

TO WHOM IS JUSTIN'S *DIALOGUE WITH TRYPHO* ADDRESSED?

It is no longer possible to understand the development of early Christianity without taking account of the extensiveness and variety of contacts between Jews and Christians in the first five centuries. Increasing awareness of these contacts has prompted a new appreciation of Judaism as a forceful influence upon the evolution of early Christianity. Despite the disappointing paucity of certitudes, a more accurate grasp of the *Sitz im Leben* of much early Christian literature is emerging.¹ This creates the possibility that hitherto familiar documents might be read in a new light and so take on a renewed utility in the effort to understand the historical and theological dimensions of the development of early Christianity.

The present essay is in the nature of a test case. It proposes a hypothesis concerning the intended audience of Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho* and thereby seeks to locate the *Dialogue* in a specific context of Jewish-Christian relations in mid-second-century Rome. If the convergence of evidences in support of the hypothesis is persuasive, then the *Dialogue* becomes a valuable resource for those engaged in determining the theological contours of those relations more precisely.

Justin himself is still a rather shadowy figure in the early Christian era. All we know with certainty about his life are the details which he himself gives us. In the *First Apology* he identifies himself as "Justin, the son of Priscus and grandson of Bacchius, of the city of Flavia Neapolis, in Syria-Palestine. . . ." ² Later, in chapter 53, he tells us that he is a Gentile convert to Christianity, and in chapter 12 of the *Second Apology* he informs us of the way he came to see through the Gentile slanders of Christians: "Indeed, when I myself was delighting in the teachings of Plato, and heard the Christians slandered, and saw them fearless in the face of death and in the face of everything else that was considered fearsome, I realized that it was impossible that they would be living in sinful pleasure." Apparently subsequent to this and at a time when he is somewhat discouraged at the lack of success in finding the truth among the various philosophies of his day, he meets the mysterious "old man," who presents Christianity to him as the true philosophy, and this encounter leads to his conversion.³

¹ See, e.g., Robert Wilken, *Judaism and the Early Christian Mind* (New Haven, 1971).

² *1 Apology* 1. The translations are mine, from the text of J. C. T. Otto, ed., *Iustini philosophi et martyris opera (Corpus apologetarum christianorum saeculi secundi*, 3rd ed., Vol. 1; Jena, 1877).

³ Some scholars doubt the existence of a historical basis for Justin's search for the true philosophy and for his encounter with Trypho, but one of the most recent surveys accepts

After his baptism, he continued to wear the philosopher's cloak and probably became an itinerant Christian teacher. The actual encounter with Trypho is placed by Eusebius in Ephesus, and the third-century Acts of his martyrdom mention that he visited Rome at least twice. Eusebius says that Crescens was the cause of Justin's martyrdom at Rome, but the Acts do not say this and Osborn doubts it.⁴

Barnard's survey of the evidence leads him to suggest a birth date in the late first or early second century and a date of death between 163 and 167.⁵

Scholarly consensus has it that, of all the works attributed to Justin, only the *First* and *Second Apologies* and the *Dialogue with Trypho* are genuine. The latter, which is the subject of our attention here, cannot be dated with precision. Trypho identifies himself as a refugee from the war in Palestine, which would mean that Justin met him shortly after 135. There seems to be no compelling reason to suppose that such an encounter did not actually take place, though it was obviously quite different from the account which Justin gives of it. Since the *Dialogue* uses the *First Apology* as a source, and the latter was composed between 151 and 155,⁶ the *Dialogue* was composed about 160.⁷

The hypothesis which this essay seeks to support is this: Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho* is addressed primarily to a non-Christian Gentile audience at Rome which is very favorably disposed towards Judaism and Christianity, yet is unable to adequately distinguish the one from the other. The *Dialogue* seeks to assist these readers not only to grasp this distinction but, further, to understand that to become a Jew is to convert to a religion which was intended solely as a preparation for Christianity. Christianity is thus superior to Judaism and, in fact, has supplanted it.

Consequently, the *Dialogue* reflects a situation in mid-second-century Rome in which Christians found their efforts at evangelization hampered by Jewish competition for the same group of potential Gentile converts and the understandable inability of this group to see the difference between Judaism and Christianity. Thus the *Dialogue* is written against the Jews, but not to them or for them.

As far as I have been able to determine, this hypothesis is shared only by Harnack.⁸ Harnack's version, however, presupposes the nonexist-

it; see L. W. Barnard, *Justin Martyr: His Life and Thought* (London, 1967) 7-12 and 23-24.

⁴ Eric Francis Osborn, *Justin Martyr* (BHT 47; Tübingen, 1973) 9.

⁵ Barnard, *Justin Martyr* 13.

⁶ *Ibid.* 19.

⁷ *Ibid.* 23.

⁸ In *Die Altercatio Simonis Judaei et Theophili christiani, nebst Untersuchungen über die anti-jüdische Polemik in der alten Kirche* (Berlin, 1883) 64-65 and 78-79.

ence of Jewish-Christian relationships, while this one assumes at least a relationship in terms of competition for converts and quite probably a wide range of other relationships, as Simon has shown.⁹ Goodenough suggests that a heathen audience is the most likely one, but he does not contextualize or develop his suggestion.¹⁰

There is significant evidence for the hypothesis within the *Dialogue* itself. First, consider the role of Marcus Pompeius. An allusion to him in chapter 8 as "beloved" and his being explicitly named in chapter 141 lead most scholars¹¹ to suppose that the formal address of the *Dialogue* (which would have been to Marcus Pompeius) has been lost. This seems plausible in view of the mutilated state of the text.¹² Of course, knowing who Marcus Pompeius was would considerably strengthen or weaken the hypothesis. In our ignorance, it seems least unlikely to suppose that Marcus Pompeius is a Roman and, as such, a Gentile.¹³ If he is a Roman and the *Dialogue* is addressed to him, the hypothesis gains considerable weight.

The first nine chapters of the work are Justin's reconstruction of his own quest for, and discovery of, the true philosophy. This is, of course, Christianity, of which all other philosophies are shadows or corruptions. These chapters serve as introduction for the *Dialogue* and thus create a setting for it which would be much more appealing to a Gentile audience than to a Jewish one. Herein philosophy is given a position of highest esteem; indeed, it is the category under which revelation itself is treated. Discussing revelation in terms of philosophy would give a Gentile audience a way to relate revelation to their own cultural background and appeal to those who had been disillusioned by its inability to fulfil its promise. But for Trypho the Jew, even with his very positive appraisal of philosophy, philosophy is not a category for discussing revelation, but merely another source of truths about God¹⁴ and the moral life¹⁵ besides the law and the prophets.¹⁶

It might be noted, incidentally, that chapters 1-9 preclude the possibility that the *Dialogue* is addressed to Judaizing Christians or to Christians tempted to convert to Judaism.

As for the figure of Trypho in the *Dialogue*, it is hard to see him as anything more than a straw man. He, as well as his companions, are such poor spokesmen for Judaism that using them to present the Jewish

⁹ Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel: Etude sur les relations entre chrétiens et juifs dans l'empire romain* (Paris, 1948).

¹⁰ Erwin R. Goodenough, *The Theology of Justin Martyr* (Amsterdam, 1968) 100.

¹¹ Except Van Winden.

¹² But see Osborn, *Justin Martyr* 12.

¹³ But we must keep in mind that many Jews adopted Roman names.

¹⁴ *Dialogue* 1.

¹⁵ *Dialogue* 8.

¹⁶ *Dialogue* 1.

position could hardly be expected to win a neutral, much less a sympathetic, hearing among an intended Jewish audience. Trypho never even throws Justin off stride. Justin dominates the *Dialogue* to the point where it would not be inappropriate to name it the *Monologue with Trypho*.

This is not to say that the figure of Trypho is simply an imaginative literary device of Justin's. While no one today identifies him with the famous Rabbi Tarphon (who lived earlier in the second century and whose anti-Christian diatribes scarcely indicate one who would converse so amicably with Justin), the details which Justin gives us about Trypho indicate that he was a Jew who did in fact, shortly after the war of 135, meet Justin somewhere in the Diaspora¹⁷ and converse with him for about two days.¹⁸ Only later, when he is pursuing his apologetic apostolate in Rome, does Justin find it useful to compose an account of the meeting, an account which will serve the purpose which the hypothesis sets forth.

If Justin was aiming his address at a Jewish audience, he would scarcely be a skilled apologist in his choice of an interlocutor who is far from being even an adequate apologist for Judaism. Trypho does not know Hebrew. He regards philosophy in a very favorable light. He has read the Gospels, he tells us in chapter 10, even though forbidden to do this¹⁹ and even to associate with Christians.²⁰ He and his companions do not consider themselves experts, but as under the theological tutelage of the rabbis. While there is no reason to suppose that Trypho is merely a figure invented by Justin, it is significant that Trypho is a Jew who is, in his attitudes and practices, very close to being a Gentile without actually being one. Better, Trypho is the kind of Jew which a Gentile proselyte was most likely to become. Thus, in the *Dialogue*, he represents the Jewish option to the potential Gentile convert.

The use of the Hebrew Bible in the work is also significant. The quotations from it are many and long. Passages are invariably quoted in their entirety, never simply alluded to as common knowledge of the participants in the *Dialogue*. This characteristic of the *Dialogue* is understandable to the extent to which we suppose an audience with little or no familiarity with the texts; for even a Jew as attitudinally far from the spirit of Jamnia as Trypho is knew Scripture well enough to dispense Justin from the necessity of quoting texts in full.

The text from which Justin quotes is the Septuagint, and his misquo-

¹⁷ Eusebius locates the place as Ephesus in *Hist. eccl.* 4, 18.

¹⁸ Barnard, *Justin Martyr* 23-24.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 24.

²⁰ *Dialogue* 38. See also James Parkes, *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue* (New York, 1964) 80.

tations may be due to his use of mistaken Christian texts.²¹ He uses the Septuagint at a time when Jewish resentment over Christian preempting of their sacred books and tradition was manifested, in some quarters, by an increasing distaste for and rejection of the Septuagint. Although this rejection was not made official till long after the *Dialogue* was composed,²² Justin is already aware of this discontent.²³ If the *Dialogue* is addressed to a Gentile audience, Justin's use of the Septuagint is quite comprehensible. But Justin would hardly be commending himself to a Jewish audience by arguing from texts whose authenticity was beginning to be questioned by Jewish leaders, as Justin himself recognizes. In using the Septuagint, Justin was doing precisely the kind of thing which prompted the turn from the Septuagint to Aquila's translation.

In the course of the *Dialogue*, Justin makes some revealing remarks. In chapter 23 he says: "Therefore I tell to you, Trypho, and to those who wish to become converts, the divine teaching which I heard from that man." This is striking in view of the fact that nowhere in the *Dialogue* is it suggested that Trypho's companions are "those who wish to become converts." Quite the opposite; they are committed Jews like Trypho himself.

At least five times in the *Dialogue*,²⁴ Justin complains about Jews spreading misconceptions about Christianity. Justin does not suggest that these Jews are speaking to Jews only, but rather that they are disseminating their slanders "throughout the whole civilized world." That is, the Gentiles are hearing these slanders and are deceived by them. This points to a Jewish proselytization effort. It is highly unlikely that Christians would allow these speakers to go unchallenged; Justin himself seems to have much experience in debate with these evangelists.²⁵ The *Dialogue* can be understood as a literary continuation of Justin's debating with Jews in order to correct Gentile misunderstandings.

The theme of forgiveness should not be overlooked. In chapter 94, one of Trypho's companions admits that Justin is correct in his interpretation of the brazen serpent and that the Jewish teachers have no satisfactory answer to the problem of how God could forbid making images, yet command Moses to make an image of a serpent. Nowhere else in the *Dialogue* do Justin's adversaries grant him so much. But the significance of this admission is relative to the meaning of the serpent as a foreshadowing of forgiveness of sins through belief in Jesus who died on

²¹ Timothy David Barnes, *Tertullian: A Historical and Literary Study* (Oxford, 1971) 175-76.

²² Simon, *Verus Israel* 348.

²³ *Dialogue* 68 and 71.

²⁴ *Dialogue* 17, 32, 93, 108, and 117.

²⁵ *Dialogue* 50.

the cross. Parkes points out that it was precisely the lack of a doctrine of forgiveness of sins that put Judaism at a disadvantage vis-à-vis Christianity in appealing to Gentile converts.²⁶ The second and third centuries will witness attempts by Jewish theologians to develop such a doctrine out of the resources of their tradition in order to minimize the Christian advantage.

The hypothesis gains further credibility when we consider the historical context in which the *Dialogue* appeared. The diversity which characterized the Judaism of the first and second centuries is reflected in varying attitudes towards the Palestinian disasters of 70 and 135. Surely there existed what seems a most natural attitude: an intransigent, isolationist hatred for Greco-Roman culture as represented by the Zealots. But there was another stance which carefully distinguished between Rome as a political power and as a culture and employed this distinction to carry on the tradition summed up in Hillel's words: "Love creatures and lead them to the law" (Pirke Aboth 1.12). Simon even affirms that, in general, the Jews of the Diaspora assigned a positive meaning to the destruction of the Temple.²⁷ Theologically, the event was regarded as the culmination of the process of the spiritualization of Judaism which had been begun by the prophets. Simon's reading of the Sibylline Oracles convinces him that, in their attacks on pagan temples, there is also present a polemic against the idolatry implicit in the cult at the Temple. Such an assessment permitted the opinion, common in the Diaspora, to emerge that individual and collective prayer was in fact a higher form of worship than that of the Temple cult. Within the *Dialogue*, we learn that this idea is quite common among the Jews with whom Justin has had to contend.²⁸

It was this attitude towards the Palestinian catastrophes that gave an impetus to Jewish evangelization efforts and thus brought Jews and Christians into competition for the same group of potential converts; for these events served to definitively strip Judaism of the nationalistic elements of its religion, thus making it more acceptable to Gentile converts. They also in fact obliterated the distinction between the Palestinian Jews who previously had been able to fulfil the whole law and the Diaspora Jews and proselytes who could not.²⁹ To the average Diaspora Jew, nationalism and isolationism made proselytization and social relations among Gentiles very difficult. In his viewpoint, isolationism was much more the cause of catastrophe than the effect.

Simon, while admitting that little evidence of Jewish propaganda exists in pagan or Jewish literature,³⁰ concludes from his study of a wide

²⁶ Parkes, *Conflict* 115-16.

²⁷ Simon, *Verus Israel* 48-59.

²⁸ *Dialogue* 117.

²⁹ Osborn, *Justin Martyr* 13.

³⁰ Simon, *Verus Israel* 324.

variety of factors that Jewish proselytization efforts were especially vital at Rome³¹ where the *Dialogue* was composed and at the time it was composed. He cites the witnesses of Juvenal (ca. 129) and Dio Cassius (ca. 229) to the growth of the Jewish population at Rome. Surely this growth was in part due to the influx of Palestinian immigrants and slaves, following the wars of 70 and 135. But proselytization must also have been responsible, else Juvenal's remarks would have made little sense then as now. In *Satire* 14, he tells of a man who, by casually observing a few Jewish practices, inadvertently influences his son, who becomes a strict and complete Jew. This must have been a fairly widespread phenomenon to provoke Juvenal's concern about the possible disappearance of Roman traditions.³² It also indicates that the war of 70 did not diminish Jewish prestige among the Romans nor retard Jewish proselytization efforts.³³ Approximately a century later, Dio Cassius remarks that Jews, men who observe their laws with zeal, are to be found everywhere, especially among the Romans.³⁴ This statement, coupled with the edicts of Hadrian and Antoninus Pius against circumcision aimed at inhibiting the growth of Judaism, points to an extensive and successful proselytization effort.³⁵

More likely than not, Jewish and Christian evangelizers would find themselves competing for the same group of potential Gentile converts.³⁶ If this was in fact the situation, the usefulness of the *Dialogue* to the Christian cause is apparent. Like Justin himself, prominent Jewish teachers and leaders visited Rome on various occasions during this period.³⁷ Surely part of their sojourn would have been spent in lending what assistance they could to the proselytization effort, and it does not seem unlikely that they would have engaged in debate with Christians before Gentile audiences.

While the *Dialogue* is showing the superiority of Christianity to Judaism, it is also formulating a response to a common pagan objection to Christianity, i.e., that it was a new, upstart sect without the roots in antiquity that would commend it to Gentiles, like the Romans, who

³¹ *Ibid.* 330.

³² Harry J. Leon, *The Jews of Ancient Rome* (Philadelphia, 1960) 252.

³³ Simon, *Verus Israel* 327.

³⁴ Text in Theodore Reinach, *Textes d'auteurs grecs et romains relatifs au judaisme* (Hildesheim, 1963) 182.

³⁵ See also Jacob S. Rainsin, *Gentile Reactions to Jewish Ideals with Special Reference to Proselytes* (New York, 1953) 292-329. This chapter gives considerable rabbinic literature concerning Jewish contacts with Romans but unfortunately does not venture opinions on the dating and historicity of these contacts.

³⁶ Parkes, *Conflict* 107-15.

³⁷ George La Piana, "Foreign Groups in Rome during the First Centuries of the Empire," *Harvard Theological Review* 20 (1927) 371.

were respectful of tradition.³⁸ Thus Justin is doing in the *Dialogue* what he had done already in the *First Apology*, addressed to Antoninus. He is exhibiting the antiquity of Christianity by appropriating for it the antiquity of Judaism, which was well known to the Romans. Consequently, the fact that all but nine chapters of the *Dialogue* are a debate over the proper interpretation of the Hebrew Bible must not lead us to jump to the conclusion that such a debate could be aimed at Jews alone.

Eusebius gives us an account of Justin's life and martyrdom and tells us that the debate with Trypho occurred in Ephesus. He knows Justin's works well enough to recommend them highly. Though he tells us that the *Dialogue* is an account of Justin's debate with Trypho, "the most prominent Jew of his day," he never suggests that the aim of the *Dialogue* is the conversion of Jews. He quotes a single passage which seems to characterize the *Dialogue* for him—a section from chapter 17 where Justin takes the Jews to task for spreading misconceptions about Christianity: "you not only failed to feel remorse for your evil deed, but you even dispatched certain picked men from Jerusalem to every land, to report the outbreak of the godless heresy of the Christians and to spread those ugly rumors against us which are repeated by those who do not know us."³⁹ It seems plausible that this early witness, Eusebius, knows the *Dialogue* and the circumstances of its composition well enough to indicate that its purpose was to refute the "ugly rumors" which were accepted and repeated by "those who do not know us."

Although Barnes disputes it,⁴⁰ there is a scholarly consensus that the *Dialogue* is a source for Tertullian's *Adversus Iudaeos*.⁴¹ The latter work is a reconstruction of a day-long dispute between a Christian (Tertullian?) and a Jewish proselyte, whom Tertullian is careful to describe as "homo ex gentibus nec de prosapia Israelitum Iudaeus" (*Adv. Jud.* 1, 2). Barnes himself concludes that the intended audience for this work was to have been not the Jewish community at Carthage but sympathetic pagans who might be confronted and confused by missionaries from both religions.⁴² It seems likely that, given Tertullian's audience, a document which had been composed earlier for a similar audience and for a similar purpose would naturally commend itself to him as a source.

No single one of these considerations from within and without the *Dialogue* is conclusive by itself and each one needs further elaboration and investigation which I hope further discussion will provoke. Taken together, however, they have a weight which cannot be easily dis-

³⁸ Parkes, *Conflict* 97–98; Simon, *Verus Israel* 103.

³⁹ Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4, 18.

⁴⁰ Barnes, *Tertullian* 106.

⁴¹ Johannes Quasten, *Patrology* 2 (Utrecht, 1953) 269.

⁴² Barnes, *Tertullian* 106.

missed, and it does seem that this hypothesis has fewer impediments to its acceptance than do other theories.

To anyone approaching Justin, Goodenough's remark is foreboding: "The piece is nearly as long as the four Gospels combined, and as a whole is so astonishingly dull that . . . it can by no means have the same attraction as the Apologies."⁴³ However, if my hypothesis is correct, then Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho* becomes an important resource for ascertaining the theological issues which came to the fore when Jews and Christians in the second century had to make their cases to a favorably disposed but neutral Gentile audience.

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⁴³ Goodenough, *Theology of Justin Martyr* 87.