

CHRISTOPH OCHS

Matthaeus Adversus Christianos

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Matthaeus Adversus Christianos

The Use of the Gospel of Matthew in
Jewish Polemics Against the Divinity of Jesus

Mohr Siebeck

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Für Herbert Reinhard
1929–2011

Jesus spricht: Ich bin die Auferstehung und das Leben.
Wer an mich glaubt, der wird leben, obgleich er stirbe.
Johannes 11, 25

Preface

The present book is a slightly revised and corrected version of my dissertation (Nottingham, 2012) which surveys how Jewish polemicists have made use of the New Testament, and predominantly the Gospel of Matthew, to refute the Christian conviction that Jesus is divine. It investigates the exegetical arguments that were put forward in medieval *Adversus Christianos* literature in order to analyze the use and interpretation of Matthew in relation to the divinity of Jesus.

Jewish polemicists have used a significant number of gospel passages, particularly where Jesus is portrayed as a human (who has to sleep, is hungry, ignorant) and those where he differentiates himself from God. The two main arguments consistently encountered are that 1) Jesus is distinctly and exclusively human, and 2) that it is unthinkable that God could become human. The arguments form a kind of polemical tradition based on the New Testament, perpetuated in exegetical arguments against Jesus' divinity, the incarnation, and the Trinity. Some of these arguments can be traced back to heterodox dogmatic debates in antiquity, while others look surprisingly modern.

Seven Jewish polemical texts comprise the main sources for this inquiry: *Qiṣṣat Mujādalat al-Usquf* (c. 8/9th century) and *Sefer Nestor ha-Komer* (before 1170), *Sefer Milḥamot ha-Shem* (c. 1170), *Sefer Yosef ha-Meqanne* (c. 13th century), *Nizzahon Vetus* (13–14th century), *Even Boḥan* (late 14th century), *Kelimmat ha-Goyim* (c. 1397), and *Ḥizzuq Emunah* (c. 1594).

I would like to thank my wife Staci, and our three children, Hudson, Miriam, and Ruben for their loving support these last years. Heartfelt gratitude also needs to be directed to Prof. Dr. Roland Deines, my *Doktorvater*, for his immense generosity, criticism, and guidance. I can truly say that I would have never attempted, nor successfully finished this study without his support and supervision. Special thanks are also due to Prof. William Horbury, the external examiner of the dissertation, and also to Prof. Tom O'Loughlin; their many suggestions and detailed corrections have greatly improved this book.

Further heartfelt thanks are due to my colleagues and friends at the University of Nottingham, in particular to Matthew Malcolm, Andrew Talbert, Eric Lee, Peter Watts, Michael DiFuccia, David Mosely, Emily Gathergood, and Kimbell Kornu. I am grateful for their friendship and many fruitful conversations over coffee (and cake).

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Finally, and most importantly, I would like to sincerely thank Him without whom we can do nothing (John 15:5).

I dedicate this work to Herbert Reinhard (1929–2011), ה"ר, who was like a father to me and who sadly was not able to see me finish my doctoral studies, but without whom I would have never been able to walk this path.

Nottingham, June 2013

Christoph Ochs

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Abbreviations

The abbreviations used for ancient texts, periodicals, and reference works are almost entirely according to P. H. Alexander et al., eds., *The SBL Handbook of Style: For Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical and Early Christian Studies* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999). In certain instances the suggested guidelines have been amended for stylistic reasons and greater convenience.

Chapter 1

Matthaeus Adversus Christianos: The Use of the Gospel of Matthew in Jewish Polemics Against the Divinity of Jesus

1.1 Introduction

The belief in the divinity of Jesus has been challenged at all times. From the first century onward the assertion that Jesus is the Son of God incarnate, even “God with us” (Matt 1:23), has constantly been called into question from within and without the Christian community. Be it from inner-Christian, pagan, Jewish, and Muslim objections to the more recent Jesus Quests, the divinity of Jesus was always a controversial subject. It is therefore false to think that it was merely the naiveté of earlier “pre-critical” generations that allowed such a high view of Jesus to prevail unchallenged. Rather, right from the beginning the “Christ of Faith” was a stumbling block (cf. 1 Cor 1:23). From the authors of the New Testament to the medieval church apologists and beyond, the conundrum of Christology was clearly understood by Christians, and yet, against all objections and probabilities, maintained as a necessary element in the description of the “real” Jesus.¹

Already the author of the first gospel proclaimed Jesus as the miraculously conceived “God with us,” who is the fulfillment of the hopes and promises of Israel, while simultaneously maintaining that he was a human descendant of Abraham and successor of king David and thus rooted in history and biblical Judaism.² It is, in fact, the New Testament itself that binds these *transempirical*³ claims about Jesus to the physical world of first century Judaism, and by

¹ For a recent discussion of the “real” Jesus see Roland Deines, “Can the ‘Real’ Jesus be Identified with the Historical Jesus? A Review of the Pope’s Challenge to Biblical Scholarship and the Ongoing Debate,” in *The Pope and Jesus of Nazareth: Christ, Scripture and the Church* (ed. Adrian Pabst and Angus Paddison; London: SCM, 2009), 199–232; also in *Didaskalia* 39 (2009): 11–46.

² See Matt 1:1, 17, 20–23, 3:15.

³ This term was appropriated by Anthony Thiselton and subsequently put to use by my doctoral supervisor, Roland Deines, see his “Can the ‘Real’ Jesus be Identified with the Historical Jesus?,” 205–11; and Anthony C. Thiselton, *Hermeneutics of Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 376–413 (the term appears on p. 377). Transempirical does not relate here to something that is utterly beyond experience, but refers to the movement of transcendent reality into and through the empirical. It describes, as such, the high christological claim that

doing so has effectively kept the “Christ of Faith” permanently joined to the human figure of Jesus of Nazareth. In this, the gospels themselves constitute the guardians of the controversial and paradoxical nature of the identity of Jesus. For it was the evangelists who effectively compelled orthodox⁴ Christianity to maintain and defend the paradox, when it would have been far easier to abandon the intellectual embarrassment of a divine-human Christ in favor of a purely human or purely divine Jesus. Thus, both those who defended *and* those who challenged Christianity found the content of the Christian canon useful for their arguments, particularly the gospels. In fact, a great number of Jewish polemical texts have persistently used the Gospel of Matthew to dispute this most central of Christian claims, and it is surprising that no in-depth study of this aspect of the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of Matthew is available to date, especially considering that both the divinity of Jesus and the Gospel of Matthew have been central to Christianity.⁵

the pre-existent, transcendent Son of God has entered the horizon of human history in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, and then “left” it by means of crucifixion, death, resurrection, and ascension. This move “into and through” the empirical realm, therefore, allows and necessitates the use of all historical-critical tools within the empirical horizon (that is, it operates on the basic premise that God was indeed present in Jesus and acted *in history*), yet, without succumbing to the illusion that human enterprise would ever be able to describe all there is to Jesus of Nazareth. In this regard, since true objectivity in this (or any other matter) is an illusion, this footnote also serves the purpose of indicating that this study, as unbiased as it seeks to be, is the exercise of a Christian who wants to understand his own tradition and Scripture by engaging another, highly capable, tradition, which out of exegetical, religious, historical, and rational concerns is antagonistic to it. On this see Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2nd ed.; trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall; London: Sheed & Ward, 1989), 277–307.

⁴ Here and throughout the term “orthodox” denotes the traditional mainstream of Christian thought (in contrast to heterodoxy or heresy), rather than a Jewish or Christian denomination.

⁵ An exhaustive study of the *pagan* use of the New Testament recently became available in John G. Cook, *The Interpretation of the New Testament in Greco-Roman Paganism* (STAC 3; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000; repr. Peabody: Hendrickson, 2002). Nothing comparable exists for the Jewish corpus of polemical texts. Only a single study, albeit never published, has examined the use of the New Testament in Jewish polemics, see Joel E. Rembaum, “The New Testament in Medieval Jewish Anti-Christian Polemics” (Ph.D. diss., Los Angeles: University of California, 1975). While Rembaum has made many observations that this study can corroborate (see chapter 9), he did not focus on the Gospel of Matthew or the divinity of Jesus. Likewise, Philippe Bobichon only researches the role of the Hebrew Bible in Jewish-Christian debate, see idem, “La Bible dans les œuvres de controverse judéo-chrétienne (IIe–opXVIIIe siècles): entre texte révélé et littérature,” in *De la Bible à la littérature* (ed. Jean-Christophe Attias and Pierre Gisel; Religions en perspective 15; Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2003), 69–97 (I am grateful to Nicholas De Lange for brining this to my attention). See also Daniel J. Lasker, *Jewish Philosophical Polemics against Christianity in the Middle Ages* (2nd ed.; Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2007), first published in 1977, who examined the philosophical arguments used against four Christian doctrines, viz. the Trinity,

This study, then, is an examination of how one of Christianity's most prominent texts, the Gospel of Matthew, was read by one of Christianity's most formidable opponents, medieval Jewish exegetes, in regard to one of Christianity's most controversial (and most foundational) beliefs, the divinity of Jesus.

1.2 The Divinity of Jesus

This study is admittedly asking a very Christian question. From a Jewish point of view probably the more pertinent question was, initially at least, whether Jesus was the Messiah,⁶ not only because this is a concept closer to the horizon of Jewish expectations, but also because the Christian arguments to this end provoked doubts, especially in the medieval period.⁷ Hence, the discussion of Christian interpretations in Jewish polemical literature were to a large extent focused on refuting the notion that the Hebrew Bible foretold Jesus as the Messiah, and considerable effort was spent on discussing, e.g., Genesis 49:10, or various passages in the prophet Isaiah.⁸

For Christians, on the other hand, it was one of the most foundational beliefs that Jesus was the Messiah, which is why this confession already very early had essentially become a proper name: "Jesus Christ."⁹ The question of his divine status — however it was perceived initially — was and is more controversial, both in terms of accounting for its origins and its historical development. In more recent New Testament studies the question of *how*

the incarnation, the virgin birth, and Transubstantiation. However, his study focuses on the philosophical discussion, thereby excluding most exegetical arguments. While many of his observations are valuable, esp. in regard to the incarnation, the present study is distinct.

⁶ See Lasker, *Jewish Philosophical Polemics*, xxvii: "The central question remains: Was Jesus of Nazareth the messiah foretold by the Hebrew prophets or was he not? In a sense, the rest is commentary." See also Tertullian, *Apol.* 21.15.

⁷ So Norman Roth, *Conversos, Inquisition, and the Expulsion of the Jews from Spain* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), 10–13, 318.

⁸ See, e.g., Adolf Posnanski, *Schiloh: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Messiaslehre — Erster Teil. Die Auslegung von Genesis 49,10 im Altertume bis zu Ende des Mittelalters* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1904); and Adolf Neubauer, S. R. Driver, and E. B. Pusey, *The Fifty-Third Chapter of Isaiah according to the Jewish Interpreters* (2 vols.; Oxford and London: James Parker, 1876–77).

⁹ See Martin Hengel, "Jesus, the Messiah of Israel: The Debate about the 'Messianic Mission' of Jesus," in *Authenticating the Activities of Jesus* (ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 323–49, esp. 323–35; idem, "Jesus the Messiah of Israel," in *Studies in Early Christology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 1–72; and idem, "'Christos' in Paul," in *Between Jesus and Paul: Studies in Earliest Christology* (London: SCM, 1983), 65–77 (and endnotes, 179–88).

Jesus came to be understood as divine is much debated,¹⁰ and it is an issue that promises to remain controversial for the foreseeable future.¹¹ What is definite is that by the second century, at the latest, a substantial number of the followers of Jesus considered Jesus Christ to be divine.¹² This understanding

¹⁰ For an overview of the more narrow discussion of how Jesus originally came to be seen as divine see William Horbury, *Jewish Messianism and the Cult of Christ* (London: SCM, 1998), esp. 109–52; but also Thiselton, *Hermeneutics of Doctrine*, 395–413, who situates the debate in the larger post-enlightenment context. Larry Hurtado, based on Martin Hengel's work, has argued that Jesus' divine status originates in the *praxis* of the first followers of Jesus, who worshipped him alongside God, which he has called a "binitarian devotional pattern," though he subsequently has abandoned the term "binitarian" advocating now a "dyadic devotional pattern," see Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ — Devotion in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), and idem, *How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God?: Historical Questions about Earliest Devotion to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005). Richard Bauckham, who has become a co-founder of the so-called "Early High Christology Club," argues that Jesus' *identity* was directly related to the one God of Israel in that Jesus was understood as a "divine personification" of God, see his *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008). One of the most prominent New Testament scholars disagreeing with Hurtado and Bauckham is James D. G. Dunn, *Did the first Christians worship Jesus?: The New Testament Evidence* (London: SPCK, 2010), who maintains that the early church very clearly distinguished between Jesus on the one side, and God as Creator and "Father" on the other (143), arguing e.g. that Jesus was a monotheist (101). That he was designated as Lord (κύριος) meant that he was regarded as a highly exalted "divine agent of creation" (145), but not as identical with the Creator. According to Dunn, high Christology developed gradually, rather than rapidly as Hurtado and Hengel have maintained. On the recent reconstructions of the development of Christology see also Andrew Chester, "High Christology — Whence, When and Why?" *Early Christianity* 2 (2011): 22–50.

¹¹ Esp. with Daniel Boyarin's contribution, *Jewish Gospels: The Story of the Jewish Christ* (New York: The New Press, 2012), who argues based on the depiction of the "Son of Man" in Daniel, and in the Similitudes of Enoch, that Jews at the time of Jesus, and long before, had a clear expectation that the Messiah was divine (this is similar to William Horbury's argument that the theological ideas behind Jesus' divinity were already present in Second Temple Judaism). Needless to say that, if Boyarin is right, this would constitute a major paradigm shift from the prevalent view that Jesus' divinity is the most significant boundary marker between Judaism and Christianity. Not surprisingly, then, this theory has so far not been received favorably, see esp. Peter Schäfer's highly critical review entitled "The Jew who would be God," in *The New Republic* (May 18, 2012). Online: <http://www.tnr.com/print/article/103373/books-and-arts/magazine/jewish-gospels-christ-boyarin>.

¹² When referring to the "divinity of Jesus" and the "incarnation" in the following and throughout, I wish to refer to what Christian doctrine traditionally has meant, not simply that "Jesus is God," but the more differentiated definition expressed in the Chalcedonian Creed, that "Jesus Christ is to us One and the same Son, the Self-same [τὸν αὐτὸν] Perfect in Godhead, the Self-same [τὸν αὐτὸν] Perfect in Manhood; truly God and truly Man; the Self-same [τὸν αὐτὸν] of a rational soul and body; consubstantial [ὁμοούσιον] with the Father according to the Godhead, the Self-same consubstantial [ὁμοούσιον τὸν αὐτὸν] with us according to Manhood; like us in all things, sin apart; before the ages begotten of the Father

has subsequently become more central to Christianity, and was (more or less) settled at the councils of Nicaea and Chalcedon.¹³ Within the Jewish-Christian debate the issue of Jesus' divinity has, therefore, likewise taken center stage over the discussion of his messiahship. Michael Wyschogrod has expressed this well:

The most difficult outstanding issues between Judaism and Christianity are the divinity of Jesus, the incarnation, the trinity, three terms which are not quite synonymous but all of which assert that Jesus was not only a human being but also God. Compared to this claim, all other Christian claims such as Jesus as the Messiah become secondary at most. The divinity of Jesus has been unanimously rejected by all Jewish (and Muslim) authors as incompatible with true monotheism and possibly idolatrous. For Jews, once this issue is raised, it is no longer necessary to examine seriously any teachings of Jesus. A human being who is also God loses all Jewish legitimacy from the outset. No sharper break with Jewish theological sensibility can be imagined.¹⁴

Likewise, Robert Chazan has pointed out that

the harshest Jewish criticism of all is leveled against the Christian doctrine of Incarnation. Christianity, with its notion of a deity incarnate and its concomitant doctrine of a trinity of divine beings, became (...) the ultimate irrationality. (...) The doctrine of Incarnation was projected as the teaching that would supposedly reveal to any impartial observer the fundamental irrationality of Christian thinking. It was seen as responsible for the profound gulf between the two traditions, was viewed by Jews as thoroughly unreasonable, and was claimed to have more than a tinge of the immoral about it as well.¹⁵

Moreover, the Christian notion of incarnation, which essentially is part and parcel of the doctrine of Jesus' divinity, is not only a question of religious

as to the Godhead; but in the last days, the Self-same [τὸν αὐτὸν], for us and for our salvation (born) of Mary the Virgin Theotokos, as to the Manhood; One and the Same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten; acknowledged in Two Natures unconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the difference of the Natures being in no way removed because of the Union, but rather the property of each Nature being preserved, and (both) concurring into One Prosopon and One Hypostasis; not as though He were parted or divided into Two Prosopa, but One and the Self-same Son and Only-begotten God, Word, Lord, Jesus Christ," see T. Herbert Bindley and F. W. Green, *The Oecumenical Documents of the Faith* (4th ed.; London: Methuen, 1950), 234–35, cf. 193; also, Heinrich Denzinger and Adolf Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion Symbolorum: Definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum* (35th ed.; Freiburg: Herder, 1973), 108 (§301).

¹³ For an overview see Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition: From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (451)* (trans. J. S. Bowden; London: Mowbray, 1965), esp. 480–91; and Richard P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy 318–381* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988).

¹⁴ Michael Wyschogrod, "A Jewish Perspective on Incarnation," *Modern Theology* 12 (1996): 195–209; here 197–98.

¹⁵ Robert Chazan, *Fashioning Jewish Identity in Medieval Western Christendom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 349.

differences, but from a Jewish point of view also touches on the definition of God's nature and holiness, which is the reason why

[t]he Jewish polemicists employ a wide range of contentions which stress that this doctrine was not befitting God. They insisted that it was beneath God's dignity to enter into a woman's body, to be born into the world like other men, to live a worldly life in which He ate, drank, slept, etc., and finally was humiliated and suffered death. (...) It would be a diminution of God's dignity, a *lèse majesté*, for God to live as man among men and to suffer. For the Christian, however, incarnation did not imply a diminution of God's glory, but rather indicated God's greatness, for He did not hesitate to become a man in order to bring men closer to Him.¹⁶

The divinity of Jesus is, thus, not an arbitrary topic of Jewish investigation, and Christian theologians likewise could not refuse the challenge of addressing the objections against this most central of Christian beliefs.¹⁷

1.3 The Gospel of Matthew

In this study the Gospel of Matthew has been chosen as the principal New Testament text of investigation, which limits the scope of the Jewish sources examined both in terms of the selection of texts and also the presentation of arguments within these sources. This is not to say that Jewish polemicists and scholars did not know and use other New Testament texts. In fact, the other three evangelists often make an appearance in exegetical arguments that

¹⁶ Lasker, *Jewish Philosophical Polemics*, 107, 108.

¹⁷ In this respect I would argue that extensive, prolonged involvement and in-depth study of apologetic-polemical literature is fueled by at least two related motivations: the first being the need of self-assurance that one's own belief system is correct, the second being a vested interest in defending and/or advancing one's own belief system (or "truth-claims") against the advances and claims of another, especially where the interaction between these two defines either side (i.e. in establishing religious boundaries). This rings true, in my opinion, for many of the principal scholars of Jewish polemical literature in the past and present, be it Christians, e.g., Johann Christoph Wagenseil, Sebastian Münster, Johann Andreas Eisenmenger, A. Lukyn Williams, or be it Jews, e.g., Abraham Geiger, or Judah Eisenstein. Likewise, more recent scholars are not unaffected by these two related motives, see e.g. David Berger and Michael Wyschogrod's tractate, *Jews and "Jewish Christianity"* (New York: Ktav, 1978; repr. 2002). Noteworthy here is also Shem Tov Ibn Shaprut's comment in the introduction of chapter twelve of *Even Boḥan* (see chapter 6): "(I wanted) to show to the leaders of our exalted faith the shortcomings of those books and the errors contained in them. Through this they shall come to know and understand the advantage and superiority of our faith over that of the remaining faiths. *For one does not (properly) know the degree of the superiority of a matter other than through the investigation of its opposite*" (emphasis mine). MS Laur. Plutei 2.17 (Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana), f. 134r: להראות לבעלי אמונתנו הרמה חסרון הספרים ההם והשגיאות הנפלות בתוכם ובזה ידעו ויבינו יתרון ומעלת אמונתנו על שאר האמונות לפי שלא יודע גודל ומעלת הדבר כי אם בבחינת הפכו.

employ Christian sources. Nevertheless, Matthew features much more frequently and extensively than passages from any other New Testament author. That the Gospel of Matthew was predominantly used in the Jewish critique of Christianity in this manner is mostly due to dogmatic, historical, and exegetical reasons.

First of all, Matthew played a vital role for Christian theology and the development of the Christian *dogma* as the exegetical basis and defense of Jesus' divinity by means of the incarnation. That Jesus Christ *conceptus est de Spiritu Sancto*, and *natus ex Maria Virgine*¹⁸ was chiefly argued by means of Matthew 1:18–24 and Isa 7:14, and was integral to the claim that God had come to dwell among humankind in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Of course, Christians could defend the belief in Jesus' divinity without the Gospel of Matthew, e.g., by referring to the prologue of the Gospel of John, or Psalm 110, but it was in particular the evangelist's nativity account of Jesus (Matt 1:1–2:23), championing the identification of Jesus as Isaiah's Immanuel, that was seminal in conceptualizing Jesus' identity.¹⁹ In fact, Matthew is the only New Testament author who linked the (Septuagint) text of Isa 7:14, "the virgin (παρθένης) shall have a son," with Jesus' birth, making Matt 1:22–23 all the more christologically important to Christians. In conjunction with Matt 28:20 the "God-with-us" motif brackets the whole gospel.²⁰ This motif, then, gives initial shape to Matthew's Christology, summarized here by Jack Kingsbury:

Matthew is equally intent upon showing that Mary's child can be called the Son of God: he is conceived by the Holy Spirit (mentioned twice: 1:18, 20); he is not the product of the union of any man with Mary (cf. 1:18, 20, 24) because she is a "virgin" when she bears him (1:23) and Joseph, for his part, scrupulously refrains from having marital relations with her until after she has had her son (1:25); his mission is to save his people from their sins (1:21); and God himself, albeit through the prophet (1:22), is the one who discloses the true significance of his person ("God with us," 2:22–23). When these several factors are combined, they

¹⁸ Apostles' Creed, the *Symbolum Apostolorum*, see John N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (3d ed.; London: Longman, 1972), 369; similar the Old Roman Creed, see *ibid.*, 102.

¹⁹ The most important christological passage in the Hebrew Bible for the writers of the New Testament, however, was Psalm 110:1 and its association with Psalm 8:6, cf. e.g. Matt 22:44; 26:64; Mark 12:36; 14:62; 16:19; Luke 20:42–43; 22:69; Acts 2:33–35; 5:31; 7:55–56; Rom 8:34; 1 Cor 15:25; Eph 1:20; 2:6; Col 3:1; Heb 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12–13; 12:2; 1 Pet 3:22; Rev 3:21. For the importance of Psalm 110:1 for Christology see Martin Hengel, "'Sit at my right hand!,'" in *Studies in Early Christology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 119–225. The revised version of this article (so far only in German) is entitled "'Setze dich zu meiner Rechten!'" Die Inthronisation Christi zur Rechten Gottes und Psalm 110,1," in *Studien zur Christologie: Kleine Schriften IV* (ed. Claus-Jürgen Thornton; WUNT 1/201; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 281–367.

²⁰ Matthew is also the only gospel author who explicitly maintains the virgin birth, see Matt 1:18, 20, 23 and esp. 25. Luke implies the virgin birth, but is not as explicit about it, cf. Luke 1:34–35.

compel the following conclusion about the sonship of Jesus Messiah: Jesus Messiah, born of Mary, is without question the Son of David, but beyond this, by reason of his unique origin, he is the Son of God.²¹

Matthew's linking of Jesus' to Isaiah 7:14 as virgin-born Immanuel was thus paramount in the development of doctrinal expressions.²² In particular the related claim of the virginal conception became a signature, and conceptual vehicle, for teaching and defending Jesus' divinity. Already in the middle of the second century we find that this interpretation underlies Justin Martyr's reply to Trypho:

What is truly a sign, and what was to be an irrefutable proof to all men, namely, that by means of a virgin's womb the first born of all creatures took flesh and truly became man, was foreknown by the prophetic Spirit before it took place and foretold by him in different ways, as I have explained to you.²³

Also Irenaeus in *Against Heresies* effectively relies on Matthew to argue that Jesus was more than a mere man:

²¹ Jack D. Kingsbury, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 43. Simon Gathercole recently has made the case that Matthew portrays Jesus as more exalted than recent New Testament scholarship conventionally has allowed for: "Matthew alone has the material about Jesus' transcendence of space and the requirement to meet *in his name* (Matt. 18.18-20), as well as the *Emmanuel* motif, the mention of Jesus as sender of prophets, and the supplement of walking-on-water account which contains just one of many references in the Gospel to reverence (προσκυνεῖν) of Jesus," Simon J. Gathercole, *The Pre-existent Son: Recovering the Christologies of Matthew, Mark and Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 79 (emphasis original), see also 46-79. About all Synoptic Gospels he further states that, "in very brief summary, then, we have seen a clear identification of Jesus as transcending the God-creation divide, the heaven-earth divide, and as transcending the confinement of his earthly ministry. This is held together with his genuine humanity and subordination to the Father: all the power and status the Son has is a result of the Father's determination" (ibid.). Gathercole subsequently argues for the pre-existence of Jesus by examining the various "I have come" sayings, and by doing so joins Martin Hengel, Larry Hurtado, and Richard Bauckham et al with a very high (and early) view of Christology in the Synoptic Gospels.

²² See esp. David D. Kupp, *Matthew's Emmanuel: Divine Presence and God's People in the First Gospel* (SNTSMS 90; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 49-108, 157-244. For the history of interpretation of Isa 7:14 see Marius Reiser, "Aufruhr um Isenbiehl oder: Was hat Jes 7,14 mit Jesus und Maria zu tun?," in *Bibelkritik und Auslegung der Heiligen Schrift: Beiträge zur Geschichte der biblischen Exegese und Hermeneutik* (WUNT I/ 217; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 277-330, but also. Laurenz Reinke, *Die Weissagung von der Jungfrau und von Immanuel: Jes. 7,14-16* (Münster: Coppenrath, 1848), appraised by Reiser for his meticulous and exhaustive investigation of the interpretation of Isa 7:14, see 286, n. 29.

²³ Justin, *Dial.* 84.2, trans. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* (ed. Michael Slusser; trans. Thomas B. Falls, rev. Thomas P. Halton; Selections from the Fathers of the Church 3; Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 2003), 130.

So this Son of God, our Lord, was both the Word of the Father and the Son of Man. Since He had a human generation from Mary, who was of the human race and was herself a human being, He became the Son of Man. For this reason the Lord Himself gave us a sign in the depths below and in the heights above. Man [i.e. Ahaz] did not ask for that [sign], because he did not hope that a virgin, as a virgin, could become pregnant, and that she [could] also give birth to a son, and that this child [could] be “God with us”...²⁴

And likewise Tertullian appeals to Matthew’s nativity account in *Against the Jews*:

“Further,” they say, “that [Christ] of yours who has come has neither been spoken of under such a name [as Emmanuel] nor has engaged in any warfare.” But we, on the contrary, consider that they ought to be reminded to consider the context of this passage as well. For there is added an interpretation of Emmanuel (‘God is with us’), so that you should not only pay attention to the sound of the name, but the sense as well. For the Hebrew sound, which is Emmanuel, has an interpretation, which is ‘God is with us.’ Therefore, inquire whether that word ‘God is with us,’ which is Emmanuel, is employed afterwards with regard to Christ, since the light of Christ has begun to shine. I think you will not deny it. For those from Judaism who believe in Christ, from the time they believe in him, since they wish to say Emmanuel, they mean that ‘God is with us,’ and in this way it is agreed that he has come already who was proclaimed Emmanuel...²⁵

These short excerpts, many more could be cited, show that the introductory chapters of the Gospel of Matthew were not only important for Christian doctrine and Christology, but further that Matthew was effectively used to establish religious boundaries with other groups, such as Judaism.

A second, related factor why Matthew was used by Jews is the first gospel’s linking of Jesus with various passages in the Hebrew Bible, which is displayed so prominently by means of the so-called “fulfillment formula.”²⁶ This linking of passages from the Hebrew Bible positioned Matthew as bridge

²⁴ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.19.3 (cf. *ANF* 1:449), trans. Irenaeus M. C. Steenberg and Dominic J. Unger, *St. Irenaeus of Lyons: Against the Heresies (Book 3)* (Ancient Christian Writers 64; Mahwah, N. J.: The Newman Press, 2012), 94. Incidentally, “Son of Man” is understood literally here (i.e. as denoting Jesus’ humanity), which is similar to the Jewish arguments surveyed in this study.

²⁵ Tertullian, *Adv. Jud.* 9.2–3 (cf. *ANF* 3:161), trans. Geoffrey D. Dunn, *Tertullian (The Early Church Fathers)* (London: Routledge, 2004), 84–85.

²⁶ In Matthew’s prologue: In 1:22, 2:15, 17, 23, 4:14; cf. also 2:5–6, 3:3. In the main body: 8:17, 12:17–21; 13:35; 21:4–5; 27:9–10; cf. also 13:14–16 and 24:15. Besides commentaries *ad loc.*, see on this also Robert H. Gundry, *The Use of the Old Testament in St. Matthew’s Gospel: With Special Reference to the Messianic Hope* (Leiden: Brill, 1967); Wilhelm Rothfuchs, *Die Erfüllungszitate des Matthäus-Evangeliums: Eine biblisch-theologische Untersuchung* (BWA[N]T 5.8 (88); Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1969); Carlene McAfee Moss, *The Zechariah Tradition and the Gospel of Matthew* (BZNW 156; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008); and David Instone-Brewer, “Balaam-Laban as the Key to the Old Testament Quotations in Matthew 2,” in *Built Upon a Rock: Studies in the Gospel of Matthew* (ed. Daniel M. Gurtner and John Nolland; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 207–27.

between the history of biblical Israel and Jesus, and gave Christians further license to find additional interpretations and prophecies fulfilled in Jesus.²⁷ However, Matthew's "proof-texting," as it was popularly understood, frequently turned out to be an easy target for Jewish scholars who often were more familiar with the details and historical context of the Hebrew Bible, and who appealed to a more contextual interpretation of a given passage.²⁸ Thus, the popularity of the Gospel of Matthew in polemical arguments not only resulted from the importance Matthew was given by Christians, but also was due to a perceived need to refute the christological interpretations of the Hebrew Bible and the ease (and urgency) by which many fulfillment analogies could be challenged.²⁹ The resolute Jewish objections to the Christian interpretation of Isaiah 7–9, often linked to the rejection of the translation of עלמה as παρθένος,³⁰ must have been especially irritating to Christians as it

²⁷ The literature on this topic is extensive, but see the essays in Stanley E. Porter, ed., *The Messiah in the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), and idem, *Hearing the Old Testament in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006); Steven Moyise, *Old Testament in the New* (London: T&T Clark, 2001); esp. Donald Juel, *Messianic Exegesis: Christological Interpretation of the Old Testament in Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988).

²⁸ Matthew's actual intention and exegetical strategy in linking these various passages from the Hebrew Bible to Jesus by means of the "fulfillment formula" cannot be fully considered here; they certainly point to Matthew's conviction (and intention) that his gospel narrative stood in continuity with Israel's divine history and expectations, and that in Jesus an age of fulfillment had arrived, see e.g., James M. Hamilton Jr., "'The Virgin Will Conceive' Typological Fulfillment in Matthew 1:18–23," in *Built Upon a Rock: Studies in the Gospel of Matthew* (ed. Daniel M. Gurtner and John Nolland; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 228–47; and Roland Deines, "Das Erkennen von Gottes Handeln in der Geschichte bei Matthäus," in *Heil und Geschichte: Die Geschichtsbezogenheit des Heils und das Problem der Heilsgeschichte in der biblischen Tradition und in der theologischen Deutung* (ed. Jörg Frey, Stefan Krauter, and Hermann Lichtenberger; WUNT 1/248; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 403–441, esp. 426–34. Already the first followers of Jesus, and most likely he himself, understood the Jewish Scriptures to foretell events that were fulfilled in him, cf. 1 Cor 15:3, Mark 1:1–3, Luke 4:21, 24:44, John 12:38, Acts 1:16, 13:27.

²⁹ The Jewish discussion of Matthew's interpretations does not necessarily mean that Jewish protagonists had an actual gospel text in front of them, as we will see later. Only from the medieval period onwards do we have clear evidence in Jewish sources that the text itself was in some form encountered.

³⁰ Since translating the original עלמה as παρθένος ("virgin") is only one interpretive choice from a range of semantic possibilities, which could also easily be "maid" or "young woman." The matter of translation became thus a heated issue in the Jewish-Christian debate. Christians saw in this a clear proof for Jesus' distinction and the exegetical basis for arguing for the virgin birth and Jesus' divinity. Jews on the other hand pointed to the ambiguity of the term עלמה and rejected it as mistranslation. Both sides subsequently accused each other of having altered the text, see already Justin, *Dial.* 68.8, 71.3, 84.1–3. The ensuing debate was usually based on semantics and the historical context of Isa 7:14. Where Jews initially appear to have identified the child as Hezekiah (a position which was later revised by Rashi, Ibn

undermined a foundational aspect of their doctrine and missionary strategy. In turn, the dispute over the interpretation of Isaiah became an integral part of *Adversus Judaeos* texts and many include extensive discussions of the Jewish interpretation of Isa 7:14.³¹

Moreover, elements from Matthew's nativity story and beyond were also echoed in the various *Toledot Yeshu* ("History of Jesus") accounts, well-known popular Jewish gospel parodies.³² Likewise, the adaptation of Matt 5:17 in

Ezra, and David Qimhi in response to Jerome's often quoted rejoinder), Christians attempted to dispel this exegesis by pointing to the miraculous character of this sign which they saw was only fulfilled in Jesus, see Reiser, "Aufruhr," 299–302.

³¹ E.g. Justin, *Dial.*, chs. 43, 54, 63, 66–68, 77, 84, also his *1 Apol.* 32–35; Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.9, 19, 21, and 4:23; Tertullian, *Adv. Jud.* 9; Ignatius, *Phld.* 3; Origen, *Cels.* 1.33–35; *The Dialogue of Timothy and Aquila* 8.5–6, 18.6–10, 26.6, 34.14–20, see William Varner, *Ancient Jewish-Christian Dialogues: Athanasius and Zacchaeus, Simon and Theophilus, Timothy and Aquila. Introduction, Texts and Translations* (Lewiston, N.Y.: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2004), 156–157, 180–181, 196–197, 216–217), *The Dialogue of Athanasius and Zacchaeus* 28–34 (Varner, *Dialogues*, 36–39), and *The Dialogue of Simon and Theophilus* 12–14 (Varner, *Dialogues*, 102–105). Though we do not have any verifiably genuine Jewish polemical texts of this nature from this early period, the arguments refuted by these early Christian writers when compared to what is found in Jewish polemical sources seem authentic, or at least point out an actual issue with Matthew's use of Isa 7:14 (as this study will be able to show). Also, Peter Schäfer discusses how *parthenos* (virgin, Isa 7:14, Matt 1:23) may deliberately have been distorted by the talmudic rabbis to *pantheros* (panther) as a "well known rabbinic practice of mocking pagan or Christian holy names," see *Jesus in the Talmud* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 98, which would further indicate that the rabbis were not ignorant of Matthew's uses of Isa 7:14. Likewise, Marcion, Emperor Julian, and Porphyry appear to have discussed Matthew's linking the virgin-born *Immanuel* with Jesus, see Tertullian, *Marc.* 3.12–13 (*ANF* 3.330–332), and R. Joseph Hoffmann, *Julian's "Against the Galileans"* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2004), 253A–B, 125–126; 262C, 126–127; *Fragment XV*, 145. According to Jerome and Epiphanius, also Porphyry commented on various passages in Matthew, see Robert M. Berchman, *Porphyry Against the Christians* (Ancient Mediterranean and Medieval Texts and Contexts 1; Leiden: Brill 2005), 144 (§28), 157–158 (§73).

³² The various narratives labelled *Toledot Yeshu* are Jewish gospel parodies, or "anti-gospels," more recently classified as "counter history," and have a different character than most other Jewish polemical works, although their influence is readily felt in many Jewish *Adversus Christianos* texts. It is likely that *Toledot Yeshu* represent a fairly early Jewish attempt (probably written in Aramaic initially) to counter a Christian gospel (written in Aramaic or Hebrew?), which must have had some relationship to the Gospel of Matthew as some major *Toledot Yeshu* manuscripts relate that Jesus applied Isa 7:14 to himself (e.g., MSS Strassburg, Vindobona, Adler), see Samuel Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu nach jüdischen Quellen* (Berlin: Calvary, 1902), 41, 53, 69, 94, 118–119, 123. For an in-depth discussion of this important polemical link see William Horbury, "A Critical Examination of the Toledoth Yeshu" (Ph.D. diss.; University of Cambridge, 1970); Günter Schlichting, *Ein jüdisches Leben Jesu: Die verschollene Toledot-Jeschu-Fassung Tam ū-mū'ad* (WUNT 1/24; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1982); and David Biale, "Counter-History and Jewish Polemics against Christianity: The Sefer Toledot Yeshu and the Sefer Zerubavel," *Jewish Social Studies* 6 (1999): 130–45;