JESUS CENTRE STAGE

Theatre Radio Church Television

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Contents

Enter Jesus » » » » » » » 9

The Jesus Of The Mysteries » » » 24

The Jesus Of The Passions » » » » 43

Jesus In The Contemporary Theatre:
Jesus Rocks » » » » » » 71

Plays, Plays And Plays » » » » 109

An Interval » » » » » » 140

Christians And Churches Cast
Jesus On Stage » » » » » » 143

Listening And Seeing – At Home » » 173

Final Thoughts » » » » » 190

Bibliography » » » » » » 204

DEDICATION

Tony Jasper dedicates this book to Sandra Butterworth, Alan and Annette Smith for their constant practical concern during his illness in 2010, and to the friendship of Jon and Betty Dean.

THANKS TO Charlotte Emmett for help with the MS.

AUTHORS' NOTE

This book is the result of the collaboration between two writers with extensive and practical experience of theatre and the study of drama, theology and popular culture in the general arts field. They write as members of Christian churches and from a background of involvement with the presentation of Christian ideas through performance.

Although the book has involved constant discussion and debate between its two authors the first three chapters are essentially the work of Kenneth Pickering and the remaining chapters are by Tony Jasper. The final chapter brings the two authors together.

CHAPTER ONE

Enter Jesus

During the writing of this book the English National Opera Company announced that it would be performing Handel's *Messiah*, a choral work entirely focussed on the figure of Jesus, for two weeks in one of the largest theatres in London. This may have come as a surprise to many people for, surely, the *Messiah* is a national treasure that belongs securely to large choirs in churches and concert halls? Could it be that, on the brink of a new decade, the place to celebrate and think about the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus, was the theatre? Nobody ever mentions poor Jennings who compiled and selected the words, but Handel, who wrote the music of *Messiah* was, in fact, a man of the theatre and the work's first performance was in a theatre in Dublin. However, by that time, Handel had abandoned writing fashionable Italian Opera in favour of Oratorios that did not, in the usual sense require ‘staging’. So the idea that *Messiah* should be ‘staged’ in the twenty-first century might seem even more surprising.

Of course, the term ‘theatre’ has several meanings. Theatre is not only a place, it is an art form, an activity and, for some, even a way of life. So perhaps we might rephrase my earlier question. Has the *way* to celebrate and think about the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus become ‘theatre’? And theatre historians might add ‘once again’.

Almost simultaneously with the announcement of the performances of *Messiah* the website of an organisation devoted to large-scale dramatic productions of the life of Jesus advertised the fact that they had obtained permission to stage a Passion Play in London's Trafalgar Square at Easter. It would seem that Jesus had, indeed,

come centre stage and was experiencing high-profile exposure through the medium of theatre.

The Christian churches of various denominations have been somewhat suspicious of and sometimes downright hostile to the entertainment media. I well recall my Strict Baptist grandmother purchasing one of the few early television sets but insisting that it had doors which could be discretely closed 'when the Minister visited'. But even twenty years ago the parish priest of Oberammergau was saying of the famous Passion Play that it was 'inappropriate to call it "theatre", apparently oblivious to the huge package deals that brought audiences from all over the world to see the performances. We might ask if the thousands of dolls representing the baby Jesus seen in nativity plays every year are an aspect of 'theatre' or if they are somehow exempt from the opprobrium with which actors 'playing' Christ are sometimes viewed by Christians. Is Christ's childhood somehow less sacred than His manhood, perhaps? The answers may lie in new attitudes and a greater understanding of the nature of theatre as a fundamental human activity that will survive any intended repression and suppression. I recently heard an elder in the United Reformed Church explaining her experience in attending a series of sessions designed to enable certain nominated elders to be allowed to celebrate Holy Communion. When she expressed a feeling of inadequacy her tutor had said 'you are really an actor playing the part of Jesus'. For some this may seem almost blasphemous, for others it may help to explain why the Communion and dramatic re-enactment have such close links and why 'theatre' as we know it in the West, is often said to have originated in the Easter Mass.

The recent emergence of a website devoted to encouraging communities to stage their own Passion Plays and to use theatre as a form of witness whilst preserving high, professional standards of production, may be further evidence that old prejudices are breaking down. For what does the new generation of media-savvy Evangelical and charismatic Christians who choose to worship in sports halls, school halls and cinemas really know or care about the history of censorious attitudes of the churches that they have left half empty?

Very little I suspect. The new generation will use whatever communication medium fits its purpose, and this will include dance, acting, clowning, puppets, music, film, radio or digital technology.

However, many of the plays and theatrical events described in this book will have taken place against a background of some hostility and resistance from Christians and it is as well to confront this topic before we can go further.

In Britain the theatre still lives in the aftermath of two significant events although these are now distant in history. The first was the suppression of the 'Mystery Plays', a popular form of drama showing the whole story of Jesus, at some time in the sixteenth century. We do not know the precise reasons for this hostility to the plays but it is likely that it was the result of Puritan influence as part of the Protestant Reformation. The second more precise event was the closure of all theatres by the Puritan government of Oliver Cromwell at the time of the 'Commonwealth' in the seventeenth century. Even though this period of closure was no more than eleven years its legacy was long-lasting and the reopening of theatres at the time of the Restoration of Charles II was accompanied by much tighter controls.

So, given that many contemporary Christians are the successors of the Non-Conformists who brought about a change in attitudes to the theatre and that the Roman Catholic Church in Britain was equally slow in looking favourably on that art form we need to ask why the theatre was seen and possibly still is, as so undesirable. I would suggest that there are three main reasons: the first is that the theatre can be seen as being associated with riotous assembly and immoral living; the second that the theatre is essentially subversive and, thirdly, that there are particular objections to the representation of Jesus or any aspect of the deity on stage.

There is little doubt that, before the time of Cromwell, the theatre was a popular public meeting place where business deals, plots, assignations and discontent might well have been a natural part of the activity. It was obvious, therefore, that any authoritarian regime would see the theatre as a possible threat. If the theatre also provided an area for sexual infidelity and, indeed, may have encouraged it by its

subject matter, it became an obvious target for Puritan objections. Even when the theatres re-opened after their enforced period of closure clergymen and laymen alike continued to thunder their disapproval in sermons, tracts and other broadsides. Their intensity was stoked by the first appearances of women on the English stage and many plays were condemned as showing and encouraging a decadent and immoral life-style. Defenders of drama then, as defenders of television and film now, would argue that the theatre's job was to show life as it is not as some clergyman would wish it. Christian suspicions have also focussed on the off-stage lives of many of theatre's practitioners, suggesting that they were dangerously 'bohemian' and, in Victorian times, this was exemplified by the fact that it was actresses who first advocated not wearing corsets! Such was the prejudice with which the nineteenth-century Church viewed theatrical performers that several bishops refused to give them communion and, for the Non-Conformist the theatre was a highly suspect territory. Ironically, the Non-conformists failed to notice the innate theatricality of their preaching and modes of worship. The popular Baptist preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon employed histrionic techniques to rival any Victorian actor and, later, the great Methodist preacher Dr. Sangster choreographed his own preaching moves before the mirror on a Saturday night. The mainstream revivalists all had a particular style - some were visual in their images for they conjured up for their congregation flames of fire and eternal damnation. Young men attempted to adopt the style of their favourite preachers, from gesture to voice modulation. I well remember my mother speaking in reverential terms of the way in which a particular minister entered from the vestry at the beginning of the service producing a hush of expectancy and 'working' his audience with as much skill as a great actor.

But the state had seemed to confirm the view of the churches for, in the eyes of the law, 'players' remained classified with 'rogues and vagabonds' for many years.

The theatre has not only hit back at many of these strictures by pointing out the relevance and deep seriousness of much of its work but also by the emergence of groups of

Christian actors, directors, dancers, technicians and designers who support the industry from the inside.

Pioneers and attitudes

Present day theatre practitioners who are able to stage aspects of the life of Jesus owe a great deal to the pioneering work of a number of almost legendary figures of the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century theatre. These include Sir Henry Irving, the first British actor to be knighted and thus bring a sense of respectability to his profession. Irving's most famous role in the closing years of his career was that of Thomas Becket, the Archbishop of Canterbury, in Tennyson's play *Becket* and all who saw the performance claimed it as a deep experience of faith. Irving had confronted the bigotry of the clergy in a famous address telling them to 'change their attitude' and assuring them that the theatre would join them in promoting more wholesome ways of living. Lilian Baylis, the remarkable manager of the Old Vic and later Sadler's Wells theatres brought the classic theatre and Shakespeare in particular to a new audience of low income enthusiasts and ran her theatre on a combination of flair, frugality and prayer. Convinced that she was doing God's will, she was instrumental in launching the careers of Sir Laurence Olivier and Sir John Gielgud and, like Irving, argued that the theatre was an educative medium that enriched and strengthened the moral life of the nation. Her producer, Harcourt Williams, who advocated a revolutionary manner of directing and performing Shakespeare, was also a devout Christian and was later to appear in central roles in the plays of one of the foremost Christian writers, Dorothy L. Sayers.

Irving, nevertheless, always maintained that the major achievement in reducing the hostility of the churches in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries lay with the Rev. Stuart Headlam, an Anglican curate who risked the disapproval of his bishop and jeopardised his chances of promotion by encouraging his congregation to read plays and attend the theatre. He is sympathetically portrayed in a thinly veiled disguise as the Rev. James Mavor Morell in George Bernard Shaw's play *Candida* and his name is still

preserved in a trust he established to enable London schoolchildren to see plays by Shakespeare. Headlam was convinced that the theatre could contribute to personal and community development in a unique way and was instrumental in helping to create the Actors' Church Union which not only continues to minister to the needs of actors but also acted as a forerunner to such organisations as the Arts Centre Group, Christians in Entertainment and Artisan, all of which now provide a forum for support and discussion of the arts as a facet of Christian life.

However, the suggestion that the theatre deals with issues central to human lives has often been seen by the Church as threatening and subversive. It is no co-incidence that tyrannical regimes always fear and suppress the theatres when they take power. The apartheid regime of South Africa was undermined by an organised 'theatre of protest' and Iranian playwrights now work in perilous conditions. The Church has always suspected that it is the theatre's task to pose difficult questions, to challenge authority, to interrogate the morality of policies, to put people's beliefs under the microscope and, as Shakespeare put it 'to hold the mirror up to Nature'. This can all be an uncomfortable business for an organisation like the Church that seeks to teach people what they should believe and what authorities to venerate. Unfortunately for much of its history the Church has sought to control and it has been perfectly comfortable with theatre as a means of this control. However, the moment that the Church has felt that it has lost control of the theatre it has become unhappy and hostile.

One of the most interesting debates in an area now known as 'performance studies' is the debate concerning what is collectively termed 'Carnival'. Such an activity would be seen as growing out of a community and might include celebratory processions, parades, carnival floats or similar forms of spectacle. Such events may well celebrate ethnicity or sexual orientation, local pride, history or trade and would certainly embrace the many processions and rituals associated with Easter in Catholic countries. Some scholars have argued that 'carnival' is an expression of people-power, of vibrant community and of shared beliefs and values. Others,

however, have argued with equal conviction that carnival is simply another example of the status quo maintaining power by providing a safety-valve of apparent self expression whilst continuing to exercise control. This might well be said of those Catholic plays and pageants that dominate the lives of many communities at Easter but remain tightly under the control of the Church.

In Britain, the theatre has also been subject to various forms of state control and this has profoundly affected the way in which it has attempted to explore the Christian faith in an imaginative and honest way. With the 'Restoration' of the monarchy in 1660, King Charles II (who had spent a period of exile in the French court with its entertaining drama) was determined to re-establish the theatre, particularly as a part of the Court circle. Keenly aware of the theatre's ability to satirise and make political statements, Charles ordered his Master of the Revels, who was responsible for the licensing of all forms of public entertainment, to grant royal patents, establishing a monopoly on theatrical production in London to William Davenant and Thomas Killigrew.

Killigrew established himself at what became known as the Theatre Royal, in Drury Lane and his company was considered to be part of the Royal household. Davenant's patent eventually led to the establishment of the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden (now the Royal Opera House). This monopoly on the ability to produce 'legitimate drama' was reinforced by the Theatre Act of 1737. Play performances by touring companies could obtain a licence but were subject to strict control, however, some theatres and companies found ingenious ways of circumventing the Act by presenting what we can now see as the roots of 'Variety' and 'Musical Theatre'.

During the late eighteenth century royal patents were gradually granted to theatres in provincial towns and cities: Norwich; York; Hull; Liverpool; Newcastle; Manchester and Margate were among those to have their Theatre Royal. A further Act of law passed in 1788 legalised acting in the provinces by enabling local justices to grant licences to players for sixty days at a time and the 1843 Act for Regulating Theatres finally ended the monopoly of the theatres

with a royal patent to produce ‘legitimate drama’. All this activity greatly encouraged the building of theatres, many of which were named ‘Theatre Royal’ as a generic title rather than having any connection with royalty.

Censorship

The role of the Master of the Revels was eventually changed in title to ‘Lord Chamberlain’ and in this capacity he continued to exercise control and censorship over what could be performed in public until his office was abolished in 1968. Enshrined in the law which he was able to invoke were three forbidden ingredients for a stage play; nudity, obscene language and the representation of the deity. This final forbidden fruit provided a major stumbling block to those dramatists anxious to present aspects of the life of Jesus in dramatic form. When it came to considering plays submitted to him for licensing that contained ‘religious’ content the Lord Chamberlain invariably turned to the Archbishop of Canterbury for advice and usually found His Grace supportive of a refusal. Until 1913 there had been a total ban on any stage play dealing with biblical subjects but there had been increasing pressure from playwrights and producers for reversal of this position. Accordingly a number of biblical pageants and plays had been allowed to go ahead but the question of acting Jesus remained highly contentious. When in 1924, for example, the Archbishop, Randall Davidson was sent a play entitled *Judas Iscariot* he wrote to the Lord Chamberlain ‘I wish they did not write these plays!’ However, he did go on to say that, had the play been written by a well-known playwright such as George Bernard Shaw, he would have found the decision more difficult.

As it happened the Archbishop's fears were partly realised for in the same year no less a figure than the famous Christian poet, John Masefield submitted a play *The Trial of Jesus* which necessitated an actor to play the part of Jesus. This clearly exercised the Archbishop as he sensed Christian playwrights pushing at the boundaries of possibility and he conceded that the play had been written with great rever-

ence and scriptural accuracy. But he finally pronounced to the Lord Chamberlain:

'I do not think protest would be awakened by the definite ruling that the Figure of our Blessed Lord Himself must not be produced in any drama which you sanction'.

Such is the early twentieth-century legacy of the theatre in Britain and the fight against it has exhausted and preoccupied many a playwright, actor and producer. Archbishop Davidson did not live to see a new and progressive Dean commission a play by Masefield for performance in his own Cathedral at Canterbury only four years after his 'definite ruling' and the play included the character of the 'Anima Christi'. Admittedly this was only the spirit of Christ before His birth but the revolution had begun!

A new world

In fact, Christian writers of the 1920s and 30s established a platform which produced some of the most influential and enduring religious literature and drama, but it was created at a time of crisis in belief. Such writers were filled with sheer horror at the man-made hell of the First World War. They had read the disturbing poetry of Sassoon and Brooke; the alarming lines of Wilfred Owen, "And Abraham arose and slew his son/ And half the seed of Europe, one by one" the ghastly statistics and details in Robert Graves' *Goodbye to All That.* They had seen R.C. Sherriff's memorable play about trench warfare *Journey's End* and terrifying images from painters and photographers; they heard dissonant music that challenged any concept of form or harmony. They had suffered personal loss and seen communities decimated by loss; they had witnessed a new role and independence for women; a refusal to return to old ways of servitude and deference. They had seen industrial unrest and unemployment; a frothy attempt by the bored affluent to party their way to happiness and, above all, they had experienced the collapse of simple faith and a growing sense that Christianity had little to say to this new waste land in the face of ever-intensifying materialism. There were also alarming shadows on the horizon of Europe.

Was it possible to catch a glimpse of God in such a situation? A group of writers that included J.R. Tolkein, Charles Williams and Dorothy L. Sayers thought that is was. Indeed, they called themselves 'the inklings' because they felt that they had an inkling of the nature and relevance of God. They, along with C.S. Lewis and T.S. Eliot found aspects of what they were seeking in allegory and in the ritual and liturgy of the High Church. Tolkein, an expert in ancient literature, produced his massive *Lord of the Rings* a complex allegory of the eternal battle between good and evil; Williams, a publisher and theologian, wrote a play about Thomas Cranmer, the Archbishop of Canterbury who had created the sublime words of the *Book of Common Prayer* but who eventually was burned for his adherence to principle; Dorothy L. Sayers, an Italian scholar made a verse translation of Dante's epic poem *The Divine Comedy* as well as writing a number of plays and C.S. Lewis is now best remembered for his remarkable Christian allegory *The Chronicles of Narnia* and through the play *Shadowlands.*

Modern readers or students of drama are more likely to be aware of T.S. Eliot's famous play *Murder in the Cathedral,* initially written, as were plays by Masefield and D.L. Sayers, for performance in Canterbury Cathedral. Almost alone amongst plays exploring aspects of the Christian faith produced during the 20s and 30s, this play broke into the London theatre scene and eventually established itself world-wide as a major classic. Its central figure, as with an earlier play by Tennyson that brought particular fame to Henry Irving, is Thomas Becket, the Archbishop who was murdered in his own cathedral. Like Jesus, Becket contemplates his approaching death and prepares his flock for the event through a memorable sermon. Patiently, Becket faces execution and explains to his perplexed followers that his death will not be without significance and that it is his destiny to die for a higher cause. Thus Eliot, who had created in his great poem *The Waste Land* an image of a world without meaning and hope, had provided in his play a sense that an individual, inspired by God, could make sense of existence and even experience peace beyond understanding.

The late 1920s and early 1930s saw a growing realisation among Christians that drama could be both a powerful medium for the exploration of faith and for evangelism. This resulted in the founding of the Religious Drama Society of Great Britain by a Non-Conformist, Olive Stephenson and Frances Younghusband in 1928. This society, which rapidly became known as Radius, has continued to promote high standards of Christian performance and writing through maintaining play collections and offering guidance in summer schools. Its first president was George Bell, who probably contributed more to the idea of a new and exploratory Christian drama than any other individual. He was Dean of Canterbury when he commissioned Masefield to write *The Coming of Christ* but then became Bishop of Chichester, in which role he continued to support a network of new playwrights and theatre practitioners and became celebrated for his opposition to the policy of obliteration bombing in the Second World War and his friendship and correspondence with the theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Significantly, his final speech in the Convocation concerned the Church and the theatre.

The emergence of a specifically 'religious' drama in a predominantly secular Britain was largely a product of the traditionally strong amateur theatre movement together with a determination to include drama as an aspect of worship in some of the more progressive churches. This, however, carried with it the danger of worthy, pious and inadequately performed work which was not refined in the considerable heat of the professional theatre. It was this possibility of 'amateurish' writing and performance that preoccupied the founders of Radius and particularly its president, George Bell and his successor E. Martin Browne.

Whereas Bishop Bell was the source of inspiration to writers who aspired to explore aspects of Christianity in their plays it was the remarkable theologian-turned- theatre -director, E. Martin Browne who acted as midwife to their work and enabled a new generation of playwrights to shape their ideas into practical reality. Browne directed the plays of T.S. Eliot and Charles Williams and was also instrumental in encouraging Christopher Fry who ultimately became the

most commercially successful of English Christian dramatists in the immediate post-war years. Browne had showed himself to be a strict disciplinarian in rehearsals and, (consequently many would argue) able to achieve impressive results in a short time with both professional and amateur actors. He was also adept at exploiting what would now be labelled 'found spaces' and was able to mount plays in churches, ruins, halls and venues of all descriptions with flair and imagination. This skill became particularly relevant when, at the outbreak war in 1939, he and his actress wife, Henzie Raeburn, set up a professional touring company which travelled from its base in Canterbury to all parts of Britain staging Christian drama in whatever space they could find. Their search for suitable material was governed by a determination that it would be of the highest quality and included Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*. Two of their plays were based on biblical sources: James Bridie's *Tobias and the Angel* and D.H. Lawrence's *David* but when they wanted a suitable play for the Christmas season they turned to the Medieval Mystery plays and made their own compilation for these ancient sources. However, in seeking a play for Passiontide the company decided upon Henri Gheon's *The Way of the Cross* which not only caught the sombre mood of the war years but furthered the need for presenting incidents from the life of Jesus in dramatic form. The performance, which took place in such 'theatres' as miners' welfare clubs, schools and village halls, showed the events of the Judgement, Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus through the eyes of a narrator together with two men and two women who play out the scenes. A critic captured the essence of the play by saying of the actors: "they are spectators who are, as it were, outside time and space, who suddenly change into a tragic embodiment of the things they see". Jesus Himself does not appear in the play, instead, the action is conveyed by the stare or stamped foot by one of the actors.

Browne and his company argued that if people would not come to the theatre, then the theatre would come to them. This sense of energy has permeated much Christian drama and is evident today in the resurgence of new and original community plays, often taking the 'Passion' as their

starting-point. E. Martin Browne remained a towering figure in the field of religious drama. His work was recognised by the award of a rare Lambeth Doctorate by the Archbishop of Canterbury and he was a pioneer director of the York Mystery plays as well as inaugurating the Program in Religious Drama at New York Theological Seminary (where one of his students would eventually write *Godspell*). Throughout his long career he had an obsession with high artistic standards and once famously remarked that 'much pious drama is impious art'. The story of the touring company which he and his wife ran during the war is engagingly told in their book *Pilgrim Story*(1945) but one wonders if the rapt audiences of schoolchildren pictured there as watching and listening to Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* were simply glad to be seeing live entertainment or enjoying a break from the routine of learning in difficult school conditions. Browne, like others who followed him may have labelled themselves too specifically as 'religious' drama specialists and eventually confined themselves too much to ecclesiastical buildings to make a substantial inroad into the thoughts of the vast majority of the population of post-war Britain.

However, in the 1920s and 30s, faced with the erosion of belief and the inadequacy of much Church life in the context of 'modern' attitudes, many Christian thinkers began to focus not so much on the distant and transcendental God but on the God who entered the torn world in human form. The upsurge of this 'Incarnational Theology' led to a renewed interest in the person, life and significance of Jesus, particularly among creative artists and, thus, for playwrights, the continuing prohibition of showing Jesus as a man and a character in a drama was a source of frustration and revolt.

The opportunity to challenge this entire aspect of censorship came when Dorothy L. Sayers committed herself to writing a radio play about the life of Christ to be broadcast during the Second World War. This play and its reception will be discussed in some detail in our chapter on the media but it is important to note here that the idea of Christ being impersonated by a human actor was seen by many conserva-

tive Christians as blasphemous and unacceptable. Interestingly, the actor in question was Robert Speight, who had played Thomas Becket in *Murder in the Cathedral*.

Playing Jesus

The problem of showing the person of Jesus in drama did not appear to concern the writers and performers of the many ancient Passion Plays that appear to have had their origins in the Middle Ages but Robert Potter, who has researched the revival of such plays in modern times argues in his book *The English Morality Play* (1975) that, for medieval actors, it was not a matter of 'representation' but a matter of 'presentation'. Those actors, he maintains, in no way claimed to represent or impersonate the figure of Jesus, they simply spoke the words and carried out the actions as a presentation. They did not 'inhabit the role' as a modern actor would put it or identify with the character they were playing. In practical terms this is a subtle distinction.

Both the contemporary theatre and broadcast media appear to be almost obsessed by 'realism'. We expect our characters to be believable and like other people we know; we are sometimes not sure if we wish to see actors in dramatic situations or 'real' people in 'reality' shows. If our stage and screen actors play parts we demand that they bring psychological and physical realism to their work and so, that is how they are trained. We expect to care about, relate to and love or hate our fictional people. We may well know more about them than we do about world leaders and we expect to share their lives.

When we go to see a play or film about Jesus we may well expect to feel the same. The actor must convince us that he is Jesus, and in many cases, *our* Jesus. Convinced that the most significant event in history is the entry of God in the form of a man early twentieth-century Christian dramatists argued that, far from being blasphemous, it was absolutely essential that Jesus was shown as being human so that we could share His human experience.

It is not difficult to see why the figure of Jesus should provide such an attractive topic for a playwright. Few, if any figures in history have been so copiously discussed in litera-

ture. Unlike the founders of any of the world's other faiths, Jesus emerges from the Gospels that tell of His life and teaching as a highly complex personality. For some He is a great story-teller, for others great teacher or worker of miracles. Some see Him as a fearless debater, others as a mystic. He was the friend of the dispossessed, the vulnerable and the outcast and yet, clearly had extensive support in intellectual and noble circles. His life was, in every sense, dramatic and yet the details we have of it are sufficiently sketchy and incomplete to tempt a writer to fill in the blanks. He was a revolutionary who challenged the status quo as every playwright seeks to do; His words have become part of our everyday speech in the way that only great dramatists and orators have shaped our language; He was able to command the attention of huge audiences to such an extent that they forgot that they were hungry and yet, in moments of one-to-one dialogue He could be the most engaging and affecting friend.

No actor could ever hope to impersonate Jesus in His entirety but aspects of His being are images that can be preserved and cultivated through drama. It is through images that human beings strive to make sense of their lives: these may be visual or verbal, tactile or auditory but, ultimately they are the means whereby we are enabled to use our ‘imaginations’ to take us beyond the mundane and humdrum towards something approaching the divine. The theatre brings together many diverse art forms and in this synthesis can provide an enrichment of life, belief and faith that has few equals.

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People and places

Actors' Church Union 14
Alayi, Tomi 133
Aldersgate 166
Aldridge, John 103,190
Alexander, Paul 163
Allain, Prof Paul 57
Almeida Theatre, London 116
Amis, Martin 189
Ampil, Joanna 101
Anderson, Carl 92
Applecart 162,168
Armstrong, K. 136
Arnaz, Desi 122
Artisan 14
Arts Centre Group 14,146, 165,167,201
Assembly Rooms, Edinburgh 85
Astley Bridge 170
Auchtermuchty 68
Austin, Michael 170
Bach, J.S. 45,99,149
Baldwin, James 126
Baldwin, Tom 113
Balsamo, Steve 101
Barnes, Clive 74
Baylis, L. 13
Beale, Robert 134
Beatles, The 89
Becket, Thomas 13
Bell, George 19,127
Bell, Jack 113
Bellehurst Productions 127
Berkoff, Steven 77,190
Bernstein, Leonard 86,157
Bernstein, Nina 85
Billington, Michael 131
Birmingham Rep Theatre 115
Birtwistle, I. 137
Bond 86
Bonhoeffer, Dietrich 19,127
Bradley, Ian 79,90,99
Bradley, Johannine 99
Brenton, Howard 77
Bridge, David 185,188
Bridie, James 20
Bristol 156
Bristol Old Vic 171
Broadway 72,78
Brooke, Rupert 17
Brown, Dan 52
Browne, E. Martin 19,176
Bruce, Lenny 142
Buckner, Richard 102
Burbridge, Paul 165,201
Burke-Dunsmore, James 67
Burns, Tommy 101
Bye, Peter 152
Caine, Michael 121
Caines, Michael 132
Cambridge 179
Cambridge Theatre, London 111
Camus, Albert 142
Candida by G.B. Shaw 13
Canterbury 18,28,68
Carr, Jacquie Ann 104
Carter, Glenn 102
Castle, Roy 152
Chapin, Harry 122
Charing Cross Hospital 150
Charles II 15
Chester 25,28
Chesterton, G.K. 175
Christian Music Ministries 167
Christian Voice 114
Christians in Entertainment 14
Church, Jonathan 115
Churches Advertising Network 142

Clark, Sir Jack Stewart 69
Claudel, Paul 176
Clemo, Jack 189
Clifford, Jo 113
Coleman, John 98
Colston Hall 156
Conry, Kieran 188
Conti, Mario 113
Cooper, Brian 128
Cornwall 25
Cottesloe Theatre, London 116
Cousins, Peter 120
Covenanters, The 164
Coveney, Michael 101
Coventry 25,28,153
Cranmer, Thomas 18
Cromwell, Oliver 11
Crystal Cathedral, California 64 - 65
Cutting Ball Theatre 126
Cutting Edge Theatre Productions, Edinburgh 68
Da Vinci, Leonardo 53
Daisenberger, Fr. Alois 63
Daldry, Stephen 76
Dali, Salvador 188
Davenant, William 15
Davidson, Archbp R. 16
Davis, Paul 153
Dawson-Scott, Robert 76
Deal, Stephen 154
Dearmer, Percy 76
Deasy, Frank 186
Deep End Theatre Co. 83
Dench, Dame Judy 170
Deo Gloria Trust 148
Dewar, Lindsay 103
Dickens Society, The 185
Dietl, Dr. Franz 63
Division, Joy 184
Dominion Theatre, London 96
Donellan, Declan 198
Dowell, Ben 121
Drew, William 197
Driver, Tom 77
Dublin 9
Duchess Theatre 73
Ducker, Deirdre 146
Duckworth, Sara 154
Dundas Castle 69
Dunlop, Bill 128
Dunn, Paul David 65
Dunsmore, James B. 203
Dylan, Bob 90
Eades, Alex 112
Edward, Gale 100
Eliot, T.S. 18,87,133,180
Elliman, Yvonne 90
Ellison, Les 170
Emery Theatre, London 183
English Chamber Singers 151
English National Opera 135
English, Jon 94
Essex, David 104
Eversole, Finley 77
Fenholt, Jeff 99
Field, Paul 153 - 154
Forde, Nigel 170
Fox, James 102
Frost, Rob 153 - 154
Fry, Christopher 19,87
Fry, William 166
Garber, Victor 104
Gardley, Marcus 127
Gatley, Stephen 107
Gheon, Henri 20
Gibbs Trust, The 201
Gibson, Mel 195
Gielgud, Sir John 13
Glyndebourne 136,153
Goodbourn, David 104 - 105
Gooderson, David 183
Goodwin, Nigel 150
Gove, Michael 194
Gowans, John 152
Graham, Billy 96,98

Graves, Robert 17
Graystone, Andrew 169
Green, Stephen 114
Greene, Graham 87
Greenwood, J.O. 179
Guevara, Che 76
Halliburton Rachel 116
Handel, G.F. 9,149
Hare, David 200
Harrison, John 103
Head, Murray 89,105
Headlam, Rev. Stuart 13
Heals. 93
Heddedorf, Russell 192
Hemley, Matthew 187
Hepple, Peter 171
Herman, Ashley 67,203
Hern, Nick 62
Hewitt, Garth 97
Heyman, Paul 169
Hickling, Alfred 107
Hill, David 183
Hirst, Damien 194
Hobson, Harold 167,199
Honeycombe, Gordon 61
Hooper, Ewan 155
Hounsell-Robert, Katy 129
Housman, Laurence 192
Howard, Peter 166
Hughes, Langston 78
Hurrell, Roger 152
Hussey, Maurice 60
Hutley, Peter 66-69, 203
Hytner, Nicholas 200
Imams' and Mosques' Council of the UK 188
Irving, Sir Henry 13,18
Isango Portobello Theatre Company 114
Jackson, Brenda 170
Jacob, Micheal 104
Jasperian Theatre Company 144,164
Jepson, Rev J. 188
Jewell, Derek 94
Jones, Roger 167
Jongh, Nicholas de 101
Kane, Sarah 132
Keating, Paul 120
Kemp, Edward 62
Kennedy, G.S. 182
Khan, Chaka 125
Killigrew, Thomas 15
King Philip 73
King, Martin J 98
King, Martin Luther 138
Kissack, Walt 193
Klee, Charlotte de 68
Korp, Alexander 124
Kustow, Michael 139
La Jolia Playhouse, San Diego 120
Lacey, Rob 169
Land, David 88
Lang, Archbishop 73
Larsson, John 152
Leak, Adrian 175
Lebrecht, Norman 131
Leominster 65
Levin, Cynthia 133
Lewis, C.S. 18,132
Lewis, Peter 94
Lincoln 25
Lincoln Centre 127
Linton, Michael 65
Lister, David 101
Littlewood, Joan 142
Lloyd-Webber, Andrew 71,77,87-88,91,94 97-98,100
Locklease, Bristol 155
Lofthus, Suzanne 68 - 69
London 156,166
London College of Fashion 188
London Welsh Male Voice Choir 151

London and International School of Acting 183
London's Cambridge Circus 72
Lord's Day Observance Society, The 188
Lucas, Sarah 194
Lyceum Theatre, London 100
Madame Tussauds 194
Maddocks, Fiona 134,137
Maddox, Hugh 149
Malachi, Martin 80,86
Malefane, Pauline 114
Mandry, Kevin 170
Manhattan Episcopal Cathedral of St John 81
Manhattan Theatre Club, New York 112
Maniam, Kamala 69
Mann, Ronald 166
Marcel, Gabriel 87
March, Polly 184
Marchese, Eric 120
Marlowe, Christopher 51
Martin, Malachi 138,141
Marvin, Ernest 155 - 156,184
Masefield, John 16 - 19,87
Matthews, Arthur 112
Maunder, J.H. 46
Mawle, Joseph 188
Mayo, Sean 84
McGuire, Barry 153
McNally, Terrence 112
Melton Mowbray 165
Meredith, Robert 168
Meredith, Robin 170
Methodist Association of Youth Clubs 154
Mill Hill 158
Miller, Jonathan 136
Miller, Samuel Howard 106
Minimum Theatre 165
Mirren, Helen 186
Mitchell, Katie 62,136
Moody, D.L. 75
Moreton, Peter 168,170,181,202
Morfitt, Darren 185
Morris, Colin 181
Morrison, Billy 144,146
Morrissey, S.P. 184
Mountford, Fiona 126
Moynahan, M.E. 160
Muggeridge, Malcolm 166
Myspace.com 142
Napier, John 101
National Theatre (see Royal)
Neuberger, Rabbi Julia 188
Newcastle 25
Newton, Rachel 154,202
Nicholas, Paul 94
Nunn, Trevor 76
O'Horgan, Tom 92
Oakes, Martin 83
Oberammergau 10,62,65,192
Old Vic Theatre, London 13,76
Olivier, Sir Laurence 13
Orme, Steve 102
Orth, Maureen 91
Osborne, John 142
Owen, Wilfred 17
Padmore, Mark 135
Palaver Productions 164,171
Palmer, Anita 169
Pasolini, P.P. 124, 163
Penryn 26
Piccadilly Theatre, London 106
Pierson, Lance 163,169
Pinter, Harold 142
Pleasance Theatre, Edinburgh 128
Potter, Dennis 77,83
Potter, Robert 22
Pridmore, J. 137
Radius 19,170,179
Raeburn, Henzie 20

Rainbow, London 148
Ravenhill, Mark 139
Read, Sylvia 166
Reality Outreach 169
Rees, Jasper 101
Reith, Lord 196
Religious Drama Society 19
Rhema 164
Rhodes, Lee 193
Rice, Tim 71, 77, 87-99, 102
Richard, Cliff 152 - 154
Riding Lights Company 164,193
Rigby, Robert 152
Robertson, Margaret 184
Rodgers, Richard 80
Rookmaaker, Prof. H.R. 146
Roose-Evans, James 170
Routley, Erik 95,97,157
Royal Albert Hall 78,154,156
Royal National Theatre 67,200,202
Royal Opera House 15
Royal Philharmonic Orchestra 151
Royal Shakespeare Co. 202
Rutenborn, Gunter 77
Sadler's Wells 13
Sahl, Mort 142
Saltmine 164
Sanders, E.P. 192
Sanderson, Terry 187
Sangster, Dr I 12
Sankey, Ira 75
Sassoon, Siegfried 17
Savoy Theatre, London 79
Sayers, Dorothy L. 13,18,21 87,175, 178-179,196
Schaeffer, Rev. F. 146
Schwartz, Stephen 102
Scorsese, Martin 186
Scottish National Theatre 155
Sevenoaks 149
Shadidraza, Maulana 188
Shakespeare, William 13,51
Sharman, Jim 93
Sharp, David G 82
Shaw, G.B. 13,16
Sheppard, David 96
Sheppard, Dick 182 - 183
Sherriff, R.C. 17
Shrewsbury 159
Sibley, Brian 167
Skues, Keith 184
Sleight, Moira 79,116
Snell, Adrian 151
Spacey, Kevin 76
Spurgeon, C.H. 12
St. Just-in-Penwith 26
St. Martins-in-the-Field 149
St. Paul's Cathedral 88
Stafford-Clark, Nigel 185
Stainer, John 46
Stansford, Peter 186
Stephenson, Olive 19
Steyn, Mark 101
Stickley, S.&J. 166
Stigwood, Robert 93
Stone, Norman 189
Stueckl, Christian 192
Sugano, Douglas 50,61
Summers, Phil 168
Taylor, T. 26
Tebelak, John M. 102-103
Thane, James 101
The Arts Centre Group 202
The Emery 183
The Wayfarers 167
The Who 89
Theatre Roundabout 166
Theatre Royal 15
Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, London 15
Theatre Royal, Nottingham 102
Thompson, Brian 94
Thompson, Kathleen Ann 127

Thompson, Rupert 169
Thornhill, Alan 166
Tillich, Paul 88
Tillman, J.B. 168
Tolkein, J.R. 18
Topping, Frank 167
Townshend, Pete 120
Trafalgar Sq., London 9,68
Traverse, Edinburgh 76
Tron Theatre, Glasgow 113
Truman, H.S. 139
Tynan, Kenneth 142
Upper Norwood 148
Vermes, Geza 192
Victoria Hall, Bolton 181
Waddington-Feather, J. 170
Wade, Mark 165
Wagner, Robin 92
Wakefield 25
Wakefield Master, The 25
Wakefield, Anne L. 184
Walford, Rex 158,179
Wallace, Kevin 193
Walsh, Sheila 153
Warburton, Nick 170,184
Warner, Deborah 74,135
Warner, Martin 126
Watts, Michael 106
Watts, Murray 139, 170
Weiss, Fr. Ottmar 63
Weiss, Peter 142
Welch, W. 176
Wesker, Arnold 142
Whitehouse, Mary 82
Wiesener, Bill 183
Wilde, Kim 120
Williams, Charles 18,87
Williams, Harcourt 13
Wilson, Penelope 188
Winter, David 152
Wintershall Estate, Surrey 66,68,203
Wolfe, K.M. 174
Wright, Stephen 140
York 25,28,165
Young Musicians' Symphony 153
Younghusband, Frances 19
Zeffirelli, Franco 186
Zovko, Fr. Jozo 66

Index of Works, ordered by title

4.48 Psychosis by Sarah Kane · · · · · · · · · · · · 132
A Man Dies by Ernest Marvin · · · · · · 78,150,154-157,196
A Matter of Life And Death (play adapted from film) · · · · 132
A View from the Underside: The Legacy of Dietrich Bonhoeffer by Al Staggs · · · · · · · · · · · · · 128
About Face by S. & J. Stickley · · · · · · · · · · · 166
Alive by Hugh Maddox · · · · · · · · · · · · 149-150
Alpha and Omega by David Gordon · · · · · · · · · · 153
And Jesus Moonwalks the Misissippi by M. Gardley · · · · 126
Angels in America by Tony Kushner · · · · · · · · · 130
Becket, by Tennyson · · · · · · · · · · · · · · 13
Betrayals by Michael Austin · · · · · · · · · · · · 171
Bezhti by Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti · · · · · · · · · · · 115
Black Jesus by Oladipo Agboluaje · · · · · · · · · · 117
Black Nativity by L. Hughes · · · · · · · · · · 78-79,158
Blasted (and other plays) by Sarah Kane · · · · · · · · 132
Blood of the Lamb by Gowans/Larsson · · · · · · · · 152
Blues for Mister Charlie by James Baldwin · · · · · · · 126
Brimstone and Treacle by Dennis Potter · · · · · · · · 83
Canadian Badlands Passion Play by Kathy Covert et al. · · · 123
Candles in the Window by Dietrich Bonhoeffer · · · · · · 127
Carousel by Rodgers/ Hammerstein · · · · · · · · · · 79
Christ in the Concrete City by Philip Turner · · · · · · · 167
Come Together by Jimmy & Carol Owens · · · · · · 149-150
Company by Stephen Sondheim · · · · · · · · · · · 80
Consequences by R. Adams · · · · · · · · · · · · · 165
Conspiracy and Palm Sunday *(Mystery Play)* · · · · · · · 49
Corpus Christi by Terrence McNally · · · · · · · · 112,115
Cotton Patch Gospel by Tom Key and Russell Treyez · · · · 122
Crucifixion at Oberammergau · · · · · · · · · · · · 192
Dating Jesus by Louise Arsenault · · · · · · · · · · 117
David by D.H. Laurence · · · · · · · · · · · · · · 20
Doubt: A Parable by J.P. Shanley · · · · · · · · · · 126
Fall and Resurrection by John Taverner · · · · · · · · 134
Father Ted by A. Mathews and G. Linehan · · · · · · · 112
Feel The Spirit by Tony Jasper · · · · · · · · · · · 75
Fiddler on the Roof by J. Bock/S. Harnick/J. Stein · · · · · 79
Fireflake by Adrian Snell · · · · · · · · · · · · · 151
First Rock · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · 159
Florence Nightingale by Norman Stone · · · · · · · · 189
Francis, the Holy Jester by Dario Fo · · · · · · · · · 128
From Olivet to Calvary by J.H. Maunder · · · · · · · · 46

Gethsemane by David Hare · · · · · · · · · · · · · 130
Giotto a Non Giotto by Dario Fo · · · · · · · · · · · 128
Glory by Gowans/Larsson · · · · · · · · · · · · · · 152
The Glory of Easter by Paul David Dunn (Crystal Cathedral) · 64,65
Godspell by Schwartz/Tebelak
· · · · 21,81,84,95,102-103,141,147-148,150-151,166,174,190,195
God's New Frock by Jo Clifford · · · · · · · · · · · · 113
Gospel at Colonus by L. Breuer/R. Telson · · · · · · · 127
Gospel of Matthew by Passollini · · · · · · · · · · · · 124
Hair by Rado/Ragni/MacDermot · · · · · · 80-81,92,141,147
Hamlet by Shakespeare · · · · · · · · · · · · · · 137
Harry's Christmas by Stephen Berkoff · · · · · · · · · · 133
Heaven's Gates & Hell's Flames from Reality Outreach · · · 169
His Dark Materials by Philip Pullman · · · · · · · · · · 131
Hopes and Dreams by Deal / Field · · · · · · · · · · · 154
Hosanna, a Portrait of Jesus, music by John Lockley · · · · 151
I AM from 'Contact' group · · · · · · · · · · · · · 149
If My People by Jimmy and Carol Owens · · · · · · · · · 149
In Arabia We'd All Be Kings by S.A. Guirgis · · · · · · · 123
Incarnation of Jesus by Messiaen · · · · · · · · · · · 134
Inherit The Wind by J. Lawrence and R.E. Lee, · · · · · · 76
Jerry Springer: The Opera by Thomas/Lee · 72,74,111,114,181,186
Jesus Christ Superstar by Lloyd-Webber/Rice · · · 48,71,77,79-80
· · · · · · 84,86,95,141,147-148,150-152,156,166,174,193,195
Jesus Folk by Gowans / Larsson · · · · · · · · · · · · 152
Jesus Hates Me by Wayne Lemon · · · · · · · · · · · 120
Jesus Hopped the A-Train by Guirgis · · · · · · · · · · 121
Jesus My Boy by John Dowie · · · · · · · · · · · · · 117
Jesus and Mohammed (Berlin production) · · · · · · · · 124
Jesus is a City Fan by Michael Dawson · · · · · · · · · · 118
Jesus, The Wasted Years by Robert Meakin · · · · · · · · 122
John (translation from German)· · · · · · · · · · · · 152
Joseph & the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat by Webber/Rice 88
Journey of the Magi by T.S. Eliot · · · · · · · · · · · · 66
Journey's End by R.C. Sherriff· · · · · · · · · · · · · 17
Judas Iscariot by E. Temple Thurston · · · · · · · · · · 16
King Lear by Shakespeare· · · · · · · · · · · · · · 137
La Nativite Du Seigneur by Messiaen · · · · · · · · · · 134
Lenny by Julian Barry · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · 92
Les Miserables by Schönberg/Boublil · · · · · · · · · · 117
Liberating Jesus by Leonard Jackson · · · · · · · · · · 124
Life of Brian by Eric Idle · · · · · · · · · · · · · · 118
Life of Christ from Wintershall Estate, Surrey· · · · · · 67-68

Little Baby Jesus by Arinze Kene Mokwe 117
Lonesome Stone by Palosaari / Hoyt 148
Look What A Wonder Jesus Has Done by Walter Robinson . . 134
Lord of the Rings by J.R. Tolkein 18
Luther by John Osborne 129
Major Barbara by George Bernard Shaw 133
Man of La Mancha by Wasserman/Darion/Leigh 79
Mass in F by Galt McDermot 81
Mass: A Theatre Piece for Singers, Players and
Dancers by Leonard Bernstein 85
Messiah by G.F. Handel 9,74,135,149
Messiah by Steven Berkoff 85,115,190
Mountaintop by Katori Hall 129
Murder in the Cathedral by T.S. Eliot 18,20-21
Narnia by Robbins/C.S. Lewis 166
New Testament by Neil La Bute 118
Night Time by Robert Dawson Scott 76
Not the Messiah by E. Idle and J. Du Prez 118
Oedipus at Colonus by Sophocles 127
Oh! Calcutta by Kenneth Tynan et al. 94,98
On The Third Day by Kate Betts 119
Only Make Believe by Dennis Potter 83
Passion by Edward Bond 85
Paul by Howard Brenton 116
Queen of Heaven by Jo Clifford 113
Racing Demons by David Hare 130
Redemption Song by Les Ellison 193
Redemption by Gordon Honeycombe 167
Rent Boy Ave: A Fairy's Tale by N. Olivero 132
Rent by J. Larson 131
Requiem for the Condemned Man by Jonathan Rathbone . . 134
Ride! Ride! by Alan Thornhill 166
Rock by Winter / Bye / Hurrell 152
Rockstar by Robert Rigby 152
See How They Run by Philip King 73
See Me! Hear Me! from Belleherst Productions 121
Sentenced to Life by Muggeridge/Thornhill 166
Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band by The Beatles 89
Shadowlands by William Nicholson et al. 18,189
Simply Heavenly? by Nicola Hughes 125
Son of Man by Dennis Potter 83
Sonburst by Pete Casey and Ron Bradshaw 151
Spirit by Gowans / Larsson 152

St. Catherine of Siena with Nancy Murray · · · · · · · · 129
St. John Passion by J.S. Bach · · · · · · · · · · · · 45,135
St. Matthew Passion by J.S. Bach · · · · · · · · 45-46,136
Sweet Charity by Coleman/Fields/Simon · · · · · · · · 79
Temptations by Michael Austin · · · · · · · · · · · · 171
The Amen Corner by James Baldwin · · · · · · · · · 126
The Black Album by Hanif Kureishi · · · · · · · · · 125
The Christ of Coldharbour Lane by Oladipo Agboluaje · · · 121
The Coming of Christ by John Masefield · · · · · · · · 19
The Cost of Freedom (about Richard Allen) · · · · · · · 129
The Crucifixion, by John Stainer · · · · · · · · · · · 46
The Death of the Black Jesus by David Barr · · · · · · · 133
The Dirtiest Show In Town by Tom Eyen and Jeff Barry · · · 94
The Fatherland by Murray Watts · · · · · · · · · · 170
The Guantanamo Years by Abie Philbin Bowman · · · · · 119
The Jesus Hickey by Luke Yankee · · · · · · · · · · 134
The Judas Kiss by David Hare · · · · · · · · · · · 130
The Last Confession by Roger Crane · · · · · · · · · 132
The Last Days of Judas by Stephen Adly Guirgis · · · · · 116
The Last Supper by Harrison Birtwistle · · · · · · · · 137
The Lion King from Walt Disney Pictures · · · · · · · · 132
The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe
by C.S.Lewis / G. Robbins · · · · · · · · · · · · · 166
The Man Born To Be King by D.L. Sayers · · · · 175,188,196
The Manchester Passion (compilation) · · · · · · · · 184
The Miracle Maker (Animation, script by Murray Watts) · · · 139
The Mysteries from Isango Portobello Theatre Co. · · · · 114
The Passion from BBC 2008 / Frank Deasy · · · · · 123, 185
The Passion by Adrian Snell · · · · · · · · · · · · 151
The Passion of the Christ (Mel Gibson's film) · · · · · 83,195
The Passion from Wintershall Estate, Surrey · · · · · · 66-68
The Pitmen Painters by Lee Hall · · · · · · · · · · 126
The Power of Yes by Hytner · · · · · · · · · · · · 200
The Saviour by Andrew Lloyd-Webber · · · · · · · · · 48
The Screwtape Letters.by C.S. Lewis · · · · · · · · · 132
The Singing Detective by Dennis Potter · · · · · · · · 83
The Son of Man by Gowans/Larsson · · · · · · · · · 152
The Song of Bernadette by Franz Werfel · · · · · · · · 129
The Trial of Jesus by J. Masefield · · · · · · · · · · 16
The Waste Land by T.S. Eliot · · · · · · · · · · · · 18
The Wintershall Nativity · · · · · · · · · · · · · 68
The Witness by Jim and Carol Owens · · · · · · · · · 149
The Wolverhampton Mystery Cycle · · · · · · · · · · 123

The York Realist, by Peter Gill 42
Tobias and the Angel by James Bridie 20
Tommy by Pete Townshend 89,120
War! Lies! And A Packet of Fags by David Gooderson 183
Warning! Religion Can Damage Your Health
by Tony Jasper 184
Whistle Down The Wind by Andrew Lloyd-Webber 117
Wildfire by Roger Jones 168
Witness by Nick Warburton 118,184
Woodbine Willie by David Hill 183
Yesterday Today Forever by John and Ross Harding 150

Index of Works, ordered by creators

– A –

Consequences by R. Adams 165
Black Jesus by Oladipo Agboluaje 117
The Christ of Coldharbour Lane by Oladipo Agboluaje . . . 121
Dating Jesus by Louise Arsenault 117
Betrayals by Michael Austin 171
Temptations by Michael Austin 171

– B –

St. John Passion by J.S. Bach 45,135
St. Matthew Passion by J.S. Bach 45-46,136
Blues for Mister Charlie by James Baldwin 126
The Amen Corner by James Baldwin 126
The Death of the Black Jesus by David Barr 133
The Dirtiest Show In Town by Tom Eyen and Jeff Barry . . . 94
Lenny by Julian Barry 92
Harry's Christmas by Stephen Berkoff 133
Messiah by Steven Berkoff 85,115,190
Mass: A Theatre Piece for Singers, Players and Dancers by Leonard Bernstein 85
On The Third Day by Kate Betts 119
Bezhti by Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti 115
The Last Supper by Harrison Birtwistle 137
Fiddler on the Roof by J. Bock/S. Harnick/J. Stein 79
Passion by Edward Bond 85
Candles in the Window by Dietrich Bonhoeffer 127
Les Miserables by Schönberg/Boublil 117
The Guantanamo Years by Abie Philbin Bowman 119
Sonburst by Pete Casey and Ron Bradshaw 151
Paul by Howard Brenton 116
Gospel at Colonus by L. Breuer/R. Telson 127
Tobias and the Angel by James Bridie 20
Rock by Winter / Bye / Hurrell 152

– C –

Sonburst by Pete Casey and Ron Bradshaw 151
God's New Frock by Jo Clifford 113
Queen of Heaven by Jo Clifford 113
Sweet Charity by Coleman/Fields/Simon 79
Canadian Badlands Passion Play by Kathy Covert et al. . . . 123
The Last Confession by Roger Crane 132

– D –

Man of La Mancha by Wasserman/Darion/Leigh 79
Jesus is a City Fan by Michael Dawson 118
Hopes and Dreams by Deal / Field 154
The Passion from BBC 2008 / Frank Deasy 123, 185
Jesus My Boy by John Dowie 117
Not the Messiah by E. Idle and J. Du Prez 118
The Glory of Easter by Paul David Dunn (Crystal Cathedral) . 64, 65

– E –

Journey of the Magi by T.S. Eliot 66
Murder in the Cathedral by T.S. Eliot 18,20-21
The Waste Land by T.S. Eliot 18
Redemption Song by Les Ellison 193
The Dirtiest Show In Town by Tom Eyen and Jeff Barry . . . 94

– F –

Hopes and Dreams by Deal / Field 154
Sweet Charity by Coleman/Fields/Simon 79
Francis, the Holy Jester by Dario Fo 128
Giotto a Non Giotto by Dario Fo 128

– G –

And Jesus Moonwalks the Misissippi by M. Gardley 126
The Passion of the Christ (Mel Gibson's film) 83,195
The York Realist, by Peter Gill 42
War! Lies! And A Packet of Fags by David Gooderson 183
Alpha and Omega by David Gordon 153
Blood of the Lamb by Gowans/Larsson 152
Glory by Gowans/Larsson 152
Jesus Folk by Gowans / Larsson 152
Spirit by Gowans / Larsson 152
The Son of Man by Gowans/Larsson 152
In Arabia We'd All Be Kings by S.A. Guirgis 123
Jesus Hopped the A-Train by S.A. Guirgis 121
The Last Days of Judas by S.A. Guirgis 116

– H –

Mountaintop by Katori Hall 129
The Pitmen Painters by Lee Hall 126
Messiah by G.F. Handel 9,74,135,149
Yesterday Today Forever by John and Ross Harding 150
Gethsemane by David Hare 130
Racing Demons by David Hare 130
The Judas Kiss by David Hare 130

Carousel by Rodgers/ Hammerstein 79
Fiddler on the Roof by J. Bock/S. Harnick/J. Stein 79
Woodbine Willie by David Hill 183
Redemption by Gordon Honeycombe 167
Lonesome Stone by Palosaari / Hoyt 148
Black Nativity by L. Hughes 78-79,158
Simply Heavenly? by Nicola Hughes 125
Rock by Winter / Bye / Hurrell 152
Life of Christ by P. Hutley 67-68
The Power of Yes by Hytner 200

– I –

Life of Brian by Eric Idle 118
Not the Messiah by E. Idle and J. Du Prez 118
The Mysteries from Isango Portobello Theatre Co. 114

– J –

Liberating Jesus by Leonard Jackson 124
Feel The Spirit by Tony Jasper 75
Warning! Religion Can Damage Your Health
by Tony Jasper 184
Wildfire by Roger Jones 168

– K –

4.48 Psychosis by Sarah Kane 132
Blasted (and other plays) by Sarah Kane 132
Cotton Patch Gospel by Tom Key and Russell Treyez 122
See How They Run by Philip King 73
The Black Album by Hanif Kureishi 125
Angels in America by Tony Kushner 130

– L –

New Testament by Neil La Bute 118
Rent by J. Larson 131
Blood of the Lamb by Gowans/Larsson 152
Glory by Gowans/Larsson 152
Jesus Folk by Gowans / Larsson 152
Spirit by Gowans / Larsson 152
The Son of Man by Gowans/Larsson 152
David by D.H. Laurence 20
Inherit The Wind by J. Lawrence and R.E. Lee, ... 76
Jerry Springer: The Opera by Thomas/Lee . 72,74,111,114,181,186
Man of La Mancha by Wasserman/Darion/Leigh 79
Jesus Hates Me by Wayne Lemon 120
Narnia by Robbins/C.S. Lewis 166

The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe
by C.S.Lewis / G. Robbins 166
The Screwtape Letters.by C.S. Lewis 132
Father Ted by A. Mathews and G. Linehan 112
Jesus Christ Superstar by Lloyd-Webber/Rice . . . 48,71,77,79-80
. 84,86,95,141,147-148,150-152,156,166,174,193,195
Joseph & the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat
by Lloyd-Webber/Rice 88
The Saviour by Andrew Lloyd-Webber 48
Whistle Down The Wind by Andrew Lloyd-Webber 117
Hosanna! a Portrait of Jesus, music by John Lockley 151

– M –

Alive by Hugh Maddox 149-150
A Man Dies by Ernest Marvin 78,150,154-157,196
The Coming of Christ by John Masefield 19
The Trial of Jesus by J. Masefield 16
Father Ted by A. Mathews and G. Linehan 112
From Olivet to Calvary by J.H. Maunder 46
Hair by Rado/Ragni/MacDermot 80-81,92,141,147
Mass in F by Galt McDermot 81
Corpus Christi by Terrence McNally 112,115
Jesus The Wasted Years by Robert Meakin 122
Incarnation of Jesus by Messiaen 134
La Nativite Du Seigneur by Messiaen 134
Little Baby Jesus by Arinze Kene Mokwe 117
St. Catherine of Siena with Nancy Murray 129
Sentenced to Life by Muggeridge/Thornhill 166

– N –

Shadowlands by William Nicholson et al. 18,189

– O –

Rent Boy Ave: A Fairy's Tale by N. Olivero 132
Luther by John Osborne 129
Come Together by Jimmy & Carol Owens 149-150
If My People by Jimmy and Carol Owens 149
The Witness by Jim and Carol Owens 149

– P –

Lonesome Stone by Palosaari / Hoyt 148
Gospel of Matthew by P.P. Pasolini 124
Brimstone and Treacle by Dennis Potter 83
Only Make Believe by Dennis Potter 83
Son of Man by Dennis Potter 83
The Singing Detective by Dennis Potter 83

His Dark Materials by Philip Pullman · · · · · · · · · · 131

– R –

Hair by Rado/Ragni/MacDermot · · · · · · · 80-81,92,141,147
Requiem for the Condemned Man by Jonathan Rathbone · · 134
Jesus Christ Superstar by Lloyd-Webber/Rice · · · 48,71,77,79-80
· · · · · · 84,86,95,141,147-148,150-152,156,166,174,193,195
Joseph & the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat
by Lloyd-Webber/Rice · · · · · · · · · · · · · · 88
Rockstar by Robert Rigby · · · · · · · · · · · · · 152
The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe
by C.S.Lewis / G. Robbins · · · · · · · · · · · · · 166
Look What A Wonder Jesus Has Done by Walter Robinson · · 134
Carousel by Rodgers/ Hammerstein · · · · · · · · · · 79

– S –

The Man Born To Be King by D.L. Sayers · · · · 175,188,196
Les Miserables by Schönberg/Boublil · · · · · · · · · 117
Godspell by Schwartz/Tebelak · · · · · · · · 21,81,84,95
· · · · · · · 102-103,141,147-148,150-151,166,174,190,195
Night Time by Robert Dawson Scott · · · · · · · · · 76
Hamlet by W. Shakespeare · · · · · · · · · · · · 137
King Lear by W. Shakespeare · · · · · · · · · · · 137
Doubt: A Parable by J.P. Shanley · · · · · · · · · · 126
Major Barbara by George Bernard Shaw · · · · · · · · 133
Journey's End by R.C. Sherriff · · · · · · · · · · · 17
Sweet Charity by Coleman/Fields/Simon · · · · · · · · 79
Company by Stephen Sondheim · · · · · · · · · · · 80
A View from the Underside: The Legacy of Dietrich
Bonhoeffer by Al Staggs · · · · · · · · · · · · · 128
The Crucifixion, by John Stainer · · · · · · · · · · 46
Fireflake by Adrian Snell · · · · · · · · · · · · 151
Oedipus at Colonus by Sophocles · · · · · · · · · · 127
Florence Nightingale by Norman Stone · · · · · · · · 189
Fiddler on the Roof by J. Bock/S. Harnick/J. Stein · · · · · 79
About Face by S. & J. Stickley · · · · · · · · · · · 166

– T –

Fall and Resurrection by John Taverner · · · · · · · · 134
Godspell by Schwartz/Tebelak · · · · · · · · 21,81,84,95
· · · · · · · 102-103,141,147-148,150-151,166,174,190,195
Gospel at Colonus by L. Breuer/R. Telson · · · · · · · 127
Becket, by Tennyson · · · · · · · · · · · · · · 13
Jerry Springer: The Opera by Thomas/Lee · 72,74,111,114,181,186
Ride! Ride! by Alan Thornhill · · · · · · · · · · · 166

Sentenced to Life by Muggeridge/Thornhill · · · · · · · · 166
Judas Iscariot by E. Temple Thurston · · · · · · · · · 16
Lord of the Rings by J.R. Tolkein · · · · · · · · · · 18
Tommy by Pete Townshend · · · · · · · · · · · 89,120
Cotton Patch Gospel by Tom Key and Russell Treyez · · · · 122
Christ in the Concrete City by Philip Turner · · · · · · · 167
Oh! Calcutta by Kenneth Tynan et al. · · · · · · · · 94,98

– W –

Witness by Nick Warburton · · · · · · · · · · · 118,184
Man of La Mancha by Wasserman/Darion/Leigh · · · · · · 79
The Fatherland by Murray Watts · · · · · · · · · · 170
The Miracle Maker (Animation, script by Murray Watts) · · · 139
The Song of Bernadette by Franz Werfel · · · · · · · et al.
· 129
Rock by Winter / Bye / Hurrell · · · · · · · · · · · 152

– Y –

The Jesus Hickey by Luke Yankee · · · · · · · · · · 134

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