Anti-Judaism in Christian Theology: A Critical Response to H. Ray Dunning's *Grace, Faith, and Holiness*

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On several occasions in his recently-published systematic theology, *Grace, Faith, and Holiness*—a work which truly stands as a significant monument in modern Wesleyan thought—H. Ray Dunning insists that his words ought not to be interpreted to imply anti-Semitism. Methinks the theologian doth protest too much.

Rob Staples of Nazarene Theological Seminary, in his review of Dunning's new systematic theology in the Spring 1989 issue of *The Seminary Tower*, mildly criticized Dunning's reticence in engaging contemporary concerns on the theological horizon such as those "raised by liberation, black, feminist, hope, and process theologies." One could add to that list a noticeable lack of sensitivity to the issues of Jewish-Christian dialogue, and thus also to the critical task of constructing Christian theology after the Holocaust.

This latter concern is one shared by particular theologians from all across the theological spectrum, including: the Roman Catholic feminist Rosemary Radford Ruether; the German theologian of hope Jürgen Moltmann; American process thinker Clark Williamion; the one-time "secular theologian" Paul van Buren, whose own use of theological language was reinvigorated by intimate exposure to Jewish thought; and from more conservative circles, David Rausch, Jakob Jocz, Andre Lacoque and Seventh-day Adventist scholar Jacques Doukhan. For all their differences, each of these authors writes in the consciousness that Hitler's program

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to eliminate the world of Jews (Judenrein) could never have even been conceived, let alone nearly carried out, apart from the two millennia of Christian anti-Judaism which laid the foundation for a secularized anti-Semitism in Europe.

Important as that consideration is—and it ought never be forgotten by Christian theologians!—it is on other grounds that I wish to challenge Dunning. Rather than on the grounds of the history of effects of Christian anti-Judaism, I intend to engage Dunning on biblical grounds, and more particularly around three foci: hermeneutics, prevenient grace and ecclesiology. In what follows I intend to address, and to take issue with, what I interpret to be unnecessary, often self-contradictory, and possibly unbiblical devaluations of Jewish faith and practice as they appear in Dunning's book.

HERMENEUTICS

Dunning should be lauded for his recognition of the profound importance of the hermeneutical task for the Christian theologian. In many ways, hermeneutic concerns reside at the very heart of Dunning's method. Undoubtedly the particular instance in which those concerns are most evident is his development of a "theological hermeneutic," by which he argues that a study of the early Church's interpretive approach to its Scriptures, or "the way the New Testament interprets the Old" [Dunning, p. 74], will yield for contemporary Christians a fruitful interpretive key for the entire Bible itself.

Essentially, this theological hermeneutic which Dunning sees at work in the early Church centers in the New Testament authors' belief that "theology that informed the Old Testament passages was filled full (fulfilled) of Christian content by the person and work of Jesus and the New Israel, the Church" [p. 75]. Thus, it is not a mechanical prophecy-fulfillment hermeneutic, nor a wooden infallibility hermeneutic founded on a theory of divine dictation, but a dynamic, historical reading of the Christ event in such a way as to see that it was the same God working in the person of Jesus who has labored in the persons, events and history of pre-Christian Israel.

This approach of course draws heavily from the Heilsgeschichte school which has so deeply influenced modern theological interpretation, and in my mind marks a significant and positive suggestion for twentieth-century Wesleyans' approach to biblical hermeneutics. Additionally, it perpetuates the well-entrenched Christian interpretive schema which makes Jesus Christ the hermeneutical key not only for reading the Bible, but for writing Christian theology. Hence, in Dunning's words, "No theological understandings can be allowed to intrude themselves into [Christian] theology that are inconsistent with the revelation of Christ. Any candidate for inclusion must be critically judged by this criterion" [p. 32]. This is not an unusual claim; particularly through the mammoth influence of Karl Barth in our own time, Christ has in fact been understood to be the norm for an authentically Christian theology.

But which Christ? This deceptively simple question begins, I believe, to reveal a matter of utmost importance: while in the history of Christian thinking the primary hermeneutical principle for understanding God's character and activity has
been Jesus, the figure of Jesus itself demands interpretation. The day is past when Christian theologians could confidently and triumphally claim that God definitively and unambiguously revealed himself in Jesus as the Christ. For Christology is neither an exact science nor a univocal art; it is an ongoing process of interpretation which must continually move back to a collection of gospels which themselves betray a plurality of interpretations of Jesus.

I would like to argue that, while an unambiguous and question-free reading of Jesus the Nazarene is well beyond our capacities, the hermeneutical commitment to grounding interpretation in a relatively thorough knowledge of a text’s or person’s socio-historical setting is certainly critical for Christology. This means, on the simplest level, that the Christian theologian must understand Jesus first of all as a first-century Galilean Jew, circumcised, dedicated in the Temple, well-versed in the Torah, and a faithful—if radical and revolutionary—attendant at synagogue. Much more, of course, would need to be said in constructing an adequate Christology for Christian faith and practice, but saying this much at least helps us to ground whatever else we say in the social, religious and cultural world of first-century Galilean Judaism.

The point, then, is that Israel’s history with, and faith in, the God of Israel provide the proper context for understanding the person and significance of Jesus—and that this socio-historical context is both temporally and (theo)logically prior to the traditional Christian claim that Jesus provides just such an interpretive context for understanding Israel’s history with God as offered in the Hebrew Scriptures. To state it using Dunning’s terminology: his claim is that final authority for Christian theology rests in “the Christ-event and, in the light of it, the salvation events of the Old Testament, of which it is the fulfillment” [p. 56]; I would delete two words and a pair of commas and say that final authority rests in “the Christ-event in the light of the salvation events of the Old Testament,” since this covenantal history is quite obviously Christ’s context.

This argument need not subvert the Christian claim that the event of Jesus Christ provides the norm for the Church’s interpretation and appropriation of the Hebrew Scriptures. In fact it gives that claim a certain substance, for now it is Israel’s faith and history which provide a context for even beginning to decide who Jesus is, and how he fulfills the messianic role. In such an argument it is apparent that the history of God’s people Israel and the event of Jesus Christ stand as mutually interpretive points on the hermeneutical circle. My suggestion is that the Church would do well to enter that circle at the point of an appreciation and affirmation of the historical context Israel provides, so as not to devalue arbitrarily the covenant with Israel established at Sinai.

For example, in his appendix on hermeneutics Dunning states, “in modern technical language, Christ becomes a ‘new hermeneutic’ in terms of which the Christian must read his Old Testament” [p. 594]. It is, in fact, obvious that this is the way in which the New Testament authors appropriated their Scriptures—but surely the potential dangers of this hermeneutic are not hidden from us. Take, as an example within this example, Paul’s use of Deut. 30:11-14 in Rom. 10:6-8. There he adopts a passage which very clearly refers to the availability and “do-ability” of
the Sinaitic commandments, and transforms it into a proclamation of Christ. Whereas Moses says that the word which is "very near you, in your mouth and in your heart" is the commandment which may be observed (Deut. 30:14), for Paul that "very near word" is "the word of faith which we are preaching" (Rom. 10:8).

It would be senseless to charge Paul with ripping the Deuteronomy verses out of context, and making them say something quite different from what they meant in their historical and literary context. Such a criticism would not even make sense to, let alone bother, the apostle or anyone else in the first century. What Paul offers in Romans 10 is a typically rabbinic reading of sacred text, in which highly creative and even imaginative interpretation yields a radically new message. But it is one thing to say Paul's Christic reading of the Hebrew Scriptures is comprehensible in the light of his socio-religious context, and quite another to suggest that we should follow his example.

One may detect a tension in Dunning at precisely this point: he often betrays a preference for typically Antiochene exegesis, with its predilection for an historical or more nearly literal reading of biblical texts—what John Wesley called the "plain meaning" of the Scriptures. Yet at the same time he appears uncertain as to how one may read the Hebrew Scriptures for their "plain meaning" and still hold to them as Scripture for the Church.

My response to Dunning's dilemma is that, while Paul has taught the Church to read the gospel of Jesus Christ into, or out of, Deuteronomy 30 and other passages of what we have named the Old Testament, it is incumbent upon the Church, out of intellectual and hermeneutical honesty, also to recognize and affirm the "plain meaning" of such passage—and be willing to wrestle with the implications of such a difficult hermeneutical shift for its understanding both of itself and of Jewish faith and practice within the context of the Sinaitic covenant. The problem is not inherently with the Christian affirmation which Paul derives from his imaginative interpretation of Deuteronomy 30, but with the denial of Deuteronomy's original intent which so readily seems to accompany such an interpretation. This is particularly the case since this very passage was also crucial to the development of rabbinic Judaism; for the rabbis, the word of Torah "is not in the heavens," for God has entrusted this word of instruction to the people Israel to interpret and apply to the concrete issues and ethical questions confronting them—and to observe it! And one would have to admit that the rabbis seem to have come closer to Deuteronomy's original intent.

Apparently Dunning anticipated a criticism of this sort. In his appendix he offers an insightful reply:

If it is remembered that the historical meaning of any text is determined by its context, and the context is not necessarily limited to the immediate setting, then it can be seen that the total context of Old Testament Scripture that is needed to establish its full historical meaning includes the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the birth of the Church. In this way, to read an Old Testament text in the light of the New Testament is to see it in its **full** historical setting [p. 623].
The only glaring shortcoming with this otherwise astute observation is that the event of Jesus Christ and the subsequent beginnings of the Church comprise only one historical setting in which those writings called the Old Testament were handled and interpreted as Scripture. There is another: the destruction of the Temple and the fall of Jerusalem, the revitalization of the Jewish tradition in the rabbinic movement, and indeed the entire subsequent history of the Jewish people, the faith community to whom the so-called “Old Testament” originally belonged. That is a radically “other” context for interpreting the Scriptures of the Jews, and contemporary Jewish narrative theologian Michael Goldberg has argued forcefully that this context at least has the advantage of historical/theological continuity with the faith community in which those writings first arose.6

I assume that Dunning would accuse me of handling “the question of the relation between the Testaments in such a way as to sabotage the Christian faith,” and argue that “the continued rejection by the church of a literalistic reading of the Old Testament” is evidence of the Church’s wise recognition that such a reading “inevitably produces this undesirable result” [p. 624]. I would counter that the only faith which gets sabotaged is a neo-Marcionite, ahistorical, spiritualized and essentially anti-Judaic Christianity which has lost track of its roots in the history and faith of the people Israel. The rejection of a literalistic reading of the Hebrew Scriptures may have been necessary for the early Church to survive the battle of contesting faiths in a harsh environment, but it is no longer so, and is in fact now counter-productive.

In his critique of dispensationalism—which will be addressed more fully in the section on ecclesiology—Dunning also reveals his uneasiness with any hermeneutic which appears to “invalidate the Old Testament as a Christian book” [p. 587], but indicates that dispensationalists would not be bothered since to them “the Old Testament is not a Christian book but speaks of the promises to Jews that shall be fulfilled literally and physically” [p. 587]. Frankly, it seems rather strange to me for Christians to claim that the so-called “Old Testament” is, first of all, a Christian book! (And I hope to show that I am not a dispensationalist!) It is first and foremost, we should recall, a Jewish book—which is the brunt of Goldberg’s argument—and best left to Jews to decide whether its promises are to be interpreted literally and physically. There is something inherently self-deceptive about Christians reading the Psalms and not recognizing that such Scriptures were written by Jews, for Jews, and in a thoroughly Jewish historical-covenantal context. Actually, it can be a rather grand experience for the Christian to realize that, through the grace of God offered in the historical event of Jesus as the Christ, she is privileged to read Scriptures which have been Jewish Scriptures used in Temple and synagogue worship for centuries—but which now the Church not only reads, but also in which it can rejoice as it is encountered through them by the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the words of Ephesians:

Remember that you were at that time separate from Messiah, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ
Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ (Eph. 2:12-13).

GENERAL REVELATION

The language of the passage just quoted from Ephesians suggests another weakness in Dunning’s interpretation of Jewish religious faith. Ephesians refers to the people Israel as a “commonwealth” of God, having received the “covenants of promise,” and elsewhere Paul writes that to them belong “the adoption as sons and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises” (Rom. 9:4). Thus, Christian theologians traditionally have considered the faith and history of Israel as recorded in their Scriptures under the category of special revelation, i.e., as a Spirit-inspired interpretation of God’s saving activities in history. It is precisely this traditional estimation which seems to suffer under Dunning’s treatment of the nature of general revelation.

In his discussion of the nature and possibility of general revelation, Dunning draws on Martin Luther’s characterization of humanity’s universal sense of God as leading to “the knowledge of the law but not to the gospel...a sense of obligation, of coming short” [p. 167]. He does not list Judaism as one of his examples, choosing rather to point to classically East Asian faiths to illustrate the point. But the language, “knowledge of the law” and “a sense of obligation,” quite clearly are reminiscent of Christianity’s traditional estimation of Judaism, and this becomes especially apparent in light of Dunning’s debt to Luther on this point.

If indeed “knowledge of the law” and “a sense of obligation” are adequate ways in which to formulate humanity’s sense of general revelation, the obvious question is, Where does Judaism fit? Does Dunning do justice to the scriptural witness to the specific, covenant-creating activity of God among the Jewish people? To put the question another way: If general revelation is defined as “knowledge of the law,” does the Sinai covenant fall under the rubric of general revelation because it is Torah-centered? Has is not traditionally been considered special revelation? And, if one accords it the place of special revelation, is it not “gospel” or good news as well, since in Dunning’s words “special revelation must carry us on to the gospel” [p. 171]? And if so, is it not also (potentially) salvific?

My argument, of course, is that the Sinai covenant, rooted in the graciousness of Yahweh, is indeed salvific when it is faithfully appropriated and obeyed. This does not necessitate considering all people of Jewish heritage to be salvifically related to God, since there are, and always have been, conditions to be met by human beings in God’s covenantal activity. This covenant established through Moses with the people of Israel, just like the covenant established through Jesus Christ for all peoples, can become distorted and even perverted by legalism, judgmentalism or isolationism. And surely such distortions and perversions were bones of contention for both Jesus and Paul—but there were many Pharisees and later rabbis who would have agreed with much of what Jesus and Paul said about legalism! The Sinai covenant is just as surely grounded in the graciousness and faithfulness of God—not in works of human flesh!—and precisely because of that divine grounding, cannot be assumed by Christians to be no longer legitimate. Dunning does in-
dicate that the Jewish covenant was grounded in divine grace [p. 344], but apparently does not recognize the implication that, precisely on the basis of divine faithfulness, it must then continue to represent a legitimate possibility for covenantal relationship with the Creator.

Indeed, it seems to me that the very heart of Christian faith, resting as it does in the prevenient faithfulness of God, receives a self-inflicted death blow if Christians deny God's continuing covenant faithfulness to Israel. Such a denial has functioned all too often as the basis for the Christian claim to legitimacy and priority, reflecting the statement of Heb. 8:6-13 that Christianity represents a new and better covenant over "the first...[which] is becoming obsolete and growing old [and] is ready to disappear" (v. 13). Christians have the convenience of reading Jeremiah's prophecy about a "new covenant" through the lens of Hebrews and its abbreviated quotation, leaving us with the impression that God is indifferent toward the Jewish people (v. 9). But a further reading of Jeremiah 31, beyond verse 34, would instruct Christians that the sun, moon and stars, and the sea and its tides, will sooner vanish than will "the offspring of Israel...cease from being a nation before Me forever" (Jer. 31:36). I maintain that God's covenant faithfulness to Israel ought to be axiomatic for Christian theologians—both out of regard for the Hebrew scriptural witness and for a sure sense of God's utter reliability. Dunning himself points out that one of the biblical attributes of God is truth (emeth), or faithfulness, which is a covenantal word describing God's utterly faithful commitment to divine promises [p. 204]. Is God true, or not? 11

The confusions and contradictions involved in considering Judaism as a phenomenon of a universal "general revelation" become apparent again when Dunning cites John Fletcher, upon whom Wesley was greatly dependent in this matter. Fletcher referred to general revelation as "the dispensation of the Father," and considered this dispensation to be inferior to those of the Son (Jesus' ministry, death and resurrection) and the Spirit (the Church age). Further, Dunning indicates that Wesley's mentor described this dispensation variously as "the natural law," "the remains of the Creator's image in the human heart," "the secret grace of the Redeemer which is more or less operative in every man," 'Gentilism,' or 'Judaism'" [p. 168]! Does Dunning cite the sainted Fletcher on this point because he approves of this caricaturization of Judaism? Is it truly possible, let alone biblical, to relegate Jewish faith to the level of a generalized sense of the Creator? And is it not a strange and even absurd twist of irony that this sense of conscience could be called both "Gentilism" and "Judaism"?

To be sure, Dunning acknowledges the grace/obligation tension which is present in Judaism, and which must also be present in Christian faith in order to avoid what Bonhoeffer called "cheap grace." Surely the covenants cut at Sinai and Calvary are both grounded in the prevenient graciousness of the Creator, and just as surely both are vulnerable to legalistic distortions. One cannot talk about grace and faith in Christianity without also talking about faithful obedience, as perhaps Matthew and James tell us most clearly; by the same token, one cannot talk about faithful obedience to Torah in Judaism without first talking about God's gracious liberation of, and covenanting with, Israel, as perhaps Exodus and Hosea tell us.
most clearly. But this much is certain in both cases: Christians who take their Bibles seriously find themselves confronted with a plurality of covenants, the two most significant of which are sealed at Sinai and Calvary. And it betrays a hidden hubris, a regrettable lack of self-critique, to relegate the first of those revelatory moments to general revelation. And if, rather, they are both moments of special revelatory activity by God, then it is difficult to escape the implication that both are of potentially salvific significance.

ECCLESIOLOGY

The implications of such an approach to the Sinai covenant for Christian reflection upon the Church are rather striking. First and foremost, Dunning's image of the Church as "the new Israel" becomes questionable, and Dunning himself admits that this prominent metaphor of Christian self-understanding is "not ever explicitly stated in precisely this way" [p. 511], though he happily endorses it. Yet the fact is, whenever the word "Israel" appears on the pages of the Christian Testament, it very clearly refers either to the land or to the Jewish people, or both--with the possible exception of Gal. 6:16, and even that verse is under debate by biblical scholars.

It is rather amazing, for example, that Dunning can make references to Rom. 9-11 [pp. 511ff, 587], the biblical passage which best reflects Paul's wrestling with the matter of relationship between Christian and Jew, and still hold that the concept of "Israel" is spiritualized and applied to the Church in the writings of the apostles. I believe it was just such a displacement mentality against which Paul was fighting in his letter to the Romans: "For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery, lest you be wise in your own estimation, that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and thus all Israel will be saved" (11:25-26). Paul goes on to say that it is only from the standpoint of the gospel (the Church) that the Jews are "enemies," but from the standpoint of election (divine choice) they are "beloved [by God, one must assume] for the sake of the fathers" (11:28).

The notion of the Church as the "new Israel" can only be held if one horribly misreads Romans 11, and unfortunately Dunning obliges. He notes first that Colin Williams, in his book The Church, finds a note of continuity between Israel and the Church in Paul's image of the branches grafted into the olive tree. But he further summarizes Williams by writing, "However the tree surgery is so radical in the excising of some branches and the grafting in of others that the discontinuity is also clear" [p. 512]. Careful examination of the etymology of the word "radical" reveals the inappropriateness of the word as an adequate description of Paul's metaphor. Were this "surgery" truly "radical"—i.e., of or from the root—it would involve pulling up the tree by its roots! Paul, in fact, seems carefully to avoid any such image; he speaks of branches being cut off, and "wild branches" (Gentiles) being grafted in "contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree" (Rom. 12:24). It is clear that the "cultivated olive tree" is a biblical image of Israel (Jer. 11:16; Hos. 14:6), and Paul warns Gentile Christians of arrogance, "since it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you" (Rom 12:18).
This is why Dunning’s citation of Williams, “the dead branches of the old Israel are cut out of the tree” [p. 512], is unnecessarily extreme and incipiently anti-Judaic: the tree itself is Israel, and there is no mention by Paul of any “old” or “new” Israel whatsoever. It is ironic that the very attitude Paul was warning Gentile Christians against in this passage is evident in Dunning’s use of it.

Dunning’s claim that “the distinction between Israel and the Church, so widely embraced among conservative Christians, simply will not stand the test of biblical exegesis” [p. 512], therefore, itself will not stand. The reason that this “distinction” is widely embraced by conservative Christians, one might suggest, is that conservative Christians tend to be most attentive to the language of Scripture. The distinction is a New Testament one (Luke 2:32; Rom. 9:4, 11:11-29, 15:8-12). And to cite Gal. 3:28 (“there is neither Jew or Greek”) is inconsequential, since Paul is here speaking of the Church itself—that “in Christ” those distinctions, while not non-existent, are of no matter. But this says nothing at all regarding the possibility of a distinct covenant people Israel outside of the Church.

Dunning appears to equate such thinking with dispensationalism, and so also as being founded “upon a Calvinistic view of covenant with Israel that is unconditional and cannot be broken” [p. 587]. That is not what I am arguing for, since it is clear that the Sinai covenant carries its own conditions—obedience to its mitzvot (commands)! The Jewish covenant does have conditions, but I would hold it is unconditional in the sense that it is grounded in, and sustained by, divine faithfulness. It is true that “to speak about the salvation of a people as a whole is to make an assumption congenial to Calvinism, one that ignores human freedom in favor of determinism” [p. 587]. But I am not suggesting “the salvation of a people as a whole” or ignoring human freedom; rather, I am speaking about the possibility of real relationship to God as it is offered in the Sinai covenant, founded in fact on the assumption that this covenant honors and even in a sense bestows human freedom, as the rabbis taught.

Finally, I appreciate deeply Dunning’s emphasis upon servanthood as an indispensable mark of the Church. But I question whether that emphasis is well served by offering disparaging remarks about the people of the Sinaitic covenant: “Refusing to take the path of servanthood, they lost their place through trying to preserve it” (p. 513). This statement assuredly reflects a common strategy in Christian theology, that of presuming to pronounce judgment upon the faith and practice of a people who, in fact, have suffered unimaginably at the hands of the Church during the past two millennia. Ignoring Jesus’ own purpose as a servant among the Jewish people (Rom. 15:8-12), the Church has been anything but a suffering servant among them.13 Further, Dunning’s castigation of Judaism here nourishes a grand, ahistorical generalization which merely whitewashes the first-century historical dynamics of the Church-Synagogue relationship, and also ignores the incredible diversity of Jewish and Christian sects in first-century Palestine which makes it virtually impossible to speak monolithically of “Church” and “Synagogue” during that era—let alone to make generalizations about the servanthood orientation of each.
At least Dunning is fair enough to recognize that the forfeiture of servanthood, wherever it occurs, leads to a forfeiture of any claim to be God’s representative people—since to represent God is to re-present to the world a Creator with a servant’s heart. Thus Dunning writes of Jesus:

The character of His ministry as the Suffering Servant was intended to give character to the new Israel who would continue that ministry in the world. Thus the Church is called to be the servant people of God. To the degree that it abandons the implication of this self-denying pattern for one marked by self-serving, it too ceases to be the people of God [p. 514].

If the negative implications of abandoning a servanthood orientation apply both to Israel and to the Church, is it not possible that one may affirm also the positive possibilities for each? That is, to the extent faithful Jews embody suffering servanthood, they indeed continue to be God’s servant people? Robert Willis, in his powerful essay “Auschwitz and the Nurturing of Conscience,” offers a haunting suggestion in this connection:

...what is presented [in the Holocaust] is the dreadful irony of a community, long accused of the crime of deicide, embodying totally the image of crucifixion claimed by the church as the most potent symbol of God’s love and the meaning of discipleship.14

I do not, in any of these comments, want to idealize the Jews, nor to romanticize or theologize their suffering in the Nazi Holocaust. I do want to lodge a protest whenever I see in texts of Christian theology the very same defaming caricatures which, over the centuries, helped to prepare the way for that slaughter.

There is one pertinent moment in that centuries-long adversus Judaeos tradition with which I end my reflections. In one of his rare references to actual Jews, John Wesley in his journal describes what he found in a visit to the Rotterdam synagogue as “that horrid, senseless pageantry, that mockery of God, which they called public worship.”15 We cannot know what it was he witnessed that so disgusted him, but we must now recognize that we, 250 years later, cannot continue in his spirit. May Wesleyan theologians do better than Wesley in that respect, and very soon excise from their thinking and writing the needless, self-serving slander of Jewish religious faith and practice.
Notes


3. A recognition of this elementary fact begins to dissolve the distinction which Dunning draws between Torah as “a less-than-adequate revelation of divine virtue and wisdom” [p. 305] and “the incarnation of His nature in Jesus Christ” [p. 306]. Dunning notes that Wesley describes the law “in language peculiarly appropriate to the Incarnation” [p. 305], even as “God manifest in the flesh” [p. 368]. There may be some validity to the Christian argument that the revelation in Christ is less ambiguous because it is eminently personal, but that must be demonstrated rather than assumed. My sole point here is that, in the cases of both Torah and of Christ, no matter how unambiguous God’s revelatory act might be in itself, the human act of interpretation is necessary for faithful appropriation.


5. In this connection, see particularly van Buren’s Christ in Context.


It is essentially out of respect for Israel’s hermeneutical primacy in regard to its Scriptures that, in my own use of language, I am disciplining myself to avoid the traditional ecclesiological designations of “Old Testament” (which has never been a favored phrase among Jews, whose literature it is) and “New Testament.” These designations tend to perpetuate the very attitude of displacement which I am laboring against. Thus, I am committed to using as alternative designations “Hebrew Scriptures” and “Christian Testament.” Interestingly, H. Orton Wiley in his Christian Theology (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1940) even offers the phrase “Christian Testament” as a legitimate designation 1:180]—although, we can safely presume, for very different reasons!
7. Dunning, like Barth earlier, does mention Pure Land Buddhism as an apparent exception to the emphasis upon self-effort thought to be characteristic of human religious response to prevenient grace. Pure Land’s emphasis upon the “other power” of Amida Buddha (as opposed to self-power) does, admits Dunning, come “very close to the New Testament concept of grace, but the object of hope is false from a Christian perspective” [p. 167]. For a differing “Christian perspective” upon the question of Christianity’s relationship to Pure Land Buddhism, see John Cobb’s *Beyond Dialogue* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982).

8. It is interesting in this connection to note that Wiley states that “the measure of revealed truth granted to men will be the standard by which they are judged in the last day” [3:347]. Specifically, Wiley (admittedly drawing upon the work of dispensationalist Samuel Wakefield) writes that “the Jews will be judged by the law of Moses and the teaching of the prophets,” while “Christians in general will be judged by the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments—especially the gospel as it confers on men superior privileges” [p. 346]. Obversely, one might surmise that the means of judgment would also logically be the means of potential salvation. If not, then the whole notion of judgment becomes meaningless.

9. For a fine Jewish treatment of this issue, see the brief work of my mentor David Blumenthal, *The Place of Faith and Grace in Judaism* (Austin, TX: Center for Judaic- Christian Studies, 1985).

10. In a footnote, Dunning cites Th. C. Vriezen (*An Outline of Old Testament Theology*) in this regard: “unfortunately some Christian theologians, however strongly they combat the dangers of a mistaken idea of being elect in the Church, cannot refrain even now, in consequence of a religious romanticism, from backing up the Jews in this temptation! In particular the establishment of the State of Israel has increased this danger” [p. 508, n.5].

    I want to insist that religious romanticism is not the issue here, but whether and when the Church will be willing to read what Israel’s (and the Church’s) Scriptures say about the Sinai covenant. There is no question that the Holocaust and the subsequent establishment of the Jewish state have exercised considerable influence upon Christian reconsiderations of Judaism, but historical circumstances are far from the sole factor. They are more the condition which has brought about the necessity for a re-reading of the Bible on this question.

11. It is a fact that the Temple structure and cultus are no more, though there are orthodox (and often militant) Jews who envision its re-establishment with the sacrificial system. But many Jews interpret Jeremiah’s prophecy as having been “filled full” (to use Dunning’s fine phrase) in terms of the rabbinc renewal of God’s covenant with Israel after Jerusalem’s ransacking and the Temple’s destruction in A.D. 70—with synagogue worship, prayer, Torah study and merciful works moving to center focus. It was, after all, a new covenant which God would establish with “the house of Israel” and the “house of Judah,” in which the primary phenomenon would be the writing of the Torah within their hearts. The Christian Testament proclamation of this promise’s fulfillment in Jesus Christ need not be negated in order to recognize at least the possibility of an analogous fulfillment within this transformed Judaism at roughly the same time under the rabbinic renewal at Javneh.
12. Again, rather surprisingly Wiley offers support to a more sympathetic reading of Israel's history when, in his section on ecclesiology, he describes Israel as "a community of the Spirit; and while manifesting itself through natural and social laws, [it] was nevertheless a supernatural organization" (3:105). It is true that his description is fitted in past tense, but his use of pneumatological language is nonetheless striking. Yet it is more than striking; it is biblical: "And as for Me, this is My covenant with them," says the LORD: 'My Spirit which is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your offspring, nor from the mouth of your offspring's offspring,' says the LORD, 'from now and forever'" (Isa. 59:21).


