

MIDWESTERN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

THE SEED OF REASON: TRACING THE LOGOS IN JUSTIN MARTYR

A RESEARCH PAPER

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE COURSE  
M-HT 3100 HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY I

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KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI

MARCH 06, 2017

## Building Highways

If you are willing to listen to an account of Him, how we have not been deceived, and shall not cease to confess Him, —although men’s reproaches be heaped upon us, although the most terrible tyrant compel us to deny Him,—I shall prove to you as you stand here that we have not believed empty fables, or words without any foundation but words filled with the Spirit of God, and big with power, and flourishing with grace.<sup>1</sup>

People born into advanced societies tend to take for granted the technological developments that have always seemingly existed. One who has never known life without highways, for example, will find himself more frustrated with potholes and fading lane markings, and less grateful for the generations before him who carved out a clearing and built these highways for easier transportation. There is a similar reality in theological studies, a certain disregard for the pioneers and trailblazers who “built highways” on which the modern church traverses. Today’s church would benefit from returning to its roots, not only paying homage to these heroes who went before, but examining their crucial place in aiding the church toward a better understanding of God and His Word. One of those heroes is Justin Martyr (c. 100-165 AD). Justin has served the universal church in multiple ways, wearing many hats. To the philosophers he became as a philosopher, to win the philosophers. Yet he also is remembered as an apologist, an educator, and eventual martyr, the title remaining today as a suffix attached to his name. Above all, however, there is one particular point of doctrine that proved pivotal for Justin’s life and work, and thus for the church. This paper will show that the Christian concept of the Logos was essential and central to Justin Martyr’s conversion, his apologetics against competing worldviews, and his legacy in church history.

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<sup>1</sup> Justin Martyr, *Dialogue With Trypho* 9, in Roberts, Alexander and Donaldson, eds. *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*. Volume I. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1876). 199.

## The Centrality of the Logos in Justin's Conversion

While some of the details surrounding Justin Martyr's life are difficult to nail down, historians have worked hard to preserve the important events detailing Justin's youth and education. Justin was born c. 100 AD in Flavia Neapolis, or modern-day "Nablus," a city within the West Bank borders. Little details of Justin's childhood are known, though based on his birthplace and later conversion to Christianity it is commonly understood that he was born to pagan parents of Roman origin.<sup>2</sup> This is an important point, as Justin's unfamiliarity with the Christian faith at an early age would certainly affect the course of his studies as he grew up. It is clear from his writings and his biographers that he saw himself firstly as a student. He embarked on a sincere quest for knowledge, "some knowledge which should satisfy the cravings of his soul."<sup>3</sup> However, Justin never let his convictions be free from the testing of reason, and should a philosophical system he adopted or chased be found inept, he changed course. Some scholars have concluded that Justin's own pre-conversion stories of studying in various schools of philosophy are not historical narrative, but allegorical, due to their literary characteristics. Most scholars argue against this view, saying that these are likely real-life experiences, and that he shares them in his writings in order to highlight the deficiency of these philosophical systems in light of Christianity.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* Volume 1. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1876), 160.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Bryan M. Litfin, *Getting to Know the Church Fathers: An Evangelical Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 44 n. 4.

Justin's *Dialogue With Trypho* is the best exploration of his conversion from his own perspective. In *Dialogue*, Justin outlines the various turns and shifts he made as a student before coming to Christianity. He first mentions learning from the Stoics, but found out quickly this teacher knew little to nothing about God.<sup>5</sup> This competed with Justin's view that "the duty of philosophy [is] to investigate the Deity."<sup>6</sup> Justin later found a Peripatetic, who clearly seemed more interested in Justin's money than his time, and then a Pythagorean, who did not have time for Justin's perceived "ignorance" about "music, astronomy, and geometry."<sup>7</sup>

As a result, Justin makes another transition. "In my helpless condition it occurred to me to have a meeting with the Platonists, for their fame was great."<sup>8</sup> Justin's move to Platonism was not simply motivated by following the crowds, however. Socrates and his student Plato famously attacked the ancient gods of the day and instead built a theology consisting of a supreme and perfect being, the human soul's immortality, and the concept of a "higher world" that would supersede the world of humanity. According to historian Justo González, "Christians found [these teachings] attractive and useful in their attempts to respond to charges that they were ignorant and unbelieving."<sup>9</sup> Justin, a man who consistently found himself subjected to multiple academic embarrassments in his quest for knowledge, had finally found a place he felt at home in Platonism.

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<sup>5</sup> Justin, *Dialogue 2* (ANF 1:194).

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.* *Dialogue 1*.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, *Dialogue 2* (ANF 1:195).

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Justo González, *The Story of Christianity*, vol. 1, *The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation* (New York: HarperOne, 2010), 22.

Despite this, Justin's stay in Plato's world would not last long. While Platonism propelled him towards penetrating the spiritual realm of philosophy, he was soon shaken by the truth of Christianity after an encounter with a stranger by the sea. As the man and Justin began to talk, the conversation turned to spiritual matters. After discussing how one can know God, Justin responded with his Platonic reasoning. "The Deity cannot be seen merely by the eyes as other living beings can, but is discernible to the mind alone, as Plato says; and I believe him."<sup>10</sup> In this moment, the stranger and apparent evangelist began to unpack the truths of the doctrine of divine revelation. The man used the Old Testament prophets (unsurprisingly a common subject of Justin's writings) to solidify his arguments, saying the biblical prophets were "both righteous and beloved by God, who spoke by the Divine Spirit, and foretold events which would take place, and which are now taking place."<sup>11</sup> The stranger wrapped up his conversation with Justin, offering a parting challenge. "Pray that, above all things, the gates of light may be opened to you; for these things cannot be perceived or understood by all, but only by the man to whom God and His Christ have imparted wisdom."<sup>12</sup> This conversation changed Justin's life forever:

I have not seen him since. But straightway a flame was kindled in my soul...I found this philosophy alone to be safe and profitable. Thus and for this reason, I am a philosopher. Moreover, I would wish that all, making a resolution similar to my own, do not keep themselves away from the words of the Saviour.<sup>13</sup>

The sovereignty of God is certainly at work here in the life of Justin Martyr. One might wonder why God set Justin on such a trajectory, exposing him to many faulty worldviews before

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<sup>10</sup> Justin, *Dialogue* 3 (ANF 1:196).

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, *Dialogue* 7 (ANF 1:198).

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*

finally illuminating his heart and mind with the light of the gospel. As will soon become apparent, one of Justin's major offerings to the church was his development of Christianity's understanding of the Logos. Justin's prior education significantly furthered this endeavor. The Logos captivated Justin's mind, beginning in his journey toward embracing Christ as Savior. He exemplified a Christian faith seeking understanding ever since that providential day seaside.

### **The Centrality of the Logos in Justin's Apologetics**

Justin's steeping in the teachings of various philosophies allowed for a unique form of apologetics. He "spoke the language" of his audience in a compelling way other leading philosophers could not as effectively, even sometimes going as far as wearing proper clothing within the community he attempted to influence.<sup>14</sup> Rather than outright rejecting competing theologies as pure foolishness, Justin would often work to demonstrate how non-Christian worldviews, perhaps surprisingly to his audience, held much in common with Christianity. He would then show how ultimately Christianity is the only "safe and profitable" worldview of all. This process clearly reflects Paul's apologetic approach at the Areopagus. Paul located himself right in the heart of Athens amongst a majority of Epicureans and Stoics. Paul knew their philosophical bents beforehand, as his defense of Christ include references to "some of [their] own poets" (Acts 17:28)<sup>15</sup>. In Justin's context, many leading philosophers and governors viewed Christianity as a most contemptible religion, a "pernicious superstition" to the point that its

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<sup>14</sup> Litfin, *Getting to Know the Church Fathers*, 50.

<sup>15</sup> Unless otherwise specified, all Bible references in this paper are to the English Standard Version (ESV) (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011).

followers should be subjected to death.<sup>16</sup> Justin recognized this tension, adopting Paul's "becoming as a Jew to win Jews" mindset (1 Cor 9:20) to engage those around him. As mentioned above, Socrates and Plato expressed belief in a supreme being, life beyond death, and other theological realities that Christians share, though sometimes differing on aspects of these points. Justin saw these as "glimpses of truth" and explained these near-agreements by the Logos.<sup>17</sup>

What is this Logos to begin with? González's summary is helpful:

The Greek word Logos means "word" and "reason." According to a tradition of long standing in Greek philosophy, the human mind can understand reality because it shares in the Logos or universal reason that undergirds all reality. For instance, if we are able to understand that two and two make four, the reason for this is that both in our minds and in the universe there is a Logos, a reason or order according to which two and two always make four.<sup>18</sup>

Borrowing from the Stoics, Justin became one of the first to introduce the language of *logos spermatikos* in theology. The term is difficult to define in English, but it is close to "the seed of reason." According to his view, these "seeds" (*spermatikoi*) of reason (*logoi*) were similar to "parts of God" discernible in everything. The *logos spermatikos* must be "the very principle of the intelligibility of the created world."<sup>19</sup> This definitely provoked interest among those schooled in Greek philosophy. Justin's apologetic teachings, however, turn evangelistic here. It is not enough to accept that Christians, Hellenists, and philosophers of other kinds have

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<sup>16</sup> Henry Bettenson and Chris Maunder, eds., *Documents of the Christian Church*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 2.

<sup>17</sup> González, *The Story of Christianity*, 65.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Orlando O. Espin and James B. Nickoloff, eds., *An Introductory Dictionary of Theology and Religious Studies* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2007), 785.

similarities and differences and be done with it. Justin developed this doctrine not only to draw parallels, but to invite others to receive Christ as Savior.

One of Justin's key contributions is positing the Logos as a *what*, and fulfilling that *what* into a distinct, unequalled *Who*. Implicitly interacting with John 1, Justin affirms the "cosmic Logos" that existed in the world before Jesus (Jn 1:1-3), but acknowledges, unlike the Greek philosophers, that the Logos "became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn 1:14). He calls the Logos "the first-birth of God [who] was produced without sexual union, and that He, Jesus Christ, our teacher, was crucified and died, and rose again, and ascended into heaven."<sup>20</sup> In writing this *Apology* to the Roman people, Justin again draws similarities, this time to traditional pagan beliefs about gods such as Asclepius, Dionysius, or Herakles, whom they believe had similar experiences.<sup>21</sup> Justin made this normal practice in apologetics, taking the non-Christian conceptions of the gods, showing how Christianity believes similarly, and then showing how Christianity serves humanity with a *better* representation for these beliefs.

Some have critiqued Justin and his contemporaries for making such arguments, however. While they "no doubt...contributed to the acceptance of Christianity among the intelligentsia" of the day,<sup>22</sup> such arguments could lead to Christians blurring the lines of pagan philosophy and Christian philosophy too much, to a fault. González elaborates:

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<sup>20</sup> Justin Martyr, *Apology* I.21-22, in Roberts, Alexander and Donaldson, eds. *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*. Volume I. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1876). 170.

<sup>21</sup> L. Michael White, *From Jesus to Christianity: How Four Generations of Visionaries & Storytellers Created the New Testament and Christian Faith* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004), 378.

<sup>22</sup> González, *The Story of Christianity*, 182.

It was possible that Christians, in their eagerness to show the kinship between their faith and classical philosophy, would come to the conviction that the best way to speak of God was not in the manner of the prophets and other biblical writers, but rather in the manner of Plato, Plotinus, and the rest.<sup>23</sup>

While González's sentiment is understood, Justin does not seem to fall into the temptation to even out the Scriptural witness with pagan philosophical ideas. In fact, Justin is continually fascinated throughout his writings by the prophetic witness of Scripture; it was integral to his conversion. Not only this, but Justin makes it clear on multiple occasions that while parallels exist between the two systems, so do clear boundary lines, and crossing over to Christianity's line proves necessary for faith. Justin's apologetic includes the key figure of Christ, the Logos that "became flesh" (Jn 1:14). "Justin takes philosophy seriously," John Mark Reynolds observes, "but the Bible foundationally."<sup>24</sup> One particular excerpt from Justin's Second Apology offers a succinct explanation:

Our [Christian] doctrines, then, appear to be greater than all human teaching; because Christ, who appeared for our sakes, became the whole rational being, both body, and reason, and soul. For whatever either lawgivers or philosophers uttered well, they elaborated by finding and contemplating some part of the Word. But since they did not know the whole of the Word, which is Christ, they often contradicted themselves.<sup>25</sup>

Behold, something greater than *logos spermatikos* is here. This is more than a principle; this Logos is a person. The incarnation of God in Christ became the apex of Logos revelation. Justin argues that while other systems of philosophy get a taste of true wisdom through the *logos*

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<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> John Mark Reynolds, "Justin Martyr: Just Not Dead, Just Not Augustine," *First Things*; 24 09 2010, <https://www.firstthings.com/blogs/firstthoughts/2010/09/justin-martyr-not-just-dead-just-not-augustine>.

<sup>25</sup> Justin Martyr, *Apology* II.10, in Roberts, Alexander and Donaldson, eds. *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*. Volume I. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1876). 199.

*spermatikos*, they are ultimately deficient at some level; only in Christ does one find the “whole of the Word.”

Fred Sanders’s description of divine revelation in the speech and act of the Father further drives home the importance of the Word becoming flesh in line with Justin:

The root idea of revelation is not verbal announcement but the unveiling or disclosing of something that has been present, though concealed. In order to inform us that the Father has a Son and a Holy Spirit, the Father sent the Son and the Holy Spirit in person. The trinity of God was revealed when the persons of the Trinity became present among us in a new way, showing up in person and becoming the object of our human observation.<sup>26</sup>

If all of this remains true, that in Christ the Logos became flesh so that man may grasp God’s special revelation, then Christ must be the “source of all truth, beauty and goodness,” and “only Christians know the Logos fully by faith in Christ. In the end, Justin argues, all thought apart from Christ is incomplete.”<sup>27</sup> Justin issues his audience a fitting challenge in the conclusion of his First Apology, echoing the man who evangelized him seaside. “If these things seem to you to be reasonable and true, honour them; but if they seem nonsensical, despise them as nonsense.”<sup>28</sup> This may seem like a strange way of offering Christ to unbelievers, but it perfectly captures the reality of the Logos, and the truth of Scripture, that God takes initiative in opening the eyes of man (Ps 119:18), making His glory plain to see (Rom 1:19-20) and imparting to God’s chosen people a secret and hidden wisdom (1 Cor 2:6-10). Justin clearly understands that God revealing

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<sup>26</sup> Fred Sanders, *The Triune God*, New Studies in Dogmatics (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 40.

<sup>27</sup> Stephen J. Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate: The Doctrine of Christ*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016), 271-272.

<sup>28</sup> Justin Martyr, *Apology* I.68 (ANF 1:186).

Himself in the *logos spermatikos*, and ultimately, the Logos as Christ Jesus, is God's work. The Logos must be preached, but more so, it must be believed, and trusted in.

### **The Centrality of the Logos in Justin's Legacy**

The teachings of the Apologists of the early church are considered "essential." They sought to do more than pass down catechetical truths, but to provide explanation of the faith for the church, from Nicea to the hundredth generation. Found in the early church teachers is a sort of *logos spermatikos* itself; there exists its own "seed of reason," the beginnings of theological development on which theologians of subsequent generations grew and built. Where Justin stands in church history in terms of legacy is ultimately left up to opinion. Careful observers will see both positive and negative implications for Justin's teaching on the Logos. This section will primarily be dealing with the latter, articulating some of the unfortunate circumstances that Justin's teachings helped bring about.

On the one hand, church historians regard Justin as "the greatest and most famous of the Apologists,"<sup>29</sup> owing to how extensively he labored to win intellectuals of his day. By placing the Logos at the center of his apologetics, Justin invites his audience to embrace any and all truth as truth from God. In today's context, such a lesson is extremely valuable for Christian apologists. Christians do not confess that their faith as truth merely because they believe it, but because it is *the objective truth* for all peoples, in all places. Justin had a way of magnifying the beauty of objective truth as compelling proof for God's existence. Humanity across religious affiliations shares universal questions and beliefs, and deep from the well of early church

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<sup>29</sup> H. Daniel-Rops, *The Church of Apostles & Martyrs* (New York: Dutton, 1960), 291.

writings is Justin pointing this out to the church. In some respects, Justin emulates a sort of patristic systematic theologian. Though no full-length work explaining every facet of systematic theology exists from his pen, Justin was a scholar at heart, and hoped to cultivate faithful scholarship in fellow Christians as well. He wrote, therefore, on a variety of subjects extending beyond the Logos. Perhaps his most widespread words consider Christian worship, where he provides wise counsel for observing the sacraments and participating in the Lord's Day from a second-century perspective. The simple fact that his name is still being mentioned, that this paper exists, is evidence of his long-lasting influence. While there has been much to commend in the life and work of Justin up to this point, he is not infallible, even when it comes to his work on the Logos. Only when a few hundred years passed could the church witness how his work potentially contributed to paving a path for theological conflict.

Apologists of the early church spent time discussing the true nature of God, forcing theologians to examine various positions on the matter. But as the church developed over the course of centuries, "civil authorities paid scant attention to theological controversies within the church."<sup>30</sup> That is, of course, until the church reached a breaking point in the early fourth century with the rise of Arianism and its leading proponent, Arius. Alexander, the bishop of Alexandria, and Arius would go toe-to-toe over the issue of the Logos. Alexander believed the Logos was coeternal with the Father. Arius disagreed. "If asked to draw a line between God and creation, Arius would draw that line to include the Word in creation, while Alexander would draw it in a manner that would place all of God's creation on one side and the eternal Word on the other."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> González, *The Story of Christianity*, 181.

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.* 184.

This led to a series of arguments surrounding the divinity of Jesus, and the term *subordinationism*. Classical subordinationism argues that Christ's divinity is lesser than that of God the Father's divinity; there is an "essential inequality of nature between the three persons."<sup>32</sup> As these disagreements grew, no longer without the attention of civil authorities and the masses, the first ecumenical council at Nicea was formed in 325 AD. It was at this council where the teachings of Arius would go on to become refuted and deemed as heresy by the council, making Christ's co-eternality with the Father the orthodox understanding of the *homoousios* of the Logos. Since Nicea, the church has been battling multiple forms of subordinationism, even in 21st-century debate. One could trace these events even back to the Apologist hailing from Flavia Neapolis.

Bearing in mind that Justin was one of the first Christian scholars to grapple with some of these concepts and the appropriate language surrounding them, the writings of Justin and his contemporaries feel often less meticulous than the writings of today, which have millennia of church teachings to consult. Because of this, Justin is accused at times of portraying a theology of subordinationism in his writing, and therefore causing the unfolding events of Arianism's rise, the Council of Nicea, and so forth. There could be many reasons for these kinds of subordinationist tendencies in the early church theologians pre-Nicea. Worthy of note, the early Apologists sought to protect monotheism at great cost in contrast to the prevailing polytheistic and pagan views of God in their society. Also, simpler and less refined proof-texting methods

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<sup>32</sup> J. Scott Horrell, "The Eternal Son of God in the Social Trinity," in *Jesus in Trinitarian Perspective: An Intermediate Christology*, ed. Fred Sanders and Klaus Issler (Nashville: B&H, 2007), 72.

could have led to confusion surrounding the Son's divinity, such as consulting John 14:28 where Jesus says "the Father is greater than I."

To what degree did Justin's Trinitarian contributions open the door for these conflicts? First, it would be helpful to determine where Justin himself lands on the spectrum of the Son's relation to the Father. In Justin's writings, one will find tensions of how exactly the ontology and economy of the Son, the Word made flesh, relates to the ontology and economy of the Father. There are several instances where his positions feel explicitly pro-Nicene here, and anti-Nicene there. For example, in *Dialogue*, Justin argues that he spends time proving "at length that Christ is called God."<sup>33</sup> Elsewhere, the language of Justin's assertions sound fuzzier; in his *First Apology* he calls Christ "both Son and Apostle of God the Father of all."<sup>34</sup> In commenting on passages in the prophets and the Pentateuch, Justin believes that instances where "God went up from Abraham" or "The Lord came down" in Scripture cannot be speaking of God the Father:

You must not imagine that the Unbegotten God himself came down or went up from any place. For the ineffable Father and Lord of all neither comes to any place, nor walks, nor sleeps, nor rises up, but remains in His own place, wherever that is, quick to behold and quick to hear, neither eyes or ears, but being of indescribable might; and He sees all things, and knows all things, and none of us escapes His observation; and He is not moved or confined to a spot in the whole world, for He existed before the world was made. How, then, could He talk with any one, or be seen by any one, or appear on the smallest portion of the earth?<sup>35</sup>

Justin argued at length that Christ is called God, yet he had to work to show where the distinctions lied. Certainly, there must be relationship between God the Father and God the Son, but *what is it?* This question had inarticulate answers up until Nicea. Even with the Council of

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<sup>33</sup> Justin Martyr, *Dialogue* 124 (ANF 1:264).

<sup>34</sup> Justin Martyr, *Apology* I.12 (ANF 1:166).

<sup>35</sup> Justin Martyr, *Dialogue* 127 (ANF 1:263).

Nicea's much-needed clarifications surrounding these issues, words like *homoousios* did not become part of normal theological vernacular for quite a while after the council's meeting.

Michael Svigel has provided some helpful commentary for how one should interpret Justin's wrestlings with these issues. First, Svigel contends:

Justin presented the Son as second in rank to the Father in the economy of creation, incarnation, and even the present and future ages. Yet amidst this clear and consistent portrayal of the Son's submission to the will of the Father, there are many indications of the Son's equality with God."<sup>36</sup>

Svigel recounts Justin's famous illustration of the torch lit from the primary flame, arguing Justin believed that in the Father and Son, "neither is less than the other and both have equality of essence and brilliance...However, the second flame is just that—second...Whatever we can say about the unity of God in Justin, he made it clear that the Son is not the Father."<sup>37</sup> In summarizing his arguments, Svigel's final point on Justin's Trinitarian theology is worth quoting at length:

Justin's Trinity of "second place and third rank" echoes the types of functional relationships in both the apostolic fathers and other apologists, and, it seems, even the New Testament itself. In short, one relegates Justin to heterodoxy or heresy by Nicene standards only if one first rejects the notion of an economic functional subordination in the Godhead. To be sure, Justin's Trinitarian theology was less precise and calculated than Nicene orthodoxy, but I do not believe it can be equated with the Arian dogma that would develop in the following centuries."<sup>38</sup>

What Svigel suggests here is important, because it puts unnecessary criticism at bay, yet acknowledges Justin's limitations in Trinitarian theology. Justin's position, upon examining the

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<sup>36</sup> Michael J. Svigel, "Power in Unity, Diversity in Rank: Subordination and the Trinity in the Fathers of the Early Church," *ETS* 56 (2004): 15.

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*, 16.

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*, 18.

writings left to the church today, is one of economic functional subordination, and ontological equality and co-eternality. To say he “caused” the rise of teachers like Arius seems a bit unfair. However, it is also important to note that the council of Nicea, particularly men such as Athanasius, worked to improve where Justin’s teaching was unhelpfully imprecise.

Where does this leave Justin’s legacy of the Logos hanging in the balance? One might be wary of turning to patristic writers, specifically because of their lack of precision, precision that the modern church now has access to thanks to its rich history. Justin may not be the modern readers’ first choice for Trinitarian studies off the cuff. As a result, some hastily reward Nicea as the starting grounds for Trinitarian conversation on the Logos. But theologians like Justin made this a *worthy* conversation in many ways. It was also his willingness to contextualize this conversation to the culture that, while perhaps contributed to ambiguity in some fashions, helped to make this a contemporary, cultural issue. Truth be told, without Justin’s attempts to take the nature of God seriously and at a scholarly level, one is left to wonder if the Council of Nicea would have taken place when it did, with the urgency it did.

### **Revisiting the Highway**

In 1985, the state of Texas began the “Adopt-A-Highway” program, a globally-recognized litter prevention effort, honoring donors and sponsors with signs bearing their name on the adopted roads. These roads can be sponsored in memory of lost loved ones or those important to them, if so desired. All along the roads, people volunteer time removing trash from the roadsides, serving their community, and doing good in the name of the organization or person whose name marks the blue sign on the road. Returning to the introductory metaphor for church

history, it would be a mistake not to adopt a highway in memory of Justin Martyr. As the modern church continues working to prevent litter on the roads, making theological travel easier, more beautiful, and more efficient, Justin is a candidate worthy of praise for his efforts in helping theologians, pastors, and statements of faith think through what the “seed of reason” means for Christian faith. He was an apologist who not only taught about the Logos, but understood how the Logos was at work in revealing Himself to the unsaved, the searching, the once-blind that now see. Justin’s life is often paid homage with the title of “Martyr” tagged along to his name, because he died for this faith. It was so much more than a system of truths to be taught in philosophy circles and from ivory towers.

Bryan Litfin argues that “Justin proclaimed a faith that would make sense to his contemporary culture yet would remain true to its original principles.”<sup>39</sup> This is perhaps the best way to describe Justin’s ministry: a bold-faced, tenacious commitment to orthodoxy in the Scriptures, while seeking to make Christianity not only reasonable of worship, but glorious to the people of his day. Any healthy pastor or scholar could get behind that as a personal mission statement. To Justin the church owes its thanks. He was not perfect, but the Word made flesh was, in which he placed his trust and faith in; this was faith he considered worth living for, and dying for.

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<sup>39</sup> Litfin, *Getting to Know the Church Fathers*, 54.

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