

BOOK REVIEW

Joel Cabrita. *The People's Zion: Southern Africa, the United States, and a Transatlantic Faith-Healing Movement*. Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018. 356 pp. Maps. Photographs. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$45.00. Cloth. ISBN: 9780674737785.

In *The People's Zion*, Joel Cabrita offers a history of the Zionist movement as it migrated from the inner-city slums of Melbourne (1880s) to the utopian settlement of Zion City, Illinois (1890s), to the Boer and British farms of Transvaal (1900s), to the black townships of Johannesburg, home to migrant laborers employed in the gold mines (1920s–40s), and finally to the kingdom of Swaziland (mid-century and currently). Labor migration, social welfare, and ethnic plurality were characteristic of the early decades of the movement, which gave rise to transnational ideals, summed up by Cabrita under the headings of egalitarianism, reform, and cosmopolitanism (8–21). As a historian, Cabrita makes a welcome move away from established mission history and classificatory analysis of so-called “African Christianity” toward an entangled and global history focused strongly on the urban phenomena common to all rapidly growing cities in expansionist contexts: “Dowie’s [the founder of Zion City, K.W.] egalitarian message that distinctions between classes were irrelevant to the possession of true holiness (an ideology forged in the streets of Melbourne inner-city slums) would be of key importance for Zionism’s reception in Southern Africa among working-class whites and blacks” (27).

The first two chapters follow the geographical trajectory of John Alexander Dowie, the minister who would later found Zion City as the headquarters of the globally active *Christian Catholic Apostolic Church in Zion*. Born in Edinburgh, the son of a Congregationalist minister, Dowie remained embedded in nonconformist circles with strong claims to temperance and divine healing after moving first to Australia and then to the U.S. Alongside the Salvation Army and the YMCA, Dowie held holiness meetings in drinking halls and cinemas. The first Zion Tabernacle was erected on the edge of the Chicago World Fair, protesting prostitution, liberalism, and alcoholism. While in Chicago, establishing a multi-racial community was added to Dowie’s reformist agenda. In an era of strong controversy over the best way to rejuvenate the Anglo-Saxon

race in the face of British colonial and U.S. politics of segregation, Dowie promoted interracial mixing to achieve this aim (78). This interracial egalitarianism proved to be attractive to British and Boer people in the immediate aftermath of the Boer war, shaping the first missionary branch of Zion in South Africa (Chapter Three). The Zionist movement's attentiveness to labor issues helped popularize the movement among the white and black mine workers of Johannesburg (Chapters Four and Five).

Dowie died in 1907, after which the typical evangelical process of fisuring set in, leading to the present situation of hundreds of independent churches carrying either the term "Zion" and/or "Apostolic" in their name. Under increasingly harsh conditions of apartheid and in the face of growing skepticism toward faith healing, the movement split up along boundaries of education and race. Cabrita points out that the movement's tendency to reach out to poor and uneducated populations remained a central point of differentiation from other independent Ethiopian churches (166, 232). Divine healing became a point of entry for black South Africans trying to break away from traditional monopolies on physical and spiritual welfare (130). Later on, during the inter-war period, the massively growing movement and further schisms reflected debates on education and leadership which led to the rise of the typically Zionist figure of the prophet as community leader (165ff., 190ff., 231ff.). In unravelling this process, Cabrita reflects local ethnic conflicts within the sociopolitical framework of the South African and Swaziland states and the institutional framework of modern, evangelical Christianity worldwide (Chapters Five to Seven).

It was the experience of urban discontent, combined with the wish for racial openness that enforced the ideal of egalitarianism, first in utopian Zion City, and later in the colonial context of South Africa. Thus, one might characterize the movement of Zionist ideals as one from "underbelly" to "underbelly." With scholarly interest in entangled histories and south-south networks on the rise, this type of lower class, or laborer-to-laborer, communication must be studied further.

Cabrita offers an amazing wealth of details on the Zionist movement, covering three continents and several decades. Each chapter begins and ends with systematic overviews framing the analytic thrust of each step on the trajectory, outlining in an eminently readable way the specific developments of each region and era. The book is a must-read for all scholars interested in the history of Christianity in South Africa as well as those interested in global networks of Holiness Christianity and nonconformism, their institutional expansion and social adaptation.

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doi:10.1017/asr.2019.80

For additional reading on this subject, the ASR recommends:

- Boas, Jack. 1973. "The Activities of the London Missionary Society in South Africa, 1806–1836: An Assessment." *African Studies Review* 16 (3): 417–35. doi:10.2307/523513.
- van der Geest, Sjaak, and Jon P. Kirby. 1992. "The Absence of the Missionary in African Ethnography, 1930–65." *African Studies Review* 35 (3): 59–103. doi:10.2307/525128.
- Wright, Marcia. 1971. "African History in the 1960s: Religion." *African Studies Review* 14 (3): 439–45. doi:10.2307/523775.