

# Jews and their Biblical Kin in Conflict: Fabricating Internal Dissent in Medieval Anti-Jewish Dialogues\*

MICHAEL KITSOS

michaik@tauex.tau.ac.il

Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv-Yafo, 6997801, Israel

The dialogues *Adversus Iudaeos*, a genre of texts written between late antiquity and the entire period of the Middle Ages, resemble each other in their structure, thematic sections, and content. They discuss several theological topics in a dialogue between a Christian and a Jew.<sup>1</sup> Their engagement with multiple theological topics could be taken as an indication of their concern with issues that were at the forefront of theological discussions at the time of each work's composition. This might have been the case, but not necessarily. For example, while the *Dialogue of Timothy and Aquila* was written at the end of the sixth century CE,<sup>2</sup> one of the theological discussions in this text on the virgin birth of Jesus/Christ and the perpetual virginity of Mary troubled the Church in the fifth century CE, almost one and a half centuries before the composition of this Alexandrian work. In the case of another text, the *Dialogue of Gregentios with the Jew Herban*, the discussions between Gregentios and Herban on specific topics have led scholars to date this work between the sixth and the tenth centuries CE. For some scholars, a brief reference in this work to the two wills of Jesus has been seen as a possible indication of this work's composition in the seventh century CE. In contrast, for others, a lengthy discussion on the icons

---

\* I would like to express my gratitude to the anonymous reviewers whose comments helped me to improve the final versions of this paper. I am also grateful to Professor Ellen Muehlberger and Professor Rafael Rachel Neis for reading earlier versions of this paper and whose feedback helped me to revise it extensively. Any mistakes are all mine.

<sup>1</sup> This diachronic homogeneity can be explained by the fact that several of these works are based on earlier *Adversus Iudaeos* compositions, as is the case, for example, with the *Dialogue of Athanasius and Zacchaeus*, the *Altercation of Simon and Theophilus*, and the *Dialogue of Timothy and Aquila*, which built on the second-century CE *Dialogue of Jason and Papiscus*. See Lawrence Lahey, "Evidence for Jewish Believers in Christian-Jewish Dialogues through the Sixth Century (excluding Justin)," in *Jewish Believers in Jesus: The Early Centuries*, ed. Oskar Skarsaune and Reidar Hvalvik (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007), 581-639; Lawrence Lanzi Lahey, "The Dialogue of Timothy and Aquila: Critical Greek Text and English Translation of the Short Recension with an Introduction including a Source-critical Study" (Ph.D. diss., University of Cambridge, 2001), 74-89; Samuel Kraus, *The Jewish-Christian Controversy: Vol. 1 History*, ed. William Horbury (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 29. The *Dialogue of Jason and Papiscus* was written originally in Greek by Aristo of Pella, and only fragments survive from a Latin translation dating from the third century CE. Lahey, "Evidence for Jewish Believers," 585, 588.

<sup>2</sup> See Lahey, "Evidence for Jewish Believers," 603.

indicates an eighth or ninth-century CE composition.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, topics in the same work, such as Jesus's virgin birth or Christians being the new Israel, reflect discussions from earlier periods.

It appears that the anti-Jewish dialogue authors engaged across time in consolidating certain teachings of Nicene and Chalcedonian Christianity. They did so by giving a synopsis of what they considered the most essential dogmas and by repeating theological topics and arguments in their works, employing, in a sense, one of the functions of the Ecumenical Councils, namely the affirmation of precedent Synods' decisions. If we could detect a common theological thread that intersects these compositions, we could identify Christology and its various aspects. The theological discussions revolved around this area of dogmatic discourse from the early centuries of Christianity up to the ninth century CE, and the Ecumenical Councils that convened from the fourth to the eighth century CE dealt with Christological matters in one way or another.<sup>4</sup> Christology not only taxonomized Christians into different groups, depending on their conception of Jesus and his relation to God, but it also comprised the point of conflict *par excellence* between Christians and Jews.<sup>5</sup>

As the title of this genre of dialectical texts witnesses, their most noticeable characteristic is the consistent use of the Jew in an encounter with a Christian to discuss matters of Christian practice and belief, which the Jew rejects as contrary to his religion. Judaism co-existed alongside Christianity since the latter's formation, and the Jew in the dialogues *Adversus Iudaeos* as the major discussant of a Christian may very well signify the presence of Judaism and the antagonism with Christianity. Besides, the anti-Jewish dialogues display precisely a dialectical crossfire between a Christian and a Jew in the context of a competition.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> See Albrecht Berger, ed., "The Dialexis," in *Life and Works of Saint Gregentios, Archbishop of Taphar: Introduction, Critical Edition and Translation* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006), 94-5.

<sup>4</sup> On the Ecumenical Councils and the theological issues they addressed, see Leo Donald Davis, *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils (325-787): Their History and Theology* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1983), 33-80; A. A. Vasiliev, *History of the Byzantine Empire*, 2 vols. (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1952); J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014); and Lewis Ayes, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> See Israel Jacob Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb: Perceptions of Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, trans. Barbara Harshav and Jonathan Chipman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 31-90; see also Peter Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 1-14, who explains that despite the limited number of Talmudic passages against Jesus, they can be seen as "powerful evidence of bold discourse with the Christian society." (10).

<sup>6</sup> In this article, I am not discussing the reality of the Jews and Judaism in the dialogues but the reason(s) for which the Jew as a persona plays such an important role in *Adversus Iudaeos* dialogues. As Christianity and Judaism were not isolated from each other and their broader cultural environment, but each functioned in a shared discursive environment, it only makes sense to expect that they were aware of each other's presence. For a thorough discussion on the Jews of anti-Jewish dialogues as literary constructs and whether they reflect a historical reality, see Sébastien Morlet, Olivier Munnich et Bernard Pouderon, eds., *Les dialogues Adversus Iudaeos: Permanences et mutations d'une tradition polémique. Actes du colloque international organisé les 7 et 8 décembre 2011 à l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne* (Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 2013). For rabbinic awareness of Christianity, see Michal Bar-

In several cases, the outcome of these meetings is foreseeable: the Christian persuades the Jew of the truth of his arguments.<sup>7</sup> Within this framework, the authors of many anti-Jewish dialogues make some striking connections in three areas: 1) between the Jewish interlocutors and those biblical Israelite ancestors, who—according to these Christian authors’ narratives—believed in Jesus/Christ; 2) between the Jewish interlocutors and biblical Israelite authors, who—according to the same Christian authors’ rhetoric—wrote about Jesus/Christ in their works; and 3) between the Jewish interlocutors and the Jewish scriptures by seeing the Jewish interlocutors as descendants of the group that composed the books of the Bible. These connections are signposted by phrases such as “your ancestors,” “your prophet(s),” “your father(s),” and “your scripture(s),” to name but a few, that are dispersed throughout the debates between the Christian and the Jew. By using this possessive adjective grammatical structure, which conveys belonging and relationships,<sup>8</sup> anti-Jewish dialogues’ authors constructed and acknowledged a kinship relationship between Jews and both biblical Israelites and biblical authors, as well as a literary lineage between Jews and their scriptures. It is this kinship relationship on which the authors of the dialogues *Adversus Iudaeos* built and capitalized for their anti-Jewish rhetoric, 1) to make even more apparent the striking difference between the Jewish interlocutors and both the ancient Israelite people and the biblical Israelite authors on matters of Christian faith; and 2) to assert their legitimacy of belief, which for them, as I will show, the Jews lost—since their theological views were in discordance with those of their ancestors—but the Christians claimed for themselves.

In this article, I explore a phenomenon on a continuum that is prominent in Christian anti-Jewish dialogues: this is the deployment of the Jew as the negative protagonist in discussions that concern Christian dogma and belief. Taking as a case study dialogues *Adversus Iudaeos* that were composed between the fifth and the eleventh century Byzantine Mediterranean, I examine conversations between Christians and Jews on the divinity of Christ/the Messiah,<sup>9</sup> investigating three aspects associated with this topic: 1) the birth of Christ from a virgin, 2) Christ as the Son of God, and 3) the number of Gods involved in the creation.

I argue that, by building on the kinship relationship between the Jews of their works and biblical Israelite authors, the Christian authors of anti-Jewish dialogues used the Jew as a foil both to Christian interlocutors and to their ancestral biblical writers to accentuate their claim for legitimacy on matters of faith. I demonstrate that by tracing their correctness of belief in the writings of biblical Israelite authors (in the way that these Christian authors interpreted them) and by presenting Jewish

---

Asher Siegal, *Jewish-Christian Dialogues on Scripture in Late Antiquity: Heretic Narratives of the Babylonian Talmud* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

<sup>7</sup> This is not always the ending in all the texts of this genre. For example, in the *Dialogue of Justin with Trypho the Jew* and in the *Disputation of Sergius the Stylite against a Jew*, the Jew is not persuaded by the Christian interlocutor’s arguments, and either he departs, or the dialogue ends with the Christian’s response.

<sup>8</sup> Namely, the combination of the possessive adjective in singular or plural number followed by one of the above nouns, namely ancestors, prophet(s), father(s), scripture(s).

<sup>9</sup> This is one of the central subjects in the dialogues *Adversus Iudaeos*.

interlocutors' beliefs in opposition to the beliefs of their ancestral biblical authors, the writers of the dialogues *Adversus Iudaeos* contrived the legitimacy of their own opinions and asserted that only their audience and not the Jews had the correct understanding of the true nature of Christ/the Messiah.<sup>10</sup> In so doing, the anti-Jewish dialogues' authors valorized a process that created, in writing, a clash between Jews and biblical Israelite writers, aiming to prove that the Jews did not comprehend the writings of their ancestors as opposed to Christians who did. In the end, by quoting biblical Israelite authors, the authors of Christian anti-Jewish dialogues appropriated them, asserting that what biblical authors wrote regarding the Messiah reflected their Christian group's understanding of Christ, granting, thus, to themselves the correctness of the teachings of orthodox Christianity.

The dialogues under discussion, which originate from different regions of the Byzantine Mediterranean and periods, display the ongoing rhetorical method of their authors to deplore the Jew as a foil.

### The Jew's Incompetence and the Christian's Efficiency

In this section, I examine conversations between Christians and Jews on the virgin birth of Jesus from Mary, an aspect of the broader theological discussions on whether Mary gave birth to a human or a God. Outside the dialogues *Adversus Iudaeos*, these two intertwined themes (Jesus's virgin birth from Mary and Mary giving birth to a human or a God) were associated with the controversies that arose from attributing to Mary either the title *Theotokos* (God-bearer) or the title *Christotokos* (Christ-bearer, insinuating that Mary bore a human).

The early Christians' views on Mary and her giving birth to Christ can be traced back to the second century CE. In his *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*, Justin Martyr compares Eve with Mary based on soteriological criteria: the former's disobedience brought about death, while the latter's obedience resulted in life.<sup>11</sup> In the *Shepherd* of Hermas and *II Clement* from the same period, the Church is described as a Virgin Mother. This image is later repeated in Eusebius's *Church History* and is possibly drawn from Mary.<sup>12</sup> The *Protevangelium of James*, from the same period, refers to Mary's virginity and her conception of Jesus by the Holy Spirit.<sup>13</sup> In his *Stromateis*, Clement the Alexandrian firmly supports the virgin status of Mary

---

<sup>10</sup> The same conclusion stands for all the theological topics across the *Adversus Iudaeos* dialogues.

<sup>11</sup> Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 100, Opera 1842: II.336–8, as quoted in Andrew Louth, "Mary in Patristics," in *The Oxford Handbook of Mary*, ed. Chris Maunder [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019], 56–7.

<sup>12</sup> See Louth, "Mary in Patristics," 57–9 and his reference to Eusebius's work, "Herbert Musurillo, ed. and trans., "The Martyrs of Lyon" in *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford, 1972), 45:77 and 55:79."

<sup>13</sup> See Wilhelm Schneemelcher, ed., "The Protevangelium of James" 11.3, 14.1 in *New Testament Apocrypha*, trans. R. McL. Wilson, 2 vols. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 1: 430, 432. The teaching on the perpetual virginity of Mary started in the second century CE and is associated with Christian circles' effort to present Mary as "the prototype...of this virginal life." David G. Hunter, "Helvidius, Jovinian, and the Virginity of Mary in Late Fourth-Century Rome," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1993): 69.

during her pregnancy.<sup>14</sup> In his homilies on Luke and Leviticus, Origen fluctuates between rejecting the belief in Mary's virginity during conception (in his sermon on Luke) and accepting it (in his homily on Leviticus).<sup>15</sup> However, in his commentary on Matthew, the same exegete seems to support the idea of Mary's virginity *post-partum*.<sup>16</sup>

Later on, in the fourth century CE, the discussions on Mary's perpetual virginity and the virgin birth of Jesus were underlined by theologians who adhered to Nicene Christianity.<sup>17</sup> Following the resolution of the theological issue on the divinity of the second person of the Trinity and his relationship with God the Father in the fourth century CE, the opposition to Mary's perpetual virginity was raised anew, but, this time, it was related to the issue of the human and divine natures in the person of Christ. The point of contention was the title *Theotokos*. The fourth century CE saw the term's usage on a larger scale.<sup>18</sup> Peter of Alexandria, Alexander of Alexandria, Athanasius of Alexandria,<sup>19</sup> Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Constantinople, and Gregory of Nyssa<sup>20</sup> referred to Mary as *Theotokos*, suggesting that this title had assumed particular dynamics within Nicene Christianity.

Other theologians, however, kept a less reverential stance toward Mary. Most importantly, from the first three centuries of Christianity, Tertullian raised doubts regarding her perpetual virginity. In his treatise, *On the Flesh of Christ*, Tertullian argued against Mary's virgin status after the conception of Jesus (*virginitas post partum*),<sup>21</sup> even though, in the same text, he writes about Mary's conception of Christ as a virgin (*virginitas in partu*) to argue that Jesus received his real body from her.<sup>22</sup> In the fourth century CE, Helvidius and Jovinian argued against the

<sup>14</sup> See Clement of Alexandria, *Miscellanies* 7.16 (Stählin, Früchtel, and Treu, eds., Clemens Alexandrinus, vol. 3, 66), as quoted in Stephen J. Shoemaker, *Mary in Early Christian Faith and Devotion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), 67 and 246 n. 6.

<sup>15</sup> See Origen of Alexandria, *Homilies on Luke* 14 (Rauer, ed., *Origenes Werke*, vol. 9, 100); *Homilies on Leviticus* 8.2 (Baehrens, ed., *Origenes Werke*, vol. 3, 395), both quoted in Shoemaker, *Mary*, 67 and 247 n. 7. Shoemaker explains that the discrepancy between the two sources might be the result of the translations of these works into Latin in which they survive and, since the original work in Greek is lost, we cannot know whether the same difference could be attested there as well.

<sup>16</sup> See Origen of Alexandria, *Commentary on Matthew* 25 (Klostermann and Benz, eds., *Origenes Werke*, vol. 11, 42–3), as quoted in Shoemaker, *Mary*, 67 and 246 n. 8. Shoemaker points out the vagueness of Origen's view on Mary's virginity *post-partum* in his commentary on Matthew.

<sup>17</sup> As Luigi Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church: The Blessed Virgin Mary in Patristic Thought*, trans. Thomas Buffer (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999), 99–322, states, such theologians include Athanasius of Alexandria, Ephrem the Syrian, Epiphanius of Salamis, Ambrose of Milan, Cyril of Jerusalem, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Constantinople (also known as Nazianzen), John Chrysostom, Cyril of Alexandria, and Proclus of Constantinople, to name but few. See also Shoemaker, *Mary*, 168–74.

<sup>18</sup> See Louth, "Mary in Patristics," 61.

<sup>19</sup> See Peter of Alexandria, *On Easter to Tricenius* (PG 18, 517B); Alexander of Alexandria, *Letter to Alexander of Thessalonica* (PG 18, 568), both quoted in Shoemaker, *Mary*, 166 and 258, n. 2. See also Price, "The Virgin as *Theotokos*," 72.

<sup>20</sup> See Shoemaker, *Mary*, 167; see also Price, "The Virgin as *Theotokos*," 72 n. 24–27.

<sup>21</sup> See Tertullian, *De Carne Christi* 23, 1–5; PL 2, 835–36, as quoted in Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers*, 65.

<sup>22</sup> See Tertullian, *De Carne Christi* 18, 1–3; PL 2, 828, as quoted in Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers*, 64.

belief in Mary's perpetual virginity. The latter did so to defend the reality of Jesus's human nature against Docetism and its teaching on his seeming humanity.<sup>23</sup>

The soundest challenge of the title *Theotokos* arose in the fifth century CE by the Syrian monk Nestorius, bishop of Constantinople. Nestorius criticized the title *Theotokos* because, for him, a human could not have given birth to God.<sup>24</sup> Instead, he preferred the title *Christotokos* to distinguish the human and divine natures of Jesus.<sup>25</sup> At stake was the teaching on the two natures of Jesus and their hypostatic union (hypostasis for pro-Nicene theologians means person and not nature) in Christ. The Third Ecumenical Council held in Ephesus in 431 CE addressed the issue. It decreed two natures in Christ and rejected the existence of two persons (a human and a divine). The same Council affirmed the attribution of *Theotokos* to Mary and designated that she gave birth to God incarnate, defining that Jesus is one person in two natures.<sup>26</sup>

Within such an intense ecclesiastical environment with conflicting views on Mary, the debates on the birth of Christ/the Messiah from a virgin constituted one of the subjects in the *Dialogue of Timothy and Aquila*, a work from the second half of the sixth century CE Alexandria.<sup>27</sup> The inclusion of this topic may suggest its relevance at the time of this text's composition, given the continued interest in discussions on Christ's two natures in the sixth century CE.<sup>28</sup>

To return to the text of the dialogue, following a conversation between Timotheos and Aquilas on the coexistence of Jesus with God at the time of creation, the two interlocutors open a discussion on the birth of God from a virgin woman. The Jew is portrayed to react aggressively to the possibility of God's birth in the flesh and responds,

I am astonished! How are you not ashamed when *you say*<sup>29</sup> that God himself entered into a woman's womb and was born? For, if he were born, he [would have] no longer existed eternally, and where is he now?<sup>30</sup>

<sup>23</sup> See Shoemaker, *Mary*, 172. See also Michael Slusser, "Docetism" *Encyclopedia of Ancient History*, doi:10.1002/9781444338386.wbeah05065.

<sup>24</sup> See Shoemaker, *Mary*, 208-10.

<sup>25</sup> As Price, "The Virgin as *Theotokos*," 71 describes in much detail, at some point after the reaction that the rejection of the term *Theotokos* instigated, Nestorius started to use both titles *Theotokos* and *anthrōpotokos* (bearer of human, an alternative for *Christotokos*), to designate Mary as both a mother of God and a mother of a human. The title *Christotokos* is in one of Nestorius's letters to Cyril, bishop of Alexandria, "Second Letter to Cyril 7".

<sup>26</sup> See Davis, *The First Seven*, 134-67.

<sup>27</sup> See Vincent Déroche, "La polemique anti-judaïque au VI<sup>ème</sup> et VII<sup>ème</sup> siècle: Un memento inédit; Les Képhalaia," *Travaux et mémoires* 11 (1991): 276; Robertson, "The Dialogue of Timothy and Aquila," 372-83; and Lahey, "Evidence for Jewish Believers," 603, 604.

<sup>28</sup> These discussions culminated in the Fifth Ecumenical Council of Constantinople in 553 CE that confirmed the two natures of Christ (human and divine) and Mary's title as *Theotokos*, who bore God incarnate, one person in two natures. See Davis, *The First Seven*, 207-57, especially 240-9.

<sup>29</sup> "You say:" the present participle *λέγοντες* refers to Christians.

<sup>30</sup> *The Dialogue of Timothy and Aquila*, ed. Robert Gerald Robertson (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2001), 5.16-17, p. xi: [ὁ Ἰουδαῖος εἶπεν·] Ξερίζομαι. Πῶς οὐκ αἰσχρῶνεσθε λέγοντες αὐτὸν θεόν,

Negating the teaching of the author's Christianity that Christ/the Messiah is a God and yet he was born as a human, the Jew poses a double conundrum: How could God be born from a woman and still exist eternally? And how could the born person be a God? The Jew does not imply that the born person was God whose human nature was either less human (Docetism) or absorbed by his divine nature (Monophysitism), but he suggests that he was only human. The Jew's negation of the human birth of God and the retainment of his divine nature is the springboard for the author to offer a synopsis of his belief in the virgin Mary, the birth of Jesus, and the unity of the human and divine natures in Jesus's person.

Timotheos states in his response that he will bring evidence from all three parts of the Hebrew Bible to demonstrate his point:

The Christian said: if you listen calmly, [you will understand that] the law and the prophets proclaimed all these, and I shall show you from the divine scriptures... Learn, Jew, that the prophets predicted all these to us: and that he had to be born from a virgin woman, and to be worshipped by the magi, and to be sought by Herod... and everything was disclosed to us through the law and the prophets, and now listen with understanding.<sup>31</sup>

The Christian author gradually constructs Aquila's literary lineage with his scriptures to present him as a foil both to Timotheos and the biblical authors in terms of his and Timotheos's comprehension of the biblical authors' theological beliefs on the virgin birth of Jesus. In particular, Timotheos underlines the importance of Aquilas paying attention to the proclamations of the law (a possible reference to the Torah), of the prophets (these are the *Nevi'im*), and the scriptures (a reference to the *Kethuvim*) regarding the birth of Christ from a virgin. The reference to the tripartite division of the Jewish scriptures is not random. Instead, it suggests the author's endeavor to prove his point from the entirety of the Jewish scriptures. In so doing, the author has two additional objectives: on the one hand, to intensify the dipole between Timotheos and Aquilas by presenting Timotheos to understand the theological teachings in the Jew's scriptures when the Jew does not. On the other hand, the author wants to heighten the dipole between Aquilas and the biblical Israelite authors by picturing Aquilas as their foil in terms of his disbelief in a Christian teaching which the biblical Israelite authors hid in their writings, but the Jew failed to comprehend. To put it another way, what the Jew is presented to negate the ancient Israelite Law has decreed; the biblical Prophets have prophesied it; and the Writings have narrated it.

---

εἰσελθόντα εἰς μήτραν γυναικὸς καὶ γεννηθέντα; εἰ γὰρ ἐγεννήθη οὐκ ἔτι προαιώνιος ὑπῆρχεν, ἀλλὰ τε καὶ ἄρτι ποῦ ἔστιν.

<sup>31</sup> *The Dialogue of Timothy and Aquila*, ed. Robertson, 5.19, p. xi; 7.6a, p. xiv; 7.8, p. xiv. ὁ Χριστιανὸς εἶπεν· ταῦτα πάντα, ἐὰν ἀθορύβως ἀκούσῃ, ὁ νόμος καὶ οἱ προφῆται προεκήρυξαν, κἀγὼ δὲ σοὶ δεικνύω ἐκ τῶν θείων γραφῶν... μάθε, ὦ Ἰουδαῖε, ὅτι ταῦτα πάντα προεμήνυσαν ἡμῖν οἱ προφῆται, καὶ ἐκ παρθένου γυναικὸς εἶχεν γεννηθῆναι, καὶ ὑπὸ τῶν μάγων προσκυνηθῆναι, καὶ ὑπὸ Ἡρώδου ζητηθῆναι... καὶ πάντα ἐδηλώθη ἡμῖν διὰ τε τοῦ νόμου καὶ τῶν προφητῶν, καὶ νῦν ἄκουε συνετάς.

Having explained that the Hebrew Bible<sup>32</sup> shall constitute the basis for his argument on Jesus's birth from a virgin woman, the author of the *Dialogue of Timothy and Aquila* deploys the Jew more openly to present him now in conflict with the biblical prophets and their utterances. Aquilas poses the question of whether Mary retained her status as a virgin after she gave birth to Jesus,<sup>33</sup> and requests that Timotheos bring proof from the prophets and the law. Aquilas is confident that his interlocutor would deploy Isaiah 7:14 (LXX) to address his request and objects to whether Isaiah's verse would still be applicable after the birth of Jesus,

And now, after you presented from the prophets and the law, speak. I know that you cite from Isaiah the passage that says, *look, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and you shall name him Emmanuel* [Isa 7:14]. But [it is] evident that after the delivery, he would not say that such a thing is [still the case].<sup>34</sup>

Aquilas's use of Isa 7:14 (LXX) needs to be seen in the context of the discussions on Mary's virginity *in partu* and *post partum*. It is not so much a rejection of her being a virgin *ante partum* as a question of her remaining a virgin *post partum*.<sup>35</sup> In Aquilas's view, the biblical verse "look, the virgin shall be with child and shall bear a son" may be interpreted as a virgin woman will conceive a child, and this conception will terminate her status as a virgin. For this reason, Aquilas explains that even if Isaiah had described the status of the woman before the conception, he would not have insisted on her status as a virgin after giving birth.

Timotheos responds to Aquilas referencing Isa 7:14 (LXX) to explain Aquilas's misapprehension of the prophet's words and to contend that the version of Isa 7:14 Aquilas used to argue against Mary's perpetual virginity also supports Mary's virginity *post partum*. In so doing, the author constructs Aquilas as a foil to his ancestral biblical author to enhance the legitimacy of his reading of the prophetic verse. The Christian responds,

And the Lord continued talking to Ahaz, saying: Ask for yourself a sign from the Lord your God, in the depth or in the height. But Ahaz said, I will not ask, nor will I tempt the Lord. Then he said: "Hear now, House of David! Is it a

---

<sup>32</sup> That the Hebrew Bible will constitute the basis for Timotheos's argument is extracted from the earlier reference to its tripartite division. Of course, the author does not use the Hebrew Bible as the source for his scriptural evidence, but he says that he does/will do so.

<sup>33</sup> *The Dialogue of Timothy and Aquila*, ed. Robertson, 18.1, p. xxxvii. The author is raising an early Christian position about Mary's perpetual virginity. See Miri Rubin, *Mother of God: A History of the Virgin Mary* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 29-30.

<sup>34</sup> *The Dialogue of Timothy and Aquila*, ed. Robertson, 18.5-6, p. xxxviii: ὁ Ἰουδαῖος εἶπεν· καὶ νῦν ἐκ τοῦ νόμου καὶ τῶν προφητῶν προβαλὼν λέγει. Οἶδα δὲ ἐγὼ ὅτι προφέρεις τὴν περικοπήν τοῦ Ἡσαΐα τὴν λέγουσαν, ἰδοὺ ἡ παρθένος ἐν γαστρὶ λήγεται καὶ τέξεται υἱόν. Καὶ ὄφρα μετὰ τὸν τοκετὸν μὴ εἶναι τι τοιοῦτον λέγει.

<sup>35</sup> Isa 7:14 (LXX) is not cited to diminish Mary ethically but only to address the status of her virginity after the conception of Jesus.



small thing for you to fight with humans? Then how do you fight with the Lord? For this [reason], the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look! The virgin will conceive and bring forth a son; and you will name him Emmanouel.”<sup>36</sup>

In its biblical context, Isa 7:10-14 describes God’s reassurance to King Ahaz regarding the imminent failure of the Syro-Ephraimite threat and King Ahaz’s decision not to rely on God but on the Assyrian King.<sup>37</sup> In Timotheos’s mouth, however, these verses take an interpretative turn to warrant his argument that God’s sign prefigures the sign of Mary’s virginity after the birth of Jesus. According to the Christian interlocutor’s reading, the verse, “the virgin will conceive and will bring forth a son,” means that a woman will conceive while being a virgin, and the same woman shall bring forth a son still being a virgin. For the Cristian author, the use of the conjunction *καὶ* – “and” between the two sentences that make up verse 7:14 (LXX), namely 1. “a virgin will conceive *καὶ* – and” 2. “will bring forth a son” suggests that a virgin conceives, *καὶ* – “and” the same virgin gives birth, implying that the woman’s virginity remained intact during, and after the conception and birth of Jesus.

The constructed conflict between Aquilas and his ancestral biblical authors in Aquilas’s failure to understand the writings of his ancestors continues with Habakkuk 1:5 (LXX). In its biblical context, God responds to the prophet’s complaint about the suffering of the righteous, “Look, despisers, and marvel and be annihilated! I am working a work in your days that you would not believe if someone should tell it.”<sup>38</sup> The author avails himself of the verse outside of its original context and even of its New Testament purview in the book of Acts 13:41, where Paul warned: “his Jewish audience not to repeat the example of their ancestors by refusing to accept God’s most recent activity in Jesus.”<sup>39</sup> Taking Hab 1:5 (LXX) outside its original context, Theophilus applies it to Mary’s perpetual virginity as a “marvelous thing” that one “would not believe if someone would tell it.” Twisting the biblical verse, Timotheos achieves two objectives: to emphasize the agreement between him and Habakkuk on the supposed reading of the virginity of Mary *post partum*; and to pinpoint the disagreement on that exact matter between Habakkuk and Habakkuk’s kin, Aquilas.

<sup>36</sup> *The Dialogue of Timothy and Aquila*, ed. Robertson, 18.8-10, p. xxxvii-xxxviii. Καὶ προσέθετο Κύριος λαλήσαι τῷ Ἄχαζ λέγων· αἰτήσαι σεαυτῷ σημεῖον παρὰ Κυρίου Θεοῦ σου εἰς βάθος ἢ εἰς ὕψος· καὶ εἶπεν Ἄχαζ· οὐ μὴ αἰτήσω οὐδ’ οὐ μὴ πειράσω Κύριον· καὶ εἶπεν· ἀκούσατε δὴ, οἶκος Δαυὶδ· μὴ μικρὸν ὑμῖν ἀγῶνα παρέχειν ἀνθρώποις; καὶ πῶς Κυρίῳ παρέχετε ἀγῶνα; διὰ τοῦτο δώσει Κύριος αὐτὸς ὑμῖν σημεῖον· ἰδοὺ ἡ παρθένος ἐν γαστρὶ ἔξει, καὶ τέξεται υἱόν, καὶ καλέσεις τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἐμμανουήλ. See also Isa 7:10-14.

<sup>37</sup> See Benjamin D. Sommer, “Isaiah,” in *The Jewish Study Bible. Jewish Publication Society: Tanakh Translation*, ed. Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 781.

<sup>38</sup> *The Dialogue of Timothy and Aquila*, ed. Robertson, 18.11, p. xxxviii; Hab 1:5. In its biblical context, Hab 1:5 is part of God’s response to the prophet’s complaint of why the righteous suffer. See Ehud Ben Zvi, “Habakkuk,” in *The Jewish Study Bible*, 1220.

<sup>39</sup> M. P. Graham, “Habakkuk, Book of,” *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, 1:475. See also Hugh R. Page Jr., “Habakkuk,” in *The Prophets*, ed. Gale A. Yee, Hugh R. Page Jr., and Matthew J. M. Coomber (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), 894.

Timotheos closes this section by addressing Aquilas with a meticulous collation of chosen parts from Isa 7:14 (LXX) and Hab 1:5 (LXX) that Timotheos had already quoted: “Those things that we speak [are] the things that the Lord said because of your [ὕμῶν] faithlessness. Indeed, for this reason, *the Lord will give you [ὕμῖν] [a] sign [Isa 7:14] and that I am working a work that you would not believe [Hab 1:5].* Then, what greater signs than these are you seeking?”<sup>40</sup> Such a collation aims to intensify the extent of Aquilas’s misinterpretation of his scriptures. We witness a double-poled relationship between Aquilas and Timotheos: Aquilas’s incorrectness of opinion amplifies the validity of Timotheos’s view, providing an authoritative flare to his discourse.

As the conversation is wrapping up, the author embarks to discuss whether Isa 7:14 writes about a virgin or a girl, one of the main points of theological disagreement between Christians and Jews. Here, the anonymous author also implements the same tactic of foiling the Jew against his ancestral biblical authors and interlocutors. First, he sets the scene to discuss Isa 7:14 (LXX) via an analysis of Gen 49:9 (LXX). He associates Judah with Jesus and claims that Isaac’s blessing of his son Judah on his deathbed in Gen 49:8-12 (LXX) found its fulfillment in Jesus.<sup>41</sup> Then, the intertextual use of Gen 49:9 (LXX), in which Isaac proclaims, “Ioudas; from a shoot, my son, you went up,”<sup>42</sup> allows the author to explain the verse’s reference to Mary and Jesus, an allusion that early Christian interpreters had also identified.<sup>43</sup> Emmanouela Grypeou and Helen Spurling inform us that according to Jerome, Ephrem, and Aphrahat, to name but a few, “Jesus derived his human existence from Jesse and David through his mother, Mary...”<sup>44</sup> The author of the dialogue continues the same exegetical tradition. He explains that the word *βλαστός* - shoot in Gen 49:9 (LXX) could not be referring to Judah’s mother, Leah, because she had already given birth to three other sons before Judah—Judah was not Leah’s firstborn child, and, thus, she could not have been characterized as *βλαστός* - shoot. He then associates the woman in Gen 49:9 (LXX), who gives birth to a son and whom the verse characterizes as *βλαστός* - shoot, with the woman in Isa 7:14 (LXX), where

<sup>40</sup> *The Dialogue of Timothy and Aquila*, ed. Robertson, 18.13, p. xxxviii: ὁ Χριστιανὸς εἶπεν· ταῦτα ἂ λαλοῦμεν, ὅσα ὁ κύριος εἶπεν διὰ τὴν ἀπιστίαν ὑμῶν· τὸ γὰρ διὰ τοῦτο ὁ κύριος δώσει ὑμῖν σημεῖον, καὶ ὅτι ἔργον ἐγὼ ἐργάζομαι, ὃ οὐ μὴ πιστεύσητε· ἄρα τούτων ποῖα μείζονα σημεῖα ἐπιζητεῖς;

<sup>41</sup> *The Dialogue of Timothy and Aquila*, ed. Robertson, 34.6, p. lxix. Genesis 49:1-33 describes the scene of Isaac’s blessing to his sons on his deathbed in Egypt. Gen 49:8-12, in particular, narrates Isaac’s blessing to Judah.

<sup>42</sup> *The Dialogue of Timothy and Aquila*, ed. Robertson, 34.7, 13, p. lxxix-lxx. The author quotes part of Gen 49:9 (LXX).

<sup>43</sup> As Emmanouela Grypeou remarks, “A major stream of patristic tradition maintains that the rod coming forth out of Jesse was Mary, the mother of Jesus... Mary is associated with the ‘root of Jesse’ due to her ancestry from the ‘house of David’. The Church Fathers argue that Mary is Judah’s ‘tender shoot’ on account of the undefined nature of the Virgin Mary. This view is supported by prophetic writings, such as LXX Isa 7:14 (cf. Isa 53:2), in which the birth of the Messiah is foretold, who will be borne by a virgin. Consequently, the ‘blossom from this root’ was Jesus, whose immaculate conception was implied in Jacob’s blessing on Judah.” Emmanouela Grypeou & Helen Spurling, “The Blessing on Judah” in *The Book of Genesis in Late Antiquity: Encounters between Jewish and Christian Exegesis*, ed. Emmanouela Grypeou & Helen Spurling (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 394.

<sup>44</sup> Grypeou & Spurling, “The Blessing on Judah,” 394 n. 84.

she is described as a virgin who shall give birth to a son and whose status explains the woman's characterization in Gen 49:9 (LXX) as *βλαστός* - shoot.<sup>45</sup>

The woman's characterization is the point of contention between Timotheos and Aquilas in Isa 7:14. Did Isa 7:14 write about a virgin or a girl? Timotheos cites Isa 7:14 from the Septuagint (LXX), in which the verse writes about a virgin (*παρθένος*) who will give birth to a son: "Look, the virgin (*παρθένος*) shall be with child and shall bear a son, and you shall name him Emmanouēl."<sup>46</sup> On the other hand, Aquilas uses the translation of Aquilas of Sinope (A), who translated the Hebrew Bible into Greek as an alternative version of the Septuagint to replace it, at least among the Greek-speaking Jews.<sup>47</sup> The version of Isa 7:14 (A) from which the Jew quotes partially writes "girl" (*νεάνις*) instead of "virgin" (*παρθένος*), "the Jew said: behold, Isaiah said, the girl (*νεάνις*), not the virgin (*παρθένος*)."<sup>48</sup>

Interestingly, Timotheos appears to justify, to a degree, Aquilas's reference to "νεάνις - girl, young woman" on the grounds of the impreciseness between languages. He says,

However, if he [Isaiah] said girl (*νεάνις*), it is [because it is] girl in Hebrew; but so that you may understand such [a thing], the [word] girl (*νεάνις*) is interpreted/translated (*ἐρμηνεύεται*) [as] virgin (*παρθένος*).<sup>49</sup>

<sup>45</sup> *The Dialogue of Timothy and Aquila*, ed. Robertson, 34.13-14, p. lxx. The Christian uses Gen 29:35 and Isa 7:14 next to each other to associate the *βλαστός* - shoot in Gen 49:9 with the virgin woman in Isa 7:14: ὁ Χριστιανὸς εἶπεν· τὸ μὲν ἐν πρώτοις, οὐκ ἀνέβη ὁ Ἰουδαὸς ἐκ βλαστοῦ· προσθεῖσα γὰρ φησὶν ἡ Λία ἔτεκεν υἱὸν τέταρτον τῷ Ἰακώβ, καὶ ἐκάλεσεν τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἰουδαν. Πῶς οὖν ἐκ βλαστοῦ γίνεται; οὗτός ἐστιν κατὰ τὸν Ἡσαΐαν τὸν λέγοντα ὅτι παιδίον δοθήσεται ἡμῖν καὶ ἡ μητὴρ αὐτοῦ ἄνδρα οὐ γνώσεται, καὶ πάλιν ἰδοὺ ἡ παρθένοσ ἐν γαστρὶ ἔξει καὶ τέξεται υἱόν, καὶ καλέσουσιν τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἐμμανουήλ. [The Christian said: Firstly, Judah did not go up from a shoot (*βλαστός*), for it continues saying, Leah bore a fourth son to Jacob and called his name Judah. So, how is he born from a shoot? This [the shoot-βλαστός] is according to Isaiah, who says that a child will be given to us and his mother will not know a man, and again Look, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and you shall name him Emmanouēl].

<sup>46</sup> *The Dialogue of Timothy and Aquila*, ed. Robertson, 34.14, p. lxx: ἰδοὺ ἡ παρθένοσ ἐν γαστρὶ ἔξει, καὶ τέξεται υἱόν, καὶ καλέσεις τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἐμμανουήλ.

<sup>47</sup> See Natalio Fernández Marcos, *The Septuagint in Context: Introduction to the Greek Version of the Bible*, trans. Wilfred G. E. Watson (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 111, and 112 n. 17 and n. 18 about theologians' views on Aquila's translation. Jenny R. Labendz catalogs rabbinic and Christian views on Aquilas's translation of the Bible and concludes that rabbinic authors saw merit in his translation, which they used wherever it was necessary, whereas for some Christians, the heresiologists, his translation was a heretical work, and for others, it was an important text as a "witness to the original Hebrew Bible and a useful tool in correcting the Septuagint translation." Jenny R. Labendz, "Aquila's Bible Translation in Late Antiquity: Jewish and Christian Perspectives," *The Harvard Theological Review* 102 no. 3 (July 2009), 387, 383. See also Reinhart Ceulemans, "The Septuagint and Other Translations," in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 42-44.

<sup>48</sup> *Dialogue of Timothy and Aquila*, ed. Robertson, 34.15, p. lxx: ὁ Ἰουδαῖοσ εἶπεν· ἰδοὺ, ἡ νεάνις εἶπεν Ἡσαΐα, μὴ ἡ παρθένοσ. Aquila's version of Isa. 7.14 writes: διὰ τοῦτο δώσει (κύριος) αὐτὸσ σημεῖον· ἰδοὺ ἡ νεάνις ἐν γαστρὶ συλλαμβάνει, καὶ τίκτει υἱόν, καὶ καλέσεις ὄνομα αὐτοῦ, Ἐμμανουήλ. Frederick Field, *Origenis Hexaplorum Quae Supersunt: Veterum Interpretum Graecorum in Totum Vetus Testamentum Fragmenta* (Oxini: E Typographeo Clarendoniano, 1875), 443.

<sup>49</sup> *The Dialogue of Timothy and Aquila*, ed. Robertson, 34.16, p. lxx: ὁ Χριστιανὸσ εἶπεν· εἰ μέντοι νεάνις εἶπεν, νεάνις ἐν τῷ ἑβραϊκῷ ἐστίν· ἵνα δὲ καὶ οὕτωσ συμπεριενεχθῶ σοι, ἡ νεάνις παρθένοσ ἐρμηνεύεται.

The primary meaning of the verb *ἐρμηνεύεται* is “to interpret, to expound, to comment,” and its secondary meaning is “to translate.”<sup>50</sup> Hence, there are two readings of Timotheos’s response to Aquilas. It either writes “the girl (*νεᾶνις*) is interpreted (*ἐρμηνεύεται*) [as] virgin” or “the girl (*νεᾶνις*) is translated (*ἐρμηνεύεται*) [as] virgin.” The difference is significant. If *ἐρμηνεύεται* means “to be interpreted,” then the Christian implies that the word *νεᾶνις* - girl, which is the word Aquilas uses when he reads Isa 7:14, denotes a girl with the implication of being a virgin. However, if *ἐρμηνεύεται* means “to be translated,” then Timotheos argues that *νεᾶνις* - girl does mean *παρθένος* - virgin. In the former case, we have an interpretation of the word *νεᾶνις* - girl, alluding possibly to a virgin woman. In the latter case, though, we have a literal translation of the word *νεᾶνις* to mean a virgin woman. Since the second reading of the word *νεᾶνις* is not supported lexicographically, it leaves us only with the first reading of this word as an option. In this case, the Christian seems to argue that *νεᾶνις* is interpreted as *παρθένος* - virgin. The author purposefully uses the polysemous verb *ἐρμηνεύεται* in relation to the noun *νεᾶνις* to claim that even this noun supports his reading of the verse: the word girl alludes to her virgin status, and a girl is virgin.<sup>51</sup> In the end, the author concomitantly paraphrases and mistranslates the word *νεᾶνις* - girl to mean *παρθένος* - virgin.

Finally, to substantiate the equation of the two meanings of *νεᾶνις* as girl and virgin, Timotheos quotes Deuteronomy 22:28 (LXX), which discusses the case of the rape of an unmarried virgin woman and the ramifications/obligations of the male rapist toward his victim. Deut 22:28 (LXX) writes,

But if someone finds the *girl*, the *virgin*, who is not engaged, and, after he forces her, lies with her and he is discovered, the man who lay with her shall give fifty silver didrachmas to the young woman’s father, and she shall become his wife. Because he humbled her, he shall not be able to send her away for all time.<sup>52</sup>

Timotheos’s citation of Deut 22:28 (LXX) is not fortuitous: the double attribution of the words girl and virgin to the victim of rape allows him to argue that the pair

<sup>50</sup> According to Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, and Henry Stuart Jones, eds., “ἐρμηνεύω,” *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 690, the verb in classical Greek means, 1. interpret, translate; 2. explain, expound; 3. speak clearly, articulate. According to G. W. H. Lampe, “ἐρμηνεύω,” *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), 549, the verb in Ecclesiastical Greek means 1. interpret, expound, comment; 2. denote; 3. translate. In both cases, the verb’s meaning as “to translate” is secondary.

<sup>51</sup> Put differently: The Jew deploys a different version of Isa 7:14 where the verse writes *νεᾶνις*. The Christian employs Isa 7:14 LXX where the verse writes *παρθένος*. For the Christian author, the word *νεᾶνις* that the Jew uses means the word *παρθένος* that the Christian deploys.

<sup>52</sup> Deut 22:28. Ἐὰν δέ τις εὔρη τὴν παῖδα τὴν παρθένον, ἣτις οὐ μεμνήστυται, καὶ βιασάμενος κοιμηθῆ μετ’ αὐτῆς καὶ εὔρεθῆ, δώσει ὁ ἄνθρωπος ὁ κοιμηθεὶς μετ’ αὐτῆς τῷ πατρὶ τῆς νεάνιδος πεντήκοντα δίδραχμα ἀργυρίου, καὶ αὐτοῦ ἔσται γυνή, ἀνθ’ ὧν ἐταπείνωσεν αὐτήν· οὐ δυνήσεται ἐξαποστεῖλαι αὐτήν τὸν ἅπαντα χρόνον. It is interesting to notice that Deut 22:28 LXX uses the noun *παῖδα* accompanied by *παρθένον*, whereas the Christian author uses the noun *νεᾶνιν* accompanied by the same noun *παρθένον*.

νεᾶνις - παρθένος (girl - virgin) suggests that a νεᾶνις (girl) means παρθένος (virgin) and that a νεᾶνις (girl) is a παρθένος (virgin), equating the two words.<sup>53</sup> Concluding that girl does mean virgin, the Christian underscores that Isa 7:14 (in both LXX and A versions) talks about Mary, who was both a young woman/girl and a virgin who bore and gave birth to Jesus.

Timotheos's interpretation alludes to him accusing Jews of misconstruing the meaning of their prophet with regard to Isa 7:14 (LXX and A), which he only had grasped and could explain to his discussant: the woman of Isa 7:14 (in both LXX and A versions) prefigures Mary, a young virgin=girl=virgin who was a virgin *ante partum*, and after she gave birth to a son she retained her virginity *in partu* and *post partum*. Aquilas's inability to defend his opinion before Timotheos's linguistic and theological arguments insinuates not merely his misreading of Isa 7:14 due to his linguistic inadequacy but also his scriptural/theological insufficiency to apprehend the equation of "virgin" with "girl" in Deut 22:28 according to Timotheos's reading. Aquilas's ongoing incompetence makes Timotheos's theological reasoning stand out, and he looks like he opposes his scriptures, which he fails to comprehend.

### Instructing the Jew of His Own Biblical Tradition

Moving to another aspect of the discussions on the Messiah's divinity, that is the characterization of the Messiah as the Son of God, the author of a different anti-Jewish dialogue, the *Dialogue of Papiscus and Philo, Jews, with a Monk*—a text of Egyptian origin that appears in two forms from the eighth and the eleventh century CE—continues the rhetorical use of the Jew as the foil to both his Christian interlocutor and to biblical Israelite authors to claim the religious accuracy of the Christian teaching that the Messiah is the Son of God and divine.<sup>54</sup>

The title Son of God has a long history in formative Christianity, comprising one of the Christological titles ascribed to Jesus. The earliest usage of the designation in a proto-Christian context is found in the New Testament, in particular, 1 Thessalonians 1:10 and other Pauline letters, and later in the four canonical Gospels.<sup>55</sup> Subsequent centuries witnessed continued theological discussions regarding Jesus's humanity and divinity. In the second century CE, the idea that Jesus was a second God and in some way subordinate to the Father did not diminish his divinity (Justin Martyr), whereas the belief that the Son pre-existed along with the Father and still assumed real flesh addressed some concerns of how the Son had received a real human body (Irenaeus).<sup>56</sup> In the third century CE, Tertullian's contribution

---

<sup>53</sup> Namely, νεᾶνις = παρθένος.

<sup>54</sup> *Dialogue between a Christian and a Jew*, ed. Arthur Cushman McGiffert (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1889), 43-4.

<sup>55</sup> See Gerald O'Collins, SJ, *Christology: A Biblical, Historical, and Systematic Study of Jesus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 121-2.

<sup>56</sup> See O'Collins, *Christology*, 176.

to arguing for the divinity of the Son of God was theologically instrumental.<sup>57</sup> Origen's views, which favored diminishing the Son's divinity to elevate his humanity, should be seen within the parameters of the theological concerns of his time and the theological challenges to which he was responding.<sup>58</sup>

The fourth century CE addressed the issue of the divinity of the Son of God and his relationship with God the Father, with the Council of Nicaea I, in 325 CE, decreeing that the Son of God is God of the same substance as the Father.<sup>59</sup> By the fifth century CE, the discussions on the Son of God were associated with the number of natures in Jesus. They culminated in the Third and Fourth Ecumenical Councils, Ephesus 431 CE, and Chalcedon 451 CE, which decreed that there are two natures in Jesus, a human and a divine (Third Ecumenical Council) and that Jesus, the Son of God, is truly God and truly human (Fourth Ecumenical Council).<sup>60</sup> In the sixth century CE, the Christological discussions on the Son of God addressed again the unity of the person in Christ against theological views, which argued that the existence of two natures entailed the existence of two persons (Fifth Ecumenical Council, Constantinople II, 553 CE).<sup>61</sup> In the seventh century CE (Sixth Ecumenical Council, Constantinople III, 680 CE), it was decreed that Christ is both God and human and has two natures (a human and a divine), two energies or actions (a human and a divine), and two wills (a human and a divine).<sup>62</sup>

In the eighth century CE, they dealt with the veneration of icons, which, in essence, concerned another Christological matter, particularly the pictorial depiction of Christ. These discussions had started in the fourth century CE. Still, they culminated in the eighth and ninth centuries CE with the Council of Nicaea II in 787 CE (Seventh Ecumenical Council) and the final restoration of icons in 843 CE. On the one hand, the rejection of the pictorial depiction of Christ by the opponents of icon-making and icon-worship was based on the premise that a pictorial representation of Jesus could depict only his human nature, which could potentially lead to reducing his divinity. On the other hand, the proponents of icons and their worship argued that an icon of Jesus depicted God incarnate.<sup>63</sup>

Given that the *Dialogue of Papiiscus and Philo, Jews, with a Monk* was composed in the eighth century CE, its discussion on the humanity and divinity of the Son of God may be connected to the heated debates around the pictorial depiction

---

<sup>57</sup> O'Collins, *Christology*, 179 explains the contribution of the third-century Tertullian against fourth- and fifth-century heresies when he writes that "Tertullian can be seen to have ruled out in advance four major aberrations to come: Arianism, by maintaining that the Son is truly God ('Light from Light'); Apollinarianism, by defending Christ's integral humanity; Nestorianism, by insisting on the unity of Christ's one person; and Eutychianism, by excluding any mixture of divinity and humanity to form some tertium quid."

<sup>58</sup> See O'Collins, *Christology*, 177-80.

<sup>59</sup> See Davis, *The First Seven*, 33-80.

<sup>60</sup> See Davis, *The First Seven*, 134-69, 170-206.

<sup>61</sup> See Davis, *The First Seven*, 207-57.

<sup>62</sup> See Davis, *The First Seven*, 258-89.

<sup>63</sup> See Davis, *The First Seven*, 290-322. See also Leonela Fundic, "Iconology/Icons/Iconicity," *Brill Encyclopedia of Early Christianity Online*, doi:[http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2589-7993\\_EECO\\_SIM\\_00001658](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2589-7993_EECO_SIM_00001658).

of Jesus, as it might be deduced from the fact that this work opens with a discussion on the icons and the pictorial representation of Jesus.<sup>64</sup>

Following the debate on icon-making and icon-worship, the author opens the topic of the Son of God by having the Jew inquire from his interlocutor about the Christian blasphemy to attribute a son to God. The two interlocutors engage in a swift dialectical crosstalk,

The Jew said: Why do you blaspheme by saying (*βλασφημεῖτε λέγοντες*) [that] God has a son? The Christian [said]: It is not only us who say this but your scripture (*ἡ γραφή ὑμῶν*) as well; for it says, “The Lord said to me, ‘My son you are; today I have begotten you.’”<sup>65</sup> The Jew [said]: The Psalm talks about Solomon. The Christian [said]: How much of the world did Solomon conquer? The Jew [said]: neither half nor one-third of the world. The Christian [said]: Then, listen now with understanding and learn that the Psalm does not talk about Solomon but about Christ, for it said, “The Lord said to me, ‘My son you are; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will give you nations as your heritage, and as your possession the ends of the earth. You shall shepherd them with an iron rod, and like potter’s vessels, you will shatter them. And now, O kings, be sensible.’”<sup>66</sup> Tell me now: you told me [that] Solomon did not possess the ends of the earth; [then] when did he shepherd them [the nations] with an iron rod? When did he shatter these same enemies like potter’s vessels? [He] never [did].<sup>67</sup>

The monk cites Ps 2:7 (a Christological verse from a Christian perspective) to argue that the verse had already foreshadowed the Son of God before Christians interpreted it in this way. As Constantin Oancea points out, Ps 2:7 (LXX), in its original context, refers to the king in Zion who was the son of God by God’s degree and not by nature, as it was determined by God’s covenant to establish the House of

---

<sup>64</sup> On Christians’ accusations against Jews for a Jewish influence behind iconoclasm and the portrayal of Jews as desecrators of icons in Byzantium, see in the excellent monograph by Katherine Aron-Beller, “The Creation of a Narrative: Byzantine Tales of Jews Desecrating Images,” chap. 1 in *Christian Images and their Jewish Desecrators: The History of an Allegation, 400–1700* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2024), 29–61, and especially, 36–42.

<sup>65</sup> The Christian cites the Septuagint version of Ps 2:7: Κύριος εἶπε πρὸς με· υἱός μου εἶ σύ, ἐγὼ σήμερον γεγέννηκά σε.

<sup>66</sup> Ps 2:7–10.

<sup>67</sup> *Dialogue between a Christian and a Jew*, ed. McGiffert, par. 2, lines 3–23, p. 52. Ὁ Ἰουδαῖος εἶπε· διὰ τί βλασφημεῖτε λέγοντες υἱὸν ἔχει ὁ θεός; ὁ χριστιανός· οὐχ ἡμεῖς ἐσμὲν οἱ λέγοντες τοῦτο, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡ γραφή ὑμῶν· λέγει γάρ “Κύριος εἶπε πρὸς με υἱός μου εἶ σύ, ἐγὼ σήμερον γεγέννηκά σε.” ὁ Ἰουδαῖος· περὶ Σολομῶντος λέγει ὁ ψαλμός, ὁ χριστιανός· πόσου μέρους τοῦ κόσμου ἐκυρίευσεν ὁ Σολομῶν; ὁ Ἰουδαῖος· οὐδὲ τοῦ ἡμίσεος, οὐδὲ τοῦ τρίτου μέρους τοῦ κόσμου. ὁ χριστιανός· ἄκουσον οὖν ἄρτι βουνεχῶς καὶ μάθε ὅτι οὐ περὶ Σολομῶντος, ἀλλὰ περὶ Χριστοῦ λέγει ὁ ψαλμός· εἶπε γάρ ὅτι “Κύριος εἶπε πρὸς με υἱός μου εἶ σύ, ἐγὼ σήμερον γεγέννηκά σε· αἰτησαι παρ’ ἐμοῦ καὶ δώσω σοι ἔθνη τὴν κληρονομίαν σου, καὶ τὴν κατάσχεσίν σου τὰ πέρατα τῆς γῆς· ποιμανεῖς αὐτοὺς ἐν ῥάβδῳ σιδηρᾷ, ὡς σκευὴ κεραμέως συντρίψεις αὐτοὺς καὶ νῦν βασιλεῖς σύνετε.” εἶπέ μοι ἄρτι, σὺ εἶπάς μοι οὐ κατέσχε Σολομῶν τὰ πέρατα τῆς γῆς, πότε ἐποίησαν αὐτοὺς ἐν ῥάβδῳ σιδηρᾷ; πότε ὡς σκευὴ κεραμέως συντρίψαν αὐτοὺς τοὺς ἐχθρούς; οὐδέποτε.

David.<sup>68</sup> However, in a Christian context, New Testament authors employed Ps 2:7 (LXX) to describe Jesus's divine sonship,<sup>69</sup> an interpretation that the author of the *Dialogue of Papius and Philo* coopts. Ecclesiastical writers read Ps 2:7 (LXX) as an allusion to Christ's divinity.<sup>70</sup> Presenting the Jew to accuse Christians of blaspheming God due to their belief that God has a son when, for the Jew, the verse should be interpreted literally as a reference to David's son, Solomon, allows the author to set up the Jew in contradistinction to the Psalmist to dramatize his misreading of Ps 2:7.

To accentuate the legitimacy of the Christian reading of Ps 2:7 (LXX), the author has the monk instruct his Jewish interlocutor on the correct understanding of Ps 2:7-10 (LXX) when he tells him, "...listen now with understanding and learn that the Psalm does not talk about Solomon but about Christ".<sup>71</sup> The discussion is not on whether Christ is the Son of God but on the identity of the addressee behind these words,

The Lord said to me, 'My son you are; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will give you nations as your heritage and the ends of the earth as your possession. You shall shepherd them with an iron rod, and like potter's vessels, you will shatter them. And now, O kings, be sensible...'<sup>72</sup>

Was the addressee Christ or Solomon? The monk invites the Jew to pay attention to his upcoming exegesis of Ps 2:7-10 (LXX), allowing him to learn the verses'

<sup>68</sup> See Constantin Oancea, "Psalm 2 im Alten Testament und im Frühen Judentum," *Sacra Scripta* 11 no. 2 (2013): 170.

<sup>69</sup> See Stephen P. Ahearne-Kroll "Psalms in the New Testament," in *The Oxford Handbook of Psalms*, ed. William P. Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 270-80. See also Susan Gillingham, *Psalms through the Centuries*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 1:14-15, 17, 18, 20, 22, 23; and Alan Kam-Yau Chan, *Melchizedek Passages in the Bible: A Case Study for Inner-Biblical and Inter-Biblical Interpretation* (Warsaw: De Gruyter, 2016), 167. Without disregarding the messianic allusions of Ps 2:7, Israel Knohl, "Religion and Politics in Psalm 2," in *Emanuel: Studies in Hebrew Bible Septuagint and Dead Sea Scroll in Honor of Emanuel Tov*, ed. Shalom M. Paul, Robert A. Kraft, Lawrence H. Schiffman, and Weston W. Fields (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 726-27, argues for the use of the phrase "son of God" as a political device intended for the Israelites rather than for Judah's enemies. As Kohn points out, the portrayal of the Judean king as the son of God follows a long line of an ancient cultural tradition where kings were called son of God as "a political tool for supporting a ruler in his struggle with his enemies" (726).

<sup>70</sup> See Gillingham, *Psalms*, 1:31, 56, 57. As Gerard Rouwhorst and Marcel Poorthuis explain, Ecclesiastical authors saw in Ps 2 a reference to Christ as God's anointed one, applying it either against the Jews or, most importantly, against Christians who denied Jesus's divine sonship and divinity by underlying his humanity on the grounds of the adoption of the Messiah about which Ps 2:7 talks. See also Gerard Rouwhorst and Marcel Poorthuis, "'Why do the Nations Conspire?': Psalm 2 in Post-Biblical Jewish and Christian Traditions," in *Empsychoi Logoi—Religious Innovations in Antiquity: Studies in Honour of Pieter Willem van der Horst*, ed. Alberdina Houtman, Albert de Jong, and Magda Missetvan de Weg (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 437-9.

<sup>71</sup> *Dialogue between a Christian and a Jew*, ed. McGiffert, par. 2, lines 13-23, p. 52.

<sup>72</sup> Ps 2:7-10: Κύριος εἶπε πρὸς με υἱός μου εἶ σὺ, ἐγὼ σήμερον γεγέννηκά σε· αἴτησαι παρ' ἐμοῦ καὶ δώσω σοι ἔθνη τὴν κληρονομίαν σου, καὶ τὴν κατὰσχεσίῃ σου τὰ πέρατα τῆς γῆς· ποιμανεῖς αὐτοὺς ἐν ῥάβδῳ σιδηρᾷ. ὡς σκεύη κεραμῆως συντρίψει αὐτοὺς καὶ ἕν βασιλείᾳ σὺνετε...



hidden message as a reference to Christ. The monk retorts to the two challenges posed by the Jew and argues that the verse, “My son you are; today I have begotten you,” describes Christ as the divine Son of God. He also claims that the verses Ps 2:8-9 (LXX) are not an allusion to Solomon (a possible explanation on the part of those who denied the Christological reading of the verse) but to Christ. Concluding his interpretation with two rhetorical questions, the monk’s goals are threefold: 1) to confirm that Solomon never had dominion over the world, 2) to insinuate the correctness of his understanding of Ps 2:7 (LXX) as a reference to Christ and not to Solomon, and 3) to intensify the instructional attitude toward his interlocutor. The monk’s instructional tone manifests in the use of two consecutive protreptic imperatives,<sup>73</sup> “listen” - *ἀκουσον* and “learn” - *μάθε*, has no other goal than to underline his authoritative voice in explaining the Hebrew Psalmist before the Jew and to minimize the Jew to a pupil who learns because he lacks understanding. The foiling of the Jew spotlights prominently the monk’s theological validity.

As the discussion on Ps 2:7-8 (LXX) progresses, the Jew’s inquiry for clarification of these verses places him in a position of hermeneutical inefficiency vis-à-vis the hermeneutical efficiency of his interlocutor. Citing Ps 2:7-8 (LXX), the Jew ponders,

How does it [the psalm] say, *The Lord said to me, ask of me?* For if he is son, as you say (*ὡς λέγετε*), how does God say, *ask of me*, as [if he speaks] to a servant? And again, how does it [the psalm] say, *today I have begotten you?* But you say (*ὕμεις λέγετε*) that he was born before the world.<sup>74</sup>

The Jewish discussant brings up two issues that concern Christ’s relationship with God: Firstly, whether Christ is subordinate to God and, secondly, whether he existed along with God before time. The Jew concludes Christ’s subordination to God from how Ps 2:8 (LXX) shows that God speaks to his addressee, namely as if one addresses oneself to a servant and not to a child. For the Jew, the phrase “ask of me anything” demonstrates the permission one gives to their discussant, insinuating that one of the two parties talks from a seat of power. Moving to the second issue at hand, that is to say, the Son’s coexistence or not with the Father, the Jew infers from Ps 2:7 (LXX) Christ’s birth in time, given the use of the adverb “today” - *σήμερον* that introduces temporality to this event. At the same time, the Jew identifies the Christians’ incongruity between the precise meaning of Ps 2:7 (LXX) and their belief that Christ was born before time existed. In both cases, the Jew questions Christ’s divinity and his preexistence with God, and although these objections remind us of early Christological controversies, such as Arianism that

<sup>73</sup> Protreptic imperative is “one where the main aim is to get the hearer to carry out a certain action.” Here, the actions are the careful listening and the learning. Nicholas Allott, ed., “Protreptic Utterance,” in *Key Terms in Pragmatics* (London: Continuum, 2010), 161.

<sup>74</sup> *Dialogue between a Christian and a Jew*, ed. McGiffert, par. 3, lines 1-5, p. 53: Ὁ Ἰουδαῖος· πῶς λέγει “εἶπε Κύριος πρὸς με αἰτησάι παρ’ ἐμοῦ”; καὶ γὰρ εἰ υἱός ἐστιν, ὡς λέγετε, πῶς λέγει ὁ θεὸς ὡς πρὸς δοῦλον αἰτησάι παρ’ ἐμοῦ; καὶ πάλιν πῶς λέγει “ἐγὼ σήμερον γεγέννηκά σε”; ὑμεῖς δὲ λέγετε ὅτι πρὸ τοῦ κόσμου ὄλου ἐγεννήθη.

denied “Christ’s eternal sonship”<sup>75</sup> but still acknowledged him as God even if only “by participation in grace,”<sup>76</sup> they do reflect the Jewish teaching that the Messiah is not divine, denying for him the title God, even in name only.

To what extent, though, may the Jew’s views be seen as valid for the author of the dialogue? The author rejects, by definition, the Jew’s reading of the biblical verses, but it does not suffice to reject them. The author undermines the Jew’s hermeneutical prowess, setting up gradually the scene to present the Jew’s observations as lacking understanding of the biblical verses. The monk explains,

The Christian: Concerning the father saying to the son, “Ask of me, and I will give you nations,” do not be scandalized, for many times the father says to his son out of great love, “Ask me what you wish, and I shall offer [it] to you. Again, concerning [the father] saying [to the son], “today I have begotten you,” he talks about his birth in flesh, for he was born from the holy Theotokos (God-bearer) and perpetually virgin Maria.<sup>77</sup>

The monk argues for three decreed teachings: First, the Father and the Son are equal, and the Son is not subordinate to the Father, as the Christian deduces from how he explains the Father’s request in Ps 2:8 (LXX). Second, the adverb “today” in Ps 2:7 (LXX) applies to the birth of Christ in time and the flesh and not to his creation by the Father. And third, Christ was born in the flesh from the *Theotokos* and perpetually virgin Mary. The author has given succinctly the orthodox Christians’ dogma 1) on the divinity of Christ being co-eternal with the Father, 2) on the humanity of Christ receiving flesh through Mary, and 3) on the designation of Mary as perpetually virgin and God-bearer (*Theotokos*) who gave birth to incarnate God—an allusion to the dogma of the two natures in Christ. Drawing on Ps 2:7 (LXX), the author attempts to prove his beliefs’ doctrinal correctness by tracing them as foretold already through the psalmic verse. To intensify the correctness of his interpretation, he deploys the Jew as the link to the Hebrew scriptures that (supposedly) support the Christian theological views. The author ends up devising an imaginative space for instructing the Jew, advocating for the religious legitimacy of the particular teachings of his Christianity.

The construction of the Jew’s literary lineage with his scriptures to degrade the value of the Jew’s interpretation also continues in this dialogue. Closing the discussion on Christ as the Son of God, the Jew inquires more information about whether Christ was born before the world and whether he is God. In other words, the Jew raises the issue of the Son’s coeternity with God. The monk explains that he will discuss this matter, bringing proof from the Jews’ scriptures,

<sup>75</sup> Rouwhorst and Poorthuis, ““Why do the Nations Conspire?,”” 437.

<sup>76</sup> Davis, *The First Seven*, 52.

<sup>77</sup> *Dialogue between a Christian and a Jew*, ed. McGiffert, par. 3, lines 6-13, p. 53. ὁ χριστιανός· περι τοῦ εἰπεῖν τὸν πατέρα πρὸς τὸν υἱὸν, “αἴτησαι παρ’ ἐμοῦ, καὶ δώσω σοι ἔθνη,” μὴ σκανδαλίζου· πολλαῖς γὰρ λέγει πατήρ πρὸς τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ πολλῆς ἀγάπης, αἴτησά με ὃ θέλεις καὶ παράσχο σοι· πάλιν περι τοῦ εἰπεῖν, “ἐγὼ σήμερον γεγέννηκά σε,” περι τῆς κατὰ σάρκα γεννήσεως αὐτοῦ λέγει· εὐδοκία γὰρ πατρὸς ἐτέχθη ἐκ τῆς ἀγίας θεοτόκου καὶ αἰὶ παρθένου Μαρίας.

The Christian: Do not ask all at once, but [ask them] one after the other. And I look for God's compassion so that I will prove from your scriptures [τῶν γραφῶν ὑμῶν] and your prophets [τῶν προφητῶν ὑμῶν] that everything about Christ is accurate and that [everything] about him was proclaimed by them.<sup>78</sup>

The reference to the Jews' scriptures is intentional and aims to draw attention to Jews and his coreligionists' kinship relationship with biblical authors. By a double rhetorical move through which the author uses the Jew as the link to the Hebrew scriptures to bring him in an interpretative and theological opposition with them, the author attempts to denote legitimacy to his theological claims.

In this context, the Christian deploys Ps 109:1-4 LXX (110:1-4 MT)<sup>79</sup> to argue that also here, the psalmist had talked about Christ,

The Christian: However, I want to learn from you [ἐξ ὑμῶν] this: David, who is a king, a prophet, and a saint, whom did he have [as] a lord and a master? The Jew: This question does not stand, for David had no other lord except for God, who created the heaven and the earth. The Christian: You spoke correctly. Behold! In fact, he is talking about Christ, saying that he is his lord, for he was born before the ages. In the one-hundred and ninth psalm, it says thus: "The Lord said to my lord, Sit on my right." Behold! He certainly acknowledges the son [as] lord. For the father said to him after his holy incarnation and ascension, "Sit on my right until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet;" "among the splendors of the holy ones. From the womb, before the Morningstar, I brought you forth." Who was born before the Morningstar? Does he talk about Adam? Not at all. For he [Adam] was created two days after the Morningstar and the luminaries. Does he talk, then, about whom you [ὑμῶν] think? But David says that he is a son. David was born after many [centuries] since Adam. Adam was made on the sixth day. The luminaries were created on the fourth day, and God talks about his own son [when he says] that "before Morning-star, I brought you forth, You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek," that is a priest of the nations. And also, Melchizedek was a priest of the nations, and he offered both bread and wine, as your [ἡ γραφή ὑμῶν] scripture witnesses again...<sup>80</sup>

<sup>78</sup> *Dialogue between a Christian and a Jew*, ed. McGiffert, par. 4, lines 14-21, p. 53. Ὁ Ἰουδαῖος· εἰ καὶ πείθεις με ὅτι καὶ πρὸ τοῦ κόσμου ἐγεννήθη, ὅτι καὶ θεός ἐστιν ὁ Χριστός ὡς λέγεις· ὁ χριστιανός· μὴ ὅλα ὁμοῦ ἐρώτα ἀλλὰ ἓν καὶ ἓν· καὶ ἐπιζῶ εἰς τοὺς οἰκτιρμοὺς τοῦ θεοῦ ὅτι ἐκ τῶν γραφῶν ὑμῶν καὶ τῶν προφητῶν ὑμῶν παριστῶ πάντα τὰ περὶ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ὄντα ἀληθῆ, καὶ περὶ αὐτοῦ ὑπ' αὐτῶν προκηρυχθέντα.

<sup>79</sup> In the Hebrew Bible, this is Psalm 110 as opposed to LXX, in which it is Psalm 109 due to the different numbering. C. T. R. Hayward, *Targums and the Transmission of Scripture into Judaism and Christianity* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 379 explains that Psalm 110 "is a royal Psalm, headed 'for David' (Ps. 110:1); and it speaks of conflict involving enemies and kings (vv. 2, 3, and 5); the humbling of nations (v. 6); and an oath sworn to 'my lord' by YHWH that he is a priest forever 'according to order of Melchizedek'." For an analysis of Psalm 110 from a literary perspective, see Chan, *Melchizedek Passages in the Bible*, 97-118.

<sup>80</sup> *Dialogue between a Christian and a Jew*, ed. McGiffert, par. 5, lines 22-3, p. 53-55. [ὁ χριστιανός] Πλὴν τοῦτο θέλω μαθεῖν ἐξ ὑμῶν· ὁ Δαβὶδ βασιλεὺς ὢν καὶ προφήτης καὶ ἄγιος, τίνα κύριον καὶ

The monk collates the different verses from Ps 109:1-4 (LXX) (110:1-4 MT), a Messianic psalm<sup>81</sup> that “identifies the Messiah as an appointed king in waiting (vv. 4-5), [and] a present priest like Melchizedek (vv. 4-5).”<sup>82</sup> The New Testament authors read Ps 110:4 (MT) as a reference to the divine nature of Christ,<sup>83</sup> and its long interpretative tradition by early Christian writers witnesses its use to indicate Christ’s divinity.<sup>84</sup> As Predrag Dragutinović writes, from the fourth century CE onwards, Ps 110 (MT) has been read as a highly Christological text, and verses such as v. three have been used to support the belief in the divine origin of Christ and his incarnation.<sup>85</sup> In line with the previous interpretative tradition, the monk reads the biblical verses in a way that justifies his belief in the divinity of Christ, in Christ’s co-existence with the Father before time, and in Christ’s birth in the flesh in time, arguing that he is both God and human.

The use of Ps 110:1-4 (MT) in the context of the discussions of the eighth century CE comes to summarize the belief in the two natures in Christ that cannot be separated, responding in a way to the opponents of the pictorial representation of Jesus but also to those who doubted Christ’s divinity. The foiling of the Jew constituted an essential rhetorical tool for the author of this dialogue to corroborate the legitimacy of the Christian teachings on Christ’s divinity and his two natures

---

δεσποτὴν εἶχεν· ὁ Ἰουδαῖος· τοῦτο ἐρώτημα οὐκ ἔχει· ὁ Δαβὶδ γὰρ κύριον ἄλλον οὐκ ἔχει, εἰ μὴ τὸν θεὸν τὸν ποιήσαντα τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν· ὁ χριστιανός· ὀρθῶς εἶπας, ἰδοὺ οὖν αὐτὸς λέγει περὶ Χριστοῦ ὅτι κύριος αὐτοῦ ἐστίν, ὅτι καὶ πρὸ αἰώνων ἐγεννήθη· ἐν γὰρ τῷ ἑκατοστῷ ἐνάτῳ ψαλμῷ λέγει οὕτως, “εἶπεν ὁ κύριος τῷ κυρίῳ μου, κάθου ἐκ δεξιῶν μου.” ἰδοὺ οὖν αὐτὸς τὸν υἱὸν κύριον ὁμολογεῖ· πρὸς αὐτὸν γὰρ εἶπεν ὁ πατήρ, μετὰ τὴν ἀγίαν αὐτοῦ σάρκωσιν καὶ ἀνάληψιν, “κάθου ἐκ δεξιῶν μου, ἕως ἂν θῶ τοὺς ἐχθρούς σου ὑποπόδιον τῶν ποδῶν σου.” “ἐν ταῖς λαμπρότησι τῶν ἀγίων σου, ἐκ γαστροῦ πρὸ ἑωσφόρου ἐγέννησά σε.” τίς γὰρ ἐγεννήθη πρὸ ἑωσφόρου; ἄρα περὶ τοῦ Ἀδάμ λέγει; οὐδαμῶς· μετὰ δύο γὰρ ἡμέρας τοῦ ἑωσφόρου καὶ τῶν ἀστέρων ἐγένετο. ἀλλ’ ἄρα περὶ τοῦ ἐλλημμένου ὕμῶν λέγει; ἀλλ’ υἱὸν Δαβὶδ λέγει εἶναι· ὁ δὲ Δαβὶδ μετὰ πολλοῦς τοῦ Ἀδάμ ἐγεννήθη· ὁ δὲ Ἀδάμ τῆ ἕκτη ἡμέρᾳ ἐπλάσθη· οἱ δὲ ἑωσφόροι τῆ τετάρτῃ ἡμέρᾳ ἐγένοντο ὁ δὲ θεὸς λέγει περὶ τοῦ ἰδίου υἱοῦ ὅτι “πρὸ ἑωσφόρου ἐγέννησά σε, σὺ εἰ ἱερεὺς εἰς τὴν αἰῶνα κατὰ τὴν τάξιν Μελχισεδέκ,” τούτεστιν ἱερεὺς τῶν ἐθνῶν· καὶ γὰρ ὁ Μελχισεδέκ ἱερεὺς ἦν τῶν ἐθνῶν, καὶ ἄρτον καὶ οἶνον προσέφερεν, ὡς μαρτυρεῖ πάλιν ἡ γραφὴ ὕμῶν...

The emphasis here is not so much on the Christian’s argument as on his effort to underscore the provenance of this reading, namely that it is found in the scriptures of the Jews. Nowhere does he say that it is a Christian interpretation, but he claims that what his audience believes about Christ’s identity is already written in the Jewish scriptures.

<sup>81</sup> See Barry C. Davis, “Is Psalm 110 a Messianic Psalm?,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 157 (April–June 2000): 160-73.

<sup>82</sup> George A. Gunn, “Psalm 2 and the Reign of the Messiah,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 169 (October–December 2012): 438.

<sup>83</sup> See Gillingham, *Psalms through the Centuries*, 1:15. In the context of the New Testament, Ps. 110 is used to talk about 1) Christ as the son of David in the gospel of Mark (16); 2) Jesus as the son of David and still his Lord in the Gospel of Matthew (18); 3) Jesus’s superiority in comparison to David in the book of Acts (20) and in Romans (21); 4) Christ’s exaltation in Ephesians (22).

<sup>84</sup> Gillingham, *Psalms through the Centuries*, gives an overview of the early Christian writers who quoted Ps. 110 in their works to refer to the divinity of Christ. Such writers are Justin the Martyr (1:25), Irenaeus (1:25), Tertullian (1:26), Hippolytus of Rome (1:26), Athanasius of Alexandria (1:29), Diodorus of Tarsus (1:32), Theodore of Mopsuestia (1:32), and John the Chrysostom (1:33).

<sup>85</sup> See for example Athanasius’s Letter to Marcellinus on the Psalms. Predrag Dragutinović, “Psalm 110 im Neuen Testament und in der Frühen Kirche ein Stück Frühchristlicher Theologiegeschichte,” *Sacra Scripta* 11 no. 1 (2013): 95-111, here at 110.

and to showcase the extent of the Jew's dissonance with his biblical tradition. In the end, the Jew's views have been invalidated next to his Christian interlocutor's.

### A Talking Scripture Against Its Kin

The tactic of deploying the Jew(s) as a foil to biblical Israelite authors and Christian interlocutor(s) is a feature that also exists in Latin anti-Jewish dialogues.<sup>86</sup> In the Latin literature *Adversus Iudaeos* from late antiquity and the High Middle Ages, the hermeneutical Jew, as Jeremy Cohen has named him so aptly, played a variety of purposes. From him serving as a witness for the Christians, being seen as an agent of the Antichrist and the devil, being forced to convert to Christianity, and being regarded as a contamination for Christians and the Church, to him being associated with Muslims and heretics, being used as means for Christians' instruction, and being accused of heresy for deviating from the literal understanding of the Bible(!) and relying on their postbiblical writings (midrash and Talmud),<sup>87</sup> the Jew is constructed to serve particular purposes, all of which comprise diverse and, at the same time, complementary facets of his function as a foil. The Jew's foiling aspect per se (which encapsulates his various tasks in his deployment as a rhetorical tool) and the strife for legitimacy (which lies behind the Jew's use as a foil and endorses the diverse purposes of his use in Latin anti-Jewish disputations) are the two components that are also ubiquitously present in Latin *Adversus Iudaeos* dialogues. Still, their mechanics have not been given much scrutiny as well.<sup>88</sup> As I will show, Latin dialogues *Adversus Iudaeos*, such as the *Altercation of Simon and Theophilus* that I discuss in this section, lavish this larger picture of the Jew as a foil and the purpose of his function as such.<sup>89</sup>

One topic that constitutes an integral part of the discussions on Jesus' divine nature and his acknowledgment as God in some *Adversus Iudaeos* dialogues is the number of Gods involved in creation.<sup>90</sup> In those dialogues where these subjects are

---

<sup>86</sup> The same rhetorical tool applies in Syriac anti-Jewish dialogues, but due to the limits of space, I have not included examples from that corpus in this paper.

<sup>87</sup> See indicatively, Jeremy Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Anna Sapir Abulafia, *Christian-Jewish Relations 1000-1300: Jews in the Service of Medieval Christendom* (London: Routledge, 2011); Anna Sapir Abulafia, "The Service of Jews in Christian-Jewish Disputations," in *Les dialogues Adversus Iudaeos: Permanences et mutations d'une tradition polémique. Actes du colloque international organisé les 7 et 8 décembre 2011 à l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne*, éd. Sébastien Morlet, Olivier Munnich et Bernard Poudéron (Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 2013); and Anthony Bale, *Feeling Persecuted: Christians, Jews and Images of Violence in the Middle Ages* (London: Reaktion Books, 2010).

<sup>88</sup> As has been the case with Greek and Syriac dialogues *Adversus Iudaeos*.

<sup>89</sup> In this section, I am restraining to late antiquity, and in a separate study, I will take on to examine the mechanics of foiling in Latin anti-Jewish dialogues from the High Middle Ages. The inclusion of a Latin anti-Jewish dialogue aims to demonstrate that the rhetorical use of the Jew as a foil was not a characteristic of Greek texts alone in the Eastern Mediterranean, but it also appears in Latin dialogues in the Latin West. For example, in another Latin dialogue from the early medieval period, the *Altercatio Ecclesiae et Synagogae*, the Synagogue is the Church's foil, and several attributions to the Synagogue aim to elevate the Church. I discuss this in detail in my book, which is in progress.

<sup>90</sup> For example, *The Dialogue of Athanasius and Zacchaeus*, ed. Fred C. Conybeare (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1898) and *The Dialogue of Timothy and Aquila*, ed. Robertson have the longest discussions on

intertwined, the authors present the Jewish interlocutor as wondering whether there are two Gods,<sup>91</sup> while they depict the Christian discussant advocating for the existence of only one God, even if he acknowledges the divinity of Christ. Fundamentally, these topics concern God's monarchy against dissenting voices, which asserted that the divinity of Christ introduced two Gods into the Godhead. We find such discussions in the Latin *Altercation of Simon and Theophilus*, which originates from early fifth-century Gaul.<sup>92</sup>

Given the time of its composition, the *Altercation of Simon and Theophilus* emerged immediately after a century of intense theological debates that culminated in the first two Ecumenical Councils, which dealt (among other subjects) with two major theological issues: the divinity of Jesus Christ the Son and his relationship with the Father (Council of Nicaea I, 325 CE), and the divinity of the Holy Spirit and its relationship with both the Father and the Son (Council of Constantinople I, 381 CE). The controversy that the First Ecumenical Council was called to resolve concerned the nature of the Son and his relationship with the Father as expressed in Arius's theological teachings according to which the Father created the Son; the Son is subordinate to the Father; and he is not truly a God, even if he is called God. The Council of Nicaea I, 325 CE, decreed that the Son was of the same substance as the Father (homoousios — ὁμοούσιος) and also a true God without introducing two Gods in the Godhead.<sup>93</sup> In the last quarter of the fourth century CE, the Council of Constantinople I, 381 CE, dealt with the negation of the divinity of the Holy Spirit and with the belief that Jesus did not possess a human soul. Whereas the second Ecumenical Council resolved the first issue by decreeing the divinity of the Holy Spirit and its designation as God equal with the Father and the Son, the other matter in question was to be resolved half a century later, in the Council of Ephesus in 431 CE.<sup>94</sup>

This historical-theological context of the *Altercation* will help us understand the theological background of the discussion between Simon and Theophilus on the divinity of Christ and the number of Gods, and it will also allow us to see the

---

the topic. On the other hand, the dialogue *Les Trophées de Damas: Controverse Judéo-Chrétienne du VII<sup>e</sup> Siècle*, ed. Gustave Bardy, *Patrologia Orientalis* XV (Paris: Firmin – Didot et C<sup>1</sup><sup>e</sup>, Imprimeurs - Éliteurs, 1920), the *Dialogue between a Christian and a Jew*, ed. McGiffert, the *Disputation of Sergius the Stylite against a Jew*, trans. A. P. Hayman, *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* 338-339 (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1973), and the *Life and Works of Saint Gregentios, Archbishop of Taphar*, ed. Albrecht Berger (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006) refer to this subject in passing and not in as much detail from a rhetorical perspective as in the first two works, or in the Latin *Dialogue of Simon and Theophilus* that I analyze in this section.

<sup>91</sup> In the context of the creation of the world.

<sup>92</sup> The *Altercation of Simon and Theophilus* is the oldest surviving Christian anti-Jewish dialogue written in Latin. See William Varner, *Ancient Jewish-Christian Dialogues: Athanasius and Zacchaeus, Simon and Theophilus, Timothy and Aquila: Introductions, Texts, and Translations* (Lewiston, ME: The Edwin Mellen Press 2004), 90. See also Lahey, "Evidence for Jewish Believers," 596, 597, and n. 69 and n. 70.

<sup>93</sup> See Davis, *The First Seven*, 33-80.

<sup>94</sup> See Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Spirit of Eastern Christendom*, vol. 2 of *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), 27-28. See also Davis, *The First Seven*, 81-133.

construction of the Jew as a foil. Simon's function as a foil is not limited to his hermeneutical persona in connection with his biblical Israelite authors and Christian discussant. It also extends to Simon's use of an extra-Christian hermeneutical tradition to interpret God's protreptic speech in first person plural to create human—"let us make human"—vis-à-vis Theophilus's interpretation of the same scene.<sup>95</sup> In this foiling framework, not only is the Jew portrayed as a cunning person<sup>96</sup> whose failing interpretive abilities and theological understanding make those of Theophilus and his biblical ancestors stand out,<sup>97</sup> but also, the Jew's traditions on the creation of humans are shown as false, underlying by contrast the correctness of Theophilus's exegesis.

In line with the previous century's synodical decisions, the author of the *Altercation of Simon and Theophilus* weaves a derogatory discourse against Simon. In doing so, he aims to intensify his theological exactitude on the divinity of Christ—still preserving God's monarchy—and to discredit his interlocutor's interpretative credibility. The Latin author unfolds his theological thinking in three levels: he first pictures biblical authors to refute Simon's beliefs. He then depicts Theophilus accusing Simon of faithlessness, which he considers the root of Simon's disbelief in the words of his ancestral biblical authors. And he concludes by admonishing Simon for having erroneous views.

The Christian author opens his dialogue portraying Simon and Theophilus as debating over Christ's divinity. This topic brings up another thorny subject: the number of Gods involved in the creation. From the onset of the debate, both interlocutors quote biblical verses as if their biblical authors utter them to justify and increase the credibility of their views. Negating Christ's divinity,<sup>98</sup> Simon cites Deuteronomy 32:39 and Isaiah 44:6 next to each other to prove the legitimacy of his view against Theophilus's; "Sim.: The resounding voice of the sacred and venerable Deuteronomy says: *For, look, I am [only], and no other god exists except me* (Deut 32:39). And Isaiah says: *I am the first and I am the last, and no other god exists besides me* (Isa 44:6)."<sup>99</sup> Deut 32:39 and Isa 44:6<sup>100</sup> are adduced to bring evidence for the existence of one God alone in response to Theophilus's belief that the Son is also God,<sup>101</sup> a teaching that for Simon disturbs God's monarchy.

<sup>95</sup> Gen 1:26, "Let us make human in our image, after our likeness." Translation adapted from the NKJV.

<sup>96</sup> As I will show below, Simon fails to make Theophilus reject the orthodox teaching of the divinity of Christ by trying to beguile him into defending that Christ was not God.

<sup>97</sup> As Theophilus's foil, Simon does not have the interpretive understanding of his interlocutor and, thus, Theophilus's correctness on the divinity of Jesus is underlined more prominently.

<sup>98</sup> *Die Altercatio Simonis Iudaei et Theophili Christiani*, ed. Adolf Harnack (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1883), I.2-3, p. 16.

<sup>99</sup> *Die Altercatio Simonis Iudaei et Theophili Christiani*, ed. Harnack, I.4, p. 16: Sim.: Sacri venerandique Deuteronomii vox resultans dicit: *Videte quoniam ego sum, et non est alius praeter me deus* [Deut 32 :39]. Et Esaias dicit: *Ego primus et ego novissimus, et praeter me non est deus* [Isa 44 :6]. The author has used Deut 32:39 and Isa 44:6 as the Jew's response that Christ is not God.

<sup>100</sup> Deut 32:39 is part of the song of Moses and describes God in the first person singular to state his monarchy, and Isa 44:6 describes God's uniqueness. The intertextual connection between the two verses is striking.

<sup>101</sup> As John F. A. Sawyer, *Isaiah Through the Centuries*, (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2018), 258 explains regarding Isa 44:6 MT, "I am first and I am the last, and there is no god but ME," the verse is

Theophilus's response, on the other hand, references Isa 7:9 and presents the biblical prophet as Simon's interlocutor and his refuter,

Th.: Christ's voice is most sacred, and, if you wish to understand [it], first it is necessary to believe, and only then will you be able to comprehend [it]. For instance, Isaiah refutes you when he says: you will not understand unless you believe [Isa 7:9]. Therefore, we acknowledge, perceive, and worship without doubt the omnipotent, invisible, without end, incomprehensible God, [and] we subsequently profess [that] Christ [is] God and the son of God. That which he says, I am the first, and I am the last [Isa 44:6a] signifies the two comings of Christ.<sup>102</sup>

In its original context, Isa 7:9 outlines the defeat of the northern kingdom of Israel to reassure King Ahaz that the Syro-Ephraimite coalition against the kingdom of Judah would not succeed and to urge him to have confidence in God's words. Re-interpreting Isa 7:9 outside its original context, the Christian author employs it about the Jew's lack of understanding of Christ's divinity. The author dramatizes the foil aspect of the Jew and creates a performative Isaiah who now converses with Simon and refutes his reading of the phrase, "and besides me, there is no God," as negating Christ's divinity. John Sawyer explains that although Isa 7:9 reads, "If you do not believe, for you cannot be established," pinpointing the "wordplay on two Hebrew verbs which have the same root"<sup>103</sup> (תִּאֲמִנּוּ – ta'āmînû and תִּאֲמַנּוּ – tē'āmēnû stemming from a common root, אָמַן – 'mn), the Church Fathers "following the Septuagint, have: 'If you do not believe, you will not understand,' a text which is then cited frequently by them in discussions of the relationship between faith and reason."<sup>104</sup> Sawyer brings Eusebius's use of the verse as an example and remarks that for the churchman, the rejection of Christ by the Jews is the result of their miscomprehending Isaiah's words.<sup>105</sup> We see this reading of Isa 7:9 in the excerpt above, which closes with Theophilus opining that via Isa 44:6, it is Christ who speaks about his two advents (per the author's interpretation), "I am the first,

---

quoted in Exodus Rabbah II.5 "to show that God has no father (before him), no son (after him) and no brother (beside him)."

<sup>102</sup> *Die Altercatio Simonis Iudaei et Theophili Christiani*, ed. Harnack, I.4, p. 16. Th.: Sacratissima Christi vox est, quam si tu volueris cognoscere, oportet te primum credere et tunc demum poteris intellegere. Esaias enim redarguit te dicens: Nisi credideritis, non intellegetis [Isa 7 :9]. Indubitanter igitur deum ornipotentem, invisibilem, immensum, incomprehensibilem novimus et scimus et colimus, deinceps Christum Deum et dei filium profiteamur. Quod autem dicit: Ego primus et ego novissimus [Isa 44:6a], duos adventus Christi significat. Here, the author cites Isa 7:9 and 44:6a as the Christian's response to the Jew.

<sup>103</sup> Sawyer, *Isaiah*, 53.

<sup>104</sup> Sawyer, *Isaiah*, 54.

<sup>105</sup> Sawyer, *Isaiah*, 54.



and I am the last, and no other god exists besides me,” a verse which the Jew-foil to his ancestral biblical author failed to comprehend.<sup>106</sup>

The author continues to devise Simon as a foil to biblical authors and employs the prophet Zechariah in the contexts of Deut 32:39 and Isa 44:6 to further bolster his view on Christ’s divinity. To Simon’s question on the reason for which Deut 32:39 and Isa 44:6 close with a similar statement that denies the existence of other gods, Theophilus answers that it was Christ who uttered “and no other god exists besides me,” to warn against the antichrist, who would declare himself a god, and about whom Zechariah had written in Zech 11:16, 17.<sup>107</sup> The author offers a biased interpretation that aligns with his goal to claim religious legitimacy of belief in the divinity of Christ without introducing two Gods in the Godhead. Calling forth Zech 11:16-17, as if the prophet spoke about the antichrist against whom Christ purportedly warned through Isa 44:6,<sup>108</sup> the author intensifies Simon’s role as the foil to biblical Israelite prophets, whose message he continues to misread. In its original context, Zech 11:16-17 writes about “an anti-shepherd, God’s worthless shepherd who abandons the flock.”<sup>109</sup> In the dialogue text, Theophilus draws on the image of the evil shepherd to identify him with the Antichrist. Drawing first a connection between Deut 32:39 and Isa 44:6 with Zech 11:16, 17 and then employing Zech 11:16, 17 as the response to Deut 32:39 and Isa 44:6, Theophilus denotes eschatological aspiration to Zech 11:16, 17. Thereby, he explains that Christ is God, but not a second God, and that Christ is one with the Father, in par with the wording in Deut 32:39, according to which there is no god besides God.

This discussion on Christ’s divinity and designation as God leads Simon to assume that Theophilus talked about two Gods.<sup>110</sup> In response to Simon’s assumption and to argue that God is one and not many, Theophilus deploys the biblical story of the appearance of three men to Abraham at the oak of Mamre from Genesis 18:3, 4,<sup>111</sup>

---

<sup>106</sup> Interestingly, the author does not support the belief in the divinity of Christ in dogmatic terms by referencing, for example, the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father, but only based on scriptural exegesis.

<sup>107</sup> *Die Altercatio Simonis Iudaei et Theophili Christiani*, ed. Harnack, I.5, p. 16-17.

<sup>108</sup> *Die Altercatio Simonis Iudaei et Theophili Christiani*, ed. Harnack, I.5, p. 17.

<sup>109</sup> Stephen L. Cook, “The Metamorphoses of a Shepherd: The Tradition History of Zechariah 11:17+13:7-9,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 55 no. 3 (July 1993): 455. See also Robert L. Foster, “Shepherds, Sticks, and Social Destabilization: A Fresh Look at Zechariah 11:4-17,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 126 no. 4 (Winter 2007): 745.

<sup>110</sup> *Die Altercatio Simonis Iudaei et Theophili Christiani*, ed. Harnack, I.6, p. 17: Sim. : Ergo tu duos deos facis?

<sup>111</sup> Gen 18:1-4, [Then the Lord appeared to him by the terebinth trees of Mamre, as he was sitting in the tent door in the heat of the day. So he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing by him; and when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the ground, and said, “My Lord, if I have now found favor in Your sight, do not pass on by Your servant. Please let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree]. On the interpretation of the three angels in early Christian literature where the three angels were seen either as God accompanied by two angels, or the Son of God, or a prefiguration of the Trinity from the second to the seventh century CE, see Emmanouela Grypeou and Helen Spurling, “Abraham’s Angels: Jewish and Christian Exegesis of Genesis 18-19,” in *The Exegetical Encounter between Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity*, ed. Emmanouela Grypeou and Helen Spurling (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 189-97; Bogdan

There is one God, from whom [is] Christ and in whom [is] God, just as [the] three [persons] [that] were seen by Abraham at the oak of Mambre, to whom he attended [and] greeted [them as] one, saying: *If I have found favor before you [singular personal pronoun te], let me take water so that your feet be washed, and you refresh [yourselves] under the tree.*<sup>112</sup>

Theophilus's interpretation of Gen 18:3, 4 reflects a trinitarian understanding of God. This scriptural exegesis appears from the fifth century CE onwards and is based on the premise that God is one in three persons. Grypeou and Spurling underline the Christian reception of the verse. They explain that in the fourth century CE, John Chrysostom understood the biblical event as a "revelation of Christ in the shape of man" and that Ephrem the Syrian and Ishodad of Merv perceived the episode as God's revelation to Abraham and a "prefiguration of Christ's coming," respectively.<sup>113</sup> However, from the fifth century CE onwards, trinitarian interpretations of the scene were the theological norm, as we can see, for example, from Cyril of Alexandria's interpretation of the incident at Mamre as a "revelation of the Holy Trinity."<sup>114</sup>

As the discussion on Christ's divinity progresses, Simon appears as a guileful interlocutor about Theophilus, who does not use any tricks to confuse his discus-sant. Simon tells Theophilus that he is willing to believe that Christ is God and the son of God only if he explains to him if God *made*<sup>115</sup> Christ a God,<sup>116</sup>

Si.: But I want you to explain this to me: If on any occasion God by himself made Christ a God, then at last I will thoroughly consider believing Christ [being] God and the Son of God.

---

G. Bucur, "The Early Christian Reception of Genesis 18: From Theophany to Trinitarian Symbolism," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 23 no. 2 (Summer 2015): 245-72; and, Grigory Benevich, "Maximus Confessor's Interpretation of Abraham's Hospitality in Genesis 18 and the Preceding Orthodox Tradition," *Scrinium* 13 (2017): 44-7.

<sup>112</sup> *Die Altercatio Simonis Iudaei et Theophili Christiani*, ed. Harnack, I.6, p. 17: Th.: Deus unus est, ex quo Christus et in quo deus, sicut Abrahae ad illicem Mabrae tres visi sunt, quibus occurrens unum salutavit dicens: *Si inveni gratiam ante te, accipiam aquam et laventur pedes vestri, et refrigerate su abore* [Gen 18:3, 4].

<sup>113</sup> John Chrysostom, *Hom. Gen. LVIII.11-12*, and *Spuria Contra Theatra*, PG 56, col. 564; Ephrem the Syrian, *Comm. Gen. XV.1*; Ishodad of Merv, "*Commentary on Genesis*," quoted in Grypeou and Spurling, "Abraham's Angels," 195.

<sup>114</sup> Cyril of Alexandria, *Contra Julianum I*, as quoted in Grypeou and Spurling, "Abraham's Angels," 195. To substantiate the trinitarian prolongations of the biblical scene, Cyril of Alexandria remarked that Abraham addressed the three men as if he addressed one person, and the three men spoke as one person. According to L. Thunberg, "Early Christian Interpretations of the Three Angels in Gen 18," *Studia Patristica* 8 (1966): 562, "the fact that Abraham addressed his guests as one person (...) is the basis of the Christological and Trinitarian interpretations of Gen 18;" as quoted in Grypeou and Spurling, "Abraham's Angels," 195.

<sup>115</sup> My emphasis on the passive form "was made" aims to indicate its position as a signpost for the Christian author's argument that Christ is God but not a second God.

<sup>116</sup> *Die Altercatio Simonis Iudaei et Theophili Christiani*, ed. Harnack, II.7, p. 18: Sim.:... sed illud volo edisseras mihi, sicubi in loco deus per semetipsum deum Christum constituit, tunc demum Christum deum et dei filium credere cogitabo.

Simon's request is bizarre, for it is reminiscent of Arius's teaching that Christ was made God, that he was not God by nature and was called such only by name.<sup>117</sup> In other words, Simon is willing to accept a pro-Nicene theological teaching (Christ is a real God) provided Theophilus proves to him a non-Nicene theological teaching (that Christ was *made* God, which is an Arian thesis).<sup>118</sup> Simon's request is a trap. If Theophilus proved that Christ *was made* a God and was not God of the same substance as the Father, it would have been Theophilus himself, a Nicene Christian, who would have denied the divinity of Christ by reducing it. Thus, it would have been Theophilus who would have annulled an orthodox dogma. This action would prove to Simon that Christ was not God by nature and that the orthodox teaching of the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father was an empty letter.<sup>119</sup>

Theophilus slips away and responds to Simon's request by juxtaposing Moses (a prefiguration of Christ for the author of the dialogue) with Christ in terms of their mission, only to show him the difference between Christ being a God and a human agent being appointed as god,

Nonbelieving Jew! Are you now disputing the prophets? However, receive the answer to your question. God speaks to Moses when he says: Behold, I have made you a god to Pharaoh, and your brother, Aaron, will be your prophet [Exod 7:1]. Look: Here, Moses is a type of Christ, a god for the non-believing Gentiles. How much more is Christ a God for those who believe? For just as Moses freed the people from Egypt from the harshest slavery of Pharaoh, so also Christ freed his people from the slavery of idols and the dominion of the devil.<sup>120</sup>

---

<sup>117</sup> See Davis, *The First Seven*, 52.

<sup>118</sup> Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, in the fourth century CE, associated Arians with Jews in terms of the former's teachings about Jesus, considering their Christian beliefs as Judaism in disguise. See Ar. 3.28 (Bright, *Orations*, 182-83), as discussed in David Brakke, "Jewish Flesh and Christian Spirit in Athanasius of Alexandria," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9 no. 4 (Winter 2001): 474. Thus, it should not come as a surprise that the anonymous author of the dialogue presents Simon as trying to entrap Theophilus to admit an Arian thesis.

<sup>119</sup> Presenting Simon to attempt to persuade Theophilus in order to prove to him a non-orthodox Christian teaching as a prerequisite for him to embrace an orthodox teaching, the author seems to "play" with the rabbinic concept of nullification of idolatry, which builds on the practice of *damnatio memoriae*. According to the concept of the nullification of idolatry, idolatry could be annulled only if an idolater engaged in an act toward an idol or a cultic object that would invalidate their ritual status, rendering them, consequently, unfit for worship. See Yair Furstenberg, "The Rabbinic View of Idolatry and the Roman Political Conception of Divinity," *The Journal of Religion* 90 no. 3 (July 2010): 335-366, here at 341. In our case, we see a similar attitude on the part of Simon: Had he succeeded in having Theophilus prove an anti-Nicene dogma, it would have been Theophilus himself who would have rendered a Nicene dogma wrong/invalid and would have validated Simon's rejection of the divinity of Jesus/Christ.

<sup>120</sup> *Die Altercatio Simonis Iudaei et Theophili Christiani*, ed. Harnack, II.7, p. 18. Th.: Incredule Iudaeae, iam et de prophetis disputas? Accipe tamen interrogationi tuae responsum. Deus ad Moysen loquitur dicens: Ecce dedi te deum Pharaoni et Aaron frater tuus erit tuus propheta [Exod 7 :1]. Pervide, hunc Moysen typum Christi fuisse, gentium incredibilium deum. Quanto magis Christus credentium est deus? Sicut enim Moyses populum de Aegyptio, de durissima Pharaonis servitute liberavit, ita et Christus populum suum de idolorum servitute et de diaboli potestate liberavit.

The author sets up Simon in disputation with his ancestral prophets and, with the construction of a debate within a debate, he accentuates Simon's estrangement from the theological messages of his ancestral biblical authors, here the prophets. In so doing, Theophilus highlights the difference between a human being assigned as god and Christ being a God. He cites Exodus 7:1 and explains that God assigned Moses as a god in that God appointed him as a leader for the Israelites to free them from Egypt. Christ, on the other hand, was not made a god. Still, he was a true God with the power to free humans from sin and, therefore, with an incomparably superior soteriological mission. Witness how Theophilus addresses Simon: The words the author puts in Theophilus's mouth when he calls Simon faithless and rebellious against his prophets amplify the image of the Jew in interpretative discordance with his ancestors. This derogatory discourse aims to discredit Simon's view and to bolster the Christian's position.

The conversation that started with Christ's divinity culminates now in the debate on the number of Gods involved in the creation of the cosmos as a whole and human in particular.<sup>121</sup> For Simon, the divinity of Christ poses the fundamentally theological problem of the number of Gods involved in the creation,

Therefore, if Christ is God and the Son of God, then how is it written in Genesis: In the beginning, God *made* [*fecit deus*—singular number] *the heaven and the earth*? Undoubtedly, it could have been said: In the beginning, *God the Father and God the Son made* [*fecit deus pater et deus filius* where *fecit* is still in singular] *the heaven and the earth*.<sup>122</sup>

Simon's question is plausible: if Christ were God, as Theophilus argues, then Gen 1:1 would have also mentioned Christ, the Son of God and God himself, participating in the creation. In this case, the verb *fecit* would retain its grammatical type in the third person singular, corroborating the pro-Nicene teaching that the Son and the Father are of the same substance, which would keep God's monarchy. However, Simon's question insinuates that since Gen 1:1 does not mention God the Son but only God, there is only one God, and Christ should not and could not be considered a God.

Simon's reasoning brings about Theophilus's reaction,

You err, Jew! Never will you discover the truth unless you understand the origin of the truth. If you wanted to believe, you would also be able to find out his [truth] in the beginning, who Christ is, the Son of God. Thus, in the beginning, it says God made heaven and earth, namely, he [God] deemed worthy to make humans by Christ's power, according to his will, and in his image. For

---

<sup>121</sup> As I mentioned earlier, the two topics are interrelated.

<sup>122</sup> *Die Altercatio Simonis Iudaei et Theophili Christiani*, ed. Harnack, II.8, p. 18: Sim.: Si ergo Christus deus est et dei filius, quomodo ergo in Genesi scriptum est: *In principio fecit deus caelum et terram*? [Gen 1:1]. Poterat utique dixisse: *In principio fecit deus pater et deus filius* caelum et terram.

he says: Let us make human; and again, he says later: God made human in the image and likeness of God; male and female he created them.<sup>123</sup>

Theophilus accuses Simon of his incorrect understanding of Gen 1:1, which he ascribes to his faithlessness. First, Theophilus sees God the Father and Christ the Son in the world's creation. By arguing that God made the world in Christ's decision, Theophilus suggests that the singular form "God made - *fecit deus*" in Gen 1:1 refers to and encapsulates both God the Father and Christ the Son, whose consubstantial relationship makes them one God and not two Gods. It is noteworthy that through Theophilus's interpretation regarding the Son's involvement in the creation "in the beginning," the author seems to follow an exegetical tradition that interpreted the phrase "in the beginning" (*ἐν ἀρχῇ* LXX - *in principio*) as a reference to Christ, in that the world was created in the Son and the Son was the agent of creation. As Philip Alexander has observed, this interpretation is already in Origen's *Homily I on the Pentateuch*.<sup>124</sup> In this work, Origen connects Colossians 1:15-17<sup>125</sup>—where we find the very first reference to Christ as the agent of creation—with Gen 1:1,<sup>126</sup> which the author of the *Altercation of Simon and Theophilus* deploys to argue—similarly with what Origen writes—that God created the world "in Christ's decision and according to his will." The author of our dialogue underlines the Son's consubstantiality with the Father to explain the absence of an explicit reference to the Son in Gen 1:1. In the opposite case, it would warrant the Jew's reading. Put differently, Simon subverted the straightforward meaning of Gen 1:1 to make the case that only he comprehends the original meaning of Gen 1:1.

To further substantiate the presence of God the Father and Christ the Son in the creation of the cosmos, Theophilus introduces Gen 1:26, 27, which speaks about human's creation. The verbal forms *faciamus* – *fecit* in Gen 1:26, 27 are employed sequentially. Gen 1:26 describes the creation of humans using the plural

---

<sup>123</sup> *Die Altercatio Simonis Iudaei et Theophili Christiani*, ed. Harnack, II.8, p. 18-19. Th.: Erras, Iudaeae, nec umquam invenies veritatem, nisi veritatis intellegas originem. Nam si velles credere, poteris et in principio eius invenire, quis est Christus, dei filius. Sic enim in principio, ait, fecit deus caelum et terram, hoc est in Christi arbitrio et ad eius voluntatem et ad cuius imaginem hominem facere dignatus est; dicit enim: Faciamus hominem, et rursus infra dicit: Fecit deus hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem dei; masculum et feminam fecit eos."

<sup>124</sup> See Philip Alexander, "'In the Beginning': Rabbinic and Patristic Exegesis of Genesis 1:1," in *The Exegetical Encounter between Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity*, ed. Emmanouela Grypeou and Helen Spurling (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 17.

<sup>125</sup> Col 1:15-17: [He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And he is before all things, and in Him all things consist].

<sup>126</sup> Origen, *Homily I on the Pentateuch*: "'In the beginning (in principio) God created the heavens and the earth' (Gen 1:1). What is the 'beginning' (principium) of all things if it be not our Lord and the Saviour of all Christ Jesus, 'the firstborn of every creature' (Col 1:15). Therefore in this 'beginning,' that is in his Word, God made heaven and earth, as John the Evangelist also says at the opening of his Gospel, 'In the beginning was the Word, etc.' (John 1:1). So here it does not intend some sort of temporal 'beginning'; rather it means that 'in the beginning,' that is 'in the Saviour,' heaven was made, and earth and all other things that were made," quoted in Alexander, "'In the Beginning'," 17.

form of the verb *facio* in the phrase, *faciamus hominem*, “Let us make human.” On the other hand, Gen 1:27 describes the making of the sexes using the singular form of the construct verb and subject, *masculum et feminam fecit eos*, “male and female he made them.” Suppose we follow the interpretation of the dialogue’s author on the interchangeable use of the verb *facio* in its different forms in Gen. 1:1 (third-person singular - fecit), Gen 1:26 (first-person plural - faciamus), and Gen 1:27 (third-person singular - fecit). In that case, we attest to the author’s painstaking efforts to explain how the grammatical alterations of the verb *facio* render the need for an explicit reference to the Son in the creation story unnecessary. Had God the Son been also mentioned in Gen 1:1, 26, and 27, it would have supported the Jew’s reading of the existence of two Gods instead of one. However, the application of *facio* in third-person singular and first-person plural bolsters the Son’s presence and role in the creation (of human and as a whole) theologically not as a second God but as one God with God the Father. The subversion of the original context of the verses is silenced.

Simon retorts to Theophilus’s theological analysis based on the verb *faciamus*—“let us make—” and suggests that *faciamus* may refer to a discussion between God and the angels regarding the creation of human.<sup>127</sup> Simon’s response alludes to rabbinic midrashic traditions. The rabbinic tradition in Genesis Rabbah 7:4—an Amoraic aggadic midrash<sup>128</sup> from the beginning of the fifth century CE—according to which God consulted the angels, resembles Simon’s explanation for using a plural number in the act of creation. Simon’s reply meets Theophilus’s emphatic reaction,

You err, Jew! To whom among the angels did ever God say: You are my son, today I have begotten you [Ps 2:7]? And again, he says in the psalm: I will appoint him the first-born, distinguished compared to all the kings of the earth [Ps 88:28]. On the contrary, he orders the angels to worship Christ. And again, it says in the Song of Deuteronomy: Rejoice nations with him, and all the angels of God confirm him. [Deut 32:43].<sup>129</sup>

Once again, the author employs harsh language to downgrade the Jew’s previous view to emphasize the correctness of the Christian opinion. Whatever the source—written or oral—the author might have been aware of, he rejects the view that God

<sup>127</sup> *Die Altercatio Simonis Iudaei et Theophili Christiani*, ed. Harnack, II.9, p. 19: Sim. : Potuit hoc et ad angelos dixisse. [He could have said this to his angels.]

<sup>128</sup> See Eyal Ben-Eliyahu, Yehudah Cohn, and Fergus Millar, *Handbook of Jewish Literature from Late Antiquity, 135-700 CE* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 81; see also H. L. Strack and Günter Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, ed. and trans. Markus Bockmuehl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 279.

<sup>129</sup> *Die Altercatio Simonis Iudaei et Theophili Christiani*, ed. Harnack, II.9, p. 19. Th.: Erras, Iudae! Cui umquam angelorum dixit deus: Filius meus es tu, ego hodie genui te [Ps 2:7]? Et rursus in psalmo dicit: Ponam principem illum, excelsum prae omnibus regibus terrae [Ps 88:28]. Angelis autem iubet, ut Christum adorent. Et iterum in Cantico Deuteronomii dicit: Laetamini gentes cum eo et adorent eum omnes angeli dei [Deut 32:43].

had a council with angels and that they might have been involved in human's creation. Instead, the Latin author has Theophilus cite three biblical verses that refer to Christ from a Christian perspective.

Putting aside Ps 2:7, whose reading I discussed above, and the same reading is also employed here, I will focus on Ps 88:28 (89:27 MT) and Deut 42:43 from the forecited excerpt. Whereas Ps 88 alludes to King David and the restoration of the Davidic dynasty,<sup>130</sup> and Deut 32:43 (which is part of the song of Moses that Moses addressed to the Israelites before his demise) is a call "not only to Israel but to the heavens and the gods"<sup>131</sup> to praise God, reassuring "Those who want to maintain covenant fidelity with God [that they should] follow the imperatives of the Song, praising and waiting in hope for YHWH to act on their behalf,"<sup>132</sup> the author has given a messianic meaning to all three verses. Ps 88:28 (89:27 MT), a messianic psalm as a whole,<sup>133</sup> was understood as a proclamation of the coming of Christ.<sup>134</sup> Theophilus deploys v. 28, in particular, "*I will appoint him the first-born, distinguished compared to all the kings of the earth,*" to underline the Son's superiority compared to angels and, thus, to claim that it could not have been the angels with whom God consulted, owing to their lower status. The author applies a similar reading to Deut 32:43, for which he points out that the angels adored God the Son and, therefore, could not be God's agents in human's creation. In all three scriptural verses, the author's analysis is biased to invalidate the Jew's understanding and uphold his interpretation.

Uniquely among the other *Adversus Iudaeos* dialogues, the author of the *Altercation of Simon and Theophilus* presents not only Simon as the foil to biblical authors and to his Christian discussant but also Simon's extra-Christian tradition as a foil narrative to the Christian narrative of the creation story in the book of Genesis. The Latin author invalidates Simon as an interpreter; he delegitimizes traveling rabbinic interpretations of the creation of the human, and constructs the validity of Theophilus's and biblical authors' exegeses and of them as exegetes.

## Conclusion

Diachronically, in the dialogues *Adversus Iudaeos*, their authors built on the kinship affinity between Jews and biblical Israelite authors to present the former as a foil to the latter. In these texts, the Jew is portrayed to misconstrue the words of their ancestors, and in the context of this article, their ancestral biblical authors' references to Christ's/the Messiah's genealogy, his nature(s), and participation in

---

<sup>130</sup> See William C. Pohl IV, "A Messianic Reading of Psalm 89: A Canonical and Intertextual Study," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 58 no. 3 (September 2015): 512 and n. 23. See also Richard Clifford, "Psalm 89: A Lament over the Davidic Ruler's Continued Failure," *The Harvard Theological Review* 73 no. 1/2 (Jan. – Apr. 1980): 45, who explains that verse 28 talks about David's exaltation "to the kings of the world."

<sup>131</sup> Matthew Thiessen, "The Form and Function of the Song of Moses (Deuteronomy 32:1-43)," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 123 no. 3 (Autumn 2004): 420.

<sup>132</sup> Thiessen, "The Form and Function of the Song of Moses," 424.

<sup>133</sup> See Pohl IV, "A Messianic Reading," 525.

<sup>134</sup> See Gillingham, *Psalms*, 1:29.

the creation, when the Christian is depicted to discern these references, claiming thus for themselves exclusive ownership of religious legitimacy of beliefs and teachings.

This double process is illustrated in the following excerpt from the *Dialogue of Gregentius and Herban*.<sup>135</sup> Here, the Archbishop of Himyar, Gregentios, and the head of the Jewish legate, Herban, are portrayed to discuss Christ as the Son of God in a competitive framework that involves scriptural understanding of biblical Israelite authors, namely of the Jews' ancestors,

The archbishop said: So, who truly told you that the only begotten son and word of God is not the God of Jacob? If you do not get angry, he is the God and the lord of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Joseph, and of Moses. For who deceived you [to think] that someone made us Christians be cut off from the faithful Jews [who lived] before the presence of Christ? God forbids! For we revere faithfully those [the ancient Jews], because they observed the law of God piously; but not only do we loathe you because you appeared faithless and ignorant after the presence of Christ, but we also detest [you]. Herban said: What is the reason for this? The archbishop said: Because he whom the law and the prophets testified that he would come when he came, you denied [him] and did not accept [him].<sup>136</sup>

The anonymous author constructs Herban and the Jewish community of Himyar as foils to their biblical Israelite ancestors in terms of their belief in the divinity of the son of God to contend that it was Christians who shared with the ancient Israelites the faith in Christ and, consequently, Christians can assert legitimacy on a matter of Christian dogma and belief.

The kinship or ancestry looms large in these texts, for, in the mind of the *Adversus Iudaeos* dialogues' authors, the Jew constitutes the link to the biblical scriptures and ancient Israelites. By tracing their beliefs back to the Jewish scriptures, presenting the biblical authors as if they articulated first the teachings of the Christian group whose dogmas the *Adversus Iudaeos* dialogues' authors advocate for, these dialogues' authors created an adequate rhetorical space in which they propagandized not only the correctness and doctrinal validity of specific theological beliefs but also their antiquity. The claim for exclusive legitimacy of beliefs

<sup>135</sup> See in this paper, n. 3.

<sup>136</sup> *Dialogue of Gregentios with Herban*, ed. Berger, *Dialexis Γ'*, lines 73-82, p. 596-8. Ὁ ἀρχιεπίσκοπος ἔφη: Καὶ μὴν τίς σοι ἀνήγγειλεν, ὅτι ὁ μονογενὴς υἱὸς καὶ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ οὐκ ἔστι θεὸς Ἰακώβ; Ἄν μὴ χολᾷς, καὶ Ἀβραάμ καὶ Ἰσαάκ καὶ Ἰωσήφ καὶ Μωσέως οὗτος ἐστὶ θεὸς καὶ κύριος. Μὴ γὰρ τίς σε ἐπλάνησεν, ὅτι τῶν πρὸ τῆς παρουσίας Χριστοῦ πιστῶν Ἰουδαίων ἀποκοπῆ τίς πέφυκεν ἡμῶν τῶν χριστιανῶν; Μὴ γένοιτο. Πάνυ γὰρ ἡμεῖς ἐκείνους πιστῶς σεβαζόμεθα ὡς τὸν νόμον τοῦ θεοῦ εὐσεβῶς τηρήσαντας· ὑμᾶς δὲ τοὺς ἀπὸ τῆς παρουσίας Χριστοῦ ἀπίστους καὶ ἀγνώμονας ἀναφανέντας οὐ μόνον μισάττομεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐπὶ πλεῖον βδελυττόμεθα. Ἐρβᾶν λέγει: “Δι’ ἦν αἰτίαν τοῦτο;” Ὁ ἀρχιεπίσκοπος ἔφη: “Ἐπειδὴ ὄν ἐμαρτύρησεν ὁ νόμος καὶ οἱ προφῆται ἦξεν, ἐλθόντα ἠρνήσασθε καὶ οὐ προσεδέξασθε.”



seems to have been a diachronically programmatic goal of the authors of anti-Jewish dialogues who composed their texts in such a way and with such adaptability that not only provided a synopsis of the most important theological teachings and dogmas of Nicene and Chalcedonian Christianity, but they could also be addressing not only one but many audiences.

Engaging in the mechanics of foiling, the authors of the dialogues *Adversus Iudaeos* constructed the Jew as a foil character to his biblical kin and his Christian interlocutor, creating, thus, a narrative according to which Christians are closer to understanding the theological meanings of the writings of biblical authors than Jews could ever be. This tactic allowed Christian authors of anti-Jewish dialogues to secure their legitimacy of Christian reading of the scriptures and undermine the Jewish interlocutor's understanding of them. Notwithstanding the central role that foiling the Jew played in anti-Jewish dialogues and the penchant their authors showed for this tool across time, this rhetorical tactic and the purpose of its implementation extended beyond the Jews. In the end, reevaluating the role of characters in dialogue texts can shed light on the deeper reasons for their composition, bringing forth their authors' anxieties concerning the legitimacy of Christianity for whose defense they composed their works.