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**A Theatre Before the World:  
Performance History at the Intersection of  
Hebrew, Greek, and Roman Religious Processional**

By  
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*We have become a theatre to the world, to angels and to all humanity.*  
*1 Corinthians 4:9<sup>2</sup>*

The field of performance studies goes beyond dramatic text and formal theatrical presentation to examine the context of social and cultural behavior. Instead of looking at the world of theatre, performance studies treats the world *as* theatre. For example, looking beyond medieval dramatic texts to the overall experience of the performance reveals an event rich in pageantry and spectacle which the script only beings to suggest. When medieval jousts, festivals, royal entries into cities, and other civic events are also taken into account, we see that medieval culture found its most striking theatrical expression in elements other than dramatic text.

The colonial period in North America has also shown itself to be richer in theatrical activity than had previously been thought. Mark Fearnow suggests, for example, that studies of performance in colonial American cannot be confined to third-string productions of Georgian comedy: “disguisings, mock trials, mock funerals, parading and abuse of effigies, and erection of Liberty Poles by patriot crowds are examples of a political street theatre quite specific to the culture of the 1760s.”<sup>3</sup>

For the theatre scholar interested in the history and anthropology of Semitic and early Judeo-Christian culture, the colonial examples pose a question: does historical evidence suggest common links in paratheatrical activity in the classical cultures of the Hebrews, Greeks and Romans? With this paper, the author will argue that it does, indeed, and that this common area of performance is to be found in a social phenomenon called *litany*.

Many of us are vaguely familiar with the word “litany” as it refers to a certain type of Christian congregational prayer in which an appeal to God is presented as a list of remembrances. For example, the epistle to the Hebrews<sup>4</sup> presents a litany of the faithful who

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<sup>2</sup> Author’s translation.

<sup>3</sup> Fearnow, “American Colonial Disturbances as Political Theatre,” *Theatre Survey* 33 (May 1992) 54.

<sup>4</sup> The following biblical citations are from the *New Revised Standard Version* unless otherwise noted.

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have gone before:

- 11.3 By faith we understand that the world was created by the word of God...
- 11.4 By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain...
- 11.5 By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death...
- 11.7 By faith Noah.. .took heed and constructed an ark...
- 11.8 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place which he was to receive as an inheritance...
- 11.9 By faith he sojourned in the land of promise...

It is as if all these persons were passing by in a great procession--which, as a matter of fact, is exactly what a *litany* was in its more ancient form: a religious parade, a public procession or act accompanied by supplication or prayer to God for a particular cause.<sup>5</sup>

Christian litanies or processions had two roots: one Hebrew, the other Greek. We will first turn our attention to the earlier of two.

#### *Hebrew Litany*

Even though there are only a few biblical references, they render vivid portraits of each occasion. Accounts of Hebrew litanies are found in the apocryphal book of Maccabees 11 (3.15; 18-20; 10.16). Two major descriptions of processional litanies are found in more familiar biblical accounts in the books of Joshua and Samuel II. The Joshua reference (6.1ff) is, perhaps, the clearest presentation of a litany and we will now examine that text. The book of Psalms also includes songs linked with royal and religious processions.

The armies of Israel have surrounded the city of Jericho. God instructs Joshua to march his warriors around the circumference of the city walls once a day for six days, carrying the ark of the covenant with them as they go. Seven priests are to blow on trumpets made of ram's horns each time a circuit is completed. On the seventh day, the circuit is to be made seven times. We pick up the action at verse 5 with Joshua carrying out God's instructions:

6.5 So Joshua the son of Nun called the priests and said to them, "Take up the ark of the covenant, and let seven priests bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the Lord." v.7 And he said to the people, "Go forward; march around the city, and let the armed men pass on before the ark of the Lord." v.8 And as Joshua had commanded the people, the seven priests bearing the seven trumpets of rams' horns before the Lord went forward, blowing the trumpets, with the ark of the covenant of the Lord following them. v.9 And the armed men went before the priests who blew the trumpets, and the rear guard came after the ark, while the trumpets blew continually. v.10 But Joshua commanded the people, "You shall not shout or let your voice be heard, neither shall any word go out of

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<sup>5</sup> George D. Dragas, "Litany," *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity* (New York & London: Garland, 1990) 539f.

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your mouth, until the day I bid you to shout; then you shall shout.” v.11 So he caused the ark of the Lord to compass the city, going about it at once; and they came into the camp and spent the night in the camp. v.12 Then Joshua rose early in the morning, and the priests took up the ark of the Lord. v.13 And the seven priests bearing the seven trumpets of rams’ horns before the ark of the Lord passed on, blowing the trumpets continually; and the armed men went before them, and the rear guard came after the ark of the Lord, while the trumpets blew continually. v.14 And the second day they marched around the city once and returned into the camp. So they did for six days. v.15 On the seventh day they rose early at the dawn of the day, and marches around the city in the same manner seven times: it was only on that day that they marched around the city seven times. v.16 And the seventh time, when the priests had blown the trumpets, Joshua said to the people, “Shout! for the Lord has given you a city...” v.20 So the people shouted, and the trumpets were blown. And soon as the people heard the sound of the trumpet, the people raised a great shout, and that wall fell down flat, so that the people when into the city, and every man straight before him, and they took the city.

Here (without irreverence intended) we have a picture of God as director and Joshua as stage manager of a spectacle with specific stage directions. The litany in this case is a processional to demonstrate to the audience--the unhappy inhabitants of Jericho--the power of Israel.

Hebrew litany was accompanied by a rich musical tradition. While Genesis 4.21 identifies Jubal as the “father of all such as handle the harp and pipe,” the Pentateuch is nearly silent about the practice and instruction of music in the early life of Israel. Then, in I Samuel 10 and the texts which follow, a curious thing happens. “One finds in the biblical text,” writes Alfred Sendrey, “a sudden and unexplained upsurge of large choirs and orchestras, consisting of thoroughly organized and trained musical groups, which would be virtually inconceivable without lengthy, methodical preparation.”<sup>6</sup> This has led some scholars to believe that the prophet Samuel was the patriarch of a school which taught not only prophets and holy men, but also sacred-rite musicians. This public music school, perhaps the earliest in recorded history, was not restricted to a priestly class--which is how the shepherd boy David appears on the scene as a minstrel to King Saul.

The story of David’s ascension to the throne in Israel is well known. The American public is also familiar with the image of the Hebrew ark of the covenant, even though this image is deeply indebted to Hollywood film versions. II Samuel 6.12-18 describes how David and the ark functioned in the most prominent of biblical Hebrew litanies:

6.12 David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obededom to the city of David with rejoicing; v.13 and when those who bore the ark of the Lord had gone

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<sup>6</sup> Sendrey, *Music in the Social and Religious Life of Antiquity* (Rutherford, NJ: Farleigh Dickinson University, 1974) 94f.

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six paces, he sacrificed an ox and a fatling. v.14 And David danced before the Lord with all his might; and David was girded with a linen ephod. v.15 So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouting, and with the sound of the horn... v.17 And they brought in the ark of the Lord, and set it in its place, inside the tent which David had pitched for it; and David offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord. v.18 And when David had finished offering the burnt offerings and the peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord of hosts, and distributed among all the people, the whole multitude of Israel, both men and women, to each a cake of bread, a portion of meat, and a cake of raisins. Then all the people departed, each to [their own] house.

The powerful ruler of Israel chooses, quite literally, to make a spectacle of himself in this procession. He dons the special costume of a linen ephod, makes use of the properties of sacrifice, then rewards the thronging audience with something they can take home from the performance.

Psalm 132 is traditionally linked with David's dance, and may give us a picture of an annual procession in honor of the event. This psalm is prefaced by the same curious phrases found in the opening lines in Psalm 120-134; "*Shir hamma'aloth*," variously translated as "Song of Ascent" or "Song of Degrees." It is generally accepted that these fifteen psalms served as a prayer book for use by Hebrew pilgrims traveling from their hometowns to Jerusalem to take part in major feasts, hence "ascending" to mount Zion or making their way by "degrees."<sup>7</sup>

The details of these litanies as performance events are suggested by the texts but remain obscure and subject to conjecture. Modern Jewish ceremonies and practices fail to shed light on scholarship into these ancient customs. Most practices can be traced back only as far as the split between church and synagogue when Herod's temple was destroyed--approximately 70 CE. The archaeological record is almost completely closed to us as well; unlike the Egyptians, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, and almost every other ancient near eastern culture, the Hebrews did not leave behind an extensive archive of sculpture, statuary, or engravings showing these processions. Prohibitions in the Torah against graven images excluded the human as a subject in visual expression. However, we can make some educated guesses about what was involved in these ceremonies. We even have remnants of stage directions. Listen to the words of Psalm 68.24ff:

The solemn processions are seen, O God, the processional of my God, my King, into the sanctuary-- v.25 the singers in front, the minstrels last, between them maidens playing timbrels. v.27 There is Benjamin, the least of them, in the lead, the princes of Judah in their throng, the princes of Zebulun, the princes of Naphtali.

A careful reading of the following selections in the Psalms enables the reader to

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<sup>7</sup> *The Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. IV (New York: Abingdon) 119:172.

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remember that the purpose for the psalms extended beyond poetry, beyond personal meditation--that is, *beyond* text. The textual content indicates, that at the time when they were written down, they were *meant specifically to be used in the processions* in honor of God. The imagery used in the Psalms is vivid and suggests movement, costume, and a playing area:

Ps. 24.7 Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors! that the King of glory may come in. v.8 Who is the King of glory? The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle! v.9 Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors! that the King of glory may come in. v.10 Who is the King of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory!

Ps. 26.6 I wash my hands in innocence, and go about thy altar, O Lord, v.7 singing aloud a song of thanksgiving, and telling all thy wondrous deeds.

Ps. 45.14 In many-colored robes [Israel] is led to the king, with her virgin companions, her escort, in her train. v.15 With joy and gladness they are led along as they enter the palace of the king.

Ps. 118.19 Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord. v.20 This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter through it... Bind the festal processions with branches, up to the horns of the altar!

The textual evidence supports the claim that many, perhaps all, of these litanies made use of ceremonial dance, as in the account of David's procession. Dances are mentioned in the biblical text in such a way as to suggest "that it was an activity so common as not to require special mention."<sup>8</sup>

The playing area of the Hebrew litany after David's dance ended--either actually or symbolically--where the Ark of the Covenant was housed, which for most of David's reign was a tent or modest structure. Passages in I Kings 6 and 7 recount that David's son Solomon, who succeeded him as king, built a splendid temple to act as the end point for processional litany. I Kings 8 describes the dedication of the temple in this way:

I Kings 8.1 Solomon assembled the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the leaders of the fathers' houses of the people of Israel, before King Solomon of Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of the city of David, which is Zion. v.2 And all the men of Israel assembled to King Solomon at the feast of the month of Ethanim, which is the seventh month. v.3 And all the elders of Israel came, and the

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<sup>8</sup> "Yet certain dances are mentioned, and these obviously are mentioned for important reasons. Israel's deliverance at the Sea of Reeds is celebrated by dancing and singing and instruments (Exodus 15.20; Isaiah 30.29). For other occasions see I Samuel 18.6; 2. 11; 29.5; 30.16. Perhaps Passover included a limping dance connected with the threshold. Yahweh's annual feast at Shiloh featured vineyard dancing by the maidens (Judges 21.16-24) [cf. Dionysian rites!]. David, dressed as a priest, danced before the ark (II Samuel 6)..., evidence of dancing on the fifteenth of Abib, on the Day of Atonement, on the day before and during the Feast of Tabernacles, in post-OT times may preserve practices of OT times...There is comparatively little mention of dancing in the Psalms, but enough to show that it was a legitimate part of worship." G. Henton Davies, "Dancing," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (New York: Abingdon) 760.

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priests took up the ark. v.4 And they brought up the ark of the Lord, the tent of meeting, and all the holy vessels that were in the tent; the priests and the Levites brought them up. v.5 And King Solomon and all the congregation of Israel, who had assembled before him, were with him before the ark, sacrificing so many sheep and oxen that they could not be counted or numbered. v.6 Then the priests brought the ark of the covenant of the Lord to its place, in the inner sanctuary of the house in the most holy place, underneath the wings of the cherubim.

Solomon goes on to deliver an eloquent dedication and prayer to the children of Israel gathered at the site of the new temple; he then makes a sacrifice and a festival commences.

### *Greek and Roman Litany*

David's dance, then, provides evidence that early in the last millennium BCE litany was an established performative event in Hebrew (civic and religious) life. The other source of early Christian litany, Greek religious procession, would develop several centuries later and provide, at the same time, the primary root of Western theatre.

Among the earliest known and still extent theatrical playing areas in the Western world is located in the ruins of the palace of Knossos on the island of Crete. The structure dates back to 1600 or 1800 BCE. Religious rites at Knossos are conjectured to have included processions along the "royal road" up to this playing area of the palace. A ceremonial greeting to the royal party is thought to have followed. This kind of "greeting area" is found again and again in ruins dating back to the classical period in Greece, namely, the sixth and fifth centuries BCE. The principle greeting area is believed to have been the *agora*, which served not only as the marketplace of classical Athens but also a center of philosophical debate and civic affairs.

When religious festivals featuring the *procession* began including dramatic presentations in their ceremonies, it was in the agora that these presentations took place. "The classical Greek theatre," notes one scholar, "may be considered a sort of duplicate agora, detached from the old centre and highly developed in a certain way for special purposes."<sup>9</sup> Eventually, these "special purposes" paved the way for classical tragedy. A tragedy customarily opened with a processional litany sung and danced by the chorus, such as the one which introduces Aeschylus' *Oresteia*. Such litanies provided the religious framework for the birth of two millennia of theatre in the Western culture.

When Rome overwhelmed the Mediterranean world, it borrowed heavily from the cultures it conquered and occupied. Although it was considered by many pious Romans as beneath their dignity because it was (among other things) a Greek religious practice, theatre was produced at Roman religious festivals early in the republican period. Plays were not the only theatrical element of Roman culture, however. Perhaps even more so than in Greece, religious processional was a staple of Roman public life, both in the city and in the countryside. Agricultural rituals

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<sup>9</sup> R.E. Wycherly, *How the Greeks Built Cities* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1962) 51.

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included a parade of livestock around the boundaries of one's property or through the town.<sup>10</sup> Roman weddings often included a public escort of the bride from her parents' home to the home of her new husband.<sup>11</sup> Funeral processions traveled "a lengthy route along major streets, even stopping at the Forum for a eulogy,"<sup>12</sup> giving the event even more of an aura of public performance. The historian Polybius describes the customary performance involved in a typical funeral litany for a prominent Roman:

A wax image of the deceased is placed in a very conspicuous spot in the house, in a little wooden shrine. This image is a mask made strikingly similar to the facial features and expression of the deceased.... When any illustrious family member dies, the family takes the images or masks to the funeral, putting them on men who seem to be the most similar in height and size to the men represented by the masks. These "actors" put on [a toga fitting their character's station in life]. They all ride in chariots, and, according to the respective rank of political office held by each "character" during his lifetime, the "actors" are preceded by the [symbols] which usually accompany the magistrates. When they reach the Rostra, they all sit down on curule seats [of honor]. It would not be easy to find a more splendid sight for a young man who loves honor and virtue to behold. For who would not be moved by the sight of the images of men renowned for their excellence, all together in one place, portrayed as if still alive and breathing? 'What finer spectacle than this?'<sup>13</sup>

Apuleis' *The Golden Ass*, written late in the imperial period, contains a long description of a procession in honor of the goddess Isis. Women dressed in white linen scatter spring flowers on the city streets in the path of the sacred party. A throng of men and women with torches and candles is next, then musicians, a boys' choir singing a hymn, and more pipe players follow. Monitors then clear the way for the sacred initiates into the cult: women with hair anointed with oil, men with their heads shaved clean, all carrying rattles called *sistra* with which to make a pleasing sound to the goddess. Next follow the priests of the sacred rites carrying cultic symbols. People dressed in costume to represent the gods follow the priests. Apuleis goes into elaborate detail in describing all the costumes and accouterments of this litany.<sup>14</sup>

The consummate Roman procession, however, was the "triumph": a long celebration considered by Roman generals to be the "greatest honor their country could bestow on them for a military victory."<sup>15</sup> The Roman writer Zonaras depicting one such event in the republican period, describing the scene as citizens lined the streets to welcome the returning army and jeer at the foreign prisoners marching in its ranks:

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<sup>10</sup> Jo-Ann Shelton, *As the Romans Did: A Sourcebook in Roman Social History*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) 380ff.

<sup>11</sup> Shelton, 40ff.

<sup>12</sup> Shelton, 98.

<sup>13</sup> Polybius, *History of the World* 6.53-6.54.3. Qtd. in Shelton, 99.

<sup>14</sup> Apuleius, *The Golden Ass*. 11.7, 9-11.

<sup>15</sup> Shelton, 257.



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The triumphant general mounted his chariot...constructed to look like a round tower...a public slave rode in the chariot with the general, holding above his head a crown with precious gems set in gold...Thus arranged, they entered the city. At the head of the procession were the spoils and trophies, placards bearing representations of captured forts, cities, mountains, rivers, lakes, and seas, indeed all the things they had captured. And if one day was sufficient for the exhibition of these things, fine. If not, the exhibition continued for a second or even a third day. When all the [soldiers] ahead of him had reached the concluding point of the procession, the general finally was escorted into the Roman Forum.

He ordered some of the captives to be led to prison and executed, and then he drove up to the Capitol. There he performed certain religious rites and made offerings. And he dined in the porticoes there. Toward evening he was escorted to his home to the accompaniment of flutes and Pan's pipes.<sup>16</sup>

While the general was escorted home with a full stomach and a song in the air, those captives who had not already been executed were imprisoned, perhaps to be the next festival's fodder for gladiatorial games or wild beast baitings.

Religious litanies always accompanied Roman *ludi*, the games held in honor of gods. Jo-Ann Shelton describes the processions which customarily opened activities at the race track:

A day of racing began with a solemn procession (Latin *pompa*, English *pomp*) into the circus and all around the track of carriages holding statues to the gods....The noisy, boisterous spectators became hushed as the procession of carriages entered the track, but they applauded enthusiastically as the carriage of their favorite god passed by.<sup>17</sup>

The litanies of Greece and Rome were to meet those of the Hebrews when Greece began to occupy Palestine during the Alexandrian age and Rome shortly before the common era.

### *Public Performance in the New Testament*

The society of Hellenistic Palestine under Roman occupation was a melange of performance traditions. Hebrew ritual was tolerated to a certain extent under provisional rule; its locus was the splendid temple built in Jerusalem by the governor Herod the Great, who also sponsored the construction of theatres. As in Greece, the social and commercial center of hellenized towns was the agora. It is in these two areas of social and religious performance that we find the Jesus of the New Testament.

The agora serves as the setting of many of Jesus' stories and sayings. He compares his generation to children idle in the agora and chiding one another for not "performing" according

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<sup>16</sup> Zonaras, *Epitome*, 7.21. Qtd. in Shelton, 258-259.

<sup>17</sup> Shelton, 352, n261.

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to each others' wishes (Matthew 11.16, Luke 7.32). Jesus' parable of the laborers in the vineyard begins with the workers idle in the agora in the morning (Matthew 20.3)--quite literally in the area of public presentation without an act to perform.

Most interesting for performance history, however, is the word Jesus used while noting how those who "play-act" spiritually love lavish displays of respect in the agora (Matthew 23.7; Mark 12.38; Luke 11.43, 20.46). We generally translate the word he uses for such people as "hypocrites." The Greek source-word, "hypokrites," is the word for stage-actor. The word is used seventeen times in the New Testament, always by Jesus (Mark 7.6; Matthew 6.2,5,16, 7.3-5). Richard Batey's article on Jesus' use of the word goes so far as to suggest that Jesus derived his oratorical skills from frequent visits to the Roman theatre at Sepphoris near Nazareth.<sup>18</sup> Though this is unlikely--both because the theatre at Sepphoris almost certainly dates from a period after Jesus' lifetime, and because a pious Jew of the period would probably not attend such a thoroughly Gentile activity--Jesus' usage of the word "hypocrites" points out the intermingling of performance traditions in the first-century Middle East.

The events of the last week of Jesus' life appear to be among the oldest of the oral traditions associated with him. Aspects of public performance in the passion narrative are unmistakable. Jesus' procession into Jerusalem (Matthew 21.1-11) both recalls Hebrew litany and throws the Roman triumph procession into sharp relief:

21.1 And when he drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, v.2 saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find an ass tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. v.3 If any one says anything to you, you will say, "The Lord has need of them," and he will send them immediately." v.4 This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying, v.5 "Tell the daughter of Zion, behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on an ass, and on a colt, the foal of an ass." v.6 The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; v.7 and he sat thereon. v.8 Most of the crowd spread their garments on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. v.9 And the crowds that went before him and that followed him shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" v.10 And when he entered Jerusalem, all the city was stirred, saying, "Who is this?" v.11 And the crowds said, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee."

The events of the week continue with Jesus' public demonstration of driving moneychangers out of the Court of the Gentiles in the Temple (Matthew 21.12-17). Soon after, he again enters the Temple and is the subject of a public inquisition by the chief priests and the elders (21.23-27) concerning his authority. Jesus tells the assembly three parables (21.28-45, 22.1-14) and is tested further (21.15--45). He denounces his inquisitors (23.1-36), laments over

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<sup>18</sup> Richard A. Batey, "Jesus and the Theatre," *New Testament Studies* 30 (1984) 563f.

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Jerusalem (21.37-39), and forecasts what is to come, interspersing his speeches with parables (24.25-46).

Threatened by the popular effect of Jesus' public performance on his audience, the chief priests and Caiaphas plot to have him put to death (26.1-5). The rest of the passion narrative chronicles how the authorities achieve this in a typically Roman way, a public spectacle not unlike the triumphal procession.

The rapid growth of the new Christian church, after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, took place in this Roman social context. The apostle Paul, a Roman citizen living in the first century CE, alludes to triumphal processions in his New Testament writings. Addressing the Christians at Corinth, Paul likens himself to one of the captives marching at the tail end of a Roman triumph. The passage is usually translated in the following way: "For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death; because we have become a *spectacle* to the world."<sup>19</sup> In point of fact, in the text just quoted, the Greek word for *spectacle* is *theatron*--the same word used to refer to a facility build to present plays. For Paul, anticipating Shakespeare by nearly sixteen hundred years, all the world really *is* a stage.

Public performance on the world stage in Paul's lifetime, then, was fraught with real dangers. Consider the irony of the playing area in the following passage in the Acts of the Apostles (19.24-41). The story takes place in Ephesus, where Paul's preaching was cutting into the business of a silversmith named Demetrius, whose trade was fashioning shrines of the goddess Artemis. We pick up the narrative as Demetrius has called a meeting of other Ephesian silversmiths:

Acts 25.25 These he gathered together, with the workmen of like occupation and said, "Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth. v.26 And you see and hear that not only at Ephesus but also throughout all Asia this Paul has persuaded and turned away a considerable company of people, saying that gods made with our hands are not gods. v.27 And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may count for nothing, and that she may even be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia and the world worship." v.28 When they heard this they were enraged, and cried out, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" v.29 So the city was filled with confusion; and they rushed together into the theatre, dragging with them Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians who were Paul's companions in travel. v.30 Paul wished to go in among the crowd, but the disciples would not let him; v.31 some of the Asiarchs also, who were friends of his, sent to him and begged him not to venture into the theatre. v.32 Now some cried one thing, some another; for the assembly was in confusion, and most of them did not know why they had come together. v.33 Some of the crowd prompted Alexander, whom the Jews had put forward.

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<sup>19</sup> I Corinthians 4.9. This passage is characterized as "a reference to triumphal processions in which returning military conquerors displayed their trophies and their capacities." *New Oxford Annotated Bible*, Revised Standard Version (New York: Oxford University Press) n. 1383.

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And Alexander motioned with his hand, wishing to make a defense to the people. v.34 But when they recognized that he was a Jew, for about two hours they all with one voice cried out, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" v.35 And when the town clerk had quieted the crowd, he said, "Men of Ephesus, what man is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple keeper of the great Artemis, and of the sacred stone that fell from the sky? v.36 Seeing then that these things cannot be contradicted, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rash. v.37 For you have brought these men here who are neither sacrilegious nor blasphemers of our goddess. v.38 If therefore Demetrius and the craftsmen with him have a complaint against any one, the courts are open, and there are proconsuls; let them bring charges against one another. v.39 But if you seek anything further, it shall be settled in the regular assembly. v.40 For we are in danger of being charged with rioting today, there being no cause that we can give to justify this commotion." v.41 And when he had said this, he dismissed the assembly.

### *Performance in the Infant Church*

Events such as the near-riot at Ephesus are not the only performative aspects associated with Paul in the early church. The central rite of the church is found in its earliest form in another of his biblical letters. In his first epistle to the church at Corinth, Paul recalls the request of Jesus on the night of his betrayal. When the disciples break bread and drink the wine, they are to "*eis tein emein anamnesis*," which is translated as "do this in memory of me."

The word *anamnesis* is used throughout the entire Bible to refer to a memorial act, a "remembering again." The term is highly performative rather than simply cognitive. Leviticus 24.7 [Septuagint version] gives this directive for Hebrews offering a specific sacrifice, they "shall put pure frankincense with each row, that it may go with the bread as a memorial (*anamnesis*) portion to be offered by fire to the Lord." Psalms 38 and 70 are songs of David which describe themselves as accompaniment "for memorial (*anamnesis*) offering." The epistle to the Hebrews describes (10.3) the ritual oblations presented annually: "in these sacrifices there is a reminder (*anamnesis*) of sin year after year."

By using the word *anamnesis* to record Jesus' request, then, Paul identified the nature of the last supper with this earlier Hebrew performative tradition. In this way, the growing Christian church understood the performance of its ritual to be connected to others reaching back to the time of the Davidic kingdom and, possibly, even to earlier centuries.

At the same time, the church was mustering its forces against other types of public performance. By the late second century CE, the Roman *ludi* increasingly included activities that were so unspeakably cruel that the patristic writer, Tertullian, could lump litany, theatre and bloodlust into one antitheatrical document called *On the Spectacles*. Tertullian decries executions and plays in his tirade, then goes on to tackle processional litanies in the *ludi*:

All [are] celebrated for a common end... [they] have their religious origins in the birthdays and solemnities of kings, in public successes, in municipal holidays. There are

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also testamentary exhibitions, in which funeral honors are rendered to the memories of private persons; and this according to an institution of ancient times... If it is lawful to offer homage to the dead, it will be just as lawful to offer it to their gods: you have the same origin in both cases; there is the same idolatry; there is on our part the same solemn renunciation against all idolatry.<sup>20</sup>

Tertullian's contempt for Roman and Greek litanies survives today in the Roman Catholic mass through the admonition to "renounce the devil and all his pomps." The English translation of the Latin *pompa*, meaning procession. Ironically, it was out of these very Roman and Greek litanies that Christian litanies grew. Just as ironically, it was the development of Christian litany which gave us the trope, *Quem Quaeritis*, and ultimately the medieval mystery cycles, culminating in the resurgence of the Western theatre. It was at the intersection of Hebrew, Greek and Roman processional that the church was born. We would do well to study further these long neglected forms of ancient public performance.

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<sup>20</sup> Tertullian, *On the Spectacles*, trans. by S. Thelwell. *The Writings of Septimus Florens Tertullianus* Vol. I (Edinburgh: I & T Clark, 1869); quoted in B. F. Dukore, *Dramatic Theory and Criticism* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1974) 87f.