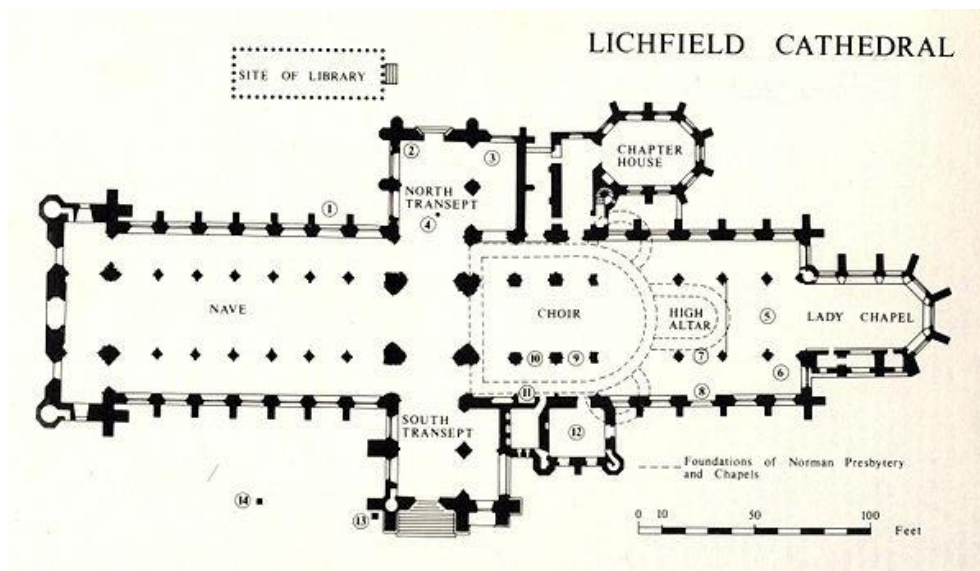


Dorothy Sayers' Dramatic Dogma in *The Just Vengeance* (1946)

"Being told either that good and evil are merely relative, or that he can exercise no effective choice between them, he does not know what to do with his moral sense, and with that consciousness of personal inadequacy which a robust and realist Christian philosophy recognizes as a sense of sin. Looking at the world about him, he cannot get rid of the impression that there is guilt somewhere, and that perhaps he himself is not altogether what he might be. The arguments of people who 'don't believe in sin' do not remove his sense of guilt; they only make him feel ashamed and guilt about feeling guilty."—Foreword to *Five Great Subjects* (1943)

"I have made it my practice to 'stick to the Creeds,' using them as a kind of peg to pin down interpretations of, or speculations about, the Gospel. I have tried to avoid vague ramblings and roamings into general ethics, historical pictures, emotionalism and 'religious experience'; to test all exercises of 'private judgment' by whether they do or do not conform to the Creeds; and to use the Creeds as a check upon unbalanced presentments of the nature of God and Christ, and upon the over-emphasising of isolated texts."—Memo on the "Oecumenical Penguin" (ca. 1943)

The Spatial Dimension of the Play



Sayers' *The Just Vengeance* is designed to be performed in a cathedral, and certain spatial elements of the play assume that setting. There is a theological logic to this. Assuming the audience is seated in the nave, the main stage could use the space afforded the transept; the upper stage borrows from the aisle of the choir; and the gates of heaven parallel the high altar of the cathedral.

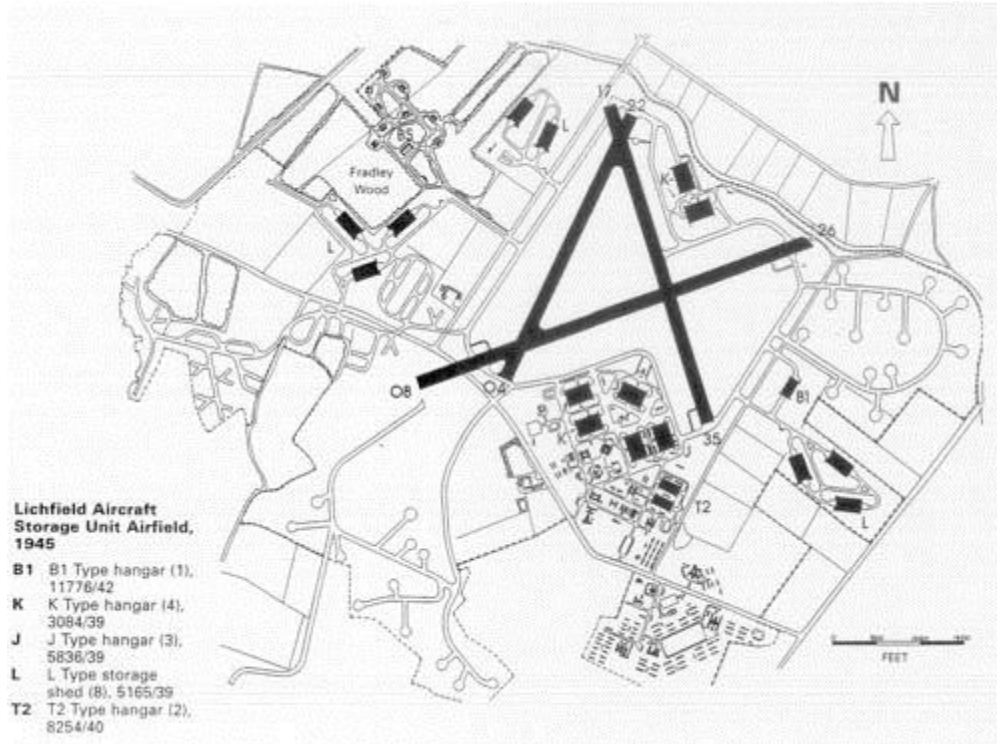
The main stage	The events of the city of Lichfield; the chorus of its citizens	<i>Present (WWII)</i>
The upper stage	The events of salvation history—Adam, Eve, Cain, and Abel; the Annunciation, Nativity, Trial, Crucifixion, and Resurrection of Christ	<i>Past</i>
The gates of heaven	The revelation of the Persona Dei and the angels	<i>Eternity</i>

The movement of the chorus between the main and upper stages helps to symbolize their participation in the past and its drama. The Persona Dei (Christ) moves between the gates of heaven and the upper stage to symbolize both the kenosis of Christ and his ascension. The church as a whole is used to model the Stations of the Cross during Christ's sufferings, as well as George Fox's arrival in Lichfield.

Discussion Questions

1. How does Sayers' use of the Chorus compare with that of Eliot and Williams?
2. What kinds of blocking and staging decisions would you make to help organize Sayers' Chorus?
3. What role does the Choir have as compared with that of the Chorus?
4. How does Sayers' model Williams' notions of the City and co-inherence/fraternity?
5. How does Sayers' use of Lichfield as a parish shape the theology of her play?
6. What role does George Fox the Quaker serve in the play?
7. What is the central irony in the Airman's demand for justice?
8. Is *The Just Vengeance* a theodicy play? Why or why not?
9. What is the Airman's secular gospel?
10. What are the lessons the Airman is to learn from Adam, Eve, Cain, and Abel?
11. What are the qualities associated with Adam and Eve? What could Sayers be suggesting about gender roles?
12. In what ways do Cain and Abel represent fundamentally different approaches to creation and technology?
13. Why does Sayers choose to call Christ the persona Dei throughout the play?
14. What does the Persona Dei's first speech reveal? (cf. 318)
15. How is Mary's role understood in the play?
16. What kind of political and religious attitudes do Herod, Pilate, and Caiaphas model?
17. Why does Judas suggest that "[t]here is no exchange in sin"? (338)
18. How does the Chorus now resolve to take up divine suffering?
19. What change comes over the Airman? Why?
20. What is the thematic and theological importance of the ending of the play?

Fradley Aerodrome, the RAF base near Lichfield was operational from 1940 to 1958:



The Apostle's Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.
 I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.
 He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.
 He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.
 He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again.
 He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
 He will come again to judge the living and the dead.
 I believe in the Holy Spirit,
 the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints,
 the forgiveness of sins,
 the resurrection of the body,
 and life everlasting. Amen.

The Nicene Creed

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made.

Who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and

was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets.

And I believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

The Great Thanksgiving

The people remain standing. The Celebrant, whether bishop or priest, faces them and sings or says

The Lord be with you.

People: And with thy spirit.

Celebrant: Lift up your hearts.

People: We lift them up unto the Lord.

Celebrant: Let us give thanks unto our Lord God.

People: It is meet and right so to do.

Then, facing the Holy Table, the Celebrant proceeds

It is very meet, right, and our bounden duty, that we should at all times, and in all places, give thanks unto thee, O Lord, holy Father, almighty, everlasting God.