

James D. G. Dunn. *Beginning From Jerusalem*. Christianity in the Making, Vol. 2. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans. 1347 pages. \$80.

In this second of three projected volumes entitled *Christianity in the Making*, James D. G. Dunn paints a picture of a Paul deeply embedded in the early community of Jewish Christians. He portrays a leader whose vision of the meaning of the traditions of Israel that he internalized as a Jew (and came to see through the lens of the traditions he received) drove him down a path that diverged from that of other early Jewish Christian leaders, particularly when it came to the role of the Torah in distinguishing Israel from the Gentiles. Dunn portrays what may reasonably have happened to groups of people in any historical period who hold much in common, but disagree passionately about what is non-negotiable.

The fulcrum of Dunn's entire presentation in this volume is his reconstruction of the movement between two events: from the agreement between reached at the Jerusalem Council to what happened at between Paul and Peter and "men from James" in Antioch.

In dialogue with other Pauline scholars, Dunn proposes that the Jerusalem Council was focused on the decision that circumcision was not required for those Gentiles who had clearly received the gift of the Spirit and were baptized. But for many of the early leaders, like Peter and James, that did not mean that Gentile believers had no obligation to the regulations that separated Israel from the surrounding nations (in particular, the dietary laws). For example, in Antioch, where there were many Jews, Gentiles joined in the activities of the Jewish synagogues without being circumcised, even though they did adopt many other distinctively Jewish practices. To use Josephus' term, they "judaized."

Prior to the episode in Antioch that involved his disagreement with Peter, Paul (along with Barnabas) had been an emissary of the Antioch community. The question is, what was happening among the Jesus believers that led Paul to break with this community and launch a mission that was still deeply rooted in both the widely-held Jewish and specifically Christian Jewish traditions he had received, but decidedly divergent when it came to those regulations that set Jews apart from Gentiles? Apparently, Jewish and Gentile Christians were eating together without adhering to the Jewish food laws, which may have been an exception. But in Antioch it emerged as an issue requiring a decisive policy decision. From the point of view of James and his representatives that did not mean that Gentile believers did not have to "judaize" in other respects. This did not mean that adopting distinctively Jewish practices helped earn salvation. But their faith in the Messiah of the Jews did mean that the Gentiles had joined themselves to Israel and their practice needed to reflect that.

Paul saw it differently. In his view, if circumcision was not required, no distinctively Jewish practices were required. Or at least those practices should cease to be the basis of any dissociation between Jewish and Gentile believers. This particular issue led Paul to move in a new direction, the unintended consequence of which would eventually be the loss of any outward distinction of Gentile Christians as a sect of Jews, and finally the loss of any sense of belonging to Israel.

What is important to observe right here is how important issues can sneak up on a community. A departure from traditional practice occurs, like Roman Catholics welcoming a non-Roman Christian to a Roman Eucharist, or the ordination of a gay priest, or a church council agrees that some portion of proceeds from a fundraiser can be used to upgrade the church's sound system. The departure does not seem to portend a trend, so no major objection is raised. But later the frequency or nature of the practice reaches a tipping point and a major controversy

erupts. One side asks angrily why this departure from tradition was not stopped a long time ago and another asks why no one protested earlier. Dunn's reconstruction takes this rather abstract-sounding theological controversy that arose in Antioch and puts skin and bones on it. It may help contemporary Christians to get some perspective on our own passionate issues and to be a little less incensed that the issue was ever allowed to develop.

This particular exposition exemplifies what the reader will find throughout. The events receive careful attention as communal events involving a variety of points of view, some of which are often at best hinted at in the preserved record, others intentionally or unintentionally often misrepresented. Dunn seeks to reconstruct a plausible account of what may have happened, drawing on the bit of tendentious evidence we possess, and weighing it in dialogue with the refined work of other scholars.

Volume One of *Christianity in the Making* is entitled *Jesus Remembered*. Volume Two, *Beginning from Jerusalem*, covers the period from 30 to 70 C.E., namely the period of the first generation of Christians after Jesus' death and resurrection. It is Dunn's first installment in his contribution to "the quest for the historical church." Anyone with a basic course in New Testament is aware of the discrepancy between The Acts of the Apostles and the letters of Paul himself. Dunn judiciously evaluates these two principle sources of historical knowledge and others that provide evidence for this first generation of the Christian movement. He reviews the history of critical scholarly work on the history of the earliest church.

With this foundation, he devotes the rest of the volume to evaluating the testimony of the early sources about how the church developed. The sources yield a fragmentary history, but carefully evaluated, they construct a reasonably reliable partial history. Dunn's picture follows the general picture presented in Acts. The first phase concerns the community in Jerusalem insofar as Acts provides evidence. The bulk of the volume is devoted to Paul. Dunn's major questions are: (1) To what degree was embryonic Christianity in continuity with the historical Jesus? (2) How did a sect of Judaism become a Gentile religion? In the course of pursuing answers to these questions, Dunn unearths a portrait of the way early Christian practice and reflection on Jesus was woven into the richly textured fabric of first-century Judaism. He also partially clears the mist from the roles played by Peter and James, arguing that the letters of James and First Peter preserve the legacy of their teaching.

Any preacher would do well to get acquainted with this volume with its up-to-date discussion of the early Church story as it emerges from and serves as background for the lectionary selections from Acts and the New Testament Epistles.

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