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L. W. Barnard

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## CHAPTER I

LIFE, CONVERSION AND  
MARTYRDOM

## THE AGE OF THE APOLOGISTS

CHRISTIANITY was born within a Jewish cradle and it was natural that the earliest attempts at a theological formulation of its doctrines should have been expressed in Jewish terms. It was not long however before the Gospel had spread into the great cities of the Graeco-Roman world where it could not be assumed that converts to the new faith would be acquainted with the Jewish Scriptures or even with the monotheistic worship of Judaism. It is true that numbers of god-fearers, or religious inquirers, had attached themselves to the synagogues and that many of these had become attracted to Christianity through the medium of Hellenistic Judaism. Nevertheless, there was the wider pagan world—sometimes indifferent, sometimes avowedly hostile—which misrepresented Christian teaching and spread calumnies against Christians.

The earliest Christian writings outside the New Testament, known as the Apostolic Fathers,<sup>1</sup> were not concerned with this wider pagan world. Their concern was rather with the consolidation of the little Christian communities spread throughout the Graeco-Roman world. They dealt with such problems as internal schism (I Clement); pre-baptismal instruction and the ordering of Church Services (Didache); the problem of repentance (Hermas); the Unity of the Church (Ignatius); the sin of avarice (Polycarp); how the Old Testament is to be interpreted (Barnabas). These writers, for the most part conservative in outlook, were dealing with definite practical and moral problems which the Church of their day was facing. When they are judged in the light of these practical considerations, and not as speculative theologians, their achievements are impressive. However, even within the Apostolic age Christianity had come into contact with the wider Roman world, as

<sup>1</sup> The Epistle to Diognetus should not strictly be classed with the Apostolic Fathers as it is an Apology.

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represented by its Governors and pro-Consuls, and the need became apparent for an *apologia*, or defence of the faith, to that world. In one aspect Luke–Acts is an attempt to provide such an *apologia* whoever Theophilus may have been. In this connection it is an interesting fact that the first *Christian* books found on rolls, in contrast to the usual Codex form, are Luke and Acts, which may point to their having been designed for a non-Christian public.<sup>1</sup> It was, however, one thing to write a Gospel or ‘Good News’ with a non-Christian audience in mind. It was another thing to face persecution and hostile misrepresentations of the faith.

Persecution in the early Church was mainly of a sporadic, local nature—certainly no ‘general’ persecution occurred before the time of Diocletian. Nevertheless, individual Christians, in some areas, did go in fear of their lives with the hated *delator* or informer never far away. Domitian, at the end of the first century, selected his victims one by one and disposed of them with a stealth and lack of pity worthy of Stalin’s Russia. Mob violence was also always a threat whipped up, as it sometimes was, by strange distortions of Christian teaching and practice. The case of Demetrius in Acts xix shows that once the new faith opposed traditional ways and practices then trouble soon ensued. A faith which shunned popular vices and amusements provoked a hatred which took the form of blackening the character of Christians. A faith which forbade its followers to sacrifice to the State deities—and especially to the *genius* of the Emperor—could only be held, it was said, by a community of atheists capable of any crime. The Christians were therefore accused of all kinds of wickedness. Their assemblies for worship, instruction and for the celebration of the Eucharist were none other than secret gatherings for incest, child murder and cannibalism. Such calumnies no doubt came to the notice of the Roman authorities who, while not encouraging false accusations, could not totally ignore them.

The appearance of the Christian Apologists is an indication that the Church took these calumnies seriously and had decided to do something about them. Christians had to be vindicated against false accusations; the Emperor himself must hear of the

<sup>1</sup> C. H. Roberts, Sandars Lectures at Cambridge, February 1961, quoted in C. F. D. Moule, *The Birth of the New Testament* (London, 1962), p. 92.

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cruel wrongs perpetrated in his name. The Christian way of life had to be shown as the highest ideal of ethical conduct which the world had yet seen. Yet *apologia*, or the case for the defence, embraced far more than the refutation of these attacks—and that was not difficult. It was based on the magnificent defence which Socrates had made at his trial before the people of Athens in which he showed the essential rationality of his position. The Christian Apologists therefore set themselves the wider task of showing how Christianity was the embodiment of the noblest conceptions of Greek philosophy and was the truth *par excellence*. In following this path the mantle of Judaism fell upon Christianity. Josephus and Philo had already undertaken the same task in defence of Judaism—Philo, in particular, had sought to bridge the gulf between the Jewish and Hellenistic worlds. It is a fact often forgotten that following on the reconstruction of Judaism at Jamnia, when Rabbinism came to the fore, Philo's writings were in all probability not preserved by Jews<sup>1</sup> but by the Church.

In addition to the refutation of calumnies and the presentation of Christianity as a rational faith the Apologists were also concerned with the questionings of thoughtful men. The object and form of Christian Worship and the character of the Christian life were clearly the subject of much discussion in certain circles. The introduction to the Epistle to Diognetus gives an interesting insight into these questionings:

Since I perceive, most excellent Diognetus, that you are exceedingly zealous to learn the religion of the Christians and are asking very clear and careful questions concerning them, both who is the God in whom they believe, and how they worship him, so that all disregard the world and despise death, and do not reckon as gods those who are considered to be so by the Greeks, nor keep the superstition of the Jews, and what is the love which they have for one another, and why this new race or practice has come to life at this time, and not formerly; I indeed welcome this zeal in you, and I ask from God who bestows on us the power both of speaking and of hearing, that it may be granted to me so to speak that you may benefit so much as possible by your hearing, and to you so to hear that I may not be made sorry for my speech (ch. i).

<sup>1</sup> The first Jew to mention Philo by name after his time is A. de Rossi (A.D. 1573).

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The earliest Christian Apologies, those of Quadratus and Aristides, are assigned to the reign of Hadrian by Eusebius,<sup>1</sup> but it now seems more likely that the latter was in fact presented to Antoninus Pius some time before the year A.D. 147 when Marcus Aurelius became joint Emperor. The reign of Antoninus (A.D. 138–61) and that of his successor Marcus Aurelius (A.D. 161–80) covered a period of peace and prosperity in the history of the Empire—perhaps the happiest years the Empire had known.<sup>2</sup> Antoninus was a broad-minded ruler who encouraged the philosophers and literary writers of the Latin and Greek traditions who flocked to his court. His conception of Government, like that of Aurelius, was influenced by the Stoic belief in a divine Reason directing the Universe. This period was suitable for the production of Apologies. Ariston and Justin Martyr defended Christianity against Jewish attacks; Justin, followed by Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus of Antioch and Melito of Sardis, argued for the truth of the new religion as against polytheism and philosophy and demanded its recognition by the State. The Jewish Christian Hegesippus produced the first ecclesiastical chronicle while the growth of Gnosticism and Marcionism called forth defences of the traditional faith from within the Church. Unfortunately, many Christian writings, including not a few Apologies, have been lost from this period, and the literary productions which remain are but scattered fragments of what was once a large body of material.

The subject of this book, Justin Martyr, represents a pioneer type of Greek Apologist. He is concerned not only with the refutation of attacks against Christians and Jewish objections; he is also concerned to show that philosophy is truth, reason a spiritual power and Christianity the fulness of both.<sup>3</sup> Justin was not a clear thinker, if he is judged by the side of Tertullian, Origen or St Augustine. In spite of his varied contacts with leading philosophies it cannot be said that he had fully mastered

<sup>1</sup> *H.E.* iv. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Note the remarks of Gibbon, *Decline and Fall*, ch. III: 'If a man were called to fix the period in the history of the world during which the condition of the human race was most happy and prosperous, he would, without hesitation, name that which elapsed from the death of Domitian to the accession of Commodus.'

<sup>3</sup> Westcott, *Canon of the New Testament* (Cambridge and London, 1881), p.65.

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contemporary philosophy and culture. Yet his testimony to Christianity as the true philosophy is one of the most important that has come down from the second century. Justin belonged to a generation which was still in touch with those who had known Our Lord's Apostles; but these were advanced in years and everywhere in the Church new men, new thoughts were arising to do battle for the faith.<sup>1</sup>

Our knowledge of the life of Justin comes almost entirely from his own writings, for Eusebius does little more than collect these notices. He was born at Flavia Neapolis,<sup>2</sup> a city not far from the ruins of Sychem, which had been named in honour of the Emperor Vespasian. Justin was, in consequence, a Samaritan by birth although nothing in his writings suggests that he was familiar with Samaritan traditions or religion. He did not hear of Moses and the Prophets until well on in life. He classes himself with those Gentiles to whom the Gospel was opened when the main mass of the house of Jacob rejected it.<sup>3</sup> He speaks of being brought up in Gentile customs, of being uncircumcised<sup>4</sup> and of having received a Greek education.<sup>5</sup> The name of his grandfather Bacchius is Greek; of his father Priscus and of himself Latin. Little can be salvaged from these details—possibly Justin's ancestors were colonists who had settled in Flavia Neapolis soon after its establishment.

We are on no firmer ground in regard to the date of his birth. According to Epiphanius<sup>6</sup> Justin was martyred under Hadrian when only thirty years of age; but as this date for his martyrdom is almost certainly wrong we cannot place any credence on the age given. We only know that Justin taught at Rome in the reign of Antoninus Pius<sup>7</sup> and that he was martyred under Marcus Aurelius,<sup>8</sup> from which we infer that his birth occurred either late in the first century or early in the second. Justin's writings are full of vigour and do not suggest that he was of an advanced age at the time of his death. His martyrdom seems to have been the outcome of a conflict with a certain Crescens the Cynic whom Justin had convicted of ignorance. 'Crescens,'

<sup>1</sup> Carrington, *The Early Christian Church* (2 vols. Cambridge, 1957), II, 107.

<sup>2</sup> *I Apol.* i.

<sup>3</sup> *I Apol.* liii.

<sup>4</sup> *Dial.* xxix.

<sup>5</sup> *Dial.* ii.

<sup>6</sup> *Haer.* xlvi. 1.

<sup>7</sup> *Eus. H.E.* iv. 11.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* 16.

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Tatian writes, ‘who made himself a nest in Rome, while professing to despise death, proved his fear of it by scheming to bring Justin and myself to death as to an evil thing.’<sup>1</sup> Tatian does not assert that Crescens succeeded, but in Justin’s *Second Apology* we have ominous forebodings that this may happen.<sup>2</sup> Certainly the reality of his martyrdom in the cause of Christ is attested by Eusebius and also by his historic title. For an actual account of his death we are dependent on the Acts of his Martyrdom which embody the third-century tradition of the death-scene.<sup>3</sup> Justin and his companions, according to this account, are brought before Rusticus, the prefect of Rome, and are simply commanded to sacrifice to the gods—there is no mention of Crescens or of Justin’s writings. Justin, on examination, testifies to Christianity as the truth. He confesses that he has held meetings, on his second visit to Rome, in the house of one Martinus at the baths of Timotinus—although only there. After a brave refusal to sacrifice Justin and those with him are condemned to be beaten with rods and beheaded. They pass to their death praising God and confessing Christ; later faithful Christians secretly carry off their bodies in order to give them a fit burial.

Although the actual date of Justin’s birth is uncertain, as with so many other figures in early Christian history, we are on firmer ground as to the details of his later life. In the opening chapters of the *Dialogue* with Trypho he gives a graphic account of the studies through which he had passed before becoming converted to the Christian Faith. From youth Justin appears to have been of an earnest and religious type of mind intent upon finding intellectual peace and satisfaction. He reverences above all philosophers: ‘for philosophy is, in fact, the greatest possession, and most honourable before God, to whom it leads us and alone commends us; and these are truly holy men who have bestowed attention on philosophy’.<sup>4</sup> With this hope in mind he undergoes instruction from a Stoic teacher only to be disappointed in his quest. Then he tries a Peripatetic only to find him more concerned about his fee than with the know-

<sup>1</sup> *Oratio* xxxii; cf. Eus. *H.E.* iv. 16.

<sup>2</sup> *II Apol.* iii.

<sup>3</sup> A good recent translation is that of E. R. Hardy, *Faithful Witnesses* (London, 1960), pp. 65–9. For the original see *Ausgewählte Märtyrerakten* (ed. G. Krüger) (3rd ed. Tübingen, 1929).

<sup>4</sup> *Dial.* ii.

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ledge of the truth. Undaunted, Justin next goes to a celebrated Pythagorean teacher only to be told that a long course in music, astronomy and geometry is needed before the soul can attain to invisible realities. On learning of Justin's ignorance in these disciplines the teacher dismisses him somewhat contemptuously. Finally Justin, in a restless condition, spends much time with a Platonist 'who had lately settled in our city'.<sup>1</sup> The Platonic philosophy immediately impresses him: 'the perception of immaterial things quite overpowered me, and the contemplation of ideas furnished my mind with wings'.<sup>2</sup> He supposed that before long he would look upon God—the supreme goal of Plato's philosophy.

It was while a Platonist that Justin became a Christian. He meets an old man while meditating in a field who points him to the Hebrew prophets: 'certain men more ancient than all those who are esteemed philosophers, both righteous and beloved by God, who spoke by the Divine Spirit, and foretold events which would take place, and which are now taking place'.<sup>3</sup> These prophets were witnesses to the truth above all demonstration, and worthy of belief; they glorified God as Creator and Father and proclaimed his Son, the Christ. The old man concludes: 'Pray that, above all things, the gates of light may be opened to you; for these things cannot be perceived or understood by all, but only by the man to whom God and his Christ have imparted wisdom'.<sup>4</sup> The old man departs leaving a flame kindled in Justin's soul: 'a love of the prophets, and of those men who are friends of Christ, possessed me'.<sup>5</sup> Christianity was the one, sure, worthy philosophy.

This account of Justin's studies and conversion has been assailed by some scholars as an idealisation. In the opinion of E. R. Goodenough 'Justin, in the entire passage, is dramatizing the relations between Christianity and philosophy and has adopted the familiar convention of relating someone's adventures in passing from school to school, and finally in the Christian school, in order to criticize each school by the adventures related'.<sup>6</sup> Goodenough instances the parallel between this

<sup>1</sup> *Dial.* ii. Either Flavia Neapolis or Ephesus where the *Dialogue* with Trypho is located.

<sup>2</sup> *Dial.* ii.

<sup>3</sup> *Dial.* vii.

<sup>4</sup> *Dial.* vii.

<sup>5</sup> *Dial.* viii.

<sup>6</sup> *The Theology of Justin Martyr* (Jena, 1923), pp. 58–9.

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account of Justin and Lucian's *Menippus* chs. iv–vi—a contemporary piece of writing.<sup>1</sup> In this *Menippus* describes how he went through several schools of philosophy and gave them up because their mutual contradictions convinced him that none could speak with authority. This is the conventionalisation of a well-known literary form. Goodenough also suggests that the same form, borrowed from the Greeks, was used by the Tannaim to describe the three types of true proselytes to Judaism, Githro, Naaman and Rahab, who go through all the heathen cults and schools without finding peace. They ultimately find their rest and peace in the haven of the Law and the Prophets.<sup>2</sup>

It is of course true that there was a Greek literary convention which related adventures in various schools of thought in order to criticise these schools. But Justin's account of his *actual* conversion, given in great detail with many local touches, cannot be separated from the preceding account of his experiences in different philosophic schools. On Goodenough's admission 'the two narratives are one, unbroken by any transition'.<sup>3</sup> And it is precisely Justin's account of his *actual* conversion at the hands of an old man which has the ring of truth about it and gives an adequate explanation of his later work as a Christian philosopher. It is true that converts to any religion tend to paint their pre-conversion life in the darkest hues. But to admit an element of idealisation and tendentiousness is something different from saying that the *whole account* is a conventional literary form taken over and later dressed up by Justin.

A different approach to this problem is that of C. Andresen in an article<sup>4</sup> which makes a real contribution to Justin studies. Andresen seeks to show that Justin's philosophical background can best be explained and understood by reference to Middle Platonism. We shall examine his thesis in another chapter<sup>5</sup> and confine ourselves here to Andresen's view of Justin's philosophical quest before his conversion<sup>6</sup> as recorded in the second chapter of the *Dialogue* with Trypho. Andresen believes

<sup>1</sup> Goodenough is here following Helm, *Lucian und Menippus*, pp. 40 f.

<sup>2</sup> Goldfahn quoted by Goodenough, *Theology of Justin Martyr*, p. 59.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 58.

<sup>4</sup> 'Justin und der mittlere Platonismus', *Z.N.T.W.* XLIV (1952–3), 157–95.

<sup>5</sup> Chapter III. <sup>6</sup> *Z.N.T.W.* XLIV (1952–3), 160–3.



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this to be a retrospective description which causes Justin some embarrassment and bears unmistakable signs of tendentiousness (*tendenziöser*). Thus there is no mistaking the ironic undertone when Justin describes how the Peripatetic, whom he visits, demands money 'in order that our intercourse might not be unprofitable' (*Dial.* ii. 4). This allusion to material cupidity is, as we learn from Lucian and Ailius Aristides,<sup>1</sup> a favourite theme in contemporary polemics against philosophers. But it is precisely these tendentious features in Justin's description which, according to Andresen, point to Middle Platonism. For it was the Platonism of the Schools (*Schulplatonismus*), with its fundamentally religious attitude, which determined the climate of the age—not least in its opinion of other philosophical systems. So Justin can speak of the great fame enjoyed by the Platonists (*Dial.* ii. 7).

Andresen next considers Justin's statement: 'I surrendered myself to a certain Stoic; and having spent a considerable time with him, when I had not acquired any further knowledge of God (for he did not know himself, and said such instruction was unnecessary) I left him . . .' (*Dial.* ii. 3). This description of a Stoic who did not think much of religion or piety seems incredible.<sup>2</sup> Andresen believes that in this description we have the judgement of Middle Platonism for whose platonist spiritualism the Stoic monistic conception of God was intolerable.<sup>3</sup>

It is the Peripatetic whom Justin depicts in the most unfavourable light, for he doubts whether he can be considered a philosopher at all (*Dial.* ii. 3). It is well known that in some of its representatives the philosophy of Middle Platonism is acutely opposed to the Peripatetics. Aristotle is blamed because his cosmology endangered the idea of divine providence and his theory of the fifth element the immortality of the soul.<sup>4</sup> These are however fundamental dogmas of *Schulplatonismus* which regarded Aristotle and Epicurus as the representatives of 'godlessness' *par excellence*.<sup>5</sup> Andresen thinks that through considerations of this kind Justin arrived at his opinion about the Peripatetic teachers.

<sup>1</sup> Lucian, *Dial. mort.* x. 11; A. Aristides, *Or.* 45.

<sup>2</sup> G. Bardy, 'Saint Justin et la philosophie stoïcienne', *R.S.R.* XIII (1923), 493 f.

<sup>3</sup> Plutarch, *De comm. notit.* 31 f.; *De defectu* 19. 24; *De Stoic. repugn.* 31–4.

<sup>4</sup> Atticus-Eus. *Praep. Ev.* xv. 5, 6 f. <sup>5</sup> Cf. Origen, *c.Cels.* I. 21; VIII. 45.

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Justin is more favourably disposed towards his Pythagorean teacher whom he describes as very celebrated and one who thought highly about wisdom (*Dial.* ii. 4). This teacher names music, astronomy and geometry as the condition for a successful study of philosophy. The sentiments which Justin, in his survey, puts into the mouth of the Pythagorean are, according to Andresen, those of Middle Platonism. Thus Theon of Smyrna puts forward in his work, ‘That the fundamental sciences are useful for the study of Plato’, the view that Plato largely followed the Pythagoreans.<sup>1</sup> And Albinus justifies the philosophical propaedeutic of the fundamental sciences by claiming that they abstract from the world of phenomena and direct thought to the world of the intelligence.<sup>2</sup> This favourable view of Pythagoreanism among the Middle Platonists is also responsible for Justin’s statement that Plato and Pythagoras have been ‘as a wall and fortress of philosophy to us’ (*Dial.* v. 6), i.e. they gave philosophy its religious aim and direction. So the School Platonists equate the Platonist definition of *telos* as ‘likeness to God’ with the Pythagorean *telos* ‘follow God’. Justin’s favourable judgement of his Pythagorean teacher thus coincides with that of the Middle Platonists. Andresen believes that the opening conversation of the *Dialogue* with Trypho reflects *in toto* the beliefs of the Middle Platonism of the schools.

This approach is clearly based on the Form Critical method (*Formgeschichte*) which has been applied by many scholars to the study of the Gospel narratives. For Andresen Justin Martyr’s training in the Middle Platonist schools is the *sitz-im-leben* which has shaped and determined his view of other philosophical systems and teachers and affected the account of his pre-conversion studies. There is some truth in this. All of us are affected, to a greater or lesser degree, by our immediate environment. We look at the past—and this is particularly true of the religious convert—from a particular *sitz-im-leben*. But it is worth remembering that Justin was not a ‘twice born’ Christian. He experienced nothing like the dramatic conversion of a St Paul or a St Augustine. Christianity was for him the true philosophy and throughout his days he retained the impress of his passage from an imperfect to a perfect philosophy.

<sup>1</sup> Ed. Hiller, 12, 10 f.<sup>2</sup> *Didask.* vii. 161, 9 f.