

CHRIST -- BOTH SCRIPT AND ACTOR

by Julisa Rowe, 2003

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ...The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (Jn. 1:1, 14)

A good play has conflict at its heart, and the action of the play comes from the resolving of the conflict. An understanding of the basic elements of a script, as shown below, help us to better picture the divine play initiated by God.

- Protagonist:* The initiator of the action, and usually the focal figure in the conflict.
- Antagonist:* The principle opposing figure or force.
- Root Conflict:* The base clash, or conflict, between the protagonist and antagonist.
- Root Action:* The process of solving the root conflict.
- Inciting Incident:* The incident which begins the conflict. This is usually at the beginning of the play.
- Crisis:* The event that makes the climax inevitable.
- Catastrophe:* The moment that precipitates the climax. This is the event that signals that the resolution is about to happen. Sometimes the crisis and catastrophe happen at the same time.
- Climax:* The moment at which the conflict is resolved and the true motives are most fully revealed. This is usually at the end of the play.
- Denouement:* Events that follow the climax but are not a real part of the action, serving only to clarify and illuminate the climax, and bring the play to an end.

John gives a very dramatic opening to his gospel, showing that the life of Christ, and the

prophecies of the Old Testament, can be viewed in theatrical terms. Jesus is the embodiment of the Word, speaking, acting and behaving as the Word. At the same time, a close examination of the New Testament points out that Jesus also was a complete fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah. He used the Old Testament scriptures to frame his life and ministry, showing the fulfillment of prophecy in himself, answering accusations, inquiries and questions, and pointing people to the kingdom of heaven. He was the actor of the script, as well as creator of a new script for the coming church, and once the disciples understood the old and new scripts, and experienced the full performance, they, too, became actors and propagators of the message. This paper looks at the details of these scripts and players.

I. The Old Testament Script

What is the script? The script is written through prophecies and types, presenting a Messiah who would arrive at a certain time in history in Israel, born of a virgin, of the line of David (seed of woman, and with a legal claim to David's throne), and born in Bethlehem. He would be the savior of people and sacrifice for sin, as well as an eternal priest and king. Specific details about his birth, life, death and resurrection are laid out—hundreds of verses give a very specific picture of the endowments and performance of the coming Messiah.

The Inciting Incident

From the time of Adam, this hope was given. The inciting incident of the grand play took place when Eve succumbed to Satan's temptation, setting in motion the action of the play—how could man stand again in God's presence in full reconciliation? God gives a hint when he states: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." (Gen. 3:15) The script begins to unfold as the search for reconciliation and a final deliverer begins—a deliverer, born of woman, who would crush Satan and his work.

When man sinned against God, he gained a sin nature that made him unworthy of speaking to God, or walking with him in harmony (Gen. 3:8ff), because sin extended to every fiber of man's being. Man now is totally depraved, completely sinful.

Romans 3:10ff states, "There is no one righteous, not even one... All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one." Romans 3:23 tells us that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." In fact, sin is so extensive in us that it is considered an integral part of us, a part that we are unable to change by ourselves. Jeremiah 13:23 illustrates this with the analogy of a leopard who cannot change his spots, or an Ethiopian unable to change the color of his skin. It is part of the identifying mark of man. Furthermore, man is unable to save himself from this. His very nature is sinful (Rom. 7:25), and needs special intervention from God to become holy. The problem of man's sinfulness was laid down in the script, and it took the performance of the script to see the action that would enable redemption. (A written script is only part of the story; two-thirds of the impact of the play comes from its performance, the action that can only be seen and felt but not written.)

[This was received when Christ died on the cross, taking the sins of man on himself, and offering a new nature to those who would believe in him (Jn. 3:16, Rom. 5:17, 6:6). John 6:44 says, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him." This is further indication that we are personally incapable of saving ourselves.]

Tactics Taken

All actors are working to achieve a goal and overcome obstacles set in their path. In this divine play, certain tactics were devised to try to obtain reconciliation with God. Systems of sacrifice for sin were set in place to provide an atonement for wrongdoing and sinful hearts. Levitical law laid out the various offerings and sacrifices that should be given for atonement; they included male livestock without blemish, burnt and blood offerings. Another type of sacrifice was the

scapegoat—a live goat taken by Israel’s high priest and given all the sins of the nation.

He is to lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites — all their sins — and put them on the goat’s head. He shall send the goat away into the desert in the care of a man appointed for the task. The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a solitary place; and the man shall release it in the desert. (Lev. 16:21)

Plotting the Birth Scene

Israel was a nation chosen by God to be His special people, an example to the world of His love and justice. Because of Israel’s continued lapses into idolatry and sin, the nation was often in exile or peril, and looked forward to their deliverance. God sent many messages to them through the prophets, giving them cause to expect one who would be a final deliverer for them from their bondage—both political and spiritual.

Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan—The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned. You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as men rejoice when dividing the plunder. For as in the day of Midian’s defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor. Every warrior’s boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this. (Is. 9:1-7)

Isaiah’s prophecy was given during a time of political uncertainty in Israel, when King Ahaz of Judah refused to listen to God for guidance. The prophecies condemned Judah and other nations and predicted the coming Assyrian domination of Israel and future Babylonian exile. At the same time, the purpose was comfort for the people of Judah by depicting the nature of their restoration. The passage above describes a future kingdom in which there will be eternal peace, coming about through the land of Zebulun and Naphtali (Galilee)—the area of Israel that

bordered heathen nations, contained many Gentiles, and whose inhabitants were less ritualistically pure in their faith. That the deliverer would be revealed here points to a worldwide salvation. If God had wished to honor only the Jews, he probably would not have chosen to reveal Himself in such a diverse community.

Additional prophecies about the birth of the Messiah further serve to set the scene for his birth. The Isaiah 9 passage indicates that the coming deliverer would be a child, rather than a *deus ex machina*, coming out of nowhere to solve earth's problems. However, the statement that his kingly reign would be eternal gives an indication of the child's divinity as well as humanity. Isaiah 7:14 indicates that the Messiah would be born of a virgin, and passages in Isaiah, Samuel and Jeremiah all prophecy that he would come from the line of David (2 Sam. 7:12-13, Is. 11:1, Jer. 23:5). These verses also talk about the eternal, just reign of this king, further indicating a divine nature. Prophecies in Psalms, Proverbs and Micah also hint at the divine origins of the Messiah (Ps. 2:7, Prov. 30:4, Mic. 5:2).

The Old Testament even lays out the time and place for the birth of the Messiah.

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times. (Mic. 5:2)

Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven 'sevens,' and sixty-two 'sevens.' It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble. After the sixty-two 'sevens,' the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. (Dan. 9:25-26)

Bethlehem was the site, and a time frame of 483 years was given before the arrival of the "Anointed One." (We will look at the relevance of this in a later section.)

It is appropriate that the script calls for a herald to announce the arrival of the king. "See, I will

send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,” says the LORD Almighty.” (Mal. 3:1) More details are given about the location and message of the herald as well:

A voice of one calling: “In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken. (Is. 40:3-5)

Character Study of the Messiah

The script also lays out aspects of the protagonist’s character, giving us a very complex look at his personality and actions. The Messiah has already been described as a just, conquering and peaceful king, but he will also be anointed with the spirit of God (Is. 11:2, 61:1, Ps. 45:7-8).

The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him — the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD — and he will delight in the fear of the LORD. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. (Is. 11:2-4)

His character would be tender, compassionate, meek, unostentatious, sinless and guileless (Is. 40:11, 42:2-3, 53:9, 12, Ps 69:10). He would have a ministry of healing, comfort, and proclaiming freedom:

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God(Is. 61:1-2).

In spite of such loving characteristics and joyous news, he would be hated, and rejected by his own people (Is. 49:7, 53:2, 63:3, Ps. 69:4-9), which leads us to the crisis and climax of the script.

The Crisis

Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. (Zech. 9:9)

It is not clear in a reading of the Old Testament script that this is the point of crisis, which makes the climax of the story inevitable. It is only in the course of the performance that this becomes clear, and will be explained in the next section. Nonetheless, this is one of the events that triggers actions leading to the end. Another such event is the entrance with authority by the Messiah into the Temple (Hagg. 2:7-9, Mal. 3:1).

The Catastrophe

Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me. (Ps. 41:9)

I told them, “If you think it best, give me my pay; but if not, keep it.” So they paid me thirty pieces of silver. And the LORD said to me, “Throw it to the potter” — the handsome price at which they priced me! So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the LORD to the potter. (Zech. 11:12-13)

The catastrophe comes through the betrayal of a friend, who chooses money over friendship. This betrayal results in the Messiah’s handing over to the Gentiles to be killed, at his own people’s instigation (Is. 53:2, 63:3, Ps. 69:8-9).

The Climax

Isaiah 53 gives a very thorough picture of the climax of the script. In it, we see that the Messiah is considered to be a transgressor, cut off from mankind and serving as the atoning sacrifice for the sins of mankind, much as the scapegoat did during Israel’s Day of Atonement. Furthermore, the details given of the Messiah’s death are vivid, brutal and overwhelming. He is to be struck, beaten on the back, spat on, mocked, and then crucified. Zech. 12:10 says “they will look on me, the one they have pierced,” and Ps. 22:17-18 adds to the picture:

Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me. They

divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.

Details are given about the entire crucifixion, from the piercing of his hands and feet, the disposition of his clothes through lots, having no bones broken (as was the custom, to hasten death) but, instead, having a spear in the side, to being given vinegar for his thirst (Ps. 22:15, 69:21).

He would be buried with the rich (Is. 53), but would not remain dead, but rise again to life! (Ps. 16:10-11) Then he would ascend to heaven, to rule with God (Ps. 110:1).

In Numbers 21, the people of Israel sinned and grumbled against God. As punishment, God released venomous snakes in their camp, killing many. When the Israelites begged for mercy, God told Moses to fashion a bronze snake and stick on a pole in the ground. Whoever looked at the snake would be healed. The image is set in place for a healing redeemer, hanging on a stake. There are many other people and episodes in the Old Testament that foreshadow the character and work of the coming Messiah, such as shepherd (Abel, Moses, David), kinsman-redeemer (Boaz, Levitical passages), sacrificial lamb (Isaac, Passover), high priest (Aaron, Melchizedek), taking of a Gentile wife in exile (Joseph, Moses), bread of life (manna). Each of these instances are “plays within a play” that are staged separately, yet together make up the curtain raiser to the main performance.

II. The Performance of the Old Testament Script

483 years after the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem (the literal interpretation of the 69 x 7 of Daniel 9:25, culminating, according to some commentators, in the crucifixion), the script written in the Old Testament was performed by the ultimate method actor (an actor who aims at completely inhabiting the character he is playing):

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed

in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil. 2:5-11)

This passage summarizes the script beautifully, but it is also thrilling to see the performance of all the details already laid out.

The performance begins with the coming of the herald who will announce the king. An angel of the Lord appears to Zechariah, the priest, promising him a son who will “go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous — to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Lk. 1:17). This son, John the Baptist, preached in the Desert of Judea, calling people to repentance and baptizing them as a sign of forgiveness from sins, as written in Isaiah 40 (Mat. 3:1-3, Lk. 3:2-6). Now the king can enter.

In the town of Nazareth, another angel of the Lord appeared to a young virgin, Mary, announcing her selection as the woman to bear the Messiah. This was accomplished miraculously, without the help of man, showing in performance what was only hinted at in script, namely, that the Messiah would be the seed of woman (Gen. 3:15), and therefore human, and yet also eternal, and therefore divine (Ps. 2:7, Prov. 30:4, Jn. 1:1, 14).

The angel also makes it clear that this baby (Is. 9) is the expected eternal heir to David’s throne: “He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and His kingdom will have no end.” (Lk. 1:32) The genealogies of Matthew and Luke also show the

legal and natural descent of Jesus from David; through Joseph, we see the legal claim to the throne, and through Mary, the natural, or genetic, claim, not only to David's throne, but also to descent from God through Adam. The enactment of Ps. 2:7 and Prov. 30:4 takes place when John baptized Jesus in the Jordan. "A voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.'" (Mt. 3:17) Jesus also declared himself to be eternal and a part of the Godhead: "I tell you the truth,' Jesus answered, 'before Abraham was born, I am!'" (Jn. 8:58) The reference to the name God gave himself when speaking to Moses out of the burning bush was plain to Jesus' listeners.

The audience of Jesus' time knew some of the main points of the script. Knowing that Jesus lived in Galilee, they asked: "Does not the Scripture say that the Christ will come from David's family and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?" (Jn. 7:42) The Messiah needed to fulfill both the Isaiah and Micah prophecies, and we see the performance of it in the circumstances of the family chosen to raise him. Joseph and Mary lived in Nazareth, in Galilee, but at the time of Jesus' birth, were required to go to Bethlehem, Joseph's ancestral town, to be registered by the government. Thus, the baby Jesus entered at Bethlehem, and came to public attention in Nazareth.

The Actor Declares Himself

Jesus officially declared himself the enactor of the Old Testament script after his baptism and temptation in the wilderness. In his home town of Nazareth, he read from his script, Isaiah 61 which described the character and acts of the Anointed One. In dramatic fashion, he revealed himself to be the fulfillment, the living enactment of that script: "He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, 'Today the Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'" (Lk. 4:21) From that time, he began to speak the words of the script, showing, scene by scene, how it should be performed. He spoke it word for word, as God had written it, and as was prophesied

through Moses in Deut. 18:18: “I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him.”

Jesus fulfills this in word and deed; in John 5:46 he says that Moses wrote about him, and in John 8:28-29 he says, “I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him.” The secret of his acting ability is in his continual reliance on the Father for filling and prompting.

Jesus also fulfills the words of Moses by reenacting several of Moses’ scenes—the feeding of the 5000 reenacted the manna in the wilderness, the conversation about living water with the Samaritan woman by the well reenacted the life-giving water Moses brought from a rock in the desert, and the crucifixion reenacted the bronze snake on the pole, raised to restore life and healing to the sick. All these reenactments caused the people who saw them to say, “Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.” (Jn. 6:14)

The Purpose

He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work. (1 Jn. 3:8)

Jesus’ purpose in entering the stage was to bring resolution to the conflict begun in the Garden of Eden, namely, to “destroy the devil’s work” by bringing a way of redemption and restoration for mankind to God. Jesus was in a unique position—knowing the Old Testament, and knowing that he was the Messiah, he also knew what would happen later in the play. He took the opportunity to give clues to the other players, as in his conversation with Nicodemus when he reached into the Old Testament script and indicated that he would be acting out that scene in order to accomplish God’s purposes: “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.” (Jn. 3:14-15) The implication of all this will be discussed in the section three.

Character Live and in Action

The script claimed that Messiah would be anointed with the spirit of God, and the enactment of that came at the baptism of Jesus, when “he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him.” (Matt. 3:16)

The character of the Messiah was also clearly given in the Old Testament script, and Jesus inhabited that character with excellence, showing compassion on the sick, healing, binding the powers of darkness by casting out demons, proclaiming the kingdom of heaven, and avoiding quarrels and fights.

Aware of this, Jesus withdrew from that place. Many followed him, and he healed all their sick, warning them not to tell who he was. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: “Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations. He will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he leads justice to victory. In his name the nations will put their hope. (Matt. 12:15-21)

Isaiah 35:5-6 states that Messiah would heal the blind, deaf, lame and mute. The enactment of this is seen many times throughout Jesus’ ministry, as he does heal the blind, the deaf, the lame, the mute, and many others sick from various ailments.

After his death and resurrection, Peter was able to say of him:

He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth. When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. (1 Pet. 2:22-25)

His miracle-working and teaching that went against the religion of law of the Pharisees caused him to be hated, particularly by the rulers and Pharisees, but also by his own family and townspeople.

In spite of his performance of the script through his actions, the people still did not realize the truth of his character. When writing and performing drama, it is important to give the audience the ability to discover truth for themselves, a moment of “a-ha.” This allows them to accept the truth more readily, because discovery came from within, rather than being forced upon them.

Jesus realized this, and taught the crowds through parables saying (in Matt. 13:13-14),

This is why I speak to them in parables: “Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand. In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: “You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.” (Is. 6:9)

Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable. So was fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet [Ps. 78:2]: “I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world.” (Matt. 13:34-35)

The Crisis Revealed

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, tell him that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.” This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: “Say to the Daughter of Zion, ‘See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’” The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. They brought the donkey and the colt, placed their cloaks on them, and Jesus sat on them. (Matt. 21:1-11)

This occurred at the beginning of Passover week. The crowd’s reaction showed that they saw in this symbolism a fulfillment of Zechariah and played their part, laying down their cloaks under the donkey’s feet as a symbol of their submission to the king, whom they acknowledged to be the son of David. All the written scenes were now coming together into a climax for the Israelites as they saw the Messianic script coming to life. However, they overlooked the fact that a donkey (beast of burden) rather than a white horse (symbolic of triumph and power) was used in this entrance of the king. Jesus was coming in submission, to bear burdens, rather than as a conquering king (that scene is yet to be played). This hidden symbolism combines with the

rejection of Jesus as king by the Pharisees and other religious leaders (triggered by the crowd's reaction, Jesus' cleansing of the Temple and his acts of healing) to set the stage for the coming climax.

The Catastrophe Revealed

Judas, one of Jesus' disciples, was the one who acted out this portion of the script, selling information about Jesus' whereabouts to the religious leaders for 30 pieces of silver (Matt. 26:14ff). Leading the soldiers into the Garden of Gethsemane, he kissed Jesus on the cheek, handing him over to be arrested and condemned to die.

When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders. "I have sinned," he said, "for I have betrayed innocent blood."

"What is that to us?" they replied. "That's your responsibility." So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself.

The chief priests picked up the coins and said, "It is against the law to put this into the treasury, since it is blood money." So they decided to use the money to buy the potter's field as a burial place for foreigners. That is why it has been called the Field of Blood to this day. Then what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: "They took the thirty silver coins, the price set on him by the people of Israel, and they used them to buy the potter's field, as the Lord commanded me." (Matt. 27:3-10)

The stage was set for the coming climax, when the suffering-servant Messiah would be revealed and the conflict between God and Satan for man's redemption would be decided.

The Climax Revealed

Jesus had spoken of this moment many times in his life, anticipating the event, and trying to prepare his disciples for its coming (Mt 12:38-42, 16:21, 17:22-23, 20:18-19, 26:31, Mk 8:31, 9:31, 10:32-34, Lk 9:22, 44, 18:31-33, Jn. 12:32-33). It also shows that he was fully aware that he was the actor of the script laid out. He reminded his audience about an earlier scene, Jonah in the belly of the whale, and let them know that he would be acting it out. The time had now come for the enactment, and the resolution of the conflict. With Jesus' arrest, trial, condemnation and

crucifixion, he fully acted out the part of atoning sacrifice for man's sin and separation from God. Every detail shown in the Old Testament script came to life as he was beaten, spat on, mocked and crucified. He was silent before his persecutors, giving no defense to the court. His feet and hands were pierced by nails, his side was pierced by a sword, he was given vinegar to quench his thirst, soldiers disposed of his robe by casting lots for it, people scoffed at him as he hung on the cross, and the Father turned his back on him, abandoning him in his death. After his death, he was buried in the tomb owned by Joseph of Arimathea, a rich man. (Matt. 26:67, 27:30,34-35, Lk. 24:39, Jn. 19:18, 28, 33-37, 20:20-28.)

Jesus physically acted and fulfilled the Old Testament script of sacrifice, but he also fulfilled it from the side of intent, resolving the long-standing conflict that existed from the time of Adam. He atoned for the sins of mankind with the sacrifice of himself, becoming Savior and Deliverer of man (Is. 53). However, the script did not end with the crucifixion. Jesus was enacting the scene of Jonah, and this meant resurrection; just as Jonah was released from the belly of the whale, so Jesus rose from the dead on the third day (Ps. 16:10, Matt. 28:1-20, Lk. 24:1-8). Furthermore, the complete script called for more than just the atonement for sin—it called for the complete and final triumph of the king and worldwide and eternal acknowledgement of his reign. This part of the play is yet to be performed—we are left at the intermission of the performance, with the ascension of Jesus to heaven (Is. 53, Ps. 110:1) and the expectation of his returning again in triumph (this time on the white horse!) to eradicate the enemy and establish lasting peace (Ps. 72, Is. 4:2, 63:1, Dan. 7:14).

III. The New Script Presented by Christ

Jesus constantly used the Old Testament to lead his followers into an understanding of who he was (Lk. 24:44). He also enacted many scenes from the Old Testament, using them to show how he was fulfilling their meaning and extending the performance to his followers. Some beautiful enactments centered around bread and water, showing the Samaritan woman at the well what

living water looked like (Jn. 4:4-42, Is. 44:3, Jer. 2:13), and continually showing himself to be the “bread of life” (Jn. 6:48).

I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”

Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever.” (Jn. 6:51-58)

In this discussion, Jesus foretold of communion and the cross, giving a picture of redemption and sustaining of life. He was writing a new script that all believers in future generations could act out again and again as a sign of reconciliation and life.

After his resurrection, Jesus walked and talked with many of his disciples, and used the time to explain the action of the play to them.

He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. (Lk. 24:25-27)

He pointed out that he was the Word in action, and that, once they understood the script, they had a part to play as well.

Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, “This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. (Lk. 24:45-57)

His apparently final scene was actually the beginning of a new act. After explaining the action

and nuances of the script, and upon his ascension, Jesus opened up the performance to new actors, namely, the church. The second act began after what appeared to be his final scene, when he told his disciples, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matt. 28:18-20) His fulfillment of Scripture, particularly through his death and resurrection, formed the basis of the script, which must then be taken out and acted throughout the world.

IV. The Performance by the Early Church

The disciples had been thoroughly steeped in Old Testament Scripture, and yet they still did not perceive the performance when it happened right in front of them. It was only after they encountered the risen Jesus, and he explained the Scriptures to them, that they finally understood and caught the excitement of the performance, desiring to become actors themselves. However, to borrow from Greek mythology, they had to wait for the “muse” before they could begin acting; when the Holy Spirit descended on them at Pentecost they were energized and enabled to begin their performance, and began witnessing and proclaiming Jesus Christ in Jerusalem and beyond.

Peter, as the leader of the new church, began to make statements and decisions based on Scripture; just as Jesus opened the Old Testament script to them, now Peter was doing the same for others, showing how Jesus was the enactment of the prophecies, and explaining the new performance to them.

“God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said, ‘The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your

feet.’ Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off — for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. (Acts 2:32-42)

The Jews of the day were very familiar with the prophecies and environment in which Jesus performed, and they were quick to understand the script explained to them by Peter. Other members of the early church took the example Peter gave and used his script for their own performance. One such was Stephen, an early leader of the church, who addressed the Sanhedrin from their history, as seen in the Old Testament. He showed them how the script Christ performed was from their own history, and he also showed them the new script, looking forward to the final act, when the Son of Man would return from heaven.

The growth of the church was not due to a set of doctrines or right teaching, or even an understanding of the Old Testament scriptures, but rather to the discovery of who Jesus was. This is evidently clear in the life of Paul. Paul heard what Stephen had to say and was impacted by it, albeit negatively. His conversion came on the heels of Stephen’s speech—Paul had been confronted by the written word as spoken by Stephen; on the road to Damascus, he was confronted with the living word, and the combination of both led to his conversion. (Like the disciples, he needed the tangible, physical evidence of the living Lord Jesus.) His immediate response to the encounter with Jesus was to fall on the ground (as Isaiah did in Isaiah 6), and

then to begin proclamation of Jesus as the son of God (Acts 9:20).

Jesus set the pattern, enacting the script and explaining the written Word. This pattern was imitated by Peter, Stephen, Paul and others. Their enactment included performing in a manner consistent with Jesus' teachings, such as caring for widows, sharing with fellow believers and those in need, praying, breaking bread together (Acts 2:42-47), and their explanations came through teaching and proclaiming (throughout the book of Acts), but each also had a personal experience with Jesus. Three things come together for the conversion of believers: The Scriptures, hermeneutics (explanation of the Scriptures) and personal experience with Jesus. For the early church, this was a powerful combination, resulting in thousands of conversions, intense belief and confident proclamation. The new actors took their role seriously and set the stage for worldwide performance.

V. What Is Our Motivation for Performing Today?

Jesus is the fulfillment of the Scriptures, and this can be intellectually understood and seen in a study of the Scriptures, but what difference does it make today? How can that excite us and compel us to proclamation? An understanding of Old Testament scriptures helped the early church "get it" in terms of Jesus. But the majority of the world is not Jewish, and does not have the same historical background. Furthermore, the American church has been a proponent of missions for a century and yet, today, the excitement for it is diminishing, being reduced to proven programs and short-term commitments. I see this question as a vital one that all Christians need to ask—what is our motivation for performing Matthew 28:19-20?

Many Christians have a very good intellectual understanding of the Scriptures, and carry out ministries based on that understanding. It is the right thing to do as an expression of faith. The problem is that this reduces the Gospel to an act of duty, rather than an act of compelling need to have people know Christ Jesus. Will you be blessed and accepted by God if you are performing

out of duty? Does this make you a Pharisee? Having a habit of church or missions and following the “rules of engagement” could easily be construed as a Pharisaical mindset, one that is condemned by God for the emphasis on rules at the expense of encounter. If our lives are comfortable, and not turned upside down by beliefs, I believe we must question whether we are truly searching after God. A firm belief and compelling urge to proclaim is necessary to face the uncertainties, dangers and even antagonistic apathies awaiting Christians in many cultures.

“The prime ingredient in the patristic capture of the great cities of the ancient world was an intense, fervent faith...The spread of Christianity throughout urban populations is due to no more human appeal to dissatisfied groups of men. It is rather that believers submit themselves to God, believe His revelation, accept His Son as Savior, receive the Holy Spirit and press forward as new creatures,...and they shall reign forever and ever.” A casual faith will not win busy cities. Burning faith will.¹

If our role is that of actor in the continuing drama, then it is helpful to look at this aspect of evangelism in acting terms, to better understand what our motivation is.

The first question asked any actor when creating their character is, “What is your VOTE?” That is, what is your Victory, Obstacles, Tactics and Expectation? The Victory is the underlying motivation for all the character says and does. In this case, the victory is to encounter Jesus in such a way that we are compelled to evangelize. There are many obstacles in the way of achieving this victory:

- the enthusiasm of first love dies down, leaving a need for ongoing encounter to renew the passion with which a believer first proclaims their love of Jesus,
- lack of a conviction of man’s depravity (including one’s own) and God’s grace,
- lack of a conviction of heaven and hell,
- a lack of complete understanding of the Scriptures and Jesus’ fulfillment and enactment of them, combined with a lack of understanding of Jewish Old Testament culture,

¹ Wendell Broom, “A Case for the City Mission,” in *3C Cross Cultural Creativity Manual*, DramaShare: Saskatoon, Canada, 2002. Article excerpted and summarized from Donald McGavran’s *Understanding Church Growth*.

- reliance on successful methods and ministries, fearful of taking a risk and doing something contrary to common sense (but at the prompting of the Holy Spirit),
- lack of involvement with the world,
- procrastination, or laziness, to spend the time needed to foster encounter with God (i.e., prayer, study of Scripture, getting out of the comfort zone, overcoming inertia),
- asking for the Holy Spirit and waiting to receiving Him.

The next part of the question, then, is “What tactics do you employ to overcome the obstacles in the way of achieving your victory?” Many tactics can be used, but they can be summarized by involvement, encounter and understanding.

In order to evangelize, we need to have an understanding of the message that we are giving, that is, knowing who Jesus is ourselves in order to relate that to others. The early church was founded on an understanding of the Old Testament Scriptures—the Jews had the expectation and understanding of Messiah, based on their knowledge of Scriptures, and this, therefore, was the starting point for Jesus and the disciples. Where do we begin with today’s pluralistic societies? Is it relevant to begin with the Old Testament, or do we take the principle of beginning where they are in spiritual truth? This would entail looking for the Old Testament reference points, or footprints, in each culture, and searching out their understanding of God and His work. Having a thorough knowledge of who Christ is and what the drama is about is also important. Once the cultural and scriptural knowledge is known, it becomes easier to work toward creating understanding. When understanding comes, then proclamation must happen—it is an essential component of the gospel (death, resurrection, proclamation and helping people see who Jesus is).

However, understanding, even followed by proclamation, is not enough.

You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have

life. (Jn. 5:39-40)

The Word is the eternal, living God, seen and heard. The disciples and Paul did not evangelize until they encountered the living Christ and then had the power of the Holy Spirit. Even an intellectual understanding did not compel the disciples to speak. Encounter with God is the key. Throughout Scripture we see the powerful effect that encounters with God had on people (Gideon, David, Isaiah, the disciples, Paul, etc.), but the encounter was instigated by God.

Communication is involvement. This is the basic principle of communication, and is the foundational tactic to encountering and revealing Christ. An understanding of the Scriptures and involvement in the world will help overcome the obstacle of lack of conviction about man's depravity and need. Overcoming other obstacles based on our own fears and inactions needs the tactic of involvement, particularly prayer and waiting on God. Jesus told the disciples to wait for the power he would send from God (Lk. 24:49). After Jesus' ascension, the disciples "joined together constantly in prayer" (Acts 1:14) until the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was given to them, enabling them to proclaim with clarity the wonders of God to many nations (Acts 2:11). Without the Holy Spirit, they were not able to communicate the message, and they received the Spirit only after waiting, praying and staying involved with God (through prayer and with the accountability of the whole group). We cannot manufacture encounter with God—He chooses the time and place—but we can increase our involvement in His world. When we combine our understanding of the play with our involvement in the world and with God, then the potential for powerful encounter is tremendous.

The final part of the question is expectation—what level of expectation do you have of achieving your goal? When Jesus taught about the kingdom of heaven, he emphasized the need to be alert and prepared for its coming. Those who are not will miss the opportunity to enter the feast with the bridegroom (Matt. 25:1-13). Therefore, it is important to have a very high expectation of achieving the victory. When the expectation is high, the actor will not let any obstacles defeat him from obtaining the final victory. Ultimately, the focus must be kept on Christ, as the center

of life, rather than on the rules and actions that make up a border. Antagonism, ridicule, pain, apathy and even comfort should not keep us from desiring and proclaiming Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ... Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified; a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. (1 Cor. 1:18, 22-24)