

Justin Martyr

Did Justin Martyr believe in trinitarianism?

Justin Martyr taught that Christians are **monotheists**, that the **Father is the most true God** and **states the members of the trinity**:

First Apology, Chapter 6. Charge of atheism refuted: Hence are we called atheists. And we confess that we are atheists, so far as gods of this sort are concerned (*polytheistic gods*), but not with respect to the most true God, the Father of righteousness and temperance and the other virtues, who is free from all impurity. But both Him (*The Father*), and the Son (who came forth from Him and taught us these things, and the host of the other good angels who follow and are made like to Him), and the prophetic Spirit (*The Holy Spirit*), we worship and adore, knowing them in reason and truth, and declaring without grudging to every one who wishes to learn, as we have been taught.

He also believed that the Son is God but distinct from the Father:

First Apology, Chapter 63. How God appeared to Moses: For they who affirm that the Son is the Father, are proved neither to have become acquainted with the Father, nor to know that the Father of the universe has a Son; who also, being the first-begotten Word of God, is even God.

Dialogues with Trypho, Chapter 63. It is proved that this God was incarnate: Therefore these words testify explicitly that He is witnessed to by Him who established these things, as deserving to be worshipped, as God and as Christ.

Dialogues with Trypho, Chapter 128. The Word is sent not as an inanimate power, but as a person begotten of the Father's substance: And that Christ being Lord, and God the Son of God, and appearing formerly in power as Man, and Angel, and in the glory of fire as at the bush, so also was manifested at the judgment executed on Sodom, has been demonstrated fully by what has been said.

Speaks of the three members of the trinity once again:

First Apology, Chapter 61. Christian baptism: For, in the name of God, the Father and Lord of the universe, and of our Saviour Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, they then receive the washing with water.

First Apology, Chapter 13. Christians serve God rationally: Our teacher of these things is Jesus Christ, who also was born for this purpose, and was crucified under Pontius Pilate,

procurator of Judæa, in the times of Tiberius Cæsar; and that we reasonably worship Him, having learned that **He is the Son of the true God Himself, and holding Him in the second place, and the prophetic Spirit in the third, we will prove.** For they proclaim our madness to consist in this, that we give to a crucified man a place second to the unchangeable and eternal God, the Creator of all; for they do not discern the mystery that is herein, to which, as we make it plain to you, we pray you to give heed.

So far it we can conclude that Justin believes in the trinity but it seems he believes in a non-co-equal view of the persons of the trinity—based on the last quote—we will get back to this later but it also seems that he believes in Jesus being “another God:”

Dialogues with Trypho, Chapter 56. God who appeared to Moses is distinguished from God the Father: I shall attempt to persuade you, since you have understood the Scriptures, (of the truth) of what I say, that **there is, and that there is said to be, another God and Lord subject to the Maker of all things;** who is also called an Angel, because He announces to men whatsoever the Maker of all things— above whom there is no other God — wishes to announce to them.

On the surface it would seem that Justin believes in some sort of polytheism (multiple Gods) but this is simply not true, as he states in **First Apology, Chapter 6** that Christian’s do not believe in multiple God’s and are “atheists” in this regard but they believe in one God. He also states in **First Apology, Chapter 17** that we worship God only. This is again monotheism. So then what does Justin mean by “another God and Lord?” Well Justin here is making a distinction in the persons of the trinity and not saying that Jesus is a different lower essence to the father. Christ is to be known as God (*not as, another God*) and worshipped:

Dialogues with Trypho, Chapter 76. From other passages the same majesty and government of Christ are proved: For He exclaimed before His crucifixion: 'The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the Scribes and Pharisees, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.' Luke 9:22 And David predicted that He would be born from the womb before sun and moon, according to the Father’s will, **and made Him known, being Christ, as God strong and to be worshipped.**

If we worship one God only and Christ is God then in essence, Christ is equal to the Father. Here is the syllogism applied here:

1. We worship one God, and no other.
 2. The Father is to be worshipped
 3. The Holy Spirit is to be worshipped
 4. Christ is to be worshiped
- ∴ Christ is God in the same essence as the Father and the Holy Spirit are.

After referring to Jesus as “another God” in Chapter 56, Justin goes on to say (in Chapter 61):

He ministers to the Father's will, and since He was begotten of the Father by an act of will; just as we see happening among ourselves: for when we give out some word, we beget the word; yet not by abscission (*cutting off*), so as to lessen the word (which remains) in us, when we give it out: and just as we see also happening in the case of a fire, which is not lessened when it has kindled (another), but remains the same; and that which has been kindled by it likewise appears to exist by itself, not diminishing that from which it was kindled. The Word of Wisdom, who is Himself this God begotten of the Father of all things

This shows that when the Father begets the Son, he does not beget a different and separate essence but one who is of the same essence as Him and one who is not less than him. Again, what did Justin mean by “another God” is this a divisible and separate deity to the Father? No, again, he clarifies in **Dialogues with Trypho, Chapter 128**:

He appears in a vision sometimes that cannot be borne; is called a Man, and a human being, because He appears arrayed in such forms as the Father pleases; and they call Him the Word, because He carries tidings from the Father to men: but maintain that this power is indivisible and inseparable from the Father, just as they say that the light of the sun on earth is indivisible and inseparable from the sun in the heavens; as when it sinks, the light sinks along with it; so the Father, when He chooses, say they, causes His power to spring forth, and when He chooses, He makes it return to Himself. In this way, they teach, He made the angels. But it is proved that there are angels who always exist, and are never reduced to that form out of which they sprang. And that this power which the prophetic word calls God, as has been also amply demonstrated, and Angel, is not numbered (as different) in name only like the light of the sun but is indeed something numerically distinct, I have discussed briefly in what has gone before; when I asserted that this power was begotten from the Father, by His power and will, but not by abscission, as if the essence of the Father were divided; as all other things partitioned and divided are not the same after as before they were divided: and, for the sake of example, I took the case of fires kindled from a fire, which we see to be distinct from it, and yet that from which many can be kindled is by no means made less, but remains the same.

So now we see that Justin has to be speaking about Jesus as being “another God” in the same sense as the orthodox belief of trinitarianism, which is, Christ is another person in the Godhead and not another essence, as we see that Justin continues to clarify that God has no divided essence and what he begets is not less of a God than he is. Now yes, we could say that Justin uses imprecise language in terms of our contemporary understanding of the trinity with one essence and three persons but this was before the Arian heresy and with Justin's clarification, this language was completely acceptable as what he explains is exactly what we believe.