

Der Märtyrer in den Anfängen der Kirche
A. Schlatter
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Dr. Schlatter tells us in the preface that the impulse for writing this treatise was received from an article published by Karl Holl in the *Neue Jahrbücher für das klassische Alterthum* for 1914 and entitled "The Martyr-Conception and the Acts of the Martyrs in their Historical Development." In many respects he finds himself in agreement with Holl, notably so in discovering a strong Jewish factor among the influences that shaped the martyr-conception in the early Church. Geffken's judgment that the word *μαρτυρ* is of purely philosophical, and therefore of Hellenic, origin is set aside by both. On the other hand Schlatter differs from Holl in denying that the element of "enthusiasm" was to any conceivable extent concerned in the origin of the phenomenon or the formation of the idea. While both seek the beginning of the movement in the Maccabean crisis, Holl finds it significant that its rise coincides with the emergence of "enthusiasm," whereas Schlatter simply denies that "enthusiasm" played any part in that struggle or was a characteristic feature of the Jewish life of the period at all. It is interesting to note this, because of late Kennedy and others, in their desire to reduce the influence of the mystery-religions on Paul, have sought out and made as much as possible of whatever might seem to offer an analogy to Hellenistic "mysticism" and "enthusiasm" in Jewish religious life. According to Schlatter, to be sure, a connection between "enthusiasm" and the martyr-idea exists, but it exists only on Hellenistic-Jewish ground. Palestinian Judaism is positively conscious of the absence of the prophetic-enthusiastic element. As to the apocalyptic literature, the author rejects the explanation of this phenomenon from "enthusiasm." The summary judgment: "Apocalyptic belongs to the category of Midrash and Midrash is exegesis, not prophecy," seems to us an overstatement; it fails to explain the peculiar character of the literature in question, which may not be prophecy but certainly presents features sufficiently different from the ordinary Midrash. It was not, according to Schlatter, through a reproduction of prophecy in Judaism, but through a carrying back of the idea of martyrdom into the life of the ancient prophets, that the two ideas became interwoven. Here in fact lies the origin of the designation of those who sacrificed their lives for the sake of religion as "martyrs," "witnesses," for in the case of the prophets their death at the hand of the enemy, had been a part of their witness borne for God to the truth of His cause. In Christian circles this became even more influential, because here the consciousness was alive of the revival of prophecy in the experience of the disciples. Consequently the Christians' death inflicted by the world became in the full sense of the word a witnessing death. At this point again the author takes issue with Holl who would explain the idea of "witnessing" from the fact that the martyr in the course of his sufferings enjoyed ecstatic intercourse with Jesus and therefore in this sense "witnessed" supersensual realities. Schlatter does not entirely deny the co-efficiency of this idea, but rightly insists upon it that the other element, that of the active witness-bearing, ought to receive the main emphasis, and further gives this idea distinctly forensic associations: it is born out of the legal trial in which the persecuted Christian upheld against the authorities the cause of Christ and God. The formula *εις μαρτυριον αυτοις*, at least where it occurs in the Gospels in contexts speaking of legal persecution, is to be explained from this.

The reverence paid to the graves of martyrs also had its root in the sacredness of the graves of the prophets to which the Gospels bear witness. The analogy with the martyrdom of the philosophers, Schlatter observes, here gives out, because of any religious reverence paid to the grave of a philosopher nothing is known. The antecedents of the Christian martyr-cult here also are purely Jewish. In the

grave the prophet was conceived as present with the people and as still taking interest in their affairs. Schlatter compares for this from the Gospels Matthew 2:17, 18. The immanent-Christian development as such cannot explain the continuous attachment of the martyr to his grave, because that would have yielded the idea of the martyr's presence with Christ. On a basis of the Jewish resurrection-belief the notion becomes intelligible.

A further association traceable to the same source is that of the meritoriousness of the martyr's experience. Here again, however, Hellenistic Judaism exerted its influence rather than the other branch. Schlatter assumes that in general the predominance of the idea of merit among Rabbinical Judaism was in part due to the contact with Greek ethics. This will be a novel idea to many, who have been accustomed to look upon the doctrine in question as one of the most specific Jewish products. The author seeks in the development of the martyr-conception at this point the solution of the difficult problem how in the Christian Church this fundamental principle of Jewish belief could penetrate so as to set aside genuinely Christian habits of thought of earlier validity, and this although the two organizations, that of Judaism and of Christianity, stood in hostile relation to each other and were wholly separated. The passing over of the conception of martyrdom from the one to the other points out one way, if not the only one, in which this could happen. From the story of Polycarp's martyrdom the idea of meritoriousness is still absent, whereas in the letter of the Lyonesse Christians it is already clearly suggested.

The last thing which the Jewish and Christian conceptions have in common, is the occurrence of the protecting miracle in the martyrdom either before or after death. This is intended to relieve the tension between the reliance on God's omnipotence as shielding His own and the apparent contradiction to this in the martyr's death. He dies but is not forsaken. In illustration of this the author points to the popular belief recorded in the Gospels that the Baptist had risen from the dead, and to the account of Jesus' own passion.

In several of the points touched upon the historian cannot but recognize a corrupting, deteriorating influence upon the Christian mind, which gained in force greatly through its entrance into the martyrdom-literature. The chief outcome in this direction was that religious eudaemonism, which made individual salvation the chief aim, became the governing motive.

More than half of the Heft is occupied by the notes which offer rich material in the way of proof and illustration of the views developed and will prove in the highest degree suggestive for further study of an interesting subject.