PROBLEMS CONCERNING JUSTIN MARTYR

Did Justin find a Certain Continuity between Greek Philosophy and Christian Faith?

BY

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During the last decad Justin Martyr has been the subject of a renewed discussion which, in some respects, went further or was more radical than the preceding ones. In 1966, the same year in which Henry Chadwick’s small but highly interesting volume *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition* appeared at Oxford, N. Hyldahl published quite a substantial study entitled *Philosophie und Christentum. Eine Interpretation der Einleitung zum Dialog Justins* at Copenhagen. In this handsome volume quite a revolutionary picture is given of what Justin’s attitude towards Greek philosophy might have been. Briefly summarized Hyldahl’s thesis is the following.

Justin has never been a student of any school of Greek philosophy; the story told in *Dial. 2*, of his passing through different philosophers’ schools is just a literary fiction, well-known in those days; as to Platonism, Justin never heard any courses of philosophy in some Platonist school of his surroundings, nor did he ever adhere to any such school; what he meant by “true philosophy” was Christian faith, and this he opposed to any form of Greek philosophy,—except in so far as philosophy borrowed certain things from “Moses”.

For the rest, Hyldahl does grant that Justin had a fairly good idea of what Platonism is like; he knew several passages of Plato’s works, either directly or indirectly, and interpreted the *Timaeus* in the way Albinus did, by identifying the Demiurge with the biblical God-Creator.

In granting this, the Danish author does not at all opt for C.
Andresen's view that Justin's Platonism was just the Middle Platonism "of his age" 1). He emphasizes the fact that 'Middle Platonism' is rather a diffused phenomenon, comprehending very different views 2), and thinks it a wrong approach when some modern interpreters endeavour to understand Justin from that background. One should rather start from Christianity and see that, from that spiritual background, Justin had to keep aloof from Platonism. In fact, that is what he did, so Hyldahl posits categorically, adding that the philosophy Justin criticizes mostly, is Stoicism.

In other words, Hyldahl assumes a total abyss between Greek philosophy, including Platonism, and Christianity. The gulf cannot be bridged. And this is the view he ascribes to Justin. Thus, that man would not have been the ἡχῆγος of what one might indicate by the name of Christian humanism: that whole line of cultivated Christians which from Clement of Alexandria went on to St. Augustine, men who, firmly rooted in the Jewish-Christian Revelation, handed down to them by the Church, could see at the same time that human reason by sharing more or less in the Logos, in spite of the possibility of error, in principle was able to attain to a certain degree of insight into the truth, even into metaphysical Truth; and this they recognized to have actually happened, also before the Incarnation.

Now this was exactly what Justin thought, as we can read clearly in both his Apologies, especially in I 46, 3-4, where he declares that "those who lived with the Logos were Christians, such as among the Greeks Socrates and Herakleitos and others, similar to them", and in II 10, where he says: "What we have 3) surpasses all human doctrine, because Christ who came on earth for our sake—body, Word and Soul—, is the whole of all rational truth. For whatever philosophers or lawgivers expressed and found


2) "ein höchst ungleichartiges Phänomen" (Hydahl, o.c., 288 f.).

3) Translating Justin precisely we have to render the words τα ἡμέτερα not so much by "our doctrine" (as some earlier translators did), but just by the seemingly less circumscribed formula "what we have".