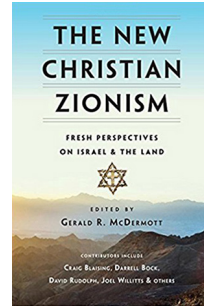


Book Review

Gerald R. McDermott (editor).
*The New Christian Zionism:
Fresh Perspectives on Israel and the Land*
Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2016. (349 pages).

Reviewed by, Mitch Glaser,



INTRODUCTION

The New Christian Zionism, edited by Dr. Gerry McDermott, provides a new and needed approach to the current theological controversies swirling round Israel in the Bible and as a modern nation. The genesis for the book is biblical and yet the chapters also cover some of the more difficult issues related to the current Middle East crisis and especially the Israeli/Palestinian conflict.

The 349 pages, include chapters by well known Christian scholars and Messianic Jews who touch on some of the major points of the controversy including the hermeneutics needed to read the Biblical material, the history of Christian Zionism, Zionism in the New Testament, and the theology and politics of the anti Christian Zionism movement.

Gerald McDermott's introductory material is excellent as he both defines and traces the history of Christian Zionism for the reader who might have little experience with the topic. McDermott assures the reader that a theology that includes ethnic Israel and the land in God's story found in Scripture is not particular to any Christian denomination.

Christian Zionism is bigger than any denomination, theological tradition or period. It focuses on the character of God

and the teaching of Jesus and the apostles. Those at the start of the Christian faith argued that God will keep his promises to Israel. This confidence also provides a basis for assurance about his promises to us. Those promises point to a reconciliation God has worked through his Messiah for the life and the Shalom of the world.¹

McDermott explains what he means by the new Christian Zionism,

So what do the scholars and experts in this book mean by "the New Christian Zionism"? The best answer to this question, we think, is the rest of the book. This introduction will telegraph, as it were, the basic implications of what we mean by this term. The first is that the people and land of Israel are central to the story of the Bible.²

He continues,

The burden of these chapters is to show theologically that the people of Israel continue to be significant for the history of redemption and that the land of Israel, which is at the heart of the covenantal promises, continues to be important to God's providential purposes.³

1 Gerald R McDermott, *The New Christian Zionism: Fresh Perspectives on Israel & the Land*, 2016, 317.

2 *Ibid.*, 11.

3 *Ibid.*, 13.

And further,

We are also convinced that the return of Jews from all over the world to their land, and their efforts to establish a nation-state after two millennia of being separated from controlling the land, is part of the fulfillment of biblical prophecy. Further, we believe that Jews need and deserve a homeland in Israel— not to displace others but to accept and develop what the family of nations— the United Nations— ratified in 1948. We would add that this startling event climaxed a history of continual Jewish presence in the land going back at least three thousand years.⁴

McDermott readily admits he has a prejudice against the more traditional Dispensational or as he would describe an older version of Christian Zionism that he believes is not relevant for today. McDermott writes,

This book has tried to unfold a new vision for the relationship between the church and Israel. It has argued that the old Christian Zionism was married to premillennial dispensationalism— for better or for worse. Traditional dispensationalists exhibited a certain theological ingenuity that rightly insisted, against many cultured despisers, that God’s covenant with Israel had not been severed. They were right about that. But we are proposing a New Christian Zionism that departs from traditional dispensationalism in some important ways, as I have already explained in the introduction. Now it is time to think about what difference this new approach to Israel and the church might make.⁵

I believe that the tone with which he jettisons his Christian Zionist forefathers who expressed their hope in the future of Israel in the theological terms available to them in that day is stronger than necessary. In fact, the very name of the book is indicative of McDermott’s attempts to break with the past. It would have

4 Ibid., 12.

5 Ibid., 319.

been more helpful to point out the weaknesses of the position without borderline disparaging the Dispensational pioneers who blazed the path upon which McDermott and his co-authors now journey.

In fact, from the above statements it would seem that McDermott sounds very much like an “old fashioned” Christian Zionist with more Dispensational theological leanings. Certainly McDermott and many of his authors would not fit into the Dispensational mode, but they would find agreement with those who have gone before in their understanding of God’s ongoing plan for Israel and the Jewish people, which includes the divine deed to the Land of promise.

The care with which McDermott chose his authors is evident from the quality of their work. I especially appreciated the denominational analysis of those Christian groups that have taken up the mantle of anti Christian Zionism written by Mark Tooley. Robert Nicholson’s chapter examining the legal issues of the controversy is superb, especially his section where he appraises the moral equivalency arguments of those who believe that the nation of Israel does not deserve the land because of their behavior towards the Palestinian community in Israel.

Dr. Blaising, who has written on these topics previously and reflects a progressive version of Dispensationalism in his chapter, grapples with some of the more challenging hermeneutical issues at the heart of the conflict. Commenting on the argument that the “fulfillment citations” in Matthew write ethnic Israel out of the divine story, he writes,

But the claim that Matthew is thereby teaching that Israel’s identity as an ethnic, national, territorial reality is ending as such and being replaced by the singular person of the Christ and/or a new mixed corporate body to be created by him reads too much into the text. It belongs to an anti-Semitic,

anti Judaic interpretation of Matthew that is generally rejected today.⁶

Bock summarizes the new Christian Zionism position by simply stating,

In this book we have presented an outline of a case for Israel as a nation in the land. That case is theological, moral, historical, biblical, political, and legal. But this book has put its greatest emphasis on the biblical and theological case to be made. The writers are convinced that this story needs to be heard. They believe that Christian Zionism is not an oxymoron. We are convinced it is a sound humanitarian and theological position.⁷

Bock continues,

As we look to make the case as Christians that Israel has a right to the land, we also tell Christian Zionism is bigger than any denomination, theological tradition or period. It focuses on the character of God and the teaching of Jesus and the apostles. Those at the start of the Christian faith argued that God will keep his promises to Israel. This confidence also provides a basis for assurance about his promises to us. Those promises point to a reconciliation God has worked through his Messiah for the life and the shalom of the world.⁸

CONCLUSION

We are grateful for the vision of Gerald McDermott in undertaking this project. Additionally we applaud the courage of Intervarsity Press who for the longest time has published books on Israel written by Stephen Sizer and others who take an extreme anti Christian Zionist and anti Israel position. The dialogue has now been balanced with the publishing of a *The New Christian Zionism*. We look forward to additional volumes addressing these significant issues that are both biblical and geopolitical in nature. We live in a complex and challenging world where we must apply Scripture to every area of life, including the Middle East conflict. *The New Christian Zionism* is a good beginning to a new day of discussion. Most of all, we hope that this new book will inspire Christians to pray for the peace of Jerusalem as the Psalmist encourages us to do in Psalm 122:6.

6 Ibid., 84.

7 Ibid., 316–17.

8 Ibid.

