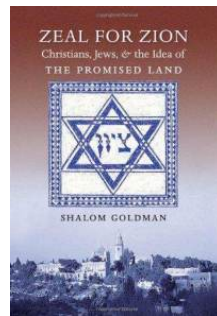


Zeal for Zion: Christians, Jews and the Idea of the Promised Land, by Shalom Goldman

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Shalom Goldman's *Zeal for Zion* is a useful and exciting new departure for the scholarly study of political and theological Zionism, and the complex of personal and institutional relationships between secular and religious Jews and Christians that has so often undergirded it. For the last several decades, scholars have worked to produce a body of writing that has systematically examined



the Christian contribution to the origins and development of Jewish and Israeli political thought. Most of this writing has focused on relationships between Jews and evangelical Christians. But *Zeal for Zion* pushes the arguments and conclusions of this scholarship in exciting new directions, uncovering a series of unexplored contexts for the revival and evolution of Zionism from the late nineteenth century to the present day. “We think of Zionism as a Jewish political cause,” Goldman explains, and “for the most part, Christians do not feature in this narrative except as antagonists.” *Zeal for Zion*, by contrast, “makes the case for a wider and more inclusive history, one that takes the Christian involvement with Zionism into account” (1), and moves conspicuously beyond this literature’s preoccupation with evangelicalism.

To this end, Goldman’s book presents six chapters which offer fresh glimpses of the development of Christian varieties of Zionism. Chapters deal in turn with the relationship between Laurence and Alice Oliphant and Naphtali Herz Imber, with Theodor Herzl and his Christian friendship network, with Herbert Danby, with the implications of two papal visits to Jerusalem, with the experiences in Israel of Jorge Luis Borges, Robert Graves and Vladimir Nabokov, and with the complex and contested relationships between Jewish settlers and Christian Zionists over the last four decades. The chapters are generally marked by an attention to nuance and detail, and by a painstaking but artful and creative reconstruction of a wide variety of literary, linguistic, geographical and historical contexts.

The decision to move beyond evangelicalism is of course an important one. A great deal of recent historical writing has argued both for and against the benefits of evangelical-Israeli relationships. Paul Wilkinson and Stephen Sizer have presented powerful accounts both critiquing and defending Zionism as an evangelical option. Goldman’s work does not deal in detail with these important sets of arguments, but instead opens up startlingly new ways of thinking about Christian Zionism.

Nevertheless, *Zeal for Zion* is, in some ways, a curious book. There is no doubt that it is adding vital new dimensions to our understanding of the relationships between Jews, Christians and the Zionist cause, but it does not explain the rationale for its selection of subjects. What it presents, instead, is a series of snapshots of how various kinds of Christians have related to various kinds of Zionism. The book, rather conspicuously, lacks a conclusion, in which an overarching argument might have been presented. As it stands, the reader is left with six detailed, engaging and generally persuasive accounts of the book’s principal theme.

The lack of conclusion is certainly unfortunate. There is no doubt that Goldman's work has broken important new ground in describing "Christians, Jews and the idea of the promised land," as the subtitle puts it, but the specifics of the new themes and methods that are here proposed are left without discussion. This unfortunate modesty underplays the real element of innovation presented in the book. Goldman has moved the scholarly discussion beyond the familiar names and topics within evangelical historiography to argue, for example, that Roman Catholic Zionism is less of an oxymoron than the established literature might have led us to expect. Similarly, Goldman's decision to examine the influence of Zionism on major creative writers, not always known for their religious zeal, widens the field of relevant discussion in a profound manner. Similarly unfortunate is the lack of clarity as to the principle of selection governing the topics of each chapter. It is not clear why the argument presented in this book is best served by the rather eclectic juxtaposition of subjects.

Despite these shortcomings, *Zeal for Zion* makes a major step forward in the scholarly discussion of its subject. Future work on Christian Zionism must take this brave, nuanced, and intelligent discussion into account.

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