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EARLY COLONIALISM AND THE MI'KMAQ:
A CONTEXT FOR RE-THINKING HISTORY OF RELIGION

by Jennifer Reid

Thesis presented to the Graduate School
of the University of Ottawa
as partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
(Religious Studies)

Thesis Supervisor: Robert Choquette, Ph.D.

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ABSTRACT

This paper considers the religious meaning of earliest contact between Europeans and North American indigenous peoples as it focuses upon the meeting of the French and the Mi'kmaq in Acadia during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, and the trade in commodities which initiated and maintained their cultural interaction during this period. Religion in this context is defined as the fundamental orientation of the human which is achieved through reciprocity: in other words, it is the process by which the human being arrives at a notion of meaning in the world and it is realized through exchanges in materiality. This definition provides a locus for the discussion of two issues: first, what is referred to as the 'problem' of the modern study of religion; and second, the problematic nature of the meaning of colonialism itself.

CONTENTS

Part One: Setting

1. Introduction 1
2. The Problem and History of Religion 4
3. Towards a Definition of Religion 11
4. Contact in Acadia 19

Part Two: Sacred Symbols, Orientation, and the Meaning of Contact

5. The Meaning of Trade 32
6. The Mi'Kmaq 39
7. The French 63

Conclusion

8. Contact as a Religious Event 91
9. "Reciprocity" and History of Religion 97

Bibliography 101

Part One

Setting

1. Introduction

The modern study of history of religion is currently undergoing a process of revision which is related to constitutive disciplinary notions concerning the nature of the object it proposes to study. The 'other' (specifically, the non-European human or culture) has continually appeared as a contradiction to the historian of religion whose presupposition of the inherent irrationality of the non-West has been confronted with apparently misplaced 'rational' orders. This fact consequently cries out for a hermeneutic which will divest the scholar of those ideological impediments which have been the source of contradiction.¹ The implications of such a hermeneutic are twofold: first, by attempting to eliminate the incongruities we will necessarily be required to regard the meaning we have assigned to encounter with the 'other', an act from which a more realistic meaning might emerge; and second, this may allow us to cultivate a broader understanding of religion itself.

The problem the history of religion (and indeed all the

¹ Pierre Bourdieu, in proposing his 'theory of practice' to overcome such contradiction, points out that the problem with the human sciences generally has been the inability to "account for all the cases observed, and only those..." Bourdieu, Outline of a Theory of Practice (Cambridge: Cambridge university Press, 1977), 11.

human sciences) has traditionally confronted when dealing with non-European peoples is a product of the Enlightenment creation of the human being of centered consciousness and the ensuing advent and repercussions of colonialism in the modern world. For the analysis of this problem a debt must be acknowledged to the recent scholarship of Charles H. Long, an American historian of religion who has perhaps most succinctly articulated it, and whose work will consequently be relied upon in this paper in order to establish a context for discussion of the possibility of its resolution.

In order to examine this possibility a particular manifestation of colonialism will be regarded from a rather novel perspective: colonial contact will be considered as a religious event and from this perspective its implications for both the colonizers and the colonized will be explored. The specific historical moment to be focused upon is that of the period between 1500 and 1615 when the Mi'kmaq people of Maritime Canada (Acadia) first had substantial contact with the French. The purpose of such an exercise is twofold. First, it may lead to a more realistic understanding of the colonial period; and second, in so doing, it should contribute to the legitimization of the new course of inquiry being proposed by scholars of religion such as Charles Long.

This discussion will begin with an attempt to situate the problem of the human sciences within both an historical and an ideological framework. Once this has been accomplished we will

turn our attention to the critical matter of establishing a definitive foundation from which we may speak of the religion of both the Mi'kmaq and the French during the period with which we are concerned. In order to arrive at such an operative definition, elements of Pierre Bourdieu's 'theory of practice', as well as the significance which the work of Clifford Geertz and Mircea Eliade has afforded to the materiality of human practice, and finally Marcel Mauss' discussion of exchange as the fundamental practice of the human being will be utilized. It will ultimately be within these theoretical frameworks that Charles Long's designation of religion as basic orientation in the world will be situated. The period of contact will then be regarded, beginning with an overview of the events which brought these two cultures together to be followed by the actual examination of the religious nature of the colonial experience for first the Mi'kmaq and then the French. In respect to consideration of the Mi'kmaq a comparative framework will be established based upon Kenneth Burridge's work on Melanesian cargo cults in order to locate our material within a broader setting of non-European religion in the colonial world. French religion will also be placed within a wider context of European ideology and particularly those ideologies of mercantilism, imperialism, and Christianity. The paper will conclude with reflections upon the meaning of this discussion of early colonial Acadia as a religious event in respect to the study of religion.

2. The Problem and History of Religion

The problem which modern historians of religion have been unable to circumvent stems from two particular constitutive components of the discipline itself. The first is the fact that as a human science, history of religion emerged as an outgrowth of the Enlightenment; and the second is that all these sciences were necessarily formulated with the presupposition of a colonial world.² The problem occasioned by these components has been a typical "confusion regarding the object which they purport to study."³ Functioning under the presumption that the human is a being which is defined by its capacity for rational thought and behaviour these scholars have consistently confronted people and cultures within which the rational, as they understand it, does not operate in any consistent manner. Long has pointed out that in the work of Max Muller, whose investigations laid the foundation for the study of history of religion, the problem was evident in his evaluation of Sanskrit language.

² Charles Long, Significations; Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 76.

³ Charles Long, from Professor Long's introduction to his course entitled "Colonial Discourse in the Study of Religion", 1988, 1.

Myth for Muller is a disease of language--a disease, that is, if one attempts to make sense of its content. For Muller and other early German Sanskritists, it is clear that the Sanskrit language represents one of the highest forms of order. One might say that they considered Sanskrit almost a perfect language. The paradox for Muller and many of his followers had to do with the ability of the human mind to fashion such a logical form...and simultaneously to use this logical form to give expression to illogicalities on the order of myths.*

Encounter with seemingly non-rational peoples has clearly proven to be disconcerting for these scholars; and furthermore, it may be that the difficulty is virtually inescapable given the nature of not only the study of religion but of all the human sciences. Michel Foucault has suggested that this potential for confusion may be inherently unavoidable given the context out of which the sciences emerged.

The human sciences did not inherit a certain domain, already outlined, perhaps surveyed as

* Long, Significations, 70.

a whole, but allowed to lie fallow, which it was then their task to elaborate with positive methods and with concepts that had at least become scientific; the eighteenth century did not hand down to them, in the name of man or human nature, a space, circumscribed on the outside yet still empty, which it was then their role to cover and analyze. The epistemological field traversed by the human sciences was not laid down in advance...the human sciences did not appear when, as a result of some pressing rationalism, some unresolved scientific problem, some practical concern, it was decided to include man...among the objects of science...they appeared when man constituted himself in Western culture as both that which must be conceived of and that which is to be known.⁶

Foucault directs our attention to the formative influence of the Enlightenment on these sciences through his characterization of the human as that which must be simultaneously "conceived of" and "known". One cannot help but be reminded of Descartes' 'cogito

⁶ Michel Foucault, The Order of Things; An Archaeology of the Human Sciences (New York: Pantheon Books, 1970), 344-345.

ergo sum'.⁶ As the initial formation of the study of religion can be located in the wake of a particular moment in the history of Western thought when human consciousness was proposed to be the "locus of an ordered and centered intelligence",⁷ so too can its development be regarded as a product of this moment. In this respect history of religion has attempted to know the 'other' while maintaining a conception of its own detachment, and this has been perhaps most conspicuous in the formation of the phenomenological approach. The work of Edmund Husserl can be regarded as a catalyst for this approach as much of his epistemology was devoted to establishing the 'other' (in the form of spiritual experience) as a scientific object which, given the correct methodology, it could be possible to know."⁸ In his Cartesian Meditations this intent was articulated most clearly:

⁶ Houston Chamberlaine, in Immanuel Kant, Vol. II (New York: John Lane Co., 1914), 215, characterized the 'cogito, ergo sum' as "a perception on the boundary line" as it defined the human in terms of the mind or conceptions. See also Norman Smith, Studies in the Cartesian Philosophy (New York: Russell and Russell, 1962), 89. This perception of a boundary line is cultivated throughout the Enlightenment so that in the work of Emanuel Kant (a century after Descartes) it is articulated as 'das Ding an sich' (the thing in itself). The axiom of the a priori effectively separates consciousness from the empirical world. For a discussion of the a priori see Norman K. Smith, A Commentary to Kant's Critique of Pure Reason (Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1962) 211ff. Mauss has argued that it was with Kant that human consciousness, "the sacred character of the human person [was made] the precondition of Practical Reason." Marcel Mauss, Sociology and Psychology (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979) 89.

⁷ Long, Significations, 66.

⁸ Long, Introduction to "Colonial Discourse in the Study of Religion", 2.

A science whose particular nature is unprecedented comes into our field of vision, a science of concrete, transcendental subjectivity, as given in actual and possible transcendental experience, a science that forms the extremist contrast to sciences in the hitherto accepted sense, positive objective sciences...we are envisaging a science that is, so to speak, absolutely subjective, whose thematic object exists whether or not the world exists. But more than this. It seems as though my (the philosopher's) transcendental ego is and must be not only its initial but its (that is, phenomenology's) sole theme.⁹

From the foundation set out by Husserl the work of Rudolf Otto, Joachim Wach and ultimately, Mircea Eliade emerged. Both Otto and Wach were concerned with the role of "religious experience" in locating the other, while Eliade focused most specifically upon the power of the sacred to manifest itself¹⁰--

⁹ Miscael Theunissen, The Other; Studies in the Social Ontology of Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, and Buber (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1984), 14.

¹⁰ Long, Introduction to "Colonial Discourse in the Study of Religion", 2.

the hierophany. Thus Wach claimed, "Religion is, in essence, experience of or living contact with ultimate reality."¹¹ Likewise Otto proposed the "mysterium tremendum" which "manifests itself in conscious feeling."¹² Eliade's examination of the hierophany in Patterns in Comparative Religion, while remaining fixed within the tradition of situating the 'other', was notable because it pointed to what Long has called a "religious imagination of matter"¹³ the importance of which will be discussed later. The critical detail to be underscored here is that none of these scholars have considered in any substantial manner the role of historical context in the experience or the showing of the sacred. Phenomenology attempts to situate the 'other' in isolation from the historical context of the modern world and that context is foremost a product of colonialism.

The problem which this creates for the history of religion is somewhat complicated. The method of inquiry necessarily denies the significance of historical context while the human science itself is indebted to the historical fact of a colonial world (out of which it emerged) for much of its pragmatic

¹¹ Joachim Wach, Essays in the History of Religions, Joseph M. Kitagawa and Gregory D. Alles, eds. (New York: MacMillan Publishing, 1988), 129.

¹² Rudolf Otto, The Idea of the Holy (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), 41.

¹³ Long, Introduction to "Colonial Discourse in the Study of Religion", 2.

understanding of the 'other'.¹⁴ The colonial period was characterized by a thrust into the non-European world in search of raw material and commodities yet in investigations of the people whom the Europeans confronted in their movement there is rarely any consideration of the impact of these forms upon their cultures.¹⁵ Such an analysis would necessarily demand consideration of not only the materials of contact but of the relationship of those people who are the object of inquiry with those who were acquiring goods. The margin delineating the 'other' would necessarily be compromised.

History of religion assumes the existence of a definitive 'other' and its difficulty arises out of a desire to portray it while sustaining its 'otherness'. The approach of phenomenology is inherently limited as it presumes to locate the consummate 'other' apart from historical context. Another alternative, as Long has pointed out, is to regard "the history of contact with the finite other, and, wherever possible, the history of contact in terms of reciprocity. Such an alternative would impel the scholar never to lose sight of "the definite and fragile moments of the human image...those moments of being and imagination which the human is graced to repeat and embody."¹⁶

¹⁴ Long, Significations, 76.

¹⁵ Long, Introduction to "Colonial Discourse", 8.

¹⁶ Long, Introduction to "Colonial Discourse", 10-11.

3. Towards a Definition of Religion

This paper will endeavour to represent the religious 'other'--both the Mi'kmaq and the French colonizers--in terms of reciprocity but in order to do so we must first delineate an operative framework for an understanding of the term 'religion' itself.

To formulate such a definition, it may be most useful to begin by shifting our theoretical perspective away from the scientific, the limitations of which have been noted in the preceding segment of this paper. Pierre Bourdieu has suggested that an alternate focus would be upon human practice which is not subject to the "detemporalizing effect" of science:

Science has a time which is not that of practice...because science is possible only in a relation to time which is opposed to that of practice, it tends to ignore time and, in doing so, to reify practices.¹⁷

Practices observed by the human scientist (and especially the historian of religion) have too often been interpreted as curiosities, and Bourdieu argues that it is only by reconsidering

¹⁷ Bourdieu, 9.

temporality that a more authentic understanding of practice can be achieved.¹⁸ Thus, this attempt to frame an effective definition of religion will be situated within a context of practice, the meaning of which is imbedded in the structures of time and its rhythms.¹⁹

According to Clifford Geertz, religion may be regarded in its most broad form as synonymous with human culture. Geertz has noted that religious symbols function to stabilize the force of both the human being's perceptions of particular configurations of reality as well as the ability to respond to given situations with appropriate emotions. As such, these symbols provide the human with a means by which the world may be understood and endured;²⁰ but more than this, for Geertz, they "formulate a basic congruence between a particular style of life and a specific...metaphysic."²¹ This is a critical detail which must be stressed as it affords significance to the way in which the person experiences the world--the practice of being human--in respect to the formulation of religious symbolism; the referent for these symbols is the activity in which human beings are

¹⁸ Bourdieu, 8.

¹⁹ Bourdieu, 9.

²⁰ Clifford Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 104.

²¹ Geertz, 90.

engaged at any given point in time.²²

In the work of Eliade we find a more systematic discussion of the relationship between the religious symbol and the experience of being human, as he situates the symbol, in the form of the hierophany, deeply in the physical reality of human practice. The hierophany itself can be anything through which the sacred is manifest²³ and all materials which are constitutive of human encounter are thus potential hierophanies.

Indeed we cannot be sure that there is anything--object, movement, psychological function, being or even game--that has not at some time in human history been somewhere transformed into a hierophany...it is quite certain that anything man has ever handled, felt, come in contact with or loved can become a hierophany.²⁴

²² Eliade also discusses the relationship between religion and culture in the foreword to Patterns in Comparative Religion (New York: New American Library, 1958). He notes: "Because religion is human it must for that very reason be something social, something linguistic, something economic--you cannot think of man apart from language and society."

²³ Mircea Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religion, New York: New American Library, 1958, Foreword.

²⁴ Eliade, 11.

At its most basic measure then, manifestation of the sacred derives from the sphere of human practice as opposed to what we might consider that of ideation.

In order to arrive at an operative meaning of religion the question must consequently be posed as to what can be said to constitute the most fundamental practice of human beings. Marcel Mauss, in his notable work concerning non-Western cultures, The Gift, submits that it is the practice of exchange as this above all else ensures the maintenance of any given culture.

Societies have progressed in the measure in which they, their sub-groups and their members, have been able to stabilize their contracts and to give, receive and repay. In order to trade, man must first lay down his spear. When that is done he can succeed in exchanging goods and persons not only between clan but between tribe and tribe and nation and nation, and above all, between individuals. It is only then that people can create, can satisfy their interests mutually and define them without recourse to arms. It is in this way that the clan, the tribe and nation have learnt...how to oppose one another without slaughter and to give without

sacrificing themselves to others.²⁵

Exchange occurs as humans are forced to confront a boundary which itself signifies their perception of some incompatibility, and the gift which is conveyed across the boundary comprises the means by which that incompatibility is negotiated.²⁶ The gifts which are exchanged, Mauss points out, need not be valued in monetary terms with which we are most familiar but may include "courtesies, entertainments, ritual, military assistance, women, children, dances, and feasts."²⁷ As the gift is passed from one person to the other an intangible link is created between the individuals as the matter exchanged brings with it a portion of the giver.²⁸ We are reminded of Emerson's essay on gifts in which he wrote

the rule for a gift...is, that we might convey to some person that which properly belonged to his character, and was easily associated with him in thought...Rings and other jewels are not gifts, but apologies for gifts. The only gift is a portion of

²⁵ Marcel Mauss, The Gift; Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies (New York: W.W.Norton & Company, 1967), 80.

²⁶ Long, from "Colonial Discourse", 10-11.

²⁷ Mauss, The Gift, 3.

²⁸ Mauss, The Gift, 11.

thyself. Thou must bleed for me. Therefore the poet brings his poem; the shepherd, his lamb; the farmer, corn; the miner, a gem; the sailor, coral and shells; the painter, his picture; the girl, a handkerchief of her own sewing. This is right and pleasing, for it restores a society insofar to its primary basis, when a man's biography is conveyed in his gift...²⁹

For Mauss, the materiality of exchange has a spiritual quality as it exerts "a magical and religious hold over the recipient," whether it be an individual or a collectivity. In a sense, that which is given to another is alive and dynamic, as it endeavours to restore to the giver some comparable token with which it may be replaced.³⁰ A refusal to enter into the process of reciprocity which is initiated by the gift articulates a refusal to negotiate the boundary which exists between the participants in the exchange; and so, we might add, denies the existence of the boundary itself and consequently of a meaningful 'other'. In other words, Mauss suggests that the gift is essentially spiritual matter and humans are consequently bound by the

²⁹ Joseph Slater, The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson: Volume III, Essays: Second Series (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), 94.

³⁰ Mauss, The Gift, 10

obligation to exchange this matter with one another.³¹

We are now in a better position to begin to propose a manageable definition of religion. As we have seen, religious symbols are rooted in the materiality of which human practice is comprised, and the most basic practice is that of exchange which is essentially the primary mode of creating human community. As religion negotiates the boundaries which exist between apparently incompatible entities it may consequently be said to constitute the means by which the human being creates and maintains an orientation in the world. As Charles Long has argued, religion allows the person to come "to terms with the ultimate significance of one's place in the world."³²

For the purpose of this enquiry then religion will be designated as human orientation which may be achieved through the exchange of matter. Before continuing however, one final definitional component must be established with respect to the fact that both Eliade and Mauss limit their notions of materiality to the realm of the 'archaic'.³³ Although their work furnishes an extremely effective framework for the discussion of religion it must nonetheless be contextualized within structures of time and space. Any investigation into religion during the

³¹ Mauss, The Gift, 11.

³² Long, Significations, 7.

³³ It should be noted that Mauss discusses contemporary society at length in The Gift, but only insofar as it constitutes an aberration of "archaic" patterns of human activity.

colonial period should therefore afford sufficient consideration to the dominant forms of materiality present in that historical situation. The discussion of the period of early contact in Acadia will consequently extend particular attention to the significance of fish, fur, European commodities, and various types of matter which were implicated in the exchanges of these three fundamental forms.

The subsequent portion of this inquiry will consider the nature of matter and its transference within the context of the specific contact situation of Acadia in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in order to assess its religious repercussions for first the Mi'kmaq and subsequently for the French. Before proceeding, however, some attention should be afforded to the geographical boundaries of the region with which we are concerned. The first Acadian trade and colonization charter, drafted in 1603, explicitly defined a territory which stretched from Ottawa as far south as Washington. The document set no lateral boundaries but simply charged the traders to move as "much and as far as may be...in the firm land,"³⁴ so that the expanse of Acadia ostensibly included most of the continent. In actuality the French presence in the region was generally confined to the territories now designated as Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island, in addition to parts of

³⁴ Marc Lescarbot, Nova Francia; A Description of Acadia, 1606 (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1928), 4.



Reproduction of a map which appeared in Lescarbot's first edition of his History of New France, 1606, and reprinted in the Harper and Brothers volume in 1928.

Quebec, Newfoundland, Labrador, New England, and Maine.³⁵ In fact, Acadia referred most often to little beyond the future province of Nova Scotia.³⁶

4. Contact in Acadia

The history of a people cannot be comprehended apart from the materiality which defines their practice of being human at any given time. As Gabriel Marcel once noted, "an individual is not distinct from his place: he is that place."³⁷ Harold Innis has stressed the importance of this factor in his discussion of the formative influence of the beaver upon Canadian history:

The history of Canada has been profoundly influenced by the habits of an animal which very fittingly occupies a prominent place on her coat of arms. The beaver...was of dominant importance in the beginnings of the Canadian fur trade. It is impossible to understand the characteristic development of

³⁵ John Quinpool, First Things in Acadia; "The Birthplace of a Continent" (Halifax: First Things Publishers, 1936), 12.

³⁶ D. Luther Roth, Acadie and the Acadians (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publications Society, 1890), 81.

³⁷ Edward Relph, Place and Placelessness (London: Pion Ltd., 1976), 3.

the trade or of Canadian history without some knowledge of its life and habits.³⁸

To follow Innis' example then, in order that we might enter into a discussion of the particular historical period of 1500 until 1610 in Acadia, consideration must be afforded first to the dominant forms of matter which ultimately brought the two societies together under the broad classification of trade. The most conspicuous of these was fur. As Alfred Bailey has noted, it was the potential value of trade in fur which initially impelled the French to colonize Acadia and subsequently furnished the economic means by which the practice of colonization was maintained.³⁹ Furs were indeed a crucial element in the colonial thrust of the French but in respect to the period with which we are concerned, Bailey's analysis is somewhat incomplete; the influence of fish, and in particular the codfish, must also be acknowledged as it was this harvest which allowed for the emergence of the fur trade.

Within twenty years of Columbus' contact with North America the French were crossing the Atlantic in search of codfish stores

³⁸ Harold A. Innis, The Fur Trade in Canada; An Introduction to Canadian Economic History (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), 3.

³⁹ Alfred Goldsworthy Bailey, The Conflict of European and Eastern Algonkian Cultures 1504-1700, A Study in Canadian Civilization (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), ix.

off the Grand Banks.⁴⁰ The intense effort required to obtain this commodity was warranted in two respects: first, a European market existed for it as a result of the limitations of current agricultural technology and a relative shortage of meat;⁴¹ and second, the north Atlantic was virtually swollen with this stock. As late as 1606 Marc Lescarbot made note of this fact.

I will say only that by manner of pastime on the coasts of New France I will take in one day fish enough for to serve as food for a longer time than six weeks, in the places where the abundance of cod is, for that kind of fish is there most frequent. And he that hath the industry to take mackerels at sea may there take so many that he shall not know what to do with them, for in many places I have seen infinite numbers of them close together, which did occupy more space there three times than the market-halls of Paris do contain.⁴²

In all likelihood the French fishermen who visited the region as

⁴⁰ Robert Choquette, French Christianity comes to the Americas, (MS, Ottawa, 1991), 15.

⁴¹ Innis, 9.

⁴² Lescarbot, 291.

early as the first years of the sixteenth century came into contact with indigenous peoples, since it appears that during this period the Mi'kmaq frequented the shores of the area (at least in the summer months) in order to harvest fish, shellfish, and eggs.⁴³

The growth of the fur trade must essentially be regarded as an extension of the French fishermen's initial contact with this territory. Demand for north Atlantic cod increased fairly rapidly following its introduction into the European market (extending into the Mediterranean) and with increased demand came also the necessity for improved treatment of the commodity. This fact, in addition to the fishermen's desire to increase profits led to the development of dry fishing (a process which did not require large quantities of salt), an innovation which initiated the search for appropriate harbours for drying fish.⁴⁴ Once such harbours were located the French were forced to establish modest colonies at these places in order to maintain their access to them. It must be noted that these fishermen were not the only Europeans to be frequenting Acadia at this time; the Bretons and Basques were also committed to procuring porpoise, seal, and whale oil in the region and consequently to obtaining the use of Maritime harbours

⁴³ Jeanne Guillemin, Urban Renegades; The Cultural Strategy of American Indians (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), 23.

⁴⁴ Innis, 9.

which extended from Newfoundland to Acadia.⁴⁵

Following this rudimentary charting of the region by fishermen, French explorers, infused with the spirit of discovery which had been inaugurated in the previous century, began appearing in Acadia and carrying on some measure of trade with the local Mi'kmaq, in order to recover some of the costs of their expeditions.⁴⁶ It must be noted that the beginnings of trade had in all probability been established during the first few decades of encounter. By the time Cartier arrived in 1534 the native population was sufficiently familiar with exchanging goods with Europeans that they greeted the Frenchman with "frequent signs to us to come on shore, holding up to us some furs on sticks."⁴⁷ As knowledge of the possibility of carrying on trade with the native community became more widespread (both through the reports of explorers and fishermen) French merchants entered into the movement across the Atlantic, first engaging in trade from on board their ships, and then establishing small settlements on shore for the same purpose. The profits which they obtained were considerable enough to warrant the more substantial colonizing

⁴⁵ Wilson D. Wallis and Ruth Sawtell Wallis, The Mi'kmaq Indians of Eastern Canada (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1955), 11.

⁴⁶ Francis Jennings, The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest (New York: W.W.Norton and Company, 1976), 96.

⁴⁷ H. P. Biggar, The Voyages of Jacques Cartier (Ottawa: Publications of the Public Archives of Canada, number 11, 1924), 49.

efforts of trading companies and the crown.⁴⁸

This is not to say that fishing was immediately displaced by the activity of traders in Acadia, for this process occurred slowly over the course of the century as European demand for furs increased. Innis has noted that the beaver pelt, which was to become the foundation of the fur trade, was not a commodity which the Europeans sought to any great extent at least until the time of Cartier.⁴⁹ Trade during this period was at best sporadic. So too, it should be pointed out, was the participation of Imperial France in the movement into North America. During the late 1530's exploration ventures were financed by the Crown which hoped to reap the economic benefits generally presumed to accompany discovery of new territories. However the likelihood of securing those items which were customarily considered to be of value seemed to fade when Cartier returned to France in 1541 with samples of what he supposed were gold and diamonds but which ultimately were determined to be no more than iron pyrites and quartz. This setback, in addition to the fact that France was entering into a period of religious wars, resulted in a temporary suspension of imperialist activity in Acadia.⁵⁰ But although France had ostensibly withdrawn from the region, French fishermen were not about to discontinue the North Atlantic harvest which

⁴⁸ Jennings, 96.

⁴⁹ Innis, 12.

⁵⁰ W. J. Eccles, The Canadian Frontier 1534-1760 (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), 17.

had become by the mid-fifteenth century an economic necessity within particular regions of France.⁸¹

Nor did the fledgling merchant enterprises consider retiring from the region. As each year passed a greater number of native people appeared at the coasts in order to trade with the Europeans; it has been pointed out that this number must have been substantial by mid-century since the Homan maps, which were drafted between 1550 and 1588, inscribed this coastal area with the designation "place of many people".⁸² The potential for profits associated with the trade in furs began to become more apparent at this time, due to not only the native peoples' desire to engage in this activity but also to the nature of fur as a commodity, as well to as increased demand for beaver felt in Europe. From an economic perspective, fur was a relatively cost efficient commodity to import into the European market where, it should be noted, it was virtually nonexistent. Production of this commodity was free of the considerable expenditures associated with other North American mercantile enterprises such as the plantation economies of the Spanish, Portuguese, and later, English which were reliant upon the costly traffic in African slaves. European merchants needed only to convey themselves (and a store of commodities for trade with the native community) to North America where an abundance of furs which were

⁸¹ Eccles, 18.

⁸² Guillemin, 23.

economical to transport back to Europe awaited them. The trade began to flourish late in the sixteenth century when beaver felt became the material of preference for European hat makers and their patrons. North American beaver fur was particularly suited to the manufacture of hats because each fibre was quilled in such a way that items produced from it maintained their form for extended periods of wear.²³

So it was a combination of factors which contributed to the commercial movement away from the protracted venture of catching and processing fish for transatlantic transport toward the potentially more lucrative trade in furs; although as we have noted, one did not completely replace the other during this period. By the turn of the seventeenth century, for example, the number of French fishing vessels frequenting the Acadian seaboard during the summer months has been estimated in the vicinity of a thousand;²⁴ and Lescarbot noted in 1606, "For so many people and in so great number go to fetch[the cods] out of all the parts of Europe every year, that I know not from whence such a swarm may come."²⁵

The French Crown resumed its activity in Acadia in the final years of the sixteenth century, following the accession of Henry IV who had converted to Roman Catholicism in 1593, and who was

²³ Eccles, 20.

²⁴ Guillemin, 28.

²⁵ Lescarbot, 285.

thus capable of facilitating the end of France's religious wars through the Edict of Nantes(1598). The renewal of French imperial inclinations was realized through the work of private merchants who wished to secure monopoly rights to the trade in fish and fur,²⁶ and in return agreed to represent the interests of the French Crown within a designated region. The first such colonization charter was granted to Pierre du Gua de Monts for the territory of Acadia in 1603. The patent required that de Monts

establish, extend, and make to be known our name, might, and authority. And under the same to subject, submit, and bring to obedience all the people of the said land and the borders thereof: And by the means thereof, and all lawful ways, to call, make, instruct, provoke, and incite them to the knowledge of God, and to the light of the faith and Christian religion, to establish it there...

...to populate, to manure, and to make the said lands to be inhabited, as speedily, carefully, and skilfully, as time, places, and commodities may permit. To make thereof,

²⁶ John S. Moir(ed), Church and State in Canada 1627-1867; Basic Documents (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1967), xiii.

or cause to be made to that end, discovery and view along the maritime coasts and other countries of the mainland...to make carefully to be sought and marked all sorts of mines of gold and of silver, copper, and other metals and minerals, to make them to be digged, drawn from the earth, purified and refined, for to be converted into use...To establish garrisons and soldiers...to do generally whatsoever may make for the conquest, peopling, inhabiting, and preservation of the said land of La Cadie...⁸⁷

The royal charter appeared to be a potentially lucrative proposition since, theoretically, it was to sustain the interests of both the crown and the merchant. In practice however, things were quite different, as the rights guaranteed the trader by such charters were difficult to enforce in North America. Basques and Bretons, for instance, did not acknowledge the legal authority of these documents, let alone the prerogatives which they defined, and were a constant obstruction to the French merchants' maintenance of their trading monopolies with the native population. Lescarbot relates the details of an encounter between de Monts' people and "four ships of Baskques...that did

⁸⁷ Lescarbot, 2-5.

truck with the savages contrary to the said inhibitions" in 1604.⁸⁸ As a result of this and other factors (mostly financial) de Monts' charter was revoked within a few years of its enactment; the economic reality of the situation was that he could not turn a profit sufficient to balance the expenditures of his colony at Port Royal.⁸⁹ A second charter for the colony was subsequently granted to Jean de Biencourt de Poutrincourt in 1610 in the hope that he might prove to be a more effective representative of the French Crown.

Before concluding this survey of the events and basic material of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries which brought about contact between the French and the Mi'kmaq, mention should be made of the missionaries who also began to cross the Atlantic for Acadia during this period. Once the French were in a position to establish colonies in the region the opportunity presented itself for what Francis Jennings has referred to as European "conquest religions" to enter the situation. Jennings regards both Protestantism and Roman Catholicism of the period as conquest religions on the basis of the zealousness with which they followed the movement of colonizers in order to convert the native populations which had been encountered.⁹⁰ It was thus the trade in Acadian commodities which allowed the French

⁸⁸ Lescarbot, 10.

⁸⁹ Eccles, 22.

⁹⁰ Jennings, 56.

missionaries to gain a foothold in that territory. Because the bearers of the first charters in the region were Huguenots who were predisposed to distrust the Jesuits,⁶¹ the earliest missionaries to arrive in Acadia were a Protestant minister and a secular priest.⁶² However, the Jesuits were rapidly able to effectively displace these men as they managed to secure their initial passage to North America through the patronage of an affluent and influential supporter of their endeavours, the marquise de Guercheville, who successfully procured the presence of two Jesuits on a boat which reached Acadia in 1611.⁶³

The preceding discussion has demonstrated that the account of French contact with Acadia and her people was from its inception an encounter which derived of two basic forms of matter: fish and fur, as well as one basic activity: trade. The context for contact, so to speak, has thus been established. On this basis we are now in a position to begin to address the question of the fundamental meaning of this event for the people who were implicated in it as it transpired; we can now begin to take note of what Long has referred to as the "definite and

⁶¹ John Webster Grant, Moon of Wintertime; Missionaries and the Indians of Canada in Encounter Since 1534 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 5

⁶² Grant, 3.

⁶³ Grant, 4.

fragile moments of the human image",⁶⁴ and in so doing undertake a religious analysis of the event.

⁶⁴ Long, Significations, 77.

Part Two

Sacred Symbols, Orientation, and the Meaning of Contact

5. The Meaning of Trade

The story of the European presence in North America begins to a substantial degree with the contact of two groups: the French (including Basques, and Bretons) and the Mi'kmaq (the easternmost tribe of the Algonkian people). The plot, if we may continue the analogy, involves a single practice in which both groups were intimately absorbed: the transfer of matter from one to the other. And the crisis, or series of crises, entailed the confusion within both groups occasioned by the confrontation of divergent notions pertaining to the significance of the practice of exchanging matter. What one detects in Acadia during the period of early contact is the engagement of two groups of people in a single practice which was, nonetheless, regarded in a dramatically different manner by each group.

The transfer of matter in this paper will be often designated by the term 'trade', although this activity necessarily entails many more forms of materiality than would usually fall under its aegis. This will become more apparent as we continue this analysis. At this point it is sufficient to accentuate the fact that trade had distinct and dissimilar meanings for each group. For the Mi'kmaq the trade in

commodities was simply a new manifestation of the practice of exchange, the nature of which we have already noted in regard to the work of Mauss concerning non-European peoples. Suffice it to say again that the transfer of matter between individuals and groups was regarded as the means by which human community was established and sustained and as such it was imbued with sacrality. For the French, on the other hand, trade ostensibly had to do with commerce, the buying and selling of commodities and the ensuing accumulation of wealth as an end in itself. For the native people there existed a basic understanding of the definitive character of exchange for the human, and consequently every act reflected this assumption and a language of symbol existed to express it. They confronted the encounter with Europeans as an encounter with new matter; and upon reflection, adapted their mode of exchange to the new situation, consistently striving to maintain their human orientation in a changing world. The Europeans had no language to speak of the sacrality in the exchange of matter, no construct for regarding such activity as constitutive of the human being. Commodities and their exchange had no relationship to the religious orientation of the Frenchman.

One must admit that it appears we are confronted with two mutually exclusive views of the same activity which result in exceedingly disparate perceptions of the human. One defines the person by its relationship to the exchange of matter; the other presumes that the person exists as something independent of

exchange and materiality. Indeed, in the minds of the French during the period in question there was no doubt as to the irreconcilability of these views. Marc Lescarbot, a Parisian lawyer-cum-historian who arrived in Acadia in 1606,⁶⁵ was fairly quickly impressed with the Mi'kmaq people's propensity for giving gifts to not only their own people but likewise to the French:

Our savages are praiseworthy in the exercise of this virtue [liberality], according to their poverty. For, as we have said before, when they visit one another they give mutual presents one to the other. And when some French Sagamos⁶⁶ cometh to them, they do the like with him, casting at his feet some bundle of beavers' or other furs, which be all their riches...⁶⁷

Impressed though he was, Lescarbot had no framework for understanding the meaning of exchange for the people of which he wrote and consequently was somewhat confused by the apparent lack of intrinsic value the natives placed on the gifts themselves. The gift appeared to have worth only in reference to the actual

⁶⁵ Wallis and Wallis, 10.

⁶⁶ Sagamos is the term employed to designate a chief by the French during this period.

⁶⁷ Lescarbot, 262.

act of transference: "And, although they be very glad when the like is done unto them yet so it falleth out that they begin the venture and put themselves in hazard to lose their merchandise."⁶⁶ For Lescarbot it was a curiosity that the native North Americans showed little regard for the actual items of exchange, or in other words that their society did not appear to have developed a cultural sanction for the accumulation of capital as had that of the Europeans.⁶⁷

A gift of the Mi'kmaq chief Membertou to the King of France had a similar effect upon Lescarbot.

This Membertou told us, at our first coming thither, that he would make the King a present of his copper mine, because he saw that we make account of mines, and that it is meet that the Sagamos be courteous and liberal one towards the other. For he, being Sagamos, esteemeth himself equal to the King, and to all his Lieutenants; and did say often to Monsieur de Poutrincourt that he was his great friend, brother, companion, and equal, showing his equality by joining the two fingers of the hand...Now although this

⁶⁶ Lescarbot, 262.

⁶⁷ Jennings, 107.

present which he would give to his Majesty was a thing that he cared not for, not withstanding that proceedeth from a generous and good mind of his, which deserveth as great praises as if the thing had been of greater value.⁷⁰

The economic value of the copper mine was foremost in the author's mind, and although he conceded a certain quality of generosity in Membertou, once again the meaning of the interaction for the chief was lost to him. We might note here Mauss' discussion regarding the role of individuals in the exchange of goods: "it is groups, and not individuals, which carry on exchange, make contracts, and are bound by obligations...the chiefs [act] as intermediaries for the groups..."⁷¹ Clearly Membertou regarded himself and the French Crown as acting respectively, on behalf of their communities, to negotiate the boundary which lay between them. The act of giving, rather than the gift itself, was the mode by which this could be accomplished.

We will note one last example from Lescarbot a few years later, when he wrote of the return of certain traders to the Mi'kmaq following a three year absence.

⁷⁰ Lescarbot, 130.

⁷¹ Mauss, The Gift, 3.

When Sieur de Poutrincourt arrived there, he found his buildings entire, the Savages...not having touched them in any way, even the furniture remaining as we had left it. Anxious about their old friends, they asked how they were all getting along, calling each individual by his name, and asking why such and such a one had not come back.⁷²

To the Mi'kmaq the disruption of an ongoing relationship with the French, facilitated by the trade which had brought them together initially, would have signified a disruption in the meaning they had affixed to their position in the changed world of colonial Acadia. To Lescarbot the Mi'kmaq valued their relationship with

⁷² Reuben Gold Thwaites(ed), The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents, Vol. I (New York: The Pageant Book Co., 1959), 69. Thwaites' use of the word "savage" is extensive throughout his translation of the Relations and will consequently appear in this paper a number of times. It should be noted however that the word as it is employed in the Thwaites edition is extremely problematic. This subject has been discussed by Maureen Korp, "Problems and Prejudice in the Thwaites Edition of the Jesuit Relations" Historical Papers of the Canadian Society of Church History, Michael Owen(ed), 1990. Korp points out that the "'sauvage' of French is not equivalent to the 'savage' of English. Although the former clearly has negative connotations which are associated with the seventeenth century notion of the "wild man" (p. 105), these do not completely correspond with those of Thwaites' "savage" which exacerbate "the inherent negative connotations of "sauvage". To compound the problem Thwaites liberally chooses to translate the Latin nomenclatures "Barbarorum", "Barbarus", "indigenus Barbarus", and "Canadico ingenio" all as "savage". (p. 108)

the French because "they had had some experience of our kind treatment while we were there, and, seeing themselves deprived of it, they wept bitterly when we left them..."⁷³ To this divergence in perspective it should be added that while the relationship appears to have been critical in its own right for the native community, the historian clearly attributed to it a different sort of value: "And consequently by a certain gentleness and courtesy...it is easy to make them pliant to all our wishes."⁷⁴

The obvious divergence in French/native opinion respecting the significance of exchange is clearly exposed in the writing of Lescarbot and if we were to accept the fact of this seemingly irreconcilable difference it would indeed be preposterous to attempt to consider the entire contact event as a religious phenomenon. However what must be emphasized when appraising the French notion of the relationship between the human and matter during this period is that they 'presumed' themselves to exist in isolation from materiality; for as we shall see, what one presumes and what one is in practice actually engaged in doing can be very different things. The French may well have claimed to derive their religious orientation exclusively from Christianity but in fact that orientation may have derived more realistically from their relationship with the myriad forms of

⁷³ Thwaites, Vol. I, 67.

⁷⁴ Thwaites, Vol. I, 69.

matter which comprised their world. Rather than affording them the means by which they might authentically define themselves as human beings, their ideologies (from Christianity to imperialism) precluded the possibility of their grasping the significance of their participation in trade with native people: that they too were involved in a process (imbedded in materiality) of defining what it was to be a colonial European. This said, we will now turn our attention to the experience of each group during this period of early contact in order to derive some appreciation of the implications of their religious orientations (arising from a relationship with matter), as well as their sacred symbols, for the meaning of the event itself. With respect to this analysis discussion of both the Mi'kmaq and the French will focus upon first, consideration of the changes intrinsic to the event, followed by the effects of these upon the given group of people, and finally the response of each group to the changed situation. In the case of the French, it will become evident that this response is somewhat more problematic than that of the Mi'kmaq.

6. The Mi'kmaq

The contact with European people was experienced by the native community in terms of a tangible mutation of the world it knew. The arrival of the French translated into the advent of a variety of material forms which required a new understanding of

the nature of the world the Mi'kmaq occupied. To begin, this materiality took the form of human encounter through sexual relationships with the 'other'--in this case French fishermen, seamen, explorers, and merchants; and consequently the creation of a new variety of offspring which had not existed before this time. These children were usually mothered by native women and so were received into that community to be reared.⁷⁵

Another form assumed by the experience of contact was that of alcohol (primarily wine and brandy), which had been previously unknown to the Mi'kmaq and for which they appear to have quickly acquired a taste. Lescarbot notes that Membertou was on one occasion furnished by the French with "some bottle of wine, which he loveth, because (saith he) that, when he hath drunk of it, he sleepeth well, and hath no fear nor care."⁷⁶ European disease quite rapidly became a significant incursion with which the native population had to contend. Among these illnesses which have been documented were smallpox, measles, typhus, tuberculosis and pleurisy, whooping cough, scarlet fever, strep infections and consumption.⁷⁷ There were numerous means by which the spread of disease was facilitated including sexual contact⁷⁸ and the

⁷⁵ Choquette, Robert, 83.

⁷⁶ Lescarbot, 130.

⁷⁷ Cornelius J. Jaenen, *Friend and Foe; Aspects of French-Amerindian Contact in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (McClelland and Stewart, 1976), 98. See also Guillemin, 29.

⁷⁸ Bailey, 18.

introduction of new European types of food into the native diet.⁷⁹ It has been noted that by the late sixteenth century the effects of these three endowments of contact (sex, alcohol, and disease) were already being experienced to a substantial degree.⁸⁰ In addition to these the arrival of European commodities attendant the French must also be recognized, and conspicuous among these were the musket⁸¹, axes, kettles, and knives.⁸²

An inventory of the variety of new forms of materiality to have entered the world of the Mi'kmaq in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries could obviously be substantially more extensive than what has been presented here. These particular instances have been offered simply to establish the fact of their presence during this period in order that we might regard the more salient issue of the impact of new forms of matter upon the native community. This impact was considerable. Lescarbot indicates that the language of the Mi'kmaq, for instance, was reverberating from the pressure exerted by early involvement in trade with Europeans, as it had by the first years of the seventeenth century become inundated with French vocabulary:

⁷⁹ Bailey, 13.

⁸⁰ Guillemin, 28.

⁸¹ Bailey, 52.

⁸² Nicolas Denys, Description and Natural History of the Coasts of North America (Acadia), W.F.Ganong (ed) (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1908), 442.

although that by reason of traffick many of our Frenchmen do understand them, notwithstanding they have a particular tonque, which is only known to them; which maketh me to doubt of that which I have said, that the language which was in Canada in the time of James Cartier is no more in use. For, to accomodate themselves with us, they speak unto us in the language which is to us more familiar, wherein is much Basque mingled with it; not that they care greatly to speak our languages...but by long frequentation they cannot but retain some word or other.¹³

Such a word, the author points out was "A DIEU" of which the native people frequently made use and which had no equivalent in Mi'kmaq.¹⁴

The introduction of European disease into the region had devastating effects upon the indigenous population which by the turn of the seventeenth century had apparently suffered a critical reduction.¹⁵ These ravages incited by disease were made

¹³ Lescarbot, 183-184.

¹⁴ Lescarbot, 258.

¹⁵ Guillemin, 28.

all the more acute by the fact that the portions of the community which were most vulnerable to their effects were those of the very young (upon whom the possibility for the continuation of Mi'kmaq society rested) and the elderly (whose capacity for cultural transmission was critical to the preservation of some form of cultural continuity).⁶⁶ The changes which accompanied the incursion of European commodities were far-reaching, especially in respect to the provision of fire-arms. The introduction of iron kettles for example, items which were much more convenient than their large wooden counterparts which had been in use until that time, distinctly altered native movement within the region. Denys relates how "they are not obliged to go to the places where were their kettles of wood, of which one never sees at present, as they have entirely abandoned the use of them."⁶⁷ Yet it was iron weaponry, perhaps more than any other commodity, which altered the world of Acadia for the Mi'kmaq. Denys discusses the effect of iron goods on the design of hunting implements:

In place of arming their arrows and spears with the bones of animals, pointed and sharpened, they arm them today with iron...Their spears now are made of a sword

⁶⁶ Jaenen, 99.

⁶⁷ Denys, 406.

fixed at the end of a shaft of seven to eight feet in length...The musket is used by them more than all other weapons, in their hunting⁸⁸

Associated with these changes in the design and character of hunting weapons was the pressure exerted upon native hunters by French traders to direct their efforts towards the pursuit of the beaver. Goods which the hunters received in return for their pelts were intended to further encourage the appropriation of this commodity,⁸⁹ and the result was that the native population fairly rapidly shifted the focus of its labour away from fishing and hunting in favour of trapping.⁹⁰ More effective tools of the hunt also resulted in the ability to kill more game than had ever been possible with stone spears and consequently animal stocks suffered significant reductions. With less food available to them the native community became increasingly reliant upon the French for this commodity.⁹¹ In a sense the most penetrating effect associated with the introduction of iron weapons was their use in confrontations between native tribes; intertribal warfare became a deadly enterprise when stone spears and arrows were

⁸⁸ Denys, 442-443.

⁸⁹ Innis, 16.

⁹⁰ Choquette, 105.

⁹¹ Bailey, 13.

abandoned and the musket adopted as the weapon of choice.⁹²

Finally, the instances of this mode of warfare itself appear to have become more common during this period due to the presence of European traders. Jennings discusses this phenomenon in The Invasion of America and concludes that such wars were the result of conflicting efforts to regulate the flow of furs.

These wars for tribal supremacy ranged over the entire space from trapline to trading post. Relations between tribes were strongly influenced by their locations in the configuration and movement of the trade. The tribe neighbouring a trading post could gain a broker's profit as long as it could block more distant tribes from direct access to the post. Distant tribes could get better prices by breaking through the obstruction.⁹³

What has become obvious from this limited discussion of the period in question is that the changes which were precipitated by the arrival of the French in Acadia had a profound impact upon the region's native people. The world of the Mi'kmaq was clearly altered dramatically within a relatively brief interval. In a

⁹² Bailey, 13.

⁹³ Jennings, 95.

sense, they had come to occupy a new space and time which demanded a reassessment of the meaning of the human being who occupied this place; and in order to effect this, the Mi'kmaq did as many non-Europeans do in such a situation: they sacralized the matter of exchange in order to affirm their conception of the human (both Mi'kmaq and French) as a being who negotiates the boundaries presupposed by the presence of the 'other' through the medium of exchange.

To more fully appreciate the significance of this process it would be useful at this point to establish a broader framework for regarding religious phenomena associated with the colonial world in order to construct a context within which the experience of the Mi'kmaq may be situated. To this end, the Cargo Cult will be briefly considered. To be sure, the practices which are associated with these movements are clearly related to a particular set of historical circumstances but their meaning for the human who must undergo the colonial experience is not so circumscribed, and for this reason warrants attention at this point.

The Cargo Cult of New Guinea has been the subject of the extensive investigation of Kenelm Burridge which is presented in his work concerning the prophetic leader Mambu. Burridge has located these movements within a class of radical collective activity but emphasizes the fact that their amalgamated articulations of political, economic, and racial strains are essentially spiritual in nature. Those who participate in such

cults characteristically "engage in a number of strange and exotic rites and ceremonies the purpose of which is, apparently, to gain possession of European manufactured goods."⁷⁴ Interesting though these rites are, what must be emphasized here is their meaning in respect to the circumstances which give rise to them. They emerge when a culture is cast into a state of imbalance by the arrival and subsequent residency of colonial Europeans.

New fashions, new habits of thought learned from other native peoples as well as from white men have wrecked the old certainties. At any chosen moment some institutions may be obsolescent, others in genesis. And since institutions contain and express series of moral notions there can be little certainty that this institution expressing these sentiments will not soon be replaced by that institution expressing other ideas. The result is a general perplexity as to which doctrines should guide in particular circumstances.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Kenelm Burridge, Mambu; A Melanesian Millenium (London: Methuen, 1960), xv.

⁷⁵ Burridge, xix-xx.

It is this state of perplexity caused by new forms of materiality and the ensuing religious attempt to bring about its resolution which is of concern here.

Long's analysis of these movements is perhaps most salient for the issues which this paper is seeking to address as he has concentrated upon the cargo cult's expression of the relationship which exists between the human and exchange of matter.

Exchanges center around the cargo and its valuation as a mode of exchange that can establish mutuality and new community...the cargo cultists accept the fact of colonialism. For them this means that an irreversible disjunction has taken place in their culture; they can never be simply traditional again."⁸

.....
They provide a unique and alternate meaning of human freedom in the modern world. Their traditions demythologized through contact with the modern world...[they] undertake a new quest for a world of sacred meaning. This quest is not a return to the precontact situation, nor a mere acquiescence to the

⁸ Long, from "Colonial Discourse in the Study of Religion", 8.

conquerors. The ingredients of the past and the present are reconceived as sacred forms, and from this sacrality new human beings are to be created. A revalorization of matter, time, money, and human exchanges is adumbrated in these movements, for they represent one of the most powerful attempts of modern human beings to live an authentic sacred life.⁹⁷

The cult then is an articulation of both the chaos which has come to characterize the world of the colonized and the attempt to recover a meaningful form of the human being from that situation.

Returning to the Mi'kmaq, it is not difficult to detect the existence of similar religious enunciations during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as this people attempted to wade through the deluge of changes which had penetrated their world, and arrive at an appropriate meaning of the human and community. This was actualized through exchanges suffused with sacrality.

It should be noted that even following a century of contact with the French, the Mi'kmaq were acutely aware of the capacity for, and the inherent power of, the sacralizing of exchange. In 1606 Lescarbot wrote of the use of the gift in Mi'kmaq society to amend injury and in so doing to restore harmonious communal

⁹⁷ Long, Significations, 93.

relationships. The story was also related of a young woman who was being held prisoner by the Mi'kmaq and who, in the process of attempting to escape, stole a "tinder-box" from the cabin of chief Membertou. For this offence the "savages' wives and daughters did execute her".⁹⁸ Clearly a human being who would steal from another was subverting the community's valuation of exchange as it related to the significance of the individual; the act of stealing was a declaration that that mode of human constitution--that human being defined by exchange--was meaningless. For the community the life of the thief not only violated the peoples' notion of itself but was consequently worthless since it had declared its own insignificance. Lescarbot also made reference to the fact that native hunters regarded the products of the hunt as gifts to their community and so generally consumed the smallest share of meat.⁹⁹ Even the act of eating in this society was sacralized and became a means by which community was defined. Of course this is not unusual in non-western societies as Eliade has remarked, "A real religious experience, indistinct in form, results from this effort man makes to enter the real, the sacred, by way of the most fundamental physiological acts transformed into ceremonies."¹⁰⁰ These examples illustrate and underscore the point that despite

⁹⁸ Lescarbot, 264-265.

⁹⁹ Lescarbot, 271.

¹⁰⁰ Eliade, 32.

large-scale interaction with Europeans the Mi'kmaq consciously maintained a distinctly non-European mode of expressing the meaning of the human. Exchange could signify more than the value of matter as it was afforded the possibility of sacred power.

In the light of this it is difficult not to begin to reconsider the implications of the fact that native people sought exchange with Europeans from earliest instances of contact. It has been noted that the earliest records of European excursions to North America contain references to encounter with indigenous people bearing supplies of pelts which were intended to be traded for European goods.¹⁰¹ Were these indigenous people truly dazzled by the combs, tin bells, and tin rings¹⁰² which they received from the Europeans, or is it possible that they may have been more concerned with the acts of giving and receiving--basic physical acts which could negotiate the boundary between themselves and the new white humans who had appeared from the Atlantic? It is obviously difficult to know. Yet what we can ascertain from the chronicles of the Europeans is that in the wake of contact the Mi'kmaq responded in a similar manner to the Melanesians Burridge encountered. Confronted with what could be

¹⁰¹ Charles Howard McIlwain(ed), "Introduction," in Peter Wraxall, An Abridgment of the Indian Affairs, Contained in Four Folio Volumes, Transacted in the Colony of New York, From the Year 1678 to the Year 1751 (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard Historical Studies, XXI, 1915).

¹⁰² James Axtell, After Columbus; Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 158.

regarded as overwhelming changes to the structure of their world, they confronted the question of their meaning as human beings in a new society,¹⁰³ and through interaction with new forms of matter they attempted to discover "how new men may be made."¹⁰⁴

In some instances this quest for redefinition was remarkably blatant in articulation. Bailey for example has noted how the 'manito' was transformed as a consequence of association with Christian missionaries. The manito was a form of "mysterious power [which was] localized in animal bones, peculiar stones, tufts of feathers, and kindred objects"¹⁰⁵ when the French first encountered indigenous people; but these were ultimately replaced with Christian images, crucifixes, and rosaries which were intended to protect their bearers from evil forces.¹⁰⁶ Although the shapes of these objects was altered (an acknowledgement that the French obviously had an impressive relationship with power) they retained the significance of what Eliade designated the hierophany--that object through which the sacred can express itself¹⁰⁷ and which is continually reevaluated as it ceases to

¹⁰³ Burrige, xvi.

¹⁰⁴ Burrige, xvi.

¹⁰⁵ Bailey, 143.

¹⁰⁶ Bailey, 144.

¹⁰⁷ Eliade, 26.

effectively manifest a particular "modality of the sacred."¹⁰⁸

The act of creation, in this case of the 'new man', presupposes the exercise of circumscription, of determining what will and what will not be admitted as constitutive of that which has been created. One way in which the circumference of the human being is depicted is through the naming of the person, an act which is not generally repeated during a single lifetime.¹⁰⁹ When a person chooses to be renamed we must consequently acknowledge the fact that he or she supposes something new has been created in the space which the body occupies. With respect to the Mi'kmaq the acceptance of baptism and the adoption of a new name coincident to that acceptance signified such a supposition. The significance of baptism itself will be considered presently; the particular aspect of renaming is most relevant at this juncture as it appears to address the question of the relationship of the person to society in an obvious way. When Membertou and his family allowed themselves to be baptized by Fléché in 1610, they accepted new names so that the chief became Henri Membertou, his son Louis Membertou, his wife Marie

¹⁰⁸ Eliade, 25. We are reminded here of Geertz' discussion of the nature of religious symbols in which he remarks "For those able to embrace them, and for so long as they are able to embrace them, religious symbols provide a cosmic guarantee not only for their ability to comprehend the world, but also, comprehending it, to give a precision to their feeling..."; 104.

¹⁰⁹ For a more detailed discussion of the implications of naming and renaming the human being, see Joseph Boskin, Sambo, The Rise and Demise of an American Jester (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 18. Boskin is concerned primarily with the renaming of African slaves by the Colonial Americans.

Membertou, etc...¹¹⁰ The connotations attendant to the juxtaposition of the family name with the names of France's royal family are considerable as these names pronounced the conception of a human being who was both French and Mi'kmaq and, at the same time, neither.

Aside from conspicuous revaluations such as those concerning the manito and the adoption of new names, literature of the period is replete with more subtle illustrations of new types of exchanges involving the Mi'kmaq and the French which betrayed similar efforts on the part of the native people to understand what constituted the human who confronted colonialism. When the corpse of the Mi'kmaq warrior Panoniac was transported to Port Royal early in the seventeenth century, for example, Membertou took great effort to accommodate the ritual activity associated with death to French sensibilities which he perceived. After explaining to Poutrincourt that the ritual generally lasted for a month, he offered to hasten the process which the members of his community subsequently accomplished in eight days.¹¹¹ The rite of mourning thus became a component of the process of negotiation with the French.

Another constituent of the process was the Christianity created by contact during this period. The first Mi'kmaq to 'convert' was Membertou who was subsequently emulated by twenty-

¹¹⁰ Thwaites, vol. I, 77.

¹¹¹ Lescarbot, 318.

one members of his clan in 1610.¹¹² Between European Christianity and native culture there existed, in the minds of the missionaries who sailed for Acadia, an irreconcilable abyss. Biard, writing in 1612, remarked that he hoped he and his fellow Jesuits would incite the aboriginal people to "see the difference between Christianity and their ungodliness."¹¹³ For Membertou such a void did not exist as, in some sense, he appears to have regarded his conversion as an embrace not of French Catholicism but of all the definitional components available to him in his changed world. And in a similar vein to the cargo cult prophet who believes he epitomizes the new human being who is "both Kanaka and moral European" and who embodies certitude in a turbulent universe¹¹⁴, Membertou believed he had discovered a mode of being human which could deliver the Mi'kmaq from the chaos of an uncertain world. Le Jeune noted that he had repeatedly told the Jesuits, "Learn our language quickly, for when you have learned it, you will teach me; and when I am taught I will become a preacher like you and we will convert the whole country." Of course, for Membertou, conversion did not signify the abandonment of ungodly ways. Over the period of a number of days during which he was dying he pleaded with Biard to allow him to be buried with his father and his ancestors, but the Jesuit

¹¹² Grant, 4.

¹¹³ Thwaites, vol. II, 15.

¹¹⁴ Burridge, 282.

would have nothing to do with the notion of burying a converted Christian with "Heathen whose souls were to be lost." Membertou acquiesced shortly before death.¹¹⁰ His Christianity, like the ritual of mourning, was a medium for negotiation as well as a means of defining the person which had emerged from the context of contact and exchange. The Jesuits had to be willing to learn the Mi'kmaq language; the natives, to convert. The Jesuits would consequently teach their doctrine; and the natives would maintain their spiritual bond with their ancestors. To Membertou it must have appeared to be a fair exchange through which something novel could arise--novel in the sense that it united elements of both cultures without being defined in terms of one or the other.

The Mi'kmaq universe was in a state of transformation and disequilibrium and Membertou might be regarded as a symbol of this confusion, for although he retained an identification with his ancestors until death, on certain occasions his actions demonstrated that the meaning of these same ancestors had undergone some measure of transformation as a result of contact with the French. Most striking in this respect is the example of the ritual of the summer feast which was refashioned to address the reality of a changed world. This ritual was

a celebration of tribal unity, and the
"festins à tout Manger" (the ritual

¹¹⁰ Thwaites, vol. III, 203-205.

consumption of the settlement's total food supply) involved the hosting of other bands and the cementing of alliances between lineages. Long and detailed genealogies were recited in order to keep alive the memory, and to preserve by tradition from father to son, the history of their ancestors, and the example of their fine actions and of their greatest qualities...¹¹⁰

Elements of the ritual were transposed into a new world context in order, one may presume, to sacralize the relationship which existed between the Mi'kmaq and the French. Lescarbot recounts the details of a feast which was hosted by Poutrincourt and attended by Membertou:

When that Monsieur de Poutrincourt did feast our savages, Membertou, after dancing, made an oration with such vehemency that he made the world to wonder, showing the curtesies and witnesses of friendship that they received of the Frenchmen, what they might hope of them hereafter, and how much their presence was profitable, yea, necessary unto

¹¹⁰ Guillemin, 36. Guillemin has taken much of this passage from Denys, 410.

them, because they did sleep in security and had no fear of their enemies, etc...¹¹⁷

It appears that Membertou had a desire to cement a new lineage which had been created with the French, as he related examples of 'their fine actions' and best 'qualities' at the feast. The revaluation of the material of the feast is particularly striking here. Although it clearly retained its spiritual quality it became a vehicle for expressing a change in the constitutive meaning of ancestors for the Mi'kmaq; the world had changed sufficiently to pose the possibility of new progenitors and presumably of new offspring. These human beings, like those of the cargo cult, had clearly been created by colonial contact.

These illustrations of the process of reorientation which the Mi'kmaq were undergoing might lead to the assumption that they were satisfied to refashion their own forms and conceive of themselves in response to the presence of the French. This would be an underestimation of the nature of their concept of the human being created by sixteenth-century Acadia. The arrival of the Europeans had signalled the termination of the world within which this indigenous people had validated its conception of itself and so new forms of interaction with all the material at hand (including, we must emphasize, human beings) were demanded in order for them to regain a sense of equilibrium and consequent

¹¹⁷ Lescarbot, 237.

meaning in this transformed place. A person needed to re-emerge from the disarray of matter, and this process necessarily involved the French who were, after all, implicated in the destruction of the old world and presumably in the ensuing advent of the new. The Europeans, in other words, also needed to recover their humanity. So, synchronous with the reinterpretation of established Mi'kmaq modes of situating the human was the expectation that the French would do the same. Often this expectation involved the presumption that the French should enter into the structures which the native community was utilizing for the negotiation of its world. Membertou, for instance, not only placed a significant value on the exchange of gifts with the Europeans but insisted that this was an obligatory component of the association between the two cultures.

During this gathering of people, it behoved to make presents unto him, and gifts of corn and beans, yea, of some barrel of wine, to feast his friends. For he declared to Monsieur de Poutrincourt in these words: "I am the Saqamos of this country, and am esteemed to be thy friend and of all the Normans (for so they call the Frenchmen, as I have said), and that you make good reckoning of me. It would be a reproach unto me if I

did not show the effects of this love.¹¹⁸

It is not peculiar that the maintenance of a mutually acceptable trade relationship was dependent upon a spiritual bond created by gift-giving since the act of trade itself was an activity which was generally instilled from its inception with sacralty. It has been pointed out that among native North Americans amicable trading relationships with Europeans were usually inaugurated with some form of ceremonial activity.¹¹⁹

It should be emphasized again however that the native conception of the new human in which the French were implied was not a complacent response of contact with that culture. At times it contained an inherent criticism of the French and as such articulated a sense that there were limitations to the amount of European influence which would be admitted within the constitution of the new human. When, for instance, the early Jesuits were endeavouring to learn the Mi'kmaq language in order to gain access to that culture they were often denied the opportunity. Biard complained in 1616,

They often ridiculed instead of teaching us,
and sometimes palmed off on us indecent
words, which we went about innocently

¹¹⁸ Lescarbot, 129-130.

¹¹⁹ Axtell, After Columbus, 156.

preaching for beautiful sentences from the Gospels. God knows who were the instigators of such sacrileges.¹²⁰

It may also be possible to situate patterns of native alcohol consumption within this articulation of the range of acceptable European traits to be admitted in the constitution of the new human. Jaenen has pointed out that there is a distinct possibility that drunkenness on the part of indigenous people may have been a means of creating tribal unity against French incursion. Heavy consumption of wine and brandy appears to have been prevalent at least as early as 1606 when Lescarbot was inspired to comment, "That is to say, they sell everything and drink everything, saving only the biscuit for the winter."¹²¹ This problem of extensive drinking, Jaenen submits,

involved drinking to become drunk, drinking exclusively in groups, demanding that the individual in the group conform to its rapid drinking, and indulging to flaunt the missionaries' and French administrators' disapproval of such behaviour. It is possible that this behaviour represented

¹²⁰ Thwaites, Vo. III, 197.

¹²¹ Denys, 449.

multiple aspects of a common function of integrating tribal groups through conflict with European society. One is tempted to speculate, in other words, that alcohol...was a means whereby some tribesmen could create or symbolize in-group solidarity against the French.¹²²

Jaenen's speculation regarding this subject is intriguing, but if it is relevant, it might be more reasonable to interpret such drunkenness not so much as having been a means of necessarily situating the native person against the non-native but of articulating the fact that there were limits to the amount of European influence which the non-European would permit to enter into its search for self definition. To put it another way, French culture was incapable of meeting all the definitional requirements of the new human; and solidarity created around a particular native valuation of a European commodity emphasized the fact that the Mi'kmaq were not about to become Frenchmen. We cannot dismiss the possibility that this activity may have been highly creative as it constituted a form of cultural critique while at the same time contributing to the delineation of the human.

¹²² Jaenen, 115.

The arrival of the French signalled the end of the world the Mi'kmaq knew and the birth of the colonial world in Acadia. In order to establish some measure of orientation within this culturally tumultuous situation the Mi'kmaq did as others who have had to undergo colonial incursion have done: they looked to the exchange of matter to delimit the nature of their relationship with this changed world and consequently their meaning as human beings within it; they drew on their "religious imagination of matter."¹²⁹ Their symbols became the materiality of colonialism (from beaver pelts and brandy to ancestors and Christian doctrine) and through them they were able to conceive of themselves and the French as beings whose meaning bore a relationship to the experience of their lives. It was through exchanges of these various forms of matter that the Mi'kmaq could be assured of their own humanity and so it was through these elements that the sacred manifested itself to them in Acadia.

7. The French

In respect to the Mi'kmaq we began by noting that contact was in the first instance experienced in terms of materiality. This was also true of the French, as contact with indigenous people involved the Atlantic ocean, fish, furs, the North

¹²⁹ Long, "Colonial Discourse in the Study of Religion", 2.

American landscape, and the Mi'kmaq themselves. The effect of new matter on the Mi'kmaq was a general sense of disorientation which ultimately resulted in the attempt to redefine the human being through exchanges which were afforded sacrality. The most conspicuous effect of this matter on the Europeans was that it reinforced their economic motive for crossing the Atlantic and engaging the indigenous population: "To seek to lead the nations thereof to...intercourse with the French for the gain of their commerce..."¹²⁴ The region provided the material required to achieve this aim, and for over three hundred years the trade in furs proved lucrative and consequently flourished in the North American context.¹²⁵ The effect of this trade was apparent not only on this side of the Atlantic but in European manufacturing sectors in which production of iron expanded dramatically as a result of the increased demand for the product by indigenous people.¹²⁶ Innis has suggested that this actually proved to be a burden for that sector:

The pull of a relatively simple civilization on the resources of a complex civilization may be regarded as of paramount importance. No monopoly or organization could withstand

¹²⁴ Lescarbot, vol. II, 217.

¹²⁵ Eric Wolf, Europe and the People Without History (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 192.

¹²⁶ Denys, 443.

the demands of the Indian civilization of North America for European goods. The task of continually supplying goods to the Indian tribes of North America, of maintaining the depreciation of those goods, and of replacing the goods destroyed was overwhelming.¹²⁷

The materiality of Acadia also effected the means by which the French conducted commerce in the territory. Within the first century of contact between the Mi'kmaq and European merchants the indigenous people discovered the advantage which could be gained from conducting trade only when a number of European mercantile interests were represented in the transactions. This ensured a level of competition for pelts which invariably resulted in higher prices paid to native traders. As these traders became more adept at conducting business in a European manner the profits which the French were deriving from the trade began to plummet and consequently they appealed to the Crown for the privilege of establishing monopoly rights to the trade in Acadia.¹²⁸

As this modification in commercial operations indicates, there was an inherent problem arising out of the nature of these new forms of materiality which had a transformative effect upon

¹²⁷ Innis, 16.

¹²⁸ Eccles, 20.

French practice. Between the matter designated as commodities and the colonial Europeans there lay another form which necessarily obstructed their ability to obtain the commodities: the landscape; and it was upon a third form of matter which they were consequently reliant for the acquisition of goods: the Mi'kmaq, who were intimately acquainted with the terrain. Confronted with the presence of valuable goods and a basic inability to get at them, the French entered into a process of exchange with the native community in the hope of solving this dilemma, and the exchanges took on a variety of postures. To overcome the very physical constraints imposed by the landscape the French learned "woodcraft and canoemanship" from native people.¹²⁹ On many occasions when there existed a real possibility of starving to death, their lives were saved by the Mi'kmaq .

Our arrival caused great joy on both sides--- great on the part of those arriving, because of their longings, and the tediousness of so long a voyage; but more than double was that of sieur de Poutrincourt, who had been in great distress and apprehension throughout the Winter. For having had with him twenty-three people, without sufficient food to

¹²⁹ Bailey, 24.

nourish them, he had been obliged to send some off among the Savages, to live with them: the others had had no bread for six or seven weeks, and without the assistance of these same Savages, I do not know but that they would all have perished miserably.¹³⁰

Most critical in this respect was the fact that the French merchant was not a trapper, nor had he any interest in becoming one. As a result, Jennings notes, his "basic strategy...was not to get at the animals but rather to get at the Indians, either by going directly to them or by bringing the Indians to himself."¹³¹ One of the pivotal ways in which this was actuated was through the exchange of gifts or food with the Mi'kmaq. 'Feasting the savages' became an indispensable agent in this process, as Lescarbot recognized when he explained, "they sat at table eating and drinking as we did; and we took pleasure in seeing them, as contrariwise their absence was irksome unto us..."¹³²

It is clear that the new forms and configurations of matter in Acadia required of the French an overwhelming dependence upon

¹³⁰ Thwaites, Vol. III, 185. See also vol. II, 263: "they were also aided by various meetings with the Savages upon that coast, of whom Louis Membertou received them, when famishing, with a liberal present of elk meat, Roland and some other Sagamores furnished a supply of bread, and others most generously gave a bountiful provision of fish and birds."

¹³¹ Jennings, 95.

¹³² Lescarbot, 118.

exchange with the native community; commercial interests during this period would have collapsed without the support of the native community.¹³³ Clearly then, entrance into a system of exchange was the response of both cultures to the presence of new forms of matter in Acadia.

When we considered the Mi'kmaq we spoke of a 'religious imagination of matter' and the sacrality of exchange. Can the same be said of the French; can their relationship to materiality be regarded as 'sacred' in the sense that it constituted a means of ultimate orientation--of defining the human? The discussion becomes problematic here. Unlike the native person the colonial European had no cultural framework for acknowledging the possible sacrality of matter and exchange; no language existed to express this sort of intimacy. What existed in place of this was the language of ideology which denied the possibility of there being a constitutive relationship between matter and the human. Despite this fact, or perhaps because of this fact, an attempt will be made to demonstrate that the French were possessed of 'religious imagination of matter' insofar as they defined themselves (and indeed all human beings) in relation to two forms of matter: the commodity and ideology.¹³⁴

The three dominant European ideologies which are implicated

¹³³ Innis, 386.

¹³⁴ It should be recalled here that Eliade asserts that the hierophany can express itself through a variety of forms, one of which is the "idea". Consequently, I have chosen to regard ideology as such a phenomenon. See Eliade, 26.

in this discussion are mercantilism, imperialism, and Christianity, all of which bear some relationship to each other. Mercantilism involved the "seizure of resources...their concentration, organization, and allocation."¹³⁵ In the mercantilist state, economic interests were regarded as preeminent so that the state itself took a managing role in the protection of home industries, establishment of foreign trade, etc... The imperialist state represented mercantile interests and was consequently inherently expansionist. In its quest for economic resources, and a coincident desire to deny other states access to these, it became dedicated to the business of conquering in order to pursue commercial advantage;¹³⁶ and so, it has been argued, came to typify "the aggressive encroachment of one people upon the territory of another, resulting in the subjugation of the latter people to alien rule."¹³⁷ Christianity, in this context, became markedly expansionist. Jennings has discussed the fact the Roman Catholic church (which was prominent during the period with which we are concerned) possessed "assumptions of superiority in the knowledge of the most important truth in the world, to which all other knowledge

¹³⁵ Wolf, 109.

¹³⁶ Wolf. 109.

¹³⁷ W. D. Meinig, The Shaping of America; A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History, vol. I Atlantic America, 1492-1800 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), xviii.

is subsidiary and inferior"¹³⁸ and which resulted in an aspiration to carry this knowledge into every region of the world for the purpose of converting the non-European populations. Christian missionaries traced the routes which had been charted by both mercantile and imperial interests and so both Catholicism and Protestantism became, Jennings argues, "conquest religions."¹³⁹ The church, which in the mother country during this period was heavily controlled by the Crown, came to represent imperial interests as missionaries were coincidentally Christian evangelists and representatives of their European crown.¹⁴⁰ Their intention in Acadia was, as Biard explained, definitely twofold: "to domesticate and civilize" the Mi'kmaq.¹⁴¹

Each of these ideologies in its own way denied the existence of a relationship between the human being and matter. Mercantilism declared the dominance of the human over the objects of acquisition as resources present anywhere in the world were available for seizure. The notion of conquest which was integral to the nature of imperialism denied the potential for exchanges. To refer to Jennings once again, he remarks, "America was [a] wilderness [which] civilization was required by divine sanction

¹³⁸ Jennings, 57.

¹³⁹ Jennings, 56.

¹⁴⁰ Choquette, 100.

¹⁴¹ Thwaites, vol. I, 183.

or the imperative of progress to conquer..."¹⁴² The Christian presumption of possessing one 'truth' was inherently ahistorical as it afforded little significance to the function of place and time in the human being's religious orientation. Materiality theoretically had no effect upon conversion, and the person who, after all, was valuable only in respect to the potential of the soul for salvation, could be regarded as such an extraneous form of matter. Thus, Christian missionaries often appeared less than wholly sympathetic to the illnesses and difficulties of their native subjects when such misfortunes bore the potential for advancing missionizing enterprises.¹⁴³

The pivotal implication of these ideological denials of the human being's relationship to matter is that all elements of the processes of exchange in which the Europeans were involved had to be in some sense commodified in order to eradicate the relational significance of these practices; and the critical form of matter whose significance was denied was the other person who was invariably confronted in the attempt to live out the ideology. In other words, the native person.

Living out the ideology was what the French were attempting to do in Acadia, and Champlain provided a most significant statement with respect to this.

¹⁴² Jennings, 15.

¹⁴³ Jennings, 57.

Among all the most useful and admirable arts, that of navigation has always seemed to me to hold the first place...Through this art we gain knowledge of different countries, regions, and kingdoms; through it we attract and bring into our countries all kinds of riches; through it the idolatry of paganism is overthrown and Christianity proclaimed in all parts of the earth.¹⁴⁴

To this Lescarbot added that it brought about "recognition of the authority and domination of the crown of France."¹⁴⁵ For these ends to be achieved the Mi'kmaq, who by their very attempt to impress a sacred meaning of exchange upon the French undermined the ideological framework of colonialism, had to be regarded as matter by the Europeans. In a sense, they had to be commodified and thus rendered less than fully human. A manifestation of this manner of definition was the controversy which surrounded the Jesuits' ability to secure a position in the newly-formed colony in the early part of the seventeenth century. As we have noted, following the rescinding of de Monts' charter in 1607,

¹⁴⁴ Biggar, The Works of Samuel de Champlain, 209.

¹⁴⁵ Lescarbot, vol. II, 217. Other portions of the passage are worth noting: "to seek to lead the nations thereof to the profession of the Christian faith, to civilization of manners, an ordered life, practice and intercourse with the French for the gain of their commerce..."

Foutrincourt was granted colonizing rights in the region. During the same period the Jesuits were contending for the right of access to the souls of the Mi'kmaq, but Foutrincourt (a Huguenot who regarded the Jesuits as "untrustworthy and underhanded"¹⁴⁶) refused to allow them to accompany him to North America. In the ensuing debate over who should be permitted to administer to the native community, the community itself figured only as rhetorical devices. The Jesuits argued their case without ever having set foot in Acadia; and Poutrincourt's claim was articulated in the relations of Lescarbot whose patrons, it should be noted, were de Monts and Poutrincourt,¹⁴⁷ and who was consequently unlikely to report anything to the Crown which did not corroborate the wishes of these merchants. The Queen was informed, for instance, of the baptism of twenty-two Mi'kmaq shortly after the arrival of Poutrincourt at Port Royal, an impressive feat which was accomplished by a secular priest, Jesse Fléché.¹⁴⁸ Of course, it was of little consequence that none of the recent converts could understand the French language sufficiently to have much idea of what the missionary believed had actually transpired during their baptism. The natives were apparently material for the advancement of colonial interests--not an unusual phenomenon, as Long has recognized that during the colonial period non-Western

¹⁴⁶ Choquette, 21.

¹⁴⁷ Thwaites, vol. I, 45.

¹⁴⁸ Grant, 3.

peoples and cultures were essentially "pawns of Western cultural creativity."¹⁴⁹

In order for the native person to be categorized as somehow less than fully human¹⁵⁰ a crucial assertion was required on the part of Europeans and this involved the concept of "cultural superiority".¹⁵¹ With such a concept the concealment of a person's humanity was a relatively uncomplicated issue. To the Jesuits the Mi'kmaq were Savages who were to be domesticated and civilized, an onerous task since it might be "too much to expect fruit from this grafting, and demand reason and maturity from a child."¹⁵² This underdeveloped humanity was particularly evident to Biard:

For in truth this people who, through the progress and experience of centuries, ought to have come to some perfection in the arts, sciences, and philosophy, is like a great field of stunted and ill-begotten wild plants, a people which ought to have produced abundant fruits in philosophy, government, customs, and conveniences of life; which

¹⁴⁹ Long, Significations, 58.

¹⁵⁰ Jennings, 15.

¹⁵¹ Jennings, 56.

¹⁵² Thwaites, vol. I, 183.

ought to be already prepared for the completeness of the Holy Gospel...Yet behold it wretched and dispersed, given up to ravens, owls, and infernal cuckoos, and to be cursed prey of spiritual foxes, bears, boars, and dragons.¹⁸³

It proved perplexing for Lescarbot that the Mi'kmaq had not developed any sense of the inherent value of commodities, for although they clearly took great pleasure in exchanging gifts with each other and with the French, they often allowed themselves to "lose their merchandise".¹⁸⁴

By regarding indigenous people as sub-human (Jennings has argued for the designation of "non-human"¹⁸⁵) the Europeans were able to deny that exchange had any meaning outside their ideological frameworks. As Long has remarked, "the cultures of the colonizers creates a methodological stratagem that denies their relationship to the cultures of the colonized in the acquisition of knowledge and material goods."¹⁸⁶ In Acadia consequently a dialectic emerged which focused upon the fact that the actuality of contact between the two cultures was

¹⁸³ Thwaites, vol. III, 111.

¹⁸⁴ Lescarbot, 262.

¹⁸⁵ Jennings, 15.

¹⁸⁶ Long, "Colonial Discourse", 9.

meaningless. One repercussion was that the French were able to regard the particular North American lifestyle of the Mi'kmaq, make note of it, and then attempt through interaction with these people to impose specific structures upon them which stood in opposition to often accurate perceptions of that lifestyle. When discussing native food consumption, for instance, Biard recognized,

If the weather then is favourable, they live in great abundance, and are as haughty as Princes and Kings; but if it is against them, they are greatly to be pitied, and often die of starvation. The weather is against them if it rains a great deal, or does not freeze; for then they can hunt neither deer nor beavers. Also, when it snows a great deal, and does not freeze over, for then they cannot put their dogs upon the chase, because they sink down...¹⁸⁷

Despite this recognition of the dictates of the North American environment, the Jesuits nonetheless insisted that those Mi'kmaq who had converted to Catholicism should comply with the Church's

¹⁸⁷ Thwaites, vol. III, 79.

sacrosanct calendar of fasts.¹⁰⁰

Another repercussion involved something just short of a repudiation of the fact of contact itself. One sphere in which this was made obvious was the perception of the French regarding the diseases which were ravaging the Mi'kmaq community.

They are astonished and often complain that, since the French mingle with and carry on trade with them, they are dying fast, and the population is thinning out. For they assert that, before this association and intercourse, all their countries were very populous, and they tell how one by one the different coasts according as they have begun to traffic with us, have been more reduced by disease...Thereupon they often puzzle their brains, and sometimes think that the French poison them, which is not true...Others complain that the merchandise is often counterfeited and adulterated, and that peas, beans, prunes, bread, and other things that are spoiled are sold to them; and that it is that which corrupts the body and gives rise to the dysentery and other diseases which

¹⁰⁰ Jaenen, 72.

attack them in Autumn...¹⁵⁹

It constitutes no great intellectual feat to establish the relationship between the arrival of the French in Acadia and the onslaught of European disease within the native community, but to concede the existence of this relationship required an acknowledgement of the reality of contact itself--something which Pierre Biard was not prepared to do.

Nevertheless the principle cause of all these deaths and their diseases is not what they say it is, but it is something to their shame; in the Summer time, when our ships come, they never stop gorging themselves excessively during several weeks with various kinds of food not suitable to the inactivity of their lives; they get drunk, not only on wine but on brandy; so it is no wonder that they are obliged to endure some gripes of the stomach in the following Autumn.¹⁶⁰

Notwithstanding their inability to recognize the authenticity of their contact with indigenous people, the French were able at

¹⁵⁹ Thwaites, vol. III, 105.

¹⁶⁰ Thwaites, vol. III, 106.

least to admit the potential for such an event and so took precautions to circumvent the possibility. Sexual relationships (perhaps the most obvious exchanges of matter in which human beings can partake) between native and non-native consenting adults were strictly forbidden in the colony, and Lescarbot asserted the appropriateness of this policy when he wrote:

The chastisement ought to be very rigorous against them that mingle the Christian blood with the infidels, and for the keeping of this justice Monsieur de Villegagnon is praised, even by his enemies.¹⁰¹

So, the colonial mind during this period was reluctant to concede the actuality of contact and, moreover, deemed it prudent to legislate against the possibility.

Ideological frameworks precluded the ability of the French to acknowledge that the confrontation of these two cultures had some meaning for both which was implicated in the exchanges which accompanied the quest for commodities. The question which must be considered then is whether these colonial Europeans indeed defined themselves in isolation from the basic practice of human beings (negotiation of boundaries by means of materiality) or whether the ideological sources of definition which they

¹⁰¹ Lescarbot, 220.

professed were in actuality a sacred language, and as such a religious symbol which authenticated the concept of their own meaning. The latter, I would contend, is a more accurate assessment since it was the Europeans' relationship with matter which established their basic orientation in the world; it was this relationship which made them the sort of human beings they were.

The creation of colonial people was a product of a relationship to materiality which can be traced to the century preceding 1492--the year when, it appears, Queen Isabella provided Columbus with capital (acquired from pillaging the Moors) sufficient to sail across the Atlantic Ocean in the interests of "merchandise", "goods", "merchants", "traffic", and "business".¹⁶² He was part of the inauguration of an age of 'discovery' which, it has been pointed out, meant essentially "reconnaissance, the search for basic information, the discovery of possibilities."¹⁶³ These possibilities related to the acquisition of material goods, the significance of which we have noted in respect to Cartier's diamonds and gold which proved worthless and figured conspicuously in the French Crown's decision to suspend Acadian operations in 1541.¹⁶⁴ The notion of

¹⁶² Jennings, 34. Jennings drew this material from Samuel Eliot Morison, trans. and ed. Journals and Other Documents on the Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus (New York: 1963), 26-30.

¹⁶³ Meinig, 65.

¹⁶⁴ Eccles, 16-17.

discovery, which was oriented toward the prospect of material gain had its roots in the material deficits of fourteenth century Europe. Wolf has argued that period of economic growth was experienced by much of Europe until the turn of the fourteenth century. Around this time material growth appears to have abated due to a number of reasons including a deterioration of the climate and the exhaustion of the potential productivity of existing technology. Epidemics accompanied the inadequate diet of the peasant population, and increased costs of war and expansion (which this group was forced to shoulder) led to a phase of popular revolt. This situation, generally referred to as "the crisis of feudalism" could only have been overcome by the generation of new surpluses gained through the discovery and seizure of non-European land. Discovery was a means by which more food could be grown and food preservatives could be obtained, as well as gold and silver and new nonessential goods. The European drive into the 'New World' then, had to do with the manipulation of resources outside Europe; and the growth of the North American fur trade was one instance of this exploitation.¹⁰⁸

The French came to Acadia then, because they were members of a human community which believed its survival was contingent upon

¹⁰⁸ Wolf, 108-109. Wolf situates the fur trade in the context of a general pattern of European movement outside Europe. Other instances include "the establishment of forts and trading posts along the coasts of Africa, the entry into the Indian Ocean and the China Seas, and the spread of the fur trade through the boreal forests of..Asia"

the acquisition of matter. Once they had occupied the region, all their activity revolved around this notion. They feasted the natives, learned their language (in the case of the Jesuits), exchanged gifts with them, and learned skills from them which would overcome the geographical limitations of the place; they built "forts, places, towns...houses, dwellings, and habitations" in order to "inhabit and traffic in the said lands".¹⁶⁶ Thus they were people whose primary mode of existence was bound to materiality.

Returning for a moment to our initial discussion of religion, we can begin to discern a particular 'religious' element in these colonial Frenchmen. The religious symbol is established upon the practice of the human insofar as it "anchors our perception of the overall shape of reality. Such symbols unite a person's "style of life" with a particular "metaphysic",¹⁶⁷ the most fundamental of which is human orientation or self-definition; essentially, we derive our meaning from what we do, and our symbols validate that meaning. The Europeans discovered and colonized (or conquered) in order to acquire goods; they were people who appropriated matter and this, for our purposes, meant two things: fundamentally it meant that they had to negotiate the boundaries which lay between themselves and the world of an 'other' in which that matter was situated,

¹⁶⁶ Lescarbot, 4.

¹⁶⁷ Geertz, 90.

and so they had to participate in exchange; but because appropriation necessarily involved an assumption of privilege, it also required that their understanding of themselves revolve around a devaluation of the 'other'. The religious symbols which could unite the requisite of exchange with the apparently conflicting notion of cultural superiority were the commodity (the form of matter whose value is established in isolation of the event of exchange and consequently has no relationship with those who participate in its motion) and ideological frameworks which denied the existence of a meaningful 'other'. This rendered the entire experience of contact problematic.

The religious symbols of the Mi'kmaq were congruent with their style of life. As people they exchanged and their meaning as human beings focused upon their ability to maintain this activity. Their religious symbols were rooted in the materiality of exchange and were effective in negotiating the space between the notion of the person who must exchange and the reality of boundaries and 'others'. The Europeans, on the other hand, developed religious symbols which posed a basic incongruity. These were people whose primary activity of appropriating goods presupposed the negotiation of boundaries (in one way or another); yet due to the particular nature of appropriation they came to conceive of themselves in comparative terms: they were fully human because others were not. Their symbols, although suitable for consolidating the practice of appropriation with the notion of cultural superiority, were deficient in one critical

respect: they could not account for the fundamental fact of colonialism, that contact with the 'other' was inevitable and unavoidable.

Ideology and the commodity, which comprised the colonial Europeans' religious symbol system, were inherently inadequate in the context of the colonial world because they required the human being to disregard reality. Religious symbols, it should be emphasized, exist to constitute a means by which one may orient oneself in the world; yet the sacred symbols of the Europeans bore no relationship to the materiality of the contact experience, for as we have noted, they afforded many far from accurate perceptions of the encounter of indigenous people. Unfortunately for these French colonials, reality has the force to penetrate even the most steadfast ideology at some level and this was the case in Acadia in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

We have noted that the French regarded the Mi'kmaq as uncivilized, godless, and generally inferior in terms of their religious, social, political, and economic structures, and this was not surprising given their ideological impetus. However, the reality of the Mi'kmaq was quite different and sufficiently impressive to have at times overcome the power of ideology. Denys, for instance, was compelled to write of the clearly uncivilized element which penetrated the Mi'kmaq world as a result of contact with French fishermen: it was the French who introduced alcohol to the native community and consequently

caused to onslaught of disorderly conduct which accompanied it;¹⁶⁸ it was also the French fishermen who taught the Mi'kmaq how to "take revenge upon one another;"¹⁶⁹ and finally, it was French fishermen who were displaying moral degeneracy as they provided liquor to native women so "they can do with them everything they will."¹⁷⁰ If the natives continued to interact with these Frenchmen, Denys concluded, "it will be still worse in the future."¹⁷¹ Likewise, the Jesuits' insistence that the Mi'kmaq had no religion but "tricks and charms"¹⁷² was made ambiguous by a number of references throughout the relations to the honouring of a "Deity" and fear of the "author of evil, Manitou."¹⁷³ The capitalization of the first letter of the word 'deity' ("Numen" in the original Latin text) is clearly an enigmatic choice on the part of the Jesuit Jouvency.

It might also be considered that in one sense involvement in feasts, ceremonies, gift-giving, and, with regard to the Jesuits, the act of learning the Mi'kmaq language, could all be rationalized as means to commodified ends; however in another sense--a more profound sense--regardless of the vocabulary that

¹⁶⁸ Denys, 448-449.

¹⁶⁹ Denys, 450.

¹⁷⁰ Denys, 449.

¹⁷¹ Denys, 450.

¹⁷² Thwaites, vol. III, 131. See also Thwaites, vol. I, 287: "There is among them no system of religion..."

¹⁷³ Thwaites, vol. I, 287.

accompanied it, the acts themselves were a confirmation by the French that to acquire commodities in Acadia, one had to acknowledge the existence (and value) of exchange and of the 'other.' This, in addition to the fact that at particular moments the realities of both contact and the Mi'kmaq permeated European ideology appears to have had a disconcerting effect upon the French.

It might initially seem odd to discover articulations of this uneasiness in the Jesuit Relations. After all the men who penned these documents were among the most ideologically motivated in Acadia and so, presumably, among the most able to withstand confrontation with the reality of contact. In a sense however, the nature of their mission to the native community required an extreme attentiveness to the specificities of the 'New World' they inhabited. It has been argued,

They worked under desperate conditions for the sake of good understanding; their reputation and more so, their very lives were being laid on the line; this same lifeline would also have to save the communities they were trying to form, some with the Indians themselves. No one who reads the literature of these times can doubt the extremity of the hazards facing early observers, nor fail to surmise from this that in order to minimize

risk to their New World communities they needed and, therefore, must seek reliable knowledge.¹⁷⁴

When this knowledge which they sought proved to be at variance with their ideological predilections the effect may well have been unsettling.

This was evident in a subtle way in Biard's discussion of Membertou's death which "greatly saddened the Jesuits, for they loved him, and were loved by him in return." Membertou had been an early and dependable convert to Christianity. Following a discussion of the chief's best qualities in this relation, Biard concluded with the statement, "He was bearded like a Frenchman."¹⁷⁵ The implication of such a statement was that Membertou was slightly less native than his fellows. If this thought had occurred to Biard, could he have been considering the possibility that Christianity was not appropriate for the non-European? It is an engaging consideration and one which gains

¹⁷⁴ Tom McFeat, Three Hundred Years of Anthropology in Canada, Occasional Papers in Anthropology No.7 (Halifax: St. Mary's University, 1980), 2-3. McFeat's comment relates to his contention that early Acadian observers such as Biard and Lescarbot should be considered the "fathers" of Canadian anthropology, because "they excelled in what we are pleased to call ethnography; by describing and analyzing people in communities, often taking something akin to a case-study approach, they did very well what in the nineteen-forties Kroeber advocated as a method of the discipline, namely, 'descriptive integration'." (p. 4)

¹⁷⁵ Thwaites, vol. III, 205.

some credibility in the light of the words of a clearly despondent Biard a few pages earlier in his Relation of 1616.

What would you have done under these circumstances? For in truth, this work cannot be understood except by those who have tried it. Besides, as these Savages have no formulated Religion, government, towns, nor trades, so the words and proper phrases for all those things are lacking; Holy, Blessed, Angel, Grace, Subjection, Authority, etc. How will you get all these things that they lack? Or, how will you do without them? O God, with what ease we make our plans in France! And the beauty of it is, that, after having racked our brains by dint of questions and researches, and after thinking that we have at last found the philosopher's stone, we find only that a ghost has been taken for a body, a shadow for a substance, and that all this precious Elixir has gone up in smoke.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁶ Thwaites, vol. III, 195-196.

What was rationally pondered and proposed in France bore no relationship to the reality of Acadia. Biard had good reason to be despondent: his culture's religious symbols, the ideologies of Christianity and imperialism, were failing him in the context of North America.

For the Mi'kmaq, as we have noted, materiality gave rise to a particular notion of the human as one who could successfully participate in exchange and so negotiate the boundaries which continually presented themselves at the peripheries of both the individual and the community. Matter itself was sacralized in this context and became the source of religious symbolism which afforded legitimacy to this concept of human constitution. Theirs was a symbol system which, because it was grounded in materiality, maintained an alignment with the realities of time and space. It was innately adaptable and subsequently proved functional within the colonial setting. The French, on the other hand, entertained an understanding of the human which, although the product of a relationship with matter, gave rise to religious symbols which were ideas; and ideas need not have any relationship with reality. Consequently they possessed the possibility of an intrinsic inadaptability which ultimately became obvious in Acadia. On some level these colonial Europeans experienced the disquietude of owning symbols which were incapable of providing the unity required by human beings between their notions of themselves and their experience of the world. Theirs proved to be inadequate when confronted with the new world

their presence had initiated.

Conclusion

8. Contact as a Religious Event

It was the European search for commodities which brought the Mi'kmaq and French together in Acadia early in the sixteenth century; and to be most specific, it was the north Atlantic fishery and the subsequent trade in furs which linked these cultures in a relationship which was relatively indissoluble. For the French this rested primarily on the fact of the economic feasibility of the trade but for the Mi'kmaq, as with many indigenous groups who entered into the new mercantile structures coincident to the arrival of Europeans, cultural transformation resulting from contact rendered them relatively incapable of withdrawing from the structures. Once implicated in the trade in fur they became increasingly subject to market controls imposed by the French,¹⁷⁷ to say nothing of their progressive dependence upon European commodities. Historians have had differing notions concerning this encounter of the Europeans with indigenous people. In the late nineteenth century Francis Parkman presented an analysis of colonial contact (which for many years became

¹⁷⁷ Jennings, 87.

normative) in which he concluded, "Spanish civilization crushed the Indian; English civilization scorned and neglected him; French civilization embraced and cherished him."¹⁷⁸ More recent scholarship has tended to regard the relatively peaceful interaction of these two cultures in North America as a result of strategic necessity on the part of the French. It has been argued, "For the French, good relations with the Indian were absolutely essential for commercial, religious, and political reasons."¹⁷⁹ This analysis is probably more realistic than Parkman's; however it fails to take note of the implications of the direction from which contact was initiated. Although concerned primarily with the ideological significance of this motion for Europeans, James Axtell has aptly pointed out that "since the Europeans had initiated contact by thrusting themselves into the natives' world, the onus of change fell heavily on the Indians, who were often required to respond to unwonted and unwanted challenges from the strangers."¹⁸⁰ The necessity for amicable relations not only pertained to the French but also to the Mi'kmaq simply because the French were there and because it did not appear that they were going to leave.

It has been suggested that the success of the fur trade was a result of both cultures' familiarity with the practice of

¹⁷⁸ Francis Parkman, The Jesuits in North America in the Seventeenth Century, vol. I (Toronto: 1899), 131.

¹⁷⁹ Eccles, S.

¹⁸⁰ Axtell, 148.

exchange;¹⁰¹ and it is this basis of materiality in addition to the imperative toward constructive interaction which gave rise to the dynamics of contact which this paper has addressed as religious.

The Mi'kmaq and the French of sixteenth and early seventeenth century Acadia found themselves in a new place with a variety of new forms of matter, and their combined presence in the region required the negotiation of the boundaries which lay between them. In the first analysis both groups appear to have conceived of themselves in relation to materiality but their conception of the human being which ultimately influenced the ways in which they negotiated those perimeters were extremely disparate.

The Mi'kmaq regarded exchange as the primary mode of creating and maintaining community. Encounter with the 'other' presupposed the presence of boundaries, and the human remained definitively human only insofar as these margins could be successfully negotiated. So it was the reality of the presence of an 'other' through which one became human; and further, this was made possible by religious symbols which revolved around the materiality of exchange. The nature of the symbols posed a basic

¹⁰¹ Jennings, 85. Jennings argues, "The trade was possible because of compatible traits in the two cultures. Europeans seeking dominance and wealth in America found peoples there who already understood and practised division of labour and exchange of commodities." I would differ with this opinion insofar as it equates exchange of matter with that of commodities. The commodity did not exist in America prior to its introduction by Europeans.

congruity between the Mi'kmaq 'style of life' and Mi'kmaq notion of the person. They were adaptable as they were altered in relation to changes in the nature or configuration of matter. During this period, these symbols were imbedded in the materiality of the new world and consequently afforded the Mi'kmaq a level of creativity which the French did not have. Due to the nature of these symbols these people were able to recognize first the reality of the colonial world--the existence of merchants, disease, colonial commodities, and missionaries; and then, to engage in a process of redefinition of the human so that it would remain compatible with that reality. In this Mi'kmaq framework, the person (whether French or native) was a being who sacralized exchanges involving European commodities so that the commodities themselves (iron tools, wine and brandy, Frenchmen, Christian souls, and native people) became infused with a spiritual quality particular to that space and time. Definitively new human beings were thus created and so the event was a profoundly religious one. As one Algonkin recognized a few years later, "Some of my people cast upon me the reproach that I am becoming a Frenchman, that I am leaving my own nation; and I answer them that I am neither Frenchman nor savage..."¹⁰²

Colonial Europeans were also the product of a relationship with materiality. Shortages of matter which initiated the 'crisis of feudalism' made them a people who discovered and

¹⁰² Thwaites, vol. 16, 115.

conquered in order to secure a flow of commodities and raw material into Europe; and the value of the commodity itself as well as the ideologies of mercantilism, imperialism, and Christianity became the symbols which permitted them to be involved in the global appropriation of matter despite the presence of non-Europeans. The symbols provided a means by which the humanity of these 'others' could be dismissed, and so posed a unity between a mode of living and the notion of the European self. These were superior human beings who were consequently justified in appropriating other peoples' matter. The symbols proved inherently inadaptable when the European was confronted with the actuality of contact with new forms of matter, tangible 'others', and relationships with each of these. As Wolf has recognized, "the quest for American silver, the fur trade, the trade in slaves and the search for Asian spices drew people into new and unforeseen interdependencies and profoundly changed their lives."¹⁰⁰ The symbols were inadequate in this situation because they were imbedded in the materiality of an old world which precluded the possibility of dealing creatively with the colonial world. It has been argued that "the impact of the discovery of the new lands upon the West was revolutionary, that it created such a fantastic shock that they could not easily integrate this

¹⁰⁰ Wolf, 130.

novelty into their own cultures."¹⁰⁴ It appears however that integration could only have occurred if the functional symbol system of the Europeans had had the capacity to acknowledge the existence of non-European people. As it was, their ideologies were incapable of uniting the reality of exchanges in materiality for the successful maintenance of trade, native epidemics, or the French reliance upon the Mi'kmaq for basic physiological survival, with their perception of themselves as culturally superior appropriators of matter; and to varying degrees they recognized this basic incongruity. Contact for the French constituted a religious event because the efficacy of their religious symbols was called into question. They were confronted with the fact that these symbols could not bridge the chasm which their movement across the Atlantic had cleaved between their notion of themselves and their experience of the world, in this case the new world of Acadia. They were thus confronted with a challenge to enter into a process of reevaluation of their symbol system in order to maintain a notion of the person congruent with the changed world. In other words, their religious symbols had to be transformed if they were to sustain a basic human orientation. How long such a process could take is a question which is beyond the scope of this paper, but we can propose that a failure to do so, a decision to devalue human meaning, would have serious implications for the lives of other human beings in

¹⁰⁴ Long, Colonial Discourse, 9. Long is paraphrasing J. H. Elliot.

the colonial and post-colonial worlds.

9. "Reciprocity" and History of Religion

In many respects the problem of history of religion echoes the problem of these sixteenth and seventeenth century colonial people. The 'other', the cultures of non-Europeans, have been continually sought out by scholars who have presumed these cultures would demonstrate characteristics which would correspond with preconceived notions of what constitutes religion and the human being. The reality of contact has been quite different and these scholars have been confronted with the fact that their ideological framework for approaching the 'other' does not afford a clear understanding of these cultures. People whose meaning as human beings, whose orientation in the world, and hence whose religion derives of the sacralizing of matter and exchange defy the Enlightenment being of centered consciousness. Yet these humans continue to exist and exert this meaning despite their encounter with the West. As historians of religion we are faced with a similar choice to that faced by the colonial Frenchmen. We can continue to maintain:

Whereas the history of the West is replete with historical events and heroes, the cultures of the world of "others" is filled

with static, eternally present social structures, and mythological events. The West is rational, the "others" non-rational; the West logical, the "others" illogical or prelogical; the West civilized, the "others" primitive.¹⁰⁰

We can continue to confound ourselves over the enigmatic quality of religion. Or we can confront the fact that our own Enlightenment categories for understanding the human are inadequate given the presence of other human beings who defy them, and consequently, begin a reevaluation of our preconceptions within the discipline itself; we can, in other words, reconceive the history of encounter with others from a perspective of reciprocity.¹⁰⁰ As this paper has attempted to demonstrate such a reevaluation might be instrumental in the formulation of a hermeneutic which would allow us to arrive at an understanding of religion which is comparatively free of the dichotomies we have continually encountered.

The world out of which this human science emerged is a product of the meeting of Europe with the non-Western world and the discipline itself is a manifestation of the implications of this encounter. What significance we choose to afford the

¹⁰⁰ Long, Significations, 76.

¹⁰⁰ Long, "Colonial Discourse", 11.

encounter will have repercussions on our ability to understand religion. We can elect to maintain our reliance upon inherently limited ideological notions and continue to formulate irrelevant categories like 'syncretism' (which presupposes a normative form of some or another religion);¹⁸⁷ or we can acknowledge that encounter has been formative for the human sciences themselves, and scholars are among the new humans created by this event. I would contend that the latter is potentially a more rewarding option. In the case of history of religion the fact must be acknowledged that the impetus for discussing the notion of religion itself arises out of the experience of contact with the non-European; it is only the presence of an 'other' which makes this an issue. In all probability human beings and their cultures have always exercised a capacity to imagine the sacred but, as Jonathon Z. Smith has noted, it is only the West which has demonstrated an imagination of religion.

There is no data for religion. Religion is solely the creation of the scholar's study. It is created for the scholar's analytic purposes by his amaginative acts of comparison and generalization. Religion has no independent existence apart from the

¹⁸⁷ John Grant, for example, applies this designation to native Canadian Christianity. See Grant, 263.

academy.¹⁰⁰

To understand the nature of religion then, one is necessarily attempting to negotiate the same sort of boundary which was created by the arrival of the French in Acadia; and this requires a concentration of our scholarly activity upon the actuality of contact.

The value of the phenomenological approach to the study of religion is that it supposes the human to be ultimately a religious being. As the discussion of the Mi'kmaq and the French during the early colonial period has demonstrated, the value of approaching history of religion from a perspective of 'reciprocity' is that it allows us to maintain the fundamental religious nature of the human being--whether that human is European, non-European, or colonial.

¹⁰⁰ Jonathon Z. Smith, Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), xi.

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