

# From Books to Testimonies

## Remarks on the Transmission of the Old Testament in the Early Church

by Oskar Skarsaune

This article considers a chapter in the history of the Old Testament within the Early Church, a history that is most often described in the terms of a history of *interpretation*. The issues include the interpreted Old Testament, the understanding of the Law, the hermeneutical and exegetical principles followed, and the authority and role accorded to the Hebrew Bible in the theological reflection of the Early Church. The usual emphasis of scholars is thus very much upon questions of hermeneutics and exegesis, or, in a word, on interpretation. This is true both of the classic monograph by Diestel from the last century<sup>1</sup> and of the recent treatment by von Campenhausen.<sup>2</sup>

Without intending to discredit that kind of approach, I shall be concerned with a kind of preamble to such studies of interpretation. For prior to asking how the Bible was interpreted in the Early Church, we should first ask how it was transmitted.

### Basic Questions

To begin with, some very elementary questions concerning the transmission of the biblical text must be addressed. How did the early Christians gain their knowledge of the text of the Bible? When they quoted it, from which sources did they quote? Did they sit down to read entire Septuagint scrolls from beginning to end, or did they rather read anthologies, "testimony books,"<sup>3</sup> or small exegetical tracts?<sup>4</sup> If they had access to scrolls, were these

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1. L. Diestel, *Geschichte des Alten Testaments in der christlichen Kirche* (Jena, 1896).

2. H. von Campenhausen, *Die Entstehung der christlichen Bibel* (Beiträge zur historischen Theologie 39; Tübingen, 1968).

3. The history of the famous "Testimony Book" hypothesis is critically told and evaluated in J.P. Audet, "L'Hypothèse des testimonia: remarques autour d'un livre récent," *Revue Biblique* 70 (1963), 381-405.

written by Jews or by Christians? When did Christian copying of the Septuagint begin? If it began only during the latter half of the second century,<sup>5</sup> how was the text transmitted within the Church previously when there was no Christian production of biblical manuscripts?

To visualize these questions, consider the early Christian writer Justin Martyr seated at his writing desk, at work on his Dialogue with Trypho. Should we imagine a pile of Septuagint scrolls on that desk, covering the entire Bible, with Justin unrolling and rerolling the relevant scrolls to copy and verify his biblical quotations and references? Or was it a pile of books by earlier Christian authors, such as the Epistle of Barnabas, to which Justin turned for his Old Testament quotations? Or perhaps we should imagine — as I believe — a combination of both possibilities, e.g., that he possessed Septuagint copies of Genesis, Exodus, Isaiah, Psalms and the Twelve Prophets, but apart from these depended heavily on earlier Christian writings for his biblical quotations.<sup>6</sup>

These questions naturally lead on to the next problem of the transmission of the Old Testament books within the Early Church, namely how extensive was a Christian's knowledge of their contents and how was this knowledge transmitted? Did the early Christian writers have a comprehensive mastery of the entire Old Testament, comparable to that of the rabbis, or was their knowledge rather limited and selective?

Furthermore, what was the *Sitz im Leben* of the transmission of the Bible? One could suggest the missionary teaching and preaching, as also the weekly reading of the Scriptures in communal worship, followed by the homily. Finally, one must deal with the obscure but fascinating subject of the early Christian school, the Christian *beit midrash*.

All these questions are relevant to the study of the transmission of the Bible within the Early Church. To obtain a truly historical grasp of this subject, however, the obvious caveat must be added that the answers to these questions may change together with the period concerned. This is what makes it possible to bring out the dynamics of the *process*, the *development*, that undoubtedly took place in the transmission of the Bible.

If we succeed in clarifying basic questions of that transmission process, we may also gain a better grasp of the interpretation history of the Bible through knowing something about the concrete conditions in which the work of interpretation was carried out. This may increase our sensitivity to anachronistic evaluations and inappropriate questions that might otherwise impose upon the

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4. For this theory, cf. W. Bousset, *Jüdisch-christlicher Schulbetrieb in Alexandria und Rom* (FRLANT, Neue Folge 6; Göttingen, 1915), pp. 282–308; H. Koester, *Septuaginta und synoptischer Erzählungsstoff im Schriftbeweis Justins des Märtyrers* (Habilitationsschrift, Heidelberg, 1956).

5. Cf. especially C.H. Roberts, "Books in the Graeco-Roman World and in the New Testament," P.R. Ackroyd and C.F. Evans eds., *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, 1970), pp. 48–66.

6. My remarks on Justin's use of the Old Testament here and in the following are based on my doctoral dissertation, *The Proof from Prophecy. A Study in Justin Martyr's Proof-Text Tradition: Text-Type, Provenance, Theological Profile* (Supplements to Novum Testamentum 56; Leiden, 1987).

ancient sources. To put it bluntly, an adequate exposition of the central message of Jeremiah can hardly be expected from an early Christian writer who — for practical reasons — had never read the book of Jeremiah itself.

## Two Periods of Transmission

We can distinguish two periods within the early Christian transmission of the Old Testament. The first corresponds roughly to the first century and includes all or nearly all the writings that later became known as the “New Testament.” It is characterized by the fact that the dominant Christian interpreters of the Bible, even when they had not had a typical Jewish education, were at least like Timothy who had “known the Scriptures from childhood” (2 Tim. 3:15). These Christian interpreters had an impressive mastery over the entire Old Testament, or large parts of it, and could freely select supporting testimonies from any part of the Bible. The second period, corresponding roughly to the second century, is characterized by the fact that the leading Christian interpreters were no longer Jews, no longer familiar from their childhood with the Old Testament, but relied heavily upon a selective proof-text tradition.

Many of the great second-century theologians had converted to Christianity as adults, having little if any prior acquaintance with the Scriptures. Justin Martyr is a typical example. Showing a remarkably good mastery of the proof-text tradition, but not of the Old Testament in its entirety, he rarely ventures beyond those traditional proof-texts in his own exposition of the Bible. He may be seen as the typical representative of the “period of testimonies” in the second century. Toward the end of that century, however, we observe such theologians as Irenaeus and Tertullian beginning to reconquer Old Testament territory, using the traditional testimonies as their bases of operation. At the same time, Christian production of complete Bible manuscripts is beginning to flourish. Both tendencies reached their peak in Origen, who established a “critical” text of the entire Old Testament, writing continuous commentaries and homilies on biblical books from beginning to end.

Were this paper to include early third-century developments, it would need to be retitled “From Books to Testimonies — and Back to Books.” Instead, it concentrates on that second-century period when gentile Christians won their limited foothold, so to speak, within the vast territory of the Bible by means of the testimony tradition. They used the traditional testimonies as a kind of bridgehead in this — for them — new and unfamiliar territory. What, then, did this passage of the Christian Old Testament tradition through the narrow bottleneck of the testimonies signify for the continuity — or discontinuity — of the transmission of the Bible within the Early Church? It is evident that there may be important consequences for the history of interpretation.

If it is objected that this is all too simple a thesis and approach, and that several qualifications and modifications are needed, I fully agree. What I have presented is no more than a rough sketch in very broad outlines. Yet such a sketch has its utility, as the following remarks will show. They are partly observations of a very general nature, and in part derive from rather detailed case studies.

## General Observations

First, the general observations. On examining the list of biblical quotations and allusions in the Nestle or Nestle-Aland editions of the New Testament, one is struck by the wide distribution of references. They cover nearly every part of almost every book of the Old Testament. Indeed, there is a remarkable degree of correspondence between the length of each book and the number of references to it. Apart from a modest over-representation of the books of Isaiah, Psalms and Daniel, there is a surprisingly even distribution of the references.<sup>7</sup>

Most of these references, moreover, are not formal quotations, but allusions woven into the New Testament text — one more indication of the authors' great familiarity with the Old Testament. When formal quotations appear, they are given in much the same way as in the rabbinic writings. As a rule, they are very short, being enough to recall to a familiar reader the whole verse or passage from which they are taken.<sup>8</sup> Most often, no book is named; "Scripture" is simply quoted as such, while the reader is presumed to know the exact source of the quotation. Often, as in Paul, midrashic quotation sequences are given, combining proof-texts from the Torah, the Prophets and the Writings.<sup>9</sup> Sometimes midrashic combinations of proof-texts are woven together into a single composite quotation. As with the early rabbis, there is considerable freedom with regard to the reading of the text: that reading is chosen which makes the text speak to the issue under discussion.

All that is to say nothing new. Nevertheless, it underlines the striking contrast found on turning to a typical second-century writer like Justin. First, there is no longer an even distribution of references. Genesis is greatly over-represented, and even more so Isaiah, Zechariah and Psalms, while Leviticus, the historical books and the remaining Writings are quoted very sparsely or not at all.

Second, the number of non-formal quotations and allusions, as compared with formal quotations, is drastically reduced. If we discount allusions to some part of a preceding formal quotation, the formal quotations are in the majority over against the allusions. In other words, Justin no longer has that great familiarity with the Old Testament required in order to weave its sayings into one's own exposition without formal quotation.

Third, Justin is fond of extended excerpts from the Septuagint, often exceeding five verses and sometimes comprising more than a chapter. In almost every case, he gives the exact reference, naming the specific book in the case of the Twelve Prophets, and giving the number of a Psalm. Yet this is not a sign of great familiarity with the Old Testament text. On the contrary, it indicates a writer who could no longer trust his own memory, or at least not that of his readers, some of whom evidently had no great or even no prior acquaintance with the Old Testament.

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7. Cf. especially A.C. Sundberg, "On Testimonies," *Novum Testamentum* 3 (1959), 268–281.

8. Cf. C.H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures: The Sub-Structure of New Testament Theology* (London, 1952).

9. As pointed out by O. Michel, *Paulus und seine Bibel* (Beiträge zur Förderung christlicher Theologie, 2. Reihe, 18. Band; Gütersloh, 1929; repr. Darmstadt, 1972).

Lastly, variant readings present Justin not with an opportunity but with a problem. To his mind, the Bible should always be quoted *verbatim* and according to the one original text, which is that of the Seventy Translators. Even the slightest deviation from their reading he regards as illegitimate. His ideas about quoting Scripture are thus markedly different from those found in most of the New Testament authors.

This contrast between Justin and the New Testament writers aroused my curiosity to find out what changed in the time between the two. Basically, two approaches to that problem can be distinguished. The most obvious is to investigate the use of the Old Testament in the writings preserved from the intervening period, namely the first half of the second century. The sources richest in Old Testament references are 1 Clement<sup>10</sup> and the Epistle of Barnabas;<sup>11</sup> there are likewise passages of interest in 2 Clement, if it belongs to that period. In any case, Justin shares many of his Old Testament quotations with these three authors. This is all the more significant in that Justin did not copy any of his quotations directly from one of these authors.<sup>12</sup> The obvious inference would be that the close parallels between him and the other authors are to be explained not in terms of direct copying, but in terms of common tradition.

My attempt to make a detailed map of this tradition, based on synoptic comparisons between Justin and others, proved to be a rewarding and interesting enterprise. Only one result will be noted here.<sup>13</sup> I made a complete list of all the Old Testament texts quoted or alluded to by Justin, plotted against references to the same texts in earlier writers, or in contemporary but independent ones. The references to which no earlier or contemporary parallel could be found form a tiny minority. In the vast majority of cases, Justin quotes texts that were already part of the proof-text tradition. This is strikingly confirmed by the observation that on those rare occasions when Justin seems to have picked up a quotation by himself outside the traditional dossier, his exegesis is often brief and tentative; nor does he ever make these texts main points in his argument. In other words, a detailed comparison of Justin with his precursors and contemporaries in the exegetical trade reveals him to be a faithful traditionalist who seldom sets out to explore unknown Old Testament territory on his own.

This may serve as an introduction to the second approach, which consists in an internal analysis of Justin's quotation material, with the goal of reconstructing the tradition upon which he built his exegetical fortress. The two approaches can, of course, supplement and corroborate or correct each other.

To illustrate the second approach, an instructive detailed case-study will be presented. First, however, one more introductory remark. Besides Justin's

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10. Cf. D.A. Hagner, *The Use of the Old and New Testament in Clement of Rome* (Supplements to Novum Testamentum 34; Leiden, 1973).

11. Cf. P. Prigent, *Les Testimonia dans le christianisme primitif: L'Épître de Barnabé I–XVI et ses sources* (Études Bibliques; Paris, 1961); R.A. Kraft, *The Epistle of Barnabas, Its Quotations and Their Sources* (dissertation on microfilm, Harvard, 1961).

12. When the earlier writers deviate from the standard Septuagint text, Justin agrees, and vice versa.

13. Cf. the tables in *The Proof from Prophecy*, pp. 454–471.

extensive Septuagint excerpts already noted, he has another and markedly different type of quotations. These are brief — at most two verses — and non-Septuagintal in their text-type; sometimes they are combined quotations. In short, one detects in them the same characteristics as in the Old Testament quotations found in the New Testament. Could these quotations derive from a tradition older than Justin and much closer to the first-century way of handling the Old Testament? Do they contain a lesson about the transmission of the Old Testament in those early times?

## Justin's Use of a Proof-Text

The case study will concern Justin's treatment of one of his main proof-texts, Genesis 49:10–11. Besides his two main expositions of this text in *1 Apology* 32 and *Dialogue* 52–54, it is quoted elsewhere in both works. This provides an opportunity to make a reasonable estimate of the likelihood of later scribal interference, which may also be checked by observing which readings in the Old Testament text are presupposed by Justin in his exegesis.<sup>14</sup> First, the versions of Genesis 49:10–11 in those two main expositions can be compared:

### ***Dialogue* 52:2 (=Septuagint)**

A ruler shall not depart  
from Judah  
and not a governor  
from his thighs  
*until that come*  
*which is made ready for him*  
and he shall be the expectation  
of the nations  
binding his colt to the vine  
*and to the vine-tendrill*  
*bis ass's colt*  
washing his robe  
*in wine*  
*and bis garment*  
in the blood of the grape

### **1 *Apology* 32:1=54:5**

A ruler shall not depart  
from Judah  
nor a governor  
from his thighs  
until he come  
for whom it is made ready  
and he shall be the expectation  
of the nations  
binding his colt to the vine  
  
washing his robe  
  
in the blood of the grape

It emerges quite clearly that this biblical text is quoted in two distinctly different versions by Justin. In *Dialogue* 52, he quotes the full Septuagint text of Genesis 49:8–12, obviously quoting directly from a Genesis manuscript — there are several more long Genesis excerpts in the immediately following chapters of the *Dialogue*. In *1 Apology* chapters 32 and 54, a different text occurs: it comprises verses 10 and 11 only, is shorter compared with the Septuagint, and contains some significant variant readings.

Before speculating further on these two versions of the text, it must be ascertained that they are both authentic. Some scholars assume that the long

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14. I have taken account of this in the following synopsis of the two versions of Gen. 49:10–11 found in Justin. My critical reconstruction of Justin's texts agrees with the text printed in Goodspeed's edition of Justin.

Septuagint quotations in the *Dialogue* come not from Justin but from some later scribe adjusting Justin's "deviant" text to the Septuagint text with which the scribe was familiar.<sup>15</sup> To show that this surmise is wrong, consider the following passage in *Dialogue* 120:

He says therefore in the passage about Judah: "A prince shall not fail from Judah and a ruler from his loins, until what is laid up for him shall come; and he shall be the expectation of the nations" [Septuagint text]. And that this was said not of Judah but of the Messiah is plain.... For the prophecy proclaimed beforehand until the coming of the Messiah: "until he come for whom it is laid up; and he shall be the expectation of the nations" [non-Septuagint text, as in the *Apology*].... Now, gentlemen, I could contend with you about the passage, which you interpret by affirming that it runs: "until those things that are laid up for him come" [Septuagint text]. For this is not the interpretation of the Seventy, but "until He come for whom it is laid up" [non-Septuagint]. But since the words that follow indicate that this is said of Christ, for they are "And He shall be the expectation of the nations," I do not enter into a discussion about the exact phrase, just as I was not anxious to draw my proof about the Messiah from the Scriptures that you do not acknowledge.... (*Dialogue* 120:3-5)

Briefly, Justin is saying here that in order not to run into unnecessary argument, he has followed the practice of quoting throughout the *Dialogue* only texts recognized by the Jews, although he himself is convinced that those texts do not always represent the original Septuagint readings. As an example, he refers to the quotation of Genesis 49:10 that he has just given, which is an excerpt from the Septuagint text he has copied more extensively in *Dialogue* 52. Quite correctly, Justin implies that he has quoted this text throughout the *Dialogue*. But then he adds a quotation from the other text-type, namely the text quoted in the *Apology*. In other words, Justin himself is clearly aware of the two text versions; he merely identifies wrongly "the interpretation of the Seventy." He claims that the text quoted in the *Apology* represents the authentic Septuagint text, but that the other text that he has been quoting in the *Dialogue* — and which we know to be the true Septuagint text — contains some non-Septuagint readings, but is recognized by the Jews.

Justin's own remarks here thus *require* us to expect to find two versions of the text in his writings. There is then no reason to suspect either version of being due to secondary scribal interference.<sup>16</sup> (We shall see another confirmation of this in a moment.)

Moreover, the fact that Justin gives priority to the non-Septuagint text found

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15. This was argued with great conviction by W. Bousset, *Die Evangeliencitate Justins des Märtyrers in ihrem Wert für die Evangelienkritik von neuem untersucht* (Göttingen, 1891), pp. 18-32.

16. This conclusion, based upon Justin's own remarks, has been further substantiated by recent studies of archaic or Hebraizing features in Justin's Septuagint texts. Cf. especially Koester, *op. cit.*; J. Smit Sibinga, *The Old Testament Text of Justin Martyr, I: The Pentateuch* (Leiden, 1963); D. Barthélemy, "Redécouverte d'un chaînon manquant de l'histoire de la Septante," *Revue Biblique* 60 (1953), 18-29; and my *The Proof from Prophecy*, Part I.

in the *Apology*, over against the text that he has copied from his Genesis manuscript in the *Dialogue*, refutes the suggestion of some scholars that the short non-Septuagint quotations could simply be loose quotations from memory.<sup>17</sup> It is inconceivable that Justin should claim priority for a loose quotation from memory over against the written text of a Septuagint manuscript of Genesis. A detailed study of the texts of the short non-Septuagint quotations generally confirms this: they are not loose and random, but carefully worked out by someone with a great mastery of the Old Testament, far greater than that of Justin himself. Given Justin's zealous insistence on exact *verbatim* quotation of the biblical texts, only one option is open: Justin took both versions of his text from written sources, and the source employed in the *Apology* had even greater authority for him than the Genesis manuscript he copied in the *Dialogue*.

Let us now turn to a closer study of the interplay between text and exegesis in Justin's two main expositions of the text, beginning with two non-Septuagint readings in the text quoted in *1 Apology* 32. First, verse 10 in the Hebrew reads "until Shiloh come..." (or "until he come to Shiloh..."), which the Targums render in a messianic sense (cf. Targum Onqelos: "until Messiah come, whose is the kingdom"). The Septuagint text of verse 10, however, reads: "until those things that are reserved for him shall have come." The "him" here refers back to "Judah" earlier in the verse; the interpretation presupposed in the Septuagint is thus not markedly messianic. Justin's Greek text in the *Apology*, by contrast, echoes the interpretation of Targum Onqelos, especially "until he [the Messiah] come, for whom it is made ready." The "it" here is understood by Justin to mean "the kingdom" ("until he should come for whom the kingdom is reserved"), which brings him even closer to Targum Onqelos as just quoted. Justin's text in the *Apology* is thus certainly not a loose quotation from memory, but a careful modification of the Septuagint text made by someone perhaps familiar with the targumic interpretation of the "Shiloh" in the Hebrew text.<sup>18</sup>

Second, the composer of Justin's short version has eliminated the synonym parallelism in verse 11, thus obtaining a tighter, more prosaic and succinct text. That may have something to do with his purpose. The composer of this text understood it as an exact prophecy, fulfilled point by point and phrase by phrase in the life of Jesus. In that scheme, the poetic parallelism of the Old Testament text could only complicate the report on the fulfillment. Two consequences follow from this elimination of the parallelism in the verse: 1) in the text of *1 Apology* 32 there is only one mention of a beast, not two as in the Septuagint; 2) the "robe" (στολή) is washed "in the blood of the grape," not "in wine" as in the Septuagint.

The significance of this becomes obvious on comparing Justin's exegesis of the text in each case (cf. the arrangement in two columns above). In *1 Apology* 32, there is a perfect phrase-by-phrase correspondence between the text and

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17. E.g., J.W. Wevers, "Proto-Septuagint Studies," W.S. McCullough ed., *The Seed of Wisdom: Essays in Honour of T.J. Meek* (Toronto, 1964), pp. 58–77.

18. This messianic version of the Greek text later intruded into some Septuagint manuscripts, but it is a proof of the great integrity of generations of Christian scribes that the original Septuagint reading was preserved in the majority of manuscripts.



the basically very simple exegesis. First, Genesis 49:10 seems to imply that kingship in Judah should not cease before the coming of the Messiah; now that it *has* ceased, the Messiah must have come. Second, there is only one beast in Justin's report on the fulfillment, corresponding to the one beast in the non-Septuagint text. Third, the "robe" (στολή) is washed not in "wine" (as in the Septuagint), but in "the blood of the grape," as in the non-Septuagint text quoted. There is thus a perfect correspondence between text and exegesis.

Now consider Justin's exegesis of these verses as they appear in *Dialogue* 52. As already said, Justin here copies a much larger excerpt from a Genesis manuscript; indeed, he has copied the whole blessing of Judah. Also, while in *1 Apology* 32 he attributed the prophecy to Moses — which indicates that the full biblical context was not given in his source — in *Dialogue* 52 he has become aware that the speaker is Jacob (verse 1 of the chapter). There is thus no doubt that in *Dialogue* 52 a Genesis manuscript is at his disposal. Nevertheless, Justin does not comment on the whole text he has just quoted, but only on that part of it which overlaps with the shorter text in *1 Apology*. Moreover, the exegesis largely runs quite parallel to the exegesis in *1 Apology* 32; it is only a little more elaborate and extensive. For example, Justin indeed quotes the Septuagint version of verse 11, yet his exegesis once more presupposes the non-Septuagint version of *1 Apology* 32: the "robe" is again washed in "the blood of the grape," not in "wine." And in that part of the exposition which overlaps with *1 Apology*, namely, on the entrance into Jerusalem, he likewise again makes mention of only one beast. Incidentally, there are some non-Synoptic features of the entry into Jerusalem which are common to these two narratives,<sup>19</sup> and the Greek name of Jerusalem is given in a version not otherwise occurring in Justin. All this seems to indicate that not only the form of the Old Testament text in *1 Apology* 32, but also elements in the exegesis derive from one and the same written source.

The fact that the exegesis of *Dialogue* 52–54 so closely follows that of *1 Apology* 32, even presupposing the same non-Septuagint text, could again raise the suspicion that the Septuagint text of the *Dialogue* is a secondary scribal modification. But the exegesis in *Dialogue* 52–54 clearly refutes that suspicion. To the simple fulfillment report concerning Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, Justin has added a typological interpretation of the *two* beasts used by Jesus. They represent the Jewish and the gentile believers respectively. Justin says that he found those two beasts not only in the prophecy of Zechariah 9, but also in the prophecy of Jacob, that is, Genesis 49:11. It is only the full Septuagint text of Genesis 49:11 that contains two beasts, not Justin's shorter text in the *Apology*, showing that the quotation of the Septuagint text in *Dialogue* 52–54 is indeed authentic.

In my study, *The Proof from Prophecy*, I examine in detail some thirty-five similar cases of Old Testament texts given in two versions in Justin. As in the example discussed above, the conclusion that seems to impose itself from this study is that the short non-Septuagint quotations, often very deviant or composite, which occur most often in the *Apology*, derive from written sources

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19. Cf. Koester, pp. 92 f.

which were not complete Bible scrolls. Also the short fulfillment reports that are regularly appended to the quotations were not created *ad hoc* by Justin, but were contained in those same sources.

There is much to be said for the proposal made by W. Bousset some seventy years ago that those sources had the character of *Schriftbeweistraktate*, containing selected quotations and short expositions that were mutually adjusted.<sup>20</sup> We probably would not be far wrong in conceiving of these documents as something like the collection of small eschatological midrashim from Qumran (4Q flor). In the *Apology* Justin is often satisfied to include these tracts in his own exposition, making only minimal additions and modifications. In a few cases he turns to a Septuagint manuscript to verify and expand the biblical quotations, but most often he sticks to the deviant non-Septuagint text contained in his sources, and he always sticks to their exegesis. Ten years later, writing the *Dialogue with Trypho*, Justin has become more ambitious. Very often he now turns directly to Septuagint manuscripts and expands the quotations considerably. Yet only rarely does he *comment* on that part of his quotations which extends beyond the traditional testimonies and the traditional exegesis. This, more than anything else, demonstrates to what extent he depends on an exegetical tradition.

By ambitiously turning from Christian testimony sources to complete Septuagint manuscripts, however, Justin was confronted with a problem. Often there were discrepancies between the deviant biblical testimony quotations found in the testimony sources and the standard text found in the Septuagint manuscripts. Sometimes this discrepancy was so substantial that Justin could not simply ignore it, as he generally does, but had to comment on it (seven cases in all).<sup>21</sup> As a rule, he keeps to the traditional exegesis, but in a few cases he tries to adjust it to suit the full Septuagint text.

What did Justin infer from his observation that the full biblical manuscripts had other readings than his testimony sources? His conclusion is only too simple. He insists that the text of the testimony sources represents the true text of the Seventy, while the text of the biblical manuscripts has been altered by the Jews. How could he claim what is so completely wrong?

There is every reason to think that the biblical manuscripts to which Justin had access were indeed written by Jewish, not Christian scribes. As remarked earlier, in the middle of the second century Christian production of Septuagint manuscripts must have been in its very infancy. But this may not be the whole explanation of Justin's suspicions. He may also have had some knowledge of the revisions of the Septuagint text being carried out in the first and early second centuries in order to bring it closer to the emerging normative Hebrew text. In a series of brilliant studies D. Barthélemy has shown, among other things, that Justin's quotations from the Twelve Prophets derive from the same revised Septuagint text as is found in the Twelve Prophets scroll from the Cave

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20. Cf. the reference given in note 4. Koester, *op. cit.*, has developed this idea further.

21. On Gen. 49:10 in *Dial.* 120:4f; on Deut. 32:8 in *Dial.* 131:1; on Is. 3:10 in *Dial.* 137:3; on Is. 7:14 in *Dial.* 43:8 and *passim*; on Ps. 82:7 in *Dial.* 124:2f; on Ps. 96:10 in *Dial.* 73; on two apocryphal texts in *Dial.* 72.

of Horror in the Judean desert.<sup>22</sup> In that case, at least, Justin's biblical manuscript did contain a Septuagint text revised by Jews, although Justin is generally wrong in all his detailed assertions about authentic Septuagint readings.

Yet why should he feel so sure that the free targumizing quotations of his testimony sources represented the authentic Septuagint? It may come from Justin's knowledge and use of the Pseudo-Aristeas legend about Septuagint origins. Besides relating this legend in *1 Apology* 31:2–5, Justin alludes to it very often when he speaks about the Seventy and their translation. Moreover, the function of *1 Apology* 31:2–5 in its context should be stressed: it seems that Justin uses the Aristeas legend as an introduction to and commendation of the scriptural quotations that he will give. The whole of *1 Apology* 31 has this commendatory character: the prophets were divinely inspired (31:1); their oracles were uttered in successive generations from utmost antiquity (31:8); their words were faithfully written down and were preserved by the Jewish kings (31:1); the translation into Greek was not a private unreliable enterprise, but one carried out officially by Jewish elders at the request of Ptolemy, King of Egypt (31:2–4); the Greek version has been kept faithfully by the Egyptians and by every Jew (no suggestion of revisions!) throughout the world to this day (31:5).

Thus the gentile readers of the *Apology* are assured that they are about to read Greek oracles that faithfully preserve the statements of Hebrew prophets of high antiquity, whose words are shown by their fulfillment to be true. It could well be, too, that when Justin himself met the Aristeas legend, it was in exactly the same setting and function as it has in *1 Apology* 31 — as a commendatory story introducing scriptural proofs. Perhaps he even met it serving that role precisely in one or more of the testimony sources. In this capacity, however, the Aristeas story served to commend the Greek Old Testament as such, not any particular version of it over against others. (Note again that the Jews here figure as *faithful transmitters* of the Greek text.) In short, the setting of the story in the testimony sources would have been *missionary* — as it is in *1 Apology* 31 — not text-critical.

When, however, Justin detected that the biblical quotations in a testimony source, claimed to be taken from the unique text of the Seventy, could often differ from the text of Bible manuscripts currently available to him, the Aristeas legend took on a new significance in his eyes. He now used it as a text-critical argument in defense of the texts that had for him been associated with the legend.

The evidence cited above suggests that the Old Testament is likely to have been transmitted to Justin initially in the form of *Schriftbeweistraktate*, containing selected proof-texts and appended exegesis, not in the form of manuscripts of biblical books complete with commentaries. I believe Justin is here a typical representative of the early second-century gentile Christian with

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22. In addition to the reference given in note 15, cf. especially his great monograph *Les Devanciers d'Aquila. Première publication intégrale du texte des fragments du Dodécaprophète* (Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 10; Leiden, 1963).

no prior training in the Old Testament. The testimonies were the necessary vehicle through which the new convert from a gentile background gained a first basic grasp of the Church's understanding of the message of the Bible. The testimony tradition formed a kind of Christian mini-Old Testament, an Everyman's Christian Bible. When the Old Testament was transmitted from a milieu of Jewish believers or God-fearers, themselves well versed in the Bible, to gentile believers with no biblical background, it passed through the narrow passage of the testimony tradition. This process decisively shaped the course of the history of interpretation.

In his famous study, *According to the Scriptures*, C.H. Dodd has made a good case for the view that the beginnings of the process of creating a Christian mini-Bible can already be observed in the New Testament writings. As noted above, there is a modest over-representation of certain Old Testament books or parts of books in the New Testament. Dodd has shown that when the material is limited to those Old Testament texts which are used to prove the *kerygma*, the basic message of Christian preaching, this over-representation becomes quite pronounced.<sup>23</sup> At that early stage, however, the selection process did not yet mean that Old Testament passages were treated atomistically, with a lack of feeling for the wider biblical context. Dodd has convincingly shown that the opposite was the case.

When, however, the mini-Old Testament was transmitted to gentile believers lacking familiarity with the context of testimonies, a somewhat atomistic and fragmentary approach to the Old Testament inevitably resulted. Since it probably could not have happened in any other way, the task of the historian is not to regret, but to try to understand. In themselves, too, these early Christian testimony traditions are highly interesting documents, well deserving of careful study. For the reasons I have presented, they also decisively shaped the subsequent interpretation history of the Old Testament in the gentile Church, transmitting to it part of a Jewish-Christian heritage which thereby continued to be influential for a long time. It is moving to see how Justin gratefully acknowledges that through this testimony tradition he had received "the grace to understand the Scriptures."<sup>24</sup> He was also convinced that this tradition did not originate with some obscure unknown theologian, but ultimately derived from Christ Himself, when after His resurrection He "opened their minds to understand the Scriptures" (Lk. 24:45).<sup>25</sup>

## From Justin to Origen

To conclude, I offer some remarks on how the process of transmission and interpretation developed from Justin onward. His own development from the *Apology* to the *Dialogue*, noted above, indicates how the testimony approach would in the long run be felt to be insufficient; it stimulated a need for a closer contact with the full biblical text in context. Justin made a pioneering attempt

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23. In his critique of Dodd, Sundberg (note 7) seems entirely to have overlooked this point.

24. *Dial.* 58:1; 92:1; 100:2; 119:1; et. al.

25. *1 Apol.* 49:5; 50:12; *Dial.* 53:5; 76:6; 106:1; et. al.

at writing a continuous verse-by-verse commentary on the whole of Psalm 22.<sup>26</sup> A closer look at this commentary, however, clearly demonstrates how difficult the task was for him. As soon as he goes outside the traditional testimonies from Psalm 22, his exegesis becomes hesitant, proposing various alternatives and following no consistent hermeneutical principle.

Some decades later, Irenaeus and Tertullian had gained greater familiarity with large portions of the Old Testament text; they also abandoned Justin's rather desperate discrediting of the text of the Septuagint manuscripts. Yet though they quote more profusely and extensively from the Old Testament than Justin, the testimony tradition still determines their hermeneutical approach. In their biblical quotations, the old targumizing testimony readings linger on side by side with the standard Septuagint text. As far as we know, they wrote no Old Testament commentaries.

All this reveals important elements of the background to the ambitious efforts of Origen in the early third century. The time had come for Christian theologians to get their Old Testament text established and standardized — hence Origen's synoptic presentation of the leading versions of the Greek text in his Hexapla. The time had also come when a Christian approach to the Bible had to take account of the entire Old Testament text, as in Origen's running commentaries. The old testimony tradition was still of some help, but only to a limited extent, because the implicit references to context presupposed in the original tradition were no longer clearly understood. There was thus a need for a new hermeneutical and exegetical tool with which the whole text could be mastered. Origen found that tool in Philo's commentaries. How new and important a chapter in the history of the Bible then began, can be seen by comparison with what we have learnt about Justin.

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26. *Dial.* 98–106.