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# **Cynthia Holder Rich, Ed.** ***Christian Zionism in Africa***

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This is a timely edited collection dedicated to a neglected aspect of Christian Zionism. While theological, historical, and social scientific analysis on the development of Christian Zionism in the global North abound, the rise of the phenomenon in the global South has been largely neglected in the literature. This makes *Christian Zionism in Africa*, edited by Cynthia Holder Rich, very welcome. The book is relevant because of its focus on how Christian Zionism is being received in one of the most important new centers of Christianity: the African continent. While some of the thirteen contributors draw their analyses from fields such as history, politics, anthropology, and law, the book is heavily anchored in theological discussions and prioritizes the elaborations of Protestant Christian theologians and clergy, particularly Lutherans. The book includes a range of case studies based on different countries such as Ethiopia, Ghana, South Africa, and Tanzania, to name a few. Moreover, the fact that most contributors are either African or at least based in Africa is highly appreciated.

After a forward by Walter Brueggemann, the book is divided into three parts. In part I, “History, Law, and Politics,” the reader is invited to explore the roots of the Christian Zionist movement and its reception in Africa. For instance, by analyzing gospel songs in East Africa, Samwel Shanga Mahjida demonstrates how such songs could reinforce ideas about the connection between biblical and physical Israel while also promoting Zion as a place of African memory and belonging. In a different vein, Suraya Dadoo’s great chapter unpacks the development of pro-Israel messages in Ghanaian Pentecostalism. The author investigates how Gen 12:3, understood as God’s promise to bless those who support the modern state of Israel, has been mobilized in Pentecostal prosperity gospel teachings. She also indicates how these sentiments contributed to Ghana’s foreign policy shift towards Israel.

Part II, “Biblical and Theological Aspects and Impacts,” presents a range of theological arguments examining the different ways in which Christian Zionism impacts the theologies and the lives of Christians in Africa. The contributors offer theological analyses largely critical of Christian Zionism. Mark Rich describes

Christian Zionism as heresy. Nehemia G. Moshi stresses the role of local African indigenous religions and their heritage in inspiring pro-Israel sentiments among African Christians. Rich highlights the importance of taking into consideration issues such as race and particularly whiteness in theological interpretations of the phenomenon. Contributors to part III, "Ministry in the Church," analyze the impact of Christian Zionist teachings in African Christian ministries, specifically in Pentecostal, Lutheran, and Independent African churches. For example, the analysis conducted by Modestus Lukong shows the reception of Christian Zionist ideas among Tanzanian Lutheran pastors. After interviewing 100 pastors from the Eastern and Coastal Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Lukong concludes that most Lutheran pastors openly support the modern state of Israel for scriptural and prophetic reasons. While controversial, this evidence shows the spread and the traction of Christian Zionist ideas among African Protestant clergy.

The book brings insights into how theological interpretations equating ancient Israel to the modern state of Israel are being mobilized in some sectors of African Christianity. By geopolitically protecting Israel, African Christians seek to fulfill Gen 12:3 and bring blessings and prosperity to their lives and their nations. The book also examines the theological contradictions of Christian Zionist ideas in relation to key Christian teachings, particularly the command to love your neighbour as yourself, focusing on claims that the modern state of Israel treats Palestinians with prejudice and openly violates their human rights.

Overall, *Christian Zionism in Africa* is a very good book for readers interested in knowing more about how some African Protestant theologians receive and respond to Christian Zionist ideas from a confessional perspective. However, the book falls short of expectations for readers interested in unpacking the rise of Christian Zionism in Africa as a broader religious, social, and political phenomenon. With some exceptions, throughout the collection, there is a general and sustained anti-Christian Zionist rhetoric that hinders an understanding of the complexity of this growing religious movement across the African continent. This view can be problematic as grassroots religious actors—African Christians embracing Zionist views—are not fully comprehended nor are their beliefs fully considered. This top-down perspective prevents us not only from understanding the appeal of Christian Zionism among African Christians but also from having a better grasp on how these lived theologies are negotiated in their own vernacular terms in African Christianity. Therefore, many readers would have appreciated an approach in line with current developments, particularly in the field of World Christianities, that takes into consideration the lived theologies experienced by Christians across the world.

Furthermore, the collection does not touch on key historical and social-political themes at the heart of the debate. For instance, the authors miss the opportunity to consider the rise of philosemitic sentiments in African Christianity and to make important connections between the spread of Christian Zionist ideas and the growing number of emerging Jewish groups across the continent, such as the Igbo in Nigeria, the House of Israel in Ghana, and the Lemba in South Africa. Relevant and nuanced historical aspects of the diplomatic relations between African states

and Israel are also not fully considered. The interest of Israel in the African continent is not new. In the 1960s, when most South African states achieved independence, Africa had a central place in Israel's foreign policy. In the context of good diplomatic relations, Zionism and Jewish Nationalism served as a model for the emerging Black Nationalism and liberation of Africa, and some African intellectuals even called their emancipation movement "Black Zionism." In this period, Israel also expressed its aversion to apartheid and white rulership in African countries. This relationship deteriorated with the growing diplomatic and economic influence of Arab countries in the African continent and after the Yom Kippur War of 1973, which marked the severance of diplomatic relations between Israel and many African countries. It was only after Israel withdrew from the Sinai Peninsula and established peace with Egypt in the 1980s that it resumed diplomatic relations with some African states. These developments prompted Israel to initiate increased outreach in Africa. In this context, religion and Christian Zionist sentiments have been important tools in Israeli diplomacy toward Africa. Today, with the explosion of Pentecostalism and its variants in the continent promoting the spread and support of Christian Zionist teachings, the Zionist rhetoric finds fertile ground in African politics.

In sum, *Christian Zionism in Africa* is a very good book for readers who want to learn more about how African Protestant theology comprehends and responds to Christian Zionism. The book is also a good resource for social scientists and historians interested in learning more about Christian theological debates and controversial theological aspects of Christian Zionism. However, this edited collection does not fully meet the expectations of readers interested in understanding Christian Zionism in light of broader historical, social, and geopolitical developments.