Charles E. Hill, *From the Lost Teaching of Polycarp: Identifying Irenaeus' Apostolic Presbyter and the Author of ad Diognetum.* vol. 186, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006). 207 pages (incl. index).

The treatise *ad Diognetum* (to Diognetus) written anonymously by *Mathetes* (the disciple) is one of the most fascinating of the works included in the standard collections of the Apostolic Fathers.[1] One supposes that Johannes Quasten's account of the "epistle" (more on that below) of *Mathetes* to Diognetus fairly represents the view accepted for most of the twentieth century. First, he treats the treatise as if it were an epistle by an unknown author dependent upon Irenaeus. Some of the possible authors reviewed by Quasten include Hippolytus of Rome and Quadratus.[2] He concludes his survey of the treatise by saying the

> epistle deserves to rank among the most brilliant and beautiful works of Christian Greek literature. The writer is a master of rhetoric, his sentence structure is full of charm and subtly balanced, his style limpid. The content reveals of man of fervent faith and wide knowledge, a mind thoroughly imbued with the principles of Christianity. The diction sparkles with fire and vitality.[3]

Hubertus Drobner's 1994 survey reflects some of the developments in modern scholarship, including an acknowledgement that it was probably not an epistle at

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[1] It has been included among the apostolic father since the 1592 edition of Henri Estienne. See Hubertus R. Drobner, *The Fathers of the Church: A Comprehensive Introduction,* trans. Siegfried S. Schatzmann (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007), 75. See also Oscar de Gebhardt, et al., eds. *Patrum Apostolicorum Oepra*, Editio Post Dresseliianam Alteram Tertia ed., 3 vols., vol. 2, Patrum Apostolicorum Opera (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1887), Michael W. Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers. Greek Texts and English Translations*, 3rd Edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), A. Cleveland Coxe, ed. *The Apostolic Fathers*, 9 vols., vol. 1, Ante-Nicene Fathers (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950).

[2] Johannes Quasten, *Patrology*, 3 vols. (Utrecht and Westminster, MD: Spectrum and The Newman Press, 1962), 1.248–49.

[3] Quasten, Patrology*,* 1.251–52.

all. It was an apologetic treatise the textual history of which is complicated by the fact that the only known exemplar of the treatise, which was discovered in a Constantinople fish shop in the fifteenth century and destroyed in a fire in Strasbourg in the nineteenth century.[4] Drobner, however, does not comment on the authorship of the work. The 1995 survey by Claudio Moreschini and Enrico Norelli explains that it was Henri Estienne (1592) who first described *ad Diognetum* as an epistle,[5] but that designation, despite its popularity,[6] is inaccurate. Neither is it an apologia. It is, they argue, a "protreptic," i.e. "an invitation to accept the Christian faith."[7] They locate the work in Asia Minor or Rome and assign it to the period before Constantine. They too are impressed with the quality of the rhetoric and of the author's command of Greek: "it is certainly the best Greek to be found in the writings of the apologists."[8]

For the reader not intimately familiar with the work it may be helpful to observe that *ad Diognetum* is in eleven chapters. Chapters 1-10 contain five major themes: against paganism (chapter 2), against Jewish worship and customs (chapters 3–4), Christian distinctiveness (chapters 5–7), God's Son as the revelation of God and Savior (chapters 8–9), and a call to imitate God.[9] Chapters 11 and 12 are

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[4] Drobner, *The Fathers of the Church*, 75.

[5] Claudio Moreschini, and Enrico Norelli, *Early Christian Greek and Latin Literature: A Literary History,* trans. Matthew J. O' Connell, 2 vols. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005), 1.210.

[6] E.g. Holmes, ed. *Apostolic Fathers*, 686–87 describes *Ad Diognetus* as an epistle.

[7] Moreschini, and Norelli, *Early Christian Greek and Latin Literature*, 1.210.

[8] Moreschini, and Norelli, *Early Christian Greek and Latin Literature*, 1.210.

[9] These themes are adapted from the chapter headings in Holmes, ed. *Apostolic Fathers*, 695–714.

usually identified as a distinct section of the treatise. Holmes describes this section as a "Homily on the Word."[10]

Who wrote this powerful, elegant, this "boldest and most self-aware undertaking in second-century Christian apologetics"?[11] This is the basic questions that Charles Hill, Professor of New Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary (Orlando) and well-published patristics scholar, undertakes to answer in a brief but dense and closely argued monograph.

He argues that the author of *ad Diognetum* is none other than Polycarp († c. 155–160).[12] He draws upon Polycarp's biography and teaching through Polycarp's epistle to the Philippian congregation (c. 120). He also appeals to the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, from which we have a detailed account of Polycarp's death. There are other sources for our knowledge of Polycarp including Irenaeus' recollections which, Hill argues, are reflected in *Adversus Haereses* (2–3; hereafter *AH*).

His argument is in two somewhat distinct (and distinguishable stages). First he identifies the "Presbyter" to whom Irenaeus referred and to whom he appealed and identifies him as Polycarp. In the second part of the work, Hill makes his direct case for Polycarp as the author of *ad Diognetum*. On the face of it, identifying the author of *ad Diognetum* is a formidable task. In 1965 H. I. Marrou presented no fewer than fifteen possible authors. Hill recognizes this problem and says, "I do not myself present the case with quite the same degree of certitude as I believe is warranted by the argument of Part One, for the identification of Irenaeus' elder in *AH* 4.27.1–32.1.... Yet I am bringing forward Polycarp's name because I believe the

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[10] Holmes, ed. *Apostolic Fathers*, 715.

[11] Moreschini, and Norelli, *Early Christian Greek and Latin Literature*, 1.212.

[12] Holmes, ed. *Apostolic Fathers*, 272.

evidence presses us to consider it seriously" (97). Even if one does not agree with Hill's identification of Polycarp as the author, Hill is surely right to say that "a fresh examination of the form and character of the *ad Diognetum*, and am exploration of the parallels between this document and Polycarp of Smyrna can yield valuable results for a sociological and historical understanding of this important document and its environment" (98).

The author begins by building the connection between Irenaeus and Polycarp. He writes,

> In Irenaeus' view the presbyters, indeed are the essential links between the apostles and the apostolic teaching, on the one hand, and the faithful churches of Irenaeus' day on the other. Even the notion of apostolic succession as held by Irenaeus has to do first all with the presbyters, and not simply with those presbyters who are bishops, for it is the presbyters who are the guardians of apostolic teaching (*AH*, 3.2.2; 4.26.2; 32.1; 5.20.2; *Proof* 3). And for Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, there is no one n the body of the church's presbyters since the apostles as prominent as his former teacher, Polycarp of Smyrna (7)

According to Irenaeus, Polycarp "knew and was ordained by apostles" and Hill argues that Polycarp is an important but unidentified source for Irenaeus' knowledge of the Apostolic doctrine (7–8). He builds his case for this connection by analyzing Irenaeus' use of oral teaching from an unidentified ancient presbyter who knew the apostles. He addresses some text-critical questions in Irenaeus' *AH* (4.27–32), which, when resolved properly favor identifying a single presbyter as the source (8–10. He identifies several connections and correspondences between Polycarp's teaching and that of the presbyter mentioned by Irenaeus (e.g. anti-Marcionite

themes; 11–17). The author argues at length from connections between the Letter to Florinus and *AH* to further establish the connection between Irenaeus and Polycarp. He answers the most obvious question, namely, if Irenaeus had contact with Polycarp and the latter had connections to the apostles, why did Irenaeus withhold Polycarp's name? Hill gives a few reasons: Irenaeus habitually withheld names of respected ecclesiastical authorities when he knew them (23). Irenaeus seems to have assumed that the reader would make the connection for himself (23). Third, he had just identified Polycarp in a previous treatise *On the Sole Sovereignty* (23). Fourth, it was not Polycarp's person but his office he wished to emphasize (24).

Among the other connections cited by Hill are the order and arrangement of lists of heretics in *AH* with the way similar material is presented in the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* (27). He notes a particular connection between the critique of Cerinthus in both documents (28–30) and the treatment of Marcion in both (30–31; 32–71). Among the more fascinating arguments is Hill's analysis of the function of the "*descendit ad infernos*" in the anti-Marcionite arguments of Irenaeus and Polycarp (e.g., pp. 85–94). They were responding to the Marcionite corruption of the *descensus* whereby Christ was said to have gone to Hades in order to save people "like Cain, the Sodomites, and the Egyptians" while "men like Abel, Enoch, Noah, the patriarchs, and prophets... did not partake in salvation" (42), To respond to this account, the presbyter (Polycarp) "accepted the concept of Christ's *descensus ad infernos* so widely known in the early church" (42). It was an adaptation of Paul's language in Ephesians 4:9 and possibly by the "Jeremiah apocryphon cited earlier by Irenaeus in [*AH*] 4.22.1" (43). More likely, Hill acknowledges, is the influence of 1 Peter 4:6. The language used by Irenaeus in these places resonates with the language of Polycarp's Epistle to the Philippians (44). The benefit of re-assessing the

connection between Irenaeus and Polycarp is that, in this light, we now have greater access to and knowledge of Polycarp's teaching (70–71). Irenaeus did not reproduce the *ipsissma verba* of Polycarp but there is evidence that Irenaeus memorized Polycarp's anti-Marcionite teaching (71, see also pp.80–82). This line of argumentation clarifies the chronological relations between Irenaeus and Polycarp so that we may be more certain that the date of Polycarp's martyrdom was 155 or 156 (73). This connection also illumines Irenaeus eschatology (77–80, 83–85). Hill argues that Irenaeus' chiliasm was a response to the Valentinian heresy. Because of the extreme anti-materialism of the dualists, Irenaeus adopted a materialist, this-worldly, eschatology. For more on this see his work on early Christian eschatology.[13] Indeed, it appears that Irenaeus' eschatology in the first four books of *AH* was non-chiliastic. He speculates that it may have been the influence of Papias that helped to lead him to chiliasm in book 5 (77–78). Significantly, Hill traces Irenaeus' earlier, non-chiliast eschatology to Polycarp's influence (85).

The heart of the work, however, is the direct argument for Polycarp as the author of *ad Diognetum*. He begins by surveying possible dates for the origin of *ad Diognetum* (98–101). The predominant views tend to locate the work either c. 140–50 (which favors Polycarp as author) or 190–200 (e.g. Marrou et al). He analyzes the form of the work not as an epistle, as frequently thought, but rather as a "transcript of an oral address" given "outside a judicial context" (101–06). Notably, there is no appeal to stop persecution. "The only plea it contains is a plea for conversion to Christianity" (102).

If it is difficult to identify the *author* of *ad Diognetum,* how much more difficult is it to identify Diognetus? Some have conjectured that he might even have

[13] Charles E. Hill, *Regnum Caelorum: Patterns of Future Hope in Early Christian Eschatology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990; Second edition, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

been a purely literary creation. If, however, *ad Diognetum* is a transcript of an address, it seems most likely that Diognetus was an actual person. Since "there is no obvious reason to question to self-presentation of the work" (105). Hill concludes that he was a probably a contemporary of Polycarp, in Smyrna (162). The evidence for this is an inscription which has been overlooked by other scholars (162–64).

Hill next turns to the literary unity of the address (106–114). There is not space in this review to work through his arguments here except to say that he concludes that "the most realistic and promises approach" to the text-critical problems is to think that we are missing one sheet of a unified work (113–14).

As to the stylistic differences between the first section (chapters 1–10) and the latter (11–12) Hill argues: "The consistent impression in both parts is that we are dealing with an oral address explaining Christianity given by a Christian teacher in the presence of one who has requested it, probably a man of some high social rank named Diognetus" (116). The change in tone in the last two chapters is accounted for by the nature of protreptic address. "It should not be surprising, then, to find in a work such as this a certain progression or even a transition in the attitude of the hearer assumed or hoped for by the speaker/author" (118). In other words, Polycarp's tone changes as he anticipates the conversion of Diognetus (118–120). Hill shows that early Christian authors in this period routinely assumed rather significant knowledge of Scripture on the part of non-Christian readers (121–27). If Hill's hypothesis about the identity of Diognetus is correct, it appears that "the protreptic efforts of the author of *ad Diognetum* did not meet with their intended results" (165).

The penultimate chapter is devoted to the case for Polycarp as the speaker and Diognetus as the hearer of a semi-public discourse delivered before Diognetus

and his entourage (128). To make his case Hill appeals to parallels in the Martyrdom of Polycarp in which Polycarp spoke "as if delivering an oral address even before a respected public official would not at all be beyond his ability or custom" (128). He argues that Polycarp should not be considered a "rustic" who could not have aspired to such oratory (130). The negative evaluation of Polycarp depends mainly upon an evaluation of his much earlier Epistle to the Philippians. To counteract this perception, Hill appeals to Polycarp's relationship with Florinus as a case where a "member of the ruling class" approached him for an explanation of Christianity (131). There is evidence that Polycarp was known to "others in the upper classes" in Smyrna by c. 108. He was pastor to the children and servants of one high-ranking official (131). There are other names of people with social standing connected to Polycarp (131–33).

The speaker in *ad Diognetum* expressly connected himself to the apostles in 11.1 where he described himself as "a disciple of apostles" (133). "The speaker is at least staking-out a firm place in succession of what he regards as authentic apostolic tradition" (133). According to Irenaeus, when Polycarp went to Rome he "caused many to turn away from the...heretics to the church of God" (134). He did so by "proclaiming that he had received this one and sole truth from the apostles...." Polycarp appealed to his direct connection with the apostles as part of his attempt to persuade those who had embraced heresy. He also defended his quartodeciman view Easter (i.e. custom of always observing Easter on the 14th of Nisan, whatever the day of week and not necessarily on Sunday) partly on the basis of his connection to the apostle John. According to Hill, if "the speaker of *ad Diog*. 11.1–4 is not Polycarp, one could almost say that he is impersonating Polycarp, as the latter is

presented by Irenaeus. Could it be that we are reading here from an actual speech made by Polycarp?" (135).

To press home this part of the argument he appeals to correspondences to his his only known literary work, the Epistle to the Philippians. He notes the rather unimpressive style of the earlier epistle but accounts for the differences in style by noting the different genres and decades to which the documents belong. The epistles is probably 40 years before the speech (137). One similarity, following Pier Franco Beatrice (1990) he notes the "Paulinismus" of both the epistle to the Philippians and *ad Diognetus* (138). He also surveys the parallels with 1 Peter and the various Petrine qualities of both documents (139–40) and especially their doctrine of the substitutionary atonement made by Christ.

There are also striking parallels between the Martyrdom of Polycarp and *ad Diognetus*. Both knew of Christians being executed by fire and wild beasts (142). Both teach that entrance into the Kingdom is through the Son (143). Both have a pronounced doctrine of Jesus as the *pais tou theou* (143–47).

Alongside literary parallels which point to Polycarp as the author of *ad Diognetum*, is a line of evidence drawn from the history of the transmission of the treatise/speech. The closest parallels with the document include, he says, "probable literary relationships...first in Asia Minor, then in Lyons, and then in Rome" (158). It seems to have been known in Smyrna at the time of Polycarp's death (159).

The last chapter of the work is a helpful survey gathering up the several and various strands of evidence. By this point it is as if the reader has been watching a detailed legal presentation and the author is making his summation before the jury. A reader expecting an airtight case dispensing with all ambiguity will be disappointed. If, however, the reader enjoys procedural dramas, is interested in

broadening his learning in patristics, and is willing to entertain a circumstantial case then time invested in this dense work will be rewarded.

As valuable as the substance of the argument is, perhaps equally valuable is the author's excellent handling of evidence and of competing arguments. This is the sort of research and presentation of research that one's teachers told one to write way back when Good historiography is about getting the facts (remember those pesky things?) right, about interpreting them in context, and from such an interpretation to draw judicious conclusions. The goal is to be led, as much as is possible in this life, by the evidence to a sound and reasonable conclusion. One must constantly die, as it were, to one's own expectations of how things should "turn out" and give oneself over to the evidence and to following where it leads. This does not happen very often so it is a pleasure to see a historian doing history the way it is meant to be done, even (or perhaps especially) when the evidence leads to conclusions that, because of the circumstantial nature of the evidence, must necessarily be somewhat tentative.

Thus, the author is painstakingly patient with the evidence and with other interpretations. The reader never has the sense that straw men are being set up or that the author is being anything but fair. This way of making his case has the effect of strengthening rather than weakening his argument.

A couple of brief notes in closing. 1) This is a work for specialists to be sure but those who are interested in patristics or in good history, if they are patient, will also benefit. 2) This reader spotted three typos (pp. 42, 77, 99). Perhaps these can be repaired for the second edition.

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