The Gospel a Republication of Natural Religion in Justin Martyr

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A piece dedicated in gratitude and admiration to Miroslav Marcovich may appropriately be concerned in the main with the early Christian writer who advanced the bold suggestion that in Heraclitus one might discern a Christian before Christ.1

The study of Justin Martyr reveals both the tensions and the affinities between Christian and educated pagan in the middle of the second century, at a stage of Christian expansion when the mission is marked by extraordinary confidence and when thoughtful adherents of pagan culture are coming to recognize in the Church a threat to the old ways. Yet the affinities are given more prominence than the tensions. Argument is never so hotly contentious as when it is being carried on between parties who have much in common and indeed may largely or even entirely share identical premisses. In consequence, during the second and third centuries both pagan critics of Christianity and the Christian defenders appear to the modern reader to manifest an almost bizarre schizophrenia. On the one hand, the polemical argument has to show how different and mistaken, how inconsistent and how dangerous, the opposing position is. On the other hand, each party to the dispute repeatedly insists that the side under attack is already conceding so vast a proportion of the assertions advanced by the critic that all claims to have a novel and distinctive position are throughout implausible. One can easily have the impression that pagan attackers and Christian defenders can hardly allow their left hand to know what their right hand has been writing. So in Justin’s Apologies we encounter direct and candid criticism of pagan religion and morality; yet every nerve is strained to demonstrate that, on assumptions every educated person would share, Christianity is reasonable and wholly tenable by the philosophically minded, at least if the Platonic framework is accepted. (Epicurean

hedonism would be harder for Justin to stomach, but Epicureans were not numerous.) Criticism from the pagan side is almost entirely confined to the rational arguments of moderate observers, and popular prejudices are pushed well into the background.

Notoriously, Justin's thrust is directed towards splitting apart religion and philosophy. Towards pagan cult and myth he is vehemently negative: They are crude, superstitious, and immoral both in content and in practical influence. The cultus of animals among the Egyptians, the offering of human sacrifices to placate Saturn, and the womanising adventures of Zeus, stand for Justin as the typical features of the polytheism to which he and his educated readers take exception. Moreover, Justin sees pagan cult as pervaded by magic and offered to demonic spirits, addicted to sacrifices, incense and libations, and in his eyes the cause not only of wars, murders, and adulteries, but also of the unjust persecution of Christians. Their vicious character seems to him demonstrable from the myths of their lusts and conflicts. Justin could find an explanation of their existence and malevolence in the passage of Genesis 6 speaking of the sons of God who lusted after the daughters of men. But in Plutarch or, later, in Porphyry one finds pagan writers allowing that among demons some are not helpful mediatorial beings between man and the gods but malevolent powers needing to be placated by sacrifices. In the Laws (896e) Plato himself had suggested that the omnipresence of evil in the cosmos might be explained by postulating an evil world-soul. Porphyry thought these unsatisfactory unhelpful spirits were ambitious beings aspiring to a divine honour which was above their station in life. They suffered from envy of higher purity, and attracted damp vapours in the sublunary realm. Porphyry thought Hebrew sages, among whom he was willing to number Jesus, were right to forbid the cult of evil demons and inferior spirits. From such texts it seems natural to deduce that Justin's demonology was not a conception of

2 Apol. 2. 7. 3, 12. 5.
3 Apol. 1. 25 and 27, 2. 12.
4 Apol. 1. 24.
5 Apol. 2. 12. 5.
6 Apol. 1. 21. 4–5.
7 In the Dialogue with Trypho (35) Justin has to meet the accusation that many who take the name of Christian eat meat offered to idols. He has to disown such people as gnostic heretics.
8 Apol. 2. 5. 4.
9 Apol. 1. 12. 5, Dial. 131. 2.
10 Apol. 2. 12. 5 sees Zeus as a dangerous example to follow; cf. Augustine, Conf. 1. 16. 26, citing Terence. The Clementine Homilies (5. 17. 5) include a pagan defence of the myths, based on the plea that free love is healthy.
11 Apol. 2. 5. 3.
12 De def. orac. 14 (417d–e).
14 Porphyry in Augustine, De civ. Dei 10. 9–11.
15 Porphyry in Augustine, De civ. Dei 19. 23.
the spirit-world utterly strange to the late Platonist mind. But by the
inheritance of Jewish traditions about the revolt of angels against God—a
truth about demons vindicated by the empirical evidence of exorcism, and
not denied by Trypho (it is found in the Slavonic Enoch and in the Books
of Adam and Eve)—he can present the entire demonic realm as hostile to
God and man, not as a divided society in which some inferior members can
be cajoled into being propitious by the offering of appropriate sacrifices.
Admittedly, without such propitiation, Porphyry believed that they would be
malevolent, using magic to deceive, and ready to devise all manner of
evil.

Nevertheless, to the educated pagan observer, Christianity appeared
alien, "barbarian" in origin and in content. The rejection of polytheistic
cults, the scorning of temples and their images, the puritan refusal to join in
the celebrations at traditional festivals, the reasonable talk of a kingdom
commanding a loyalty beyond that owed to the emperor, easily imparted
plausibility to allegations of sexual orgies and child-murder and
cannibalism. It was not a nice thing to be labelled an atheist. Yet the
Christians made no secret of their abandonment of traditional religious
customs, those rites by which celestial favour could be ensured for the
fertility of crops and spouses and for the defence of the limes. To the
charge of abandoning well-tried ways Justin would retort that truth is surely
to be followed rather than custom. But the argument was not perhaps very
effective when addressed to people who took it for granted that ancient
custom in religion was the ultimate criterion of truth. Academic
scepticism had certainly eroded old beliefs. Augustine was to comment that
the gods demolished in philosophical lecture-rooms were mercilessly
mocked in theatres. Yet scepticism (as in Montaigne) can give potent
reinforcement to tradition by undermining confidence that one can produce
a coherent alternative.

16 On Justin’s demonology, see H. Wey, Die Funktionen der bösen Geister bei den
griechischen Apologeten des zweiten Jahrhunderts nach Christus (Winterthur 1957).
17 Apol. 1. 55. 2.
18 A less literary rabbi would no doubt have been less cooperative. For exorcism in the
Dialogue, see 30, 85. 2, 121. 3, 131. 5. Justin’s belief in its evidential value appears in Apol. 2.
6. 6.
19 Slavonic Enoch 4 and 7, Life of Adam and Eve 12–16. (These texts are given in English
20 Porphyry, De abstin. 2. 37–43.
21 Apol. 1. 5. 4, 7. 3.
22 Apol. 1. 11.
24 Apol. 1. 4–6.
25 Apol. 1. 12. 6.
26 Celsus in Origen, Cels. 5. 25.
27 Faust. 12. 40. Augustine adds that pagans are ashamed of customs attaching to
polytheistic rites; similarly, De cons. evang. 1. 8. 13.
Justin himself is no stranger to the axiom that in matters of religion antiquity is a recommendation of authenticity. The old argument of the Hellenistic synagogue in favour of the priority of Moses over against Greek literature and philosophy is strongly restated: Plato’s *Timaeus* is indebted to Genesis for its cosmogony; the X in the structure of the cosmos (*Tim* 34a–b and 36b) betrays awareness of the significance of the Cross as a sign of redemption. The oracular saying in Plato’s second letter (312e) that the third things are about the third (person) refers to the biblical truth that in the second place is the Logos of God, and beside the Logos in the third place the Spirit borne over the water.

Likewise Justin felt sure that the Hebrew prophets were the inspiration of the Greek philosophers who taught the immortality of the soul, punishment of the wicked after death, and the contemplation of celestial realities. Thence the philosophers derived “seeds of truth” (a theme adumbrated in Justin’s first *Apology* and restated in the second). Above all in importance for Justin’s theodicy, Plato’s emphatic exemption of God from responsibility for evil, which originates in mistaken free choices (*Rep*. 10, 617e), must come from Moses (Dt. 30. 15 and 19).

Sensitivity to the defence against gnosticism made Justin hot in his assertion of free will. He therefore had to take special care with his argument from fulfilled prophecy. Divine foreknowledge, based on foreseen merits, is distinct from fate.

In his first *Apology* Justin is conscious of facing intelligent and educated critics for whom the Christian story is striking by its lack of distinctiveness. What does the Church say that cannot be found in philosophers like Plato? The Christians present as sober historical events narratives about Jesus which have close analogies in the pagan myths of which they speak so scornfully. The birth from a virgin is very like the legend of the birth of Perseus, born to Danae when she was made pregnant by Zeus in the disguise of a shower of gold. The elevation of Christ to

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29 *Apol*. 1. 60. 6–7. Justin replaces Plato’s neuter by a masculine (if the manuscript correctly transmits what he wrote).
30 *Apol*. 1. 44. 9.
31 *Apol*. 1. 44. 10. 2. 8. For a good recent discussion of this theme in Justin, see M. J. Edwards in *JTS* 42 (1991) 25 and 33 f.
32 *Apol*. 1. 44. 8.
33 *Apol*. 1. 43, 44. 11, *Dial*. 141. 2. Ancient discussions of determinism were familiar with the question whether correct oracular predictions are compatible with indeterminism. A specimen of the debate occurs in Origen, *Cels*. 2. 20 and in Alexander of Aphrodisias, *De fato* 10 and 31 (ed. R. W. Sharples). See also my *Boethius* (Oxford 1981) 159.
34 *Apol*. 1. 60. 10 meets the complaint that what is true is trite, and what is not trite is not true.
35 *Apol*. 1. 33. 3. Celsius (in Origen, *Cels*. 1. 67) observes that the virgin birth ascribed to Perseus and other heroes is not factually credible, but is good evidence of their noble achievements.
divine dignity by his resurrection and ascension resembles Greek legends of the divine reward conferred upon models of heroic virtue such as Dionysus, the Dioscuri, and Heracles. His miraculous healings are paralleled in the temples of Asclepius, where the sick sleep in the expectation of a therapeutic vision. Christian baptism, so far from being distinctive, does not seem to a pagan observer to be in principle or in practice so very different from the lustrations common in pagan purifications. And might not the thanksgiving ceremony with bread and wine be paralleled in the rites of the initiates into the mysteries of Mithras?

And yet when Justin sets out in the first Apology to describe the rituals practised by the Christians at baptism and eucharist, there is an evident arrière-pensée: He must defend these ceremonies from the pagan insinuation that they are dangerous magic, and has to show how moral and edifying they really are. The accusations of wild nocturnal sexual orgies and cannibalism are refuted by Justin, so far as the orthodox or great Church is concerned; but he would not object if the government turned its unpleasant attentions on some of the gnostic sects of whom such charges are true. The charge of magic and sorcery has to be repelled in the case of the gospel miracles. In pagan eyes belief in the very possibility of a resurrection of this physical body must appear ludicrous and even offensive. And the virginal birth of Jesus is hardly less offensive if it implies that the supreme deity was desirous or even capable of sexual intercourse with a woman.

So we confront the paradox that the pagan critics of the second century simultaneously attack the Christian credenda for their apparent crudity and

36 Apol. 1. 21 and 54, Dial. 69. Celsus compares Jesus' resurrection to the elevation of Asclepius, Dionysus, and Heracles (Cels. 3. 42), and even at one point to the notorious Hadrianic favourite, Antinous (3. 36).
37 Cels. 3. 24.
38 Apol. 1. 62. 1.
39 Apol. 1. 66. 4. Celsus demonstrates gnostic (Ophite) borrowing from Mithraism: Cels. 6. 22–25.
40 Apol. 1. 61–67.
41 Apol. 1. 26, 2. 12 and 15. Origen (Cels. 6. 27 and 40) records that, although these slanders had in his time become generally discredited even among the masses, it was still possible occasionally to meet people who suspected some truth in the rumours.
42 Apol. 1. 30, Dial. 69. 7.
43 Apol. 1. 30, Dial. 69. 7; cf. Celsus in Origen, Cels. 1. 6 and 38. Justin affirms that magic is among the diabolical activities which Christians renounce (Apol. 1. 14. 1–2).
44 In comparison with the Dialogue with Trypho, where references to the resurrection of Jesus are not infrequent (e.g. Dial. 107 f. and 138. 1), the Apologies have little to say about it except Apol. 1. 45. 1, 46. 5 (birth, death, resurrection, ascension) and 1. 19 (not more incredible than the development of a human being from a tiny sperm). Of the incarnation, Justin observes that pagans do not grasp the "mystery" (Apol. 1. 13. 4).
45 Apol. 1. 33. 3; cf. Origen, Cels. 1. 39. The story that at Delphi Apollo entered the body of the Pythian priestess through her genitals is, for Origen (Cels. 3. 25 and 7. 3), evidence of the spirit's impure nature.
superstition and also claim that their basic stories about Jesus are strikingly in line with old Greek myths, of which the Christians held a low opinion. On the latter ground Justin is happy to be able to ask what pagans are objecting to when they have to grant their own gods to be the subject of remarkably similar narratives.

Another feature of Christian belief and practice to which pagans took exception was the obstinacy impelling them towards the virtual suicide of martyrdom, like suicide in being irrational and at the same time perhaps an aggressive form of self-assertion over against society. Justin pertinent instances Socrates as a martyr in a religious cause. Heraclitus' criticisms of polytheistic cult also made it possible for him to be numbered among witnesses to the truth that evil demons were doing so much to suppress, even if it was not easy to claim that his eccentric death (of which Diogenes Laertius offers a number of unexciting variants) was the climax of his testimony. Justin's parallel of Musonius Rufus with Socrates was already current in Neopythagorean circles in Justin's time. Philostratus' Life of Apollonius of Tyana reports how his hero secretly communicated with Musonius when he was in Nero's dungeon to ask if he could do anything to get him out: Had not Socrates gone to his death because he refused to let his friends use their influence on his behalf? Musonius replied that Socrates simply failed to defend himself, which he himself had no intention of omitting to do. Origen likewise put Socrates and Musonius in parallel as heroes of integrity. The parallel recurs in the emperor Julian. Fearlessness in face of death was so prominent a theme in Stoic moral exhortation that it was not difficult for Christian apologists to defend their heroes. In practice, of course, persecuted believers were human, and felt powerful temptations to surrender to the trivial demand to offer incense on the altar of the gods or the emperor: It seemed (reports Origen) "superfluous and foolish to endure persecution for Christ's sake." In reply to Celsus' scornful judgement that Christian martyrdom is futile and


47 Apol. 2. 7. 3.
48 Apol. 1. 46. 3; cf. 2. 8. 1.
50 Apol. 2. 8. 1 and 10. 8.
51 Philostratus, VA 4. 46. Philostratus' interest in Musonius appears again in 7. 16. 2.
52 Cels. 3. 66 (Socrates and Musonius are cited by some as instances of moral conversion).
54 Origen, Hom. in Levit. 16. 6.
achieves nothing. Origen could answer that it is far from purposeless to die for virtue, piety, and holiness in resistance to evil powers.\textsuperscript{55} Origen once couples Socrates with Leonidas, the hero of Thermopylae.\textsuperscript{56} The ancient Church experienced acute difficulty in distinguishing between the courage of the person who openly confessed the faith and the suicidal rashness and foolhardiness of the person who went out of his way to provoke the authorities.\textsuperscript{57} Justin can defend martyrdom as consistent with the \textit{militia Christi};\textsuperscript{58} a soldier goes into battle knowing that death is all too possible. But there is a radical difference between the willingness to die and the will to die.\textsuperscript{59}

A common pagan objection to Christian proclamation was the fear of hell. The Christian preacher seemed to be producing a bogy to frighten simple people into joining the Church.\textsuperscript{60} It was difficult for pagan critics to achieve complete consistency at this point. Justin could comfortably observe that the Christian notion of a consuming fire at the end of time was strikingly similar to the Stoic doctrine that at periodic intervals the cosmos is dissolved into fire.\textsuperscript{61} He could observe that (even if the language might be mythological) belief in hell had a highly beneficial effect on personal morality.\textsuperscript{62} The wicked are those reluctant to think there is retribution hereafter.\textsuperscript{63} To affirm a personal moral responsibility for doing good or evil in this life implies for Justin belief in heaven and hell: God’s accounts are not settled in this life.\textsuperscript{64} He felt sure that after death souls retain power of sensation\textsuperscript{65} and, moreover, that while there is a waiting state between death and resurrection (only gnostic heretics hold that souls ascend to heaven immediately after death),\textsuperscript{66} it is vain to hope that in hell there will still be

\textsuperscript{55} Cels. 8. 54.
\textsuperscript{56} Cels. 2. 17.
\textsuperscript{57} Clement of Alexandria, \textit{Strom.} 4.
\textsuperscript{58} \textit{Apol.} 1. 39. 4.
\textsuperscript{59} \textit{Apol.} 2. 4.
\textsuperscript{60} \textit{Apol.} 2. 9.
\textsuperscript{61} \textit{Apol.} 1. 57. 1. But for Christians hellfire is not the result of a fatalistic, deterministic process (\textit{Apol.} 2. 7. 3). \textit{Apol.} 1. 60. 8 cites Heraclitus as witness to the cosmic fire; cf. M. Marcovich (ed.), \textit{Heraclitus} (Merida 1967) 266.
\textsuperscript{62} \textit{Apol.} 1. 12. 2. When Celsus observed that Christian teaching on torments hereafter was indistinguishable from that of the mystery-religions, Origen’s answer claimed that Christian teaching differed in actually affecting moral behaviour (Cels. 8. 48).
\textsuperscript{63} \textit{Apol.} 1. 18. 1, 19. 3.
\textsuperscript{64} \textit{Apol.} 1. 12, 17. 4, \textit{Dial.} 88. 5, 117. 3.
\textsuperscript{65} \textit{Apol.} 1. 18. 2, 20. 4, 57. 3.
\textsuperscript{66} \textit{Dial.} 80. 4, \textit{Acta Justini} 5. 1–2. For the nest of problems in finding consistency in Justin’s eschatology, see a clear recent account in C. Hill, \textit{Regnum Caelorum: Patterns of Future Hope in Early Christianity} (Oxford 1992) 22–24.
opportunity for repentance, \textsuperscript{67} or that hell will not be everlasting. \textsuperscript{68} In particular, it will be the destiny of those who persecute the Church. \textsuperscript{69} And why should pagans mock? Plato himself wrote of judgement after death with punishments for evildoers. \textsuperscript{70} Those who laugh at Christian eschatological expectation are people who are not serious about morality. But none is more insistent on freedom of choice as lying at the root of evil than Plato who, in this as in many other matters, was indebted to Moses (above, page 240). \textsuperscript{71}

Justin saw a threat to moral responsibility in the Stoic language about \textit{heimarmene}. \textsuperscript{72} Nevertheless, he was also sure that some angels and some human beings become so deeply wicked as to be unchangeably evil. \textsuperscript{73} The end of the world is coming, but is delayed to make up the fixed number of God’s elect; \textsuperscript{74} for God foreknows some, perhaps not yet born, who are to be included among the saved. \textsuperscript{75} Moreover, the presence of Christian believers in the world is a ground for God to defer its final destruction. \textsuperscript{76}

Justin felt bound to allow that the conscience of some has been so corrupted that they suffer from diminished responsibility; they are, so to speak, moral alcoholics unable to help themselves. \textsuperscript{77} But the concession is not consistent with his more prominent theme that we go astray because we know what is right and lack the will to do it. Because Justin is an apologist concerned to correct prejudice and misinformation, he can also stress that the sin of the heathen results from ignorance. If everyone really knew what Christianity is and says, no one would sin. \textsuperscript{78} Divine revelation abolishes all ignorance, \textsuperscript{79} and the incarnation of the divine Word has destroyed the power of the Devil to obscure the truth. \textsuperscript{80} For the Logos is constantly at work in the conscience of all. \textsuperscript{81} Hence Justin’s conviction that the divine Sower has sown seeds of truth everywhere, and that philosophy itself is among the

\textsuperscript{67} \textit{Apol.} 1. 52. 8.
\textsuperscript{68} \textit{Dial.} 130. 2. Gehenna is “a place for unbelievers” (\textit{Apol.} 1. 19. 8). Justin’s strong doctrine of divine revelation in Jesus convinces him that unbelief is a moral offence of gross disobedience.
\textsuperscript{69} \textit{Apol.} 1. 45. 6.
\textsuperscript{70} \textit{Apol.} 1. 44; Plato, \textit{Laws} 716c–d; \textit{Ep.} 7, 335a. Celsus unreservedly affirms his belief in punishment for the wicked after death (\textit{Cels.} 3. 16, 8. 49) at the same time as he accuses the Christians of “inventing terrors.”
\textsuperscript{71} \textit{Apol.} 1. 44, citing \textit{Republic} 617e.
\textsuperscript{72} \textit{Apol.} 2. 7. 9.
\textsuperscript{73} \textit{Dial.} 141. 2. Trypho objects to the notion of apostate angels (\textit{Dial.} 69. 1). For the question, “Why has not God destroyed Satan?” see \textit{Apol.} 1. 28.
\textsuperscript{74} \textit{Apol.} 1. 45. 1.
\textsuperscript{75} \textit{Apol.} 1. 4. 2, \textit{Dial.} 32. 3.
\textsuperscript{76} \textit{Apol.} 2. 7. 1.
\textsuperscript{77} \textit{Dial.} 93: They have “lost the common notions.”
\textsuperscript{78} \textit{Apol.} 1. 12. 2.
\textsuperscript{79} Cf. \textit{Dial.} 121.
\textsuperscript{80} \textit{Dial.} 45.
\textsuperscript{81} \textit{Dial.} 23 and 92–93.
great gifts sent down to humanity. The presupposition of the first Apology is that divine revelation is not confined to a small elite, but is addressed to the whole of humanity.

In defence of Christian disparagement of polytheistic myth and cult, Justin is glad to appeal to Plato’s expulsion of Homer and other poets from his ideal state; he expelled the demonic spirits of polytheism. Justin’s doctrine of God is characteristically expressed in the terminology of contemporary Middle Platonism: largely abstract, with many negative terms. God is immutable, nameless, unbegotten, utterly transcendent. Plato’s Timaeus owes a large debt to Genesis. In accordance with Platonist principles, God is in no need of anything, not even of the created order; yet his creative power is undiminished in the generosity of his giving.

At this point Justin faced a problem: He belonged to a community which possessed the prophetic inspired scriptures. These could be misinterpreted to mean that God is imagined to have human characteristics, mental or physical. In the Dialogue with Trypho, Justin deplores the anthropomorphism which results from a too literalistic exegesis. To the question, “Why did the Jews fail to recognize the Messiah when he came?” Justin’s answer includes the claim that they did not understand how their own scriptures were to be interpreted. They did not see that the prophets speak of two comings, one in humble suffering, another in glory. That Jesus was born a Jew, and indeed observed the precepts of the Torah, is for Justin a truth to be emphasized. But his teaching is the universal way to the good life, to happiness, and to salvation. “By the mystery of Christ crucified God had mercy on all believers of every race.” Therefore, the Church is expanding throughout the known world. That this Church is the

82 Apol. 2. 10.
84 Immutable: Apol. 1. 13. 4, Dial. 23. 2. Nameless: Apol. 1. 61. 11, 63. 1 and elsewhere.
85 Dial. 114. 3.
86 Dial. 114. 3.
87 Dial. 61. 2, 128. 4.
88 See J. Dillon, The Middle Platonists (London 1977) and S. Lilla, Introduzione al medio
platonismo, Sussidi Patristici 6 (Rome 1992), especially Lilla’s section on Justin (117–32).
89 Immutable: Apol. 1. 13. 4, Dial. 23. 2. Nameless: Apol. 1. 61. 11, 63. 1 and elsewhere.
90 Dial. 114. 3.
91 Dial. 114. 3.
92 Dial. 61. 2, 128. 4.
93 Dial. 114. 3.
authentic divine society is proved by the fact that the rival sects are not persecuted, while the Church is.\textsuperscript{94} The very improbability of the Christian belief that a crucified man is none other than the firstborn of the unbegotten God and is the judge of all mankind is evidence of its divine authority.\textsuperscript{95} Thereby philosophy has been made accessible to everyone.\textsuperscript{96} The Christian call is addressed even to manual workers and uneducated people.\textsuperscript{97} Through Christian teaching the truths discerned by Platonic and Stoic philosophers (especially about the Trinity, the Cross, and the final conflagration) are discovered by believers who cannot even read or write.\textsuperscript{98} Their eucharist is thanksgiving both for the creation and for redemption from evil through Christ's destruction of the devil's power.\textsuperscript{99}

Justin was aware that the Bible and the tradition of the Christian community contained some very unphilosophical beliefs, a number of essentially "in-house" problems like the second coming of Christ, the millennium, the final judgement of souls. What the biblical writers particularly tell us concerns the beginning and the end of things.\textsuperscript{100} The philosophers can help with matters in between.

Platonism particularly helped Justin by providing a transcendentalist language for talking about God: The \textit{Timaeus} (28c) justified belief in special revelation by the saying that "it is not easy to find the Father of all, and harder still to declare him."\textsuperscript{101} So the incarnation is "mystery," and the scriptures (i.e. the Hebrew scriptures) require special illumination if they are to be rightly interpreted.\textsuperscript{102}

In the \textit{Dialogue with Trypho}, Justin works with the axiom that the Hebrew scriptures contain matter unworthy of God unless they receive a Christian and spiritual interpretation.\textsuperscript{103} To a philosophical mind it is self-evident that God has no need of sacrifices.\textsuperscript{104} If the Mosaic law is final, how can Jeremiah prophesy the gift of a new covenant?\textsuperscript{105} The particularity of the Torah is a barrier preventing the universality of divine revelation reaching all peoples. In another instance of primitivist assumption that in religion the most ancient is the most authentic, Justin can claim that Christianity is identical with pre-Abrahamic religion before circumcision was prescribed.\textsuperscript{106} Circumcision was not applied to Adam, and therefore

\textsuperscript{94} Apol. 1. 26. 1.
\textsuperscript{95} Apol. 1. 53. 2; cf. Irenaeus, \textit{Epideixis} 42.
\textsuperscript{96} Dial. 3. 3.
\textsuperscript{97} Apol. 1. 60. 11, 2. 10. 8. The apostles were uneducated: 1. 39. 3.
\textsuperscript{98} Apol. 1. 60. 11.
\textsuperscript{99} Dial. 41. 1.
\textsuperscript{100} Dial. 7. 2.
\textsuperscript{101} Apol. 2. 10. 6.
\textsuperscript{102} A frequent theme in the \textit{Dialogue}: 7. 3, 58. 1, 92. 1, 100. 2, 119. 1.
\textsuperscript{103} Dial. 30. 1, 111. 4, 112.
\textsuperscript{104} Apol. 1. 10, 13. 1, Dial. 67. 8.
\textsuperscript{105} Dial. 11.
\textsuperscript{106} Dial. 19.
cannot be an expression of the immutable and eternal will of God. In short, God can will a change but does not change his will.

Both Apologies and Dialogue operate on a common strategy, of justifying Christianity by appealing to texts, Jewish or Gentile, which the intended reader will grant to carry authority. When Justin sharply attacks polytheism, he employs arguments that his pagan readers allow to have force on philosophical grounds. When he turns to criticise conservative Judaism, his appeal is to the authority of scriptures which Trypho fully acknowledges. It is significantly observed that his messianic texts are those of the rabbis, not those of the New Testament. But in reply to the unkind criticism that the Christians say only what others have already said, Justin is sure that the others get the truth from the divine Logos in whom the Christians believe. Dependence is the other way round.

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107 Dial. 18.
109 Apol. 1. 60. 10.