



Justin Martyr

Philosopher Turned Evangelist (c. 100 – 165)

A few decades after the Apostle John's death, a young philosopher named Justin embarked on a spiritual journey to find truth. One day, while he was walking to his accustomed place of meditation in a secluded field overlooking the Mediterranean, he noticed an old man walking at a distance behind him. Wanting to be left alone, he turned and stared with annoyance at the elderly man.

However, the old man, who turned out to be a Christian, struck up a conversation and learned that Justin was a philosopher. The old man then began to ask Justin some soul-searching questions, helping Justin to see the deficiency of human philosophy.

As Justin later reminisced, "When the old man had spoken these and many other things, he left, encouraging me to think about what he had said. I've never seen him since, but immediately a flame was kindled in my soul. I was overwhelmed by a love for the prophets and the friends of Christ. After pondering over the things the old man had said, I realized that Christianity was the only true and worthwhile philosophy."

After becoming a Christian, Justin continued to wear his philosopher's robe to symbolize that he had found the one true philosophy. In fact, he became an evangelist, especially to pagan philosophers. He proved to be a gifted evangelist, bringing many Romans- learned and unlearned- to conversion. During Justin's life, Christianity was an outlawed religion. Justin realized, however, that much of the persecution resulted from false rumors about Christians. He felt that if the government knew the truth about Christians, it might halt its savage persecution. So, at the risk of his own life, Justin penned an apology, addressing it to Emperor Antoninus Pius.

In the end, Justin's witness for Christ did cost him his life. A group of philosophers plotting against him had him arrested and sentenced to death. Choosing to die rather than to renounce Christ, Justin was executed in about 165 A.D. After his death, he became known as Justin the Martyr, or simply Justin Martyr.

Apart from the inspired New Testament writings, Justin's 1st Apology is perhaps the single most valuable work of early Christianity. It furnishes detailed descriptions of church services, baptism, and the Lord's Supper (the Mass). These descriptions are among the earliest we have. The value of this apology is enhanced by the fact that it was not written by some "church father" trying to tell the church what to teach or how to conduct its worship services. Instead, it was simply written by an evangelist explaining to the Romans what Christians believed and how they conducted their meetings. Throughout his work, Justin repeatedly uses the expression, "We have been taught..." He was not the teacher; he was simply relating what he and other Christians had learned.