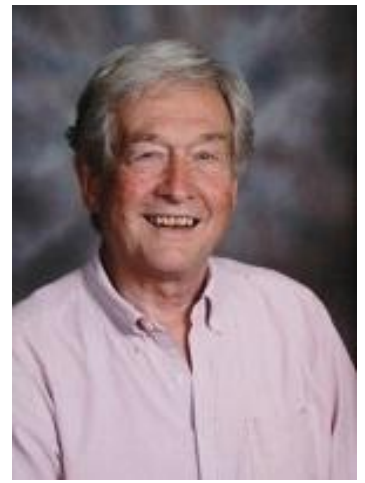


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THE QUEM QUERITIS TROPE **A Brief Liturgical Drama for Easter Morning**

A Students of English Literature will recall that the early Christian Church banned drama fairly early in its history. The Church's coming to power, prestige and privilege in the post-Constantinian era in the Fourth Century gave the Church a new mandate as guardian and gate-keeper of morality in its surrounding culture. Greek dramas, in the form of both comedies and tragedies, had simply become too raunchy and too depraved for refined Christian sensibilities. So all drama was essentially outlawed, in the West, for almost five centuries. (This is probably an over-simplification of history, but it will do for my purposes here.)

B In any case, in the Ninth Century, drama began to creep back in to Western civilization. And – perhaps not surprisingly – it did so with the Church as patron and enabler.

C Groups of monks in monasteries and perhaps in local cathedrals began to produce simple and brief dramatizations for use in such liturgical rites as Morning Prayer or even Holy Communion. The actors would be monks themselves, dressed not in costumes but in vestments; their texts would have been in Latin, and perhaps sung. These brief dramas came to be known in English as tropes, Latin for “turn” (as in “heliotrope” for “turning towards the sun”), in the sense of embellishment or decoration. The trope that follows below could be thought of as a dramatic elaboration of an Easter introit or entrance rite.

D The title, *Quem Queritis* is Latin for the first words spoken here: “Whom do you seek...?” I’ve used this six-line trope in a campus ministry setting as a brief dramatic beginning to an Easter Eucharist, at an indoor “sunrise service”. The descriptions below of the setting, costuming, and action represent those in my own particular staging, now many years ago. Maybe you can find this winsome little drama instructive and even useful, with your own local adaptations in your parish setting.

+ + +

1 The congregation gathers in silence, at the entrance to the worship space, where all is dark. Just inside the entrance archway, the Paschal Candle burns in its stand, having been lit some hours previous in the Easter Vigil. Presently a handsome young man appears from inside the entrance archway. He is vested in a alb; he carries a palm branch over his forearm.

2 Now through the midst of the assembly, three women make their way to the entrance. One is old, one middle aged, one a teen. They are vested in albs, with fringed prayer shawl (*thallis*) over their shoulders, or head scarf (*hijab*) framing their faces. They are the Three Marys, on their way to Jesus' garden tomb or sepulchre. The first two Marys each carry a lighted candle in their holders from the altar / table. The third Mary carries a thurible or incense pot with incense burning – if your congregation is open to this!

3 The Angel speaks: Whom do you seek at the sepulchre, O followers of Christ?

4 First Mary: We seek Jesus of Nazareth...

5 Second Mary..who was crucified...

6 Third Mary: ...O Celestial One. (Alternatively all Three Marys could speak these lines 4-5-6 together in unison.)

7 The Angel gestures into the darkened worship space: He is not here. He is risen, as he said.

8 All Three Marys together joyously: Alleluia!

9 First Mary: The Lord is risen today!...

10 Second Mary: ...The strong lion, Christ the Son of God!

11 All Three Marys: Alleluia! (Alternatively, all Three Marys could speak lines 8-9-10-11 together in unison.)

12 The Angel: Come and see the place where the Lord was laid. Alleluia! Alleluia!

13 (The Angel turns to a table just inside the doorway, where the white altar cloth or fair linen lies folded. He picks it up, still folded, and shows it to the Marys. The First Mary gives her candle to the Second Mary and takes the folded altar cloth from the Angel.)

14 The Angel: Go quickly, and tell the disciples that the Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia! Alleluia!

15 The First Mary: The Lord is risen from the grave...

16 The Second Mary: ...who for us hung upon the cross.

17 All Three Marys: Alleluia!

18 (Now The Angel carries the Paschal Candle into the worship space. The Three Marys follow, then the liturgical ministers, then the congregation. The worship space itself is discovered to have been decorated some hours earlier with paper streamers, balloons, and confetti. As the procession enters, all sing the processional hymn, "Jesus Christ is risen today." The congregation enters with noise-makers, bells, tambourines, rattles, and processional banners. The Angel places the Paschal Candle in its position at the side of the Altar or Communion Table. The Marys dress the Table with the altar cloth or fair linen, and candles. The assembly moves into the rows of seats and the service continues.)