
BOOK REVIEW

Dawson, Andrew. 2013. *Santo Daime: A New World Religion*. London: Bloomsbury, viii + 226pp. ISBN 978 1 4411 5424 8. £22.99.

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The book presents new insights into the complex and exciting field of Santo Daime. Santo Daime is a new religious movement in Brazil that embraces a range of different traditions and communities which are linked by the common use of “Daime,” a psychoactive beverage made from ayahuasca. While ayahuasca is traditionally used by indigenous people in the Amazon, the practice of Santo Daime (“Holy Daime”) began to spread in the 1930s among mixed-race settlers at the edge of the Amazon region. Since then it spread to the cities of Brazil among the predominantly white middle class and even beyond, to mostly educated middle classes in other countries. According to the author there are now approximately 20,000 people regularly involved in Santo Daime rituals (written in 2012, the number may have increased since then). This development from the Amazonian origin to the cities of Brazil and beyond has led the author to pursue this research among so-called “daimistas.” The book is a follow-up study to his PhD research (*New Era – New Religions: Religious Transformation in Contemporary Brazil*, Ashgate, 2007) which already focused on Santo Daime within the wider religious landscape of Brazil. This new book, however, is engaged with Santo Daime on a different level. The author describes Santo Daime as the religion of the New World, hence a so-called “New World Religion,” despite its still relatively small number of participants. Dawson argues that its significance is not linked to size but to its understanding of the dynamic interface of society and religion. The book focuses consequently on the presentation and discussion of the ritual dimension of the religion, from the origin and early trajectory to the practical-symbolic composition of the ritual repertoire in a post-modern (or late-modern, as Dawson writes) world. The result is a highly informative and enlightening presentation of a new religion that is too often overlooked within the discipline. The book combines detailed insights into the practice of *daimistas* with theoretical discourses about ritual, social transformation and self-transformation, and more. It is enriched by the ethnographic fieldwork of the author who has included in addition to excerpts from interviews many fascinating stories from his field diary. His participant observations make this book a unique contribution to the discipline and an important example for fieldwork in religion. The combination of fieldwork and theoretical discourses can be challenging for readers whose main interest

is to learn about Santo Daime. But Dawson manages to maintain the interest with comments about his field research.

The book is divided in five chapters. It starts with the presentation of the historical origin of the movement and its transition into an international religion. Chapter two presents the ritual repertoire with fascinating excerpts from the field diary. Chapter three discusses the findings within the wider discourse on social transformation and self-transformation while chapter four moves on to ritual reinvention and in particular spirit possession. The book ends with a discussion of Santo Daime within the post-modern area and the problem about classifying Santo Daime as a New World Religion. While other publications about Santo Daime are available, most of the ones that are not in Portuguese focus on the legal side of the spread of Santo Daime beyond Brazil. As the use of ayahuasca is prohibited due to the classification of ayahuasca as a hallucinogen (and illegal) drug, *daimistas* have to undertake a long legal battle before they are allowed to practise Santo Daime, which has attracted the attention from scholars of a range of disciplines. The battle for recognition as religion outside Brazil is currently ongoing in the European Union and other countries. Dawson's book, however, is not so much interested in the legal battles but in the wider interaction between religion and society. It explores the complex interactions between society and religion and the relationship between "late-modern selves" and a new world religion. The book will be useful for students and researchers in study of religions, anthropology and sociology. Its case study is also relevant for Cultural Studies and Latin American studies as it gives a fascinating insight into a new world.