

## Trick or Treat? *Daimones* in the Writings of Justin Martyr and Plutarch

The second-century Christian apologist Justin Martyr, in his *First Apology*, claimed that the persecution of Christians was the result of demons instigating a hatred for God's people in the hearts of their persecutors (*I Apol.* 5). For Justin, the demons (*daimones*) were wicked beings who sought to lead humans away from God by directly persecuting his followers, revealing themselves to humans as deities (*I Apol.* 5), and attempting to imitate the incarnation in hopes of discrediting the prophesied coming of Christ (*I Apol.* 54).

Justin's conception of wicked *daimones* is much more in accord with Jewish demonology than that of Greco-Roman religion and philosophy, who did not necessarily see *daimones* as evil. Nevertheless, the Middle Platonist Plutarch, writing approximately fifty years before Justin, describes evil *daimones* who afflict human beings (*De def. or.* 14) and credits many stories of the gods to both good and evil *daimones* (*De def. or.* 15; *De Is. et Os.* 360).

Even though Justin was a Christian and Plutarch a Middle Platonist, and as a result often had diverging views of *daimones*, there seem to be some correlations between Justin's view of *daimones* actively intervening in human affairs and discourses concerning their nature in Plutarch's writings. I argue that a comparative analysis of Justin Martyr and Plutarch's demonologies shows that Justin's claim that *daimones* actively impersonate deities and afflict Christians was perhaps more in accord with the philosophy of his non-Christian contemporaries than we would expect.