Director's Notes

Axis mundi is a Latin expression which means "the hub or center (axis) of the universe." It is used as a technical term in the history of religions to denote several universal religious images which locate the hub or center of Man's spiritual world and define these as places where God and Man are able to meet. The images used as coordinates for this spiritual landmark are basically four: a mountain, a tree, a pillar, and a ladder. So, Mount Olympus in Greek mythology is an axis mundi kind of place; Mount Sinai in the Old Testament is likewise an image of the cosmic mountain where God meets Man. The biblical story of Jacob's dream in which a celestial Ladder appears to him with angels traveling to and from the earth is an axis mundi image as is the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden story. The Judeo-Christian usage of the axis mundi image coalesces in the image of Golgotha with the "Tree" of death surmounting it. Here, atop this hill of skulls and on this executioner's arbor, the claim is made that axis mundi kinds of places have left the realm of legend, myth, and archetype and entered into human history. Here, the claim is made, God has provided a channel through which Creator and Creature can commune.

The present production is a collection of English religious playlets which were performed annually in townships in northern England between c.1350 and c.1575 A.D. They were jointly produced by the Church, the municipal government and the trade guilds which had formed at the end of the medieval period. The central purpose of these anonymously-authored playlets was to set out the "salvation history" of the world as seen from the biblical perspective. Hence, they began before creation and ended with the Last Judgment. The playlets were performed by the members of the trade guilds and were presented in order, one following the other, either on large movable wagon-stages or on fixed stages simultaneously set out in town squares or in some open field outside the town.

One of the most interesting problems facing the director of these plays is their lack of unity. This is especially true if one adapts them as I have done by picking and choosing the plays to be presented from the four or five remaining collections of extant English biblical plays. What I have done to bring a unity to these plays is basically two-fold. First, I have focused on depicting the transition from the axis mundi kind of place as set out in the Eden story to the axis mundi kind of place as set out in the story of Jesus' passion and resurrection. Hence, the Tree of Knowledge is gradually transformed into the Tree of the Cross, and the apparent Tree of Life which becomes Death to all men (arbor mortis) is transformed by an act of God into the Tree of Death which is paradoxically the Tree of Life for all men (arbor utae).

Second, I have focused on the imagery of labor and laborers as the central motif that unifies the plays. Labor is the biblical Curse which falls on both Man and Woman for their Sin of disobedience: Man must now labor by the sweat of his brow to make earth produce and Woman must suffer birthing labor to bring more laborers into the world. It is the concrete image of the Curse: a cyclical, never-ending, graphic representation of the human predicament in thrall to the mystery of evil and suffering. The biblical answer to this situation comes from God who takes upon himself the "form of a laborer" and lives among his creatures as one of them. He forever associates himself with the Laborers of the world as the Carpenter of Nazareth and it is through this Laborer that the original Curse is broken, broken at the axis mundi of Golgotha on the Cross where God and Man become "co-laborers." When we add to this fundamental literary motif the fact that these plays were performed by the members of the trade guilds, the laboring people of northern England, we can understand why they continued to be produced for almost two hundred and fifty years and were only ended by a royal decree from Queen Elizabeth banning all religious dramas in her realm. In this production, the old trade guilds have been represented by individual workers—a Carpenter, a Miner, a Laundress, etc.—who each take on and play a number of different parts.

A. Bryan Humphrey
Baylor Theater
The Division of Theater Arts
The Department of Fine Arts—Baylor University
presents

AXIS MUNDI
(Arbor Mortis, Arbor Vitae)
Adapted and Directed by A. Bryan Humphrey

Setting Designed by William T. Sherry
Costumes Designed by James W. Swain
Original Song Melodies by Bryan Humphrey and Chris Kelley
Lighting Designed by Doug Gruber

THE CAST

Paul Rogers: The Foreman, God, Annas
David Wilkerson: The Miner, Lucifer/Satan, Shem, Doctor (Lucifer), Soldier, Guard
Stephen Speights: The Farmer, Fallen Angel, Cain, Gibr, Judas/Tradesman, Soldier, Guard
John Dement: The Shepherd, Abel, Coll, Lawyer, Soldier, Undertaker, Guard
Gregory Paul: The Butcher, Japheth, Abraham, Mark, Lyon, Peter, Soldier, Centurian, Guard
Matt Beckham: The Fisherman, Fallen Angel, Noah, Joseph, Caiaphas, Poor Man
Joey Berner: The Postman, Angel Gabriel, Rewin, Blind Man, Pilate

Jeanne Sanders: Fallen Angel, Mrs. Noah, Woman 1, Fallen Angel, Mrs. Noah, Woman 1, The Laundress, Eve, Gossip 1, Mary
Kelly Hilliard: The Fishmonger, Fallen Angel, Mrs. Noah, Woman 1, The Laundress, Eve, Gossip 1, Mary
Kristin Forsman: The Rag Picker, Angel, Gossip 2, Tradesman, Mary James

PRODUCTION STAFF

Stage Manager: Monty Hicks
Set Master: Justin Case
Light Master: Daryl Swanson
Sound Master: Chris Kelley
Costume Mistress: Lisa Tabor
Property Master: John Land
Make-up Mistress: Meganne George
House Manager: Greg Holt

CREWS

Set—John Deaver, Chad Godfrey, Randy Herrell, Kris Kasmervisz, Jinny Richardson, Brandi Wilsher, Greg Paul
Light—Ben Granquist, Joyce Harris, Lura lyn 1 ozuk, Rodney Sheffield, Laura Stults, Stephen Speights
Sound—April Evans, Christie Ranev, Terry Tucker
Costume—Jeff Benton, Amanda Clark, Kristin Forsman, Kristen Osterlind, Gina Sanchez, Lia Scardamalia, Katrina Thornton
Prop—Charlotte Aiken, Chér Chester, John Dement, Sharon Fedorochko, Chelli Peak, Missy Rice, Laura Henry, Kathelln Kelley, Kerry Ann McFadden
Make-up—Lisa Denman, Sherri Lee
House—Diane Box, Stan Denman, Elizabeth Franklin, Jonna McElrath

This production is dedicated to the memory of my Grandparents, Edgar and Mary Hatton.

There will be two ten-minute intermissions.
Performances: December 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 1988 at 7:30 p.m., and December 3 at 1:30 p.m.
Jones Theatre
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
Ruth Belew
Brazos Feed and Supply
Chi's Service Organization
Cutler Equipment Company
Stan Denman
James Glenn
The Goody Mill
Richard Hill
Jernigan's Taxidermy
Strecker Museum

GRADUATE ASSISTANTS
Stan Denman
Greg Holt
Rick Lowe

UNDERGRADUATE ASSISTANTS
Justin Case
Chér Chester
John Dement
Kristin Forsman
Meganne George
Joyce Harris
John Land
Lauralyn Lozuk
Greg Paul
Rodney Sheffield
Stephen Speights
Laura Stults
Daryl Swanson
Brad Vincent

THEATRE ARTS STAFF
Ellie Allen—Box Office Manager
Marcia Cooper—Administrative Assistant
Faye Heine—Wardrobe Mistress
Richard Lee Hill—Technical Director

Refreshments are available in Student Lounge
The Art Gallery and Museum will be open one hour before each Baylor Theatre performance of the 1988-89 school year.
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Mr. & Mrs. Ed Streetman
Dr. & Mrs. Charles M. Tolbert
Mr. & Mrs. Charles Turner
Ultramation Inc.
Mr. Dewayne Weatherford
Dr. & Mrs. James M. West
Mr. Milton Wilson

Our next production will be SHE STOOPS TO CONQUER,
directed by Patricia Cook
February 9, 10, 11, 15, 16, 17, 18 at 7:30 p.m., and February 11 at 1:30 p.m.