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In reading Michael Lodahl’s “Anti-Judaism in Christian Theology: A Critical Response to H. Ray Dunning’s Grace, Faith, and Holiness,” methinks there is, indeed, a theologian who doth protest too much; but methinks the “too much protest” label better fits the theologian Lodahl rather than the theologian Dunning. An analysis of the title of the response raises significant questions at once. What does Lodahl mean by anti-Judaism? Does he mean that which is against or opposed to Judaism? Or does he mean that which is disagreeable to Judaism? Or, the even broader concept of that which is distinct from or different than or unique with reference to Judaism? The impetus behind this question is more than a mere semantic issue.

The issue that constantly works at or just beneath the surface of Lodahl’s response is his concern with the ways Christians view Judaism, the Old Testament and the Jewish people as a people. The tension that exists and that needs to be addressed (yet it never is in the article) is this: Is a viewpoint that is, by intent and design, distinctly Christian necessarily anti-Jewish? The obverse question, which may not have as much bearing for Lodahl but is nevertheless equally compelling, is this: Is a viewpoint that is, by intent and design, distinctly Jewish necessarily anti-Christian? It appears in his article that Lodahl has answered that first question affirmatively without ever considering the second.²

For example, Lodahl’s “several occasions” citation of Dunning’s concern that his words not be construed as implying anti-Semitism are confined to three men-

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tions in a 671-page work—twice in the body of the work itself, and once in a footnote! As far as the “protest too much” concern, does Lodahl equate a “noticeable lack of sensitivity to the issues of Jewish-Christian dialogue” with “anti-Judaism in Christian theology”? That strikes me as a huge leap. Is every work that demonstrates a noticeable lack of sensitivity to that particular dialogue a priori anti-Semitic? I think not, and I would further contend that a credible case for deeming a work anti-Semitic would need to be based on something much more concrete and convincing than this.

Lodahl’s second concern, the historical effects of Christian anti-Judaism, serves to clarify his personal theological agenda more than to address Dunning’s theology, unless he is implying that failure to address that concern is evidence of a latent anti-Semitism. He chose to introduce the idea, but stated that he would engage Dunning on other grounds. This he does until the end of the article, where he resurrects this precise issue in his discussion of Dunning’s emphasis on servanthood. Obviously he could subdue his own agenda no longer.

Lodahl proposes to engage Dunning on biblical grounds, specifically indicating hermeneutics, prevenient grace and ecclesiology as his foci. His criticism is deliberately aimed at what he perceives to be “unnecessary, often self-contradictory and possibly unbiblical devaluations of Jewish faith and practice.” From Lodahl’s self-stated agenda, the key concept appears to be “devaluations of Jewish faith and practice.” It would thus appear that any such devaluation is to be equated with anti-Judaism or anti-Semitism. But what does he mean by devaluation? Is any perspective of Jewish faith and practice other than or different from a Jewish perspective of necessity or by definition a devaluation, and therefore anti-Semitic? This seems to be the inference from which he proceeds.

Lodahl rightly recognizes the essential role that hermeneutic concerns play as an essential foundation for Dunning’s theological method, and his analysis appears to be fair and well balanced as he concludes that Dunning’s method is, above all, Christological. For Lodahl, the significant issue is the diversity of possible interpretations of Jesus, which he correctly suggests come initially from the NT writers themselves. His major point of departure from Dunning is the consideration of the Christ event as the fulfillment of the salvation events of the OT. Lodahl argues that the history of God’s people Israel and the event of Jesus Christ stand as mutually interpretive points on the hermeneutical circle. Therefore, he is anxious to delete the concept of the Christ event as the fulfillment of the salvation events of the OT, as that which would arbitrarily devalue the covenant with Israel established at Sinai. At this point, one might be interested in what Lodahl would propose that the Christian theologian should do with the Gospel according to Matthew, but that apparently was beyond his sphere of interest. While conceding that Dunning’s suggestion that Christ becomes a “new hermeneutic” for the Christian in reading the OT is in fact consonant with the way the NT authors appropriated the OT, Lodahl submits that such an approach contains potential dangers. Meanwhile, he himself seemingly ignores the potential dangers lurking in abandoning that approach. Lodahl cites Paul’s use of Deut. 30:14 in Rom. 10:8 and proposes that what Paul does is typical first-century rabbinic exegesis, acceptable for him in his socio-relig-
gious context but unacceptable for the contemporary Christian exegete. I agree. However, once that is said, it is inaccurate to infer that Dunning is guilty of such exegesis.

Lodahl chides Dunning for the tension that exists in trying to discern the plain meaning of the OT and still utilize it as Scripture for the Christian Church. Yet Lodahl’s proposed solution—that the Church wrestle with the plain meaning of such passages while at the same time reading Christ into or out of the text—contains within itself the exact same tension that had been discovered in Dunning! Lodahl does make a very valid point in asserting that the original intent of Deuteronomy 30 must not be lost in the Christian exegesis of the OT. He is right on target when he suggests that, at times, rabbinic exegesis does a superior job of clarifying the original intent of an OT passage than much early Christian exegesis has done. What seems to escape Lodahl’s notice, however, is the possibility that the reverse could also be true.

At this point, the sharpest division between Dunning and Lodahl emerges. Lodahl rightly notices that Dunning has adopted a particular historical context from which to read and understand the OT, i.e., to read the OT in the light of the NT to see its full historical setting. Lodahl’s reaction is to the term full historical setting. He submits instead that there is another historical setting from which to interpret the OT, namely Rabbinic Judaism that emerged post 70 C.E. His interesting suggestion, borrowed from Michael Goldberg, is that this latter context has the distinct advantage of historical/theological continuity with the faith community in which these writings first arose. Does this imply an anti-Christian bias on the part of Goldberg, and, by extension, on the part of Lodahl? Is that not, in fact, a devaluation of Christian faith and practice as an extension of the Judaism from which it arose in the first century? Lodahl appears to assume that first-century Christianity does not have a historical/theological continuity with the faith community of the OT, or at least that it is not as valid as that accorded to rabbinic Judaism, a claim that I soundly reject. I contend that we must recognize that in the first century of the Christian Era, two divergent traditions emerged from a single common source, and, once emergent, they went their separate ways. Both Judaism and Christianity share a connection with the OT faith community as their common mother. Samuel Sandmel demonstrates agreement with this connection when he writes “If one rises above nomenclature, then, it is by no means incorrect to speak of Christianity as a Judaism. Indeed, of the many varieties of Judaism which existed in the days of Jesus, two alone have abided into our time, rabbinic Judaism and Christianity.”

Lodahl’s further contention that to utilize his hermeneutic would only put a “neo-Marcionite, ahistorical, spiritualized and essentially anti-Judaic Christianity” in jeopardy is another example of his over-much protestation. The implications of his views suggest something else. Dunning indicates uneasiness with any hermeneutic which invalidates the OT as a Christian book. Lodahl seems uneasy with the claim that the OT is a Christian book. While I agree completely with Lodahl that the OT is first of all a Jewish book, I strenuously disagree that it must be left to the Jews to decide how best to interpret it. Lodahl offers the valid example of the Christian appreciation for the Psalms being enriched as one recognizes its thor-
oughly Jewish *sitz im leben*. In fact, this example points to the validity of the Christian stream of tradition that finds itself rooted and connected to the OT. My point is that Christianity is itself a product of the faith of the OT and the Christian tradition provides an equally legitimate and valid frame of reference from which one can consider and interpret the OT.

In his critique of Dunning’s analysis of general revelation, Lodahl rightly states that Christian theologians traditionally have considered Jewish faith and history as a significant component of special revelation. He then argues, because Dunning cites Luther and mentions knowledge of law and a sense of obligation in relation to general revelation, that Dunning is doing an injustice to the biblical witness of special revelation to the Jews. While Lodahl obviously presumes guilt by association, since Luther’s anti-Semitism is universally recognized, it is absurd to make the assumption that every time Christian theologians cite Luther they are embracing his anti-Semitism. This is especially so in this case, where Dunning neither mentions nor refers to Judaism at all. In his treatment of special revelation, Dunning clearly states that Jewish faith and history *are* a significant component of special revelation. Why should Lodahl strain at inferences and presumptions when clearly-stated views contradict his suggestions?

In building his case further, Lodahl argues that Dunning’s theology betrays a typical spiritualizing of the Bible that depreciates the history of Israel prior to the birth of Jesus. This sweeping generalization is interesting for two reasons. First, Lodahl suggests that this betrayal is “just beneath the surface.” Does that mean that there is nothing to Lodahl’s case on the surface? Delving beneath the surface of a plainly-stated written work is highly subjective at best and purely speculative at worst. Second, Lodahl cites no evidence to substantiate his conjecture, while Dunning’s work contains numerous examples that would refute such a claim. At no point does Dunning ever deny or depreciate the status of special revelation to the Judaism that mothered both Christianity and modern Judaism. What Lodahl seems to overlook in his hyper-sensitivity to even the slightest hint of a depreciation of Judaism is the inherent particularity of Christianity, a particularity that can be called absoluteness.5

It is somewhat ironic that Lodahl himself sounds a great deal like Luther when he observes that there is gospel at the center of the Torah, and particularly so in God’s covenants with his people. Lodahl’s discussion concerning the salvific nature of the Sinai covenant is excellent; I find it to be one of the strongest sections of his work. However, while completely agreeing with his assessment of the covenant, I am not convinced that it necessarily follows that all Christian theologians must conclude, with Lodahl, that it *must continue* to represent a legitimate possibility for covenantal relationship with the Creator. I personally think that Lodahl may be right at this point, but I am reluctant to argue that all Christian theologians must be in agreement on this issue. The fact is, there are some Christian theologians who feel that the particularity, uniqueness and even the absoluteness of Christianity must be emphasized, even if it means suggesting that the new covenant in Jesus Christ has rendered the old covenant inoperative. Lodahl’s contention that the “very heart of the Christian faith... receives a self-inflicted death blow if Chris-
tians deny God's continuing covenant faithfulness to Israel” is an overstatement. If Christianity has become a broader and more inclusive means of salvation for all humanity than Judaism had been under the Sinai covenant, acceptance of the validity of the new covenant does not nullify God's faithfulness to Israel under the previous covenant. Lodahl fails to grasp the thrust of Paul's understanding of the Christ event as the basis for the new covenant that includes both Jew and Greek, male and female, slave and free, all in a new relationship with God based on the faithfulness of God to all humanity displayed in the faithfulness and righteousness of Jesus Christ.

Lodahl's treatment of Heb. 8:6-13 raises significant questions about the concern for hermeneutics previously cited. While I agree with Lodahl that Jeremiah 31 must first be understood within its own unique historical situation, it seems that Hebrews 8 should be deserving of the same treatment at the hands of the Christian theologian. At no point does Lodahl give a careful exegesis of Hebrews 8 that goes beyond looking back at its antecedent in Jeremiah. Lodahl moves from Hebrews to Jeremiah, but never returns to Hebrews to deal with the historical situation there. What alternative method of interpretation for the passage in Hebrews does he propose for the Christian Church? Is his method of dealing with all NT passages that are based on an OT text simply to use the NT passage only to spring back to the OT, and once the historical situation of the OT passage has been fixed, to leave it at that? Lodahl apparently avoids dealing with the significant problems that would arise for his proposal about the necessity of the ongoing legitimacy of the Sinai covenant as the basis for covenant relationship if he were to provide an exegesis of Hebrews 8, John 10, John 14, Phil. 2:5-11, Ephesians 2, or 2 Cor. 5:11-22.

Another example of over-much protest is Lodahl's attack on Dunning's citation of Fletcher. It appears to me that the linkage of the terms "every man," "Gentilism" and "Judaism" is inclusive of all humanity, much reminiscent of Paul in Romans. Would Lodahl attack Fletcher or Dunning for being anti-Gentile on the basis of such a linkage? Would he attack Paul for being anti-Semitic for doing much the same thing in Rom. 1:16? I think not.

Yet another example of overly-indignant protest is Lodahl's charge of "a betrayal of hidden hubris, a regrettable lack of self critique" for Dunning's purported relegation of the Sinai covenant to general revelation. Yet such a scathing indictment rests only upon Lodahl's premise concerning what Dunning has done rather than upon what Dunning has in fact done. The Sinai covenant has been discussed explicitly in Dunning's section on special revelation, yet it is never specifically mentioned in the section on general revelation in Dunning's book! Irresponsible and unsubstantiated attacks do not enhance Lodahl's otherwise solid contention about the salvific implications of the Sinaitic covenant; rather, they tend to undermine an otherwise valid point.

It comes as no surprise that Lodahl objects strenuously to Dunning's image of the Church as the new Israel. Lodahl states as fact that Israel in the NT always refers either to the land of the Jewish people, the Jewish people themselves, or both, with the possible exception of Gal. 6:16. In typical overstatement, Lodahl argues that only a horrible misreading of Romans 11 can permit one to refer to the Church.
as the "new Israel." If that be horrible misreading, then Dunning is in the distinguished company of several biblical theologians and NT scholars who share that same affliction! Leonhard Goppelt states that Paul uses the phrase "Israel of God" as one of the designations for the Church drawing from the OT. He goes on to say that "what was spoken to Israel in the OT as the people of God was now to be connected typologically with the church. It alone was the community that could understand itself as the heir of the OT promises." The view that Paul considered the Christian Church as the new Israel of God, meaning the new people of God, is further supported by a wide spectrum. Werner Georg Kümmel, Rudolph Bultmann, George Ladd, Ethelbert Stauffer, Leon Morris, Herman Ridderbos, Johannes Munck, A. M. Hunter and D. E. H. Whiteley are all in agreement on this point.

Despite Lodahl's begging the question concerning the etymological meaning of the word radical, what Paul implies in Romans 11 concerning the Jewish branches being cut from the olive tree and Gentile branches being grafted on in their place is radical in every sense of the word. Such a notion does, in fact, require "pulling up by the roots" previously held beliefs about the uniqueness of Judaism. Lodahl's depiction of Colin Williams's statement concerning the dead branches of old Israel being cut out of the tree as "unnecessarily extreme and incipiently anti-Judaic" is itself a caricature. To speak of dead branches of the old Israel is not anti-Judaic. Whatever term Lodahl would prefer to use to describe it, the parable depicts a part of Israel, a faithless part, being cut off because of faithlessness. Paul clearly indicates throughout his writings that faithless Jews had in fact been cut off and faithful Goyim had been grafted in as the people of God. If that fact makes Lodahl uneasy, then it is Paul that he should attack.

As for the statement about Paul's warning to Gentile Christians concerning arrogance, Lodahl completely overlooks Paul's parallel warning to Jewish Christians in Romans. Lodahl's response stands self-condemned at the altar of arrogance at several points. It is particularly ironic to find Lodahl siding with conservative Christians for their "attentiveness to Scripture" in their distinction between Israel and the Church. Those same conservative Christians would insist on the particularity of their Christianity to the point that they would unequivocally say to Lodahl that Jesus Christ is now the only way to the Father.

I am astonished by Lodahl's suggestion that Paul's statement in Gal. 3:28 is "inconsequential." I agree with Lodahl that Paul is referring here to the Church—that "in Christ" the distinctions between Jew and Gentile have been rendered irrelevant within the Church. But Lodahl fails to grasp the obvious at this point. Paul clearly indicates that in Christ, the Christian Church has become an inclusive designation for the new people of God, binding together into a single corporate entity both believing Jews and believing Gentiles (as Ephesians 2 also demonstrates). If Lodahl is right about the distinct covenant people of God continuing outside the Church, then it would appear that his Jesus has come to be Messiah only for Gentiles, a concept that Paul and most Christians would find preposterous. Lodahl seems to want to claim Paul and the distinctives of Christianity without at the same time accepting that Paul considered his faithfulness as a Jew and his Jewish adherence to the mitzvot of the Sinaitic covenant as skybala in the light of the righteous-
ness that he discovered in the Lordship of Jesus as Messiah (See Phil. 3:1-8, especially verse 8). Lodahl seems to miss Paul’s whole point in Romans 2-5 that God’s faithfulness is not the problem with the Sinaitic covenant; rather, it is Israel’s faithlessness that is the problem. God’s faithfulness was the basis of the Sinaitic covenant and has become the basis for the new covenant established through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus from the dead (a concept that is also echoed in Matt. 26:28, Mark 14:24, Luke 22:20, 1 Cor. 11:25, 2 Cor. 3:61, and Heb. 7:22, 8:6-13 and 9:1-28). Following Lodahl’s line of reasoning to its ultimate conclusion would make the existence of the Christian Church, and even Jesus as Messiah, unnecessary, a concept that is totally opposite the thought of Paul and the rest of the NT witnesses.

The comments on Dunning’s emphasis on servanthood further perpetuate Lodahl’s method of obfuscating the primary issues with injections of emotionally-charged language that fails to deal with the essential realities. The pronouncement of judgment upon the faith and practice of the Jews in the first century is a major reality in the Synoptics, Johanneine Literature, Hebrews and the Pauline Epistles. Dunning’s continuation of that strategy, as a Christian theologian working from a biblical base that includes those works, should surprise no one. The suffering of Jews at the hands of the Christian Church during the past two millennia is as regrettable as the suffering of the first-century Christian Church at the hands of Jews and the Roman government; but neither of these historical realities has anything to do with Dunning’s point. Dunning states that first-century Christians perceived Jesus as fulfilling the role of Messiah as a suffering servant who suffered on behalf of all humanity—a view which first-century Judaism did not accept for itself and which modern Judaism still does not accept. The concept of a crucified Messiah was and is a skandalon, a stumblingblock, for Judaism, even as it is also foolishness to unbelieving Gentiles (as Paul indicates in 1 Cor. 1:23). The view Dunning promotes is in no way monolithic; nor is it an ahistorical generalization. Once again, Lodahl protesteth too much.

Lodahl is certainly fair in acknowledging that Dunning honestly faces the implications of forfeiture of servanthood for Christians who are not faithful, yet does not recognize by extension that that is precisely what Paul indicated was previously the case for the Jews. Lodahl’s bold proposal that faithful Jews who embody suffering servanthood may indeed continue to be God’s servant people clearly goes beyond Dunning’s intent in Grace, Faith, and Holiness, yet such a bold proposal appears to be the most positive and significant contribution that is made in Lodahl’s article. World wars and the Holocaust have demanded that Jews and Christians alike rethink their common roots and shared historical heritage—particularly the meaning of life, suffering and death. To that end, the emergent Jewish-Christian dialogue has been constructive and meaningful and it must be hoped that it will continue and increase. However, it must be remembered that Jews will always come to such dialogue as Jews and Christians will always come to such dialogue as Christians. Both must be prepared to deal with the historical realities of that diversity, including the tendencies within Christianity that appear to be anti-Semitic as well as the tendencies within Judaism that appear to be anti-Christian.
In that light, I strongly object to Lodahl’s grossly exaggerated labeling of Dunning’s work as perpetuating a defaming caricature of Jews that helped prepare the way for the Holocaust. A careful reading of Dunning’s work reveals a view of Judaism that is balanced and consistent, although it is written from a distinctly Christian perspective. It is a far cry from the “needless, self-serving slander of Jewish religious faith and practice” that Lodahl suspected he had unearthed. Yet again, the over-much protest springs from the work of Lodahl, not Dunning.

In conclusion, it appears that Lodahl carries great concern for Jewish-Christian dialogue and sincerely seeks to encourage Christian theologians to consider the implications of OT study from a Jewish perspective that would shed light on the Christian faith. In that endeavor he is to be commended. However, his choice of medium to achieve that end has proven to be extremely poor. His title is misleading, and he is not consistent in his self-stated method. His locus of attack is purportedly Dunning’s book *Grace, Faith, and Holiness*, yet he conveniently dismisses the bulk of the book to focus on isolated references and citations which he quickly twists into the object of his ire. He is frequently guilty of the very charges he levels against Dunning, and on the whole his accusation of anti-Semitism simply does not stick. On the front of hermeneutics, Lodahl dodges most of the passages in the NT that would be most problematic for his views, including Matthew 23, John’s entire Gospel, Galatians, most of Romans, Philippians 3, Hebrews and Acts. He further tends to deprecate the validity of a Christian interpretation of the OT that is not totally compatible with a Jewish interpretation thereof. In terms of Christology, he dismisses most of it with such a broad sweep that one is left wondering what Lodahl means by being Christian. In terms of his analysis of general and special revelation, his inferences and guilt-by-association methods do not change the balanced approach that Dunning in fact takes. On the front of eccesiology, Lodahl appears to want to cite Paul, but only selectively. What shape would the Christian Church take if one were to follow Lodahl’s arguments to their logical conclusions? I suspect that it would resemble a modern Jewish synagogue! For whatever reasons, Lodahl’s promised focus on the issue of prevenient grace never materialized. Ultimately, Dunning neither devalues nor disparages Judaism; he writes a Christian theology from a Wesleyan perspective that has absolutely nothing to do with an insensitive remark that John Wesley made about the Jews more than 200 years ago! One can only hope that in the future, Lodahl will find a more appropriate stone upon which to grind the axe of his personal agenda.

By all means, Christians and Jews need to dialogue and learn as much as we can from one another. Samuel Sandmel expressed this very well in the conclusion of his book, *We Jews and Jesus*, stating the issue from his perspective as a Jew who has committed a great deal of his life to dialogue with Christians:

I am not a Christian; I do not share in those convictions which make Christians of men. Moreover, I am inextricably bound up in my Judaism. Yet I have no disposition to set the one against the other, and to make meaningless comparisons. I do not regard Judaism as objectively superior to Christianity nor Christianity to Judaism. Rather, Judaism is mine, and I
consider it good, and I am at home in it, and I love it, and want it. That is how I want Christians to feel about their Christianity.11

I submit that such a process of dialogue best takes place when both groups recognize our common roots as well as our distinct and particular heritages. Then and only then can the Jews be Jews and the Christians be Christians, in dialogue together.

Notes

2. Works that address this issue include Walter Jacob’s Christianity Through Jewish Eyes: The Quest For Common Ground (New York: Hebrew Union College Press, 1974) and Samuel Sandmel’s, A Jewish Understanding of the New Testament (New York: KTAV, 1974).


4. For example, Jon D. Levenson’s Sinai and Zion: An Entry Into the Jewish Bible (New York: Winston Press, 1985) makes a substantial contribution to the field of OT theology from a Jewish perspective. Yet it certainly has not superseded the works of Eichrodt, Von Rad, Jacob, Martens and others.


8. Ibid., p. 146.


11. Ibid., p. 151.