I am a progressive Christian Mennonite. My husband is Jewish, and my children are both Jewish and Mennonite. We live in a rural area of the US, surrounded by homes and trucks flying Confederate flags. There have been Nazi symbols drawn on the walls of my kids’ school bathrooms. That use to be something I could shrug off. But antisemitic attacks against Jews increased by 60 percent since 2016. An hour from my house, white nationalists with torches marched in the streets of Charlottesville chanting “Jews will not replace us.” And the 2018 massacre at the synagogue in Pittsburgh came after a survey indicating a fifth of young Americans have never heard of the Holocaust. I have new fears for my family’s safety. I think progressive Christians contribute to a culture of hate against Jews and slow progress toward justice for Palestinians.

Quaker, Presbyterian, United Church of Christ and Mennonite publications on Israel and Palestine offer important advocacy for Palestinian history, trauma, and perspectives that has been left out of mainstream media and right-wing Christian Zionism. But these progressive Christians routinely ignore Jewish history, trauma and perspectives and carry shades of antisemitism. The problem is not in what they say about Palestinian rights, but in what they do not say about Jews, Judaism, and Israel. While these social justice-oriented Christians are sensitive to the various manifestations of racism, they seem to shrug off any suggestion that two thousand years of Christian antisemitism might manifest itself in their work. Some progressive Christian publications and events actively exclude Jewish points of view, equate all of Israel with occupation and evil, ignore wrongdoing by Arab states and Palestinian leaders, fail to recognize antisemitic tropes, and illustrate other troubling gaps.

While conservative churches avoid any criticism of Israeli policy to Palestinians, I heard dozens of sermons and talks on racism and Palestinian rights in Mennonite institutions. But I never heard a sermon on antisemitism, I was never taught the history of two thousand years of Christian persecution of Jews, and I learned next to nothing about Judaism. In 2017 Mennonite historians revealed that Mennonite church leaders had suppressed the history of significant Mennonite participation in the Holocaust. Mennonite Central Committee, a humanitarian group, rescued Russian Mennonites from the Red Army. Some of those rescued Mennonites had allied themselves with Nazis, and went on to publish antisemitic newspapers in the US and Canada and wrote the White Man’s Bible, the foundational tract for white supremacy in the US today. Yet still, my church leaders refused to acknowledge and uncover this history.

I have a long and detailed track record of advocacy for Palestinian rights, speaking out against Israeli occupation of Palestine and the Gaza siege at briefings in the White House, Congress, the Pentagon, CNN and Fox News. But after spending three months living in Palestine and Israel, I came away with new insights on the history of antisemitism and how it impacts the prospects for a just peace in Israel and Palestine. When I wrote about concerns with Mennonite antisemitism, some Mennonites wrote sexist hate mail, trolled me on social media, made threats, and some
called for Mennonite institutions to cancel my classes and ban my writing from Mennonite institutions.

This article outlines an analysis of widespread flaws within Christianity today, and specific shades of antisemitism in progressive Christian rhetoric.

**Key Points**

- **Christian Ignorance:** Most Christians lack understanding of Judaism and antisemitism. While there has been some high-level Christian-Jewish dialogue after the Holocaust, most Christians churches today lack robust understand of the role of Christians in the Holocaust, lack relationships with Jewish organizations and seem to rarely listen to Jewish perspectives on Judaism, Zionism, and what Israel means to Jews today. While the generally pro-Israel mainstream news media covers US interests in Israel, diverse Jewish perspectives on Israel are often missing.

- **Christian Zionism Blind Spots:** Many conservative Christians embrace Christian Zionism, which funds Jewish settlements in land set aside for a Palestinian state because they believe Jesus will only return when Jews live in Israel. This approach assumes Jews will die or convert to Christianity in the “end times”, ignores Palestinian Christians, and reflects both Islamophobic and antisemitic attitudes.

- **Progressive Blind Spots:** Most progressive Christian church agencies work primarily with Palestinians. Many progressive Christians demonstrate little understanding of Jewish points of view or history, rarely cite the work of anti-occupation Jewish peace groups, and some react negatively to anything positive said about Israel or Jews, as if this immediately takes away from the Palestinian cause. Some progressive Christians demonstrate both arrogance and ignorance by insisting that they are not antisemitic without awareness of their own blind spots and the gaps in their analysis and rhetoric.

- **Obstacles to a Just Peace:** Both conservative and progressive Western Christians do harm in how they relate to the conflict between Jewish Israelis, Palestinians, and the wider Muslim and Arab world. Both approaches create obstacles to a just peace.

- **Antisemitism:** Just as racism manifests differently in the North and South of the US, so too does antisemitism appear in different ways in the conservative and progressive wings of the church. The Israeli rightwing overuses the charge of antisemitism, and this is a problem. Opposing Israeli policy against Palestinians is not antisemitic. But all too often, antisemitic themes do accompany criticism of Israeli policy, and progressive Christians too easily dismiss the idea that they participate in antisemitism.

- **Multi-narrative Approach:** Most Christian’s who visit Israel and Palestine spend most of their time with Jews or Palestinians, rather than a “multinarrative” tours that listens to all sides. This contributes to distorted views among conservatives and progressives.

- **A Both/And Approach:** It is possible to both support Palestinians and to pay attention to antisemitism embedded in thousands of years of Christian culture and theology. It is possible to both pay attention to Jewish safety, trauma, and rights, and to Palestinian safety,
trauma, and rights. It is possible to both pay attention to power imbalances and listen to the
legitimate grievances of all sides.

Ten Shades of Antisemitism in Progressive Christian Rhetoric

This paper focuses on gaps and problems stemming from progressive Christian approaches. The
full article provides documentation and examples of each of these points.

1. Some progressive Christians pay little attention to Jewish history and trauma while
   emphasizing only Palestinian history and trauma.
2. Some progressive Christians ignore Jewish points of view and seem to view Israel and
   Zionism only through the lens of Palestinians.
3. Some progressive Christians tend to place all the blame on Israel, while ignoring
   Palestinian and other countries’ contributions to the conflict.
4. Some progressive Christian’s use Israel as a placeholder for the concept of evil and do
   not acknowledge any positive features of Jews, Judaism, or Israel.
5. Some progressive Christians seem to ignore or fail to recognize antisemitic tropes when
   talking about Israel.
6. Some progressive Christians dismiss Jewish concerns for safety.
7. Some progressive Christians avoid dialogue with Jews and apply a double standard to
   the ethic of enemy love, while emphasizing dialogue with Iran and other armed groups.
8. Some progressive Christians embrace punishment as a primary path to a just peace and
   the main way Western Christians should relate to Jews in Israel.
9. Some progressive Christians fail to call for a shared future or affirm the rights of both
   Palestinians and Jews to safety. This leads many Jews to assume progressive Christians
   support the destruction of the state of Israel.
10. Some progressive Christians single out Israel in church resolutions and publications but
    ignore other situations of injustice that they have more responsibility for, or control over.

Seven Principles for Talking about Israel and Palestine

Progressive Christians can do better. We can work with Jews and Palestinians to build a more
effective social change movement. Five narrative principles could help.

1. Acknowledge and study the history of both Jews and Palestinians and learn about both
   antisemitism and Islamophobia, the Nakba and Zionism.
2. Recognize the significant generational trauma for both Jews and Palestinians and
   acknowledge the role of Western Christians in the suffering of both groups.
3. Acknowledge the importance of the land for both Jews and Palestinians.
4. Acknowledge the right to self-determination for both Jews and Palestinians.
5. Acknowledge the power imbalance on all sides.
6. Recognize positive aspects of both Israeli and Palestinian society.
7. Recognize the need for safety and human rights for both Palestinians and Jews.