

A Study of the Child Martyr Justin

‘He died, but through his faith he is still speaking’
(Hebrews 11:4)

Stephen Sharman

The *passio* of the child martyr Justin has two intriguing elements: his ability to speak after he was beheaded and the light that shone over his head in the home of his parents. This study is based upon the version of the *passio* which is found in *Patrologia Latina* although the author is aware that there are two other versions of the *passio*.¹ This study will begin with a discussion of the *passio* and then examine three aspects of the account, the boy’s ability to speak after he was beheaded, the significance of his head as a relic and finally the vision of light which shone down from heaven over his head.

Justin, Justinus, as a child martyr, is one of a small army of children who gave their lives for Christ. The first of these were the holy innocents who were slaughtered by King Herod in his vain attempt to destroy Jesus.² Bede comments about them, “in this [death] is represented the precious death of all Christ’s martyrs.”³ Bede was interested in the lives and the deaths of martyrs. There are accounts of martyrdoms in his *Historia Ecclesiastica*, notably St Alban the Protomartyr of Britain. He also wrote a martyrology wherein he gave

¹ Bede, *Passio Sancti Justinii*, PL, vol 94, col. 595-602; there are two versions of this *passio* in *Acta Sanctorum*, Oct VIII, 338-40 and Oct VIII, 340-2.

² Matthew 2:16-8.

³ Bede, ‘Feast of the Holy Innocents,’ in Bede the Venerable, *Homilies on the Gospels, Book One*.

the details of the deaths of martyrs. He wrote, “in which I have diligently tried to note down all that I could find about them [the martyrs], not only on what day, but also by what sort of combat and under what judge they overcame the world.”⁴ The *Passio Sancti Justini Martyris* in Migne’s *Patrologia Latina* is attributed to Bede, the expert on martyrs, although the editor does not give us his reasons for so doing. The attribution is possibly based upon the manuscripts and texts which he was using in this volume. The attribution has been questioned by a number of good scholars. Charles Plummer considers the attribution to be spurious although he gives no reasons for this conclusion.⁵ M. L. W. Laistner thinks that this work is spurious on the grounds that it is ‘composed in quindecasyllabic rhythmic lines, a form which Bede ignores in his treatise’.⁶ M Gorman, in a recent study of the works of Bede and Pseudo-Bede, places this *passio* among the works of Pseudo-Bede.⁷ This is an impressive list of scholarly opinion. We must concede on this evidence that Bede did not compose the *Passio Sancti Justini*, which the editor of *Patrologia Latina* has attributed to him. Further Bede does not list the *passio* in his own catalogue of his works, although not all of his genuine works are listed in the catalogue.⁸

This leaves us with a *passio* of a child martyr. What more can we say about it? Can we find any knowledge of St Justin in the times of Bede? Michael Lapidge does not list a *passio* of this saint in his list of works known to Bede.⁹ An account of St Justin is not found in Bede’s *Martyrologia*.¹⁰ Aldhelm does not appear to know about St Justin, which, although saying nothing about the authorship of the *passio*, does suggest that it was not known in England in

⁴ Bede, *HE* V 24, Colgrave & Mynors, 571.

⁵ ‘A hexameter poem. Certainly spurious. Opp.i.38-49’, *Venerabilis Baedae Opera Historica*, ed Plummer, CL VIII.

⁶ MLX Laistner & HH King, *A Handlist of Bede Manuscripts*, 125.

⁷ M Gorman, ‘The Canon of Bede’s works and the World of Ps. Bede’, 433. “13 The *Passio Sancti Justini* in verse, col 367-380, *PL* 94, 595-602, *MGH Poetae* 4/1-2, 841-856, was taken by Herwagen from the same manuscript in which he found the *argument* and the *explanation* on the Psalms, Munich Clm 14387, f.95-102.

⁸ Bede, *HE* V.24, ed Colgrave & Mynors, 566-71; ed Colgrave & Mynors, 571 fn 4.

⁹ M Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, 227-8.

¹⁰ Bede, *Martyrologia*, trans. Felice Lifshitz, in Thomas Head (ed), *Medieval Hagiography: An Anthology* (New York & London 2000), 169-197; Bede, *Martyrology*, *PL* col 797-1158.

Aldhelm's time and possibly not in Bede's time as well. This is, however, not the end of the matter. A careful study of the earliest manuscripts of the *passio* by M Coens, E A Lowe and H Gneuss have discovered an Anglo-Saxon provenance which they trace back to the eighth century.¹¹ Coens refers to "un codex perdu, écrit en caractères anglo-saxons dans la première moitié du VIIIe siècle..."¹² This brings us back to the times just after Bede's death in 735 A D. This information does not prove that Bede knew about St Justin or wrote the *passio*. The information does suggest that some people in early Anglo-Saxon England did know about St. Justin. We can go no further.¹³

Now we must consider the narrative of the *passio*. It is a short and rather conventional story of a martyr. The martyr is an exemplary Christian, another conventional detail; "a little boy of nine years, Justinus, however, had gone before by age of moral behaviour, through a unspotted life putting on old age" and "he gave his soul incessantly to divine things," such as good deeds.¹⁴ As the story unfolds, we discover that Justin has two divine qualities: he can foresee future events and he has a great love for the poor, especially a certain poor man whom he feeds and clothes.¹⁵ His foreknowledge is a gift from God.¹⁶ Another conventional feature of a *passio* is the presence of an unfriendly judge. The

¹¹ Frederick M Biggs, Thomas D Hill, Paul E Szarmach & E Gordon Whately, eds. *Sources of Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture, Volume One, Abbo of Fleury, Abbo of Saint-Germain and Acta Sanctorum* 282-283.

¹² M Coens, 'Aux Origines de la Céphalopherie: un Fragment Retrouve d'un Ancienne Passio de S Just, Martyr de Beauvais' (Analecta Bollandiana 74, 1956), 90 &105.

¹³ I have adopted the attribution of the *passio* to Bede without necessarily agreeing with it or disputing the wisdom of those who reject it.

¹⁴ Bede, *Passio Sancti Justini*, PL vol 94 col 595 line 43; Bede, *Passio Sancti Justini*, PL vol 94 col 596 lines 45 & 45; Bede, *Passio Sancti Justini*, PL vol 94 col 596 line 54, *novennis puerulus, Justinus vero aetate morum anteierat, Per vitam immaculatam seneectutem induens and rebus animum divinis incessanter dederat* (author's translation); compare the Wisdom of Solomon 4: 7-20.

¹⁵ Bede, *Passio Sancti Justini*, PL vol 94 col 597 line 3, *Ut haberet futurorum saepe praescientiam*; Bede, *Passio Sancti Justini*, PL vol 94 col 597-8 which recounts the meeting with the poor man but especially line 3 where he quotes David, *Felix qui super egenum intendit et pauperum*. See Matthew 25: 31-46, "For I was an hungered and ye gave me meat...Naked and ye clothed me." See also Tobit 1: 3-8.

¹⁶ Bede, *Passio Sancti Justinin*, PL vol 94 col 599 lines 24-6, *Enim vero mens sanctorum dum adhaeret Domino, De internis et occultis ab eo instruit, Res ignotas edocetur spitiru prophetic...* (author's translation).

confrontation between a heroic martyr and the judge adds dramatic intensity to the story. Here there is a savage persecutor, “treacherous, fierce, threatening, hating the name of Christ, and raging against Christians, Riciovarus by name” but, unlike most accounts of martyrdoms, the martyr does not confront the persecutor directly but indirectly through his messengers.¹⁷ The judge remains in the background of the story. We hear his orders, and we experience the attempts of his messengers to accomplish them. The account of the martyrdom of St Alban in Bede’s *Historia Ecclesiastica* is an example of the usual pattern of a martyr facing a hostile judge.¹⁸

The narrative of this *passio* is structured on a journey from Justin’s home city in southern Gaul to a city in northern Gaul. Justin and his father make this journey in order to locate and to redeem an older brother who has been taken away in slavery. At first, his parents are reluctant to allow their son to undertake the journey, but Justin convinces them that he is able to endure the hardships of the road and that they will be successful in their quest. Along the way, they encounter several adventures. We have mentioned the poor man who benefits from their charity. There are also the normal challenges of a journey in those days, finding a guide, following the right route, locating places to spend the nights, and hiring a ferry across a deep river. Then when they arrive at their destination, they face the problem of identifying their lost son and brother. This is a miracle since the little boy had not seen his elder brother, and his father had not seen his son for many years. They are reunited. We see a determined little boy who will not let any obstacle prevent him from finding and redeeming his brother. Their quest is ultimately successful, but they are betrayed to the persecutor who sends his messengers to arrest them or kill them.

This brings us to the first of the three aspects of the story, which we identified earlier, the boy’s ability to speak after he has been beheaded. The three have been warned that the Roman persecutor, Riciovarus, had learned of their presence in his city and that he was determined to arrest them. They flee for their lives. On their way home, the persecutor’s messengers catch up with

¹⁷ Bede, *Passio Sancti Justini*, PL vol 94 col 596 lines 30-1...*perfidus, ferox, imminis, Christi nomen odiens, Et in Christianos furens, Riciovarus nomine...* (author’s translation).

¹⁸ Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, I 7.

them. Justin persuades his father and brother to hide in a cave while he watches for the messengers. They arrest him and question him. He refuses to betray his father and brother to them, and in a fit of rage, they behead him. In this, the author tells us Justin is following the example of Christ, who also refused to surrender his followers to his persecutors.¹⁹ It is the joy of the martyrs to follow the footsteps of their Lord and to accept suffering even on to death for Him. At this point, a rather remarkable event takes place; his headless body stands upright, holding his head in his hands.²⁰ This is the passage in the *passio*:²¹

So then, to declaring of how much glory he might be
 The same venerable martyr having been killed for the Lord
 Immediately demonstrates a glorious miracle
 With his most holy head having been cut off
 The body receiving this having been cut off in his hands
 Stood immobile before his lictors
 Soon stunned by the terror of whose prodigy
 The persecutors fled, having not dared to stay,
 When they saw the saint make such a great miracle (author's translation).

This wonder terrifies the messengers of death, and they flee. We can well sympathize with them.²² After they have gone, Justin's father and brother appear from their hiding place. They, too, are disturbed by what they see. They, too, see Justin's headless corpse standing and holding his head in his hands:

¹⁹ Bede, *Passio Sancti Justini*, PL vol 94 col 601 lines 22 & 23, *Quod et in confessione Christi perduraverit, Et usque ad mortem suos proximos dilexerit*. Justin says, *Nam quando in passion, quam pro nobis pertulit, Suos ipse est exactus prodere discipulos, Minime eorum delator voluit existere...*, Bede, *Passio Sancti Justini*, PL 94 col 601, line 6-8, "Because also in the confession of Christ he endured, And even to death he loved his neighbours" (author's translation).

²⁰ Two music hall songs describe the scene: "he's dead but he won't lie down," and "she walks the bloody Tower with her head tucked underneath her arm."

²¹ Bede, *Passio Sancti Justini*, PL vol 94 col 601 lines 30-7, *Proinde, ad declarandum quanta esset gloriae, Idem venerandus martyr occisus pro Domino Gloriosum demonstratur protinus miraculum. Amputato enim eius sacrosanct capite, Corpus truncum hoc in suis minibus accipiens, Ante suimet lictores steterat immobile: Cuius mox obstupefacti terore prodigii, Fugiunt persecutors, non ausi subsistere, Cum sanctum viderent tantum facere miraculum.*

²² Compare St Matthew, 28.4, "And for fear of Him the guards trembled and became like dead men," RSV.

But his parents having gone out from the hiding place
 See his holy body standing immobile
 And marvelled because he was carrying the cut off head with [his] hands
 (author's translation).²³

At this point, we may consider some of the details which we have now seen. The author of the *passio* describes Justin's head and body as holy, thus identifying him as a saint. His death makes him a martyr, that is, a witness to Christ's own death. His death and his holding his head with his hands is a "glorious miracle," and miracles testify to the presence of a saint. The terror that his miracle inspires in his executioners testifies to their sense of guilt.²⁴ Even comparatively good people feel a sense of unworthiness in the presence of the holy and need our Lord's reassurance, "Do not be afraid." Justin's father and brother both need the reassurance they receive from him.

Adding to their astonishment, the head begins to talk to them:

When they were doing which things, with a different motion of the soul
 The head of blessed Justin, which he was carrying in [his] hands
 Marvellous to say, began to address them completely
 And teaching them concerning the burial of his body
 Said, going to the place which is said Lupera
 And burying my little body there
 But to my mother carry this my head
 So that she may show in it a natural affection
 And may have with her the pledge of my love
 But if she is held by a desire for me
 She may strive to follow me [when I am] located in paradise
 Where the souls of His holy men rest happily²⁵ (author's translation).

²³ Bede, *Passio Sancti Justini*, PL vol 94 col 601 lines 39-41, *Parentes vero ipsius egressi de latebris, Vident sanctum corpus eius consistens immobile, Miratique quod abscissum caput ferret minibus.*

²⁴ Luke 5: 8, "depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

²⁵ Bede, *Passio Sancti Justini*, PL vol 94 cols 601-2 lines 49-58, *Quae cum agerent, diversa motione animi Caput beati Justini, quod gestabat manibus, Mirum dictu, coepit illos absolute alloqui, Et docens de sepultura sui eos corporis : Euntes, inquit, ad locum qui Lupera dicitur, Atque meum sepelire corpusculum ; Matri vero meae caput hoc meum advehite, Ut naturalem affectum in illud exhibeat, Et amoris mei secum istud pignus habeat : Ipsa vero si tenetur mei desiderio, Studeat in paradiso me locatum subsequi, Ubi animae sanctorum quiescent feliciter.*

Scott B Montgomery comments helpfully:

As this story provides the culmination of the *vita* of St Just, it successfully demonstrates his active abilities even in post-martyrial state. This assists an ongoing miraculous potency and concentrates this sacral power in his relics. The power of the relics is dramatically revealed as transcending the body's death. Furthermore, the saint is portrayed as the primary agent in this miraculous assertion of post-mortem potency, instituting the cult of his own relics by commanding that they be sent to his mother for osculatory veneration – the kissing of sacred objects.²⁶

When we read further in this *passio* we discover that Justin's mother is not allowed to keep her son's head. She receives it, kisses it, places it in an appropriate place in her home, and then it is taken away from her.

We now turn to the significance of Justin's head as a relic of a martyr. Justin's head was preserved as a holy relic. A reliquary from the late fifteenth century now is found in the Schweizerisches Landesmuseum in Zurich.²⁷ The reliquary is a statue of a headless man holding his head in his hands before his body. Montgomery describes the reliquary as "a masterpiece of late medieval Swiss metalwork."²⁸ Montgomery describes the reliquary thus: "The head and upper body are made of silver, with gilding on the hair and garments, while the base is gilded copper and the hands are made of wood with a silver leaf surface. Manufactured to conserve the head of the saint, which was the principal relic of the St Justuskirche in Flums, the reliquary exhibits the exquisite technique and sensitivity to detail common in late medieval reliquary busts."²⁹ The reliquary is designed to tell the story of the saint's martyrdom the most important moment

²⁶ Scott B Montgomery, 'Securing the Sacred Head: Cephalophory and Relic Claims' in Catrien Santing, Barbara Baert & Anita Traininger, eds, *Disembodied Heads in Medieval and Early Modern Culture: Intersections: Interdisciplinary Studies in Early Medieval Culture Vol 28* (Leiden Boston Brill 2013), pages 77-8

²⁷ Scott B. Montgomery, 'Mitte capud meum ... ad matrem meam ut osculetur eum: The Form and Meaning of the Reliquary Bust of Saint Just', *Gesta* Vol 36 No 1 (1997), pages 48-64.

²⁸ Scott B. Montgomery, 'Mitte capud meum ... ad matrem meam ut osculetur eum: The Form and Meaning of the Reliquary Bust of Saint Just', *Gesta* Vol 36 No 1 (1997), page 48.

²⁹ Scott B. Montgomery, 'Mitte capud meum ... ad matrem meam ut osculetur eum: The Form and Meaning of the Reliquary Bust of Saint Just', *Gesta* Vol 36 No 1 (1997), page 48.

of which came after he had been beheaded when his body stood immobile holding his head in his hands. At that moment, the head spoke to his father and brother. This confirmed the boy's status as a holy martyr.

The accounts of people whose heads continue to talk after their beheading are worth serious study. Edmund Colledge and J. C. Marler comment, "what has already been shown of the occurrences in legend, Christian and non-Christian, of this mysterious apparition of the head which is not silenced by death itself has surely been enough to tell us that we are dealing with a symbol of one of man's oldest and deepest held beliefs – surviving with much vigour into Christian times."³⁰ Many martyrs died by being beheaded, but not all of their heads were preserved as relics. St Paul the Apostle was beheaded.³¹ Legends report that his head prayed after it had been cut off.³² John the Baptist died at the hands of King Herod's executioners, who beheaded him in prison.³³ There are various accounts of his head being preserved in several places. We find other examples of saints who were beheaded and survived the event.³⁴ St Denis of Paris is reputed to have carried his head up the hill to Montmartre. The account reads: "Hilduin adds that the body of S. Denys got up, took its head in its hands, and, accompanied by a choir of angels singing 'Alleluia,' carried it to the place where now stands the

³⁰ Edmund Colledge & J. C. Marler, 'Céphalogie' A Recurrent Theme in Classical and Medieval Lore', *Traditio* XXXVII (1981) pages 411-26 at page 421.

³¹ Eusebius, *The History of the Church*, Book II.25 (Harmondsworth, Middlesex Penguin Books 1965), page 104.

³² Edmund Colledge, OSA, and J C Marle, 'Céphalogie': A Recurrent Theme in Classical and Mediaeval Lore', *Traditio* XXXVII (1981), pages 411-26; '*Moxque eius caput a corpore exiliens, Jesus Christus quod sibi in vita sua dulce exciterat et tam crebro nominaverat hebraice clara voce insonuit.*' Page 414, See also pages 418 & 419.

³³ Matthew 14: 3-12; see also Mateusz Kapustka, 'Chasing the Caput: Head Images of John the Baptist in a Political Context' in Catrien Santing, Barbara Baert & Anita Training, eds, *Disembodied Heads in Medieval and Early Modern Culture: Intersections: Interdisciplinary Studies in Early Modern Culture Vol 28* (Leiden Boston 2013), pages 160-189 which traces some of the relics of St John the Baptist.

³⁴ P M Bourke, "The Treatment of Myth and Legend in the Windows of St Neot's, Cornwall,," *Foklore* Vol 97 No 1 (1986), pages 63-69 at 68, 'In the Wives' Window there is St Meubred holding his spare head. ... Hermit and martyr: nothing else is known about him. It would have been fitting had there been a legend about St Meubred's head and a spring, as there is about other west country cephalophores, such as Sts Nectan, Melor and Decuman.'

abbey of S. Denys.”³⁵ The legends do not speak of a head which talks. Wales provides another example in the person of St Winifred or St. Gwenfrewi who is commemorated at Holywell or Tre Ffynnon in Flintshire, North Wales³⁶. According to legends, a local prince attempted to cut her head off by stabbing her in the neck. He had fallen in love with her but she refused his advances. Her uncle St Beuno healed by re-attaching her head to her body. ³⁷ An account of the event reads: “he [the prince] caught her up at the chapel door, and then in his anger he struck her with his dagger on the throat so as to wound her. Where the blood flowed the rock opened, and a spring bubbled up. S. Beuno rushed to the chapel door and cursed the young man, who at once disappeared after other game. Under the hands of her parents, Winefred rapidly recovered...”³⁸ Another account reads: “He [the prince] caught her on the threshold of the church and hacked her head from her body. Saint Beuno, coming from the church, laid the malediction of God upon the murderer.... Where her head had fallen, a fountain gushed forth. The saint then prayed to God that the girl might be restored to life. His prayer was answered; nor was there any sign of the wound to be seen except a white line encircling her neck.”³⁹ A final example of a head speaking comes from the life of St Edmund of East Anglia. He was tortured and killed by Vikings; his head was cut from his body and thrown away in the woods. His head calls out to the men who were searching for it and leads them to the place where it was being guarded by a wolf.⁴⁰

³⁵ S. Baring-Gould, *The Lives of the Saints: October Second Edition* (London John Hodges 1877) page 196.

³⁶ I have visited this Holy Place. It has a well whence the water flows into a large pool. Nearby are Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches and a gift shop. On the day when I visited it had a quiet reverend atmosphere.

³⁷ F L Cross, ed, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church Second Edition* (Oxford University Press 1974) page 1492-3 .

³⁸ S Baring-Gould, *The Lives of the Saints: November: Second Edition* (London John Hodges 1877), page 70.

³⁹ T. Charles-Edwards, *Saint Winefride and Her Well: The Historical Background* (Holywell W. Williams and Son, Printers no date) page 2.

⁴⁰ Robert Miles, ‘Talking Heads, or, A Tale of Two Clerics’ in Catrien Santing, Barbara Baert & Anita Traininger, eds, *Disembodied Heads in Medieval and Early Modern Culture: Intersections: Interdisciplinary Studies in Early Modern Culture Vol 28* (Leiden Boston Brill 2013), pages 31-57 at page 39; see also Abbo, ‘Life of St Edmund’ in Michael Winterbottom, ed, *Three Lives of English Saints* (Toronto Centre for Medieval Studies 1972), pages 65-87; St

Scholars have examined the various accounts of beheaded saints who can walk and talk after their deaths. Catrien Santing and Barbara Baert describe these saints thus:

The bodies of martyrs from Late Antiquity tended to resist the separation consequent to their beheading in the most literal way, as paradoxically, after having been put to death, these saints managed briefly to stay alive. They took up their detached head, took it their arms and walked to the place where they wished to rest forever with the remainder of their body. Hence, they are known as cephalophorics, “head carriers.” This designation refers to martyrs who temporarily survived their decapitation and who continued to attest to their beliefs until they reached their final burial ground. Frequently such post mortem physical activity involved verbally professing one’s faith, demonstrating that it was impossible to silence God’s voice in His advocates.⁴¹

Some scholars have traced the veneration of martyrs’ heads in Christian times back to pre-Christian Celtic times. Anne Ross, for one, argues that the head played an important role in pre-Christian life. She writes, “the human head was regarded by the Celts as being symbolic of divinity and otherworldly power. The motif of the severed head figures throughout the entire field of Celtic cultic practice temporally and geographically and it can be traced in both representational and literary contexts from the very beginning to the latter part of the tradition.”⁴² Gaul, at the time of Justin’s martyrdom, was still a very Celtic land.

We now turn to the significance of St Justin’s head as a holy relic. The boy had instructed his father and brother to bury his body and take his head home to his mother. They obey. We can imagine the difficulty of transporting a body; a head is more easily portable. In his hometown, his head becomes first a

Edmund, King and Martyr’ in G I Needham, ed, *Lives of Three English Saints* (New York Appleton-Century-Crofts Division of Meredith Publishing Company 1966), pages 43-59; the first *vita* is in Latin and the second in Old English.

⁴¹ Catrien Santing & Barbara Baert, ‘Introduction’ to Catrien Santing, Barbara Baert & Anita Traininger, eds, *Disembodied Heads in Medieval and Early Modern Culture: Intersections Interdisciplinary Studies in Early Modern Culture Vol 28* (Leiden Boston Brill 2013), page 3.

⁴² Anne Ross, *Pagan Celtic Britain: Studies in Iconography and Tradition*, (London Routledge & Kegan Paul 1967), page 61. She presents documentary evidence for the cult of the dead on pages 118-23.

domestic relic and is venerated in his home. Then it becomes a public relic and is venerated in the cathedral of the city. He had requested that his mother show ‘a natural affection’ for him represented in his head.⁴³ Her mother receives his head with joy and places it in a place of honour in her home. She says:

To you, O Christ, honour, praise and rejoicing
 Because you deigned to take up that boy
 And to associate with your blessed martyrs
 But you, blessed Justin, my most sweet son
 Who have entered the kingdom of Christ with the palm of victory
 There be mindful of me in your prayers⁴⁴ (author’s translation).

She recognizes her son as a martyr and preserves his head in the family home as the focus of domestic veneration. As Scott B. Montgomery explains, “Upon receiving her son’s head, Felicia kissed it reverently, rejoicing in St. Just’s heavenly repose. ...In receiving and kissing the head, Felicia was the first to venerate the relics of St. Just.”⁴⁵ Then, after a vision of divine light, which we shall presently consider, the head is transferred to the local cathedral where it becomes the focus of public veneration. The bishop of the city sends his colleagues to bring the holy relic to his cathedral, where it may be venerated reverently:

And then this deed is glorified through the people
 All run together, rejoicing, they glorify the martyr,
 On the contrary, the Lord, who so exalts him.
 Meanwhile, with the holy loving bishop ordering,
 The holy head worthily placed in a bier
 With honour and hymns is carried to the church,
 And in a place which the bishop prepared for himself,

⁴³ Bede, *Passio Sancti Justini PL* Vol 94 col 601 line 55, ‘*Ut naturalem affectum in ilud exhibeat*’

⁴⁴ Bede, *Passio Sancti Justini PL* Vol 84 col 602 lines 66-71, ‘*Tibi, dicens, Christe, honor, laus et jubilatio, Quia dignatus es istum puerum assumere, Et associare tuis beatis martyribus. At tu, beati Justine, fili mi dulcissime, Qui regnum Christi intrasti cum palma victoriae, Ibi mei memor esto in tuis suffragiis.*’

⁴⁵ Scott B. Montgomery, ‘Mitte capud meum ... ad matrem meam ut osceletur eum: The Form and Meaning of the Reliquary Bust of Saint Just’, *Gesta* vol36 No 1 (1997), page 48

There he had made provision for that to be preserved (author's translation).⁴⁶

A miracle of healing confirms Justin's status as a holy martyr. A blind woman appeals to him, and her blindness is cured.

We shall now consider the light, which shines from heaven upon Justin's head and arouses the interest of the people of his city. At home, his mother gives thanks to God that her son was found worthy to suffer martyrdom for the sake of Christ, and while she is praying, a light appears over their home:

With his mother praying these things with tears
 Soon a great light shone over the dwelling-place
 In which his holy head was being held placed
 This light, however, illuminated all things on every side
 So that those who were in the city wondered (author's translation).⁴⁷

The author, the Venerable Bede, describes the light as *ingens, coelitus emissum splendorem* and *lux de coelo*.⁴⁸ The author clearly understands that this light is heavenly light and therefore God's light. He calls it a *portento* and a *miraculo*.⁴⁹ The light has a purpose. Firstly, it lights up the place where the martyr's head was being kept and thereby identifies it as the relic of a saint, in this case a martyr. As the author writes, *Mox resplenduit lux ingens super habitaculum, In quo sanctum caput ejus habebatur positum*.⁵⁰ Secondly, it draws the attention of the people of the city to the presence of a saint's relic in

⁴⁶ Bede, *Passio Sancti Justini PL* Vol 94 col 602 lines 93-100, 'Denique clarificatur hoc factum per populum: Concurrunt omnes gaudentes, martyrem glorificant, Imo Dominum, qui illum sic mirificaverat. Interim, jubente sancto amatore praesule, Caput sanctum collocatum condigne in feretro, Cum honore atque hymnis fertur ad ecclesiam, Et in loco quem paravit sibimet episcopus, Ibi illud veneranter recondi providerat.'

⁴⁷ Bede, *Passio Sancti Justini PL* vol 94 Col 602, lines 72-6 : *Haec ipsius genitrice orante cum lacrymis, Mox resplenduit lux ingens super habitaculum, In quo sanctum caput ejus habebatur positum. Haec autem lux circumquaque cuncta illustraverat, Ita ut admirarentur qui in urbe aderant.* In this passage the word *mox* introduces the vision of light. The usual word is *subito*.

⁴⁸ Bede, *Passio Sancti Justini Pl* vol 94 Col 602, line 73, line 81 and line 88.

⁴⁹ Bede, *Passio Sancti Justini PL* vol 94 Col 602, line 83 and line 92.

⁵⁰ Bede, *Passio Sancti Justini PL* vol 94 Col 602, lines 72-3.

their midst. The light is clearly seen throughout the city, *Ita ut admirarentur qui in urge aderant*.⁵¹ This also draws the attention of the bishop of the city who sends presbyters to investigate. Thirdly, the bishop, now convinced of the holiness of the relic, makes appropriate provision for its housing in his cathedral and its suitable veneration, *interim, jubente sancto amatore praesule, Caput sanctum collocatum condigne in feretro Cum honore atque hymnis fertur ad ecclesiam, Et in loco quem paravit sibimet episcopus Ibi illud vereranter recondi providerat*.⁵² This may seem hard on the boy's mother who has lost her son to martyrdom and now his head to the bishop's desire to enhance the prestige of his cathedral by having another martyr's relic in his possession. We can only hope that her joy of a son in heaven as a martyr is increased by the honour done to his head. The holiness of the martyr and his relic is further confirmed by the miracles at his shrine, particularly the restoration of sight to a blind girl.⁵³ The vocabulary used in this *passio* for light is also interesting. When the author is writing about the light of the vision of light, he uses the word *lux*. When he writes about ordinary light as in the case of the blind girl being healed, he uses the word *lumen*. He is making a distinction between two kinds of light.

Visions of light that identify the relics of saints are common in hagiography.⁵⁴ A splendid example is the beam of light, which shone over the bones of King Oswald. The Venerable Bede writes: "So it came about that the relics remained outside all night with only a large tent erected over the carriage in which the bones rested. But a sign from heaven revealed to them [the monks of the monastery of Bardney] how reverently the relics should have been received by all the faithful. All through the night a column of light stretched from the carriage right up to heaven and was visible in almost every part of the kingdom of Lindsey."⁵⁵ Another example from the same author is the beams of

⁵¹ Bede, *Passio Sancti Justini PL* vol 94 Col 602, line 75.

⁵² Bede, *Passio Sancti Justini PL* vol 94 Col 602, lines 95-100.

⁵³ Bede, *Passio Sancti Justini PL* vol 94 Col 602, lines 104-113; see also John 9.

⁵⁴ See please see my doctoral dissertation, *Visions of Divine Light in the Writings of the Venerable Bede*.

⁵⁵ Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, III.11, Bertram Colgrave & R.A.B. Mynors, eds, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, (Oxford at the Clarendon Press 1969) pages 246

light, which shone over the bodies of the two Hewalds who were Anglo-Saxon martyrs in Germany.⁵⁶ Other similar visions of light may be found in other saints' lives.

This brief *passio* combines a number of themes common in hagiography. We find the saint, a pious little boy with a number of virtues. Then we meet a fierce persecutor of Christians and his minions. A confrontation between a saint and his persecutors leads to the death of the saint, in this case by beheading. Then miracles follow. The decapitated body remains standing with his head in his hands. The head speaks and consoles those who are lamenting his death. A vision of divine light identifies the head as a relic of a saint, and the relic is worthily venerated. The saint is dead, his soul is in heaven, his body is peacefully buried in the earth, and his head is venerated in a cathedral. The saint is dead and still speaks to the faithful through his miracles.

About the reviewer: Father Stephen Sharman is a priest at St. Nicholas parish in Narol, Manitoba. He received his PhD from the University of Wales Trinity Saint David in 2013. The title of his dissertation was *Visions of Light in the Writings of the Venerable Bede*.

& 247, *Vnde factum est, ut ipsa nocte reliquiae adlatae foris permanerent, tentorio tantum maiore supra carrum, in quo inerant, extenso. Sed miraculi caelestis ostension, quam reverenter eae suscipiendae a cunctis fidelibus essent, patefecit. Nam tota ea nocte columna lucis a carro illo ad caelum usque porrecta omnibus pene eiusdem Lindissae provinciae locis conspicua stabat.*

⁵⁶ Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica* V. 10.