

An Evening Conversation on Jesus and Paul

with



James D.G. Dunn

and

N.T. Wright



Edited by Mark M. Mattison

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Editor's Preface

by Mark M. Mattison
Editor, *The Paul Page*

What follows is an edited transcript of a two-part dialogue recorded on October 25, 2004, in Durham, England. It is both a privilege and a pleasure to be able to present this dialogue in a permanent form in this e-book.

In editing the transcript for the printed page, I've taken many steps to preserve the feel of the original, spoken dialogue. My editing involved breaking up larger chunks of text into shorter sentences, eliminating some false starts and other verbal peculiarities, and eliminating or rearranging the order of words in order to accommodate the written format. I worked with the words that were already there, avoiding introduction of new words if at all possible, so as to keep my editorial clarifications to a minimum. The reader may judge how faithful I've been to the original dialogue by comparing this text to the original recordings, which are available as MP3 files at the following URL:

<http://www.dur.ac.uk/kevin.bywater/2004archive.htm>

Where the speakers cited Scripture from memory, I modified the quotations to match either the NASB or the NRSV, depending on which was closer to the speaker's rendition.

Both James D.G. Dunn and N.T. Wright reviewed the manuscript to make additional corrections and revisions. In some cases, the revisions enlarged upon or clarified the intent of the original dialogue. The result is a better representation of the important conversation that took place between two of the top New Testament scholars in the world that evening in Durham. Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that any typos or errors in the manuscript – or in editorial judgment, for that matter – are entirely my own responsibility.

Finally, words of thanks should be extended both to Kevin Bywater, for recording the lectures and making them available on the Durham site; and to Kevin Bush, webmaster of *The N.T. Wright Page*, for urging me to transcribe and edit the entire *Conversation*, and for his valuable input along the way. Without his encouragement, this manuscript would never have been completed.

Authors' Preface

We, James (Jimmy) Dunn and Tom Wright, go back a long way. Our discussion on Paul began in the late 1970s, both stimulated by the forceful challenge made to the more traditional (particularly Lutheran) interpretation of Paul, justification by faith and the law, by E. P. Sanders' *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977). It was Tom who first began to build out from Sanders' work in his Tyndale House Lecture for 1978, 'The Paul of History and the Apostle of Faith,' *Tyndale Bulletin* 29 (1978) 61-88. And Jimmy christened 'the new perspective on Paul' four years later, in his T. W. Manson Lecture in Manchester under the same title, 'The New Perspective on Paul,' *BJRL* 65 (1983) 95-122, reprinted in *The New Perspective on Paul* (WUNT 185; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007) ch. 2. Our discussion continued episodically from then on, regularly revealing that we share many interests and insights, even when emphases sometimes vary. We both share equal interest in Jesus, but our dialogue did not develop there until the last ten years, particularly with Tom's *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1996; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996) and Jimmy's *Jesus Remembered* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

Latterly our paths have drawn closer together, Jimmy having been Lightfoot Professor of Divinity in Durham University since 1982 (he retired in 2003), and Tom, after a distinguished ecclesiastical as well as academic career, coming back to his native Northumbria as Bishop of Durham. The opportunity which this coming together gave for further dialogue has been greatly welcomed by both, though diaries packed too full and overflowing have meant that the opportunity has too seldom been realized. However, Carole Burrows, Manager of the SPCK Bookshop in Durham Cathedral, had the fine idea of staging the dialogue as a public event, when people could, as it were, listen in to the two of us chatting together about our joint fascinations with Jesus and Paul.

And so it came about. On Monday evening, October 25, 2004, we gathered in the Leech Hall of St. John's College, Durham University. We had expected a seminar-sized group sitting around, and were somewhat surprised (but pleasantly) to discover a hall with quite a large crowd sitting in serried ranks – mostly colleagues, friends and students (not all distinct categories!). Instead of sitting cosily in some lounge, with a refreshing glass to hand, and a few familiar friends flanking us, we were on the platform – in easy chairs, to be sure, but finding the conversational character of the event difficult to sustain, since we had to project our voices for the benefit of the back rows. Even so, the setting worked well and a fascinating evening followed.

Introduction

Carole Burrows, Manager of SPCK's Durham Bookshop: It is a great pleasure to maintain a tradition that Durham has had for quite a number of years: having a biblical scholar as a bishop, and having one of the most eminent theology departments in the world. And here we have two of the most eminent biblical scholars in the world, so tonight we're expecting an interesting and dynamic discussion.

I'm not going to do any formal introductions, but I am going to hand you over to Professor James Dunn who is going to be our chairman for tonight's event. So thank you everybody for coming, and I hope you have a very stimulating evening. Thank you.

Dunn: Thank you, Carole, and thank you to SPCK for giving Tom and me this opportunity to chat. That's how we want to play it: We will chat and you can, as it were, listen in to the chat.

We will be focusing on two main topics of interest: number one, Jesus; number two, Paul. These I think embrace a large part of our common interests over the last thirty to forty years, and it's interesting how much our paths have followed the same course and our how much our interests have overlapped to a great degree. I fear this may be a very boring occasion because we probably agree about 75 or 80% on the way we look at things, so if you find it too boring just give a shout and we'll stop short at that point.

What we plan to do is chat for about an hour about Jesus. We'll chat for thirty-five or forty minutes, then we will pause, and if anyone has questions or points to raise, we'll be interested to have you join in the conversation. Then we'll take a brief comfort break, stand up and turn around. Then we'll go on to the second hour, on Paul, and we'll do the same thing, roughly speaking: forty minutes and then twenty minutes or so of discussion.

We'll play it all by ear. If the discussion's dying we shall pass on to something else, if going along vigorously we may extend things. But at the end of the evening about quarter past nine, say, the opportunity is to have a glass of wine I believe, Carole?

Burrows: Yes.

Dunn: Glass of wine, and the book stall for you to peruse and to purchase from. Okay, is that all agreed?

The Third Quest for the Historical Jesus

Dunn: So, we'll start with Jesus and, as I say, most of our work has overlapped to a great degree. I suppose one of our common interests has been what you might call the "third quest," which is a title you actually gave to this phase of the quest for the historical Jesus. How would you like to define that?

Wright: Yes, there has been a lot of discussion about the meaning of the third quest and since, as Jimmy says, I did actually introduce that phrase, I claim some sort of proprietary rights on it.

When you invent a phrase, you quickly discover that phrases are like young adult children. They go away from home, get into stray company, and bring home undesirable acquaintances, and it has been thus with the third quest.

Before I started, I meant to share the gratitude that Jimmy expressed to Carole and to SPCK and indeed St. John's College for laying on this evening. I actually thought this was going to be the New Testament Seminar with one or two friends, and while I guess there are three or four friends instead of one or two, that's delightful. So thank you all for being here.

The label "third quest" was a way of tagging something up about perceived phases in the study of Jesus. I think my awareness of this as a distinct move came when I read Ben Meyer's book, *The Aims of Jesus*, when it came out in 1979.¹

As is well known (very broad-brush statement coming up), a long period of the so-called "quest for the historical Jesus" was chronicled and in a measure rounded off by Albert Schweitzer's book which came into English with that title, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*.² Then for quite some period after Schweitzer's book, basically the first half of the twentieth century, most serious New Testament scholarship – by no means all, but most – was looking elsewhere and doing different sorts of things. People were writing about the early traditions about Jesus rather than about Jesus himself. Of course there was plenty of writing about Jesus, but it wasn't as big an issue as it had been up to Schweitzer.

Then after the War, as is very well known, Ernst Käsemann began the so-called "new quest for the historical Jesus" with an extremely important point to which I go back again and again. He had observed that during the Nazi period in the 1930s in Germany, because people had been saying we really couldn't know very much about Jesus, there wasn't any point in studying Jesus. That left an open door for people to come in and invent Jesuses that suited their ideologies, particularly obviously the Nazi ideology – basically an Aryan Jesus in that case – and so on. Käsemann said even though it's difficult, we're going to have to do this.

But the new quest got bogged down in all sorts of ways through the 50s and the 60s with endless studies about how we could know what we could know and more and more endless footnotes about different traditions, pericopes, etc. It seemed there was very little actual yield at the end of that. Simultaneously with that, a major movement came from the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls after the War: revived interest in first-century Judaism as a fresh topic. Ben Meyer came in right on the tide of that, drawing on a lot of work on the Scrolls and on other aspects of second-temple Judaism to produce a portrait of Jesus who fitted right into eschatologically-minded, restoration-minded,

¹ Ben F. Meyer, *The Aims of Jesus* (London: SCM), 1979.

² Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede*, translated by W. Montgomery from the First German Edition "Von Reimarus zu Wrede," 1906. First English Edition, 1910, published in Great Britain by A. & C. Black, Ltd. Electronic edition available on-line at <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/schweitzer/>.

second-Temple Judaism in a way which was quite different from what the new quest had done and quite different from what the old quest (chronicled and in a measure dismissed by Schweitzer) had done.

Meyer himself saw in that book in 1979 that this represented a critical difference with the new quest. I wrote an article about this in the early 1980s sometime when I was in Montreal and called it “the third quest” for that reason – honoring Meyer’s insight that what he was doing was both methodologically and, in terms of contents and results, significantly different, with part of that major significance being a real attempt to put Jesus within eschatological Judaism of the time.

This is the point where the phrase gets confusing. Lots of people have gone on now using the phrase “third quest” to mean really *any* study of Jesus done after about 1979, and that was never my intention. The Jesus Seminar and the work of people like Dom Crossan and Burton Mack, and of course Robert Funk (the chair of the Jesus Seminar), has relentlessly continued the new quest which now is not quite so new. It’s the second quest, and I still make a clear distinction in my mind (which I outline in my big book on Jesus) between that and the third quest running from Ben Meyer, Geza Vermes, Ed Sanders and people on through both – I think Jimmy and I are both well within that. I certainly intend to be and I think Jimmy intends to be there too, rather than this continuing work which is done in the new quest mode. If I miss something out, is that fair enough so far?

Dunn: I think so. For me the key characteristic of the “third quest” is setting Jesus in the context of Judaism rather than seeking to find that which distinguishes him from Judaism – a whole strategy, we might almost say, driven by what in effect has been the embarrassment that Jesus was too Jewish for Christians.

Wright: Yes.

Dunn: This was always a problem. The second quest didn’t really resolve that because it was looking for a dissimilar Jesus.

Wright: That’s one of the things which I think is very interesting: The so-called “criterion of dissimilarity” which appears so neutral and objective when you line it up – let’s see what we can find in the tradition which is different from Judaism and different from the early church, and then we’ll be quite sure that neither of them made it up – that in fact carries with it both a sense of a de-Judaized Jesus and a kind of ultra-Protestant sense that anything the church made up it also muddled up, and we’ve got to get right back to the beginning.

Dunn: Yes. The other thing I agree with you about is that those who have come in like the Jesus Seminar and so on are not really “third quest.” I think the “third quest” is to be defined in terms of rediscovering the Jewish Jesus or taking seriously the Jewish Jesus. I talk about Crossan and Funk and so on more in terms of a revived “*first* quest” because they’re looking for a non-apocalyptic Jesus, they think they’ve got new sources to discover this, and they’re very happy with a Jesus who’s a very clever teacher.

Wright: Yes. And it’s curious because, I mean, without wishing to deconstruct them totally, just about 95%: You can see in works like *The Da Vinci Code*,³ at a very popular level, the same attempt to go for things like the *Gospel of Thomas* and bits and pieces of the Scrolls and other mysterious writings, saying “This was the real thing back behind what the Gospels and the early Christians were getting at.” I think there is an entire movement in our culture which is longing to disprove what has

³ Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code* (Doubleday), 2003.

been classic Christianity, to say that actually it was all really different from the beginning. I don't know how much you see of that.

Dunn: Remember when Funk did his grand tour? He did a grand tour around the U.K. as well. He put around a flyer saying one of the great things he was setting out to do was to save Jesus from Christianity.

Wright: Yes. That's been a quite explicit intention. And of course there is a sense in which I suspect both you and I want in some sense to save Jesus from some aspects of later Christian tradition that have got him really muddled.

This is something which I find the whole time people saying – particularly those who've studied thinkers like Barth, and now in the whole post-liberal and Yale schools: You get a sense that any attempt to do historical work on Jesus must be somehow illegitimate because one ought simply to take the word of God as it is, and any attempt to do history is a compromise with the spirit of the age and with the enlightenment ideals, etc. Do you meet that, and if so, how do you cope with it?

Dunn: Well, the other side I see of that is the reaction of all the quests, pretty well up to date, against a faith perspective on Jesus, on the assumption that faith has distorted the historical perspective. You can see how that works from early days in terms of the reaction against the too-creedalized Jesus – the God-man, true man true God, hardly a human Jesus of Galilee and the *Pantokrator* and all that kind of thing. But that reaction is then carried on through all the faith presentations of Jesus, on the assumption that any faith perspective was a distortion. In fact, you can trace the development of New Testament scholarship in terms of bit-by-bit paring away the faith content. John's Gospel goes first, then Paul turns the simple moral message of Jesus into a religion of redemption, and finally the Synoptics are presented as primarily theological documents.

Wright: Yes, and even Q dissolves upon closer inspection. Part of the point of Q a hundred years ago was that you were really hitting rock bottom there and, well, poor Q has had a rough time. I think it would be interesting to take a straw poll to see how many people in this room believe in Q. You probably do, do you, Jimmy?

Dunn: A modified Q.

Wright: A modified Q. I don't think you cited the point you should have done, actually, but never mind; no doubt we will play that game all night too.

I wrote an article on the David Catchpole *estschrift* on resurrection in Q⁴ – and I concluded that since a lot of my colleagues were absolutely, dogmatically, in favor of Q but claimed the right to be agnostic about the resurrection, I had equal right to do it the other way around.

I think there's a lot to be said still to question the existence of Q, but this comes up enormously importantly because people will say again and again: "When you're talking about Jesus, where do you start? How do you get the quest off the ground?" There are some – and my sparring partner Marcus Borg has said this again and again – who will simply say you've got to do the source criticism first, because until you know which are the earliest sources, you don't know where you're going with all the material.

I just think that's wrong as a matter of historical method. As a matter of historical method of course you do have to sift sources, but "earlier" does not necessarily equal "better." There are many

⁴ N.T. Wright, "Resurrection in Q?" in *Christology, Controversy and Community: New Testament Essays in Honor of David R. Catchpole*, ed. D. G. Gorrell and C. M. Tuckett, (Leiden: Brill), 2000, 85-97.

times in history when somebody writing about something doesn't actually have all the information, doesn't have as good or as broad a perspective, and a later work may be better. So I think there's been a lot of historical naivety about how people have gone about the quest.

Dunn: Well, two of my main criticisms of the traditional quests have been, first, this faith one – making the point that faith really should be the beginning of the quest in the sense that it is *a priori*; and, second, it's 90% probable that Jesus made an impact. A non-significant Jesus is an impossibility, a *reductio ad absurdum*. When you recognize that Jesus made an impact, and the impact is what turned fishermen into apostles and disciples and all that kind of thing, then you've got a clear starting point. That should have been the starting point: to say that we've got to *extract* the historical picture of Jesus *from* all faith perspectives is a misunderstanding of the fact that the Jesus who made the impact he did was bound to be evoking a faith. Not an Easter faith, of course, but a faith which becomes an Easter faith.

Wright: I forget who it was, whether it was Geza Vermes or somebody who said that Jesus has to be both credible and crucifiable in first-century Galilee, that you can't have a Jesus who wandered around saying the kinds of things that people would've found either incomprehensible or ridiculous or just boring or whatever. So he has to fit into his context, but at the same time he has to be sufficiently provocative for the crucifixion to be in a sense a natural consequence. I mean, you can go the route that some of the American scholars have gone of late and say that the crucifixion was a mere accident – that there was a riot, that he got picked up and that somebody had to be killed and nobody quite knew what was going on – but I think actually that's a pretty extreme position. You know the joke of the Jesus Seminar was that Burton Mack's Jesus was killed in a freeway accident in Los Angeles. I mean that was kind of how it was perceived, that he was sort of run over by a camel on the road to Jerusalem. The integration of Jesus' death with his life and the meaning given to those two – that for me has been one of the most fascinating aspects of what I've done.

Let me bounce that at you because I confess I have not yet read all of Jimmy's new book on Jesus;⁵ I just haven't had the time this last year, and it's even longer than any of mine. Indeed, it's as long as most of mine put together. But one thing about what you said before: Yes, the "third quest" is characterized by Jesus the Jew, but Crossan for instance would say, quite angrily, that "My Jesus is also a Jewish Jesus. He just happens to be a Galilean peasant Jew as opposed to some other sort of Jew." He would also say that his Jesus is an apocalyptic Jew, but he means by "apocalyptic" something I think rather different from what you or I or Ed Sanders would mean. These terms are extremely slippery and the question now is not so much, "Do we or don't we have a Jewish Jesus," as "What sort of a Jewish Jesus do we have, and how do we know which Jewish texts or artifacts help us get back?" So that's one thing I'd like to push you on a bit.

But then there is this question – as I say I haven't seen how you do it in the book, but it's for me one of the central questions of understanding Jesus in his first-century context: How do the theme of the kingdom of God and the fact of Jesus' death (and any interpretation that he may have given to that in advance) go together? This is a question that goes on down through Christian understanding, through the church, because I think for a great many Christians – including a great many quite well taught Christians – the two are simply poles apart. Jesus walked around doing some wonderful things, healing some people, being extremely welcoming to outsiders and tax collectors and so on and teaching about the kingdom of God, giving a great moral example. And then it's quite a separate thing: He went off and died for the sins of the world. How do you put those two

⁵ James D.G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 2003.

together, and how you understand a controlling theme, in Meyer's terms "the aims of Jesus" which embrace those two? How do you do that in this book?

Dunn: It's an important question, and I think the answer has to be that Jesus' crucifixion was not an accident, that he goes up to Jerusalem knowing the likelihood that he is going to be betrayed. He's going to be handed over. I've always been persuaded by Eduard Schweizer's comment to the effect that it's impossible that Jesus would have regarded his death as a disaster, as failure. Knowing what he must have known, the likelihood of his being put to death, if he had thought it was a disaster he wouldn't have gone to Jerusalem in the first place. Where I think I differ from you is that I am not so confident that we can be clear as to what Jesus saw the coming of the kingdom to be. I even wonder if he had a clear idea of what the coming of the kingdom was. But he goes to Jerusalem to precipitate some kind of climax, some kind of *dénouement*, and then goes on from there. The death – the rejection – is not a surprise, and resurrection to that extent is not a surprise either in terms of vindication.

Wright: Yes. Though I did just glance at what you do about resurrection because naturally I've been writing about it more recently, and I was interested in you teasing out there the question of whether Jesus, in talking about his own resurrection (if he did), expected that he would be raised at the general resurrection, or whether he expected that he might be raised ahead of time. Obviously John has a way of getting at that with the parallel between Jesus' own raising of Lazarus and the three days, four days – is there a smell? No there isn't – all that stuff, which does seem to be projecting you forwards in the picture of Jesus to a different sort of expectation. But let me just press you on that business about Jesus' understanding of his own death. He went up to Jerusalem knowing it was likely – probable – would he have believed that this was God's will for him, God's vocation to him, and if so, how might he have understood that? I think what I'm getting at is that even though I agree with you that Jesus would not have regarded his death as a disaster, which for Schweizer it seems to have been in a sense –

Dunn: I wasn't talking about that Schweizer –

Wright: I know, sorry, I was talking about Albert Schweizer, going back. Albert Schweizer has Jesus dying in a sense as a failure and only paradoxically as a success. But for Schweizer the key interpretative thing there is this idea of history reaching a *dénouement*, a climax, a moment. And then in terms of the messianic woes, an idea which you find in the book of Hosea and on into post-biblical Jewish literature, that there would be a time of intense suffering through which Israel would pass to the great redemption: Jesus seems to have thought that he had to take that onto himself. Do you go with Schweizer, with Albert Schweizer on that?

Dunn: Yes, broadly, I think, beginning from John the Baptist. I've always believed John the Baptist's expectation of one coming to baptize with the spirit and fire is the Baptist's own way of depicting that final tribulation.

Wright: Right.

Dunn: He's envisaging a fiery river of divine *ruach*, as in Isaiah 30, which people must be plunged into and pass through, and it will either destroy them or cleanse them, purify them. That's what John expected the coming one to do. Then you can pick this up (this is very old stuff, from way back in the 70s) in Jesus' own expectation that he will suffer a baptism and that he came to cast

fire on the earth and so on (Luke 12:49-50), picking it up but seeming to interpret it then in terms of his *own* suffering as part of that baptism, of that fire, and as it were absorbing its fatal consequences.

Wright: So let me just press you on this. If we look for places in the Jewish traditions that may have been accessible to Jesus where we see that sort of way of going about things – and I’m thinking for instance of the end of Daniel where the martyrs are seen as somehow the quintessential Israel-sufferers – or the suffering righteous ones in the Wisdom of Solomon, or the suffering ones in Second Maccabees, whose death is actually an atoning sacrifice for the nation – now if I think around where the Jewish texts are that would give you a bridge for what you’ve just said, I’m struck by the fact that they all in a variety of ways go back to and seem to be reinterpreting Isaiah 53, and yet you say in your book that you can’t be sure that Jesus did that.

Dunn: Well, what I say in the book is that in terms of the data we actually have, and with the methods we actually have, it’s difficult to come to a firm, positive conclusion.

Wright: Or maybe we need better methods.

Dunn: We may need better methods, but we’re stuck with the methods we have in terms of historical criticism, literary criticism and so on, and simply trying to assess the evidence as impartially as possible. So I’m not saying that Jesus was not influenced by Isaiah 53; what I’m saying is that it is not easy to demonstrate that he was, in a way and to the degree to which you can, I think, demonstrate the likelihood of a Daniel 7 influence.

Wright: Yes. I don’t think there’s any problem with Daniel 7. Although of course – and this is one of the interesting things about the way the subject has swung this way and that – there was a time not very long ago when the idea that Jesus was influenced by Daniel 7 would have been not allowed. I gave a paper in a joint Oxford-Bonn seminar in Bonn – in, I don’t know, it must have been in 1988 or sometime like that – where I did precisely that. I did a paper on Jesus’ re-use of Son of Man themes and got very firmly rapped on the knuckles by Schrage because this was completely off limits, one was just not allowed to think that stuff.

One of the fascinating things about Ed Sanders’ book on Jesus in 1985⁶ was that suddenly all sorts of things that had been out on the periphery of Jesus studies, where only a few funny, flaky people thought that – suddenly because of the new hypothesis, those very things were brought right back into the middle, for instance Jesus’ attitude to the Temple and his words about the destruction and rebuilding of the Temple which Geza Vermes, for instance, completely held at arms’ length. Sanders showed that there was a big hypothesis – a grand narrative, dare I say – within which some of those things made abundant sense.

Suddenly we’re all faced with the possibility that if you can tell the story differently, in a coherent way, rooted of course in the traditions that were around at the time, then it is possible to create – and this is what historians do all the time – a world of thought within which certain things which granted other narratives would have been unthinkable become not only thinkable but probable.

In other words – and perhaps we should shift into this atomistic versus grand narrative thing, because it’s one of the things that’s going to come between us, at some point, anyway – one of the things which for me has characterized the “third quest” over against the new quest and particularly the Jesus Seminar, is that the Jesus Seminar insisted on first chopping up the tradition into the smallest possible units and then trying to decide on the individual units, one by one, as though they

⁶ E.P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press), 1985.

were the only things in the world. Only then, supposedly, would they put them together and form a composite picture of Jesus. In fact they didn't do that because what they spent their time doing was evaluating those things against a presumed picture of Jesus. So you get a tiny little fragment of tradition which includes Jesus quoting a bit of the Psalms or Isaiah or something, and Funk says in his commentary that this is very unlikely to come from Jesus because this Jesus never quoted the Old Testament. How can you possibly say that about that point? But tell me about grand narratives and atomism.

Dunn: I guess one of the main problems I have with your presentation is that you work with what you call a controlling story as the narrative which informed Jesus and should inform our own readings of the Jesus tradition. I have concerns there. You sum up the grand narrative, and probably want to elaborate a bit, in terms of Israel in exile and restoration from exile. You pick up the Deuteronomy 30 prediction that Israel will go into exile because it will disobey the covenant and so on and be scattered, but when they repent and re-obey they will be brought back into the promised land. You operate with this on the grounds that this hope had not been fulfilled; those who are in Palestine are under the wrong rule, so the hopes of restoration at the end of exile have not yet happened.

Now, I have various problems with that. One is that I worry that you are taking a lot of more variegated material and setting it out as a grand narrative. As you know this is the main criticism of grand narratives when you use them in historical study: that they take a lot of disparate material and weave it together, so that the grand narrative is not the narrative that was actually operating, but is a narrative imposed upon the material. So for example, in Jewish expectation you can see quite a variety of expectations for a redeemer figure, a royal figure, a prophet figure, a priestly figure: How are they all related? Sometimes there is an expectation with no figure. Or again, you have diverse expectations with regard to Gentiles. The majority hope is that Gentiles will come into the eschatological pilgrimage and be converted and worship together in Zion; but there are other versions where the Gentiles come in and become in effect serfs – slaves. And in others, Armageddon – crash, bang, wallop – the Gentiles are obliterated. To try and weave all these into a single narrative is really quite difficult, and the danger is that in talking about a single narrative, you are actually squeezing out other material which is important.

Wright: Yes. Let me just come in on this because I think this is actually beginning to touch on one of the major cleavages in New Testament studies right now which concerns Paul as well.

I'm just about a hundred pages into Francis Watson's new book⁷ as we speak and I'm amazingly frustrated with my dear friend Francis for just missing this point. So in his absence, let me say this. It has to do with how you see the relation of salvation history which has echoes of Oscar Cullman – let's not go there at the moment – it has to do with whether you think that any, all, some, first-century Jews, but including Jesus and Paul conceived of the long story, going back to Abraham and maybe even beyond and then coming forward into their own day as a single, though highly complex and many-sided narrative in which they were themselves now actors, indeed actors at a moment of climax and dénouement in this drama, or whether they conceived salvation in terms of something God was going to do for them and for other people for which everything that had happened before was a sort of set of metaphors, previous examples, different types of salvation in the past, but now they were just types and shadows and patterns rather than that connected narrative.

Now of course I take the point about grand narratives in general, being always in danger of scrunching recalcitrant material, and I actually spent, as you know (and as you give me credit for) a

⁷ Francis Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith* (London: T&T Clark), 2005.

lot of time in *The New Testament and the People of God*⁸ talking about what a hypothesis has to do in terms of the essential elegance or simplicity of the line combined with a getting in of the material, and to the extent that the hypothesis doesn't get in the material but leaves it scattered all over the floor, it's a weak hypothesis. And of course I am perfectly happy to accept that first-century Judaism is irreducibly pluriform to the point where at the edges you can hardly be sure whether these people really are even Jews or if so in what sense. I have no problem with that.

So at the methodological level, the idea of looking for a grand narrative is not actually one that I started off with. What I started off with was the question, What does "the kingdom of God" mean? And looking at different "kingdom of God" expressions in the first century, Josephus talking about those revolutionaries who were prepared to dare anything because they believed that God alone should be their master. So even though the phrase "kingdom of God" doesn't come, it's clear that that's what's going on, God is going to be king. Then I started to track those things back to their Old Testament roots – to the Psalms, to Isaiah particularly – and then I started to notice that one theme in particular was coming up which is for me summed up quintessentially in Isaiah 52 where the announcement, "Your God reigns" – which in other words is the announcement of the kingdom of God – is intimately and organically connected actually to three things. In your book you say just one and then you allow me a second but there are actually three: Yes, return from exile, and I'll come back to that in a moment; second, the return of YHWH to Zion, a theme which I still think is of major importance and not usually given really any air time at all; and third, the defeat of evil which is variously construed as the defeat of pagans and all that. So that was what I then brought back to the material as a hypothesis and actually I found that the hypothesis did a pretty good job, but that's probably where you'll want to come in again.

Dunn: Yes, I do. You are so strongly convinced that Palestinian Jews believed themselves to be still in exile, and I find little or no evidence to that effect. There is plenty of a sense that those who are still in the Diaspora need to come in, so there's hope for the Diaspora Jews, which are probably two thirds of the Jewish population, to come back to the land. That's quite clear. But I get no sense of a pre-converted Paul, as a Pharisee, thinking he was in exile; of Pharisees in exile; of Sadducees in exile; etc. I go through the material and I don't find it. And then I look at the Jesus texts and the Jesus tradition and I don't find very much sign of it at all there either.

Wright: Okay. We have to get into this.

Dunn: Well, do you want to come back?

Wright: Yes. Because what puzzles me, Jimmy, and it puzzles me about some other of my – I was going to use some uncomplimentary adjective, some other of my reviewers – unfortunately the ones you quote like Clive Marsh, Maurice Casey, and Gerald Downing, each of whom have got particular axes that they're grinding, but that's another story – I find an unwillingness to hold in the mind what it is I'm actually saying, and no doubt this is my fault for not expressing it clearly. I mean, this is one of the odd things about living in the kind of cultural milieu we do. There are some things which you can say on quite other topics where half the room at once understands what you're talking about and the other half of the room simply doesn't, and goes on not understanding, however hard you try. That's a very odd position to be in. Maybe that's the point at which we ought to start telling parables instead. Let me just try and get back to it.

⁸ N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (London: SPCK), 1992; (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press), 1992.

Daniel chapter 9, as we know from Josephus, is part of a book which was widely read and studied at the time. That crumples a rather complicated argument about Josephus into a single sentence. I take it Josephus was referring to Daniel when he talks about a text in their scriptures which drove Jews to revolution in the middle of the first century A.D. because it predicted that at that time a world ruler would arise from Judea, which Josephus says actually just referred to Vespasian – conveniently, since it was Vespasian’s son Titus who was paying his pension. The book of Daniel in chapter 9 has a prayer, and the prayer begins with Daniel – a fictive Daniel, no doubt – in Babylon, commenting on Jeremiah, saying: This exile ought to last seventy years, isn’t that nearly up yet? (9:2). The angel goes into a long spiel about this and that after Daniel’s great long prayer, the climax of which is: The exile will not last seventy years, it will last seventy times seven years – Four hundred and ninety years.

Now, we know that Daniel 9 was a much-studied text at what we call the turn of the eras and thereafter. Roger Beckwith, in his work on the calendars and the calendrical speculations,⁹ has done a lot of interesting work on this. People were trying to calculate when that 490 years was going to be up. This has nothing to do with whether they happened to be geographically located in Turkey or Babylonia or Egypt or Rome or in the promised land itself, and it has everything to do with a period of time which is now to be demarcated metaphorically as “exile” because it is the logical – though not necessarily the geographical – continuance of the exile in Babylon to which Daniel 9 refers as the starting point.

We know that they were still calculating those 490 years because some of the debates, even in the second century A.D. about when the Messiah was going to come, refer to chronological calculations which actually hook into that question. There was a debate between the Pharisees and the Sadducees around the end of the first century B.C. precisely about when Daniel 9 was going to be fulfilled. I believe that’s what Josephus was referring to when he was talking about the revolutionaries in the 50s and 60s in the first century.

This creates a context within which I can understand what Ezra and Nehemiah are talking about way back then, when they have people say “Here we are, slaves to this day – slaves in the land that you gave to our ancestors” (Neh. 9:36, NRSV; cf. Ezra 9:8ff). In other words, we’ve come back geographically but we are still in the state of being enslaved to pagans.

What we’re talking about is a chronological period which is going to have an end point at which time exile in that metaphorical sense will end, and – this is most significant – that will be the forgiveness moment – seventy times seven. Four hundred and ninety. It’s the Jubilee motif with all kinds of resonances which I can explore but not just at the moment. In Lamentations you get “The punishment of your iniquity, O daughter Zion, is accomplished, he will keep you in exile no longer” (Lam. 4:22, NRSV), because exile – not geographically in Babylon, but that state of affairs that Israel is still suffering – was the punishment for Israel’s sins according to the great prophets and was believed to be such by their successors. If someone is in jail suffering punishment and somebody says, “You’re forgiven, you’ve got a pardon,” then they get out of jail. Conversely, if somebody comes to the jail and lets them out, it means “You’re forgiven.”

So there is a deep nexus between the idea of forgiveness – not just a one-off “me getting forgiven for my sins” but “the Forgiveness of sins” with a capital “F” – and the redemption, the end of exile. That’s what I’m talking about. That’s why I say it hooks into this idea of the salvation which

⁹ Roger T. Beckwith, “The Significance of the Calendar for Interpreting Essene Chronology and Eschatology,” *Révue de Qumran*, 38, 1980, 167-202; “Daniel 9 and the Date of Messiah’s Coming in Essene, Hellenistic, Pharisaic, Zealot and Early Christian Computation,” *Révue de Qumran*, 40, 1981, 521-42.

is coming as the climax of and the dénouement of a long process rather than a salvation dropped into one moment in history which merely has analogous or typological antecedents.

Dunn: I have absolutely no problem with a grand narrative in the sense that I'm sure Jesus, the first Christians, and the contemporaries of Jesus think in terms of a narrative. They see the purpose of God in the beginning, the election of Israel, etc., so there's no problem about that. It's simply that you have given a nice example of spinning together various threads into a rather neat pattern and I just begin to wonder, is it *you* spinning, or is it all the thread? When I look at the Gospels, I just don't find that kind of resonance to the degree that you do.

I have no doubt that return from exile is a motif. Absolutely clear on that. But to make it *the* motif, really "the controlling story" (your term) which gathers everything else into it, I fear, is actually squeezing out some very important material: in particular, the whole business of the righteous and the sinner which is a fundamental element in the Jesus tradition. Jesus is the friend of sinners, he invites sinners and not the righteous and so on. That's a dynamic of relationship *within* Israel between the self-styled righteous and those they style as sinners. That doesn't really have a place, properly speaking, within your return from exile theme. You even miss the point of the parable of the prodigal son to the extent that you say, "Ah, this clearly echoes return from exile." And it sure does, yes! The younger son is in a far country and he comes back. But then you don't know what to do with the elder brother in the story. The elder brother is compared to the Samaritans or something like that.

Wright: No, no, no. That's where you're misunderstanding what I do with that.

It's a fascinating point, because actually a lot of the Jesus Seminar-type analysis of the parable of the prodigal son reduces simply to having a welcoming God, whatever, like the Rembrandt picture – well actually, no, Rembrandt's much more subtle than that, you do get these shadowy characters in the background looking cross and puzzled and so on – but clearly the punch line of the parable is in the second half. The punch line of the parable, as I thought I said, relates very directly to the setting which we have in Luke, which is the scribes and Pharisees criticizing Jesus for receiving sinners and eating with them. The whole point then is that what is happening is resurrection which is, yes, another of the themes that belong.

You see, I don't think the controlling story is return from exile. I think the controlling story is kingdom of God, and kingdom of God separates out into at least three strands, but I chase those three: Return from exile, return of YHWH to Zion, and defeat of evil. Then, yes, I have tried to follow that hypothesis, rule of elegance of line with getting in data.

So I'm open to the challenge, but I reckon that what's going on at the end of that parable is precisely Jesus' challenge to the scribes and the Pharisees who are wanting him not to associate with tax collectors and sinners. The challenge consists in this: that resurrection is happening right under your noses, and you can't see it. "This son of mine was dead and is alive again" (Luke 15:24, NRSV), and then "this brother of yours was dead and has come to life" (Luke 15:32, NRSV). Then that, of course, in the Lukan presentation, hooks in with the end of the next chapter: "If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead" (Luke 16:31, NRSV), which is the rich man and Lazarus, a similar kind of thing, just kaleidoscopically adjusted.

I've got all the room in the world for that, and resurrection of course is one of the key motifs in, and elements of, the hope of Israel. If you want me to tie it in very closely there, just to sort of rub it in, in Ezekiel 37 resurrection is used precisely as a metaphor for – guess what? Return from exile, and you're not going to tell me that's wrong.

Dunn: No. But I am going to say that in drawing the parable back into this grand narrative you're missing, it seems to me, this fundamental point of the parable (according to Luke at least): it's because there were those who criticized him for eating with sinners that he tells these parables. I mean there's a dynamic there about tensions within the people. It's not a question of Diaspora and returning to the land. There's the righteous / sinner dynamic which is very fundamental in Jesus' mission, and it just seems to me that although you notice it, you're not giving it the weight that is there.

Wright: Jimmy told me today in an e-mail where to find pages in his book which criticize me, so I quickly read them. You criticize me in a footnote for taking a theme with wooden literalism, but I have to say a *tu quoque* because it is you who is now taking this theme with wooden literalism. I'm not talking about people who happen to be in the Diaspora or whatever. Of course in the stories in Ezra and Nehemiah and so on, when the first lot of Jews did come back, there was opposition to the returnees by people who were still in the land. All I was saying there is that within the dynamic of the parable, the idea of some people returning from exile and other people opposing them is itself part of the older narratives that would be familiar. But the point is then this: that for Jesus, the kingdom of God is happening. Resurrection is happening. The return from exile is happening right under your nose; it consists of the return of the outcasts and the sinners and so on, and you Pharisees and scribes are so blind and deaf that you can't see it happening. That, it seems to me, not only takes care of but rather revels in the righteous / sinners motif and does so nicely within the elegance of line which I'm trying to pursue.

Dunn: Yes. It's just that where reality is complex, to insist or to look for an elegance and simplicity of line as though that's the criterion is a misunderstanding.

Wright: I've actually argued in one or two places in quite some detail about this in terms of historical method versus method in the natural sciences. I'm always interested when physicists and people talk about elegance as a major argument, and I've often myself argued that actually in history it is far more messy than that, (a) because human life is messy and (b) because the data that we have is patchy, accidental, and ad hoc, so we can't by any means necessarily do that. One of the main things I was trying to do was to smoke out the fact that all of us in the Western tradition have been accustomed to read the Gospels with a controlling story in mind, namely, "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so," or words to that effect. Actually, this is my answer (since you didn't answer, it I will) to the Barthians or the mere liberals who said that you shouldn't be doing this stuff because it's naughty and a capitulation to the Enlightenment. I think what you and I are both trying to do is to give the church back the New Testament it didn't know it had. In other words, by the historical work to remind the church not of some cunning construct over against the texts, but of this amazing richness which comes through the texts.

Dunn: On that note of harmony, we should perhaps open up to some questions and points from the floor.

Question: Thank you for a very rich account of recent debate. But the concerns of Nicea and Chalcedon, where we encounter "very God of very God," don't seem to feature at all. Does it have a place for Jesus in the twenty-first century?

Wright: This is why I've said we need to spend more time with the idea of the return of YHWH to Zion. The penultimate chapter in my book on Jesus has to do with Jesus' reappropriation of those return of YHWH themes and his application of them to himself. To my surprise, no reviewer

has dumped on me from a great height on this (probably because they all stopped reading before they got to that chapter) because I actually thought it was the most controversial thing I was saying in the whole book.

I go back to that again and again: When we look for the self-consciousness of Jesus (and I'm aware of yards of books complaining about that phrasing), I believe, as a historian and as a Christian, that when Jesus came to Jerusalem on that last journey and told stories about a king or a master coming back to see what was going on and to judge people, what he had in mind was to explain what he was doing in coming at last to challenge Jerusalem and to explain it by means of telling stories about YHWH returning to Zion. In other words, as I think I say at one key point in the book (I'd love to know what Jimmy thinks of this), when you go back to the Exodus narratives, YHWH is there as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night with the Israelites in the wilderness. Isaiah 40:5 says:

Then the glory of the LORD will be revealed,
And all flesh will see it together" (NASB).

But it remains an open question as to what that's going to look like. I believe, and have argued in detail, that Jesus believed that those prophecies of the return of YHWH, the glory of the Lord returning to Zion would not look like a whirlwind, a fire, Ezekiel's dynamo picture, but would look like a young Jewish prophet riding in tears on a donkey and going off to have a last meal with his friends and die on a cross.

In other words, I think Jesus was telling stories about God coming back to explain his own return to Jerusalem. That's where I find very deep and rich, and very, very high Christology in the mind of Jesus himself, which then gives me a bridge to understand all the other hints which have been picked up in other bits of the tradition. Jimmy himself would say, and has said, that you take a thing like Peter's confession, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." I take it that means "You are the Messiah." I don't think that means "You're the second person of the Trinity." Now Matthew maybe already thinks that Peter said more than he knew, and by the time we get to Paul, Paul is construing it as a lot more. But just because I think that doesn't mean that Jesus didn't have that sense of his own identity. Jimmy, you might want to come in on this.

Dunn: Yes, there's no doubt, I think, that from very early days, the first Christians were seeing God in Jesus, seeing Jesus as the human face of God, seeing Jesus as the one who shows them what God is like and all that. And the way in which already in Paul you have Jesus inserted into the Shema: "For us there is one God, the Father ... and one Lord, Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 8:6, NRSV), and so on – that's really very astonishing. Where I'm less clear is how much you can trace that back into the self-consciousness of Jesus, and I'm not particularly worried on that score. It was a Durham scholar years ago who pointed out that Jesus didn't need to know who he was in order to be who he was, and there's something in that. In other words, the perception that comes through clearly very early on may be a sufficient answer to your question.

Wright: Lest I be thought to agree with that, let me just say, it all depends on what you mean by the word "know." Did he "know" who he was? I have argued that he had the sort of knowledge which is appropriate to vocation, which is a real knowledge. Stephen had a question. Yes, sir. Our host.

Question: My question is about the use of the word "grand narrative," because I want to make a point about the way you use that.

Wright: Do you want to stand up so that everyone can hear, Steve?

Question: It's worth saying, first, that when biblical scholars disagree with each other, then systematic theologians rub their hands – about what you would expect.

Would you agree that the proper use of the word “grand narrative” in relation to Christian faith is in fact the decisive move which was made in the creed with the Council of Nicea, to identify Jesus as one in being with the Father, and that that grand narrative is hospitable of a variety of reconstructions of these life stories of Jesus; it's hospitable with four Gospels which are different versions of the life of Jesus, and in principle therefore it ought to be hospitable of a good number of alternative reconstructions by biblical and historical scholars? I mean if you agree with that, then you're not a million miles from the point which Karl Barth was essentially making which you have twice in the course of the remarks –

Wright: Misrepresented? It wasn't Barth so much as some post-Barthians and I suspect post-post-Barthians.

Question: But you included the whole school.

Wright: Well absolutely, because that's where I've met it. I mean – you know who I'm thinking of. Jimmy, do you want to have a go at that first?

Dunn: Yes. I'm just wondering how appropriate it is to call the Trinitarian confessional creeds a grand narrative. I can see them as a lens, as a perspective, but as a grand narrative? I'm not quite sure the eternal generation of the Son and the eternal procession of the Spirit is a narrative, if you see what I mean.

Wright: This is interesting for a number of reasons, not least because there's a current debate within general cultural studies about the use or non-use of narrative. There was an article in *TLS* before last by Galen Strawson against narrative as a controlling category.¹⁰ It's a very important article and I would commend it to anyone who's interested in this. He's saying we've overused narrative and we're just trying to make narrative do all the work and it simply won't, and that there are lots of things, not least individual human lives, which do not admit of – or in your phrase “are not hospitable of” – a narrative construal.

Now I need to hear that because I've so enjoyed playing with narratives and stories over the last ten or fifteen years. That, and since I still find it enormously fruitful, I've never before met someone telling me to stop except my dear friend Oliver O'Donovan but that was in quite a limited sense. But I do see a sense in which the creeds are narrative and I suspect this may have been your putative argument to Jimmy. It's fascinating that the creeds are not a list of fifteen dogmas to be believed but actually a story which begins with God as Creator and with creation, then proceeds with Jesus Christ, then develops and tells the story of Jesus Christ, and then proceeds to the life of the church and the *eschaton*. So the fact that the creeds fall into a narrative framework is not accidental, and I would say it is a sign of their deep fidelity to the essential Gospel tradition as, for instance, over against the *Gospel of Thomas* which is a specifically “de-narrativized” presentation of some bits of Jesus from which the entire narrative framework has been quite deliberately taken out (which I see as a de-Judaizing, by the way).

¹⁰ Galen Strawson, “Against Narrative,” *Times Literary Supplement*, October 15, 2004, available on-line at <http://www.rdg.ac.uk/AcaDepts/ld/Philos/gjs/antls.htm>.

Whether the divinity of Jesus is a moment in that narrative – that wasn't quite what you said – it is sort of a key move in that narrative. I suppose I want to say there that the critical thing about being a Christian is not that we know who God is ahead of time and then fit Jesus into that package, but that we take the risk, as John 1:17ff tells us to take, and Colossians 1 and so on, of looking hard at Jesus and thinking the word “God” as we do so, if I can put it like that, and then drawing our appropriate conclusions. That means you cannot pre-judge who Jesus is by some template, e.g., the picture you have of God at the moment, and therefore I see this as actually committing each generation of the church to look even longer and harder at who Jesus really was – the real human being Jesus – in the faith that it's when you discover this Jesus that you discover who God really was. Of course that then gets muddled up with – and has to be set over against half of – the quest from Reimarus to the present, which is quite deliberately and explicitly following through with an enlightenment agenda which was reductionist – we just wanted to find some miscellaneous chap who was a failed revolutionary or whatever. Jimmy, does that help?

Dunn: Yes, I agree with that a lot. If you're talking about narrative, then you're talking about Creation, you're talking about the story of Jesus, and so on. But I was taking it as the exposition of the Trinity. I'm very much with you on all you said. I often talk about how the first Christians saw in Jesus what God was like; Jesus showed them what God was like. What I'm not sure about is how that ties in with seeing it all as narrative; that's my point.

It's going on eight o'clock. Is there any burning question on Jesus wanting to come forth? No? Right. Well, why don't we take a ten minute comfort break and peruse the book stall around the corner?

The New Perspective on Paul

Wright: Jimmy began the last session by quizzing me about the phrase “the third quest for the historical Jesus,” which I coined, and so I’m going to begin this session by quizzing him about the phrase “the new perspective on Paul,” which he coined.

Jimmy and I go back a long way when it comes to the new perspective, but the phrase “new perspective” comes from a lecture in 1982 which was published in 1983.¹¹ So, Jimmy, where is the new perspective now? And in a nutshell, because obviously we could talk about it all night, how do you see the debate sitting now?

Dunn: Let me go back and set the scene a little.

The new perspective was an attempt to set the record straight in reference to the traditional or Lutheran perspective. That perspective tended to operate with a view of Judaism as very legalistic, narrow, and bigoted, so that what Paul was objecting to was the idea that you could “earn” your way to salvation – that you paid your way to heaven – and that this is what all Israel taught. “Works of the law” were works that you did to prove to God that you were deserving of entry into the new age. Your “boasting” was boasting in your achievement, in good works.

The new perspective really begins by asking whether this is the case. In Judaism it doesn’t appear that it was assumed that you had to “earn” your way to become acceptable to God. It was E.P. Sanders who made this breakthrough, but before him there were many Jewish scholars, very sympathetic to Christianity, who were quite puzzled by this presentation of the Judaism that Paul was attacking because it wasn’t the Judaism they knew.

E.P. Sanders started with the observation that Judaism begins its soteriology with the conviction that Israel had been chosen by God to be God’s people. The ten commandments begin: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (Ex. 20:2, NRSV). The act of salvation – the act of deliverance – is God’s prior choice of Israel. Then comes the ten commandments, the statement of what God expects of his people. So the commandments are not a way of earning God’s favor but a way of showing how the people of God should live. That’s the basic point that had to be made in terms of the new perspective.

The other key feature of the new perspective begins from an observation made particularly by Krister Stendahl in the last generation: that Paul’s theology of justification emerges as his attempt to explain how it is that Gentiles are acceptable to a Jewish God. Prior to Paul it was characteristically assumed that in order to be acceptable to God they had to become Jews. But Paul discovered – the early Gentile mission discovered – that the gospel of Jesus preached to Gentiles was received by faith, by faith alone. Gentiles received the Spirit, God’s sign of acceptance; so that was that! Paul’s whole concern, as apostle to the Gentiles, is to defend *this* gospel, this understanding of how the gospel works. This gives a quite different twist to the old debate about justification by faith. It’s not just about the problem of individuals trying to earn salvation by pulling their bootstraps. It begins as a statement of the way in which God accepts all who believe. The gospel is for *all* who believe, as Paul again and again emphasizes.

Those were really, I think, the two basic starting points.

Wright: Would you agree with the following analysis of how all this happened? The mainstream of New Testament studies from the Reformation until very recently – certainly in the nineteenth and

¹¹ James D.G. Dunn, “The New Perspective on Paul,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*, 65, 1983, 95-122.

twentieth centuries – was being led by German Lutherans who had a very definite law-gospel antithesis. Had it instead been led by people in the Reformed as opposed to the Lutheran tradition, the new perspective would never have been necessary. If you take the theology of someone like Ridderbos or Charles Cranfield, you find exactly the same idea in principle, which is that the law was never given as a ladder of good works up which people ought to climb to save themselves; if anyone ever thought that, that was an abuse of the law, because grace and particularly the covenant precedes obedience.

I find this very ironic, because if you were to go on to Google and were to type in “Tom Wright” + “justification by faith,” you would turn up many American web sites from the Presbyterian Church of America and various other strongly Reformed centers like Westminster Seminary which are extremely rude about the two people sitting on this platform tonight for having sold Paul down the river and given up the genuine Reformed doctrine of justification by faith. This is really quite bizarre, because I think that what we have both done in taking forward Sanders’ proposal theologically – Sanders is really not a theologian, he’s more of an historian – I see what we’re doing as actually much more on a Reformed map than a Lutheran map, precisely because of the emphasis on the covenant and grace as basic, and on the Law from the start as being the way of life for the redeemed people. This corresponds to Luther’s tertiary use of it, if you like, but it’s much easier to do it in a Reformed or Calvinist framework. Would you be happy with that?

Dunn: That’s entirely so. I rediscovered, as it were, my Reformed heritage in all this because I was brought up Presbyterian. I was a strong Calvinist in my youth, and one of the impressive things about Calvin is that he sees the continuity of the covenants. The covenant of grace is the dominant category running through the Old and New Testaments.

Wright: Grand narrative, you mean.

Dunn: Well, a motif, shall we say. And likewise, a very important point: Calvin’s work is systematic – Luther was never systematic like that. Calvin is able to integrate better what is typically called now a “participationist” soteriology (“in Christ”) and the forensic emphasis. One of the sad things about this rebuke coming from many in the States is that they want to operate entirely in forensic categories. They haven’t really integrated the *en Christo*, the “in Christ” motif, which is so fundamental to Paul. The term “in Christ” occurs far more frequently in Paul than justification language.

Wright: Yes.

Dunn: It’s absolutely crucial – the whole sense of Christian life as being conformed to Christ, becoming like Christ in his death and resurrection. This is a way of understanding how it is that Christians can be expected to do good works. This is a very important motif that a law-gospel antithesis almost prevents you from getting into. It really snarls you up in your Christian theology and in its outworking.

Wright: Yes. I would just be interested to hear your comments on this, Jimmy. A century ago, Albert Schweitzer was writing in *Paul and his Interpreters*¹² about, and then developing further in

¹² Albert Schweitzer, *Paul and His Interpreters: A Critical History*. (*Geschichte der Paulinischen Forschung von der Reformation bis auf die Gegenwart*. Tübingen, J.C.B. Mohr, 1911.) Translated by W. Montgomery. London, A. & C. Black, 1912, available on-line at <http://www.thedcl.org/christia/s/schweitzer/paulahi/paulahi.html>.

Mysticism of Paul the Apostle,¹³ this same antithesis between “juridical” categories, as he called them, and “mystical” categories. He would say Romans 1 to 4 is juridical because it’s all about justification and the law, and then Romans 5 to 8 is what he called “mystical,” it’s about being “in Christ.”

Now we could argue whether “mystical” was actually the right word to use, but there’s a great divide between those two, and there’s an oddity already about that in that if you look at Galatians 3 and 4, you get all the material which is in Romans 1 to 4 and 5 to 8 scrunched together as though it’s all about the same thing. It’s not a different set of categories at all; these two belong together. But then between Schweitzer and Sanders you get much more Lutheran exegesis, not least from interpreters like Käsemann and Bultmann, for whom justification (whatever they mean by it) is still the primary thing. Everything else is just kind of an outworking, trying to subsume it under the Christian life, post-justification. Then in Sanders you get the same antithesis between “forensic” and “participatory” categories, which are really just like Schweitzer’s categories.

But I have argued – and others have agreed with this, I think Richard Hays not least – that if we take the covenant as the real theological controlling category, in a way in which (ironically) Sanders never did, then you see that the forensic outworking (when Paul needs to argue about Jews and Gentiles not least) and the so-called “participationist” outworking are two different outflows of the same basic covenantal theology, which is for Paul a new covenantal theology, a renewed covenantal theology, à la 2 Corinthians 3 or Romans 8. Would you be comfortable with that?

Dunn: Not so much on the covenant as the governing linking thing. It strikes me that the two antithetical positions that are characteristic of the debate fail to take seriously passages like 2 Corinthians 5:21 and Philippians 3 which talk about the righteousness of God “in Christ,” the righteousness from God as only possible “in him.” Paul had no difficulty, it would appear, in integrating these two categories which theologically have been pursued separately.

Wright: Which implies that we’re telling the wrong story or getting the wrong framework or something.

Dunn: Again, the “story” thing I’m less comfortable with, because what I see is different ways of presenting the divine-human relationship and the soteriological relationship. There is a forensic story, a judicial story, a story of law-courts. That’s one metaphor which runs quite far, but the “in Christ” doesn’t naturally fit with that. Well, does that matter? It’s not a matter of synthesizing it into a single story; these are different ways of putting the same spiritual reality, the same divine reality, the same soteriological reality, and the fact that Paul was able to hold the two apparently incompatible images together, that should be enough for us.

Wright: I basically agree with that, though I think we tease it out slightly differently, and probably I would want actually a more holistic, elegant view.

Dunn: A grand narrative.

Wright: Exactly. So, let me cut to the chase. I’d really like you to tell me how that comes out for you at the moment in relation to those several passages, three or four at least in Paul, where he talks quite explicitly about a final judgment according to works. Now, whenever I mention anything about a final judgment according to works, somebody pops up like a jack-in-the-box and says that I’m going soft on justification by faith. What do you do with all that?

¹³ Albert Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*. (*Die Mystik des Apostels Paulus*. Tübingen, J.C.B. Mohr, 1930.) Translated by W. Montgomery. London, A. & C. Black, 1931.

Dunn: This is right. I get the same rebukes thrown at me: “Ah, you’re going down the Pelagian route! You’re a semi-Pelagian!” I just have to say, there *is* this emphasis in Paul on judgment according to works. He expects his converts to do good, to produce the fruit of the Spirit, the harvest of righteousness. He hopes to be able to present his converts before God’s throne, the throne of Christ, “irreproachable,” “blameless,” “mature,” “perfect.” If your only theology is that the believer is a sinner, as much a sinner until the day he or she dies as from the day of conversion, you’re missing out that whole dimension.

I don’t disagree with the fact that we always remain sinners, and every time we come to God we come as sinners, but there is this other dimension of Paul that has to be taken seriously, and if you don’t take it seriously, you’re just ignoring large chunks of Paul’s letters.

Wright: Yes. Can I just have a stab at it? Because each time I say it, it comes out slightly differently.

I do think that Paul actually makes a clear distinction in time between the future justification or judgment (those are the same word, basically), and present justification, which is on the basis of faith. I think he keeps those in absolute and appropriate tension throughout, because the point about justification by faith in the present is that it is the anticipation in the present, on the basis of faith, of the verdict which will be issued in the future on the basis of the entirety of the life led.

Interestingly, in the first main chapter of Francis Watson’s book,¹⁴ he says much about Romans 1:16, 17 and Romans 3:21-26, as well as some of the earlier verses in chapter 3, but he never discusses any of the verses in chapter 2, which really makes sense of how you get from chapter 1 to chapter 3. This is odd because part of his argument is that you have to pay close attention to the actual detail of what Paul says. But in Romans 2:1-16 you have a future scenario which could in principle be said, I imagine, by many second-temple Jews, although Paul nuances it in terms of Jew and Gentile alike (then the crunch at the end is that God judges the secrets of people “according to my gospel by Christ Jesus”). But the basic thrust is that at the last day, all will be judged according to the totality of the life that they have led. Some have said that Paul is just setting it up as a hypothetical thing and then just knocking it down, saying no one can get in that way, so there’s got to be an easier way, namely faith. That’s a trivialization of Paul’s argument.

The whole point then is that God in Christ brings forward the verdict of the last day into the present and says that when somebody believes the gospel, they are declared to be *dikaios*, in the right. Then they are launched upon this life in which – and I’m totally in agreement with Jimmy here – Paul again and again speaks about doing things which will redound to one’s credit on the last day.

All those who were brought up as good evangelical Protestants are tempted to say, “You’re not supposed to say that, Paul.” But then you read 1 Thessalonians (I heard a paper by Lionel North in Cambridge a year or two ago on this) where Paul asks, “For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming?” And we expect him to say, if we’re good evangelical Protestants, “The blood and righteousness of my Lord Jesus,” but he doesn’t. He says “Is it not you? Yes, you are our glory and joy” (1 Thess. 2:19, 20, NRSV)!

Paul is quite clearly not so embarrassed about saying things that we have done will redound to our credit at that last day. But the point is that this does not in any way undermine justification by faith, because justification by faith is a statement that in the present time, on the basis of faith alone – hence not on the basis of ethnic identity, moral achievement, any personal civic status whatever – one is declared to be a member of God’s people, which is why justification by faith is the basis of ecclesiology.

¹⁴ *Op. cit.*

Dunn: Yes. One of the most difficult things for me as a junior Calvinist in days gone by was to face up to Paul's warnings about failure to persevere in Christian life, his own presentation of himself as running a race, and having to be very disciplined in case he'd be disqualified, as well as the warnings to his readers in Rome that if you Christians live according to the flesh, you will die.

One of the five points of Calvinism, as you know, is the perseverance or preservation of the saints, and I had to face up to what seems to me undeniable: that Paul brings out the real possibility of Christians falling away and failing to attain the finishing line. For example, in Philippians 3, you remember, he insists on his own account:

Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:12-14, NRSV).

It's the same imagery as the end of 1 Corinthians 9 about the danger of being disqualified. He doesn't hesitate to use this language. So Paul is very clear on the importance of Christians being very serious about their ethical responsibility in discipleship. And I think it should be equally clear that he warns of the possibility of failure. So final justification, judgment and so on, is going to have to take that into account as well.

Wright: I actually do it rather differently from you, and I think I've just discovered why you're a Methodist, which I've always wondered. The move against final perseverance might indicate a more open Wesleyan stance. I don't know, maybe that wasn't the only reason.

Dunn: No, it was ecumenism.

Wright: But consider Romans 5 through 8. I think that's a set piece argument. I think when Paul starts to dictate Romans 5 he has the whole thing in mind. It's almost formulaic, you know. Every 11 or 12 verses you've got the argument rounded off "through Jesus Christ" or "in Christ Jesus." It's a very sustained argument. He knows at the beginning of 5 how he's going to end in 8 because it has a symphonic structure to it. The whole of Romans 5 through 8 is an argument for assurance, and despite the truth in everything you say, nevertheless Romans 5 to 8 is saying "those whom he justified he also glorified" (Rom. 8:30, NRSV), and that's part of the point of justification by faith. Then and there is given that assurance, even though that has to be tested to the limit and has to face the possibility that faith itself might prove false.

Dunn: Yes.

Wright: But in 1 Corinthians 3 (where albeit he's talking about Christian work rather than simply Christians *per se*), he speaks of those who build on the foundation with wood and hay and stubble, whose work will be burned up when the Day appears. He says nevertheless that person will be saved "but only as through fire" (1 Cor. 3:15, NRSV), which is (as far as I'm aware) the only passage in the New Testament which says something like that, "saved nevertheless by the skin of your teeth." It's a very strange and dark passage.

Dunn: Well, can I come back on that one?

Wright: Sure. Yes. Absolutely.

Dunn: My point there is, as in all these arguments, to take seriously *all* that Paul says.

Wright: Yes.

Dunn: I keep meeting people who have taken up one aspect of Paul and so emphasized it that they either forget the rest or fit it in awkwardly.

Wright: Yes.

Dunn: On the one hand Paul can speak with unshakeable assurance. I am thinking of Romans 8, a wonderful passage, my favorite chapter in the whole Bible, with its wonderful hymn of assurance at the end. Paul can speak like that. But he can also say the other things – all these warnings and expressions of concern for his converts, that they persevere right to the end. So it's holding both emphases in balance. Often we're not able to tie them all together into a neat package or a grand narrative or whatever, but that shouldn't worry us. What should worry us is that we're not giving weight to things that Paul gave weight to.

Wright: I totally agree. For me, if there are grand narratives, they're scaffolding around the building to help us appreciate and clean up and tidy up the building. But when you've got the building straight you take the scaffolding down again, not because it hasn't done its job but because it has.

So for me the bottom line is, whether having done all the homework and looked at all the stories, you can then sit down with Romans, Galatians, Philippians, whatever, and actually read it through and appreciate, verse by verse and line by line, what is being said. If you can't – if you have to say, as people did for generations about Romans 9-11, this is in square brackets, it's an old sermon that Paul just stuck in here, like C.H. Dodd said – then basically you should assume, if you draw that conclusion, that you've taken a seriously wrong turn in the exegesis somewhere. Paul can have little asides, but again and again, his letters are very carefully crafted. Until you've seen how the different strands fit together in that symphonic fashion, you haven't actually done business with him.

We should move on. There are just two other areas which we promised ourselves we would talk about. We haven't actually covered "the works of the law," but I think we probably more or less agree about that. We disagree about how Paul sits in relation to 4QMMT, but that's a bit technical.

Dunn: We do, yes. You miss the point there.

Wright: Well, that's for another time. There's one more thing which I suspect we agree on, and then one thing which Jimmy and I have never I think talked about, which I really do think is important and want to get to.

First, the ecumenical subject. Ever since I read Richard Hooker on justification many years ago, I've taken this very seriously. We are not justified by faith by believing in justification by faith, we're justified by faith by believing in Jesus. It is remarkable how many people make belief in justification by faith the thing which divides the church. Hooker said, very dangerously, early in the Elizabethan period, that because this is so – and forgive me my Roman Catholic friends, but this is the way he saw it; the Roman Catholic forbears of the Church of England, who many in the Reformation period were inclined to consign to darkest theological oblivion – that they were in fact justified by faith because they believed in Jesus. But because they didn't believe in justification by faith they didn't lack justification or salvation; they lacked assurance. That was deeply controversial to the

Puritans who were Hooker's opponents, who really wanted to say, "No, if you don't believe in this, you're not even saved."

From that I move on to say that for Paul, justification is *the* ecumenical doctrine. In Galatians 2, which is the first place we meet justification language in Paul, the point about justification is not "this is how I get saved," it's "this is how you and I sit at the same table and eat together, even though we come from different sides of the great cultural divide." That is what Galatians 2 is about. And I think anyone who tries to resist that is simply resisting what Paul is clearly saying on the surface of the text.

Dunn: Yes, I agree entirely with that. Remember that Galatians 2 is speaking of the Antioch incident, where Peter had eaten with the Gentile Christians – table fellowship presumably including the Lord's Supper, the Eucharist, at least on occasions. But when certain men came from James, Peter and the other Jewish believers, even Barnabas, had separated themselves from that fellowship.

Now we can understand, we can even sympathize with Peter, although we read the episode through Paul's writing. One can appreciate Peter's concerns, given that for centuries, Gentiles had been regarded as some kind of a threat to Israel's holiness. To be holy, to be set apart *to* God, meant being set apart *from* other nations. Leviticus 20:24-26 spells it out quite explicitly. Why do you observe the distinction between clean and unclean foods? Because it marks your separation from the nations, the people of the land, who may defile you and prevent your total commitment to YHWH. That is why you observe the distinction between clean and unclean foods. So the law of clean / unclean animals / birds wasn't simply about unclean *foods*, it was about unclean *people*, people who are not acceptable as table companions.

Now that's clearly the logic behind the action of Peter and these other Jewish believers in separating themselves from the Gentile believers. This was part of the core commitment of the covenant of the people of Israel, and nothing that they knew of – even though Peter had been with Jesus, eating with sinners and so on – nothing seems to have prepared him to take a firm stand on this, to see that this was no longer appropriate (despite Acts 10:10-16, 28)! So what does Paul say? Paul gives voice to the great Reformation "justification by faith" formula and draws it from this episode. "Peter, you are requiring these Gentile believers, in effect, to "Judaize," to do "the works of the law," to live like Jews in order to be acceptable to us (that is, in your thinking, to God, because you still think that's what God requires of his people)."

So this first formulation of "justification by faith" (Gal. 2:16) is actually a protest against any attempt to require more from other believers than justification by faith, than the fact that *God* has accepted us. That's a very fundamental, ecumenical position to take up.

In a little article which was published in the *Heythrop Journal* years ago, I draw this very point directly from the Antioch incident, Galatians 2:11-16: That Paul rebukes Peter for laying down more strict controls on the Lord's table, on eating together, in spite of the fact that we have all been accepted by God by grace through faith.¹⁵

Wright: I am totally in agreement with that and I too have challenged my Roman Catholic friends with this. Justification by faith is not simply a doctrine about which we ought to be able to agree, it is the doctrine which says we are one in Christ, that all those who believe in Jesus belong at the same table. I do not see that as the El Dorado, the reward at the end of the ecumenical endeavor. I see it as a necessary step on the road of ecumenical endeavor, and I expect there will be

¹⁵ James D.G. Dunn, "Should Paul Once Again Oppose Peter to his Face?" *The Heythrop Journal*, 34, 1993, 58-65.

warm agreement in some quarters in this room, and probably strong disagreement from other quarters.

Dunn: But I think the point has to be pressed even more. There is only the one thing necessary for us to worship together, to work together, to mission together, and that is that God accepts us, has accepted us, and accepts others on the same terms, by grace through faith.

Wright: Yes.

Dunn: And to make further requirements before we can work together, can come together, as churches, before we can work together in mission and service, is actually to destroy the fundamental character of justification by faith, to call in question what Paul calls “the truth of the gospel” (Gal. 2:5, 14).

Wright: Yes, it’s ironic because it is in fact an attack on justification itself.

Let’s be quite clear what Jimmy is saying. Some recent writing continues to polarize justification by faith in terms of “how I get saved and how I get into a personal relationship with God,” on the one hand, and on the other hand, how Jews and Gentiles come together, and the fact that Gentiles don’t have to get circumcised. These are not two separate things to be polarized in Paul. It is because of the one that the other is true. They go absolutely together and it’s not an either-or.

Let me move you on, Jimmy, to what we’ve got down as the last of the things we thought we might discuss.

There has been a whole new movement in the last ten or fifteen years in Pauline studies examining the political meaning of Paul. I have taken part in this. The moving spirit really behind much of it has been Richard Horsley of the University of Massachusetts. He has argued very strongly – and pulled together teams of scholars from classics and elsewhere in various symposia that he’s edited – to make the point that since the Caesar cult was the fastest growing religion in Paul’s world; and since the Roman empire itself with all its ideology (irrespective of the Caesar cult itself) was a massive ideological movement announcing justice, freedom, peace for the world (at a price), a movement which had an emperor who was the divine Son of God, who was the Savior, who was the *kyrios*, the Lord; if all those terms and ideas would have carried those meanings in Paul’s world (and there is massive evidence that they would), we can no longer ignore the fact that when we read Paul saying “every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is *kyrios*, Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:11, NRSV), we ought to see that there and perhaps in dozens of other passages as well, there is an implicit and sometimes an explicit subversion of Caesar’s world.

Now, Jimmy, I have never heard you reacting to this whole new movement of thought. Where are you on it?

Dunn: Yes, this new movement really emerged after I had completed my main work on Paul, in which I was dealing more with the *theology* of Paul than with the social interaction of his mission and churches, although I take your point that it’s not simply social interaction that is in view here.

I’m quite sure you’re right. There was a political dimension which is inescapable in all this.

We’ve just come back from the west coast of Turkey. There you visit Pergamum and Ephesus, which were centers of the Caesar cult and even the worship of Roma. Anybody operating in that context could not have been unaware of it. It was simply too much “in your face.” It wasn’t so strong in Rome itself, but certainly in Asia Minor it was already strong. No question about that.

But there are two other aspects of Paul I’d want to bring in here. I don’t think we want to push the political *so* much. In the passage we’ve been talking about already, namely Galatians, the truth of

the gospel is not the political message so much as the fact that Gentiles are equally accepted by God through faith. This is the truth for which Paul was willing to die.

The other aspect struck me when I did my work in Romans back in the 1980s. Here was Paul writing to the capital city of the largest empire to date, certainly around the Mediterranean world. When you remember that, the things he says in Romans chapters 12 and 13 are flooded with light. He writes these passages clearly with an awareness that they are in this situation, no doubt aware that the Roman authorities had their agents out and were deeply, deeply suspicious of any little groups and societies coming together. So what is the advice he gives them? He advises them to keep their heads down, to be good citizens, to not respond when people try to provoke you, to pay your taxes, to observe the laws. So it's an interesting, very strongly political statement, but it's kind of a quietist political statement. Of course the subversion is working away underground, below the surface, as it were, but in that situation, for the little house churches in the center of the Roman Empire, it was not overtly or "in your face" political.

Wright: Well, I'm happy to disagree with you once again. I would never use the word "quietist" of Paul vis-à-vis Caesar. I just think that's completely out of line and I think that Romans 13 has to be understood within the framework that Paul has set up.

In chapter 1 he says essentially "I am defined by 'the gospel,'" which is also a Caesar word, as we know from the Priene inscription and perhaps elsewhere. The gospel is "the good news" that we have an emperor. As I said in a seminar the other day to somebody, when a Roman herald came into town saying "Augustus is dead but Tiberius is the emperor, he is the Savior, he is the Lord," they didn't say, "If you fancy having an imperial-type experience, you can come and have an after meeting here and we can talk about it." They said "Tiberius is Lord, down on your knees and pay the taxes," and actually that is much more like what the gospel is about. The gospel is that Jesus Christ is Lord, which doesn't mean "If you fancy a new sort of religious experience sign on here." It's a demand for, as Paul says, the obedience of faith, which is very strong. But then Paul defines the gospel as concerning the Son of God who is descended from the *Jewish* royal house (as opposed to anyone else's – you know the Roman emperors tried to claim descent from all sorts of people way back to Romulus and Remus if they could), and he was designated Son of God in power by the Holy Spirit through the resurrection of the dead. He is the Lord who claims the allegiance of the whole world, Jew and Gentile alike, and through this message – this gospel – God's justice, *dikaiosune*, is revealed to the world because it is God's message of salvation. Those are all Roman imperial buzzwords.

That's Romans 1:1-17. Then when you come to the end of the theological exposition of the letter, in the middle of chapter 15, Paul very carefully structures a catena of quotations in 15:7-13. The last one is a quote from Isaiah 11, which states "the root of Jesse shall come, the one who rises to rule the Gentiles; in him the Gentiles shall hope" (Rom. 15:12, NRSV). I just think that is a framework for Romans. I think that is as near to "in your face" as he could get.

Now of course I agree with Jimmy that Paul wanted them to keep their heads down and not to go in for the normal kind of political revolution, but there is something far deeper, something far more remarkably revolutionary going on there.

Dunn: Well, yes, I don't disagree basically with the framework, but the political outworking is pretty clear. I think a better example of the kind of politics that Paul operated with is in the household instructions in Colossians (Col. 3:18 - 4.1). His "household rules" give very strong advice in regard to husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and slaves. It's very striking that these rules all follow the normal pattern, though there are some important variations. So he accords there with the insight which lies behind the typical household rules of the time, that the household is

the basic unit of society, and that it must be stable and well ordered if society is to be well ordered. That is why, for example, wives must be “subject” to their husbands, for as the *pater familias*, the head of the household, its good order depends on him. In effect, Paul goes along with that. He doesn’t want to rock the boat in any overt way.

Where he *does* rock the boat – and this is where the subversion comes in – is that it’s all to be done “in Christ,” “in the Lord.” That changes the whole perspective and the whole motivation in a very subtle way. Not in an open way, as if Christian families operate differently from non-Christian families, but the whole rationale and value system was thereby so radically changed that over generations, it was bound to have effect, to make a fundamental difference.

Wright: I’ve just seen how fast the clock is moving on. We did promise you some question time. Sorry we have run on a bit, but I hope it’s been a good survey of a bunch of current topics. Are there questions now which you’d like to ask about Paul, reasonably briefly before we go to a glass of wine and the bookstore? Yes.

Question: You talked at length about Jesus and Paul, but you haven’t faced the fact that Jesus is venerated, being worshipped as God within nine, ten, fifteen, twenty years. It has been in a way the most remarkable thing.

Wright: Jimmy did mention that phrase in 1 Corinthians 8:6 where Paul takes (and it may already be traditional) the Shema: “Hear, O Israel! the LORD our God, the LORD is one” (Deut. 6:4, NASB) – and actually weaves Jesus into the middle of this phrase of Jewish monotheism.

You see parallel things going on in Philippians 2 and in Colossians 1, and of course you also see it remarkably when Paul takes passages about “YHWH” (which comes out as *kyrios* of course in the Septuagint), applies them without a “by your leave” to Jesus, and does so in the sort of way which implies that all we early Christians use the Bible like this. When we read *kyrios* in the Old Testament, we expect that to mean Jesus. And so it’s just very, very deeply rooted from very, very early on.

Maybe Jimmy has shifted his position on it, but I would certainly be completely with you, and agreeing with Martin Hengel, who says that that step – openly to recognize Jesus and to use “God” language of him while remaining a monotheist and not a polytheist – is both one of the most remarkable things ever to happen in the history of theology, and also one of the earliest within Christianity. Do you want to comment on it?

Dunn: Yes. I did refer specifically to that point in response to an earlier question. The features that Tom is referring to are the ones that stand out. You’re probably familiar with the recent book which came out last year by Larry Hurtado¹⁶ in which he shows how devotion to Christ (but devotion defined in a very interestingly broad way) was there from the very beginning, or very near the beginning.

The one hesitation I have is – and this is my same point as before, that I want to take seriously *everything* Paul says – that I see in Paul a reservation about the language he uses about Christ. The probability is that he does not use *theos*, “God,” for Christ. He hesitates to use language about glorifying Christ and avoids using typical prayer language to Christ. I think that that’s worth noting, as well as the fact that Christian veneration for Christ does not seem to have been a problem with the Jewish constituencies with which Paul was working in the way that the Law was. So I’m not sure

¹⁶ Larry Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 2003.

how mind-boggling Paul's language actually appeared then as compared to how it now appears looking back.

Wright: We could go on about that one all night, and I'm going to bite my tongue and not go to what I would say in response, but see if there are other questions. Yes?

Question: Richard Hays has reopened the question of whether Galatians 2:16 should be translated "faith of Christ" or "faith in Christ."

Wright: We actually disagree on this. Yes, go on.

Question: The Greek is apparently ambiguous. Luther translated it "faith in Christ." Tyndale translated it "faith of Christ." Every English translation up until the RSV followed Tyndale. All of a sudden, the Lutheran translation took in the RSV. I'm just wondering if there is any discussion as to why the RSV followed Luther as opposed to Tyndale.

Wright: That's a much more focused question than the one I thought you were going to ask. I have no idea why the RSV did that. I have no inside track on that at all.

Of course, in older English, you could have an objective genitive more easily, so "faith of Christ" might have been heard in the sixteenth or seventeenth century as "Christian faith" or "the faith related to Christ," not necessarily, as in some of the modern debates, as subjective genitive, that is to say, "Jesus' own faith" or "faithfulness."

Let's see if we can do this in about two sentences each, shall we?

There was a big debate between Richard Hays and Jimmy Dunn in *SBL* about ten years ago on the meaning of *pistis Christou* in Paul, and I was sitting at Richard's left hand as one of his supporters and friends on that occasion.

My own view is based entirely on Romans 3. I do not claim that Paul must have always meant the same thing by the phrase wherever it occurs, but I think Romans 3 creates a presupposition in that direction. Paul says in Romans 3:1-3 that the Israelites who were entrusted with the oracles of God were faithless, which leaves a problem for God because God is committed to working through Israel to save the world. What is required is a faithful Israelite in fulfillment of God's covenant faithfulness, so when in 3:21 he says God has unveiled his covenant faithfulness, *dia pisteōs Iēsou Christou, eis pantas tous pisteuontas*, I find every reason to translate "God has unveiled his covenant faithfulness through the faithfulness of Jesus for the benefit of all who believe," both halves of which are important. I think what Paul means by "the faithfulness of Jesus" there is not Jesus' belief system or act of faith, but his faithfulness to God's saving plan, which is the same thing as his obedience as we find it in Romans 5. Therefore, I hold my mind open to hearing the same things in Galatians and elsewhere.

Dunn: This is very hard to deal with in two sentences.

Wright: Well, mine were quite long.

Dunn: Right. Well, to pick up an older theme of our conversation, one point would be a slight hesitation, because I hear the grand narrative being brought in again. "The faithfulness of Jesus" becomes a very nice filling out of an important part of the narrative, so I'll just make that observation.

The other is that it's pretty clear to me in some key passages, particularly Galatians 3, that *pistis* language is being used of *Christian* faith, to use that shorthand. The problem with Richard Hays'

presentation, as I recall, is that once you refer one of the *pistis* phrases, one of the “faith” phrases, to Christ’s faith (“the faithfulness of Christ),” it’s difficult to avoid reading all of the *pistis* references in the same way – the agreed presumption being that he’s using *pistis* consistently. But what strikes me again and again is that Paul starts his talk of *pistis* in Galatians 3 with Abraham: “Even so Abraham ‘believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.’ Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith (*ek pisteos*) who are sons of Abraham” (Gal. 3:6, 7, NASB). It’s pretty obvious to me that this means “you believed as Abraham believed”; and it is that *pistis* reference which sets the pattern for the *pistis* references throughout the chapter. That would be one of the lines of argument I would want to develop.

Wright: It’s not necessarily a straight either-or. There are many passages in which you can see nuances this way and that, but I regard the fact that that phrase fits really rather nicely into that controlling narrative as yet one more argument that that controlling narrative really was intended by Paul.

Anyway, is there one more question? Yes?

Question: Just one. We read a lot of the statement “justification by faith alone.” You’ve spent much time discussing that, but I felt that it was rather, shall I say, ecclesiastically focused, in the sense of the ecumenical movement, in terms of interchurch relations or in the sense of application today. That wasn’t exactly what Paul had in mind. He was speaking about being all one in Christ, about justification by faith and saying Gentiles don’t need to have all the same systems which the Jewish people had in their heritage. I just wondered whether you would take that phrase, “justification by faith alone,” outside, or with, the ecclesiastical or ecumenical context, in our own context today even, for the twenty-first century. We need to come into social, interreligious, or political debate. Where else does it fit?

Wright: It fits all over the place. The question was where does justification by faith fit outside the context that we were dealing with it in. I think Jimmy and I were focusing on particular contexts, (a) because some of them have been controversial and (b) because some of them are important and often ignored, the ecumenical one being one of those. But yes, it has resonances in all sorts of places. The problem with picking up those resonances is that you really do first have to do justice to the context in which Paul uses it. You can’t simply scoop it out as a theologoumenon and just drop it in somewhere else and hope it will do the right job, because it may not. So Romans 3, Galatians 3, Philippians 3, and the other cognate passages are really hugely important to understand, and there is so much there about God’s purpose to reach out and save all – Jew and Gentile, male and female, slave and free, etc., and then from there it goes out via Galatians 3:28 if you like, into all sorts of other areas. You know the sky is the limit then, but you’ve got to get the center of it right first.

Dunn: Yes, it seems to me really rather unfortunate that generations of Christians seem to have focused on that phrase so much in an individual, pietistic, “finding peace with God” way. There is that too, of course. I’m not going to decry that for a minute. Anyone who’s found peace with God through the preaching of justification by faith will know precisely what I mean. But as Tom says, Paul’s teaching of justification by faith occurs in that context where Paul was apostle to Gentiles, so Jews and Gentiles could worship and fellowship together. I just don’t think we’ve recognized how important that was to Paul. In Romans, we think that theology stops at the end of chapter 8, maybe 9-11, then jumps to the ethics, but Paul goes back to it in chapter 15, and the climax to the gospel is his vision of Gentiles and Jews worshipping together (15:9-12).

And if you take Ephesians 2, whether you think it's Pauline or a Pauline disciple summarizing Paul, the vision there is of the middle wall of partition broken down – of one new person, Jew and Gentile together – it's fantastic. This was absolutely fundamental for Paul to an extent that has been quite lost to sight. The new perspective, I would say, has been trying to bring that back. Not to *replace* the traditional emphases. What we're saying is that there is a dimension that has been lost and needs to be recovered. If we, the Christian people, could really have retained that through the centuries, what a message that would have been in a world which is riven with racial, national conflicts: That in Christ, there is neither east nor west, neither black nor white, neither north nor south, and so on. It's a tremendous and powerful vision and message.

Wright: Yes. We must wrap up. Just to echo that, I can't resist just pointing out the passage which Jimmy cited is precisely Paul's great summary of the grand narrative, "that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy" (Rom. 15:8, 9, NRSV). That's the most elegant statement of the gospel.

Dunn: I have to give the bishop the last word.

Afterword

A discussion, such as we enjoyed that evening in October 2004, tends naturally to focus on the points of disagreement and variation between us. Who would want to listen to an evening of us agreeing with each other on everything? Much better that we should have played a bit of cat and mouse for our own (and others') interest (and amusement) – Jimmy's shorthand title for the evening was 'The Tom and Jimmy Show'! The downside of that, of course, is that the evening majored on the disagreements and may have left a misleading impression on the extent to which we see eye to eye. So let's correct the balance by switching from minor to major on what we both think of as important in both the areas of our discussion.

In regard to Jesus and the quest of the historical Jesus, five features of common ground in particular should be emphasized:

- The methodological approach which can be described as 'critical realism.' Tom defines it in the following terms, which Jimmy quotes: "This is a way of describing the process of 'knowing' that acknowledges the *reality of the thing known, as something other than the knower* (hence 'realism'), while also fully acknowledging that the only access we have to this reality lies along the spiraling path of *appropriate dialogue or conversation between the knower and the thing known* (hence 'critical')."
- The crucial importance of seeing Jesus in his historical context, that is, as a first-century Palestinian Jew, rather than trying to find a Jesus who was different and distinct from that context, and only of lasting significance by virtue of such differences and distinctions.
- The 'restoration of Israel' as an overarching theme which lay at the heart of Jesus' mission and preaching of the kingdom of God.
- That Jesus did not see death in Jerusalem as a disaster to be avoided but understood it as part of God's saving purpose for his anointed one and for his people.
- That 'God raised Jesus from the dead' is not only the earliest proclamation of the first Christians but is also, surprisingly, the most plausible interpretation of the events which constituted the first Easter.

In regard to Paul and the new perspective on Paul, seven points could be mentioned:

- Paul's teaching on justification by faith, in its particular form of 'by faith and not by works of the law,' is Paul's attempt to explain and defend his gospel as a gospel for *all* who believe, which in the context of Paul's mission meant, for Gentile as well as Jew.¹⁷

¹⁷ A correspondent suggests we use the opportunity to reinforce the point that for us 'works of the law' do not simply refer to circumcision and food laws; works of the law' in Gal. 2.16 is another way of saying 'live like a Jew' (2.14), that is, a life-style which marks it out as distinctive. Our mutual friend, Richard Hays, expresses the point well: "works of the law" refer primarily to practices commanded by the law (circumcision, dietary laws, Sabbath observance) that distinctively mark

- Justification by faith is not only about and is not reducible to how the individual sinner can find peace with God; for Paul it was also, and integrally so, about how God has broken down barriers between individuals and peoples, that is, for Paul, 'the dividing wall' between Jew and Gentile.
- These two dimensions of Paul's teaching on justification must not be set in antithesis, otherwise the wholeness and richness of the gospel is seriously diluted.
- The traditional Lutheran antithesis between 'gospel' and 'law' has been overdrawn, particularly insofar as it fed upon and reinforced the view that Christianity is to be seen as the polar antithesis to Judaism, Judaism being seen as narrowly legalistic and arid.
- The other dimension of Reformed theology, highlighted more by John Calvin, that is, the 'in Christ' dimension of Paul's theology of salvation, must not be lost to sight, and, again, must not be set in antithesis to justification.
- That Paul taught judgment 'according to works' as clearly as he taught justification 'apart from works (of the law)' needs to be taken more seriously than has been typically the case in contemporary restatements of Paul's theology.
- The ecumenical implications of justification by faith alone need to be given more focused attention than they have been thus far; Paul's rebuke to Peter in Gal. 2.14-18 needs to be heard afresh by all denominations and factions today.

If our work separately and our discussion together helps in any measure towards a renewed and better understanding of Jesus and Paul, and, more important, encourages a positive response to the good news which they saw as their mission to bring, then we will be more than grateful for the opportunity which the crisscrossing of our pilgrim paths have given us.

*JDGD
NTW*

Jewish ethnic identity; these symbolize comprehensive obedience to the law's covenant obligations' (*The HarperCollins Study Bible*, ed. W. A. Meeks, et al. (New York: HarperCollins, 1993) 2185.

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Further Reading

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