JAMES DUNN

James Douglas Grant Dunn

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elected Fellow of the British Academy 2006

by

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James ('Jimmy') Dunn was a scholar of the New Testament and early Christianity, who through his ground-breaking publications and personal influence led the international re-evaluation of Paul's relation to Judaism (the 'new perspective on Paul') and challenged scholars to rethink the development of early Christology and the role of oral tradition in the transmission of Jesus-traditions. His comprehensive grasp of the field also enabled him to chart the unity and diversity of early Christianity through the first four generations. He wrote fifty books over the course of his career, some designed for scholars, others for a wider audience in the churches worldwide. His historical enquiries were conducted with theological interests, and often provoked controversy, which he generally relished.

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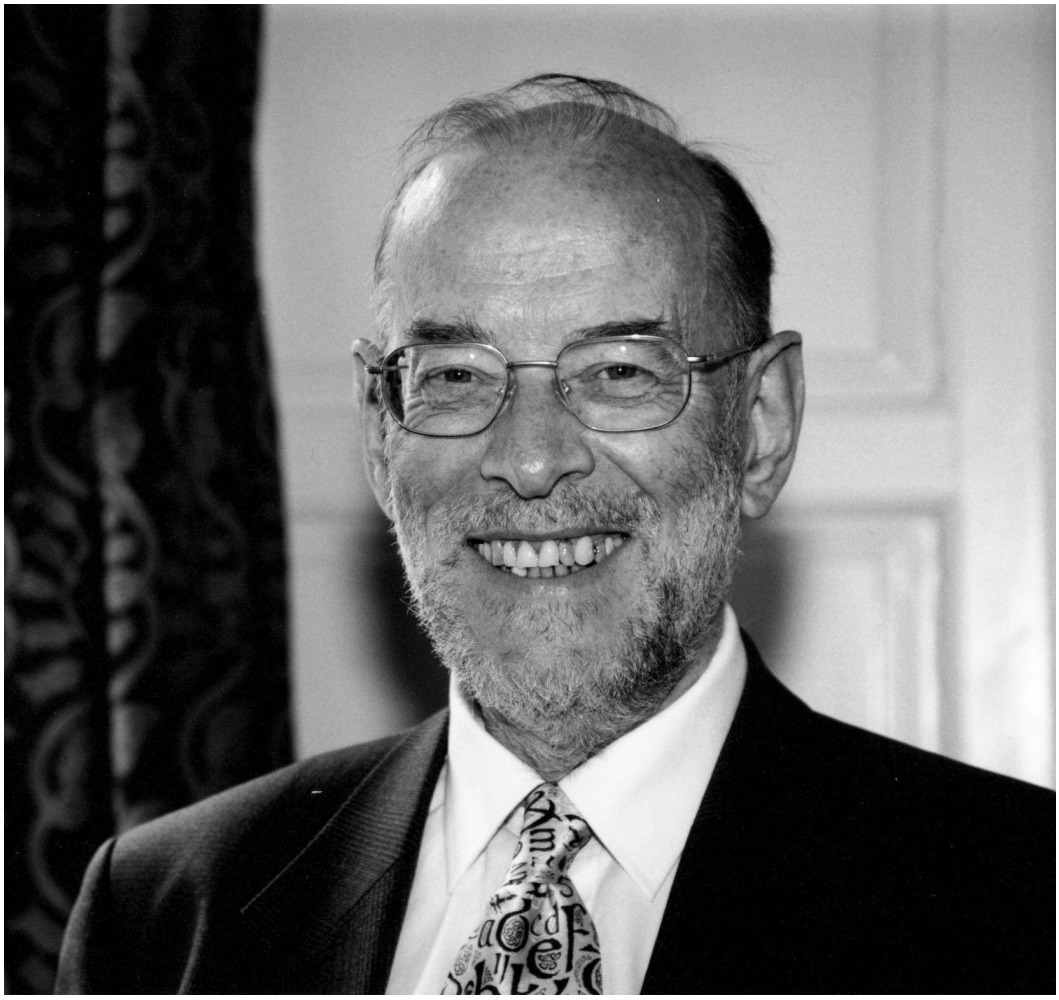

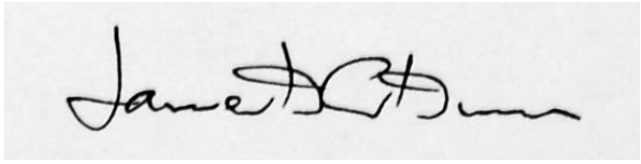

Formation and early career

James Dunn (known to his friends as 'Jimmy') was the youngest of four sons born to Scottish parents who at the time of his birth (1939) lived in Birmingham. His father (David Dunn) died when he was less than a year old, and his mother (Nancy, née Orr) moved the family back to Glasgow and brought up her boys single-handed. As an adult, Jimmy Dunn appreciated how much he owed to his mother for his upbringing, which was accompanied by a first-rate education at Hutcheson's Grammar School in Glasgow. There, besides gaining a beneficial grounding in Greek and Latin, Dunn was deeply influenced by the Scripture Union, an evangelical youth organisation that stressed personal faith, daily prayer, and deep familiarity with the Bible. By his own account, in his senior school years and through Scripture Union activities (missions and youth gatherings), the foundations of his life were set in a personal faith that was to prove of sufficient existential strength to survive the onslaught of the intellectual questions that arose from his historical research.[1] It was through these youth meetings that he met Meta Russell, with whom he fell in love and whom he married in 1963. Meta, a multi-talented, robust, and down-to-earth woman of immense energy and deep faith, was to be his equal partner in a marriage that lasted fifty-seven years, the bedrock of Dunn's psychological resilience and practical welfare.

After a first degree in Economics with Statistics at Glasgow University, Dunn trained for Church of Scotland ministry at Trinity College, Glasgow. The Church of Scotland allowed considerable latitude in Christian belief, but Dunn was on the conservative end of the spectrum and stood out among the students in his forthright defence of traditional beliefs. The dialectical skills honed in theological debate at Trinity College were to serve him well throughout his life, even if his own views were later to modify considerably. His mentor at Trinity College was Professor William Barclay, the world-famous scholar of the New Testament who combined historical and philological expertise with an incomparable ability to communicate the Christian message to a public audience. Inspired by Barclay, and with a well-organised mind ideally suited to the detailed investigation of history and texts, Dunn began to envisage his future in academia rather than church ministry. With Barclay's encouragement, he went to Cambridge in 1964 to study for a PhD under the supportive but rigorous supervision of C.F.D. ('Charlie') Moule, whose own combination of historical rigour and evangelical faith was exactly what Dunn desired to emulate.

Dunn's doctoral years in Cambridge were to prove a watershed period in his personal and intellectual development. As his family grew (his two oldest children, Catrina and

[1] See James D.G. Dunn, 'In Quest of Truth', in John Byron and Joel N. Lohr (eds.), *I (Still) Believe* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 55–68.

David, were born in Cambridge), he and Meta enjoyed the company of fellow postgraduates (including the future New Testament scholars, David Catchpole, Graham Stanton, Gerry O'Collins, and Peter Richardson) whose friendship encouraged him to explore theological terrain beyond his hitherto limited horizons. Here he encountered a range of vibrant and intellectually robust forms of Christianity among his friends, including Catholic fellow postgraduates, nudging him to reconsider his previous assumptions about the essentials of the Christian faith. At the same time, his involvement in the burgeoning 'charismatic movement' (a neo-Pentecostal wave, which emphasised personal experience of the Spirit) led him to loosen some of his previous doctrinal parameters. Reminiscing on this formative period, Dunn recalls that his diverse Christian circle of friends used to quote John Wesley: 'If your heart beats with mine in affirming "Jesus is Lord", give me your hand'.[2] Meanwhile, his historical research into the New Testament and early Christianity was forcing him to abandon some of his conservative, literalist, and harmonising assumptions about the Bible. Although he used the study resources of Tyndale House (a well-stocked library in Cambridge established to defend conservative evangelical perspectives on the Bible), Dunn found himself wrestling with historical evidence that questioned his earlier convictions about the infallibility of the Bible.

This was both an intellectual and a personal phase of transition. He recalls a turning point when he came to accept that Peter did not write one of the New Testament texts attributed to him (the letter known as 2 Peter); his friends remember that this moment brought tears to his eyes. While some Tyndale colleagues warned him about the 'slippery slope' he had started to descend, Dunn here embarked on a lifelong quest to negotiate the relationship between his Christian faith and his historical research, which he felt required to conduct with the whole range of critical tools developed since the Enlightenment. His journey was to constitute a classic and influential form of emancipation from evangelical 'fundamentalism', although, like many who followed this route, he retained key features of Protestant theology and evangelical piety. Because of his growing public stature and his love of debate, this intellectual shift was to prove controversial, but Dunn experienced it as liberating. It gave him a lifelong, passionate commitment to freedom, vitality, and flexibility, while inducing a deep antipathy to what he considered 'narrow', 'restricted', or 'authoritarian' forms of religion. One can trace these polarities through much of his scholarly work, as we shall see.

A brief synopsis of his early career will help to place the first stages of his work in context. After gaining his PhD from Cambridge University (awarded in 1968), Dunn and his family returned to Scotland where he nearly embarked on what would have been a tense experience of Church of Scotland ministry (given his recent broadening of perspective) but was instead appointed Secretary and International Chaplain to the Edinburgh

[2] Dunn, 'In Quest of Truth', 58.

Christian Council for Overseas Students (1968-1970). But in 1970 his academic ambition was fulfilled by his appointment to a lectureship at Nottingham University, where a supportive environment of colleagues, led by A.R.C. (Bob) Leaney, enabled him to throw himself energetically into research and teaching. Between 1970 and 1982, Dunn rapidly established himself in New Testament scholarship, while his family grew (with the birth of his youngest, Fiona) and his wife, Meta, renewed her career as an outstanding teacher, rising to be head of Westglade Primary School.

Early publications on the Spirit and Christian experience

From the beginning, Dunn's research and publications were attuned to points of contemporary interest in the church or in wider society: he had a knack of 'riding the wave' of recent controversies or innovations, while making a distinctive, and often decisive contribution of his own. His Cambridge PhD was published in 1970 as *Baptism in the Holy Spirit* and was explicitly connected to the neo-Pentecostalism with which Dunn was acquainted.[3] Dunn offered a thorough examination of all the relevant New Testament material (in the Gospels, in Acts, and in the letters of Paul) and deployed the scholarly rigour he had learned in Cambridge, showing comprehensive knowledge of all relevant scholarship. He argued that there was no New Testament basis for a 'baptism' in the Spirit *subsequent to* conversion/initiation: the Pentecostal reading of the New Testament was, on this point, simply wrong. At the same time, he showed much sympathy for the charismatic emphasis on the felt *experience* of the Spirit as basic to conversion/initiation, something he considered badly underestimated in the 'mainstream' theological traditions. Like the Protestant Reformers, he refuted 'enthusiasm' on the one side (e.g., improper claims for a second enrichment by the Spirit) while attacking, on the other side, the 'sacramentalism' that interpreted 'baptism in the Spirit' as subsumed by water baptism, or administered by bishops in the rite of 'confirmation'. Unafraid of provoking dissent, he was strongly opposed to any such ritual 'restriction' of the Spirit.

In the event, this work was well appreciated by readers sympathetic to Pentecostalism, who were delighted by Dunn's emphasis on the central importance of Spirit-experience; in later years, their emergence as a scholarly group in the Society of Biblical Literature prompted the second edition of the volume, with a new preface, in 2010. There was a frostier reception among theologians in the mainstream churches, partly because Dunn had yet to establish any personal standing there, and partly because both in tone and

[3] James D.G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit: A Re-examination of the New Testament Teaching on the Gift of the Spirit in relation to Pentecostalism today* (London: SCM Press, 1970); a second edition was published in 2010, which is a sign of Dunn's worldwide reputation and the enduring significance of the subject matter, at least in the church.

content he had not connected well with the theological tradition. His persistent contrasting of 'inner' experience and 'outer' ritual appeared all too Protestant (and modern) to those rooted in longer traditions, while statements such as 'I must confess to being completely unmoved by any appeal to "the sacramental principle" or [the] "incarnational basis to sacramental teaching"' (p. 228, citing Wotherspoon) were not likely to win friends among theologians. Dunn's stance was a classic expression of Protestantism in a modernist mode. The Bible is to be interpreted with historical tools, as reflecting the origins (and therefore, in Dunn's view, the essence) of Christianity, forming the 'yardstick' for theology (Preface; 'our rule', 228). In the absence of any theological or anthropological theory of ritual, Dunn took the New Testament texts, as far as he could, in an anti-ritual direction, placing all the emphasis on the inner and unpredictable experience of the Spirit. It is hard not to see here some correlation with his own experience of Christianity, and it is understandable that this work formed the impetus for a life-long interest in early Christian experience.

His next book, *Jesus and the Spirit* was subtitled *A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament*.[4] Despite the title, the work was largely confined in scope to those texts that reflect the first generation of Christianity – the historical Jesus, the earliest Christian communities, and Paul. With hindsight, the book appears far too ambitious in attempting to press through the literary sources to the 'religious experience' itself. At certain points, Dunn relied heavily on the Acts of the Apostles, with what many would now consider an overly optimistic view of its reliability as a historical source. At least in the case of (the authentic letters of) Paul, one could be certain of a window onto the first generation of the Christian movement, but how one moves from the literary expression of an experience or emotion to the actual felt experience is a question which might have been given greater consideration. Despite such caveats, the breadth and clarity of this work are exceptional. At a time when New Testament scholarship was becoming increasingly specialised (with an ever-growing tsunami of narrowly focused publication), Dunn here (and later) defiantly kept his horizon broad. At the same time, the reader never loses track of his line of argument. The division of each chapter into headed sub-sections and the use of summaries and italics to highlight the essential points helped readers to navigate this large book of exegetical analysis without becoming lost in the detail. In all his later work that clarity of writing was to continue, making even his larger volumes accessible, with appeal and impact both inside and outside the scholarly community.

With precise exegetical and historical tools, in *Jesus and the Spirit* Dunn attempted to trace the similarities and continuities between the religious experience of Jesus and the experience of the Spirit in the early church, including Paul. Against liberal tenden-

[4] London: SCM Press, 1975; reprinted by Eerdmans in 1997.

cies to reduce this experience to inner feelings and rational piety, Dunn (following Hermann Gunkel, nearly one hundred years earlier) underlined the 'ecstatic' and dramatic experience of the Spirit, which historical scepticism and theological embarrassment had long played down. He could not resist, however, his own theological assessment of the evidence – that Jesus 'transcends' his Jewish predecessors, that Luke (author of Luke and Acts) was undiscriminating between true and false religious experience, and that Paul had the most 'mature' voice on this matter. A glance, in the final chapter, at the second generation of Christianity (where 'the vision fades') brings out Dunn's theological preferences. On the one side, where God is a 'living reality', experience is crucial, so long as it is 'fresh', 'vital', 'creative', and 'dynamic'; on the other side (beginning in the Pastoral Epistles), we find 'sacramentalism', 'institutionalisation', 'dogma', and an 'authoritarian' church. Like most New Testament scholars of his generation, Dunn conducted historical research within a theological frame: he asked theological questions of relevance to the contemporary church, used theological categories of analysis, and allowed theological preferences to come to the surface. As his career developed, this theological frame would become less obtrusive in his scholarship, but it was never entirely absent, and he would remain engaged with the church, writing numerous books for a popular church audience to the end of his life.[5]

Unity, diversity and early Christology

Dunn was a popular teacher at Nottingham University, with a warm and friendly personality; friends would be greeted with a bear-hug rather than a formal handshake. His character matched the charismatic movement to which he was attracted – ebullient, enthusiastic, informal, and brimming with energy. With breathtaking speed, he produced a third book within two years of his second, based on a Nottingham course of lectures: *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity*.[6] Again, the theme was topical. In the 1960s a group of German-American scholars (notably Helmut Koester at Harvard Divinity School and Hans-Dieter Betz at Chicago Divinity School) had re-energised the study of early Christianity as a purely historical enterprise (though most were Protestant pastors and drew on the heritage of Rudolph Bultmann). They were instrumental in reviving the somewhat neglected thesis

[5] Examples include: *The Evidence for Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1985; in response to what Dunn considered a faith-damaging TV series); (with James I. McDonald *et al.*), *The Kingdom of God and North-East England* (London: SCM Press, 1986); *The Living Word* (London: SCM Press, 1987; second enlarged edition, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009); *Jesus' Call to Discipleship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); *Why Believe in Jesus' Resurrection?* (London: SPCK, 2016).

[6] London: SCM Press, 1977; second edition, 1990; third edition, with some modifications, 2006.

of Walter Bauer (*Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum*; originally published in 1934, but republished in 1964). Bauer had argued against the traditional (and theologically comfortable) notion that 'orthodoxy' was original and 'heresy' a later deviation from the mainstream of Christian thought, stressing, by contrast, the irreconcilable diversity of Christianity in its earliest form. The impetus for re-opening this historical question was the publication of the Nag Hammadi library – an archive of Christian texts discovered in Egypt in 1945, whose 'Gnostic' documents illustrated a wider diversity of early Christian thought than had previously been imagined. Since, it was argued, some of these texts (such as the *Gospel of Thomas*) could be dated quite early, 'Christianity' could appear *from the beginning* as a contradictory constellation of beliefs and practices, only later reduced to a self-professed 'orthodoxy' by the questionable exclusion of 'heretical' strands of thoughts.[7] But the questions here raised about the unity or diversity of the Christian tradition were not just of historical interest. In the wake of Vatican II (1962-1965), there was new energy and excitement in the ecumenical movement, advanced by the World Council of Churches. Questions concerning what united the churches, and what diversity they could tolerate, were front and centre in the minds of church leaders and were live issues in local church discussions, such as the 1960s negotiations between Methodists and Anglicans in the UK.

This combination of historical and theological interests forms the backdrop to Dunn's *Unity and Diversity*, which also had personal significance as he continued to expand his notion of 'legitimate' expressions of Christian faith. Dunn's method is to sink a number of strategic 'bore-holes' into the New Testament material (which he took to be more or less coterminous with 'early Christianity'), on such topics as kerygma (preaching), confessional formulae, and the role of tradition, together with theologically inflected topics such as 'ministry' and 'sacraments'. In the second part of the book, four 'streams' in early Christianity are examined: Jewish, Hellenistic, and Apocalyptic Christianity, and 'Early Catholicism' (a theologically loaded category). The striking and controversial conclusion of Dunn's examination is that the *sole* unifying theme in the New Testament/Early Christianity is the continuity between the man Jesus of Nazareth and the exalted Christ, God's agent in salvation. If this was the only unifying factor (though the centre of the whole), there was, Dunn argued, a remarkable diversity in the ways this Christological conviction was expressed and put into practice. It is hardly fanciful to trace in this thesis the imprint of his Cambridge experience, with his discovery of varied expressions of a unifying faith in Jesus (the Wesleyan 'Jesus is Lord'). What is most striking is the boldness of this project: at only thirty-seven years of age, and less than ten

[7] For a representative example of this influential trend, see J.M. Robinson and H. Koester (eds), *Trajectories through Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1971). Bauer's book was translated by a team of scholars as *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (London: SCM, 1971).

years out from his PhD, Dunn here offers confident judgments about an enormous range of New Testament topics. Individually, not many of these judgments were wholly original, but cumulatively they constituted a bold thesis with important theological consequences that brought Dunn widespread fame.

Although *Unity and Diversity* gained wide attention (and Dunn was commissioned by the publisher to produce two further editions, the last as late as 2006), it did not satisfy many readers. What he identified as the common denominator in the New Testament documents (the continuity between the historical Jesus and the exalted Christ) was so bare, and of such limited historical or theological weight, that it seemed to most a disappointing (or even alarming) conclusion. By offering such a minimal unifying core (far smaller than the theological commitments of most self-identifying evangelicals), by undercutting the harmonising instincts of evangelical readings of Scripture, and by polemicising against those who made any one strand of New Testament theology a criterion of exclusion (a stance here dubbed 'narrow rigidity'), Dunn alienated many who had looked to him as a rising star in evangelical biblical scholarship. But it was clear by now that he placed greater stock in his reputation in international scholarship than in his reception at Tyndale House. At the more radical end of the scholarly spectrum, Dunn's judgments looked overly traditional: if his search was for 'early Christianity', why did he not recognise the value of the 'proto-Gnostic' Corinthian believers who challenged Paul, or accept an early date for the *Gospel of Thomas*? And if the unity was Christological, were there not endless, and incompatible, variants in the way the early Christians viewed Jesus/Christ? Dunn's method and conclusions appeared to such critics both too historically conservative and too theologically determined. His thesis intrigued many but pleased rather few.

In truth, the chief weakness in this work was its incautious merging of historical and theological categories. With hindsight, some of his historical judgments now appear outdated, in method and conclusion, but that is the fate of historical scholarship in a fast-moving field. As Dunn later recognised, the use of sociological tools (beginning to influence New Testament studies in the 1970s) could have enhanced his work. But it is the lack of hermeneutical and theological reflection that most weakened a work that was attempting to make not just an historical contribution to scholarship but also a theological contribution to the church. The identification between 'Early Christianity' and 'the New Testament' reflects a failure to consider the theological significance of the New Testament canon (and how it came about), and its placement, from the beginning, within a larger theological frame in the production of 'norms' for Christian belief. Dunn's approach matched the historical positivism typical of British evangelicals at this time, as if one could make theological judgments simply on the basis of historical evidence. Dunn declared that 'with *only* the NT and without all the rest of Christian history and documentation we should have more than enough to serve as chart and compass as

Christianity presses into an unknown future'.[8] His historical work shared the critical sensibilities of Bultmann and his pupils, but he lacked their hermeneutical sensitivities. Where their radical Lutheranism combined historical scepticism with strong theological convictions, Dunn's evaluation of the New Testament lacked the conceptual depth necessary to carry weight in the theological arena.

Since he put his finger on beliefs about Jesus/Christ as the unifying centre of the New Testament, it was not surprising that Dunn's next work, *Christology in the Making*, explored this topic more fully. Again, Dunn was riding a current wave. In the late 1970s a spate of books by liberal Christian theologians questioned traditional Christology (as defined by the early Christian creeds), in the wake of a collection of essays entitled *The Myth of God Incarnate* (edited by John Hick and published in 1977). These theologians generally affirmed that Jesus was outstanding or ultimate in some way, but rejected the orthodox belief in a pre-existent second person of the Trinity, incarnate in the human Jesus. Since New Testament texts were frequently banded about in this discussion, Dunn took it upon himself to use his historical and exegetical skills to trace the origins of the traditional belief, giving his *Christology in the Making* the subtitle: *An Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation*.[9]

The key thesis of this book was a simple but powerful narrative: neither Jesus himself nor the *earliest* Christian texts collected in the New Testament considered Jesus to be the incarnation of a pre-existent person. Though the early Christian authors considered him highly exalted in the resurrection, a figure of ultimate significance for the world, they did not retroject his significance into some form of pre-temporal existence: that was a notion that came to expression for the first time in the Gospel of John, at the end of the 1st century. As a historian, Dunn aimed to tease out what the New Testament authors intended to say by their various Christological statements, and how their 1st-century hearers/readers might be expected to hear them: the greatest historical error would be 'dogmatic anachronism', reading back into early sources later conceptual elaborations. He was also convinced that the concepts deployed (and developed) by the New Testament writers derived not from 'pagan superstition' but from the Jewish tradition, especially in its Hellenised intellectual forms. Thus, as he traced the various Christological titles/themes – Son of God, Son of Man, Adam, Spirit, angel, Wisdom, Word – Dunn showed in each case the absence in Judaism of a pre-existent divine figure 'independent of God', and how the early Christian use of these titles remained within the bounds of 'monotheism'. It was John who combined the Logos-poem (John 1.1-18) with his Father-Son Christology and was thus 'the first Christian writer to conceive

[8] *Unity and Diversity* (third edition), 426 (although his 'further reflections' indicate that he was later aware of how naïve this sounds).

[9] London: SCM Press, 1980; second edition, SCM Press, 1989 (reprinted by Eerdmans, 1996); third edition, SCM Press, 2003.

clearly of the personal pre-existence of the Logos-Son' (249), with all the tensions that creates within a monotheistic faith.

Dunn's thesis was argued in painstaking detail, based on detailed exegesis and meticulous research. Its caution against over-reading the evidence impressed many, while its simple but bold thesis of a gradual evolution in early Christian thought made his argument instantly comprehensible. Some liberal theologians (e.g., Maurice Wiles) were disappointed: they liked his historical exposure of the 'low' Christology in many New Testament texts, but disagreed with his acclamation of John, who in their view had not crowned but distorted the early Christian message. On the other hand, a plethora of New Testament scholars questioned his linear narrative and disputed what they considered his special pleading in relation to a number of first-generation, Pauline texts. Dunn's thesis depended on proving a negative – that much-discussed texts like Galatians 4.4-5, Philippians 2.6-8 (the 'Philippian hymn'), 2 Corinthians 8.9 and Colossians 1.15-20 did *not* attribute to Christ any form of personal 'pre-existence'. In each case, Dunn found evidence of an Adamic Christology (Christ as the final Adam, not a pre-existent Primal Man) or a Wisdom Christology (Christ as the expression of the Jewish concept of Wisdom, a poetic hypostasis or personification, not a personal divine being). A large body of scholars (including his *Doktorvater,* Moule) rejected his readings of such texts, and some formed an 'early high Christology club' (led by Larry Hurtado) who expended considerable effort in countering Dunn's reading of the evidence. Dunn relished such controversy (he was always happy to be at the centre of scholarly attention), although he often (and not always fairly) complained of being misunderstood or misrepresented. In a flood of follow-up essays he responded to his critics, conceding little if anything.[10] Fortunately, he was not inclined to take criticism personally, and on meeting his critics continued to greet them with a warm hug whatever the robustness of the debate that had passed between them.

Dunn's exegesis of the controversial passages has not generally stood the test of time, and further readings of the Jewish texts to which he drew attention has tended to question the limitations in meaning that he imposed upon them. Although he used concepts like 'God', 'monotheism', 'person', and 'incarnation' freely, he did not devote the necessary philosophical or theological attention to their definition, and did not seem well informed on the development of 'trinitarian' concepts. By insisting that the 'historical' meaning of the text can be independently established and should be clearly distinguished from its later theological reception, he showed little sympathy for the ways that early Christians found a 'surplus of meaning' in phrases that for Dunn *could not* mean what

[10] Some are collected in James D.G. Dunn, *The Christ and the Spirit: Collected Essays, Volume 1: Christology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). In general, Dunn rarely adjusted his views in response to scholarly criticism, leading some to despair of 'getting through' to him.

they were later heard to say. Moreover, he only later paid attention to the ways that Christological texts and titles were interpreted through practices that venerated Jesus.[11] But as an original piece of historical analysis, combining both textual precision and clarity of argument, *Christology in the Making* established Dunn's international reputation as an outstanding scholar in the field of New Testament studies.

Transition to Durham and the 'new perspective on Paul'

In 1982 came the personal and professional change that was to frame the rest of Dunn's career. In that year he was appointed to the Chair of Divinity at Durham University, in succession to Professor C.K. Barrett FBA, and he was to stay at Durham University until his (slightly early) retirement in 2003. In 1990 he was transferred to the Lightfoot Professorship of Divinity, in recognition of his life-long admiration for J.B. Lightfoot (the 19th-century New Testament scholar and Bishop of Durham). Through his long career at Durham, Dunn was twice Head of the Department of Theology (using his training in economics to make sure the Department got the best financial deal from the University), while his stellar scholarship cemented Durham's reputation as a world-famous centre for New Testament studies. Scores of PhD students came from all over the world to study under his supervision, many of whom went on to become leading scholars themselves. He built a strong community around a weekly research seminar in New Testament studies, capped by pot-luck suppers in his home and annual staff-student outings to local places of interest. The Dunns were happy to be nearer to their Scottish roots, and often students would be invited for a Hogmanay party, where they were introduced to haggis and someone would be taught to 'first-foot', while Dunn would wish them enthusiastically, 'lang may your lum reek!' Together with Meta, Jimmy excelled in building life-long friendships with students and their families through their joint hospitality and pastoral advice. Numerous students testify to their formative influence on their lives. Alongside the Festschrift from Dunn's peers on his retirement,[12] it was fitting that his former students organized their own Festschrift to mark his 70th birthday.[13] As every student will testify, a greeting from Jimmy would always start with a warm hug and a beaming smile: he was deeply invested in people, and they repaid his kindness with loyalty, respect, and love.

With characteristic energy and enthusiasm, Dunn threw himself into life at Durham,

[11] Dunn was later exercised by this issue (pressed by Larry Hurtado); see his *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus?* (London: SPCK, 2010).

[12] *The Holy Spirit and Christian Origins*, edited by G. Stanton, B. Longenecker, and S. Barton (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

[13] *Jesus and Paul*, edited by B.J. Oropeza, C.K. Robertson, and D. Mohrmann (London: T & T Clark, 2009).

a frequent preacher on the local Methodist circuit, a leader of Durham Churches Together, a founder of the Wesley Study Centre, and an influential member of St John's College, where he was President of the SCR, a member of Council, and honorary life fellow; he later bequeathed to the College the 3000 volumes of his (previously downsized) personal library. But his vision was also global. He was active in the leadership of *Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas* (the international New Testament society), serving as its Treasurer and finally President (2002-2003), while energetically supporting its promotion of academic study of the Bible in Eastern Europe. He also developed a strong link between the Durham Department of Theology and the Protestant Faculty of the University of Tübingen. His strong friendship with Tübingen's Professors Martin Hengel and Peter Stuhlmacher were the foundation of biennial conferences of staff and students (producing at least five influential volumes of essays). The busier he was, the more Dunn seemed to thrive, as he poured himself into local, national, and international commitments, while also teaching with enthusiasm and mentoring his junior colleagues.

The move to Durham coincided with a shift in scholarly focus to the letters and theology of Paul. Just a month after starting his new job at Durham, Dunn gave the 'Manson Memorial Lecture' at the University of Manchester, which he entitled 'The New Perspective on Paul' – an essay and a title that signalled his most famous contribution to New Testament studies. The 'new perspective' to which he refers is the revolution in the study of Paul inaugurated by the ground-breaking book of E.P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*.[14] Here, at considerable length and by reviewing a range of Second Temple Jewish texts, Sanders had effectively undermined a long tradition of Christian (and especially Protestant) misrepresentation of Judaism. Where Judaism had been caricatured as 'legalistic', seeking salvation by self-generated righteousness through obedience to the Torah, Sanders found a consistent pattern of 'covenantal nomism', where law-observance was framed by God's prior establishment of the covenant by grace. Sanders' case was generally persuasive, and it fitted a widespread concern to repudiate the longstanding tradition of anti-Judaism (even anti-Semitism) that had shaped Pauline studies up to the 1970s, not least through the Lutheran existentialist theology of Rudolph Bultmann and his students.

Sanders' reading of Paul's Jewish heritage threw all the cards in the air. Luther and his successors had made central to Paul's theology the statement that 'justification' is 'not by works of the law' but by 'faith in Christ' (Galatians 2.16), and had interpreted 'justification by works of the law' as the Jewish search for salvation by 'works-righteousness'. But if that reading was historically impossible, what was Paul's antithesis about and what, more broadly, was Paul's relationship to his Jewish tradition? In the last part of *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, Sanders had given a provisional answer to that

[14] Subtitled, *A Comparison in Patterns of Religion* (London: SCM Press, 1977).

question that many found inadequate, and Dunn leapt into this scholarly gap to offer his own reading of the evidence.[15] In line with a general shift in scholarly attention from the individual to the social, Dunn argued that Paul's primary concern, as 'apostle to the Gentiles' (non-Jews), was not the salvation of the individual but the incorporation of Gentiles into the people of God *without* requiring them to adopt typically Jewish 'identity markers', such as male-circumcision, Sabbath-observance, and kosher food laws. That (not self-righteousness) was the topic of dispute in Paul's letter to the Galatians, and that (at least primarily) was what Paul meant by 'works of the law'. What Paul opposed, then, was not a grace-less religion, nor a self-reliant attempt to earn salvation by works, but any restriction of membership in the covenant people on ethnic or national lines. Paul does not misrepresent his Jewish tradition as 'legalistic'; he merely, but crucially, resists Israel's claim to a special, privileged position before God.[16] Using a range of spatial language, Dunn pits Paul's policy of 'openness' and 'freedom' against any 'narrow' understanding of God's purposes, any policy that is 'exclusive', any imposition of 'boundary-markers', and any programme of 'separation', 'distinction', 'confinement', and 'division'.[17] Once again, echoes of Dunn's Cambridge reaction against his own 'narrow' theological formation are not hard to detect.

Committed to close, exegetical analysis of the Pauline texts, Dunn's exploration of this new reading of Paul took fullest expression in his two-volume commentary on Romans, at each point raising to prominence the importance of Paul's social context and the place of his theology within his mission to Gentiles.[18] Not surprisingly, this challenge to a long-entrenched reading of Paul garnered considerable opposition. Not all his exegesis was equally convincing, but, more generally, his 'new perspective on Paul' was heard to undermine not only the Protestant tradition, but also longer traditions of theological appropriation of Paul. To begin with, Dunn freely polemicised against 'the Lutheran reading of Paul', although he later insisted that he was merely supplementing

[15] To what extent Dunn was a pioneer is open to debate. Sanders himself pointed in some of the directions Dunn explored, and elaborated on them himself in E.P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983). And before Dunn had published on this matter, N.T. Wright had written an essay on 'The Paul of History and the Apostle of Faith' (*Tyndale Bulletin* 29 (1978) 61-88) which outlined a reading of Paul along lines that Dunn would pursue and which even used the expression 'new perspective'.

[16] It is not unreasonable to find here echoes of the Enlightenment reaction to Judaism, notably articulated in F.C. Baur's acclamation of Pauline universalism over against 'Jewish exclusiveness' and 'particularism'. See D. Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

[17] Such language is already prominent in his seminal essay 'The New Perspective on Paul' and runs through most of the essays on this theme collected in *The New Perspective on Paul: Collected Essays* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005).

[18] *Romans 1-8* (Waco: Word, 1988); *Romans 9-16* (Waco: Word, 1988); both are in the series, Word Biblical Commentaries. He also wrote a shorter commentary on Galatians, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (London: A & C Black, 1993), applying there also his 'new perspective' insights.

(not denying) the individual-focused readings of Paul typical of Protestant tradition – broadening the understanding of justification by faith by showing its relevance to ethnicity and community, not diminishing its contemporary relevance. Here again Dunn's comparative weakness in the field of theology did not serve him well: he did not find it easy to spell out the *theological* rationale for Paul's Gentile mission, presenting it rather as a programme for social inclusivity and ethnic diversity. Moreover, to the next generation of Pauline scholars, with enhanced sensitivity to the history of Christian anti-Judaism, Dunn's presentation of Paul as opposed to Jewish 'ethnic exclusivism' did not seem much of an improvement on the old image of Paul as an opponent of Jewish 'legalism'.

The vigour, skill, and confidence with which Dunn (alongside N.T. Wright) promoted 'the new perspective on Paul' placed him (and Durham) at the centre of worldwide debate in Pauline scholarship, the area of New Testament studies always most important to the Protestant tradition. For almost twenty years, Dunn was *the* Pauline scholar to whom everyone needed to respond, and Dunn also felt himself here most at home.[19] During this time he also wrote the book that gathered and summarised his previous research and teaching on Paul, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*,[20] still a standard textbook for students, comprehensive, well organised, and clear. Amidst all this, he also wrote a major commentary on Colossians that offered an innovative solution to the question of Pauline authorship (giving a major role to the amanuensis).[21] The quantity and speed of scholarly production was breathtaking.

The final trilogy: *Christianity in the Making*

True to form, Dunn could not allow himself to get confined to Paul or to any other single field of New Testament studies. As early as 1980 he had signalled his intention to write a comprehensive analysis of early Christianity, and in the late 1990s this began to take shape as a three-volume project entitled *Christianity in the Making*. By that time he had already made a significant contribution to the topical and vexed question of (what he called) *The Partings of the Ways between Christianity and Judaism and their Significance for the Character of Christianity*,[22] suggesting the key factors, social and theological, that resulted in the separation of the Christian movement from its Jewish matrix.[23] Not

[19] In Dunn's own terms, he was 'as much a Paulinist as a Christian' ('In Quest of Truth', 67).
[20] Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988.
[21] *The Epistles to the Colossians and Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996).
[22] London: SCM, 1991; second edition, 2006.
[23] This was also the topic of one of the most successful Durham-Tübingen colloquia, whose papers he edited and were published as *Jews and Christians: The Partings of the Ways AD 70 to 135* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992).

everyone agreed that he had hit on the right factors, or that the 'parting of the ways' was the best metaphor, but as the subtitle indicates, his concern was above all to illuminate the emerging identity of the Christian movement.[24] As he put it in the Preface to (the first edition of) that book, 'One of my besetting sins (but perhaps it's a strength!) is the desire to see the large picture, to gain the (so far as possible) comprehensive overview' (xi). That desire had been evident already in *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*, but it now took the shape of a historical analysis running into the 2nd century, with a cut-off date originally conceived as 150 CE but in the event extended to 180 CE. The ambition was enormous: the growth of scholarly literature and the increasing diversity and complexity in scholarly method made such a project, conceivable in the 1970s, unimaginable to most by the time Dunn set about his task. But once he put his shoulder to the wheel, he was not going to be deterred, and what eventuated, as his last scholarly project, were the three promised volumes, which together totalled 2892 pages (not counting the bibliographies).

The first volume, *Jesus Remembered*, was the product of two years of leave, which proved to be his last two years before his retirement from Durham University in 2003.[25] It was notable that he should spend a whole volume on 'the historical Jesus', perhaps the most slippery and uncertain field of enquiry in New Testament studies. Right through his career, Dunn had been concerned to identify some link between the Jesus of history and subsequent Christian faith, convinced that without this historical foundation, Christianity would be indefensible. He was also troubled by liberal or revisionary readings of the evidence that offered a Jesus incompatible with traditional Christianity, such as the popular books by Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan, together with the sceptical results of the 'Jesus Seminar', led by Robert Funk. In many respects, *Jesus Remembered* represented that blend of ruthless honesty and Christian faith that characterised all Dunn's scholarly work. From his first encounter with a synopsis of the Gospels, he was troubled by the fact that the same stories and sayings were recorded in such different ways in the New Testament Gospels: if harmonisation was intellectually indefensible, and if editorial whim or sheer invention was not an attractive solution, what was the best account for this combination of 'the same' and 'the different'?

Dunn was convinced that the key lay in the *orality* of the process by which the Jesus-traditions were passed down, and he made this the methodological centre-point of his

[24] As the preface to the second edition makes clear (pp. xxix–xxx), underpinning this work was a desire to communicate to 'fellow-Christians' the Jewish roots of Christianity, and thereby also contribute to Jewish-Christian dialogue (a life-long concern).

[25] *Christianity in the Making, Volume 1: Jesus Remembered* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

Jesus Remembered.[26] On his hypothesis, not only was oral transmission the vehicle of the Jesus-stories in the first generation (before the first gospel, Mark, written in about 70 CE) – that was hardly an original suggestion, though it was one he explored further with the aid of comparative studies in orality. Oral transmission was also, he argued, a continuing influence on all the gospel writers, alongside their written sources, such that the differences between the gospels were not just the result of editorial changes to literary predecessors but were also the effect of the continuing oral tradition, which (in his view) combined preservation of the *gist* of the story (or saying) with variety in the details of description. On this hypothesis, Dunn was inclined to put considerable trust in the essence of most of the gospel narratives and sayings, such that he could draw a fairly comprehensive picture of the life and teaching of Jesus, at least with regards to the impact he had on his first followers.

Of all Dunn's scholarly monographs, *Jesus Remembered* was received with the greatest scepticism. While he effectively questioned the scholarly tendency to resort only to *literary* explanations of textual differences, Dunn's own hypotheses were unproveable, and sometimes looked like special pleading. His title evoked the burgeoning field of 'memory studies', but he had not taken that into account, and when he did so, subsequent to this monograph, he found its emphasis on the creative work of 'memory' unpalatable. In his admirable desire to provide a comprehensive picture of a massively complex topic, he created a text longer than most students could stomach (893 pages) but, at the same time, lacking sufficient detail to convince most scholars. Above all, the reconstruction of Jesus that he offered was not sufficiently original to capture attention – at a time when alternative versions of Jesus, not least N.T. Wright's spirited *Jesus and the Victory of God*, seemed both more creative and more attractive.[27] As a historian, Dunn was perhaps too cautious and balanced in his judgments to capture the readers' imagination with a new, single vision of Jesus, and he entered this field just when the tide of scholarly interest was beginning to ebb away, given the difficulty of saying anything about Jesus capable of commanding a scholarly consensus. Whatever methodological contribution he made concerning orality, and however impressive his capacity to sift and synthesise the current state of scholarship, his historical reconstruction did not engage with the theoretical resources increasingly deployed by other New Testament scholars, and seemed to lack the 'bite' of his earlier work.

Undaunted (as ever) by criticisms, Dunn continued with the next two volumes of his three-volume project. The second, *Beginning from Jerusalem*, traced the story of the first generation of 'Christianity' from 30 to 70 CE, using as its primary sources the Acts of

[26] His thesis was also laid out in his SNTS Presidential Address, given a characteristically bold title: 'Altering the Default Setting: Re-envisaging the Early Transmission of the Jesus Tradition', *New Testament Studies* 49 (2003) 139–75.

[27] N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1996).

the Apostles and the letters of Paul.[28] Dunn steered a middle course on the historicity of Acts, acknowledging its one-sidedness but in general giving it credence – more credence than was becoming the norm in New Testament scholarship. The volume is huge (1175 pages of main text) and comprehensive in its engagement with scholarly literature (the Bibliography runs to a further 65 pages). That reflects Dunn's capacity to keep abreast of scholarship over the decades: whenever he and Meta travelled by car in the UK, she would drive and he would read, and he was renowned for the size of his library and for knocking off book reviews in record time. A number of key questions hold his enquiry together: what continuity was there between Jesus and embryonic 'Christianity'? How did this Jewish sect become a Gentile religion? Was early Christianity a single or a multiple phenomenon? With section-headings and clear signposting, the reader is enabled to follow the project from start to finish, and the writing is, as always, clear (though not notably elegant). However, the scale of the work has probably intimidated most students, for whom the work seems best suited, and it is not easy to trace a fresh perspective that illuminates this terrain. This is a classic, judicious, historical enquiry, but without new theoretical resources or a bold new hypothesis, the volume feels like a helpful but slightly conservative summation of all that can be deduced from the historical sources.

The third volume, *Neither Jew nor Greek: A Contested Identity*, was undoubtedly, for Dunn, the most challenging of all.[29] This was partly because of his life circumstances. In 2009 he and Meta left their beloved Durham to be nearer to their two daughters, Catrina and Fiona, and three of their seven grandchildren (their son, David, and family were based in the States). That required a down-sizing of his personal library (from 7000 to 3000 volumes), but the limited library resources in and around Chichester, where they settled, required frequent research trips to King's College London, and to Oxford. By this time, Dunn was also feeling the effects of a mini-stroke, and he described the labour of research for this volume (again huge, at 824 pages) as exhausting. Moreover, in exploring the history of Christianity up to 180 CE he was also drawn beyond the terrain most familiar to him, covering a range of texts (including the 'Gnostic' texts from Nag Hammadi) where in linguistic and historical terms he felt least at home. Once again, the scope of this work, spanning more than 100 years, with its summation of complex and controverted evidence, is remarkable. Dunn's leading questions concerned the development of Christianity over the generations. But he had to struggle here, more than ever, with sources that were historically unreliable and often difficult to date, while his concept of 'development' sometimes lacked the subtlety necessary to support the value judgments he offered. With his (traditional) focus on texts, ideas, and persons, Dunn did

[28] *Christianity in the Making, Volume 2: Beginning from Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009).
[29] *Christianity in the Making, Volume 3: Neither Jew nor Greek: A Contested Identity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015).

not offer much by way of social (and sociological) analysis, and he did not place the burgeoning Christian phenomenon particularly well within its Graeco-Roman social, political, and religious context. But within its own terms, this comprehensive analysis of Christianity from 70 to 180 CE is unmatched, and it may be many decades before anyone attempts to surpass it.

The final trilogy that constitutes *Christianity in the Making* represents the summary of Dunn's extraordinary scholarly career, while also encapsulating the character and the achievements of the five decades of scholarship in New Testament and early Christian studies in which he rose to such prominence. His historical analysis of texts and their contexts, the (broadly) theological interests with which he studied them, and his trademark combination of attention to detail and big-picture framing placed him at the peak of his generation, and justly made him a towering figure in his scholarly world. His breadth of interests, his clarity of mind, and his lucidity in writing made him interesting and accessible to scholars and students across the whole of his field, and throughout the world. Although his research field is more influenced now by critical theory, and is shaped as much by political and ethical interests as it is by historical and theological questions, readers will continue to return to Dunn's work for its unfailing clarity and its honest treatment of the evidence. His journey from an ultra-conservative form of Christianity, sketched above, was an expression of that commitment to honesty and intellectual integrity, and it was no accident that, after his election as a Fellow of the British Academy (2006), he convened a one-day conference at the Academy on the topic 'What is Fundamentalism?' (February 2013) and contributed an important essay.[30] His ebullient personality left a lasting impression on scholars and students, who found him ever eager to debate, and never pompous or arrogant. In church circles he felt himself overshadowed by the popular writings of his contemporary N.T. Wright, whose more conservative judgments and more scintillating prose attracted a wider audience. But Dunn's dedication to popular-level writing, lecturing, and preaching ensured the wide impact of his scholarly views not only in the Anglophone world but also (through numerous translations) well beyond. He will be remembered among scholars for his pioneering spirit, his intellectual honesty, and his phenomenally capacious mind, as a prodigious writer who greatly enhanced our understanding of Paul and of the Jesus-traditions, and who traced with new precision both early developments in Christology and the first formative stages of the Christian movement. And for those who knew him personally, his enthusiasm, energy, and warmth will be the abiding memory of a truly remarkable man.

[30] His essay, 'The roots of Christian fundamentalism in American Protestantism', was published in *British Academy Review*, 22 (summer 2013).

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