PAGEANTRY AT THE METHODIST CENTENARY

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During the summer of 1919 in Columbus, Ohio, the Methodist Episcopal Church observed its Centenary Missionary Exposition with an event called by some a “world’s fair of Methodism.” The Ohio State Fairgrounds were filled with displays of the church’s work in foreign and domestic areas and demonstrations of the progress their work had made in these areas. This immensely popular event was a fascinating combination of patriotism and Christianity. Reflecting the current attitudes of fervent Americanism, a newspaper headline described this event as, “A Great Drive for World Redemption and Practical Democracy.”

Musical programs, parades, skits and demonstrations of native crafts were presented, but the crowning event was the nightly production of a pageant called, The Wayfarer, a hugely popular undertaking requiring the efforts of thousands of volunteer performers and large monetary gifts. Noting the unusual nature of this popular event, the Indianapolis News said:

Marking the beginning of a new era in modern church policy, a capacity audience here last night witnessed the premier performance of “The Wayfarer” a gigantic dramatic spectacle representing the triumph of Christianity through the ages in connection with the opening of the Methodist Centenary celebration.

This particular pageant (and the others performed during the celebration) struck such a positive note with audiences that plans were made for future performances all over the country. The effect of this popularity was to encourage the church at large to use theatrical means to proselytize. It may come as a surprise to some that during the first part of this century Protestant churches were actively promoting and utilizing the pageant form, despite their historical aversion to the theatre. But as Ralph Davol noted, people who would never go to a theatre would take part in a pageant.

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1Total attendance was predicted to top 1,000,000 based on average daily attendance of 50,000. Columbus Evening Dispatch, July 10, 1919.
2Columbus Sunday Dispatch, March 2, 1919. After their initial citation, the Columbus Sunday Dispatch will be cited as CSD, the Columbus Evening Dispatch as CED, and the Ohio State Journal as OSJ.
3As much as $120,000,000 was pledged for mission work. CED, March 21, 1919. Sources differ as to how much was raised and how much was spent on the observance. In any event, the organizers were astonished at the huge amounts raised.
5The Wayfarer was indeed performed in New York City at Madison Square Garden the following December but seems not to have lived up to original expectations. Perhaps this mixed reception was one reason for its not being performed elsewhere.
They look upon it as sanctified drama—acceptable in the sight of the Lord. ...Devout enthusiasts see in a pageant a prayer of aspiration. ... The local clergy not only countenance this form of entertainment by their presence and participation, but are frequently the prime movers in its affairs. 6

There was, however, a demarcation between the use of the techniques of theatre and the approval of the professional theatre. Antitheatrical bias, which was present even before the appearance of the Christian religion, was historically strong amongst American Protestant denominations. Yet in 1919 Methodists, north and south, considered both secular and religious pageants to be a fitting means of observing both their hundred years of mission work and a motivating force for future work. Writing for the Detroit News, Charles Mirick suggested one reason for this decision.

It is significant of the sway the new American is beginning to exercise on American religious life and thought, that the largest and most perfectly organized denomination of American Protestantism, the Methodist Episcopal Church, should have decided on a revival of pageantry at the dawn of the new world era of peace as the most fitting way in which to celebrate the one hundredth anniversary of the founding of its first missionary society by a Negro preacher of this town [John Stewart, Columbus, Ohio].

The decision to use pageantry was the result of a combination of factors. A pageant is not a traditional drama but a series of episodes interspersed with musical interludes. Up to this point American pageants had generally been based on local history and served as a means of celebrating the history of a particular place, though the focus of the subject matter changed as time moved on. The emphasis in a pageant is on spectacle and music rather than finely drawn drama. The Methodist Episcopal Church had reached a point in its history where it could accept the use of theatrical means to further its goals just as pageantry was reaching its peak of popularity in the US and was being used for patriotic reasons. It was the mass medium of the moment but was soon to be overshadowed by film.

As part of the pageantry movement in the United States during the first quarter of the century, The Wayfarer and its counterparts were almost unique amongst community pageants for their religious content. They also reflected the changing focus of pageants from local subjects to more universal ones. Comparable to the Passion Play at Oberammergau done every decade since the Middle Ages, The Wayfarer was sweeping in scope. Framed by scenes of refugees of the recently completed Great War and a scene of the final blessing which included children of twenty-four nations and representatives of the armed forces as well as Abraham Lincoln and George Washington, this pageant/spectacle/morality play covered history from the Babylonian captivity to the discovery of the Resurrection. Audience reaction was generally ecstatic. The Columbus Evening Dispatch noted that,


7 Detroit News, June 25, 1919.
When the great curtains of the Coliseum stage swung together for the first time Friday night, the audience left with the quietness of people who have seen a great vision. Superlatives are entirely inadequate to convey the startling impression of the "Wayfarer," its size, its brilliancy, the total overwhelming effect of music, costuming and scenery.3

The cooperation of Methodists from both the north and south was necessary for this huge undertaking. Columbus, Ohio, was chosen as the site of this celebration because of its geographic centrality for American Methodism.4 While the centenary celebration was a Methodist affair, members of other churches were inspired to participate, among them the Presbyterian, Christian Church, First Congregational, Methodist Protestant, Episcopal, United Evangelical, and Baptist.5 Secular officials of the city and state also lent their support. At a meeting of 3,500 celebration planners at Memorial Hall in Columbus in March 1919, Ohio Governor Cox stated:

If there is anything you want from the state and you will come before the legislature adjourns and ask, I will recommend that it be given to you, and will trust that there are enough Methodists in that body to see that you get it.6

From a perspective at the end of the 20th century, this kind of support for organized religion by the government is surprising. During the second decade of the century, it was not questioned. The expected revenue generated by a possible million visitors may have influenced government officials into lending their aid.

While the pageants of the centenary were overseen by Percy Burrell, a professional pageant master,7 most of the work on The Wayfarer was done by amateurs, notably its writer J. E. Crowther, a Methodist pastor from Seattle, Washington, and the director Laurence Rich, a photographer by trade. Professional actors played the two lead characters; Henry Herbert as the Wayfarer and Blanche Yurka as Understanding. Professional singers were hired to sing solo parts of the music. Local clergy played the parts of the apostles as well as those of Paul, Constantine, Augustine, Luther and historically important Methodists.8 The efforts of literally thousands of others to organize, provide music and costumes, and participate was necessary. The cast consisted of some 1,500 players, a chorus of 1,000 and 75 members of the

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4CED, June 21, 1919.
5It had been determined that one in twelve Ohioans was Methodist and that there were 1,000,000 Methodists within a 6 hour ride of Columbus. The ME Church, North, preference for Columbus prevailed when they showed 1,250,000 members of the ME Church, South, lived closer to Columbus than any leading southern city. "Official Reports and Records of the Methodist Centenary Celebration. State Fair Grounds, Columbus, Ohio, June 20-July 13, 1919." Compiled by Alonzo E. Wilson, Director, Division of Special Days and Events, 12.
7OSJ, March 19, 1919.
8OSJ, January 28, 1919.
Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra. Alternating chorus members and some cast members brought the total to about 3,000 participants. Little wonder that people were awed by the spectacle.

Huge amounts of money were spent to mount this production as well as the other pageants and life plays done during the centenary. Ten train cars of scenery were built by professionals in New York which caused some delay on opening night as the scenery had only arrived in Columbus that day and had never been totally assembled before.\(^\text{14}\) In fact, some scenery and costumes were not delivered until part way through the run of the show.\(^\text{15}\) Back of the mammoth settings was the largest sky cyclorama ever built, “a great oval that gave the illusion of distance and beautiful clouds and far away forests.”\(^\text{16}\) A mammoth $50,000 pipe organ with five manuals and 95 stops was built for the occasion.

Final accounts of attendance of *The Wayfarer* showed that there were 140,800 paid tickets to see the 23 performances. Thousands were turned away each night. Hundreds waited in the rain in lines as long as 15 city blocks only to be turned away. The phenomenal popularity of this performance led the management to change from a general admission policy to reserving some seats each day. By the end of the run, 2,000 of the available 6,000 seats were reserved, 1,000 being sold the day before and 1,000 sold on the day of the performance. Because of the length of the performance the original plan was to play the first half on alternate nights with the second half, the admission price being $1 for one night, $2 for both nights plus a 50¢ admission to the ground each time. Because of the chaos at the ticket office, officials decided to play the show in its three hour entirety each night with a general admission charge of $1 and a reserved seating price of $1.50.\(^\text{17}\) With lines forming as early as 4:30 AM, tickets were sold out by noon most days.\(^\text{18}\) A cartoon in the *Columbus Evening Dispatch* noted this demand, as prospective audience members suggested asking Alvin York (who attend the fair) to break in and get tickets for them.\(^\text{19}\)

During the Columbus run of *The Wayfarer*, bishops and missionary secretaries as well as doctors of divinity were besieged with questions by drama critics which seemed to be inadequately answered. One writer commented:

> The Methodists, who disbelieve in theatres, have staged the biggest and most spectacular religious drama ever produced in the New World. They did it all themselves. They drew upon the Bible, their hymn books and American history for inspiration, and upon the whole wide world for materials, furnished by their missionaries. The result at its climax is “The Wayfarer . . .”\(^\text{20}\)

\(^\text{14CED, June 4, 1919.}\)
\(^\text{15CED, June 28, 1919.}\)
\(^\text{16New York Herald, July 16, 1919.}\)
\(^\text{17CED, July 8, 1919.}\)
\(^\text{18CED, July 10, 1919.}\)
\(^\text{19CED, July 10, 1919.}\)
\(^\text{20New York Tribune, July 13, 1919.}\)
But others were unsure of its impact. Enthusiastic critics received little or no response to questions about *The Wayfarer* being the greatest dramatic triumph of the year.

... that [The Wayfarer] would stampede the theatre-going public was a complete surprise to the management. The critics passed it up for the first week until they were sent for by surprised reporters. What they saw was not a "show," not a mere spectacle, not a theatrical performance. It was something altogether new, they said, in American drama, and they looked to the Passion Play at Oberammergau for a suitable comparison.

... Unquestionably, it is all devotional. But unquestionably, also, it is superlatively dramatic: and opposition to the theatre is one of the fundamental tenets of Methodism.

"How did the Methodist Church happen to go in for drama?" newspaper men are always asking. But nobody is answering. At least, nobody is allowing himself to be quoted publicly.

"You wouldn't hardly call this drama, would you?" one of the exposition leaders asked. ... "It is only an attempt, a successful attempt, it seems, to furnish an adequate background for the most sublime music in existence—Handel's Messiah and other classics." ... To be fair to the Methodists, they aren't worrying much about the apparent inconsistency of their position. "The Wayfarer" is as truly a form of worship to the Columbus celebrants as is the Passion Play to the peasants of Oberammergau.¹¹

Not everyone was pleased with the response to *The Wayfarer*. Both people in the Methodist Episcopal Church and those outside it decried the use of the stage even for religious reasons. While the actual complaints may sound quaint to modern ears, they are complaints which have been expressed over the centuries. Bias against the theatre can be traced back as far as Plato's *Republic*, where he chose to censor all art and outlaw theatre, "to shield the fledgling guardians from malign influences that might injure them as protectors of the state."²² Plato found the theatre totally without merit because it corrupted society (with its content) and because it easily influenced behavior through *mimesis*. His writing became the basis for a continuing anti-theatrical prejudice which is only now dissolving.

A close relationship existed between Christianity and the medieval theatre which is documented in the proceedings of councils and synods as well as in the writing of theologians and scholars and monastic and cathedral records. These writings reflect a strong antipathy to theatrical performances of the late Roman Empire performed by professional actors and makes a clear distinction "between popular, often sacrilegious and scurrilous, entertainment and the Christian drama performed as an act of worship or instruction to the faithful."²³ The Christian drama cited grew out of the liturgy and became the mystery and miracle plays performed outside the church by lay people. These mystery and miracle plays which portrayed biblical events and the miracles of the saints were generally performed on a particular feast day, one the most

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¹¹NY World, July 6, 1919.
popular being Corpus Christi. Inevitably with the expansion of the material and the intervention of the laity, non-biblical content was included and the plays gained more of the attributes of the strictly secular mimes. It is usually to these medieval productions that modern advocates of church drama refer. *The Wayfarer, The Seeker,* and other pageants are similar to these older forms in their use of allegory, visual symbolism, and spectacle. It should be noted that passion plays and mystery cycles attacked by Christian clerics in the 16th century were generally Catholic dramas attacked by Protestant clergy.

A dismissal of church drama growing from liturgy is not surprising. Unlike the Protestant Episcopal and Roman Catholic churches, the Methodist churches did not emphasize liturgy. In fact, they had purposely discarded much of what was considered empty ceremony to get back to the roots of a personal Christianity. Perhaps this antipathy to liturgy carried over to all enactment, ceremonial or otherwise. However, by 1860 even Methodist ritual was becoming more formalized, using choirs and organ music, and moving away from a revival or camp meeting atmosphere common in the first part of 19th century.

The 1880s appearance of the holiness movement led to a period of sectarian diversification. Methodists were a major force in the holiness churches like the Church of God (Anderson, IN), the Church of God (Holiness), and Church of the Nazarene. One result of this split was to drain off the most fervent advocates of Wesleyan doctrine and may have removed many of the opponents of such diversions as the theatre from the Methodist fold.

The late 19th century and early 20th century were a period of immense social change and consequent social activism. Large groups of immigrants poured in from eastern Europe bringing their Catholic faith with them. Many Americans saw the need to Americanize these immigrants as quickly as possible and felt that the best method was to make them into their own peculiar brand of American Protestant. Not only were these newcomers to be evangelized, but world missions increased greatly in an effort to civilize the world. As Norwood points out, "the line between complete personal commitment and evangelistic imperialism is sometimes very narrow." First efforts were made along the lines of an individualistic concern for personal morality so rescue missions were set up for hapless individuals to help fight social evils such as liquor, gambling, "improper diversions," ungodly literature, and desecration of the Sabbath. The Methodist Episcopal *Discipline* of 1872 labeled as "imprudent conduct" dancing, going to the theater, and "such other amusements as are obviously of misleading or questionable moral tendency." The influx of large numbers of southern European immigrants into America may have eased the acceptance of drama as a religious tool. Mirick described it this way:

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24 See Vince for a concise description of the on-going arguments for and against theatre.
26 Norwood, 342.
American religious history from 1620 has been largely dominated by the austerity of the English Puritan. American Protestantism, faced now with the problem of evangelizing the new Americans who flocked to our shores before the war from Southern Europe, finds that the old austere methods of inculcating piety makes no appeal to their imagination and love of beauty. The new American has no use for religion that does not involve the highest type of colorful artistry in its appeal.

So it was in the early church when religious pageantry was in its flower. In the Middle Ages the church was more than a refuge for sufferers and a house of worship for believers. It embraced the intellectual interests and nourished the higher aspirations of the people. 27

By the turn of the 20th century, Methodists, like many other Christians, were affected by the Social Gospel espoused by Washington Gladden. The Social Gospel, a new social creed recognizing the bearing of Christian faith on the whole society and not just individual lives and recognizing that social issues were not reducible to simple terms of individual morality gave rise to social action. This activism culminated in the effort of World War I and the belief that a Christian world would be a democratic world. The Methodists were caught up in this enthusiasm along with everyone else. Their euphoria culminated in the centenary celebration in Columbus, “at once a sort of religious expression of democratic devotion and a celebration of the end of the war.” 28

Saving the world for democracy was viewed as a Christian duty. Liberty bonds were sold in churches, and patriotic sermons were delivered. For a season Christian faith and patriotism were almost indistinguishable. Methodists were no more or less involved than the members of other churches. All of this was simply an illustration of the predominant culture of the era, especially of the overwhelming belief in progress and the advance of civilization. 29

Democracy, the American way of life, and Christianity were conjoined publicly and proudly. S. Earl Taylor, executive leader of the centenary organization, stated these thoughts clearly when he said:

World democracy can and will be realized when through applied Christianity, and nothing but faithlessness on the part of the Christian church need delay its realization now. . . . The Christian religion is the only religion which answers the need of the day. It is peculiarly the religion of the present, for it is the religion of dynamic democracy. It is the only religion which can satisfy in these days of social upheaval. . . . A Christian world will be a democratic world; but only through Christianity will democracy be made safe. 30

Evangelism for the faith was clearly linked with evangelism for the political system. Consequently, the entire centenary celebration was a melding of Christianity and civil religion. Even the obvious Christian messages were mixed with statements of patriotism and American imperialism. Which brings us back to The Wayfarer.
Originally planned to be a staging based on Handel's Messiah, *The Wayfarer* consists of a series of scenes interspersed with original music such as Kraft's "Glory to God" as well as Faure's "The Palms," Rossini's "Inflammatus et accensus," Macfarlane's "Ho, Everyone that Thirsteth," and Verdi's "Praise Ye" from *Attila*. The pageant/oratorio script consequently reads like a list of greatest hits of Christian music. In his book of words, J. E. Crowther states the theme of the pageant to be the recognition of the dismay and bewilderment of the world at the destruction of World War I. The action is synopsized before each scene and the specific pieces of music are cited by title and author. The prologue is an interchange between the allegorical characters of Despair, Wayfarer, and Understanding. Just as in medieval morality plays, the main character, the Wayfarer, is pulled between Despair and Understanding throughout the pageant. The dialogue is blank verse of a higher order than is frequently found in this type of pageant. The pageant opens with a fanfare of trumpets and an orchestral theme of Armageddon heralds the scene of a ruined Flanders which includes escaping refugees and soldiers attacking against a background of destruction. Despair opens the scene "in lamentation":

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The world's awry, undone!
What though the right should triumph in the strife;
Who can restore our fallen youth to life;
Waken the joy of our lost happiness;
Replace the beauty of the world again;
And give a peace that's more than barren words?
Where shall you find true love or charity?
What has become of honor, sacrifice,
Kindness of heart, or loyalty of spirit?
Are we not living in the final days
When earthquake, famine and the lust of war
Presage the coming of the Lord in wrath
To hurl an impious world to ruin.
And usher in the eternal night of doom?
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Understanding, in response to Wayfarer's query, states:

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... I come
To show thee that no work by God begun
Shall ever pause until the task is done.
If thou wilt follow where the Master trod,
And hold thy way through darkness up to God,
He will throw back the gates of life to thee.
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The Biblical scholarship is commendable as passages are chosen to fit into the dramatic scheme. The dialogue is largely based on familiar scriptural

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"J. E. Crowther, *The Wayfarer* (Souvenir program from performance adapted and produced by Laurence H. Rich from the original production at Columbus, Ohio, June 20–July 13, 1919), 8–9.

"Crowther, 8.

"Crowther, 9."
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passages put together with logical connections. For instance, in the opening episode, a Hebrew captive states:

As the hart panteth after the water brooks,
So panteth my soul after Thee, O God.
My soul is athirst for God, for the living God.
My tears have been food day and night—
They continually say unto me,
Where is now thy God? [Psalms 42:1–3]

And this:

By the rivers of Babylon sit we down and weep;
Yea, we hang our harps on the willows
In the midst thereof.
How shall we sing Jehovah’s songs in a foreign land?
If I forget thee, O Jerusalem,
Let my right hand forget her skill,
Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth
If I remember not thee:
If I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.
[Psalms 137:1–2, 4–6]

From the Old Testament, the story moves to the Gospels, showing the shepherd’s encounter with the angel at the birth of Christ. One of the shepherds is assigned the familiar lines:

The people who walked in darkness
Have seen a great light;
They have dwelt in the land of the shadow of death—
Upon them hath the light shined.
For unto us a Child is born,
For unto us a Son is given.
And His name shall be called
Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God.
Father Everlasting, and Prince of Peace. [Isaiah 9:2, 6]

Coupled with scriptural passages, the spectacle was impressive. “Trumpets accompanied by echo organ and chimes, play “Adeste Fideles,” then are joined by the heavenly host above, and children’s chorus crossing stage toward Bethlehem.” After the curtain closes, the Magi cross the stage. The special effect of the exploding star was especially effective.

One disturbing aspect of the script is the anti-Semitism shown in the second scene and in the scene before Pilate. The purpose of the inclusion of the

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34Crowther, 14.
35Crowther, 16.
36Crowther, 34.
37Crowther, 41.
37CED, June 21, 1919.
first scene is unclear. While it does include the portrayal of a faithful remnant who have not adopted pagan gods, the scene also gives a rather negative view of the Hebrew people at this point in their history. One character laments,

Jehovah hath forsaken us!
Because we follow customs from the East,
And are soothsayers like the Philistines.
Everyone loveth bribes and rewards.
We are become as one that is unclean."

The Jerusalem scene before Pilate is relatively kind to Pilate as he bows to the will of the people, but amongst all the responses from “The People” is a single line identified as being said by “A Jew”: “His blood be upon us and upon our children!” This choice may reflect an unthinking belief in the historic part of the Jews in Jesus’ death. It may also be a result of the rabid anti-Semitism of the second decade of the 20th century. Such lines are common in medieval passion plays and it was only in the most recent performance that changes were made in the script of the Oberammergau Passion Play to remove specifically anti-Semitic references.

Another curious choice made in the production of this pageant was the decision not to cast the part of Jesus. Through five scenes, in Bethlehem, Jerusalem at the Shushan gate strewing palms, Pilate’s courtyard, the march to Calvary, and at the tomb, even as the Wayfarer and other characters observe and comment upon the actions of Jesus, He is not seen. The script describes what the Wayfarer observes from a distance. The Wayfarer and the people regard Jesus at some place as the back of the stage unseen by the audience. A review of the New York production noted:

The story is depicted without the actual presentation of any of its great incidents, through the familiar device of having such events which would call for the actual presence of the Christ either described by some one who witnesses it offstage or recounted by one who was present at the occurrence."

For instance, during the Palm Sunday scene, Jesus’ presence is presented through the stories of the blind man made to see and the cripple made to walk. Bartimeus, the blind man, states:

Outside the gates of Jericho,
I heard the multitude crying out
As they passed by:
“Jesus of Nazareth goeth to Jerusalem.
He heals the sick and helps the poor.” And I cried out with a loud voice: “Thou Son of David, have mercy upon me!” But they rebuked me; “Hold thy peace!” But I pleaded the more; “Have mercy, Son of David!” And then I heard the gentlest, sweetest voice; “What wilt thou I should do unto thee?” One touch of a cool finger, and then the blessed daylight burst upon me. Darkness fled and I could see His face. He smiled upon me with compassion. “Go thy way,” He said, “Thy faith hath made thee whole.”

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39 Crowther, 15.
40 NY Times, December 16, 1919.
41 Crowther, 43.
We see the crowds with their palms facing the back of the stage while Faure's *Les Rameaux (The Palms)* is played. Photographs of the scenes show a pretense of seeing Him by the cast members. A description of the Palm Sunday scene by an observer also indicates that the staging deliberately obscured the absence of a physical Jesus. This is apparently a choice based in the Puritan belief of the danger of *mimesis*, a belief in its blasphemy and in the power it might evoke. There was no similar fear amongst the Roman Catholic performers of the medieval mysteries as they portrayed God and angels, frequently in humorous ways.

Max Harris in *Theatre and Incarnation* sees the basic problem as being one of dealing with incarnation. Pushing aside squeamish fears he states,

> . . . I consider it strange that a faith grounded in the conviction that the divine Word became, of all things, flesh, should pose as ascetic . . . . It seems to me, however, that the root of such a persistent tendency to otherworldliness lies not in the dramatic entry of God into the world which I see at the heart of the Christian *kerygma* but in a kind of Gnosticism or neo-Platonism which seeks to escape from the world and which has often found too fertile soil in the Church.  

The medium of the theatre is flesh, "the flesh of the actor or actress who is, together with the audience, the irreducible minimum beyond which theatre disappears." The fear of the flesh and the fear of the pleasures of the flesh have inspired critics for millennia.

The text of this pageant makes no direct reference to civil religion. However, probably due to the tenor of the times, the final scene makes visual obeisance to this other faith. It is implied by the presence of George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, representatives of the branches of the military, Union and Confederate soldiers and the figure of Columbia that this message is both addressed to and fulfilled by the United States. The framing of the religious message between scenes of military destruction and representatives of the armed forces carrying national flags fuses the two beliefs. It is interesting to note from the photographs of this final scene that all of the national flags are on poles topped with crosses.

The three week long Methodist Episcopal Centenary included the performance not only of *The Wayfarer* but numerous other "life plays" and pageants. The life plays demonstrated the life styles of foreign peoples who had been missionized by the Methodists, emphasizing how life had improved for converts. Notable among the pageants performed was W.E.B. DuBois’ *Star of Ethiopia* on July 7. A pageant of 1,000 participants celebrated what a

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42 Photographs are from *The Wayfarer* collection in the Hargrett Rare Books collection of the University of Georgia (MS 689).
43 *NY Times*, December 16, 1919.
44 Max Harris, *Theater and Incarnation* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1990), x.
45 Harris, x.
later generation would call black pride. This particular pageant was repeated with all black casts for years all over the country. Many of the other pageants had a more direct religious message. One of the more successful pageants (based on its printing and presentation for performance in other venues) was *The Seeker* by Clarice Vallette McCauley with original music by William J. Kraft. The purpose of this pageant was to trace the progression through time and place from animism through Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, and Islam to the fulfillment of Christianity.46 Each of the early religions is shown in a somewhat positive light though each is also shown to be inadequate to satisfy the universal hunger of the human race for meaning. This view of the evolution of religion is a product of the Progressivism of the times.

The book of words of *The Seeker* describes the stage constructed for this indoor production as providing a variety of levels and curtained off areas which were nonspecific.47 This description is followed by a listing of the 19 musical numbers and the characters in the pageant by episode. The main characters of this pageant are Religion, Motherhood and The Seeker. Unlike those in *The Wayfarer*, these characters not only move through the scenes but interact with the other characters rather than simply commenting on them. The movement through the various manifestations of religion provides the opportunity to present a variety of costumes which provide for spectacle along with the movement of groups of people.

Religion appears as a woman. Her symbolic costume is noteworthy in that it has no particular connotation for any particular religion, except perhaps that of ancient Greece. "[T]here should be an attempt to convey an ecclesiastical reverence and dignity by her simple draperies of royal purple and deep blue—with perhaps a hint of crimson."48 Her speech is more based on poetry and seemingly expresses a tolerance for the other religions presented.

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God of the pagan, God of the Brahman,
God of the sorrowing children of the race;
God of the Buddhist, God of the Moslem,
Each have I been—in each have found some grace . . .
Many are the paths—and devious the ways—
But each draws us nearer to God's throne of Grace;
For I am that need that dwells in every heart—
The universal hunger of the human race.49
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The figure of Motherhood is a symbol dear to civil religion. Motherhood was equated with the height of patriotism and depicted sentimentally in many

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46Despite the historic development of Islam after Christianity, it is placed as preceding it and subordinate to Christianity.
48McCauley, 17.
49McCauley, 1.
pageants. In The Seeker Motherhood is personified and depicted as the one who leads to true religion.

An interesting side note to the pageantry of the centenary was the decision by D. W. Griffith to make a film record of the event. He offered to do this as a tribute to his deceased mother, a devout Methodist, at no cost to the centenary body. Griffith advocated the use of film as a means of Christian proselytizing.

In order to film The Wayfarer an outdoor stage with 4,000 square feet of surface was built. It was laid on tracks in order to maintain the best lighting angles. Ample evidence exists that Griffith’s two most trusted cameramen, G. W. “Billy” Bitzer and Alfred P. Hanburg, completed filming of The Wayfarer as well as much of the rest of the celebration. Unfortunately, the film, if it was ever edited and released, has disappeared.

Why the Methodists chose a dramatic medium to celebrate their centenary can be explained by a variety of factors. The church had abandoned its antitheatrical stance in regards to productions which advanced the church just as the technique of pageantry reached its peak of popularity in America. Pageantry was adopted not only by the Methodists but by other American Protestants as a means of advancing the faith. The pageants were a product of their time and are the ancestors of the multimedia productions presented in today’s evangelical churches who have embraced the technology of performance. The huge and impressive pageants of the beginning of this century, however, declined during the Twenties and became the familiar children’s church pageants of the present era. Their like will probably not be seen again.

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51CED, April 1, 1919.
52CED, June 24, 1919.