# Augustine vs. Archisynagogus: Competing Modes of Christian Instruction in the Benediktbeuern *Ludus de nativitate*

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Among extant works of Church drama, the thirteenth-century Benediktbeuern *Ludus de nativitate* has drawn critical attention for "the most imaginative version of the Procession of Prophets to be found anywhere in medieval drama."[1] Based on the sixth-century *Sermo contra Judeos, paganos, et Arianos de symbolo* wrongly attributed to Augustine, the *ordo prophetarum* that opens the Christmas Play is ostensibly aimed at showing Jews the folly of not accepting the Virgin Birth despite evidence delivered by a parade of their own Old Testament prophets. The energy and innovation of the *ordo*, however, is owed largely to its polemical interruption by a Jewish antagonist called Archisynagogus, who does not appear in the Pseudo-Augustinian sermon or in any other of its later dramatic renditions.[2] Finding the notion of conception without sexual intercourse logically untenable, Archisynagogus, who has been watching the procession with a gallery of other Jews, derides the words of the prophets and demands an explanation:

> Dic michi, quid predicat     dealbatus paries!
> dic michi, quid asserat     veritatis caries!

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1   Bevington, *Medieval Drama*, 179. E. K. Chambers comments on the originality of having Augustine appearing on stage *in propria persona*; Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage*, 73. More recently, Steven Wright has discussed the thematic connection of the *ordo* to the *Ludus de Rege Egypti* that follows in the Benediktbeuern manuscript; Wright, "*The Play of the King of Egypt*," 51.

2   The *ordo prophetarum* of the twelfth-century Anglo-Norman *Jeu d'Adam* is also disrupted by a "Judeus," but neither the character nor the interruption receives the developed treatment present in the Benediktbeuern play. For other *ordines,* see Young, *Drama,* 2:125-71.

> dic michi, quid fuerit,     quod audivi pluries!
> vellem esset cognita     rerum michi series.
> <div align="right">(*CB* 227.45-49)[3]</div>

[Tell me, what / Does the whitewashed wall proclaim? / Tell me, what / Does the carrion of truth maintain? / Tell me, what is this / That I have heard so often? / I was hoping that the chain of events / Might be made clear to me! (ll. 79-86)]

Because Archisynagogus's complaint is peppered with insults and accompanied by a temper tantrum — stage directions call for him to "make an excessive clamor […] shoving forward his comrade, agitating his head and his entire body and striking the ground with his foot"[4] ("valde obstrepet […] trudendo socium suum, movendo caput suum et totum corpus et percutiendo terram pede") — he has been considered mainly as an "ethnic caricature," as among the "despicable, risible types," and as akin to "the *senex* of New Comedy," in other words, as a character whose main function it is to contribute to the farcical dimension of the play.[5] When critical attention has focused on his disruption for more than its comic stereotyping, it has tended to situate the episode within the *ecclesia-synagoga* debate tradition where polemical encounters between personified symbols of Christianity and Judaism reveal the wrongness of Jewish belief.[6] This approach limits Archisynagogus to a strawman whose arguments are meant to be summarily demolished.

Yet consonant with the originality of the use of the *ordo prophetarum* in this play, Archisynagogus's role is much more complex. His distinct personality, which implies something other than simple abstract personification, suggests a closer parallel with twelfth-century Latin dialogues between a Jewish individual who questions Christian doctrine and the clerical defender who sets the debate down in writing. Comparing what takes place in the *ordo* interruption to works like Gilbert Crispin's *Disputatio Iudei et Christiani* and Odo of Cambrai's *Disputatio contra Judaeum Leonem*, which have so far been neglected in discussions of the play, sheds new light on Archisynagogus's didactic function.

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3  Quotations from the Latin text of the Christmas Play *(Ludus de nativitate)* are taken from Schumann and Bischoff's edition of this part of the *Carmina Burana*, where the play is numbered *CB* 227. English translations are based on Bevington's bilingual text of the play. Citations refer to these two editions, with line references provided parenthetically.

4  Stage direction preceding *CB* 227.45 (Bevington, l. 79) in the play.

5  See Goodman, "*Quidam de Sinagoga*," 171, n. 10; Schiff, *From Stereotype to Metaphor*, 1; Marsicano, "Adaptations," 60.

6  See Dahan, *Les intellectuels chrétiens*, 379. Young discusses the dispute as an offshoot of the pseudo-Augustinian *De Altercatione Ecclesiae et Synagoga Dialogus*; see Young, *Drama*, 2:192.

Although interreligious debate literature provides some historical clues that actual interfaith discussion took place — Odo claims that he debated with a Jew named Leo in Senlis — it is readily apparent that the purpose of these works is to furnish religious instruction for a Christian audience.[7] By the twelfth century, the application of logic and dialectic to matters of faith led many Christians to question a number of thorny doctrinal issues, including those involved in the Incarnation and the Virgin Birth, as "they could see with their own eyes that empirical reality contradicted what their priests taught them to believe."[8] Because such misgivings reflected the objections posed by disbelieving Jews, scholastic theologians like Gilbert Crispin, Odo, Abelard, and Anselm sought to validate difficult theological points using the dictates of logic and framing their arguments in the form of a reasoned debate (*rationabiliter*) between the author and an incredulous Jew.[9] In his *Disputatio contra Judaeum Leonem*, for example, Odo declares that "it seemed appropriate to me to pursue this question [of the Incarnation] in the form of a dialogue, where the Jew had asked and I had responded," while Crispin admits that he is writing "sub persona Iudei."[10]

The Jewish opponent thus becomes a surrogate, in Odo's words, for those "Catholics who had sided with the views of the Jew" and who should now realize that their doctrinal doubts have been misguided.[11] A dramatized version of the Jewish-Christian polemic, such as that initiated by Archisynagogus, makes it even clearer that the didactic point of the exchange is intended for a Christian audience, as it is highly unlikely that viewers of a Latin play performed inside a church during the Christmas season would have included any real Jews.[12] Moreover, the casting of Archisynagogus "et suos Iudeos" in the role of spectators to the *ordo* serves to raise a parallel between the fictional Jews viewing the action on stage and the Christian audience doing the same.[13]

Given this polemical context and Archisynagogus's specific request for a rational explanation of the logic-defying concept that he has heard so much about ("quod audivi

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7   Dahan discusses the frequency of public debates between Jews and Christians; see Dahan, *Christian Polemic*, 23-27, 58.

8   Abulafia, "From Northern Europe," 183.

9   Gilbert Crispin, *Disputatio Iudei et Christiani* 15.16.

10  Odo of Tournai, *"On Original Sin" and "A Disputation with the Jew,"* 85. Crispin, *Disputatio* 6.22.

11  "quibusdam Catholicis qui intererant pro Judaei parte." Odo, *Disputatio contra Judaeum*, Col. 1112C. Trans. by Resnick in Odo of Tournai, *"On Original Sin" and "A Disputation,"* 97.

12  As Bevington notes, the opening stage direction indicates performance "in fronte ecclesiae," which has been taken to mean "the front part of the church interior" at either the east or west end of the nave. Bevington, *Medieval Drama*, 180, n. 1.

13  Opening stage direction.

pluries," *CB* 227.47), it seems as if the Benediktbeuern *ordo* will ineluctably culminate in a debate similar to other Jewish-Christian dialogues. Indeed, when the Boy Bishop presiding over the procession calls on "mentem Augustini, / per quem disputatio concedatur fini" (*CB* 227.55-56; "The mind of Augustine, / By whom the dispute / May be brought to an end," ll. 100-102), there is every anticipation of an intellectual battle, one that will reaffirm the purity of the Virgin on rational grounds for any Christians harbouring doubts similar to those voiced by the Jew. Augustine's appearance as a character adds to this expectation as he commands his Jewish opponents to "open [their] ears" (l. 119) for verbal instruction ("Nunc aures aperi," *CB* 227.65). Finally, despite a rubric calling for him to address Augustine's exhortation "cum nimio cachinno" ("with immoderate and violent laughter"),[14] Archisynagogus delivers opening arguments that contain a structured refutation of the statement "virgo pariet" (*CB* 227.72; "a virgin shall give birth," l. 132) as a concept "quod negat ratio" (*CB* 227.71; "which reason denies," l. 131):

> Vel si virgo pariet    vel iam forte peperit,
> que non carnis copulam    ante partum senserit,
>   . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
> quod phantasma fuerit,    lex docet et aperit.
>
> Quod de clausa virgine    sic procedat parvulus,
> est erroris credere,    non doctrine cumulus.
> vel ergo respondeat    ad obiectum emulus,
> vel erroris fugiat    et ruboris baiulus!
>
>                   (*CB* 227.82-89)

[If a virgin either "will bear a child," / Or perhaps has already done so, / Who did not experience / The bond of flesh prior to giving birth, / The law teaches and reveals / That such a thing would be fantastical.

To believe that from inviolable virginity / Should thus proceed a small child / Is to believe erroneously, / Not the summit of wisdom. / Therefore, let my rival / Either respond to this objection, / Or else flee as the bearer / Of error and shame.  ll. 154-67.]

The dialectical construction of Archisynagogus's words establishes his desire that Augustine respond "ad obiectum" (*CB* 227.88), to continue in the debate format using the same method; and if the didactic purpose of the *Ludus de nativitate* were simply to vindicate Christian doctrine using reason, as in earlier debates, one would expect the Bishop of Hippo to answer his opponent's objections with logic. However, what happens next

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14   Stage direction preceding *CB* 227.69 (Bevington, l. 127).

is marked by a surprising incongruence between expectation and actualization as Augustine eschews "argumenta […] moresque sophistici" (*CB* 227.91; "arguments and sophistical precepts," ll. 170-71) on the manifest grounds that reason falters in this unique case ("talis casus unici," *CB* 227.90).

This is highly unusual, for no such excuse bars discussion of the Virgin Birth elsewhere in the context of interreligious debate. Odo's argument defending the notion of Mary's bodily purity, for instance, relies specifically on the concept of *ratio* as superior to *sensus*, while Inghetto Contardo's *Disputationes contra Judeos* bases its justification on empirical observation of parthenogenesis in earthworms;[15] thus, despite what the character of Augustine claims, the dismissal of an established and effective method of instruction does not reflect its inherent uselessness for the given situation, but exemplifies a divergent view on the proper means of Christian learning. Archisynagogus's interruption of the *ordo* is thus less an opportunity to uphold any single doctrinal point (*what* one must believe) than a means of promoting an Augustinian notion of *how* one must believe to best learn sacred truth in general. This aspect has remained largely unexplored in assessments of the didacticism of the play. As Catherine Brown observes, "the Latin *doctrina* […] means first of all the act of teaching or instruction [and] secondarily, and by figural transfer of meaning, 'the knowledge imparted by teaching.'"[16] This duality is implied in Augustine's *De doctrina christiana*, which is as much a teaching manual as it is about specific exegetical readings. Within this expanded definition, the utter rejection of debate reveals the conflict between Archisynagogus and Augustine as a clash of two opposing pedagogical approaches to Christian mystery: the Jew's emphasis on learning by intellectual process versus the saint's ultimate defence of inspired understanding. The resolution of this ideological opposition in favour of the latter constitutes the overlooked didactic message of the episode and of the *Ludus de nativitate* as a whole.

The motives for the rejection of debate as a means of instruction can be inferred from the likely authorship of the play. The presence of the *Ludus* in the same manuscript as the *Carmina Burana* strongly suggests that it is part of a single collection composed by the *vagantes clerici*, the wandering student poets who were known to "thumb their collective nose at the very academic and ecclesiastical establishment that nurtured them."[17]

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15  Odo's discussion, which concludes his polemic, appears in cols. 1110C-1112C. Dahan excerpts a passage, drawn from Psalm 21, from Inghetto's discussion of the Virgin; see Dahan, *The Christian Polemic*, 113.
16  Brown, *Contrary Things*, 9.
17  Colish, *Medieval Foundations*, 202. The attribution of the Benediktbeuern plays to the *vagantes* is longstanding. Wolfgang Michael, for one, calls the manuscript "the most outstanding vagantic collection on German soil"; see Michael, "Tradition and Originality," 27.

In this case, the disdain for polemics can be read as a parodic jab by students against their masters and modes of teaching. Archisynagogus is twice called "magister" (*CB* 227.198 and 263), and his insistent emphasis on the wording of the statements "virgo pariet" (*CB* 227.72, 78, and 82), "est virgo puerpera" (*CB* 227.81; "A virgin is childbearing," l. 151), and "matre virgine" (*CB* 227.97) recalls university instruction through *sophismata*, logically problematic sentences like these that were dissected at the level of grammar and debated *pro* and *contra* "to teach proficiency in argument."[18] Likewise, when Archisynagogus remarks that Augustine's foolish defence of the Virgin Birth is akin to the statement "homo mortuus [est]" (*CB* 227.94), he conveys his sense of the ridiculousness of the proposition by invoking a classic sophism that preoccupied a number of later thirteenth- and fourteenth-century university masters at Paris and Oxford.[19] In a nutshell, the statement "the man is dead" is held to be grammatically impossible by schoolmen like Richard Kilvington and John Buridan since a man who is dead is no longer technically a man but a corpse that no longer partakes of the state of being.[20] By giving Archisynagogus an interest in the rigorous application of logic, the vagantic author mocks the "Jewishness" of schoolmen with the same narrow understanding of Christian mystery, drawing on an established notion of Jews as "hair-splitting logicians."[21] Criticizing precisely the Judaic interpretation of "a virgin shall conceive," Peter the Chanter, for example, notes that Jewish readers are "versed in the sophism of composition" that lacks comprehension of deeper truth.[22]

In a broader sense, Archisynagogus's confrontational attitude to learning is highly reminiscent of the methods of dialectical instruction that also developed in the schools toward the end of the twelfth century, particularly the *quaestiones disputatae*, of which the *vagantes* were surely aware. This approach required a master to debate an *opponens* in response to a question (*quaestio*) on a topic such as the interpretation of Scripture or canon law posed to him by students or other masters before providing an authoritative resolution or *sententia*.[23] For Vincent Marsicano, the entire structure of the *Ludus de nativitate*, not just the *ordo*, is governed by this didactic pattern of *quaestio-disputatio-sententia*.[24] Yet, to perceive the presence of these scholastic elements as a means of

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18  Leff, *Paris and Oxford*, 207. On the *sophismata,* see Pironet, "Sophismata."
19  The best history of this *sophisma* is Sten Ebbesen's "The Dead Man is Alive," 43-70.
20  It appears, for instance, as question 14a:4 in the first book of Buridan's *Quaestiones in analytica priora* and in *The Sophismata of Richard Kilvington*, 100.
21  Smalley, *The Study of the Bible*, 235.
22  Quoted in Smalley, *The Study of the Bible*, 234.
23  Bazàn discusses the origin and evolution of the *disputatio* in *Les Questions disputées*, 31-40.
24  Marsicano, "Adaptations," 60.

promoting instruction through polemics is to neglect the implications of attributing the format to Archisynagogus. Recognizing the parodic aspect of the episode, as well as the sudden truncation of all arguments in the play, remains an essential step in unveiling its more sober point: Augustine's refusal to take up the *quaestio* of another master and participate in his proposed mode of instruction reflects the notion that Christian *sententia* must be obtained through means other than *disputatio*.

An examination of the serious philosophical motives for the denial of scholastic didacticism in the play reveals the nature of this alternative path toward sacred truth. Beyond its participation in the simple mockery and reversal of order that characterize Christmas festivities such as the election of the Boy Bishop, the deferral of reason in the *ordo* evokes the anti-Aristotelianism of thirteenth-century theologians like Eustace of Ely who defended inspired learning against those who "sought to reduce the ineffable mysteries of the Trinity, transubstantiation and the other theological truths to 'our understanding … and presume to formulate them according to certain natural and philosophical and logical reasons, seeking to include within the rules of nature what is above all nature.'"[25] Archisynagogus's denial of the Virgin Birth on account of what "the law teaches" ("lex docet," *CB* 227.85) is not based on any incongruity between this concept and the "Old Law" of Judaism but on its defiance of the laws of nature expounded by Aristotle. Refutations of "homo mortuus est" appear in commentaries on the *De Interpretatione* and *Sophistici Elenchi*, and the logical impossibility of this *sophisma* leans heavily on Aristotle's discussion of syllogism in the recently discovered *Prior Analytics*, a technique also alluded to in the Jew's request to be shown "the chain of events" (l. 85; "rerum […] series," *CB* 227.49).[26] Archisynagogus is therefore a champion of learning through Aristotelian logic — a point made obvious in his direct invocation of the philosopher's authority to support his case (*CB* 227.94-95) — and his wrongheadedness owes as much to this philosophical perspective as it does to his Judaism.

Although the *Ludus de nativitate* can be dated no more precisely than the late-twelfth or early-thirteenth centuries (the manuscript dates from 1230), it is tempting to identify its interest in university instruction alongside its anti-Aristotelian perspective as a response to the early controversy over the teaching of Aristotle at the University of Paris between 1210 and 1231; this was an expansive quarrel that "crystallized the latent

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25  Leff, *Paris and Oxford,* 199. Amos examines the context of the Boy Bishop in "'Cum nimio cachinno.'"

26  Buridan's *Quaestiones in analytica priora*, for example, is a commentary on Aristotle's *Prior Analytics* and assesses "homo mortuus est" in light of the philosopher's "multi modi syllogistici" (14a:4). On the Aristotelian origins of the *sophisma*, see Ebbesen, "The Dead Man," 43.

conflict between natural experience and revelation."[27] Whether or not this clash of ideas had already come to a head when the play was composed, it casts the introduction of Augustine as a foil to Archisynagogus in a more complex light, for the Bishop of Hippo is not only the putative author of the *Sermo contra Judeos* but also a representative of Platonic instruction, the bastion of a pedagogical system that opposes a reliance on external logic with one based on inner inspiration.

According to the view of Christian pedagogy that can be assembled from Augustine's works, all understanding of sacred truth is entirely dependent on the ability of the learner to consult an Inner Teacher who is Christ. In the succinct formulation of the commentary *In epistolam Ioannis ad Parthos*, "interior ergo magister est qui docet, Christus docet, inspiratio ipsius docet" (It is the Inner Teacher who teaches: Christ teaches, his inspiration teaches).[28] The complex intermediate process through which this inspired learning takes place is described in Platonic terms as seeing the *rationes aeternae,* the archetypes or patterns for reality conforming to Plato's Ideas, "eternal and always maintaining in the same condition […] contained in the divine intelligence" ("aeternae ac semper eodem modo sese habentes, quae in divina intelligentia continentur").[29] When a student grasps a concept being taught, it is because the student glimpses with the "inner eye" or "eye of the mind" its archetypal form, pre-existent if deeply hidden in the soul;[30] this insight is granted by the *intus magister* only to an eye that is "sound, genuine, and serene, like those things it attempts to see" ("oculum quo videntur ista, sanum, et sincerum, et serenum, et similem his rebus quas videre intendit"), that is, to one who approaches learning with true piety.[31]

The consequences of Augustine's influential view of learning for the didacticism of the *Ludus de nativitate* are several. First, sophistical arguments are rendered superfluous because one eventually requires the intervention of the *intus magister* to comprehend any sacred truth including that of Christ's parthenogenesis; rational process takes a back seat to inspiration. The role of human teachers is, instead, to create the faith and belief that enables their students to receive enlightenment, likened by Augustine to the role of a farmer who waters the trees in his orchard while their Creator maintains their shape and growth from within.[32] Archisynagogus and his Jews cannot learn until they

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27  Leff, *Paris and Oxford*, 190.

28  Augustine, *In epistolam Ioannis* 3.13.

29  Augustine, *De diversis quaestionibus LXXXIII*, 46.2.

30  Augustine, *De diversis quaestionibus* 46.2 describes the "oculo […] interiore," which is the "oculum mentis" in the later *De doctrina Christiana* 3.5.9.

31  Augustine, *De diversis quaestionibus* 46.2.

32  Augustine, *In epistolam Ioannis* 3.13.

are made to internalize Christian belief. How this is to be accomplished is encapsulated in Augustine's response to Archisynagogus's cry of "Res neganda!" (*CB* 227.107; "A thing to be denied!" l. 204) regarding the Virgin Birth, a mindset antithetical to the pious receptivity required for learning. Instead of countering by emphasizing the miracle as "a thing to be affirmed," Augustine replies with "Res miranda!" (*CB* 227.108; "A thing to be wondered at!" l. 205). If metaphors of vision — seeing the truth, gaining insight, and being illuminated — are most suited to describing the process of inner learning, the external sight implied by the act of "wondering" conversely "is closest to mental vision" ("est visioni mentis […] vicinior") and is capable of providing a similar transformative experience.[33]

Although removed from the ideal condition of the *rationes aeternae*, objects that signify visually (*res significandi*) in Augustine's pedagogical theory can communicate their natures to a higher degree of reliability than words. Among human beings, "thousands of things […] can be exhibited through themselves," that is, visually, "rather than through signs: for example, eating, drinking, sitting, standing, shouting and countless others" ("millia rerum […] quae ipsae per se valeant, non per signa monstrari, ut edere, bibere, sedere, stare, clamare, et innumerabilia caetera").[34] One can intentionally teach something of what "walking" is by showing the act of walking itself or learn the nature of a bird catcher's skills just by watching him at work.[35] Relying on this communicative ability of *res*, the stage directions for the *Ludus de nativitate* can specify that the actor playing Archisynagogus should "imitate the mannerisms of a Jew in all ways" ("imitando gestus Iudei in omnibus")[36] and expect that an audience viewing these movements will recognize the stereotype. While words are conventionally used as "aids and admonitions" ("adjutoria […] et admonitiones") when teaching, the possibility of understanding truth by observing an object exceeds what can be learned through verbal signs so that one "does not learn at all unless he himself sees what is described, where he then learns not from words but from the things themselves."[37] With Augustine's discussion of the Inner Teacher taken into account, the necessary stages in the process of learning are seeing, which results in believing, which, in turn, results in understanding.

Described as "blind" ("ceca," *CB* 227.106, 109) and "veiled in shadows" ("tenebris abscondita," *CB* 227.61), Archisynagogus and his companions must first *see* the truth;

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33  Augustine, *De trinitate* 11.1.1, *CCSL* 50, 50A.
34  Augustine, *De magistro* 3.6.
35  See Augustine, *De magistro* 3.6 and 10.32.
36  Stage direction preceding *CB* 227.45 (Bevington, l. 79).
37  Augustine, *In epistolam Ioannis* 3.13; Augustine, *De magistro* 12.39.

only then can they accept the doctrine of the Virgin Birth. This approach is apparent when the character of Augustine abandons his appeal to the ears of the Jews and offers the classic pictorial image of light passing through a glass, not as rational proof, but as a visual analogy for the conception of Christ (*CB* 227.102-105). This is consistent with the historical Augustine's observation that striking verbal imagery, such as the *Canticum canticorum*'s description of the Church as a beautiful woman with teeth "like a flock of shorn ewes," lends itself more readily to learning.[38] Such an emphasis on visualization is also a product of the Incarnational theology that developed in the twelfth century. An emphasis on the humanity of Christ and individual responses to it by theologians like Hugh of St. Victor and Bernard of Clairvaux led to the idea that "body and sense play an essential role in the creation of knowledge," revaluing sensory perception, and vision in particular, as a means of spiritual understanding.[39]

The ease with which this emphasis can translate into performance is manifest in the work of Bernard which evinces an "impulse for representation [...] that itself frequently verges on the theatrical," leading Michael O'Connell to conclude that the ideological movement toward visual imagery contributed to the rise of sacred drama.[40] There seems to be no better support for such a theory of origins than the *Ludus*, a play about the Incarnation that strongly promotes the attainment of spiritual understanding through seeing. More effective than mental pictures in promoting the wonderment or marvelling required for belief are the *res significandi* of drama that can actually be looked upon; consequently, Archisynagogus and his followers are invited to become spectators to biblical events portrayed in a series of Nativity scenes within the larger play.[41] These episodes — the Annunciation, the Coming of the Magi, the Adoration of the Shepherds, and the Slaughter of the Innocents — come after the exhortation of "Discant nunc Iudei" (*CB* 227.110; "Let the Jews now learn," l. 233) and are clearly intended as a means of creating belief among the fictional Jews and, by extension, of affirming it in a wider Christian audience.

Reconsidered from this perspective, the Benediktbeuern Procession of Prophets already contains a unique emphasis on observing *res* as a means of arriving at sacred

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38  Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana* 2.6.7.

39  O'Connell notes that "Vision in particular is privileged" in the work of Hugh of St. Victor, where "it appears to be a crucial power in the ascent to contemplation"; see O'Connell, *The Idolatrous Eye*, 68.

40  O'Connell, *The Idolatrous Eye*, 69.

41  The stage directions directly after *CB* 227.110 (Bevington, l. 233) call for the prophets to withdraw or "sit in their places to observe the play" ("sedeant in locis suis propter honorem ludi"). The stage directions do not mention where Archisynagogus and his associates are to go, but since the play's lesson is directed towards them, they surely return to their place "a sinistra" as specified in the opening rubric, to witness the action and later re-enter it.

meaning. In no other medieval *ordo* edited by Young, including the original *Sermo contra Judeos,* does Daniel's prophecy conclude with his singing of the responsory "Aspiciebam in visu noctis" (*CB* 227.15; "I beheld in the vision of the night," l. 27), which stresses the importance of sight in the acquisition of his sacred knowledge. Moreover, while other *ordines* present only the eschatological prophecy of the Erythraean Sibyl on the signs of Judgement ("Iudicii signum: ‹tellus sudore madescet. / E celo rex adveniet›," *CB* 227.32-36, esp. 32-33), the Benediktbeuern *processus* depicts her first viewing the star ("inspiciendo stellam")[42] over Bethlehem and commenting on its messianic "novum nuntium" (*CB* 227.16), the "new message" (l. 29). The "newness of the star" (l. 28; "stelle novitas," *CB* 227.16) and its message refer no doubt to the supersession of the *vetus testamentum* in consequence of the coming of Christ; however, because simply observing the star is represented as the direct catalyst for the Sibyl's visionary awareness, "newness" is also identified with seeing and believing as a replacement for the old scholastic approaches to sacred knowledge, approaches embodied by the *senex* Archisynagogus and classed as "errore Iudeorum" like a continued adherence to the Old Law.[43]

Such a distinction between new and former ways of learning is made plain when, in the scenes portraying the Coming of the Magi, the star is foregrounded as a mystery to be interpreted. As the three kings seek to interpret the star of Bethlehem, rubrics indicate that they begin by properly marvelling at it ("ammirentur"),[44] but the first king confuses himself by trying to understand the "novum […] nuntium" (*CB* 227.124) further according to the "sayings of the *old* school" (l. 269; "lingua secte *veteris*," *CB* 227.132; emphasis mine), namely, astrological knowledge based on the scholastic methods of the "quadruvium" (*CB* 227.121). For all this, he remains perplexed, bemused, and speechless ("distrahor," "miror," and "elinguem," *CB* 227.121, 127, 133), knowing only that a child of global power will be born (*CB* 227.135-36). Like the Sibyl, the first king does ultimately focus on stargazing ("semper inspiciendo stellam") but continues to make the mistake of "pondering about it" ("disputet de illa").[45] The second king begins in much the same way with an internalized *disputatio* and is frustrated by his attempts to comprehend the mystery fully through the faculty of reason ("ratio," *CB* 227.142 *CB* 227.16). The third king is similarly able to recognize that the star is an object signifying the birth "of a great prince" ("magni […] principis," *CB* 227.160), but since he, too,

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42  Stage direction preceding *CB* 227.16 (Bevington, l. 28). Young's edition of the *Sermo* in *The Drama of the Medieval Church* provides the standard text of the Sibylline prophecy; Young, *Drama,* 2:130-31.

43  Stage direction preceding *CB* 227.53 (Bevington, l. 95).

44  Stage direction preceding *CB* 227.121 (Bevington, l. 246).

45  Stage direction preceding *CB* 227.137 (Bevington, l. 278).

is occupied with reasoning about its nature ("disputando de stella") in the mode of the university, he is unable to grasp its full significance.[46] Only another visual act — seeing the infant to whom the star refers — can bring a complete understanding of its meaning.

Simply gazing on the child is again offered as the ultimate means to understanding sacred truth later in the *Ludus de nativitate* when *angelus* and *diabolus* compete to sway an audience of shepherds regarding the divinity of the newborn Christ. The devil — who, in the medieval conflation of the Judaic and the diabolic, sounds very much like Archisynagogus — attempts to subvert the faith that is the basis for inspired understanding when he urges the shepherds not to visit the manger.[47] His argument, couched like Archisynagogus's in the language of Aristotelian dialectic, characterizes the concept of a divinity born in a manger as something "that truth does not prove" (l. 452; "que non probat veritas," *CB* 227.223); the angel who announces this concept thus "constructs things contrary to truth" ("fabricat vero contraria," *CB* 227.231), an objection that accuses the angel of violating the very basis of dialectic: its capability of "discerning true things from false."[48] This is highly ironic, for the quasi-magical power to turn "verum in contrarium" (*CB* 227.236) through syllogism is exactly what medieval critics of dialectic like Walter of St. Victor present as an "art not dialectical but most surely diabolical" ("non dialecticam sed plane diabolicam artem"), confirmed now in the devil's own manipulative logic.[49]

But the devil's rhetoric aims at more than creating doubt through reason; his choice of words seeks to undermine seeing as the basis for belief by representing the Incarnation as "a falsehood open before the eyes" (ll. 455-56; "ad oculum reserata falsitas," *CB* 227.225) when it is only questionable according to the dictates of reason. The angel who speaks against him, however, reaffirms the didactic value of marvelling in the absence of any rationalization, assuring the shepherds that the manger will *show* the truth ("*monstrabit* presepium," *CB* 227.241; emphasis mine) to those who look on. This episode thus does not simply portray "the conflict between rational faithlessness and belief in divine miracle," as Bevington observes, but more accurately counters logic with an invitation to see for oneself, which will lead to belief and to understanding.[50]

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46  Stage direction preceding *CB* 227.153 (Bevington, l. 312).

47  A later example of the Judaic-Satanic equivalence appears in the N-Town "Parliament of Hell," where Satan voices the Jewish concern that Christ will "oure lawe […] down hewe" (l. 33). Trachtenberg's *The Devil and the Jews*, first published in 1943, remains a valuable discussion of medieval perceptions regarding Jewish diabolism.

48  The definition is Alcuin's, quoted in Brown, *Contrary Things*, 37.

49  Brown, *Contrary Things*, 64, cites Walter's critique of dialectic taken to extremes in his *Contra quatuor labyrinthos Franciae*.

50  Bevington, *Medieval Drama*, 179.

Ultimately, a persistent emphasis on learning by looking promotes the didactic efficacy of the Benediktbeuern play itself and the dramatic medium in general, for biblical scenes recreated on stage are accorded the same evidential weight as the events themselves. Archisynagogus and his companions are expected to learn by watching the original events surrounding Christ's birth; this enables Archisynagogus to abandon his role as a spectator and enter the action at Herod's court on two separate occasions (*CB* 227.198-209, 263-66). Yet, because these are the same scenes performed for the audience of the play, the distinction between true Gospel events and their re-enactment, between passive observation and active participation, breaks down, and with it any obstacles to visually accessing spiritual truth. The suspension of disbelief that takes place when viewing dramatic *res* as the things they portray participates in the desired state of non-intellectualizing receptivity necessary to learning sacred truth, and Christian viewers eager to disavow the lack of faith that would ally them with a Jewish audience would surely be inclined to accept the truthfulness of what they see on stage.

In addition to illustrating an Augustinian view of learning and the likely translation of image-centred theology into dramatic performance, the sort of reflexive acceptance stressed by the *Ludus* signals a fundamental shift in attitude towards the right to question Christian doctrine, a change with implications for European Jews and their depiction in medieval drama. An increasing emphasis on orthodox belief within the thirteenth-century Church resulted in the establishment of inquisitional tribunals and the passage of legislation designed to check spontaneous interreligious debate of the sort desired by Archisynagogus. Synods at Paris, Trier, Tarragon, and Bourges issued orders, echoed by papal bull, that expressly forbade "any lay person […] to discuss the Catholic religion in public or in private,"[51] for the logic of disbelieving Jews could "easily 'seduce' the 'simple' Christians" and promotes rather than forestalls doubt.[52] Alongside these prohibitions against debate, a number of canons from thirteenth-century councils, most notably Fourth Lateran Canon 68 and the Synod of Narbonne Canon 3, aimed at preventing Jewish-Christian interaction altogether, effectively eliminating the possibility of continued dialogue.[53]

For historian Gavin Langmuir, a vehement and violent antisemitism arose from "an irrational reaction to repressed rational doubts" precisely because such restrictions and texts like the *Ludus* promoted the denial of reasoned enquiry in favour of unwavering

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51  Canon law (*Sext*. V. 2. 2) based on a ban proclaimed by the Council of Tarragon (1233); quoted in Dahan, *The Christian Polemic*, 29.
52  Dahan, *The Christian Polemic*, 28.
53  "The Twelfth General Council (1215) Fourth Lateran Council," 290-91.

belief.[54] When Christians who questioned matters of dogma like the Incarnation and Virgin Birth were encouraged to "suppress . . . their rational empirical knowledge about the nature of objects and human beings" rather than to address such doubts using the tools of logic, the resulting acceptance of irrationality primed them to invent and accept fantasies about Jews that were not grounded in observation, particularly involving their imagined violence against Christians through ritual murders, well poisonings, and cannibalism.[55] Such beliefs in turn led to the increased hostility and reactionary attacks against Jewish communities.

Though the exact causes of medieval antisemitism are highly complex, it cannot be denied that coincident with the development of these irrational attitudes, depictions of rationally questioning Jews all but disappear from medieval religious drama as well. Archisynagogus's attempt to learn through scholastic *quaestiones* is supplanted by dramatic representations of Jewish *quaestio* in the sense of inquisitional torment;[56] the non-intellectualized response to visual scenes urged by the Benediktbeuern Christmas Play would find its most prominent expression in the highly affective portrayal of Jews as torturers of Christ in enactments of the Passion from late-medieval English drama.

The best example of this transmutation of scholastic *quaestio* into a form of Jewish torture is the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*. Written in or shortly after 1461 as a response to the Wycliffite rejection of transubstantiation, the Croxton play uses Jewish violence to symbolize the Lollards' erroneous attempts to understand the supernatural mystery of the sacrament according to the dictates of reason.[57] Since Jews were officially absent from England following the Edict of Expulsion in 1290, those in the play are once more stand-ins for incredulous Christians who question orthodox belief rather than historically accurate portrayals. Like Archisynagogus, the Jew Jonathas is driven by doubt to seek empirical evidence of transubstantiation, to "put [it] in a prefe."[58] But, in this case, Jewish violence directed toward Christ's body in the form of the Host is the chosen technique to investigate Christian doctrine. As Jonathas explains, "þe entent ys, if I myght knowe or vndertake / Yf þat he [Christ] were God allmyght" (ll. 291-92), a proposition

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54  Langmuir, *History, Religion, and Antisemitism*, 276.

55  Abulafia, *Christians and Jews in the Twelfth-Century Renaissance*, 5. For an account of these accusations, see Langmuir, *History, Religion, and Antisemitism*, 299-302.

56  For the multiplicity of meanings inherent in the Latin term *quaestio*, see Enders, *Medieval Theater*, 41-43; for the particular application of the term to the "shift […] in the rhetorical tradition from intellectual to bodily hermeneutics," see Enders, *Medieval Theater*, 38.

57  See Scherb, "Violence and the Social Body," *passim*.

58  *The Play of the Sacrament*, l. 442. Subsequent line references to this play are provided parenthetically.

he tests by stabbing a sacramental wafer with daggers "To prove in thys brede yf þer be eny lyfe" (l. 460). What is already deemed an improper means of interpreting sacred mystery — seeking empirical evidence and rational explanations — is supplemented by a learning process that seeks to establish proof by brute force, one that seems starkly at odds with the Augustinian concept of inspired understanding. Yet, like in the *Ludus*, an inappropriate approach affords the opportunity for proper visual instruction: stabbing, boiling, and baking the sacrament eventually prompts the wounded Christ child into making a miraculous appearance that confirms the reality of transubstantiation and motivates conversion. And, like in the *Ludus de nativitate*, the learning experience of the Jews is shared by the members of the audience, who are invited, in the Croxton play, to "goo see that swymfull [painful] syght" (l. 809) and thus to reaffirm their belief by observing the bleeding child.

The fact that disparate plays can evince a common didactic message through their Jewish characters despite changes in the perceptions of Jews during the intervening two and a half centuries significantly reinforces the idea of the pedagogical role of Jews in medieval drama first represented by the Archisynagogus episode, while challenging the notion that their portrayal embodies simple "ethnic caricature" or merely promotes antisemitic attitudes. This unidimensional reading misses the main purpose for their inclusion in these works, which is not to incite hatred but to promote a particular brand of instruction. Archisynagogus has little if anything in common with the Jews of his time. He may reflect certain preconceptions regarding his real-world counterparts, but it is more important that he mirror contemporary doctrinal concerns and serve as a vehicle to resolve them. Certainly, using Jews as symbolic tools for Christian teaching in this way does not humanize their portrayal any further, nor does it discount the historical realities of persecution or the fact that drama presents negative stereotypes of Jews overall. Yet identifying the characterization of Jews as an integral part of instruction in dramatic works like the Benediktbeuern *Ludus de nativitate* remains essential to gain a full understanding of the *doctrina* they present.

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