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Justin Martyr and His Worlds

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Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth
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Justin, philosopher and Christian martyr, Samaritan, exegete, apologist, and witness to so many of the intellectual and cultural worlds of the later Roman Empire... (1)

These are the opening words in the introduction of *Justin Martyr and His Worlds* and it is these worlds in which Justin moved and lived that the essayists seek to examine. This volume is a collection of 14 essays from some of today's top scholars of early Christianity, names such as: Bruce Chilton, Larry Hurtado, Paul Foster, and many more.

Sara Parvis and Paul Foster edit this volume and they tell us in the introduction that "...it is in the area of Christian theology and early Christian history that [they] have focused, above all at the interface between biblical studies and patristics, with two editors being drawn from these two disciplines." (1) One is hard-pressed to find two better editors for such a task.

The 14 essays are divided into three main sections: (1) "Justin and His Text," yielding 3 essays, (2) "Justin and His Bible," yielding 5 essays, and (3) "Justin and His Tradition," yielding 6 essays. Each essay is roughly 8-15 pages with one notable exception, Oskar Skarsaune's "Justin and His Bible" coming in at a massive 24 pages! All notes were relegated to endnotes which I found odd in an academic work such as this, but in defense of this decision, I must say that it did allow the essays to flow much better than they would have had my eyes had to wander to the bottom of the page every few sentences.

Also worth noting is the beautiful 8 page spread that one finds three quarters of the way through the book with color photographs and short blurbs of things such as the first edition of "Saint Justin, Philosopher and Martyr" published by Robert Stephanus in 1551 and some wonderful icons of St. Justin that I've never seen before. This was a nice treat to discover as I flipped through the pages of this volume.

The essays vary as to whether or not they use Greek or transliterate Greek phrases and passages. For example, Bruce Chilton transliterates all Greek terms in his essay while C.E. Hill (in the very next chapter) does not — but no knowledge of Greek is necessary to work through these papers. More times than not Greek is only present to show the underlying phrase of something quoted in English.

Every essay is certainly worth reading and I'd recommend this book to any and everyone. Even if you're not particularly interested in early Church history you'll find Justin to be a most fascinating character and these essays examine him and his writings in a way that I have never seen in any volume on early Church history. There are however some essays that I enjoyed more than others (as is always the inevitably the case).

Of particular interest for me was the opening chapter by Michael Slusser entitled "Justin Scholarship: Trends and Trajectories," in which he takes an admittedly incomplete survey of where Justin scholarship has been and where he believes it is going. He begins by focusing on critical editions of Justin's writings as well as noting two trends of Justin scholarship. He says:

The first trend emphasized Justin as a philosopher, and one might call it the "Justin of the *Apologies*," even though much attention was also given at that time to the first several chapters of the *Dialogue with Trypho*. That will be followed by a second, more recent trend, in which emphasis has shifted to the *Dialogue*... (13)

In proposing his trajectories he said something that caught my attention and gave pause for thought:

If, in the period of "Justin of the *Dialogue*," attention has shifted away from Justin as primarily a philosopher, I think that it also has made it less appropriate to call him an "apologist." In fact, the whole category of "apologist" may need to be rethought. There are texts that we should no doubt continue to call "apologies," but perhaps their authors should not be designated in terms of those writings. (20)

I had always thought of Justin as an apologist, indeed, *the* apologist of the early Church era, but perhaps it is wrong to pigeonhole such a versatile man into such a one-dimensional role.

Paul Foster's contribution "The Relationship between the Writings of Justin Martyr and the So-Called *Gospel of Peter*" was also enjoyable. In this brief essay Foster begins by noting the difficulty in establishing literary dependence from one source to another. He lists three ways that a citation can be identified. Briefly summarized these are:

1. The author making the citation utilizes a direct reference to the previous author or employs some type of formula.

2. This requires an extended piece of shared text. It is debatable as to what constitutes sufficient shared text to allow such an identification. The problem is that even with large parallels it does not necessarily establish direct borrowing. There may be a common literary ancestor (he says these circumstances necessitated the Q hypothesis),
3. The third modified the second and deals with rare terminology. If two texts both use rare or unusual words then less overlapping is necessary to establish a connection. (105)

Foster notes however that:

[W]hen a later author is citing a passage from the Gospel tradition, an added layer of complexity is involved. If the material being quoted occurs in more than one of the Gospels, then it may be impossible to accurately identify the source. This is especially the case with a number of “triple tradition” passages common to the Synoptic Gospels. (105)

To my amazement there are really only two passages (*1Apol.* 35.6 // *G.Pet.* 3.6-7; *Dial.* 97 // *G.Pet.* 4.12) in Justin and the *Gospel of Peter* that would point to any literary dependence and the second is superficially similar at best. Foster interacts with Peter Pilhofer (an advocate of Justin’s dependency on *G.Pet.*) and draws from H.B. Swete in countering Pilhofer’s position. To Swete’s arguments Foster adds the option that even if there were some possible literary dependence, who’s to say that *G.Pet.* didn’t borrow from Justin.

This was a solid contribution to an altogether solid volume and one I learned from greatly.

The last essay I wish to highlight and the one that was my personal favorite is Larry Hurtado’s “‘Jesus’ as God’s Name, and Jesus as God’s Embodied Name in Justin Martyr.” In this essay Hurtado focuses mainly on Justin’s *Dialogue with Trypho* because “[r]eferences to Jesus in connection with God’s name do not feature in Justin’s Apology, likely because the category was not so useful or even meaningful to readers unappreciative of Jewish/biblical religious tradition.” (136)

The first part of the essay focuses on Justin’s typological exegesis. Hurtado quotes Justin saying, “*the name of God Himself, which, He says, was not revealed to Abraham or to Jacob, was Jesus.*” (130). Hurtado goes on to note the significance for Justin of Hoshea’s name change to Joshua/Ἰησοῦς as a fulfillment of God’s promise to send a messenger to the Israelites. Hurtado notes his thought process saying:

Justin’s exegetical logic is as follows: (1) God promised a figure who would lead Israel into Canaan and who would bear God’s name; (2) in the biblical record the figure who led Israel into Canaan is Joshua; and (3) this figure had been given this name by Moses; therefore, (4) “Joshua/Ἰησοῦς”

must be God's name, given to Hoshea to prefigure his greater namesake, Jesus. (130)

What follows are some interesting parallels that Justin draws between Joshua and Jesus such as Moses' outstretched hands in support of Joshua and Joshua's commanding of the sun to stand still, all as types to be fulfilled in Jesus. Hurtado also contends that seeing 'Jesus' as God's name was not original to Justin, making mention of early Christian gatherings in Jesus' name as well as the nomina sacra which was "*intended to be read both as the abbreviated form of the name and also by gematria as the numerical equivalent of the Hebrew word for life, chay (ח = 18).*" (131)

The next section of Hurtado's essay focuses on Justin's recognition of Jesus as God's embodied name. He takes a look at Justin's exegesis of passages from the Psalms and Isaiah which refer to God's name and God's glorious name. Justin saw two divine figures in view when reading through these passages. But again Hurtado contends that these interpretations didn't originate with Justin and he points to passages from *1 Clement* and the *Didache* in support of this. I think it is important to note Hurtado's conclusions that:

[A]ncient references to Jesus as God's name (and glory) should probably be taken as functionally equivalent to the sort of claims about Jesus' full divine status that were expressed later in what became more familiar categories in such classical statements as the Nicene Creed . . . At the same time, defining Jesus' divine status and significance with reference to God ("the Father") was intended . . . to avoid ditheism. The affirmation that Jesus shares God's glory or name was intended to express a profound unity of God and Jesus in divinity and in the devotional practice of Christians, while also clearly identifying two divine figures. (135)

Justin Martyr and His Worlds is a first rate piece of scholarship and I would highly recommend it to every student of the NT, Early Christian history, Patristics, or Christology. It is both rigorous in its academic approach and readable in its presentation. Either independently or as a whole these essays are capable of provoking thought, informing the otherwise unlearned, and compelling further study. Well done!