

# The Church and the Synagogue in Ecclesiastical Art

## *A Case from Medieval Norway*

KRISTIN B. AAVITSLAND

B. 1967. Dr. art. Professor of Medieval Culture and Church History, MF Norwegian School of Theology. Kristin.B.Aavitsland@mf.no

### *Abstract*

This article discusses the pictorial representation of the Church and the Synagogue in medieval ecclesiastical art. The case chosen for analysis is the Calvary scene in the 13th-century painted vault from Ål stave church, Hallingdal in Norway, where personifications of *Ecclesia* and *Synagoga* appear by the foot of the cross of Christ. The examination of the scene aims to show how the visual rhetoric transcends the biblical narrative in multiple ways. The representation of the Synagogue in the painted vault from Ål testifies to the hostile attitude towards Judaism generally found in medieval culture, also in societies like the Norwegian, where Jews were practically absent. The author argues that the anti-Judaic stance was abstract and fictional, grounded on a conceptual theology aimed to confirm Christian self-understanding.

**Keywords:** *medieval painting, Ecclesia and Synagoga, visual rhetoric, painted vault in Ål stave church*

### *Sammendrag*

Artikkelen diskuterer fremstillingen av Kirken og Synagogen i middelalderens kirkelige kunst. Korsfestelsescenen fra 1200-tallsutsmykningen av taket i Ål stavkirke er valgt som analyseeksempel. Her opptrer personifikasjoner av Ecclesia og Synagoga ved foten av Kristi kors. Bildeanalysen søker å påvise hvordan den visuelle retorikken overskrider den bibelske fortellingen på flere måter. Avbildningen av Synagogen i Åltaket vitner om den fiendtlige holdningen til jødedommen som preget middelalderens kultur, også i samfunn som det norske, der det praktisk talt ikke fantes jøder. Forfatteren argumenterer for at den anti-jødiske holdningen var abstrakt og teoretisk, begrunnet i en teologi som først og fremst tjente til å bekrefte en kristen selvforståelse.

**Nøkkelord:** *middelaldermaleri, Ecclesia og Synagoga, visuell retorikk, Åltaket*

IT'S A GREAT HONOUR to give this lecture for Professor Reidar Hvalvik on the occasion of his sixty-fifth birthday.<sup>1</sup> As I represent Reidar's second academic discipline, art history, I intend to exemplify what I consider to be a driving force behind some of his scholarship during the last decade: the recognition of a mutual dependence of theology and art history in the study of religious images and historical church art. Therefore, I hope you all, included this seminar's guest of honour, will take my talk today as a token of appreciation for what Reidar Hvalvik has done to reduce the distance between our two disciplines.

### **The Emergence of an Antagonistic Image: Ecclesia and Synagoga**

My topic today has some affinity to a reoccurring theme in Reidar's research: the relation between Jews and Gentiles in the self-understanding of the Christian Church. Being a medievalist, the material I examine belongs to another period than that of Reidar's principal expertise, which is late antiquity and the era of the early Church. But as we all know, the foundation for the expropriating (and often highly problematic) Christian conception of Judaism was laid in the theology of the early Church and its biblical exegesis. And from early on, the relation between the Jews and the Gentiles found visual expression in ecclesiastical art. In the following, I will present to you some selected cases from this pictorial tradition.

One of the earliest visualizations of the relation between Jews and Gentiles is the famous fifth-century mosaic from Santa Sabina in Rome (Fig. 1).<sup>2</sup> The pictorial means to visualize the two "branches" of converts to Christianity: Jews and Gentiles, was that of *female personifications*, a rhetorical device inherited from Roman imperial art.<sup>3</sup> In Santa Sabina, the two stately women similarly clad in purple draperies, each holding an open book to which they authoritatively point, represent, respectively, the Hebrew Church (the Church of the circumcised, left) and the Church of the Gentiles (to the right). Appearing almost as twins, they are clearly conceived of as the two equivalent foundations of the Church of Christ. One generation earlier, the late fourth-century mosaic of the Roman church Santa Pudenziana provides another example: here, the couple appear in golden robes, the Church of the Gentiles crowning St Paul, and the Hebrew Church crowning St Peter (Fig. 2).<sup>4</sup>



*Fig. 1. The Church of the Circumcised and the Church of the Gentiles. Mosaic, early 5th century, S. Sabina, Rome*



*Fig 2. Apse mosaic, late 4th century. S. Pudenziana, Rome. Photo: Wikimedia commons*

The apparent harmony and equivalence between Jews and Gentiles is however not found in much of the most influential theological literature of the time. During the fourth and fifth centuries, the Jewish element of Christianity seems to be toned down, and the Hebrew Church, that is Jewish believers in Christ, gradually disappears from the conceptual understanding of Christianity.<sup>5</sup> Instead, the Church fathers emphasized the Christian Church's radical break with Judaism and created an image of inequality and contrast rather than one of equality and synthesis. In Augustine, the contradictory figures of *Ecclesia* and *Synagoga* enter the rhetorical scene: the former being "the new bride" of Christ, whereas *Synagoga* is Christ's carnal mother who he is obliged to leave.<sup>6</sup> Jerome and, later, Gregory the Great, continue to apply female personifications in their discourse on Jews and Gentiles, and they cast *Synagoga* as adulterous, selfish, and blind.<sup>7</sup> These negative characteristics were theologically founded on the Jews' refusal to recognize Christ as the Son of God, but may also be seen in relation to a tendency in contemporary imperial legislation, which for instance banned Jews from holding public offices.<sup>8</sup> In visual art, the equivalent figures of the *Church of the Gentiles* and the *Church of the Circumcised* eventually were substituted by the antithetic personifications of *Ecclesia* and *Synagoga* – bringing, as it were, the pictorially communicated theological argument in balance with the verbally communicated (Fig. 3).

The two antithetic women appeared time and again in the refined liturgical art works surrounding the Carolingian court in the ninth century, propagating the Church's theological superiority over the Synagogue. The motif became increasingly popular in all of Europe during the 12th and 13th centuries. In these works, like the sculptures from Strasbourg Cathedral (Fig. 3) or the fresco from Spentrup Church in Denmark (Fig. 4), the triumph of Christianity and the defeat of Judaism are clearly communicated through contrary attributes like the cross banner of *Ecclesia* versus the broken standard of *Synagoga*, *Ecclesia*'s firm gaze versus *Synagoga*'s blindfold, *Ecclesia*'s upright stature versus *Synagoga*'s hunched one. In the Spentrup Church, blindfolded *Synagoga* is actually killing the Lamb of God with her lance, while *Ecclesia* carefully collects the blood in her chalice. The introduction and application of these highly ideological figures must, of course, be seen in light of the historical and theological contexts in which they occur. However, within the frames of this seminar, in which we are concerned about *picturing the New Testament*, it may also be worth asking *how* the figures of *Synagoga* and *Ecclesia* operate as rhetorical devices in the pictorial language. What is their rhetorical potential and how do they relate to the role Jews are given in New Testament narratives often depicted in ecclesiastical art?



*Fig. 3. Ecclesia and Synagoga from the portal of Strasbourg Cathedral, ca. 1230.  
Photo: Wikimedia commons*



*Fig. 4. Synagoga killing the Lamb of God; Ecclesia collects the pouring blood. Fresco in the  
chancel arch of Spentrup Church, Denmark, ca. 1200. Photo: kalkmalerier.dk*

## The Mutual Interests of Theology and Iconography

Before I discuss these questions, however, I wish to comment a little on the relationship between Biblical exegesis and the study of theology on the one hand, and the study of art history on the other. In doing so, I will also comment a little on the relationship between the New Testament scholar Reidar Hvalvik and myself, the medieval art historian. Although this excursion may seem to be a detour from the topic of my talk, I promise to guide you back on track in a few minutes.

Ten years ago, in 2006, Reidar Hvalvik was among a group of scholars to initiate a transdisciplinary national network, *Forum for ikonografi og teologi*, to stimulate cooperation and exchange between theologians with an interest in church art and architecture and art historians with an interest in the religious content and functions of the same. Early on, I was invited to participate in the board of this network, and hence I got to know Reidar. For various reasons, the network's activities faded away after some years, but we did arrange some stimulating conferences together, one of them in this very building, long before I knew that I was to become Reidar's colleague as a faculty member here at MF Norwegian School of Theology.

An outcome from this network's activity was Reidar's 2008 article on the thirteenth-century painted vault from the wooden stave church at Ål, Norway, now exhibited at the Museum of Cultural History in Oslo (Fig. 5). In this article, published in a Norwegian periodical for art history, Reidar scrutinized the vault's cycle of scenes from the Genesis – and proved to be a very competent iconographer.<sup>9</sup> Thanks to his thorough insights in the exegetical tradition of the biblical texts, he was able to increase the level of iconographic precision in the reading of these scenes. Furthermore, he suggested new, convincing interpretations of some of the details of this cycle. He thus demonstrated the value of crossing disciplinary borders in academic investigation of the religious culture of the past. In doing so, he aimed to comment on the much-debated relation between (Biblical) text and narrative image in ecclesiastical art. As a scholar of texts, Reidar emphasized the indisputable influence of Biblical texts and exegetic tradition in the development of Christian iconography, quoting the famous phrase by Gregory the Great in his letter to Serenus, bishop of Marseille, about images being the scripture of the illiterate: “Those who are ignorant of letters may at least read by seeing on the walls what they cannot read in books (*codicibus*). What writing (*scriptura*) does for the literate, a picture does for the illiterate looking at it.”<sup>10</sup> Here Gregory – and Reidar! – seem to prioritize the written word as the privileged and more efficient communicator of religious knowledge, leaving the visual image to serve an auxiliary function as the second-best solution, to overcome the handicap of illiteracy. I hurry to say that I am not entering the complex scholarly discussion about how Gregory's dic-

tum should be interpreted,<sup>11</sup> neither do I intend to simplify Reidar's view on the relationship between images and the written word. But as a scholar of medieval visual culture, I have to contest the assumption that images depicting Biblical events are bare illustrations of Biblical texts or reflections of influential Biblical exegesis.<sup>12</sup> This may perhaps have been the case in the Lutheran countries of Northern Europe after the Reformation, even if I doubt it. But it was not in any way the case during the centuries we call the High Middle Ages, when visual media clearly functioned as a communicative and argumentative language in its own right – even prior to verbal discourse, according to some medieval theoretical thinkers, like for instance Hugh of St. Victor (1097–1141). In his book *Didascalicon*, which was paramount for the intellectual culture of the High Middle Ages, Hugh refers to geometry as *fons sensuum et origo dictionum*, the fount of perceptions and the source of utterances.<sup>13</sup> To Hugh, the very structure of thought is visual! His attitude testifies to a keen awareness of the graphic and its rhetoric potential, characteristic of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In medieval art, a picture is certainly worth a thousand words.

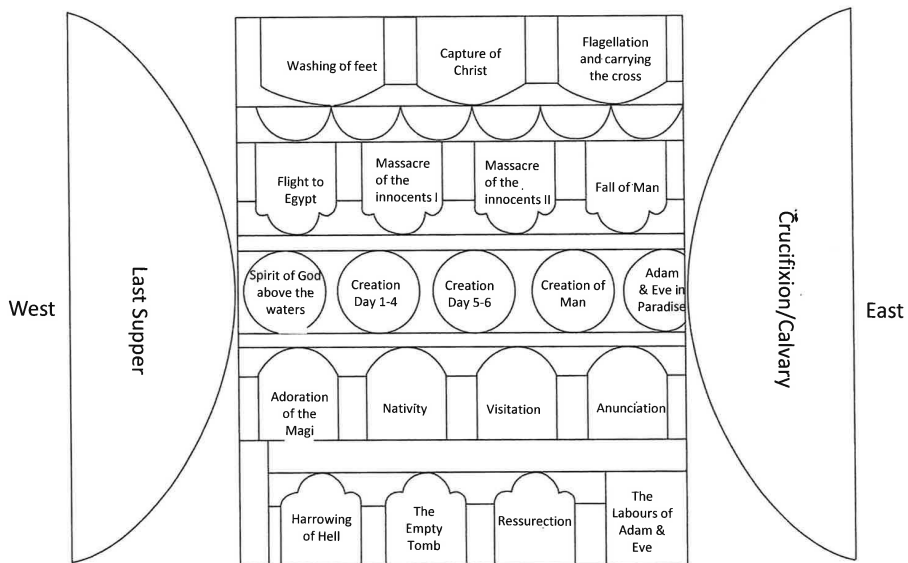
To demonstrate the various ways in which the visual language transcends the Biblical text in medieval ecclesiastical art, I shall examine one of the New Testament scenes depicted in the painted vault from Ål stave church. Here, we are again confronted with the theme of the Jews and the Gentiles, as you shortly will see.



Fig. 5. Painted wooden vault, about 1250, from Ål stave church, Hallingdal, Norway.  
Photo: Oslo University Museum of Cultural History

## The Calvary Scene from Ål Stave Church

Painted about 1250 in the mountainous district of Hallingdal, the wooden vault was made to span a new, extended chancel in Ål stave church, a parish church of modest dimensions. The scope of the decoration was nevertheless an ambitious one: to picture the whole narrative of the Salvation history from Creation to the Last Judgment (Fig. 6). Three key narratives are distributed across the vault: 1) the Genesis cycle with the seven days of creation, the fall and subsequent toil of Adam and Eve, 2) the Incarnation cycle from the Annunciation to Mary, the Nativity of Jesus and the following dramatic events of the flight into Egypt and Herod's massacre of the innocents; 3) the Passion cycle from the grand representation of the Last Supper and the events of the Passion narrative, culminating with the crucifixion scene and continuing with the Harrowing of Hell and the Resurrection. In addition, a representation of the Last Judgement once completed the program. Today, this part of the decoration is but fragmentarily preserved. Its original position in the church is unknown, but scholars have suggested that it adorned the northern wall of the chancel.<sup>14</sup>



The painted ceiling from Ål stave church. Schematic overview  
(based on Fuglesang 1996)

*Fig. 6. Scheme of the iconographic program of the painted wooden vault from Ål stave church. From: Signe Horn Fuglesang, ed., Middelalderens bilder: Utsmykningen av koret i Ål stavkirke (Oslo: Cappelen, 1996), 24*



Of this very consistent and rather conventional pictorial program, we will turn to the monumental Crucifixion/Calvary scene on the Eastern wall (Fig. 7). This representation is of course an explicit case of picturing the New Testament – which is the theme of today’s seminar. Simultaneously, it is the most emblematic pictorial scene in Christian art, and as such the image transcends the Gospel text in multiple ways. We see the crucified Christ surrounded by several figures, recognizable from iconographic convention. Some of them belong to the biblical narrative in the Gospel of St. John (19: 26–27): the Virgin Mary to the far left, St. John the apostle to the far right, and the Roman soldier who by tradition has been named Longinus, piercing Christ’s side with his lance (John 19: 34). The man to the left thoughtfully pulling his beard and looking towards Christ may be interpreted as the centurion who according to Matthew (and Luke) came to realize Christ’s true identity from the earthquake and the other signs occurring at the moment of his death. These events led him to admit that “truly this was the Son of God” (Matthew 27:54/Luke 23:47). The most interesting figures in this context are, however, the two females flanking the cross at both sides, the one to his right with an elevated chalice and her eyes firmly directed towards Christ, the other half-naked, turning away and looking down. In these two figures, we recognize the personifications of the Church and the Synagogue. As we saw in the introductory part of this paper, the two of them form a pair with a long and continuous history in Christian iconography. How then, do these allegorical figures blend into the Calvary scene of the painted ceiling from Ål? Why are they there? How do they relate to the Gospel narrative underlying the representation? And what is their rhetorical contribution to the decoration’s visual argument?

### **Transcending the Gospel narrative**

The presence of the two personifications of Ecclesia and Synagoga beneath the cross transcends the biblical texts by transforming the narrative scene into a theological statement. Still, the inclusion of Ecclesia and Synagoga in the Ål Calvary scene is but one of several ways in which the visual rhetoric exceeds the Gospel account. The Calvary scene represents a synthesis of selected elements from several textual and visual narratives. This feature is of course not peculiar to the Calvary scene from Ål church; it is simply the way in which medieval visual rhetoric works. By applying material from the huge stock of texts and images available in ecclesiastical culture, the visual language creates argumentative statements. The combination of Mary, John and Longinus from the Gospel of John with the assumed centurion from the Gospel of Matthew/Luke already creates a narrative different from any of the four gospels. Moreover, several central elements one should expect to find in a Calvary scene are left out here – like the two thieves crucified along with Jesus, the



*Fig. 7. Calvary scene. Eastern end of painted wooden vault, about 1250, from Ål stave church, Hallingdal, Norway. Photo: Oslo University Museum of Cultural History*

trilingual *titulus* at the top of the cross, the soldiers throwing dice on Jesus' clothes, and the swamp with vinegar given Jesus to drink from. These omissions tend to sharpen the scope of this particular representation and concentrate on the one main theme exposed here: the recognition of the significance of Christ's death on the cross and the acceptance of its implications.

This theme – recognition and acceptance – is emphasized not only by the converted centurion (if we are to interpret him thus), but also by the figure of Longinus with the lance. According to the apocryphal *Acts of Pilate* and the range of legendary texts and liturgical passion plays circulating in twelfth- and early thirteenth-century Europe, Longinus was cured of blindness in his one eye when a drop of Christ's blood spilled on it.<sup>15</sup> From having been blind and participating in the torture of Christ, Longinus regained his sight and was able to perceive God incarnate.<sup>16</sup> In the painting, Longinus firmly gazes towards the crucified Christ, while pointing his index finger to his left eye. Similarly, all his three companions on the right side of the cross are represented as perceptive and focused: Mary, the other centurion, and Ecclesia with her chalice – all have their eyes fixed on Christ. On the contrary, John and Synagoga on the left side of the cross are looking away. *Synagoga* at Ål is particularly grim: Refusing to look at the crucified Christ, her crown is slipping; she shamelessly exposes her body and carries the head of a goat in her hand. Her grotesque attribute hints perhaps to the sacrifices of animals in the Temple of Jerusalem, a practice made superfluous and invalid after the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Simultaneously, the goat head associates to the Jewish concept of the scapegoat (Leviticus 16:8). It may also be a rude insinuation of *Synagoga*'s supposed liaison with the diabolic, cf. the troublesome passage in John 8:44, where Christ accuses the Jews of being offspring of the devil.<sup>17</sup> Its multiple meaning is undoubtedly intended.

St. John's role in the painting is more ambiguous. Perhaps his association with the Synagogue is largely an unintended result of the need to combine the pair of Ecclesia and Synagoga with the pictorial scheme of the crucifixion, where the apostle and the mother of Jesus are indispensable protagonists on either side of the cross.

That being as it may, the composition of the scene remains clearly divided: the personae at Christ's right side see and recognize him, whereas the personae at his left side are looking away and thus refuse or hesitate to do so. This two-partite compositional scheme with the figure of Christ in the middle echoes the scheme of the Last Judgement, with the righteous to the right and the damned to the left. The goat-head in *Synagoga*'s hand enhances this pictorial association, serving as a visual allusion to the well-known verses in Matthew 25, where the Last Judgment is predicted and construed as separation between righteous sheep and damned goats.

As we see, this representation of a well-known and easily identifiable scene from the Passion of Christ is also a tight web of associated texts and images. It is an intertextual, but even more, an “intervisual” network within which a certain theological message is communicated. This means of communication is clearly not, I argue, a substitute for literacy. Rather, it requires a certain sophisticated level of *graphicacy*; that is the ability to read graphic representations.<sup>18</sup>

### Framing the Eucharist

I hope to have shown that all these instances of intertextuality and intervisuality in the Calvary scene from Ål suggest a far more complex relation between biblical narrative and visual representation than the simple transfer of literate meaning from one medium to another. However, I would argue that the most significant transcendence of the biblical text is embedded in the *liturgical context* of this painting. Its ecclesiastical setting is actually indicated in the painting itself, through the choices of both formal design and certain iconographical elements. The angel handling a censer above the cross is interesting in this context. It is yet another extra-textual element added to the composition, but unlike the figures of Ecclesia and Synagoga, the angel seems to refer directly to the liturgical performance, that is the celebration of the Eucharist, meant to take place right beneath the painted vault.

In the thirteenth-century understanding of the Eucharist, the liturgy was conceived of as a mystical re-enactment of the Golgotha event, and simultaneously harmonious with the heavenly liturgy eternally celebrated before the throne of God.<sup>19</sup> Mimicking the celebrating priest at the altar, the censuring angel conceptually breaks down the borders between past and present, time and eternity. The pictorial space merges with the ecclesiastical space; painted narrative blends into performed liturgy in the chancel of Ål stave church. Another feature that suggests this integration of pictorial and ecclesiastical space even stronger is the design of Christ’s cross. Quite different from the crudely manufactured cross that is depicted in the narrative passion scenes elsewhere in the decoration (Fig. 8), the cross of the Calvary scene is carefully and beautifully crafted. With its trilobed ends, diamond-patterned brims and polychromies, it is conspicuously reminiscent of several large sculpted crucifixes from medieval Norway, like the one from Hov Church in Soknedal (Fig. 9). This makes us wonder which level of representation the painted Christ in the Ål Calvary scene belongs to. Should he be perceived as the main character in a narrative tableau, or as a liturgical cult sculpture? Do we see a painting of Christ, or a painting of a sculpture of Christ? The representation oscillates between both. Together with the censuring angel and the abstract, patterned background, the design of the cross blurs the borders between pictorial and liturgical/ecclesiastical space.



*Fig. 8. Scenes from the passion of Christ: the flagellation and carrying of the cross. Painted wooden vault, about 1250, from Ål stave church, Hallingdal, Norway. Photo: Oslo University Museum of Cultural History*



*Fig. 9. Crucifix from Hov Church, Soknedal, Norway. Photo: NTNU Vitenskapsmuseet, Trondheim*



*Fig. 10. Painted vault from Torpo stave church, c. 1250, with a Calvary scene at the eastern end with Ecclesia, Synagoga, the Virgin, St. John, and censuring angels flanking a blank space where a sculpted crucifix must once have hung. Photo: Kjartan Hauglid*

A comparable arrangement in the church of the neighbouring parish of Torpo confirms this pictorial blurring of narrative and liturgical spheres. Here, a similar painted vault is preserved. The pictorial program of this vault differs from that in Ål, but the Calvary scene with Ecclesia and Synagoga on the eastern wall is common to both decorations. The figure of Christ in Torpo, now lost, was obviously a sculpted, three-dimensional crucifix mounted onto the painted ornamental background and surrounded by the two-dimensional figures of Ecclesia, Synagoga, Mary, St. John, and two censuring angels (Fig. 10).

### **The Question of Hostility Towards the Jews**

It seems clear that in the painted vault from both Ål and Torpo churches, the personifications of Ecclesia and Synagoga appear where Christian doctrine collides most abruptly with Judaism: in the proximity of the Eucharist. This is not unique in Western medieval art: rather, a connection is often seen between the antagonistic pair and the immediate environment of the sacrament, like the decoration of the altar itself. The twelfth-century portable altar from Stavelot provides one example. Here, Ecclesia opposes Synagoga surrounded by Old Testament scenes interpreted as prefigurations of the Eucharist – a liaison the blindfolded Synagoga refuses to see.<sup>20</sup> In the early fourteenth-century altar

frontal from Kinsarvik church in Norway, Ecclesia and Synagoga surround the crucifixion in a scheme comparable to that in the Ål Calvary scene. Again, the rhetoric at work in these cases is a message of recognition and acceptance versus blindness and rejection. The constant and repeated charge against the Jews in medieval Europe was their stubbornness in rejecting Christ, and worse, their alleged hatred against him and his Church.<sup>21</sup> In the Ål paintings, the passion scenes preceding the Calvary scene at the eastern end of the vault depict Christ's torturers and executioners as Jews, not as Roman soldiers. Their religious affiliation is clearly communicated by their pointed headgear, so called Jewish caps (*Judenhut* or *pileum cornutum*), and their grotesquely deformed and monstrous faces testify to the widely held opinion of the thirteenth century that the Jews alone were responsible for Christ's suffering and death. This manner of representing Jews is not in any way unique for the Ål paintings. Similar examples are legio in Norwegian medieval art as well as in England and continental Europe, from where the Norwegian craftsmen inherited their pictorial language.<sup>22</sup> It is however intriguing that the allegorical figure of the Synagogue as well as the Jewish protagonists in biblical narratives are given such monstrous apparitions in paintings from the largely mono-cultural Scandinavian kingdoms, where Jewish presence was as good as non-existent during the Middle Ages. What was the motivation behind such hostile imagery? The few scholars who have approached this issue have of course pointed to the fact that iconographic conventions travelled and were shared all over Latin Christendom, and that the craftsmen in Scandinavia copied the models from pattern books.<sup>23</sup> Still, I find it hard to believe that this copying of models was unconscious and uninformed. A conceptual understanding of Judaism as treacherous and vicious was indeed communicated through texts and images, and this understanding had a clear rhetorical role to play in ecclesiastical art. The figure of Synagoga never occurs alone without her adversary Ecclesia. The two personifications come as an antagonistic pair – comparable to other antithetic entities in medieval visual rhetoric: life and death, day and night, sun and moon, virtue and vice, just and unjust. In order to establish the Church as the legitimate heir of the covenant with God, it was necessary to demarcate the illegitimate heir. The Christian expropriation of the Hebrew bible required a rhetorically potent legitimation. The juxtaposition of Ecclesia and Synagoga – in eloquent favour of Ecclesia – functioned largely as a kind of mirror for the Christians. It was not primarily aimed at the Jews, at least not when it appeared in liturgical spaces. The antagonistic representation of the Synagogue was conceptual and fictional, and the comparison with the Ecclesia was, to quote the historian Kenneth R. Stow, “a competition with only one active competitor, the Christian, who alone set the rules and named the game.”<sup>24</sup>

## Coda

In Norway, the hostility towards the Jews that was conceptualized in theological teaching and exhibited in visual art remained abstract and theoretical for a very long time. Elsewhere in Europe, where a portion of the population actually was Jewish, these ideas indeed had more manifest and violent consequences. The allegorical figures of *Ecclesia* and *Synagoga* eventually faded out from the stock repertoire of Christian iconography, but the hostility certainly remained in the Church. After the Middle Ages, the general attitude of the Christian Churches, be it Catholic or Protestant, continued to be largely hostile towards the adherents of Judaism, as we all are painfully aware of. In the Catholic Church, a definitive turning point did not come until the Second Vatican Council and the papal declaration *Nostra aetate* (1965).



Fig. 11. Joshua Koffmann: "Synagoga and Ecclesia in Our Time." Full-size clay version of the bronze sculpture at St. Joseph's University, Philadelphia. Photo: Joshua Koffmann

In the aftermath, a millennium and more of Christian hostility towards Judaism seems to have come to an end – and the allegorical iconography of *Ecclesia* and *Synagoga* has undergone a veritable transformation. The premodern pictorial tradition was recently re-applied and reinterpreted outside St. Joseph University in Philadelphia. Here, Joshua Koffmann's monumental bronze sculpture was inaugurated in September 2015, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of *Nostra Aetate* (Fig. 11). It was meant to counter the centuries



of art in which Synagoga has been construed as a mockery mirroring Ecclesia's superiority. Hence it shows the two as twin sisters sharing the same seat and symmetrically mirroring each other.

### Notes

- 1 This paper was given in very much the same form as a lecture at the seminar *Picturing the New Testament*, arranged at MF Norwegian School of Theology, August 29, 2016, to celebrate Reidar Hvalvik's 65th birthday.
- 2 Reidar Hvalvik, "Jewish Believers and Jewish Influence in the Roman Church until the Early Second Century," in *Jewish Believers in Jesus: The Early Centuries* (ed. O. Skarsaune and R. Hvalvik; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2007), 179–216 (216). For the Santa Sabina mosaic, see Joseph Wilpert and Walter N. Schumacher, *Die römische Mosaiken der kirchlichen Bauten vom IV.–XIII. Jahrhundert* (Freiburg i.B.: Herder, 1916, reprint 1976), 307; Maria Andalora and Serena Romano, eds., *Pittura medievale: Corpus* (Milan: Jaca Book/Università di Tuscia, 2006) 1:292–97.
- 3 Nina Rowe, *The Jew, the Cathedral, and the Medieval City: Synagoga and Ecclesia in the Thirteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 41–47, doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511762413>.
- 4 The interpretation of the two female figures in this heavily restored mosaic has, however, been disputed. See Frederic Schlatter, "The Two Women in the Mosaic of Santa Pudenziana," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 3, no. 1 (1995): 1–24, doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/earl.0.0020>.
- 5 Hvalvik, "Jewish Believers," 215.
- 6 Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 44: 3; 44:12 (*Expositions of the Psalms, 33–50* [ed. J. E. Rotelle O.S.A.; trans. M. Boulding O.S.B.; New York: New City Press, 2000], 3.16: 290–91).
- 7 Jerome, *Commentariorum in Osee Prophetam Libri Tres*, 1.2.2; PL, 25, 830; Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Job (Morals on the Book of Job)* [trans. J. Bliss; Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1844], 1:108).
- 8 James Everett Seaver, *The Persecution of the Jews in the Roman Empire 300–428* (Lawrence, Kans.: University of Kansas Press, 1952), [http://vlib.iue.it/carrie/texts/carrie\\_books/seaver/text.html](http://vlib.iue.it/carrie/texts/carrie_books/seaver/text.html).
- 9 Reidar Hvalvik, "Skapelse og syndefall i tekster og bilder: Ikonografiske merknader til Genesis-bildene i Ål stavkirke," *Kunst og kultur* 91 (2008): 34–49.
- 10 Hvalvik, "Skapelse og syndefall," 35. Hvalvik quotes Gregory in his own Norwegian translation. For an edition of Gregory's letter, see Gregory, *Epistola IX*, 229 (ed. D. Norberg; Corpus Christianorum 140 A; Turnhout: Brepols, 1982), 768.
- 11 Lawrence G. Duggan, "Was Art Really the 'Book of the Illiterate'?", *Word & Image* 5, no. 3 (1989): 227–51, doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02666286.1989.10435406>; Celia M. Chazelle, "Pictures, Books, and the Illiterate: Pope Gregory I's Letters to Serenus of Marseille," *Word & Image* 6, no. 2 (1990): 138–53, doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02666286.1990.10435425>.
- 12 Kristin B. Aavitsland, "Meningsmangfold i middelalderens billedspråk: Metodiske refleksjoner," in *Tegn, symbol og tolkning: Om forståelse og fortolkning av middelalderens bilder* (ed. G. Danbolt, H. Laugerud and L. Liepe; Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum, 2003), 53–63.
- 13 Hugh of St Victor, *Didascalicon: Eruditionis didascalicae libri septem*, PL, 176, 757.
- 14 Signe H. Fuglesang, ed., *Middelalderens bilder: Utsmykningen av koret i Ål stavkirke* (Oslo: Cappelen, 1996), 89.
- 15 Rose Jeffries Peebles, *The Legend of Longinus in Ecclesiastical Tradition and Its Connection with the Grail* (Baltimore, 1911), 20; Sandro Sticca, *The Latin Passion Play: Its Origins and Development* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1970), 141–60.
- 16 In some of the sources, Longinus is identified with the centurion who acknowledged Jesus' divinity after experiencing the earthquake, solstice and other signs appearing at his death, see Peebles, *The legend of Longinus*, 20.
- 17 Debra Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews: Making Monsters in Medieval Art* (Princeton, N.J./Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003), 78, 134.

- 18 Ildar Garipzanov, "The Rise of Graphicacy in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages," *Viator* 46, no. 2 (2015): 1–22, doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1484/j.viator.5.105359>.
- 19 In medieval Norway, this understanding of the Mass was communicated and circulated through vernacular explanations of the Mass and other ecclesiastical rituals, so-called *expositiones missae* (*messuskýrningar* in Old Norse). See Olaf Kolsrud, ed., *Messuskýrningar: Liturgisk symbolik frå den norsk-islandske kyrkja i mellomalderen* (Oslo: Kjeldeskriftfondet, 1952); Kristin Norseth, ed., *Messuskýrningar: Norrøne messeforklaringer i norsk oversettelse* (trans. E. Kleivane; Oslo: St. Olav, 2014).
- 20 Rowe, *The Jew, the Cathedral, and the Medieval City* [see n. 3], 62–65.
- 21 Gavin I. Langmuir, "The Faith of Christians and Hostility to Jews," in *Christianity and Judaism* (ed. D. Wood; Oxford/Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell/The Ecclesiastical History Society, 1992), 77–92. For charges against the Jews in medieval Scandinavia, see Martin Schwarz Lausten, *Kirke og synagoge: Holdninger i den danske kirke til jødedom og jøder i middelalderen og den lutherske ortodoksi (ca. 1100–1700)* (Copenhagen: Akademisk forlag, 1992), 15–375.
- 22 On the stereotypical representation of Jews as monstrous, see Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*, 95–156.
- 23 Margrethe C. Stang, "De fremmede i norsk middelaldermaleri: Jøder og muselmaner blant fjord og fjell," in *Transformasjoner i vikingtid og norrøn middelalder* (ed. G. Steinsland; Oslo: Unipub, 2006), 183–95.
- 24 Kenneth R. Stow, *Alienated Minority: The Jews of Medieval Latin Europe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 234.