

Opinion

David French

Whatever This Is, It Isn't Anti-Zionism

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If you ever wanted a succinct explanation for more than 2,000 years of vicious Christian antisemitism, all you had to do was to tune in to a [meeting](#) of the Trump administration’s Religious Liberty Commission last Monday.

The [commission](#) itself, which is housed in the Department of Justice, is supposed to “advise the White House Faith Office and the Domestic Policy Council on religious liberty policies in the United States.”

The commission contains a [quintessentially Trumpian](#) mix of serious people, sycophants and pop culture influencers. For example, one of the members is Dr. Phil — a man who’s hardly renowned for his expertise on religious liberty.

President Trump also named Carrie Prejean Boller, a former Miss California USA who had a brief moment of stardom, backlash and controversy in 2009 when she said during a question-and-answer session at a pageant that she believed that marriage was between a man and a woman.

After her comments, seminude photographs of her emerged, which — as The Times reported at the time — she blamed on “disreputable photographers.” Then, a month after standing by her, Trump (along with other pageant organizers) [fired her](#), alleging that she’d violated her contract by failing to perform her duties.

Trump’s comments were blunt: “I told Carrie she needed to get back to work and honor her contract.”

Apparently, all is forgiven. Last year Trump appointed Boller to the commission. It was another odd choice. Apart from facing public scorn for her stance on marriage, she has no particular experience with religious liberty. Nor was she all that prominent in the world of conservative influencers.

But she likes Trump, and in this administration, that’s all the qualification you need.

On Monday, she arrived at the hearing loaded for bear. In a series of contentious exchanges, she asked if “certain parts of the Bible” could now be [considered antisemitic](#) for “referring to the killing and crucifixion of our lord and savior, Jesus Christ,” defended Candace Owens and Tucker Carlson — two of the most prominent sources of antisemitic propaganda in the United States — and attacked Zionism as incompatible with her Catholic faith.

In the days since, she’s doubled down. As her social media following soared, she reposted a [supportive tweet](#) from Owens, in which Owens declared that Boller was being attacked for refusing to “support the mass slaughter and rape of innocent children for occult Baal worshipers.” On Tuesday, [Boller posted](#), “Be a good little Goyim and give me a follow.”

In a [defiant interview](#) with The Atlantic's Yair Rosenberg, Boller refused to disavow even the most grotesque and blatant antisemitic statements from Owens, including Owens's claims that "Jewish supremacists had everything to do with the Civil War in America" and that "Jewish people were in control of the slave trade. They've buried a lot of it, but it's there, and you can find it."

Boller responded to a tweet from Ted Cruz [by saying](#), "Ted, in Catholic theology the true Israel is the church, not a political movement. You Zionists have always hated Catholics who reject Zionism and don't support 1948 Israel."

The chairman of the commission, Dan Patrick, the lieutenant governor of Texas, [said he was removing her](#) from the commission, but Boller was defiant. "I remain on this commission until I hear from the president," she told Rosenberg, and she had her own request of the president: "I want the president to admit: Is he 'America first' or 'Israel first'?"

I'm sharing this sad background not because Boller is particularly influential or powerful but because she perfectly encapsulates the rising tide of antisemitism in the United States. Gross bigotry isn't ending her career; it's the rocket fuel that's propelling her to stardom.

Boller is also, ironically enough, showing the necessity for a sane Christian Zionism. She's demonstrating exactly why I have long identified myself as a Christian Zionist.

Before I explain further, let me offer two important caveats. First, there is no definition of "Christian Zionist" that should excuse, rationalize or justify any form of injustice committed by the modern state of Israel. There is no form of Christian Zionism that should mandate support for the policies of the Netanyahu government.

I unequivocally support Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state, but I have also written [repeatedly](#) and [critically](#) about Israel's tactics in its war on Gaza, which I believe have prolonged the conflict and created extraordinary and unnecessary human suffering.

Jewish lives aren't more precious than Palestinian lives, and any form of advocacy for Israel that treats Palestinians as any less deserving of safety and security than Israelis isn't just un-Christian; it's anti-Christian. It directly contradicts the [teachings of Scripture](#), which place Jews and Gentiles in a position of equality.

Second, internal Christian debates about whether the modern state of Israel is a fulfillment of biblical prophecy — as interesting as they can be — should be irrelevant to American foreign policy, which should be based both on American interests and on American commitments to international justice and human rights.

But historic Christian antisemitism is rooted in a historic Christian argument, and it requires a specifically Christian argument in response.

Put in its most simple form, Christian antisemitism is rooted in two propositions — that Jews bear the guilt for Christ’s death (“Jews killed Jesus”) and that when a majority of Jews rejected Jesus (who was a Jew, as were all his early apostles), God [replaced his covenant](#) with the children of Abraham with a new covenant with Christians. This idea of a new covenant that excludes the Jewish people is called supersessionism or replacement theology.

Put the two concepts together — “Jews killed Jesus” and “Christians are the chosen people now” — and you’ve got the recipe for more than 2,000 years of brutal, religiously motivated oppression.

Boller is a recent convert to Catholicism, and she — like Owens — wields her newfound faith like a sword. But perhaps they both need to spend a little more time learning and a lot less time talking.

First, let’s put to rest the indefensible idea that “the Jews” killed Christ. As the Second Vatican Council [taught](#), “The Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ; still, what happened in his Passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive nor against the Jews of today.”

This isn’t a statement of high theological principle so much as basic common sense. Convicting an entire people, for all time, of the crimes of a few religious leaders is a moral monstrosity that runs counter to every tenet of Christian justice.

Second, Boller’s own church teaches that there is a deep bond between Christians and Jews. Last year Robert P. George, a noted Catholic political philosopher at Princeton, wrote a [powerful essay](#) in *Sapir*, a Jewish journal of ideas, in which he described the relationship between the Jewish people and the Catholic Church as an “unbreakable covenant.”

As George writes, Pope Benedict XVI explicitly rejected the idea that the Jewish people “ceased to be the bearer of the promises of God.” Pope John Paul II said that the Catholic Church has “a relationship” with Judaism that “we do not have with any other religion.” He also said that Judaism is “intrinsic” and not “extrinsic” to Christianity and that Jews were Christians’ “elder brothers” in the faith.

Indeed, [Paragraph 121](#) of the Catechism of the Catholic Church states that “the Old Testament is an indispensable part of sacred Scripture. Its books are divinely inspired and retain a permanent value, for the Old Covenant has never been revoked.”

I don’t believe for a moment that the Catholic view is the only expression of Christian orthodoxy. I know quite a few Protestant and Catholic supersessionists who are not

antisemitic, but I highlight the words of John Paul II and Benedict XVI because they starkly demonstrate the incompatibility of antisemitism with Christian orthodoxy.

But one doesn't have to agree with Catholic teaching (or its Protestant analogues) to be fairly called a Zionist — a Christian Zionist, even — because one believes in the right of Israel to exist as a Jewish state.

The reason is rooted in Scripture's commitment to equal dignity for all people, [regardless of ethnicity, class or sex](#). As an extension of that commitment, no group of people should be subjected to abuse or persecution — much less genocide.

In this formulation, a so-called Christian Zionist would also probably be a Christian Kurdist (not a phrase you hear every day) or have a Christian commitment to Palestinian statehood. Kurds and Palestinians have been historically oppressed, denied a home and deprived of the right to defend themselves.

In those circumstances, statehood isn't a matter of fulfilling prophecies; it's about safety and security. It's about self-determination and the preservation of basic human rights. And if you think that can be done without supporting statehood, then I'd challenge you to consider the long and terrible historical record.

A consistent Christian Zionist would oppose both the heinous massacre of Jews on Oct. 7, 2023, and the aggressive, violent expansion of settlements in the West Bank. He would stand resolutely against Iranian efforts to exterminate the Jewish state and against any Israeli war crimes in Gaza.

Embracing the idea that the modern state of Israel is a direct fulfillment of biblical prophecies and therefore must be supported by the United States for theological reasons can lead us to dangerous places — to a belief, in essence, in permanent Israeli righteousness, no matter the nation's conduct and no matter the character of its government.

But the opposite idea — that Christians have replaced the Jews in the eyes of God and there is no longer any special purpose for Jews in God's plan — has its own profound dangers. It creates a sense of righteousness in religious persecution, and it has caused untold suffering throughout human history.

The better Christian view rejects both dangerous extremes, recognizes the incalculable dignity and worth of every human being, and is Zionist in the sense that it holds that one of history's most persecuted groups deserves a national home.

And since Christians persecuted Jews so viciously in the past (and some still do), we have a special responsibility to make amends, to repair the damage that the church has done.

That begins by turning to the new Christian antisemites and shouting, “No!” Ancient hatreds born from ancient heresies have no place in the church today.

David French is an Opinion columnist, writing about law, culture, religion and armed conflict. He is a veteran of Operation Iraqi Freedom and a former constitutional litigator. His most recent book is [“Divided We Fall: America’s Secession Threat and How to Restore Our Nation.”](#) You can follow him on Threads ([@davidfrenchjag](#)).