

THE LOGOS THEOLOGY OF ST JUSTIN MARTYR¹

by

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ST JUSTIN MARTYR, the early Christian Apologist, who taught in Rome in the reign of Antoninus Pius and was martyred for his faith in the reign of Marcus Aurelius somewhere between A.D. 162 and 167, made a distinctive contribution to the intellectual tradition of Christian thought. I propose in this paper to discuss briefly the background of the logos in Graeco-Roman thought and in Judaism; then to give some account of St Justin's teaching concerning the logos, particularly seeking for the source of his ideas; and finally to consider his use of the term *logos spermatikos* in the light of recent scholarship.

I

The doctrine of the divine logos played an important part in the thought of the second-century Apologists. Its use enabled them to claim as 'Christian' anything that was good or noble in pagan philosophy and literature. Yet the logos was also a theological necessity which enabled them to solve the cosmological problem and to show that Christianity itself was as old as the creation.² Finally it provided a basis for their rather intellectual view of salvation, viz. that Christ as the logos was a teacher whose words brought salvation to men.

The doctrine of the logos, in various forms, was widely known in the Graeco-Roman world. The word itself has many meanings

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² Athenagoras, *Legatio* 4; Theophilus, *ad Autolyicum* 1.

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most of which are subsumed under the two heads of inward thought and the outward expression of thought in speech. In any form of theism logos could easily be used to account for a divine revelation, God's Word being communicated by his speech. But in Stoicism logos had lent itself to pantheistic use and was equated with the rational principle in accordance with which the universe existed, i.e. with God. In the fusion of Stoicism and Platonism found among the Middle Platonists the rational principle of the Stoic universe was the logos of God. In the Septuagint, however, logos was used of the Word of God in creation and of the message of the prophets by means of which God communicated his will to his people. The meaning is not abstract, but spoken, active communication. But in later Judaism the doctrine of the logos took on a new emphasis. In the Targums of the Old Testament the Aramaic word *memra* is frequently used. This appears to be a way of speaking about God without using his name and thus avoids the anthropomorphisms of the Old Testament. Philo, on the other hand, introduced the Stoic-Platonic logos of Middle Platonism into Judaism, although without consistency. Through the use of allegorical interpretation the logos is identified by Philo with certain Old Testament *personalia*, such as the High Priest. He also refers to the ideal world, of which the present world is a copy, as *the logos of God*. The logos is also the ideal, primal Man, the image of God from whom spring and decline all mortal men.

This widespread background lies behind the use of the term, logos by the early Church. Professor C. K. Barrett has well said: 'Again it would be wrong to suggest that John accomplished his task by making a neat amalgam of Hellenistic and Jewish speculation on the subject of mediation and applying it to Christ.'³ Rather, early Christian theologians begin with Jesus Christ as the fulfilment of God's purposes, the logos which God has spoken and who lived a historical life on earth. This was the line which divided Christian speculation from that of Hellenistic and Rabbinic Judaism and of Philo. But in using the logos idea, there is no doubt that early Christian writers were appealing obliquely to the contemporary world so that both Jewish and Greek readers would understand their meaning.

³ *The Gospel according to St John* (London, 1955), p. 129.

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II

St Justin Martyr, as a pioneer Apologist, takes over and develops the earlier Christian use of the *logos*. He introduces the term as a familiar one to both Christian and non-Christian. It has been held that he admitted a large element of philosophical speculation into his idea of the *logos*. E. R. Goodenough argued that St Justin was wholly dependent on Philo in this connection;⁴ other scholars have pointed to Stoicism as the *fons et origo* of his doctrine while, more recently, C. Andresen in Germany has pointed to Middle Platonism as a decisive influence.⁵ Before considering these views it is necessary to give an account of St Justin's teaching on the *logos*.

He uses the term in the two *Apologies* to explain the divine nature of Jesus Christ — why he is called Son of God and worshipped by Christians — as well as to explain the relation of Christianity to other truth. In the *Dialogue with Trypho*, which in its present form dates from c. A.D. 160, St Justin uses it to show that Christ was the God who appeared to the Jewish patriarchs in the theophanies recorded in the Old Testament. St Justin's starting point is that the *logos* is the personal Reason of God in which all men partake: 'For not only among the Greeks did *logos* prevail to condemn these things through Socrates, but also among the barbarians were they condemned by the *logos* himself, who took form, and became man, and was called Jesus Christ' (1 *Apol.* 5). Hence there were Christians before Christ — men who possessed seeds of the *logos* and so arrived at facets of the truth: 'We have declared above that he (i.e. Christ) is the *logos* of whom every race of men were partakers; and that those who lived with the *logos* are Christians though they have been thought atheists; as, among the Greeks, Socrates and Heraclitus and men like them; and among the barbarians, Abraham, Ananias, Azarias, Misael and Elias and many others whose nations and names we now decline to recount, because we know it would be tedious' (1 *Apol.* 46). St Justin however emphasises that the whole *logos* only resided in Jesus Christ and accordingly those who possessed a seed of the *logos* often contradicted themselves (2 *Apol.* 10).

⁴ *The Theology of Justin Martyr* (Jena, 1923), pp. 139-75.

⁵ *Z.N.T.W.* 44 (1952-53), pp. 157-95.

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In developing the biblical teaching of the Incarnation of the logos in Christ, St Justin conceived of him as the Father's intelligence or rational thought. Yet he realised that such a belief did not do justice to the fundamental Christian idea of Jesus as a separate being. So St Justin argued that the logos was not only in name distinct from the Father, as the light is from the sun, but was also numerically distinct, which for St Justin meant 'different in person'. The sharp personality ascribed to the logos distinguishes St Justin's use from that of the prologue to St John's Gospel and from that of Philo. It was, however, in conflict with Jewish monotheism that St Justin particularly developed his view of the duality in the heart of the Godhead. The 'otherness' of the logos was evident, he held, from the divine theophanies recorded in the Old Testament (*Dial.* 56-60); by the Old Testament passages which represent God as conversing to another who is a rational being like himself (Gen. i, 26, cf. *Dial.* 62); and by the texts found in the Jewish Wisdom literature which imply either a poetic or a real personification of Wisdom (Prov. viii, 22, cf. *Dial.* 129). St Justin realised that his biblical proofs for the numerical distinction of the logos from God could easily be turned against him and land him in ditheism.⁶ So he emphasises the unity of the Father and the logos anterior to the creation. The logos was begotten by the will and power of God as a preparatory step before the creation of the universe. As the incarnate logos marked the beginning of the Christian race, so the logos had marked the beginning of created things (*Dial.* 62). The logos was not, however, a creature, in the later Arian sense, nor an emanation from God like the rays from the sun. He was begotten by the Father's will from the Father himself. St Justin illustrates this by the analogy of the kindling of fire by fire which does not diminish the original fire. So the logos was in essence a unity with the Father, although distinct in personality. Yet he is subordinate to the Father in regard to creation and revelation for he is the medium between the transcendent God and the finite universe. St Justin says that he is worshipped in the second place after God the Father of all (1 *Apol.* 6, 13, 61).

Where did St Justin obtain his idea of the logos? What influences determined and shaped his attempt to explain the relationship

⁶ This was the criticism which the Monarchian movement was to make in the early third century.

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between Christ and the Father and between Christianity and other knowledge? There is a wide divergence of opinion among scholars on this question due to the fact that St Justin is, in general, more influenced by prevailing philosophical speculation than, e.g. St John — and it is precisely this philosophical element which is difficult to assess accurately. It is clear that St Justin was acquainted with the earlier Christian use of the *logos* and it must be emphasised that he is primarily a Churchman and biblical thinker. For St Justin the *logos* was first and foremost Jesus Christ who was 'the whole Word' (2 *Apol.* 8, 10). Creation proceeded through him. Redemption flowed from his incarnation, death and resurrection. He is the power of the ineffable Father, and not the mere instrument of human reason (2 *Apol.* 10). This equation of the *logos* with Jesus Christ at once differentiates St Justin from Stoicism and Philo for whom history in the last resort had no meaning.

Whether St Justin took over the idea of the *logos* direct from St John's Gospel or from the tradition of the Church cannot be answered with certainty. We know that the *logos* doctrine was known in different centres in the second century such as Rome, Ephesus, Antioch and Alexandria. The fact that St Justin attempted to explain this belief philosophically testifies to the previous existence in the Church of a non-philosophical belief. The *logos* in St John's Gospel is, I believe, ultimately non-philosophical for it is based on the Old Testament Word of the Lord active in creation and revelation.

It is, however, in St Justin's philosophical development of the *logos* that scholars have detected a larger element of non-biblical interpretation. Since the seminal work of Goodenough (op. cit., pp. 139-75) it has often been assumed that Philo's doctrine of the *logos* and the divine powers is the key which will unlock the secrets of St Justin's thought. Goodenough believes that the *titles* which St Justin applies to the *logos* conclusively prove this dependence. So St Justin states four times that the name of the *logos* is *dayspring* or *east*, with reference to Zach. vi, 12 (*Dial.* 100, 106, 121, 126). These references occur amidst other titles based directly on Old Testament passages such as Num. xxiv, 17, and Ps. lxxii, 17. Philo, on the other hand, says that *dayspring* in Zach. vi, 12, could not refer to a man of body and soul but only to that incorporeal one who differs in no respect from the divine image of God (*De Conf. Ling.* 62). It is

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difficult to trace any direct dependence here, for Philo is using his customary allegory while St Justin is using familiar Messianic interpretation of the Old Testament.⁷ Goodenough's other examples fare no better. The title *Stone* or *Rock*, used by St Justin, appear to depend on earlier Christian exegesis rather than on Philo. This title was one of the primary *testimonia* in use in the early Church. Similarly the title *the beginning*, which St Justin uses of the logos, is based directly, as is Philo's use, on Prov. viii, 22. The title *Day* (*Dial.* 100) appears to derive from Ps. cxviii, 24, rather than from Philo (*De Opif. Mundi* 35) where *Light* is used of the logos rather than *Day*. St Justin calls the logos-Christ *Israel* and *Jacob* (*Dial.* 123, 126). Philo, on the other hand, uses *Israel* (although not *Jacob*) as a title for the logos but explains it to mean 'him who sees God'. St Justin and Philo are moving in different worlds of thought. The former gives a typically Christian explanation of the Old Testament while Philo allegorises biblical texts along psychological lines. The similarity between the two thinkers is due to their both using the Old Testament. Philo is an eclectic thinker who uses material inherited from his predecessors and Greek teachers. But he also has antecedents in non-philosophical Judaism, as is shown by his comparison of the High Priest to the divine logos and his reference to the Old Testament as the priestly logos. Philo is here using logos not in the Stoic sense of the immanent, universal Reason but as the logos or speech of God. Philo's logos is ultimately Stoicism or Middle Platonism blended with the Old Testament 'Word of God'. St Justin's logos is Jesus Christ understood in the light of the same Old Testament 'Word of God' and the Christian tradition. At the most Philo was a peripheral influence on St Justin, and it may well be the case that Philo's influence on early Christian thought has been exaggerated and was confined, at the most, to Christian literature emanating from Alexandria such as the *Epistle of Barnabas* and the writings of Clement of Alexandria.

⁷ I have criticized Goodenough's views in detail in my book *Justin Martyr: His Life and Thought* (Cambridge, 1967) pp. 92-96.

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III

If earlier philosophical influence on St Justin's conception of the *logos* was minimal, what of his use of the term *logos spermatikos* for the universal activity of the *logos*? St Justin held that each thinker, in as much as he conformed to the truth and spoke well, possessed a seed of the *logos* which in its entirety was Jesus Christ. The seeds of truth sown in the hearts of men were the formative principle of right knowledge and right living (1 *Apol.* 44). So there were Christians before Christ (1 *Apol.* 46) and Christianity was brought into relationship with wider truth. For commentators the main difficulty has been that St Justin calls the *logos spermatikos* divine (2 *Apol.* 13), yet also describes the 'seed' of the *logos* as something human and distinct from the divine *logos*. Since he identifies the *logos* with Christ, the question is how he conceived the relationship between the *logos*-Christ and the seed of the *logos*. M. Pohlenz, in his important work *Die Stoa I* (Göttingen, 1948), pp. 88, 199, 412, held that, when St Justin was preparing his *Second Apology* as a 'new edition' of the *First Apology*, he developed his earlier statements about Socrates (1 *Apol.* 5, 46) into a closely defined theory taking ideas from the Stoic teaching of the *logoi spermatikoi*, a material conception. St Justin, however, did not conceive of these as germinative forces in the physical sense but transferred them to the ethical field, identifying them with the Stoic *semina virtutum*, the moral dispositions already implanted in the soul. This made possible natural knowledge which in men such as Socrates was so far developed that they could, at least in part, know the *logos*-Christ. Pohlenz holds that in the process the Stoic idea of organic development was lost and the Christian picture of the seed, which God sows in the heart, came into existence such that a substantial presence of the divine *logos* existed in man.

Following Pohlenz, Carl Andresen subjected the *logos spermatikos* theory to a renewed examination.⁸ His starting-point is that St Justin understood it not in the cosmological-pantheistic sense of the Stoa but as a spiritual-ethical principle. He traces the antecedents of the idea to Antiochus of Askalon⁹ who influenced Cicero and

⁸ Z.N.T.W., op. cit.

⁹ Born, c. 130-120 B.C. Head of the Academy at Athens, c. 79 B.C.

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who speaks of the *semina justitiae* as having been present since the earliest ages of man. It was these which made possible the love of knowledge in the mind of man and an honourable and proper community life. Cicero, Andresen holds, linked the seed-forces of the Stoa with the seeds of justice, so giving them an ethical, rather than a metaphysical, interpretation. The same development is found in Arius Didymus, in his exposition of the Peripatetic ethics, in which he attempts to bring together the Academy, the Stoa and the Peripatos by adopting a certain indifference to metaphysics. In Andresen's view, Arius Didymus¹⁰ is the link between the philosophy of Antiochus of Askalon, Cicero and Middle Platonism in which the idea of 'seed forces' is connected with that of 'general ideas'.

This theory has been vigorously criticized by the Norwegian scholar, R. Holte, in a long essay in the Scandinavian periodical *Studia Theologica* (Vol. 12, 1958, pp. 109-68) and by J. H. Waszink in a weighty contribution to the *Theodor Klauser Festschrift* (Münster, 1964, pp. 380-90). Holte and Waszink point out that the *semina virtutum* mentioned by Cicero are not to be designated out of hand as a platonising reinterpretation of the Stoic *logoi spermatikoi* since they are imagined as produced by them. It is not the case that the process of spiritualisation had been started by Antiochus of Askalon. In fact, no unambiguous evidence for the idea of the *logos spermatikos* or the *logoi spermatikoi* exists in second-century Middle Platonism either in an ethical or in a cosmological role, and St Justin could not have received the impulse for such a theory from that quarter.

Faced with this impasse, Holte, like Goodenough before him, fell back on Philo, for whom the term *logos* had displaced mind as an appellation of the divine intellect and who designated ideas as *logoi*. Holte also held that by 'seed of the *logos*' St Justin did not mean a germinative force but a static factor incapable of further development. St Justin did not assume in man any immediate knowledge of the *logos* but an analogous knowledge gained through things reflecting and resembling *logos* (the Platonic conception of *methexis* and *suggenes*). Holte's examination of the texts is valuable and his conclusion that the epithet *spermatikos* does not mean 'disseminated' but refers to the *logos* in a special activity, i.e. sowing his seed in religious and moral illumination, may be accepted.

¹⁰ An Alexandrian teacher of the first century B.C.

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However, Holte's denial of any immediate knowledge of the *logos* in man would appear to be more doubtful. A close comparison of three passages in 2 *Apol.* 8, 10 and 13 shows that St Justin assumed the presence in every man, before the coming of Christ, of part of the 'sowing *logos*' which is identical with Christ. While it is true that St Justin never refers (in the usual English translation) to men's 'share of the spermatik word' or 'share of the word disseminated among men', the *logos* is for him an active and divine potential, the sowing *logos* who sows in men, even before the coming of Christ in the flesh, a part of himself.

What was the source of St Justin's idea of the *logos spermatikos*? Holte's view that he took it from Philo would seem unlikely in view of the infrequency of the term in Philo's works (only in *Leg. All.* 3, 150; *Quis Rer. Div. Heres.* 119; *Quaest. in Exod.* 2, 68) where the term is used in connection with the propagation of species in animals and plants. For Philo, moreover, it is not the *logos* who is regarded as the highest cause of the origin and maintenance of species, but God. J. H. Waszink, in the study cited, postulates a three-fold source for the use by St Justin: it was a well-known Stoic term; the influence of the Gospel parable of the Sower (St Matt. xiii, 3 ff); and the frequency of the idea of 'sowing' and 'planting' in the works of Philo. This last theory falls far short of proof. It is significant that St Justin never quotes directly the parable of the Sower, although he quotes many other New Testament passages in detail. And in any case *logia* concerning the 'Sower' circulated in the early Church independently of the Gospels, as is shown by 1 *Clem.* 24, 4-5, and *Gospel of Thomas* logion 8, which reinterpret the parable in a Jewish-Christian direction. Furthermore, as Philo's influence on St Justin cannot be demonstrated in other matters, it may be that the most obvious solution is the correct one, viz. that in working out the *logos spermatikos* idea St Justin took over the well-known Stoic term without taking over the Stoic connotation. Having adopted the term as most suitable for his purpose, St Justin then developed the Sower idea boldly in his own way. St Justin's originality should not be underestimated. The idea of the *logos* sowing seeds in men and in pre-Christian humanity was in essence his own.

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IV

When we study objectively and dispassionately the first two centuries of our era we cannot but be struck by the way in which the Church spread throughout the Graeco-Roman world and laid hold of the Greek tradition moulding it to her purpose. In this process, which was an inevitable part of her mission, St Justin was a pioneer. He made an outstanding contribution to the intellectual tradition of Christian thought through his interpretation of the logos — although it is also true that he bequeathed some thorny problems with which later theologians had to grapple. In many ways later Fathers, consciously or unconsciously, were his debtors. St Justin was, moreover, the first thinker after St Paul to grasp the universalistic element in Christianity and to sum up, in one bold stroke, the whole history of civilisation as finding its consummation in Christ. The Church today is in process of rediscovering St Justin's insights in the contemporary encounter with non-Christian faiths and cultures.