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American Christianity, Jews and Israel: Antisemitism and Faith

“No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin or his background or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love. For love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.”

Nelson Mandela¹

Introduction

On August 11–12, 2017, armed white supremacists, white nationalists, neo-Confederates, Klansmen, neo-Nazis, and other racist and antisemitic groups marched in Charlottesville, Virginia. Carrying Nazi-like banners, chanting antisemitic, as well as anti-Muslim and anti-black slogans, they clashed violently with counter demonstrators.² The magnitude of the event, its militancy, and the venom it unleashed against Jews and others shocked many Americans, who had viewed such groups as fringe, small, and lacking in influence and importance. Since the 1960s, and even more so the 1980s, American writers and activists thought that White Christian antisemitic groups have weakened and declined, moving into the shadows, having lost their legitimacy and much of their base of support.³ This, they now discovered, was not quite true.⁴ Racist, virulently antisemitic Christian groups have not taken over American society, and they weakened since their heyday in the 1920s and 1930s. Such groups, however, returned with much vigor to the limelight, complete with Nazi-like regalia and arms in their hands, carving a more visible niche in the American public

1 N. Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1994), 542.

2 Cf. M. Astor, Ch. Caron, and D. Victor, “A Guide to the Charlottesville Aftermath,” *The New York Times*, August 13, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/13/us/charlottesville-virginia-overview.html>.

3 Cf. Ch. E. Silberman, *A Certain People: American Jews and their Lives Today* (New York: Summit Books, 1985).

4 Cf. D. E. Lipstadt, *Antisemitism: Here and Now* (New York: Schocken Books, 2018).

arena.⁵ According to one source, the number of hate groups in America increased by more than 50 percent since the year 2000.⁶

Clinging to a prevailing ethos, Jews and others have tended to see America as a country that, at least ideally, provides its inhabitants with unprecedented privileges and opportunities while respecting their heritages and faiths.⁷ This almost utopian picture did not always correspond to the ethnic and religious realities of American life. In actuality, the United States has been mostly a Christian country, both in its vision and its demography.⁸ Non-Christians, and, at times, even non-Protestants, had to struggle for acceptance and equal standing. Even when legislatures offered Jews full civil standing at the turn of the nineteenth century, Jews still confronted restrictions in housing, education, and employment.⁹ Likewise, older European images and stereotypes of Jews persisted in America, even if the country proved more hospitable to Jews than Europe.

Following the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s–1960s, the cultural transformation of the 1960s–1980s, and the interfaith movement of the 1960s–1970s, most Jews became reassured that America has indeed turned into the pluralistic and inclusive nation they had hoped and struggled for, and that antisemitism, while not disappearing completely, had declined sharply and moved to the margins.¹⁰ Those margins, it now seems, have been broader than many have assumed. Christian Americans, as well as their Canadian neighbors, inherited theological and cultural opinions on Jews that had circulated in Western societies for many centuries. While one can point to considerable improvements in American Christian attitudes toward Jews in the last two generations, pockets of antagonism and negative stereotypes have persisted. Even before the recent virulent outbursts, there have been many reminders that for many Christians, the Jews have been an “other,” and for some the “other,” as many Christians do not relate

5 Southern Poverty Law Center has tracked 1,020 hate groups in the United States in 2018. Cf. “Hate Map,” Southern Poverty Law Center, accessed September 4, 2019, <https://www.splcenter.org/hate-map>.

6 Cf. “The Anne Frank Center USA Proudly Presents ‘Lashon Hara: On the Consequences of Hate Speech’,” Cision PRWeb, November 19, 2014, <http://www.prweb.com/releases/2014/11/prweb12336281.htm>.

7 Cf. A. Libman Lebeson, *Pilgrim People* (New York: Harper & Brother, 1950).

8 See R. T. Handy’s classical work, *A Christian America: Protestant Hopes and Historical Realities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971).

9 Cf. L. Dinnerstein, *Antisemitism in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

10 Cf. Silberman, *A Certain People*; Y. Ariel, “Jewish-Christian Dialogue,” in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Interfaith Dialogue*, ed. C. Cornille (New York: Wiley Blackwell, 2013), 205–23.

to Jews in the same manner they interact with Christians, including those who affiliate with different groups than their own.¹¹

Moreover, while Christian American attitudes toward the Jews have mostly improved since the 1960s, American Christianity is particularly diverse and one cannot point to one cohesive attitude on its part. Even within the same Christian denominations, different groups and members have voiced varied opinions.¹² Likewise, attitudes have not been static. In some quarters of American Christianity, there have been considerable changes in the perception of Jews, while in others traditional, supersessionist opinions have remained the norm. In many quarters, attitudes toward the Jews are ambivalent and complex. One element that has stirred strong and diverse reactions, at the same time enhancing antisemitic language, has been the rise of the State of Israel and, since 1967, its occupation of territories with Palestinian majorities.¹³

In order to assess American Christian attitudes, we will therefore need to examine a large spectrum of groups and movements. These range from progressive Christians on the left to regressive non-inclusive groups on the far right. Only then can we reach broader generalizations. Christian attitudes toward Jews often derive from the groups' tenets of faith and the social and cultural atmosphere and political standings of the different Christian groups, and one needs to examine opinions toward the Jews within these contexts.

Liberal and Mainline Christians

The terms mainline and liberal Christians relate mostly to historical denominations that have not chosen the conservative evangelical road, or walked away from it.¹⁴ Many of the mainline Protestant churches, including American Baptists, the Presbyterian Church USA, and the United Methodist Church, have taken liberal, egalitarian, inclusive, gay-friendly choices in the last decades, but they also hold conservative wings in their midst. In Canada, Protestant de-

11 Cf. Dinnerstein, *Antisemitism in America*.

12 Cf. L. B. Spitzer, *Baptists, Jews, and the Holocaust: The Hand of Sincere Friendship* (Valley Forge: Judson, 2017).

13 Cf. P. Merkley, *Christian Attitudes towards the State of Israel* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 2001); Y. Ariel, "Contemporary Christianity and Israel," in *Essential Israel: Essays for the 21st Century*, ed. S. I. Troen and R. Fish (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017), 280–311.

14 Cf. M. E. Marty, *Modern American Religion*, vols. 1–4 (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1986–1998).

nominations organized somewhat differently than in the United States. A number of the larger mainline Protestant churches amalgamated in 1925 to form the United Church of Canada, which became and remained the largest in the country. In America, mainline churches were indeed the mainline until the 1970s. In the last decades, they have declined in numbers and lost members, while conservative churches gained more ground.¹⁵

In relation to the Jews, there have been, in the last half a century, dual trends on the part of liberal and mainline Protestants, while Catholic trends have been somewhat more cohesive. Since the 1960s, both Catholics and liberal Protestants have, in principle, accepted as legitimate, at least in theory, the existence of a Jewish religious tradition and community outside of the confines of Christianity. Open supersessionist attitudes have dwindled among mainline Christians, although they have not disappeared completely.¹⁶

A number of developments contributed to the change of mind. One of them had been the realization on the part of Christian thinkers that the horrors of the Holocaust ultimately resulted from Christianity's antagonistic and demeaning attitudes toward Judaism and Jews.¹⁷ Likewise, the de-legitimation of the Nazi regime and its ideology brought about a taboo in polite society on Nazi-like opinions and rhetoric. If before World War II, writers, politicians, and celebrities felt confident when expressing antisemitic opinions, they now have to tune down, disguise, or repress their feelings or prejudices. Incidents, in which American Christian leaders and ministers make anti-Jewish remarks, or slips of the tongue, have occurred numerous times, often resulting in apologies.¹⁸ Such exclamations had become "politically incorrect" even before Americans invented the term at the turn of the twenty-first century.

Mainline American Christian's official standing toward Judaism and Jews changed considerably in concurrence with and following the declarations and theological pronouncements that the movement of interfaith dialogue of the 1960s and 1970s spelled out. The new atmosphere, which promoted more accept-

15 Cf. D. W. Lotz, ed., *Altered Landscapes: Christianity in America, 1935–1985* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).

16 Cf. Y. Ariel, "Protestant Attitudes to Jews and Judaism during the Last Fifty Years," in *Terms of Survival: The Jewish World Since 1945*, ed. R. S. Wistrich (London: Routledge, 1995), 332–48.

17 Cf. Ariel, "Jewish Christian Dialogue."

18 Cf. Y. Ariel, *Philosemites or Antisemites? Evangelical Christian Attitudes towards the Jews* (Jerusalem: Vidal Sasson Center for the Study of Antisemitism, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2002).

ance and recognition, brought about momentous changes.¹⁹ Christian thinkers began following in the footsteps of the Christian Realist theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, who pioneered already in the 1920s–1930s the idea that Jews were not in need of the Christian gospel and had a vital religious tradition of their own to sustain them.²⁰ Interfaith dialogue progressed in the decades between the two world wars, alongside unprecedented low points in many Christian quarters in their treatment of Jews. Paradoxically, the rise of more radical ethnic hatred in the 1920s–1930s stirred liberal religious activists to interfaith activity and enhanced the development of more systematic dialogue. Liberal Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish thinkers offered each other a greater amount of recognition and appreciation, and there were advances in more systematic and institutionalized forms of dialogue. The movement advanced considerably in the years after World War II, reaching a “golden age” in the late 1960s and 1970s, when a momentum for reconciliation and dialogue flourished in Europe, America, Israel, and other countries. Although the movement of interfaith dialogue has since witnessed setbacks and lost much of its momentum, it has nonetheless made a profound impact on the relationship between Judaism and Christianity, bringing about great improvements in the manner the different communities of faith relate to each other.

Christian missionary activity had caused much resentment among Jewish leaders, who viewed the missions as a demonstration of contempt toward Judaism and Jews. During the 1950s–1960s, pro-dialogue groups within mainline churches, such as the Presbyterian Church USA or the United Methodist Church, gained the upper hand, and a growing number of Protestant denominations decided that they had no more interest in allocating money and human resources to evangelizing Jews.²¹ The Catholic Church as well as mainline churches came out with a series of historical decisions.²² They exonerated the Jews from long

19 On the movement of interfaith reconciliation and the changes in brought about see the following collections: H. Croner, ed., *Stepping Stones to Further Jewish-Christian Relations: An Unabridged Collection of Christian Documents* (New York: Stimulus Books, 1977); H. Croner, and L. Klenicki, eds., *Issues in the Jewish-Christian Dialogue: Jewish Perspectives on Covenant, Mission and Witness* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979); H. Croner, ed., *More Stepping Stones to Jewish-Christian Relations: An Unabridged Collection of Christian Documents, 1975–1983* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985).

20 On Reinhold Niebuhr, social justice, and the Jews, see E. Naveh, *Reinhold Niebuhr and Non-utopian Liberalism: Beyond Illusion and Despair* (Brighton: Sussex Academic, 2002).

21 Cf. Y. Ariel, “Eschatology, Evangelism, and Dialogue: The Presbyterian Mission to the Jews, 1920–1960,” *The Journal of Presbyterian History* 75, no. 1 (1997): 29–42.

22 Cf. Croner, *Stepping Stones to Further Jewish-Christian Relations*.

held accusations, such as *Deicide*, the idea that Jews, in every generation, are responsible for the suffering and death of Jesus.

Jewish thinkers have noticed and appreciated the transformation.²³ A number of Jewish leaders have pointed out that the change had not been complete, expressing concern that instead of disappearing, antisemitism has become more subtle and disguised. For example, anti-Israel attitudes have replaced, at least partially, anti-Jewish ones.²⁴ The June 1967 war, in which Israel had overtaken Jordanian, Egyptian, and Syrian territories, worked to alter the image of Israel even among those mainline Christians who previously approved of Israel's existence. Christian liberal opinions have often been committed to Arabs in the Middle East, to political justice, and to protecting Third World nations. In later years, liberal Christians have also come to put high premium on dialogue with Muslims and on establishing cordial relations with the Muslim communities worldwide. A development that demonstrated the sharp change in attitudes was the depiction of Israel in the progressive Protestant publication *Christianity and Crisis*, which Reinhold Niebuhr founded, and where he published a number of pro-Zionist essays.²⁵ One of the most influential American theologian of the twentieth century, the socially progressive Niebuhr advocated, in addition to a new approach toward the Jewish people, a pro-Zionist outlook. After the periodical took an anti-Israel twist in the 1970s, Niebuhr's widow, Ursula, requested that the editors remove her late husband's name from the publication. The change was symbolic. Progressive Protestants have come to take exception to Israeli policies, and, often, to the entire Israeli project. Liberal Protestant views have often been harsher than Catholic ones. The Catholic Church has tried to walk a fine line between friendly and sympathetic attitudes toward Israelis and Palestinians, while many liberal Protestants have affirmed their commitment to the Palestinian cause.

While the continued Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories could account for some, or even much, of the criticism, both Jews and Christians have noticed that the recriminations and sanctions directed toward Israel have been outstanding in their magnitude and intensity. Liberal Christians have disproportionately directed negative attention and boycotts against Israel in the last two de-

23 "Dabru Emet: A Jewish Statement on Christians and Christianity," National Jewish Scholars Project, issued July 4, 2002, accessed September 4, 2019, http://www.jcrelations.net/Dabru_Emet_A_Jewish_Statement_on_Christians_and_Christianity.2395.0.html.

24 Cf. M. Lerner, *The Socialism of Fools: Antisemitism on the Left* (Oakland: Tikkun Books, 1992).

25 On Reinhold Niebuhr's theological, social, and political career, see P. Merkley, *Reinhold Niebuhr: A Political Account* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1975); R. W. Fox, *Reinhold Niebuhr: A Biography* (New York: Pantheon, 1985).

cares, while overlooking compatible or worse violations in other nations. In fact, the same Christians blaming Israel have not reacted with the same passion toward countries with deadly breaches of human rights, such as Sudan or Sri Lanka. It seems that many Christians view a Jewish state with uneasiness and are more apprehensive about its moves and actions.

For Christian groups and thinkers, attitudes toward Israel have also become a measure of their positions on a variety of issues, including the appropriate manner of reading the Christian sacred scriptures and their standing on political and moral affairs. Relating to Israel often touched on sensitive nerves, corresponding to Christian self-understanding of their own role and place in the history of redemption. Liberal Christians established cordial relationships with Palestinian as well as with Israeli and Jewish activists who have voiced highly critical understandings of Israeli policies and even the Israeli experience at large. Cooperating with such Jewish activists has offered legitimation to anti-Israel activists since it validates liberal Christian critique and exonerate Christians who blame Israel. One element that did not endear Israel to progressive Christians has been the fact that their rivals in the Christian camp, the evangelicals, have landed support to Israel on behalf of a Messianic interpretation, with which they do not agree, of the biblical text.²⁶

Evangelical Christians

When assessing the opinions and actions of evangelical Christians, it is important to remember that evangelical Christianity is a diverse movement, with hundreds of denominations, thousands of churches, and numerous missionary and educational institutions that are independent of denominational control. Taken as a whole, evangelicals have also expressed diverse, variegated, and often ambivalent views about Jews and Judaism, as well as on other topics. Evangelicals, as a rule, have not joined the interfaith movement, which has remained mostly associated with liberal, mainline, or national churches, and have remained firmly committed to evangelism. While differing on various theological, liturgical, and ecclesiastical components, almost all evangelicals uphold certain principles or attitudes. Almost all evangelicals insist that only women and men who undergo a conversion experience, “establish a personal relationship with Jesus,” or are

²⁶ On the contemporary liberal-evangelical divide, please see J. K. Wellman, *Evangelical vs. Liberal: The Clash of Christian Cultures in the Pacific Northwest* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

“born again in Christ,” are justified and saved. As long as the Jews as individuals and a people have not accepted Jesus, they have not secured their personal salvation and collective redemption. Without Jesus, they also lack a firm moral compass and often follow wrong teachings and movements.²⁷ As a rule, evangelicals hold the Christian Bible, both the Old and New Testaments, to be God’s message to humanity and have tended to read the sacred Christian scriptures more literally than their liberal counterparts. Their understanding of the Bible as an historical and Messianic message has strongly influenced evangelical attitudes toward the Jews and Israel.

While not all evangelicals subscribe to a premillennialist Messianic faith, many in this camp in Christianity, including leading evangelists, have accepted and propagated the idea that Jesus is about to return to earth and that the Jewish people are going to play an important role in the unfolding of the Messianic era.²⁸ Evangelicals who adhere to a Messianic faith in the imminent return of Jesus to earth have come to recognize the Jewish people as heirs and continuers of historical Israel and as the object of biblical prophecies about a restored Davidic kingdom in the messianic era.²⁹ Many of them have come to view the Jews as important partners along the road that leads to the materialization of the kingdom of God on earth. They have looked upon a Jewish state in Palestine as a legitimate, even desirable, albeit temporary commonwealth, a stepping-stone on the road to the Messianic kingdom.

The Arab-Israeli war in 1967, in which Israel took over the historical parts of Jerusalem, had a very different effect on evangelical-Jewish relations than on liberal Christians. The dramatic Israeli victory, and the territorial gains it brought with it, strengthened the evangelical Messianic convictions and the idea that Israel was to play an important role in the developments that were to precede the arrival of the Messiah.³⁰ During the 1970s–2010s, conservative evangelicals became Israel’s most ardent supporters in the American public arena, with their positive views of Israel gradually affecting their opinions on the Jews.³¹ Previous-

27 Cf. Y. Ariel, *Evangelizing the Chosen People: Missions to the Jews in America, 1880–2000* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

28 Cf. B. Graham, *World Aflame* (New York: Doubleday, 1965).

29 Cf. T. P. Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming: American Premillennialism, 1875–1925* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1983); T. P. Weber, *On the Road to Armageddon: How Evangelicals became Israel’s Best Friends* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004).

30 See, for example, the numerous references to Israel in Hal Lindsey’s best-selling book, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970).

31 Cf. Y. Ariel, *An Unusual Relationship: Evangelical Christians and Jews* (New York: New York University Press, 2013).

ly, evangelical opinions on Jews were more skeptical and resentful. They could accept the idea that the Jews were to occupy an important role in the events of the Messianic era, but at the same time, they expressed prevailing stereotypical images of Jews as greedy in business or as advocates of social revolutions.

An example of such bigoted exchanges took place in the White House in 1972 between President Richard Nixon and Billy Graham, America's most respectable evangelist in the second half of the twentieth century. The content of the audio-cassette shocked many Americans. The transcripts revealed that Graham and Nixon expressed negative opinions of Jews, blaming them for the ills of the age and echoing stereotypical images of Jews as subversive liberals whose aim was to undermine Christian values and institutions.³² Many had already been aware of Nixon's prejudices against Jews but were surprised that Graham shared so wholeheartedly the president's opinions. Remarkably, Graham's conversation with Nixon took place in the same year that the evangelist produced a movie, *His Land*, that portrayed the State of Israel in very favorable terms. Israel's prime minister at the time, Golda Meir, was a guest of honor at the film's opening night. The movie was not an isolated endeavor. Graham spoke and wrote many times in favor of Israel, viewing it as playing a significant role in the unfolding of prophecy as well as regarding it as an ally in the global war against the Soviet bloc.³³ In the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, American Jewry supported Israel almost unanimously and judged pro-Israeli stands as indications of friendliness toward the Jewish people. In addition to his expressed pro-Israel sympathies, Graham spoke about Jews and Christians as overcoming prejudices together, a gesture that Jewish organizations appreciated.³⁴ Until the recording became public, Jewish leaders generally looked upon Graham as a devoted friend. In 1969, the Anti-Defamation League, one of the central Jewish organizations in America, awarded Graham the Torch of Liberty Plaque; and in 1977, the American Jewish Committee, another major Jewish group, awarded him its first Inter-Religious Award. Yet, it was the same Billy Graham who spoke so negatively about Jews and promoted the importance of Israel at the same time.

32 Cf. D. Vest, "They Don't Know How I Really Feel: Billy Graham, Tangled Up in Tape," *Counter Punch*, March 5, 2002, www.counterpunch.org/vestgraham.html; "A Statement by Evangelist Billy Graham on Intolerance and Prejudice following Release of Nixon White House Tapes," Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, issued March 16, 2002, accessed September 5, 2019, <http://jmm.aaa.net.au/articles/175.htm>.

33 Cf. B. Graham, *Just As I Am: The Autobiography of Billy Graham* (New York: Harper Collins, 1997), esp. 353–55.

34 Cf. "Billy Graham and the Jews," Beliefnet, accessed September 5, 2019, www.beliefnet.com/story/102/story_10204_1.html.

Graham's opinions were quite typical for his group cohorts. A survey the Anti-Defamation League sponsored in the early 1960s found rampant prejudices among American evangelical Christians.³⁵ However, a similar survey, conducted twenty years later, pointed to huge improvements in evangelical standing on Jews. In the years following the 1967 war, evangelicals encountered a growing body of information about Jews, Judaism, and Israel, which helped familiarize and humanize the Jews. Evangelicals have also come to interact more with Jews, in Israel and America, and many evangelicals adopted Jewish symbols and holidays, including the celebration of Passover. Evangelical Christians have modified their End Times scenarios in order to reassure their Jewish friends that they consider them positive players in their vision of the End Times. In evangelical publications of the 1990s–2010s, authors gave up on the idea that the Antichrist would be a Jew, coming up with other options.³⁶

Non-Messianic, especially anti-premillennialist, evangelicals do not regard the Jews as the chosen people. They have little use for Israel, and many do not see merit in Jewish celebrations, holidays, or symbols. Occasionally one can hear such evangelicals expressing unfavorable views on Judaism and Jews as well as on their fellow evangelicals who have been enchanted with Jews and Israel. However, the most open and persistent attacks on Jews come mostly from more radical quarters in Christian American society.

Radical White Christians

Open antisemitism and the promotion of conspiracy theories involving Jews had been evident among mainline and evangelical Protestants in previous generations. In recent decades, such rhetoric signals its owners as acting outside the respectable mainstream. In the 1920s, for example, the rich and powerful Henry Ford Sr. sponsored the publication of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* on the pages of the *Dearborn Independent*.³⁷ Focused on blaming the Jews for the ills of the days, Ford's antisemitic newspaper appeared between 1920 and 1927, fully subsidized by the car manufacturer. Ford was the major producer of cars in America and beyond, with his T-Model selling by the millions, and he

³⁵ Cf. Ch. Glock and R. Stark, *Christian Beliefs and Anti-Semitism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966).

³⁶ For example, T. LaHaye and J. B. Jenkins, *Left Behind* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1995).

³⁷ On Henry Ford and his incitement against Jews, see A. Lee, *Henry Ford and the Jews* (New York: Stein & Day, 1980); N. Baldwin, *Henry Ford and the Jews: The Mass Production of Hate* (New York: Public Affairs, 2001).

knew how to promote ideas and products. Dedicated to his anti-Jewish campaign, he instructed every Ford branch in the country to distribute free copies of the paper to customers, workers, and inquirers. Believing in “Consumerism” as a global means to promote peace, Ford’s need to sell cars brought him at one time to halt his antisemitic activity in consideration of Jewish clients. However, his anti-Jewish attacks caused long-lasting damage to Jews and their civil standing. Ford and his lieutenants turned a collection of the articles that they had printed in the *Dearborn Independent* into a best-selling book, *The International Jew*.³⁸ *The International Jew* enjoyed global circulation, appearing in numerous languages, in millions of copies. In Germany during the 1920s and 1930s, Ford’s writings enjoyed popularity in antisemitic circles, with Adolf Hitler and other Nazis enamored by them, citing them, and deriving legitimacy from their pages for their racist views. Baldur von Schirach, leader of the *Hitlerjugend*, the Nazi Youth movement, confessed after the Nazi defeat that he became an antisemitic racist and a convinced Nazi when reading *the International Jew*.³⁹ In 1938 as a chancellor of Germany, Hitler awarded Ford the *Verdienstkreuz Deutscher Adler*, a medal the German government offered foreign dignitaries, whom it wished to honor. The relationship between American White Christian antisemitism and Nazi ideology is worth noticing.⁴⁰

Contemporary White American groups advocate Nazi-like ideologies and maneuvers, complete with Nazi flags, uniforms, insignia, and slogans. However, it is important to remember that the influences have been in both directions, and, in fact, American racism served as a model for German Nazi antisemitism. Ford and his cronies were successful in spreading, enhancing, or offering reasoning for virulent antisemitic opinions and hate way beyond the American orbit.

Ford’s anti-Jewish writings continue to circulate, influencing and reinforcing conspiracy theories directed against the Jews. In a number of countries, they are still in print. In the 1990s and 2000s, when the internet turned into a venue that

38 Cf. L. Ribuffo, “Henry Ford and *The International Jew*,” *Dearborn Independent* 69, no. 4 (1980): 437–77.

39 On Baldur von Schirach and his Nazi career, see “Baldur von Schirach and the ‘Mission of the Younger Generation’,” in *The Face of the Third Reich*, ed. J. Fest (New York: Penguin, 1979), 332–54.

40 In recent years, historians and journalists have begun taking notice of the connection between American racism and Nazism. Cf., for example, J. Q. Whitman, *Hitler’s American Model: The United States and the Making of Nazi Race Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

circulates conspiracy theories and antisemitic incitements, *The International Jew* found a home there as well.⁴¹

A number of white Protestant and Catholic leaders and activists agreed with Ford, utilizing his writings and coming up with ideas of their own.⁴² The preacher Gerald L. K. Smith, also a sympathizer of Nazi Germany in the 1930s, has served as a link between antisemitic activity in America before World War II and after.⁴³ Smith started his public career in association with Huey Long, governor of Louisiana until Long's murder in 1935, but unlike the populist Long, he took a decisive racist and conservative Christian outlook. "Share Our Wealth" started as a populist movement, but under Smith's leadership turned into a Christian White Supremacist group. Smith moved to establish the "Nationalist Christian Crusade," which has foreshadowed many of the current White Supremacy groups that openly incite hatred against Jews.

Matters changed during and after World War II. Granted, preachers and activists who amalgamate racist convictions and Christian exclusivist theological preaching when blaming the Jews have not disappeared. However, advocating blatant racist ideas became politically incorrect, even before the term appeared in cultural discourse. Christian social elites, even when harboring anger at Jews, have made an effort to refrain from embracing racist theories. Such teachings became almost obsolete in mainstream society following the war on the Nazis, and uttering such expressions in polite Christian society decreased enormously, although it continued under the current and occasionally popped up above it as well.⁴⁴ Since the 1960s–1970s, such accusations stood against the civic, cultural, and religious consensus in America. Instead, they went underground, or moved to the margins, finding a home among white supremacist groups, such as the Aryan Nation, or the KKK, who have not enjoyed the respectability that Henry Ford possessed. Such groups do not represent, as a rule, the political elites, although occasionally one can find influential voices partial to such groups, as the recent example of Steve Bannon has indicated. Gerald L. K. Smith, for his part, continued his ministry well into the 1970s, demonstrating resourcefulness and innovative spirit, with many supporting his ministry. His ability—and the ability

⁴¹ H. Ford Sr, *The International Jew: The World's Foremost Problem*, http://www.magtudoin.org/Henry_Ford_The_International_Jew.pdf.

⁴² Cf. R. Lord Roy, *Apostles of Discord: A Study of Organized Bigotry and Disruption on the Fringes of Protestantism* (Boston: Beacon, 1953).

⁴³ Cf. G. Jeansonne, *Gerald L. K. Smith: Minister of Hate* (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 1991).

⁴⁴ Cf. Glock and Stark, *Christian Beliefs and Anti-Semitism*.

of others like him—to reach and influence American society at large eroded but did not fully disappear.

While conspiracy theories involving Jews have been rampant in Christian circles for generations, there are some novel features relating to contemporary groups. One of the salient among them is the centrality of the internet. Antisemitic groups appear on thousands of sites on the internet. When the internet started as an open access medium in the early 1990s, such groups were still rare, but by the late 1990s, they became rampant.⁴⁵ One can study therefore the thoughts, ideas, and plans of such groups by examining their websites. Many of the groups hold to a Messianic faith that predicts a bloody apocalyptic End Times. The apocalyptic Messianic scenarios often combine confrontational, anti-establishment notions, with xenophobia and virulent antisemitism.

Another salient feature of white supremacist antisemitic groups is that they are Holocaust deniers. Holocaust denying is central to their position. Acknowledging the Holocaust would have forced them to restrain their virulent bigotry and conspiracy theories. It would also have to confront the fact that they are following in the footsteps of mass murderers. Not just declared “Nazis,” or neo-Nazis, but other racist and antisemitic groups too have adopted Nazi symbols and paraphernalia. Holocaust denying, not surprisingly, is rampant, since it clarifies the Nazis from atrocities that had placed them, and those looking up to them, in the wrong side of history.⁴⁶

Older groups of white extremists did not always relate to Israel as a pivotal entity in world politics. Israel was not there before the late 1940s, and when it was established, it did not seem at first important enough. Current extremist groups often place Israel at the center of their conspiracy theories and claim that Zionists rule America. A number of neo-Nazi or white supremacist groups have militated against the alleged Jewish or Zionist control of America. This was a prominent theme for the demonstrators in Charlottesville. The Zionists-controlling-America myth has been one symptom of the frustrations of members of the groups, who are mostly white, male, born in America, Christians. Many of them feel that ethnic and cultural elements, for which they do not care, have usurped their rightful place in the nation. Another feature of contemporary groups relates to Christian pluralism. In contrast to previous generations, in which white supremacist groups were almost exclusively Protestants, and

⁴⁵ Cf. F. Diep, “How Social Media Helped Organize and Radicalize America’s White Supremacists,” *Pacific Standard*, August 15, 2017, <https://psmag.com/social-justice/how-social-media-helped-organize-and-radicalize-americas-newest-white-supremacists>.

⁴⁶ Cf. S. Miller, “Denial of the Holocaust,” *Social Education* 59 (October 1995): 342–45, <http://www.socialstudies.org/sites/default/files/publications/se/5906/590607.html>.

often included anti-Catholic rhetoric in their list of groups they wished to exclude, a number of the current groups have removed Catholics from their lists of dangerous intruders. They have left Jews high on that list.

For the most part, Jews and white supremacists do not rub shoulders, and the latter know very little about Judaism and Jews. Since the 1960s, most Jews have been members of middle-class America, holding excess to good educational and professional opportunities. Radical racism and antisemitism often gives expression to those parts of America that feel that they have been short-changed economically, politically, and culturally and that their place in society has been on the decline.⁴⁷ Their resentment against the Jews, and other groups, reflect larger socio-economic dissatisfactions as well as distrust of multi-cultural, multi-ethnic society. Confronting such groups demands social and economic action, coupled with better educational opportunities, as well as some measure of compassion.

It also calls for introducing Judaism and making it available to the larger public. As the evangelical example shows, actual interaction with Jews and Israel brings with it greater respect. The more Christians encounter Jews, Jewish practices, and Jewish history, and become aware of Jewish struggles and dilemmas, the more accepting of Jews and Judaism they become. Anti-Jewish sentiments, subtle and brutal alike, call for dissemination of information about Jews and Judaism. Almost all cultural, religious, social, and even ethnic, groups in America engage in outreach, presenting themselves to larger audiences, and trying to gain appreciation, sympathy, interest, and support. In recent decades, Jews have started to engage, rather hesitantly, in various programs of outreach. One rather outstanding venue, the Holocaust museum in Washington, proved very successful, making a long-lasting impression on its visitors. There are a few other such venues, but they cannot refute all conspiracy theories directed at Jews.

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⁴⁷ Cf. M. Berbrier, "The Victim Ideology of White Supremacists and White Separatists in the United States," *Sociological Focus* 33, no. 2 (2000): 175–91.

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