CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE AS APOLOGETIC: 
THE CASE OF JUSTIN MARTYR SEEN IN 
HISTORICAL CONTEXT

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Introduction

“What art is there, what method or practice, which will take us up there where we must go? ... What sort of person should the man be who is to be led on this upward path?”

“Surely one who has seen all or, as Plato says, ‘who has seen most things, and in the first birth enters into a human child who is going to be a philosopher, a musician or a lover.’ The philosopher goes the upward way by nature, the musician and the lover must be led by it.”

“What then is the method of guidance? Is it one and the same for all these, or is there a different one for each?”

“There are two stages of the journey for all, one when they are going up and one when they have arrived above.”

These words, written by Plotinus in the third century, introduce his treatise On Dialectic. Plotinus did not consciously compose a dialogue here; as we know from Porphyry, his method of writing was far different. Though the above lines were written continuously, with no breaks, I have set them into the form of a dialogue to illustrate how Plotinus thought. “His lectures were like conversations,” reports Porphyry. Indeed, “dialectic” itself means “conversational method.” When Plotinus discussed philosophical truths, he turned to the art of conversation. Dialogue guided a person to truth, to union with the One.

Since Plato’s time, dialogue has been used in divers ways for the purpose of arriving at eternal truths. In fact, however, Plato did not invent the form of the dialogue. Ancient Near Eastern

2 “He worked out his train of thought from beginning to end in his own mind, and then, when he wrote it down, since he had set it all in order in his mind, he wrote continuously as if he were copying from a book” (Porphyry, Life of Plotinus, 8, in Plotinus, vol. I).
3 Life of Plotinus, 18.
literature, composed hundreds of years before Plato, attests to a rich variety of dialogues. What Plato contributed was a clearly defined discipline of dialectic and his influence in this area stretched deep into the Middle Ages.

Why does man seem instinctively to turn to a conversational method when examining matters of utmost importance? And how does he use this method for the particular purpose he has in mind? When I began research on this essay, I was intrigued by the second century A.D. writer Justin Martyr and his composition *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*. Since Justin himself professed a deep interest in various Greek schools of thought before his conversion to Christianity, I was interested in studying how his Dialogue would compare to a Platonic dialogue. But I soon discovered that Justin's work, rather than being an isolated text, is an early manifestation of a phenomenon, which, like Plato's influence, extended well into the medieval period. Justin's early adherence to Platonic doctrine did not prevent him from fitting a Platonic literary form to specifically Christian purposes: to defend the faith and, in so doing, refute the claims of Judaism.

In this essay, I shall take a bird's eye view of this dialogic phenomenon. Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho* will remain the centre of this study, not only as an illustration of early Christian methods to defend Christianity but also as an important continuation of a path that stretches deep into man's history for millennia.

**Dialogues Before Plato**

Among man's oldest literary creations in Mesopotamia and Egypt are a number of purely dialogic texts. In Egypt there dates from the Middle Kingdom (specifically the Twelfth Dynasty) "The Dispute Between a Man and His ba" (often rendered "soul" by modern translators). One of the few pure dialogues in Egyptian literature, this text records a discussion between a man who wants to commit suicide and his soul (ba) who threatens to abandon him. Most dialogue texts in Egypt centre around narratives, such as the "Eloquent Peasant" or sets of instructions handed down from father to son. Mesopotamia also knew of the

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5 Ibid., i. 169-82.
6 Ibid., i. 58-80, 134-92.
tradition of wise instructions and counsels but developed the genre of "disputations" or "contest literature" as well. In this genre, two parties (two animals, two implements, two seasons of the year) engage in a dialogic contest to prove the superiority of one over the other. A deity, normally the sun god who is the god of just decisions and righteousness, pronounces a judgment as to the winner. In addition, we have two literary masterpieces composed as dialogues, the "Babylonian Theodicy" and the "Dialogue of Pessimism." The latter takes place between a servant and his master; so far from being a pessimistic text, the dialogue employs a high level of satire and serious humour to indicate how all choices in life are double-edged. The wise man is he who observes all the possibilities and accordingly makes his choices, fully aware that a sense of profound humour is necessary to make the proper choices.

The "Babylonian Theodicy," a sophisticated acrostic composition, is a lengthy discussion between a righteous sufferer and a friend. The friend echoes the traditional religious values of his time and encourages the sufferer to recognize his guilt and make atonement. The sufferer protests that, on the contrary, he has done no wrong but has loved God and man and performed his religious and social obligations with great joy. The text ends on an uneasy but harmonious note: the sufferer asserts that one must trust in God's love and justice and the friend appears to agree with him.8

This Akkadian composition invites comparison with the later book of Job in the biblical tradition. Job differs externally in the number of participants; there are four "friends" while in the "Theodicy" there is one. It is evident, however, that all four friends do not substantially differ in their views; basically, their one traditional view, like the friend in the "Theodicy," is opposed to the radical ideas of Job. Both Job and our Akkadian text concern themselves with "theodicy"; neither Job nor the

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7 These are the modern titles given to these two works. The ancients referred to literary texts by the first line which was their "title". Translations of both texts and of the Akkadian contest literature may be found in W.G. Lambert, Babylonian Wisdom Literature (Oxford, 1960).

8 I should add that my opinion in this interpretation is not shared by all Assyriologists, many of whom view the outcome of the dialogue in rather dismal terms.
Akkadian sufferer seek so much to condemn God's actions in creation as to come to some sort of understanding for the apparent contradictions which have affected both of them so acutely. And, like the "Theodicy," Job arrives at a "solution" that leaves the modern reader a little uneasy. The author of Job finds his solution in a natural revelation of God's glory which eradicates Job's presumption: "Indeed, I spoke without understanding of things beyond me, which I did not know ... I had heard You with my ears, but now I see You with my eyes" (42: 3, 5, Jewish Publication Society). It is interesting that the theme of man's difficulty in understanding is expressed in the Babylonian "Theodicy," not by the recalcitrant sufferer, but by the friend: "The divine mind, like the centre of the heavens, is remote; knowledge of it is difficult; people at large do not know it" (256-257).

In the ancient Near East we find clear evidence of dialogues used for the purpose of arriving at certain truths. The modern reader often finds himself at a loss when reading these pre-Platonic dialogues: many times the "logic" escapes him or he is ill at ease with the concreteness of ancient Near Eastern illustrations. The ancient Mesopotamian, Egyptian or Hebrew had little practical appreciation for the pure abstractions that we often hide behind, fancying ourselves somehow more "real" or sophisticated. The ancient Near Eastern scribe provided concrete examples, drawn from daily experiences, to illustrate the deepest philosophical and religious insights. We shall find that Plato also used metaphors and similes continuously to drive home his ideas. In the ancient Near East, man wrote dialogues to probe the gravest matters he encountered and it was through the dialogue form that he discovered solutions he could live with.

Platonic Dialogues

As W. K. C. Guthrie has pointed out, the verbal debate in Greece grew out of a literary tradition where the works of Homer, the lyric poets, the historians, the playwrights and the orators were primarily oral in nature. Their written form was intended to...
facilitate their memorization or their being sung.\textsuperscript{10} Already by Plato's day, a rift had arisen between those who wrote things down and those who championed the spoken word. For Plato himself, the dialogue form presented the best means in which to enframe the lively exchange of Socrates. The written form of the dialogue was meant to aid the memory, reminding the wise man of what he knows already.\textsuperscript{11}

The essence of the Platonic dialogue is definition. Once you have answered the question "what is x?" claims Socrates, then you will know the nature of x. He chides Meno for the latter's insistent enquiry into whether or not virtue can be taught.\textsuperscript{12} How can we decide that, Socrates retorts, when we haven't even asked ourselves "What is virtue?" and, so are not yet sure what the essence of virtue is. Hence, many (though by no means all) Platonic dialogues consist of a lengthy question-and-answer format to draw out the truth of the matter (the definition of the topic under discussion). "I have this in common with the midwives," explains Socrates. "I am sterile in point of wisdom, and the reproach which has often been brought against me, that I question others but make no reply myself about anything, because I have no wisdom in me, is a true reproach; and the reason of it is this: the god compels me to act as a midwife, but has never allowed me to bring forth."\textsuperscript{13} Socrates envisions himself as a midwife of words. By continual interrogation of a person he brings to the light two things: first, a necessary recognition by the other that he does not know what he thought he did (admitting his ignorance); and second, arriving at the essence of something by a careful definition. Indeed, some dialogues never get beyond the first stage (e.g. Meno), but one cannot proceed to definition unless one sheds the garment of presumption.

I have said earlier that "dialectic" literally means the "conversational method." Several points need to be made here. For one thing, the notion of a conversation implies a certain informality,
people simply conversing with one another. In many Platonic dialogues, the conversation arises out of seemingly ordinary circumstances: afterdinner relaxation and entertainment (Symposi- sium); a chance encounter outside the courthouse (Euthyphro); Socrates meeting a friend and accompanying him on a stroll (Phaedrus). From the chance meeting an ordinary conversation arises from which the dialogue proceeds to a specific issue. Philosophy here is not concealed in special terminology or a particular jargon, to which only a few individuals are privy. The serious discussion centring on eternal verities is open to any individual willing to exercise his reason and join in the search. And we should note how it is the servant in the Mesopotamian “Dialogue of Pessimism” and the peasant in the Egyptian “Eloquent Peasant” who play the most important rôles in their respective dialogues. The supposedly uncultured and unlettered of society are here a significant part of grave discussions.14

A second point to be made with regard to “dialectic” as “conversational method” is that a great many illustrations are used. People do not normally engage in abstractions in their conversations. When an idea is to be explained, analogies, metaphors, and similes are used. Observations are drawn from the experiences of normal day-to-day encounters. We find this in all ancient Near Eastern and Greek dialogues. In Mesopotamia, for instance, a sage will give advice about speaking truth at all times but this is never given in isolation. He will perhaps quote a proverb that brings the “abstraction” to life by relating it to what his listener experiences everyday. Many times an “abstract” idea is presented side by side with some subject of pure practicality whether or not the two are specifically related. The modern reader may feel rather puzzled to read

Requite with kindness your evildoer.
Maintain justice to your enemy.
Smile on your adversary.

in the same text as

Do not marry a prostitute, whose husbands are legion ...
A courtesan whose favours are many.15

14 Of course, there is also an element of the trickster figure here; it is part of the very real humour present in both texts.

15 Counsels of Wisdom, II.42-44, 72, 74 (Lambert, Babylonian Wisdom Literature, 101, 103).
The abstract is not separated from the concrete. Instruction is not carried on in a vacuum but is infused with life only when adapted to the experiences of the listener.

Plato, too, used many examples to illustrate his ideas. One of his central themes, the vision of the intelligible world by one who has completed the journey, is explained by the analogy of coming out of a cave to the overpowering light of the sun. But although he uses metaphors and images for the purpose of instruction, he insists that such images only be used to illustrate. An image belongs to an inferior grade of reality (Republic, 595-602), he says; it is never meant to be taken for essence itself. The abstract and the concrete must serve each other.

We see, then, that man has discovered a valuable helpmate in the dialogue. Through dialogue, one arrives at the truth; through conversation, carefully structured, one finds solutions. The ways cultures have used the vehicle of dialogue are, most assuredly, not identical. In the ancient Near East one rarely finds more than two participants in a dialogue, or more than two points of view contrasted. There is not readily to be found a round-table discussion. Even Plato does not always engage in a full-fledged, many-voiced debate, although he certainly comes closer to it in such dialogues as the Symposium. What becomes of the dialogue when we turn to the early Christian writers? How do these writers use the dialogue form and to what purposes is the form fitted?

Justin Martyr

In his First Apology, Justin identifies himself as "son of Priscus and grandson of Bacchius, of Flavia Neapolis in Syria.

16 For the cave metaphor see Republic, 532a-e; see also the important line metaphor, Republic, 510-511e. Sight is very commonly used by mystics for the beatific vision. Plotinus, in one of the few references to his personal experiences of the matter, exclaims in On Beauty: "Anyone who has seen it knows what I mean when I say that it is beautiful" (I.6.7). Note also the famous image of the icon used by Nicolas of Cusa with his stress on the eyes in De visione dei. It is interesting that, while Plato uses the exit from the Cave as the metaphor for the vision, Cusanus uses the image of a wall that must be scaled before attaining the vision.

17 I have pointed out earlier that in spite of multiple participants in Job's discussion, there are still only two distinct points of view presented.

18 Some dialogues give evidence of the practice of interested people coming together to hear an informal debate such as in Protagoras.
Palestina.” As E. R. Goodenough points out, these indicate that his forefathers were Greek or Roman colonists in Samaria; and that from the 28th chapter of the Dialogue, is the information that Justin was uncircumcised, and hence, he was no Jew.20

The first chapter in Justin’s Dialogue21 introduces us to Trypho and provides the setting for the discussion, while chapters 2 to 8 describe Justin’s early philosophical endeavours and his conversion to Christianity. Let us look for a moment at how he sets up his dialogue.

In good Platonic fashion, Justin is out walking one morning and, by chance, runs into a group of men. He is addressed by one member of the group, “Hail, 0 philosopher!” because he is wearing the philosopher’s cloak. The man tells Justin how he has been instructed by “Corinthus the Socratic” to take advantage of encounters with people who wear the philosopher’s dress and learn something from them. He identifies himself as Trypho, a “Hebrew of the circumcision” who has recently fled from the Bar-Cochba war and is living mainly in Corinth. He and Justin engage in a discussion. Trypho asks if it is not true that philosophers “turn every discourse on God? and do not questions continually arise to them about His unity and providence? Is not this truly the duty of philosophy, to investigate the Deity?” Further on, he asks Justin what ideas he has about God and what his philosophy is.

Thus, the scene and tone are set. First, Justin describes his efforts at discovering the true philosophy: he engaged the services of a Stoic (who had no knowledge of God), a Peripatetic (who appeared more concerned about his fees), a Pythagorean (who insisted Justin could not get anywhere unless he was first acquainted with music, astronomy, and geometry), and finally a Platonist who excited him greatly:

And the perception of immaterial things quite overwhelmed me, and the contemplation of ideas furnished my mind with wings, so that in a little while I supposed I had become wise; and such was my stupidity, I expected forthwith to look upon God, for this is the end of Plato’s philosophy. (2)

Justin goes on to describe his conversion. Continuing in the Platonic vein, he meets by chance an old man while he is searching for a spot in which to meditate. The two strike up a conversation and it quickly turns to serious matters. The old man assumes a Socratic-like stance, asking questions that demand definition, e.g., “What, then, is philosophy?” “But what do you call God?” “Is not knowledge a term common to different matters?” (3rd chapter). This discussion continues through chapter 7, in which the two discuss the soul and its inability to see God, the soul and the problem of immortality, and the truth of the prophets. Carefully using Socratic question-and-answer and the Socratic stress on definition, the old man demonstrates to Justin the inadequacy of the philosophers’ insights and the real philosophy of Christianity. Justin is overwhelmed. The old man disappears as mysteriously as he had first made his presence known. And Justin experiences conversion:

But straightaway a flame was kindled in my soul; and a love of the prophets, and of those men who are friends of Christ, possessed me; and whilst revolving his words in my mind, I found this philosophy alone to be safe and profitable. Thus, and for this reason I am a philosopher. (8)

Several points may be made so far. We get the impression that Justin’s eagerness for the true philosophy is a little superficial, from his treatment of the Pythagorean. Expressed frankly, the philosophical rigour required by the Pythagorean was too much for Justin: he was not prepared to study the prerequisites in his search. He wanted truth now, or, if it would take some time, by the shortest route possible. One wonders how it is that Platonic philosophy, on which he finally alighted, would offer this less strenuous route. At least, that is how Justin perceived it. One of the criticisms levelled at early Christianity was that it was a religion that attracted the less learned of society. This, of course, was a strong point as well as a weak one. Still, Justin might rightly be accused of not wanting to follow the most stringent of intellectual paths. Curiously enough, Eusebius describes Justin as “truly the most philosophical of men” (History of the Church, IV, 16, 2).

We also see most clearly in these first chapters, the influence of Plato: the chance encounter setting the stage for the dialogue; an old man à la Socrates, engaging in serious discussion; the question-and-answer format; the realization on the part of Justin
that he did not really know all that he thought he did. Hence, Justin uses a Platonic form and Platonic methods to discredit, eventually, Platonic truths. And he caps off this introductory section by describing his conversion to Christianity with reference to the same image of a flame used by Plato to describe a sort of philosophical conversion experience:

For it [the subject about which Plato is in earnest] does not at all admit of verbal expression like other studies, but, as a result of continued application to the subject itself and communion therewith, it is brought to birth in the soul on a sudden, as light that is kindled by a leaping spark, and thereafter it nourishes itself.  

The dialogue now returns to Trypho and his friends and seems to have taken two days. There are 142 chapters in the dialogue and almost all of the chapters from 8 on form lengthy monologues by Justin. Due to the great length of the dialogue, I will simply bring out some major areas of interest to us.

The Influences on Justin

Since Justin claims he made the rounds of the philosophical schools, it is natural to enquire into the influences exerted on him. L. W. Barnard has pointed out that the Platonism of Justin's day was not the pure Platonism of its founder but that of Middle Platonism, exemplified by the second century A.D. contemporary of Justin, Albinus. One of the most significant features of this Middle Platonism, according to Barnard, was its eclecticism. Elements of Platonic thought were combined with Aristotelian ideas, resulting in such things as accepting the Aristotelian notion of God. Albinus also took some Stoic thoughts and fused them with certain Platonic features. He is described as being more mystical than Plato but not attaining Plotinus' mysticism. "His philosophical theology represents a transition stage between Platonism proper and the Neoplatonism of Plotinus ..." It is this eclectic form of Platonism which exerted such influence on Justin. This eclecticism, continues Barnard, explains Justin's

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22 Letter VII, 341d.
23 Justin Martyr: His Life and Thought (Cambridge, 1967), Chapter III. See also R. E. Witt, Albinus and the History of Middle Platonism (Amsterdam, 1971), and Robert M. Berchman, From Philo to Origen. Middle Platonism in Transition. Brown Judaic Studies 69 (Chico, Scholars Pess, 1984).
24 Barnard, Justin Martyr, p. 31.
initial search for the true philosophy and his travelling from one school to another: Justin was “typical of the eclectic spirit of the age.”

But what about the Judaism of Justin’s day? From the remarks of Trypho in the Dialogue and Justin’s own exclamations, what do we find out about second century Judaism? And who is the figure of Trypho?

“One of the most eminent Hebrews of the day,” says Eusebius of Trypho (Eusebius 18). He was a “Hellenistic Jewish layman who combined the culture and enquiring spirit of the hellenistic world with a knowledge of traditional Jewish exegesis and haggadah… Trypho represents a mediating Judaism.” His Judaism is neither that of Philo of Alexandria nor that of Rabbinic Judaism found in Palestine. And it is not the Hebrew bible to which both Justin and Trypho turn. Neither of them knew Hebrew. But both were quite familiar with the Septuagint. According to Barnard, Justin’s knowledge of Judaism derived from certain post-biblical Jewish practices (e.g., the cursing of Christians in the synagogues); some post-biblical Jewish notions found among the Rabbis (e.g., that Christ was a magician and deceiver); Jewish post-biblical exegesis (e.g., Justin uses scriptural passages in order of importance to Jews, viz., Hagiographa, Prophets, and, most important, Law); a number of Jewish heretical sects.

Lastly, we may note that Justin has no “New Testament” with which to work; along with the Septuagint, he uses “memoirs” of the apostles, which was a sort of synopsis of the first three gospels, John not yet having been added.

Justin’s Arguments and the Role of Trypho

Given the influences of an eclectic Middle Platonism and Justin’s acquaintance with the Septuagint and post-biblical practices and ideas, how does Justin proceed in his dialogue with Trypho? What is he trying to prove?

25 Ibid., p. 32.
Trypho’s original query, we may recall, concerned Justin’s idea of God and his philosophy. This is the starting point in the discussion and Justin engages, not so much in a flexible dialogue but rather in a vigourous apologetic of Christianity. His main argument for the truth of Christianity lies with prophecy, an argument used to a great extent in chapters 30 to 53 of his First Apology. He discerns the coming of Christ prophesied virtually everywhere in the Old Testament. He quotes lengthy passages continuously to Trypho. Justin’s main idea is that the Old Testament paves the way for the new Law, inaugurated by Christ. Not only have the Jews been blind but they have even falsified the Scriptures (72). Furthermore, the Law was initially given to the Jews in order to set them apart because of their wicked ways:

Therefore to you alone this circumcision was necessary, in order that the people may be no people, and the nation no nation. (9)

But you were never shown to be possessed of friendship or love either towards God, or towards the prophets, or towards yourselves, but, as is evident, you are ever found to be idolaters and murderers of righteous men so that you laid hands even on Christ Himself; and to this very day you abide in your wickedness, execrating those who prove that this man who was crucified by you is the Christ. (94)

The New Law is now in effect:

For the law promulgated on Horeb is now old, and belongs to yourselves alone; but this is for all universally. (11)

Justin’s argument is that when two laws are promulgated, the newer one annuls the earlier one. Hence, the “eternal and final law—namely, Christ” (11) was intended to take the place of the outdated Mosaic Law.

And how does Trypho react to the belligerency of Justin’s remarks? He maintains his composure to a remarkable degree. He is fully aware of Justin’s selective tendencies when quoting Scripture: “Why do you select and quote whatever you wish from the prophetic writings...?” (27). He becomes annoyed at Justin’s lengthy speeches but defers to him nonetheless in a spirit of

28 Quoting so many passages from Scripture rather than simply referring to the passages, would, it seems, be an indication of the audience to whom this dialogue is addressed. Trypho, who was at least as familiar with the Septuagint as Justin, was not in need of such lengthy citations. But this method would be especially helpful to less educated Christians.
graciousness. "...and though you repeat the same things at considerable length, be assured that I and my companions listen with pleasure" (118). Nor does he object when Justin prevents him from entering the discussion at a certain moment: "As Trypho was about to reply and contradict me, I said, "Wait and hear what I say first"... (115). A paragraph further, Justin adds: "Indeed, I wondered ... why a little ago [sic] you kept silence while I was speaking, and why you did not interrupt me..." But how could Trypho have interrupted, considering the unceasing flood of Justin's monologue? Indeed, the further we proceed into the dialogue, the less dialogic it becomes, as if Justin were being carried away by the force of his own apology. In fact, I perceive a real climax in the dialogue, not toward the end, but almost exactly at the halfway point.29 It is at this juncture that an actual exchange occurs between the two men and even Trypho begins to lose his temper, returning Justin's gibes with an irritation that was not detectable earlier. But once this climax is reached, Justin's speeches become longer and longer and little remains of true dialogue.

By the conclusion of the work, Trypho has regained his gracious demeanour: "And I confess that I have been particularly pleased with the conference... For we have found more than we expected. And if we could do this more frequently, we should be much helped in the searching of the Scriptures themselves" (142). Justin agrees that he would like to do the same thing daily if possible, but alas, he is about to set sail. His final words to Trypho and his friends give an indication of what he has tried to accomplish in the dialogue:

I can wish no better thing for you, sirs, than this, that recognizing in this way that intelligence is given to every man, you may be of the same opinion as ourselves, and believe that Jesus is the Christ of God.

Justin believes that all men possess a parcel of the Logos within them by virtue of the Reason they are endowed with. Hence, it is possible for there to be Christians before Christ: "...Christ ... was partially known even by Socrates (for He was and is the Word who is in every man...)

29 It is interesting that the device of placing a climax in the middle of a work is evident in several ancient Near Eastern literary texts. We find this also in some modern literature, e.g., some Latin American literature.

reasonable person will accept wholeheartedly the undeniable truth of Christianity. Several times throughout the dialogue, he talks of Trypho and his friends being “persuaded” of the facts (e.g., 32 and 51); persuasion to the truth was also a Socratic feature. But because Justin is inexorably convinced of the rightness of his philosophy, he is not really interested in a “dialogue.” Only the introductory chapters describing his philosophical endeavours and eventual conversion can truly be called a dialogue. Thereafter, we see Trypho asking questions, occasionally flinching but maintaining his gentlemanlike behaviour throughout. In fact, Trypho often seems to be a sort of straw man for Justin, a superficial similarity he shares with many characters who tangle with Socrates. It is clear that the spirit of the Platonic dialogue is not being fully tapped by Justin. Plato used dialogue to arrive at the truth: one found the truth through the process of dialogue. But Justin already knows the truth; he doesn’t have to go search for it any longer. All he has to do is to convince this obstinate Jew of the same truth. Hence, dialogue becomes a tool for apologetic; and an extremely powerful tool because of the force of tradition behind it.

It is also important, however, to keep in mind the argument put forth by Goodenough: Justin’s apologetic stresses a real continuity with Judaism. “It has been seen that Justin’s defense of Christianity as a revelation of the truth was utterly meaningless apart from the continuity of Christianity with Judaism.” This seems most likely since Christians and Jews shared the same Scriptures—though Justin’s hermeneutical method was mainly one of allegory. Christianity would make little headway convincing people of its viability if it divorced itself from the rich tradition of Judaism. But Justin claimed also to be a philosopher and Christianity to him was the true philosophy. Hence, it was necessary to demonstrate this new philosophy’s continuation with the revered philosophy of the Greeks. Christianity for Justin was the natural fulfillment of Greek philosophy at its best and the Old Law of the Jews. Nonetheless, in view of the fact that Justin’s dialogue is, in reality, an apology, the assertion of Goodenough cannot be accepted wholeheartedly. By the very nature of his apologetic method, Justin cannot fail but try to prove the superiority of Christianity over Judaism. But let us not be unduly

harsh with Justin. Eusebius says of Justin's writings: "They are full of good things, and I can recommend them to students..." (Eusebius, IV. 18). Quite so. Justin's lack of tact may occasionally irritate us and his vituperative arguments might lead us to vigorous objections. Still, we cannot help but see here a man singularly happy in his treasure, who wants nothing more than to encourage his fellow man, both past and present, to share in that treasure.

Dialogue After Justin

I would like to conclude by briefly discussing Christian dialogues used after Justin's time. In so doing, we will place Justin in a wider historical context.

There is a large number of dialogues with Jews written by Christian authors in the centuries after Justin. On the other hand, there is a paucity of Jewish dialogues, one remarkable exception being the Kuzari written in the 12th century by Judah Halevi. This situation should not greatly surprise us. Christianity, as a new religion, needed to "prove" itself, to demonstrate its claim to authority amid the rich traditions it found itself. A man with the universal spirit of salvation like Justin was quite eager to win over "pagans" and Jews. In the early era of persecution, Christianity needed to defend itself in its hostile environment. Judaism did not experience these particular tensions. The Jews were a people apart who accepted the Law and the observances it required. What did Judaism need to prove?

Surveying the millennium following Justin, one finds a fascinating array of dialogues and realizes that Justin is one of the first to compose a Christian dialogue. For examples, there are the "Dialogue of Timothy and Aquila" (3rd century A.D.), the "Dialogue of Athanasius and Zacchaeus" (c. 325), Peter Alphonsi and his "Dialogue" (11th to 12th century), "Dialogue Between an Enquiring Jew and a Christian," of Peter Damiani (11th century). And there are Christian dialogues that are not specifically directed against Jews. One thinks, for example, of Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy and Anselm's Why God Became Man.33

32 Summaries of these dialogues may be found in A. Lukyn Williams, Adversus Judaeos: A Bird's-Eye View of Christian Apologiae Until the Renaissance (Cambridge, 1935).

33 Boethius is available in a Penguin edition; Anselm may be found in Eugene
In most of the dialogues directed against the Jews, several features immediately stand out. First, the discussion often takes place before groups of Jews and Christians, "debate style", as if they were to be the adjudicators of the dialogue. Second, there appears to be a stock set of Scriptural passages referred to by the Christian in his argument. Third, the Jew is very often converted to Christianity by the dialogue's termination. This last feature may have been a gradual development that occurred after Justin's time, as there is no indication in his own dialogue that Trypho ever intended to convert.

We must also keep in mind the changing historical context of these later dialogues. By the Middle Ages it was clear that a final winning over of the Jews was not possible. The Jews and their tenacity to their Law were there to stay. Yet, Christian writers continue to use the literary form and even the same arguments. What is different, however, is the emergence of the religion of Islam, which also declared belief in one God. Within that context springs the original creation in the 12th century of the Spanish Jew, Judah Halevi. Written in Arabic, the work is best known by its Hebrew translation, the *Kuzari*. The historical context is the eighth-century conversion of the Kuzari king Bulun to Judaism. The dialogue takes place between the king and four participants: a philosopher, a Christian, a Muslim, and a Jew. After the discussion the king is attracted to Judaism in a dream. This dialogue is remarkably similar to that written by Peter Abelard in the same century, "Dialogue of a Philosopher with a Jew, and a Christian."

In Abelard's dialogue, Abelard has a dream in which a philosopher, a Christian and a Jew appeal to him for help in deciding whose religious/philosophical tradition is to be rated most highly.


35 See the translation of Pierre J. Payer (Toronto, 1979). He states: "I know of no possible contact nor a common source which might explain what seems to be a coincidental parallel" (p. 10). I question how "coincidental" the parallel is.
First, the philosopher and the Jew converse and thereafter, the philosopher and the Christian. The work is incomplete and we have no record of Abelard’s official “decision”. It is quite clear from the dialogue, however, that the Christian was victorious. The Jew is given short shrift while the bulk of the dialogue is centered on the Christian. The mood of the philosopher, who officially leads the discussion, is far more amicable to the Christian than to the Jew. Very similar to Justin’s dialogue, the further one proceeds in the Abelard dialogue, the less dialogic it becomes; rather, the Christian’s didacticism becomes ever more pronounced while the figure of the philosopher gradually disappears.

Both Halevi and Abelard are writing dialogues in good Platonic fashion but we see, again, several divergences. The discussions are never open round-table dialogues. In the Abelard dialogue, the philosopher converses first with the Jew, then with the Christian. Similarly, in Halevi’s dialogue, the king speaks consecutively with the participants. In neither dialogue do the people confront one another. The social context of each writer is also different: living in Spain, Halevi was in far greater contact with Muslims than Abelard was in France. Halevi’s composition is a reflection of what must have constituted a spiritual crisis and deep confrontation for him and his contemporaries.

Is Abelard apologetic? I think so. But his apologetic does not seem quite as dogmatic as that of Justin. The two men share several intellectual similarities. Both were deeply interested in Greek philosophy. Both were ardent Christians who tried to adapt certain philosophical elements to their Christian ideas. An important distinction must be noted, however. In the first chapters of his dialogue, Justin clearly assumes the position of the philosopher. But after his conversion, there is no question of where his allegiance lies: he is staunchly Christian. With Abelard the transition is much more subtle, reflecting, I think, his own inner struggles with the dilemma. In the discussion with the Jew, he is the philosopher. Once he turns to the Christian, he changes garb. But that transition is more gradual and one gets the impression that the philosopher is as gentle as he is with the Christian because Abelard the philosopher is earnestly carrying on the dialogue with Abelard the Christian. Abelard is far more critical a scholar than Justin and he seems to write the dialogue as much for himself as for a wider audience.
Conclusions

Though my study on Christian dialogue ends here, the discussion is far from over. One need only look ahead a few hundred years to Nicolas of Cusa and his *De pace fidei*\(^{36}\) to witness yet another manifestation of dialogue composed for the attainment of truth. Cusanus' *De pace fidei* originates in a man's vision and is committed to writing afterwards. In the vision, God presides over lengthy discussions that run the gamut of man's spiritual journeys; involved are a Greek, Italian, Arab, Indian, "Chaldean", Jew, Scythian, Persian, Syrian, Spaniard, German, Tartar, Armenian, Bohemian, Turk, Englishman, Peter and Paul. The participants examine issues either individually with God, or with Peter or Paul.\(^{37}\) The purpose here is the same as in all the dialogues we have surveyed: the attainment of truth and unity. Cusanus is searching for the underlying unity that brings all men, all creation, together. Plato sought it as much as his ancient Near Eastern forebears did; and it is what Justin and his fellow Christian apologists, and Halevi and Abelard sought as well. All used dialogue as their vehicle in the search, though the method was not always identical. Dialogue is among the most natural forms given to man; hence, we have dialogic literary texts from millennia before Justin, and ever since. Dialogue, being a very common form among people, implies that people with different points of view can participate in one and the same quest. We might even say that in all ages that one quest is a quest for wisdom, the ultimate goal of all serious human conversation. It is most clearly expressed in the ancient Near East and philosophically polished in Plato. A new twist, perhaps not altogether admirable, is given by early Christian thinkers, notably Justin. Plato used dialogue and dialectic to discover the truth; the early Christian writers felt that they knew the truth and wanted, through the rich dialogue form, to exhibit that truth and unity.


\(^{37}\) The device of placing the dialogue in a dream is prevalent throughout man's history; we have just witnessed Abelard's dialogue and we find similar "heavenly dialogues" occurring in ancient Mesopotamian literature as well. The idea of God presiding as judge over a discussion, present in an altered form in Abelard, is also a main feature of the Mesopotamian contest literature. See above, p. 494.
Words like "wisdom", "truth", and "unity" unfortunately strike many people as "high-falutin" abstractions, terms bandied about in the mysterious treatises of the philosophers and academicians. When everything scholarly is said and done, throughout history in all dialogues a structural unity continues to show itself even though the most serious dialogue is born from ordinary human conversation. And ordinary human beings, no matter how close, are always different from each other, not only because of profoundly-held convictions but because of attitudes, temperaments, and motivations caused by circumstances. A line by Archilochus, the Greek poet, the interpretation of which has intrigued scholars, expresses the human desire for unity in its enigmatic simplicity: The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing.38