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## A study of the trope

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A STUDY OF THE TROPE

A Thesis

Presented to the

Department of English

and the

Faculty of the College of Graduate Studies

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Glenn Starnes Lindsey

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## CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I . . . . .	1
II . . . . .	19
III . . . . .	38
IV . . . . .	54
EPILOGUE . . . . .	79

In order to study the beginning of drama one must understand the context or the womb from which the play was born. It is usually accepted that drama in the West, as in most civilizations, developed from the popular religion. In medieval Europe, drama sprang from the Catholic Church<sup>1</sup>--an institution which had, centuries before, suppressed the drama of Roman culture.

The purpose of this study is not to ask the question of "What happened?" but "Why did it happen?" That is, why did drama develop in the midst of an anti-drama Christian Church? Any study done of early European drama owes a great deal to E. K. Chambers and Karl Young, but these two scholars asked the question "What?" and produced essentially a history of drama. Until the present, little investigation has been done in the whence and how-so of drama.

During the Middle Ages the liturgy developed toward a separation between the congregation and the priest. This separation was induced by the liturgical language, which was understood only by the educated; by the dogma, which made a distinction between the worthiness of the clergy and the layman before God; by the architecture, which physically

<sup>1</sup>There are some, such as F. M. Salter, Medieval Drama in Chester, who believe the drama did not begin in the medieval Church. The evidence is heavy against such a view. The problem is usually whether one considers the moralities and mysteries as the commencement of drama and whether or not their inception lies in the Church or in the folk festivals.

separated the Faithful from the visible acts of worship; and by the liturgy, which forced the laity to a passive role in public worship.

But at the same time an effort was made by the clergy to involve the passive layman and to make the liturgy more meaningful for him. Such effort resulted in making the services more awe-inspiring and more dramatic. A unifying force was the symbolism used by the clergy as a means of communication with the parishioners. It is my theory that it was from this use and understanding of symbolism and from the desire to make the Mass more meaningful that the liturgical drama, in part, developed. The trope developed out of symbolic actions used to convey to the observer the truths of the Gospel. To understand "why it happened," that is, why the trope appeared, one must study the christianization of Western Europe during the Middle Ages.

By the fifth century about half of the population of the Roman Empire was Christian, but by far the vast majority of the converts were in the East. The people in rural Europe were too closely identified with their nature cult for Christianity to make rapid inroads.<sup>2</sup> The conquering barbarians, however, became awed by the works of the conquered. The Roman world obviously offered much in the arts of civilization that the barbarian needed and wanted. Part of this awe and respect for the Roman civilization was attached to Christianity. After the barbarian invasion of Rome the Church became the protector and keeper of Roman culture. The most outstanding area of church leadership, other than

<sup>2</sup>H. Daniel-Rops, The Church in the Dark Ages, trans. Audrey Butler (New York, 1959), p. 74.

the strictly religious, was the keeping of political order. In Gaul in the sixth century the Roman influence was fast disappearing, as its troops were called home, and when the political officials left a vacancy in the leadership of a province, the bishop of the area usually took over.<sup>3</sup>

It is understandable why Catholic Christianity was able to survive the barbarian invasion. Orthodox Christianity had a distinct advantage over Arian Christianity and Pagan religions, since it was well-organized. The Catholic Church had established a hierarchy in the far-flung provinces of the Roman Empire; and, as the power of Roman authority diminished, the bishops assumed much of the political and judicial prerogatives of Rome.<sup>4</sup> United by the cohesiveness of the Catholic organization, the Church offered another equally unifying contribution to the fragmented early medieval society: salvation.<sup>5</sup>

Salvation was important to the Catholic, the Arian, and the Pagan. All were seeking to find means by which man's life could become meaningful and by which man could be at peace with himself and the universe. And here Christianity, with its well organized hierarchy, had the upper hand. By no means did Orthodoxy quickly win the war for the hearts of the Pagans, but the Catholic Church did have many attractive advantages.

<sup>3</sup>Kenneth Scott Latourette, A History of Christianity, III (New York, 1938), 345-49.

<sup>4</sup>J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, The Barbarian West: The Early Middle Ages (New York, 1962), p. 18.

<sup>5</sup>G. G. Coulton, Ten Medieval Studies (Boston, 1930), p. 191.

The Germanic Pagan religion held that fate is larger than the gods, and that no man could alter its powerful force, while Christianity offered the hope that man could overcome the universe. Christ was all-powerful.

Christianity gave the believer salvation and a happy future life, and could thereby match or better the promises of the Pagan cults. Such advantages were convincing; many Pagans accepted. Many converts, however, were still Pagan at heart and continued to practice Pagan rites and customs. And this mixing of Christian and Pagan beliefs persisted throughout the medieval period.<sup>6</sup>

The outstanding figures of medieval Christianity are its saints, and rightly so, but this fact has given rise to the stereotype of the devoutly religious medieval Christian. The stereotype has its source in the large number of saints in the period, but the ordinary layman was tainted with Paganism and impiety, for the mass conversion of barbarians in the sixth and seventh centuries to Christianity was not quickly assimilated.

Christianity often was adopted on a tribal basis. The chief would become a Christian, and tribal members followed their leaders into the Church with no true understanding of conversion, much less of the more subtle dogma of the Church.

The majority of these barbarians were incapable of even the simplest intellectual activity. Intellectual concepts and abstract thought were so foreign to them that they were incapable of grasping the doctrine of the Church. The profound wisdom of St. Augustine and St. Jerome could

<sup>6</sup>Latourette, History, III, 349-50.

no longer be used to teach the faithful as had been the case in the Roman world. When St. Caesarius tried to explain the creed of the Church, he found his flock unable to understand his teaching and had to resort to infantile terms to teach even his adult members the simplest laws of the Church.

The low level of ethical and moral comprehension during the early medieval period is appalling to the modern reader. The men who had become members of the Church on a mass scale had not had a real change of heart. They had not accepted or completely understood the teachings of the Church as part of their lives.<sup>7</sup>

The conversion of Clovis in the sixth century is a prime example of the problem the Church faced during the dark years after the fall of Rome. Clovis was baptized in 497, four hundred years before all of Europe could be called Christian. When Clovis became a Christian, his men became Christians; but their conversion was on a provisional and trial basis. If Christ helped them win battles, if Christ protected them from the wrath of their former gods, they would worship Him; but if their former gods proved stronger, they would forsake Christ. Christianity soon became the religion of the victor instead of the defeated. Since Clovis won battles and he was Christian, then it was reasonable that Christ was the strongest God.<sup>8</sup> This simple logic plagued the Church for centuries; for if the faithful believed in other

<sup>7</sup>Dom Gregory Dix, The Shape of the Liturgy, 2nd ed. (Glasgow, 1949), pp. 595-96.

<sup>8</sup>Henry Osborn Taylor, The Medieval Mind, 4th ed. (London, 1927), I, 193.

gods and worshipped Christ only as the most powerful God, they were not monotheistic.

When the Carolingian dynasty began in the eighth century, the majority of Europeans were counted among the baptized, but this did not mean they were Christians in their beliefs or ethics. It was impossible to develop true believers from the collective baptisms, when several thousand soldiers became followers of Christ because of loyalty to their leader. The mass conversions had a profound effect on society in the barbarization of the intellectual and moral life of Europe.<sup>9</sup> The barbarian Arians saw no discrepancy in presenting gifts of thanks to miracle-working Catholic saints for the slaughter of noted Catholics. The barbarian code of conduct was based on the ancient creed of the sword that demanded, among other things, blood for the most minor injuries to one's honor. Life was cheap, and the family vendetta was thought of as being both moral and necessary. Families protected their honor by vengeance, which usually meant bloodshed.

The most quickly noticed area of barbarization is that of law. Fairly numerous records of barbarian law have come down to us where one can immediately notice the lack of Roman justice and refinement. Vengeance was not considered wrong. If a man discovered his wife was sleeping with another man, the wronged husband was allowed to kill her. Life of the individual held little value. Duelling was considered a legal means of determining right. In short, the barbarians added

<sup>9</sup>Daniel-Rops, Dark Ages, pp. 193-237.

an anti-humanitarian spirit to the moral life of Western Europe.<sup>10</sup>

However, the Carolingian dynasty had the ability to bring reform to the Church and to society and to bring light to the so-called Dark Ages. When Charlemagne became king, it was not only barbarian society that needed reform, but also the Church, which was too loosely organized on the parish level to reach the Christian in order to Christianize him. One of Charlemagne's most important moves was to establish the parish system on a firm basis and to give parish churches financial help.

Europe was essentially rural, and communication and transportation were extremely poor. It was difficult for the rural population to be instructed in the Christian doctrine at the bishop's church. But the bishop's resident church was usually the only church that could support full time priests. And since the bishops were located near the royal courts or in one of the widely scattered cities of Europe, the rural population had scant opportunities for religious training. By endowing the parish church, Charlemagne made it possible for each parish to have a priest whose duty it was to teach the Apostles' Creed and the Lord's Prayer. This essentially put the responsibility of teaching Church doctrines upon the parish priest, who would naturally reach more people than could the bishop. The obligations of the parish priest increased during the medieval period, and the list of required instruction increased until, by the latter Middle Age, most European Christians knew the seven deadly sins, the seven virtues, the Ten Commandments, the

<sup>10</sup>Wallace-Hadrill, The Barbarian West, pp. 56-60, 76-79.

articles of faith, and a host of stories about the lives of the apostles and saints.<sup>11</sup>

Charlemagne also worked for reform in the liturgy. He especially liked the Gregorian Chant used in the Roman Rite. Germany and France were using the Gallican Rite; but Charlemagne, much impressed with the Roman Rite, worked for its acceptance in his kingdom. In order to carry out his reforms Charlemagne used the new vigor that the newly reformed Benedictine Order displayed.<sup>12</sup> It was through this order that most of his liturgical reforms were carried out. Between 787 and 797 Theodonor, Abbot of Monte Cassino, was given the duty of promulgating the Benedictine Rule; and he saw to it that the Rule was followed in Charlemagne's realm. He also established singing schools to teach the Gregorian Chant. These schools were influential in producing a revival in music in the ninth century. Liturgical activity of the period reached its acme in Alcuin's missal, which firmly established the Roman Rite in the Frankish kingdom.<sup>13</sup>

In the fourth century, four distinct rites had been practiced in the various areas of Christendom. They were the rites of Antioch, Alexandria, Rome, and Gaul.<sup>14</sup> The Roman Rite, which eventually became the accepted liturgy, was written in a definitive form in the eighth century. It then became possible to spread the Roman liturgy to all

<sup>11</sup>Latourette, History, III, 348-52.

<sup>12</sup>Wallace-Hadrill, The Barbarian West, pp. 104-106.

<sup>13</sup>Ruth Ellis Messenger, The Medieval Latin Hymn (Washington, D. C., 1953), pp. 20-22.

<sup>14</sup>Karl Young, The Drama of the Medieval Church (Oxford, 1933), I, 16-17.

parts of Europe in written form, and this in part accounts for its universal acceptance. When the Roman liturgy was accepted by the Anglo-Saxon, French, and German Churches in the eighth century, it experienced two hundred years of growth and addition in its new setting. This flux made it possible for the clergy to insert extra-liturgical forms such as the trope into the liturgy. Unlike today's Roman Catholic priest, the ninth and tenth-century clergyman had ample opportunity to add to the liturgy.<sup>15</sup> The present Roman Mass was not fully complete until the eleventh century, when the Credo and Agnus Dei were added.<sup>16</sup>

An example of the expansion of the Mass was the introduction of hymns, that play such a cardinal part in today's liturgy. The hymn was made popular by St. Ambrose (340?-397), but it did not become part of the Mass until the eighth century and was not accepted in Rome until the ninth century.<sup>17</sup> It was not until the latter century that the ecclesiastical year was fully established in hymnology. Then around the festivals of Lent, Passion, Easter, Ascension, Advent, Nativity and Trinity, the processional and extra-liturgical hymns of the Middle Ages were written.<sup>18</sup>

The flexibility of the liturgy during the eighth and ninth centuries was concurrent with two developments in the relationships of priest and

<sup>15</sup>Joseph A. Jungmann, The Mass of the Roman Rite: Its Origins and Development, trans. Francis A. Brunner (New York, 1951), I, 67-75.

<sup>16</sup>Howard McKinney and W. R. Anderson, Music in History (Chicago, 1940), p. 120.

<sup>17</sup>Albert Seay, Music in the Medieval World (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1965), p. 48.

<sup>18</sup>Messenger, Latin Hymn, p. 32.

layman to the liturgy. The status of the priest was enormously enlarged, and the layman's participation decreased in proportion to the priest's increase. Undoubtedly, many of the factors for the change are unknown. But the history of heresy reveals at least one of the theological agents.

Many of the Germanic invaders of the Empire had been baptized, but into Arian Christianity.<sup>19</sup> The major division between Arianism and the Orthodox belief was the doctrine of Christ. The Arians believed that God was supreme and had always existed, but that the Son, Christ, had not perpetually existed. This means that Christ had a source other than himself: the Father. This places Christ not in a co-equal position with the Father, but makes him a second-rate God. This belief completely discounts the Trinity, and Christ becomes revered as a half-man half-God phenomenon. Stress was placed on his humanity, on his likeness to men. This stress made him the perfect mediator between God and man.

The Church successfully fought the Arian heresy in Northern Europe but was not as successful in Southern France and Spain, for as late as the eighth century the Spanish population was still strongly affected by Arianism.<sup>20</sup>

As a reaction to the emphasis placed on the humanity of Christ, the Church placed new stress on the divinity of Christ. Where Christ was once the mediator between God and man, man now needed a mediator to reach Christ. This concept placed Christ theologically out of touch with the

<sup>19</sup>Daniel-Rops, Dark Ages, p. 182.

<sup>20</sup>William Ragsdale Cannon, History of Christianity in the Middle Ages (New York, 1960), p. 48.

layman, and Christ became the mediator between the priest and the Father. The priest was, at least theoretically, thought to be in a better position to reach God, for he lived a life of devoted service and prayer. This life established the priest in a much higher status in the religious and social hierarchy, for now he was not merely the guide in worship but the middleman between God and his secular children.<sup>21</sup>

Another cause for division between the parishioners and the clergy was the low level of moral standards during the early Middle Ages. The men who had become members of the Church on a mass scale had not, as was brought out earlier, had a change of heart. Their children and their children's children tended to perpetuate the Pagan morality and ethic. And it is a far easier task to change the ways of men at the time of initiation into a new religion than to try to change their actions after they are already members. Therefore, the Church made a sharp division between the holy priest and the often immoral layman.<sup>22</sup> How could the unclean layman be allowed to handle the holy things of God? What right did he have to the holy Body and Blood of Christ?

A notable advance in the aggrandizement of the clergy can also be seen in the history of dogma. The early medieval view of the Church was that all believers were " . . . fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God . . ." (Ephesians ii,19). Worship was the union and communion of those who had been cleansed by God. By the eighth century, however, a new concept had begun to creep into the liturgy.

<sup>21</sup>Jungmann, Roman Rite, I, 84.

<sup>22</sup>Jungmann, I, 84.

This new concept emphasized the priest as supreme in the act of worship. The shift in emphasis occurred by the addition into ritual of new text which placed the priest as an intercessor before God on behalf of the catechumen. Thus, it became an accepted dogma that no longer would all men offer up the sacrifice. Now, only the priest would offer the sacrifice for the people.

Isidore of Seville (560-636) had begun the move in this direction with his idea that at a supreme moment in the Mass the transformation of the Host occurred. Isidore's idea stimulated a detailed study of the Mass to discover the exact moment when the consecration occurred. It was the priest who uttered the sacred words that caused the miracle, and it was he who stood before God on behalf of the people. Only the priest knew how to reach God.

In the ninth century the Sacrament was referred to as the "Mystical Body," an apt expression of the distance between the laity and the celebration of the Mass.

The change in the type of bread used in the Mass is an illustration of the transformation taking place in the liturgy in the eighth and ninth centuries.<sup>23</sup> Alcuin had set up schools at Aachen and Tours<sup>24</sup> and from these centers he produced pamphlets, books, and priests who worked for the acceptance of unleavened bread over the traditional leavened bread that had been used in the West. The practice was slow in being

<sup>23</sup>Jungmann, Roman Rite, I, 82-84.

<sup>24</sup>O. B. Hardison, Jr., Christian Rite and Christian Drama in the Middle Ages, (Baltimore, 1965), p. 80.

accepted, but it eventually won universal acceptance. The mystery and holiness of the Mass encouraged the use of white bread that did not crumble easily. The Body of Christ should not easily break into crumbs. The bread had been put into the hands of the worshipper along with the wine, but was now placed on his tongue. This practice made sure that no unholy hands would touch the Bread of Life. By the high medieval period the bread was received while kneeling, a practice that ultimately gave rise to the present communion rail.<sup>25</sup>

In urban centers like Rome, however, the Mass remained an act of joint worship. The lay community actively participated in the Mass and received both the bread and wine. The layman was still on equal terms with the priest. This practice persisted in the sophisticated urban centers until the eleventh century. In most of Western Europe, however, the communion was no longer a corporate rite after the fifth century, when the slow movement toward making communion a clerical duty and exclusive possession began. Dom Dix skillfully explains the implications of this monopoly:

The seriousness of this disappearance of lay communion was increased by the fact that partaking of communion had always been so closely linked in the West with the right of offering. When the layman ceased to communicate, he ceased as a matter of course to have an active part in the offertory; . . . . Thus along with the increased emphasis or 'consecration' (the 'liturgy' of the celebrant alone) there went a parallel movement by which the layman lost all active participation in the rest of the rite, the offertory and the communion--his 'liturgy.' He became a mere spectator and listener, without a 'liturgy' in the primitive sense at all.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup>Jungmann, Roman Rite, I, 84.

<sup>26</sup>Dix, Liturgy, p. 598.

As the role of the priest increased, many prayers to be spoken by the priest were added to the liturgy. The celebrant's private prayers were increased as well as lengthened. When the Mass was participated in by the entire congregation, the prayers were said by the priest on behalf of the people; and now he prayed, not for the people, but for himself that he might be acceptable in the sight of God. The difference is most noticeable in the replacement of "I" for the older form of "we."

The liturgy provided for vesting prayers, unvesting prayers, prayers before ascent to the altar, and prayers before descent from the altar. These prayers were usually said silently or in a soft whisper. The posture of the priest stresses the new shift in interest. Where the priest had prayed with outstretched arms which included the worshippers and expressed their desires and needs, now he prayed with back to the nave, with bowed head and folded hands.

There were other reasons for the lengthening of the distance between the priest and parishioner. One was the rising social position of the clergy as the governing class in many parts of Europe.<sup>27</sup> Another was the Carolingian acceptance of the Roman Mass.

With the elimination of the layman's active participation in the Mass, his part became one of "seeing" and "hearing."<sup>28</sup> The latter mode was lessened by the use of Roman liturgical Latin. When the Gallican Rite was used, the Latin was close to the "Romance popular dialect," but with the Carolingian acceptance of the Roman Mass the break between the

<sup>27</sup>Jungmann, Roman Rite, I, 72, 82.

<sup>28</sup>Dix, Liturgy, p. 598.

priest and his parishioner was increased because of the remoteness of the Roman Latin from the language of the uneducated.

The growing remoteness of the clergy was also reflected in church architecture. In the years before the eighth century the altar was close to the people. Now it was pushed back against the wall. This was a physical manifestation of the detachment of the people in the service. Placing the altar against the apse wall required that the choir-stalls face each other on either side of the apse; heretofore, they had formed a half-circle behind the altar. The height of this separation between priest and layman came with the insertion of the rood-screen or choir-screen between the congregation and the altar. It became almost impossible to see the altar from the nave.<sup>29</sup> All these things developed, as Joseph Jungmann puts it, as "a concealment of things holy, not from the heathen--there were none--but from the Christian people themselves."<sup>30</sup>

It is evident, then, in what direction medieval liturgical developments were going. The personal preference of the Carolingian kings for the Roman Rite, the reaction against heresy, the mass conversion of Pagans, the social position of the clergy, and the new liturgy all helped to push the laity to the rear of the church and spurred the development of a liturgy that became the exclusive property of the clergy. Yet, at the same time there was a concern for the layman.

<sup>29</sup>Jungmann, Roman Rite, I, 83.

<sup>30</sup>Jungmann, I, 81.

Charlemagne was interested enough in the poor and uneducated people of his kingdom in 789 to decree that every parish must have a school for the education of the freeborn and the serfs.<sup>31</sup>

All the evidence indicates a similar concern on the part of the clergy.<sup>32</sup> The gap that now excluded the layman from many of the liturgical privileges he had once enjoyed did not arise from premeditated discrimination, but from sociological and historical developments over several centuries. But if the layman was not fit to drink the Blood of Christ, if he was not devout enough to take part in the responses and kiss of peace, he was still in need of God. Holy Mother Church existed for the salvation of the layman; and, if she was not reaching him, she was neglecting her duty.

But the layman was not forgotten. While the parishioner's part in the Mass was greatly reduced, there was concurrently a marked increase in the visual aspects of the liturgy. The visual aspects of the re-enactment of Christ's death were heightened. The extension of the hands in the form of a cross increased and was performed after the consecration, at the mention of the Resurrection, and at the mention of the Ascension. At the end of the Memento, the rite related the events surrounding Christ's death, the priest bowed his head to tell the congregation that the death had occurred. The breast was struck when the priest said Nobis quoque. These actions obtained symbolic meaning that made the

<sup>31</sup>Cannon, Middle Ages, p. 87.

<sup>32</sup>Latourette, History, III, 350-52.

Mass a vivid presentation of the Gospel story.<sup>33</sup> The emphasis upon the symbolic meaning of the gestures by the priest and the stress put upon visual aspects of worship stimulated the development of the trope.

The Church was mindful of the needs of its parishioners and tried to explain and make the liturgy meaningful. The people were ignorant of the mutterings going on around the altar,<sup>34</sup> and the priests tried with music, color, light, darkness, images, and gesture to make the worship more intelligible.

It had become necessary for the Church to express its doctrines in ceremonial rites in order that men might believe and have faith and be saved. It was now the Church's duty to teach a largely illiterate catechumen those Christian truths that went against nature but which were necessary for salvation.<sup>35</sup>

If the unlearned were unable to understand the profound theological implications of the Mass, they could accept and understand the symbolic meaning. The symbolic interpretation taught in commentaries written by Amalar<sup>36</sup> for laymen created a dramatic situation where the congregation was actually a party in the Passion of Christ. At one moment the people were the Jews hearing John the Baptist preach; at another point, they were the crowd crying for the death of Christ; they even became Christ's

<sup>33</sup>Jungmann, Roman Rite, I, 107-108.

<sup>34</sup>Coulton, Studies, p. 197.

<sup>35</sup>F. M. Salter, Medieval Drama in Chester (Toronto, 1955), p. 5

<sup>36</sup>Jungmann, Roman Rite, I, 91.

followers, moaning His death. Amalar reasoned that if the bread and wine literally became the Body and Blood of the Lord, then the events surrounding the Crucifixion were also relived at every Mass. The symbolic interpretation was simply more stimulating than the historical view of the Mass.<sup>37</sup> According to the historical definition, the Mass was an act that reenacted an historical event, whereas the allegorical or symbolic interpretation saw the Mass as a living event where the congregation was a participant in the events leading to Christ's death. The faithful became witnesses to the events and thereby added excitement to the Mass. "All these usages," Jungmann points out, "making a bid for the curious and fascinated eyes of the Christian people, obtained an allegorical significance."<sup>38</sup> It is my idea that the trope appeared because of a desire on the part of the clergy to give a symbolic interpretation to the Mass in order to make it more inviting and meaningful, and to make it an attention-getting as well as an educational device.

<sup>37</sup>Hardison, Christian Rite, pp. 38-39.

<sup>38</sup>Jungmann, Roman Rite, I, 38-39.

## CHAPTER II

E. K. Chambers and Karl Young approach the trope from the viewpoint of drama. They examined the trope not as a fully realized entity, but as a kind of embryo of drama. Chambers and Young also affirmed the chronological development of drama, a practice that often falls into the common errors of literary evolution; that is, assuming the simplest forms of literature to be the earliest forms. Without the data in Chambers' The Mediaeval Stage (1903) and Young's The Drama of the Medieval Church (1933), there would be scant accessible information about the trope in English, but their Darwinian perspective distorts their interpretations. The evolutionary interpretation is now untenable for no accurate chronology can be established, and it is now known that many of the primitive tropes are much later in composition than some of the highly developed ones. Therefore, the evolutionary theory is nullified.<sup>1</sup>

The anti-clericalism of Young and Chambers also distorts their objectivity. To them, especially Chambers, the dramatic elements in the tropes are symptoms of mutiny against the medieval religious authority. Chambers' thesis is that drama triumphed in spite of and over the Church, while Young equates the "secularization" of drama with progress<sup>2</sup> and the

<sup>1</sup>O. B. Hardison, Jr., Christian Rite and Christian Drama in the Middle Ages (Baltimore, 1965). After I had reached some of these same conclusions I discovered that Hardison heartily agrees with them. He gives an extended analysis of the scholarship of Chambers and Young in view of recent discoveries.

<sup>2</sup>Hardison, Rite, pp. 1-34.

"ringing out the old, ringing in the new; ringing out the false, ringing in the true."

In order to objectively study the tropes, one must willingly and purposefully suspend prejudices and "enlightenment" of the centuries that separate him from the Middle Ages. No matter how secular our world may be, it is still true that the Middle Ages were dominated by religion. The tropes were a part of this milieu. They were a development of elements of the liturgy, in prose and in verse, during the eighth and ninth centuries, and they were employed for liturgical purposes.<sup>3</sup> As Hardin Craig points out, "The medieval religious drama existed for itself and for the discharge of a religious purpose and not as an early stage of secular drama."<sup>4</sup>

The exact origin of the trope is not known; yet it can be traced to rather ancient sources in Eastern Christian worship. St. Paul in his letter to the Ephesians (v,19) encouraged the early Christians to "be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." It was probably around the new hymns and spiritual songs introduced into Christian worship that the trope developed.

By the third century many new hymns had been written by devout Christians. The hymn, however, became the means whereby heresies were injected into the Church; therefore, restrictions were placed upon the

<sup>3</sup>M. D. Anderson, Drama and Imagery in English Medieval Churches (Cambridge, 1963), p. 22.

<sup>4</sup>Hardin Craig, English Religious Drama of the Middle Ages (Oxford, 1955), p. 6.

insertion of new hymns into the worship service. The Laodicean Council, ca. 364, forbade such hymns completely and thus tried to set up a fixed liturgy for the Church.

This decree from the Laodicean Council is the beginning of the tug-of-war between the religious hierarchy, which continually worked for a constancy in liturgy, and the host of mystics--priest and lay folk--who wanted a personal and immediate expression of their religion beyond the fixed rite. Of course, neither this decree nor similar ones could stop hymn writers from composing orthodox hymns to fight the heretical hymns. Yet, the effort of repeated councils against the creation of new liturgical songs placed pressure upon the clergy to follow the accepted liturgy of their areas and not allow new hymns to be introduced. The Council of Toledo (589) and the Council of Narbonne (589) expressed the fear that the use of non-canonical songs would spread heresies or help keep Pagan rites alive. The bulk conversion of Pagans had already helped to introduce many Pagan customs into the Christian community. Examination of non-canonical hymns was part of the endeavor to keep the Church and its liturgy pure. But the new songs were difficult to discourage for they were the reflection and manifestation of the religious spirit and devotion of the vulgar people.

Rome was the center of learning; Romans considered themselves more sophisticated and enlightened than the rest of Western Europe. They considered themselves as the true protectors of all that was pure and holy in the Church. Rome, free from the Pagan superstitions that were widespread in Gaul and Spain, considered itself as the arbitrator in those spiritual areas that were considered sacred. Pope Gelasius

(492-500) forbade the reading in church of hymns written by those he termed "private, irresponsible individuals." The contention continued until the eighth century, when Pipin the Short and Charlemagne ruled in favor of the Roman Rite over the Gallican ritual.<sup>5</sup>

The long struggle to keep the liturgy pure from any new or un-orthodox hymns points to the continuous tendency on the part of the worshipper to give a personal and immediate expression of the festivals of the Church. The Church was the center for the entire spiritual life of Europe, and both laity and clergy were seeking to benefit and express religious sentiment by making the service more imaginative and appealing. For four hundred years the struggle had continued. In the process the original fear of heresy became unfounded; by the eighth century there was no need for safeguards against heresies in hymns composed by "private, irresponsible" people. An exception existed in Spain, where Arianism and Islamism were still practiced.

Charlemagne interpreted the ruling of the early councils to mean that no private, ignorant layman could write hymns in the vulgar language of the day. He followed the words of the Council of Laodicea, but his interpretation of the spirit was quite different. And the old interpretation was forgotten with the passing of several more centuries until it was no longer unacceptable for clergy to write hymns as long as they were in correct Latin.

<sup>5</sup>H. F. Muller, "Pre-History of the Medieval Drama. The Antecedent of the Tropes and the Conditions of their Appearance," The University of Minnesota Studies in Language and Literature, IV (1916), 544-575.

As has been stated before, the adoption of the Roman Rite prompted the acceptance of Roman Latin for the Mass instead of the Romance Latin used by the people of Gaul. Charlemagne recognized the vast difference between the Latin spoken by his subjects and the Latin of the sacred text, but he set about, nevertheless, to "correct" all religious services to a uniform Roman Latin. This acceptance of Roman Latin helped to create the gap between layman and clergy as mentioned in the previous chapter.

At first the uniform Roman Rite provided little room for innovations of hymns, but gradually there was a development of the musical parts to the Mass which allowed new musical expression. This expansion centered around the Alleluia with the extension of the last "a" of Alleluia.<sup>6</sup> It is thought that this procedure is related to Byzantine practices that were brought by Greek scholars to the courts of Gaul.<sup>7</sup>

St. Augustine testifies to the Eastern origin of the hymns and vividly describes their inspiration to the worshipper. In his Confessions he relates his reaction to a service in Milan at the time of St. Ambrose (340-397), the greatest hymn writer in the West:

I wept at the beauty of your hymns and canticles and was most powerfully moved at the sweet sound of Your Church's singing. The sounds flowed into my ears, and the truth streamed into my heart; so that my eyes, and I was happy in them.

It was only a little while before that the church of Milan had begun to practice this kind

<sup>6</sup>Muller, "Pre-History of Medieval Drama," pp. 550-561.

<sup>7</sup>Albert Seay, Music in the Medieval World (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1965), p. 49.

of consolation and exultation, to the great joy of the brethren singing together with heart and voice . . . .

It was at this time (the persecuting of Ambrose by the boy Emperor Valentinian and his mother, Gustina) that the practice was instituted of singing hymns and psalms after the manner of the Eastern churches, to keep the people from being altogether worn out with anxiety and want of sleep. The custom has been retained from that day to this, and has been imitated by many, indeed in almost all congregations throughout the world.<sup>8</sup>

The worship in Santa Sophia during the reign of the Byzantine Emperors, before the fall of the Eastern empire, was enriched by hymns written by friars, sung by a cantor and answered by a choir. Dialogue hymns such as these were used to enliven the liturgical music. At appropriate times the choir became angels, saints, devils or other Biblical characters.<sup>9</sup> The Western Church, however, did not adopt this practice until many years later when refugees, fleeing the puritan movement begun by the Byzantine Emperor Leo III in 726, landed in western Europe. Many of these refugees were the creators of the artistic and musical productions that the iconoclasts in Constantinople were destroying. This migration continued sporadically until 811 when the sack of Constantinople occasioned another major influx of artists and intellectuals to western Europe. These artists were especially welcomed by Charlemagne.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup>Saint Augustine, The Confessions of St. Augustine, trans. Tobie Matthew (Chicago, 1956), pp. 241-242.

<sup>9</sup>Howard McKinney and W. R. Anderson, Music in History (Chicago, 1940), p. 129.

<sup>10</sup>Roger Hinks, Carolingian Art (Ann Arbor, 1962), pp. 95-97.

Charlemagne (771-814) was anxious to bring his kingdom into conformity with the Roman Rite. He had been crowned by Pope Leo III in Rome and had been understandably awed by the splendor of that city. The Gallican liturgy stressed the separation between the culture of Rome and that of Gaul. What he wanted was to establish a religious unity within his kingdom and among all Christian people. His object was a theocracy.<sup>11</sup> He saw that a great unifying force within Europe would be a common liturgy. The English had begun the acceptance of the Roman Rite as early as 680,<sup>12</sup> and Charlemagne was seeking a cultural unification with Rome and with England when he accepted the Roman liturgy as the official rite of Gaul.

Yet, the Carolingian rulers (752-877) must also be given credit for their interest in purely artistic and intellectual achievement. They were interested in changing from the Gallican Rite to the Roman Rite not only for political and social reasons, but also out of a sincere interest in the new music of the Roman Rite for its aesthetic appeal. A revival in music was also spurred by the wealth of learning and talent from Ireland, England and the Byzantine Empire. Part of Charlemagne's religious reforms called for monks to be able to sing and read well. He put the talent at his disposal to work establishing singing schools to teach music to the clergy. These schools gave importance and prestige to religious music, and by the ninth century its highest development was

<sup>11</sup>Christopher Dawson, Religion and the Rise of Western Culture (London, 1950), p. 15.

<sup>12</sup>Dawson, Rise of Western Culture, p. 65.

achieved.<sup>13</sup> In the first part of the ninth century singers dedicated their lives from boyhood well into maturity to practicing their art. This dedication to music spurred much of the musical experimentation that enriched the Church during this century.<sup>14</sup>

And it was this creative activity during the eighth and ninth centuries that gave rise to the trope, an expression of the new learning of the Carolingian period. The revival in music occurred in conjunction with the aggrandizement of the clergy in the worship service, with the new liturgical reforms that allowed interpolations in the liturgy, and with Charlemagne's concern for the layman. The trope is the by-product of all these activities.

Broadly speaking the trope is an interpolation in the liturgy. It is a literary ornamentation, usually sung, added to the standardized liturgy to enhance its emotional quality.<sup>15</sup> The earliest record of the trope was recorded by Notker of St. Gall who states that the trope was introduced at his monastery by a monk fleeing his home in Jumiege because of Norman invasions sometime before 862. This unknown monk had with him a book of chants that contained additions to the usual musical score. These additions were verse added under the final "a" of the Alleluia which continued to be voiced in a series of varying notes that lasted as long as the singer had air. Notker was excited about the

<sup>14</sup>Jacques Handschir, "Trope, Sequence, and Conductus" in Don Anselm Huges, Early Medieval Music up to 1300 (New York, 1954), p. 146.

<sup>15</sup>Karl Young, The Drama of the Medieval Church (Oxford, 1933), I, 178-179.

augmentation for he had found these long melismas difficult to remember and the accompanying words made the task easier. Notker judged the original verse poor, however, and began writing his own more graceful renditions. This very practical explanation for the interpolations as aids to the singer's memory no doubt has great validity; yet, it does not seem to fully explain their popularity, for the tropes were not limited to the chants and hymns but were also attached to the Epistles.<sup>16</sup>

Clement Blum and H. F. Muller believe the trope had its origin before the incident at St. Gall occurred. Blum believes that Amalar wrote sequences and tropes a full seventy-five years before Notker. Amalar states that he found his best means of expressing his religious joy and wonder in these literary and musical compositions.<sup>17</sup>

Exultatio et laetitia unde responsorius praesorius praesens dicit, clariores efficiuntur in mente nostra si clariore lingua, id est Hebraea, pronuntiatae apud nos fuerint. Ideo in ea statione in qua apostalus celebrat vespertinale officium, Alleluia canitur cum omni supplemento et excellentia versum et sequentiarum.<sup>18</sup>

Amalar is certainly talking here about the accompanying verse and sequence added to the Alleluia, and his reason for its appearance seems as logical as Notker's. Notker's generation carried the process to its

<sup>16</sup>Seay, Music, pp. 49-50.

<sup>17</sup>Clement Blum, "Sequentia," Catholic Encyclopedia.

<sup>18</sup>Quoted in Muller, "Pre-History of Drama," pp. 562-563. The exaltation and joy with which the responder being present sings are made more splendid in our own minds if they will have been pronounced before us in a more distinct language, that is Hebrew. Therefore, in this place in which the priest celebrates the evening office, the Alleluia is sung with every embellishment and excellence of the sequence and verses.

fullest development, but is not responsible for its origin.<sup>19</sup>

The music for the tropes was borrowed from existing religious and secular music such as the antiphon, hymnal melodies, and chants that were especially adaptable into dialogue. The antiphon was often used as a reiteration between verses of a Psalm with one side of the choir replying to the other side to emphasize the text being sung or chanted.<sup>20</sup>

Originally the interpolation centered around the Alleluia. The wordless tunes that had been introduced from Jumieges were added to the last "a" in the antiphonal style. The trope began with one syllable given to each note. The syllabic construction affixed to the Alleluia became known as sequeta or sequence.<sup>21</sup>

The sequence, however, is a trope since it is a syllabic embellishment of the melismata ending the Alleluia. It is the earliest form of the trope and owes its existence to the annexation of words to the already existing liturgical melody. The sequence is distinguished from other tropes because it is the syllabic interpolation of the long melismata of the Alleluia while all other tropes expand the melodies of the Introit, Kyrie, Gloria, Sanctus, Agnus, and the Gradual. Another difference that separates the sequence and other tropes is that the trope expands the meaning of the text into which it has been interpolated, while the sequence has a very loose connection to its original text.

<sup>19</sup>Muller, "Pre-History of Drama," p. 563.

<sup>20</sup>Paul Kretzmann, "The Liturgical Elements in the Earliest Forms of the Medieval Drama," The University of Minnesota Studies in Language and Literature, IV (1916), 8.

<sup>21</sup>Dom Anselm Hughes, Musical Quarterly, (April 1938), 149.

Essentially there are two types of trope excluding the sequence; one adopted the existing music adding new words, the other took the existing music as well as the words breaking them up into sections at the melismata and added new words to each note of the melismata.<sup>22</sup> An example of the latter is the interpolation of the Kyrie: Kyrie (fons pietatis, a quo bona currecta procedunt) eleison, or Kyrie (rex genitor ingenite) eleison.<sup>23</sup>

A more developed trope is the "Cuctipatens dominator" which act as a commentary on the original text:

All powerful Ruler of the heavens, angels of the earth, of the sea and the dead. Kyrie eleison.

Who from the mire formed Adam the first man, and set up Paradise, Kyrie eleison. Even to mankind longing for the grace of the High King with a whole heart, Kyrie eleison.<sup>24</sup>

Tropes are not a part of the liturgy; for once Charlemagne had accepted the Roman Rite, the official hymns and chants were set. However, music held such a high position in the Carolingian age that it was bound to find expression in the church services. The Church, not without dissension, put up with extra-liturgical ceremonies that were inserted into the existing liturgy wherever opportunity allowed. The trope, therefore, appears as an expression of the medieval habit of glossing--that is, adding to and building on some older authority.

<sup>22</sup>Seay, Music, pp. 51-52.

<sup>23</sup>Paul Henry Long, Music in the Western Civilization (New York, 1941), p. 73.

<sup>24</sup>Reese, Music in the Middle Ages, p. 186.

Blank spaces were often left between sentences and phrases of the original allowing the choir master to insert whatever commentary he thought acceptable. A similar habit is well known in medieval literature and philosophy.

Even though the trope was not a part of the liturgy it was religious in content and was non-liturgical only in the sense that it was not formally included in the uniform order of service according to the Roman Order. The trope is a dependent art that developed because of the rigid canonical acceptance of the Gregorian musical heritage. Since the Gregorian music could not be replaced it was amplified; thus, every trope is an expansion of a canonical Gregorian song. True, after many generations of development, the relationship became less and less obvious, but always the trope retained the essential theme of the original song. The continual dependence on the official liturgy can be recognized in the close similarities between the antiphons for lauds found in the Gregorian matins and the Quem quaeritis play.<sup>25</sup>

Antiphon: And early on the Sabbath they came to the sepulcher, when the sun had just risen, alleluia.

Antiphon: And they said to one another; who will roll the stone for us from the entrance of the sepulcher? Alleluia, alleluia.

Antiphon: And looking again they saw the stone was rolled away, it was indeed huge, alleluia.

Antiphon: Do not fear, you seek Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified; he is not here; he has arisen, alleluia.

Antiphon: I will precede you in Galilee; there you will see me as I told you, alleluia.

<sup>25</sup>Gustave Reese, Music in the Middle Ages (New York, 1940), p. 186.

Antiphon: Go quickly, tell the disciples that the Lord has arisen, alleluia, alleluia. After the Passion of the Lord the covenant has been completed, since the body is not in the sepulcher. The rock supports eternal life, the sepulcher has given up the pearl of heaven, alleluia.

Antiphon: Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the sepulcher, alleluia.<sup>26</sup>

The Quem quaeritis has two parts, one for the choir representing angels and a second part probably taken by one member of the choir:

Question: Whom seek ye in the sepulchre, O followers of Christ?

Answer: Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified, O celestial one.

The angels: He is not here; he is risen, just as he foretold. Go, announce he is risen from the sepulchre.<sup>27</sup>

Four hundred years after the above tenth century version was written another rendering was written in Wakefield. The similarities testify to the enduring qualities of the older Quem quaeritis as a model and to the close tie with the official liturgy.

I Angelus: Ye mourning women in youre thoght,  
Here in the place whome have ye soght?

Maria Magdalene: Ihesu that unto ded was broght,  
Our Lord so fre.

II Angelus: Certys, women, here is he noght;  
Com nere and se.

I Angelus: He is not here, the sothe to say;  
The place is voyde there in he lay;

<sup>26</sup>Hardison, Christian Rite, p. 296.

<sup>27</sup>Joseph Quincy Adams, ed., Chief Pre-Shakespearean Dramas (Boston, 1924), p. 3.

The sudary here se ye may  
 was on hym layde.  
 He is rysen and gone his way,  
 as he you sayde.

II Angelus: Euen as he saide, so done has he;  
 He is rysen through his pauste;  
 He shalbe fon in Galale,  
 In flesh and fell  
 To his dyscypgls now weynd ye,  
 And thus thaym tell.<sup>28</sup>

At first, the tropes were almost exclusively performed in the monasteries spreading to lay churches later. The monastic life was of great importance to European society for it was the home of the intellectual and artistic culture from the sixth to the tenth centuries.<sup>29</sup> Charlemagne took advantage of this cultural heritage and began a series of monastic reforms carried out by Theodomor, Abbot of Monte Cassino. The invigorating spirit of this monastic reform created the intellectual mood and the artistic freedom that allowed and encouraged the growth of the trope.<sup>30</sup>

Certainly, the clergy were the originators of the trope. The explanations, in summary, for its development among the clergy, other than the obvious educational advantage, are the medieval glossing habit, the liturgical and musical reforms, the need for help in memorizing the melismata notes, and artistic spiritual expression. Yet there are a few discrepancies that cannot be explained unless the layman's part in the development of the trope is considered.

<sup>28</sup>Joseph Quincy Adams, Pre-Shakespearean Dramas, p. 195.

<sup>29</sup>Muller, "Pre-History of Drama," p. 545.

<sup>30</sup>Messenger, Latin Hymns, p. 21.

Charlemagne's concern over the use of Romance language in the Mass instead of the proper Roman Latin prompted him to call for the education of the clergy as well as the secular citizenry. The clergy also shared his concern for the layman. Although the monks and priests used Latin in all their services they often used the vulgar language in tropes. This is true even in monasteries where the better educated clergy studied. The obvious reason for the use of the popular language was to increase the emotional fervor of the laity during the Mass. The Roman Church wanted a liturgy free from human errors and personal elements of individual song writers; yet the Church in Gaul needed a Christianity more intelligible to the common people.<sup>31</sup>

Evidently some members of the clergy were keenly aware of the need of the masses for an active and personal part in the services, for the vernacular was often used in introductions and instructions to the different parts of the Mass. These were written for the congregation and not for the priesthood. Epistles were troped by rendering the Latin into the common language, using the same melody for both, or by setting the vernacular to a totally new melody. Sometimes the Epistles were introduced by a trope exhorting the congregation to listen and feed on the Word.<sup>32</sup>

Now here, great and small, draw yourselves here  
toward this Scripture, then heed what I have read,  
this lesson and this (uttered) chant. I preach<sup>/?/</sup>  
to all that each one pray the good Lord that He

<sup>31</sup>Muller, "Pre-History of Drama," p. 549.

<sup>32</sup>Reese, Music in Middle Ages, p. 192.

dwelt in us and in our hearts make his bed and not hold our end in disdain. Lesson from the Book of the Apocalypse of the blessed Apostle John. Harken to the meaning and the sense of the vision of St. John . . . .<sup>33</sup>

The use of the vernacular in the service enabled the people to experience a more personal and vital relationship with the worship service.

The trope was probably used as an attention-getting device. The people were unaware of and sometimes unconcerned about the activity at the front of the church. Their participation in the service had been extremely curtailed and there was little stimulus left for them. There is a parallel rise in extra-liturgical (trope) developments with the decreased role-playing of the congregation. The events in chapter one recording the aggrandizement of the priest and the limiting of the laity occur at the same time as or shortly before the origin and popularity of the trope.

The secular worshipper, in order to be involved in the worship of the Church, required a more relevant part in the Mass than the performance allowed with its stress on the clergy. This need increased as the clergy more and more became the sole physical participants in the service and as the service became more "universal" by dropping the vernacular. Consequently the trope became a means of making the Mass a present experience, an experience the layman could identify with. It was a new teaching aid. The Church obviously thought much of this type

<sup>33</sup>Reese, Music in Middle Ages, p. 193.

of schooling for it also used frescoes and stained-glass windows to teach the layman.<sup>34</sup>

St. Ethelwold in Regularis Concordia (963-978) accepted the trope because it helped "to fortify the faith of the ignorant multitude and novices."<sup>35</sup> The trope was recognized as a means whereby the wandering eye of the people could be caught by the movement, the vernacular songs, and the richness of dress that it provided. Understandably, the mind of the unconcerned would be caught by the dramatic use of light and dark that the Easter and Christmas trope often used.

In one Easter trope the congregation is addressed when a member of the choir lifts an empty blanket to show that the body of Christ is no longer present but has been resurrected. This does not at first appear to be significant, but when one examines the liturgy of the Mass it is apparent that the congregation is not needed for the mystical rite nor does the congregation have to be acknowledged as ever being present. But the trope has no life without the presence of the worshippers. Where the priest has his back to those in front of the altar rail, the trope's action is usually always facing the viewers. The trope was a group effort. The trope was unnecessary for the transformation of the Host; the transubstantiation liturgy was complete and fixed. The trope was for the aid of the worshippers.

The trope is a corporate act done not for the praise of God as the Mass, but that the hearers and viewers will know why they should praise

<sup>34</sup>B. Hunninghea, The Origin of the Theatre (The Hague, 1955), p. 58.

<sup>35</sup>Seay, Music, p. 53.

God. It became a union between the action of the priest and the action of the people. The priest taught the people through the trope the lessons and meaning of the Mass and the Biblical story. The people were once again asked to take part in the service. Their position is still passive in the physical sense, but very active in the spiritual realization of knowing what is happening and becoming involved.

Ivo of Chartres (d. 1117) was aware of the need of making the services richer for the sake of the laity when he began reading the Gospel on the right side--for Christ preached to the Jews first--and the Epistle on the left--for they were written to the Gentile after the Jews rejected Christ.<sup>36</sup> This simple gesture created a dramatic atmosphere for the reading and gave a meaningful symbolic interpretation to the action.

The dramatic and symbolic interpolations into the services were, as Karl Mantzius points out, "compensation for the incomprehensible Latin words . . . ." <sup>37</sup> Ivo of Chartres was following a tradition as old as St. Augustine who in a Christmas service supposed he was addressing the Jews and summoned all the old prophets to retell their story of the coming of Christ. After the Old Testament prophecies had been heard the New Testament prophets appeared, who were in turn followed by the well-known heathen prophets: Virgil, Nebuchadnezzar, and the Sibyl. After

<sup>36</sup>Joseph A. Jungmann, The Mass of the Roman Rite, Its Origins and Development, trans. F. A. Brunner (New York, 1951), I, 108.

<sup>37</sup>Karl Mantzius, A History of Theatrical Art, trans. Louise Von Cassel (New York, 1937), II, 4.

this parade of wise and solemm men Augustine could exhort the congregation to believe in Christ for they had heard the very prophets tell of His coming.

A medieval service of even more dramatic intensity is the Slaughter of the Innocent in Bethlehem. The dramatic power of this trope over the layman can readily be seen. The choirboys, dressed in white, marched around the church with a lamb leading them. When they reached the front of the nave Herod ordered their death, at which time an angel called them and they rose to heaven as they walked to the choir, where they sang Te Deum.<sup>38</sup>

The famous Quem quaeritis is prefaced in the Regularis Concordia (965-75) with a reference to its value in teaching the "unlearned common persons": "if anyone should care or think fit to follow in a becoming manner certain religious men in a practice worthy to be imitated for the strengthening of the faith of unlearned common persons and neophytes, we have decreed this only . . . ." <sup>39</sup> From here the text proceeds to give detailed instruction on the performance of the trope.

The tropes were the means by which the clergy endeavored to involve the common worshippers more meaningfully.

<sup>38</sup>Karl Mantzius, A History of Theatrical Art, pp. 4-5.

<sup>39</sup>Hardison, Christian Rite, p. 192.

## CHAPTER III

The philosophy behind medieval symbolism was the notion that the universe is a finite expression of an infinite that gives the finite meaning and coherence. Nothing was seen in nature without its being considered an expression of some infinite idea. All things in nature are working together to express the infinite, although no one part alone can ever express the infinite perfectly. Medieval people called this underlying force in nature God, and felt that it was He who gave meaning to all things by a process of self-revelation through the working of the universe.<sup>1</sup> If symbols had been taken away from medieval man, he would have been incapable of expressing himself, even as all mankind would be limited.<sup>2</sup>

To say that a candle is a symbol does not mean that it is not what it is in everyday life, but only that it can be used to point to something beyond itself of greater consequence. All symbols are meant to point to something, yet there is a difference between them. In Language and Reality Urban makes a distinction between "intrinsic" and "insight" symbols. The intrinsic symbol points to something that can actually be known without the help of the symbol.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>H. Flanders Dunbar, Symbolism in Medieval Thought (New Haven, 1929), II, 16.

<sup>2</sup>A. N. Whitehead, "Uses of Symbolism" in Symbolism in Religion and Literature, Rollo May, ed. (New York, 1960), p. 234.

<sup>3</sup>Wilbur Marshall Urban, Language and Reality: Philosophy of Language and the Principles of Symbolism (New York, 1939), pp. 414-416.

In the case of the candle--if it represented the sun during the dark hours, it would be an intrinsic symbol, for the next morning the sun could again be experienced without the aid of a symbol. The insight symbol, however, cannot be completely, rationally known or experienced; rather it points to that which transcends human rational ability. When the candle is symbolic of the all-seeing eye of God, it is an insight symbol; it cannot be understood nonsymbolically. St. John, for instance, says that Christ is the Word. This goes beyond our rational or empirical abilities to understand.<sup>4</sup>

Paul Tillich designates insight symbols as pointing symbols, for they are actions and objects that point to something higher than the gesture and sensory objects themselves. Such religious symbols give concreteness to the transcendent. They allow the worshipper to see that which cannot be seen and in so doing they give to the transcendent objectivity.<sup>5</sup>

Of the two types of symbols, the medieval Church used insight symbols as its best means of communication. Insight symbols deal with that which is just beyond man's comprehension (the union of the infinite and the finite), convey a reality greater than the symbols, and penetrate to level after level of deeper truth.

All sensuous things to which a higher meaning--a meaning beyond any natural significance--is attributed are symbols. Symbolism is found in

<sup>4</sup>Maurice S. Friedman, "Religious Symbolism and Universal Religion," Journal of Religion, XXXVIII (October 1958), 216.

<sup>5</sup>Paul Tillich, "The Religious Symbol," trans. James Luther Adams and Ernst Frankel, The Journal of Liberal Religion, II (1940), 20-29.

all religions because of the dependence on intuition in spiritual matters. The expression of religious truth and abstract notions by analogous phenomena in the physical world is one of the common denominators in comparative religion. To communicate these differing conceptions to others, and to fix them by means of association, it is necessary to give them regular and repeated expression. Therefore, to be successful in conveying religious ideas, symbols are necessary. Le Roy H. Appleton and Stephen Bridges state that "symbols express visually a truth for which many words would be required."<sup>6</sup>

Symbolism has played an important role in the proclamation of the Christian faith. In the early Church the symbols of eternal life and the resurrection of Christ helped to keep morale at a higher level than otherwise would have been possible. In later periods Christianity developed symbols for its worship and doctrine to penetrate the hearts and minds of men. Many of the supernatural elements of Christianity came to be clearly suggested by symbolic words and signs.

In book III, chapter 7 of Sartor Resartus, Teufelsdröckh speaks as a man of the Middle Ages when he says, "Is not God's universe a symbol of the godlike; is not immensity a temple; is not man's history a perpetual evangel?"<sup>7</sup> Flanders Dunbar uses the rock as an example to show how a natural object was often taken as a symbol of the spiritual life. The rock may be seen as Christ, "the Rock of Ages," or it may

<sup>6</sup>Le Roy H. Appleton and Stephen Bridges, Symbolism in Liturgical Art (New York, 1959), p. v.

<sup>7</sup>Thomas Carlyle, Sartor Resartus, Book III, Chapter 7.

stand for what each believer should be to those around him or it may be the foundation of the kingdom of heaven. Here are three symbolic interpretations of one natural object, and each is an insight symbol. Indeed, the medieval mind saw an insight symbol in almost everything. A prominent characteristic of the period is its great use of symbolism in literature.<sup>8</sup>

Of course, the majority of men in any society are never caught up in the transcendent experiences of mystic thought and consequently cannot comprehend the mystical life. Spiritual experience is incapable of being wholly explained verbally for it becomes corrupted if described in words. Hence, nonverbal empirical symbols are often found as the best means of conveying the unexplainable.<sup>9</sup> Since the mystic cannot explain his feeling of oneness with the universe verbally, he may try to explain the feeling by using an empirical aesthetic form such as a circle. In time such symbols become meaningful to others who have not had the mystical experience but who have gained its meaningfulness by a process of association, intuitive insight, and use in a contextual framework.

The type of symbol used successfully in the church service has an inner spiritual meaning, an intellectual appeal, and an emotional stimulus, all perceived through as many of the five senses as possible. In other words, symbolism unites aspiration of spirit, mind, and body and so is a peculiarly useful tool in man's search for God.

<sup>8</sup>Dunbar, Symbolism, II, 20.

<sup>9</sup>Evelyn Underhill, Mysticism (London, 1962), p. 125.

The more profound symbols are those which appeal to the emotions.<sup>10</sup> The more the connotations that surround a symbol, the more meaningful it becomes. A symbol, to be powerful, appeals not only to man's rational side but to his heart and his emotions as well. Successful symbolism creates feelings of wonder, mystery, beauty, and passion.<sup>11</sup>

Successful use of religious symbols was employed in pre-Christian Jewish life, as well as in early Christianity. An example of early uses of Christian symbolism is the symbolic military dress which St. Paul describes in Ephesians vi, 11-17.

Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.

(Ephesians vi, 14-16)

Christian symbolism was clearly established when Augustine could, with a straight face, try to convince a skeptical Manichaeon that the Biblical story of David and Bathsheba was symbolic of Christ's (David's) longing for His bride (the Church), of the bride's washing herself of worldly sins, and of Bathsheba's slaughtered husband portraying the Devil.<sup>12</sup>

Several early Church Fathers used symbolism to point out the validity of specific Christian truths on the basis of their similarities

<sup>10</sup>Whitehead, "Uses of Symbolism," p. 247.

<sup>11</sup>Underhill, Mysticism, p. 126.

<sup>12</sup>H. L. B. Moss, The Birth of the Middle Ages: 395-814 (London, 1957), p. 259.

to universal concepts. Theophilus of Antioch wrote of the resurrection of seeds to fruits as symbolic of the resurrection of the dead. In the same vein, Clement of Rome writes: "day and night show us the resurrection; night sets, day rises; day departs, night comes."<sup>13</sup>

The Church had fully accepted symbolism when it became the guardian of culture in the Middle Ages, and so symbolism and allegory became the typical intellectual modes of the period.<sup>14</sup> Symbolism became a mental habit of the medieval preacher. In his sermons he not only gave the immediate, literal meaning of a Biblical passage but also expounded on the moral and mystical meaning. The Psalms of David are at once the religious experiences of one man, the experiences of all religious men and the experiences of a Christ. Medieval man came to think on a multi-symbolic level. When he saw religious drama, it was meaningful to him on the symbolic level. A modern writer using a great deal of symbolism runs the risk of obscurity, but the medieval poet was confident of being understood; for he shared with his readers a common tradition of symbolic understanding.<sup>15</sup> In popular medieval literature Piers Plowman occurs as an example of this tradition. It seems natural to conclude, then, that the churchmen who wrote the tropes were products of their age and probably wrote with the symbolic meaning foremost in their minds.

<sup>13</sup>Mircea Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York, 1961), pp. 136-137.

<sup>14</sup>Moss, Birth of Middle Ages, p. 258.

<sup>15</sup>Summerfield Baldwin, The Organization of Medieval Christianity in The Berkshire Studies in European History, ed. Richard A. Newhall and others (New York, 1929), pp. 173.

Naturally, the medieval audience required the use of symbols common to its everyday life. This may seemingly require Biblical illusions and liturgical jargon to be dropped because today we find them obscure. But this was not true of the population of medieval Europe,<sup>16</sup> for the churchgoer was continually being introduced to symbolism through sermons, daily conversation and even the very architecture of the church.

The famous sermon book by the monk Honorius of Autun, Speculum Ecclesiae, has as its chief aim an allegorical exegesis of Scripture. Honorius' allegories were neither new nor original, but they carried with them the impact of many generations of symbolic thought and were as profound and inviting as if they were.<sup>17</sup> The priest interpreted the Scriptures to the layman in his sermons and, it can be assumed, also in his daily conversation. He often used symbolism as a means to instruct the faithful in the meaningfulness of everything from numbers to the Ten Commandments. A sermon on the New Testament story of the Loaves and Fishes by Rypon of Durham, for instance, is an example of how the layman acquired the intellectual heritage of the clergy.<sup>18</sup>

By the five loaves, doctors understand the five Books of Moses which are aptly compared to a barley loaf; for a barley loaf on its outside is rough, in part, and harsh, yet within it is full of the purest flour. Likewise the Books of Moses, too, are rude when considered historically; nevertheless, within they

<sup>16</sup>Glynne Wickham, Early English Stages (London, 1959), I, 157.

<sup>17</sup>Henry Osborn Taylor, The Mediaeval Mind, 4th ed. (London, 1927), II, 76.

<sup>18</sup>G. R. Owst, Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England, 2nd ed. (New York, 1961), p. 58.

are full of moral senses and doctrines, useful alike to the preacher and to his audience.<sup>19</sup>

Rypon could have carried the symbolism deeper, as others did. He could have used the five loaves to represent Christ's five wounds, or the five stones David used to kill Goliath, or he could have had "each of the five loaves symbolizing a separate sacrament or religious act."<sup>20</sup>

The use of number symbolism became very popular during the Middle Ages. One sermon took the number "40" and tried to prove its religious importance by its repeated reoccurrence in sacred writing.

As Christ was forty weeks in His Mother's womb, and fasted forty days, and preached forty months, and was dead forty hours, so for forty days after His resurrection He appeared to (His Disciples) and continued the teaching which He had given them for forty months by many arguments, being made immortal for forty days.<sup>21</sup>

Such symbolizing in medieval sermons explains how the uneducated layman became proprietor of the complex symbolic thought of the educated clergy. Possibly, Piers Plowman is written by an uneducated poet who had inherited the tradition of symbolism, and it must be assumed that the unknown poet's peers had a similar common knowledge of symbolism. Without such an understanding the faithful could not have grasped the meaning of sermon or liturgy. Many meanings of symbolism ranging from the complex structure of the church building to the meaning of colors

<sup>19</sup>Quoted in Owst, Literature and Pulpit, p. 58.

<sup>20</sup>Owst, p. 62.

<sup>21</sup>Owst, p. 67.

and numbers, were constantly mentioned in medieval sermons and everyday conversation.<sup>22</sup>

The entire Mass was a symbolic act of the Christian drama. It was from earliest times a common and symbolic part of the Christian ritual.<sup>23</sup> After the Roman liturgy began to be accepted by the Anglo-Saxon and French Church in the eighth century, the Mass experienced two hundred years of growth and addition in its new setting,<sup>24</sup> but it was not fully complete until the eleventh century when the Credo and Agnus Dei were added.<sup>25</sup> In the ninth century the ecclesiastical year was fully established in hymnology, and the processional and extra-liturgical hymns of the Middle Ages were written around the festivals of Lent, Passion, Easter, Ascension, Advent, Nativity, Epiphany and Trinity.<sup>26</sup> Within these festivals the tropes had their greatest development.

During the time that the Mass was undergoing physical change there was a great deal of discussion about its meaning and interpretation. One of the foremost and earliest interpretations was necessarily symbolic; as would be expected, it came from the Eastern Church. A Syriac homily by Narsai who died in 502 instructs the viewers of the mass to,

<sup>22</sup>M. C. Nieuwbarn, Church Symbolism, trans. John Waterreus (St. Louis, 1910), p. 139.

<sup>23</sup>Karl Young, Drama of Medieval Church (Oxford, 1933), I, 16-17.

<sup>24</sup>Joseph A. Jungmann, The Mass of the Roman Rite, Its Origins and Development, trans. F. A. Brunner (New York, 1951), I, 75.

<sup>25</sup>Howard McKinney and W. R. Anderson, Music in History (Chicago, 1940), p. 120.

<sup>26</sup>Ruth Ellis Messenger, The Medieval Latin Hymn (Washington, D. C., 1953), p. 32.

. . . put away all anger and hatred and . . . see Jesus who is being led to death on our account. On the paten and in the cup He goes forth with the deacon to suffer. The bread on the paten and the wine in the cup are the symbols of His death. A symbol of His death these (deacons) bear on their hands and when they have set it on the altar and covered it, they typify His burial: not that these bear the image of the Jews, but rather of the watchers (i.e., the angels) who were ministering to the passion of the Son . . . . The priest who celebrates bears in himself the image of our Lord in that hour. All the priests in the sanctuary bear the image of the Apostles who met together at the sepulchre. The altar is a symbol of our Lord's tomb, and the bread and wine are the Body of the Lord which was embalmed and buried.<sup>27</sup>

The symbolism of the Middle Ages, therefore, was the heritage of Christian antiquity, for symbols were used and were expanded throughout the so-called "Dark Ages" and saw their full expression in the Mass of the medieval Church. The symbolic meaning of the Mass was highly developed and accepted by the ninth century and was used to explain its invisible truths.<sup>28</sup>

The first deliberative group movement to develop a full symbolization of the Roman Mass began with Alcuin, but as with so much of Alcuin's other activities, it was his students that achieved the greatest contribution. One in particular, Amalar the Bishop of Metz (780?-850) began the wholesale symbolic exposition of the Mass with his book Liber Officialis. Amalar was not content merely to explain his views for

<sup>27</sup>Narsai, The Liturgical Homilies of Narsai, trans. Dom R. H. Connelly, in Texts and Studies, Biblical and Patristic Literature (Cambridge, 1909), VIII, 3-4.

<sup>28</sup>O. B. Hardison, Christian Rite and Christian Drama in the Middle Ages (Baltimore, 1965), p. 36.

when he was copying the Roman liturgical text for use in the Frankish services, he freely admits in his Prologue:

I also put in some additions of my own, prompted by my own thought, where I felt that I could improve upon the book of Rome and Metz.<sup>29</sup>

Amalar's confession is an illustration of the freedom the clergy of the ninth century had and took advantage of regarding the official text of the Roman liturgy. The written exactness of the liturgy had not as yet assumed the holiness that was later attached to it. The tropes could easily be slipped into the services in such an atmosphere.

In his Liber Officialis Amalar gives the complete symbolic meaning of the Mass. He likens the Church year to the history of the Jews. The year begins with Septuagesima where the Alleluia and the Gloria in Excelsis are not heard, for the children of God are still in bondage in Babylon. This is winter, winter in nature, and winter in the soul of those far from Jerusalem. When Lent arrives, the Jews have returned to Jerusalem and spend forty-six years rebuilding the temple, just as the Christian spends forty-six days from the beginning of Lent to Holy Saturday cleansing his heart and making his heart's temple ready for God.<sup>30</sup>

The Bishop of Metz also held that the Mass symbolized the life of Christ. He divided the Mass into three broad biographical periods. The broadest of the periods is the first part of the Mass which runs from the

<sup>29</sup>Eleanor Shipley Duckett, Carolingian Portraits: A Study in the Ninth Century (Ann Arbor, 1962), p. 103.

<sup>30</sup>Duckett, Carolingian Portraits, p. 105.

Introit through the Gospel and symbolizes Christ's life up to His final entry into Jerusalem.<sup>31</sup>

The introduction to Amalar's Expositis (813-814) gives a brief outline of the involved symbolic innuendoes in the Mass.

The introit alludes to the chair of the Prophets (who announce the advent of Christ just as the singers announce the advent of the bishop) . . . . The Kyrie Eleison alludes to the Prophets at the time of Christ's coming, Zachary and his son John among them; the Gloria in excelsis Deo, points to that throng of angels who proclaimed to the shepherds the joyous tidings of our Lord's birth (and indeed in the Mass the bishop intones and the whole church joins in); the prima collecta refers to what our Lord did in His twelfth year . . . , the Epistle alludes to the preaching of John, the responsorium to the readiness of the Apostle when our Lord called them and they followed Him; the Alleluia to their joy . . . the Gospel to His preaching . . . . The rest of what happens in the Mass refers to the time from Sunday on . . . . The progress which the priest says from the secrets to the Nobis quoque peccatoribus signifies the prayer of Jesus on Mount Olivet.

The prayer after the consecration signifies the Passion of our Lord on the cross. When the priest bows down (at the Supplices), our Lord bows His head and dies. The slight lifting of the voice at Nobis quoque refers to the centurion's loud profession at the death of Jesus. The deacons at this point straighten up (they have been bowed to show their sorrow over the suffering of Christ until he is delivered) and begin to busy themselves with the Body of the Lord, to signify the steadfast courage which seized the women and their work at the grave. At the concluding doxology the celebrant and the deacon elevate the Host and the Chalice and then set them down again, to signify Nicodemus' and Joseph of Arimathea's taking down our Lord's corpse from the cross. The seven petitions of our Father typify the rest and quiet of the seventh day . . . .<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup>Young, Drama of Church, I, 81.

<sup>32</sup>Jungmann, Roman Rite, I, 89-90

Amalar's influence was widespread in France and the surrounding regions, but not without antagonism.<sup>33</sup> The excessive use of symbolism in Amalar's work was condemned in 838 by the Synod of Quiercy. This, however, did not stop the symbolic interpretation which continued to grow, nor did it stop Amalar's great influence.<sup>34</sup> In a letter written in 853, one of Amalar's critics, a certain Deacon Florus, complained that Amalar "has by his words, his lying books, his errors, and his fanciful and heretical discussion inflected and corrupted almost all the churches in France and many in other regions."<sup>35</sup> Florus goes on to state that the simpliciores or simple folk had a special love for Amalar's books.

The symbolism of the structural body of the Church, in which the Mass was said, also had a host of interpretations. Its shape symbolized the human body, the chancel being the head and the transept the arms. The shape also symbolized the cross on which Christ died and the four corners of the world for which Christ died.<sup>36</sup> It is not difficult to see how the clergy became preoccupied with symbolism; nothing escaped being viewed as symbolic.<sup>37</sup> Symbolism has a tendency

<sup>33</sup>Hardison, Christian Rite, p. 83.

<sup>34</sup>Jungmann, Roman Rite, I, 88.

<sup>35</sup>Hardison, Christian Rite, p. 38.

<sup>36</sup>Dunbar, Symbolism, II, 403.

<sup>37</sup>Dictionaries of allegories were popular in medieval Europe, the earliest being De formulis spiritalis intellegentiae by Bishop Euchewes of Lyons, who died in 450.

to be ungovernable, to become so prolific that it strangles itself.<sup>38</sup> Karl Young relates how far symbolism was carried when he says that cement that was used in the church "was made of the lime of charity, the sand of social service and the water of the spirit."<sup>39</sup> The Church in which Christ became flesh and blood and where He lived on earth was a symbol of the heavenly Jerusalem where God lived eternally. Finally the church of stone and wood built by mortals was symbol of the Church not made by human hands.<sup>40</sup>

The services of the Church provided much of the education in the Gothic Age. Even the buildings with their pictures, windows, and images were there to teach--symbols of God, of man's life cycle, and of the universe. The medieval artist translated into form the symbolic thought of the liturgist.<sup>41</sup> It would seem impossible for the trope to be anything other than part of the prolific use of symbolism used to teach the medieval man Christian doctrine. The trope was needed by the Church, for when the people could not take part in the Mass or even understand the language of worship, their attention wandered. The trope drew back their attention and taught lessons by its symbolism.

The imaginative clergy were interested in making the worship of the Church more meaningful to the unlearned follower, and they did so by use of symbols. Just as the medieval church was built in the center of

<sup>38</sup>Whitehead, "Uses of Symbolism," p. 233.

<sup>39</sup>Young, Drama of Church, I, 403.

<sup>40</sup>Nieuwbarn, Church Symbolism, pp. 11-12.

<sup>41</sup>Emile Male, Religious Art (New York, 1958), p. 61.

the town or village and towered far above all other buildings, Christian symbolism surpassed any other symbolism or means of expression used during the Middle Ages. Morton Bloomfield, however, in his "Symbolism in Medieval Literature" reminds us that Europe was not always Christian and that the monks and priests did not at first succeed in destroying all the pagan past.<sup>42</sup> He is correct in saying that the medieval man was not far removed from his classical and barbaric past and that he was influenced by them. However, in trying to prove that medieval literature was no more symbolic than all meaningful literature, he has to use such broad definitions of "meaningful" and "symbolic" that the words become meaningless. As for the medieval scholar being influenced by his more distant classical origins, such influence had to be either an archetypal influence or one that had been filtered through the Christian Church. Bloomfield even says that medieval symbolism must not be placed in a Christian context. Yet, even if the Mass was a new way to worship the sun god, it was still Christian.

By using symbolism as its means of expression and teaching, however, the Church was following an age-old tradition. Alfred North Whitehead states that a society or group leads its members into correct action by having them respond to its symbols. These symbols evoke a conditioned reaction on the part of the member and produce in him all sorts of individual and collective emotional responses.<sup>43</sup> The distinguishing

<sup>42</sup>Morton Bloomfield, "Symbolism in Medieval Literature," Modern Philology, LVI (November 1958), 73-81. Bloomfield believes that there is very little symbolism in medieval literature.

<sup>43</sup>Whitehead, "Uses of Symbolism," p. 240.

difference between the use of symbolism by the Church and its use by other groups is that the Church is conscious as well as unconscious of its action, while most groups are merely unconscious of their dependence on symbolism.

The above discussion has placed the trope in the larger context of medieval symbolism. Now we will examine the use of symbolism within the trope itself.

## CHAPTER IV

In his book Medieval English Poetry, John Speirs discusses the relationship between medieval painting, sculpture, and literature; and concludes that the greater part of these arts were symbolical and not simply representation or literal. He sums up with the following statement:

In the churches we find the pictorial and sculptural equivalents of the scenes and episodes of the religious literature . . . . The audiences for the poems and the Miracle Plays must also have been taught to "see" and, by way of symbolism, to think and feel largely by means of the paintings and sculptures in the churches. These images in colour, stone and wood were an essential part of their visible and imaginative world, and are mostly allegorical or symbolical, multiplex in meaning. The symbols are often highly sophisticated and elaborate, . . . . By means of these symbols, and with the aid of the preachers who expounded them, the audience of the poets must have been made accustomed to symbolism and expert at symbolical, not merely literal, interpretation. The medieval mind must have been filled by these images and symbols, and shaped by them; and therefore the conclusions for the poetry should be of interest. The symbolism of the one art may provide the modern reader with a clue to that of the other. It seems we cannot be on the wrong track if we expect to find symbolical meaning in medieval poetry.<sup>1</sup>

What Speirs has to say about medieval poetry holds equally true for the tropes. The trope writers used symbolism to enliven the Latin verse, for symbolism allowed the layman to "see" the trope. The medieval heritage of symbolism made it peculiarly appropriate for the trope, for it helped to instruct the layman and, at the same time, increased the dramatic impact of the service.

<sup>1</sup>John Speirs, Medieval English Poetry: The Non-Chaucerian Tradition (The Macmillan Co., 1957), p. 380.

The sophisticated understanding of symbolism by the medieval audience is very much evident in the trope. The trope writers were concerned with details of dress, use of color, and other symbols that would have no purpose other than for their symbolic meaning. The late medieval painting Giovanni Arnolfini and His Bride by Jan van Eyck remains a mystery to the modern viewer until its disguised symbolism is explained. But to its contemporary viewers its symbolic meaning was immediately recognized. In the same manner the modern reader of the tropes may carelessly pass over symbols that the medieval audience would have quickly recognized.

A close examination of the tropes will reveal their rich symbolism. The earliest text we have is the Quem quaeritis trope, which has two parts, one for the choir (the angels) and a second part (the followers of Christ) taken by one member of the choir. The dialogue ran thus:

Question:

Whom seek ye in the sepulchre, O followers of Christ?

Answer:

Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified, O celestial ones.

The Angels

He is not here, he is risen, just as he foretold. Go, announce he is risen from the sepulchre.<sup>2</sup>

It is from this simple beginning that the liturgical drama developed. There are, seemingly, no symbolic words, colors, or objects used in this early trope; we do not have recorded what the Marys wore nor the type of

<sup>2</sup>Joseph Quincy Adams, Chief Pre-Shakespearean Dramas (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1952), p. 3.

choir robes used. Later text records in more detail the action and dress of those taking part in the trope.

In the Depositio Crucis of the Abbey Church of Durham we have a detailed account of the Good Friday service. A large gold crucifix is placed upon a velvet cushion, embroidered with gold, between the legs of two members of the choir while all the monks, after removing their shoes, creep to the crucifix and kiss it. After the last monk has kissed the crucifix it is taken to a prepared sepulcher and placed therein along with a picture of Christ to which had been attached the blessed Sacrament. Two candles were placed before the sepulcher until Easter day. This action took place after the Passion was sung.<sup>3</sup>

The great detail with which the Durham service was recorded is understandable when one realizes its symbolic value.<sup>4</sup> The crucifix is a Passion symbol of the suffering Savior. It is the symbolic Christ who has died and whose followers are coming to pay their last respects before the body is placed in the tomb. The gold of the crucifix and the gold embroidery remind them of Christ's heavenly glory, for gold was

<sup>3</sup>Adams, Dramas, p. 4.

<sup>4</sup>The following books were helpful in understanding medieval symbolism: Le Roy Appleton and Stephen Bridges, Symbolism in Liturgical Art (New York, 1959).

Jean Danielou, Primitive Christian Symbols, trans. Donald Attwater (Baltimore, Helicon Press, 1964).

H. Flanders Dunbar, Symbolism in Medieval Thought and Its Consummation in the Divine Comedy (New Haven, 1929).

M. C. Nieuwbarn, Church Symbolism, trans. John Waterreus (St. Louis, 1910).

F. Ernest Johnson, Religious Symbolism (New York, 1955).

the heavenly element of which the eternal streets were to be paved. The act of reverence shown by removing the shoes before approaching to kiss the crucifix was at once recognized as being symbolic of holy ground, a tradition going back to the burning bush in the wilderness. The placing in the sepulcher is a continuation of the symbolic enactment of the death of Christ, although the placing of the Sacrament on one of the crucifixes makes the act partly actual. Once the body is placed in its tomb two candles are placed on each side to proclaim that this is Christ, the Light of the World.

The Easter Day (Elevatio Crucis) service at Durham was even more carefully recorded. While singing the anthem "Christus resurgens," two monks dressed in red velvet, the cloth of kings and the color of martyrdom which proclaims love and justice, removed the crucifix from the sepulcher that had been set up on Good Friday. Approaching the tomb, they censured the whole area. The censers were of silver, the metal of chastity, symbolic of Christ's purity. The smoke of the incense is symbolic of the prayers and the worship of the faithful that is due the resurrected Christ. The crucifix was then elevated so all could see the Blessed Host encased in clear glass. The elevation is symbolic of the resurrection of the Savior. A procession then began carrying the crucifix around the church. Young is referring to such practices when he writes, "Symbolism of a more or less imitative sort appears in the frequent practice of carrying venerated objects in the procession."<sup>5</sup> The crucifix

<sup>5</sup>Karl Young, The Drama of the Medieval Church, I (Oxford, 1933), p. 91.

is covered by a canopy of purple velvet, red silk, and gold, symbolic of royal dignity, love and martyrdom, and heavenly glory respectively. The procession was accompanied by great singing and great light, thus literally and symbolically telling the people that the Light of the World lives. The procession made its way back to the high altar where the crucifix would remain until Ascension Day. Hanging above the altar, the crucifix was a symbol of Christ's presence on earth until His ascension.<sup>6</sup>

In a trope performed at Tours, the instruction is given that two boys should be dressed in albs, one on the left and one on the right side of the apse, to perform the trope. The specific direction that they be dressed in albs, since this was not an unusual dress, implies that its symbolic meaning was important to the understanding of the trope.<sup>7</sup> The alb is a white linen vestment symbolizing the innocence of Christ before Herod and the mockery He endured while dressed in a similar robe. The sleeves, chest and hem were often embroidered to symbolize the five wounds of Christ.

These two boys sing, "Whom seek ye in the sepulchre, O followers of Christ?" They are answered by three chaplains, "Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified, O celestial ones." Each of these three is dressed in a dalmatic, a vestment worn by deacons. It was cut in the shape of a cross, referring to the cross of Christ, and was a symbol of joy and salvation.

<sup>6</sup>Adams, Dramas p. 4-5.

<sup>7</sup>Henry Osborn Taylor, The Mediaeval Mind, 4th ed. (London, 1927), II, 103. Taylor states that every article of the priestly vestments was symbolic.

The boys dressed in albs respond, "He is not here; he is risen, just as he foretold. Go, announce that he is risen from the dead." The three say, "Alleluia, the Lord is risen!"<sup>8</sup>

Those that proclaim that Christ is no longer in the sepulcher are dressed in the white robe of innocence, a testimonial that He is free from any guilt and by His wounds will redeem men. It is even more appropriate that those who shout the good news are symbolically dressed in His cross, the way to joy and salvation.

Such minor detail was not overlooked by medieval trope writers and was inserted because of its significance, for these symbolic lessons were the popular catechism of the day.<sup>9</sup>

Originally there was nothing mysterious or unusual about clerical vestments. They were all ordinary articles of everyday dress, worn by clergy and laity alike. But as modes of dress changed, the conservative clergy was not hasty in accepting new styles. The liturgical dress was also associated with the dress of saints and with the divine service, and slowly it became sacred. By the seventh century, what had been the dress of the private citizens and officials of Rome became the distinctive dress of the clergy. And in keeping with medieval practice, the distinctive and venerable garb of the clergy set them apart and became symbolic.<sup>10</sup>

When the trope writer took pains to include the specific type of dress, rather than let the choir members wear their usual dress of

<sup>8</sup>Adams, Drama, p. 6.

<sup>9</sup>Nieuwbarn, Church Symbolism, p. 7.

<sup>10</sup>Dom Gregory Dix, The Shape of the Liturgy, 2nd ed. (Glasgow, 1949), pp. 397-404.

albs,<sup>11</sup> he did so with purposeful intent. When the instruction is given that albs should be worn the trope writer is insisting that the symbolic meaning of the garment is important to the meaning of the trope and that the choir member should not use this special occasion to dress in more elaborate vestments.

In the ninth century the alb had a week of religious services named after it. The week following Easter was known as octava in albis (the octave of white robes). It was during this week that the Church celebrated the Resurrection. During the services of this week the choir wore only albs, for its members became symbols of the resurrected Christian in the New Jerusalem.<sup>12</sup> The alb was symbolic of the redemption of man by the purity and wounds of Christ.

A trope recorded at the St. Martin of Tours shrine in France instructs two young choir members dressed in dalmatics to stand before St. Martin's tomb. These two young boys were joined by two deacons who were given directions to re-vest in white dalmatics before they took part in the trope.

The deacons begin:  
Whom do you seek?

And two boys standing before the singer reply:  
Jesus of Nazareth.

Deacons:  
He is not here.

<sup>11</sup>Dom David Knowles, The Monastic Order in England (Cambridge, 1950), p. 543.

<sup>12</sup>O. B. Hardison, Jr., Christian Rite and Christian Drama in the Middle Ages (Baltimore, 1965), p. 83.

Boys:

Alleluia, the Lord has risen.<sup>13</sup>

Notice in this trope both the deacons and the younger boys take part in telling the world that Christ lives. The deacons respond that Christ was not in the tomb, and the boys knowingly relate that "the Lord has risen." One garment was fitting for both parts of the trope. The dalmatic was made in the shape of the cross, the symbol of Christ's death and not of His Resurrection; yet it was also the symbol of salvation which could not be achieved without the victory of Christ over the grave. Therefore, the men who relate to the worshippers that Christ is no longer in the tomb are dressed in the instrument of His death, by which joy and redemption come to man. Further symbolism is seen in the dalmatic's colors. The garment is basically white, which symbolizes joy and purity; but it has two red or purple bands which cross each shoulder and run down to the hem in front and back. The red symbolizes love and suffering.

The dalmatic was reserved for the deacon or more important clergy and was usually worn for extremely solemn occasions. In this trope, however, the writer deemed it important that the two young boys be vested in this symbol of the Passion of Christ. Therefore, liberty was taken with the rules governing liturgical dress in order to impress upon the viewer the symbolic meaning of the two groups of characters in this trope.

The Regularis Concordia of St. Ethelwold records a trope that uses much more variety in the dress of the priest.

<sup>13</sup>Hardison, Rite, pp. 200, 297.

While the third lesson is being chanted, let four brethren vest themselves; of whom let one, vested in an alb, enter as if to take part in the service, and let him without being observed approach the place of the sepulchre, and there holding a palm in his hand, let him sit down quietly. While the third responsory is being sung, let the remaining three follow, all of them vested in copes, and carrying in their hands censers filled with incense; and slowly, in the manner of seeking something, let them come before the place of the sepulchre. These things are done in imitation of the angel seated in the monument, and of the women coming with spices to anoint the body of Jesus. When therefore that one seated shall see the three, as if straying about and seeking something, approach him, let him begin in a dulcet voice of medium pitch to sing:

Whom seek ye in the sepulchre, O followers of Christ?

When he has sung this to the end, let the three respond in unison:

Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified, O celestial one.

To whom that one:

He is not here; he is risen, just as he foretold.  
Go, announce that he is risen from the dead.

At the word of this command let those three turn themselves to the choir, saying:

Alleluia! The Lord is risen today, the strong lion, the Christ, the Son of God. Give thanks to God, huzza!

This said, let the former, again seating himself, as if recalling them, sing the anthem:

Come, and see the place where the Lord was. Alleluia!  
Alleluia!

And saying this, let him rise, and let him lift the veil and show them the place bare of the cross, but only the cloths laid there with which the cross was wrapped. Seeing which, let them set down the censers which they carried into the same sepulchre, and let them take up the cloth and spread it out before the eyes of the clergy; and, as if making known that the Lord has risen and was not now therein wrapped, let them sing this anthem:

The Lord is risen from the sepulchre, who for us  
hung upon the cross.

And let them place the cloth upon the altar. The  
anthem being ended, let the Prior, rejoicing with  
them at the triumph of our King, in that, having  
conquered death, he arose, begin the hymn:

We praise thee, O God.

This begun, all the bells chime out together.<sup>14</sup>

This Easter trope gives a much fuller example of the use of symbolism than the tropes we have already examined. Again the angel that announces that Jesus is risen from the dead is dressed in the vestment of purity ornamented with the five wounds of Christ--the wounds that caused His death and purchased life for men.

The men dressed in copes approach the sepulcher with censers in imitation of the Marys carrying spices to anoint the body of Jesus. These were the women closest to Jesus while He lived. They were the ones most devoted to Him. To assume their character, the men carry censers that are symbolic of the prayers of the faithful. The tradition of the censer and its smoke as a symbol of the prayers of the devout rests upon Psalm cxli,2: "Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense . . . ."

The cope that these holy "women" wore was a cloak which was opened all the way down in the front and was buttoned at the chest. It was usually made of silk in order to stress the solemnity of the occasions when it was used. The cope was a symbol of purity and dignity. The cope and censer are befitting symbols, for the Marys were devout women

<sup>14</sup>Adams, Drama, p. 9.

devoted to Christ, pure in heart and body; and they were well aware of the importance of their role in anointing the body of their dead friend.

The angel holds a palm in his hand as he relates the return of Christ to life. The carrying of a palm by an angel signifies that the angel was no ordinary visitor to earth, but a heavenly messenger from God. The palm also had a meaning similar to the evergreen tree in Northern Europe. It meant victory over death, perpetual life.

The use of the palm and the censer was like an aside in Elizabethan drama which captured the eye of the audience by directing their attention to a single actor who addressed them personally. No matter how cold the church was, no matter how many times the Mass had been observed, when these objects were waved before the congregation they caught the eye of the worshippers and directed their attention toward the story of Christ's death.

One can imagine the craning of necks at the end of the trope when the grave-cloth was held up for all the world to see that Jesus had in truth been raised from the dead.

The cross was removed from the altar, covered with a grave-cloth, and placed in the sepulcher. Of course the cross was the symbol of Christ. On Good Friday the cross was placed in the sepulcher. Sometime between that day and Easter Sunday a priest had removed it from the sepulcher so the symbol of the risen Christ would be complete. When the empty cloth was held up for all to see, a hymn was sung and the church bells began ringing to celebrate the victory of Christ.

The grave-cloth was the cloth that covered the altar during regular services. It was made from white linen and was always placed on the

altar during Mass as a symbol of the cloth with which Joseph of Arimathea wrapped the dead body of Christ.<sup>15</sup>

The complexity of the sepulcher used in the Easter trope increased as the complexity of the liturgy increased. The sepulcher began as the high altar itself, and later as a separate and highly ornate structure.

In the medieval Church several extra-liturgical ceremonies took place about these symbolizations of the sepulcher of Christ. One of the earliest records describing one of these services is in Liber de Officiis Ecclesiasticis by John of Auranches, Archbishop of Rouen from 1063-1079.

When these /i.e., lessons and prayers/ have been completed, let two priests, in chasubles,--singing the antiphon Popule meus bring a veiled cross; to whom let two others in copes, standing in the midst of the choir, reply, with the Greek word Agios, and let all the others say the Sanctus, which is three times repeated . . . . When this has been done /adoration to the cross/, let the crucifix, in commemoration of the blood and water flowing from the side of the Redeemer, be washed with wine and water, of which the clergy and the people should drink after the holy communion. After the responsory Sicut ovis ad occasionem, let them bring the cross to a certain place fitted up in the manner of a sepulchre where it should be laid away until Sunday.<sup>16</sup>

John of Auranches' record shows the natural union between the trope and the symbolic meaning of medieval ceremony. The above trope is the Depositio of Good Friday.

<sup>15</sup>Nieuwbarn, Symbolism, p. 63.

<sup>16</sup>Neil C. Brooks, "The Sepulchre of Christ in Art and Liturgy," University of Illinois Studies in Language and Literature, VII (1921), 31.

Another symbolic use of the sepulcher is the trope performed on Maundy Thursday. Good Friday is the only day in the Catholic liturgy that a Host cannot be consecrated; so the priest is instructed to consecrate two Hosts on Thursday. The second Host is then "entombed" in the sepulcher.<sup>17</sup>

Color symbolism also played an important part in the meaning of the tropes. In an Easter trope from the church of St. John the Evangelist in Dublin, instruction is given about the color of garments the apostles were to wear.

Meanwhile let there come to the entrance of the choir two persons barefooted, impersonating the apostles John and Peter, clad in albs without ornaments, with tunics, of whom John clothed in a white tunic, carrying a palm in his hand, Peter clad in a red tunic, carrying the keys in his hand; . . .<sup>18</sup>

Notice that the albs worn by Peter and John are to be free of ornaments--that is, albs without the symbols of the five wounds on them. In the other tropes discussed, it was always the angels, who proclaimed that Christ had risen, who had worn the albs. These angels were supernatural beings who were symbols of the victory of Christ over the grave, but Peter and John were men. They were men worthy of the alb, for they also would be mocked before "Herods" as Christ was, but the trope writer would not allow them to wear the wounds of Christ because of the symbolic meaning related to the death of Jesus.

<sup>17</sup>Brooks, "Sepulchre," pp. 21-32.

<sup>18</sup>Adams, Dramas, p. 13.

Over the albs the apostles wore tunics. John, who later in the trope is referred to as "that disciple whom Jesus loved," wears a white tunic and carries a palm. There is no way to know exactly why John wore a white tunic and held a palm. But the palm probably refers to the triumphal Christ that John writes about in his Gospel, and the white could allude to John's great faith in Jesus.

Peter's dress is much easier to understand. He holds in his hands keys that are symbolic of the authority Christ gave him (Matthew xvi,19), and the red no doubt refers to his saintly death and his episcopal authority. Since both Peter and John are barefoot the events that they are going to take part in are understood to be sacred and the ground holy.

The trope writer was deeply concerned with the worshippers. Without their presence all his efforts would be for nought. He was writing to involve the layman in the worship service and hoping to instruct him. The writer of the Easter trope from St. Lambrecht demonstrates his concern by including singing in the vernacular.

Meanwhile, toward the end of the third lesson, /let/ the sacrist /give/ a candle to each brother, and the deacon should vest himself in a white stole, and go to sit on the stone of the tomb. When the third response has been begun for the second time, all the candles having been lit, the chief singer should form a procession in the following order: first the scholars with the teacher, then the abbot, next the older /clerics/, then the junior ones and the untaught. But those who are to visit the sepulcher in the person of the holy women should remain in the choir and veil their heads with humerals or with the hoods of their copes. The rest of the convent should go, as stated, to the place of the sepulcher and /stand/ there in silence. The aforesaid three should say three times in a subdued voice:

Who will remove the stone from the door that we see covering the holy tomb?

To whom the deacon playing the angel should reply, saying:

Whom seek you, O fearful women, weeping at this tomb?

And they to him:

We seek Jesus of Nazareth.

To whom he replies:

He whom you seek is not here; but go swiftly; tell the disciples and Peter that Jesus has arisen.

After this, as they draw near, he should rise and withdraw the curtain and show the sepulcher, and say to them:

Come and see the place where the Lord was placed, alleluia, alleluia.

The /women/, approaching with bowed heads, should look within the sepulcher, and, taking from there the veil in which the cross was wrapped and the sudary which was over the top of the cross, and returning, they should stand near the altar and before it and sing in a loud voice:

We came to the tomb lamenting, we saw an angel of the Lord seated there and saying that the Lord has arisen.

This said, the whole convent should sing together, saying:

Tell us, Maria, what did you see on the way?

And one of the three who visited the sepulcher should say in a loud voice:

I saw the sepulcher of the living Christ, and the glory of His rising.

The second should say:

An angel was witness, and the sudary and the graveclothes.

And the third should add:

Christ has risen, my hope; he precedes His  
/disciples/ in Galilee.

After this the whole convent should say:

A single truthful Mary is more to be believed  
than /the lying tribe of the Jews/.

Then the people should begin this song:

Three women went to the holy grave.

. . . let the three aforementioned /women/ come  
before the near altar displaying the graveclothes,  
so that all can see them, singing:

Behold, O companions, behold the graveclothes and  
sudary, and the body is not in the tomb.

And next they should raise the cross on high,  
singing in a loud voice:

The Lord has arisen from the sepulcher.

The whole convent should sing along with them.  
After this the abbot or prior should begin  
Te Deum laudamus; and, singing the hymn, they  
should return to the choir, the people singing  
"Christ has arisen."<sup>19</sup>

In this trope the St. Lambrecht writer involves the congregation in the action. Twice the lay-people, joining in singing a vernacular hymn, actually become "one" of the participants in the trope. Notice also that the grave-cloths are taken to the altar to be displayed, insuring a clear view for all worshippers.

The symbolic importance of dress is also brought out in this trope. In most tropes the angels are instructed to wear albs, but in this one the angel wears a white stole. The stole is a narrow vestment worn around

<sup>19</sup>Hardison, Rite, pp. 234, 299-300.

the neck and across the breast. It was a sign of the hope of immortality in Christ. The fact that the garments can be interchangeable implies that the vestments were not for liturgical purposes, but were selected for their symbolic meaning. Both vestments point to the victory of Christ over death, both are acceptable to the trope writers, whereas only specific garments could be worn during the liturgical part of the Mass.<sup>20</sup>

The majority of tropes that have been preserved are part of the Good Friday-Easter services, such as the one from St. Lambrecht; however, there are others that equally demonstrate the use of symbolism. One example is the Palm Sunday procession. The use of symbolism in the procession into the town from some high point outside the city walls is seen in the carrying of the Gospel Book, symbolizing Christ. In the absence of the real, one points to an object that reminds one of the real. If the king is away, one points to the throne; if Christ is not physically entering the procession, then symbolically He is.

An impressive development around the Palm Sunday procession was the pulling of a figure of Christ on a wooden ass called a Palmesel. The use of the Palmesel is found as early as 973 at Augsburg. The rite remained orderly and serious and increased in symbolic importance until the late Middle Ages. After passing over carpets and past palm-waving people, the Palmesel was placed in the church, where hymns were sung and the worshippers knelt in its presence. Tropes were added to the procession to make this one of the most symbolic of the early liturgical dramas.

<sup>20</sup>Hardison, Rite, p. 236.

The procession usually began from some high hill and proceeded to the church. In towns where there was no Palmesel available, it was substituted by the Host or by a cross. The Gospel Book was carried in the procession with at least one candle accompanying it, thus drawing on the double symbol of the Word being a light unto the believer's feet and of Christ being the light of the world.<sup>21</sup>

As the procession moved toward the church the people waved palms before the various symbols of Christ and often threw carpets in the roadway. The palm, as has been noted, is an ancient symbol of victory and triumph. And in this procession the palms were symbolic of Christ's kingship, for the march to the church is itself symbolic of the entry of Christ into Jerusalem recorded in St. John xii,12-13: "On the next day . . . when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried, Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord."

The very space in the procession assumed symbolic importance. The hill where the procession began stood for the Mount of Olives and the church became Jerusalem.<sup>22</sup>

Upon reaching the church a short service of singing and prayer was held before the march continued into the building for Mass. A ceremony dating at least to the ninth century and probably much earlier records a dramatic dialogue between Christ and Satan before Christ enters the church victoriously.

<sup>21</sup>Young, Drama at Church, I, 90-97.

<sup>22</sup>Hardison, Rite, p. 112.

. . . let the bishop /pontifex/ or priest ascend to the west portal: and striking it with a staff or the wood of the cross, let him say in a loud voice, Attollite portas principes vestras: et elcoimini portas enternales: et introibit Rex gloriae. Then two cannons standing within the church should reply in the same tone, Quis est iste Rex gloriae. And the bishop should say, Dominus fortis et potens. Again let the bishop or priest strike the door and say in a still louder voice, Attollite portas. And those within the church reply as before but louder, Quis est iste Rex gloriae. Then the bishop or priest should say, Dominus potens in proclio. And again the priest should strike the door and say in a still louder voice, Attollite portas. And those within reply still more loudly, Quis est iste Rex gloriae. And the priest replies, Dominus virtutum ipse est Rex gloriae. This completed, the doors should be opened and the cantor should begin the response Ingrédiente Domino.<sup>23</sup>

The excitement that this trope would generate is obvious. Christ is not only victorious against evil men, but He is able to do battle with the Devil himself.

The candles carried in the Palm Sunday procession are an excellent example of the importance of candles (light and dark) in medieval symbolism. In the beginning of Christianity the altar was bare, and nothing was allowed on it. The use of candles upon the altar did not begin in the West until the ninth century. The slow acceptance of candles upon the altar did not begin out of any utilitarian purpose but for ceremonial and symbolic purposes.<sup>24</sup> Candles give light and comfort to those in darkness, just as Christ brings light to those in the darkness of sin and comforts those in the uninviting world.

<sup>23</sup>Hardison, Rite, pp. 114-115.

<sup>24</sup>Dix, Liturgy, p. 417.

One of the ceremonial uses of candles in the church services centered around the reading of the Gospel. The scripture "Thy word is a lantern unto my feet and a light unto my paths" was literally interpreted. Thus, a candle became the symbol of God's Word, lighting the way to Heaven. The processional where the Gospel Book was carried around the church always had candles to precede the book. This arrangement was symbolic of the preaching of the Word of Christ and of His bringing light to men.<sup>25</sup>

Candles also were symbolic of Christ, the Lord of light. After all, Christ had freed men from darkness and the sin of Adam. He had replaced darkness with light and fear with joy; and the candle was, therefore, a token of joy, a symbol of the Light of the World.

In order for Christ to bring light to the world it was necessary for Him to spend Himself. Christ gave up His substance, His life, in order to free man from darkness. Likewise, the candle is destroyed as it gives light. Hugh of St. Victor presents a typical medieval relationship between Christ and a candle.

Just as wax is formed in the virginal body of the bee, and this, made into a candle, surrounds the wick, and from the union of these two light is produced, so in like manner the Body of the Lord, taken from the spotless Virgin-Mother and surrounding His glorious soul, when united to His Divine nature, sheds its light over all creation.<sup>26</sup>

The symbolic use of lights became an important part of the Holy Week services. When the death of Christ was retold by the priest often

<sup>25</sup>Dix, Liturgy, pp. 417-419.

<sup>26</sup>Nieuwbarn, Symbolism, pp. 64-65.

the candles in the church were put out at the point in the story where Christ dies.

An impressive, symbolic act during Holy Week occurred at Matins and Lauds on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. At these times a service called Tenebrae was conducted where a number of candles, usually fifteen in number, one for each of the psalms read, was put out after each psalm. By the end of the service only one candle was left which was placed behind the altar. The symbolic effect of the gradual darkening of the Church or the world at the death of Christ, would leave the worshipper deeply impressed.<sup>27</sup>

In a late trope from Coutances, France, the Roman soldiers who had been placed by Pilate before the grave of Christ fell powerless, as if dead. Two choir members then appeared carrying two candelabra with ten candles each. The light overpowered the soldiers as the Light of the World returned from Hell and was resurrected.<sup>28</sup>

A thirteenth century trope from Orleans, France, makes dramatic use of the symbolic candelabrum. When the Marys go to the tomb of Christ to "putrify the Blessed Flesh," they are greeted by an angel holding in his left hand a palm, and in his right hand a candelabrum. The angel responds to the women:

Why, O followers of Christ, seek ye the living  
among the dead?

He is not here; he is risen, as he foretold to  
his disciples.

<sup>27</sup>Young, Drama of Church, I, 101.

<sup>28</sup>Young, Drama of Church, I, 408-410.

Remember now what he said to you in Galilee,

That it behoved the Christ to suffer, and on  
the third day

To rise with glory.<sup>29</sup>

The palm is a symbol of a heavenly messenger, but it is in the left hand, for the right hand correctly holds the more important token of joy. The blaze of light from the candelabrum tells the world that Jesus of Nazareth is risen to dispel the darkness of the world, to bring life.

The Resurrection was a dramatic change from death to life, a change from mourning to rejoicing. Light and darkness as symbols of death and life were used in early Christian worship and added great drama to the medieval Holy Week services. The Exsultet chant recited during Holy Week proclaims the joys of the Resurrection using light as its major symbol:

Let the earth also be filled with joy, aglow  
with so great a glory: and let her know that  
the darkness which overspread the whole world  
is chased away by the splendor of our eternal  
King.<sup>30</sup>

A trope from the Cathedral of Laon illustrates the beautiful and dramatic use of light symbolism in the medieval Church. The trope is linked with the Easter Vigil. During the vigil God is referred to as One "who makes the night radiant,"<sup>31</sup> and this theme is carried out when the darkened church is entered from the rear by a procession led by a

<sup>29</sup>Adams, Drama, p. 16.

<sup>30</sup>Hardison, Rite, p. 148.

<sup>31</sup>Hardison, Rite, p. 145.

choir member carrying a candle. This candle was used to light the large paschal candle, the symbol of Christ. The trope begins after the procession reaches the paschal candle.

On Easter at matins two bells are rung together; six candles are placed next to the great /paschal/ candle before the altar. While the bells are being rung, a procession goes from the altar to the sepulcher in this order. Two acolytes with candles, two with thuribles, two deacons, another two to chant Dicant nunc, a chief singer, and one assistant. All these are dressed in white copes; the others follow in order, each one carrying a lighted candle. The aforesaid deacons, coming to the door of the sepulcher, begin:

My heart burns.

An acolyte in the sepulcher:

Whom do you seek?

Deacons:

Jesus of Nazareth.

Acolyte:

He is not here.

This finished, a priest, dressed in a white alb and emerging from the sepulcher carrying a cup with the Corpus Christi, finds the four acolytes before the door carrying a canopy on staffs, and covered by this, moves to the head of the procession. The acolytes with candles precede him; the other two stand next to him with thuribles. Then the aforesaid deacons say:

The Lord has risen, alleluia.

After this the singer and his assistant begin this part of the antiphon:

When Christ the King of Glory.  
You have come, O adorable one.

And singing thus all proceed to the middle of the church before the crucifix. After the antiphon:

Christ arising.

Two canons with copes /sing/ the versicle Dicant nunc. After the versicle the procession enters the chorus singing:

Because he lives, he lives in God.

The priest places the cup on the altar. Meanwhile the bells are rung together.<sup>32</sup>

When the paschal candle was lit the church was illuminated by the candles of the worshippers also. When this celebration begins the worshippers are sitting in darkness. When it ends the church is illuminated, and the believers are told that the "Lord has risen, alleluia." The Easter Vigil with its accompanying trope was one of the many occasions when the Church used the trope as a means to teach the layman the difference between the philosophy of the Pagan in his darkness and the philosophy of the Christian who believed in the Light of the World.<sup>33</sup>

The services of the Church were the great educators of the Gothic Age. The building with its pictures, windows, and images was there to teach; these objects were symbols of God, man's life-cycle, and the universe. It is impossible for the tropes to be anything other than part of the prolific use of symbolism used to teach the medieval man the Christian doctrine. The tropes were needed by the Church, for when the people could not take part in the Mass or even understand the language of worship, their attention wandered. The tropes drew their attention and taught a lesson through symbolism.

<sup>32</sup>Hardison, Rite, pp. 206-298.

<sup>33</sup>Hardison, Rite, p. 208.

It is unnecessary to extend the list of examples, for the ones given are enough to show that the tropes were symbolically oriented. The tropes were not art-for-art's-sake but servants of the faith and worship, a dispenser of the truths of faith and salvation. They introduced the people to the divine mysteries and established the believers in the knowledge of the plan of Christian doctrine.

## EPILOGUE

The redemptive purpose of the trope became clouded by abuses and excesses. There is no date that can be given as the year when tropes lost their symbolic value. In fact, they never completely lost their symbolism, for symbolism was a habit of thought; but it became secondary, meaningless, and robbed of its spiritual wealth. The comic situation of the tropes became the death shroud of symbolism. The dramatic effect overpowered the mysteries. Eventually the symbolism became unfruitful and was cast into the fire to be replaced with the dramatic elements.

The stage directions of a twelfth century trope from the Abbey Saint-Benoit-sur-Loire show a surprising lack of symbolism. In the place of symbolism there is dramatic effect which undoubtedly kept the attention of the people. The dramatic and entertaining effect of the Herodes of Saint-Benoit-sur-Loire turned the center of attention away from the strictly religious lesson to the very real characters. There is a great deal of movement within the trope which establishes it as an active dramatic device. The trope is much longer than earlier ones; in fact, it is a combination of the story of the Magi and the Shepherds.

The directions for dress leaves out the naming of any symbolic vestment but refers to the "garb of young gallants." The directions for action increase:

Then let Herod, having seen the prophecy kindled  
with rage, hurl the book to the floor; but let  
his son, hearing the tumult, advance to calm his  
father, and, standing salute him.

Then let the son, speaking contemptuously of  
Christ . . . .

The language becomes more ornate and expanded. The simple statement of early tropes gives way to:

He whom heaven, earth, and the wide seas  
 Could not contain in their own magnitude,  
 Born from the womb of a virgin,  
 Is lying in a manger.

The bright star has blinded our eyes with  
 its dazzling light,  
 The gleaming brilliance prudently leading  
 us to the cradle.<sup>34</sup>

The writer becomes concerned with his work as art. He makes it more beautiful and descriptive, paying more attention to description than to symbolism. After all, Christ did not come to blind men, but to free humanity from the blindness of error. This trope appears little more than a framework within which the writer can try his art.

Even if symbolism during the late medieval period was becoming subordinate to dramatization in the tropes, it was not completely dropped; for it was an established tradition, a habit which the people followed as well as the trope writers. Nevertheless, the development of impersonation, dialogue, or characterization tended to make symbolism lose its importance; it was replaced by reality which was more interesting.

A fourteenth and fifteenth century trope on the Judean shepherds gives directions that the participants wear tunics, amices, and dalmatics, all symbolic liturgical vestments, but advises the angel to be "dressed like an angel." After these three symbolic vestments are put on, there is no mention of symbolism.

In The Prophets, from a thirteenth century manuscript, a list of

<sup>34</sup>Adams, Drama, pp. 32-39.

characters is given, thirteen in all. Of these only five are given symbolic clothes: three wear dalmatics, Isaiah has a red stole, Moses has a table of the laws, Virgil has an ink-horn and candlesticks. Simeon and Balaam hold a palm. The seven remaining characters dress according to their social position: Daniel wears gorgeous clothes, David has a royal habit, and Elizabeth is merely in female attire. This lack of symbolic dress would not have been unusual if these characters had not played such an important role in the history of Christ. Yet the writer saw no need to identify these characters with symbolism; they were dressed according to the social station they belonged to and were introduced by summoners. The use of the dramatic method to make the liturgy meaningful had at last replaced symbolism. More and more dramatic instructions were given, while fewer instructions pertaining to symbolic dress, objects, and actions were communicated.

There is no easy answer why symbolism lost its grip over the medieval mind, but there are a few reasons that can be suggested as part of the answer. Mention was made in an earlier chapter of Whitehead's view that symbolism has a tendency to be ungovernable and to become so prolific that it strangles itself.<sup>35</sup> This was certainly true in the case of many medieval men. An example is the man who saw the inner meat of a walnut as the divine nature of Christ, the unsightly dark outer hull as his humanity and the hard wooden division between the two as the cross. The desire to put into tangible form all holy ideals and

<sup>35</sup>A. N. Whitehead, "Uses of Symbolism," in Symbolism in Religion and Literature, Rallo May, ed. (New York, 1960), p. 233.

ideas condemned them to the fate of materialism. Such materialism eventually resulted in the destruction of the mystical and spiritual attributes of these holy abstractions.<sup>36</sup>

The more connotations surrounding a symbol the more useful it becomes. A symbol, to be powerful, should not try to appeal to the rational side of man but rather to his heart, his emotions. This can be best achieved by conveying the feeling of wonder and mystery, beauty and passion, and by the symbol's physical simplicity.<sup>37</sup> The Middle Ages was able to achieve these desirable effects until the latter part of the period when the spirit of the age forced symbolism into rigid forms. Symbols became lifeless and meaningless, unable to speak to the soul. In the late medieval ages symbolism became mechanical and merely persisted as a dry habit of thought.

The complete saturation of everyday life with religion united the dissimilar worlds of the profane and the holy, the infinite with the finite. Such familiarity, as usual, bred contempt. The holy things became no different from the common, losing their ability to evoke religious feelings. After seeing Balaam beating his ass--and it was a real ass--and having it talk back to him as it does in The Prophets, the peasant would surely go from church remembering little of the religious doctrine but not forgetting the great fun with Balaam and his ass.

<sup>36</sup>Johan Huizinga, The Waning of the Middle Ages (London, 1937), pp. 186-87.

<sup>37</sup>Evelyn Underhill, Mysticism (London, 1962), p. 126.

The saints became so familiar that they were no longer given their proper reverence. In art they were depicted as people in contemporary fashions; and not until the Renaissance, which put them in classical robes, did they regain their dignity.<sup>38</sup>

The closing generations of the Middle Ages saw the decline in power that the Church had over the minds of the people. Religious scepticism and abuses within the Church caused this decline.<sup>39</sup> It was a time when the Church became a law-enforcing and authoritarian organization at the cost of mysticism. The Church was no different from the political kingdoms with its hierarchy composed of administrators instead of preachers and theologians. Its saints were no longer mystics as in the early Middle Ages but the Canon lawyers and promoters.

A decline in religious feeling followed the increased organization. The economy of Europe improved, and the interest in this world became greater than in the next.<sup>40</sup> There were things in this life to be enjoyed; and, drama being one of the more entertaining forms, it developed its comic scenes and dramatic effects in the Church, until it was removed to the church steps and eventually to the town square. When realism replaced mystery and symbolism, the tropes were no longer of any worth to the Church.

<sup>38</sup>Huizinga, Waning, pp. 136-150, 185.

<sup>39</sup>Sheldon Cheney, Men Who Have Walked with God (New York, 1945), p. 176.

<sup>40</sup>Charles S. Baldwin, The Medieval Centuries of Literature in England 1100-1400 (Boston, 1932), p. 88.

The unified feeling of the age began to disintegrate. The Church no longer was the focal point of all things. National states overshadowed the heavenly kingdom, spices from the East became more exotic than the smoke of the censers, and men's hearts were caught between the worship of two gods. With the disintegration of the unified, transcendent medieval spirit, the disassociation of parts from the whole, the independence of thought, and the destruction of unity among the arts (making individual ability and ideas more important than traditional forms), medieval symbolism disappeared. The times became barren for creating symbols. For over two hundred years the old symbols were reproduced, but after that, under the influence of the Renaissance, medieval symbolism came into disfavor and interest in it disappeared. Neither the sterile soil of rationalism, which Thomas Aquinas began to cultivate,<sup>41</sup> nor the soil of materialism, which the fairs and wars of late medieval years rejuvenated, was suitable ground for the spiritual life.

<sup>41</sup>Herschel Baker, The Image of Man (New York, 1961), p. 200.

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