

THE ALTERCATIO JASONIS ET PAPISCI, PHILO, AND ANASTASIUS THE SINAITE

I

One of the lost Christian works of the second century is the *Altercatio Jasonis et Papisci*, a dialogue between a Jewish Christian (Jason) and an Alexandrian Jew (Papiscus) which ends with the conversion of the latter. Our earliest reference to it is in Origen's *Contra Celsum*.¹ Celsus singles it out for ridicule (for "pity and hatred" are his words) but Origen describes it as undeserving of his adversary's contempt: "In it a Christian is described as disputing with a Jew from the Jewish Scriptures and as showing that the prophecies about the Messiah fit Jesus; and the reply with which the other man opposes the argument is at least neither vulgar nor unsuitable to the character of a Jew." Nevertheless, Origen had no great opinion of the work; for he also says that "although it could be of some help to the simple-minded multitude in respect of their faith," it "certainly could not impress the more intelligent." It must, however, have indeed become popular, since it was translated into Latin and we have the preface to that Latin version² in which the dialogue is called famous and splendid. It is from this preface that we learn that the Christian was Jewish and the Jew Alexandrian, which suggests an Alexandrian provenance for the work, though Maximus the Confessor, writing in the seventh century, attributes it to Aristo of Pella, adding, tantalizingly, that Clement of Alexandria attributed it to Luke the Evangelist in his sixth book of the *Hypotyposes* (also, of course, lost).³ We may have another reference to this work and its author in the *Chronicon Paschale* for the year 134.⁴

¹*Contra Celsum* 4, 52 (GCS, Origenes 1, 325; Chadwick 226-27).

²*Ad Vigilium* 8 (CSEL, Cypriani opera 3, 128-29).

³*Scholia in Lib. de mystica theologia* 1 (PG 4, 421-22). There are some scattered and not very impressive witnesses to a tradition that Luke evangelized Egypt and/or Alexandria, such as the *Constitutiones apostolicae* 7, 46, and a number of ms. titles and scholia which specify a sojourn in Alexandria (PG 1, 1051-52). Symeon Metaphrastes gives more details, but he is generally thought to have misunderstood the traditions about Luke's activity (PG 115, 1136). It must be noted that Maximus may have misread Clement or that we may be misreading Maximus, whose text, if but slightly amended (*hon* for *hēn*), would yield: "Now I read 'seven heavens' in the dispute between Papiscus and Jason which was written by Aristo of Pella, [the Jason] whom Clement of Alexandria says, in the sixth book of Hypotyposes, St. Luke wrote about (in Acts 17, 5-9)."

⁴PG 92, 620. The text reads: "In this year Apelles and Aristo, whom [plural] Eusebius the son of Pamphilus mentions in his ecclesiastical history, presents [*sic*: in the singular] a carefully prepared defense (*apologias syntaxin*) concerning our religion to the emperor Adrian." Eusebius does not mention anyone named Apelles and it has been suggested that the text originally read not *Apellēs* but *ho Pellaios . . . hou*.

There are only three certain citations extant from the dialogue:⁵ Jerome refers to it twice and Maximus once. Eusebius, who never mentions the dialogue itself, notes that Aristo of Pella tells about Hadrian's decree forbidding the Jews further access to Jerusalem,⁶ but this is not sufficient reason to suppose that the dialogue contained an account of this event, since Aristo may well have written more than one work. The citations in Jerome and Maximus are very brief. In his *Commentary on Galatians* Jerome wrote: "Memini me in Altercatione Jasonis et Papisci, quae Graeco sermone conscripta est, ita reperisse *Loidoria Theou ho kremamenos*, id est, maledictio Dei qui appensus est." In the *Questions about Genesis* Jerome again refers to the work by title and says that it read Gn 1:1 as "In Filio fecit Deus coelum et terram," which he rejects as a reading, and he notes that Tertullian in the *Contra Praxean* and Hilary "in expositione cuiusdam psalmi" also give the reading found in the dialogue. Jerome is mistaken in what he says about these other authors, and it is well to keep in mind that when he refers to the dialogue in the *Commentary on Galatians*, he explicitly says that he "remembers" reading what follows. His memory was not always exact and therefore we cannot be certain that the citations are exact. Maximus, in his *Scholia* on the Pseudo-Areopagite's *Mystical Theology*, states that he read the phrase *hepta ouranous* in the dialogue of Papiscus and Jason.

From the passage in which Origen describes the dialogue one might assume that the Christian speaks first and then the Jew, though we would have to suppose another similar cycle if, as the Latin preface tells us, Papiscus received the grace of faith. That same preface, however, intimates that the order of speaking was Papiscus first and then Jason: "Probat hoc scriptura concertationis ipsorum, quae collidentium inter se Papisci adversantis veritati et Iasonis adserentis et vindicantis dispositionem et plenitudinem Christi Graeci sermonis opere signata est." Both descriptions seem to suggest that each party spoke uninterruptedly.

II

The lost dialogue may yet be recovered from oblivion.⁷ At the end of the nineteenth century it seemed as though perhaps it had been. Between 1880 and 1900 notice of the existence of several copies of "a dialogue between the Jews Papiscus and Philo and a Christian monk" (named Anastasius in some mss.) was brought to the attention of the

⁵All these citations may conveniently be found in *PG* 5, 1277-86.

⁶*Historia ecclesiastica* 4, 6, 3.

⁷As A. Lukyn Williams notes, "it may still be hidden in some library" (*Adversus Iudaeos* [Cambridge, 1935] p. 30).

scholarly world by Th. Zahn,⁸ A. Harnack,⁹ A. C. McGiffert,¹⁰ and E. J. Goodspeed.¹¹ The various manuscripts are located in Venice, Paris, Moscow, Dresden, and Mt. Athos, or were at the time of Goodspeed's article, which was, to my knowledge, the last contribution to the discussion.¹² The Venice and Dresden mss. are considered to be the earlier witnesses to the original text, though they too differ from one another in some respects. However, it is agreed that although the title of this dialogue certainly owes something to the second century *Altercatio*, the contents do not. The later dialogue is dated to the sixth or seventh centuries. McGiffert sets the fifth century as the *terminus a quo* on the basis of the use of the epithet *aei parthenou* for the mother of Jesus.¹³ None of the citations given by Jerome or Maximus appear in it nor any approximations of them. Of interest, however, is the fact that throughout the dialogue there are only two speakers, Papiscus and the Christian monk. Philo, whose name appears in the title, has no part in the dialectical exchange.

What explanation can be given for this strange fact? Zahn and Harnack see in the addition of Philo's name merely a desire to associate Papiscus (an Alexandrian Jew, as we know from the Latin preface to the *Altercatio*) with that other Alexandrian Jew whose fame was widespread.¹⁴ McGiffert, taking his clue from the fact that there are but two speakers and that the Christian was unnamed in the original edition of the dialogue, thinks that the original title was *Antibolē Papiskou kai Philōnos*, Philo being a Christian and *not* the renowned Jewish philosopher: "we know of a number of Christian Philos of the fourth and following centuries When the Christian Philo meant in the title had dropped out of memory, it would be quite natural to think, in connection with this name, of the great Jewish philosopher and later editors or copyists would then have before them the singular spectacle of an

⁸ *Acta Joannis* (1880) p. liv, n. 2; cf. *Forschungen zur Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanons* 4 (1891) 321 ff.

⁹ *Die Überlieferung der griechischen Apologeten des zweiten Jahrhunderts in der alten Kirche und im Mittelalter* (TU 1 [1883] 115-30); *Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur bis Eusebius* 1, 1, 95-96.

¹⁰ *Dialogue between a Christian and a Jew Entitled Antibolē Papiskou kai Philōnos Ioudaiōn pros monachon tina* (Marburg, 1889).

¹¹ "Pappiscus and Philo," *American Journal of Theology* 4 (1900) 796-802.

¹² Not, of course, that notice of it has been neglected (Lukyn Williams, cited above [n. 7], for instance, devotes a chapter to it), but in the sense that there has been no new light or discovery brought to bear upon the existing material.

¹³ *Op. cit.*, p. 43.

¹⁴ As Zahn (*Acta Joannis*, cf. n. 8 above) puts it, Papiscus "mit seinem noch berühmteren Mitbürger und Glaubensgenossen Philo als Polemiker gegen das Christenthum zusammengestellt."

anti-Jewish dialogue held between two Jews. The extension of the title, when it was once thus interpreted, became of course a necessity."¹⁶ There is another possibility which McGiffert did not consider: that the Philo intended is the Alexandrian philosopher in his Christian guise;¹⁶ but I do not wish to examine this possibility, because it seems very unlikely and cannot be considered apart from the material yet to be dealt with in this paper. The presence of Philo's name creates something of a problem, whereas no one who has written on this dialogue doubts that the name Papisclus is taken from the second century *Altercatio*.

III

No one—again to the best of my knowledge—has introduced into the discussion of the two dialogues (that of the second and that of the sixth century) an excerpt from the *Hodēgos* of Anastasius the Sinaite, which is surely very relevant to it. I refer to that passage in chap. 14 in which Anastasius reproduces part (the Jew's part) of a dialogue between Mnason the disciple of the apostles and Philo "the philosopher and unbelieving Jew."¹⁷ I present it here in my English translation of the Greek given in Migne's faulty but not yet replaced edition of the text. The translation is occasionally a bit free but always closer to the Greek than the Latin version accompanying it in Migne.

I am going to adopt and appropriate the role of Paul of Samosata¹⁸ for you, or, better, that of the unbelieving Jew Philo, the philosopher; for he argued against the divinity of Christ with Mnason, the disciple of the apostles, and called Mnason *dichrota*.¹⁹ What argument, what sort of argument, and from what

¹⁶ *Op. cit.*, pp. 39–40.

¹⁶ Photius is our principal source for the legend that Philo was converted to Christianity (*Bibliotheca*, cod. 105), though it is implied by Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 2, 4, 2) and, very clearly, by Anastasius the Sinaite (*In Hexaemeron* 1, 7), which, as we shall see, poses a problem for this paper. An account of Philo's baptism is given in the *Acta Joannis* (Zahn, pp. 110–12), though it is evident that pseudo-Prochorus knew nothing about Philo beyond the fact that he was a learned Jew.

¹⁷ *PG* 89, 244–48.

¹⁸ Given the facts that Anastasius is relying upon his memory and that he begins this passage with the intention of citing Paul of Samosata, one might suspect that the statements he subsequently attributes to "Philo" are really those of Paul of Samosata; but this seems to be impossible, because the fragments we have of the latter's writings (and I refer the reader to H. J. Lawlor's "The Sayings of Paul of Samosata," *JTS* 19 [1917] 20–45, 115–20, which has not been surpassed as a *basic* presentation) make it clear that he could never have attacked the divinity of Christ in the way "Philo" does here. The strongest evidence of this lies in the fact that Paul of Samosata quite readily concedes that Jesus was superior in every way to any other human being, specifically superior to Moses.

¹⁹ Literally, "two-colored." The exact sense in this context is obscure. We can surmise that "Philo" meant a "fence straddler," i.e., someone who claimed to believe in the God of

source (comes) any argument to the effect that the Christ is God? Should you adduce his birth from a virgin, without seed as they say, the begetting of Adam (appears) more noble and more striking, a formation by the very hands of God and a vivification through God's own breath, and it was purer than the nine-month fetation of Jesus in his mother (terminating in) filth and wails and mess. Should you adduce the signs he performed after his baptism, I would say to you that no one on earth ever performed such signs and wonders as did Moses for a period of forty years. Should you then point out that Jesus raised the dead, well, the prophet Ezekiel raised up from the dry bones of the army of dead men a numberless people. Moreover, Jesus himself said that some men would perform greater works than he.

Now if you tell us that Jesus was taken up into the heavens as God, surely the prophet Elias was taken up more gloriously in a blazing chariot and with horses of fire. Calling Jesus the God of heaven must be reckoned as the most outrageous of your blasphemies, for God Himself said to Moses that "No man shall see my face and live." Further, our Scripture witnesses that "No one has ever seen God."²⁰ No man has seen or is able to see God." How is it that Christian preachers are not ashamed to proclaim Jesus as God? For it is said that God is a consuming fire. Tell me, then, does a God of fire hunger? Does a God of fire thirst? Does a God of fire spit? Is a God of fire circumcised and does he bleed? And does he cast on the ground bits of flesh and blood and the refuse of the stomach? All such things were cast to the ground by Jesus and were eaten up and consumed by dogs, sometimes by wild beasts and birds, and trampled on by cattle. Every bit of his flesh that was cast off and discarded, whether it was sputum or nail-cuttings or blood or sweat or tears, was a part and portion naturally associated with the body and sloughed off or discarded in due process of growth. Indeed you say that he was like men in all things according to the flesh apart from sin. Yet you preach that he who was dead for three days was God. And what sort of a God who is a consuming fire can die? Why his very servants, the angels, cannot die, neither can the evil spirits of the demons, nor, for that matter, the souls of men.

To press the matter, I ask: What sort of God, having the power of life and death, would take to flight—as Jesus fled from Herod lest he be put to death as an infant? What sort of God is tempted by the devil for forty days? What sort of God becomes a curse, which is what Paul says of Jesus? What sort of sinless God commits sin? For, according to you, Jesus became sin for our sake. And if he is God, how is it that he prayed to escape the cup of death? And his prayer was not heard. If he is God, how can he speak as one abandoned by God: "O God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Is God abandoned by God? Does God need God (as would appear) when he says "Do not abandon my soul to the nether

the Old Testament but who, nevertheless, attributed to this God attributes and activities that were incompatible with His essence. The editor of this passage in Migne found the word incomprehensible, but it is perfectly good Greek.

²⁰The Latin translation in Migne reads here "your Scripture," and surely with reason, since the text given is from the fourth Gospel.

world"? Is God (such as to be) tied up, and abused and despised and put to death? If he was indeed God, he should have crushed those intending to take him prisoner, just as the angel crushed the Sodomites (who threatened) Lot. But you call the helplessness of Jesus "long-suffering."

There are many things to be said about this passage. First, that it comes from the pen of a man whose work has been too long neglected and about whom we know very little save that he lived in Alexandria during the latter half of the seventh century and earned for himself the reputation of a great theologian and polemicist.²¹ The *Hodēgos* was written about 685 in the desert, where Anastasius had to *rely on his memory* for the many patristic and conciliar texts he cites and which are often enough, not surprisingly, found to be inaccurate. Nevertheless, it is clear that his learning was vast and that he had read many works now lost to us.

What is the work from which he has drawn this attack on the divinity of Jesus? I suggest that it may have been the lost *Altercatio Jasonis et Papisci*. One cannot but be struck by the fact that Anastasius is reporting a dialogue between a Christian of the early second century (a "disciple of the apostles," like Polycarp) who is otherwise completely unknown but whose name is remarkably similar to Jason, and an Alexandrian Jew whom Anastasius identifies with the great Philo. Only a portion of the dialogue is given, but if we keep in mind that Anastasius is quoting from memory, we may find in it two of the three phrases *known* to have appeared in the lost *Altercatio*: "Philo" here alludes directly to Gal 3:13 and uses Paul's word *katara* according to Anastasius. Jerome's reference to the dialogue, which also assumes an allusion to Galatians, gives a rather singular Greek translation of Dt 21:23 which does not appear in Anastasius, but "Philo" does not here refer to the Old Testament text, though it would be reasonable to suppose that the passage Anastasius is attempting to recall read "What sort of God becomes a curse, which is what Paul says of Jesus? Does not the Scripture say that he who is hanged is the reproach of God?"

Maximus says that he read the phrase "seven heavens" in the *Altercatio*. Anastasius reports Philo as stating: "Now if you tell us that Jesus was taken up into the heavens as God, etc." The possibility that Anastasius simply omitted the word "seven" here is very real. The notion of seven heavens was a popular one in Jewish-Christian and Hellenistic circles in the early centuries of this era.²²

²¹ Cf. O. Bardenhewer, *Geschichte der altkirchlichen Literatur* 5 (Freiburg, 1932) 41-46; M. Jugie, "Anastasio Sinaita," *Enciclopedia cattolica* 1, 1157-58.

²² Cf. J. Daniélou, *A History of Early Christian Doctrine* 1 (London, 1964) 173-81.

The third phrase we know to have existed in the *Altercatio*, "In Filio fecit Deus coelum et terram," does not appear in the passage from Anastasius, but clearly it would be part of the Christian respondent's argument, and none of that is given by the Sinaite.

I may be mistaken, but I do not think this passage, as a whole, bears any resemblance, as an anti-Christian polemic, to other existing examples of the genre. Certainly it is very unlike the later dialogue published by McGiffert. In terms of scornfulness, it is redolent of the attacks of Celsus and Porphyry,²³ and indeed, if it does derive from the *Altercatio*, it could not have been this part of it which aroused Celsus' detestation and pity. On the other hand, it conforms to Origen's judgment that the arguments of Papiscus were not "unsuitable to the character of a Jew."

One wonders, too, if there is any significance to the fact that many of the arguments used against the divinity of Jesus here are taken up by Melito of Sardis as examples of the paradox inherent in the fact of incarnation: "to take on flesh from the holy virgin"; "the invisible one is seen"; "the impassable one suffers and does not take vengeance"; "the deathless one dies."²⁴ Are the paradoxes of such a nature that a Christian writer who wanted to invent a dialogue between a coreligionist and a Jew would easily seize upon them as objections to be placed in the mouth of the latter? Very likely, but this is not to suggest that the invention was Anastasius'. We are, I think, guaranteed that the Sinaite had read the dialogue which he is excerpting by the reference he makes to "Philo's" having called "Mnason" *dichrota*. This is too circumstantial and too isolated a detail to be attributed to the whim and fancy of Anastasius.

If this identification of the passage from the *Hodēgos* with part of the lost *Altercatio* is correct, there nevertheless remain two problems that call for some attempt at a solution. They are: (1) How do we reconcile the Sinaite's acceptance here of Philo the philosopher with his inclusion of Philo among the earliest Church writers in his exegetical work on the Hexameron?²⁵ (2) How are we to account for the various shifts and displacements of the names of the disputants witnessed to by Anastasius and the later, substitute dialogue?

With respect to the first problem, it must be remembered that if Anastasius *is* calling upon his memory of the *Altercatio*, then he knows that the Jewish disputant—whom he here identifies with Philo—was converted by the arguments of Jason (Mnason). In this respect the Philo of this passage in the *Hodēgos* is no different from the Philo of the *Acta Joannis* who, before his baptism, prays that the Christian God forgive

²³ Cf. P. de Labriolle, *La réaction païenne* (Paris, 1934).

²⁴ Cf. R. M. Grant, *Second-Century Christianity* (London, 1957) pp. 75-76.

²⁵ In *Hexameron* 1, 7; Greek text in E. Preuschen, *Antilegomena* (Giessen, 1901) p. 60.

him "for all the things said by me against your (apostolic) preaching."²⁶ The legend of Philo's conversion was known to Eusebius, Pseudo-Prochorus, and Photius;²⁷ we may assume it was also known to Anastasius. This readily explains how the same Philo can appear in his works both as an anti-Christian polemicist and as a Christian apologist.

However—and now we enter into the problematic of the second question—there are at least two possible explanations for the substitution of Philo for Papiscus in the passage from Anastasius. The first, and *prima facie* the simplest, is that just as Anastasius' memory was vague about the name Jason, it completely faltered over the name of the Jewish antagonist and could only recall that he was an Alexandrian. The recollection that the great Philo, who was a contemporary of the apostles, was a prominent Alexandrian Jew—before his "conversion"—would remedy that *lapsus memoriae*. But we cannot prescind here from the fact that by the seventh century there was a "new" *Altercatio* in circulation which in its title combined the names of Papiscus and Philo without giving the latter any role to play and without naming Jason at all. This suggests that Anastasius is witnessing to an intermediate stage in the history of the *Altercatio*—one in which the name Jason still appeared but in which Papiscus had been joined by Philo as another adversary, for the obvious reason given by Zahn and Harnack. Anastasius, however, would have had before him in Alexandria both the *old* text and the new title. Since it is obvious that the second-century dialogue disappeared and that a new one was probably created on the basis of the partially remembered title of its predecessor, we can reasonably reconstruct the stages in the history of our documents:

1) The original *Antibolē* between Jason and Papiscus, known to Clement of Alexandria, Celsus, Origen, Celsus Africanus (who translated it into Latin), Jerome, and Maximus Confessor.

2) The original *Antibolē* with title altered to include Philo. Known to Anastasius the Sinaite (?).

3) A new *Antibolē* omitting the name of Jason but retaining the names of Papiscus and Philo. The Christian disputant becomes "a certain monk" subsequently given the name of Anastasius.

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²⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 112: *mē orgisthēs epi tō sō theraponti peri pantōn tōn logōn tōn lalēthentōn hyp' emou eis antilexin tēs sēs didaskalias.*

²⁷ See n. 16 above.