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Victoria Clark. *Allies for Armageddon: The Rise of Christian Zionism.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007. x + 331 pp. Illustrations. $28.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-300-11698-4.

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Eye on Zion

Christian Zionism's influence on American foreign and domestic policy has become a frequent specter in both media and scholarship. It was most recently raised when Christian Zionist pastor John Hagee endorsed John McCain for president and created scandal with his radical remarks about the Holocaust, Muslims and Catholics. But the question of Christian Zionist influence has persisted much longer. In his famous book *When Time Shall Be No More,* meticulous scholar Paul Boyer mistakenly quoted Ronald Reagan's Secretary of the Interior James Watt as saying that it hardly mattered how we treated the environment since Jesus was coming soon. Watt has fiercely protested that he never said any such thing, but the idea that Christian eschatology has undue influence on American leaders has persisted.

Most essentially, Christian Zionism is the belief that the Bible teaches a privileged place for Israel designated by God. Christian Zionists have long quoted Genesis 12:3: "I will bless those who bless you and him who curses you, I will curse." But beyond a basic preference for Israel, Christian Zionism is tied to a set of eschatological beliefs about biblical prophecy and our imminent descent into the reign of the antichrist. This is commonly called (by scholars, not by believers) "dispensationalist premillennialism" and refers to a very specific timetable for global events leading to the end of the world. Believers are constantly on the lookout to see these events occur, and the founding of Israel in 1948 is central evidence.

Victoria Clark's book is a significant t contribution toward an understanding of these issues. Clark is a British journalist who has written extensively on religion and culture. In *Allies for Armageddon* she combines journalistic investigation with historical research. In the introduction, Clark accompanies dispensationalist entrepreneur and minister, Chuck Missler, on a tour of Israel with a group of American evangelicals. On tour, Clark overhears such comments as the one from a dentist from Colorado who, upon entering the area of the Dome of the Rock said, "I wish someone would just move things along here–like, just blow this whole place up!" Attitudes such as this one, in addition to the desire of many Christian Zionists to provoke a military conflict with Iran, motivate Clark's investigation of Christian Zionism.

The first part of the book (1621-1948) is a richly documented history of three hundred years of Christian Zionism. She begins with a Bible commentary from an anonymous author in 1621 called *The World's Great Restauration, of the Calling of the Iewes and (with them) of all the Nations and Kingdoms of the Earth to the Faith of Christ.* King James I had the book banned since it hinted that even the king of England and Scotland would someday pay homage to the king of the restored Israel. As this anonymous author demonstrates, the history of Christian Zionism is one that has to be told from the margins.

At first, I was skeptical of an account of Christian Zionist history that would give me pages and pages of information on obscure figures like Theodore Beza, a friend of John Calvin, or Sir Henry Finch, a British lawyer with a penchant for Bible prophecy. I am not that patient a reader of history. But Clark does three things to turn what could be a tedious history into a valuable read. First, she is simply an excellent writer and has a knack for telling a story about someone you have never heard of in a way that makes you care. Second, despite the fact that much of this story has been told in other scholarly books, she has done a remarkable amount of original research and has excerpts from diaries and letters that do not appear in other accounts. Finally, she does an excellent job of reminding the reader why this history is directly relevant to our present situation. Sometimes, per-

haps, she stretches the direct relevance a bit far, and in her account of marginal figures I sometimes lose sight of the bigger picture. But overall, she has convinced me that this is a story that has to be told from the margins and the rewards for carefully reading through her account were many.

In the second part of the book (1948 onwards), she leaves the historical narrative and returns to the contemporary period. She moves topically instead of chronologically, giving the reader a picture of contemporary Christian Zionism and its most immediate predecessors. She profiles such figures as John Hagee, Jerry Falwell (posthumously), and many other far lesser known people, like the man working to breed an entirely red heifer, of the kind required by Jewish priests to be sacrificed in the new temple when it is built, and another working on the theory of the Bible that teaches there are vast fields of undiscovered oil in Israel.

As Clark travels through Christian Zionist America, she learns to speak the vernacular, sometimes in ways that make me uncomfortable. When she is in Waco at the tourist office, the young woman behind the desk asks why she is in Texas. Clark tells her that she is writing a book about people with a "heart for Israel"–words chosen to signal at the very least her knowledge of the subculture. To me it also seemed perilously close to misrepresenting herself. The young woman immediately identifies Pastor Hagee and gushes about his new book. Then she bursts into tears and says, "I'm just *so scared* that if we get the Democrats again they won't defend Israel so well, and that's going to bring suffering on America" (p. 263). In the way the scene is executed, Clark turns from reporting to parody.

My other quibble with the book is that Clark glides over important distinctions and disagreements in Christian Zionist territory. While she is attentive to distinctions between various personalities, she ignores fundamentalist and Pentecostal differences, for example. When Dr. Ice (a biblical scholar prototype at Falwell's Liberty University) dismisses Chuck Missler as a "wacko" or when faculty argue with Ice at a meeting, she elides the nuances that such disagreements might illuminate. She simply claims that "these men are all united where it counts and there is nothing complicated about their basic creed" (p. 184). On the contrary, dispensationalism has one of the most complicated creeds I know, and disagreements and struggles for power among various factions remain an untold part of the story.

At the same time, Clark is a skilled observer and reporter of both the charm and the chill of various personalities in the realm. She renders Pastor John Hagee's fiery folksiness effectively, and she lets his final words of the "Night to Honor Israel" that she attends linger with all their implications. "'The voice of evil is not going to go uncontested!' he bellowed. 'Not on our watch!–NOT ON OUR WATCH!' The church was in an uproar. Hagee's last words were directed at Jews, 'STOP GIVING THE LAND AWAY!–THE LAND BELONGS TO YOU!–KEEP IT!'" (p. 283). These are words you understand far better and more deeply after reading this book.

Christian Zionism may appear marginal and strange, but Clark is convincing when she argues that it has had stunning social influence during its several centuries of existence–always driven by eccentric personalities. And it is poised to have significant influence right now. "Again and again," she concludes, "the ideology has proved its chameleon-like ability to change with the times, to plug the gap left by ignorance of history and foreign cultures and assuage an unreasoning existential terror by answering a psychological need to be 'in the know' about the future, to feel in control." If, in the current presidential administration, staffers were known to be eagerly reading the Christian Zionist *Left Behind* series, perhaps in the next administration, someone could assign them this book.

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