

The Project on Allyship to Combat Antisemitism

The Case for Christian Allyship in an Era of Antisemitism on the Right and Left Joel N. Lohr¹

I look around this room, and I see a lot of the same people. The same people speaking, the same people coming, and I think to myself, what if we're only talking to ourselves? What if the world isn't listening? What if we only have each other?

Thus spoke Jewish American fashion designer, entrepreneur, and author Julia Haart as part of a rousing speech given to a "Bring Them Home Now" rally on May 7, 2024 in New York City. She continues:

Well, here's what I'm going to say. If we only have each other, we are enough. We don't need anyone else. We are enough. We have survived pogroms, murders, auto-da-fés. We have been burned, butchered, put into ovens, our skin used as lampshades, and we are still standing. The world turned against us in the 40s, and yet we are still standing. ... If we only have each other ... if we band together, if we unite, even if the entire world is against us ... we, united, defeat hate! That's what we do!

I was sent a video of the speech² as part of an uncommon group chat in which I participate, uncommon at least because I am the sole non-Jew (or gentile) to do so. It was sent by a Jewish friend along with a text stating, "Something to lift us up!" There was one response, from among the other 31 (Jewish) members, though the message was positive, indicating "Thanks!"

I was moved by Haart's speech, but also troubled. I did not know what to say, or really think for that matter, but I felt compelled to say something because I cared about Haart's message. I also cared about the person who sent the video. Deciding to text the person privately, I wrote: "... thank you for your messages on WhatsApp. I'm blessed to be part of the Poland March of the Living group chat. I saw your message this morning and wanted to reach out to you personally to say hello. I stand with you and the Jewish people. ... You are not alone. I'm recommitting my life to this work. Never again."

She immediately responded and indicated that my text moved her, that she treasured my friendship, and then she thanked me for sending the message and for standing with her and the Jewish people. She stated that my message helped restore her faith in humanity.

Her words confirmed my suspicion that, however powerful Haart's speech was, it is not enough that Jewish people stand up for themselves, and stand up to hate. It is also not

¹ The views expressed in this essay are entirely my own and do not represent those of my employer or any other group, organization, or board to which I belong.

² The video can be found at: https://www.instagram.com/juliahaart/reel/C7b_YH7MhJr .

enough when we consider Jewish population disparities in the world. This point is driven home by Jeffrey Herbst, the convener of our papers, when he notes in his invitation to participate:

[Allyship in combatting antisemitism is a necessity] given that Jews are a very small percentage of the population. Thus, Angelina Kazmaier notes, “Jews make up only 0.2% of the world population, meaning that even if every single Jew spoke up against antisemitism, either at home or abroad, they would still never amass the numbers required to create a dent in the amount of hate speech and discrimination against them. Thus, the only way to combat antisemitism effectively is to find allies who truly wish to create a world free from it.”³

The sufficiency of Jewish advocacy is not a thesis I am willing to test. The Holocaust, or Shoah, is too entrenched in my mind, having studied it extensively and written on it.⁴ To put it bluntly, non-Jewish listeners of Haart’s speech should be troubled by the prospect of seeing more Jews sent to the ovens and death camps to possibly prove her right that some Jews might remain standing thereafter. No, it is not enough. “Never again” has to mean something. Never again needs to be said by more than just Jews; it needs to be said, understood, and felt beyond the borders of Jewish culture. I would argue that these words need to be said and lived out as loudly, perhaps more loudly, by *non-Jews* if we are to live in a safe and just world, and they need to be said especially by Christians. And with that, I announce the focus of this essay.

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I have spent most of my adult life fighting Christian antisemitism and engaging in Jewish-Christian dialogue. During this time, the threats of Christian antisemitism seemed to have been concentrated almost exclusively within the (so-called) right, that is, among more conservative, Bible believing Christians who, even if unknowingly, dealt in traditional antisemitic tropes. These tropes include the idea that Jews are no longer God’s people (they are replaced by Christians), that the Jews killed Christ and remain guilty today, that Judaism is a dead religion or a religion mired in legalism without grace or knowledge of a loving God, that Jesus corrected Judaism, that the Old Testament (or what Jews know as Tanakh) is no longer important and can safely be ignored unless a passage points to Christ, and so on, and so on. These tropes I have fought as best I could over the years, in writing, preaching, teaching, and my actions. My actions have involved dialogue, sustained theological reflection, and building friendships across religious lines.

³ The larger quote is from “Research Proposal on Allyship as a Means of Fighting Antisemitism,” provided by Herbst when invited to participate in this project; the embedded quote by Kazmaier is from “Non-Jewish Allies can be Key to Combatting Antisemitism,” *The Jerusalem Post*, December 26, 2021 found at: <https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-689483> .

⁴ See, e.g., Steven W. Brallier, with Joel N. Lohr and Lynn G. Beck, *Mitka’s Secret: A True Story of Child Slavery and Surviving the Holocaust* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021).

Over the years I have written op-eds on Christian antisemitism, which still seem relevant. Two come to mind. In the first, a response to the April 2019 Poway synagogue shooting, I noted that the perpetrator was a church-going Christian, a member of an Orthodox Presbyterian Church in the San Diego suburbs.⁵ He apparently had every intention of killing many Jews since he believed that, according to the Washington Post, the Jewish people were guilty of “faults ranging from killing Jesus to controlling the media, [and they] deserved to die.” He also believed that “his intention to kill Jews would glorify God.”⁶

In my op-ed, I noted that part of the problem is that the New Testament, heard in Church each Sunday, is a collection of texts by mostly Jewish writers that contains heated intra-Jewish dialogue and polemics, often about non-Jew (or “gentile”) inclusion into the religious community. It is one thing, I noted, for a first century Jewish author to speak in harsh terms about one’s own people. It is quite another when, centuries or millennia later, these texts become entirely divorced from their Jewish and historical contexts and are read by an almost exclusively non-Jewish church. As a Christian, the Poway synagogue shooting brought out an ugly history for me.

The second op-ed responded to murders by “Black Hebrew Israelites” of two Jews and a police officer at a kosher market in Jersey City in December 2019.⁷ Members of this quasi-Christian group claim to be the true Jews. Shortly after that event, attacks against Jews continued, including the stabbing of five Jews on the seventh night of Hanukkah during a candle lighting at a rabbi’s home in Monsey, NY. The perpetrator also had a connection to the Black Hebrew Israelites. These utterly tragic, awful, sickening events—and let’s call them what they are: Evil, with a capital E—should not surprise Christians.

I noted this because for Christians our long history is closely bound up in supersessionism, a teaching that Christians supersede, some believe replace, the Jewish people. In this line of thinking, Christians have become the true people of God, the people God really loves — the “New Israel” — and typically this leaves no place for Jews, or worse yet casts Judaism as an impediment that must be overcome before God’s kingdom can arrive.

Within that op-ed, the following words drew the strongest reactions from readers:

One thing that often strikes me, whether in my classes, my social life, or my travels, is how much work we still need to do to overcome antisemitism. Actually, I’d say we have equal work to do to overcome Islamophobia, but many of my students arrive ...

⁵ Joel N. Lohr, “The Poway Synagogue Shooting Raises Important Questions for Christians,” *Hartford Courant*, May 13, 2019, found at: <https://www.courant.com/opinion/op-ed/hc-op-lohr-christian-jew-0513-20190513-xl43uqvrzfeqxm57tdm6v5uh4-story.html> .

⁶ See Julie Zauzmer Weil, “The alleged synagogue shooter was a churchgoer who talked Christian theology, raising tough questions for evangelical pastors,” *The Washington Post*, May 1, 2019, found at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2019/05/01/alleged-synagogue-shooter-was-churchgoer-who-articulated-christian-theology-prompting-tough-questions-evangelical-pastors/> .

⁷ Joel N. Lohr, “No, Our Work on Anti-Semitism is Not Done – Especially as Christians,” *Hartford Courant*, January 12, 2020, found at: <https://www.courant.com/opinion/op-ed/hc-op-lohr-anti-semitism-0112-20200112-y6jj26oefnafzblj6dn4dtxnm-story.html> .

aware of Islamophobia. And, a good number of these students and others I meet seem aware that this is a pressing problem. *Thank God*. But fewer people I meet seem to understand that antisemitism is also alive, indeed thriving and growing. It is a national problem, on the right and on the left. Many of us, even if unwittingly, perpetuate stereotypes, foster unhelpful and destructive anti-Jewish tropes, or just generally think we are free of antisemitic leanings or thoughts or words, when we are not.

At the time of publication, in January 2020, I could still say such a thing. Today, I would not, at least not in terms of stating that only “few people” seem to understand that antisemitism is alive and growing. Hopefully we all do now. But particularly interesting was the strong reaction my above words elicited from both sides: Jewish friends, who unanimously commended the piece, and Christians, *especially on the left*, who came out of the woodwork to challenge me, indeed accuse me of speaking falsely.

I will return to the accusations in a minute but first let me share a positive response to the op-ed I received from respected Jewish thinker in Israel, Yossi Klein Halevi:

Thanks so much for sending this ... It is really powerful — though it needs to be taken one step further: [it needs to explore] how a kind of supersessionism is playing out on the secular progressive left, where the Palestinians are the new Jews and Palestinian suffering the new holocaust.

Again, note that this was in January 2020.

The same week I received an email from a Christian reader, presumably left of center, who wrote:

I strongly disagree that anti-Semitism is “thriving and growing” “on the right and on the left.” It certainly is growing on the right, but such accusation against the “left” is wrong. Such charge leveled at the “left” is typically employed to discredit legitimate criticism of Israel’s ongoing occupation and oppression of the Palestinian people. ... Attributing the evils cited in your op-ed “to the right and to the left” is especially problematic. These days legitimate critiques of Zionism’s conquest of Palestine is frequently met with the charge of anti-Semitism. Such attacks deny and distort history. It weakens the fight against anti-Semitism. ... So, while I applaud your efforts to combat anti-Semitism, I urge that you not paint the “left” with the same broad-brush critique that should be reserved for those who wish harm on the Jewish people. Such messaging only weakens the peace and justice movement.

I could not have disagreed more.

Antisemitism *was indeed* a national problem, thriving and growing, on the right *and on the left* in January 2020. But Christians, both on the right and on the left, seemed unable to see it or unwilling to acknowledge it. Those on the right seemed to insist that they were only

stating what the Bible teaches: the Jews *did* kill Christ, Christians *are* the true people of God, and the Bible *is* clear that Jews, especially the Pharisees, are hypocritical, venal, money-loving, children of vipers. Those on the left, in an effort to promote Palestinian autonomy and statehood — concerns I share — seemed to equate all Jews with Israeli hardliners, ignored antisemitic elements among pro-Palestinian fellow-travelers, and insisted that while Palestinians should have their own state, a position I support, any form of Zionism — the Jewish aspiration to live in their own national homeland — was illegitimate, even despicable.

So, where then do we go from here to create allyship among Christians, both right and left, especially among those who apparently do not believe antisemitism exists in their left leaning and mainline churches?

* * *

Jew hatred. It is the most concise definition of antisemitism of which I know, even if it is not enough as Deborah Lipstadt has made clear.⁸ It has been called “the longest hatred,”⁹ an idea hard to argue with though finding other long and despicable hatreds, especially connected to race or ethnicity, can be done.¹⁰ Christianity has a prominent place within the history of antisemitism, and one might argue that without Christianity there would not be antisemitism as we know it today. That seems true on the surface, but is not the whole picture anymore, at least not since the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. With that event arose, over time, a new form of antisemitism that is not as deeply connected to Christian theology although it thrives in some churches. This newer form of antisemitism is based on a rejection of the idea of Zion, something of fundamental importance not only to Jews but also of importance to Christians, if they take their Bibles and religious history seriously.

So what happened? How did we end up with two distinct but overlapping forms of antisemitism — one connected to the right, and long traversed tropes from within Christianity, and one connected to the left, and a newer anti-Zionism? Both share a suspicion, dislike, or hatred of Jewish thriving and power in the world, but each displays distinct ways of hating Jews. While “blood and soil” and “the final solution” are very different than “from the river to the sea,” all are slogans of those who despise or hate Jews and seek their downfall, often extermination. And both forms of antisemitism lurk in the dark corners, sometimes even the open spaces, of Christianity.

A great deal has been written about historic Christian antisemitism, and the need to overcome it.¹¹ It has been analyzed, denounced, and numerous Christian denominations

⁸ Deborah E. Lipstadt, *Antisemitism: Here and Now* (New York: Schocken, 2019), 11-21.

⁹ Robert S. Wistrich, *Antisemitism: The Longest Hatred* (New York: Schocken, 1994).

¹⁰ Benjamin Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

¹¹ Among the many treatments, I have found the following helpful: William Nicholls, *Christian Antisemitism: A History of Hate* (Lanham, MD: Jason Aronson, 1993); David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2013); Edward Kessler, *An Introduction to Jewish-Christian Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge

have committed themselves to its end.¹² I will not rehearse those efforts here, but I will affirm them and say again: *more needs to be done to overcome historic Christian antisemitism*. But because this antisemitism, ‘antisemitism on the right’ (a term I use for convenience), has received significant analysis and condemnation by Christians, in this piece I will focus on what I will (again for convenience) refer to as ‘antisemitism on the left’.¹³

A caveat. What follows might read like a case for Christian Zionism. It is not. I find modern Christian Zionism problematic, and I distance myself from it.¹⁴ Rather, this essay is an attempt to explain how Zionism is linked to Christian faith.¹⁵ My argument today is that unless Christians understand how and why Zionism is linked to our *own* tradition — however problematic or scandalous — we will not be able to be effective allies, and our thinking may promote subtle antisemitism, antisemitism as dangerous as that which exists on the right. And while anti-Zionism is not, technically, the same thing as antisemitism, in practice the distinction is almost always lost.

But let me also say that despite what I say in what follows, support in principle for the idea of Zion and Zionism, a Jewish homeland, the modern State of Israel, and Jewish right to self-determination does not *in any way* mean blanket endorsement of the Israeli government, its leaders, its actions, or its war efforts, nor does it mean that one cannot support Palestinian statehood and a Palestinian right to self-determination. I am also reminded that, if Matthew 25:31-46 in the New Testament (commonly referred to as the sheep and the goats story) means anything— and I would argue that it means *everything* — caring for and protecting “the least of these,” which so many Palestinians are, is the most important thing, an idea that stems from the long Jewish tradition of caring for the widow, orphan, alien, and stranger within its gates.¹⁶ How we treat “the least of these,” according to

University Press, 2010); and Carol Rittner, Stephen D. Smith, and Irena Steinfeldt, eds., *The Holocaust and the Christian World: Reflections on the Past, Challenges for the Future*, 2nd ed. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2019). See also the important forthcoming work edited by Edward Kessler and Neil Wenborn, *A Documentary History of Jewish-Christian Relations: From Antiquity to the Present Day* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024).

¹² For more, see Rittner, Smith, and Steinfeldt’s edited volume, mentioned above, especially the essays under the “Part 8: After the Holocaust: How Have Christians Responded” (227-239) as well as the Appendix “Post-Holocaust Statements from the Churches” (317-345).

¹³ I do not have the space to document ‘antisemitism on the left’. For a short, recent, and popular foray, see Franklin Foer’s cover story in the April 2024 issue of *The Atlantic*, titled “The End of the Golden Age” (20-35).

¹⁴ By “modern Christian Zionism” I am referring to a system of thought associated with “Dispensationalism” or “Dispensational Theology,” popular within American evangelicalism. See Daniel G. Hummel, *The Rise and Fall of Dispensationalism: How the Evangelical Battle over the End Times Shaped a Nation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2023).

¹⁵ After writing this essay, a mentor to whom I sent a draft encouraged me to read Gary A. Anderson’s April 2005 *First Things* article, “How to Think About Zionism,” which I had not read. I agree with a great deal of Anderson’s argument therein, and am reminded of the need for caution in linking modern Zionism directly with biblical teachings, even while the two are not only connected but inextricably linked. Readers are encouraged to read his carefully nuanced piece, found at: <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2005/04/how-to-think-about-zionism> .

¹⁶ On this, see especially my article, Joel N. Lohr, “A Jewish Teaching: Jesus, Gentiles, and the Sheep and the Goats (Matthew 25:31-46),” in *Soundings in the Religion of Jesus: Perspectives and Methods in Jewish and Christian Scholarship*, edited by Bruce Chilton, Anthony Le Donne, and Jacob Neusner (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 29-45 and 202-05.

Jesus, determines one's destiny, that is, whether one participates in the-world-to-come, or enters what Christians call "the Kingdom of God," or "Heaven."

* * *

I grew up in a traditional, some might say conservative, Christian home. Denominationally, we were part of the Christian Reformed Church of North America. At the time, this movement was profoundly Calvinist (that is, following the teachings of the 16th century Protestant reformer John Calvin), and very Dutch. Both of my parents were born in Holland and immigrated to Canada, where I was born and raised.

Some of my earliest memories, which are etched into my mind, involve reading from the Bible and then praying at the dinner table as a family each evening after the meal. We systematically worked our way through the entire Christian Bible, over and over, both Old and New Testaments. Occasionally, our parents would interrupt our scheduled reading with a Psalm, probably to provide us with a needed break while lingering in a long or difficult book, like Leviticus or Revelation, or as a small act of mercy to let us go play on a beautiful evening. As children our favorite Psalm was, *hands down*, Psalm 117, the shortest Psalm in the Psalter. We advocated for this two-verse Psalm regularly, sometimes in chorus fashion: "Psalm 117, skip the first and last verse!" Our parents sometimes gave in — well, without the skipping verses part. This Psalm has remained a favorite of mine, one I have committed to memory in both Hebrew and English. This is not only because of its nostalgia and short length — though the latter helps — but because it has such a powerful message of worldwide gentile praise of Israel's God. This is despite, one could argue, the fact that the people Israel is elevated within the economy of God's love, something the nations (or *goyim*) are called to notice and accept. For me, it's as scandalous as it is short.¹⁷

Concurrently, until the ninth grade at least, my siblings and I attended a private Christian school run by our denomination; there, the Bible was also a large part of the ethos and curriculum. In our classrooms we systematically worked through the Bible beginning in the first grade, and I loved learning the stories of this sacred collection. Though following Jesus was certainly central to the school's teachings, I realized early on that the New Testament was not necessarily prized above the Old. The Old Testament was studied, interrogated, learned, recited, at times acted out, and loved by our teachers and us as students. We probably took our cue from John Calvin himself, who devoted much of his intellectual energy to Old Testament interpretation. A quick glance at his commentaries on the Bible

¹⁷ In the NJPS translation states:

Praise the LORD (*yhwh*), all you nations (*goyim*);
extol Him, all you peoples,
for great is His steadfast love toward us;
the faithfulness of the LORD (*yhwh*) endures forever.
Hallelujah.

My argument hinges upon the idea that the "us" in this Psalm is Israel. Universal blessing by God in the Bible is almost always achieved through the particular, something I believe this Psalm teaches too.

reveals nearly three times as much material focused on the Old Testament compared to the New.¹⁸

From this background, at home and at school, I gained a deep sense of the importance of Israel's unique place as God's chosen people, a treasured possession from among the nations of the world (*am segulah*, Deuteronomy 7:6). We were taught, as the Bible makes clear, that God's love and election of Israel was not because Israel was a great nation, for the same texts said that Israel was the smallest of all nations. Thus, I learned about a personal God who loves, chooses, gives, could be jealous, and forgives. My understanding then, and now, sees the Christian faith as deeply connected to the narrative arc of the Bible, an arc that focuses firmly on this chosen people.

Moreover, I came to see that the narrative arc of the Bible also focuses on this people's relationship with *land*. We were *not* taught that this was generic land. Instead, we learned that the land is a specific land that was long promised to Abraham, eventually to Isaac, Jacob, and the people of Israel. The Bible called this "a land flowing with milk and honey," a land to which God would lead the people by pillar of fire and cloud. This journey happened first with the help of Moses, out of Egypt and slavery, and then with the help of Joshua, through the River Jordan with the priests carrying the ark of the covenant.

How many days, weeks, months, and indeed years did we not spend in the books of Moses, or what Jews call the Torah, wandering ourselves as students in the desert with the tribes of Israel? How many days, weeks, months, and years did we not read about how the people living in the land under its Judean and Israelite kings were threatened by their disobedience, a "turning to the right or to the left" when instead they should have chosen the straight path of YHWH worship? And how many days, weeks, months, and years did we not hear of God's great love for the uniquely blessed people Israel, and how everyone's fate, indeed every last person and nation on earth, was wrapped up into how they treated this specially loved people, and how they respected God's promises to them, promises that involved both peoplehood and land, specific, physical land?

When I mentioned this to a Jewish colleague recently — lamenting the fact that Christian churches seem to have lost this sense of story, and a commitment to the people of Israel and land — this seasoned Jewish scholar reminded me that Christians today "just don't hear the story of land" because "the Christian lectionary is virtually devoid of all references to the land unless those passages somehow point to Jesus."¹⁹

The comment hit me hard. However much I did not want to believe it, I knew it was true. Today I live primarily in mainline churches that use the Revised Common Lectionary, and — having examined the lectionary — I now realize that "the land" and the promise of it to the

¹⁸ Calvin's commentaries roughly correspond in length to that of each Testament; if nothing else the point is that he did not ignore the first Testament.

¹⁹ See Amy-Jill Levine, "The Gospel and the Land Revisited: Exegesis, Hermeneutics, and Politics" in Cary Nelson and Micahel C. Gizzi (eds.), *Peace and Faith: Christian Churches and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (Philadelphia: Academic Studies Press, 2021), 130-51.

people of Israel by God is not present. No wonder concern for Zion, or for “the land,” is increasingly absent in Christian theology and psyche. Unless we read the Bible systematically, privately or as a family, this significant dimension of our faith becomes eroded in churches, especially mainline and left-of-center churches that use the lectionary. “The gifts and call of God” may be “irrevocable,” as Romans 11:29 teaches, but if these gifts and call are unknown none of it makes a real difference anyway.²⁰

What does this have to do with Zionism, especially modern-day Zionism?

A lot, in fact. In my view, much of our current public discourse seems to assume that Zionism began in the late 1800s into the mid 1940s, as if this period is what gave birth to the modern State of Israel, conceived of then as an outworking of Jewish advocacy and British colonialism. This is not true and certainly not the whole picture, even if that point in time is significant and Britain was indeed involved and controlled the outcome. When we examine that time period, and come to understand the widespread Jewish reluctance at the time (and some to this day) to the very idea of establishing a modern State of Israel *precisely because it did not closely enough align with a Jewish self-understanding of the land*,²¹ we can see that what I will call lowercase zionism is in fact thousands of years old, and deeply linked to a religious (or what scholars call tribal) history that extends back in time nearly 4000 years.²²

In this sense, zionism is not new but is connected to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It is connected to slavery, the Exodus, Sinai, and wandering in the desert. It is connected to *cherem* (and all its problems), monarchy, and temple. It is connected to destruction, wars, and threats to Israel’s existence. And it is connected to a second temple and diaspora; in fact, diaspora makes no sense apart from it. It ties into, indeed essentially starts in, Genesis 12:1-3, a story that begins what Jews call a larger passage of the Torah, *Lech Lecha*. In it, God calls Abraham, promises to multiply his descendants, and indicates he will bring Abraham to a land he would show him. We later learn that this land will be given to Abraham’s descendants, a promised land where they would dwell with God. That divine presence was especially palpable in Zion, where the first and second temples were built. Zionism is *not* a 20th century invention.²³ Zionism — the promise of land, the desire to live in

²⁰ I do not have the space to examine how this might be different in traditional and evangelical churches that do not use the lectionary, or why they tend to have a stronger commitment to the modern State of Israel. I hope to explore that in a future writing (see also the footnote above about dispensationalism). Note as well the important recent article by Motti Inbari and Kirill Bumin documenting how members of left of center and mainline churches are much more supportive of Israel than their clergy. See their “Mainline Protestant Clergy are Increasingly Pro-Palestinian: Their Congregants May Not Follow,” *Religion News Service*, May 29, 2024, found at <https://religionnews.com/2024/05/29/mainline-protestant-clergy-are-increasingly-pro-palestinian-their-congregants-may-not-follow>. There is also the important issue of Christians spiritualizing the idea of land today, which I believe happens in churches on both sides of the spectrum, a topic for another (but important) essay.

²¹ For a not-so systematic but engaging exploration of this history, see the novel by Chaim Potok, *The Chosen* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1967). See also the article by Gary Anderson referenced in an above footnote.

²² The word “tribal” is not used pejoratively by scholars; it is used because alternate terms like “religious” or “national” would be anachronistic in this context.

²³ Again, Gary Anderson’s piece is helpful here, especially his concluding question:

it, the hope of returning to it from the Diaspora — is hardwired into the biblical tradition. Christians should know this as well, as scandalous as a divine gift of land may seem, as hard as it may be to reckon with today, as uncomfortable an idea as it may be in our world, and as difficult as it may be to explain to our neighbors. We cannot ignore it. We certainly need to understand it.

Again, none of the above precludes careful and sincere criticism of the government of the modern State of Israel. But it is hard to know how Christians can, given Genesis 12 and the larger story of the Bible, not support the land of Israel in principle — a specific land, even if its boundaries today are complicated and not aligned with those indicated in the Bible. It is hard to be a Christian and not view this land as holy and in some way connected to, in some way belonging, carefully understood, as a divine gift to the Jewish people who are God's special people, God's treasured possession. Again, this does not mean that the concerns of the Palestinian inhabitants of the land in 1948 and their descendants should be ignored. To the contrary: *they deserve utmost safety, dignity, respect, and simultaneous statehood alongside Israel, which I support*. Palestinians also have compelling claims to indigenoussness in the land, which need to be taken seriously. Further, Christians, with Jews and others, can and should cry out for justice regarding Palestinians who are suffering. But we — especially we as Christians — cannot act as though the Jewish people's connection to this specific land is unimportant, non-existent, only recent, or somehow the result of modern colonialism. And I must reiterate that all of this is, to be sure, *a scandal*, in much the same way that it is also a scandal that Christians believe that the God of Israel sent his specially loved son into the world to save people from their sins — born to a virgin, died on a cross, rose from the dead, and will come again to judge the living and the dead. All of these ideas are in some way scandalous, and all of them are true for Christians unless they choose to rewrite their history and abandon traditional Christian theology.²⁴

Part of my argument, therefore, is that all Christians — even left leaning ones — exist in a distinct place of allyship with Jews and in fighting antisemitism because of the unique relationship we have with them. Christians believe they have been grafted into the biblical people Israel, as guests, as the book of Romans in the New Testament teaches. Both Christians and Jews worship not only *a* God, but *the* God who they believe created the world, who has a personal and ineffable name YHWH, who made promises to Abraham and his descendants, who delivered this people from Egypt, who gave this people instruction at Sinai through Moses, who brought this people to the land of Canaan as an

The question now is whether we can move from an attitude of toleration and acceptance to bold theological affirmation. Is the return to Zion part of God's providential design and eternal promise to His people Israel? I believe that it is. Is Israel's most recent return to this land final and permanent? No one can know for sure. That will depend, as Uriel Simon wisely argues, on the providential plan of our benevolent Creator and on the actions of Israel.

²⁴ When I say here that "All of these ideas ... are true," or later that "These statements are true ...," I am not precluding the possibility that they are true, as they are for me, via what Paul Ricoeur called a "second naiveté," or via Gadamerian hermeneutics that involve a *Horizontverschmelzung* (fusion of horizons).

enduring possession, who established a monarchy connected to a king named David whose line would eventually lead to a messiah, and who continues to work in and through this special people. These statements are true even if Jews and Christians worship that God separately, differently, and we disagree about particulars, especially those related to a messiah and peoplehood.

This special connection Christians and Jews have to each other is not shared by either of them with any other people or religious group, though Islam has important connection points to Judaism and Christianity too. They are important. In the case of Islam, however, the connections are different, and potentially fraught, for an important reason: Jews and Christians agree on something that Muslims do not. Jews and Christians agree that the Tanakh, or what Christians call Old Testament, is true, accurate, sacred, and authoritative (to use an old word), and this agreement is precisely what makes their connection powerful. Jews and Christians share this text, for many Christians right down to “the jot and tittle” when you consider that many Christian Bibles today base their translations of the Old Testament on the Masoretic Text, a Hebrew textual tradition that is Jewish and similarly revered by Jews.²⁵ Of course, Jews and Christians disagree about how best to interpret it — Christians do so through the lens of the New Testament and Christian tradition, and Jews do so through Rabbinic Judaism and Jewish tradition.²⁶ My point is that although the Tanakh and Qur’an have overlap and share important ideas, concepts, and stories, as do the New Testament and Qur’an, Muslims do not accept the authority of the Tanakh in the same way as Christians do. For Muslims, the Qur’an does not exist in tandem with this corpus, nor is the Tanakh regarded to be trustworthy in the same way as Christians regard it, as Old Testament. Religious authority is not attached to the Tanakh/Old Testament in Islam, even if it is generally respected as sacred.²⁷ Allyship, especially around divisive issues like land and peoplehood, is much more complicated without this foundation.

* * *

Jews and Christians have deep and abiding connections that should lead to fruitful allyship, even when they disagree — and they will — about peoplehood, modern politics, or who the messiah of Israel really is, to name a few areas. These are not minor disagreements nor things to overcome so much as be acknowledged honestly and worked through sincerely. That our long, intertwined history has been tainted by precisely the

²⁵ I here qualify my language (using the word “many”) since Catholic and Orthodox Bibles typically use Greek textual traditions for their Old Testament translations.

²⁶ For the sake of space, I truncate what could be a much larger discussion. See my co-authored book: Joel S. Kaminsky and Joel N. Lohr, *The Hebrew Bible for Beginners: A Jewish and Christian Introduction* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2015).

²⁷ I do not have the space to explore this topic here, nor engage with Islamic ideas of *Tahrif* (‘distortion’). As a starting point, consult Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur’an and the Bible: Text and Commentary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), especially his Introduction (pp. 1-25). In his footnotes he points to his earlier article, “On the Qur’anic Accusation of Scriptural Falsification (*tahrif*) and Christian Anti-Jewish Polemic,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 130.2 (2010), 189-202, as well as Gordon Nickel’s *Narratives of Tampering in the Earliest Commentaries on the Qur’ān* (History of Christian-Muslim Relations 13; Leiden: Brill, 2011), both of which I have found helpful.

opposite of allyship (to understate things rather grossly) makes the case for allyship even stronger, not weaker. Christianity's long history of antisemitism is indeed a good argument for allyship, and it is also a good, additional argument for Christian support of Israel as a Jewish homeland, carefully understood.²⁸

In the sermon he delivered just days before his death, Martin Luther King Jr. poignantly said the following to his fellow Americans, Black and white, "We must all learn to live together as brothers or we will all perish together as fools. We are tied together in the single garment of destiny, caught in an inescapable network of mutuality."²⁹ In his earlier "I Have a Dream" speech, he made similar points when he explained that the presence of white allies in the civil rights movement shows that they "have come to realize that their destiny is tied up with our destiny and their freedom is inextricably bound to our freedom."³⁰ I believe the same is true for Christians in becoming allies with the Jewish people to combat antisemitism, only more so. It is not enough that Jews stand up for themselves. Christians have a special duty — a calling — to join them as siblings in a common cause. Our destinies are more than intertwined.

²⁸ Again, keeping in mind my earlier comments about care and rights for Palestinians. For more on supporting Israel as a Jewish homeland because of past mistreatment, see Germany's Vice Chancellor Robert Habeck speech given shortly after the Hamas attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, found at: <https://twitter.com/BMWK/status/1720130870864998800> .

²⁹ Martin Luther King Jr., "Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution," delivered on March 31, 1968 at the National Cathedral, Washington, D.C., found at: <https://www.seemonline.com/history/mlk-jr-awake.htm> .

³⁰ Martin Luther King Jr., "I Have a Dream," delivered on August 28, 1963 on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, found at: <https://www.npr.org/2010/01/18/122701268/i-have-a-dream-speech-in-its-entirety> .