this study, historical validity is not considered a necessity for a script's aesthetic success. However, since the plays deal with a historical figure, a possible function of the scripts is to elucidate dramatically on the historical phenomenon of that character. This is obviously more markedly true of some scripts such as The Dark Hours, Herts' The Son of Man, and Potter's Son of Man than others
such as *Dear Judas* and *The Seed of Adam*. Therefore, it is critically valid to observe whether the scripts have historical validity or not. The observation is only a judgement when the scripts aspire to the thematic function of historical reporting and analysis. The writer of this study does not intend historical validity to be an aesthetic issue inherently.

In a summary survey of the scripts examined in this chapter, there are various difficulties emergent in the two groupings evident in the author's purposes, those that approach the subject as an attempt to preserve the intent of the Gospel accounts and those which are more freely speculative in presenting individual positions as to the character of Jesus. Both basic approaches have fundamental traps which are demonstrated by the mixed success of the various plays.

The principal difficulty apparent in the plays of the reverential type is that of creating a sense of compelling human action in their dramatic conflicts. Such pageant-like scripts as the *Black Hills Passion Play* and the *Pilgrimage Play* express no strong sense of a humanity in their dramatic actions. Slavishly using only the specific content of the Gospel accounts, the plays lack a vital sense of continuity and the characters tend towards one-dimensional stereotype. This unduly reverential
tack which utilizes the disjointed sequence of major Gospel episodes with no attempt to string them on a strong throughline of action results in a distancing of the experience from the viewer rather than vitalizing the events for him. Bethlehem by Housman in its ritualistic formality and mystical one-dimensional characters also falls into the same category. Although they flirt with the potential for theatrical ritual and abstract dramatization, these scripts have little more theatrical vitality than would the process of showing some sort of visual aid while reading aloud a Biblical story. In moderately successful contrast is Marquis' The Dark Hours which has the potential for a vital stage portrait of Christ if one were to decide to disregard his convention of concealing Jesus visually. Through the use of the detailed sequence of the Passion week events found in the Gospels, Marquis has created a drama that has a strong dramatic logic and consistency both in plot and characterization. He has not belabored either aspect of the mixture of humanity and divinity in Jesus, but his characterization of the Nazarene acknowledges the presence of both. Marquis' fictionalization supports while never violates the content of the portions of the Gospels which he intends to dramatize. The Dark Hours is also notable for its experimental conventions which serve to vivify the action.
Ferris' play embellishes its central conflict too heavily with a romantic, cliched subplotting. The Forsyth script is the worst offender because it substitutes attention to comic machinations of secondary plot importance for the necessary development of its primary dramatic action.

The difficulties with Jesus' character in the divergent scripts is indicative of problems also evidenced in other radical works discussed later. Those plays tend to discard the coherent portrait of Jesus available in the Gospels, which is certainly their prerogative. However, they do not substitute adequately another equally workable characterization. Too many times, fictional and historical material with mutually exclusive thematic implications are mixed to enigmatic dramatic effect. Because there is no solid, credible pattern established in the protagonist's behavior, the thrust of the drama becomes thoroughly ambiguous. Herts' *The Son of Man* goes far afield into an enigmatic, mystical realm in his attempt to give a scientific and therefore supposedly objective justification for Jesus' motivations. Consequently, he ignores the possibility of a logical justification inherent in the historical events which he nonetheless depends on for his almost random plot development. Jeffers' *Dear Judas* contains passages of thrilling poetry but its vague mysticism muddles the acute psychological struggles presented
within its characters. Williams' *Seed of Adam* also suffers from an overly complex, yet basically unresolved metaphorical framework as the premise of its action. Of these scripts, Potter's *Son of Man* is the most successful in consistently pursuing a coherent view of Jesus divergent from that in the Gospels. From the alternative interpretations of Jesus as a god, madman, or conman suggested in the previous chapter, Potter has chosen madman and pursued his choice zealously. It is not impossible but it is obviously very difficult to construct a strongly divergent portrait of Jesus from that found in the Gospels if the author relies too heavily on various passages from that source as the major substance for his dramatic action. Potter is most successful partially because he diverges from the historical record most radically and consistently.
CHAPTER FOUR
CHRIST AS A MYTHOLOGICAL FIGURE

Two of the major poets of the twentieth century, William Butler Yeats and John Masefield, attempted to use their poetic skills in dramatizing specific sections of the accounts of Jesus' life. Yeats wrote two short plays, Calvary and The Resurrection. The Masefield plays which employ Christ as a character are The Trial of Jesus, The Coming of Christ, and Easter. Another play, Good Friday, which concerns Jesus' immediate impact on the people of his day but does not actually include him as a character, will be discussed elsewhere. All of these plays evidence a more deliberately metaphorical approach in their abstraction of the content of the events they portray than is found in the other plays in this study. Combined with a desire to establish a close affiliation between the Christ story and mythological traditions from other cultures, that metaphorical approach would suggest that these playwrights lean in their treatment of the material much more towards a mythological view of the subject than found in the historical approach. The degree to which Masefield
and Yeats have been successful in crafting the Nazarene teacher and martyr into a subject for mythic tragedy and/or pageantry in their plays will be examined in this chapter.

*Calvary* by William Butler Yeats (1920)

In the earlier of his two dramatizations of the essence of the Christ experience, Yeats portrays the crucifixion in a play which is at once reminiscent of Greek tragedy and classic Noh drama. His Christ stands as a rather impersonal poetic representation of the Divine martyrdom. In the static encounters between the Christ figure and the several visitors to the cross, Yeats portrays the Christ as the instrument of a Divine "love" which pursues mercilessly its objects and imposes its power on all those who are vulnerable to its force. Rather more suggesting a narrative than a drama through the use of frequent choral commentaries by the "musicians," Yeats has constructed an emotionally detached, poetic examination of the impact of Christ's death on the range of human experience.

From the beginning, Yeats uses theatrical conventions to give a ritualistic air to his dramatic action. The drama opens with a choral ode sung by three masked musicians who unfold a large cloth to cover the bare space of the
stage. This is done so that the other players may take
t heir places behind it. The ritual ends with the refolding
of the cloth and the musicians take their places at the
rear of the stage. As Christ enters carrying his cross,
the First Musician sings a song which tells of Christ's
suffering and particularly of the mocking and rejection by
the crowd.

As the drama progresses, all of the actions are per­
formed in a simple, abstract manner which does not encumber
their metaphorical connotations with realistic detail.
Lazarus visits Christ as he arrives at Calvary for his
execution. Lazarus has come to reclaim the death which
Christ denied him in raising him from the grave. He yearns
for the solace of mortal oblivion and leaves in order to
break the grasp that Christ has on his soul. Although
not represented by physical characters, the visit of the
three mournful Marys and several other women is described
by the First Musician. Their sorrowful worship is disrupted
by the appearance of Judas. He has come to assert the
triumph he has gained over Christ's divinity with his
betrayal. Although Christ insists that all that Judas has
done was predestined, Judas claims that he has saved himself
from Christ's coercive salvation. The final visitors to
the cross are three Roman soldiers. They are intrigued
by Judas' decision to hold up the cross. As the guards
of Christ's execution, they assure him of a peaceful death and try to comfort him by telling him that they do not need his spiritual assistance. Planning to gamble for Christ's cloak, the three dance merrily about the dying man as a form of funereal entertainment. Christ cries out in despair to his heavenly Father.

The play is ended by a reversal of the ritual of the cloth. The closing choral ode concludes the recurrent imagery of birds used throughout the play in relation to various people and situations. The drama ends with the enigmatic assertion, "God has not appeared to the birds." 1 Yeats has both culminated the development of his imagery and reasserted his ritualistic approach.

Yeats' Christ does not emerge as a human individual but as a metaphorical representation of various aspects of the Christ personality that he perceives. With a character that is involved in such static, formal exchanges with abstracted emotional content, Yeats has constructed a dramatic figure who is mystical and impersonal. The Christ does not seem to hold a personal will and desire but is rather the functional operant for a larger, even

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more impersonal force identified as his "father". He is well-intentioned but insensitive to the needs of those around him. Because of his slavish subjection to a will separate from his own, he is unable consequently to address effectively the needs of certain of his contacts. Yeats presents Christ's suffering and ultimately his purpose as existing on a plain of spiritual illusion by using symbolist conventions. He is a dreamer of ideals which are beyond human grasp but which force him relentlessly towards a fatalistic destruction. This theatrical Christ is not a subject of human tragedy, but an abstract object for poetic examination of the most esoteric dramatic sort.

When Christ enters carrying a cross, he is masked as are all the other players in the drama. Clearly he is intended to serve as a theatrical abstraction on the order of the tragic Greek demigod heroes or the Japanese mythic protagonists. In the lyrical description of his situation by the First Musician, there is an immediate denial of literal physical reality not only in the drama itself but also in the action which it portrays. The First Musician seems to function as an objective poet/observer when he sings,

... Good Friday's come,
The day whereon Christ dreams His passion through.
He climbs up hither but as a dreamer climbs.
Yeats views the plight of the Divine martyr as operating
in the framework of a mystical relativism. Yeats' nar­
rator suggests that all things only seem to exist but
insists that seeming stands as men's controlling personal
reality. Yeats also uses the Musician as a representation
of the crowd when he describes Christ's humiliation by
the mockers who warn Him about His physical humiliation
('Call on your father now before your bones/ Have been
plucked by the great desert birds.')

In the exchange which takes place between Lazarus and
the Christ, there is a sense of human struggle in Lazarus' plight, but Yeats keeps the Christ consistently at a level of emotional detachment insensitive to the nature of his suitor's dilemma. This passive stage persona seems unaware even of the nature of his own actions in so far as their immediate application to others is concerned. Lazarus recounts the torment that he has suffered because God robbed him through Christ of the solace of death's end.

2Yeats, p. 450.
3Ibid.
He views Christ's actions as negligently malicious ("You dragged me to the light as boys drag out/ A rabbit when they have dug its hole away . . ."). However Christ's actions in response are never more than the objective recounting of the event. His explanations of his actions do not address Lazarus as an individual but are the expressions of an instrument of a larger commanding force ("I do my Father's will."). Throughout this exchange as well as the others Yeats keeps the interaction consistently on an esoteric, emotionally uninvolving level.

The nature of the Christ's love for his followers is suggested in the description of the mournful women. The First Musician describes their sorrowful adoration as they cleanse Jesus' feet with their tears and hair. He comments that the Christ holds a stabilizing power over the women when he says,

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Take but His love away,
Their love becomes a feather
Of eagle, swan or gull,
Or a drowned heron's feather
Tossed hither and thither
Upon the bitter spray
And the moon at the full.
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However the nature of Christ's love is not elaborated and certainly is never demonstrated so Yeats' suggestion dies

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4Yeats, p. 452.
5Ibid.
6Ibid., p. 453.
with its introduction. In this encounter, Christ is even more detached from any involvement with his visitors. This is evidenced effectively by Yeats' decision not to physicalize the women on stage and emphasized by the lack of alert reaction when the Christ says, "I felt their hair upon my feet a moment/ And then they fled away-- why have they fled?"  

In the episode with Judas, Yeats allows more dimension and activity in the Christ personality and thereby produces a more playable dramatic action. Christ says to Judas,  

You were beside me everyday, and saw  
The dead raised up and blind men given  
their sight,  
And all that I have said and taught you  
have known,  
Yet doubt that I am God.  

Here the Christ claims actively divinity but in the same speech suggests typically a lack of understanding or even awareness of the personality of his betraying follower. The dramatic push of the exchange between Christ and Judas is moved by Judas' assertion that, although he recognized the divine identity of Christ, he denied his right to hold sway over the course of his life. Against that rebellion, Yeats puts the fact that Christ has subjected himself to a higher will that desires his martyrdom if the impli-

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7Yeats, p. 453.
8Ibid.
cations of his claim ("My Father/ Even now, if I were but to whisper it,/ Would break the world in His miraculous fury,/ To set me free") are seen in light of his earlier assertion ("I do my Father's will.") The playwright maintains Christ in his role as the spokesman and chief demonstration of that divine will and power as when he insists that Judas has not achieved freedom in his betrayal because it was a predestined action. However, the argument builds when Judas asserts that his triumph has been that he has achieved freedom from Christ's salvation ("You cannot even save me.") However, that freedom is not consistent with the fact that he remains to hold the cross which puts him into the position of fulfilling a function in service to the will of that all-powerful God.

The suggestion that the power of God in Christ is valid but can not meet all individuals' needs effectively found in the episodes with Lazarus and Judas is presented more pointedly in the visit by the three Roman soldiers. Christ is struck by their detachment from his situation when he asks, "And who are you that ask your God for nothing?" They see no need to receive anything more from Christ but

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9Yeats, p. 454.
10Ibid.
11Ibid., p. 455.
his cloak and that is only so they will have a reason to gamble. The inability of Christ to speak to the lives of men such as these is suggested when the First Soldier says, "One thing is plain/ To know that he has nothing that we need/ Must be a comfort to him." 12 Surrounded by their gambler's dance of hedonistic brotherhood, Yeats finally has the Christ express an emotion of some magnitude when he cries in despair, "My Father, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" 13 Faced with a failure to affect the lives of these visitors in a positive sense, perhaps the Christ is registering a realization that he is ruled by an impersonal force that moves over and through the lives of individuals for its own purposes rather than for their benefit. The exchange between the soldiers and Christ is striking in that the soldiers are Yeats' most human characters. They thus seem to function in a different stylistic plane from the Christ.

The failure of the God figure to fulfill the wants of every human individual and the subsequent failure of those individuals to relate to Him in a spiritually gratifying relationship is asserted by the final "God has not appeared

12Yeats, p. 456.
13Ibid.
to the birds."  Throughout the descriptive commentaries, all of these characters who Christ has failed to reach effectively have been identified with bird imagery and thus they all become symbols of the spiritual relativism that Yeats presents. He does not work to deny the power of Christ's suffering and victory over death in the course of human history. However, he suggests that the God which Christ embodied in human form was not a god with whom all men could find the resolution for their souls' searchings for meaning and spiritual rest.

There is a beauty and grace to Yeats' dramatic poetry. There is also a consistent formality and abstraction of both imagery and physical action which allows the drama to operate on a mystical, symbolic level. From a theatrical viewpoint, the most interesting aspect of this esoteric drama is Yeats' use of the staging conventions of the cloth ritual, commentator musicians, and the use of masks. They create corporately a framework of Noh-based conventions which is intriguingly evocative. As an example of a dramatization of Christ's situation, Yeats' script is an interesting demonstration of the use of formalistic and symbolist stage techniques.

14Yeats, p. 457.
The Resurrection by William Butler Yeats (1931)

This later dramatization of a Passion week event by Yeats is less dramatically abstract than Calvary is. However, Yeats has gone even farther in making the Christ figure a mystical representation rather than a human characterization. The contrast which existed between the more human personas of the visitors and Christ's spiritual detachment in the earlier play is much more marked in this script in which Christ appears only as a masked man-spirit. Yeats seems most concerned with presenting what he considers the typical Greek and Hebrew views of the nature of Christ in reaction to the evidence of the resurrection. He contrasts particularly the parallel aspects of the Greek Dionysiac resurrection cult and the Christian doctrine of the risen saviour. There is an enigmatic relationship suggested by Yeats between the content of Greek mythic-based philosophy and wisdom and the impact that Christ's death and resurrection had on man's view of his experience of life and death.

Yeats employs a similar introductory device to that in the other play. He calls for three musicians to perform a ritual of the unfolding of a curtain cloth. The ritual is accompanied by a song of two strophes which presents the Dionysiac tradition of the sacrifice of the god by his followers as a central image of both the Greek and Roman
cultures. Yeats' introduction presents the Greek religious tradition he will use in the play, but it bears little relationship stylistically to the rest of the script.

The action of this play consists almost entirely of rhetorical discussion of the contrasting Greek and Hebrew viewpoints. The script begins with a discussion between the "Greek" and the "Hebrew" about their views of what was involved in the crucifixion. Their conversation is diverted to discussion of a Dionysiac ritual commemorating the pagan god's death that has been going on outside the city. The two agree on the need to defend both themselves and the remaining eleven disciples to the death from the mob that is searching for Jesus' followers. The Hebrew describes the disciples in the next room who are sharing each other's remorse in their first meal together since the Last Supper.

As the play progresses, it is obvious that Yeats is not interested in creating two human individuals involved in a dramatic action but will limit them to the function of philosophical mouthpieces. Provoked by the Greek's laughter at the sight of the empty crosses on Calvary, the Hebrew argues with him that Christ was actually a physical man and not merely a spirit. The Hebrew explains the nature of the Messianic prophecy which Jesus had appeared to fulfill. The Greek is appalled that the Hebrew
tradition entails that God must suffer as a man. The Hebrew insists that Jesus was not the Messiah. Once again their talk is interrupted by the Dionysiac celebration which is now taking place directly outside the building.

Yeats' didactic purposes prevent him from taking full advantage dramatically of the excitement and tension of the reports of Jesus' resurrection. Returning from a secret mission appointed by the Greek, the Syrian is almost drunk with excitement as he relates the story that the three Marys have seen Christ risen from the tomb. Not believing the story because of their divergent views of Jesus, the two resist the Syrian's desire to tell the apostles the story. The Syrian ridicules them for their unbelief which is tied to their limited human knowledge. The playwright presents an interesting opposing parallel as the Dionysiac worshippers outside the house mock the Christians with their ritual of the annual resurrection of the Greek god. Suddenly Yeats precipitates his climax as all this controversy is disrupted by the appearance of the phantom figure of Christ. The Greek is convinced that it is only a spirit but falls away in amazement when he discovers that "the heart of the phantom is beating!" While Christ

enters the other room to reveal himself to his disciples, the Greek asserts that in Christ the wisdom of the mythic-based cultures is overthrown and Man and God's life and death are merged in Christ's resurrection. Rather than giving his characters strong reactions of personal applicability, Yeats has them speak metaphorical summations of philosophical significance.

The drama ends with the ritual of the curtain cloth performed by the musicians. The final choral ode that concludes the drama expresses the manner in which Christ's existence has fed man's fleeting imagination.

Yeats is not so concerned in this simple drama of debate with what the nature of Christ was, but more specifically with certain aspects of what Christ was not. Christ appears only as a masked apparition in the last moments of the play. Even though Yeats demonstrates the physical reality of the resurrection in a sense, the impact of that event is limited basically to a refutation of the prevalent Greek spiritualism popular contemporary to the beginning of Christianity. Yeats has depersonalized and abstracted even more thoroughly the Christ figure in this play than he did in Calvary. He is an object for esoteric religious debate for the majority of the play rather than a vital dramatic identity with an immediate and dynamic impact on those with whom he has contact.
The primary motivating force for the drama's conflict is the contention between the Hebrew and the Greek as to Christ's identity and character. The argument has much meat for debate but yields little to promote theatrical attention. Interestingly both characters consider themselves to be "Christians." They are presented in the context of a debate which examines the nature of their fallen leader. Both characters recognize the past dominant leadership by Christ of both themselves and the disciples. This is indicated clearly by the Hebrew's assessment of the group without their standard bearer when he says, "What are we all but dogs who have lost their master?"\(^{16}\)

The Hebrew talks of the Christ as having been a prospective Messiah who failed to fulfill all the qualifications. The Greek discusses a view of the Christ as a divine, but strictly spiritual entity which could contact but not experience personally the human physical realm. The Greek's view of a metaphysical illusionistic Christ is most concisely stated in,

No god has ever been buried; no god has ever suffered. Christ only seemed to be born, only seemed to eat, seemed to sleep, seemed to talk, seemed to die.\(^{17}\)

\(^{16}\)Yeats, The Resurrection, p. 582.

\(^{17}\)Ibid., p. 583.
The Hebrew summarizes his view of Jesus' character as such:

He was nothing more than a man, the best man who ever lived. Nobody before him had so pitied human misery. He preached the coming of the Messiah because he thought the Messiah would take it all upon himself. Then someday when he was very tired, after a long journey perhaps, he thought that he himself was the Messiah. He thought it, because of all destinies it seemed the most terrible.18

Here the Hebrew suggests a masochistic, self-sacrificing dimension to the Christ's character. Yeats uses that aspect as a tie between the Hebrew martyr and the Dionysiac tradition of the sacrificed mythic god which he presents repeatedly as a parallel, yet divergent Greek counterpart to the Christian leader. In fact the recurrence of the Dionysiac image seems to serve as a major obstacle to the Greek's comprehension of the resurrection experience. The exchange between the two characters reveals ultimately more about the fundamental conflict between the first century Greek theoretical view and a Jewish orthodox interpretation of Jesus' situation than it does about the situation itself.

A dramatically stimulating identity and situation of the post-resurrection Christ is introduced by the entrance of the Syrian who brings news that Christ has appeared to

the Marys. In the account of Christ revealing himself to the women and his handling of the Roman guards at the tomb are found fleeting references to an active individual who operates from a sense of responsibility to the specific situation. Just before the phantom's appearance, there is the sudden introduction of the ironic parallel of the Dionysiac resurrection cult worship. The Hebrew says of the Greek revelers outside the house, "They have come to mock us, because their god arises every year, whereas our god is dead forever." The falsity of the sentence's conclusion is presented clearly with the entrance of the risen Christ character. He is a silent, enigmatic figure who allows the Greek to have contact with him. It is curious that despite the fact that Yeats asserts in dialogue that his point is that the Christ rose in a physical and spiritual resurrection, he asks for the character to wear only the "stylistic mask" in the play and refers to him as a "phantom figure." The characters speak of a living human individual but are confronted by an abstract theatrical symbol.

20Ibid.
The impact of Christ on the disciples is not disclosed although it seems likely to be at least one of solace for their remorse. The Syrian describes Christ as taking the time to demonstrate his risen reality to them. However, the major impact of Christ's triumph over death in the play focuses on the more esoteric consideration of its influence on Hellenistic wisdom and mysticism. The final speech of the play comes from the Greek.

O Athens, Alexandria, Rome, something has come to destroy you. The heart of a phant­tom is beating. Man has begun to die.
Your words are clear at last, O Heraclitus, God and man die each other's life, live each other's death.21

The theological content of that last statement is alluded to only here and is never explained or developed in the body of the play. Presumably the physical appearance of the risen Christ refutes the reasoning and speculation of both the Greek and the Hebrew. However, this drama presents the Christ phenomenon basically as stimulating to, but beyond the grasp of human understanding.

As a piece of dramatic theatre, *The Resurrection* holds considerably less promise for stimulation and sustaining of interest as an entertainment than did the

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earlier play. The body of the play is dedicated to the theological debate between two spokesmen of national/philosophical viewpoints. The conflict is developed on a strictly philosophical plane. The contributing secondary elements such as the Dionysiac revelers also function on that level exclusively. The play's climax comes suddenly and resolves the conflict with fairly simple theatricality. Yeats has used the earlier conventions of a bare stage, musician commentators, and masks to less advantage in this script. The play remains more a static, philosophical discussion than a theatrical drama. The play does not have the fascinating poetic imagery and evocative ambiguities of the earlier script. Neither does it hold the potential found in Galvary to be a refreshing novelty in the theatricality of its portrayal of the dramatic action. For his later play, Yeats has taken a historic action ripe with dramatic potential and reduced it to a piece of rhetorical conflict between two divergent and fundamentally archaic philosophical stances. It is not an approach which yields a fruitful theatrical product as did his earlier, more poetic approach.
The Trial of Jesus by John Masefield (1925)

In The Trial of Jesus, Masefield takes the Biblical accounts of Jesus' trials under the Sanhedrin, Herod, and Pilate as the basis for his dramatic examination of the nature and purpose of Christ's martyrdom and its impact on those who brought about his execution. Masefield has framed all this in a fairly standard melodramatic structure. He handicaps the effectiveness of his drama because he seeks to elevate it to a mythic level through the inclusion of choral odes which provide transitional commentary between episodes. He also uses a poetic prologue and epilogue, both of which operate only on a level of mythic abstraction.

Masefield purports to present a Christ who is more of a tragic human hero, a symbol of men who dare to rebel against conventional thought in order to bring hope to their fellowmen, than a divine sacrifice and saviour. Masefield however does make allusions to that second view of Christ's identity. Yet there is a strong sense in much of Christ's behavior that he is really just a functional automaton for some higher will's purpose. He does not strike us particularly as a human individual trying to achieve some self-willed purpose. Using almost exclusively quotations from Scripture as a source for Jesus' responses in fictional conversations, Masefield
creates a Jesus who is stiff and formal in his behavior. Compared to the relative success that Masefield has in portraying the very human dilemmas that determine the other characters' actions, this Jesus is markedly other-worldly and unfortunately emotionally unaffected. Masefield's dramatic impact is damaged severely by his excessively reverential and spiritualist approach to his central character that ultimately suggests him to be more of a pious, religious robot than a tragic Christian Promethean figure, which is the view Masefield suggests he intends in the choral commentaries.

Masefield has constructed a drama which alternates between realistic scenes based on the Biblical trial records and mystical poetic narratives which attempt to give the realistic events mythical significance. The first act centers on the trial of Jesus before the Sanhedrin. Using the device of the Pharisees' reviewing the evidence, the author theatricalizes his exposition about Jesus' ministry with moderate success. The major dramatic crises of the act are the results of Jesus' claims of Deity and Judas' suicidal reaction when he realizes the consequences of the testimony he gave. The second act suffers from its attempt to handle too much action in too short a span of time. Included in this act are both trials before Pilate and the intermediary hearing before Herod which is only
described here. The act ends with Jesus' stirring and dignified consolation of the mourning Marys which includes his prophecy of Jerusalem's fall. Act III contains the most fabricated material of any of the acts with its discussion by members of Pilate's court of Jesus' significance in the aftermath of his crucifixion. Containing an intriguing political compromise between Herod and Pilate, the act presents varied reactions to the incidents of Christ's crucifixion. By themselves, the three acts comprise a fairly successful realistic dramatization of the various actions of Jesus' trials.

The major stylistic difficulty of the play comes with Masefield's disruptive insertion of choral commentaries which are enigmatically relevant to the content of the acts. The play opens with a prayer and prologue which attempt to rationalize the basic thematic approach to the subject matter. In the prologue, Masefield presents an allegorical confrontation between Wisdom and Jesus which then blurs ambiguously into a realistic enactment of Jesus' arrest. The second act is introduced by a mythic treatment of the visit of the three kings who visited the baby Jesus inadvertently according to the narrative. The preface to the third act is a poetic tale about a young man's quest for a cave in which the gods are hiding. Masefield ends his drama with a didactic description
first by Jesus and then by a chorus of his significance to man's struggle for "light". Masefield encumbers his major action with these nontheatrical, intrusive sections that are confusing in their exact relevance to the straightforward realistic episodes they introduce.

The development of Jesus' characterization by Masefield is ambiguous fundamentally because his view of Christ's identity found in his choral commentaries operates from such an amorphous and vague conception of the nature of God that it overwhelms the more detailed specifics of the character found in the play's realistic passages. As the play stands, there are seemingly two different Christs operating here. One is an inhuman and mythic idealist who proclaims a universalist view of revolutionary brotherhood which is the Jesus found in the choral interludes. The other is the rather stiff, yet more human individual who suffers through the humiliation of a series of trials because of his claims to be a divine sacrifice for the propitiation of mortal weaknesses. The character suggested in the realistic actions does not complement the dramatic argument about Christ which Masefield seems to be presenting in his poetic commentaries. The argument that Christ was seeking a vague, hopeful assurance for man's searching spirit is fine as Masefield's poetic view of the Christ phenomenon
but it simply does not make sense in light of the specific claims of his earthly mission to be a source of divine vindication which are presented in the realistic action. That second interpretation is indicated primarily by Masefield's use of Scriptural passages for the majority of the character's dialogue. I will first summarize the character as presented in the realistic action and then in the mythic commentaries. Special attention will be given first to the exchange between Jesus and Wisdom—in the Prologue which operates somewhere between the two levels.

In that encounter between the apparently human Jesus and the metaphorical spirit of Wisdom, Masefield gives his initial descriptions of Christ's character. Wisdom addresses Jesus not so much as a divine sacrificial being but as a young heroic seeker of his spiritual fortune. He says,

Child of intense thought, son of light and truth,
You stand to-night at the parting of the ways.
Man, you have followed wisdom all your days,
The beauty of God has overflown your heart,
Truth has been rapture to you, you have known Happiness so intense that flesh and bone
Have shared the divine life.22

Discussing his selfless purposes, Wisdom lauds Jesus in that,

You ask but this:
To go where your poor suffering brother is,  
And give him of your life and make him feel 
That God is in him and about him always.

Your intense life gives life and cannot die  
Because it goes, past flesh, into All  
Thought,  
And from that great sea brings back to the world 
A beauty undying that is God eternal.²³

Jesus is being identified here with a universalist view of the nature of God as an abstracted spiritual force rather than a personal divine identity with will and character. As their conversation progresses to Wisdom's prophetic disclosure of the coming suffering, Jesus' responses to the spirit's questions and comments are curious in their brevity and neutrality. Jesus functions rather like an expositional straight man for the flights of poetic philosophizing given to Wisdom.

When the spirit suggests that Jesus might escape his fate, Jesus expresses in the Biblical quotation, "O God, my Father, if it be possible,/ If it be possible, let this cup pass from me/ Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt," his acceptance of the necessity to be governed by

²³Masefield, p. 4.
the specific will of a God figure whom he speaks of in personal terms.\(^ {24}\) This is an early discrepancy between the portrayal of God as an abstract spiritual force as suggested in Masefield's choral narratives and the concept of God as a personal divine individual with a recognizable, specific character as evidenced in Jesus' dialogue. The implications that may be drawn from this single discrepancy are several and troubling. If it is true that Jesus must die because he failed to conform with human traditions—as is indicated in Wisdom's comments and the choral ode which introduces the scene, then are we to assume that punishment for such nonconformity is the will of the God to whom Jesus refers as his "Father"? Or perhaps does Jesus not understand what is involved in his ministry and passion because he is speaking of those forces in such misguided terms? In this dilemma, Masefield's drama suffers rather than is strengthened by his refusal to settle on a clear and consistent view of Jesus' identity and behavior. Consequently his dramatic action is not only ambiguous, but also confusing because of a damaging thematic raggedness.

Throughout the realistic action of the play which begins with the arrest and follows through the trials,

\(^ {24}\)Masefield, p. 9.
Masefield draws so directly from Scriptural accounts with little amplification for Jesus' dialogue that there are few surprises or suggested new insights given in the major body of the dramatic action which would create a sense of dynamic suspense. In the arrest, Jesus does not condone violent opposition from the disciples, yet evidences a strength and passive defiance towards his arresters when he says, "Are you come against a thief, with swords and staves?/ When I was daily with you in the Temple/ You laid no hold upon me."²⁵ In the trial before the Sanhedrin, Jesus is calm and controlled, passively refusing to answer the baited questions of the Pharisees until pressed to either claim or deny his Christhood. He then states with quiet dignity, "You have said it, not I. Nevertheless, I say hereafter you shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power and coming in the clouds of heaven."²⁶ Later he states simply his agreement when asked if he is the "Son of God".²⁷ This passage contains more references to a specific reality for Jesus to his relationship with a personal God. Of course, perhaps all that is only self-delusion or at least

²⁵Masefield, p. 11.
²⁶Ibid., p. 27.
²⁷Ibid., p. 28.
relativistic fantasy according to Masefield's view.

Jesus again takes a relatively passive role in the encounters with Pilate. When demanded to either claim or disclaim his identity, the prisoner affirms quietly his self-proclaimed Lordship over a spiritual realm higher than an earthly kingdom. In Jesus' testimony to Pilate, he states,

What you say is true, for a king I am. To this end have I been born, and to this end am I come into the world. That I should bear witness of the truth.28

This claim of divine purpose does not jive with the much less tangible purpose that Masefield will have the spirit of Jesus make claim to at the play's end. At that time, he talks of having come to earth to bring men hope through establishment of some sort of vague, tolerant, spiritual brotherhood.29 The account given of Jesus' behavior during the crucifixion is drawn selectively from the Biblical accounts. Longinus, one of Pilate's officers, refers to Jesus' prayer of forgiveness for his persecutors, his forgiveness of the penitent thief, and his final act of commending his spirit to his Father above. We can only be struck by the sincere selfless

28 Masefield, p. 54.
29 Ibid., p. 97.
humility and intense suffering of his death as is Longinus who says to Procula, "Truly, lady, that was the Son of God, if one may say that."^0

Masefield's handling of Jesus' opponents' views of his character stimulates dramatic interest. The testimony given by the other characters is surprising in that there is considerably more positive response to Jesus personally by his persecutors than one might expect. They do not view him with personal contempt but they do see him as a dangerous political threat because of his controversial spiritual stances and great popular appeal. The only personal aggravation for his examiners comes in his passive strength under the pressure of the trial.

The most favorable characters towards Jesus (other than obviously the three Marys) are Procula, Pilate's wife, and the centurion, Longinus, both of whom are struck by the Jewish teacher's sincerity and authority in his sayings. Procula goes so far in her warning to Pilate as to say, "I believe that that man is one of the great men of our time."^1 Masefield uses the contrast between Pilate and Procula's attitudes towards Jesus as a major source for dramatic conflict.

^0Masefield, p. 94.

^1Ibid., p. 58.
There is nothing problematic about the characterization of Jesus in the realistic passages. It is in the coordination of that material with the poetic content of Masefield’s choral odes used as commentaries on his tragic hero that difficulties emerge. Masefield attempts to supply evocative metaphorical parallels to the Christ phenomenon in his odes, but they bear little helpful insight into the body of his realistic drama. Actually, they serve only to confuse the issue of his identity. It is intriguing that Masefield has not coordinated even closely the content of the odes among themselves towards any unified thematic effect.

The introductory choral ode relates Cassandra’s prophecy of Priam’s fall to the recurrent tendency of society to condemn the philosophical revolutionary. The parallel serves to identify the story of Jesus artificially with Greek mythology. The choral ode at the end of the Prologue acts only as a poetic narrative describing the confusion of the early stages of the trial of Jesus before the Sanhedrin.

At the conclusion of Act 1, there is a choral ode which Masefield suggests be accompanied by “Iphigenia” music. The ode tells the story of the three kings who made a long search for a mystical person known to them only as the “Queen of all things.” In their search
they stumbled upon the Christ's nativity and found it so pitiable that they gave the child gifts and homage and then continued on their search for "The Queen of all things, sitting waiting for her King." This tale suggests that man struggles in a continual search for spiritual wisdom and perhaps that the Christ child did not address that need for those specific seekers or at least they did not realize it.

The ode at the end of the second act is even more enigmatic in its implications for Christ's story. It tells of a cave in which the gods are hiding. A single hunter went to call them forth with a trumpet blast but he became frightened and left. Since then no one has returned to the hidden cave, but a chant lures men once every hundred years to come and raise the gods from their hiding. A men's chorus goes on to comment on man's inevitable need to suffer in his quest for God. The accompanying women conclude with the assertion that man's undying hope is his glory and justification and is what the gods admire in him. With this ode, Masefield is moving from monotheism to a whole pantheon of gods. He seems to place Jesus in an ineffective position as the young hunter failing to reach his spiritual destiny. A final ode closes the drama with a description of man's

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32Masefield, p. 42.
search for spiritual "light". Perhaps Masefield is commenting directly on Christ's role when the chorus sings:

Light that is the brightness of the soul
made it shine,
Lovely is the spirit that will give his
days,
To bring beauty to his brothers who are
lost upon earth's ways.

As they stand, the relation between these odes and the body of the drama is poetically stimulating but also somewhat confusing.

Basically Masefield has written a realistic melodrama dramatizing the events of Jesus' trials. The major portion of the work contains interesting attempts at fleshing out the identities of particularly Annas, Caiaphas, Pilate, and Herod to theatrical effect. Although the treatment of Jesus in those sections is rigid and emotionally detached, the play makes for interesting melodrama, separate from Masefield's insistence on his mythical parallels. The drama at the center of the play is augmented by ambiguous mystical implications. The playwright has a certain dramatic feel for the occurrences of the trials but he perhaps tries too hard to make the

\[33^\text{Masefield, p. 98.}
34^\text{Ibid.}\]
subject matter profound poetically. The content of this series of historical events is powerful in its own resonances and becomes somewhat uncontrolled in its effectiveness by the application of such weighty amplification.

The Coming of Christ by John Masefield (1928)

In this later play that presents a rather ritualistic dramatization of the forces and individuals involved in Christ's nativity, Masefield presents a more controlled and coherent depiction of the nature and purpose of Christ. This Christ has come to earth to bring both hope and guidance to man in his mortal dilemma. There is a clear recognition of the necessity for a sacrificial martyrdom by Jesus, and the character views the suffering as necessary in his attempt to relieve man's misery. Masefield presents a Christ whose mission apparently carries no divine assurance of success. This Christ seeks the possibility of opening an avenue of access for mankind to God but he does not seem to have any certainty of achieving that end. Nonetheless he is presented as a worthy object for human adoration because of the bond with God which he seeks to offer.

Masefield introduces his view of Christ's birth in the framework of a ritual patterned after a religious
celebration. The play is to be staged in a facsimile of a traditional cathedral arrangement of elevated platforms, altar steps, choir loft, etc. The play contains only short stretches of dramatic action and exists basically as a series of formal exchanges and thematic expressions of the author's view of the Christ phenomenon.

Masefield presents his view of the tensions involved in Christ's incarnation through the use of an intriguing ritualistic and basically allegorical debate. The first section of the play presents an exchange between the Anima Christi, the spirit of Christ separate from his human incarnation, and four angel spirits who represent different aspects of the character of God. They are the Power (God's force), the Sword (God's justice), the Mercy (His peace), and the Light (His spiritual truth). The four discuss with the Christ figure their reservations about his entry into mankind and his sacrificial mission for man's spiritual welfare. They attempt to discourage Christ's actions by foreshadowing in great detail his inevitable earthly struggle. Another technique that they use is discrediting man's right for such gracious divine intervention. The Anima Christi's resolve is bolstered by the prophetic visions given him of Peter and Paul by the Mercy. When faced with Christ's unswerving resolution, the four send him off on his journey with their blessings.
A chorus of the Heavenly Host serves to prophesy both the Christ's Passion and the triumph achieved for life in his martyr's death. The angelic spirits join in a chorus which accounts briefly the humble details of Christ's nativity. After pledging their powers to the infant, the spirits and the choir sing praise for what will be fulfilled through the life of the child.

The consistency of Masefield's formality extends past the introductory section into the body of the action. The section which introduces the three kings is begun with a chorus which describes the unceasing devotion, yet inevitable failure of achieving a satisfying spiritual wisdom through man's worldly pursuits. Balthasar "the Fierce", the first king, tells of his quest for a "Saviour-King" who will relieve him from his plaguing devotion to military might.  

Gaspar, the second king, has great financial power and influence but seeks an answer to the problem of his personal despair. The final king, Melchior, cries out for God's wisdom to end fruitless search for fulfilling knowledge. Aware of the coming hostile reaction from Herod and his slaughter of the innocents, the kings plan to continue their hopeful quest to try to find a source of remedies for their spiritual problems.

Three shepherds named Rocky, Earthy, and Sandy are presented in a somewhat more vivid dramatic sense in the solitude of tending the flocks. When Rocky leaves for provisions, Earthy and Sandy begin to complain about their situation as servants of their masters and the state. Rocky returns admonishing them to appreciate the simple things they have. He is met with ridicule for his belief in God which he counters with evidence of times in which God has protected him from danger. The "Power" appears to them with the Heavenly Host and brings them the tidings about Christ's nativity as a divine gift to the world.

The most ritualistic section of the play comes in the enactment of the adoration of the child. The kings arrive and receive guidance to the inn. Both the kings and the shepherds go to the stable to find the mother and child. The kings each give their gifts and praise Christ's strength of character in contrast to their personal weaknesses. The shepherds also present tokens of their esteem and then carry the mother and child out on a litter. In a final chorus of praise to God, the Host proclaim Christ as an object and enabler of man's toil for fulfilling hope. The drama closes with benedictory blessings from each of the four spirits who opened the play.
The character of Christ is revealed principally through the lengthy discussion between the Anima Christi and the four spirits. That characterization is amplified by the unanimous praise extended towards the infant Christ in response to the anticipated powers and blessings which he will provide for mankind in his maturity. As in The Trial of Jesus, this Christ is motivated principally by a devotion to the necessity of his sacrifice for the cause of bringing a new insight to man's perception of God. However, the Christ here is not completely secure in his resolve as he faces the entrance into mankind. He says,

I stand here at the gate,
I quake as I enter in:
Life with its griefs and sins,
Earth with its death and Fate,
Man with his love and hate.36

Seemingly he has come to the spirits to receive blessing, empowering, and some sort of assurance before undertaking his earthly mission. However, he receives a good deal of well-intentioned opposition from his heavenly advisors. The implications of that opposition are curious in that the four spirits represent major aspects of the character of God. Yet the spirits seem to be tempting the Christ to reject his ministry to mankind. By this, Masefield is

suggesting that the character of the Father God opposed the intervention of the Christ in the course of human history. Masefield has certainly supplied intriguingly problematic connotative content. The exchange between the Anima Christi and the spirit serves most effectively as an expositional device which refers to the later development of Christ's life and provides a framework for evidencing major aspects of his character.

Other than the dedication to purpose and self-sacrificing aspects already mentioned, there is a striking optimism in this Christ about the ultimate success of his mission. That optimism is evidenced by such statements as "They [mankind] will be one with me in exultation" and "O blessed joy, to be the means of joy." 37 Confident of the Godhead's support of his endeavor, the Anima Christi is encouraged particularly by the prophetic appearances of Peter and Paul who will carry on and amplify his ministry. 38 Masefield's Christ is definitely a divine being who is willing to "lay aside his glory and his power to take up Manhood." 39

38 Ibid., p. 13.
Masefield fills out the fabric of his play with a long series of divergent testimonies to the merit of the infant Saviour prompted by a variety of reasons. He cannot entirely resist his former tendency to associate the Christ story with Greek mythological parallels. He compares Christ's purpose with that of Prometheus in bringing comfort to mankind while suffering personally. That parallel is raised in the first chorus of praise sung by the Heavenly Host.⁴⁰ There is also a mythological, pastoral preoccupation with the imagery which he chooses to describe Christ's life-giving power of spiritual rejuvenation. The three kings depict the Christ that they seek as a divine source of remedy for all of men's dilemmas. The hope that is represented by Christ is summarized most succinctly in Gaspar's statement,

They say that a King will be born who will end this despair
Of the brain that creates and achieves but must rot in the mould.
They say that his coming will make even Death to be fair.⁴¹

The three shepherds come to see him as a comforter and supplier for their physical and spiritual needs. Rocky praises him with, "For this most little lad is one/Who

⁴⁰Masefield, The Coming of Christ, p. 16.
⁴¹Ibid., p. 24.
comes to save folk under sun/ And bless us all and be our Lord."

Ultimately Christ is seen as a direct contact between God and man which will be to man's benefit. That thematic conclusion is set forth in the final chorus:

Our God is sharing
His light and daring
To help man's faring
And set men free.

He puts on dying
That life have birth.

Masefield's *The Coming of Christ* is reminiscent of the handling of such subject matter in medieval cycle dramas. Little characterization is supplied beyond what is functionally necessary. The dramatic action is very simplistic and the only active conflict is in the stereotypical clash of wills found in the rude actions of the lower class shepherds. Masefield's language is an interesting complement to the overall effect because of its primitive, rhythmic awkwardness. The author has chosen an emotionally unaffected, yet pleasantly archaic approach to his subject matter which is both formal and essentially descriptive rather than dramatic.

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42 Masefield, *The Coming of Christ*, p. 44.

43 Ibid., p. 45.
Easter by John Masefield (1929)

What was archaic about The Coming of Christ in its neo-medieval dramatic techniques becomes even more primitive in this play for singers. The depiction of different participants in the Easter story operates at a level of dramatic endeavor just slightly more active than that of a series of tableaux vivants. The Anima Christi, the spirit of the risen Christ, makes a brief appearance in this little play which functions as an exultant assertion of the certainty of Jesus' triumph over the grave. The script presents a series of character speeches, expressions of thematic intent, and simple conversational exchanges which make a poetic point about the Christ's identity rather than dramatize the nature of his risen behavior.

The play opens with a spirit character, the "Way of the World," making the claim to have defeated "the healer and preacher" in death. A brief encounter between two Roman soldiers guarding the tomb of the Christ is used to show a hostile viewpoint toward the reality of Christ's resurrection. After they leave, the "Spirit of the Place" arrives with two dead men accompanied by

the "Wind" from above. Tormented by the fatalistic philosophy held by the spirit characters, the two dead men are joyful in the possibility that Christ can bring a new dawn to their dark existences. Then suddenly the Anima Christi appears and gives a pledge of his understanding and support of all men who struggle in their mortality. Masefield also employs the two thieves hung on crosses beside Christ. Gestas decides following Christ is best and he is saved whereas Dismas chooses to govern himself and thus leaves his fate in the hands of arbitrary chance.

Masefield gives no dramatic continuity but continues his series of representative appearances. A chorus praises the miracle of the resurrection. The Christ explains that he has died to give new life, wisdom, and hope to sinful man. Mary Magdalene enters lamenting her lost Master. She is shocked when she finds the tomb seal broken and the stone rolled away. A young man tells her that Jesus is risen, but she is not confident of this truth until the Christ appears physically to comfort her. That is the only active dramatic action that Masefield affords the Christ in this little resurrection celebration. Mary then embarks on a joyful description of the benefits reaped by Christ's death and rising. A chorus of angels sing a psalm of praise about the "dawning of an Eternal
Spring triumphing over death." The play ends with Mary Magdalene's assertion that the Easter events have put man into a new relationship with God. It is an immediate and personal relationship as indicated when she says, "Henceforth a cry can bring/ Our Master near us." Fairly little need be said about the characterization of Christ beyond what is implied obviously by the plot summary. This Christ is involved in a religious celebration. He is a poetic theatrical metaphor for a spiritual phenomenon. The compassion which is evident in the Christ's handling of revealing himself to Mary is the most pointedly emotional moment in his character. The Anima Christi is both an object of praise and a praise giver as evidenced in his speech,

O God, my Peace, on whom my hope was fixt,
To Whom, in agony, my thought did strive
The while I drank the cup my coming mixt,
Thou hast maintained me out of hell alive,
Out of the strangling bonds that suffered so,
This flesh I brother still, for all its scars,
I step to Life unspeakable and know
The primrose and the night-wind and the stars.

The cock that crowed for Peter ends the night,
O benediction of the morning's change,
Out of the eastern darkness light on light on light,

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45 Masefield, Easter, p. 12.
Mountains on mountain gleaming, range on range,
O Brother Men, who suffered at my side,
Come with me to this freedom, to befriend
The friendless, the abhorred, the crucified,
And make their spirits steadfast to the end.47

Masefield's poetry here is rather hackneyed in both its rhythms and imagery. It makes the Christ an idealistic and personally inaccessible dramatic identity who confronts the audience with a flood of lovely language and abstract, virtuous themes with little practical or dramatic application as they stand in the script. Masefield presents a poetic symbol of the Christ as a universal big brother who offers a boundless and unqualified assistance to all in need.

Wherever hearts grow faint,
Where sinners stand, or saint,
Confounded by constraint
With courage reeling,
To such Myself will come
To stay their martyrdom,
Strength to the failing some,
To the sick, healing.48

Masefield has constructed more of a ritual than a drama because there is basically no dramatic action here. This little script yields a shallowly exultant expression of a religious mysticism about the Christ phenomenon set in

47Masefield, Easter, pp. 6-7.
48Ibid., p. 8.
a pastoral framework. Masefield's creation is crafted to hold more of the effect of the traditional Easter sunrise service worship experience than that of a more typical contemporary drama.

Both Yeats and Masefield have chosen to go far in poetically abstracting the material in their respective dramatizations of episode in Christ's life. Yeats' two plays are interesting for their attempts to impose theatrical conventions and philosophical stances upon the subject matter from cultures alien to the Hebrew environment in which the first century teacher/martyr operated. The earlier play Calvary is rather more successful than The Resurrection because of the strength of the novelty found in the theatrical potential of its conventions and its poetic evocativeness. The later play almost never reaches beyond the cold level of academic debate to delve into the fuller poetic dimensions of the human issues involved.

All of Masefield's plays present a mythic hero of divine love and sacrificial concern for mankind. The degree to which they use static poetic conventions increases from the first to the last play. The Trial of Jesus contains major stretches of intriguing human drama which are weakened unfortunately by the imposition
of the playwright's network of mythological parallels. The *Coming of Christ* moves toward a stronger thematic cohesion. Masefield has here moved further into a consistent, coordinated poetic approach to the entirety of the play's content. *Easter* is much more a combination of poetic narrative and description than a dramatic action. It has only suggestions of a dramatic conflict in the interaction of its agents. The story of Jesus and his ministry which can be dramatized on the basis of the historical source material in the Bible is a fundamentally very human story in its interaction of individuals and situations. To abstract the humanity of the material and craft it into a mythological framework increases the dangers to achieving a consistent theatrical impact although such an approach can yield a great deal of evocative, poetic material.
CHAPTER FIVE
CHRIST AS AN OBJECT FOR REFUTATION

Turning from plays which do not seek consistently to challenge a traditional view of Jesus' identity, we now move to scripts which are presented by their authors as dramatized refutations of such a view. Two separate, but closely related plays by the Irish playwright, George Moore, will be considered. In both The Apostle (1911) and The Passing of the Essenes (1930), the content of Moore's dramatic actions center in a possible meeting of Paul and Jesus in around 55 A.D. Arising from Moore's rejection of the Biblical account of Jesus' resurrection and ascension, the two plays are unique dramatizations in that they present Jesus as a penitent, middle-aged Jew rather than a young, persecuted God-figure. In Jesus: Tragedy of Man, Odin Gregory intends to reveal the true character of Christ's ministry, which he insists has been misunderstood throughout church history. The script is a dramatized argument for a strongly dissident view of the basic doctrinal teachings of the founder of the Christian faith. All three plays are interesting doctrinally in their theatrical postulations but faulty in their dramatic argumentation.
As a prefatory insight into the two Moore plays, it is necessary to examine his introductory commentary on the Bible which is included with the earlier scenario. In this introduction, Moore presents himself as an arrogant Irish literary and religious critic. He shows only an impressionistic familiarity with the Bible. However, he certainly does not retreat from making unflinching judgements of both the literary merit and historical content of the Scriptural writings. That zealous cynicism reflecting a naive inexperience with the Biblical material which the preface demonstrates is the overpowering reason behind his creations which provides the driving motive and also fundamental weakness of Moore's scripts.

Moore claims a strong passion for the cause of Irish nationalism. He minces no words in his hatred for British involvement in Ireland. Associated with his nationalistic enthusiasm is his hatred for the Catholic church's presence and influence in Irish society. Attacking clerical materialism, negligence of social issues, and governmental protection of illegal practices, Moore characterizes Catholicism as "an inert mass of ancient superstitions."¹ Moore's hatred of Catholicism

seems to goad him on to his fundamental attack on the institution of Christianity in the plays. Calling himself a religious man, the writer claims to have been a Protestant since childhood. However, this seems to be in a highly personal rather than denominational sense.

Moore gives a brief summary of his initial reactions upon first reading the Scriptures. He is alternately bemused and irritated by the Old Testament writings. Particularly offended by the horror of the Psalms, Moore seems to be most intrigued by Ecclesiastes which he calls "an agnostic work in which God seems to get the worst of it." This Irish nationalistic critic proceeds into the New Testament with a cryptic glance. He finds Luke's Gospel "polished, lifeless." He rejects John's as late ecclesiastical editorializing. Moore regards "Matthew" more highly but he finds it also plagued with ecclesiastical retouching. Only the Gospel by Mark receives his approval. He likens the writing to that of de Maupassant. The writer presents an interpretation of Mark's Jesus as "a magnificent young heretic who came up

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2Moore, p. 11.
3Ibid., p. 15.
4Ibid., p. 16.
from Galilee to overthrow the priests in Jerusalem."  
Unfortunately for his dramatic purposes, that picture of Jesus has faded into the passive elder shepherd image presented in Moore's plays. Just as the content of Moore's Biblical criticism operates on assumptions that are not given clear foundation so his characters operate from motivations that are not given definite base.

Passing over Acts with cursory praise for its vital historiography, he plunges into a long rhapsodic discussion of Paul as a Biblical Don Quixote. He identifies Paul's writings with Protestantism and disdains Peter as the Jewish herald of Catholicism. Interpreting Paul's theology as pantheistic, Moore likens Paul to the literary genius evident in Shakespeare, Cervantes, and Rousseau. He claims a general disregard on Paul's part for the specifics of Jesus' life. He suggests a sort of creative theology on Paul's part. Although Moore's interpretation of the character of Paul's writing is highly personal, it is certainly an interesting foreshadowing of the creative polarization of ideologies which Moore attempts to

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5 Moore, p. 16.
6 Ibid., p. 20.
7 Ibid., p. 24.
8 Ibid., p. 30.
dramatize in the conflict between his Old Testament monk, Jesus, and his New Testament fanatic, Paul. It is also vital, yet ultimately confounding to keep this prefatory, sympathetic portrait of Paul in mind when examining the dramatic conflict between the protagonist slave of Jewish order, Jesus, and the violent antagonistic Paul which climaxes in Jesus' murder in The Apostle.

The Apostle by George Moore (1919)

Although The Apostle exists only in an extended scenario form, the character of Jesus, the play's protagonist, is presented in such detail that study of Moore's characterization is worthwhile. Virtually all indicated dialogue passages for the character have been written out in their entirety. The portrait painted of Jesus in this skeletal script serves as an intriguing introduction to the completed characterization presented in Moore's later finished work, The Passing of the Essenes.

Moore takes a unique approach to the character of Jesus by taking a totally speculative approach to his historical situation. At least for the sake of generating dramatic action, Moore has chosen to reject the doctrinal and historical presupposition that Jesus of Nazareth was raised from the dead following his execution by the Roman government and then ascended subsequently into heaven, thus ending his physical existence as a human individual.
Accepting the theory that Jesus swooned rather than died on the cross, Moore speculates on what Jesus' life might have been some twenty years after the Biblical Easter week events had supposedly taken place. Jesus appears as a middle-aged man working as a lay servant for an order of Essene monks in an isolated monastery somewhere in the wilderness area near Caesarea. The major dramatic conflict arises when the apostle Paul stumbles into the monastery fleeing from Jewish persecution and is confronted with the physical presence of the man whom he presumed to have been in Heaven for some twenty years. The clash between the docile, self-sacrificing Jew, Jesus, and the aggressive, self-obsessed Christian, Paul, emerges in Moore's scenario as an intriguing, yet awkwardly ambiguous dramatic experience.

In order to understand the historical framework in which his Jesus figure is placed, some note should be made of the identity and character of the movement that Moore utilizes, the Essenes. They were the third major religious party in Judea in the time of Jesus of Nazareth, operating contemporarily with the Pharisees and Sadducees. However there are no major New Testament references to

them. Philo, Josephus, Pliny, and the Christian writer, Hippolytus, are the major historical sources on the movement.  

Situated in the area of the Dead Sea, the Essenes were a strictly male sect living chaste and secluded lives, accepting new members from the surrounding Jewish communities.  

A major activity of the group was the communal study of moral and religious issues, particularly the interpretation of holy writings. Abstaining from military and commercial activity, the group was noted by Philo for its sharing of property, mutual provision for needs, and deliberate, virtuous behavior. Josephus presents the movement as preoccupied with the role of Fate in the course of human experience. Leaving all guidance of activity in God's hand, the Essenes were focused on a simple, pure existence of service to each other and spiritual devotion involving self-sacrifice. Initiation into the movement involved strict vows concerning

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10 Bruce, p. 82.
11 Ibid., p. 83.
12 Ibid., p. 84.
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid., p. 86.
15 Ibid., p. 87.
general behavior, aims for personal activity, and most notably such strict dietary laws that an Essene might starve rather than eat unclean food.\textsuperscript{16} The whole attitude and behavior of the Essenes were marked by sobriety and quietness.\textsuperscript{17} Hippolytus mentions that the Essenes held Gentiles in particular contempt.\textsuperscript{18} Having such a high regard for the law given in the books of Moses, the Essenes held Moses to be in a position next to that of Jehovah, their Lord.\textsuperscript{19} This brief sketch of the movement is sufficient and beneficial in that it does not in any significant way conflict with Moore's portrayal of the movement. However, he does seem to credit the Essenes with a somewhat more gnostic viewpoint than may be justified easily by the historical evidence. This should not be surprising given his curious manipulation of doctrinal attitudes of Jesus in the two plays in opposition to the Scriptural evidence. One can not condemn the man as a playwright for his doctrinal originality, but his religious naivete handicaps him from achieving a consistent dramatic argument.

\textsuperscript{16}Bruce, p. 88.
\textsuperscript{17}Ibid., p. 89.
\textsuperscript{18}Ibid., p. 90.
\textsuperscript{19}Ibid., p. 91.
Although Moore's play provides considerable substance for doctrinal debate, *The Apostle's* scenario does not hold great promise for having been an effective theatre piece if it had been completed. Set in the meeting hall of an Essene monastery somewhere in the Palestinian hills, the action of Moore's script relies too heavily on the dry demonstration of conflicting philosophical stances through simple rhetorical debate. In order to establish the Essene framework of the action, the author employs a long introductory expositional discussion between Sadduc, Manahem, and Matthias, who are consumed in esoteric theological conflict. When Jesus, a lay servant for the order, is introduced, he is more reticent to elaborate his personal doctrine, but finally he operates in the same rhetorical manner that is more suited to academia than the theatre. Just as Jesus suggests that there are more effective means for edification than found in the brothers' debates, there are certainly more effective means for dramatization than found in Moore's rhetorical discourses.

With the sudden introduction of Paul as a weary traveler, Moore has the possibility of lifting his drama out of its static rhetoric. However, Paul's activity in the first act is limited basically to a narrative exposition of the history of his personal evangelical ministry. As a
dramatic stimulus, the introduction of this stranger only serves to give the Essenes a new topic for conversation. Only in Paul's feeling that he has seen Jesus somewhere before does the playwright begin to create an element for suspense that could generate some dramatic interest.

In the second act, the concentration on theological debate continues as the major action of the drama. Instead of developing the human interaction between Paul and Jesus which he suggests through Jesus' compassionate personal attention, Moore turns the major portion of the act into an impromptu lecture by Paul on the development of the early Christian church. That teaching is followed by yet another debate in which Matthias' gnostic views are disarmed by Paul's "stern and zealous affirmation." Finally a workable dramatic conflict is established when Paul learns of Jesus' claims to have been the man who suffered through all the events that his followers credit to their Christ. Curiously out of the staid character of the previous action, Paul's reaction is highly emotional and aggressive. When Moore has chosen finally to present a conflict of theatrical interest, he pushes it to an extreme as his raving Christian apostle rushes out to disprove the claim of Jesus who then plunges into a

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20 Moore, p. 67.
depression.

In the third act, Moore once again presents a series of philosophical, verbal combats which are resolved suddenly by violent physical action. The Prior of the monastery argues with the other monks about the significance of Paul's radical doctrine. Then Jesus discusses with him the necessity of returning to a public ministry to refute the Christian. Paul returns and there emerges a three way debate about the truth of Jesus' past and the importance of the Christian resurrection doctrine. Further complicating the discussion is the appearance of Mary Magdalene whom Paul had contacted on his way back to Jerusalem. Moore confuses his dramatic construction of a past for his protagonist with the use of enigmatic facts from Mary about her master's actions after the crucifixion and before the ascension. Moore takes advantage of this interaction as a means of setting forth his theory that Jesus only swooned on the cross. After Mary has left, the author feels that his debate has gone on long enough so he rushes to a resolution as Paul's frustrated rage explodes in his murder of Jesus which ends the Jew's objections. Recalling Moore's sympathetic enthusiasm for the Christian apostle in his preface, it is difficult to understand how we are to perceive this violence against the gentle shepherd protagonist that Moore has constructed in his drama.
Whereas Moore's scenario functions more as a speculative essay than as a theatre piece, it does present an unusual and intriguing, yet flawed characterization of Jesus. It is also a good example of the great difficulties of trying to meet the challenge of giving Jesus a characterization radically divergent from the one suggested by Scripture. Moore has constructed a portrait of Jesus as a gentle, self-sacrificing servant figure. Long past the turmoil of his early ministry, Jesus has taken up a simple, secluded existence of strict devotion to his Jewish-based conception of God. He has become preoccupied with the glory of God's physical creation manifested in nature. Prizing the daily fulfillment of menial tasks as necessary for proper obedience to God's will, Moore's Jesus is a docile, and highly sympathetic dramatic creation. Speaking in a dialect modified from the King James translation (as do all the other character), this simple shepherd has an impressive command of language. He uses metaphor and poetic devices to express his appreciation for the manner in which man's earthly existence demonstrates God's truths. The major ambiguity which weakens the characterization lies in Moore's failure to present clearly Jesus' view of the nature and significance of his past and possible future ministries. This Jesus is ennobled by his self-sacrificing service. However he is pathetically heroic in his
acceptance of the possibility of suffering. His sudden martyrdom at the hands of the Christian apostle does not resolve their conflict of spiritual views but only serves to end it abruptly.

The introduction of Jesus in the play is a stereotype similar to the popular image of St. Francis of Asissi. The most striking, yet self-consciously demonstrative image of Jesus given by Moore is of birds lighting on his shoulders as he feeds them with crumbs in the kitchen. This is a Jesus who extols the simple pleasures of the natural creation, as when he says of the evening that "the outline of the hills is evident now, evident as the will of God."  

Jesus' view of man's relationship to God which purportedly governs his whole behavior is revealed partially in the incident in which he opposes Matthias' excessive speculation on Scripture. That incident indicates a major ambivalent aspect of Moore's characterization. Jesus discerns a fault in his fellow's life but then avoids curiously saying what he thinks the fellow should do. When prompted by the Prior, Jesus proceeds into a vague discourse about his desire to spend time outside in solitude so that he can come to understand "all the secrets of the

21Moore, p. 45.

22Ibid., p. 44.
"earth and the heavens" in his sleepy visions. He continues to insist on his love for his duty of servitude to the brethren. He goes so far as to explain that his responsibility to the Law is fulfilled in his daily chores. All this is indicative of this Jesus' almost obsessive attention to his daily fulfillment through simple survival. But it is also important to note that Moore does not probably intend the character's dealings with his colleagues to appear as oblique on these basic issues of life as they do. Moore give his Nazarene a certain inadvertent mystique through his pleasant, yet frequent spiritual obtuseness.

Moore's characterization alludes to but does not develop clearly what Jesus holds to be his exact mission in life beyond his daily routine. The character acknowledges that he was involved in a controversial ministry which ended in his crucifixion. After Paul challenges the truth of his claims to his identity, Jesus claims Divine prompting to return to Jerusalem to oppose Paul in his ministry. The plaguing thematic question in this conflict is just why Jesus opposes Paul so actively.

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23 Moore, p. 49.
24 Ibid., p. 71.
25 Ibid., p. 83.
The motivation for Paul's opposition to Jesus is clear. The human presence of Jesus of Nazareth undermines Paul's whole doctrine of redemption through the resurrection of a martyr who then ascended to glory at the right hand of God. But what about Jesus' reaction? There seems to be more at stake for Jesus than merely the threatened security of his personal identity. But that enigma is unsolved because Moore is careless in his discussion of Jesus' spiritual self-image.

A survey of Jesus' theological commentary in the script gives an impression of Moore's superficial development of his character's motivating presuppositions about life. When one of the brothers asks him about his view of individual duty, Jesus takes an ambiguous stance for tolerance and passivity:

I would say nothing, giving no orders to other men, for the divine order is implanted in the heart, and every man knoweth what is best for him to do. To go forth at dawn to thy work and to take joy in it, and to forget thy work in the beauty of the sunrise, and to remember it and to continue it in remembrance of the light that dawneth for all men. So do our days go by and we should be content with them.

There is a pleasant call for gentle simplicity here but just how every man comes to know what is best for him and

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26 Moore, p. 70.

27 Ibid., p. 50.
just what that light is that dawns for every man are only two questions raised but never resolved in the script.

There are three major instances in which Moore supplies Jesus with behavior which is confusing to any thematic development. When Jesus talks about his earlier persecution experience, "Once I begged our Father which is in heaven to let this trial pass from me, but it was not decreed that it should pass, I suffered," there is no acknowledgement on the character's part of what the purpose may have been of that trial.²⁸ He once submitted passively to what was apparently God's inexplicable will and later says that he will gain if necessary. Superficially, this may be construed as an ennobling, courageous sacrifice. However, given no understanding of the sacrifice, it makes the behavior of the character seem rather masochistic. Later, in comforting Mary Magdalene, Jesus tells her that her beauty will be remembered "wherever my Gospel is preached."²⁹ But the character never begins to make any kind of statement of what the content of that Gospel might be. The final instance comes in the last debate between Jesus and Paul in which Jesus claims that

²⁸Moore, p. 75.
²⁹Ibid., p. 92.
it is necessary for both he and the Christian to return
to Jerusalem. They must correct the distorted Christian
doctrine by preaching "the resurrection of the spirit."30
While it is apparent that this statement is intended to
summarize the thrust of Jesus’ teaching, it is meaningless
because there is no clear explanation of what constitutes,
empowers, or arises from that "resurrection of the spirit."
Moore has constructed a character in his Jesus who is
gentle in service to all those around him. He leads a
self-contained existence indulging in rhapsodic meditation
on the manifestation of God’s creative work in Nature.
While he is an intriguing, and pleasantly sympathetic
character, his view of life is virtually incomprehensible
if one judges him only on the basis of this dramatized
behavior. As such, he functions as a very weak protagonist
for a drama. Especially one which would attempt to drama-
tize the potential ideological contest between the pur-
ported founder of the Christian faith and its most pro-
lfic apostle. Consequently, the engaging central thematic
struggle is weakened and preempted by a concentration on
the melodramatic persecution by Paul, the religious fanatic,
of Jesus, the shepherd philosopher.

30 Moore, p. 98.
Moore's characterization demonstrates difficulties found in other scripts which attempt a radical view of Jesus' character. While dismissing the foundations for his personality in Scripture, they fail to substitute a solid structure or motivational base to make the character a playable dramatic entity. Such characterizations tend to present a deluge of thematic implications which have been cut loose unfortunately from any underlying and unifying logic. Such characterizations contain so many unresolved ambiguities that they will be both troubling for the actor and unsatisfying for the audience.

The *Passing of the Essenes* by George Moore

This later script speculates similarly on an encounter between Jesus and Paul some twenty years after the crucifixion. However, this play exists as a completed script ready for full production. Moore's second Jesus is drawn with several striking differences from the earlier characterization. Given those changes and the slight modifications in the behavior of Paul and the other Essenes, the resolution of the arising dramatic conflict is drastically different from that in Moore's earlier scenario. Moore's writing is much more carefully controlled here. The conflict is still plagued with an enigmatic vagueness in Jesus' stance on some issues but is a much less ambiguous experience generally.
This script is weakened however by a more static concentration on rhetoric. As such it loses even the compelling interest of the melodramatic conflict of the earlier play. Moore still can not make a strongly persuasive dramatic argument out of the clash of philosophical viewpoints.

Throughout the majority of the first act, there is considerable promise of the theological argument of Moore's script being crafted in a more theatrical sense than was The Apostle. The interaction between Jesus and Jacob, a young shepherd, which begins to establish the contrast between Jesus' gentle, free spirit and the cold formality of the Essene life has considerably more grace and charm than did the flat introductory exposition of the earlier script. There is a certain poignancy to the conversation which follows between Jesus and Hazael, the aging prior of the Essenes who confesses that he has become indifferent to both God and life. However the danger of excessive rhetoric so evident in the earlier script begins to emerge when the rest of the monks plunge into a discussion of Mathias' allegorical interpretation of Old Testament passages. Moore almost manages to avert that movement into cold didacticism in the comically suspenseful manner in which he handles the entrance of Paul. His sudden arrival suggests the possibility of ghosts and
robbers to the monks. After Paul has been accepted in at Jesus' prompting, the script becomes entrenched firmly in Moore's rhetorical style. Only retaining an effective note of melodrama in Paul's separation from Timothy, the playwright turns the initial encounter between the Christian and the Essenes into a lengthy narrative in which Paul summarizes a major portion of the book of Acts.

Because Jesus has gone out to find Timothy, the major portion of the second act centers on a debate between Paul and the Essenes about points of conflict in Jewish and Christian doctrine. Although Moore presents both sides of the major issues with considerable accuracy and clarity, the exchanges do not make for an effective theatrical experience. In this sense, Moore's script serves as an effective demonstration of the hazards of relying on doctrinal debate to constitute the substance of a dramatic action. That emphasis on theological discussion would seem to be a logical alternative for the dramatization of this type of subject matter, but it is a dangerous choice in its effect on dramatic impact. When Jesus returns with news of Timothy, Paul is told that Jesus was crucified and "raised from the tomb" at the same time as his Christ.31

Finally Moore has created an active point of conflict that holds theatrical interest. Because Jesus' story threatens the basis of Paul's beliefs, he raves against Jesus as being a crazed liar and rushes out of the monastery only to be knocked unconscious on the terraces below. Just as in *The Apostle*, the sudden interruption of the static rhetoric by an incident of explosive verbal and physical action is a jarring way of moving the action forward.

The third act consists almost entirely of rhetorical exchanges which move toward a surprising and dramatically unsatisfying resolution of the conflict between Paul and Jesus. To the detriment of the movement of the action, the first long section of the act focuses on Mathias' story about his gnostic experiences in Alexandria. When Paul is brought back into the monastery, a long debate ensues in which Paul and Jesus contrast their stories of the events in Jerusalem some twenty-five years before. During the debate, Paul inadvertently persuades most of the monks to break their Essene vows and follow him in his ministry. Moore brings his conflict to resolution when he Jesus claim that both his and Paul's stories are not incompatible given the power of God's will. That resolution is sudden and unexpectant. While it does lay to rest the conflict of the two stances, it is too simple a solution to be satisfying intellectually because it ignores the
apparent fact that the two combatant doctrines are mutually exclusive. After that surprising concession by Jesus, Moore closes his drama all too slowly. Paul gives a long farewell address instructing the Essenes who have decided to follow him. There is a lengthy dispute between those disciples when he leaves which ends with their decision to join him immediately. Finally left alone with the few faithful monks, Jesus ends the play by his assertion that it would be best if he returned to his ordinary duties.

Moore's second Jesus bears obvious similarities to the earlier characterization, but there are striking differences. This Jesus is still a gentle shepherd figure who delights in service through simple menial tasks. However, the second characterization maintains an even more passive spiritual role than the first did. Gone is the preoccupation with the necessity for suffering which gave Moore's earlier Jesus a driven, fatalistic, and almost masochistic quality. Also absent from the motivations of this Jesus is the sense of purposeful ministry in the past, present, or future which was suggested in the earlier character. The desire to return to Jerusalem to preach a true gospel (whatever that might be) in opposition to Paul found in the first Jesus is not a consideration for his second treatment. Jesus in The Passing
of the Essenes is primarily a penitent Jew who has withdrawn into the self-denial and dedication to daily duty of the monastic life. He has participated in a controversial and radical ministry as a young man which ended catastrophically. At present, he still carries the physical and mental scars of that persecution and he prefers the simple stability of the isolated ascetic existence.

Moore's second Jesus functions differently in relation to the characterization of Paul which is essentially the same although there is not the same aggressive tendency present. This Jesus stands as a passive foil to Paul's religious fervor. However, the theological stance taken by this Jesus is so obsessed with a concentration on a total devotion to the will of the Hebraic god that it is too limited to provide for contrasts with many of the theological issues raised by Paul. The major source of active conflict for Paul presented in the play comes from Mathias, the spiritually disenchanted Egyptian Essene. Because Jesus refuses to take an active stance against the claims made by Paul, the play remains basically at the level of a rhetorical debate between a Christian and a rather gnostic Jewish view. It stands as a curiosity of hypothetical history and does not achieve a level of compelling drama. The flaw limiting
the play's success is found in the passive, and somewhat vague characterization of Jesus. Therefore the script serves as a demonstration of the difficulty of making playable drama out of a philosophical view that compromises both sides of a theological argument to the point that they are easily resolved.

Our introduction to Jesus in this second play emphasizes his loving and gentle character as a sensitive and resourceful shepherd. When first seen, Jesus is completing the preparation of his young apprentice, Jacob, to accept the duties of shepherd for the monastery. He admits his love for the beauty and comforts of the open countryside. Jesus accepts Jacob's assessment of his character when Jacob warns him against moving into the confinement of the monastery saying,

> for it will breed a great longing in thee
> for the sky and the hills, the flocks
> running merrily, following after the sound
> of the pipe, the sunny mornings on the
> hillsides and the oak wood where we have
> sat so often resting through the heats
> of midday.32

Jesus displays a practical compassion for Jacob's distress about taking over the full duties. In a speech which is one of the longest and most telling that Moore supplies his Jesus, the elder shepherd gives extended

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advice to Jacob about different tricks of the trade in handling the flock. There is a certain poetic quality to Jesus' discourse which is reminiscent of the use of metaphorical pastoral images in the Biblical Jesus' teachings:

Take heed of thy flock. Do well the work that God hath given thee to do, remembering always that though the distance be great from bad pasture to good, the journey from the bad to good will profit thee, though the flock be weary before they attain it; but, however weary, if the grass be good they will fail to nibbling . . . 33

This Jesus loves God's physical creation and gains peace from the daily fulfillment of menial tasks that give him the chance to experience the natural world. Moore has presented a sort of Jewish Thoreau in this emphasis of love of nature which permeates the whole characterization.

The conversation between Hazael and Jesus in the first act is also a strong indicator of the mettle of this character. The concern expressed by the younger monk for the elder's health is a striking example of Jesus' hospitable, giving nature which is later evidenced particularly in his service to Paul. Jesus' emotional nature is demonstrated when he grieves deeply over Hazael's

expression of growing indifference to life and God with his increased age. Jesus prizes obviously very highly his loving relationship with God and vows to cherish it even in the seclusion of the monastery.

In this conversation with the Prior, Jesus brings up the issue of his "lost years." Jesus wants to tell his colleagues about what he did in those turbulent years of his ministry. However, this hearkening to the past is not caused by a reawakening of a sense of positive ministry but comes out of a plaguing need to expiate a guilt. Jesus' shame is so great that he tells Hazael, "for none is less worthy than I. The greatest sinner amongst us is sitting by thee, one that hath not dared to tell his secret to thee for twenty years or more." This aspect of guilt is a vital departure from Moore's earlier treatment of Jesus. In that earlier portrait, Jesus was reticent to think back on his physical suffering, but there was no suggestion that he desired the content of that ministry to be denied or washed away. This latter Jesus is so guilt-ridden about what he had done that he says the he can not even live peacefully with the faithful Essenes until his guilt is expiated. Moore provides an interesting, yet abrupt

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34 Moore, *The Passing of the Essenes*, p. 15.
resolution of this issue in the conversation. When Jesus is asked to drop the subject for the sake of the whole order, he obliges saying, "my first duty is obedience." For this character, obedience to what he regards as his responsibilities overrides all personal considerations.

There is a passing reference made by Moore to the miraculous powers attributed to the historical Jesus of the Gospels. In a conversation about Paul's welfare, Jacob cites Jesus' past powers of healing. He recounts a story of Jesus healing a sick housewife in the hills near the monastery. But Jacob does not end there. He pictures Jesus' fame by saying, "the sick ask for something thou hast touched--the laces from thy shoes, a strip from a veil thou hast worn." No explanation of this phenomenon which Jesus does not deny is ever made. There is also nothing made of the possible supernatural implications of the shepherd's testimony. This passage, reminiscent of the Biblical Jesus, seems like an odd intrusion into a portrayal of Jesus which strives to make him very earthbound.

In order to grasp the motivation of the character, it is important to consider at length Jesus' account of

35 Moore, The Passing of the Essenes, p. 17.
36 Ibid., p. 37.
his past ministry given at Hazael's request in the third act. In a long discourse of unusual formality for the character, Jesus explains his hidden past. He had left the monastery where Hazael had brought him to be baptized by John the Baptist. He adopted John's ministry of calling for repentance. He claims that his success in teaching and performing miracles came from God's power which at that time was vested in him. He confesses that he became "puffed up with pride and arrogance." He pictures himself straying from God's will and entering into Jerusalem in a fervor of blasphemous exhibitionism. He explains that both the Jewish and Roman authorities decided that his death was necessary. However, he did not die but only swooned on the cross. He was revived and cared for by Joseph of Arimathea until he was able to get away from the city and return to his wilderness home.

This account emphasizes both the character's ever present guilt and identification with a God of nature. The account is simple, straight-forward, and does not deal with any specific issues of the ministry described except for the vague assertion of Jesus' self-proclaimed divinity. It is

37 Moore, The Passing of the Essenes, p. 80.
38 Ibid., pp. 80-81.
interesting that Moore retreats from dealing with the appearances of the resurrected Jesus which he considered in the earlier scenario. The emphasis of his guilt over his past ministry calls into question the sincerity of his insistence that both his and Paul's stories are compatible. Given such torment about his past, it is entirely possible that Jesus' concessions to Paul reflect his desire to retreat from the issues of his past rather than show his true feelings about Paul's claims. Thus, Moore's dramatic resolution stands as a very ambiguous compromise for his thematic conflict.

Even more so than in Moore's earlier work, Jesus is ultimately a passive figure in The Passing of the Essenes. He retreats from most pressing issues by withdrawing into a rather simplistic appreciation of an agrarian life. As such, what might be a compelling dramatic invention results only in an aging common man who spouts spiritual truisms and pastoral platitudes.

One point of stylistic interest in Moore's work is his attempt to pattern the speech of his characters after those speech patterns found in the Scriptural accounts. Jesus' dialogue has a simple structure. There is an abundance of natural imagery reminiscent of the diction in the pastoral parables. Moore even lifts specific phrases from the Gospels such as "He that hath ears to
hear will hear." Paul's dialogue is close paraphrases of passages from various of the epistles, particularly in his discussion of the clean and unclean food customs which suggests that of the First Corinthians discourse.

Both in structure and content, the farewell address to the Essene brothers is closely parallel to the typical farewell summation of doctrinal and personal considerations used by Paul in the various epistles, perhaps most strikingly in the last chapter of Romans.

The major dramatic weakness of this play is in the weak development of a central conflict. There is a static, academic quality to the play's extended passages of rhetoric. Because the majority of the play's action consists of various theological debates, it remains a talky work with little theatricality. However the play does contain a major attempt to portray Jesus in a manner which is radically different from that found in the Bible. Because there is both theatrical and thematic potential in Moore's premise of presenting Jesus in a role as a penitent Jew, it is unfortunate that the promise of the drama has been fulfilled so ineptly.

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40 Ibid., p. 91.
Jesus: Tragedy of Man by Odin Gregory (1922)

In Odin Gregory's play, Jesus: Tragedy of Man, we encounter an attempt to present a refutation of the traditional Christian view of Jesus of Nazareth. Gregory sets out to attack the traditional depiction of Jesus as the self-professed Son of God, a spiritual figure who explained that eternal life in communion with God could only be achieved by faith in his divine work. In order to demonstrate the fallacy of this view of Jesus' teachings, Gregory choose to dramatize the impact of that ministry on a group of historical and fictitious characters in the last week before the crucifixion. Although Jesus only appears as a disembodied voice reciting a variety of Scriptural passages in the drama, the play presents an unusual view of Jesus which bears consideration. In the guise of scholarly concern, Gregory has constructed a lurid melodrama with pretensions for high tragedy that presents a mortal struggle between the concept of the vengeful God-figure, Jehovah, and the pantheistic, moral consciousness presented by his interpretation of Jesus' teachings.

As with Moore's writings, Gregory has included prefatory remarks which establish a critical base for his approach to the play's subject matter. The author sees a struggle between "Christianism" (the philosophy espoused
by Jesus) and its antithesis, "Jehovism" (as represented by all institutionalized religion).\textsuperscript{42} Gregory claims that Jesus was tortured and killed because he would not conform to contemporary religious practice. He presents Jehovism as the major antagonistic force which not only is identified with the Biblical Pharisees but also with all organized religious movements, Christian and otherwise. He characterizes Jehovism as always insisting that the particular banalities which serve its purposes of the moment have sprung from Divinity, and are sacredly obligatory for all men. "Conform or be crucified!" is its eternal slogan.\textsuperscript{43} Denying the haranguing nature of the script that the reader is about to begin, Gregory curiously insists that "it is not the business of the painter artist to exhort."\textsuperscript{44}

The central issue on which Gregory builds his case about Jesus' teachings is one of translation. He criticizes the common translation of the Greek word \textit{peitho} in most versions of the Bible as "to believe". He claims that this translation was chosen by those who wanted to build a religion out of the Nazarene's teachings. That decision

\textsuperscript{42} Odin Gregory, \textit{Jesus: Tragedy of Man} (New York: Colony Publishing Co., 1922), p. 3.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., p. 4.
allows the possibility for the conception of Christianity "that bids for mass patronage by reason of the cheapness of admission to 'salvation'." Gregory insists that a better translation for the traditional "believe on me" given as the key to eternal life would be "agree with me" or even "live as I have taught." He insists that despite the fact this demands a more difficult formula for obtaining salvation, that it is a more accurate representation of Jesus' teaching.

There are unfortunate scholarly problems with Gregory's argument. Gregory's initial criticism of the translation of the Greek word peitho would be of greater significance if that were even the word which appears in the Greek manuscripts in the passages to which he refers. The word used by the New Testament authors in King James version passages which present the concept of belief in Jesus Christ as necessary for eternal salvation is actually the word, pisteuo. This word is used in translation as "to believe" in some two hundred instances in the Gospels. Among the significant passages in the Gospels are Matthew 3:13, Mark 16:16, Luke 8:12, and John 3:16, 18, 36, and

45 Gregory, p. 5.
46 Ibid.
48 Robert Young, Analytical Concordance to the Bible (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1975), p. 86.
In addition to this fundamental flaw in the basic facts of Gregory's argument, there is also a dangerous tendency on his part to take the isolated passage out of context. Even granting the possibility that the word "meant more accurately "to agree with" than "to believe, " the question is then with what is one to agree? Given the instances in which Christ claims divinity and his status as the only way by which man could reach God (notably Mark 14:62, Luke 24:14, John 14:6,7), it seems that the distinction between the exact import of the words "agree" or "believe" becomes academically irrelevant.

Gregory also claims a great divergence of views of the nature of God between the Old and the New Testaments. That assumption is not uncommon. However, the conclusion that the God of the Old Testament is one of the wrathful judgement and His counterpart in the New Testament is exclusively one of loving forgiveness reflects a lack of familiarity with the Scriptures. There are striking and undeniable instances of forgiveness or promises of forgiveness in Isaiah 55, Jonah 4, and Mich 6:6-8, among

49 Layman's Parallel Bible (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1974).
50 Gregory, p. 6.
many others. As far as the Gospel accounts are concerned, passages such as Matthew 5:21-22, Mark 9:47,48, Luke 11:29-32, and John 12:43,49 are only select examples of the many promises of judgement against the unrighteous that Jesus makes. Whether or not the different views Gregory suggest were held by isolated individuals is an irrelevant point because it can not be supported in a full Scriptural context. All of the above may appear to be more appropriate for doctrinal argumentation than it is for theatrical criticism. However, we are dealing here with a script which the author intends to function primarily as a dramatized justification for a scholarly argument. It is therefore necessary to understand the assumptions which underlie the drama which are in the case of Gregory’s play thoroughly faulty.

A major flaw in Gregory’s crafting of the play lies in the zeal he shows for his viewpoint; a zeal so great that it overwhelms any sense of dramatic discretion. Consequently, Gregory weighs the elements of the play so excessively in his didactic favor that he oversells his points. That tendency is immediately apparent in his verse introduction which accuses the listener or reader of being part of the tradition that distorted, polluted, and destroyed Jesus’ original teachings. The audience is confronted by an overaggressive artist who is playing more for shock than
sympathetic attention to his argument. Indeed, he identifies his listeners with "bartered judges, jailers of the disagreeing tongue, mouthing gang-leaders of creeds, tribes, races, priests of strife, gluttons of men's tears." 51

Following a prelude that is both painfully simplistic and utterly out of the style of the rest of the script in its abstraction of the spiritual forces at work in Jesus' ministry, Gregory introduces the various agents in his melodramatic demonstration of what he sees as the human conflict between Jehovahism and Christianism. The initial conflict centers in the hostility Samuel, a merchant and member of the Sanhedrin, feels toward the actions of Judas, a disciple of the religious radical, Jesus. By means of Judas' personal defense against Samuel's vicious attack, Gregory establishes the tension that exists between Jesus' philosophy of loving pacifism and the pervading desire for nationalism almost exclusively as a type of blood lust which stands in horrible contrast to Jesus' message of brotherhood and forgiveness. A rather gratuitous romantic subplot involving Esther, Samuel's daughter, and Claudius, a Roman, also begins in the first act. That melodramatic sidelight is a major example of Gregory's tendency to introduce

51 Gregory, p. 10.
elements which will have some emotional appeal but are used ultimately to little dramatic purpose in advancing the central conflict.

The second act suffers from an uncontrolled mixing of blatant thematic passages outlining the doctrinal conflict with equally unsubtle incidents of extremely melodramatic action. Using the premise of Esther and Claudius discussing with Peter Jesus' relevance to their relationship, the playwright provides for the description of Jesus' teachings from more favorable viewpoints than found in the first act. In order to keep the audience strongly on his side of the doctrinal argument, Gregory has Samuel's son and a group of other Zealots break in and rape Mary and Martha supposedly more out of nationalist fervor than violent lust. The author tries to point as negative a portrait of his Jehovahists as possible. In the second portion of the scene, Judas is identified with all the negative connotations of the opponents of Jesus when he is more upset that the Roman, Claudius, has visited the disciples than that a group of Jewish patriots have beaten and raped his friends.

Gregory's handling of the Garden of Gethsemane events suffers theatrically for similar reasons that the same scene in Maryquis' The Dark Hours did. Because Gregory keeps Jesus offstage, the principal onstage action is limited to Claudius' listening to his teaching and witnessing his arrest from a distance. Making the majority of the action
overheard puts too great a demand on the audience's imagination to maintain dramatic interest. Also the scene is handicapped by the author's construction of a sermon for Jesus which consists of such a random selection of Scriptural passages that there is no apparent logic to its content.

The two trial scenes of the fourth act fairly burst with melodramatic incidents. The Sanhedrin blatantly conspires with false witnesses bribed to condemn Jesus. Favorable witnesses are denounced and abused. Judas nearly throws a temper tantrum when he learns of the Pharisees' hypocrisy. Mary Magdalene tries to seduce Samuel as a means of receiving Jesus' pardon. The beating and mocking of Jesus is overheard by the emotionally overwrought Peter. Finally Jesus is sentenced, Samuel is faced with the need to defend his son, Isaac, who has been condemned for treason against Rome. While never really establishing a case for the Christianism which he supports, Gregory is relentless in mounting layer upon layer of overemotional melodramatic evidence against the Jehovism he attacks.

In the last act, the author works out all of the various lines of the conflict in pointed relation to his central thematic contrast of Jehovism and Christianism. Major examples are found in Judas' decision to kill himself because he has defended Jehovah and Claudius' dying claim.
that he has learned the true meaning of love from the crucified man. The principal dramatic resolution comes in Samuel's desperate realization after his children's deaths that Jesus was right in saying that the kingdom of God is within each man. Samuel's change of heart is pronounced by Mary to be the miracle of Jesus' death. The play ends with a self-consciously ironic postlude which both demands that the audience take up lives of love and service and also disregard the drama as just a "silly play."

Because Gregory uses a disembodied voice representing Christ and only then in the third act, the bulk of the characterization is derived from the commentary about the character by Gregory's other dramatic figures. Four largely divergent views are presented of Jesus. In what can be gleaned from his passage of teaching, Jesus appears to be a rather disjointed speaker who harangues on issues of judgement while merely touching on major doctrinal issues in a very cursory manner. As portrayed by his affectionate followers, Jesus is a troubled, yet dynamic leader who has a profound emotional impact. However full fruits of his ministry come with the impact of his death. Judas represents a dissenting viewpoint among the disciples. Judas pictures Jesus as a charismatic, yet ultimately

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Gregory, p. 127.
unsatisfying leader whose great weakness is his pacifism. The fourth viewpoint is that of the Jewish establishment as principally embodied in the behavior of Samuel. Gregory is vehemently negative in his presentation of this fourth view. However, his intent towards the other three is somewhat ambivalent. So as the drama ends we are left uncertain as to what the real character of this dramatic Jesus is— the scattered, melancholy preacher described during his life or the spiritually stimulating spokesman as he is glorified after his death.

The sermon (if in its disjointed sketchiness it can be called a sermon) delivered by Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane is almost the only direct source in the script for studying Jesus' character. The discourse which Gregory has concocted covers a wide variety of topics. First Jesus attacks religious hypocrisy in what amounts to a paraphrase of the series of Seven Woes to the Pharisees and the scribes in Matthew 23:13-36. This section is followed by three unrelated quotes from the Sermon on the Mount dealing with casting out offending members (Matt. 5:29), praying in private and in simple devotion (Matt. 6:6,7), and the necessity to live one's faith rather than just profess it (Matt. 7:21). This first major section ends with "Verily, verily, I say unto you. He that agreeth with me hath everlasting life. And whosoever liveth in agreement with me
shall never die.\textsuperscript{53} As it stands that is not a direct quote from any Biblical passage but must be viewed as Gregory's creative translation of such a passage as John 5:24 which in other translations states "Truly, truly, I say unto you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal Life, and does not come into judgement, but has passed out of death into life."\textsuperscript{54}

Continuing in his random presentation, the character proceeds to touch upon a variety of subjects. He briefly states that evil comes from within the man, rather than from outside (Mark 7:20,21). This is followed by the Matthew 26:52 remark made at the time of Christ's arrest which Gregory paraphrases to state "They that take the sword shall perish with the sword."\textsuperscript{55}

The last section of Jesus' address deals with his doctrine of love. The teacher is quoted as saying,

A new commandment I give unto you. That you love one another;
For if ye love them which love you, what thanks, have ye? For sinners also love those that love them.
But love ye the stranger.
These things I command you, that ye love one another.\textsuperscript{56}

\textsuperscript{53}\textit{Gregory}, p. 75.
\textsuperscript{55}\textit{Gregory}, p. 75.
\textsuperscript{56}\textit{Ibid.}
This quote from Matthew 5:46,47 is followed by the passage from John 15. "This is my commandment that ye love one another." \(^{57}\) The teaching is climaxed with Jesus' proclamation found in Luke 17:21, "the kingdom of God is within you." \(^{58}\)

There are two major, related problems with the Garden address as manufactured by Gregory— to whom is Jesus speaking and to what purpose? In context of Scripture, the "Woe to You" sequence was addressed to the Pharisees and scribes in Jerusalem. It seems highly unlikely that any such persons are intended to be present at this point in the Garden. Why is Jesus addressing his disciples in this manner? Gregory leaves unresolved whether Jesus is referring to his followers as hypocrites or simply reminding them of his earlier teachings. The rest of Jesus' teaching are used so completely out of context and in such a disjointed sequence that they do not give the audience the sense of a coherent human personality at all. What we probably have here is Gregory's attempt to present his view of Jesus as an all-loving pantheist who rejected Jewish tradition. Unfortunately because of his undue economy in consolidating his whole argument address, he robs his character of any kind of rational order to his thinking or sensitivity to

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\(^{57}\) Gregory, p. 76.

\(^{58}\) Ibid., p. 77.
the art of persuasion. The character does not emerge as a tangible dramatic entity but remains as a disembodied spokesman of a string of truisms and weakly related social criticisms.

Jesus is then arrested by the guards led by Judas and Samuel. He has a typically pacifist reaction in his gentle submission, expressing sorrow for the actions of Samuel and his son. He tells the Pharisee that his action and attitude so deeply offends and grieves him that he can not even look at him. The above is the total direct revelation we are given of Jesus in the action of the play. On the basis of this scene alone, the characterization is highly unsatisfying.

Gregory has caused a confusion in the projection of Jesus' characterization in that the dissenting witness is by Judas about the character and merit of Jesus' ministry his most active spokesman. The major source for Judas' view is in his account to Samuel of his involvement with the Nazarene's ministry. Judas says he was first attracted to Jesus because he was teaching a doctrine of solidarity in brotherhood disregarding ethnic differences. 59 Judas expresses a lack of understanding of the content of the teachings. "What was it that I heard? I know not, though

59 Gregory, p. 29.
I knew it, . . .—every word. It is unclear whether this reflects the teacher's effectiveness or the student's comprehension. Judas had increased in enthusiasm for the movement because of Jesus' apparent leaning toward a nationalist rebellion against Rome. Judas continues to describe how his dissent from the group's passivity grew in intensity over the months. He became greatly frustrated by Jesus' refusal to lay claim to his right to lead Israel back to its former glory. In light of his fundamental dissension with the thrust of Jesus' ministry, one must take Judas' personal description of Jesus with discretion. Jesus is described by Judas to Samuel as follows:

He is like other men, but fain
Would seem unlike. There's an aloofness in him
That often irks me much. 'Tis not to call;
In carelessness, "Hey Jesus!" 'Tis not to sound
His comrade's back, to thumb his friendly side,
Or mock-assail his festive heard. When mirthful--
And he is often that, although his mirth
Seems bashful, mild, and modest-- when adroop,--
Which he is mostly-- be he in common tasks,
Or in degate or frenzy; always, always,
He is apart. His veriest menial service
He looks to robe in purple dignity.
He is arrogant of knowledge. He pronounces
As one would: "You grope, but I know."
There have been times I've lost my sure perception
In the deep pools of his persuasive vision,
And felt my saneness melting to strange phantasms . . .

60 Gregory, p. 29.
61 Ibid., p. 21.
Yea, I have almost loved him... Almost love him...
I've often thought him present where he was not.
As now-- 62

However, it is not clear how much is intended to be the truth and how much distortion. When in the fifth act, Judas repents concerning his betrayal of Jesus and says that he sees all men to be hypocrites compared to Jesus' purity, it is apparent that Judas has come to experience the same overpowering spiritual mystique generated by the martyred leader as do his other converts. 63 But there is still the plaguing problems of his earlier testimony. Distorted as it may be by nationalist fervor, Gregory still has Judas present a picture of a moody and self-consciously mysterious preacher. The portrait presumably has some seeds of reality in it, as far as Gregory is concerned.

It is only after his crucifixion that Gregory attempts to reveal clearly the import of Jesus' character. Judas says that "He, only he, was honest, truthful, kind." 64 As he is about to die Claudius proclaims that "the Nazarene/Who dies so slowly on that felon's cross/Has the true spark!/..." 65 Peter seems finally to be able to focus

62 Gregory, p. 22.
64 Ibid., p. 111.
65 Ibid., p. 116.
on the ministry of love entirely when he grieves for his master's death. Samuel's change of heart is tied to Jesus' death (although undeniably it is prompted by Isaac and Esther's death.) He states that in Jesus' death he has learned,

To love--
To love is life; to fail to love is death.
To take is loss, to give is to receive,
He said it,-- that scarecrow on the cross. And when I taunted him, and struck his face, he grieved.
But not for his own self;-- for me . . .

However, Samuel's final realization which Mary proclaims as the miracle of Jesus' death is tied to the realization of a pantheistic and thoroughly abstracted sense of God; a sense which is cut adrift from any human identity tied to a view of a personality of the human Jesus. Samuel concludes Gregory's doctrinal argument by saying,

I need a god
Man cannot live without a god. I know
That somewhere there must be a natural god,
A god who's higher than mere human lust,
Or human pattering, or human guile;
A spirit universal within ourselves,--
Who is not of our prayers, but of our lives.
A something changeless, endless, fixed, and just.
The reach of heaven would be unbearably
A chill, unfriendly, frightening thing without him . . .
I'll hear you tell of your kind formless one.

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67 Ibid., p. 126.
68 Ibid., p. 125.
Realizing that Jesus taught "the kingdom of God is within you", Samuel is spiritually satisfied and one may assume from Gregory's presentation that Jesus' ministry is fulfilled in such a spiritual resolution.

Stylistically there are both literary and theatrical difficulties with Gregory's play. There are long awkward passages of poetry particularly in the expositional discourses. Due to his use of over-inflated imagery, Gregory has often given his characters unwieldy dialogue. The contrived use of the offstage voices in the Garden and the trial scenes would be difficult to handle plausibly in the otherwise fairly realistic style of the staging suggested. There is an excessive use of exaggerated imagery in the scenes of arguments. This is most painful in the scenes which involve the Zealots, who Gregory has tried too hard to paint unsympathetically. Also the unpleasant confrontation of the audience's character is handled in very untheatrical superimpositions on the play's action at beginning and end.

The major dramatic difficulty is in the focus and control of the conflict. It is difficult to determine the play's protagonist. Presumably it is Samuel, but the secondary plot threads are seemingly so equally developed that particularly Peter, Mary, and Judas seem in strong contention for the distinction. The story of Esther and Claudius
is only a distracting melodramatic sidelight. If Samuel is intended as a central tragic figure, his realization in the last act seems prompted more by the loss of children than by the impact of Jesus' death. Dramatically, Jesus remains such a vague, distanced identity in the play that his exact nature and impact on the lives of the major characters is either ambiguous or unconvincing in the final analysis. Because of the excesses which result from Gregory's uncontrolled zeal to make his didactic doctrinal points, the script serves as a significant demonstration of the problems that may befall any author who is more interested in pleading his theological case rather than creating a good dramatic argument. The hazards Gregory encounters will be present for didactic religious authors whether they are pro- or anti-Christian.
CHAPTER SIX
CHRIST AS A POSITIVE INFLUENCE

Among twentieth century playwrights utilizing the events of Christ's life as a source for dramatization, there have been many who decided to use the thematic and dramatic stimulus available in the material while not attempting to draw an onstage characterization of Jesus. Some of these plays are historical melodramas involving individuals in crises precipitated by their involvement with the Nazarene. Others are psychological character studies of those who are involved with him at moments suggested by the historical record. Still there are others which are elaborate theatrical fantasies using the stimulus of Christ only as an initial plot device to prompt their characters' dramatic activity. All of the plays studied here employ Jesus as a means of initiating conflict or transformation of character. This chapter studies the manner in which that potential in Jesus is exploited, how his life and character are presented for those purposes, and what the dramatic and thematic difficulties are with this use of Christ as a dramatic figure.

In the first two decades of the century, there were four plays which presented fanciful, melodramatic histories of the impact that Jesus had on figures both real and fictitious who were his contemporaries. Good Friday by John Masefield
presents the possible effects that Jesus' trial and execution had on those associated with Pontius Pilate's court. E. Temple Thurston used Christ as a dramatic catalyst twice; once with a legendary character in The Wandering Jew and once in association with a historical figure in Judas Iscariot. Unlike the other three, Philip Barry's John emphasizes the impact of Jesus' early ministry as evidenced in the life of John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin and his prophetic herald. In all four of these plays, the authors have used the ministry of Jesus as a major dramatic impetus for the initiation of their plays' conflicts. Thereby, Jesus emerges in each as more of a personified theological stimulus for melodramatic struggle than a human personality whose presence and behavior personally affects lives.

Good Friday by John Masefield (1915)

This simple one act drama stands as a fairly ordinary Passion play, except the central character in that spiritual struggle never appears onstage. A full array of characters involved with Jesus' ministry and suffering are introduced in terms of how they are affected by the teacher's life and teachings. However, the source of all those reactions never appears and consequently never emerges in the drama as any more than a rather spiritual/psychological force. Because Masefield has opted for what amounts to an absent protagonist, the exact focus and thrust of the dramatic


action is vague. In such a treatment, Jesus is little more than a set of associated religious tenets and impressions rather than a dynamic personality with perceptible, coordinated dimensions of behavior.

From the beginning, Masefield's drama is so focused on demonstrating reactions to Jesus that the logic behind the sequence of events suffers from subordination to that end. When the action begins, Pilate has sentenced Jesus to exile in reaction to the demands of the Jewish authorities. His action is much to the relief of his wife, Procula, who is sure that Jesus' life has deep spiritual significance. Insisting upon the danger of Jesus' political influence among the common people, a Hebrew official pleads that Pilate must give a stiffer sentence. Pilate is suspicious of the Jews' motives and resists against the protest. A madman whom Jesus had befriended comes into the court and is shocked to learn that Barabbas has been released instead of Jesus. The Jews at court are anxious to see Pilate satisfy their vengeful desires against Jesus. It becomes apparent that one of the crowd is Peter who denies knowing Jesus three times in rapid succession. Interactions between characters are weak or forced, only coincidental because of the central involvement with Christ. Masefield threatens the play's credibility by so conveniently arranging to have an immediate cross-section of opinion in
A major weakness in Masefield's crafting is in his failure to give Pilate's actions more detailed motivation. Even though he is displeased by the Jews' desire for Jesus' execution, Pilate feels compelled to punish Jesus for his persistence in claiming to be the Jews' king. Yielding to the calls for crucifixion, Pilate decides to put the scroll on the cross which proclaims "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" despite the Jews' protests. After a forced thematic exchange with the court sentry about man's rejection of those who expose hypocrisy, the Madman laments the inevitable suffering of men of spiritual truth and looks to death as the final reward of release from life. Masefield fails to give a rounded characterization here to his major constage agent.

Masefield concludes his drama with another rapid succession of representative reactions to Jesus. Proculla is so distraught when she learns of Jesus' execution that she stabs her arm in atonement. Joseph of Arimathea obtains Pilate's permission to bury the Jew just before the Roman receives his attendant Longinus' report about Jesus' crucifixion. Longinus was so impressed by the supernatural phenomenon accompanying Jesus' death that he is convinced that he was the Son of God. Herod comes to thank Pilate for the courtesy of having referred Jesus' case to him and
thereby agrees to reestablish open relations with the Roman consul. Still caught up in the tragedy of the day, Procula rejects Herod because of his involvement in Jesus' death. The play ends with the Madman's call for the emergence of Wisdom and Beauty through noble suffering. Masefield has tried to tie up all his loose ends of plot and character through a series of excessively compressed reactions to the intense stimulus of Jesus' death.

In Masefield's treatment here, Jesus emerges as an individual with much spiritual and political significance who elicits a wide range of responses from those with whom he has contact. In establishing that variation in reactions, Masefield covers a broad field of types such as represented by Pilate's contention that he is "a common country preacher" or Longinus' testimony that "He was God's son." There is no consistency to the depth that Jesus' impact has on the characters. Although Pilate finds no malicious fault in Jesus' behavior, he sees Jesus' suffering as inevitable because of his challenge of the accepted wisdom of the world. Ultimately Jesus is little more than

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2 Ibid., p. 588.
a political expedient to either Pilate or Herod as they use his trial as a means of reconciling their political differences. Noteworthy is Masefield's presentation of the Jewish officials in the fact that their focus is on the political danger of Jesus' claims rather than evidencing any religious outrage over his purported blasphemies. Perhaps the Jewish characters' argument is more a point of leverage with the Roman official than an accurate reflection of their personal response, but nonetheless it is Masefield's choice for channeling their attack on Jesus.

The spiritual impact of Jesus' struggle is centered in three characters, Procula, Longinus, and the Madman. Pilate's wife has the most intensely emotional response. Her reactions amount to a deep spiritual dread of the unknown, yet apparent significance of the Nazarene's life. She recounts her traumatic dream about Jesus to Pilate in a broken, almost hysterical description in which she tells of "a cry, no spoken word/ But crying, and a horror, and a sense/ Of the poor man's naked intelligence,/ Pitted against the world and being crushed." Procula's almost superstitious terror crests when she learns of Jesus'
crucifixion. She is overwhelmed by a self-destructive guilt for what she sees as the noble, spiritual martyrdom of "a rude, poor man" who pursued to the point of his destruction "the lonely exaltation of his mind." \(^5\) So intense and negatively channeled is her response that she even wounds herself as an irrational act of attrition. Whereas Procula has been moved by a dream rather than the man, Longinus' acknowledgement of Jesus' spiritual identity comes in reaction to the natural holocaust accompanying his death. Longinus assesses the earthquake during the crucifixion as evidence of Jesus' claim of divinity. \(^6\) Not unlike Procula, Longinus' response seems to be much more untempered emotion than a controlled reaction with spiritual content. The Madman who functions as the major poetic spokesman in the script feels a compassion for Jesus' dilemma but expresses no sense of extraordinary content or purpose to Jesus' martyrdom which could serve to reinforce the reactions from Longinus and Procula. \(^7\) In fact, he serves to present Jesus more as a type of ridiculed human truth rather than the embodiment of any unique spiritual reality. Masefield's

\(^5\)Masefield, "Good Friday," p. 622.
\(^6\)Ibid., p. 631.
\(^7\)Ibid., p. 617.
drama is weak in impact because there is only a superficial similarity between these reactions eventhough they are apparently the ones to which he gives most credence.

There emerges little of a cohesive portrait of Jesus in this script. Basically he is a catalytic figure whose identity is tied to an enigmatic spirituality which elicits a wide range of reactions dependent upon the individual's spiritual attitude. The play has no perceptible onstage protagonist who serves as a controlling focus for the drama. As such, the dramatic action of the play is limited to a revelation of different responses to the character and work of the offstage Nazarene martyr. The play suffers from the enigmatic portrayal of that offstage stimulus so that no definite standard is set forth by which to gauge the characters' behavior. It is interesting to note that in this early work by Masefield, he has not as yet moved to the self-consciously mythic approach to the subject matter which is evidenced in the works discussed in a previous chapter. Good Friday seems almost like a preparatory exercise for his later, much more admirable Trial of Jesus, particularly in his construction and use of Pilate, Procula, Herod, and Longinus. In many of its dramatic and thematic difficulties, this play is an initial representative of many of the other plays in this chapter.
The Wandering Jew by E. Temple Thurston (1920)

In this elaborate four act melodrama, Thurston has used the incidents of Jesus' trial and execution as a springboard for his flight into mystical fantasy. Jesus serves as a purely catalytic force, operating more as a plot device than as an influential personality. The play centers around the melodramatic, spiritual struggle of a fictitious hero and only those aspects of the Nazarene's life which are advantageous to establish a spiritual premise for the hero's conflict are mentioned.

The first part of the drama is set at the home of one Matathias in Jerusalem on the day of Christ's trial and execution. Grudgingly at the request of his dying wife, Matathias has gone to Jesus' trial before Pilate to get the teacher to come heal her. He returns enraged because Jesus has identified her illness with the sinful situation of their lives. Matathias is enthusiastic in his support of Jesus' crucifixion although Judith, his wife, is repentant and faithful in her reaction to Jesus' advice. As the procession to Calvary goes by the house, Matathias rushes out and spits in the condemned man's face. In horror Judith expires. When he had spit, Matathias was cursed by Jesus to live until the martyr came to get him. Although he tries to kill himself out of grief for Judith, he can not because the curse is already in effect. Thurston has thus
engineered the premise for his long, exotic dramatic development. The dramatic action has been set into motion by a spiritual presence rather than by a tangible force.

From that point the other three acts function as dramatizations of the highlights of Matathias' tormented trek towards death through history. The man's central difficulty is presented as being a spiritual hollowness which prevents him from being able to express any kind of positive emotional commitment. During the course of the three acts, Matathias' hardened heart is softened by contrived melodramatic crises which cause sudden leaps in his characterization. Act II is set at the time of the Crusades. Matathias has become a mysterious, yet chivalrous knight who begins to realize that there is much lacking in his soul when a young woman rejects him as being the legendary Wandering Jew whom Christ cursed. Over two hundred years later, Act III shows Matathias' status as a successful Jewish merchant in Palermo. To serve Thurston's purposes, Matathias still has a long way to go toward spiritual rest because he curses Christ when his wife decides to enter a convent after their son's death. There is another span of nearly three hundred years before the beginning of Act IV. For no apparent reason, the Wandering Jew has begun to grow compassionate and sacrificial. As a successful, benevolent doctor in Spain, he is betrayed inadvertently
by the heretical statements of a whore he had helped. His Hebrew identity is exposed by another cowardly Jew whose son Matathias had saved. Standing trial under conveniently parallel circumstances to those of Jesus' trial in order to achieve emotional and spiritual resonance, Matathias renounces the Inquisition for having strayed completely from Christ's standard. He is burned in the public square and finally dies as Christ accepts him in his martyrdom.

Thurston's Jesus is not the all-forgiving messenger of personal peace often portrayed in other dramas. Rather he is a martyr who is unrelenting in his direct condemnation of man's sinful weakness. There is a clear connection acknowledged by Jesus between an individual's willful wrongdoing and the necessity for that person to suffer as evidenced by his discernment about Judith's disease and his curse of Matathias' vengeful attack. In contrast, there is some mention made of characteristics more typical of benevolent, dramatic Jesus figures. Those center principally around Judith's faith that Jesus can and will heal her (although obviously he does not find her faith sufficient, because requires effective, penitent action.) Still, Thurston presents a picture of a Jesus who projects a gentle presence as for instance when Rachel, Matathias' sister, describes him as having "a woman's face this Nazarene; nay,
yet a man's, though all the tenderness of women I can find there too." There is mysterious spiritual power attributed to Jesus in his interaction with Matathias in the first act although it is more communicated by the Jew's dazed reaction rather than by any lucid verbal description. The prominent theatrical aspect in Thurston's mystical portrayal of the Christ's character is the use of an intense light associated first with Jesus on the way to Calvary and then subsequently each time that Matathias comes closer to gaining spiritual peace. This device is inspired probably by particularly the imagery identifying God and Christ with "light" in the Gospel of John. Used as the major stage manifestation of Christ's spirit, it creates an abstract, dramatic effect.

Thurston's play does not make any attempt to deal specifically with the life or character of Christ. It rather uses Christ as a spiritual phenomenon which serves to stimulate a melodramatic conflict. The play is very reminiscent of nineteenth century popular melodrama in its simplistic dramaturgy and yet it is unusual in its placement of Jesus in a rather antagonistic role.

Judas Iscariot by E. Temple Thurston (193)

In this later play, Thurston once again constructed a four act melodrama; however he deals much more directly with the body of Jesus' life and ministry through the use of a historical protagonist. In speculating on the internal conflict behind Judas' betrayal of Jesus, Thurston spends a good deal of time establishing the context of Jesus' ministry in which Judas functions by means of long expositional passages. Because he is concentrating on a character so closely involved with the Nazarene, Thurston spends a great deal more energy on constructing a more complete sense of Jesus' identity and character than he did in The Wandering Jew. Jesus functions as a dramatic force ranging in importance from being only a secondary topical reference in conversation to being the direct stimulus of a character's changing motivation. However, there is an ultimate confusion as to what Thurston's exact purpose is for the drama. That confusion is tied to the author's tendency to pay so much attention to the offstage Christ that the role of Judas as protagonist is weakened. In overall effect, the play is little more than ordinary historical melodrama that speculates on certain details of Jesus' ministry and Passion but uses them to little thematic purpose.
Thurston begins the play with a scene that serves as a heavy foreshadowing of the future relationship between Judas and Jesus. In Act I, set at the hut of Simon Iscariot, a simple shepherd of the area south of Bethlehem, Simon and his wife, Anna, are both excited by the presence of three Chaldeans who have come to the area looking for the Messiah. The three wisemen arrive expressing their concern over Herod's plan to kill all male infants in the area so as to destroy the Christ child. After they receive a supernatural sign, they warn Simon and Anna to save their infant, Judas. Anna is exultant because she is sure that Judas is fated to serve God's purposes. Thurston has constructed a first act which is ripe with melodramatic contrivance and spectacle but only serves the rest of the plot in a foreshadowing sense.

The weight of responsibility for establishing the major characters and the dramatic conflict falls on the second act which is heavy with expositional passages. That second act contains three scenes which portray the beginning of Judas' association with Jesus some thirty years later. The Iscariot family, which now includes a daughter, Lois, is split because Judas wants to marry a Canaanite girl, Huldah. Intrigued by rumors of Jesus' ministry, Judas, Huldah, and his sister go to the marketplace to see the teacher. Although he is skeptical at first of Jesus' purposes, Judas is deeply impressed by a miracle in which
Jesus raises the Nain widow's son from the dead. After he hears Jesus preach of the Kingdom of God as a brotherhood of all men, Judas decides that he must follow Jesus. Huldah is left alone. She does not understand, but she quietly accepts.

The action of the last two acts is set in Jerusalem at the time of the Passion week. In Act III, Judas has become disillusioned because of Jesus' refusal to assert himself in a militaristic Messianic role. His father suggests that if Jesus were arrested, he would be forced to declare his rightful claims. When Lois brings in a deathly ill Huldah, Judas tells his former lover that only violence can fulfill Jesus' promises. Judas tries to heal Huldah using the powers that he assumes Jesus has given him. In a very confusing character decision, Judas takes his failure and her death as a sign that it is his duty to make Jesus declare himself. There is a leap in the action as the trial is already in process when the last act begins. Judas watches expectantly and witnesses Peter's denials of Jesus. After Judas testifies that Jesus was his master, Jesus is condemned for blasphemous claims to be the Christ. Throughout the final scene, Judas is sure that Jesus will have saved himself miraculously in the midst of the crucifixion. Lois chides Judas for having condemned the man whom she sees as being the Son of God.
When news comes that Jesus is dead, Thurston's protagonist rushes to an abrupt resolution by killing himself because of his guilt-ridden grief.

Throughout the play, Thurston uses a catalytic image of Jesus as a profoundly charismatic personality who can wield great influence in men's lives both through his words and actions. This personal power in contrast to the flawed physical nature of this Jesus is implied when Judas describes him as, "A thin face he has. Ill-fed and spare. His walk is slow-- looks like a tired man. Or is He lame and needs to heal Himself?" Not only is Jesus described as being dynamic in his power over individuals but also he is not reticent to exercise his powers as when he takes it upon himself to stop the death processional and heal the widow's son. The content of Jesus' teaching is only suggested as focusing on a loving brotherhood of man. However, his preaching is shown to have a deep emotional effect on his listeners as demonstrated by Judas' testimony that Jesus taught "everything the world could need to know."

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10 Ibid., p. 69.
This Jesus is passive as far as seizing political power is concerned. That reticence serves as a major stimulus for Judas' climactic betrayal action. Except in recounting the giving of Mary to John's care and the forgiveness of the penitent thief on the cross, Thurston does not attempt particularly to deal with the personality of Christ during the trial and execution. There is still a note of the vindictive in Thurston's Jesus as was present in the earlier play when he has Jesus say at his trial that "he that delivered me unto them hath the greater sin." 11 The emotional and spiritual impact of Jesus' passive suffering is emphasized strongly in Lois' assertion of his divine identity and Judas' almost hysterical remorse for the betrayal.

Thurston's Jesus is presented with a much more fully detailed character in his function as the dramatic stimulus in this later play. Because of the degree to which the author portrays a character who never appears, the play suffers from a static concentration on expository narrative in the dialogue. There is also a troublesome ambiguity in the presentation of Judas' central conflict. There is

11Thurston, Judas Iscariot, p. 120.
such strong foreshadowing of his ultimate demise during his childhood (most of which is identified with a mystical fatalistic view) that his later destruction through well-intentioned, but misguided choices makes him seem more a victim than an active hero. However Thurston's stance on that issue is never presented clearly. The play remains as a fairly ordinary historical melodrama that exploits events in Jesus' life for much pathos but little illuminating effect as drama.

**John** by Philip Barry (1929)

This five act drama is concerned principally with the conflict between John the Baptist and Herod Antipas over the Baptist's denouncement of Herod for marrying his brother's wife. Although that is the major impetus for the action, Barry's John becomes preoccupied with the question of Jesus' identity as his situation leads him toward death. The possibility of Jesus being the Messiah which is such a secondary consideration for a major part of the play becomes the central focus of John's attention at the play's climax. Basically Jesus serves only as a token subject for conversation throughout the development of the conflict between John and Herod which is the major action moving the drama. It is not until the last act that Barry employs the historical Baptist's prophecy of the coming Messiah to involve more directly the identity of the
personality of Christ in the play. As he faces death, John is provided with sufficient specific information about Jesus to justify minimally for his final resolution.

Throughout the first three acts, John the Baptist's wilderness ministry of repentance is detailed through pedestrian passages of descriptive dialogue between his disciples and short, rather comic exchanges involving them with their leader. Beyond his concentration on the necessity of repentance, the major concern of John's preaching is his personal outrage at the immoral union of Antipas and Herodias. That obsession is set against Herodias' fascination with John as a radical country preacher who could be pressed into the political role of a war-like Messiah. There is much serio-comic interplay involving spies who come to investigate John's activities and hope thereby to lead him into either cooperation with Herodias' wishes or self-condemnation as Antipas' accuser. Initially placed far in the background, the concurrent ministry of Jesus begins to emerge as a more prominent consideration for John. The possibility of Jesus' Messiahship evidenced by his virtuous behavior and charismatic teaching attracts more and more of John's attention. This is a curious development since there is virtually no contact established between the two to justify such
Eventually John sends several of his followers to become Jesus' disciples and forces his own arrest by denouncing Herod publically after ample warning. It is a strange move to make both on his and Barry's parts since John is so far from his final conclusion that Jesus is the Christ.

After his arrest, Herodias tried to provoke Messianic pride from John by taunting him with reports about the character of Jesus' ministry. John refuses to believe the stories of Jesus' teachings of love and forgiveness. He is repulsed by the possibility that the Nazarene associates with social outcasts and immoral people. This is a very odd plotting decision for Barry because it goes against the audience's probable understanding of the historical context and undermines greatly John's ultimate resolution. Disregarding all of her attempts to woo him to accept a conspiratorial role against the Romans, John once again denounces Herodias' sinful marriage and thus brings execution threats on himself. In the final act, the disciples of John who now follow Jesus are allowed to visit John by two sympathetic guards, who serve as unnecessary comic relief. The visitors describe their master's teaching, healings, and conflicts with the Jewish officials to John, who finally suspects that Jesus may be the awaited Messiah. Why he did not accept it before
and does now is not at all clear. John refuses Herodias' messages that he will be released if he will agree to fit into her plans. Herodias derides the possibility of the pacifist Jesus being the Messiah she awaits. Frustrated by the Baptist's continual refusals, Herodias proceeds with her plot to have John killed. Convinced that he would know the identity of the Messiah before his death, John asserts quickly that it is Jesus as Salome comes with the executioners for his head.

The portrayal of Jesus by Barry in its relation to John's ministry undergoes an interesting progressive revelation during the course of the play, although the progression is often inexplicably forced. Initially, John is struck merely by the purity that Jesus projects but he makes no connection between the young man and a Messianic role. In the second act, Jesus has become known by John and his disciples as a rather enigmatic young man of exemplary virtue whom John sees as an appropriate successor to his ministry. He tells his followers, "if ever they should come for me, and I am taken of a sudden, tell this Jesus I count on him."\(^{12}\) That attitude does not seem justified by any evidence given by Barry in the play

regarding John's knowledge of Jesus. However, John's enthusiastic support of Jesus' ministry grows to such an extent that he is willing to give over his ministry and disciples informally to the celebrated young preacher as he faces arrest. There is an interesting tension established in Act IV between John's expectations and understanding of Jesus' character and the historical information familiar to the audience. That historical record is used by Herodias to taunt John. Particularly Jesus' doctrines of exaltation of the downtrodden, the possibility of forgiveness for all sinners, and the love of enemies are aspects of Jesus' ministry which John views as perpetrated only to make him suffer. It seems odd that he did not know these basic teachings by the man to whom he entrusted his role of prophet and preacher. In the next and final act, when Jesus' followers confirm those things to him, John is moved apparently by their witness and becomes receptive to the possibility of Jesus as the Christ. He even suggests to the disciples that they plant the idea in Jesus' mind if he has not yet considered it. John's final confirmation of Jesus as the Messiah is very weak because it appears as a sudden leap of faith taken by a man trapped between the strong desire to know the identity of the Messiah and the sudden inevitability of his death.
Basically, Jesus functions only as a significant dimension of John's experience in this play. Barry has constructed a drama which is interesting in its speculation as to the details of the recorded events of the Baptist's ministry. However neither the impact of the mortal conflict between John and Herodias nor the preoccupation with finding the Messiah are developed to much dramatic advantage given their potential. Part of the problem centers in his devotion of too much stage time to the mundane activities of weakly comic, secondary characters. Because Barry brings both John's conflict with Herodias and his search for a Messiah to such an abrupt, coincidental conclusion, he trivializes the impact of the dramatic action comically rather than strengthens it.

Lazarus Laughed by Eugene O'Neill (1929)

In this epic four act drama, O'Neill broke away from traditional treatments of the Jesus phenomenon both in dramatic development and thematic viewpoint. Using the historical incident of Jesus' raising Lazarus from the grave as a starting point, O'Neill rushes into wild fantasies that take the character Lazarus through a series of metaphysical conflicts and melodramatic events that results in a total obscuring of the initial involvement with Jesus. The drama is a massive, unwieldy pageant
that presents an enigmatic and apparently highly personal spiritual view of human experience. Ultimately, Jesus Christ stands as a significant, although fairly minor element of O'Neill's creation. The author is self-conscious in his experimentation with the drama using a massive Greek-like chorus containing a whole range of ages and psychological types. The combination of these everchanging masses with the masked, oratorical major characters makes for an exotic, yet generally inexplicable dramatic experience.

The first act is set in the midst of the recounting of Lazarus' resurrection and uses a framework very reminiscent of the choral expositions of Greek tragedy. However, there is a marked modern psychological flavor to the constant counterpoint of reactions coming from different character types. The crowd is amazed by Lazarus' serene change in character. However, that serenity startlingly is broken by the beginning of Lazarus' laughter over the death of death, a laughter which is the running motive and even major plot stimulus throughout the rest of the drama. Even in the second scene of the play Lazarus' maniacal insistance that death is only a manifestation of man's fear of the unknown which is always accompanied by that crazed laughter begins to preempt Jesus' significance as a force not only in the character's mind but also in the playwright's as well.
It is of little advantage to detail the plot of this complex pageant drama from the point at the end of the first act when Lazarus asserts his philosophy as being more important than Jesus' to the Jews and Nazarenes. Suffice it to summarize the plot as follows: Lazarus becomes involved deeply with the political/sexual machinations of the Roman courts of Tiberius and later Caligula because he is revered, feared, and ultimately hated as being a possible incarnation of the god, Dionysus. The long battle between Lazarus' claim to have ended death and Caligula's preoccupation with power through violence ends with the Roman's vindictive execution of the laughing Jew in the arena.

Represented by the characters' commentaries on his actions, Jesus serves only as an offstage initiator of the play's action both in plot and theme. The play begins with quotations from both the Gospel writers and Jesus set in a choral counterpoint. O'Neill's use of the crowd as an expository device does little to humanize the dramatization of dimensions of the experience involving Jesus and his friend. The opening scene sets the spectacular, yet emotionally lifeless tone of the whole script. The effect of the scene emerges much more as that of a ritualistic portrayal of a metaphysical phenomenon which defies full human comprehension.
The movement of the play away from any kind of thematic theology affiliated with Jesus and his teachings emerges in the conflicting views of Jesus' import. Mary, Lazarus' sister, views Jesus as a strong leader who is able to grasp power at his will. Martha, her sister, speaks of a Jesus who taught kind compassion towards all men. Both assessments are left abruptly behind as Lazarus asserts himself as the prophet of a new life free from the fear of death. Later, he dismisses almost callously the loss of Jesus in the crucifixion when he remarks, "even a Son of Man must die to show men that Man may live! But there is no death!" Lazarus' reasoning is so circular and exaggerated throughout the play as to make the thematic core inexplicable. It is telling to note that in later accounts of Lazarus' resurrection the role of Jesus is dropped entirely except in Tiberius' listing of factors resulting in his miraculous return to life. Jesus thus serves only an initial function of plot stimulation but is then abandoned in deference to O'Neill's higher thematic purposes. The play suffers as a whole from an overindulgence in unwieldy experimentation, and also from the constant harping on a view of human experience which is too abstract and complicated in its implications to be grasped under normal viewing circumstances in a theatre.

During the 1930's, three different authors used the events of Jesus' life to quite varied purposes. In John Drinkwater's *A Man's House*, we are presented with an analysis of the consequences that the catastrophic end of Jesus' ministry had on the lives of those who were involved. His impact depended on whether individuals placed faith in the promises and claims which were fulfilled in his resurrection. *Family Portrait* by Lenore Coffee and William Joyce Cowen is concerned with the implications of Jesus' controversial career for his family living in relative obscurity in Nazareth. The play takes a much more ambiguous stance towards the historical content of the Gospel accounts, particularly in its enigmatic portrayal of Mary's concept of who her son was and what he did. Both of these two plays are realistic. Christopher Hassall's verse drama, *Christ's Comet*, is a drastic departure from the popular realism of its contemporary theatre with its attempted return to Elizabethan poetic theatre. This last play speculates on the contact between the adult, martyred Christ and one of the kings that sought him at his nativity.

*A Man's House* by John Drinkwater (1934)

In Drinkwater's realistic domestic melodrama, we have one of the most detailed examinations of the divisive potential that Jesus' teaching and claims had between
individuals who had to decide where to align themselves between the poles of accepting or rejecting Jesus as the Jews' promised saviour. Because of that conflict, there are a wide variety of impressions of Jesus expressed. However, Drinkwater presents his stance clearly in the resolution of the plot.

Drinkwater skillfully constructs a fairly tightly moving melodrama out of the interaction between various solid characterizations. The play begins at the home of Salathiel, a rich Jewish merchant, who lives not only on the physical outskirts of Jerusalem, but also figuratively on the outskirts of the contemporary political, religious activity. His whole household is divided over the issue of Jesus' ministry. Nathan, his brother, is a follower of the Nazarene as is Rachel, his daughter, who is in love with David, a young supporter of the teacher. Also in league with the Nazarenes is Jacob, a servant, whose brothers are Simon Peter and Andrew, Jesus' disciples. On the opposite pole stand Salathiel, his son, Mathias, Isaac, the head steward, and Esther, the blind daughter of Salathiel, who is hostile at least initially to Jesus' work. The antagonism in the household has developed to such an extent that Mathias is cooperating actively with the Romans against Jesus and his followers and Salathiel has even vowed to disown Rachel if she joins David.
Drinkwater employs dramatic incidents which serve effectively to establish the change in the family members' attitudes that begin on Palm Sunday, the setting of Act II. Levi, a fellow businessman, comes to warn Salathiel and Barnabas, David's father, that probably they are both in trouble because of their children's religious involvements. When the procession of Nazarenes comes from Bethany to Jerusalem, the Roman officer who is protecting the house is furious that they stop at the gate. Having been struck by the faith Rachel has in Jesus, Esther goes down to meet him and her blindness is healed. Although Salathiel praises Jesus who sent Esther back to him, Mathias is furious that the family has become involved more deeply with the radical. Throughout the act, the reactions are human for the most part both in dimension and transition.

The climax of Drinkwater's drama is set on Easter Sunday. Nathan, David, and Jacob have been arrested for an attack on a Roman soldier supervising Jesus on the road to Golgotha. Mathias will do nothing but complain about the consequences for the whole family. However, the Roman officer seems to be open to help in some way. He is in love with Esther but she will not allow her love because the Romans executed Jesus. Salathiel arrives with news that Jacob has been sentenced to the galleys,
David exiled, and Nathan acquitted because of his age. There is conflict between Mathias and his father over whether to allow David and Rachel into the house. Levi arrives with news of the resurrection which basically is disregarded by the others. It is revealed that the officer has obtained Jacob's pardon, but even then Nathan must calm Jacob's rage against the Romans. Accepting their responsibility for the ministry of Jesus' memory, Rachel, David, and Nathan all leave for Bethany. Even though the officer was the centurion who lanced Jesus on the cross out of mercy, Esther agrees to go to Syria with him because she understands his sympathetic actions. In reaction to their mutual loss, Salathiel and Mathias become reconciled somewhat. As the play ends, Salathiel sees the group of exiles going toward Bethany having been joined by the resurrected Jesus. Drinkwater has resolved very credibly the individual character's situations without any leaps in development or excessively artificial machinations.

Jesus serves Drinkwater's purposes as a passive source of conflict among the various combatants in this family drama. Because he is the stimulus for so many opposing views, Jesus is portrayed in a variety of lights during the play. Mathias views him as a dangerous political radical who has no regard for the lives of the Jews.
under Roman rule. Salathiel and the other antagonistic adults focus on the orthodox Jewish view of Jesus as a sinful blasphemer who threatens the foundations of their faith. To his supporters, Jesus is a powerful, yet relatively passive leader who has great impact as a loving and compassionate teacher. Drinkwater has indicated pointedly the interpretation of Jesus he credits and that view is found in the direct, positive reactions to contact with the Nazarene. Esther's testimony is simple, yet eloquent when she says of his healing, "It was nature in those hands." Jesus is shown to be concerned for the welfare of his supporters as indicated by his insistence that it was better right then for Esther to stay with her father. Drinkwater seems to avoid the specific issue of divinity but his praise of the Christ is formidable as when Esther speaks of the martyred teacher, "I claim nothing but that he was wiser than the world that killed him. And he had healing hands . . . He gave me back my life. But I learnt more than my own deliverance. He spoke to the people things that they had never heard." Drinkwater does present clearly a resurrected Jesus who is a source of spiritual peace and growth for his followers.

15 Ibid., p. 74.
The play is an interesting dramatic examination of the conflicts provoked by varying reactions to the call of Jesus' ministry. Drinkwater is wise in establishing a strong central focus in the character of Salathiel who serves as the onstage common denominator of all the other individuals. The play still suffers from a necessity for too much expositional dialogue to accommodate keeping Jesus unseen. Also, the drawing of Mathias' characterization is rather more villainous than necessary for the dramatic conflict. Nonetheless this script is an excellent example of a workable balance in the split attention between the onstage conflict and its offstage stimulus which allows the play's success as a very human domestic melodrama.

Family Portrait by Lenore Coffee and William Joyce Cown (1939)

This is another play which deals with family division in reaction to Jesus' ministry, however the family in question here is Jesus' own. As such, the central figure of this domestic drama is Jesus' mother Mary. She is portrayed as a very limited, yet emotional woman who is dedicated to her son despite her meagre understanding of his behavior. The play's action attempts to coordinate early references in the Gospel accounts of Jesus' sketchy involvement with his family. However, in the last section of the play, the authors choose to ignore both the historical evidence or any logical extensions of it and turn
to purely creative speculation. As such, the play which begins intriguingly as a conjectural dramatization drawing upon historical events becomes an ambiguous and unresolved fiction which disregards any audience knowledge of the historical base for such a treatment.

Coffee and Cowen use too much overly deliberate exposition in introducing their dramatic premise. In the first scene Mary discusses with her four sons and their families their reaction to Jesus' departure to pursue his new work of preaching. There is a variety of reactions ranging from sorrow to anger including James' desire to go out and force their brother to return. When a customer is upset that Jesus, the best carpenter in the family, will not work his job, Mary must placate him with promises that the job will be to his satisfaction. The second scene takes place several months later. Despite her protests, Mary has come to Capernaum with all but the youngest brother to retrieve Jesus. The authors give Mary unexpected and inconsistent insight when she understands Jesus' identification with his followers more than his family. Still his brothers are offended deeply. As a melodramatic contrivance at this point, Judas is introduced to Mary as an enthusiastic follower of her son.

The next act opens on a fury of activity surrounding the arrival of Jesus who has been invited to speak at the Nazarene synagogue. All the family except the pious James
are pleased. Neighbors arrive with "helpful" suggestions concerning preparations for Jesus' visit. An ironic foreshadowing arises when the brothers consider a deal to build crosses for the Romans which they do not accept due to Mary's objections. The authors here have introduced a potentially effective melodramatic contrivance and then shy from exploiting it. In the second scene of the act, the family has been plunged into difficulty because Jesus was disgraced at the synagogue when he did not perform miracles but denounced the community for its lack of faith. The brothers have begun to lose business because of Jesus' reputation. Judah who had loved Jesus the most turns against him when his engagement is broken with Miriam by her anxious father. That action is just another in the many melodramatic machinations which the authors employ briefly and then drop.

The last act is weakest in its construction of credible events and in the logic of the characters' motivations. The action of the last shifts initially to Jerusalem during the Passion week. Mary and Mary Cleophas, her cousin, have come to Jerusalem to look for Jesus. Hearing about the controversy and danger surrounding her son's work, Mary encounters Judas who directs them to the site of the Last Supper. However, the two reach the upper room conveniently too late. Despite the concern of a
friend over the danger to the teacher and his disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane, Mary stays to speak with the Magdalen, one of his ardent supporters. When news comes of Jesus' arrest, Mary goes to him to give him his cloak to face his ordeal. Ignoring the ripe dramatic potential of final direct contact between mother and son, the authors stop the action here and skip the point of greatest theatrical promise to be found in the impact of Jesus' life on his mother.

For the final scene, there is a jump of several years and a return to Nazareth. The family has no apparent knowledge or experience of the possibility that Christ was resurrected. Judah's wife is ready to deliver her first child and a suitor has come from Damascus to his sister Esther. When Mary reveals to the suitor that her son was crucified, the information is met with only mild curiosity. Climaxing the vague references to the early apostolic ministry, Mary asks Judah to name his boy Jesus so that his brother's memory will not be lost.

As it stands, the play serves as a worthwhile dramatization of the problems for people who are associated necessarily with a man of controversial notoriety. Because the variation in the public opinion is so marked and frequent, Jesus is described by many opposing connotative expressions. This is most apparent when the general
enthusiasm and esteem expressed towards the Nazarene as a heralded guest to the city turns to hostility and disillusionment after his apparent failure begins to affect his family personally. Only Mary is steadfast in her appreciation of her son's sincerity of purpose although ultimately she can not see the meaning and central thrust of his activity. Many fine and traditional attributes from the Gospels are expressed in description of the teacher such as the references to his diligence, self-sacrifice, love of children, and impeccable moral character. However, Jesus finally becomes an enigma when the authors decide to disregard any historical suggestion of the involvement of Mary or the rest of the family in the Christian movement after the resurrection. Thus they have sidestepped potentially evocative ironies in for instance James' move from skepticism to being the head of the Jerusalem church.

The play is intriguingly imaginative in its creation of a family life for Jesus' kin which draws upon the dramatic potential of the tension inherent in familial association with such a controversial figure. There is an excessively heavyhanded quality in the playwrights' use of various dramatic contrivances such as the surprise introduction of Judas put to little purpose or the foreshadowing in the dealings with the Romans for the cross
contract used only for easy pathetic effect. It seems odd that a drama which pulls so heavily on various Biblical events to piece together a speculative exercise would then go in an opposite direction from the available evidence at the point of resolution. This play is not a historical portrayal of the possible impact of Jesus on his family; it is rather a fictional demonstration of the behavioral effect on family members associated with a condemned public figure.

_Christ's Comet_ by Christopher Hassall (1938)

Hassall's play is a drastic change of pace from the rest of the plays studied in this chapter in that the author attempts to recapture the spirit of the Elizabethan verse drama both in style and approach to content. The identity of Jesus is limited almost entirely to the mystical aspects of his Messianic role as man's spiritual saviour. The conflict involves an exotic, learned king who searches for a fulfillment of his personal spiritual thirst which he believes can be satisfied only by the one who accomplishes the prophetic promise of the Jewish nation. Because of that central action, Jesus functions more as a mystical object of faith and thereby a spiritual

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motivation for character action rather than as an influential and recognizable personality.

Hassall's script is replete with evidence of his attempt to create an epic Elizabethan drama complete with subplots and picturesque local color. The first act is concerned with the activities related to the appearance of the prophetic comet heralding Christ's birth. The action involves different individuals in the Eastern kingdom of Trebizond ruled by Artaban, the play's protagonist. When the sign of the come appears, Artaban and the other three kings set off to find the promised new "Alexander" who will cast Rome off the seat of dominion. A poet servant, the Muleteer, joins the caravan, an action which will change the course of his life more than he expects. The first act contains scenes of the common people which are completely gratuitous.

The melodramatic interaction between the kings and Herod constitutes the major body of the second act. Herod is portrayed as a paranoid, slightly senile despot who reacts to the kings' search for the Messianic king of the Jews by decreeing the slaughter of all boy infants in the area of Bethlehem. Artaban is so moved by the truth and import of the child's birth that he vows not to approach the child until he has proven himself worthy. That reaction appears unexpectedly and it is very difficult to justify
it by any onstage occurrence. Not comprehending his resistance just as the audience probably does not, the other kings proceed to Bethlehem while the Muleteer agrees to become Artaban's companion in his quest for spiritual merit.

The climactic sequence of the play comes thirty years later at the time of Jesus' crucifixion. During the storm that accompanies the teacher's death, the blind and impoverished Artaban and the Muleteer care for an ailing robber who coincidentally is Barabbas. Barabbas explains his release and the execution of Jesus whom Artaban believes to be the child whom he would not approach years before. The criminal takes the two wanderers up to Golgotha, but retreats in fear from climbing the hill to the crosses. At the summit, Artaban has a vision of the cross' guardian angel who explains that in Christ's life and death man is reconciled to God and given eternal life. With this witness, Artaban dies fulfilled. For no apparent reason, the Muleteer is denied understanding of what has happened. A carol of praise ends the verse drama during which Artaban rises to take his place with the other kings in the adoration of the child.

Hassall is concerned minimally with the personality of Jesus and the influence of his life in this play. He is focused more on the personal quest of faith found in
Ar taban for a personal reconciliation between the individual troubled spirit and the object of that faith. Jesus is presented as the Christ with its associated offices of Son of God and Prince of Peace, but it is never necessary for him to be allowed any specifically human personality in Hassall's dramatic purposes. As with Artaban, Hassall is focused on the theological implications of Jesus' existence rather than the dimensions of his specific actions. That view is presented succinctly by Artaban's statement to Barabbas, "He who has suffered in your stead/ And set you free, has suffered for mankind/ And freed the stock of Adam." Thus, Hassall's use of Jesus is limited to that of a supernatural motivational object rather than a human agent of conflict.

This play suffers from a self-conscious attempt to employ various characteristic devices from earlier verse drama traditions in that it uses to little purpose. Particularly in the counterpoint of scenes between the nobility and the peasants, the attempt to show the same actions perceived from different social strata becomes belabored quickly. The use of the several lyrics sung

17 Hassall, p. 88.
18 Ibid., p. 135.
by the Muleteer serves only minimal dramatic or thematic purpose. Also the characteristic leap over a large span of time between acts two and three leaves a troubling hole in the development of the Muleteer and the central character, Artaban, which can not be filled in the brief exposition at the opening of the last act. On the whole, Hassall's play is a well-intentioned, yet generally flawed attempt to create an epic melodrama out of the search for faith in the contact of one man with the Christ.

There is a long span between these first eight plays about Jesus' influence and the last two scripts discussed here, Terror of Light by Charles Williams (1963) and The Carpenter by Charles E. McIntosh (1974). Both plays are representative of a more contemporary realism which does not make such a concerted attempt to create a sense of historical distance which in the other plays centers principally in the use of archaic language. The attempt to create a more detailed sense of humanity in the character of Jesus' followers in the Williams' play results in a more subtle sense of both drama and comedy than is present in the other scripts. McIntosh's play uses the most contemporary colloquial speech in what amounts to a mundane soap opera with aspirations for spiritual tragedy.
Terror of Light by Charles Williams (1963)

Williams deals with a Biblical event not addressed in any of the other plays in this dissertation. That event is Pentecost, the time at which the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles in tongues of fire. That event is recorded in the second chapter of "Acts" but it is affiliated directly to Jesus' relationship with his followers as he explained in John 14 and 15, saying that he would send the Holy Spirit after he ascended into Heaven. The situation serves as an excellent framework in which to examine the different Nazarenes' attitudes and understandings of what was Jesus' significance for their lives. Williams presents the play as more of a dramatic study of the various personalities involved rather than as a clearly progressing dramatic action. Throughout the play the teacher whom the disciples believed to have been resurrected and then ascended into Heaven is the central reference point for their thoughts and activities.

In the confines of this short drama, Williams constructs affiliated events that demonstrate dimensions of the disciples' personalities. The one act play is set in the orchard of John the Apostle's house in Jerusalem. All the followers of Jesus are gathered there awaiting some unknown thing to happen as Jesus had promised.
The various major disciples describe to the mother Mary their feelings of grief, guilt, and fear that accompanied the events of Jesus' Passion. Led by Peter, the disciples have decided that a substitute must be chosen for Judas who hung himself after betraying Jesus. There is an exchange between Mary and Mary Magdalene in which the older woman comforts the younger in her grief and remorse. Saul of Tarsus, presented as an old friend of John, who later was to become the apostle Paul, comes to warn John against associating with the Nazarenes who include such undesirables as the former prostitute, Mary Magdalene. A gnostic, mystic priest named Simon the Magus and his consort, Luna, come to find out the secret of Jesus' physical resurrection but their inquiry is interrupted when Thomas announces that the wind of the Holy Spirit has begun to rise.

Williams uses the actions of the two mystics as the source for his principal dramatic conflict. Left alone in the garden, Luna has a vision of the Pentecostal event that is happening inside and then she plunges into a dark vision of death. The ghost of Judas Iscariot is called up from Hell and identifies himself with Simon's desires for black powers. When Peter and Mary Magdalene come out having received the Spirit, Peter rebukes Judas back to Hell. Explaining the Gospel to Simon, Peter also chides the magician. Luna has become possessed by Judas but is
saved by Mary Magdalene whose spiritual triumphs over Judas' ghost because of her faith in Christ. Both Simon and Luna leave deeply affected by the spirit present in the Nazarones. Saul returns first with warnings and then threats that the group will receive official condemnation and punishment. Thomas ends a sparring exchange ironically with Saul by predicting his conversion to the purpose of Christ. Mary Magdalene and John discuss the love they feel for each other because of their love of God. The Mother Mary feels that she has served her role now that the Spirit is in all of them and she blesses the disciples prophetically in their individual ministries. Following her explanation of the Spirit as the light of God in men, they all corporately praise God.

Jesus' life and character once again serves as a stimulus for activity in this play, specifically in that his meaning for human lives is the focus of the characters' searching and speculation. Initially Jesus is presented as being an object for adoration but his intense spiritual significance is so enigmatic to his followers that they are actually afraid of his discernment of their souls. As Thomas describes Jesus' relationship with them, "It was perfectly appalling--it was like being put completely into one's own identity at that moment;
perpetually settled in exactly that intention, that valuation. Pure heaven or pure hell." This play is one of the few to attempt to verbalize specifically the impact of Jesus on the individual beyond the purely gut emotional level. Also the action involving the two mystics centers in an attempt to grasp the workings of Jesus' miraculous life. Williams has established as a point of variance the mother Mary's resolve and calm in her thoughts about her son. As it is revealed, Williams identifies this understanding with the internal possession of the Holy Spirit. Mary eventually explains that she has had the gift of understanding through the Spirit since Jesus was a child. Williams demonstrates the difference between individuals' degree of spiritual peace in relation to their experience of Jesus through the Spirit. Initially all but Mary are troubled (although for particularly Peter and Thomas it is almost a comic bewilderment.) When Pentecost occurs, the disciples gain resolve and the two gnostic visitors are moved deeply by their exposure to the power of the Spirit. Williams has handled carefully and consistently this standard for his characters' behavior. Only Saul leaves

the drama with no relief for his spiritual agitation because of his active denial of the truth of Christ through the spirit.

Williams has taken on a formidable task for dramatization because of the intensely metaphysical nature of the Pentecostal experience. Consequently, he limits himself to poetic description, probably the only workable stage alternative, and draws the majority of his dramatic impetus from the simpler spiritual actions of the fictitious episode of Simon and Luna. The play is strong in its diligent attempt to provide human characterizations for the major apostolic figures. However, the play remains basically at the level of a character essay rather than a compelling drama.

The Carpenter by Charles E. McIntosh (1974)

McIntosh's realistic melodrama takes a group of historical and fictitious characters whose lives are affected by the spiritual impact of Jesus' ministry and life. However, the play is interested much more deeply in the machinations of the characters' personal dilemmas than it is with the exact dimensions of their spiritual transformations. McIntosh has constructed a historical, excessively involved soap opera which falls back on the presence of the Jesus figure to serve as a sort of absent deus ex machina in providing sudden emotional resolution.
The dramatic conflict of the play centers around a romantic triangle involving Zoathan, a young Roman soldier, his centurion brother, Cassius, and Mary Magdalene. The elaborate attempts by Cassius to save Zoathan from the influence of his former lover, the Magdalene, who had been involved with another young man's suicide also involves Pilate and his wife, Claudia, because of their friendship with Cassius. Because of Cassius' zeal and Zo's rebelliousness, the conflict results in Zoathan's court-martial and sentencing to death. The association with Jesus is drawn weakly in the dramatic development which operates through the coincidental ties of Cassius with Magdalene's dependence on Jesus' spiritual teachings and Pilate's role as Jesus' final judge. The line of McIntosh's plot fully intersects the life of Jesus finally at the crucifixion when Cassius substitutes himself for Zo and becomes one of the two thieves executed alongside Christ.

The use of Jesus in this play seems almost gratuitous in its impact on the central conflict. Mary Magdalene is the most solidly associated tie because of her personal involvement and dedication to the guidance from the Nazarene. The other characters seem to be connected much more tokenly for the sake of establishing some precedent for the beatific resolutions that each of the characters experiences at the end. Cassius views Jesus as a political inconvenience that demands elimination. Pilate sees Jesus
as an innocent man who must serve as a religious sacrificial goat. Claudia is sympathetic to Jesus because of his poetic sincerity. McIntosh has all of his characters come to their final personal resolves at the summit of Calvary. Although the association with the crucifixion of the Christ as it stands is almost unnecessary. The change through personal crisis seems to be more credible because of the catastrophic circumstances than because of any involvement with the martyrdom of a spiritual being.

In the case of all these plays, Jesus functions in some sense as the stimulus for the dramatic action. That function ranges from that of sustained agitant of the conflict as in Good Friday and A Man's House to the initial springboard into elaborate fictionalizations on other matters as in Lazarus Laughed and The Wandering Jew. There are a number of problems which run throughout the several plays. A frequent weakness in theatrical potential lies in the excessive dependence on narrative exposition dominating the dialogue as an unsatisfying substitute for the creation of active dramatic events. That problem is prominent in Judas Iscariot and Christ's Comet. The reliance on offstage activity as a major substance of the drama results in the sense that the play's protagonist is an absent figure in Good Friday. Many of these scripts
suffer from such a skeletal or varied depiction of Christ through the characters' testimonies that his exact dramatic import for the plot and theme is never realized adequately. *Joh,* *Family Portrait,* and *Judas Iscariot* are most handicapped by this flaw. Some scripts such as *Terror of Light* and *Family Portrait* have moderate success as character studies of individuals in association with Jesus. In *The Wandering Jew,* *Lazarus Laughed,* and *The Carpenter,* Jesus serves such a secondary plot function that his presence seems almost superfluous. The most successful of the plays studied here is Drinkwater's *A Man's House* which focuses on a strong central figure whose conflict is prompted by involvement with the Nazarene. The play is balanced fairly well in its presentation of the onstage conflict in relation to the offstage stimulus. Drinkwater's play also contains interesting individuals who have credibility in his involved, yet not excessively contrived plotting.
CHAPTER SEVEN
CHRIST AS A MUSICAL COMEDY CHARACTER

At the beginning of the 1970's, there appeared the first two major commercial attempts in the U.S. and Great Britain to use conventions of the twentieth century musical theatre to portray the life of Jesus of Nazareth. They were Jesus Christ Superstar, a rock opera by Webber and Rice, and Godspell, a softer rock musical by Tebelak and Schwartz. The opera presents a highly controversial portrait of Jesus as a manic popular figure involved in a mortal struggle with his existential destiny. The musical uses the metaphor of clowns on a junkyard playground to depict a gentle tragi-comic hero. Jesus Christ Superstar appeared originally as a best-selling album recorded by various leading British rock performers before being moved to the stage in London and New York. Godspell was first presented as a graduate directing project at Carnegie-Mellon University in Pittsburgh and then was moved to an Off-Broadway house for what was intended originally as an academic experience. Both works are seriously flawed. However, at this writing, the first is still being toured throughout the United States and the second is continuing an indefinite run on Broadway more than six years after its
premiere. Those commercial records are ample testimony to their impacts as theatrical works. This chapter will examine the handling of the Jesus story and persona in these two unusual contemporary works.

**Jesus Christ Superstar** by Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber (1970)

In the experimental genre of the rock opera which uses contemporary musical idioms mixed with the conventions of traditional opera, Webber and Rice followed on the precedent established popularly by Peter Townsend's *Tommy* to create the portrait of Jesus as a manic Biblical celebrity. The focus of Webber and Rice's musical drama is on the contest of volatile egos of Jesus, who is presented as a self-destructive megalomaniac, and Judas, who emerges as a tragic hero, sort of a Biblical surrogate for a confused contemporary Everyman on a road to existential hysteria. Using freely adjusted conventions of traditional opera, Rice has constructed a loosely connected libretto, a series of isolated dramatic incidents and arda-like character studies which center around events of the Passion week. Without exception every character and event is presented in a markedly divergent light from the range of traditionally accepted views communicated in the Biblical accounts. Webber and Rice have created a compelling modern reworking of the Passion story.
The rock opera is unsettling in the cynicism and ultimate ambiguity of its viewpoint. However, it uses a modern idiom to present the Scriptural content in a grippingly radical context. Jesus emerges as an enigmatic, contemporary anti-hero in a drama which conforms to the image of heroism prevalent in modern popular tragicomedy.

The action of the opera is divided into separate song episodes, many of which function more as character statements than as dramatic incidents. There is particular emphasis on the conflicting personalities and aspirations of Judas and Jesus. The other principal characters, Mary Magdalene, Caiaphas, and Pilate are presented principally in light of their relationship to Jesus. There is an intriguing, but sometimes disjointed, mixture of styles and tones in the different songs ranging from the tragic aria "I only want to say" that Jesus sings in Gethsemane to the campy vaudeville tune "Herod's Song."

Rice establishes Jesus' state of alienation from his companions and environment immediately and consistently. The disillusionment and hostility which Judas expresses first in "Heaven on Their Minds" is baited by Jesus' self-righteous antagonism until it climaxes in their brutal, direct confrontation in "The Last Supper." Jesus' relationship with the disciples is more that of an irritation than of a consolation as revealed in their self-parodying
confusion in "What's the Buzz?" and "The Last Supper." The only comfort available to Jesus comes from Mary Magdalene who functions rather as a Biblical "groupie" who follows an attractive, yet enigmatic, celebrity. Rice emphasizes the mixed emotions of both Pilate and Caiaphas who see some merit in Jesus initially. However, both men turn bitterly against him in the face of his passive arrogance.

Rice has used the major events of the Passion week for his plot. Moving from the Palm Sunday entry into Jerusalem, the action centers particularly on the events that most directly involve Judas and Pilate. The play climaxes catastrophically in the dramatically powerful sequence of "Trial Before Pilate," "Superstar," and "The Crucifixion," before ending in the unsettling and irresolve instrumental lament "John 19:41." All the events are crafted so as to establish the function of Jesus as a contemporary metaphor for ambitious young pop rebels who are faced with a confusion of ideals, the intoxication of mass popularity, and a self-destructive streak. Their untimely destruction is precipitated both by their vaulting arrogance and the impersonal forces of the social establishment. Jesus' crisis is of vital importance to Rice, but almost more significant is the depiction of Judas as a common man who is disillusioned by the egocentric
sham of his counterculture heroes. It is a disillusionment which prompts first a betrayal of those tainted ideals and then leads to a suicidal drive that is both literal and existential. Rice is interested apparently primarily in the Christ phenomenon as a means of catching the audience's imagination for his examination of a pop existentialist crisis.

Webber and Rice have created a Jesus who is spectacularly emotional in character. His moods cover a range from sublime passivity to nearly manic-depressive hysteria. Viewing himself as both leader and victim of a revolutionary religious movement, this Jesus is keenly aware of the power struggle that is involved in his ministry. Finding only small consolation in the gentle sympathies of an ex-prostitute, Webber and Rice's Jesus is an often frightened, isolated individual who faces certain catastrophic crisis. The pathetic dilemma of confusion about Jesus' identity and purpose represented by the portrayal of Judas is justified given the self-conscious and impetuous obscurity and petulance of this Jesus. Because they have shaped the available historical evidence with considerable consistency, the authors have constructed a relatively well-controlled characterization which supports their apparent purposes. They seem to have set out to present Jesus as a very problematic religious
figure in order to address particularly contemporary youth's perception and personal experience. Given the characterization which supports a view of Jesus as a first century religious-political pop star, they have presented an unusually strong dramatic argument compared to other plays which call Jesus' positive influence into critical scrutiny. This is a characterization which is constructed from a sophisticated integration of the content of the lyrics and the nature of the music given Jesus. Hence, the analysis of their creation will first concern the literary aspect and then the musical.

The character is presented directly in his own behavior and indirectly in others' commentary. Most prominent among these is Judas. When Judas is first introduced he is already dissident in his view of Jesus. However, given the great sympathy that Judas is apparently expected to elicit, his testimony may not be disregarded. There are instances in which he seems to overstate his case because of his emotional involvement. However, the confusion about Jesus' motives and behavior which results in Judas' ultimate rejection of his former leader is held up as an understandable and appropriate response in the libretto. To Rice and Webber, Judas' rejection is certainly not an object of ridicule.
In "Heaven on Their Minds," Judas warns Jesus that he has become involved in a momentum that will inevitably crush both him and his disciples. The warning centers on the growing belief that Jesus is the Messiah—a belief that Judas insists Jesus can not possibly fulfill. (The contention that Jesus is not the Messiah is suggested clearly elsewhere in the libretto.) Webber seems to portray Jesus as a simple man who has overstepped his natural ability to control his situation when Judas sings,

   Nazareth your famous son should have stayed a great unknown.
   Like his father carving wood—he'd have made good.
   Tables chairs and oaken chests would have suited Jesus best.1

Jesus is presented as either unaware or negligent of the probable danger of the course his ministry has taken. Saying that Jesus' disciples have "Too much heaven on their minds," Judas implies that Jesus leads his followers into a disastrous attitude of other-worldliness.

As presented in "What's the Buzz?", Jesus has a rather unfavorable relationship with his disciples whom he views as being insensitive to his needs. He refuses petulantly to answer their questions, not even acknowledging

their right to ask. "Why should you want to know? Don't you mind about the future, don't you try to think ahead/ Save tomorrow for tomorrow, think about today instead." Jesus expresses curious ambiguity about his future when he says, "If you knew the path we're riding you'd understand it less than I." Even if this Jesus does not know what will happen to him, it is already apparent that he has a blind sense of fatalism about the inevitability of his fate. When Mary Magdalene offers the physical consolation of a moist cloth, Jesus responds with sensual pleasure ("That feels nice, so nice ... "). He also reveals a self-pitying bitterness against his followers for not ministering to his needs. "While you prattle through your supper-- where and when and who and how/ She alone has tried to give me what I need right here and now." Far from being self-sacrificing, this Jesus is disagreeable, obtuse, and highly self-concerned.

When Judas attacks Jesus for his involvement with Mary, he is set upon with a self-righteous rebuke. He

2 Rice and Webber, p. 6.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
tells Jesus that "it doesn't help if you're inconsistent" in such matters as his seeming endorsement of prostitution.  

Using the John 8:3-11 passage (Jesus' saving of the adulterous woman from stoning) as a source for their creative history, Rice has Jesus respond, "If your slate is clean— then you can throw stones/ If your slate is not then leave her alone." In this context the remark smacks of a false piety. Turning on the rest of the disciples who seemingly are guilty through proximity, Jesus condemns them singing, "I'm amazed that men like you can be so shallow thick and slow/ There is not a man among you knows or cares if I come or go." This is another striking example of this Jesus' bitter self-pity.

The conflict between Jesus and Judas still continues in "Everything's Alright." Mary's attempt to soothe Jesus' hot disposition is met with ridicule from Judas because of her use of an expensive oil. Jesus' reaction evidences a callous attitude towards any concern other than his self-glorification.

Surely you're not saying we have the resources
To save the poor from their lot?
There will be poor always pathetically struggling

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6 Rice and Webber, p. 8.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
Look at the good things you've got!
Think! while you still have me
Move! while you still see me
You'll be lost and you'll be so sorry
when I'm gone. 9

The viewpoint of the Pharisees evidenced in "This
Jesus Must Die" is interesting in its mixture of contempt
and respect. Jesus' influence over his followers is viewed
clearly as a political threat to the status quo under
Roman rule. Even though Jesus is described as a "Miracle
wonderman— hero of fools," the Jewish officials are
struck by his operation with "no riots, no army, no
fighting, no slogans."10 (Given the general sporadic
nature of Jesus' behavior here, this may be evidence of
a negligent lack of organization.) Caiaphas comments with
an ironic twist considering Jesus' previous emotional
outbursts, "One thing I'll say for him— Jesus is cool!"11
Despite this curious compliment, the group still regards
Jesus as a threat sufficient to demand drastic action.

The extent of Jesus' egotism is presented vividly in
the "Hosanna!" which accompanies his Palm Sunday entry into
the city. Chided to calm his followers' fervor, Jesus
ridicules the Pharisees' objections flippantly. He brags,

10 Rice and Webber, p. 9.
11 Ibid.
Why waste your breath moaning at the crowd?  
Nothing can be done to stop the shouting  
If every tongue was still the noise  
would still continue  
The rocks and stones themselves would start  
to sing.12

He then not only condones the singing but leads the final chorus of the "Hosanna."

In his lament, "Poor Jerusalem," Jesus expresses his sorrow over the fact that no one seems to comprehend what is involved in his ministry. He complains because none of the people who are in his world "understand what power is/ Understand what glory is/ Understand at all."13
This is the most plaguingly vague part of the characterization in that what Jesus is exactly referring to is never revealed clearly. If Rice wants to make a point about Jesus' idealism being vague and ultimately hollow, he does not indicate that strongly enough. Jesus moves to the suggestion that death is the release from life's concerns. He sings,

If you knew all that I knew, my poor Jerusalem  
You'd see the truth, but you close your eyes  
But you close your eyes  
While you live your troubles are many, poor Jerusalem  
To conquer death you only have to die  
You only have to die.14

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12Rice and Webber, 11.
13Ibid., p. 13.
14Ibid.
This whole solo is enigmatic because it touches upon two major aspects of Jesus' teaching, the nature of power and the achievement of immortality, without really discussing either. All we are left with is a melancholy character who professes to have understanding of the issues, but it is an understanding which is completely internalized if present at all. With such an approach to central issues, it is little wonder that the character's followers seem confused.

The rapid range of Jesus' moods is clear in his confrontation with the merchants in the temple. His initial rage is so intense as to be near hysteria as he shrieks, "My temple should be a house of prayer/ But you have made it a den of thieves/ Get out/ Get out!"\(^1\)\(^5\) It should be noted that here Jesus does refer to the Holy Temple as "My temple," a statement which suggests his personal equation of himself with the Godhead. As soon as the outburst is past, Jesus plunges into an introspective gloom. He considers his situation in singing, "My time is almost through/ Little left to do/ After all I've tried for three years, seems like thirty/ Seems like thirty."\(^1\)\(^6\) But Jesus is pulled out of his near stupor by the pressing

\( ^1\)\(^5\) Rice and Webber, p. 13.
\( ^1\)\(^6\) Ibid.
demands of the crowds for solutions to their problems. Here is one of the most striking examples of the character's personal dilemma caused by the strength of his public persona. He cries, "There's too many of you-- don't push me/ There's too little of me-- don't crowd me/ Heal yourselves!" 

This wild variety of emotional states finally climaxes in Jesus' grateful succumbing to Mary Magdalene's consolation. He lies in her arms apparently in a swoon of nervous exhaustion.

Mary's love song does not reveal specifically any definite aspects of Jesus' character. However the fact that Mary could view this Jesus romantically and even sexually suggests that there is a dynamic masculinity apparent in the character's charismatic appeal. This aspect of the characterization is an obvious ploy on Rice's part to parallel the appeal of Jesus to a contemporary rock personality.

There is an interesting suggestion about Jesus' view of the inevitability and necessity of his death in Judas' negotiation with the Pharisees. He explains that it is necessary to stop Jesus' rise to power in saying, "Jesus can't control it like he did before/ And furthermore I know

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17 Rice and Webber, p. 14.
that Jesus thinks so too/ Jesus wouldn't mind that I was here with you." The extent to which this is simply a rationalization to soothe his troubled conscience is uncertain. However, it may be possible that on one level Jesus would have approved of Judas' actions as being necessary. When relating the character to contemporary counterparts, Rice seems to see a dark, self-destructive drive among modern youth figures. This aspect of Jesus is illustrated further in the confrontation at the Last Supper. In the bitter argument that transpires between Judas and Jesus, there is both contempt for Judas' betrayal and anger at his delay displayed in Jesus' attitude. He chides Judas to go to his work and not stay bothering him about his personal motives. Rice has given Judas an insult which appears to be at least somewhat indicative of the manner in which he intends Jesus' persecution to be viewed. In his anger and disillusionment at his leader's ridicule, he shouts, "What if I just stayed here/ And ruined your ambition?" This outburst is suggestive of the interpretive problem of whether this type of character is driven towards his destruction by

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18 Rice and Webber, p. 15.

19 Ibid., p. 17.
some impersonal forces from outside him or by a distorted drive for power from within. The issue is a central, plaguing, and ultimately unresolved one in this musical drama.

Jesus' address to his disciples at the Last Supper is an intriguing mixture of self-pity, self-recrimination, and a touch of a more traditional Christ-like self-sacrifice. He sings plaintively,

The end . . .
Is just a little harder when brought about by friends,
For all you care this wine could be my blood
For all you care this bread could be my body
The end!
This is my blood you drink
This is my body you eat
If you would remember me when you eat and drink
I must be mad thinking I'll be remembered--yes
I must be out of my head!
Look at your blank faces! My name will mean nothing
Ten minutes after I'm dead.

Most intriguing in this passage is Jesus' curious ambivalence about the symbolism of the communion elements and his apparent disbelief in the possibility of having a lasting impact from his ministry. At the end of the

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\(^{20}\) Rice and Webber, p. 17.
Last Supper, Jesus still turns to his followers who he has ridiculed repeatedly to ask for their support in his time of distress. He asks particularly Peter, John, and James to keep vigil with him in the Garden. This Jesus is a very human character who strikes out when he feels betrayed and will reach for any means of support when he feels cut adrift.

Jesus' aria in the Garden, "I only want to say," is the single most telling passage in the libretto about this character. He confronts directly the fact that he does not want to have to accept the death which seems inevitable at this point. He explains that although he was confident at the beginning of his ministry, he is now "sad and tired" and shaken in his resolution to continue.\(^\text{21}\) Singing to the power behind his fate, Jesus pleads that he be relieved, citing "surely I've exceeded expectations."\(^\text{22}\) From Jesus' view the disturbing problems center in the exact purpose for his death. He demands repeatedly,

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{I'd wanna know I'd wanna know my God} \\
\text{I'd wanna see I'd wanna see my God} \\
\text{Why I should die. } \text{23}
\end{align*}
\]

\(^{21}\)Rice and Webber, p. 18.  
\(^{22}\)Ibid., p. 19.  
\(^{23}\)Ibid.
He is obviously uncertain whether his ministry will have any lasting impact. He wants some tangible assurance as a justification for his sacrifice ("If I die what will be my reward?"). He expresses the same torment of not comprehending the reason for his fall into destruction that Judas has stated repeatedly. Jesus almost ridicules the Godhead with "You're far too keen on where and how and not so hot on why?" Jesus denies all responsibility for the beginning of the actions which are leading to his death. He turns to confront his Lord with the lines,

Why then am I scared to finish what I started
What you started-- I didn't start it
God they will is hard  But you hold every card.

With those lines, the character moves into a grudging acceptance of the course on which he is set. In a final attempt at self-assertion, Jesus gives himself over to his Passion with certain reservations ("Bleed me beat me kill me take me now-- before I change my mind.") This aria may not seem very probable as the inner struggle

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24 Rice and Webber, p. 19.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
of the historical Jesus, but it is a compelling piece of musical drama. Rice is using Jesus as a cynical pop metaphor for contemporary individuals driven on a destructive course of action by impersonal powers. They are sacrificed for ideals they did not choose or understand.

There then proceeds a long series of humiliations and physical persecutions beginning with "The Arrest" and climaxing in the "Trial Before Pilate." Throughout the long line of accusations and threatening confrontations, Jesus is consistently passive in response to various personal attacks. Having accepted his persecution and eventual death as inevitable, there is an apparent strength and resolution which enables him to answer such charges as Caiaphas' claim of blasphemy if Jesus said he is the "Son of God." He says calmly to his accuser, "That's what you say-- you say that I am." After being mocked by Herod and carried back to Pilate, Jesus finally becomes more eloquent to his examiners. He laments to Pilate, "I look for truth and find that I get damned." Pilate is struck by Jesus' apparent innocence characterizing him as a "harmless" and "misguided" man.

28 Rice and Webber, p. 20.
29 Ibid., p. 24.
30 Ibid., p. 25.
However, when Jesus insults Pilate’s sense of command with his statement, "You have nothing in your hands/ Any power you have comes to you from far beyond/ Everything is fixed and you can’t change it," the Roman ruler stops opposing the Jews’ desire for Jesus’ death. He now characterizes Jesus as a “misguided martyr” and “an innocent puppet.” Pilate thus becomes another spokesman for the Rice view of Jesus as possibly being just a pawn for an inscrutable and impersonal force of fate in the form of the Godhead. This view is then reinforced climactically by the song, “Superstar” in which basic questions and confusions about the purpose and plan for Jesus' life and his identity as either a man or God are raised for the sake of the work’s thematic development, and, obviously, those questions are significantly never answered.

The final presentation of Jesus is in the nightmarish “Crucifixion” sequence. Rice uses the various recorded Biblical quotations from Christ on the cross in his own slightly paraphrased versions.

God forgive them— they don’t know what they’re doing
Who is my mother? Where is my mother?
My God My God why have you forgotten me?

31 Rice and Webber, p. 25.
32 Ibid.
I am thirsty
It is finished
Father into your hands I commend my spirit. 33

Emphasizing the physical suffering of Jesus, there is a particular stress given to the "I thirst" quote in its multiple repetitions in different emotional states. Here is the last example of the range of Jesus' response to his fate. He forgives those who have wronged him. He cries out in protest to the determiner of his course. He relinquishes his power to that force in broken resolution.

Because the writers supervised a recording of the work in 1970, we are able to analyse Webber's original musical intentions with unusual detail. Ian Gillan's performance as Jesus on that recording is used here to establish the standard for the musical analysis of the character.

The music composed by Webber for the character of Jesus tends to vacillate between a plaintive ballad-like melodiousness and jarring fragmented emotional utterances. The frequent rapid progression from mellow croon to frantic wail is demonstrated first in Jesus' solo passages in "What's the Buzz?" The sensuality of the character is evidenced in the low moaning rock motif used by Jesus in

33 Rice and Webber, p. 26.
his solo passages. This pattern of the soft soothing melody line suddenly changing to a piercing emotional shriek or howl and then returning to the original lamenting quality is present in the majority of Jesus' songs.

Whereas several of the other characters are given very simple melody lines with much repetition, Jesus has some much longer and more interestingly developed lines, particularly in the gentle lamenting tune that is used in "Poor Jerusalem" and "I only want to say." Changes in attitude or emotional response to situations are reinforced usually by sudden transformations of metre, form, and melodic development in Jesus' music. That range is shown in the changes in his "Last Supper" solo from the classical aria section that opens it to the section reminiscent of Judas' accusations in "Strange Thing Mystifying" which follows. An interesting aspect of the composition of Jesus' music is the use of varied metres in rapid succession. This technique is prominent in the "I only want to say" use of the alternating sections of the 4/4 and 9/8 metres. The 4/4 is used in the pleading sections with a plodding pace. The switch is made to 9/8 for the agitated passages of Jesus' demands for attention and response from the Godhead. In the "Crucifixion." Jesus no longer sings. He speaks in hushed tones or screams in desperate cries. Webber has used a considerable
range of techniques in constructing what emerges as an interesting musical characterization which has consistency in its constant instability and moodiness as does the characterization evident in the libretto.

There are a number of strengths and weaknesses which serve to make Jesus Christ Superstar an interesting, yet problematic dramatic piece. The dramatic libretto is full of vivid imagery and clearly portrayed emotional confrontations. Particularly Jesus and Judas (with passages of strength for Mary Magdalene and Pilate) are strongly drawn characterizations. Webber and Rice have achieved an unusually successful mix of historical and contemporary idioms in their establishment of contemporary parallels to an ancient situation. The use of the rock genre works surprisingly well as a means of communicating the emotional content of the dramatic conflict. The opera stands as a fascinating example of creative historical dramatization.

Weaknesses in the script are often aligned closely to those particular strengths. There is a certain disjointed quality to the dramatic development because of the excessively episodic nature of the plot. Mixtures of style are interesting but ultimately disruptive to a unified effect. Solos which supply vivid characterization are
abundant, but they substitute too often for necessary dramatic incidents for the play to sustain a growing flow of action. There are occasions in which the music seems only to serve no purpose in advancing either plot or characterization. Such instrumentals enhance the emotional pitch of the play but hinder the necessary progress of the conflict. Particularly the gentle, pastoral quality of the "John 19:41" instrumental is touching in its emotion-charged musical powers. However, it is thoroughly unsatisfying as a dramatic resolution because of its sheer uncommunicative ambiguity. A final point of strength and weakness lies in the play's creative historiography. If the writers have chosen to modify consciously each historical incident to create their dramatization then it is apparent that the drama relinquishes its merit as an examination of the historical events themselves. However, in consistently manipulating the historical content Webber and Rice have created a treatment of the life of Jesus which has unusual immediate impact of contemporary relevance.


Similar in its use of the rock music idiom but even more experimental and eclectic in theatrical approach than Jesus Christ Superstar is Schwartz and Tgebela's free form
musical, Godspell. Evolved through an improvisational process at Carnegie-Mellon University, Godspell is a gentler, more innocent portrayal of Jesus' ministry and Passion than is found in Webber and Rice's rock opera. Functioning as the charming leader of an itinerant troupe of youthful clowns, Jesus here emerges as a sentimentalized metaphor for an idealistic view of the spirit of youth in the Woodstock generation. Jesus serves as a much looser metaphor for contemporary phenomena than does his counterpart in Jesus Christ Superstar. He is also an allegorical figure for the martyred minister of love who lived in the first century Palestine. The script is little more than an elaborate scenario, a patchwork of skits, songs, and moral instructions. However the show is always moving towards that inevitable catastrophic ending of Jesus' death. A curious mixture of Biblical quotations, ingenious theatrical gimmickry, and passages of melodramatic realism, Godspell stands in an ever-changing position on the dramatic continuum between unabashed presentationalism and highly illusionistic representationalism.

Because the characters grew initially from the stage persona of the original troupe of college performers, there is an understandably open-ended quality to the individual participants in the action. The script is a skeletal
framework for a dazzling theatrical experience when the necessary continuity of sustained dramatic action is supplied in performance. As the script stands, often little is given other than the necessary narration and a suggested premise for the accompanying theatrical activity. In presenting the action of the play, I will be drawing upon personal experience in having directed three productions of the play, both under educational and professional auspices. As such I will use my personal interpretation of how the many fragments of the published scenario work together in live performance.

The play is set in a theatricalized version of a combination junkyard and playground surrounded by a three-sided hurricane fence. The action opens with an Eden-like atmosphere of harmony among the cast members which is then interrupted by each of the players trying to take control to espouse a different philosopher’s concept. The resultant bedlam is disrupted by another actor in a circus costume who functions as John the Baptist. He (David) calls the people to repentance with a song during which he baptizes them symbolically. While the company goes off, the Jesus character comes on and joins David for a jovial reenactment of Jesus’ baptism. The main action of the play begins with Jesus’ joyful song, “Save the People,” in which he is joined by the other company members now all
outfitted as clowns. The rest of the first act consists of a long series of sketches and vaudeville gags based on passages of Jesus' teaching (principally the Sermon on the Mount in "Matthew") and parables from "Luke." Each vignette is accompanied by Jesus making a point of the moral lesson involved. The comedy is interspersed with a variety of songs, most of which are simple rock hymns praising God. The effect of the first act is very sprightly in its entertaining suggestion of the growing discipleship of Jesus and his followers.

The second act attempts to zero in more concertedly on a more obvious plot. The action constitutes a free form reenactment of some of the Passion week events. For the first major portion, clowns disguised as the Pharisees question Jesus and then his teaching of his second coming is emphasized. Still the tone is generally comic. With the revelation of Judas' plan to betray Jesus, the tone shifts abruptly to a serious one. The Last Supper, Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane, and the betrayal are acted out simply with increasing emotional intensity. Tebelak has his Jesus crucified on the chain-link fence in what appears to be an electrocution. Emotional intensity is pushed by the joining of the whole cast in Jesus' agony. After his death, the play concludes promptly with a reverential lament, "Long Live God," and the optimistic hymn, "Prepare Ye," as the
cast carries out Jesus' body. Although the majority of
the second act retains the variety show format of the first,
there is an increasing move towards more traditional
dramatic continuity as the play nears its climax.

In *Godspell*, Tebelak and Schwartz have presented a
Jesus who basically is a spokesman for a patchwork of
Scriptural passages seen in the theatrical, connotative
guise of a youthful clown. Because the vast majority of
Jesus' dialogue is drawn directly from the Gospel accounts
with virtually no modification, interpretation of the
characterization is therefore dependent on the indivi­
dual's view of the passages' content. The sequence basi­
cally follows the original chronology found in the
Gospels. Tebelak does not seem to have crafted the material
towards any specific thematic argument. Strung together
in loose association, the rather random selection of
teachings makes the character seem rather diffuse in the
focus of his activity. Because the material is drawn
primarily from the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, there is
a strong emphasis on the Mosaic law and many parables
used for teaching moral lessons. The characterization
does contain some other indicative actions, but these
come together ultimately to form an impression of theatrical
resourcefullness in the performer rather than grounds for
generalizing about his emotional character. It is
customary to dress this Jesus in a colorful clown suit with a Superman T-shirt. His face is painted as a sad little clown with a heart on his forehead. He is a gentle visual symbol of wistful youth, not a fully dimensioned human individual.

The treatment of Jesus in this play is similar to the traditional pageant-like approach of presenting him through a series of "greatest hits" incidents pulled from Scripture. The character suffers from similar problems of a lack of continuity to the pageant Christ figures. There is the consistent sense that here is a one-dimensional spokesman for love rather than a three-dimensional human personality. From the variety show format that the show maintains generally, one would suspect that the authors were much more interested in gleaning the theatrical potential from a religious figure of topical interest rather than in presenting a serious dramatic examination of this religious character or his serious contemporary implications. There is however undeniable resonance from the involved spiritual and moral themes in the script's content. However, that content is used often for little more than low comic effect. Particularly curious is the movement from the comic/performer playing at Jesus to the martyred character who we are asked to believe has actually died on the fence.
Symptomatic of the whole characterization, this action can have a whole range of effects on the viewer depending on the personal perception of the historical and spiritual situations dramatized. Thus the audience member reacts much more on the basis of what he brought into the theatre than what he has experienced during the performance. Tebelak and Schwartz's Jesus is certainly a warmly sympathetic, eloquent, and ingeniously eclectic individual in his teaching, but beyond that his character's dimension is almost entirely the responsibility of the actor, director, and audience to determine.

It is nonetheless interesting to examine the specifics of the portrayal of Jesus in Matthew and Luke (and in one instance, John) that have been chosen and how they are strung together in this musical comedy with an unhappy ending. The voice of the actor playing Jesus opens the show with a statement of the creative Godhood he holds,

My name is known God and King. I am most in majesty, 
In whom no beginning may be and no end, 
    Highest in potency I am, 
    And have been ever. 

I have made stars and planets in their courses to go. 
I have made a moon for the night and the sun to light the day also. 
I have made earth where trees and grasses spring. 
. Beasts and fowls, both great and small, 
all thrive and have my liking.
I have made all of nothing for man's sustenance
And of this pleasant garden that I have mostly goodly planted
I will make him gardener for his own recreation.34

The use of Jesus' voice for this passage is reminiscent of the Divine prologues in medieval plays in which the Christ or God figure addressed the audience. Tebelak's prologue speech is an interesting suggestion of the John 1:1-4 doctrine of Christ as the Word of God being the author of creation. However, no reference to any such implications are ever developed in the script. The play's initial mood is one of pastoral peace that will be disrupted by human intervention.

When Jesus is baptized by John, there is a childlike quality to his behavior.

David- Do you come to me?
Jesus- Yeah, I wanna get washed up.
David- I need rather to be baptized by you.
Jesus- No, no, Look, let it be so for the present; we do well now to conform with all that God requires.35

Without any further comment, Jesus breaks into the exuberant call for God's mercy and salvation, "Save the

35Ibid., p. 5.
People." This song would suggest that either this Jesus does not know God's plan for the redemption of mankind through his sacrifice or that he is stating simply a question that is in the hearts of his listeners. Although not tied specifically to himself, there is a confident enthusiasm shown as Jesus sings,

Is it thy will, O Father,  
That man shall toil for wrong?  
No, say thy mountains; No, say thy skies;  
Man's clouded sun shall brightly rise.36

He uses the song to involve the whole cast in the initial act of turning to God as the source of change in their lives.

In his first teaching to the group, Jesus takes command of the situation immediately and also asserts his doctrine that man must adhere to the Mosaic law's standards perfectly. His conservative doctrine throughout the play could create a self-righteous effect if it were not balanced by the character's warmth and sense of humor. Tebelak suggests that Jesus jump up on the sawhorse table during his first teaching.37 The author describes in his stage directions a Jesus who is as physically agile as he is mentally mercurial.

36 Tebelak and Schwartz, p. 6.  
37 Ibid., p. 7.
The first time one of the cast plays a part in demonstrating a lesson it is strictly voluntary. However Jesus immediately begins to appoint and encourage his followers to play roles in illustrating his teachings. Beginning with the parable of the unjust judge and the poor widow, Jesus almost always follows up each parable with a pointed explanation of its moral purpose. The first instance of this is when he says,

You hear what the unjust judge says; and will not God vindicate his chosen people who cry out to him day and night while he sits listening patiently to them?38

The content of Jesus' teachings fall into several different areas of concern. This first section addresses the issue of obedience to God as opposed to token religiosity which is a hypocritical facade. It is an issue which Jesus raises repeatedly in both acts. He uses the parable of the Pharisee and the tax gatherer praying as a case in point. Jesus' patient assistance of Jeffrey when he keeps falling down serves to demonstrate his gentle compassion to his followers.

It also serves as an introduction of the section about divine forgiveness and the necessity for man to model his

38 Tebelak and Schwartz, p. 8.
own forgiveness after it. Both with Joanne's gift to the altar and Lamar's unforgiveness of Joanne's debt, Jesus shows the necessity of repentance and forgiveness to function together. Jesus teaches that all things are forgiven when the transgressor repents. He tells Joanne that "you won't get out until you've paid the last penny." Later in explanation of the parable of the unforgiving servant, he explains "that is how my Heavenly Father will deal with you unless you each forgive your brothers from your hearts." 

As exemplified by his response to "Day by Day," "O Bless the Lord, My Soul," and "By My Side" in particular, Jesus receives the devotion and admiration of his followers warmly. However, he does not demand it verbally nor does he make anything of it. As far as his involvement in the musical numbers go, he participates actively in two of the most playful numbers in the score, "All for the Best" and "Turn Back, O Man." This is by no means a stiff or overly reserved Jesus.

When David wants to chasitse Sonia for flirting with Herb, Jesus demonstrates his characteristic avoidance of

39 Tebelak and Schwartz, p. 11.
sudden punishment for wrong. He stops David both at this point and also when he lashes out at the Pharisees in the second act. Perhaps the most striking example of Jesus' desire to give opportunity for repentance and forgiveness is in his protection of "adulterous" Peggy which precedes "By My Side."41

This Jesus is not a passive lecturer who lets his task of illustration be performed entirely for him. He jumps into a game of charades to make his point about generosity.42 He also works as a ventriloquist to complete the second teaching in that series. Other examples of his personal showmanship are his use of simple magic tricks. He does a scarf trick to illustrate "Don't let your right hand know what your left hand is doing."43 As a playful example of God's provisions, Jesus produces a magician's bouquet of flowers for "Consider the lilies of the field . . . ."44 There is also the curious instance when Jesus imitates a drill instructor barking orders at his followers.45 This is the only example of Jesus teaching the players in other than a gentle manner.

41 Tebelak and Schwartz, p. 50.
42 Ibid., p. 16.
43 Ibid., p. 19.
44 Ibid., p. 25.
45 Ibid., p. 35.
Perhaps the most important thrust of Jesus' teaching is that love of God and fellow man should guide all of a man's actions. He stops a fight between David and Lamar by telling them to love even those who oppose them. He teaches that only in loving and accepting all God's children does one display a necessary level of goodness. Thus, Jesus sets an extremely high standard of love when he says "your goodness must know no bounds, just as your heavenly Father's goodness knows no limit."^46

The demonstration of God's love for his creation is found in his provisions according to Jesus. He explains that because of the unbounded blessings available man should not be anxious for his needs. He states that man should not focus on his personal concerns but rather on God as in the following:

Jesus- How little faith you have! So don't go around anxiously saying, "What am I to eat, what am I to drink?" . . . Set your mind where?

All- God!

Jesus- God's kingdom and his justice and all the rest will come to you as well. So don't worry about tomorrow. Tomorrow will take care of itself. Each day has problems of its own.\textsuperscript{47}

\textsuperscript{46}Tebelak and Schwartz, p. 19.
\textsuperscript{47}Ibid., p. 28.
This is not blind optimism. It is simply putting temporal concerns in the perspective of eternal provisions, he teaches.

One fascinating, yet somewhat enigmatic aspect of Jesus' characterization is his relationship with David as the dual John the Baptist and Judas character. As John, David receives Jesus respectfully and accepts his instruction humbly. As a disciple, David asserts his personal will frequently, and this often demands Jesus' direct response. It has already been mentioned that in two instances Jesus stops David from seizing upon someone whom he has condemned. Also David is the one involved in the fight that Jesus stops. Jesus slaps David and then shames him mildly into forgiveness to demonstrate the principle of "turning the other cheek." When David tries to explain Jesus' secret to the audience and then hesitates in broken embarrassment, Jesus bails him out of his predicament. However, he then jokingly startles David with a trick champagne popper. The first strong confrontation between the two comes during the Beatitude section. David says the last Beatitude about

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48 Tebelak and Schwartz, p. 15.
49 Ibid., p. 19.
persecution and revilement to Jesus as if it were a threat. The entire cast is stunned. It is perhaps the only point at which Jesus loses firm command of the situation. Instead of dealing with the issue, he shifts his tone by making a joke about reading feet. He then begins the "All for the Best" number which is his consolation for times of trials. David breaks into the number with a self-congratulatory verse about being deserving of heavenly reward. It is a subtly different counterpoint to Jesus’ original point. In the vaudeville break section, Jesus confronts David in a joking manner with a display of David’s insensitivity.

Jesus- Now how can you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye, when all the time there’s this great plank in your own?

David- I don’t know. How can you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye when all the time there’s this great plank in your own?

Jesus- Or, how can you take the speck of sawdust out of your brother’s eye while all the time there’s this great plank in your own?

David- I don’t know. How can you take the speck of sawdust out of your brother’s eye while all the time there’s this great plank in your own?

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\(^{50}\)Tebelak and Schwartz, p. 28.
Jesus- You hypocrite! First take the plank out of your own eye so you can see clearly to take the speck of sawdust out of your brother's.

David- Wait a minute! That's no answer to the question!

Jesus- Did I promise an answer to the question? 51

Obviously there is a volatile opposition potential in David's character which is provoked perhaps intentionally by Jesus. However, it seems to be only a sketchy suggestion as a motivation for Judas' betrayal as the script stands. There is never a direct clash of wills that develops before the Last Supper revelation of Judas' intention to betray Jesus comes. Tebelak has raised an interesting possibility of Judas' hurt sense of self-righteousness but he does not pursue it.

At only one point does the actor seem to drop all attempt to create the illusion of character as Jesus. It is in the intermission speech. Here is no longer Jesus the clown/teacher, but a young actor/singer who invites the audience to enjoy some wine with the cast. 52 The sudden intrusion of this vaguely Brechtian device is a clear demonstration of Tebelak's general disregard for consistent conventions.

51 Tebelak and Schwartz, p. 30.
52 Ibid., p. 40.
In the opening sequence of the second act, Jesus deals ingeniously with the Pharisees' questions. As does the Gospel Jesus, this teacher meets their questions with more difficult questions. Ultimately he uses the situation for his most direct doctrinal statement of love for both God and fellow man. The only clear demonstration of anger in this Jesus' character is in the meeting with the Pharisees. He warns the audience against the evil of the Pharisaic facade of false piety. Blasting into the "Alas for You," we see a Jesus who accuses them wrathfully in saying, "then when you've got your converts, you make them/ Twice as fit for hell/ As you are yourselves." It is a drastic switch from the gentle showman found elsewhere, but it is understandable in light of the confrontation with his religious enemies. The more characteristic compassion for man's sinful predicament emerges in his lament for Jerusalem which then follows.

For the majority of the second act, Jesus is preoccupied with giving prophecy of the end times and his second coming. His message is the most obscurely metaphorical in this section; so much that often it is difficult to communicate to the audience what the purpose

53 Tebelak and Schwartz, p. 44.
54 Ibid., p. 45.
of the content is. An example of Jesus' prophetic, yet oblique teachings in this section is when he reads the fortune cookie message, "Remember, even a good runner, if he remains indifferent to the race, can never enter the kingdom of my Father," and then eats it. In his explanation of the Last Judgement which precedes "We Beseech Thee," Jesus gives clearer explanations of his metaphors than anywhere else in this section.

Beginning with the Passover episode, the whole tone of the play becomes much more serious and the character of Jesus as written suddenly demands much greater emotional depth. He prophesies his betrayal by Judas and forgivingly sends him to his task. Then Jesus blesses the Passover wine and bread explaining that it is the symbol of his sacrificial suffering "for the forgiveness of sins." In a passage of touching simplicity, Jesus bids farewell to each of the disciples while the Hebrew lament in Babylon (found in Psalm 137) is sung as "On the Willows." He asks for their support as he goes to pray saying, "Stay here while I go over there to pray. My heart is ready to break with grief. Stop here and stay awake with me." In the prayer which follows,

55 Tebelak and Schwartz, p. 48.
56 Ibid., p. 55.
57 Ibid., p. 56.
Jesus is shown to be a suffering individual who fears death but accepts the desires of his Father ("yet not as I will, but as thou wilt."") When he finds the disciples asleep and knows that they will deny him, he is not condemning, but compassionately grieved by their weakness. After a second prayer of submission, Jesus is tormented by his now-demonic disciples. In a telling series of defenses, he relies on the power of the Scriptures to dispel their claims and threats. He also is shown—to have the authority to cast out Satan as the disciples quickly return to normal.

From the betrayal to his death, Jesus shows a core of passive dignity in his acceptance of the necessity of his suffering. To Judas, he simply says, "Friend, do quickly what you have to do." He is the one to kiss Judas on the cheeks and complete the betrayal. Jesus then tells his disciples not to use violence to defend him. There is a gentle dignified command in Jesus' last lines before his execution.

Do you not suppose that I could appeal to my Father who would at once send to me twelve legions of angels. Do you

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58 Tebelak and Schwartz, p. 56.
59 Ibid.
60 Ibid., p. 57.
61 Ibid., p. 58.
take me for a bandit, that you come
after me with swords and cudgels?
Day after day I sat teaching in the
synagogues and you didn’t come after me
then, but all this has happened to ful-
fill what the prophets have written.62

Hanging on the fence, Jesus only sings three different
statements of his suffering ("Oh, God, I'm bleeding!"
"Oh, God, I'm dying!"; "Oh, God, I'm dead!") and then
quietly dies.63 As the disciples carry their dead leader
off, a hymn is sung that suggests a non-specific optimism
for the endurance of Jesus’ teaching. Tebelak has chosen
to dispense with a resurrection sequence. As with other
plays discussed before which neglect that episode in the
historical account, the emphasis in the portrayal of
Jesus is on the content of his moral teachings and not on
the Christian doctrinal insistence that the resurrection
was the necessary completion of Jesus’ earthly ministry.
The contrast between the dead character at the end of the
second act and the actor thanking the audience for coming
at the finale of the first is great and indicative of the
free form approach that Tebelak and Schwartz have taken
to portraying Jesus.

62 Tebelak and Schwartz, p. 58.
63 Ibid., p. 59.
There are a number of difficulties with this script. An initial difficulty in performance is getting the self-conscious intellectualism of the "Prologue" to work dramatically. It is a very sluggish opening for an otherwise sprightly show. The major problem of the script centers in the random mixture of genres and dramatic approaches. The majority of the play amounts to a Biblically based vaudeville entertainment. Still there is a semblance of dramatic action as Jesus' teaching proceeds and he has interactions with the others. Finally there comes the climactic sequence in which we are asked to become involved emotionally in a largely realistic representation of the final Passion events. The range in approaches to the content raises the unsettling question of just how illusionistic the whole play should be to justify the ending. One must also question just what the dramatic action is that ties together all the disparate elements to lead to that climax. Tebelak has concocted the metaphorical frame of a seemingly contemporary circus/playground premise. Then he uses Biblical quotes to historical entities which are jarringly specific in the context of the generalized metaphor. For the most part, the play is not intended apparently to be taken too seriously. Because of this, the seriousness of its moral teaching and unhappy final actions do not seem to fit with
the general approach. Despite a general adherence to the chronology of the Gospels, every incident and teaching is taken out of context and that nurtures a feeling of disjointed dramatic progression. Frequently the coherence and comprehensibility of the content suffers at the expense of theatrical gimmickry. The vague transition of David's identity from John the Baptist to Judas which could be intriguing thematically is used to little point. The songs, although pleasantly tuneful and involving, are almost always intrusive in the tradition of the conventional musical comedy.

Godspell is very different from Jesus Christ Superstar in both conventions and apparent intent. Godspell is a dramatic/musical variety show which seeks to turn the life of Jesus into a comic, then emotionally touching entertainment. Superstar is a rock opera with pretensions to be an existential tragedy. However, both plays have made effective use of very contemporary idioms to portray the life of Jesus. Whereas the former is trapped somewhere between theatricality and literal portrayal, the latter often forces its argument through manipulation of content. However, both are vivid theatre pieces which are unique attempts to deal with the challenge of putting Jesus on stage.
CHAPTER EIGHT
PROBLEMS OF CHRIST AS A DRAMATIC CHARACTER

Twentieth century plays depicting the life of Jesus Christ represent a wide variety of styles and dramatic approaches. The characterizations of Jesus that emerge from those scripts embody the most devout mystical views and the most irreverent challenges of the man's spiritual claims. This chapter presents generalizations that may be drawn from the analyses of the scripts regarding the plotting of the plays, the characterization of the Jesus figure, the use of language, the theatricality of the scripts, and their thematic viewpoints. Following that summation, there is a speculative attempt to suggest possible guidelines for constructing a more successful dramatization of the life of Jesus.

The root problem limiting the success of most of these scripts lies in their plotting. In plotting a dramatization of the life of Jesus, the author is faced with the decision of how to use the available source material found in the Gospel accounts. In light of the author's specific dramatic intention, he must select which events to employ and what manner in which to present them. Because
the events in the Gospels are presented in an often non-chronological literary narrative which does not have unbroken continuity or vast amounts of detail particularly in the actions of secondary characters, the author must decide how to go about filling out the action into a full dramatic fabric. If a playwright wishes to express a view of the Biblical action which falls outside the range of possible interpretations evident in the Gospel context, he must decide upon a working balance between the material given in Scripture and creative speculations which support his stance. These are the issues which face a playwright treating this subject and which have not been met with any particular success in most of the scripts studied here.

The majority of the Jesus plays have melodramatic plot structures. Early in those dramas there is the establishment of the protagonist representative of virtue, usually either the Christ or a character or group identified closely with him. The antagonistic foil is almost invariably an active opponent of the ministry of the Nazarene, typically a character such as Judas or one of the members of the Jewish power structure in Jerusalem. After a series of simple melodramatic complications, the conflict is resolved usually with the death of Jesus which involves some sense of spiritual triumph in the dignity
of Jesus' suffering or the impact which his death has on other dramatic agents. Although such scripts as Judas Iscariot and Jesus Christ Superstar may have aspirations for tragedy in the moral struggle of the Judas figure, none of these scripts develop the characters' moral choices to a level of complexity and credibility that is necessary for the successful achievement of tragedy status. Given the necessity for a clear triumph of the protagonist in a satisfying melodramatic resolution, surprisingly few of these scripts employ the victory of the Resurrection as the means for such a triumphant resolution. As they stand, most of these plays may be categorized as pathetic melodrama which uses the dramatic conflict of simple, heroic characters against equally simple, villainous characters for emotional pathos but little satisfying insight into the content of that conflict. There are some melodramas such as Family Portrait and Good Friday in which the sides of the conflict become so diffuse and the resolution is so ambiguous that the melodramatic effect becomes ultimately utterly enigmatic. The best melodrama which uses Jesus directly as an agent is Marquis' The Dark Hours which establishes the opposing forces strongly, giving them considerable, credible complexity and firmly resolving their conflict in the climactic death of the protagonist Christ. The most
successful melodrama in which Jesus functions only as an
offstage stimulus is Drinkwater's A Man's House. The
conflict of that script's central character, Salathiel,
operates effectively as the focus for a melodramatic plot
structure.

There are various other difficulties in the plotting
of the scripts. Many of these plays such as John, The Son
of Man, Dear Judas, and The Coming of Christ rely too
heavily on expositional expression of major events in
Jesus' career as a major portion of the stage activity.
Because of long passages recounting offstage action, those
plays are very static in the development of their dramatic
action and would not maintain audience interest easily. A
related problem is the excessive reliance on rhetorical
discussion in plays such as Jesus: Tragedy of Man, The
Passing of the Essenes, Son of Man, and Resurrection as a
means of dramatizing the conflicting philosophical stances
involved in the action. That technique tends to turn the
plays into staged lectures rather than enactments of
dramatic action. Most of the verse dramas here are simply
too abstract in their plotting to be readily effective
as theatre pieces. Calvary, Dear Judas, Seed of Adam, and
Easter all evidence the most dangerous attributes of the
symbolist movement such as static physical action and
inaccessible inhuman characters, all of which result in
unsatisfying theatrical experiences for most audiences.

There is a wide range of dramatic options that have been pursued in the attempt to bring the life of Jesus to the stage. Such scripts as The Black Hills Passion Play, Bethlehem, and Easter seem to be no more than modern reconstructions of the medieval mystery plays, which are the dramatic precedent for the whole body of plays studied here. On the other end of the spectrum, some are very contemporary in their plot developments as with Son of Man's rapid, cinematic series of images and demonstrative incidents or Godspell's montage of sketches and gimmicks which almost substitutes totally a variety-show format for a dramatic plot. Most of the scripts focus primarily on machinations of the plot action even at the expense of the content of the conflict. This is pointedly true in the case of Tempted in All Points, while others such as Terror of Light and Jesus Christ Superstar emerge more as character studies than dramatic events. A few of these scripts simply try to cover too many of the incidents of Jesus' ministry given the limited possible development of a long sequence of events in a single dramatic experience. Such dissimilar scripts as The Black Hills Passion Play and Son of Man cover so much ground with little sense of dramatic continuity that their dramatic developments become too diffuse.
It is interesting to note (as supported in the appended chart of Gospel events employed in the various scripts) that the majority of incidents utilized is limited to either the period of Christ's nativity or the Passion week. This would seem to indicate a common, facile reliance on the familiar spectacle of the Christmas story or on the nearly infallible emotional appeal of the Good Friday climax. An admittedly challenging problem inherent in these scripts is the difficulty in settling on a workable-compromise between the basically nontheatrical Scriptural transcript approach and the attempt to establish continuity by excessively fictionalizing content around the various Biblical events. When too much careless fictionalization occurs, the playwright runs the risk of disrupting the inherent logical development of the Gospels if he does not substitute a new workable dramatic progression.

As has become apparent throughout this study the dramatic characterizations of Jesus in twentieth century theatre cover a wide range of alternative choices. As with Bethlehem, The Coming of Christ, and Christ's Comet, there have been those which have presented a Christ with no apparent human reality. Those Christ figures are nebulous spiritual entities embodying abstract ideals. Such characterizations are at the opposite extreme from
the Jesus figures in *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Son of Man*, and *The Passing of the Essenes* who are utterly earthbound mortals with neurotic complexes and aborted mundane aspirations. In a majority of the plays included here, Jesus emerges in the role of a spiritually influential moral teacher who creates considerable interpersonal conflict while maintaining a fairly passive personal role. That basic character is evident in a wide range of plays including *Tempted in All Points*, *The Black Hills Passion Play*, *The Road to Emmaus*, and *Jesus: Tragedy of Man*.

Whether Christ is shown onstage or remains as an unseen influence, most of the plays which present him in such a light limit the character to a personally static and rather passive dramatic role. As such the character does not have the compelling dramatic dimension necessary to provide sufficient dramatic interest to function dynamically at the center of a playable and consistently involving conflict. In too many instances, the playwright does not create a Jesus with a well-rounded character but leaves his persona at the level of being an embodied consolidation of moral virtues and celebrated sayings. Even in a play which has such considerable overall effectiveness as does *The Dark Hours*, we are not really given any insight into the behavior of the man himself. Even Marquis' Jesus provides only a series of teachings and
In many instances, the more radical characterizations provide more vital dramatic interest. Jeffers' Jesus in *Dear Judas* is a tormented spirit caught in the fatalistic struggle to determine his destiny in a web of infinity. Tebelak's *Godspell* Jesus is an antic showman who is a mercurial catalyst for the theatrics of a troupe of young clowns. A mythic Jesus confronted with the turmoil of lost souls alienated from an impersonal God is depicted in Yeats' *Calvary*. Both *Jesus Christ Superstar* and *Son of Man* present portraits of an emotionally unstable young eccentric whose delusions of grandeur inevitably precipitate his destruction. In moving away from a reverential approach to the Nazarene, these plays present characters that may stir more dramatic interest; however, all of these characterizations suffer from some internal flaws in crafting. There is a lack of internal consistency in the behavior of most of these Jesus figures. Their moral teachings are neither supported nor contradicted clearly by their actions. Their spiritual and social aspirations seem to surface out of nowhere and their motivations are a confused conglomeration of those
apparent from the historical records mixed with those created for the author's didactic purposes. Although the source and content of the self-justification for their misguided actions is consistently ambiguous, usually these Christ figures seem to be personally resolute in the thrust of their behavior. Oftentimes these Christ characters emerge as pathetically confused victims of their own jumbled idealism. At best it is only possible to view their impact on those with whom they associate as being ironic.

It is intriguing to assess the plays as portraits of a historical figure whose personal philosophy influenced the development of Western civilization strongly for some two thousand years after his death. In some sense, an audience member knows Jesus to have been a historical figure whose life yielded various cultural and philosophical consequences. That factor can not be disregarded entirely in any dramatization of his life. Certainly not all the scripts which deal with the subject as a historical phenomenon to be analysed take a reverential view of the historical veracity of the Gospel accounts. In fact, several scripts such as The Black Hills Passion Play, The Dark Hours, and The Trial of Jesus which follow the historical records closely for the major content of their plots focus more heavily on the spiritual implications of the Biblical events. Therefore they do not project
the sense of historical drama so much as that of religious drama eventhough they have validity as both. There are a number of scripts which seem to treat the story as a historical subject but diverge drastically from the only major historical accounts, the Gospels. Such plays as Herts' The Son of Man, Potter's Son of Man, Gregory's Jesus: Tragedy of Man, and Webber and Rice's Jesus Christ Superstar have manipulated the recorded historical events obviously in order to draw conclusions divergent from those traditionally drawn from the Gospels. Both Potter's play and Webber and Rice's rock opera seem to be concerned with establishing metaphors for the contemporary behavior of political radicals and social rebels in the guise of the historical figure, Jesus. Therefore, the extreme modification of the historical events is necessary for the playwrights to make their points. In cases such as the Herts and Gregory plays, the authors have been careless in mixing historical and fictional events which seem to have mutually exclusive implications. There is also a tendency to reorganize the historical events in such a disjointed manner that there is a plaguing lack of logical progression to the realistic dramatic actions. Son of Man and Jesus Christ Superstar are most successful because the writers have reshaped and fictionalized the historical events so consistently and conscientiously
that their creations have an internal strength of dramatic development lacking in the other divergent scripts.

However it must be reasserted that generally the more traditional approaches to the character have not succeeded dramatically. Their weakness is often due to their failure to do anything more than transcribe the scattered actions from the Gospels accounts. Others obscure the humanity of Jesus by trying self-consciously to emphasize the supernatural spiritual aspect of his character by distancing and depersonalizing him.

Language is an important consideration in the construction of a life of Jesus. There are four choices which have been made by various playwrights on how to have their Christ figures express themselves. A common approach is to use the archaic dialect found in the King James translation of the Bible. The use of that Jacobean literary English is found in The Black Hills Passion Play, Bethlehem, and The Passing of the Essenes among others. While the use of that dialect gives a more traditional, reverential tone to the dialogue, it is distinctly archaic and thereby distances the audience from the immediacy of the action. Conversationally the dialect is awkward. It yields its best results from its formality and syntactical grace when used for metaphorical description or discursive narrative. A slight modification of some personal
pronouns and certain conventions of tense results in a formal modern prose style which typifies the dialogue in other scripts such as Tempted in All Points, The Resurrection, and A Man's House. The problems inherent in this style are similar to those with the King James dialect. While giving an air of solemnity to the proceedings they detach the action from immediate contemporary application. The question arises as to what the merit may be in distancing the audience from the action by use of an archaic or nonconversational, formal means of address. When presenting the life of Jesus in the form of a realistic melodrama as all these plays do, it seems that the possibility of personal detachment risked overrides the potential for a sense of historical distance gained.

Four scripts, Son of Man, The Carpenter, Jesus Christ Superstar, and Godspell use modern colloquial dialects for their conversational medium. Particularly in the case of Son of Man and Jesus Christ Superstar, the immediacy of the action which is achieved is counterbalanced detrimentally by the jarringly modern presence of contemporary slang and anachronistic jargon. Terror of Light is most successful in its simple, modern, conversational flow in reinforcing its realistic purposes with its
use of language. The final language alternative has been the use of a traditional poetic diction and syntax evident in Seed of Adam, Christ's Comet, Calvary, and Dear Judas as well as the other verse dramas. While the poetic framework is excellent for expression of the metaphorical content of the plays, it is stifling to a sense of conversational action in the hands of playwrights who are far from the literary skill of, say, a Shakespeare or Moliere.

The issue of effective theatricality in these scripts is one of varying interest dependent upon the individual play. Most of the scripts are ordinary realistic melodramas and are therefore fairly standard in their theatrical potential. While some such as The Dark Hours hold potential for fascinating variety in realistic visualization through multiple actions, others such as The Passing of the Essenes and The Resurrection are excessively talky, static little pieces which onstage would seem more like discussions than dramas. Three of the plays, Tempted in All Points, Christ's Comet, and The Wandering Jew are strongly reminiscent in their production demands of the most theatrical of nineteenth-century romantic melodramas. The first of those, the Ferris script, is nearly Wagnerian in its elaborate "vision" sequences.
There are instances of modern staging experimentation found in various of the plays. *Lazarus Laughed* is an example of O'Neill's eclectic dabbling in the elements of expressionism, symbolism, and psychodrama in its use of archetypal masked crowds. In his two short dramas, Yeats makes a minor, yet interesting attempt to use staging techniques from traditional Oriental theatre as a means of abstractly theatricalizing his conflicts. Potter's *Son of Man* demands a mercurial cinematic technique to accommodate its rapid flow of images and events. Jesus Christ Superstar with its sequence of rock numbers and pop recitatives requires a resourceful mixture of elements from musical comedy, opera, and the rock concert. The most intricately theatrical experiment is Tebelak's *Godspell* which runs through an elaborate sequence of popular theatre styles and performance gimmickry almost to the total obscuring of the dramatic action.

Mention must also be made of the instances in which scripts necessitate staging very similar to that of the medieval cycle traditions. *The Black Hills Passion Play* requires the medieval mansion staging. *Bethlehem, The Coming of Christ,* and *Easter* are all written so as to suggest the symbolic, ritualistic staging of those earlier liturgical dramas that were the first theatrical
treatments of Christ. A fundamental, unresolved consideration in the theatricalizing of the Christ story seems to be how best to visualize the inevitable supernatural aspect of the drama particularly if the basic approach taken is ordinary realism, as it is in the case of most of the plays.

The final dramatic aspect of these scripts which should be considered is their basic thematic stance on the subject matter. Scripts including A Man's House, The Dark Hours, Bethlehem, Tempted in All Points, and Terror of Light which take a traditional Christian view of their content run the risk of holding little new insight into the dramatized actions for the audience. Often the characters make only the most simplistic dramatic discoveries and the progression of the action is so predictable as to be uninteresting. On the other hand, particularly the Williams' play incorporates probably too many involved Christian doctrinal complexities to be comprehensible to a non-Christian audience member. It is easy for plays with that thematic stance to amount to little more than ritual reenactments or theological lectures. Thereby such scripts hold limited dramatic vitality. The second major thematic approach appears in those which are humanistic in their view, limiting Jesus to the role of mortal moral teacher rather than a divine agent. Scripts
in this category include *The Carpenter*, *John*, *Family Portrait*, *The Son of Man*, and *Godspell*. Because these scripts generally deemphasize, obscure, or neglect the spiritual implications of the content of their major character's verbal behavior, their central characterizations weaken their dramatic thrust. Judging from the vague development and resolution of the conflicts, the Jesus figure seems to be speaking with little reason and to no particularly forceful end. Thus, these plays are generally weak dramatic experiences.

The final type of thematic stance is the anti-Christian thrust which is evident in *Lazarus Laughed*, *Son of Man*, the two Moore plays, *Jesus: Tragedy of Man*, *Calvary*, *Dear Judas*, and *Jesus Christ Superstar*. The exact thematic implications of each of these scripts have not been worked out carefully enough to avoid entirely problems which damage a consistent dramatic argument. Because of this tendency towards internal raggedness thematically, the effect of these dramatic experiences may be stimulating, even troubling, but probably not satisfying. Curiously these scripts end up being often more didactic and heavy-handed in their thematic thrust than do the devout Christian plays.

In the attempt to arrive at an effective thematic approach to the subject, it seems that the playwright would be
safest in either making a relaxed, yet reverential use of the implications of the Scriptural accounts or in crafting meticulously a completely divergent structure of material only suggested by the Gospel material.

Before presenting a speculative approach for a more successful dramatization of Christ's life, it might be worthwhile to touch upon the relative success of Christ dramas in the film medium. Of particular note are the two versions of King of Kings, George Stevens' The Greatest Story Ever Told, Pasolini's The Gospel According to St. Matthew, and the recent Zefferelli production, Jesus of Nazareth. These works generate their major dramatic interest through the cinematic potential for depicting epic physical action, realistic local color and exotic spectacle, and deeply emotional events such as the Crucifixion shown in intimate detail. Because of their possibility for dazzling the viewer with the elaborate recreation of historical events on a sweeping scale, these films can elicit more mass audience fascination than a limited stage script. However, it should be noted that those films have for the most part gone even farther afield from communicating the human experience involved in Jesus' life successfully. Most successful are the Pasolini and Zefferelli works which make the most concerted attempt to become involved
personally in the human interactions of the Nazarene's ministry.

In summary, I would like to suggest certain guidelines governing each of the five aspects of the dramatization of Christ discussed above which could yield better results as a dramatic theatrical experience. As far as plotting is concerned, a playwright should beware of trying to use too many different incidents and scattered details from the Biblical record which can result only in a dramatic diffuseness in the final effect. A limited selection of events developed to greater depth would produce better dramatic impact than do a whole panorama of related events touched upon only superficially. It is important for the playwright to appreciate the inherent implications of the content of Jesus' ministry. The dramatic development of the play will be on much more secure ground if the author uses the logical progression of events apparent in the Bible as the key to his establishment of dramatic sequence. If a playwright wants to demonstrate the flaws and hypocrisy of the Christian movement, that is his choice. However, deciding to execute that aim by attacking the source of the movement is a rather weak decision given the evidence. The Biblical events may be used most effectively to build a dramatic support for the Christian
concept of Jesus or to play ironically upon the nature of the phenomenon. Heavy reliance on Scriptural events is not productive for dramas which actively refute Jesus' claims.

If one wants to dramatize the character of Jesus, it might be worthwhile to try to diverge from some of the traditional preoccupations found in the devout Christian scripts. Perhaps it would more effective to depict solely a passage of time from the center of Jesus' ministry rather than follow the common tendency to focus on either the birth or the death of the man. Such a detailed examination from the Gospel accounts as Jesus' relationship with Lazarus, Mary, and Martha culminating in the resurrection of Lazarus, as O'Neill attempts wildly in *Lazarus Laughed*, could reveal much about the character of Christ if dramatized with respect for the content of the recorded events. It also might be worthwhile to center on the personality of Simon Peter or John the Apostle as given in the Gospels for the creation of a central focal character whose affected relationship with Jesus could be controlled for a dramatic examination of the teacher's life. Generally, plays have failed because they either do not do enough to flesh out the specific incidents from the Gospels or they take too many indiscriminate liberties with the events recorded there.
A conscientious middle ground must be found to achieve success in plotting.

The key to the character of Jesus would seem to be in communicating the humanity of the figure which operates alongside his supernatural identity. Precious little of the human personality evident in the Gospel Jesus has ever been used in a dramatization. Typically he is either a passive, pious prig whose charisma is evident only in that people follow him, or more recently he is a pathetic, neurotic victim of his own hopeless human aspirations. A more legitimate dramatic Jesus would be an active, adult male teacher who is involved vitally in the needs of his associates and countrymen. If the ministry as recorded in the Gospels were presented with more developed human dimension, the supernatural aspects of the teachings and miracles would emerge on their own accord and would not need self-conscious presentation.

A typical realistic approach would seem to be the best tack to theatricalizing the life of Jesus. Simple modern conversational speech will allow the audience to relate readily to the conflict and individuals while not contemporizing them unnecessarily. For a clear and controlled presentation of the events involved, a traditional realistic production style seems the most workable. Excessively abstract production elements only
serve to obscure the fundamental humanity of the phenomenon rather than illuminate it. As such, the supernatural occurrences need not be retreated from, although there are certainly those events which could never be visualized effectively on stage.

A major key that would assist in controlling the thematic success of dramatizations of Jesus would be to choose one thematic aspect to focus upon and craft the whole drama to illustrate that point. It is dangerously diffuse to attempt to deal with the entirety of the significance of Jesus' ministry in a single drama just as it would be with any important man's life. Appropriate thematic subjects might be Jesus' dedication to God's will, his struggle against religious and social hypocrisy, or his progressive revelation of his divine identity to his contemporaries.

In conclusion, the subject of Jesus' life would seem to be treated most advantageously as a simple controlled realistic melodrama. If a writer focused on the moral choices involved in the actions of his disciples, it would be possible to craft a tragedy from the elements of the historical accounts. However, it is a subject which has not been dealt with yielding more than severely flawed aesthetic success in the twentieth century. Given the
vast implications of the first century Jewish teacher in
the development of human history and philosophy, it is
a topic which calls for successful theatrical utilization
of its considerable dramatic potential as an important
human event.
In examining the New Testament accounts of Jesus' life and his impact on contemporary figures through his ministry, several issues must be discussed in order to give an adequate justification for the sources involved. Obviously, the primary issue is that of the documentable historical accuracy of the New Testament writings. However, it would be unwise to suggest that the entire original purpose of those books was merely to establish a historical account of the life of Jesus. The New Testament accounts also served to establish the written foundation for the theology of the new faith which was instituted and initially embodied in the life and character of the Nazarene. Only four different histories of the man's life have been saved and were recognized to be the acceptable and therefore definitive records of the important events involved. Although the documentable historical validity of those writings is an inherent consideration in the criteria used by the early church to determine which of the available records were worthy of preservation, it is not the only one. In examining the process by which the body of work recognized now as the New Testament emerged,
it is apparent that each document was tested concerning its intrinsic and extrinsic evidence as being eligible for consideration as the "Word of God," a revelation to man from the Godhead. This consideration involves issues of divine inspiration, canonicity, inerrancy of content, and spiritual veracity. Although the bulk of attention here will be given to the apparent historical accuracy of the documents, it is necessary to touch upon those other areas. Whether or not the reader chooses to place his trust in the spiritual validity of these writings is not the issue here. It is nonetheless necessary to examine the evidence for those claims made for the writings in the Christian church which were the principal initial justification for their maintained existence as accounts of Jesus' life.

The apparent historical accuracy of detail which may be accepted without significant debate by scholars in the New Testament places it in an extraordinary position when compared with other preserved documents. Take the plays of Shakespeare as a case in point. Whereas the New Testament records are now nearly nineteen hundred years old, having existed exclusively in manuscript for all but some four hundred years of that time, the works of the English master have been available in print for approximately one sixth of that time. The number of cases in which an unresolved debate over a specific word choice in a New Testament passage affects
significantly the content and meaning of that example is limited to some dozen to twenty exceptions. However, each of Shakespeare's thirty-seven scripts contains upwards to a hundred disputed readings which alter materially the meaning of the affected passages. However, it is necessary to look at the historical evidence which supports the unique position that those Biblical accounts maintain.

As it stands, the New Testament consists of twenty-seven short "books" which were written originally in Greek. The first five of the books are principally historical in approach. There are four of those works identified as the Gospels and which give selective historical records of the life of Jesus of Nazareth. Each operates from the assumption that God had revealed Himself in human form through that Jesus in order to achieve the necessary redemption of mankind. The Gospels, named for their authors, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, deal almost exclusively with the final two to three years of that Jesus' life. There is a particular preoccupation with the events of the last seven days before his execution by the Romans and those revolving around his miraculous resurrection from death. Each of the Gospels operates from a somewhat different point of view and was written for a different intended audience. The fifth book of that histo-

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1Josh MacDowell, Evidence That Demands a Verdict (San Bernardino, Ca.: Campus Crusade, 1972), p. 22.
rical series is known as "Acts of the Apostles" and covers the rise of the early Christian church in the thirty years following Jesus' crucifixion. This book was written by the same author as that of the third Gospel.

Following those five histories are included twenty-one letters to various early church groups and specific individuals involved in the initial evangelical ministries. Thirteen of those epistles are written by Paul, recognized as the principal Christian apostle to the non-Jewish nations. There is a letter addressed to the Hebrews (presumably the church in Jerusalem) which is also credited generally to Paul. There is a letter written by James, thought by many scholars to have been Jesus' half-brother. The next is signed by Jude, who identifies himself as a brother of Jesus. There are two short works written by Peter, one of the twelve disciples. Three letters are assigned to John because of obvious affinities to other writings by the apostle. The final book is known as "Revelation." It is an apocalyptic work written by that same John dealing with various visions of the ultimate triumph of the returned Christ over a world of cataclysmic conflict. This survey will be concerned chiefly with the first four books of the New Testament because of their con-

centration of the life of Jesus referred to as the Christ.

Exact dating of the separate works in the New Testament is controversial but there are definite ranges of dates which are possible. All of these projected dates support the historical soundness of the Biblical accounts of the events. The date of the crucifixion of Jesus is placed at about 30 A.D. This time is determined by a combination of corroborative sources. In Luke 3:1, the ministry of John the Baptist which signals the beginning of Jesus' teaching is placed in the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar (A.D. 27). The Gospel of John refers to three Passovers passing between the beginning and end of Jesus' ministry which would locate the crucifixion at A.D. 30. This date coordinates the documented periods of activity for Pontius Pilate, Herod Antipas, and the high priest Caiaphas, all men involved with Jesus who are documented by extra-Biblical references.\(^3\) Even accepting the most delayed dates for their composition which can be justified, all four of the Gospels are considered to have been completed by A.D. 100, well within the range of living recall of the original events. "Mark" is the earliest of the accounts having been written sometime between A.D. 60 and 65. The next book is determined to have been "Luke" which may have been written as early as A.D. 60 to as late as A.D. 85.

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\(^3\)F.F. Bruce, p. 12.
Then followed "Matthew" the original of which is placed sometime between A.D. 70 and 90. The youngest of the Gospels is therefore John's which was written between A.D. 90 and 100. Earlier dates are perhaps more likely because of the prophetic relationship portions of the first three Gospels bear to the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

The authorship of the Gospels is a matter which serves to strengthen the writings' historical credibility due to the specific evidence available. The Gospel of Mark was written apparently by a close associate of the disciple Peter. This is supported by the corroborative testimony given by Papias, a bishop of Hierapolis in Asia Minor who in A.D. 130-140 researched the validity of the Gospel writers' witnesses by consulting the associates of the disciples of Jesus in order to get a representative overview of the information passed by the oral tradition. This earliest Gospel then is the record of the oral teaching principally as embodied in Peter written down in an economical literary format. It was written for the Christian community in Rome as an account

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4 F.F. Bruce, p. 12.
5 Ibid., p. 35.
apparently more of what Jesus did than what he said. The book is written distinctly to a Gentile Roman audience as evidenced by the several interpretations of Aramaic words given the reader in the text and the use of Latin words in several places. 

The Gospel written by Luke is the work of a Gentile citizen of Antioch who used as his principal source the apostle Paul, who had received a direct revelation from Christ and had had sustained contact with the original disciples, particularly Peter. Luke spent some two years with Paul in Palestine during which time he was able to research the various eyewitness sources available. The work represents a combination of Aramaic and Hellenistic sources. Based on references in "Colossians" and "Philemon," it is asserted that Luke had contact with Mark through their association with Paul in Rome. There is speculation that there may have been a lost first draft of the Gospel, referred to as the "Proto-Luke." As it stands, the writings are addressed to one Theophilus, a Roman citizen, the purpose being to document the ministry of Jesus as evidence to the Gentile world. 

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8 Bruce, pp. 42-44.
The disciple, Matthew, wrote the Gospel which is the most distinctly Jewish in character. According to Papias, Matthew had been involved in the composition of the "Logia" in Aramaic. That "Logia" is thought to have been the collection of Jesus' sayings during his ministry and is referred to usually as the "Q" source by Biblical scholars. That "Q" document also was probably a major reference for Luke as evidenced by many parallel passages with the writings of Matthew. Discrepancies between parallel passages can be credited to the two giving variant Greek translations of the same Aramaic account of Jesus' teachings. There is a particular emphasis on Jewish considerations of Christ's genealogy, Messianic prophecies, and Jesus' relation to the Mosaic law in the Gospel. With its long discourses on the law of the New Covenant, this Gospel seems to function rather like a Christian counterpart to the Torah. These three books comprise the "Synoptic" gospels which function primarily as historical accounts of Jesus' activity rather than theological discourses on its significance as does the remaining Gospel. Given the projected dates of their com-

9Bruce, pp. 38-40.
10Ryrie, p. 5.
11Bruce, p. 41.
position these three detailed records of Jesus' ministry were all completed at the latest less than forty years after the resurrection. 12

The Gospel written by John is the work of an eyewitness who participated in Jesus' missionary journeys. Through deduction from the various interrelated Scriptural references both in this book and the others, it is accepted that the author was John, "the Beloved disciple." 13 John was a Palestinian Jew who had a strong familiarity with the Palestinian area and the Jewish traditions practiced there. The Gospel also communicates the most detailed understanding of the theological import of Christ's teachings. 14 Irenaeus, a second century author, who was a disciple of Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna and in turn a follower of John, stated that John wrote the Gospel while at the church in Ephesus. 15 Papias explains that John dictated his Gospel to one of the Ephesian elders, who functioned apparently as corporate editors of the work. 16 This Gospel contains massive portions

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12 Bruce, p. 46.
13 John 13:23.
14 Ryrie, p. 160.
15 Bruce, p. 49.
16 Ibid., p. 50.
of Jesus' theological discourses which may have been translated from an Aramiac original. There is conjecture that John avoided intentionally overlapping the other writers due to his early emphasis on the ministry in Judea and Jerusalem as opposed to the focus on the Galilean ministry found in the Synoptics. It is possible that John's writing style gives the most accurate portrayal of Jesus' own speaking style. This is postulated on the parallel passages from the Synoptics and the strong similarities with the typical Hebraic literature found in the Qumran writings known as the Dead Sea Scrolls. John is considered generally to be the most accessible Gospel to Gentile readers because of his clarity of spiritual content.

The cumulative witness of the Synoptic Gospels is reinforced by the amount of corroborative parallels found amongst them. Of the 661 verses in "Mark," 606 of them are found in "Matthew" and 380 are in "Luke." 500 of the lines in Matthew's Gospel are paralleled in Mark's work. Beyond that overlapping, there are 250 common verses between "Matthew" and "Luke" which are not found in "Mark." Thus, the number of verses which are peculiar to only one of these three works is 520 for "Luke" and 300 for "Matthew"

17 Bruce, p. 55.
18 Bruce, p. 51.
19 Ryrie, p. 160.
with only 55 in "Mark."\textsuperscript{20} The instance of exact parallels may have been the result of a specific oral tradition of religious teaching and reporting which was apparent in the stereotypical spiritual instruction of the ancient Middle East. That stereotypical format emphasized accuracy rather than editorial ornamentation.\textsuperscript{21} There are several occasions in which seemingly parallel passages are in fact significantly varied. These are thought to be examples of reporting of very similar, but not identical events.\textsuperscript{22}

The major point of contention concerning the scholarly acceptance of the New Testament documents is the lack of any of the original manuscripts. However, this is by no means an unusual situation for ancient writings. In fact, the evidence in support of the Christian histories is much greater than that for most major classical documents. There exist four thousand ancient Greek manuscripts in whole or part of the New Testament.\textsuperscript{23} In addition, there remain eight thousand copies of the classical Latin Vulgate and another thousand manuscripts available of other early versions.\textsuperscript{24} There are thus some thirteen thousand copies extant, the most important

\textsuperscript{20}Bruce, p. 31.
\textsuperscript{21}Ibid., p. 32.
\textsuperscript{22}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{23}Ibid., p. 16.
\textsuperscript{24}MacDowell, p. 21.
being the "Codex Vaticanus" and the "Codex Sinaiticus," both written c. A.D. 350, little more than two hundred and fifty years after the original writings. It is instructive to compare this situation with that of other classical authors. There are only ten manuscripts left of Caesar's *Gallic War*, written between 58-50 B.C. and the earliest of those was copied some nine hundred years later. Only thirtyfive of Livy's original 142 Roman histories survive. Of the twenty manuscripts available, only one fragment is even within four hundred years of the original composition. Tacitus' *Histories* survive in manuscript at least seven hundred years after the originals. The highly regarded writings of Thucydides and Herodotus are only available in versions which at the earliest date were copied over thirteen hundred years after the fact.

However, not only do the two excellent manuscripts date from the fourth century, but there are many papyrus fragments of New Testament passages which can be placed one to two hundred years earlier. The collection known as the "Chester Beatty Biblical Papyri" contain three codices of the Gospels and Acts dating from the first half of the third century. A recognizable paraphrase combining the four Gospels exists

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25 Bruce, p. 16.
26 Ibid.
in papyrus fragments dated at no later than A.D. 150. Probably the earliest New Testament fragment still in existence is the John 18: 31-33, 37, 38 excerpt which was dated at A.D. 130, only some forty years after its composition.27

Support for the early existence and acceptance of the New Testament documents can be found in contemporary authors' commentaries on early church issues. There are three works, the "Epistle of Barnabas," the "Teaching of the Twelve Apostles," and Clement's letter to the Corinthians, which are all placed at c. A.D. 100 and significantly quote from the Synoptics in addition to several of the canonized epistles.28 There are also extensive identifiable quotations from New Testament sources in the letters written by Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, in A.D. 115, and in Polycarp's letter to the Philippians in c. A.D. 120. An intriguing source of historical corroboration from non-Christian authors is the general recognition of the specific New Testament works among the Gnostic school of writers before the mid-second century.29

27Bruce, p. 17.
28Ibid.
29Ibid., p. 19.
As far as the controversy over the exact original content of the manuscripts is concerned, there are over 150,000 contested readings that have surfaced over hundreds of years of study. However, only some four hundred of these are concerned with issues of meaning rather than orthography or grammar, and the majority of those have been settled with general acceptance through contextual deduction. Philip Schaff asserts that only fifty variant readings are of any great significance and that none of those involve issues of faith which are not detailed abundantly by other unquestioned passages. Another important aspect of this issue of variance is that of the whole number of contested elements, they all are limited to only ten thousand different places in the New Testament, thus immediately limiting the seemingly overwhelming contest for scholarly support. In conclusion, it is sound to agree with John W. Montgomery in his conclusion that if the New Testament may be discounted blithely then so must all records of antiquity, for no other classical documents have as much scholarly attestation as these.

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30 MacDowell, p. 44.
33 John W. Montgomery, History and Christianity (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 1971), p. 29.
Having now briefly discussed the New Testament's historical validity, it is now necessary to touch upon the issues which determined for the early church the validity of these specific New Testament writings to take a place alongside the works of the Old Testament as a further and final direct revelation of the Word of God for man. All of the issues of inspiration, authority, and inerrancy mentioned here were considerations in the emergence of each work's canonicity as part of Scripture. Through evidence available both from within the texts and from external reliable sources, each work was assumed to have been the result of the divine inspiration of the author through the work of the Holy Spirit. Because of the establishment of that inspiration, each work could be considered to speak with a Heavenly-ordained spiritual authority. So as to be in harmony with the accepted view of the perfect character of God, each book or epistle must meet the requirements of infallibility (free from all forms of deception) and inerrancy (not liable to be proven mistaken in content in any sense.) In approaching such considerations, it is obvious and crucial to acknowledge that ultimate acceptance of those assertions is dependent upon the individual's faith or lack of it in the truth of Christ. Belief in those characteristics of the Bible do not precede faith in Christ. However, they are underlying assumptions operating in the original compilation
of the New Testament and are thereby necessary historical insights into the nature of that collection.

The central consideration for each of the New Testament writings was whether it was deserving of the designated canonicity. The fundamental test for canonicity was proof of the work's inspiration by God through the Holy Spirit and authority as ordained by Jesus Christ. All books of the New Testament are recognized as canon by the three major divisions of Christianity, the Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Eastern Orthodox churches. All the New Testament writings were canonized within one hundred years of their composition. The early recognition of these works as being worthy of Scripture is evidenced by the extensive quotations from the Gospels and various epistles as being authoritative sources found in the writings of Clement, Ignatius, and Polycarp mentioned above. There is evidence for the acceptance of the four Gospels as rightful members of the canon within thirty years of the apostle John's death. Justin Martyr wrote prior to A.D. 148 repeated references to all of the Gospels as being valid parts of Scripture.

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34 Harris, p. 200.
35 Ibid., p. 201.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid., p. 213.
presents the whole of the New Testament as early as A.D. 170 (with the exception of "Hebrews," "James," "I John," and "II Peter" in what may be a matter of lost fragments rather than purposeful exclusion.) Those epistles were uncontested contemporarily because of other reliable sources. Thus the New Testament as we know it was accepted generally as being the revelation of God within seventy years of the death of the last surviving disciple and less than one hundred and fifty years after Christ's resurrection.

The chief characteristic attributed by early Christians to those books which were considered canon was that each had been inspired by God as a revelation of spiritual truth. The doctrine of inspiration asserts that the Holy Spirit of God was at work in the authors of Scripture so that both the content and words found there were chosen and employed under divine supervision. This doctrine does not claim literal dictation of the texts except in isolated instances of direct revelation such as Jesus' address to the seven churches in "Revelation." Such a concept of mechanical dictation would deny the function of individual free will and thus be in contradiction with a fundamental concept of

38 Harris, p. 215.


40 Harris, p. 20.
Christianity. There are numerous Scriptural statements concerning the fact of inspiration involved in the composition of the Biblical writings. The most pointed is Paul's statement in II Timothy 3:16 that "all Scripture is inspired by God." Another general claim is made by Peter when he writes in his second epistle that "no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." Various references to fulfilled Old Testament prophecy made by Jesus and editorially by the New Testament authors supports indirectly a concept of divine inspiration for both the Old and New Testaments. Outstanding examples from each Gospel are Matthew 26:56, Mark 15:28, Luke 3:4, and John 12:38. The use of the phrase, "which the Holy Spirit foretold by the mouth of David," in Acts 1:16 is evidence of an acceptance of the inspiration of Scripture inherent in the writing of the New Testament. Paul asserted his personal revelation of spiritual truth from God at various points in his writing, particularly I Corinthians 14:37 and 2:10-13, I Thessalonians 2:13, and II Thessalonians 2:15. Peter and John make similar claims of having received inspiration in II Peter 3:2, 15 and Revelation 22:18,19 respectively. The doctrine of inspiration is crucial to the prevalent fundamentalist Christian acceptance of the concepts of Scriptural authority and inerrancy.

41II Peter 1:21.
If a writing was viewed as having been a result of divine inspiration it would necessarily be considered as holding spiritual authority.\textsuperscript{42} The principal source of authority for the New Testament authors came directly from the personal witness of Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{43} A major portion of Jesus' witness of the authority of Scripture is focused on the Old Testament. The most striking example from the man's affirmations of Old Testament moral statutes, prophecies, and historical accounts is the general assertion in Matthew 5:17, "For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished." In this instance, Jesus refers to the Old Testament by the common collective term, the "Law."\textsuperscript{44} The authentication of the New Testament writings directly by divine witness comes in two stages. The first is the selection and discipleship training of the apostles by Jesus as discussed throughout the four Gospels. The second stage is conceived as being the guidance from the Holy Spirit of the early church and its apostolic leaders to recognize certain evangelical writings as containing

\textsuperscript{42} Harris, p. 219.

\textsuperscript{43} Wenham, p. 9.

\textsuperscript{44} Harris, p. 46.
fundamental spiritual truth. The Gospel of John contains the most explicit references to that second stage. Perhaps the most obvious is Jesus' promise in John 14:26 to his disciples that "the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you." In later passages in John 15:26-27 and 16:1-5, Jesus further explains prophetically the knowledge and insight imparting function that was accepted to be operating in the New Testament authors. Each of those authors gained their claim of authority at least indirectly through apostolic commission from Jesus. In the case of the Gospels, Matthew and John were actual disciples of the teacher. Mark can be assumed to have received his information principally through contact with Peter, the major apostle to the Jews. Luke was Paul's secretary and therefore claimed authority because of the direct apostolic calling Paul had received as described in Acts 9. Thus the New Testament accounts were viewed to have received spiritual authority in conjunction with their divine inspiration.

The final aspect of Scripture's character which was integral to the fundamentalist Christian view of the New Testament was

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45 Wenham, p. 110.
46 Harris, pp. 239-243.
Testament was its freedom from any blemish of human error in fact, doctrine, or judgement. Inspiration from God necessitates the perfection of the inspired text or else that product is inconsistent with the character of its divine source. Thus the concept of inerrancy (not liable to be proven mistaken in content in any sense) is an inherent implication of the necessary acceptance of infallibility (freedom from all forms of deception.) Because the Bible stands as the only primary source for the formulation of Christian theology it was crucial that it be viewed as having such a unique degree of literary and historical integrity. Once again the principal authority for acceptance of such a doctrine comes from the original head of the church, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus' acceptance of both the overview and the specifics of the Old Testament accounts as evidenced in Matthew 12:42 and Luke 17:27 among many others stands as proof of the inerrancy of the Old Testament. Such a doctrine would by implication necessarily include the New Testament writings. As cited above, Jesus credited the revelation of the New Testament writings to the work of the third person of God, the Holy Spirit. Functioning

47 Harris, p. 20.


49 Ibid., p. 11.
within the perfect character of God, it would be assumed by Christians that any revelation from that source would be without error. It must be acknowledged that the doctrine of inerrancy only fully applies to the original writings and not to subsequent scribal copies. This is true particularly in the modern deluge of translations which must be judged by their apparent integrity to the specifics of the available Greek manuscripts. There are a number of possibilities which are not included in the ancient concept of inerrancy. The history found in the Bible is not considered to be all inclusive. Biblical language is an instrument of simple observation, not scientific empiricism. There is allowance for techniques of poetic expression, but only when clearly indicated. There may be divergence between parallel events in different accounts which is not explained explicitly but does not jeopardize the inerrancy because of our limited knowledge of the specific circumstances involved in those events. Quotations from the Old Testament may be slightly divergent in the New Testament because of individual use and selection of different specific Greek translations. Finally, the concept of inerrancy does not exclude a variety of literary skills among the various authors.

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50 Pinnock, p. 15.
51 Ibid., pp. 20-22.
As it stands, the New Testament, our only major scholarly source for a contemporary account of the life of Jesus, is a very unusual historical document. The extent to which the accounts therein can be supported by extra-textual sources in unique among classical histories. There is a great weight of spiritual implications which have been derived from the content of its text over the nearly 1900 years since the book's compilation.
APPENDIX B
HARMONY OF THE GOSPELS

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<td>Incidents of the Birth and Boyhood of Jesus Christ Till He Was 12 Years of Age</td>
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1This harmony is taken in its entirety from the Ryrie Study Bible.
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Inauguration of Christ's Public Ministry

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Public Ministry of Christ from the First Passover to the Second

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<td>23. Christ goes up to Jerusalem for the Passover, and, with a scourge expels the sellers and money-changers from the temple; works miracles, convinces many</td>
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24. Nicodemus is convinced; has a night interview with Jesus |  |  | 3:1-21 |  
25. Christ leaves Jerusalem, stays eight months in N.E. Judea, and his disciples baptize |  |  | 3:22 |  
26. John, baptizing at AEnon, again witnesses to the Christ |  | 4:2 |  |  
27. Imprisonment of John |  |  | 3:19,20 |  
29. Passing through Samaria, he converts a woman of Sychar, and through her, many of the Samaritans, four months before harvest | 1:14,15 | 4:14,15 | 4:43-45 |  
30. Commencement of his public ministry | 1:14,15 | 4:14,15 | 4:43-45 |  
31. Visiting Cana again he heals a nobleman's son sick at Capernaum |  |  | 4:46-54 |  

From His Second to His Third Passover

32. Returns to Jerusalem at the Passover. His second Passover. From this to the third, His main Galilean ministry, Jesus cures an infirm man at Bethesda pool on the Sabbath. The Jews seek to kill him for declaring himself one with the Father |  |  | 5:1-47 |  

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<td>55. Seeking a sign and the answer</td>
<td>12:38-45</td>
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<td>11:16,24-36</td>
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<td>56. His kinfolk; try to lay hold on him as mad</td>
<td>12:46-50</td>
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<td>3:19-21</td>
<td>8:19-21</td>
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<td>57. From a fishing vessel he speaks a series of seven parables</td>
<td>13:1-53</td>
<td>4:1-34</td>
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<td>58. Jesus crosses the lake with his disciples, and calms a storm</td>
<td>8:18-27</td>
<td>4:35-41</td>
<td>8:22-25</td>
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<td>59. He cures two demoniacs of Gadara</td>
<td>8:28-34</td>
<td>5:1-20</td>
<td>8:26-40</td>
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<td>60. Returning to the west shore, he raises Jairus' daughter, and heals a woman with a hemorrhage</td>
<td>9:1,18-26</td>
<td>5:21-43</td>
<td>8:40-56</td>
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<td>61. He heals two blind men and casts out a demon</td>
<td>9:1,18-26</td>
<td>5:21-43</td>
<td>8:40-56</td>
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<td>62. Jesus visits Nazareth again, when his countrymen disbelieve in him</td>
<td>13:54-58</td>
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<td>63. Christ teaches throughout Galilee</td>
<td>9:35-38</td>
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<td>64. Sends forth the Twelve</td>
<td>10:1-11:16</td>
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<td>65. Herod, who has murdered John the Baptist, fears that Jesus is John resurrected</td>
<td>14:1-12</td>
<td>6:14-29</td>
<td>9:7-9</td>
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<td>66. The Twelve return to Jesus, tell all they have done and taught. He withdraws with them to a desert on the other side of the Sea of Galilee, and feeds five thousand</td>
<td>14:13-21</td>
<td>6:30-44</td>
<td>9:10-17</td>
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<td>67. He sends the disciples across the lake westward to Bethsaida and at night comes walking to them across the water</td>
<td>14:22-23</td>
<td>6:45-56</td>
<td>6:15-21</td>
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<td>68. The multitude seek and find Jesus. His discourse and Peter's confession</td>
<td>14:22-33</td>
<td>6:45-56</td>
<td>6:22-71</td>
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From the Third Passover to the Beginning of the Last Passover Week

69. Healings in the Gennesaret plain for a few days 14:34-36 6:55,56

70. Pharisees from Jerusalem object to his neglect for washing hands 15:1-20 7:1-23

71. Jesus goes northe west towards Tyre and Sidon. The Syro-Phoenician woman's faith gains her daughter's cure 15:21-28 7:24-30

72. He returns through Decapolis, and ascending a mount near the Sea of Galilee heals many and feeds four thousand 15:29-38 7:31-8:9

73. He crosses the lake to Dalmanutha 15:39 8:10

74. Pharisees and Sadducees require a sign 16:1-4 8:11,12

75. Embarking in the ship, he comes to Bethsaida. He warns against leaven of doctrine 16:4-12 8:13-21

76. Healing of a blind man 8:22-26


79. The transfiguration on Mount Hermon six days later 17:1-13 9:2-13 9:28-36
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<td>80. Descending, the following day he casts out a demon which the disciples could not cast out</td>
<td>17:14-21</td>
<td>9:14-29</td>
<td>9:37-43</td>
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<td>81. Jesus again foretells his death and resurrection</td>
<td>17:22,23</td>
<td>9:30-32</td>
<td>9:44,45</td>
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<td>82. Temple-tribute money miraculously provided from a fish at Capernaum</td>
<td>17:24-27</td>
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<td>83. The disciples strive which shall be greatest. Jesus teaches a childlike, forgiving spirit. John tells of the disciples forbidding one who cast out demons in Jesus' name</td>
<td>18:1-35</td>
<td>9:33-50</td>
<td>9:46-50</td>
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<td>Journey to the Feast of Tabernacle six mths. after the third Passover; this period ends with his arrival at Bethany before the last Passover</td>
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<td>7:1-10</td>
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<td>84. He goes up from Galilee about the midst of the feast and teaches in the temple</td>
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<td>85. The people are divided in opinion; the rulers try to seize him, Nicodemus remonstrates</td>
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<td>7:11-53</td>
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<td>86. His charity, yet faithfulness, towards the adulteress</td>
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<td>8:1-11</td>
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<td>87. Jesus in the temple declares himself Light of the world, preexistent before Abraham. The Jews seek to stone him.</td>
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<td>88. Healing of the beggar, blind from birth</td>
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<td>89. Christ as Good Shepherd and the Door</td>
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<td>90. Final departure for Jerusalem from Galilee through Samaria</td>
<td>9:51-56</td>
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<td>91. Warnings to certain who would follow</td>
<td>9:57-62</td>
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<td>92. Sending forth of the seventy</td>
<td>10:1-16</td>
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<td>93. The seventy return, announcing success</td>
<td>10:17-24</td>
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<td>94. In reply to a lawyer's question about the whole law, Christ speaks parable of Good Samaritan</td>
<td>10:25-37</td>
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<td>95. Jesus in Bethany visits Mary and Martha</td>
<td>10:38-42</td>
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<td>96. He again teaches the disciples how to pray</td>
<td>11:1-13</td>
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<td>97. Cure of the dumb demoniac; the Pharisees again attribute his miracles to Beelzebub; dines with one; woes to hypocritical lawyers; doom of the nation</td>
<td>11:14-54</td>
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<td>98. Exhortation to disciples</td>
<td>12:1-12</td>
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<td>99. Appeal to Jesus to arbitrate about inheritance; parable of the rich fool</td>
<td>12:13-21</td>
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<td>100. Discourses</td>
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<td>101. God's judgements; motive to repentance</td>
<td>13:1-5</td>
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<td>102. Parable of the barren fig tree</td>
<td>13:6-9</td>
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<td>103. Cure of a woman with a spirit of infirmity</td>
<td>13:10-17</td>
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<td>104. Jesus, at the Feast of Dedication, proclaims his divine oneness with God. The Jews again seek to kill him, when consequently he withdraws to Perea</td>
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<td>105. His second journey to Bethany on hearing of sickness of Lazarus</td>
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<td>11:1-16</td>
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107. Cure of man with the dropsy 14:1-6
108. Parable of the great supper 14:7-24
109. He warns the multitude to count the cost of discipleship 14:25-35
110. Many publicans crowd him, he utters the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son 15:1-32
111. To the disciples he speaks the parables of the unjust steward and the rich man and Lazarus 16:1-31
112. Sayings as to offenses; mutual forgiveness and profitableness never exceeding duty 17:1-10
113. Arriving at Bethany, He raises Lazarus from the dead 11:16-46
114. Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin determine to put Jesus to death; unconscious prophecy 11:47-53
115. Jesus withdraws to Ephraim on the borders of Samaria 11:54

The Last Journey to Jerusalem through the midst of Samaria and Galilee

116. He heals ten lepers on the Samaritan frontier 17:11-19
117. The Pharisees ask when the Kingdom of God shall come, he foretells related events 17:20-37
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<td>123. Parable of the laborers in the vineyard to warn against mercenary service 20:1-16</td>
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<td>124. Jesus goes before on his way to Jerusalem and a third time foretells his death and resurrection 20:17-19</td>
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<td>127. Zaccheus climbs a sycamore tree and is called down by Jesus; salvation comes to his house 19:2-10</td>
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<td>128. Near Jerusalem, when men think the kingdom of God shall immediately appear, Jesus corrects this thought by the parable of the pounds 19:11-27</td>
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<td>The Last Sabbath, Saturday, beginning at Friday Sunset</td>
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<td>129. The hostile Jews seek him at Jerusalem; Pharisees command to take him. Jesus reaches Bethany 6 days before Passover. In the house of Simon the leper, Mary anoints his head and feet</td>
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<td>130. Jews come to Bethany to see Jesus</td>
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<td>11:55-57</td>
<td>12:1-8</td>
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<td>First Day of the Week</td>
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<td>131. Jesus triumphantly enters Jerusalem. He weeps over the city as doomed. At eventide he returns to Bethany, having first entered the temple and sternly looked round about on all things</td>
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<td>Second Day</td>
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<td>132. On his way from Bethany, Jesus curses the barren fig tree. He purges the temple at the close of the ministry as at the beginning, and returns to Bethany after detecting at a glance the desecration of the Gentiles</td>
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<td>21:12-16</td>
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<td>19:45,46</td>
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<td>Third Day</td>
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<td>133. On his way to Jerusalem, the fig tree curse explained in power of prayer</td>
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<td>21:20-22</td>
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<td>135. Parable of the marriage feast</td>
<td>22:1-14</td>
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<td>136. The Pharisees, with the Herodians, try to entangle him in his words. His reply from Caesar's image on coin</td>
<td>22:15-22 12:13-17 20:20-26</td>
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<td>138. He replies to a lawyer on the great commandment</td>
<td>22:35-40 12:28-34</td>
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<td>139. He leaves them without answer to his question about David</td>
<td>22:41-46 12:35-37 20:41-44</td>
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<td>141. He commends the widow's offering</td>
<td>12:41-44 21:1-4</td>
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<td>142. Some Greeks desire to see Jesus. Pledge of glory to Gentiles.</td>
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<td>Jesus' prayer and the Father's answer heard by disciples</td>
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<td>143. Leaving temple, Jesus, sitting on Olivet with Peter, James; John, and Andrew, foretells the destruction of temple and Jewish theocracy. The last days</td>
<td>24:1-42 13:1-37 21:5-36</td>
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<td>144. Second coming parables</td>
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<td>Fourth day</td>
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<td>145. Beginning at sunset; Jesus announces his betrayal and crucifixion; the Sanhedrin consult to kill Jesus by subtlety. Judas agrees to betray him. Most disbelieved; some rulers believed, Jesus' judgement</td>
<td>26:1-5</td>
<td>14:1,2, 22:1-6</td>
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<td>Fifth day</td>
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<td>146. Jesus sends two disciples to prepare Passover; follows with rest in afternoon</td>
<td>26:17-19</td>
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<td>22:7-13</td>
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<td>147. At sunset, Jesus celebrates Passover</td>
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<td>148. Reproves the ambition of disciples, yet promises kingdom</td>
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<td>149. He teaches love and humility by washing disciples' feet</td>
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<td>14:27-31</td>
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<td>152. Ordains The Lord's Supper</td>
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<td>154. His agony in Gethsemane</td>
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<td>156. Hearing before Annas, Peter's denials that night</td>
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<td>66:72</td>
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<td>158. Brought before Pilate for sentence to crucifixion</td>
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<td>15:1-5</td>
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<td>18:28-38</td>
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<td>159. Pilate sends him to Herod; Herod sends him back</td>
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<td>162. Judas' remorse; he hangs himself</td>
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<td>164. Crucified at Golgotha, probably outside the Damascus gate. 7 sayings on the cross- (1) &quot;Father, forgive them...&quot;</td>
<td>27:35-44</td>
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<td>165. (2) The penitent thief promised paradise</td>
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166. His garments divided and vesture cast lots for; (3) commends his mother to John's care. | | | | 19:23-27
167. Cover of darkness from 6th to 9th hour. Jesus' loud cry (4) "Eloi, Eloi . . ." (5) "I thirst" and receives the vinegar to fulfill Scripture (6) "It is finished" (7) "Father into thy hands I commend my spirit"; gives up the spirit; the veil of the temple rent. Centurion's testimony 27:45-54 15:33-41 23:44-49 18:28-30
168. The side pierced by spear and the blood and water attest his death. The body, taken down, is wrapped up with Nicodemus' aloes and myrrh, and buried in new tomb of Joseph of Arimathea 27:57-61 15:42-47 23:50-56 19:31-42

Seventh day
169. Pilate grants a guard, and they set a seal on the tomb 27:62-66

Christ's Resurrection, His Appearances during Forty Days, and Ascension

First day- Easter Sunday
170. Resurrection at first dawn 28:2-4
171. The women, coming with spices, find the tomb open and empty. Mary Magdalene returns to tell Peter and John 28:1 16:1-4 24:1-3 20:1,2
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<td>172. The other women, remaining, see two angels, who declare the Lord's resurrection</td>
<td>28:5-7</td>
<td>16:5-7</td>
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<td>173. Mary Magdalene returns to the sepulcher, Jesus reveals himself to her. She reports to the disciples- 1st appearance</td>
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<td>16:9-11</td>
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<td>174. Jesus meets the women (Mary, Salome, and Joanna)- 2nd appearance</td>
<td>28:8-10</td>
<td>16:8</td>
<td>24:9-11</td>
<td>20:3-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>175. Peter and John find tomb empty</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>24:12</td>
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<tr>
<td>176. Report of the guards to the chief priests, who bribe them</td>
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<td>28:11-15</td>
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<tr>
<td>177. Jesus seen by Peter- 3rd appearance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>24:34</td>
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<tr>
<td>178. Seen by two disciples on way to Emmaus- 4th appearance</td>
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<td></td>
<td>16:12, 13</td>
<td>24:13-35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>179. Jesus appears to the ten- Fifth appearance</td>
<td>16:14</td>
<td>24:36-49</td>
<td>20:19-23</td>
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<tr>
<td>180. Evening of Sunday after Easter day. Jesus appears to them including Thomas- 6th appearance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>20:24-29</td>
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<tr>
<td>181. The eleven go to Galilee, to a mountain appointed. Jesus appears, and commands them to teach all nations- 7th appearance</td>
<td>28:16-20</td>
<td>16:15-18</td>
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<tr>
<td>182. Jesus shows himself at Sea of Tiberius- 8th appearance. Charges Peter to feed his lambs</td>
<td></td>
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<td>21:1-24</td>
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<tr>
<td>183. Seen of above five hundred individuals at once probably including the eleven-9th appearance</td>
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<td>28:16</td>
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<tr>
<td>184. He is seen by James then by all the apostles (Acts 1:3-8; I Cor. 15:7) - 10th appearance. In all, 538+ persons are specified as having seen the risen Christ; also, after his ascension, Paul (I Cor. 15:8)</td>
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<tr>
<td>185. The ascension, forty days after Easter (Acts 1:9-12)</td>
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<td>186. Purpose and conclusion</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

16:19,20 24:50-53 20:30,31 21:25
APPENDIX C

GOSPEL EVENTS IN THE SCRIPTS

The following is a listing of the events from the Harmony given in Appendix B which are used in the various scripts. The numbers given correspond to the numbered events in Appendix B. The key for the symbols is as follows: "X" means the event is used basically as it appears in the Gospels; "R" means the event is referred to in the text of the script; "M" means the event is used but in a significantly modified form.


Journey to Jerusalem: 8-R, 15-M

Seed of Adam: 4-M, 7-M, 8-M, 11-M

Bethlehem: 8-X, 9-X, 11-X

The Resurrection: 172-R, 179-M


The Apostle: 164-M, 173-M


The Wandering Jew: 160-R, 163-R


Lazarus Laughed: 113-M, 164-R


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