CHAPTER 10

Justin Martyr: “Autobiographic” Gethsemane

10.1 Old Testament as “Autobiography”

It is natural to start this part of the study with Justin Martyr.1 In his Dialogue with Trypho, written sometime between 155–67, Justin devotes much space to addressing Ps 22 as key to understanding the entire ministry of Jesus (chapters 98–107). As demonstrated by Judith M. Lieu, Justin turns the biblical metaphor-ical imagery of this psalm into descriptive narrative.2 This is highly relevant for the present study, since Justin in so doing anticipates an approach whereby the available sources on Gethsemane are multiplied through prophetic readings of the Old Testament. That means that the psalm fills in blanks in the life of Jesus and in his passion in particular. The psalm is a prophecy that finds its detailed fulfillment in the Gethsemane story. Justin reads the psalm as proso- 
oiá, as sayings uttered by Jesus himself. He speaks about himself in this psalm, a fact that naturally adds authority and significance to Justin’s additional source, which then provides “autobiographical notices” on the event. Justin argues that this psalm predicted even details to be fulfilled in the life of Jesus.

In Dial. 98 much of the psalm is cited at length, with chapter 99 introduced by Justin’s saying: “I will now show you [Trypho] that the whole Psalm referred to Christ…”3 His exegesis of the psalm proceeds from the passage of Ps 22:2

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1 A search in Édouard Massaux, The Influence of the Gospel of Saint Matthew on Christian Literature Before Saint Irenaeus (ed. Arthur J. Bellinzoni; New Gospel Studies 5/1–3; Macon, Ga.: Mercer and Peeters, 1990–93) makes evident that Gethsemane, in its Matthean fashion, does not occur often before Justin Martyr; the exception is Pol. Phil. 7:2 (Vol. 5/2 pp. 31–32) and Mart. Pol. 7:1; 8:1; 4:61 (Vol. 5/2 pp. 46–49). The passages taken from The Martyrdom of Polycarp refer mostly to the imitation of Christ idea presented in Chapter 3 of this study. Craig D. Allert, Revelation, Truth, Canon and Interpretation: Studies in Justin Martyr’s Dialogue with Trypho (Supplements to VC 64; Leiden: Brill, 2002) does not refer to Gethsemane.


(“My God, My God, why have you forsaken me”) quoted by Jesus on the cross. This verse corresponds to Jesus’ situation and turns the psalm into a narrative description throughout; it applies in detail to both the passion and the fuller life of Jesus. The overall picture is that his life and ministry according to the psalm were susceptible to suffering. In what way is Gethsemane affected by taking this “autobiographical” source into account?

### 10.2 A Story of Sufferings

By taking Psalm 22 (21) as descriptive and Jesus as speaking about himself, Justin is led to construe the whole life of Jesus, from Bethlehem to passion, as marked by suffering, enmity, and hostilities. The story of suffering started when a “roaring lion opened his mouth against me,” as the psalm has it. For Justin this refers first to Herod but eventually also to Pilate, “or it could be that by the lion that roared against Him He meant the devil himself (Dial. 103.5). This paves the way for the first temptation scene of the gospels, from which Justin turns directly to Gethsemane (Dial. 103.5–9). The devil who once deceived Adam thought he could do harm to Jesus as well. This is the larger perspective and the backdrop against which Gethsemane is seen, very much in line with Luke 4:13 and the Synoptic Gospels generally. The human enemies Jesus faces are described with metaphors from the psalm, such as calves and bulls; which represent the disguised devil. All this means that Gethsemane and passion are seen together; they are intrinsically entangled as incidents on a continuum: Gethsemane anticipates the passion, while the passion explains Gethsemane. In Dial. 99.2, the chronology of Gethsemane is set to “the day of his crucifixion” (see below). This remarkable chronology is likely due to the coherence between Gethsemane and Golgotha that Justin assumes. In fact, reading Psalm 22 (21) as prosopoïa contributed to this merging of the events; the crying prayer of Jesus and his prayer on the cross that God had abandoned him are not distinguished in the psalm. Hence, they also belong together in Jesus’ life; they embody this prophetic psalm. Justin demonstrates the intimate relationship between garden and cross in his first remark on the psalm:

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4 Mark 15:34; Matt 26:46.  
6 The way Macarius negotiated the motif of temptation in Apocriticus proves the importance of this aspect in Christian tradition; see Chapter 4.8 in the present study.  
7 Thus also Cha, “Confronting Death,” 266–67.