The Problem with Abraham: Justin Martyr's Use of Abraham in the *Dialogue with Trypho a Jew*

Timothy J Horner

Justin has sometimes been viewed as both the beginning of the formal *Adversus Judaeos* tradition and the epitome of it. In this view, it is taken for granted that the Christian attitude toward Jews and Judaism finds its point of origin and fullest expression in Justin. In a way this is a safe assumption. We have not yet found an earlier treatise, besides Paul, which deals with the relationship between Judaism and Christianity with comparable detail or verve. Moreover, the later apologists reveal an unavoidable dependence on Justin's style and themes. But has scholarship put too much weight on Justin and his writings? Have we imbued Justin with more Christian tradition than is merited? It is tempting to read history backwards in search of the origin for an idea or theme. For many scholars, Justin has been the fount of origin for Christian themes which took on gigantic proportions in later writers. In Justin, von Harnack saw the first permanent stain of philosophical terminology – Christ as the Logos.[1] And more recently, Jeffery Siker has stated what much patristic scholarship has been hinting at. In his *Disinheriting the Jews: The Use of Abraham in Early Christian Controversy* (Philadelphia: 1994), Siker has put forward the idea that it is not Paul who is responsible for the exclusion of the Jews from Christian theology, but Justin in his treatise *Dialogue with Trypho a Jew*.[2] Siker follows the figure of Abraham through the New Testament, as well as the writings of the early church, in order to trace the embodiment of the Christian attitude of Jewish exclusion. He has attempted to show that Justin used Abraham, not as a way of including the Gentiles, as Paul did, but as a way of excluding the Jews from the promise, or inheritance, of God's Kingdom. It is the focus of this article not only to address Siker's particular claims about Justin's use of Abraham, but to try to adduce what Abraham meant to Justin and inquire if, in fact, we can say that 'Justin uses the very Abrahamic heritage that the Jews claim in order to show that

1 Adolf C G von Harnack *Outlines of the History of Dogma* E K Mitchel trans (Boston 1957) *passim*

2 Quotations from Justin are taken from *The Ante-Nicene Christian Library* vol II Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson trans (Edinburgh 1867).

they are not the children of Abraham; he thus leaves them abandoned and disinherited' (Siker p 163).

Reading Justin's *Dialogue* without the voices of the later *Adversus Judaeos* tradition crowding in on the reader is a difficult, but necessary, exercise. I am not attempting to find any roots or adumbrations of a later tradition. I shall simply attempt to let Justin speak for himself on Abraham. When such a reading is undertaken it will be shown that, for Justin, Abraham is a difficult and problematic figure. Siker's treatment of him shows not the fullness of Christianity's understanding, but the ambiguous and sometimes contradictory aspect of Abraham, especially in regard to his circumcision and bloodline with the Jewish people as a whole. Focusing only on Abraham reveals Justin's argument as less than seamless. Highlighting the ambiguities which surround Abraham allows us to see Justin as part of a development in the *Adversus Judaeos* tradition, rather than its prow. Thus, everything after Justin is not simply variations on a theme.

The sections of this article will be divided thus: Justin's position in recent scholarship and the way in which he is seen in relationship to Judaism and Abraham will first be outlined. Against this backdrop I shall then deal with the main issues surrounding Abraham in the *Dialogue*:

1 Abraham and Circumcision
2 Abraham and the Law
3 Abraham and the Jewish Remnant
4 Abraham and Melchizedek
5 Abraham and Christ.

In the final section I shall explore possible explanations as to why an ambiguity is present and propose a clearer lens through which to view Justin's agenda in the *Dialogue*.

Scholarship on Justin and Abraham

Tracing the roots of anti-Semitism in the Christian tradition is a difficult and sensitive endeavour. The last several decades have cast an increasingly critical eye on patristic authors and their attitudes toward Judaism. Harnack's view that Christianity and Judaism had nothing to say to each other after the second century has been challenged, opposed, and re-asserted. Marcel Simon's *Verus Israel* (Paris 1964) was a landmark study with which all subsequent scholarship has had to reckon. Simon's account of the *Adversus Judaeos* tradition sought to tease out of the Christian sources some element of genuine interaction and dialogue. It is worth noting that along with this fresh debate has come a renewed interest in tracing western anti-Semitism back to the early centuries of the church. Zion ben Bosker has focused on Justin as the origin of many later trends.

'Justin contributed not a little to the bitter heritage of the violence in words and then deeds which the Church inflicted against the Jewish people.'[3]

Jeffery Siker's recent study is the most explicit piece of scholarship to deal exclusively with the issue of Abraham in Justin. But Justin does not take up the whole of his study. An analysis of Justin's work is the last of several chapters which chronicle the use of Abraham from Paul through Justin. His basic thesis attempts to show a consistent progression of development in regard to the use of Abraham in Christian writings. He contends that 'the various uses of Abraham from Paul through Justin Martyr show a shift in focus from gentile inclusion to Jewish exclusion' (Siker p 190). Siker even has this period split into four distinct generations, the first being Paul, who is characterized by his emphasis on gentile inclusion rather than Jewish exclusion. The second is the account of Matthew, Luke-Acts, and the letter to the Hebrews, which edged away from emphasizing gentile inclusion to a heightened concentration on Jewish exclusion. The third generation, John, Ignatius and Barnabas, shows still more exclusionary use of Abraham and very little emphasis on gentile inclusion. The fourth generation is comprised of Justin, Marcion, Heracleon and Aristides. For Siker, Abraham is the vehicle which Justin uses to advocate total Jewish exclusion (Siker p 190). Unfortunately, this delineation into generations does not take into account the distinct differences within each of these writers with regard to their particular relationship to Judaism.[4]

In an effort to vindicate Paul from the charge of Jewish exclusion, as expressed in Romans and Galatians, Siker has focused on Justin as the most radical proponent of Jewish excommunication. The principal attitude which Siker is countering finds its clearest expression in Rosemary R Reuther's statement that, for Paul, 'Christians, not Jews, are the true

3 Zion ben Bosker 'Justin Martyr and the Jews' *Jewish Quarterly Review* 64 ('73/'74) pp 97-122, 204-211. See also F G Batton *The Crime of Christendom* (Boston 1969); Alan T Davies *Antisemitism and the Foundations of Christianity* (New York 1979); Edward H Flannery *The Anguish of the Jews* (New York 1985); John G Gager *Origins of Anti-Semitism: Attitudes Toward Judaism in Pagan and Christian Antiquity* (Oxford 1983); John M Oesterreicher *Anatomy of Contempt* (New Jersey 1975); James Parkes 'The Christian Roots of Antisemitism' *Antisemitism* (Chicago 1963); David Rokeah *Jews, Pagans, and Christians in Conflict* (Jerusalem 1982); Rosemary R Reuther *Faith and Fratricide* (New York 1974); Robert Wilken *Judaism and the Early Christian Mind* (New Haven 1971).

4 J Alvarez 'Apostolic Writings and the Roots of Anti-Semitism' *Studia Patristica* 13 1968 is a review of many early Christian documents and their attitude towards Judaism. The article reveals that while some documents make no mention at all of Judaism (eg *Didache* p 70), others are particularly fierce in their thinking on Judaism (eg *Pseudo-Barnabas* p 73). There are many others which can be placed at other points on this spectrum. Contrary to Siker's shifting ethos, the sources themselves reveal a more natural and understandable difference within the Christian tradition. In *Theology of Jewish Christianity*, J Danielou speaks against Siker's progression, by noting the individual and idiosyncratic nature of the *Adversus Judaeos* tradition in his correct observation that 'Justin's attitude is less radical than Barnabas' ' (p 35).

offspring of Abraham and heirs of the promise'.[5] Siker rivals this view by focusing on Paul's particular use of Abraham as a symbol of gentile inclusion. Siker then pushes the onus forward into the history of the church and finds in Justin a full-blown expression of Jewish exclusion:

> Justin's use of Abraham marks the final stage of development in the Christian use of Abraham against non-Christian Judaism. The many centuries of Christian controversy with Judaism following Justin simply restate in various ways the Christian conclusions that Abraham is the Father of the Christian, not the Jews (eg Irenaeus, Tertullian, Eusebius, Chrysostom, Aphrahat). (Siker p 193)

Justin is then both the definitive voice of Jewish exclusion as well as the progenitor of this particular attitude in later writers. After Justin there is no development, only replication.

In order to honour his thesis about Paul and Abraham, Siker claims that Abraham is the central theme in Justin's *Dialogue*. It is through Abraham that Justin combats the Law and disconnects the Jews. 'In the same breath that he affirms that Christians are the spiritual descendants of Abraham, Justin denies the heritage to the Jews, granting them only the status of being physical descendants, which counts for nothing' (Siker p 172).

In the *Dialogue*, circumcision is closely linked to Abraham. When Justin speaks of Abraham it is mostly in the context of circumcision (Siker p 165). Or in Siker's words, 'Justin repeatedly links the ritual Law with circumcision, so that we may see circumcision as the focal point of this dispute' (Siker p 166). From this fact, Siker draws the conclusion that Justin makes this connection deliberately so as to dismantle the entirety of the Law by way of circumcision (Siker p 165). Justin is portrayed as crystal clear on the separation between Jews and Gentiles. Siker draws the conclusion that salvation, for Justin, is based on being Gentile and that the Jews are automatically excluded from the inheritance based only on their Jewish blood and physical circumcision. For example, in attempting to understand Justin's use of the kingdom banquet in Matthew 8:11-12, Siker draws the conclusion that 'for Justin, the Jews will receive judgement, while the gentiles will receive a banquet' (Siker p 183). He portrays Justin as making a salvific distinction based on race and nothing else.

Siker also engages in an inversion theory about the Jews and Gentiles. 'On a deeper level the Jews were never God's children at all!... For Justin, the inversion of the status of Jews and gentiles stands in continuity with God's purposes in Christ' (Siker p 187). Siker thus pushes the racial

5 Rosemary Reuther *Faith and Fratricide* (New York: 1974) p 98

distinction to an extreme. God never had the Jews as his children and the Gentiles were always meant to be the recipients of the inheritance. It will be shown that Siker's interpretation of Justin does not follow Justin's words or his overall meaning. Racial distinctions are used at times, but in terms of inheritance and salvation race plays an insignificant role (see below *Justin and Salvation*). Moreover, it could be said that race lends a certain amount of hope to Justin's attempt at Jewish conversion (see below *Abraham and Jacob*).

As his springboard, Siker uses Justin's frequently quoted passage on the Jews and their relationship to God's inheritance:

> For this [the Church] is that nation which the God of old promised to Abraham, when He declared that He would make him the father of many nations, not meaning however, the Arabians, or Egyptians, or Idumeans... and along with Abraham we shall inherit the holy land, when we shall receive the endless eternity, being children of Abraham through the like faith. For as he [Abraham] believed the voice of God and it was imputed to him as righteousness, in like manner we, having believed God's voice spoken by the apostles of Christ, and promulgated (κηρυχθείση) to us by the prophets, have renounced even to death all the things of the world. Accordingly, He promises to him a nation of similar faith, God-fearing, righteous, and delighting the Father; but it is not you, 'in whom there is no faith'.
> (*Dialogue* 119.3-6)

Here, Justin speaks clearly about the exclusion of the Jews and one can sense the emotion behind this absolute language. Based on this passage alone it is understandable how Siker can state that 'The only conclusion Justin can draw from this argument is that Christians, not the Jews, comprise the religious and righteous nation, which God promised to Abraham' (Siker pp 163-4).

Nevertheless, the question one may ask is whether there are other statements or attitudes in Justin which temper or even contend with Siker's conclusion, or is Justin completely consistent in his attitude about Abraham and the disinheritance of the Jews? It is worthwhile to ask if that is all there is to say on the matter.

Abraham and Circumcision

Justin seems to indicate different attitudes to circumcision. At one point it appears that he is unaware of other cultures which practised male circumcision:

> For circumcision according to the flesh, which is from Abraham, was

> given for a sign; that you may be separated from other nations, and from us... For you are not recognized among the rest of men by any other mark than your fleshly circumcision. (*Dialogue* 16.3)

A short time later he acknowledges that circumcision is practised by other peoples. 'For it [circumcision] is of no use to the Egyptians, or the sons of Moab, or the sons of Edom' (*Dialogue* 28.5). In the latter case, Justin is seeking to dilute the uniqueness of circumcision and thus undermine any divine stamp. In the former case he is highlighting the opinion that circumcision is a mark of separation. Circumcision was an apologetic tool which, for Justin, was often double-edged. Sometimes he was able to use it to his advantage and at others times it weakened his arguments, especially when it came to Abraham and his circumcision.

This issue is actually Justin's Achilles' heel in the *Dialogue*. Time and time again Justin is confronted with the glaring truth that Abraham, while he was justified by faith, was also circumcised by divine ordinance.[6] In chapter 46 of the *Dialogue* we have an exchange which embodies well the confusion and frustration which Abraham's circumcision held for Justin. At his request, Trypho lists those commandments which can still be followed: Sabbath, circumcision, observation of months and purity laws involving washing. Justin sees his opening and replies:

> Do you think Isaac, Jacob, Noah, and Job, and all the rest before and after them equally righteous... who observed none of these will be saved? And Trypho answered. 'Were not Abraham and his descendants circumcised?' And I said that I know that Abraham and his descendants were circumcised... But you are aware that up to Moses, no one in fact who was righteous observed any of these rites at all of which we are talking except circumcision which began from Abraham. (*Dialogue* 46.3-5)

Justin concedes the flaw and quickly moves on to discuss Mosaic Law and its

6 The fact that Trypho is continually allowed to throw this fact in Justin's face seems to confirm the notion that some parts of the *Dialogue* have their basis in reality. It is difficult to understand why Justin, if the *Dialogue* was complete fiction, raised the issue so many times. As will be shown, it does not serve to link circumcision to the Law: rather it links Abraham to the Law in a problematic way. The question of Justin's intended audience is one of great debate. One's stance on the issue of audience reveals one's attitude about the Christian/Jewish debate, or the lack thereof. My general attitude about the Christian/Jewish debate has been shaped by Miriam Taylor's *Real Men or Men of Straw* (Leiden 1995). Letting the text determine the amount of Jewish/Christian interaction is a difficult task. Overall, I do feel that in the case of the *Dialogue* there is a ring of truth which is often smothered by rhetorical device and Christian stereotype. T Stylianopoulos' *Justin Martyr and the Mosaic Law* SBLDS 20 (Missoula Mont 1975) (hereafter Stylianopoulos) gives a complete and sensitive analysis of the occasion and audience of the *Dialogue*.

> The former is said to have circumcised the people a second time with the knives of stone (πέτρα) (which was a sign of this circumcision with which Jesus Christ has circumcised us from the idols made of stone and of other materials), and to have collected together those who were circumcised from the uncircumcision, from the errors of the world, in every place by the knives of stone, to wit, the words of Jesus Christ. (*Dialogue* 113.5)[11]

In the same way that Joshua led Israel into the promised land with a second circumcision, so Christ leads his followers to the promised land by a second circumcision. It is difficult to push Justin much further than this. He does not answer questions about whether Abraham received the second circumcision of the heart. Within this particular quotation Justin infers that the second circumcision was not ushered in until Jesus' ministry on earth. There is a correlation between the knives of stone which Joshua used and the words of Jesus which were stones. 'Accordingly, the knives of stone [are what] we take to mean his words' (*Dialogue* 113.6). With respect to Abraham, this would make second circumcision a technical impossibility. Circumcision is not at centre stage here. The focus in this typological correlation is on emphasizing Joshua as a type of Christ, rather than explaining the nature of Christian circumcision.

The overall impression Justin conveys about circumcision is not consistent. It is a unique and special problem for Justin.[12] Circumcision is not a matter of life or death for him either. He does attempt to play down Abraham's circumcision, but despite Justin's efforts Abraham's standing is made more complicated by this admission. Therefore, Justin is less likely to dwell on Abraham when there are other patriarchs who are less controversial.

Despite his desire to distance Abraham from the observance of the Law, Justin allows Trypho to claim the reality of Abraham's circumcision. In the end it appears that Justin is able to segregate Abraham and his circumcision as anomalous so that he may deal with Mosaic Law unencumbered by the contradiction of a circumcised Abraham. Jewish

11 See *Dialogue* 114.4 for reference to Christ as the rock, and R Murray *Symbols of the Kingdom* for the significance of Christ as a stone, or rock, in Christian metaphors during Justin's time, especially in Syriac Christianity.

12 Stylianopoulos also notes Justin's particular problem with circumcision. 'In the case of circumcision, the purpose which Justin perceives in this commandment is so peculiar and so different from his general thesis [that the Mosaic Law is no longer functional] that it deserves separate attention' (p 133). The footnote to this quotation adds 'It may be noted that scholars who have written on Justin usually view what he has to say about circumcision as one example of his central thesis about the Law's purpose'. This is exactly what Siker as well as Paul Donahue in his *Jewish Christian Controversy in the Second Century: A Study in the Dialogue of Justin Martyr* (unpublished PhD dissertation Yale University 1973) have done.

Law by itself is a far easier topic for Justin to address. The historical lines are more clearly delineated. Were it not for Abraham's circumcision, his argument would have had a sharper bite. This is shown by the fact that, when dealing with Jewish rites, Justin attempts to steer the *Dialogue* toward Moses and the Law and away from circumcision. The previous quotation (*Dialogue* 46.3-5), where Justin is not allowed to include Abraham with those patriarchs who were justified without the Law, illustrates how he tries to harmonize Jewish history with the Christian categories of pre- and post-Law. He is prevented from doing so by Abraham's circumcision. It is striking that it is the issue of circumcision which *prevents* Justin from completely separating Abraham from the Mosaic Law. Circumcision occupied a different temporal zone and needed to be addressed in a special way.

Abraham and the Law

There is, in Justin, the understanding that the Law had a certain function in time. It promoted important elements of universal goodness, on which Plato was dependent, so the argument goes, while simultaneously enjoining other cultic practices intended solely to keep the Jews from idolatry.[13] There is a passage in the *Dialogue* which portrays circumcision and the Law as fulfilling time-bound needs. This is linked to Justin's concept of grace and how it is a pre-requisite to understanding the Scriptures:

> Unless, therefore, a man by God's grace receives the power to understand what has been said... the deeds will not profit him. One will ask why Enoch, Noah, with his sons, and all others in similar circumstances, who neither were circumcised, nor kept the Sabbaths, pleased God... [or why] those who lived between Abraham and Moses were justified by circumcision, and that those who lived after Moses were justified by circumcision and the other ordinances. (*Dialogue* 92.2-6)

The notion that the Law or circumcision justified in any way is a puzzling thought given Justin's general attitude about the futility and

13 Justin does not treat Mosaic Law as a consistent whole. There are some parts of the Law which are good and reflect that superior morality of the Mosaic Law (*Dial* 44.3 and 93.1). These qualities have come down through philosophy, but find their origin in Moses, since Justin believed that Plato was dependent on Moses (I *Ap* 59). Then there are those practices which are concerned with deterring from idolatry (*Dial* 45.3 and 67.4,10). These include Sabbath observance and sacrifice, but not circumcision, which pre-dated the Mosaic Law. In addition there are those parts of the Law which prefigure Christ and Christian worship (*Dial* 44.4 and 42.4). It is these elements which are used by Justin typologically to point to a future, more spiritual, interpretation and use (*Dial* 41.1; 91.1 deal with the typological significance of the sacrificial system and its meaning in Christian worship).

powerlessness of Jewish ritual Law. But for Justin, those who lived before Christ and followed the Mosaic Law will be saved by virtue of their adherence to that part of the Law that was good:

> Those who regulated their lives by the Law of Moses would in like manner be saved. For what in the Law of Moses is naturally good, and pious, and righteous, and has been prescribed to be done by those who obey it; and what was appointed to be performed by reason of hardness of the people's hearts; was similarly recorded, and done also by those who were under the Law. Since those who did that which is universally, naturally, and eternally good are pleasing to God, they shall be saved through this Christ in the resurrection equally with those righteous men who were before them, namely Noah, and Enoch, and Jacob, and whoever else there be, along with those who have known this Christ [ie Christians]. (*Dialogue* 45.4-5)

In this way, Justin does not hold past Jews responsible for their obedience to the Law. There is nothing inherently wrong with adherence to the Law before Christ. In fact, Justin sees it as a positive endeavour, despite the punitive aspects meant to keep Judaism away from idolatry.

Despite the large amount of energy Justin commits to dismantling the Jewish faith and the Law on which it is founded, ultimately he sees the Law and all its practices as insignificant and counting for nothing against the power of faith in Christ and the profession of him as Lord. Justin allows Trypho to push his logic and test how committed he is to the centrality of faith in Christ:

> And again Trypho inquired, 'But if someone, knowing that this is so, and after he recognizes that this man is Christ, and has believed in him, wished however to observe these institutions [Jewish practice], will he be saved?' In my opinion, such a one will be saved, if he does not strive in every way to persuade other men – I mean those gentiles who have been circumcised from error by Christ, to observe the same things as himself, telling them that they are useless to do so. This you did yourself when you declared that I would not be saved unless I observe these institutions. (*Dialogue* 47.1)

Next to Chrysostom, Ephrem, Barnabas or Tertullian, Justin looks quite liberal in his stance on Jewish practice. But this allowance, as long as it is not imposed on gentile Christians, serves only to show the importance of belief in Jesus. Against this, the Law, circumcision, and blood-line are nothing. In this way Justin reveals his true agenda. 'Christ has come to restore both the free sons and the servants among them conferring the same honour on all of them who keep his commandments' (*Dialogue* 134.5). It is

this heightened sense of faith in Christ which puts all things in perspective and allows Justin to hold to a strong belief in a Jewish remnant.

Abraham and the Jewish Remnant

Abraham is perceived, by Siker, as the hinge on which the Christian claim to history and authenticity turns, but in the *Dialogue* this interpretation of Abraham is not borne out. Justin does proclaim Abraham the father of many nations and makes the comparison between his justification by faith and the Christian faith. But Justin's use of Abraham as father of the Christian nation is not as clear as one would think. Justin's first reference to Abraham is that of a spiritual father:

> For the true Spiritual Israel, and descendants of Judah, Jacob, Isaac and Abraham (who in uncircumcision was approved of and blessed by God on account of his faith, and called the father of many nations), are we who have been led to God through the Crucified Christ. (*Dialogue* 11.2-3)

Siker makes the claim that 'Justin uses Abraham to render the Jews orphaned and without any legitimate claim to Abraham as their Father in any meaningful way' (Siker p 163). He draws this conclusion on the strength of the passage quoted earlier (*Dialogue* 119.3-6). But this is an overstated assertion. Nowhere does Justin deny the Jewish connection to Abraham. Justin often critiques the Jews for resting too solidly on their rightful claim to Abraham's bloodline, but he never denied it (eg *Dialogue* 44.2; 140.4). Siker interprets the heritage of the Jews as being stripped down, by Justin, to the status of physical descendants only, which Siker states 'counts for nothing' (Siker p 172).[14]

Siker, in his effort to draw an unbroken line of development, puts Abraham at the centre of the issue of descent and inheritance. Consequently, this myopic view has not allowed him to examine the role of Jacob, who is, in the *Dialogue*, a symbol of the church, Christ, and the way in which the twelve tribes of Israel will fall out. Justin is quite clear when it comes to explaining the role of Jacob:

> For the seed (σπέρμα) is divided (μερίζεται) from Jacob and comes through Judah, and Jesse and David. And this was the symbol (σύμβολα) of the fact that some of your nation would be found children of Abraham, and found too in the lot of Christ; but others,

14 The assessment that physical descent counts for nothing seems to be more a Christian interpretation than a Jewish one. Physical descent did not, and does not, count for nothing in Judaism. Even if this comment is allowed, it is not accurate, because Justin's belief in a Jewish remnant does not allow him to think that physical descent counts for nothing. Some Jews will be saved, according to Justin; it is only a matter of which ones.

> who are indeed children of Abraham would be like the sand on the sea shore, barren and fruitless, much in quantity but without number indeed. (*Dialogue* 120.5)

From this passage it becomes clear that Abraham is not the watershed between those who would be in Christ and those who would not. It also attests to the existence in Justin's thinking of a Jewish remnant. This is a crucial issue in understanding Justin's drive in the *Dialogue* as well as his attitude toward the Jewish people. It is a distinction that Siker omits, probably because it takes the light off Abraham and places it on Jacob. It also makes the split between Christian and Jew difficult to delineate along racial lines.

Justin uses a number of comparisons and images which are connected to the person of Jacob. When he speaks about Jacob as the church the theme of a Jewish remnant occurs without fail. Early in the narrative Trypho remarks:

> 'What is this you say? That none of us shall inherit anything on the holy mountain of God?' I replied, 'I did not say so; but those who persecuted and persecute Christ, if they do not repent, shall not receive anything on the holy mountain'. (*Dialogue* 25.6-26.1)

Although it might be assumed that Justin is referring to the Jews in this passage he is not so specific. Here we see Justin refusing to draw racial lines, even if Trypho does. In introducing his motivation behind the treatise Justin states 'I will attempt to prove all [that I adduced], in the hope that some of you may be found to be that remnant which has been left by the grace of the Lord of Sabaoth for the eternal salvation' (*Dialogue* 32.2). Justin also offers these words to Trypho. 'He [God] has left a seed for salvation lest your race be utterly destroyed like Sodom and Gomorrah' (*Dialogue* 55.3). Certainly, these words are small comfort, but in their context they reveal an openness in Justin's attitude, however slight and restricted, which has often been ignored in scholarship.

Justin compares the church to the marriages of Jacob saying that:

> Leah is your people and the synagogue; but Rachel is our church. And for these, and for the servants in both, Christ now serves... Christ has come to restore both the free sons and the servants among them, conferring the same honour on all of them who keep his commandments; even as the children of the free woman and the children of the bond women born to Jacob were all sons and equal in dignity. (*Dialogue* 134.3-4)

On one hand, Justin wishes to affirm the validity and favourableness of

the Christian tradition of faith and the accompanying promise of inheritance. On the other hand, there is an unambiguous indication that Christ will restore all who keep his commandments regardless of their status or nationality. This is strong evidence to support the idea that Justin did not advocate a racial separation of the Jewish people from the promises of God.

Nevertheless, Justin's polemical eruptions cloud his message. In one of his more virulent chapters he vents a series of invectives in which he accuses the Jews of 'crafty and unscrupulous behaviour' (*Dialogue* 123.2). Riding a wave of polemic he uses Isaiah 19:24 to show that there will be yet a third Israel! 'In that day there shall be a third Israel among the Assyrians and Egyptians' (*Dialogue* 123.5). His reference to the eschatological Israel seeks to undermine any exclusive claims on which Judaism might stand.

Even with these difficult passages taken into account, Justin presents an unambiguous testament to the existence of a Jewish remnant. He even employs typological exegesis (one of his favourite modes) to show this. When speaking about Isaiah being hewn in two by a wooden saw he asserts that:

> this was a mysterious type of Christ being about to cut your nation in two, and to raise those worthy of honour to the everlasting kingdom along with the holy patriarchs and prophets; but he has said that he will send others to the condemnation of the unquenchable fire along with similar disobedient and impertinent men from all nations. (*Dialogue* 120.5. See also 134.1,4 for typology of Jacob's marriage discussed above.)

The Jews may appear to be under a divine ban at the moment but there will come a time when Christ will become active among them as judge both to save and condemn. This judgment, it should be noted, applies to all people, not Jews exclusively. These passages prohibit the idea that Justin saw the Jews as irrevocably excluded from the Kingdom because of their Jewishness.

Abraham and Melchizedek

It is the existence of a Jewish remnant and the hope that some Jews will be found to be on the side of Christ that provides the *raison d'être* of the *Dialogue*.[15] Within Justin's conversionary agenda (if only literary) he provides a model for Jewish conversion. This model is based on the meeting of Abraham and Melchizedek, the uncircumcised priest (Gen 14:18). This enigmatic and mysterious priest provides Justin with scriptural proof of Judaism's place in relation to Christianity. In chapter 19

15 Stylianopoulos p 39 concurs with this opinion.

of the *Dialogue*, Justin lists for Trypho those scriptural figures who were without fleshly circumcision yet were deemed worthy of God. Adam, Abel, Enoch, Lot and Noah comprise the list of those who although in uncircumcision were yet honoured by God. Melchizedek is also listed in relation to his meeting with Abraham. 'Melchizedek, the priest of the Most High, was uncircumcised; to whom also Abraham, the first who received circumcision after the flesh, gave tithes, and he [Melchizedek] blessed (εὐλόγησεν) him' (*Dialogue* 19.4). In this instance, Melchizedek illustrates the superiority of an uncircumcised priest as well as the posture the circumcised should take to this uncircumcised holy man. Abraham is firmly linked with his circumcision in this passage. There is no allusion to Abraham as the father of the Christian nation. In fact, Abraham's faith or his attachment to Christian faith is not mentioned in this context. The reason for his inclusion in this list of uncircumcised patriarchs is to show the status of circumcision when it is compared with uncircumcised holiness. Even Abraham, who is revered by the Jews as their forefather and honoured by Justin as the father of many nations, is subject to Melchizedek. As in the Bible, Melchizedek makes only a few appearances in Justin, but in every case the relationship between them emphasizes Melchizedek and his superiority over Abraham.

Justin also sees in the meeting of these two figures a model for Jewish conversion to Christianity. Justin is predictable in his usage of Psalm 110 ('The Lord said unto my Lord... '). For him, this Psalm attested to the reality of the pre-existent Christ as well as his future reign over all the earth. It does not refer to Hezekiah as the Jews had interpreted it (*Dialogue* 33.1). Melchizedek now becomes a type of Christ, or at least a pre-figurement of the character of Christ's priesthood.

> As Melchizedek was described by Moses as the priest of the Most High, and... a priest to those who were in uncircumcision and blessed the circumcised Abraham who brought him tithes, so God has shown that His everlasting priest, called also by the Holy Spirit (τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος) Lord, would be Priest of those in uncircumcision. Those too in circumcision [Jews] who approach Him, that is, believing and seeking His blessing from Him, He will both receive and bless. (*Dialogue* 33.3)[16]

Justin draws the analogy that in the same way in which Abraham abased himself before Melchizedek and was blessed by him, so the Jews should

16 The highlighting of Melchizedek took its extreme form in the Melchizedekians of the fourth and fifth centuries AD. One of the forms condemned by Marcus Erimita claimed that Melchizedek was 'le Fils de Dieu'. Justin does not count this encounter as one with the Logos, but it is understandable how later readers might reach that conclusion. See G Bardy *Melchisedeciens* DTC 10 (pt 1928) cols 513-16.

do the same and receive the blessing. The analogy is not drawn to show the inherent rejection of the Jews on the basis of their race; rather it serves to illustrate the possibility of Jewish conversion. Abraham emerges here in a minor, yet significant, role. His role is to play that of the circumcised Jew who models the way in which one may come into the blessings of God through Christ.

While we may refer to Abraham as a model or an ideal for one who is Jewish, we could not say that Abraham is used typologically in this instance. Firstly, when Justin wishes to highlight those aspects of Judaism which are types or symbols, he does not hesitate to call them such. Abraham is not referred to as a type of anything in the *Dialogue*. This is notable given Justin's heavy use of typology as a means of providing proof for the Christian faith. Secondly, if typology is defined as 'the historical interrelation of any two given moments in the divine plan; and the exegetical method which establishes the theological affinities between these two moments in order to elucidate the Laws of God's action',[17] then we have no correlative point in time with which to match the meeting of Abraham and Melchizedek. Nevertheless, even if we are unable to see Abraham as a Jewish type, it is significant to point out that, in this case, Abraham functions as a Jew, not a Christian, especially in his deference to the uncircumcised priest Melchizedek. This runs counter to the idea that Abraham functioned only as a Christian in Justin's thinking. Once again, Abraham shows himself to be enigmatic. This is not to say that Abraham had no relationship or attachment to Christ, for he did. It was the relationship and meeting at Mamre (Gen 18) which served as the foundation for Justin's assertion that Christ the Logos made earthly visits to the patriarchs.[18] It is worthwhile then to examine this relationship in more detail.

Abraham and Christ

Siker uses this connection to assert two points. Firstly, that because of Abraham's knowledge of Christ he received the spiritual circumcision of the Christians (see above). Secondly, and more importantly, Siker sees the relationship between Abraham and Christ as proof of the exclusion of the Jews. He draws this conclusion by connecting two different images in the *Dialogue*, the meeting at Mamre (Gen 18) and the Matthean account of the eschatological banquet (Matt 8:11-12). 'Although they do not appear

17 Jean Danielou *Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture* (Philadelphia 1973) p 198

18 The relationship of the Logos to the patriarchs is unique and unparalleled in Justin's account of pagan history as found mainly in the *Apologies*. This is a point seldom noticed or accented but quite significant when looking at the role and function of the patriarchs in the writings of Justin. Justin's explication of the Logos as it related to the patriarchs differs significantly from the Logos as it was experienced by the 'heathen' philosophers. In this way, Justin saw the patriarchs as special and intimate 'knowers' of the Logos and thus Christ.

together, these two scenes describe for Justin the essential interconnectedness of Abraham and Christ. Just as Christ was with Abraham at Mamre, so Abraham will be with Christ at the eschatological banquet' (Siker p 178). Indeed, the eschatological banquet finds Abraham in its midst and Justin does wish to establish Mamre as a Christo/theophany before the Advent, but Siker draws the surprising conclusion that 'there is no clearer indication of the Jews' status as a disinherited people than Justin's appeal to Matthew 8:11-12' (Siker p 183). He draws the conclusion this way: because Abraham knew Christ at Mamre and is mentioned as a member of the banquet, Justin means to say that Jews are excluded from the banquet and will not be given a share in the future kingdom. There are two issues which need to be addressed in such a line of thinking:

1 Why did Justin dwell on the account of Mamre?
2 Does Abraham's presence at the eschatological banquet necessitate Jewish exclusion?

Justin is probably at his most creative when he is engaged in proving the existence of Christ at Mamre. But his main agenda has little or nothing to do with Abraham. Abraham's visitation by the three angels at Mamre is only the beginning of Justin's larger agenda. Chapter 56 is one of the more interactive exchanges in the *Dialogue*. Justin obviously knows what he wishes to say about this particular event. He makes Trypho claim that the three at Mamre were angels (*Dialogue* 56.5). That is when Justin presses the logic of this assumption and claims that one of them was God who was called an angel[19] (*Dialogue* 56.9). This allows Justin to prove:

> that He who is said to have appeared to Abraham, and to Jacob, and to Moses, and who is called God, is distinct from Him who made all things, numerically (ἀριθμῷ), I mean, not in will (οὐ γνώμῃ). For I affirm that He has never at any time done anything which He who made the world – above whom there is no other God – has not wished Him both to do and engage Himself with. (*Dialogue* 56.10)

Justin goes on to deal with each of these visitations one after the other. The overarching importance of these visitations is not to show the special relationship between Christ and Abraham; it is to prove that Christ – the Λόγος – made earthly appearances. Granted, God revealed Christ to these patriarchs because of their privileged standing with God, but the effort is a Christological one. The importance of the Logos and his earthly visits in Justin's thought is well established and need not be explained in this

19 'In the various passages in which Justin assigns the reason for Christ being called angel or messenger, Justin uses also the verb ἀγγέλλω, to convey messages, to announce. The similarity between ἄγγελος and ἀγγέλλω cannot be retained in English' (translators' note.)

context. In short, the goal was to prove:

> that it was Jesus who appeared to and conversed with Moses and Abraham and all the other patriarchs without exception, ministering to the will of the Father; who also, I say, came to be born man by the Virgin Mary, and lives forever. (*Dialogue* 113.4)

Mamre did not have as its centre Abraham's relationship to Christ. But even if we grant the importance of Abraham's knowledge of Christ, we still have a long way to go to prove that this translates into Jewish exclusion. The passage in Matthew reads:

> I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matt 8:11-12)

Siker interprets the passage in this way. 'First, the reference to the people coming from east and west shows the gentile believers coming into the Kingdom of heaven. Second, the casting out of the "children of the Kingdom" indicates God's rejection of unbelieving Jews' (Siker p 182). This is not an impossible conclusion, but it is one which Justin does not make. Justin does not split the people into racial groups as Siker thinks he does. It is far too simplistic to say that 'for Justin, the Jews will receive judgement, while the gentiles will receive a banquet' (Siker p 183). This is Siker's gloss on what he believes to be Justin's intention. Siker's failure, or refusal,[20] to see a Jewish remnant in the *Dialogue* makes it possible for him to assert racial conclusions about Justin's attitude toward the Jews:

> Apart from Christ, the Jews have no hope in the future, no deliverance. Without the promises of Christ, the Jews have no part in God, as Justin in fact claims. Apart from God, the Jews have only judgement and destruction awaiting them. In Justin's sketch of Abraham, we find a bleak picture indeed. (Siker p 184)

Siker does recognize that, for Justin, salvation and the promises of God revolve around faith in Christ. But he has unfortunately drawn artificial lines by saying that Justin was seeking to say something particular about the Jews. What he has not taken into account is that, for Justin, *anyone* who is outside Christ faces the same fate. In his *First Apology* he is

20 I say refusal because Siker uses many of Justin's quotations which contain clear references to a remnant, yet he does not acknowledge this fact. The existence in Justin's writing of a Jewish remnant weakens his central thesis about the disinheritance of the Jews. It seems, therefore, to have been suppressed.

unequivocal: 'For we forewarn you, that you shall not escape the coming judgment of God, if you continue in your injustice; and we ourselves invite you to do what is pleasing to God' (*I Ap* 68.1). Judgment is for all who are not in Christ and do not live lives of justice. For Justin, there is nothing racial about salvation. It is based solely on faith in Christ, not on the mark of physical circumcision. Abraham will be at the banquet and in Justin's mind he was ritually circumcised. When Trypho claims that Jesus himself 'was circumcised and observed other legal ceremonies ordained by Moses [Justin replies], "I have admitted it and do admit it that he endured all these not as if He were justified by them"' (*Dialogue* 67.5). In explaining the eschatological banquet Justin never makes a racial distinction about who was in and who was out.

Justin and Salvation

Understanding the major theme that underpins the text we will be better able to understand Justin's attitude about circumcision, Abraham, and his remnant theology. It is salvation and the promise of God's inheritance whichstands at the centre of the *Dialogue*.[21] Justin's critique of the Jews in the *Dialogue* assumes that they are standing on their blood-line alone for salvation. Justin accuses the Jews of resting on their well-connected laurels:

> And you deceive yourselves while you fancy that, because you are the seed (σπέρμα) of Abraham after the flesh, therefore you shall fully inherit the good things announced to be bestowed by God through Christ. For no one, not even they [Abraham's seed] has anything to look for, but only those who in mind are assimilated to the faith of Abraham and who have recognized the mysteries... So that it becomes you to eradicate this hope [on fleshly lineage] from your souls, and hasten to know in what way forgiveness of sins, and the hope of inheriting the promised good things, shall be yours. But there is no other way than this, – to become acquainted (ἐπιγνόντες) with Christ, to be washed in the fountain spoken of by Isaiah for the remission of sins; and for the rest, to live sinless lives. (*Dialogue* 44.2,4)

Here, Justin is attempting to put Abraham in perspective and focus on the spiritual attachment to him rather than the physical one. But even this spiritual attachment to Abraham is not enough unless it becomes

21 Williams Lukyn *Adversus Judaeos: A Bird's-eye View of Christian Apologetic until the Renaissance* (CUP 1935). 'Justin is so intent on the salvation won for us by the cross of Christ that he sometimes finds symbols of the cross in the verses of the Old Testament where we can hardly see them' (p 39). For example, the serpent on Moses' pole makes a cross (Deut 33:13-17), the horn of the unicorn refers to the crucifixion (*Dialogue* 91.1), the roasting of the Paschal lamb on a spit resembles a cross (*Dialogue* 40.1) and Moses praying against the Malachites made a cross with his body (*Dialogue* 90.4).

synonymous with faith in Christ. There is no denying the fact that Justin's concept of salvation is thoroughly Christ-centred. There is only one way to salvation and the promised inheritance of God. That is not the same, however, as excluding Jews from the promises of inheritance based on their race or on their circumcision. Instead, it makes salvation conditional on faith in Christ. If this condition is met, all other externals become irrelevant and thus allowable. For Justin, therefore, all the externals of Jewish practice, mainly circumcision and ritual practice, can be maintained if they are in a Christian perspective. The promises can be obtained by Trypho and his sins forgiven if he turns to belief in Jesus Christ. In the above passage there is also an allusion to baptism, which, following the teaching element, would be the common progression of entrance into the church. Justin is not simply out to destroy, but to replace. Granted, there is an aggressive element to replacing one's religious beliefs, but it is not as violent as wholesale destruction.

Salvation is based on a freely made choice to believe and live an upright life. Justin is very much attached to the importance of free-will. In the *First Apology*, free-will is a vital element. Without it, humans cannot be held accountable for their actions (*I Ap* 43.2). Judgment in his *Apologies* is based on the choices one has made in life; even the angels will be judged by their choices (*II Ap* 43.2). He does not discuss the relationship between faith and free-will, but from his emphasis on choice and belief it is clear he sees faith as something chosen, not received. There is not in Justin the sense that anyone is irretrievably doomed in this life. In the penultimate chapter of the *Dialogue* Justin affirms this idea again. 'So that if they repent, all who wish for it can obtain mercy from God' (*Dialogue* 141.3). This is also an important element to understand in Justin and his attitude toward the Jews. His idea of free-will coupled with the hope of a Jewish remnant allows him to see possibility within the Jewish community; thus his effort to convert or convince those who adhere to Jewish beliefs, in this case Trypho and his friends.

Admittedly, there are times when Justin accuses the Jews as a corporate body of disobedience and consequently asserts that they have lost out on the inheritance (*Dialogue* 119.6; 123.4; 140.3), but these occur in the context of polemic (119.6; 123.4) or hyperbole (140.3) and do not form a coherent or consistent theme. For Justin, the Jews as a whole showed much more resistance to the gospel than other groups. Pagans could be excused on the grounds of ignorance, but the Jews, who read the same Scripture, must have appeared intransigent to Justin, who saw the Hebrew Scriptures as purely Christian writings. That Justin slipped at times into generalizations and spoke of the Jews as a collective is not surprising. But this does not mean that these generalizations can be taken as normative. Taken as a whole, Justin does not see the Jews as doomed or forever

separated from the promises of God's future Kingdom. There is still time for Trypho to be a part of that remnant group who will be found in Christ's camp. He even allows room for Jewish practice within Christian faith (*Dialogue* 47.1).

Conclusion

At this point, it might appear that Abraham has been left behind. Jacob and the particular lineage through Judah seem to occupy Justin's attention more than Abraham. Justin uses the name Jacob 121 times in the *Dialogue* as compared with 103 for Abraham. The majority of the instances where Abraham is mentioned deal with circumcision and the special problem Justin faced trying to explain this inconsistency – a problem which even Siker admits he does not handle well (Siker p 169). When Abraham is put against Justin's idea of salvation, he is pushed even further into the background. Circumcision may serve as a kind of temporal punishment, but it is not of permanent import. Even observance of the Law is of little matter if one has faith in Jesus and lives a good life. Scholarship is mistaken if it sees Abraham as the centre of the *Dialogue* or if it sees the disinheriting of the Jews as the driving force behind Justin's apologetics. Justin was ambiguous, if not confused, about Abraham. He did not fit well into what he wished to say about the Law and Christianity. Justin was concerned to show the legitimacy of the Christian faith by showing its own lineage. But that lineage highlighted Jacob and Judah and their ultimate linkage with Jesus more than Abraham.

Abraham is both the model of faith in Christ and the model for Jewish conversion in his meeting with Melchizedek. Far from separating Abraham from the Jews he wishes to have him as the model of how one who is circumcised is able to convert. Justin's critique of the lineal confidence of the Jews and the affirmation that only through faith in Christ is one saved puts Abraham's circumcision and the Law a distant second.

TIMOTHY HORNER is studying for an Oxford doctorate in the area of Christian apologetics during the patristic period.