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REVIEW – **TIKI AND TEMPLE: THE MORMON MISSION
IN NEW ZEALAND, 1854–1958**

Reviewed by Gina Colvin

Marjorie Newton, *Tiki and Temple: The Mormon Mission in New Zealand, 1854–1958*. Draper, Utah: Greg Kofford Books, 2012. Paperback. 343 pages. ISBN: 978-1-58958-1210. \$29.95

While the written histories of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the United States have been characterized by the meticulous attention to its genesis and evolution, the same cannot be said in the case of Aotearoa New Zealand. Aside from some important contributions by Hunt (1977) and Britsch (1986) the Mormon story in the South Pacific has appeared in the annals far too infrequently. Newton's scrupulous history of the church's formation in Aotearoa New Zealand is thus a welcome addition to the bibliography.

Newton's history of the New Zealand mission spans a period of 104 years of from the first halting efforts to stake a religious claim in the colony, to its culmination in the dedication of a temple in Hamilton in 1958. The Mormons were latecomers in the competition for religious market share, arriving some two generations behind the Anglicans, the Methodists and the Catholics. It was never going to be an easy road to establish themselves as a credible church alongside their well-established opponents. By the time Augustus Farnham and William Cooke initiated missionary work in Wellington in late 1854 it was likely that story of the Mormons was familiar to the growing population. Sensationalist news about the Mormons that was carried in both the settler press and the newspapers at 'home' in England positioned the church as an oddity, full of deviance and avarice. Add to this a colonial regime that privileged British culture and tradition, this young, callow, presumptuous and under-resourced American faith must have looked like the pathetic cousins.

Yet Newton's painstaking analysis of primary sources, including mission correspondence, mission diaries, mission minutes and papers

attest to a mission history full of optimism, faith, resilience, sacrifice and sheer bloody-mindedness.

As she reviews the first attempts to find converts, it becomes clear that the early years of the church in Aotearoa New Zealand were characterized by fluctuation and instability as European converts made their way to Utah leaving gaps in congregations and consequently gaps in leadership. The church was thus consistently 'managed' and 'run' by the missionaries who frequently rotated through the mission with regularity. Maintaining consistency of personnel emerges as a constant drawback in finding a way of making the church locally relevant in the same way that the Church of England was able to do with its permanent ministry, its stable parishes and its commitment to building beautiful churches and establishing elite schools.

It would appear from Chapter Two that the turn to pursuing Maori converts changed the nature of the mission from one in which new white adherents were encouraged to 'gather', to one in which an independently run, largely brown church, became an inevitability. The challenge was however to religiously colonize Māori enough that they could be trusted as the Mormon stronghold in Aotearoa New Zealand. Frequent attempts to facilitate cultural adjustments, to honour the 'spiritual' orientation of Māori while corralling them into conformity were met in the record with frustration. Surely, it was hoped, a school would go some way to civilise and fit Maori with a more sympathetic disposition to the way in which white Mormons in Utah 'do things'? Thus, as Newton's work affirms, the building of the Māori Agricultural College, and a Temple became an important measure in the early church in Aotearoa New Zealand to 'finish' a uniquely Mormon Māori identity.

Newton's history captures those subtle tensions that seem to characterize the first 100 years of the church in Aotearoa New Zealand. It chronicles a period years in which the LDS church was a struggling, resource poor, new religion that grappled constantly with the implications of its 'Americanness' in a place that was (and probably continues to be) largely unreceptive to its idiosyncrasies and orthodoxies.

Having said this however, Newton writes as a classically trained historian as she unselfconsciously wades through the records. While an early disclaimer acknowledges her subjectivity and the gaps in her interpretation of the documents there is little in her book that conveys a

sense that her audience might include indigenous readers and descendants of those original 'Native' converts. While she assembles the data, and mines the record in order to establish an objective historical account, the effect is that the work doesn't inflect a much needed post-colonial orientation. By virtue of the resources she accumulated, the weight of the narrative voice continues to belong to the Utah church, present in New Zealand at the time as presidential and authoritative. Māori on the other hand are positioned as Other, savage (albeit 'noble'), spiritually capable but morally aberrant, requiring the heavy hand of the mission to mitigate for their cultural lapses. This sometimes romanticized account of the halcyon days of the New Zealand Mission, full of divine heroics by white men in brown spaces, continues to be an important myth with significant currency in the Utah church. But the church in 2012 is more than Utah or even the United States. This is why the cultural turn is much needed in the writing of history, so that as an indigenous scholar I am not left to sift through yet more accounts of my people as petted savages under the heavy hand of an ecclesiastical weight from afar.

Newton has produced a fine work, dense, historically rigorous and an important contribution in the study of the LDS church outside of the United States, and as she rightly points out will be a seminal resource from which a more nuanced account will hopefully be assembled.

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