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***Coming Down from Above: Prophecy, Resistance, and Renewal in Native American Religions,* by Lee Irwin, Foreword by Philip J. Deloria. University of Oklahoma Press, 2008, 528 pp. Hb $75.00, ISBN-13: 9780806139661.**

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Coming Down from Above is impressive in many ways. This large book (25 x 18.5 cm) is a real treasure trove for all those who are interested in Native religions because it functions as an encyclopedia of prophetic groups, but it is far more than a mere encyclopedia with alphabetically classified entries. The prophetic movements are consistently grouped by four in ten long sections. Most of these parts analyze specific categories of prophecy in a long introduction and a very well-rounded presentation of the movements. In the individual chapters Irwin presents the history and the culture of the people to buttress our understanding of their religion. Each part closes on a chronology to clarify even more the evolution of the tribal cultures and of their interactions with the Euro-Americans.

The prologue explains the author's methodology, the complexity of trying to cover the religious visions of the numerous tribes, and stresses the problems raised by the fact that practically all the literature on the subject was produced by non-Native scholars. The author, an historian of religion (aware that he is adding another stone to this "non-Native scholarship"), has aimed at not just retracing the historical development of the prophetic movements born in reaction against the conquest, but at replacing them within the tradition of Native religions already alive before the Conquest (with what knowledge we can have of them), and at pointing out their originality and their contribution to the ever-evolving field of spirituality.

As Irwin reminds the reader, most past interpretations of prophetic movements place them within the context of the deprivation resulting from colonization, in the light, for example, of Lanternari's seminal book on the religious movements of oppressed peoples. Irwin does not negate the impact of the trauma to shape religious expressions, but he does not see these as being completely new, as creations *ex nihilo* after 1492, but rather as the continuation of previous modes of religiosity. The millenarianism most often associated with prophetism, that is to say the belief in a soon-to-come radical transformation of the world—with the suffering Natives recovering what they lost

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at the hands of the White invaders, and their crushed ancestors coming back —was undoubtedly influenced by the biblical motif of the reward of the Just and the punishment of sinners at the End of Time, but each tribal prophet adapted this common pattern to his own cultural visions (that Irwin summarizes in the book's chapters) and the structure of his prophecies did not rely on a specific biblical/evangelical model. Irwin also thinks that the revitalization theory (8), such as put forward by Anthony Wallace in his study of the Iroquois and of Handsome Lake's visions, can be limitative, for indeed such theory implies a new start after a period of anomie, a new radical start more than a form of evolution (I would, however, argue that revitalization theory does not preclude a continuation of previous practices and beliefs as can been seen in Handsome Lake's vision and the ensuing Long House rituals, just as Christianity can be seen as a revitalization and continuation of Judaism).

Irwin is thus engaging in what he terms "ethnotheology": "the creative synthesis of indigenous religious beliefs (and practices) with a variety of Christian theological ideas, particularly sin, salvation, reward and punishment after death, and the moral teachings of kindness, nonviolence, and the preservation of family and communal values." (7) His mastery of both worldviews (the Christian, Western view, and that of many Native cultures) is impressive and allows for a most original and useful resource book.

Even though "ethnotheology" is an original term, Irwin does not pretend to be producing totally new data on the groups he presents, nor does he claim to be inventing the syncretism concept. His major contribution is that he is bringing a masterfully comprehensive, yet concise, update, the latest state of the art, on the existing literature for each movement. Each chapter offers a survey of the history of the movement and of the various interpretations scholars have offered, along with his own critique. Several primary documents at the end allow us to follow the unfolding of the prophecies.

What I also find original in this book is the unusually developed analysis of the rich Mexican and Mesoamerican imports into the religious traditions within the current territory of the USA. North American religions are not frequently enough viewed as deriving from those Southern cultures. Similarly, the border is too often closed tight on the exchanges between the religions of the Native American tribes and those of their cousins in Canada. Irwin on the contrary constantly underlines these links, the transmissions from one area to another.

Part one, "Ancient visionary worlds," seeks to define "prophet" in the biblical world and in the American Indian one. It also insists on the paramount importance of the soil, the land, of nature in the Indian world. It then focuses

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on the cultures of the Southeast: the Adena-Hopewell; the Mound cultures, their iconography, their cosmology; the Natchez Great Sun: Irwin notes the problems the French had interpreting this because they came from a nation ruled by the Sun King, and did not see the Natchez Great Sun was a prophetic figure, one of the many errors outsiders are bound to make, which warns us against hasty interpretations of intrinsically foreign practices. The last chapter looks at the Cherokee ani-Kutani.

Part two, "The Rhetoric of Conquest," dwells with the Caribbean groups, the first to "encounter" the Europeans. The first two chapters summarize the apocalyptic traditions and the theological and millennial prophecies within Christianity. The following chapter addresses the confrontation of Columbus, a man imbued with the prophetic millenarian spirit of his age, with the Taino. This is followed by a survey of Protestant prophetic theories and conflicts with the Catholics, in particular with the Jesuits. Such information foregrounds the divergence in missionizing the two branches of Christianity would carry out in the Americas.

Part three, "The Invasion of Paradise," summarizes the conquest of Mexico and moves to Popé and the revolt of the Pueblo. Part four, "A Clashing of Worldviews," turns to English colonization, their constant demonization of Native religions, and the work of missionaries among the Mid-Atlantic tribes, in particular their "praying towns." Prophetic rhetoric seeps in. The Lenape religious traditions are studied and Native prophets appear (in the scarce data we have about past centuries) with the famous Delaware Prophets (Neolin, Wangomend…).

Part five, "The Haudenosaunee Good Word," opens on the Iroquois league and its founder Deganawida who, as a prophetic leader before the missionaries imported biblical prophetism, exemplifies exactly what Irwin wants to stress in his book: the indigenous tradition of such modes of religious expressions were "boosted," but not initiated, by the introduction of biblical rhetoric. Irwin explains the part played by dreams and visions in Native cultures, then and now—again a practice that predated the arrival of the missionaries. (One can also add here that these visions were discarded by Christians as being produced by sorcerers [*les jongleurs* as the French would say] whereas these same Christians had incredible dreams and visions about the new lands, as for example Marie de l'Incarnation, the first European woman to set foot in New France who was a major mystic with vivid visions of her own mission among the Indigenous people.) Irwin summarizes the story of Deganawida and Hiawatha as fixed by the Iroquois Committee of Chiefs in 1911. He then moves to the Jesuit missions in New France, and the Anglican ones. The other

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chapters focus on Handsome Lake and on his code. Irwin explains how most people have seen the influence of the missionaries, the Quakers in particular, in the prophet's message, but that in fact the message does not contain any real Christology, that what the messengers told the prophet had already been observed by the Jesuits, but that, nonetheless, one could find similarities in the rhetoric used by the prophet and Christian missionaries—in a perfect case of ethnotheology, syncretism. When I studied the Code, I was indeed struck by the fact that threats leveled at witches, drunkards, and gamblers seemed to come straight out of a Protestant morality sermon, whereas the rituals established afterwards retained much of ancient Iroquois practices.

Part six, "Fighting for a way of life," surveys the Second Great Awakening (around 1790–1830), the emphasis on prophetic preaching, new representations of the Indians, and focuses on the Shawnee prophet Tenskwatawa (or Lalawethika). Irwin gathers all possible information on the sources of his teachings and his pan-Indianism, the prophet being an innovator at that. The intertwining of spirituality and politics (since Tecumseh understood how to benefit from his brother's prophetic gifts) is documented with precision. Several other prophets are then examined, as well as the Cherokee revival of the early 1800s. This period brought more prophets to the fore who rebelled against their oppression by Christian settlers, while promoting a softer kind of integration, making way for the preservation of ancestral traditions alongside modernization. Yet we know that the outcome was removal, a radical erasing of practically everything the displaced tribes had known before.

Part seven follows up on "Removal and Resistance." It opens with Wabokieshiek, made known to us by the *Autobiography of Black Hawk*. Irwin explains that the period saw prophecy interpreted more and more as a political tool and separated more and more from its spiritual roots. Mainline discourse became the locus of the separation between the Indians who could become Americanized, through Christianity, and those who refused this and whose prophecies were supposed to encourage political resistance, in a typical example of "semiotic dislocation" (218–219) whose effects are still visible today in many interpretations of Native prophets, exactly what Irwin is trying to reverse. Kenekuk's prophetic function is then analyzed. Here again we see a visionary man who synthesized the old and the new, imbued with Christian values (but not so exceedingly Christian as some authors have claimed) in order to produce a new *modus vivendi* for his people the Kickapoos.

Irwin moves to the Dream Dance prophets of the Plateau. After noting that it is hard to know exactly how these people operated because anthropologists have concentrated on them so much that they probably twisted the

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meaning of their actions, Irwin insists once more on the fact that these "leaders drew primarily upon indigenous sources" and only "secondarily—and very selectively—borrowed from Christian sources" (229). The tribes of the Columbia Basin are presented, with the epidemics and many natural disasters leading to the elaboration of the Dance movements. The millenarian vision becomes structured: the invaders are responsible for calamities and the link to the ancestors must be restored. The dances, not totally similar, brought people together. Some scholars have seen the influence of the frontier camp meeting on their ritual forms.

Irwin follows the dance movements into Canada, among the Athapascans. He shows how the numerous prophets drew from shamanism and prophetism, while understanding the distinction between the properties of the two forms of contact with the spirit world. As he showed with the Mexican and Mesoamerican roots of US Southern tribes, Irwin looks into the lineage of these Canadian peoples, their reliance on dreams and their later addition of Christian elements to their worldview and their performances, with the two traditions never quite reconciled.

Part eight, "Drum and dreamer prophets," goes back to the difference between prophecy as performed by Americans (exclusively removed to the religious sphere) and the one performed by Indians, as an expression of resistance, and this is when the theories of deprivation and revitalization prospered. Irwin explains how the developing science of anthropology colored our understanding of Native religions. The term "Prophet" lost its edge as it came to describe a great variety of spiritual leaders. To correct such a slant, Irwin analyses the teachings of Smohalla and Skolaskin, who emphasized the superiority of their Native cultures, and of John Slocum the famous prophet of the Shaker movement. Here again Irwin tries to distinguish the traditional components from the Christian imports. Irwin also explains the prophetic movement of Jake Hunt, the Waptashi Prophet. Both movements are still active today.

Part nine is dedicated to the Ghost Dance, placed in the context of the failed Peace policy and of the expansion of schools to accelerate the civilization of the Indians. Irwin looks at the earlier Dances among the Paiute and among the numerous tribes of California, dislocated by the missions and the new situation after Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848). Wovoka's prophecies, his version of the Ghost dance, and his messianism are also analyzed in relation to Mormonism. The part ends on Wounded Knee but follows Wovoka until his death in 1932 (incidentally the very year John Neihardt published *Black Elk Speaks*, introducing one new prophet on the American stage).

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The last part, "In search of Religious Freedom," covers the last decades of the nineteenth century with the Dream Knowledge and the Prophet Dances among the Apaches, and, with the Hopi prophecies, it enters the twentieth-century, showing—as the book has pointed the old roots of Native prophecy—not only that prophecy did not die with the Dawes Act, but that it has not become simplified at all over the years, the Hopi case offering the most complex system to the observer. Irwin explains the ceremonialism of this culture and its evolution until the 1990s, and traces the impact of the participation of Thomas Banacya in a United Nations conference in 1992 where he delivered his prophetic message to the whole world. In such a context the prophecy could not but share pan-Indian concerns, and more to the point it joined the pan-Indigenous resistance movements for which the UN has became the perfect tribune. Because of the current environmentalist rhetoric and the (once again) fashionable Indian turn, the prophecies of the Native speakers are perfectly attuned to the general Western apocalyptic mood about the way the world is running to its demise.

The epilogue presents the continuing prophet dance traditions among the Iroquois, the Athapascans, the Anishinabe, the Lakotas, the Navajos, the Hopis and the North West Coast communities. Irwin continues here the definition of prophecy, of apocalypticism, seen as "liberation theology," to promote spiritual values, and interestingly it is not just critical of Western mores but also of those of some Natives. Prophecy implies constantly debating about the spirit world and the material world. It is about how one organizes life.

The appendices give several prophetic testimonies. The bibliography is extraordinarily rich. I regret however that we only have an alphabetical classification (which is of course required by the reference system) and not a dual system of classification (which I impose to my PhD students for their dissertations), allowing a thematic bibliography as well. It would have been very useful here (who cares about 28 more pages when the book is 512 pages long!) since Irwin deals with so many aspects of prophecy and with so many tribes. It would be precious to be able to cover one area, one form of prophecy, instead of having all of the titles mixed together.

There were also a few typos in the bibliography: *The Pursuit of the Millenium* is by Norman Cohn and not "Cohen" (457). It should be the Colville reservation and not "Coleville" (to my knowledge) in the title of Schultz (475). And the author is Omer Stewart and not "Omar" "Steward" (476).

Coming Down from Above is truly invaluable: because of the scholarly data brought up to date, and because of the constant discussion Irwin engages in with this data. His concept of ethnotheology should be discussed in rela-

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tion to what scholars call juxtaposition. The term is used in particular by Caribbean activist scholars since they now adamantly refuse to consider the local religions, such as vaudoo, as being a form of syncretism. Juxtaposition supposes that colonized Caribbean peoples "pretended" to borrow from Christianity, or even to become Christian, Catholic for that matter, but never actually incorporated it into their rituals, beliefs or general worldview. If they had indeed incorporated these elements of Christianity they could be held as sold-out weaklings by their post-colonial descendants who today refuse to see their ancestors as having been vanquished spiritually if they cannot deny their physical conquest. So syncretism is out, juxtaposition is in.

The return of Native tribes in the last decades to tradition only, along with the regular disengagement from Christianity, poses the same question: to what extent were the movements analyzed in this book a mere "juxtaposition" of beliefs, an "external dressing"? Since tribes already shared many moral values with Christians, did they borrow certain norms or did they just dress them in a Christian attire to pacify the colonizers? Yes, this is what Irwin is saying since he constantly emphasizes the tribal characteristics of the very idiosyncratic prophecies. Yet, the debate is still open, as Irwin shows by presenting the prophecies still being aired today.

It is indeed a fascinating issue because the rifts between the traditionalists and the "genuinely Christian" Natives run extremely deep. The transformation started with the Catholics even before Vatican II and is spreading to the Anglican Church and the United Church of Canada in particular. Those who call themselves "Christian Natives" have been evolving a very rich theology, an ethnotheology as Irwin says, but one in which the Christian spiritual elements seem to prevail. The Jesuits introduced the term "inculturation" that is now frequently used, and in regards with what the book discusses, it is most intriguing to see that inculturation implies the gradual abandonment of the European cultural, material, imperial forms of Christianity to counterbalance the loss of traditional elements imposed by the missionaries in times past. Yet, it would seem that if the Christian message blends with Native rituals, the doctrinal Christian "ingredients" themselves remain steadfast. One now needs to study the type of prophecy we see coming from some very strong spiritual leaders in this inculturation phenomenon who, as in the past, straddle two worlds.

Irwin's book must absolutely be read by everyone interested in understanding not just Native religions but the essence of religion and its mode of expression.

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