ANCIENT CHRISTIANITY
JUSTIN MARTYR AND HIS DEMON-RIDDEN UNIVERSE

Theodoor Korteweg

INTRODUCTION: WHO IS THE REAL JUSTIN?

In many textbooks and surveys of early-Christian literature Justin Martyr is still represented as the ‘founder of Christian humanism’ (C.J. de Vogel), a broadminded spirit who tried to establish ‘the harmony of Christianity and Greek Philosophy’ (H. Chadwick) or even ‘a marriage between two divergent religious and cultural traditions’ (Richard A. Norris, Jr.). Especially Justin’s doctrine of the ‘seminal Logos’ (λόγος σπερματικός), the Universal Reason that is sown or sows itself out into all rational creatures and in which Greek philosophers and Old Testament prophets participated on an equal footing before it was fully revealed in Christ, is often regarded as the central tenet around which most of his thought revolves. On the basis of modern investigations Stephan Heid in his recent article in the Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum qualifies this positive picture in many respects, but even he concludes finally that Justin should be given the honour of having been the first to have reflected on the ‘dialogue between Christianity and Greek philosophy’, although he adds a bit later that this did not amount in Justin’s eyes to a complete reconciliation.

In my opinion it would not be difficult on the basis of a cursory reading of Justin’s writings to paint an entirely different portrait. Not that of a Justin who was above all concerned with the reasonableness

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1 C.J. de Vogel, Wijsgerige aspecten van het vroeg-christelijk denken (Baarn: Het Wereldvenster, 1970), 22.
4 On the passive or active sense of the adjective σπερματικός see J.C.M. van Win- den, De ware wijsheid. Wegen van vroeg-christelijk denken (Baarn: Ambo, 1992), 68. The passive sense is nowadays generally rejected.
5 RAC 19, ed. Th. Klauser et al. (Stuttgart: Hiereemann, 1999), col. 842.
6 Ibidem, col. 844.