THE REVIVAL OF DRAMA
From the Fall of Rome to the Middle Ages there were only histriones [wandering players] and jongleurs [minstrels] to keep drama alive with dancing, singing, juggling, acrobatics, & marionettes.

Strangely enough, it would be the needs of the Church that would revive drama.
THE DILEMMA OF THE CHURCH

• Common people were illiterate as were many nobles.
• Books were rare and highly prized, including The Bible, which was in Latin.
• How then was the Church to better spread its message?
• LITURGICAL DRAMA
TROPES

• A trope is the performance of a religious text

• Tropes were developed to highlight important aspects of the Church year: Easter, Christmas, Corpus Christi, Whitsunday (Pentecost)

• Earliest known trope is *Quem Quaeritis*, a story of the Resurrection. (920-970 A.D.)
• Initially, all parts were played by clergy and choirboys.
• Usually took place in cathedrals & monasteries
• Though initially in Latin, soon the tropes would be performed in **vernacular**, the common language.
• Staging involved **mansions** arrayed around a **platea**. Hell was stage left, heaven stage right, earth in middle.
A ground plan of a medieval cathedral. A = aisle, M = mandorla, S = sanctuary, Sept = septulum.
DRAMA MOVES OUTDOORS

• For 200 years the tropes grew in importance and elaborateness.
• Around 1200 the performances began to move outdoors due to lack of space and the more elaborate mansions needed.
• 1350-1550 medieval theatre came under secular control and grew.
• **Secrets** (stage machinery) were added.
The Cycle Plays

• Guilds and tradesmen took over productions, in competitions. Called Mystery Plays (from *mystere*)

• Elaborate cycles, portraying biblical events from Creation to Last Judgment.

• Name after the towns of production, four cycles survive: York (48 plays), Chester (24), Townley [Wakefield] (32), and *Ludus Coventriae* [N Town] (42)
• Were completely in vernacular
• Became disfavored by the Church because of growing lack of Biblical adherence (comedic lines and actions being inserted)
• Pageant wagons were developed for the productions. (see next slide)
As left, a pageant wagon alongside a wheeled platform stage; above, a floor plan of this arrangement; below right, plan of a booth stage, used to show its similarity to the pageant wagon arrangement of the other two drawings. Reconstructions by Glynne Wickham. (From Wickham, *Early English Stages*, 1, 1959; courtesy of Routledge Publishers.)
OTHER MIDDLE AGES
DRAMATIC FORMS

• MIRACLE PLAYS: dramatized incidents from lives or saints or martyrs, usually performed on the feast day of the saint

• MORALITY PLAYS: sought to give a moral message through allegories about moral temptation, e.g. EVERYMAN); flourished 1400-1550.
• FOLK PLAYS: portrayed adventures of popular heroes – Robin Hood, St. George
  – Performed by amateurs
  – Went from house to house, usually at Christmas
• FARCE: showed the ridiculous depravity of man. Very popular in France.
• SECULAR INTERLUDE: a serious or comic play, performed by traveling troupes, usually between parts of celebration such as a banquet
• Eventually, all would merge into Renaissance drama.