CHAPTER THREE

A COMPARISON OF EVANGELIUM VERITATIS WITH THE WRITINGS OF JUSTIN MARTYR IN RELATION TO THE NATURE OF TRUTH

This chapter aims to demonstrate in detail what truth means in Ev. Ver. and in the writings of Justin Martyr. To perform the task the works of the two men are compared through a series of propositions pertaining to truth, the truth concerning God and his world (propos. I), concerning Jesus Christ as the Logos of the Father (propos. II), concerning the earthly life, death, and resurrection of Christ (propos. III), concerning man and his appropriation of truth (propos. IV), and concerning the community of truth (as each writer understands it)—its origin, life, and destiny (propos. V). As a conclusion to the discussion of each proposition, a summary and a comparison of the ideas of the two writers appear.

PROPOSITION I

The writings of Justin and Ev. Ver. understand truth to be inherent in an incomprehensible God. Both view truth as cosmic in scope. They differ sharply, however, in their understanding of the manifestation of truth; in Justin's writings, truth is manifested in the realm of Divinely-ordered events; in Ev. Ver., truth is largely manifested in a metaphysical realm known as "the middle."

A. Truth is inherent in an incomprehensible God

1. According to Justin, Justin affirms that God is both the true (ἀληθινός) and the most true (ἀληθεστατος) God (I. 53:6; 6:1). This means that amid the confusion and multiplicity of human existence, the Apologist's concern, no less than that of any philosopher of his day and earlier, was with a central principle of truth. This, he found, in the transcendent God. Justin has no doubt about God's transcendence. He calls him ἄφθονος, "unutterable" (I. 9:3; 61:11; II. 10:8; 12:4; 13:4; D. 126:2; 127:2, 4). In one sense, as Goodenough observes,¹ the term denies the Stoic idea

of the immanent God; in another sense, it expresses Justin’s idea of “the immense chasm between God and humanity”. The word is common in sacred inscriptions and often is associated with the mysteries. The one occurrence of the word in the New Testament (2 Cor. 12:4) is in the neuter plural and refers to the unutterable words which Paul heard during his experience in the third heaven. Justin’s use of the word shows that man cannot know God by means of conceptual thinking. In I. 61:11, Justin’s language is especially strong. “For no one can ascribe [τι έχω] a name to the ineffable God [τό άφροτό θεό]; but if anyone should dare to say that there is [i.e. a name to him] he has raved the reckless raving.” The fact, however, does not lead Justin into agnosticism since he discovers (e.g. D. 29:3; 127:4) that the inexpressible God manifests himself in the world which he has made. The fact that Christ is named in close connection with the “inexpressible God” (Π. 13:4; D. 126:2; 127:4) points to the way out of the human dilemma. The Father is inexpressible, yet Christ is his dunameις or logos to express the one who cannot be expressed. That is, the ineffable (άφροτος) Father, the origin (άρχη) of truth, can be known through the various manifestations (δυνάμεις) of truth.

2. According to Ev. Ver. The writer of Ev. Ver. is certain that God is “the Father of truth” (Ἀνοσὴ πεταναchs), i.e. the source from whom all truth issues (16:33). The two alpha privative adjectives, πιστανάτις παπαεσσε άρας, “the Infinite, Incomprehensible One” (17:7-8, cf. 17:22-23; 18:31-32; 30:33-34) are closely parallel in thought to Justin’s term ἀφροτός. God can be confined within no limits. He surpasses all human thought. The idea is amplified in the final words of the prologue of Ev. Ver. (17:8-9), ποτε έταχθή οὐκ είμι. The verb έταχθή is qualitative in form and hence, the clause is to be rendered, “the one who remains chosen over against every thought [of men].” The incomprehensible character of God is especially lucid in 22:31-33, “Since they were unable to comprehend and know the one in whom they were.” By way of comparison we find that Irenaeus describes

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1 Ibid., p. 132.