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Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho* Revisited: Philosophy, Rhetoric and the Defence of the Christian Faith

Dimitrios Karadimas

Introduction

Justin wrote his *Dialogue with Trypho* (Πρὸς Τρύφωνα Ἰουδαῖον διάλογος, henceforth *Dialogue*) in the middle of the second century AD (after his *First Apology*, sometime between AD 155 and 165).¹ The *Dialogue* reports a discussion that took place probably at Ephesus between Justin and the Jew Trypho.² Some of Trypho's friends are also attending the discussion, but very rarely get actively involved in it, merely uttering a few words. It is a rather long discussion of 142 chapters.

The reader of the *Dialogue* notices, from the very first lines, that Justin adopts a Platonic medium (the dialogue form) in order to convey his message. Further along, as the reading progresses, the Platonic influence becomes clearer: the reader understands that a chance encounter has set the stage for the discussion, and that an old man, reminding us of Socrates, is engaged in a serious exchange of philosophical views in a question-and-answer manner.³ All students of the *Dialogue* agree, however, that this picture (of a work that follows the Platonic form and method in order to discuss theological subjects) vanishes after the first eight chapters, i.e. after the prologue. It seems that the first chapters (1–8) recount Justin's search and attainment of truth, while the rest (9–142) are dedicated to the explanation of the truth that Justin has found. This latter section presents the major divergence of the *Dialogue* from the true Platonic dialogues: in the latter Socrates leads his interlocutor to the truth, while Justin, in his dialogue, knows the truth and tries to explain it.⁴ In this way the *Dialogue* becomes a tool for apologetic.

The influence of Platonism on the development of Christianity is much discussed and well-documented. This situation is also true for the Platonic or Middle-Platonic influence upon Justin's conception of Christianity. The *Dialogue* is indeed a subject of modern debate as well. The enquiries raised in the course of this discussion do not question the existence of Platonic influence, but rather are concerned about its extent and the role it plays in the formation of Justin's world view, when compared to influences from the Bible.⁵ This paper does not pursue this side of the matter. Rather, it seeks to show how rhetorical elements are incorporated into the body of this work, which has got a clearly

¹ See Allert 2002, 32-34.

² The details of the discussion are most probably fictitious, but the broad outline may bear some relation to fact. Very little is known about Justin's main opponent, Trypho. From the *Dialogue*, we understand that he was a Jewish refugee who fled from Palestine to Ephesus (probably during the uprising - the war ended ca. 135 - against the Roman power). See Barnard 1964, 395-406, cf. 395-396. For the view that the *xystos* is located at Ephesus, see Eus. *HE* 4.18.6. Caesarea has also been proposed as the meeting-place in other publications. See Bagatti 1979, 319-331; Hamman 1995, 231-239.

³ See Allert 2002, 135-136.

⁴ Allert 2002, 135-136.

⁵ See e.g. Gaston 2009, 573-580; Copan and Craig 2004, 131-134. See also Osborn 1973; Nahm 1992, 129-151.

Platonic form and which exhibits characteristics of such a Platonic model. I shall maintain that the discussion after the prologue follows a thread that is illuminated by rhetorical prescriptions and especially by the *stasis* theory in rhetoric, and that Justin, most probably consciously, exploited the advantages offered by judicial rhetoric in order to construct a persuasive apology in the frame of a Platonic dialogue. Tackling this side of the matter is most necessary, since the modern reader usually wonders, together with Chadwick, whether there is any coherent thread in the *Dialogue's* arguments at all. Chadwick wrote: "As a writer he [Justin] lacks the organizing power to arrange his material with desirable clarity. Were he writing today, he would be one of those scholars who place one line of text at the head of the page and cover the rest with lumpy footnotes."⁶

We will tease out the rhetorical elements that conceal themselves under the dialogue form of the work. Of them, those linked to the *stasis* theory are probably the most important. What, then, is the *stasis* theory?⁷ The word *stasis* (plural *staseis*) literally means *standing still* or a *stopping point*. In ancient political life it also meant *faction, discord*. In rhetoric, a *stasis* is an issue that may be contested or a question that needs to be resolved before the argument can proceed. The ancient rhetorical theory of invention, whose systematic development started with Aristotle's topos-based approach in his *Rhetoric*, achieved its full-scale development in the hands of Hermogenes, the second-century AD rhetorician, in his work *On Staseis*. Aristotle had made the distinction between cases in which the question at issue was one of fact (one asks whether something had actually been done by someone) and those in which the question was one of law (one asks whether the action is legal or illegal),⁸ and he had realized the importance of defining the question at issue for the development of the trial. He did not proceed, however, to construct a theory that could cover all the various possibilities, nor did he employ the term *stasis*.⁹ The first who did so in detail was Hermagoras, in the second century BC: he discerned four types of *stasis* and laid the foundations for a more detailed discussion that resulted in Hermogenes' very systematic exposition some three centuries later.¹⁰

The *stasis* model was basically meant as a theory of argumentation for judicial oratory, but it could be (and was) useful to all kinds of oratory. The four principal *staseis*, from which secondary *staseis* result, are those of *conjecture* (στοχασμός), *definition* (ὄρος), *quality* (ποιότης) and *objection* (μετάληψις). The first, the *stasis* of conjecture, arises when the accused denies that he had committed the crime. Then, both parties have to present their case and "those presenting the better answer to the question will succeed in breaking the stasiastic impasse in their favour."¹¹ This is also true for the other *staseis*. If the accused admits the act, but he tries to redefine it, then the *stasis* of definition arises. Let us consider, for example, that someone admits that he killed the victim, but maintains that it was in self-defence. Then the act must be defined before we proceed further. If the accused accepts both the action and its definition but has recourse to various mitigating circumstances and argues that the victim deserved death or his death is beneficial for the community, and so on, then we have the *stasis* of quality. There is always, however,

⁶ Chadwick 1965, 276, 281.

⁷ For *stasis* theory, see Russell 1983, 40-73; Kennedy 1983, 73-86; Montefusco 1986; Heath 1994, 114-129.

⁸ Arist. *Rh.* 1358b.

⁹ See Kennedy 1994, 97.

¹⁰ Matthes 1958, 58-204; Nadeau 1959, 52-71.

¹¹ Nadeau 1959, 55.

the possibility that the accused will not rely on any of the preceding *staseis*. He might protest that there should be no formal action concerning this act or against him, since, for example, he has been granted immunity or he is a citizen of another city, etc. This stance represents the *stasis* of objection, a *stasis* that is brought forward on mainly legal/juristic arguments. From these principal *staseis* other secondary ones result, which, taken together, form the fourteen *staseis* in Hermogenes' system. We will encounter some of them in the following discussion and they will be explained in their proper places.

The viewpoint underpinning the analysis to follow is that Justin organized his *Dialogue with Trypho* following rhetorical strategies and, to some extent, the precepts of *stasis* theory, which was obviously familiar to him. The rhetorical theory that furnished judicial oratory with the necessary tools for creating persuasive and compelling apologies/defences could also help him defend his faith. The dialogue form was not incompatible with this plan, since for the rhetoricians at least the process of asking the right questions in the right order (always keeping an eye open for a chance of persuasion) was offered by *stasis* theory.

Employing *stasis* theory

Justin's aim was to persuade his audience (Trypho and his followers in the first place), as well as his readers. This is not just a plausible supposition, but a conclusion which emerges, as one reads the *Dialogue*. I counted more than 25 cases in which the verb *πείθειν*, 'to persuade', is used in its various forms,¹² so illustrating the ongoing effort to make Trypho change his views and adopt Justin's positions. This effort relies much on the procedure of *ἀποδεικνύειν*, a verb which is also repeatedly used. Trypho demands it as well, when he says *ἀπόδειξόν*, i.e. prove it, show it by argument.¹³

It is characteristic of the apologetic nature of the work that Justin chooses to start the discussion with (and so base it on) the accusations made against Christians. The first step is to clarify the contributing factors and pinpoint the accusation.¹⁴ Is it really an issue of fact? Are Christians generally accused of having adopted customs and a way of life that are condemned by every sensible human being? Or, as Justin expresses it in his address to Trypho, do the Jews condemn Christians only for believing in such doctrines and holding opinions which are considered false by the Jews? Is it, in other words, an issue of fact, or an issue of definition and opinion, which in this case equates with not observing a specific law? The arguments would be of a different kind in the first case. Trypho makes clear that he does not accept the accusations the multitude brings forward against the Christians (for example, that they eat human flesh, that after the feast they engage in lewd acts, etc.).¹⁵ This accordingly means that the accusations are centred upon different views held by the two parties and concern the observance of a specific law, which is in this case the law of God. Thus, Christians are accused of not observing festivals, Sabbaths and circumcision. This accusation has its wider theological implications: Christians disobey

¹² See for example 1.4, 11.1, 29.2, 32.5, 34.1, 38.1 and 44.1.

¹³ E.g. *Dial.* 36.1.

¹⁴ *Dial.* 10.1–2.

¹⁵ For the accusations against Christians see, for example, Just. *I Apol.* 26; Athenagoras *Leg. pro Christ.* 3, Tert. *Apol.* 7; Tatianus *Ad Gr.* 32–35. See also Karadimas 2003, 15–19.

God's commandments and their behaviour is very close to that of the gentiles; thus, Christians do not believe in the true God.¹⁶

Justin replies to this series of implications by affirming that they believe in the same God as the Jews, and to the basic accusation by employing a well-known judicial argument: "Now, law placed against law has abrogated that which is before it, and a covenant which comes after in like manner has put an end to the previous one."¹⁷ The argument works in judicial oratory since it has been generally agreed that a new law comes in, as an improved version, and displaces an older one. But can it be adduced as an argument in matters of religion? And to what extent is it true? Justin is conscious of the problem and proceeds to two additional points: the new law has been given by the same God who had given the old one, and after that "there shall be no law, no commandment, no precept." The well-established view that a new law abrogates the old one has a strong persuasive force and this is exploited by Justin. In this connection Justin does not fail to mention that the new law concerns all people now and not only the Jews.¹⁸ In order to establish more firmly the authority of the new law, Justin argues that the old law had already predicted the advent of the new one.¹⁹

The next step for Justin is to give a more detailed answer to the basic accusation that Christians do not observe the law.²⁰ This is much easier now, since he can exploit the method of legal interpretation, and more specifically the kind of the *legal stasis* found in Hermogenes under the name *περὶ ῥήτοῦ καὶ διανοίας*. This is an interpretation of the law based on the play between the wording of the law and the intention of the lawgiver. At the same time this stance allows Justin to make a counterattack on the Jews: you do not interpret the old law correctly, you do not understand it, and finally, you do not respect it. The argument runs as follows: the ordinances of the old law were intended to lead the Jewish people to righteousness and free their souls from wickedness, but they interpreted them in the wrong way and understood them in a *carnal sense*.²¹ Thus, their symbolic significance was lost. Consequently, the observing of fasting, circumcision, etc., does not have any meaning at all.

Though the counterattack mentioned above falls within the scope of this argument, there follows a yet harsher one on the Jews later on.²² Justin asks Trypho and his people to apologise for the crimes they have committed themselves, instead of playing the role of accusers. Their crimes are: they crucified the Saviour, they have not repented and they slander the Christians. This strategy, according to which the denial of guilt is followed by a direct attack against the accuser, is certainly an old rhetorical weapon, and seems to

¹⁶ *Dial.* 10.3–4.

¹⁷ *Dial.* 11.2. Translations from the *Dialogue* basically follow the *ANF* 1. Some modifications, however, have been introduced, when this was required for reasons of emphasis or greater clarity. In the effort of attaining greater clarity of meaning in the translation, the work by Falls (Falls and Halton 2003) was of great assistance.

¹⁸ *Dial.* 11.4.

¹⁹ *Dial.* 12.1.

²⁰ *Dial.* 12–16.

²¹ See e.g. 14.2: "For what is the use of that baptism which cleanses the flesh and body alone? Baptize the soul from wrath and from covetousness, from envy, and from hatred; and, lo! The body is pure. For this is the symbolic significance of unleavened bread, that you do not commit the old deeds of wicked leaven. But you have understood all things in a carnal sense, and you suppose it to be piety if you do such things, while your souls are filled with deceit, and, in short, with every kind of wickedness."

²² *Dial.* 17–18.

be a further development or a part of a more general eristic strategy, employed by orators and philosophers alike. I mean here the eristic strategy that seeks to turn the speaker's words back upon himself, to turn the argument of the opponent against the opponent himself, which process is described in some detail by Plutarch in his *Praecepta gerendae reipublicae* (810E–811A).²³ This part of Justin's discussion closes with a rhetorical question:

For if we patiently endure all things contrived against us by wicked men and demons, so that even amid cruelties unutterable, death and torments, we pray for mercy to those who inflict such things upon us, and do not wish to give the least retort to any of them, exactly as the new Lawgiver commanded us, then, how is it, Trypho, that we would not observe those rites which do not harm us – I speak of fleshly circumcision, and Sabbaths, and feasts?²⁴

The rhetorical question includes Justin's final answer, which is based, to employ Aristotelian terms, on the general *topos* of the greater and lesser degree. When we can successfully observe much more difficult and dangerous things, it is not a problem for us to observe your rites! Trypho, however, is not allowed to employ the same kind of argument or similar strategies against Justin. He is severely criticized when (much later in the discussion; see 64.1) he tries to do so and expresses objections to Justin's words thus:

Let Him be recognised as Lord and Christ and God, as the Scriptures declare, by you of the gentiles, who have from His name been all called Christians; but we who are servants of God that made this same Christ, do not require to confess or worship Him.²⁵

Trypho tries to make an argument based on the rhetorical *topos* of the greater and the lesser degree: if something is true for the major thing, then it is also true for the minor that is included in it. We worship the Father, this includes everything, and thus we do not need to worship the Son! Trypho endeavours to apply logical principles in a subject which does not necessarily admit it. Justin's reply makes clear that he does not regard the remark seriously. He attributes it to Trypho's quarrelsomeness and light-mindedness (Trypho is φιλέριστος καὶ κενός). He also points out that Trypho is not prepared to understand what is said and only tries to find any sort of response. This description and the use of the word φιλέριστος (= φίλερις) indicate that Justin has it in mind to reproach Trypho with following strategies of *eristic*. The purpose of the eristic argument was to win the dispute by any means. Thus, eristic can use various techniques in order to achieve its aim: to succeed in debate or to give the impression of succeeding.²⁶ In our case it is true that Trypho applies an argument that is irrelevant (if we accept that Son is God, and that there is no gradation in divinity), but Justin's first reaction also follows eristic precepts, since he replies not with a refutation of the argument, but with an equally irrelevant *argumentum ad hominem*.

²³ See also Roscam 2009, 83–85.

²⁴ *Dial.* 18.3.

²⁵ *Dial.* 64.1.

²⁶ See, for example, Pl. *Tht.* 167E, *Euthyd.* 272A–B; Arist. *Soph. el.* 165a–166a; see also Kerferd 1981, 62–63. As Kerferd points out, “Fallacies of any kind, verbal ambiguities, long and irrelevant monologues may all on occasion succeed in reducing an opponent to silence and so be appropriate tools for eristic.”

To come back to Justin's allegation that it is very easy for the Christians to observe the Jewish customs, Trypho presents a reply that in some way transfers the discussion from the sphere of law to that of facts: "It is this about which we are at a loss, and with reason, because, while you endure such things, you do not observe all the other customs which we are now discussing."²⁷ This also transfers the arguments from the *legal* to the *logical stasis* (both of them constitute sub-divisions of the general *stasis of quality* mentioned above), according to Hermogenes' system. Justin is now obliged to adapt his answer to the needs of the issue and explain why this happens. Thus, he introduces the notion of *necessity*. In Hermogenes' classification the necessary (ἀναγκαῖον) constitutes a part of the *practical* issue (πρακτική) which belongs to the logical *stasis*. Justin argues that the commandments regarding circumcision (19), fasting (20), Sabbaths (21), sacrifices and libations (22) were necessary for the Jews in order that they not forsake God and distance themselves from Him, but they are not necessary for the Christians. In order to give more authority to his arguments he employs again passages from the Old Testament and legal interpretation.

To this problem posed by Trypho there follows another answer further along: all the customs under discussion were introduced at a certain point (or points) in Jewish history for a certain reason (or reasons). There was no need of circumcision before Abraham, or of the observance of Sabbaths, of feasts and sacrifices, before Moses. This means that there is no inherent relation between these habits, on the one hand, and righteousness, on the other; they may, thus, be abolished at another point in history. This and other similar arguments give a philosophical colour to chapter 23. This special colour has also a transitional function, since it allows Justin to continue his explanations in theological terms and focus on the Scriptures again. In this way he comes back to the discussion of law. He writes, for example, about circumcision: "the blood of that circumcision is obsolete, and we trust in the blood of salvation; there is now another covenant, and another law has gone forth from Zion." For a short while this atmosphere prevails (24–26), and we find Trypho asking for a clearer explanation of some points.²⁸ When, however, Justin maintains that there is no salvation for the Jews except through Christ, Trypho bursts out and accuses him of selecting and quoting whatever he wishes from the prophetic writings: there are, for example, many passages which call the Jewish people to observe Sabbaths.²⁹ This gives the opportunity to Justin to explain that these passages (he admits their existence) do not refute what has been said: it has been explained that they existed for a certain purpose and that the lawgiver wished to achieve a certain purpose through them.³⁰ The selective presentation of evidence was a usual strategy of the accused and the accusers and Justin wants to make clear that this is not the case here.

At this point Trypho raises another objection:

that answer which pleases most—namely, that so it seemed good to Him [...] does not satisfy me. For this is ever the shift to which those, who are unable to answer the question, have their recourse.³¹

²⁷ *Dial.* 19.1.

²⁸ See *Dial.* 25.6. "What is this you say, that none of us shall inherit anything on the holy mountain of God?"

²⁹ *Dial.* 26.

³⁰ *Dial.* 27.

³¹ *Dial.* 28.

The lawgiver is God here. Trypho questions Justin's right to interpret the law by referring to the will of the lawgiver and not to the law itself, and regards such behaviour as a sign of a lack of effective arguments. Casting doubt on the opponent's legal argumentation in this way is a usual rhetorical strategy. On the other hand, the recourse to the will of a higher authority is also employed in philosophy (see e.g. Philo, *Quis rerum divinarum heres sit* 11, ἔδοξεν τῷ νομοθέτῃ διπλὴν εἶναι τὴν οὐσίαν τῆς ψυχῆς), as well as in rhetoric, when classical orators discussing matters of law refer back to Solon, the great lawgiver. Justin, however, feels that he has adequately proved his positions so far (ἀπό τε τῶν γραφῶν καὶ τῶν πραγμάτων, 'from the law and from the facts', as he says), and that he can now speak in an axiomatic way. His reply in this case starts with an appeal to the feelings of the audience, as it includes covered threats invoking fear, and concludes with the mentioning of Christ's power in the Second Coming.³² It is characteristic that in this connection he also feels the need to point out that these words of his can persuade everybody, because they are not work of art, but the words of God:

I think that while I mention this, I would persuade even those who are possessed of scanty intelligence. For these words have neither been prepared by me, nor embellished by the art of man; but David sung them, Isaiah preached them, Zechariah proclaimed them, and Moses wrote them.³³

Justin has brought the discussion, step by step, to this point on purpose, and secured for himself the right to be the mouthpiece of God. At the same time he introduces a new and important dimension, probably necessary in this situation, not only because he addresses a distrustful Jew, but also because this is a central point in the new Christian rhetoric: persuasion comes not from proofs human wisdom adduces, but from the grace of God. It is achieved through the *kerygma* that conveys the divine words. Justin follows the line of thought which was explicitly introduced by Paul, in the first and second chapters of the *First Epistle to the Corinthians*.³⁴ When, however, one encounters this polarity in a preacher's thought (human art vs. God's grace), one is entitled to ask whether this is a genuine belief or a rhetorical strategy that tries to exploit to the *maximum* the persuasive force of authority. Augustine who approached the subject theoretically in his *De doctrina Christiana* makes the question legitimate, when he recognizes that persuasion does not come only from God, but that it rather results from a combination of both knowledge and skill in speaking, on the one hand, and divine guidance, on the other.³⁵ But we will come back to this matter later.

The subject of the discussion has remained basically unchanged from the very beginning. The description of the Second Coming, however, gives rise to a controversy that also involves changing the subject. Trypho says:

These and such like Scriptures, sir, compel us to wait for Him who, as Son of man, receives from the ancient of days the everlasting kingdom. But this so-called Christ of yours was dishonourable and inglorious, so much so that the last curse contained in the law of God fell on him, for he was crucified.³⁶

³² *Dial.* 28–31.

³³ *Dial.* 29.2.

³⁴ See esp. *Dial.* 2.4–5; see also Kennedy 1983, 180–183.

³⁵ See esp. *Dial.* 4.32; see also Kennedy 1999, 177–181.

³⁶ *Dial.* 32.1.

Trypho interprets crucifixion according to the old law and implicitly blames Justin of using the method of *forcible definition* (βίαιος ὅρος), in Hermogenes' terms, since he presents an arbitrary interpretation of the law and identifies the Messiah of the Scriptures with Christ, despite the major difficulty of his crucifixion. Justin promises to bring forward other passages from the Scriptures which show that the expected Messiah is Christ and that the Jews misinterpret them. This is what he tries to do in the following chapters (32.2–34).

A concluding remark by Justin (that gentiles who came to know the God Jesus, the crucified one, do not worship idols, something that Solomon committed under a woman's influence) which bears epideictic traces of praise for Christians,³⁷ gives Trypho the opportunity to blame them: "many of those who say that they confess Jesus, and are called Christians, eat meats offered to idols."³⁸ This reproach by Trypho leads to a short digression on this subject.³⁹ In his answer Justin makes a distinction that is also employed by orators and philosophers of the period alike. Aristides, for example, makes the distinction between real, genuine orators and those who just pretend to be so, while Plutarch says the same about philosophers and here Justin about the Christians. As well as genuine Christians, there exist false ones.

The subject, however, whose discussion started in ch. 32, has not come to an end yet. Trypho repeats and slightly changes his question.⁴⁰ If we suppose that everything is as Justin says, then he has proven that Christ should suffer in his initial Coming, be glorious in the Second, judge all people, and reign in peace for ever; but he has to prove still that all that has been spoken about refers specifically to this person: Jesus. Hermogenes would say that there is a dispute here about a person, which is to be examined and become the basis for argumentation. He explains in his work that determinate proper names, such as Demosthenes or Pericles, provide the best basis for argument (as opposed to broader generalized terms, such as farmers), because they can be seen from various aspects. Demosthenes, for example, was father, orator, politician, soldier, etc.⁴¹ The *stasis* is obviously that of definition. Can it be proved that all the prescriptions of the Old Testament are implemented in this man? Unfortunately for Justin this case can only be argued on the basis of the Scriptures and the advantages Hermogenes finds with the determinate proper names practically do not exist here. If this discussion really took place, I think that this question was the most difficult Trypho asked. This becomes obvious from Justin's answer:

I shall come to these proofs which you seek in the fitting place; but now you will permit me first to recount the prophecies, which I wish to do in order to prove that Christ is called both God and Lord of hosts, and of Jacob, in parable by the Holy Spirit.

³⁷ See *Dial.* 34.8: "Nay, also, I venture to repeat what is written in the book of Kings as committed by him, how through a woman's influence he worshipped the idols of Sidon, which those of the gentiles who know God, the Maker of all things through Jesus the crucified, do not venture to do, but abide every torture and vengeance even to the extremity of death, rather than worship idols, or eat meat offered to idols."

³⁸ *Dial.* 35.1.

³⁹ *Dial.* 35.

⁴⁰ *Dial.* 36.1.

⁴¹ Hermogenes, *On Issues* 29–30.

Indeed, Justin provides such evidence, but this does not give an answer to Trypho's question.⁴² It is exactly these arguments by Justin which provoke the heated reply of Trypho:

Sir, it were good for us if we obeyed our teachers, who laid down a law that we should have no intercourse with any of you Christians, and that we should not have even any communication with you on these questions. For you utter many blasphemies, in that you seek to persuade us that this crucified man was with Moses and Aaron, and spoke to them in the pillar of the cloud; then that he became man, was crucified, and ascended up to heaven, and comes again to earth, and ought to be worshipped.⁴³

Trypho is not obviously persuaded and probably not able to bring counterarguments from the Scriptures: so he reacts in this way, abandoning the *legal stasis* and adopting the *logical* one – something he did earlier. Justin understands that the problem arises from the fact that these things sound paradoxical to the Jews, but he calls on them to believe and announces that more paradoxical words will follow. And he returns to new passages of the old law. It seems that the message Justin tries to pass on is that seemingly paradoxical things, things that transcend human logic, can express the divine truth. Trypho, however, is not persuaded and interrupts him to say: "I wish you knew that you are beside yourself saying these things."⁴⁴ Justin, on Trypho's insistence, restricts himself to the *logical stasis* and has recourse to what could be a kind of *metastasis*, transference,⁴⁵ in Hermogenean terms. The Jews, he says, do not believe because they are afraid of their archons. It is beneficial in a judicial sense not to believe.

Trypho does not try to give an answer to this remark of Justin and asks again the same question he had already posed in ch. 36 (it was actually asked first in ch. 32), pointing out that he has not yet received an answer: "Now, then, render us the proof that this man who you say was crucified and ascended into heaven is the Christ of God. For you have sufficiently proved by means of the Scriptures previously quoted by you, that it is declared in the Scriptures that Christ must suffer, and come again with glory, and receive the eternal kingdom over all the nations, every kingdom being made subject to Him: now show us that this man is He."⁴⁶ Trypho has been patient enough, but he makes clear at this point that the arguments used so far by Justin have not proved what he wants to know. In other words, the *legal stasis* (the discussion based on the Scriptures) cannot overcome its internal limitations. This question now needs arguments of a different kind to be brought to bear. Trypho seems to ask for additional evidence, probably of a logical or historical nature, which means that he tries to transfer the basis of argumentation from the pure *legal stasis* to the *logical* one as well. Justin, however, cannot offer satisfactory proofs of this kind, since much of the rest is mainly a matter of faith. This is the reason why he does not hesitate, in a very rhetorical manner, for a second time to postpone the answer for a more fitting occasion:

⁴² *Dial.* 36.2–37.

⁴³ *Dial.* 38.1.

⁴⁴ *Dial.* 39.3.

⁴⁵ Μετάσταςις, transference; the blame for some wrong is transferred to a third party (other than the defendant or the victim) that is capable of being held to account.

⁴⁶ *Dial.* 39.7.

It has been already proved, sirs, to those who have ears, even from the facts which have been conceded by you; but that you may not think me at a loss, and unable to give proof of what you ask, as I promised, I shall do so at a fitting place. At present, I resume the consideration of the subject which I was discussing.

Trypho has correctly described the situation. To a non-believer it has not been proven that anything written in the Scriptures about the Messiah pertains to Jesus Christ. Justin, however, interprets it as a lack of willingness to understand and even maintains that Trypho and his friends not only heard such arguments, but also have already accepted some of them. He agrees finally to bring forward additional arguments, but postpones it for later and he returns to the Mosaic Law to continue, as he says, the previous discussion.

He explains how some of the prescriptions of the Mosaic Law were symbols of things which pertain to Christ. He speaks, for example, of the mystery of the lamb (which God enjoined to be sacrificed at the Passover) as a type of Christ, of the offering of fine flour (a symbol for the bread of the Eucharist), of the twelve bells being attached to the robe of high priest (a symbol for the twelve apostles).⁴⁷ This part of the exploration ends as follows:

And in short, sirs, by enumerating all the other precepts of Moses I can demonstrate that they were types, and symbols, and declarations of those things which would happen to Christ, of those who were foreknown as those who would believe in Him, and of those things which would also be done by Christ Himself. But since what I have now enumerated appears to me to be sufficient, I revert again to the order of the discourse.

What does Justin actually mean? Is the evidence sufficient to prove that the predictions of the Scriptures find their fulfilment in Jesus Christ? It is true that he gave a symbolic meaning to some prescriptions of the old law, and through them he could connect the law with facts related to Jesus. This kind of argumentation is closer to what Trypho demands. But to prevent it from being contested still demands on the part of the opponent, if not an actual acceptance of the same convictions, at least much good will. Justin knows this and what he does in response is to employ a rhetorical stratagem. By postponing the direct reply to the crucial question and by piling up arguments that are only partially germane, Justin gives the impression that much yet has to be said about this subject (which is true in any case), and that the points proving the issue are or will be among others to come. In this way, however, he conceals that this is his weak point. This is a version of a well-known stratagem of the forensic rhetoric which Quintilian calls *Homerica dispositio*.⁴⁸ Its name comes from the fact that it resembles Nestor's tactics of placing the weaker warriors in the middle of the battle array, so that their weakness will not be appreciated by the enemy. In the same way Justin tries to create the impression that the evidence that connects old prophecies with Jesus is compelling gradually. His purpose behind the remark that he "revert[s] again to the order of the discourse" is not clear: it probably belongs to the same strategy – that the importance of the matter does not lie with this argumentation, but with what will follow.

⁴⁷ *Dial.* 40–42.

⁴⁸ *Quint. Inst.* V 12.14.

Immediately afterwards, Justin points out that the law has an end in Christ who was born of the Virgin and that the Jews cannot obtain salvation, despite the hopes they express among themselves.⁴⁹ Salvation can be obtained only through Christ.⁵⁰ Jews cannot be saved only because they are descendants of Abraham. They have, according to Justin, to understand things clearly and make a distinction between the real purpose of the law (its ethical end) and its ritual requirements (which are the means to the end). In this connection, the mention of understanding (ἐπίγνωσις), as well as of the notions of piety and practice of justice (θεοσέβεια καὶ δικαιοπραξία) which follow help Justin to point out that the Mosaic Law has a deeper significance that concerns everybody and not only the Jews. This could be what Justin regards as the real point of the discourse, provided that, as mentioned above, this expression is not simply a rhetorical stratagem. After that, the Jews are called to accept Christ in an authoritative tone of revelation.

A little later, Trypho interrupts Justin's speech. There follows this dialogue:

And Trypho said, 'If I seem to interrupt these matters, which you say must be investigated, yet the question which I mean to put is urgent. Suffer me first.' And I replied, 'Ask whatever you please, as it occurs to you; and I shall endeavour, after questions and answers, to resume and complete the discourse.' Then he said, 'Tell me, then, shall those who lived according to the law given by Moses, live in the same manner with Jacob, Enoch, and Noah, in the resurrection of the dead, or not?'⁵¹

The atmosphere is now relaxed. Trypho interrupts very politely to ask an *urgent* question. The reader expects him to repeat the still unanswered crucial question. Justin very promptly replies that he is ready to receive and answer any question and that there is no problem with this. The question Trypho finally poses is a surprise. At this point of the dialogue Trypho gives the impression that he has been persuaded by Justin's arguments concerning Jesus Christ's relation to the Scriptures. The yet unanswered question seems not to be a problem now. Moreover, Trypho's new question gives rise to a discussion of a different kind. It is as if Trypho has come close to accepting Justin's theological convictions and he wishes to know whether people who observed the Mosaic Law in the past or follow it now will be saved. There follows a discussion on this subject in the next three chapters (45–47). I think that this digression is not a chance one and serves Justin's plan to delay yet further the answer to the basic question.

At the same time, the distinction made earlier is fully exploited now and it is clearly stated that those who observed the Mosaic Law before Christ would be saved because they did what is good, pious and just (καλά, εὐσεβῆ καὶ δίκαια), i.e. because they did what is universally, naturally and eternally good, pleasing to God and just. The importance of Justin's distinction between the ritual and the ethical requirements of the Mosaic Law has already been stressed.⁵² I will only add here that this division is practically the one

⁴⁹ *Dial.* 43.

⁵⁰ *Dial.* 44.

⁵¹ *Dial.* 45.

⁵² See Wendel 2011, 141. She writes that in this way Justin "deploys Greek concepts and terminology to depict the fidelity of Christ-believers to the Mosaic code as an exemplary embodiment of Greek Ideals." See also Wendel 2011 n. 22 on Justin frequently using such terms to appeal to Graeco-Roman sensibilities. If this is true, it is a clear indication that Justin did not intend to persuade Jews only through the *Dialogue*.

distinguishing between the word of the law and the intent of the lawgiver. The intent of the lawgiver is to guide people to what is universally just and pious, and this is done through certain prescriptions addressed specifically to Jews. In this way a qualitative differentiation is pointed out between the piety of Christian believers and that of Jews.

Later, however, Trypho brings back the question about Jesus, but changed in some respects:

And Trypho said, 'We have heard what you think of these matters. Resume the discourse where you left off, and bring it to an end. For some of it appears to me to be paradoxical, and wholly incapable of proof. For when you say that this Christ existed as God before the ages, then that He submitted to be born and become man, yet that He is not man of man, this appears to me to be not merely paradoxical, but also foolish.' [...] [To this Justin replies as follows:] 'Now assuredly, Trypho, the proof that this man is the Christ of God does not fail, if I will be unable to prove that He existed formerly as Son of the Maker of all things, being God, and was born a man by the Virgin. But since I have certainly proved that this man is the Christ of God, whoever He be, even if I do not prove that He pre-existed, and submitted to be born a man of like passions with us, having a body, according to the Father's will; in this last matter alone is it just to say that I have erred, and not to deny that He is the Christ, though it should appear that He was born man of men, and it is proved that He has become Christ by election'.⁵³

Stressing the paradoxical side of Justin's convictions, Trypho seems to imply that he accepts *only* for the sake of the discussion that this Jesus is the Christ of God. Justin, on the other side, seizes the opportunity and points out that this has already been proved and is not affected by the answer that will be given to the present question. But both of them know that this has not been proved, and this becomes clear further along. The question gives rise to the discussion of whether Jesus Christ is son of man or son of God.⁵⁴ There, Trypho does not fail to notice that the Jews expect Christ to be a man who, when he comes, will be anointed by Elijah. This did not happen with Jesus, so this man is not the Christ. This is a characteristic point which shows that Justin (the writer, not the person of the dialogue) did not want to leave this question unanswered, and that he tried in every possible way to do so, although the nature of the problem did not allow him to be fully successful. What he does here is to depict Trypho, whose questions earlier tried to take away the discussion from the Scriptures, as bringing it back to them. Trypho questions that Jesus is Christ on the basis of the Scriptures. This moves again the discussion onto what we have called *legal stasis*, and now the question can more easily be argued for and answered. Elijah will come, as it is written, but before the Second Coming. Moreover, the spirit of God that was in Elijah was also in John, the precursor of God.⁵⁵

Now Trypho admits that Justin is an able debater, ready to answer any question addressed to him.⁵⁶ It is implied that the question that kept coming again and again to the fore has been answered. The new version of his question, which follows immediately, is a genuinely theological one and keeps the discussion in the field of the Scriptures:

⁵³ *Dial.* 48–49.

⁵⁴ *Dial.* 48–49.

⁵⁵ *Dial.* 49–51.

⁵⁶ *Dial.* 50.

Answer me then, first, how you can show that there is another God besides the Maker of all things; and then you will show further that He submitted to be born of the Virgin.

These two questions will mainly occupy the discussion in the following chapters until chapter 86. The former extends from 51 to 62, and the latter from 63 to 86. The discussion is now based on the Scriptures and their interpretation. Trypho's remarks and questions are devised now by Justin, the writer, to bring forward those possible objections or reservations of an opponent who does not reject out-of-hand what he thinks is not proven, but he rather wants to have clear and well-documented evidence for the subject in question.

Some critical remarks and theoretical points

Very early Trypho protests: "All the words of the prophecy you repeat, sir, are ambiguous, and have no force in proving what you wish to prove."⁵⁷ The ambiguity of a word or phrase was exploited by speakers in various ways from very ancient times. The oracle at Delphi is a well-known example. As a device it is not exclusively linked to rhetoric, but it is included in the lists of rhetoricians as ἀμφιβολία, and it is also found in Hermogenes under this name as a *stasis*. It is certain that in the period under discussion the students encountered ἀμφιβολία, in their rhetorical studies, as a rhetorical device. It usually appears when both sides appeal to the content of the same law, but each of them reads this content in a different way in order to support its own case. In our situation, Trypho confines himself to pointing out the ambiguity, and he does not try to exploit it in favour of his own convictions. Justin's reply treats two points (prophecies which pertain clearly to Jesus and came true, as well as the absence of any new prophet after Christ) as facts, and tries to overcome the difficulty in this way.⁵⁸ In this case, he means, there is no ambiguity allowing of different interpretations. They are clear facts. Later, Trypho makes a similar remark again.⁵⁹ He asks Justin to be careful, in continuing his discussion of the Scriptures, not to use a metaphorical language that impedes clear understanding. This use of language, for example, allows the reputed gods of nations, who are only idols of demons, to be mentioned as gods! Justin is conscious of the problems metaphorical language can create in such discussions and he promises to bring forward Scriptural quotations which have a clear meaning and need no explanation, but only a hearing (i.e. there is no room for ambiguity and misunderstanding). Justin is obviously conscious that a problem of ambiguity appears not only when each party interprets a passage in its own way on purpose, but also when a certain phrase or expression is inherently ambiguous.

Another point worth noting is to be found in the second of the two parts mentioned above (namely, 64–86). Trypho expresses the view that, according to the Scriptures (a passage from Isaiah), God does not lend His glory to another (and by this he is pointing at Jesus). Justin makes a heated rejoinder in 65.2:

⁵⁷ *Dial.* 51.

⁵⁸ The last prophet, according to Rabbinic tradition, was Malachi (fifth century BC). Justin does not take him into consideration.

⁵⁹ *Dial.* 55.

If you spoke these words, Trypho, and then kept silence in simplicity and with no ill intent, neither repeating what goes before nor adding what comes after, you must be forgiven; but if you have done so, because you imagined that you could throw doubt on the passage, in order that I might say the Scriptures contradicted each other, you have erred. But I shall not venture to suppose or to say such a thing; and if a Scripture which appears to be of such a kind be brought forward, and if there be a pretext for saying that it is contrary to some other, since I am entirely convinced that no Scripture contradicts another, I shall admit rather that I do not understand what is recorded, and shall strive to persuade those who imagine that the Scriptures are contradictory, to be rather of the same opinion as myself. With what intent, then, you have brought forward the difficulty, God knows.

Justin says that such arguments that rest on the fragmentary presentation of relevant information are results either of simplicity or of ill intent, and he seems to believe that the latter is true of Trypho. Trypho is implicitly accused of having concealed parts of the passage and changed its meaning, so that he may mislead Justin. But this exchange gives also Justin the opportunity to declare that he is absolutely persuaded that there are no contradictions in the passage, and that if something seems to be so, then the problem is that the reader cannot fully and correctly understand it. He tries to prove, then, that this specific passage of Isaiah has a quite different meaning from that brought forward by Trypho.

Justin's discussion with Trypho necessarily focuses on the Mosaic Law and its interpretation. It is the law of God, but still it has to be explained, interpreted and understood. When things are differently understood and different interpretations are adopted, then the one party has to persuade the other and win it over. Among the methods employed by rhetoric in discussions of this kind were the three we met above: word of law vs. intention of the lawgiver, fragmentary or selective quotations and the exploitation of an existing ambiguity or the creating of one. It is Sextus Empiricus' work *Against the Rhetors* (early third century AD) which makes it clear that these three methods were the most usual and important ones. He maintains that rhetoric is harmful to the laws of the cities and his characteristic examples of harmful rhetorical practices are those under discussion.⁶⁰ The fact that we encounter them, or discussions about them, in the *Dialogue* is a clear proof of Justin's awareness of the existence, function and efficiency of those rhetorical practices.

As the discussion proceeds and Justin tries to prove, based on the Scriptures, that the son of God existed from the very ancient of times, and explains that he had already appeared to Abraham or to Moses, the following dialogue takes place:

Then I continued, 'I propose to quote to you Scriptures, *not that I am anxious to make merely an artful display of words; for I possess no such faculty, but God's grace alone has been granted to me*

⁶⁰ Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Rhetors* 34–38; see, for example, 36 and 38: "And that rhetoric is against the laws is already plain from the statements they make in their mal-artful arts. For at one time they advise us to attend to the ordinance and words of the lawgiver as being clear and needing no explanation, at another time they turn round and advise us to follow neither the ordinance nor the words but the intention; [...] And sometimes they bid us cut out bits as we read the laws, and construct a different sense from what remains. Often, too, they make distinctions in ambiguous phrases and support the signification which suits themselves; and they do thousands of other things which tend to the upsetting of laws." For a detailed discussion, see Karadimas 1996, 75–85.

to the understanding of His Scriptures, of which grace I exhort all to become partakers freely and bounteously, in order that they may not, through want of it, incur condemnation in the judgment which God the Maker of all things shall hold through my Lord Jesus Christ.' And Trypho said, 'What you do is worthy of the worship of God; *but you appear to me to feign ignorance when you say that you do not possess a store of artful words.*' I again replied, '*Be it so, since you think so; yet I am persuaded that I speak the truth.* But give me your attention, that I may now rather adduce the remaining proofs.'⁶¹

In my opinion, Justin admits here that he possesses the art of making a good display with words, the art of rhetoric in effect, (notice how he agrees with Trypho's remark; ἐπεὶ σοὶ δοκεῖ τὰυτὰ οὕτως ἔχειν, ἐχέτω, as if he says: what you see cannot but be true), but that its power is as nothing compared to the grace of God. It is the latter which gives him the power to speak and explain the Scriptures. Justin also points out that the important thing is to speak the truth, and in this case being persuaded of the truth and having the ability to present it comes from God. This is important for both the participants in the dialogue-based discussion and any future readers. It is implied that the traditional rhetorical art is not enough anymore to convey the message of God and persuade by its own means. The transmission of the new divine message has the need of divine interference, of the grace granted by God himself. Thus, Justin paves the way for the new Christian rhetoric not only in practice, but also in theory with these implications.

Towards the end of this part Trypho again accuses Justin of contriving interpretations of the Scriptures which are even blasphemous (79.1):

On this, Trypho, who was somewhat angry, but respected the Scriptures, as was manifest from his countenance, said to me, 'The utterances of God are holy, but your expositions are mere contrivances, as is plain from what has been explained by you; nay, even blasphemies, for you assert that angels sinned and revolted from God.' And I, wishing to get him to listen to me, answered in milder tones, thus: 'I admire, sir, this piety of yours [...].'⁶²

Justin admits the limits of his method of persuasion. What is the word of God for someone may be a blasphemous one for another. In such cases the speaker has to be patient and understanding, while the traditional rhetorical practice of flattering the audience can play a mitigating role. The last case in which Trypho raises objections against Justin's words is in the next chapter (80.1), when he questions his sincerity and honesty.⁶³ Justin's reply is again a moderate one, delivered in low tones.

A turning point in the *Dialogue* is in chapter 87. Trypho declares at this point that he asks now questions because he wishes to learn more and does not want to create problems to Justin's exposition:

⁶¹ *Dial.* 58.1. Italics added.

⁶² *Dial.* 79.1.

⁶³ "And Trypho to this replied, 'I remarked to you sir, that you are very anxious to be safe in all respects, since you cling to the Scriptures. But tell me, do you really admit that this place, Jerusalem, shall be rebuilt; and do you expect your people to be gathered together, and made joyful with Christ and the patriarchs, and the prophets, both the men of our nation, and other proselytes who joined them before your Christ came? or have you given way, and admitted this in order to have the appearance of worsting us in the controversies?' Then I answered, 'I am not so miserable a fellow, Trypho, as to say one thing and think another. I admitted to you formerly, that I and many others are of this opinion, and [believe] that such events will take place, as you assuredly are aware [...].'"

Do not now suppose that I am endeavouring, by asking what I do ask, to overturn the statements you have made; but I wish to receive information respecting those very points about which I now inquire.

This admittance does not mean that Trypho has been persuaded. There are points he cannot understand, such as, for example, that about the shameful crucifixion of Christ, given that the law says that whoever is crucified is accursed. But now he is ready to listen to Justin's exposition with a good will. When Trypho later asks a question that has already been answered, Justin mentions three possible reasons for this behaviour (ignorance, a desire to quarrel and request for repetition of the argument), but prefers to assume the last one (i.e. that Trypho tries by his question to urge Justin to exhibit the same proofs for the sake of the audience).⁶⁴ Trypho also agrees with this explanation. In this way Trypho appears to be practically Justin's collaborator in the effort to convey his message efficiently and persuasively.

Various subjects are discussed in the rest of the dialogue (the question just mentioned about crucifixion, that Christ took upon himself the curse for our sake, the resurrection that was also foretold, the offerings of the bread and the cup, and other subjects already expanded in the previous chapters), but it is now obvious that Trypho does not raise objections anymore and, as the dialogue proceeds, the already long answers by Justin become real monologues; Trypho is almost pushed into the background.

Conclusions

The previous exposition has sought to introduce new perspectives on the *Dialogue*, looking at it from a rhetorical point of view. The fact that Justin tries to defend aspects of the Christian faith and persuade Trypho and his friends of its truth makes this a legitimate approach. When the discussion closes, however, Trypho and his companions do not seem to have been persuaded and, certainly, they do not seem ready to accept Christianity.⁶⁵ Despite that, all of them confess that they have derived great pleasure from this long discussion, that they have heard more than they expected, and that this was a study of the Scriptures profitable to them. On the other hand, when Justin asks them to hearken to the word of Christ and not to their teachers, he does not receive any negative responses: he closes the *Dialogue* by wishing them to be of the same opinion as he is himself and accept that Jesus is the Christ of God. Although the reader does not encounter any conversion to Christianity at the end, the closing chapter of the *Dialogue* engenders a very positive atmosphere, which seems to imply that Trypho's negative view of Christianity did not remain intact, and that Justin managed to lead him and his friends into a better understanding of the Christian faith and its relation to the Mosaic Law. This is only the first step in the long course towards conversion. In other words, persuasion managed to cover only a part of the long distance Justin wished to cover.

⁶⁴ *Dial.* 123.7–8.

⁶⁵ *Dial.* 142.

Some conclusions to be drawn from the previous discussion are:

1. Justin uses the form of a Platonic dialogue, but behind this, the way the discussion is conducted follows more the conventions of a rhetorical (and to some extent, of a judicial) investigation than of a philosophical one.

2. The arrangement of the material conforms more to rhetorical precepts of how to adduce persuasion and less on precepts of an arrangement by subject. Thus, we can discern four major parts, after the prologue. (a) 9–31. The main subject is the accusations of Jews against Christianity and the discussion is conducted basically according to the principles of *stasis* theory. (b) 32–49. Justin tries to prove that what is written in the Scripture refers specifically to Jesus. The version of the *Homerica dispositio* employed here is worth noting (delaying the answer and placing it in the midst of other arguments). (c) 50–86. The main subject here is Justin's effort to prove that there is another God besides the Maker of all things, and that he submitted to be born of the Virgin. Trypho's objections are basically methodological in this part and concern various strategies of misleading the opponent (ambiguity, metaphorical language, piecemeal information, etc.). (d) The last part is also the longest (87–142). Justin has so far managed to persuade Trypho and his friends at least to listen carefully and be interested in a deeper understanding of the new law of Christianity. He can now explain some other points to his audience, adduce some additional evidence from the Scriptures and present the word of God in the form of the new divinely-inspired rhetoric.

3. From the point of view of the 'degree' of the persuasion adduced, we can discern three major components, which correspond to three different grades of persuasion. There is a progress from an inferior degree of persuasion to a higher one. As was already implied above (see under 2), this first section comprises the chapters 9–50. Trypho has a certain view about the Christians and their faith, he is not open to Justin's arguments, tries to bring forward counterarguments and asks crucial questions which pose some difficulties to Justin. In the second part (51–86) Trypho is no longer as aggressive and hard-nosed as before: he seems to have accepted that the discussion will be continued on the basis of the Scriptures, and his reservations mainly concern the way Justin quotes or interprets them. He is rather motivated by his respect of Scripture than by his original negative view of Christianity. In the third part (87–141), Justin seems to have ascended to a higher point of persuasion, step by step. Trypho is depicted as almost having had all his reservations overcome. He is now ready to listen and understand, and submits his questions for that purpose. Justin has achieved a degree of persuasion, the highest possible in the circumstances, which allows him to make an exposition and present his interpretations to open ears.

4. As to the question whether the *Dialogue* was intended for the Jews only or for Jews and gentiles alike: here, I am afraid, we are none the wiser. The Jews or the gentiles who read the *Dialogue* are supposed to have received a Greek *paideia*, so the dialogue form as well as the rhetorical conventions and strategies used would be familiar to both sets of people. The fact that the greater part of the discussion is based on the Scriptures points to the Jews, but the approach could probably work even with the gentiles. It is worth noting that much of Justin's effort is to show that Old and New Law constitute one

body, and not only is there no special place for the Jews, according to the new Law, but they even have placed themselves outside the Old one by constantly misinterpreting it.

To discuss works like this one from a purely rhetorical point of view means that, by definition, one does not consider the philosophical or theological aspects of these works, which are – absolutely and definitely – the more essential ones. I think, however, that especially in a period of transition as this period of the second century AD was, the conflict of ideas and convictions and their mutual influence are better illuminated if we try to read these works under the light of the wider cultural environment in which they were written.

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