

Northolt Park Baptist Church (5 November 2006)

5 Minutes on Justin Martyr

We've already looked briefly at Clement, Ignatius, and Polycarp, as just three examples of those who give us a glimpse of the church after the time of the New Testament. Here we look at another figure in the early church, called Justin Martyr, who was born about AD 100.

In Justin's day, as in our own day, there were all sorts of philosophies and religions on offer, and Justin tried most of them. But he had been touched by the courage of Christians who had been killed for their faith, and he became a Christian himself after he met an old man by the sea who showed him the Old Testament Scriptures and told him about Christ.

Justin was what we call an *apologist*. That doesn't mean that he went about saying sorry all the time! In Latin and Greek, if you gave an 'apology', it meant you were *defending* yourself against an accusation. So, an apologist was someone who tried to *defend* the Christian faith.

After he became a Christian, Justin didn't reject his learning from Greek philosophy. In fact, he wanted to show that Christianity was the only truly satisfactory teaching. So, he used philosophical ideas that were recognised in his day, and tried to show how they were related to Christian truths. He was especially interested in Jesus being described at the start of John's gospel as the *word* of God, the *logos*. Greek philosophers talked about the *logos* as the divine spark in the world, and Justin said that Jesus was the *logos* they'd been looking for! So, Justin tried to relate the Christian faith to his Greek background, and show that Christianity was the fulfilment of all the best in Greek philosophy.

Three of Justin's writings have survived...

Dialogue with Trypho

One of those works, called *Dialogue with Trypho*, is the record of a debate with a Jew. Justin argued that Christianity was the fulfilment of the hopes of the Jewish people.

First Apology

Then there is his *First Apology*. This was written to the emperor. He argues that Christianity is a moral religion, that the inner life of Christianity is in fact superior to paganism. Justin also points out that the Christian faith carries on spreading despite attempts to stop it doing so.

Second Apology

Then there is his *Second Apology*. He was angered by the execution of three Christians in Rome, and wrote to the Senate, once again defending the faith.

He was arrested, along with six others. They wouldn't offer sacrifices to other gods, and were beaten and then beheaded outside Rome. But Justin's martyrdom made his writings popular, and inspired other apologists to defend the Christian faith as he had done.

At one place in his *Second Apology*, he writes: 'I both boast and strive with all my strength to be found a Christian.' So, Justin still teaches us and inspires us today, as he did all those years ago.