

# Justin Martyr's Exegesis of Biblical Theophanies and the Parting of the Ways between Christianity and Judaism

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**Abstract**

The article provides an overview of the three distinct approaches to the exegesis of theophanies documented in the surviving works of Justin Martyr. It argues, contrary to previous scholarship on Justin Martyr, and in agreement with Larry Hurtado, that the argument from theophanies precedes its use by Justin, and suggests that the *Dialogue* and the *Apologies* may offer a glimpse into the process by which the exegetical disagreement over theophanies contributed to the crystallization of distinct “Jewish” and “Christian” social identities.

**Keywords**

Justin, Trypho, theophanies, exegesis, Judaism, parting, Skarsaune, Hurtado

Students and scholars of early Christianity ought to pay more attention to the Christian exegesis of Old Testament theophanies. The association and even identification of Israel's LORD with the “Lord Jesus,” supported exegetically by the identification of Jesus as the subject of theophanic texts such as Genesis 18, 28, 32; Exodus 3, 19, 24; Isaiah 6; Ezekiel 1; Daniel 7; and Habakkuk 3 (LXX), was crucial for fashioning an increasingly distinct symbolic universe among early Christians.

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Rooted in the apostolic era, as recent scholars on Christian Origins have argued,<sup>1</sup> the christological exegesis of OT theophanies gained prominence in the second and third centuries, and played an important role in anti-Jewish, antidualistic, and antimonarchian polemics: it figured significantly in a catechetical manual such as Irenaeus's *Demonstration*; it was part of the antidualistic arsenal deployed by Irenaeus and Tertullian; it was the crucial argument used by Tertullian and Hippolytus against "Monarchians," as well as by later polemicists against the "Sabellianism" of Marcellus of Ancyra or Photinus of Sirmium. The controversies of the fourth and fifth centuries pushed to the margins the argument from theophanies that identified the Lord Jesus with Israel's LORD, as a much more precise and nuanced "technical" vocabulary came to dominate the articulation of doctrine. Nevertheless, recourse to theophanies remained a frequent occurrence in Christian hymnography, and iconography and, as a result, continued to enjoy great popularity among Christian worshippers, irresistibly commanding the gaze of the iconographer, the ready pen of the hymnographer, and the amazing tales of the hagiographer. As late as fourteenth-century Byzantium, the exegesis of biblical theophanies was still providing the exegetical infrastructure for the Hesychast controversy. In short, the argument from theophanies is an important "ingredient" in the gradual crystallization of a distinct exegesis, doctrine, liturgy, and spirituality from the earliest stages of the Jesus movement until well into the fifth century and, in the case of hymnography and iconography, until the ninth and the fifteenth centuries respectively.<sup>2</sup>

The following pages explore the exegesis of biblical theophanies illustrated by the extant writings of Justin of Neapolis.<sup>3</sup> This early Christian writer is an apt choice for the topic at hand. Not only does Justin often refer to OT theophanies, but the exegetical confrontation between Christianity and Judaism, dramatized in his *Dialogue*, also concerns the proper interpretation of these biblical key-texts. Building on the substantial

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1. See the relevant bibliography in n. 49 below.

2. For more detailed treatments of the ideas summarized in this paragraph see Georges Legeay, "L'Ange et les théophanies dans l'Écriture Sainte d'après la doctrine des Pères," *Revue Thomiste* 10 (1902) 138–58, 405–24; 11 (1903) 46–69, 125–54; Basil Studer, *Zur Theophanie-Exegese Augustins: Untersuchung zu einem Ambrosius-Zitat in der Schrift "De Videndo Deo"* (Rome: Herder, 1971); Bogdan G. Bucur, "Exegesis of Biblical Theophanies in Byzantine Hymnography: Rewritten Bible?," *Theological Studies* 68 (2007) 92–112; Bucur, "Dionysius East and West: Unities, Differentiations, and the Exegesis of Biblical Theophanies," *Dionysius* 26 (2008) 115–38; Gabriel Bunge, *The Rublev Trinity: The Icon of the Trinity by the Monk-Painter Andrei Rublev* (Crestwood, NY: SVS, 2007).

3. I have used the following critical editions and English translations: *Justin, Philosopher and Martyr: Apologies*, ed., trans., and commentary Denis Minns and Paul Parvis (New York: Oxford University, 2009); *Justin Martyr: Dialogue avec Tryphon*, ed. and trans. Philippe Bobichon (Fribourg: Academic, 2003); *St. Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho*, trans. Thomas B. Falls, rev. and intro. Thomas P. Halton, ed. Michael Slusser (Washington: Catholic University of America, 2003); *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Genesis* (hereafter *Tg Ps.-J.*), trans. Michael Maher (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1992); *The Babylonian Talmud*, ed. and trans. Isidore Epstein (London: Soncino, 1935–48); *Midrash Rabbah: Translated into English with Notes, Glossary, and Indices under the Editorship of H. Freedman and Maurice Simon*, foreword by I. Epstein, 13 vols in 10 (London: Soncino, 1939).

work produced by previous scholars,<sup>4</sup> I provide an overview of Justin's treatment of theophanies and highlight its importance for understanding early Christian exegesis, worship, and doctrine in an era of increasing distinction between church and synagogue.

## Three Approaches to Old Testament Theophanies

### *Justin's View*

Justin documents three distinct ways of interpreting OT theophanies. His own position is to ascribe all manifestations of the Logos to the patriarchs and prophets of Israel, as well as to relate Heraclitus, Socrates, and Plato<sup>5</sup> to the Logos who was subsequently the subject of incarnation, death, resurrection, and worship by Christians. Here are two representative passages:

This crucified man was with Moses and Aaron, and spoke with them in the pillar of the cloud; . . . he became man, was crucified, and ascended into heaven, and will return again to this earth; and . . . he should be worshipped (*proskunêton einai*).<sup>6</sup>

Jesus Christ is Son of God and Apostle, and was formerly Logos and was sometimes revealed in the form of fire and sometimes in an incorporeal image. But now, having become a human being by the will of God for the sake of the human race. . . .<sup>7</sup>

On an exegetical level, this interpretation of theophanies provides a solution—the same christological solution—to difficult or ambiguous texts. Its main value, however, is that it produces a coherent narrative leading from Genesis to Jesus, a Christologically rewritten Bible in which Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as well as Moses and the prophets

4. See E. R. Goodenough, *The Theology of Justin Martyr: An Investigation into Conceptions of Early Christian Literature and Its Hellenistic and Judaic Influence* (Jena: Frommann, 1923) 142–47; Jules Lebreton, “Note G: L’Interprétation des théophanies chez les apologistes et les antécédents de cette doctrine dans la spéculation hellénique et judaïque,” in *Histoire du dogme de la Trinité des origines au Concile de Nicée*, vol. 2, *De Saint Clément à Saint Irénée* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1928) 663–77; Benedict Kominiak, *The Theophanies of the Old Testament in the Writings of St. Justin* (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1948); Pierre Prigent, *Justin et l’Ancien Testament* (Paris: Lecoffre, 1964) 117–33; David E. Aune, “Justin Martyr’s Use of the Old Testament,” *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society* 9 (1966) 179–97; Demetrius C. Trakatellis, *The Pre-Existence of Christ in the Writings of Justin Martyr: An Exegetical Study with Reference to the Humiliation and Exaltation Christology* (Missoula: Scholars, 1976) 53–92, 138–46; Oskar Skarsaune, *Proof from Prophecy: A Study in Justin Martyr’s Proof-Text Tradition; Text-Type, Provenance, Theological Profile* (Leiden: Brill, 1987) 409–24.

5. *I Apol.* 46.2–3: “We were taught, and we mentioned before, that Christ is the first-born of God, being the Logos in which the whole race of human beings shared. And those who lived with the Logos are Christians, even if they were called atheists, such as among the Greeks, Socrates and Heraclitus and those similar to them, and among the barbarians, Abraham and Ananias and Azarias and Misael and Elias and many others whose deeds and names, for the present, we forbear to list, thinking it to be tedious.”

6. *Dial.* 38.1. This description of Christian exegesis is placed on the lips of Trypho, who considers it blasphemous. I discuss this text in a later section of the article.

7. *I Apol.* 63.10.

are “men of Christ,”<sup>8</sup> and in which the readers are invited to inscribe themselves by following Justin’s own example. Judging from the later writings of Irenaeus and Tertullian, it is very likely that Justin also used this “theophanic” approach to the Scriptures polemically against Marcion. In fact, Oskar Skarsaune thinks that the argument from theophanies was forged by Justin in the heat of his antidualistic polemic.<sup>9</sup>

### “All the Jews”

The second interpretation is what Justin ascribes to “all the Jews”:

But all the Jews even now teach that the unnamable God spoke to Moses . . .

[the unthinking Jews] . . . say that the one who said these things [Ex 3:2, 14] was the Father of all and the Creator.<sup>10</sup>

The Jews therefore, having always supposed that the Father of all spoke to Moses; . . . the belief entertained by the whole of your [i.e., Trypho’s] nation.<sup>11</sup>

The reference to “all the Jews” and the view ascribed to them may be an oversimplification to which Justin resorts in order to avoid any distracting details in his letter to a pagan addressee. But it may also be an attempt to ridicule the Jews for their view, which Justin declares philosophically untenable (because it compromises the transcendence of the supreme divinity) and, quite simply, an unintelligent proposition.<sup>12</sup>

Trypho’s view is nevertheless more complex, as can be seen in the exegesis of one crucial biblical text, Genesis 18. Trypho first treats the apparition of the Lord at Genesis 18:1 (“the Lord appeared to Abraham”) as chronologically prior to, and distinct from, the apparition of the three visitors at Genesis 18:2 (“Abraham lifted up his eyes, and behold three men”), interpreting the latter as three angels: one sent to deliver the good news to Sarah and the other two dispatched to destroy Sodom.<sup>13</sup>

8. *Apol.* 63.17: “But what was said to Moses from the thornbush: ‘I am the one who is, the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob and the God of your fathers,’ is indicative that, even though they died, those human beings *remain and are of Christ himself*” (emphasis added). See Trakatellis, *Pre-Existence of Christ* 92.

9. Skarsaune, *Proof from Prophecy* 210, 422, 424.

10. *I Apol.* 63.1, 11, 14.

11. *Dial.* 56.9.

12. *Dial.* 60.2: “He who has but the smallest intelligence will not venture to assert that the Maker and Father of all things, having left all supercelestial matters, was visible on a little portion of the earth”; *Dial.* 127.1–3: “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 has come 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, having neither eyes nor 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?”

13. *Dial.* 56.5: “God appeared to him, before the vision of the three men. Furthermore, those three whom the Word calls men were angels. Two of them were sent to destroy Sodom, while the third was sent to impart the good news to Sarah that she was to have a son and, having fulfilled his mission, he departed.”

This represents a traditional position that is also recorded in rabbinic literature.<sup>14</sup>

Trypho subsequently concedes the point that one of the three must be God. This, too, is not an ad hoc exegesis, but part of an older Jewish exegetical tradition, whose trace one can discern in Philo.<sup>15</sup> Eventually, Trypho also agrees that the one who appeared accompanied by two angels is different from the supreme God, the Father of all (*Dial.* 57.1), and that this is the case in all theophanies (*Dial.* 63.1). Trypho even goes so far as to call the subject of the theophanies at Mamre, Peniel, and the burning bush, “God.”<sup>16</sup> Skarsaune finds that “in the entire *Dialogue* there is hardly any argument more offensive to a Jew than the argument concerning the Second God in *Dial.* 56–60,” and that Trypho’s failure to object to Justin’s proof about “another God and Lord under the Creator of all things” (*Dial.* 56.4) is simply “unrealistic.”<sup>17</sup> I disagree.

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14. See *Cant. Rab.* 1.59 (see n. 3 above for the reference to *Midrash Rabbah*): “He was clasped between the Shechinah and an angel, as it says, ‘And when he saw he ran to meet them’ (Gen 18:2). ‘He saw’ the divine presence, and ‘he ran’ to the angel.” In *Tg Ps.-J.*, Abraham entreats God, who had appeared to him (Gen 18:1) “I beseech you, O Lord, if now I have found favor before you, let not the Glory of your Shekinah go up from your servant until I have received these travelers.” See *Shabbath* 127a: “Rab Judah said in Rab’s name: Hospitality to wayfarers is greater than welcoming the presence of the Shechinah, for it is written, *And he said, My lord, if now I have found favor in thy sight, pass not away, etc.* R. Eleazar said: Come and observe how the conduct of the Holy One, blessed be He, is not like that of mortals. The conduct of mortals [is such that] an inferior person cannot say to a great[er] man, Wait for me until I come to you; whereas in the case of the Holy One, blessed be He, it is written, and he said, My Lord, if now I have found, etc.” In other words, Abraham showed the importance of hospitality by boldly asking God to wait until he could care for the three guests.
15. *Dial.* 56.9. Philo (*On Abraham* [hereafter *Abr.*] 24.121) sees in the mysterious guests “the Father of the universe” (*patēr tōn holōn*) and his accompanying two powers, the creative (*poiētikē*) power and the royal one (*basilikē*)—in scriptural terms, He-Who-Is (*ho ōn*) “God” (*theos*), and “Lord” (*kurios*). The two powers are given slightly different names elsewhere (*Abr.* 124, 146; *On the Cherubim* 27–28; *On the Sacrifices of Cain and Abel* [hereafter *Sacr.*] 15.59). Philo’s reference to God “escorted” or “carried aloft” (*doruphoroumenos*) by the two powers (*Sacr.* 15.59; *Abr.* 24.122) evokes the biblical throne imagery (the ark, the mercy seat, and the two cherubim). Indeed, according to *Cherub* 27–28, the cherubim on the mercy seat are symbols of the two powers. See Fred Strickert, “Philo on the Cherubim,” *Studia Philonica* 8 (1996) 40–57. The three are not distinct entities, but rather aspects of the one ineffable divinity, and the alternation between singular (“Lord”) and plural (“three men”) corresponds to the higher and lower modes of spiritual perception (*Abr.* 24.119–24; *Questions and Answers on Genesis* [hereafter *QG*] 4.4). Philo sees illustrated in Genesis 18:1–2 the general truth that God summons before the spiritually seeing soul three appearances (*phantasias*) or an appearance sometimes of one, sometimes of three (*Sacr.* 15.60; *Abr.* 24.122; see also *QG* 4.2, 4; *Abr.* 24.119–24). For the scholarly discussion of Philo’s possible influence on Justin, see the substantial survey by David T. Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature: A Survey* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993) 98–105.
16. *Dial.* 60.3: “The God who communed with Moses from the bush was not the Maker of all things, but He who has been shown to have manifested Himself to Abraham and to Isaac and to Jacob; who also is called and is perceived to be the Angel of God the Maker of all things, because He publishes to men the commands of the Father and Maker of all things.”
17. Skarsaune, *Proof from Prophecy* 210.

As Daniel Boyarin explains, there is nothing unrealistic in Trypho's admission of two numerically distinct entities (*Dial.* 130.1):

The Logos Asarkos is kosher for Jewish worship but not the Logos Ensarkos. . . . Christianity and Judaism distinguished themselves in antiquity not via the doctrine of God. . . . The ascription of the actual physical death and resurrection to the Logos was the point at which non-Christian Jews would have begun to part company theologically.<sup>18</sup>

Although Justin and Trypho are in basic agreement on a binitarian monotheistic view, their understanding of this binitarianism remains different: for Trypho, the agent "is called and perceived to be (*kaleitai kai noeitai einai*) an angel of God the Creator of all" (*Dial.* 60.3); for Justin, he "is called an angel, and is God": *kai aggelos kaloumenos kai theos huparchôn* (*Dial.* 60.4). In short, the two share the notion of theophanies as manifestations of an agent distinct, in number not will, from the supreme deity; but Trypho's second power is *angelic* even though it may be called "God," while Justin's is *divine* and angelomorphic.

### A "Jewish" or "Modalistic" View

Justin also reports a third interpretation of theophanies. The two relevant passages are:

Then I repeated all that I had already quoted from Exodus concerning the vision in the bush, and the imposition of the name Jesus [Joshua], and continued, "Do not consider, you people, that I am verbose or repetitious in my explanations. My remarks are rather lengthy because I know that some of you want to forestall them, and to declare that the power which was sent from the Father of all and appeared to Moses, or Abraham, or Jacob, was called *Angel* because he came to men (since by that power the Father's messages are communicated); is called *Glory*, because he sometimes appears in visions that cannot be contained; is called a *Man* and a *Human Being*, because he appears arrayed in such forms as please the Father; and they call him *Word*, because he reveals to men the discourses of the Father. But some teach that this power is indivisible and inseparable from the Father, just as the light of the sun on earth is indivisible and inseparable from the sun in the skies; for, when the sun sets, its light disappears from the earth. So, they claim, the Father by his will can cause his power to go forth and, whenever he wishes, to return again. In this manner, they declare, God also made the angels. But it has been demonstrated that the angels always exist and are not reduced again into that from which they were created. It has also been shown at length that this power . . . is numbered different by its name, as is the light of the sun, but is something distinct in real number."<sup>19</sup>

The Jews therefore, having always supposed that the Father of all spoke to Moses when really it was the Son of God, who is called angel and apostle, who spoke to him, are rightly refuted, both through the prophetic Spirit and through Christ himself, as knowing neither the Father nor the Son. For those who say the Son is the Father are refuted as not having known

18. Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2004) 125. Goodenough's view (*Theology of Justin* 93) is similar.

19. *Dial.* 128.1–4.

the Father nor knowing that the Father of all has a Son who also, being the first-born Logos of God, is also God. And previously he appeared through the form of fire and an incorporeal image to Moses and to the other prophets, but now, in the time of your empire, he has become a human being through a virgin.<sup>20</sup>

The unnamed group in *Dial.* 128 holds that the Power of God becomes distinct only ephemerally, in economic manifestations. “They” also believe that angels do not have independent existence, but are “springing forth” from God and are then “reduced” to God. This view, as has been noted, is documented in rabbinic literature.<sup>21</sup> By contrast, in Justin’s thought, the Logos is distinct from God not only “in name” but also numerically,<sup>22</sup> the Logos subsists as “Lord,” “God,” and “Son of God” (*Dial.* 128.1), and, like fire lit from fire, “seems to exist of itself” (*tou autou menontos*, *Dial.* 61.2). And yet, since Justin does not impute these views—erroneous, in his opinion—to either Trypho or his teachers (or to any of their coreligionists, for that matter), we are left wondering whether “they” refers to Jews or, as more scholars are inclined to think, to Christians of a Monarchian variety.<sup>23</sup>

The same problem presents itself in *Apol.* 63. In the course of his argument against the “Jewish” exegesis of the theophany at the burning bush, Justin writes, “Those who say the Son is the Father are refuted as not having known the Father nor knowing that the Father of all has a Son who also, being the first-born Logos of

20. *I Apol.* 63.14–16.

21. *Hag.* 14a: “Samuel said to R. Hiyya b. Rab: O son of a great man, come, I will tell thee something from those excellent things which thy father has said. Every day ministering angels are created from the fiery stream, and utter song, and cease to be, for it is said: They are new every morning: great is Thy faithfulness (Lam 3:23). Now he differs from R. Samuel b. Nahmani, for R. Samuel b. Nahmani said that R. Jonathan said: From every utterance that goes forth from the mouth of the Holy One, blessed be He, an angel is created, for it is said: By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth (Ps 33:6).” See Genesis Rabbah 78.1: “Emperor: Do you maintain that a band of ministering angels do not offer praise to God more than once, and He daily creates a fresh band who sing before Him and then perish? R. Joshua: That is so. Emperor: Where do they go? R. Joshua: To the place where they were created. Emperor: Whence are they created? R. Joshua: From the river of fire.” “Emperor: What is the nature of the river of fire? R. Joshua: It is like the Jordan, which does not cease its flow day or night. Emperor: Whence does it originate? R. Joshua: From the perspiration of the *Hayyot* which they exude while carrying the Throne of the Holy One, blessed be He.” Both Goodenough (*Theology of Justin* 34) and Leslie W. Barnard (*Justin Martyr: His Life and Thought* [Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1967] 107) find that Justin reports here “a good Jewish tradition” or “a good Tannaitic tradition” respectively. More recently, Michael Fishbane (“Some Forms of Divine Appearance in Ancient Jewish Thought,” in *From Ancient Israel to Modern Judaism: Intellect in Quest of Understanding; Essays in Honor of Marvin Fox*, ed. Jacob Neusner et al. [Atlanta: Scholars, 1989] 261–70) places “Justin’s interlocutors within the context of early Jewish theosophical speculation” (269).

22. *Dial.* 129.3: *ouch onomati monon . . . alla kai arithmō heteron ti esti*; see *Dial.* 56.11: *heteros esti arithmō alla ou gnomē*.

23. See n. 26 below.

God, is also God.”<sup>24</sup> One can only wonder whether the expression “those who say the Son is the Father” applies more fittingly to “all the Jews” who, according to Justin, think theophanies are apparitions of the Father of all—or to Monarchian Christians, who *do* operate with the terms “Father” and “Son” but in a manner that Justin finds objectionable.

In seeking a solution, scholars have been repeating the same mantra—“Jewish or Modalistic”—for over a century, occasionally even pairing the terms in ways that further muddy the waters.<sup>25</sup> Following Boyarin, we can say that the view described in *Dial.* 128 and *1 Apol.* 63.15 is difficult to categorize as either Jewish or Christian, given that Justin’s texts are not so much descriptive as generative of these mutually exclusive entities. More precisely, at the very time that rabbis are labeling Jewish binitarian theologies as *minut*, Justin is “othering” a modalistic view of the Logos by refusing to claim it as Christian and even (at *1 Apol.* 63.15) implicitly painting it as “Jewish.”<sup>26</sup>

24. *1 Apol.* 63.15.

25. Carl Andresen (*Logos und Nomos: Die Polemik des Kelsos wider das Christentum* [Berlin: de Gruyter, 1955] 336) and Trakatellis (*Pre-Existence of Christ* 35) both speak of “some specific Jewish modalistic speculations” (!). In his *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte* (1.1, 187 n. 2 in the third German edition; 196 n.2 in the English translation) Harnack finds that *Dial.* 128 “seems to favor the idea” of modalistic conceptions before the last third of the second century as an example of Modalism. In a later study dedicated specifically to the Judaism reflected in Justin’s Dialogue (“Judentum und Judenchristentum in Justins Dialog mit Trypho,” *Texte und Untersuchungen* 39 [1913] 47–92, at 77 n. 5) he concludes that *Dial.* 128 reports on “Speculationen des philosophischen Judentums”—by which he probably means ideas espoused by educated Jews of the Alexandrian diaspora, such as Philo. Lebreton, who speaks about “certain Jewish teachers” (*Histoire du dogme de la Trinité* 2:430, 432), later in the same volume refers to this passage as “the discussion against the Modalists” (447) and finally, and emphatically, to “Alexandrian Jews” (675–77); Slusser 193 n. 1: “Perhaps some Jews, like Philo, or some Christians, like the Monarchians”; Eric Francis Osborn, *Justin Martyr* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1973) 31: “Their ideas are clearly of Jewish origin, although they show some similarity to the doctrines of Modalist Monarchians”; Minns and Parvis 245 n. 3: *Apol.* 63 “is ostensibly directed against Jews, but may also have been concerned with Christian heretics, perhaps Marcion, perhaps modalists. Chapter 128 of the *Dialogue*, which has many resonances with this chapter of the *First Apology*, suggests that it was Christian modalists that Justin was attacking.” Skarsaune (*Proof from Prophecy* 422) and Bobichon (2:893 nn. 7, 11) also view the theology of this group as Modalistic.
26. In Christian heresiology, “disbelief in Two Powers in Heaven (so-called Sabellianism, Modalism, or Monarchianism, that is, One Power in Heaven) is named—accurately—‘Judaism,’ producing a binary opposition between the inside and outside of Christianity and disavowing a threatening difference within.” In rabbinic texts, conversely, “the belief in Two Powers in Heaven is excommunicated from within Judaism and named (albeit slightly, but only slightly, obliquely) as ‘Christianity’”; “Jewish/Christian Modalism is being constructed as Jewish, Jewish/Christian binitarianism as *minut*” (Boyarin, *Border Lines* 137, 138; but see the entire chapter [128–47]).

A closer look at *Dial.* 128 reveals that Justin does not call the doctrine he is criticizing in this passage “Jewish.” He may be aware that Trypho, his teachers, and the hypothetical Jewish interlocutors of his readers, would not claim these views as their own either, just as he recognizes that they “would not acknowledge as Jews the Sadducees or the similar sects of the Genistae, Meristae, Galilaeans, Hellenians, and the Baptist Pharisees.”<sup>27</sup> But Justin does not claim it as a Christian opinion either. He refers to its proponents as “some” and “they,” and seems concerned that Trypho and his friends might mistake their views with his (Justin’s) presentation of Christian doctrine. It is significant that Justin explicitly calls “Christian” not only those “wholeheartedly orthodox Christians” to whom he belongs<sup>28</sup> but also groups holding controversial doctrines or practices. He speaks, for instance, of “pure and pious Christians who do not share our opinion” in matters of eschatology (*Dial.* 80.2); he regards Torah-observant worshippers of Jesus (it is not clear whether these are ethnic Jews or proselytes) as “kinsmen and brethren,” and even regards as Christian those who view things differently and reject them;<sup>29</sup> and he warns Trypho against others “who are called Christians” but “whose doctrines are entirely blasphemous, atheistic, and senseless.”<sup>30</sup> If the mysterious group of *Dial.* 128 is not referred to as Christian, it may very well be due to the fact that “they” had never claimed to belong to the Christian faith.

In fact, nothing indicates that the speculation on the relation between Father and Son in *Dial.* 128 and *1 Apol.* 63 was professed by worshippers of Jesus, since there is no reference to an earthly manifestation of the second power linked in some fashion to Jesus. It seems more likely that the passages under discussion sketch out a binitarian theology of the “two powers in heaven” type, disinherited theologically by both sides, but whose adherents in all likelihood would not have themselves claimed to be Christians.<sup>31</sup>

27. *Dial.* 80.4.

28. *Dial.* 80.5.

29. *Dial.* 47.2.

30. *Dial.* 80.3.

31. “Binitarian” seems the term most apt to suggest a bifurcation of the divinity that does not preclude a fundamentally monotheistic conception. Such binitarian monotheism, positing a “second power in heaven”—be it the Glory, Name, the Angel of the Lord, the Wisdom, or the Son of Man, etc.—is characteristic of the prerabbinic or nonrabbinic forms of Judaism (e.g., Philo’s language of Logos as “second God” or the *memrā*-theology of the Targums). Binitarian monotheism is also, of course, the defining mark of the emerging Jesus movement’s high Christology, with the crucial distinction that the “second power,” the Logos, “became flesh and lived among us” (Jn 1:14) and was worshipped as “Lord and God” (Jn 20:28) in a cultic setting. Relevant articles are found in James R. Davila et al., eds., *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism: Papers from the St. Andrews Conference on the Historical Origins of the Worship of Jesus* (Leiden: Brill, 1999). See also Gilles Quispel, “Der Gnostische Anthropos und die Jüdische Tradition,” in *Gnostic Studies*, 2 vols. (Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut in het Nabije Oosten, 1974–1975) 1:173–95; Alan F. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1977), passim; Paul A. Rainbow, “Jewish Monotheism as the Matrix for New Testament Christology: A Review Article,” *Novum Testamentum* 33 (1991) 78–91; Rainbow, “Monotheism—A Misused Word in Jewish Studies?,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 42 (1991) 1–15.

Boyarin argues that Justin's rhetoric created "Judaism" and "Christianity" by establishing boundaries to divide a formerly undifferentiated unity. I find it rather more plausible that, in the passages under discussion, Justin assumes an already existing difference between "his" brand of Christianity on the one hand, and both Trypho's brand of Judaism and the binitarian theology of the unnamed group on the other.

## Christophanies and the Borderline

As I indicated earlier, Trypho's Judaism can embrace a "two powers in heaven" position that would mark it as traditional, in the sense of warranting comparison with Philo, Wisdom of Solomon, or the Targums, and earn it the scholarly label of "binitarian monotheism."<sup>32</sup> Moreover, the discussion between Trypho and Justin is polite and at times even bordering on amicable. Reassured by Justin's firm rejection of anything remotely resembling dualism, Trypho is open to consider Justin's arguments for a binitarian exegesis of theophanies.<sup>33</sup> He finds it "incredible" that the teachers and leaders of the people would have expunged certain lines from the sacred texts but prefers to withhold judgment on the topic;<sup>34</sup> and he even envisions the possibility that Justin's argumentation could be pertinent to Gentiles, whose worship of Jesus might be divinely sanctioned.<sup>35</sup>

There are boundaries, however, that Trypho will absolutely not cross—most notably the ultimate identification of the polyonymous agent in theophanies with Jesus of Nazareth. It is this point that is truly offensive to Trypho and his coreligionists. When Justin presents Trypho with the image of Jesus as the one speaking in the pillar of cloud, Trypho reacts by accusing him of blasphemy:

For you have blasphemed many times in your attempt to convince us that this crucified man was with Moses and Aaron, and spoke with them in the pillar of the cloud; that he became man, was crucified, and ascended into heaven, and will return again to this earth; and that he should be worshipped.<sup>36</sup>

32. It is important to acknowledge the problematic theological freight of this otherwise useful term. See my article, "'Early Christian Binitarianism': From Religious Phenomenon to Polemical Insult to Scholarly Concept," *Modern Theology* 27 (2011) 102–20.

33. *Dial.* 56.12, 16; 57.4: "And Trypho said, 'Prove now that this is the case, that we also may agree with you. For we do not understand you to affirm that He has done or said anything contrary to the will of the Maker of all things. . . . Prove this; for, as you see, the day advances, and we are not prepared for such perilous replies; since never yet have we heard any man investigating, or searching into, or proving these matters; nor would we have tolerated your conversation, had you not referred everything to the Scriptures: for you are very zealous in adducing proofs from them; and you are of opinion that there is no God above the Maker of all things. . . . Do as seems good to you; for I shall be thoroughly pleased.'"

34. *Dial.* 73.5: "Whether [or not] the rulers of the people have erased any portion of the Scriptures, as you affirm, God knows; but it seems incredible."

35. *Dial.* 64.1: "Here Trypho said, 'Let Him be recognised as Lord and Christ and God, as the Scriptures declare, by you of the Gentiles, who have from His name been all called Christians; but we who are servants of God that made this same [Christ], do not require to confess or worship Him.'

36. *Dial.* 38.1.

Since Justin regards all theophanies as manifestations of the same “rational power” referred to in Scripture as “now the Glory of the Lord, now the Son, again Wisdom, again an Angel, then God, and then Lord and Logos,”<sup>37</sup> there is good reason to suppose that he understood throne theophanies such as Isaiah 6 or Ezekiel 1 in the same manner, that is, christologically.<sup>38</sup> Even though he does not explicitly refer to Jesus as the glorious figure “seated on the throne” (Isa 6:1), or Ezekiel’s humanlike figure “above the likeness of the throne” (Ez 1:26), he does, twice in the *Dialogue* (37.3 and 64.4), use Ps 98:1–7 to identify Jesus as the one who is “seated over the cherubim.” For Justin, Jesus is “the Lord seated upon his holy throne” (Ps 46:9), “the Lord enthroned upon the cherubim” and “the Lord in Zion” (Ps 98:1–2), “the Lord of glory” and “Lord of the powers” (Ps 23:7, 10).<sup>39</sup> Of the latter Justin writes that it must be Jesus Christ, since “solely of this Christ of ours . . . who is *Lord of the powers* (*kurios tōn dunameōn*) . . . who arose again from the dead and ascended into heaven, as is stated in the psalm and the other scriptural passages which also declared him to be *Lord of the powers*.”<sup>40</sup> As Christian Oeyen has shown, the phrase *kurios tōn dunameōn* means, for Justin, that the “Lord” is Jesus and the “powers” are the highest angelic beings.<sup>41</sup>

Jesus as the God of Sinai and Zion, as rider of the chariot-throne, as YHWH himself: this is the very core of Justin’s Christology, a doctrine that Trypho’s teachers understandably viewed as sheer blasphemy.

## Is Justin the Inventor of the Argument from Theophanies?

The dominant scholarly view is that Justin of Neapolis *invented* the argument from theophanies.<sup>42</sup> More specifically, according to Skarsaune, Justin would be fusing the

37. *Dial.* 61.1.

38. Darrell D. Hannah, “Isaiah’s Vision in the *Ascension of Isaiah* and the Early Church,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 50 (1999) 80–101, at 81–82.

39. *Dial.* 37.1; 37.3; 36.5–6.

40. *Dial.* 85.1.

41. According to Oeyen (“Die Lehre von den göttlichen Kräften bei Justin,” *Studia patristica* 11 [1972]: 214–21), *kurios tōn dunameōn* was a fixed expression, with a precise referent: the “powers.” Justin might have been aware, like Origen later on, of a tradition—which Origen (*Commentary on John* 1.31.215) ascribes to his famous “Hebrew”—that derived the title Lord Sabaoth from a specific class of angelic beings, namely, the “Sabai.” Aside from “thrones,” “dominions,” “rulers,” and “powers” (see Col 1:16) Origen is convinced that there exist many other heavenly beings, “of which one kind the Hebrew called *Sabai*, from which was formed *Sabaoth*, their ruler, who is no other than God.” Justin consistently uses *kurios tōn dunameōn*, and not the prevalent LXX *kurios pantokratōr* and *kurios sabaōth*.

42. Skarsaune, *Proof from Prophecy*: “the argument on the theophanies is not met with prior to Justin” (208); “Justin has an inventor’s pride with regard to his argument in *Dial.* 56–60” (211); “the section on the theophanies, *Dial.* 56–60, is one of Justin’s own substantial contributions to the traditional argument employed elsewhere in the *Dialogue*. He has probably presented it for the first time in his anti-Marcion *Syntagma*, briefly recalling part of it quite incidentally in *1 Apol.* 63, and then coming back to the theme in a fresh way in the *Dialogue*” (212). See Kominiak, *Theophanies* 4: “Justin has arranged the theophanic texts into a scriptural proof for the plurality of Divine Persons and for the divinity of Christ. This

traditional *testimonia*-argument in favor of two Gods (the cluster of Gen 19:24; Ps 110:1; and Ps 45:7) with his own original argument about theophanies as christophanies.<sup>43</sup>

With all due respect to our ancient Christian writer and his eminent twentieth-century exegetes, I see less originality at play in Justin's argument from theophanies than Kominiak, Trakatellis, and Skarsaune would have us believe. One should note, first of all, that Trypho invokes his "teachers" who have *already* been warning the community against holding conversation with those who preach that "this crucified man was with Moses and Aaron, and spoke with them in the pillar of the cloud," and who thus "ensnare the people into worshipping Jesus."<sup>44</sup> Second, Melito of Sardis in his *Peri Pascha* also identifies Jesus as the one who guided Israel in a pillar of fire, fed his people manna from heaven and water from the rock, and gave the Law on Horeb, and he generally *assumes* his readers' familiarity with the same type of christological rereading of the story of Israel from Abraham to the conquest of the land and further to the times of kings and prophets.<sup>45</sup> Justin's writings and the *Peri Pascha* appear,

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is the first Christian attempt to construct the well-known argument from the theophanies" (emphasis added); Trakatellis, *Pre-Existence*: "In the known texts then of the first and second centuries, there is no christological interpretation of the Old Testament theophanies except in Justin's works" (59); the "coherent christological interpretation of theophanies . . . seems to be Justin's own achievement" (85).

43. Skarsaune, *Proof from Prophecy* 209.

44. *Dial.* 38.1.

45. Melito, *Peri Pascha* 81–85 (English translation by Stuart G. Hall, *Melito of Sardis on Pascha and Fragments* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1979]): "O lawless Israel, what is this unprecedented crime you committed, thrusting you among unprecedented sufferings—your Sovereign, who formed you, who made you, who honored you, who called you 'Israel' (Gen 32:31)? But you did not turn out to be 'Israel'; you did not 'see God' (Gen 32:31), you did not recognize the Lord. You did not know, Israel, that he is the firstborn of God, who was begotten before the morning star (Ps 109:3), who tinted the light, who lit up the day, who divided off the darkness, who fixed the first marker (Gen 1:3–5; Ps 135:7–9), who hung the earth (Job 26:7), who controlled the deep, who spread out the firmament (Gen 1:6–8; Ps 135:6) . . . who formed man upon earth (Gen 2:7). It was he who chose you (Isa 44:1; Ps 32:12) and guided from Adam to Noah, from Noah to Abraham, from Abraham to Isaac and Jacob and the Twelve Patriarchs. It was he who guided you into Egypt (Genesis 37–50), and watched over you and there sustained you. It was he who lit your way with a pillar and sheltered you with a cloud (Ex 13:21; Ps 77:14; 104:39), who cut the Red Sea and led you through (Ex 14–15; Ps 135:13–14) and destroyed your enemy (Ps 135:15). It is he who gave you with manna from heaven (Ex 16:4–35), who gave you drink from a rock (Ex 17:4–7; Ps 135:16), who legislated for you at Horeb (Ex 19–31), who gave you inheritance in the land (Jos 11:23), who sent out to you the prophets, who raised up your kings." On Melito on a precursor of this tradition of exegesis, see Egon Wellesz, "Melito's Homily on the Passion: An Investigation into the Sources of Byzantine Hymnography," *Journal of Theological Studies* 44 (1943) 41–48; Eric Werner, "Melito of Sardis, the First Poet of Deicide," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 37 (1966) 191–210; Hansjörg Auf der Maur, *Die Osterhomilien des Asterius Sophistes als Quelle für die Geschichte der Osterfeier* (Trier: Paulinus, 1967) 142; Werner Schütz, "Was habe ich dir getan, mein Volk?," *Jahrbuch für Liturgik und Hymnologie* 13 (1968) 1–39, at 1, 2, 38; Sebastia Janeras, *Le Vendredi-Saint dans la tradition liturgique byzantine: Structure et histoire de ses offices* (Rome: Benedictina, 1988) 264–70.

therefore, as two separate witnesses of an older tradition. This exegetical tradition can even be discerned in writings of the New Testament. The Gospel of John, for instance, identifies the *kyrios* in Isaiah's vision with the *kyrios* of Christian worship: Isaiah "saw his glory (Jn 12:41),<sup>46</sup> just as "we have seen his glory" (Jn 1:14).<sup>47</sup> Similarly, Paul terms the crucified one as "the Lord of glory" (1 Cor 2:8), and the Book of Revelation extends the thrice-holy hymn sung by Isaiah's seraphim to the Son.<sup>48</sup> There is, in fact, a growing segment of scholarship on Christian origins—scholars associated with the so-called New *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*, but also older scholarship—that traces this second-century "YHWH Christology" or "Christology of Divine Identity" back to

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46. Incidentally, while the Masoretic Text reads, "I saw *the Lord* sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and *the hem of his robe* filled the temples," the LXX reads, "I saw *the Lord* seated on a throne high and lifted up . . . and the house was full of *his glory*," while the Targum to Isaiah has, "I saw *the glory of the Lord* . . . and the temple was filled with *the brightness of his glory*" (emphases added).
47. On Jn 12:41 in relation to Isa 6, see C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1953) 207, 261; Nils A. Dahl, "The Johannine Church and History," in *The Interpretation of John*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997) 147–67, first published in *Current Issues in New Testament Interpretation: Essays in Honor of Otto A. Piper*, ed. William Klassen and Graydon F. Snyder (New York: Harper & Row, 1962) 124–42, esp. 154–55; A. T. Hanson, *Jesus Christ in the Old Testament* (London: SPCK, 1965) 104–8; Hanson, *The Prophetic Gospel: A Study of John and the Old Testament* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991) 167, 170, 242, 263, 339; Jey J. Kanagaraj, *Mysticism in the Gospel of John: An Inquiry into Its Background* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998) 224–26; April DeConick, "John Rivals Thomas: From Community Conflict to Gospel Narrative," in *Jesus in Johannine Tradition*, ed. R. T. Fortna and T. Thatcher (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001) 303–21, at 308; Darrel D. Hannah, "Isaiah's Vision in the *Ascension of Isaiah* and the Early Church" 80–101, at 81; Raymond F. Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, 2 vols. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966) 486–87; C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St John*, 2nd ed. (London: SPCK, 1978) 432; Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray et al. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971) 452 n. 4; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St John*, trans. Cecily Hastings et al. (London: Burns & Oates, 1980) 2:416–47; Jarl E. Fossum, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord: Samaritan and Jewish Concepts of Intermediation and the Origin of Gnosticism* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1985) 295 n. 112. See also Jn 8:53, 56 ("before Abraham was, *I am*. . . Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day; he saw it and was glad"). The same type of "vision of the preincarnate Word" is assumed here by Hanson, *Prophetic Gospel* 126–29, 241, 261, 338; and Edwin D. Freed, "Who or What Was before Abraham in John 8.58?," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 17 (1983) 52–59.
48. In Revelation 4:6–9, the four living creatures—a fusion of Isaiah's seraphim and Ezekiel cherubim—"give glory and honor and thanks" to God by singing a version of the thrice-holy: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!" In the next chapter, however, worship and praise seems to be directed both to "Him who sits on the throne" and to the Lamb bearing the seven spirits (5:8–14). See 7:10 (God and the Lamb receive the acclamation of the martyrs); 14:4 (God and the Lamb receive the self-offering of the martyrs as "first fruits" of humankind); 20:6 (God and Christ receive priestly service from those who are worthy, and reign together with them); 21:22–23; 22:5 (the Lamb is, or embodies, the divine glory and light).

the writings of the New Testament.<sup>49</sup> This development has, quite naturally, changed the perception of Justin's achievement. Whereas Kominiak, Trakatellis, and Skarsaune viewed the Christological interpretation of theophanies as Justin's innovation, Larry Hurtado, one of the major representatives of the New *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* has more recently arrived at the opposite conclusion:

Justin did not originate the basic idea that the preincarnate Jesus could be found active in certain Old Testament passages. . . . Justin was essentially building upon a line of christological argument already available. He reflects an approach to the Old Testament that had been a feature of devotion to Jesus during the first decades of the Christian movement.<sup>50</sup>

It is time for scholarship on Justin to take note of the significant advances in the study of Christian Origins. The argument from theophanies did not derive *from* Justin's second-century antidualistic polemics but was the extension *to* such purpose of a much older exegetical tradition belonging to the Christian discourse *ad intra*, in the context of worship and celebration. Furthermore, this approach to theophanies remained normative for the vast majority of early Christian writers before the fifth century, as well as for hymnography until the ninth century, and iconography until the fifteenth.<sup>51</sup>

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49. Fossum, "The New *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*: The Quest for Jewish Christology," *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* 30 (1991) 638–46. See the articles collected in *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism: Papers from the St. Andrews Conference on the Historical Origins of the Worship of Jesus*, ed. Carey C. Newman, James R. Davila, and Gladys S. Lewis (Leiden: Brill, 1999); Charles Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology: Antecedents and Early Evidence* (Leiden; Brill, 1998) esp. 51–123, 187–200; Gieschen, "The Divine Name in Ante-Nicene Christology," *Vigiliae Christianae* 57 (2003) 115–58; Gieschen, "The Real Presence of the Son before Christ: Revisiting an Old Approach to Old Testament Christology," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 68 (2004) 105–26; **Larry Hurtado**, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (**Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003**); Fossum, "Kyrios Jesus as the Angel of the Lord in Jude 5–7," *New Testament Studies* 33 (1987) 226–43; "In the Beginning Was the Name: Onomanology as the Key to Johannine Christology," in *Image of the Invisible God* 109–33; Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008); A. T. Hanson, *Jesus Christ in the Old Testament* (London: SPCK, 1965); Earle E. Ellis, "Deity-Christology in Mark 14:58," in *Jesus of Nazareth Lord and Christ: Essays on the Historical Jesus and New Testament Christology*, ed. Joel B. Green and Max Turner (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994) 192–203; David Capes, *Old Testament Yahweh Texts in Paul's Christology* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992); Walther Binni and Bernardo G. Boschi, *Cristologia primitiva: Dalla teofania del Sinai all'io sono giovanneo* (Bologna: Dehoniane, 2004); C. K. Rowe, "Romans 10:13: What Is the Name of the Lord?," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 22 (2000) 135–73; Simon J. Gathercole, *The Preexistent Son: Recovering the Christologies of Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006); Daniel Boyarin, *The Jewish Gospels: The Story of the Jewish Christ* (New York: New Press, 2012) 138–39; Sean M. McDonough, *Christ as Creator: Origins of a New Testament Doctrine* (New York: Oxford University, 2009).

50. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ* 577.

51. See n. 2 above.

## Implications for the Parting of the Ways

Early Christian exegesis of theophanies shows fascinating points of continuity and discontinuity with earlier Jewish exegesis. Even though, as I have argued elsewhere, the christological interpretation of the theophanies constitutes a good example of “rewritten Bible,”<sup>52</sup> neither the concern with biblical theophanies, nor the binitarian tendency in reading such texts, nor the practice of “rewriting the Bible,” are originally or primarily Christian. And yet, the christological reading of theophanies marks a radical exegetical, theological, and liturgical gap between the two parties: while for Trypho, the identification of biblical theophanies as manifestations of Christ amounts to “blasphemy,”<sup>53</sup> Justin views the refusal of such a reading as a denial of Christ and a blasphemy.<sup>54</sup>

On the assumption of an early high Christology, the exegesis of theophanies practiced among followers of Jesus together with its liturgical implication—the actual cultic worship of Jesus—had from the earliest stages of the Christian movement the potential of creating an ideological (and consequently also a social) rift greater than the one separating, for instance, the sectarians at Qumran and the religious establishment around the Jerusalem Temple. The active ingredient, as Hurtado puts it, was present “amazingly early,” “astonishingly early,” “phenomenally early,” and “from the earliest observable years of the Christian movement.”<sup>55</sup> Or, to quote Martin Hengel, “this development in Christology progressed in very short time. Its final result was that the statements in the Old Testament in which the inexpressible divine name . . . was used, were now transferred directly to *Kyrios Jesus*.”<sup>56</sup>

Ironically, however, this initial exegetical and theological step away from all other self-professed forms of Judaism was later deemed insufficiently distinct and therefore theologically deficient. A perfect example of this situation can be found in the history of the interpretation of Genesis 18. After some five centuries of christological exegesis rehearsing the exegesis of Justin, and using it in anti-Jewish, antidualistic, and antimodalistic contexts, the interpreters pivot—starting with Cyril of Alexandria and Augustine—toward a robustly trinitarian view. In the sixth century, Procopius of Gaza offers the following assessment of the situation:

52. Bucur, “Exegesis of Biblical Theophanies.”

53. Justin, *Dial* 37.3; 64.4.

54. See *1 Apol.* 31.5–7: the rolls of Scripture “are also present everywhere to all the Jews, who, even though they read them, do not understand what has been said, but consider us to be enemies and adversaries, and, like you, they destroy and punish us whenever they are able, as you are able to learn. For even in the recent Jewish war, Bar Kokhba, the leader of the rebellion of the Jews, ordered only Christians to be led away to fearsome torments, if they would not deny Jesus as the Christ and blaspheme him.” In this text, the persecution of Christians under Bar Kokhba, and the imposed “denying of Christ” and “blasphemy” are linked with scriptural exegesis, since Justin sees the targeting of Christians during the Jewish revolt as evidence of their being considered “enemies and foes” as a result of their exegesis of Scripture.

55. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ* 651.

56. Martin Hengel, *The Son of God: The Origin of Christology and the History of Jewish Hellenistic Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976) 2, 77.

Some take the three men as three as angels; those who are judaising (*ioudaizontes*), however, say that one of the three is God, while the other two are angels; others still deem them to bear the type (*tupon echein*) of the holy and consubstantial Trinity, who are addressed as "Lord" in the singular.<sup>57</sup>

That the authors of the Fourth Gospel, Justin, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and so forth, would qualify, in this instance, as *ioudaizontes*, offers a measure of the parting of the ways. What Procopius is bearing witnessing to is a *trend*, a process set in motion much earlier, that has moved inexorably toward increasing separation.

The *Dialogue* also allows us some insight into the social aspect of this separation. I noted earlier Trypho's reference to his "teachers" who had been warning the community against holding conversation with those who preach that "this crucified man was with Moses and Aaron, and spoke with them in the pillar of the cloud" and who thus ensnare the people into worshipping Jesus.<sup>58</sup> Not only scholars such as A. H. Goldfahn, E. R. Goodenough, or Leslie Barnard, who think that Justin had a good and accurate knowledge of contemporary Jewish beliefs and practices, but also David Rokéah, who is overly skeptical on this point, consider that *Dial.* 38.1 offers "a true parallel" to the rabbinic warning against interaction with *minim* (heretics, i.e., Christians).<sup>59</sup> Although

57. Procopius of Gaza, *Commentary on Genesis* 18 (PG 87/1:364B). See also Emmanouela Grypeou and Helen Spurling, "Abraham's Angels: Jewish and Christian Exegesis of Genesis 18–19," in *The Exegetical Encounter between Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity*, ed. Emmanouela Grypeou and Helen Spurling (Leiden: Brill, 2009) 181–202, at 190–97.

58. *Dial.* 38.1: "It would be better for us, Trypho concluded, to have obeyed our teachers, who warned us not to listen to any of you, nor to converse with you on these subjects, for you have blasphemed many times in your attempt to convince us that this crucified man was with Moses and Aaron, and spoke with them in the pillar of the cloud; that he became man, was crucified, and ascended into heaven, and will return again to this earth; and that he should be worshipped."

59. A. H. Goldfahn, "Justinus Martyr und die Agada," *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 22 (1893) 49–60, 104–15, 145–53, 193–202, 257–69, at 106–7; Goodenough, *Theology of Justin* 94; Barnard, *Justin Martyr* 52; David Rokéah, *Justin Martyr and the Jews* (Boston: Brill, 2002) 33. The relevant passages (*Abot de Rabbi Nathan* version B, chap. 2; *Abodah Zarah* 17a; *Abodah Zarah* 27b) apply the biblical warning against consorting with the adulterous woman (Prov 5:8, "Keep your way far from her") to *minut* (heresy). The rabbinic rulings are illustrated by the famous stories about R. Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, arrested by the Roman authorities on suspicion of being a Christian because he had in his early years entertained the opinions of Christian teachers (*Abodah Zarah* 16b); and about Ben Dama who was proclaimed "happy" for having died before calling upon a Christian doctor. The stories and the rulings can be useful for historical reconstruction because of their paradigmatic value. On this see the detailed analysis of Dan Jaffé, *Le judaïsme et l'avènement du christianisme: Orthodoxie et hétérodoxie dans la littérature talmudique I<sup>er</sup>–II<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Cerf, 2005) 117–235; see also Jaffé, "Représentations et attrait du christianisme dans les sources talmudiques: Proposition d'un nouvel paradigme," in *Studies in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity: Text and Context*, ed. Dan Jaffé (Leiden: Brill, 2010) 45–66; Peter Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 2007) 41–62.

not yet authoritative (after all, Trypho does not heed his teachers' advice to shun all company and discussion with Christians—he even speaks [*Dial.* 10.2] of having read “the Gospel”), the voice of these teachers (*didaskaloi*) and leaders of the people (*archontes tou laou*) can be clearly discerned in the *Dialogue*: it is radical in rejecting theologies that advocate “two powers in heaven,” in prohibiting any discussion on such topics of *minut*, and in seeking to minimize social interaction with the *minim*. Justin, for his part, offers the Christian perception of the same: it is those *didaskaloi* and *archontes tou laou* (*Dial.* 73.5) who are not to be trusted inasmuch as they reject the Septuagint (*Dial.* 71.1) and “mutilate” some of the scriptural passages (*Dial.* 72–73). Overall, Trypho should obey God rather than these “stupid, blind teachers” (*Dial.* 134.1).

The exegetical and theological parting of the ways on the issue of biblical theophanies was bound to have a real and lasting social impact. For both sides of the debate, Scripture reading was not so much an individual as a communitarian enterprise and part of a complex network holding together sacred text, doctrinal speculation, and liturgical and ascetical practices, with each element unfolding its meaning in reference to the others. Evidently, the identification of Jesus as subject of the OT theophanies had practical consequences for the communal worship of the God of Israel and thus for the worshipping community's religious experience.<sup>60</sup> This experience set in motion a process of “reshaping” the self, which in turn led inevitably to a gradual social distinction between the two worshipping communities and the individuals within them.

## Conclusions

Justin of Neapolis's extant writings present and discuss three distinct exegetical approaches to OT theophanies. Justin's own articulation of the Christian doctrine relies on a christological interpretation of the divine manifestations to the patriarchs and prophets of old. This renders the Bible into a coherent narrative leading from Genesis to Jesus, in which Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as well as Moses and the prophets, are “men of Christ,” and in which the readers are invited to inscribe themselves by following Justin's own example. The resulting Christology identifies Jesus as the God of Mamre, Bethel, Sinai, and Zion, and the rider of the chariot-throne.

Pointing to recent scholarship in New Testament studies and the study of Christian Origins, I have argued that the consistently christological interpretation of theophanic texts—the argument from theophanies—was not Justin Martyr's invention, but rather an older tradition with roots going back to the New Testament. Justin exploited this argument for his anti-Jewish and antidualistic polemical needs, just as a few decades later Tertullian and Hippolytus of Rome reused this argument against monarchianism.

Considering how early Christian writers interpreted biblical theophanies, and how this practice both created and confirmed the increasingly distinct symbolic universe of

60. We are all indebted to Hurtado for his insistence on the factor of “religious experience” as the medium and catalyst of the fusion between Jewish monotheism and early Christian worship of Jesus. See Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ* 180–204; Hurtado, “Religious Experience and Religious Innovation in the New Testament,” *Journal of Religion* 80 (2000) 183–205.

early Christians offers useful insights into the highly complex developments that resulted in what came to be known as “Christianity” and “Judaism.” Justin’s writings seem to substantiate the thesis that, inasmuch as the christological exegesis of theophanies produced an immediate reinterpretation of the object and manner of divine worship, it also, more than the “proof from prophecy,” sowed the seeds of a communal separation between those who advocated and those who rejected this exegetical avenue.

### **Author biography**

**Bogdan G. Bucur** received his PhD from Marquette University and is now associate professor of theology at Duquesne University, Pittsburgh. Specializing in the reception history of the Bible, early Christianity, and Byzantine theology and spirituality, he has recently edited *Mystagogy: A Monastic Reading of Dionysius Areopagita*, by Alexander Golitzin (2013). Publications forthcoming are “The Early Christian Reception History of Genesis 18: From Theophany to Trinitarian Symbolism,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies*; and “Clement of Alexandria’s Exegesis of Old Testament Theophanies,” *Phronema*. Most recently published is “Exegesis and Intertextuality in Anastasius of Sinai’s Homily on the Transfiguration,” *Studia patristica* 68 (2013). In progress are several articles and a large study on the reception history of OT theophanies in the first millennium.