
This is a translation of a book first published in French in 2006, but it certainly retains its relevance, not least for Anglophone readers, in that it offers a necessary and fascinating supplement to the more familiar discussions of North American Native religions and their relation to New Age beliefs and practices. Focusing on differing but comparable movements in Peru and Mexico, Galinier and Molinié examine the development of “a flourishing ethnogenesis...bursting onto the scene upon the ruins of colonization” (ix), which fashions traditional indigenous and New Age elements into distinctive new forms. In North America, the Native American reaction against what they see as religious appropriation by New Agers has often been to defend their own claims to authenticity, autochthony, and purity. In South America, though, there has already been a longer and more positive history of syncretism and hybridity, and the authors, in showing how Neo-Indians use and invent tradition in remarkably new ways, largely avoid the temptation to dwell on questions of authenticity or historical accuracy. Instead they show how Neo-Indian practices relate in intriguing ways to the complexities of the Mexican and Peruvian colonial and pre-colonial legacies, and the present status of their indigenous people.

The authors’ background is as anthropologists working with indigenous groups in Mexico and the Andes, but the neo-Indians that are the subject of this book are something of a challenge to the normal approaches, as they acknowledge. This is not a fixed group that can be studied like a tribe. As the authors insist, there are no full-time neo-Indians, but a shifting mixture of Western New Agers and traditional indigenous people, but also—and the book is particularly insightful on this—strategic adherents, such as local and national politicians, who literally clothe themselves in the mantle of the re-invented Incas or Aztecs. In (re-)creating their beliefs the neo-Indians (mis)use anthropological studies, so that this really is invented tradition with a vengeance.

The authors have chosen the term neo-Indian to indicate that their subject is not just—or even mainly—the indigenous people, but a new heterogenous group that cannot straightforwardly appeal to unbroken lineage or tradition. Instead the movement has created new sorts of autochthonous and spiritual legitimacy, which link past nobility to present-day strategies of creating political legitimacy. Both in Mexico and Peru, the neo-Indians can invoke a past of powerful empires, the Aztecs and the Incas, respectively. These were highly-evolved civilizations and this study shows how festivals and rituals are used by political leaders as well as religious followers to claim continuity with this imperial past. The actual strategy is quite complicated. They want to assert autochthonous
traditions that are purified of colonialism and are also imperial and powerful. It requires considerable ideological sleight of hand to align the despotism of the Aztec or Inca empires with modern New Age requirements of respect for Mother Earth, cosmic energy, egalitarianism, and so forth, but this is precisely the project.

Much of the focus is on ceremonial events, such as the Inti Raymi in the Zócalo, in Mexico City, the historic center of both Aztec and colonial power, and the appearance of the imperial Inca in Cuzco in Peru, and we are given close readings of these events, from the clothing of the participants to the words of the ceremonies. What we are not given, though, is any account from the participants themselves of what they feel, or how they conceptualize what is happening. It would have been interesting, for instance to have compared the experience of some of the indigenous attenders with non-indigenous tourists attending for supposed spiritual or metaphysical reasons. Are they similar enough to both be described as neo-Indians? It would also be useful to have a clearer sense of what proportion of indigenous people were attracted by these ceremonies and beliefs. More focus on the subjective experience of the varied participants would also have given more sense of the spiritual and religious dimensions, which are often subsumed under the author’s extensive (and excellent) political and ideological analysis of the movement.

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Standing Apart: Mormon Historical Consciousness and the Concept of Apostasy. Edited by Miranda Wilcox and John D. Young. Oxford University Press, 2014. xii +364 pages. $99.00 cloth; $39.95 paper.

From Joseph Smith to Thomas B. Monson, LDS prophets have taught (and members have believed) that the pristine New Testament church at some point fell into apostasy, to be restored centuries later as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Mormons refer to the time between the pure apostolic church and the restoration as “the Great Apostasy.” The contributors to Standing Apart, all LDS scholars with academic training in the fields that they address, perspicaciously examine the Great Apostasy meme. The essayists have three goals: contextualizing the shifting narratives Mormons have constructed about the Great Apostasy; correcting ahistorical or polemical readings of the past produced by many of these narratives; and suggesting more productive ways that Mormons can maintain a narrative of Apostasy and Restoration that does not do violence to the past, other religious traditions, or the foundations of their own faith. In short, the volume is both a work of Mormon historical theology and Mormon constructive theology.