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052166201X - Paul and the Crucified Christ in Antioch: Maccabean Martyrdom and Galatians 1 and 2

Stephen Anthony Cummins

Excerpt

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INTRODUCTION

By common critical consent Paul's account of, and theological reflection upon, the so-called 'Antioch incident' (Galatians 2.11–21) remains a *crux interpretum* in New Testament studies. The various interrelated problems which it presents are complicated and wide-ranging, not least concerning the reconstruction of both Pauline theology and the development of the early church. Given that this monograph proposes a markedly new approach to this much debated subject, certain preliminary considerations are necessary and will be addressed in this introduction. First, by way of an orientation to the current scholarly state of play, I shall offer a brief outline of certain prominent antecedent evaluations of the Antioch incident, with particular reference to recent developments arising out of the so-called 'new perspective' upon Paul as exemplified in the analysis of James D. G. Dunn. In observing various deficiencies and lacunae in these estimations, I also begin to set forth the nature of this enterprise and the manner of its undertaking.

This leads to a second introductory consideration, that of method. Here an attempt is made to explicate and justify what will prove to be a range of new angles on this long-standing issue, some of which are themselves a departure from the current consensus. Foremost among these is the intention to view the Antioch incident within the framework of Maccabean martyrdom. Hence, it will be helpful to observe briefly the (albeit limited) work in this specific area – a significant subject in its own right – noting especially the recent contributions of J. W. van Henten. In so doing I shall also account for the particular reconstruction of Maccabean martyrdom offered here, and for its subsequent use in relation to a detailed analysis of Galatians 1 and 2. It will be argued throughout that the Antioch incident is the more clearly understood by reference to a Maccabean model of Judaism now christologically reconfigured and redeployed in the life and (Antiochene) ministry of Paul.

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[More information](#)2 *Paul and the crucified Christ in Antioch***The Antioch incident: problems and proposed solutions from the patristic period to the present day**

From the patristic period to the present day, the Antioch incident has been the subject of much confusion and controversy, not least because of its pivotal role in any consideration of Pauline theology and New Testament ecclesiology. It is neither possible nor necessary to replicate the detailed and comprehensive histories of interpretation already on offer.¹ Rather, the more modest aim is to provide a thumbnail sketch of certain older and influential lines of approach, and then to focus particularly upon the more recent contribution of the ‘new perspective’ on Paul, especially that of James D. G. Dunn. This will allow me to highlight certain significant shortcomings and oversights, and to set forth what remain as the most pressing issues demanding further inquiry and the manner in which they may be addressed.

The Antioch confrontation fuelled the cause of various unorthodox elements during the early period of the church: Marcion (d. c. AD 160) deployed it in service of his antagonism towards Judaism; the Pseudo-Clementines (early third century AD) drew upon it in a thinly veiled attack upon Paul; and Porphyry (c. 232–303) cited it in castigating Christianity itself. Indeed, in responding to such elements, and then also to one another, the Church Fathers found the Antioch incident to be a source of much consternation and controversy. Thus, for example, Irenaeus (c. 130–200), in combatting certain gnostic advocates of Paul, attempted to cast Peter in a more positive light by arguing that Paul readily submitted to the Jerusalem apostles’ authority; in so doing, Irenaeus resorted to some dubious exegesis in claiming that Paul had earlier acceded to the request to circumcise Titus (see Gal. 2.5). Tertullian (c. 160–220), reacting against Marcion, also engaged in exegetical expediency. Maintaining that the two apostles shared the same basic gospel, Tertullian argued that Paul – with the zeal of a new convert – had reproached Peter because of his behaviour and not because of his preaching. While this concerted attempt both to rehabilitate Peter and to comprehend Paul upheld a long-standing tradition of them

¹ On what follows, and for detailed references to both primary and secondary sources, see especially Kieffer, *Foi et justification à Antioche*, pp. 81–132; and Wechsler, *Geschichtsbild und Apostelstreit*, pp. 30–295; more briefly, Mußner, *Der Galaterbrief*, pp. 146–67.

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as the two great apostles (see *1 Clem.* 5–6), clearly it did so by erring on the side of Peter and at the expense of New Testament exegesis.²

Two even more remarkable attempts to deal with the confrontation were apparently initiated by Clement of Alexandria and Origen respectively. According to Eusebius, Clement (c. 150–215) simply maintained that the Peter of Galatians was not the apostle Peter, but rather another of the seventy disciples bearing the same name (see Luke 10.1).³ Even more imaginative was the theory which seems to have begun with Origen (c. 185–254), to the effect that Peter and Paul were only pretending to dispute with one another. That is, though actually of common mind on the issue at hand, they devised a scene which would enable Paul to condemn more effectively the Judaizers, this being in virtue of Peter's humble acknowledgement of admonishment which would then serve as an example of the submission required of them. Although such a theory only served to impugn the integrity of *both* apostles, it was taken up and embellished by no less a figure than Chrysostom (c. 354–407), who afforded Peter an even more active role in the ruse.⁴ It was also strongly advocated by Jerome (c. 342–420), and became the subject of his heated exchange of correspondence (c. 395–405) with Augustine (354–430). The latter sought to disabuse Jerome of a view which he regarded as undermining the truth of the gospel and the authority of scripture.⁵

Augustine's view on the matter was influential throughout the Middle Ages, with Aquinas' commentary on Galatians offering a notable and representative case in point. Aquinas (1225–74) followed Augustine in viewing Paul's public rebuke of Peter as a necessary response to an action which was an unacceptable renunciation of the truth. Nonetheless, inasmuch as it was an act of human frailty by one otherwise in receipt of the Holy Spirit, Aquinas argued that it thus constituted a venial rather than a mortal sin. How-

² See Kieffer, *Foi et justification à Antioche*, pp. 83–7, 90–4, who also notes that whereas certain Latin Fathers (e.g., Cyprian and Jerome) attempted to exculpate Peter, others emphasizing the importance of Pauline theology (e.g., Victorinus, Augustine) felt less need to exonerate him. Kieffer stresses, however, that neither side sought to discredit one or other protagonist in the forceful manner of the Pseudo-Clementines or Marcion.

³ For a modern and scholarly, if ultimately unpersuasive, attempt to argue for a Cephas/Peter differentiation, see Ehrman, 'Cephas and Peter'.

⁴ See Kieffer, *Foi et justification à Antioche*, pp. 88–9.

⁵ See the discussions in Auvray, 'Saint Jérôme et Saint Augustin'; Kieffer, *Foi et justification à Antioche*, pp. 95–9.

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ever, it was precisely in this respect that Luther (1483–1546) was to differ, and in so doing give expression to an immensely influential interpretation of the event.

Luther's view of the Antioch incident emerged over the course of his three commentaries on Galatians. He clearly differentiated himself from both Jerome and Aquinas: the conflict was no mere pretence, nor was Peter's action but a venial sin. Rather it was a desertion of the truth of the gospel. Luther's understanding of what precisely this meant is strongly coloured by his own struggle in relation to the ecclesiastical authorities of his day. The veneration of the saints (even of the leading apostles), the significance of papal decisions, the value of works of satisfaction, and so on, are all, for Luther, relativized in relation to the truth of a gospel whose central tenet becomes justification by grace through faith, *not* through 'works of the law' (Gal. 2.16). The Antioch incident furnished Luther with both a model of behaviour and a central doctrine by which to live. His estimation of the event has governed its interpretation – and that of Pauline theology as a whole – from his own time to the present day. Indeed, only of late has the dominant Lutheran interpretation come under strenuous re-evaluation. However, before considering this critique, one further influential approach to the Antioch incident may be noted.

F. C. Baur, founder of the so-called Tübingen school, made Galatians 2.11ff. (together with 1 Cor. 1.12ff.) a key element in his reconstruction of the historical development of the early church.⁶ For Baur, the churches in Jerusalem (led by James) and Antioch (led by Paul) represented the outworking of a division between two Christian 'parties': the conservative 'Hebrews' and the more liberal 'Hellenists' (see Acts 6.1–8.4). The Antioch confrontation between Peter and Paul attested to this emergent theological divide, as the conservative faction moved towards a more retrenched Jewish legalism and the Pauline liberal faction became increasingly universal in its outlook. Baur's view has been a dominant force in nineteenth- and twentieth-century interpretations of the Antioch incident – notably in German scholarship – and it too has only recently been subjected to a concerted critique.⁷

⁶ Baur, 'Die Christuspartei'.

⁷ By Craig C. Hill, *Hellenists and Hebrews*, who argues for a much more complex and fluid estimation of the nascent church.

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Indeed, the combined effect of the interpretations of Luther and Baur, together with the attendant emergence of the historical-critical method, has proved to be the major impediment in more recent attempts to arrive at what might be termed an ‘ecumenical’ approach to the Antioch incident. Clearly the event has become the thin end of a very large theological wedge. Now at stake are such fundamental and wide-ranging issues as justification by faith, and the role of exegetical method in relation to matters of theology, dogma and praxis. Certain conciliatory efforts have been made, but the Antioch incident remains as much of a divide today as it did in its own context of origin.⁸

At this point it will be helpful to itemize certain interrelated observations arising out of this brief review of older interpretations. First, assessment of the Antioch incident has often been governed by vigorous apologetical interests. Indeed, like the protagonists in the event itself, these have often stood in direct antithesis to one another: the various attempts of certain Church Fathers to rehabilitate Peter in defence of ecclesiastical authority; conversely, Luther’s appropriation of Paul in service of his critique of such authority, this also being an impetus towards his stress upon justification by faith as the essential aspect of both gospel and church. While, as modern hermeneutics has rightly stressed, the reader’s own horizons cannot (or need not) be dispensed with, clearly a more circumspect approach to this most pivotal of texts was required.

Second, apologetic interest has often been at the expense of the exegesis of Galatians 2.11ff. and its context. This certainly applies to the more specious and ingenious estimations of certain Fathers, but also (as will be seen) to that of Luther. And, although the rise of the historical-critical method has in some measure addressed this matter, this critical approach has itself been constrained by its alliance to particular interpretative frameworks – whether (frequently) that of Luther or, in the case of Baur, another prevailing ideology (Hegel). Thus an exegetical rigour, informed by a clearer understanding of the wider historical and theological considerations which properly bear upon the text in question, must be taken as fundamental in any attempt to comprehend the nature and significance of the Antioch incident.

Third, the apologetical and exegetical considerations have obviously been determinative in estimations of what was at stake in the

⁸ See Wechsler, *Geschichtsbild und Apostelstreit*, especially pp. 4–14.

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confrontation between Peter and Paul. Augustine and Luther rightly recognized that for Paul the issue of church unity and authority was subsumed under the more fundamental question of the truth of the gospel. Luther also saw that the truth of the gospel involved a certain antithesis between ‘works of the law’ and the outworking of God’s grace in Jesus Christ. However, as noted, his understanding of this antithesis was in considerable measure a retrojection of his own opposition to the ecclesiastical excesses of his day. This issued in a stark contrast between a legalistic Judaism preoccupied with ‘works of the law’ as a way of meriting salvation, and faith in Jesus Christ as that which constituted the essence of the truth of the gospel. It is precisely this estimation of the truth of the gospel – and thus of what was at stake in Antioch – which has come under considerable fire in recent years.

Finally, though Marcion was woefully misguided, and Baur’s reconstruction simplistically schematic, each in their own way at least recognized that the Antioch incident had to be viewed in relation to the larger question of the nascent church’s emergence from its parent body, Judaism. Their horizons constrained by apologetical considerations, older interpreters of Galatians 2.11ff. had failed to see that its theological and ecclesiological concerns – not least as these devolved upon ‘the truth of the gospel’ – were the more properly perceived when viewed within this historical context. This too has been taken up in more recent analyses of the Antioch incident, the most significant of which will now be considered.

In recent years a reassessment of the very nature of first-century Judaism has led to a ‘new perspective’ upon Paul and, in turn, to a new evaluation of the Antioch incident in particular. Countering the traditional (Lutheran) estimation of Judaism as a legalistic religion of ‘works righteousness’, E. P. Sanders has argued on the basis of a massive treatment of the relevant documentation that Jewish self-understanding was essentially that of Israel as the covenant people of God. Properly understood, Torah-obedience was not about entering the covenant or earning salvation, but all about maintaining the covenant relationship with God: indeed, ‘righteousness in Judaism is a term which implies the *maintenance of status* among the group of the elect’.⁹ Sanders argues that, viewed from the standpoint of this ‘covenantal nomism’, Paul’s wholesale rejection of the law was not on grounds of its legalism, but rather due to his post-

⁹ E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, p. 544.

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conversion perspective that ‘*it is not Christianity*’ (earlier citing Gal. 2.21 as a notable example of this logic).¹⁰ Furthermore, Paul’s polemic against ‘works of the law’ (in Galatians) is not a refutation of self-righteousness, but rather a rejection of Torah-obedience as ‘the condition on which Gentiles enter the people of God’.¹¹

James D. G. Dunn is among a growing number of scholars who has welcomed Sanders’ work as “‘breaking the mould” of [modern] Pauline studies’ and allowing ‘a new perspective on Paul’.¹² Pursuant to Sanders, Dunn likewise stresses that ‘covenantal nomism’ had to do with being the people of God: it was ‘what the devout Jew did to express his Jewishness, that which distinguished him from the other nations’. From this standpoint, Paul’s critique of the ‘works of the law’ did not concern ‘legalism’ traditionally understood, but rather Jewish ‘covenant markers’ (circumcision, food laws, sabbath, and the like) which he viewed as expressing a narrow, nationalistic and ethnic conception of the people of God.¹³

It is this which governs Dunn’s significant contributions to the interpretation of the Antioch incident.¹⁴ He observes that the particular controversy over mixed table-fellowship was a function of the wider debate concerning the ‘works of the law’ (versus Jesus Christ) as that which demarcated the people of God. Dunn argues that although this table-fellowship was basically Torah-observant, the men from James viewed it as altogether insufficient and as a virtual abandonment of the Torah. Part of the impetus for their position was the increasingly difficult wider historical context, as

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 443, 552. Paul’s logic, claims Sanders, now functions from solution (God’s righteousness available in Christ) to plight (an Israel whose Torah simply does not effect righteousness); see especially pp. 442–7. See Thielman, *From Plight to Solution*, for a judicious estimation of this position.

¹¹ E. P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, p. 18.

¹² Dunn, *Jesus, Paul and the Law*, p. 184. For further favourable accounts of this paradigm shift, see Watson, *Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles*, pp. 1–22; Barclay, *Obedying the Truth*, pp. 3–6; among more recent and wide-ranging estimations, see Boyarin, *A Radical Jew*, pp. 39–56; Donaldson, *Paul and the Gentiles*, pp. 3–27. Contrast the detailed analyses of Westerholm, *Israel’s Law and the Church’s Faith*; Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment*; and Kruse, *Paul, the Law, and Justification*.

¹³ Foremost among many publications by Dunn on this matter: *Jesus, Paul and the Law*, pp. 183–214, 215–41; *The Partings of the Ways*, pp. 117–39; ‘Yet Once More – “the Works of the Law”: A Response’; ‘Paul and Justification by Faith’; ‘4QMMT and Galatians’; *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, pp. 354ff.; together with his commentaries, *Romans* and *Galatians*. The citation is from *The Partings of the Ways*, p. 130.

¹⁴ In addition to the aforementioned publications, see Dunn, *Jesus, Paul and the Law*, pp. 108–28, and especially 129–82.

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mounting Jewish nationalism constrained the Jerusalem Jewish-Christian community to be all the more Torah-observant. Indeed, there is some evidence that the local Antiochene Jewish community – always vigilant with respect to its own identity and rights – would also have applied similar pressure.

Paul, says Dunn, would no doubt have recognized both the logic of covenantal nomism and the constraints of the broader religio-political environment. However, Paul followed the logic of faith: life within the covenant people was not tied to Torah regulations such as those governing food laws and table-fellowship; rather ‘*it should depend solely on faith* (2.16)’.¹⁵ Indeed, Galatians 2.16 looms large in Dunn’s estimation of Paul’s response to the Antioch crisis. Here Paul starts out on common ground with Peter, and with the accepted view amongst those Jewish Christians to whom he is appealing: covenantal nomism is not called into question by, but rather more precisely defined in relation to, Jesus as Messiah (so Gal. 2.16a). That is, as the Antiochene Torah-observant table-fellowship readily indicated, belief in Jesus as Messiah did not require Jewish Christians to set aside that which traditionally characterized their response to covenant grace, nor to forsake their Jewishness. However, Paul, compelled by the view that God’s verdict upon a person was contingent only upon grace through faith, then moved from qualification to an outright antithesis (in Gal. 2.16b–d):

Perhaps, then, for the first time, in this verse faith in Jesus Messiah begins to emerge not simply as a *narrower* definition of the elect of God, but as an *alternative* definition of the elect of God . . . Jesus as Christ becomes the primary identity marker which renders the others superfluous.¹⁶

Thus, says Dunn, we have a transition from ‘a form of Jewish Messianism to a faith which sooner or later must break away from Judaism to exist in its own terms’.¹⁷

It is Dunn’s significant new interpretation of the Antioch incident which provides the most appropriate point from which to set forth our own considerations. It may readily be agreed that the ensuing confrontation between Peter and Paul is one of competing claims about what it meant to be the people of God – a concern which

¹⁵ Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways*, p. 133.

¹⁶ Dunn, *Jesus, Paul and the Law*, p. 196.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

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embraced entrance, maintenance of status, and vindication (both present and future) as such. Furthermore, Dunn correctly points to the wider historical context within which this must be viewed, noting especially both the Maccabean period as one in which covenant markers such as food laws and circumcision were massively reinforced,¹⁸ and to first-century Jewish nationalism as a factor in the demands for greater Torah-obedience in Antioch. These are extremely important observations. However, in a manner to be set forth momentarily, they may be given even greater weight than Dunn has allowed.

Less satisfying, however, is Dunn's evaluation of Paul's response to the confrontation, which is deficient in at least two fundamental respects. First, while it may be granted that Paul was concerned that 'works of the law' belie a narrow, nationalistic perspective, Dunn does not press with sufficient weight the question as to *why* this is the case. That is, we need to get at what Paul deemed to be the root cause of this state of affairs, in order to have a proper understanding as to why Paul rejected covenantal nomism as a legitimate and viable way of being the people of God. This matter is inextricably related to a second deficiency: Dunn's estimation of Paul's response in terms of 'the logic of faith'.

It is not at all clear that Dunn's exceptive and 'two-stage' reading of Galatians 2.16 is warranted. Certainly it is difficult to find anything comparable elsewhere in Paul. This immediately casts doubt on his claim that Jewish Christians – including Paul, at least until the Antioch incident – commonly held that belief in Jesus as Messiah simply gave greater precision to, rather than called into question, their Jewish way of life. Indeed, this raises what is in fact *the* most fundamental issue at stake in Antioch: the role of Jesus the Messiah in the outworking of divine grace. Dunn, having asked on behalf of the Antiochene Jewish Christians 'Why should a Jewish belief in a Jewish Messiah make any difference to . . . Jewish distinctives', argues that Paul's response was to invoke the logic of justification by grace through faith.¹⁹ But this only begs a series of key interrelated questions. How does Paul understand 'faith'?²⁰

¹⁸ See for example, Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways*, pp. 28–31.

¹⁹ Dunn, *Jesus, Paul and the Law*, p. 196; cf. the wider discussion in *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, pp. 371–9.

²⁰ Here, of course, the much debated question as to whether πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (Gal. 2.16) is to be taken as an objective genitive (so Dunn and others) or a subjective genitive (so other commentators) comes into play.

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What is its relationship to the manner in which God has manifested his grace in Messiah Jesus? And, perhaps, most fundamentally, what does this have to do with Paul's remark that 'I – in virtue of crucifixion with the Messiah – 'through the law died to the law'? Such considerations suggest that Paul's antithesis between 'works of the law' and πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ as the means of demarcating the people of God was a much more long-standing, constitutive and contentious aspect of his life and ministry than Dunn seems to allow. Indeed, it may be argued that it is these interrelated *Messiah*-focused considerations which were the focal point of his defence of the truth of the gospel at Antioch.

Thus this study will pursue the insights of commentators such as Dunn, while also addressing many of the remaining deficiencies and lacunae. So, for example, by way of giving greater focus and force to the important observations that (i) covenant markers such as food laws and circumcision loomed large during the Maccabean period, and (ii) Jewish nationalism may have impinged upon the Antioch confrontation, here I shall offer a two-stage reconstruction of Maccabean martyrdom as an illuminating framework against which to interpret Galatians 1–2 and its climactic Antioch incident. This will first involve an estimation of two notable interrelated aspects of the Maccabean period itself: (a) the broadly based theme of the suffering and vindication of the people of God, not least as devolved upon those willing to die for Torah, and (b) that Daniel's 'one like a son of man' figure (Dan. 7.13–14) became an important backward reference point for ongoing and widespread Jewish expectations that God would act through his Messiah to rescue, restore and rule Israel (chapter one). Both features will prove to be central elements in the later attempt to address more fully the significance of Paul's view of Jesus as Messiah and Son of God, and of the afflictions attending those conformed to him. The second stage of this enterprise will demonstrate the currency of Maccabean martyrdom within the Judaism known to Paul, both in terms of the nationalist socio-political climate and the living traditions well represented in certain texts of first-century provenance. Here I shall also offer a brief excursus on the intriguing (albeit disputed) possibility of a Maccabean martyr cult in Antioch itself (chapter two).

Despite the manifestly contentious aspects of the Antioch incident, and the force of such salient themes as coercion to Judaize and crucifixion with Christ, virtually all commentators have failed to discern its underlying theme of suffering and persecution. Alerted by