

What's Hecuba to Him, or He to Hecuba?

Paul W.F. Harms

My first attendance at this institute also marked the first of these Institutes. I came to meet a musician classmate of mine. He was in a discussion with Edward Rechlin, the distinguished organist. As I came within earshot, Rechlin said to my classmate, "Is he a musician?"

He said, "Oh, no! No! He's not a musician."

"Perfectly normal then," Rechlin responded.

Rechlin continued, "Many musicians compose marvelous compositions. Then they bring out their toys. I tell them to place the composition in a wall safe. Check it in ten years. Only after some revision will it be safe to perform. But not right now."

A gathering to honor O.P. Kretzmann's relationship with the Institute brought me here a second time. The invitation came through the office of Herbert Lindemann of blessed memory. Herb was one of the few pastors who was absolutely, utterly at home in the chancel. One felt that and sensed that. It is necessary that we experience a "felt-sensing" of "presence" in a presider and preacher's action, if we are to be at home in worship.

I remember a sermon Herb preached during my internship. His sermon reviewed C.S. Lewis' *The Great Divorce*. One of the tourists in the story was carrying a creature on his shoulder. When it began to annoy, the guide said, "Shall I kill it?"

"No, I think the creature will calm down." Only a moment later, however, it acted up again.

"Shall I kill it?" And a third time, "Shall I kill it?" I can still hear Herb's voice roar from the pulpit, "Take the damned thing off!"

An invitation to speak on Baptism brought me to the Institute for a third time, not at the most recent conference but at an earlier institute centering on that same theme. My fourth attendance is this occasion. I feel honored to be invited to preach and to be the "latch-key" speaker.

C.S. Lewis was once asked, "Why isn't worship better for us than it is?"

"The answer is very simple. "We don't love God enough."

What else is there to say following that? We need to remind each other of that repeatedly, lest the trivial consume us in the name of the Holy. The biggest gap is always between us and the gospel. That's where the gap really is. As we talk among ourselves and talk about others, it is helpful to remember that the biggest gap is between us and the gospel. "Some people are more sinned against than sinning," wrote a thoughtful man.

When I remonstrate with people, I have to ask myself, "Have they had any opportunity to be any different than they are?" If a child behaves poorly, I assume that the poor behavior is occurring against the same con-

text that marked my childhood. Parents and children together, we were eight. We ate all of our meals together, all 21 a week. If we slept in on Saturday, it could be as late as seven o'clock. We had prayers, family prayers, morning and evening, from the time of our birth through eight years of parochial school. All of us children went to Christian boarding schools for at least six years after we had completed the eighth grade. When we returned for the summer, the same family worship routine continued.

Unless I remember that a child "may be more sinned against than sinning," I can regard her misbehavior as rebellion against her parents, rebellion against the catechism, rebellion against the will of God, rebellion against the Bible, against Baptism, Eucharist, and the preaching of the gospel. The truth of the matter is she hasn't eaten a single meal together with her whole family, if there is any semblance of family intact. Nursing at her mother's breast could well have been the last family meal the child ever had. I cite the above example to warn us away from assumption and presumptions about anything in the church. I'm talking about worship, presiding ministers, assistant ministers, about liturgy, about the sacraments, about preaching the gospel, about pericopes and cycles, the church year, the lectionary, the orders of worship, evangelism, and stewardship.

Or to ask very bluntly, "How does this conference answer Louise's questions of a moment ago?" Any answers? No answers? All right, we'll proceed as though she had not asked. She asked hard questions. "How is the liturgy enfleshed?" "How is the Bible enfleshed?" "How is the word of God enfleshed?" If you ain't doin' the enfleshing, it don't make no difference. Cause that's the payoff. Doin' the enfleshing.

"You know these things. Blessed are you if you do them." It is not, "You know these things. Blessed are you in your accumulation of knowledge." I had considerably more Biblical knowledge and more theological knowledge than did my mother. I tried never to fool myself into thinking that my faith was greater than hers. It is easy for us theological, worship types, who mess around with ministry, to say about the common folk, "They don't even know the background of the Johannine gospel. They don't know from whom John stole his material." The response of them common folk to our response is to feed the poor.

I cannot emphasize too much that which you already know, the fragility and the value of Sunday morning worship. If people don't get it then, they just don't get it. What have we got to offer them the rest of the week? Small groups? I don't want to minimize that work. But how many are touched with that work in comparison to the number gathered worship of a Sunday morning? To reach the people of God calls for Sunday morning or bust. That's all that's to it.

Joe Sittler talked about the "anguish of preaching." We could as well speak of the "anguish of reading the lessons," "the anguish of presiding at the Eucharist," or "the anguish of praying for the welfare of all God's world." Not only the why and the what of Sunday morning worship but

the way we do Sunday Morning worship is significant. By "way" I mean, at the very least, worship as it happens moment by moment. The "way" often reveals the why and the what of worship or shrouds it in dullness.

Worship is a fragile thing indeed. Nothing kicks in automatically in worship, even if you have done it thousands of times. One cannot preside in the liturgy as though one portion were like the other. Each part does not follow the other like items on grocery shopping lists. We cannot expect that going through the liturgical list, no matter how, will produce the liturgy's intent! A diffident presider does not evoke the Trinity but only diffidence. The liturgy is not magic. The liturgy is not meant to be fundamentalistic or Pavlovian.

The presider needs to attend with focus and concentration. Fifty years of presiding doesn't change this. That you presided well last Sunday is no guarantee that you will do so this Sunday. That you presided well at the 8:45am service does not mean you will preside well at the 11:00am. Worship demands that the presider remain forever a beginner. You do not master presiding and go on to other things. Presiding at 8:45 is an action unique to itself as is presiding at the 11:00 unique to itself.

A theater tour to New York taught that to my wife and me vividly. At 1:15 we arrived at our hotel. We promptly bought tickets for *Jelly's Last Jam*, the life of Jellyroll Morton. At 2:00 we were in the theater ready for the play. At 2:00 my wife and I didn't care whether the company had rehearsed three weeks or four weeks or no weeks. Or whether they had rehearsed according to Stanislavski's or Strasburg's or Lawrence Olivier's method. We didn't care if they had read biographies or autobiographies of Jellyroll Morton. We asked just one thing: that at 2:00 the drama ignite our lives! That's all! That's what Sunday morning is all about!

"I can't tell you how much I struggled with that Petrine material." "So?"

"My migraine kicked in Friday night." "So?"

Worship calls for ignition. For illumination. For astonishment. "Worship is to be mind-stretching, soul-searing, gut-wrenching and a generally exhausting experience," says Robert Shaw, retired Conductor of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra and the Robert Shaw Chorale. Worship begins with invoking "The name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." We do not speak the words of invocation. We invoke the presence of God in our midst. Our studied intent is that "God be present here on earth as in heaven." Through worship God intends to deliver the resources of heaven the way God would want them to be delivered. All the energies of us leaders is poured into worship so that the congregation can see in us what God chooses to reveal—not just us, but the one who lives within us and whose light for a moment we reveal.

Diffident presiding is catastrophic, because sight is the sense that dominates. Seeing indifferent leaders practicing their indifference (I refer to choirs and acolytes as well as to organists and assistant ministers as well as to presiders and preachers) suffocates the liturgy so that it cannot sur-

vive. I don't care if the liturgy goes back to St Augustine. Sight is the dominant sense in worship as well as elsewhere in life, so dominant at times that we may not hear the most orthodox bit of theological excellence. Lawrence Olivier's word is helpful. He's talking about theater. It's absolutely applicable to worship—"So often the eye and the ear are at war," says Olivier. The ear hears, "Jesus died for you and rose again from the dead for you." The eye sees those words spoken by a life-less, sunken-in or rotund figure and sounded by a lackluster voice. What dominated the hearer's attention is not the words about Jesus' death but the lack of my luster involved in that message. I have failed to embody the message. My preaching remains laryngeal sound.

When the eye and the ear are at war with each other, we don't achieve what we set out to achieve. We do not differentiate between a blueprint and its outcome at 8:00 or 9:45 or 11:00. Discussions in liturgy and worship often flounder because Group A is talking about a distinguished liturgy, centuries old, and Group B is saying that last Sunday that self-same liturgy was a disaster. Despite all its biblical, historical, theological, and aesthetic excellencies, the liturgy last Sunday was a disaster. Tracing the historical roots of the liturgy does nothing at all. It's a kind of worship Watergate.

Let me illustrate. If I move in where angels fear to tread, forgive me. I speak of the Christmas and Easter Papal Masses. The setting and context are vibrant. The paintings are utterly alive. The candelabra is utterly alive. The choruses are utterly alive. The vestments are utterly alive. Only the Holy Father and his assistants bear the unmistakable mark of death. A total reversal! Only "the stones crying out" saved the night! I've seen Lutherans doing the same thing, so I'm not badgering the pope. So, here's the High Mass of Christmas or Easter. Everything about the moment done the way it's supposed to be done, yet the leaders say in effect, "It really isn't that serious." The demeanor and bearing of the leaders beg us to take neither the birth of Christ nor the resurrection of Christ seriously, all despite the torrent of correct words generated by both events.

If what I am saying has merit, we need to keep the eye and the ear from being at war. The eye and the ear need to reinforce each other. The centered focus of the leaders will enable the worshippers to see and to hear and to feel and to taste and to touch what worship is all about. Concentrated focus on the part of the leaders provides an opportunity for the message of the Resurrection of Christ to transcend the barriers of the hearts and minds of the listener. The odds are, at least then, better than those of a national lottery. It takes all of our concentrated energies and focus to preside and to preach. Otherwise it won't even come off. It won't even begin to come off.

As Foley said, "It is very important that people get involved." When we preside, do we set out with a deliberate attempt to involve people in liturgy? I know liturgy is the work of the people, but it's our work to get them involved in their work. It's our work to get them to work. Nothing

happens unless the people are involved. We involve people in worship by appealing to the senses. Remember how Foley stirred us by his description of that little garlic bud? He reminded us again of something we have often forgotten—or maybe never recognized—that faith, hope, and love are emotions. I appreciated Dave Truemper's comment and the comments of others on the fear we have of our emotions because some other theologians had some problems with theirs. C.S. Lewis says that both St. Paul and Martin Luther were products of catastrophic conversions. Absolutely catastrophic conversions. They just didn't say one Wednesday afternoon, "Well, I think I'll begin believing at 3:30. Got the afternoon free, I can indulge myself." Their whole lives were turned upside down. Hence, their exuberance. Of course, we attribute it to adrenaline and the testosterone. Their conversions had to do with the Holy Spirit. It enabled them to realize what had happened when God moved them from death to life, from darkness to light, from midnight to dawn to noon.

What does all this mean? That before I was a "no thing" and now I am a "some thing"? What does all of this mean? Preaching and liturgy make the "Christ event" present here and now. It is not as though St. Paul says, "I better write Romans so that the Lutherans will have something to talk about." Much of the turgid language of Galatians and of Romans are the despair of exegete and close argument and a battlefield for theological argument as they are the language of love and adoration. St. Paul simply pours out his heart and soul, and pours it out some more, and yet more. Paul is so intense, he almost sounds angry.

We do the same thing when we are highly excited. After you've been to an excellent restaurant, your invitation to a friend to join you there in the future takes on an intensity that is near anger. You get physical about it (grasp Martin Seltz on the platform). He should have had sense and gotten off the platform. You literally reach out, and when you can't reach out and grab someone like this, you reach out in worship attitudinally. Physically we see you stretching out to embrace. You know how. You just don't pray like this (slump over). Somewhere there must be a Trinity." It's stretching out to embrace the Grand Canyon. I've never seen anybody go to the edge of the Grand Canyon and stretch to embrace it this way (sink in the middle). You get as close as you can. You stretch as tall as you can. Stretch as far as you can. You are on your tiptoe. That's what it means. To stretch out to embrace. And that's what gives preaching and liturgy its force and its energy to engulf all others—"till all creation worships and adores." Because they experience the one who is engulfed, they themselves stretch out in worship and adoration.

Even if your preaching did not persuade them, and you may not have, at least everyone will be persuaded that you are persuaded. That's the bottom line. Though you persuade nobody, yet everyone is persuaded that you're persuaded. On an occasion similar to this Institute, at the conclusion of my four days of lectures, a member of the assembly said, "We are

exhausted. You are excited and full of energy. How do you account for this?" The question caught me off-balance. I had not given it any thought before. After some moments of reflection I said, "For one thing it is in the genes. My parents have been relatively healthy. They passed some of that on to me. The other thing is, I believe the garbage! I believe the garbage! That's what I believe. And that's what makes the difference. And that's what always makes the difference."

Louise gave us good examples of how "deep belief" makes a difference. I'm sure that Bob Schnabel, among others, remembers one of our professors, Fred Mayer, an exciting and excitable lecturer. Some time later cancer and chemotherapy reduced him to lecturing while seated in a wheelchair. His voice barely above a whisper now, interrupted by long silences for pain. The Fred Mayer would resume his lecture. Let me tell you, he was far more powerful with that quiet little voice than I with mine. It was his attitude. His heart and his guts. It came deep down from Fred's center. If it's not from the center, it will not long endure. What's crucially important is that we are emotionally responsive to what's happening in the moment; otherwise not much else will happen. "The differentia of Rhetoric is that it wishes to produce in our minds some practical resolve. . . as Aristotle points out, intellect of itself 'moves nothing': the transition from thinking to doing, in nearly all men (sic) at nearly all moments, needs to be assisted by appropriate states of feeling. . . (Therefore) passions must be brought to the aid of reason." (Adapted and edited by speaker from *A Preface to Paradise Lost* by C.S. Lewis). This is straight talk from dry-as-dust Aristotle.

Lane Cooper concludes that *The Dialogues of Plato* insists on the necessity of disciplined emotion. Emotions yes, but disciplined. Disciplined yes, but emotions. Is there a time in our lives (I'm addressing preacher types principally) when we are not emotional? Women student preachers are often quick to apologize for tears during a sermon. I'm trying to get them to see their emotions other than as a cultural sign of weakness. Both men and women are emotional in their preaching. Most of the time, the men's emotional response is inappropriate. The response is one of blandness. They're talking about resurrection, they're talking about Life, they're talking about Louise's concerns, and all with a mask-like face! It's the whole gamut of stimuli from birth to death, and we are not physically and emotionally responsive. The face has thousands of ways to nuance our preaching, largely unused. A voracious reader and a prolific writer, Martin Luther said that the gospel should be shared *viva vox*. The gospel propelled by sound, not only with an alive and lively voice, but coming from someone who is alive and responsive at that moment of speaking, whose blood is still flowing, whose arteries are still pumping.

The word, which was characterized as a two-edged sword, is to be proclaimed by people who are utterly and absolutely alive. Preaching includes speaking. It's oral. It's talking to folks. Orality gives a sense of immediacy that the printed word and even reading aloud of the printed

word seldom if ever achieves. When is a sense of immediacy felt to be more necessary than in the action of preaching? In fact, the gospel by its very nature, compassionate, calls for a sense of immediacy.

Print has so many benefits and print has benefitted us. We have been bathed in a sea of print since birth. We cannot conceive, therefore, that there might be some negative side-effects. The flip side of the Gutenberg Galaxy, according to Hans Ruedi-Weber, is that print has impinged itself on the oral and wreaked its havoc there. Lest we forget, Sunday morning worship is oral. It is dominantly non-linguistic. Print is frozen words, dead words. Print has invaded our preaching and in all too many places has conquered. Print has helped anesthetize our preaching. Remember Foley's story of yesterday. Melissa wanted a particular story read every night, so they read it every night for four nights. The parents, tired of reading the same story, recorded it. They played the recording the next two nights. On the third, Melissa said, "Read it to me."

"Well, it's all the same story," they said.

"Yes, but I can't sit on the recorder's lap."

A survey said senior students graduating from our seminaries are in debt somewhere between \$17,000 and \$25,000, all because of the word made flesh. Blame it on the doctrine of incarnation. I'm surprised that no one from the synods represented here have proposed we do ministry exclusively with videotapes. It would save so much money. It would be a nice way to downsize this crowd. But given your druthers, you want a human being to serve you and not a videotape. You want someone in your parish who is not dead from the larynx down to call on you. You want a human being who reaches out, touches your hand, kisses your forehead. That's what it means to be human like Jesus: to touch, to hold, to see, and to embrace. Observe Jesus as he takes a child, placed the child in the midst of the crowd, and then holds the child on his lap. What a difference it makes when we approach the Scriptures with a theatrical hermeneutic and see the scenes as they unfold in the life of Christ and not as they unfold in successive lines on the printed page.

Gail's words were not magic, nor did she mean them to be. Sometimes, however, I get a feeling that we think there is magic. We produce magic by keeping the component parts of ritual in their proper place. This approach to doing liturgy is fundamentalistic. The mere utterance of the liturgy is transformational, not unlike a mantra. There is no greater magic released in the liturgy than in reciting Jeremiah 28:2. Communication, whether inside or outside of worship, is enormously complex. It is not only words in relationship to each other. How they sound together make a difference. Their tonal and emotional coloring are crucial. The spatial/temporal relationship of the moment, often not even thought of, colors the communication enormously. It's different when I speak down here on floor level than when I speak on the podium. It's a whole different ball game. Spatially different. Though I'll be saying the same words, this is a different world. Keeping cer-

tain words intact is not a guarantee for anything. In oral communication, which preaching is, the nonlinguistic features are more significant than the linguistic. We ignore nonlinguistic signs at our own peril.

In a play one evening I heard "In That Sweet Bye and Bye." There was not a dry eye in the house. That the "Hymn" was sweet and old and sentimental could not explain its fitness. Bach's "Tocatta and Fugue in D minor," could not have been more fitting. "In That Sweet Bye and Bye" was precisely right for that moment, because the spatial/temporal/physical/social relationship was precisely right. When Fred Niedner and Martin Seltz, David Kehret, John Paul, Dave Truemper, Bob Schnabel, Dick Lee, and Warren Rubel and I speak with each other, our conversation has its roots in our decades of association with each other. The fact that nonlinguistic elements are more important than linguistic ones doesn't mean the linguistic isn't important. Print, alone isolated, struggles to get as much meaning as it can from itself. In oral speech, words get the most of their meaning elsewhere than from other words. In most speech, the words, as words alone, account for only about ten percent of the communication. So when you rise to preach, even after the requisite thirty hours (sounds like all of you do); even after you put in the thirty hours; when you rise to preach nine-tenths of what needs doing still needs doing. That's what makes preaching tough. "The sights, the sounds, the gestures in a continuum of time," is how Davis defines preaching. An oral phenomenon requires an oral approach.

Seldom is adequate provision made that the leaders are readily visible to the congregation. The easier the assembly can be, the more readily they can hear. I was pleased that every service had its silential time, which is hard to come by. The most important thing in preaching is silence. So you rid yourselves and your congregations of the sense of rush and its dominance in worship. I know that after the invocation I'll confess my sins, then someone will absolve me, then we do a little kyrie stuff, and then the prayer. The remainder of the service gets much the same treatment. It's like Andrew Lloyd Weber's *Midnight Express*, but without any of its intoxicating rhythms and passions.

The above is hardly a caricature. It's an example of getting in our way. We don't allow each moment to make its way deep down into our bones. We cut things off with our sense of rush. The sermon often falls victim. Once a pastor barely said "Amen," when the assistant said, "We'll now confess our faith in the words of the Apostle's Creed." I dare say that most of our sermons would improve enormously if we were silent where our sermons called for silence. I don't mean the imposition of silence. You place silence where it really ought to be. You let it arise out of the whole contextual moment. Not Paul Harvey style. Then you get manipulation. Let the silence, the pace, the timing electrify, "Will you. . .also. . .go away?" "Were there not ten cleansed? Where are. . .the nine?" "Oh well, you've seen one leper you've seen them all." We lose the text's impact on us.

So we need to be aware that we do not minimize the internal things in worship and in preaching. Not get in our own way. Not step on our own feet. That takes a lot of doing. Take nothing for granted, ever. Work to ensure that each moment's intention is fulfilled. Once during a baptism the pastor asked the congregation to "renounce the devil and all his wicked works and ways." Right at that moment, the assistant went on the long pilgrimage to the altar to light the baptismal candle. Since I had frequently renounced "the devil and all his wicked works and ways," I thought I could watch the assistant light the candle and then make the journey back to the baptismal group. The eye and the ear were set at war with each other. The war jarred the concentration off the focus. I missed the big moment. So did many others. What happened? Baptism was made perfunctory, even though all the details of the ritual were scrupulously observed. The baptismal ceremony was savaged from within.

Lawrence Olivier, speaking for theater, might well have been speaking for worship as well when he said, "The third spear carrier from the left should believe that the play revolves around the third spear carrier from the left." It's been rare, but I've seen that kind of care. Herb Lindemann of blessed memory was one such spear-carrier. We shook hands and greeted each other as I entered the sacristy. Not another word was spoken until the Invocation. Two very young acolytes in the sacristy lighted the torches themselves. No giddy laughter, no noise-making. They were spear carriers. But that's rare. Often worship, if it's not destroyed, is mortally wounded in those fifteen minutes before the invocation.

We urge one another to this kind of intense concentration not just so that things may be done decently and in order. The purpose of worship, as Ed Krentz said so well, is to ensure that the grace of God is clear, dominates, and is forceful, and gets its work done. Anything that aids this cause is worth our time and energy. Alvina Krause from Northwestern University put it very strongly, "I will not have an audience disappointed." We translate that into, "I will not have a congregation disappointed." I want to be sure that they will be fed and nourished, that they celebrate. Frank Galatti, a student of Miss Krause's and now also a professor at Northwestern, said, "The most important ingredient in theater is the audience." We probably would modify that, "The most important ingredient in worship is God. People are in second place only because God is in first, not because the people are secondary ever."

That's why Jesus Christ became servant, in order that he might serve God's intentions. After Arthur Miller had talked to a sister-in-law whom he had not seen for some twenty-five years and who was the worse for wear, said, "Somewhere, somewhere down deep where the sources are, was a rule never, if possible, to let an uncultivated, vulgarly candid, worldly, bleached-blond woman walk out on one of my plays disappointed." What a passion! And that's for a fading crown of glory, for a theater piece. "I don't want anymore to walk out disappointed." What a high level of com-

passion for the welfare of human beings. What passion and drive for excellence in theater. How much more should not our passion be in the church!

Some years ago David Rhoads of ISTC performed the Gospel of Mark in its entirety. The next day we discussed it. For a good half hour, no one commented on what they had seen, though David Rhoads used all areas of the stage. The clergy kept asking the scholarly questions as they are wont to do. "Do you think the Markan text reflects a pre-Johannine gloss as some people had reported?" Since I was chair, I asked, "Were any of you at the play last night?" A full half hour and not one word about what they had seen or felt or experienced. With some prodding the audience kicked the habit or regarding Mark as first a literary document. Rhoades' "acting out" the Gospel of Mark gave us a theatrical hermeneutic to coalesce with the gospel.

Willimon and Hauerwas arranged for Willimon to preach a series of sermons and for Hauerwas to critique. Both the sermons and the critiques were published. If my memory serves me correctly, there is not one single comment about Willimon's preaching itself. The critique deals with the sermon as a literary document. It was as though the critic had not been there and did not need to be there. For this critic the printed word, not the preached word, was key in the preaching. However, properly speaking, there are no books of sermons, only reprints of the words of the sermon. The important ninety-percent is not incorporated in the print.

In his book *Theater and Incarnation*, Max Harris asks whether liturgy nourishes "the rough as well as the holy." None of the people in Christ's time, neither his friends or his enemies, succeeded in smoothing out the rough edges of this North Galilean peasant. The language of liturgy seems to nurture the holy at the cost of the rough. The Incarnate Christ embraced both. So must also our worship. Are our prayers filled with the rough as well as the holy, composed and, above all, prayed in such a way that they do not smooth out the rough? To pray in such a way that we don't smooth out the rough is not easy. That is why we ask the spirit to pray with us in our "groanings which cannot be uttered"; that's why we ask that "our prayers be united with the prayers of our great high priest," so we do not smooth over the rough.

Do our prayers, our preaching, our worship affect the Dow Jones Index of Obedience? That's the real question. Do they make a difference for the widows and the orphans? We may do all things well theologically, liturgically, systematically, aesthetically, and ecclesiastically. When we have done, the question comes, "How is it with the widows and the orphans?" Unemployment may be way down. General salaries may be way up. Then, when we think everything is settled, comes this voice again, probably from God, "How is it with the widows and the orphans? How is it with the most defenseless people in our culture?"

Our cause is a great cause, none greater. Yet we need to remind each other of it everyday. Hamlet can help us remember how great is the cause. Hamlet's father has died. Murder is suspected. His mother has married

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Hamlet's uncle too quickly for Hamlet's taste. Yet he cannot bring himself to action. In the meantime a troop of traveling players enact a scene in which one of the players weeps for a woman called Hecuba. Hamlet compares the actor's full emotional response to mere fiction, to his own diffident response to matters of great moment. Hamlet then laments:

Oh, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!
Is it not monstrous that this player here,
But in fiction, in a dream of passion,
Could force his soul so to his own conceit
that from her working all his visage wann'd,
Tears in his eyes, distraction in's aspect,
A broken voice, and his whole function suiting
With forms to his conceit? And all for nothing for Hecuba!
For Hecuba!
What's Hecuba to him or he to Hecuba
That he should weep for her? What would he do
Had he the motive and cue for passion
That I have? He would drown the stage with tears,
Make mad the guilty and appal the free,
Confound the ignorant, and amaze indeed
The very faculty of eyes and ears.
Yet I, a dull and muddy-mettled rascal peak
Like John-a-dreams, unpregnant of my cause,
And can say nothing; no, not for a king,
Upon whose property and most dear life
A damn'd defeat was made.

O! vengeance!
Why, what an ass I am! This is most brave
That I, the son of a dear father murder'd,
Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,
Must, like a whore, unpack my heart with words!
(From *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* Act II,
scene ii, lines 555-578 and 588-592)

We need not like a whore unpack our gospel hearts with words, whether they be the words of liturgy or of preaching. Dorothy Sayers helps us remember that what we do in words is unforgettable:

Not Herod, not Caiphas, not Pilate, not Judas ever contrived to fasten upon Jesus Christ the reproach of insipidity; this final indignity was left for pious hands to inflict.

To make of his story something that could neither startle, nor shock, nor terrify, nor excite, nor inspire a living soul is to crucify the Son of God afresh and put Him to an open shame. . . .

Let me tell you, you Christian people, an honest writer would be ashamed to treat a nursery tale as you have treated the greatest drama of history.