



Shalom Goldman, *Zeal for Zion. Christians, Jews, & the Idea of the Promised Land*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009.

Reviewed by Johannes Gerloff

Shalom Goldman is professor of Hebrew and Middle Eastern Studies at Emory University. “His teaching and research interests include comparative literature, modern Hebrew language and literature, Biblical themes in Jewish and non-Jewish literature, and the study of Hebrew and the ‘Hebraic’ in Christian and Muslim cultures.”¹ He authored or edited four major books and taught at different universities in the United States and Israel.

In “six narratives set in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries” Goldman pairs Christian and Jewish counterparts, describes their “Zeal for Zion” and explains how they stimulated each other ideologically.

The first three chapters present the poet, Naphtali HerzImber, and the British diplomat and journalist, Laurence Oliphant; Zionist leader Theodor Herzl and Anglican cleric William Hechler; Hebrew University professor Joseph Klausner and the Anglican Hebraist Herbert Danby.

Chapter Four describes the Vatican’s engagement with the State of Israel, focusing on individual Catholics who were supportive of Zionist aims.

Chapter Five describes the literary pilgrimage of Jorge Luis Borges, Robert Graves and Vladimir Nabokov.

The final chapter focuses on “Jewish Settlers and Christian Zionists.”

History is not as clear-cut black and white, good and bad, pro and con or—for our topic’s sake—Christian and Jewish, as one would wish to believe. Christians are neither a homogeneous bloc, nor clearly divided between “far right, pro-Israel/anti-Arab Evangelicals” on the one side, and “far left, pro-Arab/anti-Israel ‘main-line’ Protestants and Catholics”² on the other.

With his book, Professor Goldman steps into a field that is deeply riven by stereotypes and antagonisms of all kinds: Palestinians versus Israelis, Muslims versus “Crusaders,” Jews versus Christians, the religious versus the secular, conservatives versus liberals, to name just a few. Some of these adversaries have centuries’ old roots, and they influence each and every one of us through our own tradition and emotional as well as intellectual existence.

All the more remarkable, then, is the intriguingly honest manner in which Goldman describes Jewish and Christian personalities—not shying away from their individual personal, moral or intellectual short-comings—on both sides of the Jewish-Christian divide:

Whether it is Oliphant's mysticism or syphilis (pp. 50–51); Imber's love for alcoholic beverages ("he was indeed drunk when he wrote [Israel's national hymn]"—p. 60); Herzl's "lighting the Christmas tree" (p. 93) or his son's conversion to Christianity (p. 98)—which, in order to enable his burial in a Jewish cemetery, was later declared by Israel's Sephardic chief rabbi Shlomo Amar to have been "the result of mental illness, and not the result of a rational decision" (p. 135): these are just a few of the amusing or embarrassing personal details and anecdotes that render Goldman's book so readable, even for non-academics.

Goldman—who studied ancient Aramaic and Egyptian, and reads, writes and speaks classical and modern Hebrew as well as classical and modern Arabic, German and French—does not use the term "fundamentalism" (as so many do nowadays) assuming that everybody understands it and in truth is just propagating stereotypical prejudices. Rather, his explanation of it is excellent (p. 32). He sketches, with astonishing accuracy, the historical background of Christian Zionist thinking, mentioning leading lights like John Nelson Darby, Orde Wingate, Cyrus Scofield, Tim LaHaye, Jerry Falwell and Oral Roberts. At the same time, he keeps from stumbling into the trap of those opponents of Christian Zionism who squarely blame the adherence on dispensationalism.³ He correctly concludes that the "majority of evangelicals do not subscribe to dispensationalism [yet still] support Israel, for they see its establishment as the fulfillment of the biblical promise." (p. 37).

Goldman seeks "to describe and analyze the Christian encounter with Zionism in a nonpartisan, engaging, and illuminating manner" (p. 41). As a Christian, the reviewer can attest to Goldman's success—by and large—in maintaining the standard he adopted, despite the sometimes tricky, but always underlying emotional layer in Christian-Jewish relations.

Zeal for Zion credits Christians with bringing a great deal more influence to bear on the movement that finally led to the founding of the State of Israel, than do traditional—especially Jewish—accounts. For example, Goldman writes how, "[u]ntil the late nineteenth century, most plans for a Jewish entity in Palestine were Christian" (p. 3). He credits Christian thinkers with foreshadowing "the Zionist call for a renewed emphasis on the Bible, and a decreased emphasis on rabbinic authority" (p. 9). He even acknowledges the role of the German Pietist Templers as "exemplary models that inspired the local Arabs, the Turkish rulers, and most of all the Jews" (p. 11)—this despite the fact that, from today's point of view, the Templers presence in the Land of Israel was overshadowed by many of the third generation members having become ardent Nazis during the first half of the twentieth century.

In a way, Goldman denies Jewish theologians the originality of their Zionism, at least in the time frame of the past two or three centuries. At the same time, he succeeds in showing how those Christians who discovered the Zionist straits of the Holy Writings often had difficulties with their own Christian background; their

own fellow-believers suspecting them of being “too Jewish.” Often they sacrificed their Christian orthodoxy in favor of a faithful adherence (as they understood it) to the original meaning of the sacred texts, in order finally (and obviously successfully!) to challenge traditional rabbinical teaching with their Jewish counterparts.

In a refreshingly objective and accurate way, Shalom Goldman describes the tension Zionist Christians feel within themselves between a Biblical command to evangelize the Jewish people, and a hesitance to do so, for different reasons, in different times, and according to different personalities. This is one of the reasons Jews suspect their Christian supporters’ motives, and why, even within Zionist circles, Christian-Jewish relations can be ambivalent. Very instructive is the well-documented, inner-Church struggle for a theological position in the face of a modern State of Israel. To name just one example: “The framers of *Nostra Aetate*⁴ were careful to dissociate their call for a new relationship with the Jewish people from the question of Zionism” (p. 191).

In the final chapter about Jewish settlers and their Christians sympathizers, the American Jewish professor seems to let down his objectivity, at least in some places. Reading between the lines, his antipathy for the Jewish settlers of the Gush Emunim is obvious. He certainly mirrors the political correctness of our time in claiming that Gush Emunim rejects “Jewish humanism and universalism” (p. 286). In this instance, however, the book lacks the source reference.

It would be interesting to examine, whether Rabbi Yaakov Madan’s dictum against “the evil rule that had dominated” the Land of Israel (p. 287), really meant that “Arabs [...] had no place in the Land of Israel,” (p. 286)—or whether it simply denied Arab rule over it (which would make a difference!).

On page 298, Goldman himself quotes from the Gush Emunim’s founding document, that the “purpose of Judaism”—according to them—is “the full redemption of the people of Israel *and the whole world*” (reviewer’s emphasis). This quote, then, gives a clear hint, that even the Gush Emunim views themselves committed to at least some kind of “Jewish humanism and universalism.”

It would have been more convincing had Goldman quoted a Christian or Jewish Zionist claiming that “[a]ny peace effort, therefore, would be an act against God” (p. 291)—instead of crediting Yoram Peri—a former advisor to the assassinated Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin who has a clear interest in discrediting Jewish extremists—as source. The question to be clarified is whether Christian or Jewish “right-wingers” opposed the Oslo Process in general as a “peace effort” or whether they opposed it as sell-out of Israel’s assets that would not—and up until now did not—bring peace.

Professor Goldman seems also to have overlooked some significant changes within the Christian and Jewish Zionist movements during the past years. While dating the period under discussion from “1967–2007,” he fails to mention the significant shift within the national-religious movement that obviously took place

after the Israeli disengagement from the Gaza Strip and Northern Samaria. Following the overwhelming gathering of this movement's members at Kfar Maimon in the summer of 2005, the settler movement as a united power seems to have been broken. Today, many national religious settlers seem to be caught up more in infighting than in standing up against their religious and ideological foes within and without of Israeli society.

Likewise the Christian Zionist movement underwent a significant change after the highlight of the Millennium. For example, the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem (ICEJ)^c changed its leadership and corrected its ideological and theological course. Despite this, Goldman, after taking his reader into the year 2005 (p. 300), quotes "Jan Willem van der Hoeven, the head of the International Christian Embassy of Jerusalem"—who by then had already left the ICEJ half a decade before. In fact, during the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, no substantial Christian voice within the State of Israel opposed this move of Ariel Sharon's government. The ICEJ was quiet on the subject.

The chronological mix-up in the final chapter stands in stark contrast to the differentiated work of the first chapters. The difference between the first five chapters and the last chapter, methodologically, is obvious: Goldman in the first chapters concentrated on certain individuals and their biographies. In the last chapter—with exception of the father and son Rabbi Kook—he attempted to describe movements that are quite diverse, and which underwent significant changes during the past decade. Perhaps Professor Goldman, as historian, was just a bit too close to his research subject toward the end of the book—and perhaps he should have sacrificed the nice, round and biblical 40 years ("1967–2007") for the sake of accuracy in his analysis.

NOTES

1. <http://www.mesas.emory.edu/home/people/faculty/goldman.html>.
2. Larry Derfner, "The Many Faces of Christian Zionism," *Jerusalem Post*, April 1, 2010, <http://www.jpost.com/LandedPages/PrintArticle.aspx?id=172156>.
3. As, for example, the conference "Christ at the Checkpoint" organized by the Bethlehem Bible College in Bethlehem, March 12–17, 2010, <http://www.christatthecheckpoint.com/>.
4. The Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions of the Second Vatican Council and promulgated on October 28, 1965.

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