PRELUDE:

JUSTIN’S SELF-UNDERSTANDING AS AN EXEGETE

A basic premiss for the present study is the conviction that Justin in his exegesis is handing on a received tradition. He may have modified it and added to it - but the basic groundwork of his exegesis is something he has received from his predecessors. It may be useful as a prelude to the following analyses to point out that this premiss corresponds to Justin’s understanding of himself as an exegete. Justin presents his OT exegesis as something received.1

In order to substantiate this statement, it may be useful to take a closer look at the idea of exegetical tradition in Justin. According to his own understanding, Justin is handing on the apostolic exposition of the Scriptures, and this apostolic exegesis of the OT ultimately derives from Christ’s own instruction of the apostles after his resurrection.

Before Christ’s resurrection the meaning of the OT was hidden. -For if Christ was covertly preached by the prophets as about to be liable to suffering, and afterwards to be Lord of all, yet he could not be so understood by any, until he himself persuaded the apostles that these things were plainly (!) proclaimed in the Scriptures- (Dial. 76:6). When Christ rose from the dead, he appeared to the apostles -and taught them to consult the prophecies, in which it was predicted that all these things would happen,- and the apostles -received the power which he sent them . . . . and went out into every race of men, (and) they taught these things and were known as apostles- (1. Apol. 50:12). The same idea is expressed in somewhat different terms in Dial. 53:5: -For, after he was crucified, his disciples that were with him were scattered, until he rose from the dead, and persuaded them that it was thus prophesied concerning him that he should suffer. And when they were thus persuaded they went out even into all the world and taught these things.- In the two last passages we have also the idea that the expounding of the Scriptures is an essential part of the apostolic kerygma. All later exegesis in the Church depends on this basic apostolic instruction. In 1. Apol. 49:5 Justin says about the apostolic preaching that the apostles -handed over the prophecies- to their Gentile audience: τὰς προφητείας παρέδωκαν. Because all later Christians have been taught the meaning of the Scriptures by the apostles, Justin can claim that Christians have their understanding of the OT directly from Christ. The structure of the Scriptural proof (A) corresponds to the structure (B) of what Christ said about the meaning of the Scriptures:

He revealed ... to us all that we have understood from
(A) the Scriptures by his grace, having come to know him as
First-born of God and before all created things, and son of
the patriarchs, since he became incarnate by the Virgin who was of their
race, and he endured becoming a man without form and honour,
and liable to suffering.
(B) Wherefore he said in his speeches ... that
The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the
Pharisees and Scribes, and be crucified, and rise on the third day.
(Dial. 100:2f).

In other words: When Justin expounds the OT, he does so as a pupil of
the apostles; he is carrying on the OT exegesis they learnt from Christ. I
think this throws light on a disputed term in Justin, namely -the grace to
understand-, ἡ χάρις τοῦ νοήσατο (τας γραμμάς). N.Pycke\(^2\) has tried to
understand this -connaissance de grace- as a supernatural knowledge
endowed by grace, and beyond the reach of human reason.\(^3\) He has been
sharply contradicted by R.Joly,\(^4\) who underlines the entirely rational con-
tents of this knowledge: It is capable of compelling rational proof! Accord-
ing to Joly, the grace to understand is closely related to the Scriptural
proof.\(^5\) I think this is a correct observation, and Joly is certainly right in his
basic criticism of Pycke. But then, what is -the grace to understand?- Joly
says: the typological method of interpretation. This is too vague and
general. The texts already quoted, especially Dial. 100:2, where the -grace-
is explicitly mentioned, should enable us to give a more precise answer:
The -grace to understand- simply is the apostolic proof from the Scriptures,
taught by Christ to the apostles and transmitted to all Christians. Without
this instruction the Scriptures are unintelligible -this is the valid point made
by Pycke. Justin can talk about the -grace to understand- and the apostolic
instruction in exactly the same terms: (1) Without -the grace to under-
stand- one cannot understand the Scriptures, Dial. 92:1; 119:1; (2) before Christ
revealed the meaning of the prophecies, they could not be understood,
Dial. 76:6.

This also makes clear the role of rational argument: Once the hidden
meaning of the Scriptures has been brought to light by Christ and the
apostles, it shows itself to be rational and convincing, and every denial of its
validity and cogency is due either to hatred of the truth (σκληροκαρδία,
Dial. 44: 1; 53:2; 68: 1; 95:4) or cowardice, Dial. 36:9; 44:1; 112:5. There is
thus no contradiction between the rationality of the Scriptural proof and the

\(^2\) N. Pycke, 'Connaissance rationnelle et connaissance de grace chez saint Justin', Éph. Lov. 37
Louvain/Gembloux, 1961), pp. 52-85.
\(^3\) Cf. also Aune, p. 182.-He (Justin) stands as a counterpart of the Old Testament prophet and is
able to perceive the true intent of their writings by means of charismatic illumination.- See
further idem, pp. 186f.
\(^5\) Ibid, pp. 108-111.