Shorter writings

Justin Martyr (c. AD 100–165)

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Introduction

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Chapter I.--Justin justifies his departure from Greek customs.

Do not suppose, ye Greeks, that my separation from your customs is unreasonable and unthinking; for I found in them nothing that is holy or acceptable to God. For the very compositions of your poets are monuments of madness and intemperance. For any one who becomes the scholar of your most eminent instructor, is more beset by difficulties than all men besides. For first they say that Agamemnon, abetting the extravagant lust of his brother, and his madness and unrestrained desire, readily gave even his daughter to be sacrificed, and troubled all Greece that he might rescue Helen, who had been ravished by the leprous [2493] shepherd. But when in the course of the war they took captives, Agamemnon was himself taken captive by Chryseis, and for Briseis' sake kindled a feud with the son of Thetis. And Pelides himself, who crossed the river, [2494] overthrew Troy, and subdued Hector, this your hero became the slave of Polyxena, and was conquered by a dead Amazon; and putting off the god-fabricated armour, and donning the hymeneal robe, he became a sacrifice of love in the temple of Apollo. And the Ithacan Ulysses made a virtue of a vice. [2495] And indeed his sailing past the Sirens [2496] gave evidence that he was destitute of worthy prudence, because he could not depend on his prudence for stopping his ears. Ajax, son of Telamon, who bore the shield of sevenfold ox-hide, went mad when he was defeated in the contest with Ulysses for the armour. Such things I have no desire to be instructed in. Of such virtue I am not covetous, that I should believe the myths of Homer. For the whole rhapsody, the beginning and end both of the Iliad and the Odyssey is--a woman.

[2493] Potter would here read liparou, "elegant" [ironically for effeminate]; but the above reading is defended by Sylburg, on the ground that shepherds were so greatly despised, that this is not too hard an epithet to apply to Paris. [2494] Of the many attempts to amend this clause, there seems to be none satisfactory. [2495] Or, won the reputation of the virtue of wisdom by the vice of deceit. [2496] That is, the manner in which he did it, stopping his companions' ears with wax, and having himself bound to the mast of his ship.

Chapter II.--The Greek theogony exposed.

But since, next to Homer, Hesiod wrote his Works and Days, who will believe his drivelling theogony? For they say that Chronos, the son of Ouranos, [2497] in the beginning slew his father, and possessed himself of his rule; and that, being seized with a panic lest he should himself suffer in the same way, he preferred devouring his children; but that, by the craft of the Curetes, Jupiter was conveyed away and kept in secret, and afterwards bound his father with chains, and divided the empire; Jupiter receiving, as the story goes, the air, and Neptune the deep, and Pluto the portion of Hades. But Pluto ravished Proserpine; and Ceres sought her child wandering through the deserts. And this myth was celebrated in the Eleusinian fire. [2498] Again, Neptune ravished Melanippe when she was drawing water, besides abusing a host of Nereids not a few, whose names, were we to recount them, would cost us a multitude of words. And as for Jupiter, he was a various adulterer, with Antiope as a satyr, with DanaÃ« as gold, and with Europa as a bull; with Leda, moreover, he assumed wings. For the love of Semele proved both his unchastity and the jealousy of Semele. And they say that he carried off the Phrygian Ganymede to be his cup-bearer. These, then, are the exploits of the sons of Saturn. And your illustrious son of Latona [Apollo], who professed soothsaying, convicted himself of lying. He pursued Daphne, but did not gain possession of her;

and to Hyacinthus, [2499] who loved him, he did not foretell his death. And I say nothing of the masculine character of Minerva, nor of the feminine nature of Bacchus, nor of the fornicating disposition of Venus. Read to Jupiter, ye Greeks, the law against parricides, and the penalty of adultery, and the ignominy of pÃ¦derasty. Teach Minerva and Diana the works of women, and Bacchus the works of men. What seemliness is there in a woman's girding herself with armour, or in a man's decorating himself with cymbals, and garlands, and female attire, and accompanied by a herd of bacchanalian women?

[2497] Or, Saturn son of Heaven. [2498] In the mysteries of Eleusis, the return of Proserpine from the lower world was celebrated. [2499] Apollo accidentally killed Hyacinthus by striking him on the head with a quoit.

Chapter III.--Follies of the Greek mythology.

For Hercules, celebrated by his three nights, [2500] sung by the poets for his successful labours, the son of Jupiter, who slew the lion and destroyed the many-headed hydra; who put to death the fierce and mighty boar, and was able to kill the fleet man-eating birds, and brought up from Hades the three-headed dog; who effectually cleansed the huge Augean building from its dung, and killed the bulls and the stag whose nostrils breathed fire, and plucked the golden fruit from the tree, and slew the poisonous serpent (and for some reason, which it is not lawful to utter, killed Achelous, and the guest-slaying Busiris), and crossed the mountains that he might get water which gave forth an articulate speech, as the story goes: he who was able to do so many and such like and so great deeds as these, how childishly he was delighted to be stunned by the cymbals of the satyrs, and to be conquered by the love of woman, and to be struck on the hips by the laughing Lyda! And at last, not being able to put off the tunic of Nessus, himself kindling his own funeral pile, so he died. Let Vulcan lay aside his envy, and not be jealous if he is hated because he is old and club-footed, and Mars loved, because young and beautiful.

Since, therefore, ye Greeks, your gods are convicted of intemperance, and your heroes are effeminate, as the histories on which your dramas are founded have declared, such as the curse of Atreus, the bed of Thyestes [2501] and the taint in the house of Pelops, and Danaus murdering through hatred and making Ã†gyptus childless in the intoxication of his rage, and the Thyestean banquet spread by the Furies. [2502] And Procne is to this day flitting about, lamenting; and her sister of Athens shrills with her tongue cut out. For what need is there of speaking of the goad [2503] of OEdipus, and the murder of Laius, and the marrying his mother, and the mutual slaughter of those who were at once his brothers and his sons?

[2500] Triesperon, so called, as some think, [from his origin: ”ex concubitu trium noctium.”] [2501] Thyestes seduced the wife of his brother Atreus, whence the tragic career of the family. [2502] There is no apodosis in the Greek. [2503] Not, as the editors dispute, either the tongue of the buckle with which he put out his eyes, nor the awl with which his heels were bored through, but the goad with which he killed his father.

Chapter IV.--Shameless practices of the Greeks.

And your public assemblies I have come to hate. For there are excessive banquetings, and subtle flutes which provoke to lustful movements, and useless and luxurious anointings, and crowning with garlands. With such a mass of evils do you banish shame; and ye fill your minds with them, and are carried away by intemperance, and indulge as a common practice in wicked and insane fornication. And this further I would say to you, why are you, being a Greek, indignant at your son when he imitates Jupiter, and rises against you and defrauds you of your own wife? Why do you count him your enemy, and yet worship one that is like him? And why do you blame your wife for living in unchastity, and yet honour Venus with shrines? If indeed these things had been related by others, they would have seemed to be mere slanderous accusations, and not truth. But now your own poets sing these things, and your histories noisily publish them.

Chapter V.--Closing appeal.

Henceforth, ye Greeks, come and partake of incomparable wisdom, and be instructed by the Divine Word, and acquaint yourselves with the King immortal; and do not recognise those men as heroes who slaughter whole nations. For our own Ruler, [2504] the Divine Word, who even now constantly aids us, does not desire strength of body and beauty of feature, nor yet the high spirit of earth's nobility, but a pure soul, fortified by holiness, and the watchwords of our King, holy actions, for through the Word power passes into the soul. O trumpet of peace to the soul that is at war! O weapon that puttest to flight terrible passions! O instruction that quenches the innate fire of the soul! The Word exercises an influence which does not make poets: it does not equip philosophers nor skilled orators, but by its instruction it makes mortals immortal, mortals gods; and from the earth transports them to the realms above Olympus. Come, be taught; become as I am, for I, too, was as ye are. [2505] These have conquered me--the divinity of the instruction, and the power of the Word: for as a skilled serpent-charmer lures the terrible reptile from his den and causes it to flee, so the Word drives the fearful passions of our sensual nature from the very recesses of the soul; first driving forth lust, through which every ill is begotten--hatreds, strife, envy, emulations, anger, and such like. Lust being once banished, the soul becomes calm and serene. And being set free from the ills in which it was sunk up to the neck, it returns to Him who made it. For it is fit that it be restored to that state whence it departed, whence every soul was or is. [2506]

[2504] Autos gar hemon. [2505] [He seems to quote Gal. iv. 12.] [2506] [N. B. --It should be stated that modern critics consider this work as not improbably by another author.]

Introduction

[Translated by the Rev. A. Roberts, D.D.]

I.

The most admirable Justin rightly declared that the aforesaid demons resembled robbers.-Tatian's Address to the Greeks, chap. xviii.

II.

And Justin well said in his book against Marcion, that he would not have believed the Lord Himself, if He had announced any other God than the Fashioner and Maker [of the world], and our Nourisher. But since, from the one God, who both made this world and formed us and contains as tell as administers all things, there came to us the only-begotten Son, summing up His own workmanship in Himself, my faith in Him is stedfast, and my love towards the Father is immoveable, God bestowing both upon us.-Irenaeus: Heresies, iv. 6.

III.

Justin well said: Before the advent of the Lord, Satan never ventured to blaspheme God, inasmuch as he was not yet sure of his own damnation, since that was announced concerning him by the prophets only in parables and allegories. But after the advent of the Lord learning plainly from the discourses of Christ and His apostles that eternal fire was prepared for him who voluntarily departed from God and for all who, without repentance, persevere in apostasy, then, by means of a man of this sort, he, as if already condemned, blasphemes that God who inflicts judgment upon him, and imputes the sin of his apostasy to his Maker, instead of to his own will and predilection.-Irenaeus: Heresies, v. 26.

IV.

Expounding the reason of the incessant plotting of the devil against us, he declares: Before the advent of the Lord, the devil did not so plainly know the measure of his own punishment, inasmuch as the divine prophets had but enigmatically announced it; as, for instance, Isaiah, who in the person of the Assyrian tragically revealed the course to be followed against the devil. But when the Lord appeared, and the devil clearly understood that eternal fire was laid up and prepared for him and his angels, he then began to plot without ceasing against the faithful, being desirous to have many companions in his apostasy, that he might not by himself endure the shame of condemnation, comforting himself by this cold and malicious consolation.-From the writings of John of Antioch.

V.

And Justin of Neapolis, a man who was not far separated from the apostles either in age or excellence, says that that which is mortal is inherited, but that which is immortal inherits; and that the flesh indeed dies, but the kingdom of heaven lives.-From Methodius On the Resurrection, in Photius.

VI.

Neither is there straitness with God, nor anything that is not absolutely perfect.-From manuscript of the writings of Justin.

VII.

We shall not injure God by remaining ignorant of Him, but shall deprive ourselves of His friendship.

VIII.

The unskilfulness of the teacher proves destructive to his disciples, and the carelessness of the disciples entails danger on the teacher, and especially should they owe their negligence to his want of knowledge.

IX.

The soul can with difficulty be recalled to those good things from which it has fallen, and is with difficulty dragged away from those evils to which it has become accustomed. If at any time thou showest a disposition to blame thyself, then perhaps, through the medicine of repentance, I should cherish good hopes regarding thee. But when thou altogether despisest fear, and rejectest with scorn the very faith of Christ, it were better for thee that thou hadst never been born from the womb.-From the writings of John of Damascus.

X.

By the two birds Christ is denoted, both dead as man, and living as God. He is likened to a bird, because He is understood and declared to be from above, and from heaven. And the living bird, having been dipped in the blood of the dead one, was afterwards let go. For the living and divine Word was in the crucified and dead temple [of the body], as being a partaker of the passion, and yet impossible to God. By that which took place in the running water, in which the wood and the hyssop and the scarlet were dipped, is set forth the bloody passion of Christ on the cross for the salvation of those who are sprinkled with the Spirit, and the water, and the blood. Wherefore the material for purification was not provided chiefly with reference to leprosy, but with regard to the forgiveness of sins, that both leprosy might be understood to be an emblem of sin, and the things which were sacrificed an emblem of Him who was to be sacrificed for sins.

For this reason, consequently, he ordered that the scarlet should be dipped at the same time in the water, thus predicting that the flesh should no longer possess its natural [evil] properties. For this reason, also, were there the two birds, the one being sacrificed in the water, and the other dipped both in the blood and in the water and then sent away, just as is narrated also respecting the goats. The goat that was sent away presented a type of Him who taketh away the sins of men. But the two contained a representation of the one economy of God incarnate. For He was wounded for our transgressions, and He bare the sins of many, and He was delivered for our iniquities.-From manuscript of writings of Justin.

XI.

When God formed man at the beginning, He suspended the things of nature on his will, and made an experiment by means of one commandment. For He ordained that, if he kept this, he should partake of immortal existence; but if he transgressed it, the contrary should be his lot. Man having been thus made, and immediately looking towards transgression, naturally became subject to corruption. Corruption then becoming inherent in nature, it was necessary that He who wished to save should be one who destroyed the efficient cause of corruption. And this could not otherwise be done than by the life which is according to nature being united to that which had received the corruption, and so destroying the corruption, while preserving as immortal for the future that which had received it. It was therefore necessary that the Word should become possessed of a body, that He might deliver us from the death of natural corruption. For if, as ye say, He had simply by a nod warded off death from us, death indeed would not have approached us on account of the expression of His will; but none the less would we again have become corruptible, inasmuch as we carried about in ourselves that natural corruption.-Leontius against Eutychians, etc., book ii.

XII.

As it is inherent in all bodies formed by God to have a shadow, so it is fitting that God, who is just, should render to those who choose what is good, and to those who prefer what is evil, to every one according to his deserts.-From the writings of John of Damascus.

XIII.

He speaks not of the Gentiles in foreign lands, but concerning [the people] who agree with the Gentiles, according to that which is spoken by Jeremiah: ”It is a bitter thing for thee, that thou hast forsaken me, saith the Lord thy God, that of old thou hast broken thy yoke, and torn asunder thy bands, and said, I will not serve Thee, but will go to every high hill, and underneath every tree, and there shall I become dissolute in my fornication.” -From manuscript of the writings of Justin.

XIV.

Neither shall light ever be darkness as long as light exists, nor shall the truth of the things pertaining to us be controverted. For truth is that than which nothing is more powerful. Every one who might speak the truth, and speaks it not, shall be judged by God.-Manuscript and works of John of Damascus.

XV.

And the fact that it was not said of the seventh day equally with the other days, "And there was evening, and there was morning," is a distinct indication of the consummation which is to take place in it before it is finished, as the fathers declare, especially St. Clement, and Irenaeus, and Justin the martyr and philosopher, who, commenting with exceeding wisdom on the number six of the sixth day, affirms that the intelligent soul of man and his five susceptible senses were the six works of the sixth day. Whence also, having discoursed at length on the number six, he declares that all things which have been framed by God are divided into six classes,-viz., into things intelligent and immortal, such as are the angels; into things reasonable and mortal, such as mankind; into things sensitive and irrational, such as cattle, and birds, and fishes; into things that can advance, and move, and are insensible, such as the winds, and the clouds, and the waters, and the stars; into things which increase and are immoveable, such as the trees; and into things which are insensible and immoveable, such as the mountains, the earth, and such like. For all the creatures of God, in heaven and on earth, fall under one or other of these divisions, and are circumscribed by them.-From the writings of Anastasius.

XVI.

Sound doctrine does not enter into the hard and disobedient heart; but, as if beaten back, enters anew into itself.

XVII.

As the good of the body is health, so the good of the soul is knowledge, which is indeed a kind of health of soul, by which a likeness to God is attained.-From the writings of John of Damascus.

XVIII.

To yield and give way to our passions is the lowest slavery, even as to rule over them is the only liberty. The greatest of all good is to be free from sin, the next is to be justified; but he must be reckoned the most unfortunate of men, who, while living unrighteously, remains for a long time unpunished. Animals in harness cannot but be carried over a precipice by the inexperience and badness of their driver, even as by his skilfulness and excellence they will be saved. The end contemplated by a philosopher is likeness to God, so far as that is possible.-From the writings of Antonius Melissa.

XIX.

[The words] of St. Justin, philosopher and martyr, from the fifth part of his Apology: -I reckon prosperity, O men, to consist in nothing else than in living according to truth. But we do not live properly, or according to truth, unless we understand the nature of things. It escapes them apparently, that he who has by a true faith come forth from error to the truth, has truly known himself, not, as they say, as being in a state of frenzy, but as free from the unstable and (as to every variety of error) changeable corruption, by the simple and ever identical truth.-From the writings of John of Damascus.

Introduction

Justin, Chariton, Charites, Paeon, and Liberianus, Who Suffered at Rome.
[Translated by the Rev. M. Dods, M.a.]

Chapter I.-Examination of Justin by the Prefect.

In the time of the lawless partisans of idolatry, wicked decrees were passed against the godly Christians in town and country, to force them to offer libations to vain idols; and accordingly the holy men, having been apprehended, were brought before the prefect of Rome, Rusticus by name. And when they had been brought before his judgment-seat, said to Justin, "Obey the gods at once, and submit to the kings." Justin said, "To obey the commandments of our Saviour Jesus Christ is worthy neither of blame nor of condemnation." Rusticus the prefect said, "What kind of doctrines do you profess? "Justin said, "I have endeavoured to learn all doctrines; but I have acquiesced at last in the true doctrines, those namely of the Christians, even though they do not please those who hold false opinions." Rusticus the prefect said, "Are those the doctrines that please you, you utterly wretched man? "Justin said, "Yes, since I adhere to them with right dogma." Rusticus the prefect said, "What is the dogma? "Justin said, "That according to which we worship the God of the Christians, whom we reckon to be one from the beginning, the maker and fashioner of the whole creation, visible and invisible; and the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who had also been preached beforehand by the prophets as about to be present with the race of men, the herald of salvation and teacher of good disciples. And I, being a man, think that what I can say is insignificant in comparison with His boundless divinity, acknowledging a Certain prophetic power, since it was prophesied concerning Him of whom now I say that He is the Son of God. For I know that of old the prophets foretold His appearance among men."

Chapter II.-Examination of Justin Continued.

Rusticus the prefect said, ”Where do you assemble? ”Justin said, ”Where each one chooses and can: for do you fancy that we all meet in the very same place? Not so; because the God of the Christians is not circumscribed by place; but being invisible, fills heaven and earth, and everywhere is worshipped and glorified by the faithful.” Rusticus the prefect said, ”Tell me where you assemble, or into what place do you collect your followers? ”Justin said, ”I live above one Martinus, at the Timiotinian Bath; and during the whole time (and I am now living in Rome for the second time) I am unaware of any other meeting than his. And if any one wished to come to me, I communicated to him the doctrines of truth.” Rusticus said, ”Are you not, then, a Christian? ”Justin said, ”Yes, I am a Christian.”

Chapter III.-Examination of Chariton and Others.

Then said the prefect Rusticus to Chariton, "Tell me further, Chariton, are you also a Christian? "Chariton said, "I am a Christian by the command of God." Rusticus the prefect asked the woman Charito, "What say you, Charito? "Charito said, "I am a Christian by the grace of God." Rusticus said to Euelpistus, "And what are you? "Euelpistus, a servant of Caesar, answered, "I too am a Christian, having been freed by Christ; and by the grace of Christ I partake of the same hope." Rusticus the prefect said to Hierax, "And you, are you a Christian? "Hierax said, "Yes, I am a Christian, for I revere and worship the same God." Rusticus the prefect said, "Did Justin make you Christians? "Hierax said, "I was a Christian, and will be a Christian." And Paeon stood up and said, "I too am a Christian." Rusticus the prefect said, "Who taught you? "Paeon said, "From our parents we received this good confession." Euelpistus said, "I willingly heard the words of Justin. But from my parents also I learned to be a Christian." Rusticus the prefect said, "Where are your parents? "Euelpistus said, "In Cappadocia." Rusticus says to Hierax, "Where are your parents? "And he answered, and said, "Christ is our true father, and faith in Him is our mother; and my earthly parents died; and I, when I was driven from Iconium in Phrygia, came here." Rusticus the prefect said to Liberianus, "And what say you? Are you a Christian, and unwilling to worship [the gods]? "Liberianus said, "I too am a Christian, for I worship and reverence the only true God."

Chapter IV.-Rusticus Threatens the Christians with Death.

The prefect says to Justin, ”Hearken, you who are called learned, and think that you know true doctrines; if you are scourged and beheaded, do you believe you will ascend into heaven? ”Justin said, ”I hope that, if I endure these things, I shall have His gifts. For I know that, to all who have thus lived, there abides the divine favour until the completion of the whole world.” Rusticus the prefect said, ”Do you suppose, then, that you will ascend into heaven to receive some recompense? ”Justin said, ”I do not suppose it, but I know and am fully persuaded of it.” Rusticus the prefect said, ”Let us, then, now come to the matter in hand, and which presses. Having come together, offer sacrifice with one accord to the gods.” Justin said, ”No right-thinking person falls away from piety to impiety.” Rusticus the prefect said, ”Unless ye obey, ye shall be mercilessly punished.” Justin said, ”Through prayer we can be saved on account of our Lord Jesus Christ, even when we have been punished, because this shall become to us salvation and confidence at the more fearful and universal judgment-seat of our Lord and Saviour.” Thus also said the other martyrs: ”Do what you will, for we are Christians, and do not sacrifice to idols.”

Chapter V.-Sentence Pronounced and Executed.

Rusticus the prefect pronounced sentence, saying, ”Let those who have refused to sacrifice to the gods and to yield to the command of the emperor be scourged, and led away to suffer the punishment of decapitation, according to the laws.” The holy martyrs having glorified God, and having gone forth to the accustomed place, were beheaded, and perfected their testimony in the confession of the Saviour. And some of the faithful having secretly removed their bodies, laid them in a suitable place, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ having wrought along with them, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Source. English translation: an older public-domain translation as collected in the Writings-Database (HistoricalChristianFaith), mostly from the Ante-Nicene, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers and similar nineteenth-century editions. SermonIndex has only divided it into chapters and short sections; the wording is the translator's own. Square brackets, Greek or Latin words and footnote-free text are as the source file prints them, and a transcription error may remain. No Greek or Latin text is shown beside it yet, and no modern English version has been made.