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“Conversions and Transformation: Missiological Approaches to Religious Change”  
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THE TRANSFORMATIVE ENCOUNTER WITH PLACE:  
“CHRISTIAN ZIONISM” AS A SECOND CONVERSION  
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In evangelical pro-Zionist thought the land of Israel emerges as a locus of personal religious transformation. The symbolic, as well as the physical encounter with place is ascribed a unique ability to mediate divine presence and to foster spiritual growth. This paper, which draws on a three-year field research among evangelical volunteers in Jerusalem, explores evangelical narrations of their encounter with religious narratives about Israel and with the land itself. The volunteers are involved in aid related and/or advocacy work at one of the three main Christian Zionist ministries in Jerusalem: the International Christian Embassy, the Bridges for Peace, and the Christian Friends of Israel. Their stories, which typically emphasize divine agency and the suddenness of religious change, will in this paper be placed alongside anthropological theories that focus on the role of language in evangelical conversions (particularly Peter Stromberg, Susan F. Harding and Simon Coleman). While the evangelicals in Jerusalem (generally) do not change their religious allegiance in the traditional sense, they do narrate their realization of Israel’s spiritual significance as a rupture from their earlier religious life, and emphasize the centrality of this transformation to their religious identities. To embrace “Christian Zionism”, they seem to say, is akin to a religious conversion.

This paper would probably fit best in either DABOH study group or the study group on interreligious issues.