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“A Secret Sentiment.
(Devils and gods in
17th century New France)”

Un document produit en version numérique par Jean-Marie Tremblay, bénévole,
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"A secret sentiment (Devils and gods in 17th century New France)".

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In the course of the seventeenth century, ideas concerning the beliefs of Canadian Indians underwent a slow process of modification. Chroniclers at the beginning of the century, influenced by those who, the century before, had flatly declared a number of Indian nations to be "faithless, kingless and lawless," continued to describe them pejoratively. However, as they gradually came to see that the Indians were not irreligious, their declarations grew increasingly contradictory. An attentive reading of documents left by missionaries and explorers reveals that towards the middle of the seventeenth century - at a time when, in Europe, conceptions of witchcraft and religion were changing - the observation of American facts became more nuanced. The discovery of a "false religion" launched the debate as to whether or not the Indians had preserved a *secret sentiment* of God.

Were the Indians monotheistic or polytheistic ? At the beginning of the twentieth century, Paul Radin was to take up the question and propose a *tertium quid* - namely that the Indians had practised monolatry or henotheism.

Foreword

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In order to understand what the notion of polytheism signifies in the 17th century, I have read the chroniclers of this period and sought their comments on that subject. Because I wanted to give my subject a certain unity I have limited myself to one region : New France and the East coast of North America. I have sometimes had the impression of conducting a veritable ethnohistorical investigation of the chroniclers so as to discover the way they perceived the "superfluous religion" (that is, full of superstitions). Even had I wished, I could not have

found the word polytheism in their writings, since the word does not belong to the usual vocabulary of the 17th century chroniclers (on this subject, see Schmidt, 1985 : 84-88), even though what they describe often corresponds to it. On the other hand, what stands out (with exceptions, as we will see), is their insistent denial that the Amerindians possessed any religion or beliefs at all. How is such total negation possible ? Influenced by the prejudices of the preceding century, marked by such a concise expression as *sans foi, sans roi, sans loi* (no faith, no king, no law) which would become in time an accepted concept, the chroniclers applied themselves to demonstrating, with more or less success, not what was, but what was not. Fortunately, their thesis was difficult to defend, and because they wanted so much to prove it, they constantly contradicted themselves, even going so far as to give strikingly beautiful descriptions of the "false religion."

I have therefore structured my article around a fundamental and highly ambiguous 17th century question : do the Indians have a religion, and if so, to what category (or categories) does it belong ? Given that Lafitau, in his work *Les Moeurs* (1724), constructs a powerful indictment against the Jesuits of the preceding century, I will begin with this author. The following sections are devoted to recurrent and typical themes of the 17th century : since the Indians lived in a state of total ignorance, it should have been easy for the missionaries to instill the precepts of the "true Religion". However there were important obstacles : did the Devil not hold sway over the whole of Amerindian society, and did the sorcerers not communicate with him ? This Manichean vision of the American world led the chroniclers to oscillate constantly between the notions of Good and Evil, and to grant the Devil a supremacy of position such that any religious manifestation would be directly inspired by him. As the century unfolded, and especially after 1640 - a period when a change in mentality towards sorcery and the devil occurred in France - our chroniclers were eventually seized by doubt, and no longer dared to put forward with such assurance the opinions they earlier affirmed so peremptorily. Although they continued to repeat that the Indians had no religion, they

destroyed the effect of their negation by relating it to descriptions of religious rites. Thus they discovered that the Indians, not being "irreligious," could not be atheists. Some had religious beliefs, others a "false religion" ; consequently, the *tabula rasa* remained in their imagination. In the final analysis, the missionaries would be faced with a serious problem of conscience : if the Indians had been able to create for themselves different gods, why, among all these deities would they not choose a single One ? Actually, the idea that the Indians, corrupted by the Fall, were nevertheless molded from the same clay as all of humanity, had never been altogether absent from the minds of the chroniclers. The Indians must necessarily have had the notion of a First Principle, an innate idea of God. Upon reflection, it was seen that these "people miserable as beggars but absolutely superb" (Ragueneau) nourished a "secret sentiment."

As will become evident my conclusion is inspired by Paul Radin, who for many years studied the Amerindian religions, concerning himself particularly with the question of whether or not the Indians were polytheists. Radin (1915, 1924, 1937, 1954) does not draw his conclusions from the chroniclers but from ethnographic works of the 19th and 20th centuries, including his own. Although I doubt he ever found a definitive answer to his quest, he proposed nonetheless a *tertium quid*. the Indians could be monolatrism or henotheist, a kind of middle path between monotheism and polytheism which borrows characteristics from both.

In order to concentrate on the historiography of ideas during the 17th century, I have purposely excluded all ethnographic analysis from my study. Indeed, borrowing from modern ethnological discourse could have led to the danger of overshadowing the chroniclers' thinking by replying on their behalf. After all, studies on this subject do exist. I have also excluded 18th century writings. Likewise, I could not retain certain late 17th century chronicles concerning the expeditions of La Salle, Jolliet, Marquette and Hennepin in the valley of the Mississippi, simply because I had to reduce the scope of my research.

One last word : the 17th century chronicles do not necessarily reveal a constant evolution of one or several ideas. From Biard, Champlain and Lescarbot, from Sagard, Le jeune and Lalemant to Le Clercq, Al-louez and Ragueneau - three groups of authors who represent different moments in the century - the same ideas appear frequently. However, an attentive reading permits one to discern several key concepts and to follow their evolution ¹.

CORRUPTION OF THE MONARCHY

In addition to the Savages' concept of a primal Being whom they identify with the Sun, they have that also of still other spirits or demons... Thus they are truly Idolaters

(Lafitau, 1724 : 145-146 & 1974 : 113-114).

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In his work, *Moeurs des Sauvages Américains, comparées aux mœurs des premiers temps*, François-Joseph Lafitau tried to demonstrate what to him was an evident truth : "Men need a religion" (1974 : 109). With just cause, he reproaches his 17th century Jesuit colleagues for being contradictory on the subject of the American "Barbarians," claiming, on the one hand, that they had neither cult nor divinity and on the other hand, a divinity and a regulated cult, adding !hat even "Mr Bayle himself has observed" this discrepancy (1724 : 5-6). As a consequence of errors made in the past, Lafitau would very much like to destroy once and for all "the false idea given by authors of the In-

¹ I wish to thank the research group on polytheism at the E.P.H.E., and in particular Francis Schmidt and Hélène Clastres for their friendly attention. I wish also to thank John Aubrey of the Newberry Library (Chicago), who kindly sent me excerpts from the Geneva edition of Benzoni's *The History of the New World* translated by Chauveton, and also Othmar Keel who read my paper in French, Aileen Ouvrard and Larry Shouldice who helped with the English version.

dian ... and prove this unanimity of opinion among all nations, showing that, indeed, there is none so barbarous as to have no Religion or sanctioned customs" (1974 : 29). For Lafitau, human nature and religious convictions are the same everywhere in the world. Monogenist and diffusionist by conviction, he assumes the first Americans came from Asia. Initially, all men shared the same beliefs, but after they had travelled a long time and they had arrived at the end of the earth, their original ideas had degenerated to the point where they had forgotten the true God (1724 : 93).

During the 18th century, the idea of the corruption and the Fall was already ancient. Numerous are the authors who, during the Renaissance, tried to resolve the problem of the origin of the Indians, and who disagreed on the question of monogenism and polygenism (cf. Gliozzi, 1977 : 331-347) when they were not arguing about whether or not the Aristotelian notion of savagery preceded that of civilization (cf. Hodgen, 1971 : 308). For example, Urbain Chauveton, of whom Montaigne was an assiduous reader (cf. Chinard, 1978 : 197-201), wrote in 1579 in his preface to Benzoni's *La Historia del Mondo Nuovo* : "Thus the Malediction in which those Nations are immured is nothing more than that shared by the whole human race, the malediction into which mankind plunged first with the transgression of Adam, then with those sins added by each person when Men, having successfully extinguished even the little natural light remaining to them, refused to acknowledge and glorify God, even though He revealed Himself to them ... It is the all-embracing curse under which live all those who do not believe in the Gospel..." (1579 : iij) ².

As for the origin of the Americans, one can say that it is based on a geographical imbroglio : whereas Columbus believed he had discovered Cathay, an error that was soon recognised, Bartolomé de las Casas, at the beginning of his *Historia de las Indias* (1527), writes that the American lands are part of the Orient (Scaliogne, 1976 : 65).

² See also Keen's article on Chauveton (1976 : 107-120).

From this, to affirm that these peoples came from the Orient was but a step, one which Chauveton, as a precursor, did not hesitate to take : "It is indeed more apparent, if one must take conjecture for truth, that those peoples belong to the East Indies, which I suppose to be contiguous with and joined to the West Indies ... Since it is certain that the earth was neither peopled nor inhabited all at once, either before the Deluge or after it, but as the people bred and multiplied, they pushed forward little by little until all the face of the earth was covered with men" (1579 : ij).

Lafitau's predecessors in Canada were less eloquent than Chauveton on this subject, and their hypotheses conformed to the ideas current at that time. This is not the place to quote all of them, but we can recall what Marc Lescarbot, lawyer in the Parliament of Paris, wrote after his voluntary exile in Acadia (1606-07). In his chapter, "Conjectures on the peopling of the West Indies & consequently of New France herein included," he recalls that several authors "have racked their brains to discover the manner whereby it can have been peopled after the Deluge" (vol. 1, 1907 : 43). According to Lescarbot, who liked to quote from the *Wisdom of Solomon* (although not a Huguenot, Lescarbot borrows from the Geneva Bible), the Indians descended from a race of Ham come to these lands by God's punishment. He sees evidence in the fact that the Canaanites were formerly anthropophagi as were certain peoples of America. He adds : "... although formerly they had some knowledge of God, little by little it disappeared, for lack of teachers, as we see happened in this hemisphere shortly after the Deluge" (44).

As we can see if Lafitau's views were orthodox according to the general perceptions of his time, and even in terms of certain authors of the 16th and 17th centuries (Hodgen, 1971 : 268), he had the virtue, unlike his predecessors, of being the first to construct a genuine system whose elements were articulated in a logical manner (Fenton & Moore, 1974 : xlvii). Convinced that God had inscribed the true religion on the hearts of all men, he quotes Saint Augustine : "... that it is

not from the Gentiles that we have taken the idea of monarchy (*that IS to say of the unity of God*) but ... the Gentiles have not so delivered themselves to their false divinities that they have lost the belief in a unique and veritable God, who is the author of all nature of whatever sort it may be" (1974 : 98). Thus, for Lafitau the religion of the Americans was the result of a degeneration : if they were idolaters then, it was not so much because the idea of monarchy had been forgotten as because it had been corrupted by other beliefs. Here I deliberately offer this simplified version of a much more complex thought. It nonetheless reflects Lafitau's advanced thinking : the Indians already had an idea of the unity of God because, like the Ancients, they had conserved "vestiges", and employed "strong and forceful expressions" to designate "the Great Spirit, sometimes the Master and Author of Life" (1974 : 98). These, however, neither prevented them from having erred, exactly like the Ancients (1724 : 456), nor from paying homage to inferior gods which they never confused with "this superior Being" even though they may have given them the same name (1724 : 145).

If one reads attentively my initial quotation from Lafitau, one realizes that for him, the idea of the corruption of the monarchy is not without hope of being reformed. On this subject, moreover, William Fenton and Elizabeth Moore demonstrate in their authoritative preface to the American edition of *Les Moeurs* (1974) how Lafitau was influenced by two 17th century bishops and theologians, Huet and Bossuet. They further argue that Bossuet, in his *Discours Sur l'Histoire Universelle* (1681) - himself following Jean Bodin's model - showed Lafitau the way : the Bishop of Meaux divided history into three periods, including "les premiers temps" preceding the universal Flood. In addition, he showed how the corruption of the monarchy was due to several factors including "the spirit which corrupted the first man, the old theory of demonology, Sun Worship (Sabaism), and worship of the

authors of inventions useful to human life (a utilitarian variant of Euhemerism)" (1974 : liv) ³.

According to Lafitau, one finds among the American nations an intrinsic inneity, that is, an innate belief in God (1724-110), and in spite of "ignorance, superstition and corruption... which they conspired to destroy, the essential article, that is the belief in a religion and a supreme Being, remains always invariable" (1974 : 93). Lafitau then goes on to incriminate atheists like La Hontan who "has a Savage talk about Religion" (cf. La Hontan, 1703 et Roelens, 1973) in a manner that "leads to conclusions contrary to Religion itself" (1974 : 94) ; he sees him as one of those libertines who "would wish others to have no more Religion than they" (*ibid.*), or who like Bayle or Locke ⁴, are persuaded "that barbarian peoples have no awareness of religion" (1724 : 110), because according to them the origin of the divine cult is to be found in legislation. Perhaps Lafitau is also thinking of Lescarbot "who doesn't miss a thing" (436) and who said that religion "is the bond which keeps nations at peace, and is, as it were, the pivot of the State" (vol. 1, 1907 : 181), again repeating that "it is the most solid foundation for a State, containing in itself justice, and consequently all the virtues" (194).

Although Lafitau was undeniably subject to influences, he also had personal reasons for believing that all men conceive the fundamental idea of the existence of God. He became convinced of that at the time of a sojourn with the Iroquois of Saint-Louis-du-Sault (near Montréal) where he discovered religious ceremonies whose founding myths told

³ This passage is taken from Fenton & Moore (1974 : liii-liv). These authors also remind us that according to Frank Manuel (*The Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods*, 1951), Bossuet's theory on the corruption of the unity of God contains elements, the 18th century deists would borrow.

⁴ In *An Essay on Human Understanding* (1690), Locke argues against the notion of innate ideas, so dear to Lafitau, which was also debated by Ragueneau and Bressani ("formed desires and innate desires") in the *Relations* (1648-49 and 1653).

how cultural heroes brought benefits to humanity. In the same way his reading of the *Relations*, written in the 17th century, and from which he borrows copiously in writing *Les Moeurs*, allowed him to compare the religious rituals with those of other Amerindian nations. He deduced from such comparisons that these religions were but degenerate forms of the true Religion, which is as ancient as Moses, and existed at the time of the universal Flood an event that has remained engraved in the collective memory. Because they shared common characteristics, all religions necessarily had the same origin, all the more so since this is due to divine will (Fenton & Moore, 1974 : lxxvi-lxxvii).

One of Lafitau's major ideas, inspired no doubt by his stay in Saint-Louis-du-Sault, was that *Religion permeates everything* (1724 : 17) since it is linked to every act of social and cultural life. At the beginning of the 18th century, one could scarcely be more resolutely modern. For the same reason Lafitau rose up vigorously against the current of negativism towards the Americans, a current that was very powerful and which still persisted into the 18th century. One can even assert that Lafitau was led by it to write his work. He makes his purpose clear in his *Dessein & Plan* : "I have seen, with extreme distress, in most of the travel narratives, that those who have written of the customs of primitive peoples have depicted them to us as people without any sentiment of religion, knowledge of a divinity or object to which they rendered any cult, as people without law, social control or any form of government ; in a word, as people who have scarcely anything except the appearance of men" (1974 : 28-29).

Lafitau fought even more strongly against this idea because, during his life, many Indians of Eastern Canada, such as the Abenaki, had already been converted (1724 : 387). This also implied, in Lafitau's view, that it was urgent for him to write on the universal sense of Religion. The information he needed to compose the American part of his work was mostly contained in the *Jesuit Relation* (see Thwaites, ed.). One of the most striking aspects of the 17th century chroniclers is their rationalist side : they attempt to explain everything on the

strength of irrecusable principles, and they condemn strangeness as a production of sensation and deficiency.

A TOTAL IGNORANCE

The cause is that these Savages have no formal religion, no magistrature or regulations, no arts either liberal or mechanical, no commerce and no civil life...

(Father Biard to Father Balthazar, Prov., January 31 1612, in Campeau, (doc. 78 1-5) 1967 : 230)

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Already current in the 16th century, the negative mode of description did not fail to impress the chroniclers of the following century, who remained profoundly Europocentric (cf. Hodgen, 1971 : 196-201) : Indians were perceived primarily in terms of what they did not have in relation to Europeans.

In 1548, the young Étienne de La Boétie, in the *Discours de la Servitude Volontaire*, speaks of these "new people" who "live without faith, without king, without law," where man is "without law, without emperor, and each man is his own master" (*in* Clastres, 1976 : 245). In 1580, in his famous *Essay Des Cannibales*, Montaigne goes even further, demonstrating in a long series of negations that "Savages" share with Europeans, even *a contrario*, the "identity of the human spirit," to borrow an expression from Gilbert Chinard (1911 : 209) ⁵.

⁵ Montaigne writes : "This is a Nation... that hathe no kinde of traffike, no knowledge of Letters, no intelligence of numbers, no name of magistrate, nor of politike superioritie ; no use of service, of riches, or of poverty', no contracts, no successions, no dividences, no occupation but idle ; no respect of kindred, but common, no apparell but naturall, no manuring of lands, no use of wine, come, or mettle. (...) ... Men freshly modelled by the gods" (1965 : 305, see also Hodgen, 1971 : 197).

But Montaigne had a predecessor in the person of Chauveton who, in his Preface to Benzoni's *La Historia* and in the "Discours" strewn throughout the translation, writes ironically about the Indians' supposed deficiency ⁶: "What, they go about naked and are not ashamed ? To do so is worthy more of simplicity and innocence than of malediction ... They sacrifice men. So, formerly, did the French and Germans, who offered up human victims to their false gods ... and we would do the same ourselves if God had not delivered us from the Tyranny of the Devil" (1579 : iij). And Chauveton again asks himself. "Because what are we of ourselves, if not what they are ? Poor, blind, naked, idolatrous, devoid of all good and all vice" (iij) ? In his "Discours sur le XXVI chapitre", he does not hesitate to criticize the attitude of contemporary Christians who, in contrast to the Indians, had received the Revelation and therefore could not - like them - find any excuses for "adoring the Devil in visible form" (305). He hastens to denounce "what manner of individuals one must endure today in Christendom. Such as Poisoners, Massacrers, Blasphemers, Apostates, Atheists, Naturalists, Libertines, Lucianists, Simoniacs, Pantagruelists, Necromancers, Enchanters, Sodomites, Epicurians, Sardanapalists, careless Children, Swine who fatten themselves at the expense of the Church. Because which God is this, I beg to ask you, that all those good people adore, if not the one Saint Paul calls God of the World ?" (306). Addressed exclusively to Europeans, this long citation has a familiar ring : in fact, except for the charges concerning "Atheists and Swine", we find exactly the same accusations or the same sentiments applied to the Indians in the 17th century *Relations*. This is a strange inversion and unconscious projection, purporting to describe accursed humanity. Further on we will see how the Indians escaped suspicion of being atheists : in fact, the contrary would be difficult, since they were supposed to be without a God and without a religion. However,

⁶ American, Indian or Amerinidan : in this paper, I use those terms synonymously.

when the missionaries questioned them to know if they had a false religion, they could still escape any accusation of atheism.

The example of Chauveton, who tended to praise Indians in order better to blame Europeans, was not necessarily followed by the chroniclers of his time. Let us note that Chauveton presents a special case, in the sense that he swore to defend the memory of the Florida Huguenots and denounce their massacre by the Spaniards in 1565. He abhorred the Spaniards, guilty according to him of both pillage and murder among the Indian population. In his *Brief Discours*, he even jeers at Spanish monks who fled from Florida because "these Savages... were worse than Heretics, ... whose conscience does not bother them when they eat flesh in Lent, even the flesh of a Monk !" (1579 : 35). Therefore, anything for which the Indians might be censured caused Chauveton to place the blame squarely at the feet of the Spanish when, as we will see later, he did not place it on the Devil's shoulders. Nevertheless our author concludes, on the basis of the Huguenot chronicles, that the Floridians, even if they had priests, possessed neither religion nor any knowledge of God, apart from their worship of the Sun and the Moon (1579 : 41). This assertion accords with what Laudonnière wrote (1564 : 43), although Le Challeux contradicts him when he says that the Timucua were not "without an idea of divinity" (1566 : 213).

Needless to say, the current of negativism remained very strong, and as Hodgen has demonstrated, authors such as Louis Le Roy, André Thévet, Johann Boemus, Samuel Purchas, Pierre d'Avity, Thomas Hobbes, etc. (1971 : 378), were all highly experienced practitioners of it. Given these conditions, it is hardly surprising that the first chroniclers of Canada and of the east coast of America (that is, from Florida to Acadia and Newfoundland) maintained a discourse analogous to that of their contemporaries.

Let us briefly examine the cases of Verrazano and of Cartier. In 1524, Giovanni da Verrazano, exploring the northeast coast of Amer-

ica on behalf of François I had little to say about the religion of the peoples he encountered. As was not always the case with his successors, he himself admitted that because he could not understand their language, he was unable to learn much about their religion. However, observing that the Indians neither prayed nor offered sacrifices, and that they possessed no temples, he notes that they had "no law, no belief... or primary cause (...) no religion and in consequence of their total ignorance live in absolute liberty" (1946 : 71-72). On his second voyage to Canada, in 1535-36, Jacques Cartier, who was exploring the possibility of bringing Christianity to this land, reported that the Indians had "no belief in God worth mentioning" (1946 : 156). Yet, the Indians asserted that they did have a God, *Coudouagny* ; but for Cartier, as for all the chroniclers, only one God was "worth mentioning", and any resemblance to him could only be the work of the Devil.

This way of understanding the Amerindian religion (one should rather say, religions) - initially denying it and then comparing it to Christianity - was found in Canada throughout the 17th century. Rare were the voices who questioned the legitimacy of this judgment or who denounced its simplicity. Although Baron de La Hontan was an exception - he was a man who already belonged to the Age of Enlightenment - he would have little influence on his immediate contemporaries. On another level, even if Lescarbot, and to a lesser extent Sagard and Le Clercq, had already tried, before Lafitau, to make comparisons between American religions and those of other nations, only when Lafitau appeared in the 18th century would a methodical analysis be elaborated into a true system. Hence the difficulty of conceiving the American religions with the help of the chroniclers.

In order to demonstrate to what extent the use of negative expressions continues to influence explorers and missionaries during the century, thus preventing them from thinking differently, I will give a few examples. Samuel Champlain, for instance, during his voyages of exploration, reacted in a similar manner. In 1613, the "Savages" of Massachusetts appear to have "neither rules, nor government, nor Be-

lief' (1951 : 108), and in 1618, the Hurons "die without any knowledge of God and even without any religion or law, whether divine, political or civil, established among them. For they neither worship nor pray to any object, at least according to what I could discover in conversation with them" (vol. III, 1929 : 52) As if to seek assurance that he was right, Champlain a little later almost repeats himself : "Moreover, they recognize no Divinity, they adore & believe in no God... but live like brute beasts. They have indeed some regard for the Devil" (vol. III, 1929 : 143).

Lescarbot, being more cultivated, familiar with Latin and Hebrew, and desiring "to flee a corrupt Europe and to examine the New World with his own eyes" (Biggar, 1907 : xi), made a far subtler analysis, even if he reached the same conclusions as his contemporaries. Thus the Souriquois (Micmacs) of Acadia "and other of their neighbours (the Malecites) ... are destitute of all knowledge of God, have no worship, and perform no divine service, living in a pitiful ignorance" (vol. III, 1914 : 92). However - and this was something new - Lescarbot tried to explain why the Micmacs and Malecites had no religion. Having read certain chroniclers from Virginia, including Thomas Hariot, he writes that in contrast to the Souriquois, the Virginians believed "in many gods ... One alone is chief and great, who is eternal who purposing to make the world, made first other gods (...) And the Sun and the Moon & the Stars as demi-gods" (vol. III, 1914 : 95-96). He then compares the inhabitants of Virginia to those of Acadia, showing that if the first are Idolaters, the second "have no vestige of religion (because I do not call it Religion if there is *no latria* or divine service) *nor of tillage of the soil* (italics mine)" (93). In consequence, Lescarbot does not so much deny a religion to the Micmacs and Malecites as he cannot account for it, for only the cult of latria can sanction a religion worthy of the name. He also offers his own rational explanation by opposing hunters (without latria) to agriculturalists (with latria), as though they belonged to different cultural stages : even if this reasoning was not necessarily new - it had been discussed in the 16th cen-

tury - Lescarbot nonetheless anticipates the theory of cultural evolutionism of the 19th century ⁷.

We may also observe in our chroniclers that this current of negativism was combined with religious zeal. Therefore, Lescarbot saw in the Souriquois' supposed absence of religion all the more reason to make them Christians. just as the Parisian lawyer believed it was simple to make a Christian out of an infidel (livre II, 1617 : 317), Father Biard was persuaded that he would succeed in inculcating elementary notions of Christianity in the Micmacs, for the simple reason that they had nothing ; what he had written (*supra*), he repeated in slightly different terms : *Templa, aedesvé sacras, ritus, caeremonias, disciplinam nullam habent, uti nec leges aut artificia Politiamvé ullam, praeter certos mores & consuetudinem, quorum sunt retinenttissimi.* (vol. 2, 1612-14 : 74).

Nevertheless, the Micmacs, at least those in the Gaspé peninsula were not so easily converted ; as late as 1691, the Recollet Chrestien Le Clercq had of them an opinion analogous to Father Biard's. The Gaspesians "have never really known any deity, since they have lived down to our own day without temples, priests, sacrifices, and any indication of Religion" (1910 : 143). Le Clercq notes, however, that they revered the Sun, "which has always been the constant object of their devotion, homage and adoration" (*ibid.*). And because the Gaspesians were familiar with the cross, he also believed that the voice of the Apostles had been heard in this land. Although it had no Christian signification, the symbol of the cross was not unknown in North America. In the case of the Gaspesians, who even wore crosses, one can suppose that they had borrowed the idea from Jacques Cartier who, in 1534, had erected a cross in Gaspé ; or from João Alvarez

⁷ In the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, the evolutionist theory posed serious problems for ethnologists interested in Amerindian religions. The question of monotheism led to many arguments. On this subject, see the last part of the paper.

Fagundes who, in the 1520's had established a Portuguese colony in Cape Breton. Whatever the case, Le Clercq was one of the rare chroniclers of Canada, if not the only one, to believe in the coming of the Apostles. While Lescarbot, for his part, reported that such was the case for Brazil, he rejected it for Canada (livre VI, 1616 : 358). Le Clercq, who had certainly read Lescarbot, shows interest in the question of comparative values when he tried to explain why the Romans wished "to retain among them the idols of all the peoples whom they had conquered" (1910 : 225). His implications are clear : the "Savages," by adopting religious beliefs from other nations - American as well as European -could very well do the same thing, even if, with time, they forgot the origins.

Among the authors of the 17th and early 18th centuries, there emerged a figure, La Hontan, a free-thinker who earned the opprobrium of a number of his contemporaries ⁸. Although Lafitau writes in 1724 that "men need a religion," La Hontan had already affirmed in 1703 that "all the Savages are convinced that there must be a God" (vol. II, 1703 : 434). And preceding Lafitau, La Hontan had made use of contradictory descriptions from Récollet and Jesuit missionaries (Roelens 1973 : 52) to support his own opinions. Himself a deist, he hastened to project a similar image on the Indians he had known (Algonquins and Hurons). Hence, La Hontan, in *Conversations* or *Dialogues* has Adario (in real life the Huron chief Kondarionk) develop similar arguments against the Jesuits or against revealed truth. According to La Hontan's Adario, religion was a natural phenomenon and belief in God a universal truth : "Dost not thee know in the first place, that we acknowledge a Creator of the Universe, under the Title of the Great Spirit or Master of Life, whom we believe to be in every thing, and to be unconfined to Limits ?" (vol. II, 1703 : 518). The

⁸ Although he published his *Voyages*, *Mémoires* and *Dialogues* for the first time in 1703, Baron de La Hontan had sojourned in Canada much earlier, from 1683 to 1694. In 1705 he published a second edition of his works because the first edition "sinned by its style (and) because one found in it low phrases, vulgar expressions and cold mockeries" (1974a : *4).

same applies in his *Mémoires*, in which La Hontan attempts to prove the preeminence of a First Principle among the Americans, for whom revelation is superfluous since they find the necessary guides in Nature. That is why they adored this God "in everything they see" (ibid., 434) and chose the Sun as the most beautiful thing. (It is interesting to note here that the sun, almost universally worshipped, is a symbol the deists eagerly adopted (cf. Atkinson, 1971 : 126)).

Incidentally, we may recall that while La Hontan's critics emphasized his anticlerical views, they effectively concealed his very real ethnographical knowledge. Even today, as W. Washburn points out, it seems unfair to continue ignoring "his favourable view of the American Indian because he sought consciously to use it in the service of his political views" (1976 : 339). Be that as it may, Father Charlevoix - who was in Canada around the year 1705 and whose *Histoire* would not be published until 1744 - is not so distant from La Hontan when he writes : "Nothing is more certain, nor at the same time more obscure, than the idea that the Savages of this continent have of a first Being" (tome III : 343).

It was no accident that Baron de la Hontan thought this way at the end of the 17th century : he, too, had read the *Relations* and realized that the Jesuits' commonly shared view of the Indians had its sources more in Europe than in America. Especially at the beginning of the century, the Iberian and Italian influences (whose sources come from South America) were still strong in France (cf. Gilmore, 1976 : 519-527). The early missionaries and chroniclers were very much influenced by such views : corrupted by the Fall, barbarous, ignorant of the existence of God, the Indian was nonetheless the plaything, *par excellence*, of the Devil. Despite the apparent logic of this superficial and preconceived image carried to Europe, and despite the discursive and repetitive formula of "*sans foi, sans roi, sans loi*" which would finally confer on it the ineluctable appearance of truth, there were modifications as the century unfolded. One can doubtless explain these modifi-

cations by the fact that the chroniclers, far from European influences, were doing "fieldwork" in the modern sense of the term.

Precisely because of their contradictions, the *Relations* distinctly show that the Jesuits, once in America, saw less clearly than in Europe. And by reading them attentively, one realizes that very often what they describe as perverted forms of the "true religion" were perhaps not so foreign to it. Paul Le Jeune one of the most colorful witnesses among the Jesuits and one who could not be suspected of lacking a powerful sense of proselytism timidly anticipates Lafitau by writing in 1637 : "I am not pleased with those who have believed that in the mind of the Savages one did not observe any little ray of light or knowledge touching the Divinity" (vol. 14, 1637-38 : 190). Even earlier in 1633 he had written : "I was astonished by this in France, seeing that Nature had given this sentiment to all the nations of the earth. I confess that the Savages do not have public and common prayers, nor a cult that they ordinarily accord to the one they take for God ... but one cannot deny that they recognize some nature superior to man's ; as they have neither laws nor regulations, they also have no ordinance concerning the service of this superior nature, each doing as he thinks best" (Tome I, 1633 : 16). In spite of the doubts which assailed Le Jeune, he joined the chorus of accusers who claimed that the Indians communicated with the Devil. And as M. Hodgen writes in this regard, decadence was not only considered a product of the times ; it was also thought to be the work of the demon and his human agents (1971 : 267).

THE APE OF DIVINITY

God be with you, My Lord Satan !
(Chauveton, 1579 : 294)

[Content](#)

The missionaries and chroniclers began their work in Canada with a misunderstanding and a paradox. While Marc Lescarbot believed that the peoples : of New France were "like to a bare canvas, which is ready to receive whatever colour one will give to it" (vol. III, 1914 : 91), Jérôme Lalemant avowed that the Jesuits were mistaken about these peoples because when they "saw no worship paid by them to any false Divinity," they believed that "as upon a bare tablet, from which there was nothing to erase - we might without opposition impress on them Ideas of a true God" (vol. 23, 1642-43 : 151-153). And Father Lalemant added that nothing could be further from the truth since they were full of "Diabolical Superstitions" (ibid.).

An initial paradox : one can scarcely describe the contents of a religion the Indians do not have. This points to the need of interpreting the *Relations* and other 17th-century chronicles on several levels of analysis. One of the first impressions which emerges is the principal and elementary idea of opposition between Good and Evil, the Good being linked with the notion of a Christian God (whose name the missionaries had been sent to bring with them), and Evil with the notion of the Devil (who manifests himself behind various masks and multi-fold stratagems among the Indian populations). From this perspective, one could say that evil is the not-good, or the exact and inverted replica of the good. This Manicheism, a concept the Jesuits shared with the Puritans, has an effect such that each time authentic religious characteristics appeared, the missionaries were blinded to the point of seeing them as manifestations of "the Ape of Divinity," to use the

words of Lafitau (1724 : 10), who reproached the chroniclers, and Father Acosta in particular, for putting too much emphasis on this matter.

An initial misunderstanding ; when the Indians spoke of their Creator (the Master of Life or the "Great Spirit"), or of one of their cultural heroes or their trickster (both very important in mythology throughout the continent), the chroniclers believed in a disguise of the "accursed one with the horn" in America (Biard, vol. 3, 1611-16 : 119-121). La Hontan was to raise strong objections against this confusion between what he calls "Fatality" or "Misfortune, Fate, Unfavourable Destiny", and "that Evil Spirit that in Europe is represented under the figure of a Man, with a long Tail and great Horns and Claws" (tome II, 1703 : 448). Whenever the Indians invoked their Guardian Spirit (a notion that reflects the individual tutelary spirit), the missionaries suspected them of being under the influence of a "familiar demon" (J.. Lalemant, vol. 17, 1639-40 : 200). Even though Satan communicated less with American Sorcerers than with European ones, the former nevertheless remained the ideal vehicle through which the "cruel usurping tyrant" (vol. 17, 1639-40 : 200) made himself manifest : through them, he fought against the cult, true Religion and the true God⁹. One may Stop to reflect for a moment on the fact that expressions such as *manitou* (Algonquian) or *oki* (Iroquoian) - already known in the 16th century - could lend themselves to several levels of interpretation, since

⁹ We may observe that in France at the beginning of the 17th century, the sorcerer was truly perceived as casting spells and communicating with the Devil. In 1619, the Bishop of Saint-Malo affirmed that "sorcerers and diviners deliberately make pacts with Satan," and he exhorted Christians not to fear those who are nothing but "ancient masks, stinking and demented" (*in* Lebrun, 1983 : 103). F. Lebrun reminds us that the discourse on Satan's pact with the sorcerers was a very coherent one in that period. As R. Mandrou has demonstrated (*Magistrats et sorciers en France au 17e siècle*, Paris, 1968), from 1640 a change in mentalities occurred among the magistrature and the more enlightened people, This change, however, did not prevent contradictory judgments from being handed down on the subject of sorcery many decades thereafter (*in* Lebrun, 1983 : 103-104)). Those facts are not unconnected to the chronology of the *Relations*.

they can be applied to subjects, objects, or a Creator ; thus, it is not surprising that observers could not always comprehend the significance of these words. Besides the connotation of "sacred" attached to terms like *manitou* (Algonquian) and *wakanda* (Siouian), they can also signify something "strange", "remarkable", "wonderful", "uncommon" and "powerful" (Radin, 1972 : 277). The meaning of *oki* (Iroquoian) is similar ; it can also designate an entity or a spirit that has the powers to achieve exploits impossible for an ordinary human being. As in the case of *manitou* and *wakan*, objects like charms, or individuals who possess uncommon qualities (shamans, sorcerers, warriors, lunatics, etc.) can be called *oki* (Trigger, 1969 : 90). However, not all the chroniclers necessarily misinterpreted those notions that Lafitau was later to define clearly (1724 : 145-146).

In that light, one can grasp the biting irony of Urbain Chauveton who, like his contemporaries, was persuaded that when the Indians spoke of their "God," they were really speaking of the "Devil." He reports on a case where the Indians, "thinking to do (the Christians) a great honour," greeted them in the name of their Creator, and Chauveton adds : "However, that is just like saying to a man : "God be with you, my Lord Satan !" (1579 : 294). In the same spirit the Jesuit Claude Allouez reports a similar case : while he was among the Machkoutench (Potawatomi or perhaps Illinois), he was invited to a feast during which prayers were addressed to him and where he was called "a Manitou". Father Allouez was utterly filled with horror, believing that he was called God (tome 6, 1670 : 99). One could hardly find clearer indications of the Christians' (both Protestant and Catholic) incomprehension of the American Indians.

As the 17th century progressed the missionaries' thinking, when they were not seized by doubt, became more complex. Moreover, the principal and mysterious sense of expressions such as *manitou* and *oki* finally forced the chroniclers to acknowledge that, beyond the antinomy of Good and Evil, the Indians did have religious beliefs. Without wishing to contradict Father Lafitau, they remarked on this fact with

relative frequency, and admitted as well that most nations believed in the immortality of the soul and in the after-life. They also reported all sorts of religious beliefs which were, in their eyes, superstitious : the Hurons believed in the transmigration of the soul when, for example, the name of a deceased person (one who accomplished exceptional feats) was given to a living person (Bressani, vol. 39, 1653 : 33) ; the Outaouïacs (Ottawa) in the metempsychosis of the souls of dead fish, which passed into the bodies of living fish (Le Mercier, vol. 50, 1664 : 289). The Algonquins generally were convinced that each animal species had a *Master* with whom the hunters could communicate in exceptional circumstances. This master, a *manitou*, reigned among animals whose soul was immortal (vol. 8, 1635 : 119). Somehow, such beliefs were enough to persuade the chroniclers of their hosts' "barbarism."

The presence of manifest religious traits and the description of numerous rituals did not prevent the Manichean vision from prevailing among the missionaries. However, they had progressively to abandon the idea, seductive though it may have been, of the *tabula rasa* which was already encumbered with all kinds of beliefs. Of these, the most serious was the belief in the devil, which in their view had to be extirpated at all costs. Thus one finds in the *Relations* almost a précis of demonology. Jérôme Lalemant, in a relation sent to Paul Le Jeune in 1639, even devoted his final chapter to the "Reign of Satan in these lands..." (vol. 17, 1639-40 : 151).

This is not the place to enlarge on this question ; however, I shall give a few examples to demonstrate the important position of Satan in the missionaries' minds and to show how they projected his image on the Amerindian nations. First of all, from Patagonia to northern Canada, the presence of the Evil One was reported by all the chroniclers with a splendid unanimity. To read them, the kingdom of Satan was physically of this world, and contrary to Columbus, who briefly believed he had found the Garden of Eden, these chroniclers were convinced that America was the private preserve of this "Infernal Wolf."

Moreover, Satan revealed himself in various disguises : he was man or woman ; he bore several names (generally those of a particular nation attributed to its Creator, its Master of Life, its Trickster, or simply the "Unfavourable Destiny") ; and finally he was extremely active. One of the oldest ideas was that he tormented the "poor Indians", when he was not busy beating them cruelly. Le Clercq was absolutely convinced of this in the case of the Micmacs : "Our poor Gaspeians were formerly tormented by the Devil, who often beat them very cruelly, and even terrified them by hideous spectres and horrible phantoms to such an extent that, on some occasions, frightful carcasses have been seen to fall in the midst of their wigwams, a circumstance which caused to the Indians so much terror that sometimes they fell dead upon the spot" (1910 : 224). Father Biard confirms that it was the Devil's custom to beat the Souriquois (Micmacs) : "The Savages indeed have often told me that, in their Fathers' time, and before the coming of the French, the Devil tormented them a great deal, but that he does not do it any more, as it appears" (vol. 3, 1611-16 : 133).

It is the same story elsewhere ; according to George Alsop, the Susquehannah (Iroquois) of Maryland were not spared from diabolical manifestations. In the first place, their religion, their ceremonies, and their rites were so absurd as to make it almost a sin to talk about them. They had only one Deity : the Devil. His infernal, diabolical Grandeur filled them with terror : "... he forcing them to his Obedience by his rough and rigid dealing with them, often appearing visibly among them to their terror, bastinadoing them (with cruel menaces) even until death, and burning their fields of corn and houses" (1666) 1930 : 369).

In 1634, Father le Jeune did not believe that the Devil "communicates himself visibly and sensibly to our Savages", but thought the situation was different in southern America where "our Europeans have heard the noise, the voice and the blows that the Devil deals to these poor slaves", (he continues, adding on the spur of the moment that although the Devil flees at the sight of a Catholic, he would not

stop bastinadoing a Calvinist unless he converted on the spot !) (vol. 6, 1633-34 : 201). On the other hand, in 1637, after witnessing the "shaking tent" ritual among the Montagnais, he devoted a whole chapter to the "Sorcerers, and whether they have communication with the Devil" (vol. 12 :7). This time he would reply in the affirmative. Indeed during the ritual intended to consult the "Genii of Light", the Montagnais erected a "Tabernacle" which began to shake violently. Given those facts, Le Jeune concluded that the Devil certainly communicated with those "poor Barbarians" (16-19). It is possible that a relation written by Father Brébeuf, which had been sent two years earlier to Father Le Jeune, had also helped him change his mind. Father Brébeuf reported that the *Arendiouane* (Huron medicine men) "are true Sorcerers who have access to the Devil. Some only judge of the evil, and that is in diverse ways, namely, by Piromancy, by Hydromancy, Necromancy, by feasts, dances, and songs ; the others endeavour to cure the disease by blowing, by potions, and by other ridiculous tricks" (1634-36 : 123). In addition, according to Le Jeune, the Devil "occasionally gives (the Sorcerers) assistance, and reveals himself to them for some temporal profits, and for their eternal damnation" (vol. 10, 1636 : 195). The Jesuit explains the Devil's ascendancy by the fact that the "licentious life and debaucheries of this people (the Hurons) hinder them from meeting God", making it that much easier for the Devil to "meddle and offer them his service" (*ibid.*).

When he was not beating them, appearing in one of his frightful guises, or speaking through them, the Devil used the Indians' dreams to command them. In short, every nation in which the missionaries worked was literally under the yoke of Satan. As Jérôme Lalemant confirms, "frequently these demons show themselves only too visibly" 'So that the Hurons could no longer doubt their existence (vol. 23, 1642 : 153). The same was true of their war god, the "devil" *Ondoulaehte*, who "appears to them, - but never without inspiring fright, for he is terrible. Sometimes he assumes the countenance of a man mad with rage ; again, that of a woman whose features are only those of fury" (*ibid.*). In one of the last Relations, Father Allouez reports how

he refused to pray to God on behalf of the chief of an Ottawa war party for the success of his enterprise. Indeed, this war chief had earlier "impersonated the devil, imitating his voice to make believe that the latter spoke by his mouth ; and he had held feasts in his honor" (vol. 57, 1672-37 : 279). One can surmise here that the war chief, anxious to lead his party to success, prayed to his own god of war, and to improve his chances, asked Father Allouez to plead with his God.

If the Devil was omnipresent in Amerindian society, demons were literally hiding everywhere. Sometimes, demons were described rather as *genii*, sometimes as being a direct product of the Devil, when they were not mistaken for him. In certain cases, this confusion is taken to the point of absurdity. Indeed, certain definitions given by the chroniclers were reminiscent of the Christian God, unless this was another device of the "Ape of Divinity !" Let us look at what Father Le Jeune says about the *Oki* of the Hurons : "... they imagine in the Heavens an *Oki*, that is to say, a Demon or power which rules the seasons of the year, which holds in check the winds and the waves of the sea ; which can render favorable the course of their voyages, and assist them in every time of need. They even fear his anger, and invoke him as a witness in order to render their faith inviolable, when they make some promise of importance, or agree to some bargain or treaty of peace with an enemy" (vol. 10, 1636 : 161). In this passage one can immediately see why the missionaries refused to give any name but "Demon" to the supraterrrestrial Beings of the Huron Pantheon. All the same, Le Jeune saw in this description a favourable sign for the conversion of the Hurons, since "... it is really God whom they honor, though blindly" (*ibid.*). This is neither the first time nor the last time that a Jesuit appears to contradict what he has just said in the same paragraph !

One last excerpt, taken this time from Father Vimont's relation, will convince the reader that these prayers and supplications bear an uncanny resemblance to those the Christians address to their God : "... we find that the Devil interferes and gives them any help beyond the

operation of nature ; but nevertheless they have recourse to him ; they believe that he speaks to them in dreams ; they invoke his aid ; they make presents and sacrifices to him, -sometimes to appease him and sometimes to render him favorable to them ; they attribute to him their health, their cures, and all the happiness of their lives" (vol. 28, 1644-65 : 53). One can here assess the distance separating the religious thought of the Indian nations from that of the European Christians, and better understand Baron de la Hontan's stubborn defence of Natural religion.

We might suppose that the interpretation of rituals in diabolical terms was specific only to the Jesuits in 17th century New France. Nothing, however, would be more false : a rapid reference to the situation in New England in the same period reveals that the Puritans also saw the Indians as being in the grip of Satan. They went even further than the Jesuits, considering the extinction of the Indians as a gift from Heaven : thus, the plague in the 1610s, which eliminated most of the Algonquin population, was perceived as "wonderful" (Pearce, 1967 : 19), since the territory, now empty of its former inhabitants, was also delivered from Satan. In addition, the Puritans, according to Pearce, thought in accordance with an inexorable logic : "Wherever the Indian opposed the Puritan, there Satan opposed God" (22). In other words, the Puritans defended the cause of God while the Indians defended Satan. Corrupt and living in a state of mortal sin, they had only two choices : to die or to be converted ¹⁰.

¹⁰ Contrary to Catholic New France, the case of the American colonies was very different : while Maryland was Catholic, Virginia was Anglican and New England Puritan. And from 1646 onward, more and more cults would be established in such a way that by 1681, in the old and new colonies, Lutherans, Mennonites, Baptists, Quakers, Anglicans, Catholics and Presbyterians would live side by side.

TO DIE IN THIS WORLD

Quid perderent si unum colerent prudentiore compendio ?
(Saint Augustine in Bressani, vol. 39, 1635 : 15)

[Content](#)

In the middle of the 17th century, Father Paul Ragueneau cautions those helping to evangelize the "Savages". He counsels them not to hastily "condemn a thousand things among their customs" even though these may "greatly offend minds brought up and nourished in another world" (vol. 33, 1648-49 : 145-146). Indeed, for Ragueneau, it is too easy to call "irreligion what is merely stupidity" and to take for "diabolical working something that is nothing more than human" (*ibid.*). To reason thus, avers the author, could lead to abuses whereby the first to arrive would confuse "impertinent customs" with criminal acts (*ibid.*). Ragueneau goes on, declaring that if in the beginning, it was necessary to be severe, "as the Apostles were, regarding the use of idolotytha" (*ibid.*), this rigour and severity were no longer justified.

How had it happened that a mind as incisive as Ragueneau's should invite his contemporaries to tolerance ? Although this change was no doubt linked with the evolution in mores emerging in France after 1640 (cf. note 13), let us look more closely at what was occurring in New France. After announcing categorically that the "Savages" had no religion, and that the Devil, the greatest of Heretics, had chosen to live among them, the Jesuits - at least those who were working among the Iroquois - realized that the situation was much more complicated than it seemed at first sight. After all, these demons, distinct from the Devil, permeated the whole of Amerindian society ; should they not therefore be understood in the etymological sense of the term, *daemon*

(mot grec), that is, as tutelary genies superior to men ? Admittedly this is not exactly the problem posed by Ragueneau, but what he infers compels a different reading of the *Relations*, and leads to an inescapable question : could there be, by chance, a "false Religion" ? In more precise terms, is there "a false and abominable religion, resembling in many respects the beliefs of some of the ancient Pagans," as Father Allouez seems to affirm in reference to the Outaouïacs (Ottawa) ? (in *Le Mercier*, vol. 50, 1664-67 : 285).

I have already approached this question in part when I spoke of the Virginians, who, according to Lescarbot, possess a "cult with latria," contrary to the Canadians. Lescarbot bases his assumptions on Thomas Hariot who, following his travels (1588) in Virginia wrote that the inhabitants of that region believed in many gods whom they called *Mantoac* (Manitou) and that they had one Great God who had been there for all Eternity. Hariot added that the Virginians already had a religion, which, while it was not the right one, did exist and could be reformed. He continued, giving an insight into euhemerism, by saying that they "think that all the gods are of human shape" (1889 : 350).

Some years later, in 1612, Captain Smith was to provide more details concerning the Powhatan (Algonquins), asserting that "there is yet in Virginia no place discovered to be so Savage in which the Savages have not a religion, deer, bows and arrows" (1930 : 108). True to his time, however, Smith adds that their principal God is the Devil : "Him they call *Oke* (Oki) and serve him more of fear than love" (109) ¹¹. Smith claims that they converse with him and in their temples place a carved image of him, embellished with chains, copper and beads, and covered with hide. In addition, each territorial division had

¹¹ The Powhatan and Patuxan belong to the Algonquin linguistic group ; in theory, they should address their prayers to *Manitou* and not to *Oki*. If our chroniclers are not in error, this reference to an Iroquian God could be explained by a cultural borrowing, inasmuch as at the time of these reports, the Iroquois were neighbours of the Algonquins and reported to exercise a certain influence on the latter.

a Temple and two or three officiating priests, with altars on which they made offerings ; it even happened that they occasionally sacrificed a human being (111).

When, in 1634, the Jesuit Andrew White established a mission ¹² among the Patuxan (Algonquins) of Maryland, he had a chance to verify that this "blind idolatry" (according to Smith), had been somewhat modified : the Indians had adopted the Christian God, but they nonetheless continued to pray in their temples to their Oki ("a frenetic spirit"), and to adore beneficial gods such as corn and fire (1910 : 44-45). Here is a fine example of religious syncretism, which would be repeated many times in many places where the missionaries had established themselves. It shows very clearly that the Indians, thanks : to the supraterritorial hierarchy they had conceived, were in certain cases disposed to adopt an additional God and to put him alongside their Creator ¹³ (or whatever they conceived him to be), yet without aban-

¹² In the 16th century, the Spanish Jesuits had already established missions in Virginia ; the following century would see English Jesuits in Maryland.

¹³ It is well known that certain Amerindian societies include in their pantheon a Supreme Creator. This is the case, for instance, of *Olelbis* among the Wintun (California), *Awonawinola* among the Zuñi (Southwest), and *Tirawa* among the Pawnee (Plains). Other nations have worked out an elaborate belief in the *Great Mystery*, called *Kitche Manitou* (Algonquians) and *Wakan Tanka* (Siouans) mistakenly called the "Great Spirit," who pervades the Universe. In this respect, it is far from certain that *Kitche Manitou* is an invention of the missionaries, if one recognizes, for example, the precolumbian existence of societies such as the *Midewiwin* (the Great Medicine Society) among certain Algonquins, or if one analyzes the different components of *Wakan Tanka* in the Dakota ritual of the Sun Dance (see note 17). From this perspective, the *Great Mystery* is a form of supraterritorial. rationalization. Foreign to the Christian God, it is an invention of Amerindian cosmology. Thus the belief in a supreme Creator can be secondary insofar as the gods do their work through cultural heroes, the benefactors of civilization. In many cases, the Creator acts in a peculiar manner since he delegates most of his tasks to secondary heroes. It is as if he were doing nothing or as if he were prodigiously bored in the eternal Void. But he is changeable : sometimes hieratic, and sometimes active (Désy, 1981 : 10-17).

doning their beliefs. In this sense, Le Clercq was right to make a comparison with the Romans (*supra*).

If such detailed examples of idolatry are rare in 17th century New France, they exist nevertheless. In this respect, certain peoples of the Great Lakes did not differ greatly from the Susquehannah, the Patuxan and the Powhatan, if one is to believe Father Allouez and the explorer Nicolas Perrot. In his *Mémoire*, Perrot, who speaks of the Outaïas ¹⁴ in the passage cited, takes up the commonly accepted argument according to which the Indians were without religion, but a few lines further on, he hastens to give a fine example of the contrary : "The Savages ... recognize as principal divinities only the Great Hare, the sun, and the devils. They oftenest invoke the Great Hare, because they revere and adore him as the creator of the world ; they reverence the sun as the author of light... (...) They have also many other divinities, to whom they pray, and whom they recognize as such, in the air, on the land, and within the earth" (1973 : 12-13 & Kinietz, 1965 : 287). These very numerous creatures included the air, thunder, lightning, the moon, eclipses, winds and several animals such as serpents, "tigers" and bears.

Years before Perrot, Claude Allouez had already described the same thing, saying the Outaïacs "recognize no sovereign master of heaven and earth" (*in* Le Mercier, vol. 50, 1664-67 : 285). However they believed in several spirits : some benevolent (such as the sun, the moon, the lake (lake Huron), the rivers and woods), and others malevolent (such as the grass snake, the dragon (sic), the cold and storms) (*ibid.*). Moreover, "whatever seems to them either helpful or hurtful they call a Manitou, and pay it the worship and veneration which we render only to the true God" (*ibid.*). Even worse for Father

¹⁴ *Outaioïas, Outaïacs, Ondataouaouats* : these terms refer to the Ottawa (or *Odawa*), Algonquins originally from Manitoulin Island in Lake Huron. The chroniclers spelled their name in dozens of ways, all phonetically similar. Champlain called them the "Cheveux-Relevés."

Allouez, these "Savages" paid homage to idols : he was horrified to see in a village an idol to which they had sacrificed at least ten dogs (286). This people had "priests", generally old men, who prayed, exhorted, invoked and made sacrifices with ceremonies in which the Sacrificers participated.

All these signs, however, were not sufficient to constitute a true religion, since as we have seen a religion must include priests, temples, altars, and sacrifices to the gods (Lescarbot, 1617 ; Hariot, 1588 and Smith, 1612). As far as the missionaries were concerned, only the Natchez of Louisiana had a regulated cult (Le Petit, tome IV, 1819 : 260) ¹⁵. There were indeed traces of "false religion" : Father Allouez and Nicolas Perrot depicted Ottawa rituals reflecting this. Father Brébeuf, much earlier, had related similar patterns for the Hurons, showing their belief in all animate things (an earlier version of animism). He wrote of how they address themselves to the "earth, to rivers, to lakes, to dangerous rocks" (vol. 10, 1636 : 159), and above all to the sky. Brébeuf described two sorts of ceremonies : the first to win favour with the spirits and the other to appease them.

Those numerous opinions - which have the repetitive qualities one may find in the variants of the same myth - must certainly have led to casuistic and dogmatic arguments, without solving the initial question of the presence of God among the American Indians. As a matter of interest, we can read, for instance, that "one meets men so devoid of every notion of Religion, that one cannot find a name to make them understand God" (Le Jeune, vol. 8, 1634-36 : 185) ; that "they do not clearly understand our theology" (179) ; that "Faith is not natural to these peoples, - as it seems to be in France, where it is imbibed with one's mother's milk" U. Lalemant *in* Vimont, vol. 28, 1645-46 : 55) ; and that (their) "conversion to God has not been a slight labor (*una piccola fatica*), - they knew not even his name, or yet his worship and

¹⁵ However, we have not space to speak of them here because to do so would lead us geographically too far away.

mysteries" (Bressani, vol. 39, 1653 : 43). Yet, such a variety of opinions reveal a basic truth ; as in the case of an unequal exchange, the missionaries, while collecting a tremendous amount of information on the beliefs of the Indians, seem to encounter enormous difficulties in communicating their own beliefs.

On another level of analysis, the notion of inneity so dear to Lafitau, is not absent from the *Relations*. This is significant, not so much because the Europeans sought to prove that the American peoples had an innate notion of God, but rather because it highlighted their doubts when confronted by the complexity of these beliefs. The Récollet Gabriel Sagard, although he does not say so in so many words, never absolutely rejects the possibility that the peoples of Canada had a notion of God. In his chapter entitled "On the belief and Faith of the Savages in the Creator (1-632) he writes : "Cicero has said, in speaking of the nature of the gods, that there is no people so savage, so brutal, or so barbarous that has not some instinctive notion about them. Now as there are diverse nations and countries of barbarians so also are there opinions and beliefs because each of them fashions a god suitable to its place" (1939 : 167).

Relatively early in the 17th century, Brother Sagard makes a remark worthy of special note : he suggests the possibility that "barbarous peoples," including the Indians, may not only have a notion of several gods but may also be capable of creating for themselves an original one. Twenty years earlier, the rather narrowminded Father Biard had written that the Micmacs "believe in a God ... but they cannot call him by any name except that of the Sun, Niscaminou" (vol. 3, 1611-16 : 133). In 1634, Father Brébeuf, in a relation on the Hurons, reinforced the observations of Brother Sagard : "It is so clear, so evident that there is a Divinity who has made Heaven and earth, that our Hurons cannot entirely ignore it.

But they misapprehend him grossly, and having the knowledge of God, they do not render him the honor, the love, nor the service which

is his due" (vol. 8, 1634-36 : 117-119). The following year, in another relation sent to Father Le Jeune, Brébeuf explains further : "There are some indications that they had formerly some more than natural knowledge of the true God, as may be remarked in some particulars of their fables. (...) For not having been willing to acknowledge God in their habits and actions, they have lost the thought of him and have become worse than beasts in his sight, and as regards the respect they have for him" (vol. 10, 1636 : 125). And he adds later, as though to convince himself further : "As these poor savages, being men, have not been able altogether to deny God, and, being given to vice, could have only conceptions of him unworthy of his greatness, - they have neither sought nor recognized him except on the surface of created things" (vol. 10, 1636 : 159). Father Brébeuf thought that with time it would be easy to evangelize the Hurons "since they already honor so especially a creature which is so perfect an image of him. And, furthermore, I may say it is really God whom they honor, though blindly..." (161). However, some years later, when the Jesuits required their proselytes to abandon such habits and customs as the "diabolical ceremonies" celebrated in hopes of a bountiful harvest, good hunting and fishing, and success in love and war, the Hurons came to interpret conversion to Catholicism as being literally equivalent to "dying in this world" (Vimont, vol. 28, 1644-45 : 53).

All this leads us to discover yet another paradox : the Indians were thought to have no religion, but they were obviously deeply religious. Was it not possible, asked the missionaries, that they might have retained the memory of God ? Whatever the case, Paul Ragueneau's appeal to prudence, in 1647, concealed an ulterior motive. In the following year, he reveals his thoughts by asserting "that all the nations of these countries have received from their ancestors no knowledge of a God" (vol. 33, 1648-49 : 226) ; however, he adds that they invoke Him without knowing Him. According to the author, these invocations sought the protection of different gods : "... in danger of shipwreck, they name him *Aireskouy Soutarditenr*... In war, and in the midst of their battles, they give him the name of *Ondoutaeté*... Very

frequently, they address themselves to the Sky... in the treaties of peace and alliance ... they invoke, as witnesses of their sincerity, the Sun and the Sky, etc." (*ibid.*). Ragueneau even turns for support to Tertullian, a Christian apologist, recalling that in the midst of perils, even the most infidel nations used the same words as Christians (*ibid.* : 225-226). In the final analysis, the Hurons and the Ottawa, though Barbarians, supposedly possessed "in their hearts a secret idea of the Divinity and of a first Principle, the author of all things" (*ibid.* : 225).

Francesco Giovanni Bressani confronted a similar paradox. In a chapter devoted to the "Conversion of the Canadians" (vol. 39, 1653-14), he addresses the question of inneity, compares the points of view of Indians with those of atheists and libertines, and ends up deciding they are quite different. He goes on to describe how the Indians believe in good and bad spirits, here acknowledging genii and there a Master for each animal species. He demonstrates how the Hurons and certain Algonquin nations believe in the immortality of the soul and also in an afterlife that includes two distinct places, one of great happiness and another of wretchedness. Furthermore, he maintains, these peoples have an instinct for divinity : they pray to Heaven and call on the sun as their witness. The Ottawa invoke the "creator of Heaven" and recognize "seven other genii, who dwell in the air and breathe forth the seven winds which commonly prevail in those regions" (*ibid.*).

Even though he did occasionally borrow from Ragueneau (cf. Ragueneau, vol. 33, 1648-49 and Bressani, vol. 39, 1653), Bressani's reflections on the Amerindian religions - particularly those of the Ottawa and the Hurons - were original. In a way, he admits his regret at not finding any regulated, customary cult of divinity. But while he has to conclude that the Indians do not have a Christian religion, he adds that they are not irreligious (vol. 39, 1653 : 17). That is why he finds it all the more paradoxical to speak of "superfluous religion" when there

is none ¹⁶. In consequence, Bressani must eventually confront the most logical question concerning the unity of God ; what, in fact, would the Indians have to lose by choosing One God alone among all those gods ?

As we have seen, the chroniclers' view of the Amerindian religions extends to a number of horizons, both temporal and spatial, which are by definition irreconcilable. Every nuance can be found, from negative judgments, to theological questioning, to an appeal for prudence. This explains our perplexity when we read the chroniclers and their apparently insurmountable contradictions. These are easy enough to identify *a posteriori*, but more difficult to discern *a priori*. All this lends to the *Relations* and to other chronicles an impression of tentativeness, since what has earlier been asserted may later be refuted. Although one finds the chroniclers saying all sorts of things, nevertheless one must not make the mistake of having them say whatever suits one's purpose, even if they do offer different versions. As indicated previously, sometimes the Indians were thought to have no religion, or to be devoid of any sentiment at all in this regard ; sometimes they were considered idolaters, or 'even demonolaters. They may have had a Creator to whom they could render (or not render) homage, although they ordinarily addressed their prayers to the Sun. Conversely, their thinking and rites were pervaded by devils, confused with the *genii loci*. They did not know God, having long forgotten him, but it was not impossible that they might have maintained a secret sentiment of him.

And what about the chroniclers themselves ? We may observe that, although the same ideas come back regularly, their evolution and development can be traced. We may further observe that the chroniclers

¹⁶ Bressani writes : "It will seem a paradox to hear mention of superstition, - that is, of superfluous religion, where there was none at all ; but it is not a new thing to see that in vices there is a passage *ab extremo ad extremum, sine medio*" (vol. 39, 1653 : 16).

occupy different intellectual spaces : indeed, a Récollet does not think like a Jesuit, nor an explorer like a missionary. Also, these writers did not all live in the same period, even though they all came to Canada in the 17th century. just as the Indians, who were the subject of their writings, inhabited different regions, spoke different languages and had different ways of life, the chroniclers were deeply marked by European culture. For instance, if Biard and Champlain were still influenced by the 16th century, Ragueneau and Le Jeune were very much creatures of the Age of Reason, whereas La Hontan already had a foot in the Enlightenment. In the same vein, what could a baron like La Hontan share with a "coureur des bois" like Perrot, except the fact that they both lived in the Great Lakes region at approximately the same time ? Nor are dates altogether reliable : Lescarbot, in 1606, seems to have a more open mind than Le Clercq in 1691. All those factors thus make it imperative to take into account the peculiar characteristics of each Indian nation as well as the degree of perceptiveness and sensitivity in each author. So how then is one to conclude ?

TERTIUM QUID ?

What we have is monolatry, and this is essentially merely a form of polytheism.

(Radin, 1937 : 259)

[Content](#)

It would no doubt be possible to look at the writings of other chroniclers, but to do so would not be of much help in resolving the questions at hand. Certainly the philosophical treatises and discussions of the 18th century would cast a new light on the subject of religion. This would become even more complex were I also to consider sources dealing with the celebrated richness of the mythology of other Amerindian nations (for example, in the Southwest, California or the

Pacific Northwest). Such, however, is not the primary goal of the present work.

If we return to the question of polytheism, this was a subject of little concern to the chroniclers, who in fact were less interested in learning whether the Indians had gods than in imposing upon them the idea of their own God. Their task was first and foremost to extricate the "Savages" from the clutches of idolatry. In point of fact, only a close examination of their writings can reveal their impressions on such matters. Moreover, with particular regard to the North American Indians, true scientific debate on the subject of polytheism as compared to monotheism is very much a product of the 19th century. This was the century in which Darwin developed his theory of evolution, Spencer attempted to apply Darwinian principles to human society, and Morgan further advanced these arguments in his famous work *Ancient Society* (1877). Such, briefly, are the premises of cultural evolutionism according to which humanity was divided into "Savages," "Barbarians" and "Civilized Peoples," a theory whose influences can be felt even today.

If we go back to the beginnings of American anthropology in the second half of the 19th century, we can better understand how the situation evolved on the scientific level. Anthropology was at that time an offshoot of the cultural evolutionist theory. Curiously, without Morgan being directly responsible, this theory would lead to an impasse on the question of whether the American peoples were thought to be polytheist or monotheist. In addition, the 19th century was strongly marked by the doctrine of Manifest Destiny, which foresaw the imminent disappearance of the American Indians. From this perspective, there arose an urgent need for a definitive classification. To reinforce their thesis, certain authors endeavoured to apply the Morganian division to religion. John Wesley Powell, director of the collection of the Bureau of American Ethnology at the Smithsonian Institution, and a powerful personage of the time, sets the tone in 1887 by comparing the physiology of the "Savages" to the degeneracy of their

senses, so as to prove that they could not have a God. The "Savages," according to Powell, were peoples who by virtue of their backward physiological development, had correspondingly limited intellectual life. Under these conditions, their beliefs were at a level comparable to their physical, social and cultural primitivism. Four stages of "philosophical" thought were identified : hecastotheism (God is contained in everything) ; zootheism (men make animals the object of their adoration) ; physitheism (the gods are anthropomorphic) ; and finally, psychotheism (although the gods are associated with natural forces, they possess individual psychological traits which distinguish them one from the other). Psychotheism was thought to evolve in two directions : monotheism and pantheism (Powell, 1879-80 : 29-33). As for the American Indians, they were assigned for the most part to the second category - zootheism - since their supreme gods were bears and wolves, etc. (33) ! Powell adds that all civilizations have inevitably passed through the three preceding stages.

Heir, no doubt, to the 18th-century "detractors" of America, such as William Robertson, the Abbé Raynal and the Abbé Corneille de Pauw, and heir also to the Puritan tradition which regarded the Indians as the children of Satan, Powell (strongly influenced by Spencer) was a convinced evolutionist who used science to support his religious beliefs. While scholars in American anthropological circles (among whom Powell appears to be the most extremist) devoted themselves to discussions on this subject, works published in Europe gave fresh impetus to the debate. Although it was generally accepted that so-called primitive peoples, including American Indians, were animist if not polytheist, the question was raised as whether or not they were monotheist. E.B. Tylor, the British anthropologist, was no exception to the cultural evolutionism trend, since he tried to show that animism, polydaemonism and polytheism had preceded monotheism. In 1871, he writes that polytheism inevitably leads to the doctrine of a Supreme Creator : "Among these races, Animism has its distinct and consistent outcome and Polytheism its distinct and consistent completion, in the doctrine of a Supreme Deity" (vol. 2, 1929 : 336). Some years later

the Scot, Andrew Lang, seriously shook the convictions of polytheism's supporters by writing the following : "On (the) point (of a primitive American monotheism) it must be said that, in a certain sense, probably any race of men may be called monotheistic, just as, in another sense, Christians who revere saints may be called polytheistic" (vol. II, 1887 : 42-43). The question Lang poses, as to whether or not monotheism precedes polytheism, which would be a degenerate form of it, was already an old one (cf. Hume, 1757) ; however, his work opened the way to a new concept of the problem, of which Father Schmidt would be one of the principal advocates. Father Schmidt was to continue in this vein, endeavouring to demonstrate that all primitive peoples were monotheistic (see *Der Ursprung der Gottesides*, 1912).

In another work published in 1898 (*The Making of Religion*), Lang went even further by claiming that the American school of evolutionism was incorrect in asserting that belief in a "Great Spirit" had never existed among the American peoples, and that the ethnologists had erred when they attributed the cult of a Superior Being to the influence of Christianity. Lang pursues this line of reasoning - very near to Lafitau's - when he explains that if one finds traces of monotheism among primitive peoples, it is because this monotheism somehow represents vestiges of a more ancient belief- in other words, monotheism precedes polytheism. Powell, even if his influence is less important had already warned the reader of such a trap : "Scholars, too, have come essentially to an agreement that physitheism is earlier and older than psychotheism. Perhaps there may be a 'doubting Thomas' who believes that the highest stage of psychotheism - that is, monotheism - was the original basis for the philosophy of the world, and that all other forms are degeneracies from that primitive and perfect state. If there be such a man left, to him what I have to say about philosophy is blasphemy" (1879-80 : 32). But Powell, though one would not wish to exaggerate the importance of his role, thought as did the other Americans of his generation. Francis Parkman, famous for his work on the Jesuits, among other writings, did not believe for a moment that the American Indians could have had a Supreme Being. He did not hesi-

tate to write that "The primitive Indian yielding his untutored homage to one all-pervading and omnipotent spirit is a dream of poets, rhetoricians, and sentimentalists" (1868 : LXXXIX).

If thus appears that the Spencerian and Morganian theory of evolutionism, as developed by their successors on terrain historically hostile to the Amerindians, stifled any attempt at objective analysis. Paradoxically, the attempt first roused opposition between monotheism and polytheism. It all seemed as if the fact of knowing in which god(s) the Indians believed depended uniquely on scientific thought, if not on the idea of progress.

In the first part of the 20th century, Paul Radin achieved distinction by taking up 19th century theories and trying to answer those questions left unsolved. In three texts (1915, 1924 and 1937) and in a short introduction to the 1954 edition of *Monotheism among Primitive Peoples*, Radin attempts to shed new light on the writings of the theologians and ethnologists. He distinguishes three stages of commonly held beliefs : the first, animism, is a religion characterized by faith in innumerable spirits and an animate natural world ; the second, which comes much later, is marked by the adoration of anthropomorphic deities : this is the polytheism practised by the ancient Egyptians, Babylonians, Greeks and Romans. A special category should be assigned to the Persians, among whom two principles, Good and Evil, stood side by side. The last stage is monotheism. For Radin, monotheism refers to the belief in the Supreme Deity : utterly benevolent, omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent ; one, furthermore, who demands the exclusion of all other gods (1954 : 5). If, on the contrary, God acts through the intermediary of inferior deities, then it is a question of idolatry, by definition a concept alien to monotheism (1954 : 5-6).

Radin showed how the concept of "pure" monotheism - a wholly intellectual concept - had influenced the theoreticians' attitudes towards non-monotheistic beliefs. According to both his contemporaries and the scholars of the previous century, monotheism is excluded in

animistic or polytheistic societies and vice versa. Some years later, in his work *Primitive Religion* (1937), especially in the chapter entitled "Monolatry and Monotheism," he challenges Lang, Tylor, and particularly Father Schmidt, whose principal hypothesis had attempted to prove that monotheism preceded polytheism. Radin concluded that enormous difficulties are posed by the question of whether so-called primitive peoples believe in God. He felt, however, that if they are not necessarily monotheists, they can be monolaters, that is, they can believe in one supreme Deity associated with other deities. Thus, although God is All in the Christian religion, the Indians' Creator is not necessarily identical, although, in certain cases, he is One. Also he may be perceived in different ways, depending upon whether one belongs to a religious or lay society, whether one is a shaman, etc.. Radin constantly returns to this point in his works, including his 1915 article, "Religion of the North American Indians." For him, religious knowledge is not homogeneous. The proof is that informants contradict each other continually ; some admit they have little to say ; others report variants, depending on the secret society they belong to. Radin relates the case of the Winnebagos' Earth Maker, who is sometimes a distant God, sometimes an active Creator. Similar instances can be found among other Amerindian nations ; for example, *Heammawiyó* of the Cheyennes is either a Pure Spirit or a cultural Hero, depending on the source of the information ([see note 13](#)) ¹⁷.

¹⁷ The Amerindian peoples recognize a celestial hierarchy among their supraterrrestrial creations. Thus, among the Iroquoians, the highest-placed Being is Sky, the elder brother of the twins Taiscaron and Djuskeha (themselves sons of the daughter of Ataentsic, first woman of the Iroquois, who fell from the vault of the firmament). This hierarchy is also found in the course of ceremonies. The Pawnee, too, identify a series of circles leading to the Creator, Tirawa. The circle of visions first reaches the clouds, then the sun and finally Father-Sky. The Ojibwa recognize a series of powers, the highest of which is *Kitche-Manitou*. Other peoples have conceived several universes, some of which are chthonian (the Hopi have seven of them, the Navajo five). In an article on the Sun Dance, Walker (1917) showed the complexity of Wakan Tanka (the-Great Mystery). Wakan Tanka possesses four natures (God-Chief, Great Spirit, Creator, Executor) which are in turn formed of four unities. Nevertheless, Wakan Tanka, who unites sixteen spiritual unities, is the equivalent

Whereas, in 1915 Radin affirmed that belief in a Supreme Being was not very widespread in North America (292), by 1954 he no longer doubted that a form of primitive monotheism exists among all peoples. As he had shown in his 1937 publication, the only question was whether this form of monotheism belongs to henotheism or monolatry. One of the reasons for Radin's compelling interest in this question had to do with the fact that, outside the area of ethnographical research, the evolutionist theory had for a long time been a stumbling block for anthropologists : indeed, to reject the thesis of polytheism for that of monotheism would have meant rejecting the evolutionist thesis to which they adhered. It was against this current of thinking that Radin fought.

These quarrels among 19th and early 20th century anthropologists, though they seem coherent in the light of relations between "Savages" and "Civilized People" in the last century, appear nonetheless curious when one reads the chroniclers of preceding centuries, particularly those of the 17th century. In fact, all things being equal, the 17th century chroniclers come across as being more enlightened than certain 19th century scientists. In any case, the chroniclers very early distinguished religious themes, and by questioning themselves on the idea of a first Principle among the Indians, *nolens volens* they showed the latter had invented a superior Celestial Power to whom they did not, perforce, accord the place which Christians reserve for their own God. Following Radin's proposition, is there then a *tertium quid* ? Provided that one must systematically categorize the facts even when they do not seem to fit a familiar framework, this is probably the only solution.

of One. Sioux shamans call him *Tobtokin* , that is four-times-four. The mysteries of Wakan Tanka are more accessible to shamans than to ordinary people, of course. It is in this sense that Radin is right to stress that religious knowledge differs from one to another, and that certain particulars are not accessible to all (Radin, 1954 : 20 et passim).

There is no doubt that the question of polytheism as opposed to monotheism, while clearly part of the great discussions of the 19th and early 20th centuries, has been overshadowed by the theory of cultural evolutionism. This question is less frequently discussed today. Nevertheless it continues in an insidious way to colour the debate.

For a long time the term polytheism had long fallen into disuse ; one can search in vain for it in modern publications devoted to North-American ethnology except when used in comparison to monotheism. More generally, anthropology tends to explain religious phenomena by integrating them into the cultural system itself, as advocated by Lafitau, or dividing them into particular categories such as shamanism, myth, magic, or by reducing them to symbolic structures.

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