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Title: **“American Christianity, Jews and Israel: Antisemitism and Faith”**

Panel: Bible, Christianity and Anti-Semitism

American Jews have often looked upon their country as offering them opportunities that the ‘Old World’ had denied them. Clinging to a prevailing ethos, Jews, and others, have tended to see the United States as an open and inclusive society that provides all its inhabitants with equal opportunities and respects their heritages and faiths. This, almost utopian, picture does not always correspond to the ethnic and religious realities of American life. In actuality, the United States has been a Christian country, both in its vision and its demography. Non-Christians, and, at times, even non-Protestants, had to struggle for acceptance and equal standing.

In relating to Jews, Christian Americans, as well as their Canadian neighbors, inherited theological and cultural opinions that had circulated in Christian societies for long centuries. One can point to considerable improvement in American Christian attitudes towards Jews, in the last two generations, although pockets of antagonism and negative stereotypes have persisted. A recent outburst of vilification took place at the end of 2016 and the beginning of 2017, following the election of Donald Trump to president of the United States.

There are no easy generalizations to simplify our subject. American Christianity is particularly diverse and even within the same traditions different groups and members have voiced varied opinions. 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 opinions have remained the norm. In many Christian quarters, attitudes towards the Jews are ambivalent and complex.

One element of contemporary Jewish life that has stirred strong and diverse reactions has been the rise of the state of Israel and its continued occupation, since 1967, of territories with Palestinian majorities. While Israeli policies could account for some of the criticism, both Jews and Christians have noticed that the recriminations and sanctions directed

towards Israel are outstanding. The same Christians blaming Israel have not reacted with the same passion towards countries with deadly breaches of human rights, such as Sudan or Sri Lanka. It seems that many Christians view a Jewish state with suspicion, and are more apprehensive towards its moves and actions.

In order to assess Christian attitudes towards and interactions with Jews and Israel we will need to examine a large spectrum of Christian groups and movements. These range from the far right to progressive Christians, both in churches and in interdenominational or non-denominational organizations. Only then, can we reach broader generalizations. One preliminary hypothesis is that 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 tolerant they become. Acquainting Americans with these bodies of knowledge would be my recommendation to combating Antisemitism, as well as other forms of prejudice and bigotry.