



The Solidarity of Kin

*Ethnohistory, Religious Studies, and the
Algonkian-French Religious Encounter*

KENNETH M. MORRISON

This page intentionally left blank.

THE SOLIDARITY OF KIN

SUNY series in Native American Religions
Kenneth M. Morrison, editor

The Solidarity of Kin

*Ethnohistory, Religious Studies, and the
Algonkian-French Religious Encounter*

Kenneth M. Morrison

STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK PRESS

Published by
State University of New York Press, Albany

© 2002 State University of New York

All rights reserved

Printed in the United States of America

No part of this book may be used or reproduced
in any manner whatsoever without written permission.
No part of this book may be stored in a retrieval system
or transmitted in any form or by any means including
electronic, electrostatic, magnetic tape, mechanical,
photocopying, recording, or otherwise without the prior
permission in writing of the publisher.

For information, address State University of New York Press,
90 State Street, Suite 700, Albany, NY 12207

Production by Cathleen Collins
Marketing by Patrick Durocher

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Morrison, Kenneth M.

The solidarity of kin : ethnohistory, religious studies, and the Algonkian-French
religious encounter / Kenneth M. Morrison

p. cm. — (SUNY series in Native American religions)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-7914-5405-3 (alk. paper) — ISBN 0-7914-5406-1 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Algonquian Indians—Religion. 2. Algonquian Indians—Missions. 3. Syncretism
(Religion). 4. Jesuits—Missions—Canada. 5. Jesuits—Missions—New England. I. Title:
Ethnohistory, religious studies, and the Algonkian-French religious encounter. II. Series.

E99.A35 M66 2002
266'.2'089973—dc21

2001049408

*Dedicated to
Geoff Glover
Michael Jewell
Andrea Bear Nicholas and Daryl Nicholas
William Philie
—Where they are, community happens*

This page intentionally left blank.

Contents

Acknowledgments	ix
Introduction: Making Sense—Religious Studies and Ethnohistory	1
1. The Study of Algonkian Religious Life: The Methodological Impasse	17
2. Beyond the Supernatural and to a Dialogical Cosmology	37
3. Toward a History of Intimate Encounters: Algonkian Folklore, Jesuit Missionaries, and Kiwakwe, the Cannibal Giant	59
4. The Mythological Sources of Wabanaki Catholicism: A Case Study of the Social History of Power	79
5. Discourse and the Accommodation of Values: Toward a Revision of Mission History	103
6. Montagnais Missionization in Early New France: The Syncretic Imperative	115
7. Baptism and Alliance: The Symbolic Mediations of Religious Syncretism	131
8. The Solidarity of Kin: The Intersection of Eastern Algonkian and French-Catholic Cosmologies	147
Notes	173
Selected Bibliography	223
Index	231

This page intentionally left blank.

Acknowledgments

Since this volume reexamines diverse and well-known interpretations of Eastern Algonkian religious life and history, my debts are many. My training in Canadian-American history at the University of Maine at Orono focused on the northeastern region and the colonial period that localizes this work. My fellowship year at the McNickle Center for the History of the American Indian at the Newberry Library in Chicago affirmed my research interests. I owe the center a debt not only for precious reflective and writing time, but also for the scholars I met at its seminars and conferences: James Axtell, Robert Berkhofer, Vine Deloria, Jr., Raymond Fogelson, Jeannette Henry, D'Arcy McNickle, Alfonso Ortiz, and Wilcomb Washburn.

I am grateful for another institutional affiliation. My work with the American Indian Studies Center at UCLA, its staff and Faculty Advisory Committee, brought me a practical understanding of the intellectual challenges of Native American Studies in a university context. I owe a special thanks to the center's director, Charlotte Heth, for support that made it possible for me to rethink and rewrite Chapter Three of this volume. I also thank the history graduate students at UCLA—particularly Margaret Beemer, Roger Bowerman, Susan Kenney, and Rebecca Kugel—who shared the excitement of our individual and collaborative work.

Most important of all has been my association with the Department of Religious Studies at Arizona State University. My colleagues as a whole share a conviction that Religious Studies offers new ground for the human sciences. Anne Feldhaus, Joel Gereboff, and Mark Woodward have made valuable contributions to my study and they have my gratitude. Patricia Friedman has helped with a myriad of technical details in preparing the manuscript. As at UCLA, many ASU Religious Studies students have been vital conversation partners on a variety of issues which have shaped this work: Mark Ament, Christie Barker, Lynn Brun, Sara Bush, Kimberly Christen, Dan Coons, Michael Coyle, Tracy Davids, Gretchen Fletcher, John Fulbright, Kenja Hassan, Grace Hoff, Maria Kardamaki, John Lindamood, Ken Lokensgard, Randy McCaskill, Lisa Nelson, Mary Schulte-Dwan, Alon Unger, William Van Norman, and Cynthia Carsten Wentz. I am especially grateful to Mark Leary, Orlando Garcia, David Shorter, and Patricia Farmer Smith for their incisive readings of an early draft.

Over the years I have benefited from many conversations with colleagues in the American Academy of Religion, the American Society for Ethnohistory, and the Society for the Study of Native American Religious Traditions: Jennifer S. H. Brown, Vine Deloria, Jr., Raymond DeMallie, Fritz Detwiler, Sam D. Gill, Howard Harrod, Lee Irwin, Thomas Parkhill, Jordan Paper, Jacqueline Peterson, Melissa Pflug, Ivan Strenski, and Ines Talamantez. No work can proceed without the support of family and friends, and I thank Aaron Anderson, Kim and Jay Berneburg, Noreen Dresser, Joanne Glover, Ric and Cathy Glover, Marcia Hageman, Michael Jewell, Kathleen McGrane, Irin Smith, Jody Tarshis, Thandeka, Martha Townsend, and Michael Cochise Young. Similarly, I have enjoyed rich conversations with several Wabanaki people, particularly Deanna Francis (Passamaquoddy), and Wabanaki scholars, Eunice B. Nelson (Penobscot), Andrea Bear Nicholas, and Daryl Nicholas (Maliseet). I am grateful to Geoff Glover and my mom, Lucille Stewart, for helping to edit the scanned versions of my previously published essays.

I acknowledge a real debt to Arizona State University for both financial support and sabbatical leaves. The National Endowment for the Humanities provided a summer stipend that made it possible to drop off the planet for three months, and thus to take stock about what I knew and needed to know about Native American religious ethnography.

I am also grateful to the following journals for permission to reprint essays: Chapter Three was published as "Towards a History of Intimate Encounters: Algonkian Folklore, Jesuit Missionaries, and Kiwakwe, the Cannibal Giant," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 3-4 (1979): 51-80; Chapter Four was published as "The Mythological Sources of Abenaki Catholicism: A Case Study of the Social History of Power," *Religion* 11 (1981): 235-263; Chapter Five was published as "Discourse and the Accommodation of Values: Toward a Revision of Mission History," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 53/3 (1985): 365-382; Chapter Six was published as "Montagnais Missionization in Early New France: The Syncretic Imperative," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 10/3 (1986): 1-23; Chapter Seven was published as "Baptism and Alliance: The Symbolic Mediations of Religious Syncretism," *Ethnohistory* 37/4 (1990): 416-437.

Special thanks are due to Nancy Ellegate and Cathleen Collins at SUNY Press for the care they have given the preparation and production of this book. I have also been particularly fortunate for the constructive criticism the anonymous reviews for SUNY Press provided.

A special acknowledgment must be given to my brother-in-law, Geoff Glover, who generously constructed, electrified, and remodeled the spaces within which I have worked. Thank you, Bro.

I am thus greatly in the debt of many institutions and persons, but I must add that I am solely responsible for the interpretations that follow.

Kenneth M. Morrison

Johnny #1
The Bradshaw Mountains
Arizona

Introduction

Making Sense—Religious Studies and Ethnohistory

These essays attempt to build bridges between ethnohistory—that joint endeavor between history and anthropology—and Religious Studies. As they have developed, these distinctive fields have pursued an understanding of human reality in very different ways. As they often describe their enterprise, historians deal with cultures diachronically, as they change over time. Anthropologists, conversely, are said to study cultures synchronically, as abstract pattern and structure. The interpretive situation is actually much more complex, but in the early years of the American Society for Ethnohistory scholars worked toward combining both approaches—time and pattern, structure and change. In this sense, the interdisciplinary goal was to understand cultures ethnographically and historically.¹

Religious Studies, at least as I understand and attempt to practice the discipline, concerns itself with the study of meaning. As a hermeneutical field, Religious Studies attempts to interpret the ways in which life is itself an interpretive experience on the part of its participants. Ethnohistorians also deal with “religion,” but tend to see it as either some abstract, institutionalized, and functional part of culture, and/or as subjective belief.² Religious Studies scholars pursue religion as meaning (theological, cosmological, humanistic, sociological, historical, interspecies),³ and I explore some of that pursuit in these essays.⁴ Meaning can be treated abstractly, as a culture’s existential and normative principles,⁵ for example. Meaning can also be understood dynamically, if we are able to reconstruct the play of such principles in what people say and do.

In this effort to bridge the disciplines, I am not alone.⁶ Indeed, anyone attempting Native American Studies in any of these disciplinary contexts has found the going challenging. None of these fields adequately comprehend Native American life. A dissonance of disciplinary commitments, methodologies, and interpretive strategies makes both ethnohistory and Religious Studies prime examples of postmodern intellectual confusion and lively response.⁷ In these essays (particularly Chapters One, Two, and Eight), I explore the general character of that confusion, assessing some of the major efforts in the past

twenty-five years to understand Native Americans' religious traditions, social life, and historical experience.

I heartily agree with many critics who observe that current interpretations are ethnocentric.⁸ I differ from most because I make distinctive claims about that ethnocentrism. First, I argue that scholars remain ethnocentric because they have failed to understand the distinctive premises of Native American life. Second, I explore the ways in which they have not understood that those premises constitute genuine conceptual alternatives to scholarly ways of representing other peoples in abstract cultural terms. Third, I claim that those existential principles can be reconstructed. Finally, I contend that those premises can guide us in fitting our interpretation to Native Americans' actual experience and history, or at least whatever of that experience can be reconstructed.

Given the challenges involved in understanding Native American life and historical experience, my aims are limited and focused. I present a series of essays written to explore the complex meaning of Native American and European contact. I am concerned particularly with the ways in which both parties negotiated that meaning in French Catholic missions to Eastern Algonkian peoples. Initially, I did not intend to focus on missionization. The first two historical essays on Wabanaki (Abenaki) Catholicism (Chapters Three and Four) aimed rather to explore the ways in which the Wabanaki people's religious tradition shaped their understanding of the European other, English as well as French. But in the seventeenth century, the French Catholic missions were also a major context for a contested encounter of meanings. Since these missions localized those cultural processes from which has emerged what scholars call a world system, understanding the religious and social change they induced has large implications beyond their particular time and place.⁹ Native Americans and European colonizers met in many other situations—economic, diplomatic, and military, for instance—but the missions focused the larger conversation on both sides of the encounter: Who are you? What do you want? What do you mean for us?

The historical essays have developed of their own accord, but in an orderly fashion. I have come to understand them as interdisciplinary hybrids, linked conceptually by a long conversation with other scholars in history, anthropology, ethnohistory, and Religious Studies. During my graduate studies in Canadian-American history in the early 1970s, the field of American Indian history was just developing, albeit mostly in the form of the history of Indian-White relations, and anthropological study was just beginning to provoke new interdisciplinary questions about the cultural patterns of American Indian life. From what was then the emerging field of ethnohistory, I took the conviction that cross-cultural studies must recognize that Native American "others," who are the "subjects" of scholarly study, ought to be engaged in their own terms, in the narratives in which they self-constitute, and in the particular worlds of meaning in which they live. I taught American Indian history and ethnohistory for eight years at UCLA, and found myself increasingly dissatisfied with the

main concerns of the field: Indian-White relations, and the development of federal Indian policy.

If the goal was to understand Native American experience, then policy studies were necessary for understanding the colonialist context. I also came to realize that colonialism defined only part of American Indian history. Historians had not explained, for one example, what Robert Berkhofer called the startling and paradoxical survival of Native American identity despite centuries of cultural change, and economic, political, and technical colonialism.¹⁰ Nor had scholars made sense of the prominent role that “religion” played in Native American experience. From first contact to the present, Native Americans have understood contact, and have responded to non-Indians, religiously. They understood that contact challenged their own sense of tribal identity, just as non-Indian diseases, ecological transformations of the land, and dispossession and dispersal from traditional territories undercut their social solidarity.¹¹ Such massive changes also threatened the peoples’ relation to cosmic beings with whom their health and well-being, their ability to make a living, and their location in the cosmos depended. The peoples worried about their own responsibility for such cataclysmic changes: they turned to ritual to diagnose the causes of their condition, to rectify health problems, and to reinvigorate their relations with cosmic, plant, and animal beings, as well as with their ancestors.¹² Ritual performance, I came to understand, was the very way in which Native Americans took responsibility for their historical situation. Meanwhile, for American people in general and for scholars in particular, victimization continued as the main explanation of Native American experience.

I slowly came to realize that Religious Studies might offer some precision in understanding that mythological traditions reflect on the proposition that human life derives from, and constrains, cosmic meaning.¹³ Religious Studies affirmed what seemed to me a central purpose of Native American Studies: achieving a representation of Native American realities in which Native American peoples might recognize themselves. I also found that Religious Studies has some distance to go before Native American realities can be understood. Accordingly, the historical essays in this volume attempt to make sense of the historical and ethnographic record in interdisciplinary modes of study, and to assess that record in light of the ethical constitution of Native American life.

My concern for understanding the ethical character of American Indian life aims to create new methodological ground. Some critics of professional American Indian history, as we will see, rail against a pervasive tendency for scholars (here acting out implicit assumptions in popular culture, especially the “Lo! The poor Indian” sentiment) to write moral histories of Indian-White relations. The critics have not recognized, unfortunately, that our tendency to impose subjective constructs on Indian experience, our tendency to moralize, fails simply because scholars’ values and those of Native Americans differ

greatly. Moreover, scholars seem not to understand that in Native American contexts the moral ideal and social life share common ground, and that the ideal cannot be understood apart from everyday life. Although much will be said about the respective disciplines and their actual and potential relations, I am concerned particularly with their limitations and my own struggle to overcome the shortsighted consequences. In my view (as with many others), the disciplines remain inadequate, imperfect, and illogical extensions of an Euramerican ideological stance that has always made every effort to subsume Native American peoples under Christian, progressive, objective, and other universalizing views of history.¹⁴

The essays of this volume explore some of the ways in which I have come to think about Native American history, and what I have been able to reconstruct as Native American points-of-view. I've wanted to understand early Canadian missions as the ways in which Algonkian people made sense of difficult, even deadly, post-contact realities. I've also wanted to understand the missions as Algonkian ways of responding creatively to those conditions. Contact created an explosion of uncertainty. Violence between Europeans and tribes devastated by alcohol and disease accelerated at an alarming pace. Contact even amplified intra- and intertribal conflict, but eventually drove home the need for native peoples to achieve a united front against all Europeans, even the well-intentioned. As anthropologist Victor Turner has shown so effectively in his African studies, ritual activities and social order intersect.¹⁵ Disasters, such as those that affected seventeenth-century Algonkian peoples, engender a state of consciousness called liminality. In Turner's view, the concept of liminality captures a root social uncertainty. Liminality has both positive and negative aspects; in either case, liminality is defined by an experience of what Turner calls being "betwixt and between." In good times, liminality might be thought of as the achievement of solidarity, a state of sociality in which selfish, individualistic, and anti-social impulses are contained by a people's fresh commitment to core communal values. In bad times, liminality might be thought of as a kind of social psychosis. Psychotic forms of liminal consciousness respond to a world coming or come apart, and they do so by seeking answers to barely glimpsed, but keenly suffered, problems. In the seventeenth-century Northeast, every aspect of social order needed to be recast, not in some abstract formulation of a cultural policy, but in the social relations of everyday life. Algonkians had no choice but to make sense of the medical, economic, political, and ecological changes that led to their experience of social chaos. Not surprisingly, Eastern Algonkian peoples understood the seventeenth century as an eruption of anti-social evil, the extent of which went far beyond anything in their pre-contact experience.

The devastating events of the seventeenth century can hardly be exaggerated, but Algonkian peoples were able to respond effectively. If these essays have any unity at all, they explore the moral principles of Algonkian lifeways as

ways of documenting these peoples' astute assessment of the character of their post-contact situation, and also the viability of their very own ways of making sense. If, in Turner's sense, the incomprehensible constitutes liminal uncertainty (as Turner explores in a variety of cultural settings), those disasters also presented Algonkian people with many opportunities to remake their world anew. Accordingly, these essays seek to privilege Algonkian points-of-view, and they work hard to reconstruct such indigenous perspectives. They are based on a reading of historical and ethnographic texts across the grain of European and Christian biases. They seek to reconstruct some of the ways in which Algonkian peoples discerned their post-contact situation.

As anyone even vaguely familiar with the scholarly literature on the seventeenth-century Northeast realizes, we now have a rich overview of how contact proceeded in real defiance of the religious and political expectations of the colonizers.¹⁶ The enduring challenge is to understand the ways in which missionary and Algonkian purposes sometimes clashed and sometimes converged. In this regard, these essays attend to the missionaries' motivations, teachings, and interventions into Algonkian life. The essays are also unlike most studies that comprise the field of mission history, and indeed of American Indian history. They seek primarily to uncover Algonkian ways of assessing missionary truth claims, and not the other way around. Thus, readers seeking an interpretive balance between Algonkian and missionary positions will find some useful insights, but the essays move closer to Algonkian than to missionary concerns. As readers will also see, the essays have taught me the virtue of learning more and more about less and less.

In all these complex ways, scholars recapitulate the interpretive quandary facing seventeenth-century French Jesuit missionaries in Canada: how to make sense of the Native American other when an adequate self-understanding was, and is, not commonly available. After all, even those persons who profess belief assume that there is a fit between religion and the world, but are not necessarily aware of the cosmic assumptions that play themselves out in their lives. In this sense, theologian George Tinker argues that missionaries—all of them, without exception—engaged in acts of genocide against Native American peoples.¹⁷ For much of the historical encounter, the complex problem Tinker reconstructs has not been appreciated. Like the Jesuit missionaries, non-Indians have continued to blunder in, devising theories of missionization and civilization after the fact. We have not had a theological, historical, and anthropological perspective to ease the ongoing and ethnocentric character of our encounters with Native American peoples. Nor have we understood the economic, political, material, and religious factors that have shaped our colonialist relations with indigenous peoples. Our colonialism has thus proceeded in happenstance ways without regard for Native American actors. We have not been able to conceptualize, let alone manage, the intricacies of cultural contact. As one result, we, as well as Native Americans, have been on a learning curve. For our part, we have practiced the art of the pos-

sible whose limits have been defined by the myth of Christian Civilization.¹⁸ We will gain no insight into Native American traditions until we understand the ways in which we are fundamentally committed to Judeo-Christian, as well as the related secular, principles of worldview.

Because these terms are so pervasive, and unconscious, the study of Native American religious life is necessarily fraught with controversy. For one example, in seeking some baseline understanding of Algonkian tradition, I run the risk of conveying the very mistaken notion that there is a pure, aboriginal, and unchanging religious system. Nothing could be further from the actuality. Native American religious peoples have, in fact, been in conversation with each other for thousands of years, and their particular tribal traditions thus express negotiated agreements about the pluralistic nature of reality.¹⁹ In such conversations, and the mythological and ritual adaptations they engendered, we discover only one way in which Native American traditions have always had a collective and changing character.²⁰

American Indian peoples have always sought kinship solidarity as a collective goal shared by humans and other personal beings.²¹ One need think here not only about the pervasiveness of councils in many cosmogonic traditions, but also the extensive and hardworking institutional forms of kin, village, tribal, and intertribal councils, to recognize the hard-won value of solidarity.²² But such a recognition is not enough. How we make sense of both individual and collective forms of tradition depends fundamentally on two factors. First, if we are willing to understand that tradition is a dynamic consensus about reality, then we can see that all peoples at all times and in all places participate in that lively process of making cultural, religious, and social sense. Second, if we can come to understand the typical, and often ethnocentric, assumptions that we make about “religion,” then we can see the actual need to learn how to think about “religion” from other peoples, and in ways that are faithful to their particular understanding of the ways of the world.²³ I can suggest how we face some of these challenges by comparing two textbook treatments of Native American religious traditions and life: Peggy V. Beck and Anna L. Walters’ *The Sacred: Ways of Knowledge, Sources of Life* (1977), and Sam D. Gill’s *Native American Religions: An Introduction* (1982).²⁴

Beck and Walters begin with what has become a familiar and difficult problem: Native American peoples have no abstract term to convey what non-Indians mean by “religion”: sacred text, dogma, institution. For Beck and Walters, there is an inherent contradiction between being religious, on the one hand, and thinking about religion on the other. Their statement of concern is worth reflecting upon:

Like all peoples throughout the world, Native Americans seek their own way to explain origins and destinies—to face the unknown and learn the power and meaning of natural laws and forces. Religions

attempt to bring an individual or group closer to the source of these powers and laws. A study of the world's religions would show that many symbols, ways of teaching, and ways of expressing the sacred, are universally shared by human beings. The point this textbook makes, however, is that in contrast to many organized religions in the world, Native American sacred ways limit the amount of explaining a person can do. In this way they guide a person's behavior toward the world and its natural laws. Many Native American sacred teachings suggest that if people try to explain everything or to seek to leave nothing unexplored in the universe, they will bring disaster upon themselves, for then they are trying to be like gods, not humans.²⁵

For Beck and Walters, these discriminations are directly related to what they see as an unsatisfactory separation between ways of knowing that are typical of the social and behavioral sciences, and "the religious life of the scientists who study them and who perform the experiments." In addition to this distance, they decry the scientific attempt "to dominate and control the unknown, to overcome human frailty or weakness." Beck and Walters see such activities in apocalyptic terms: "This has begun to destroy certain balances and relationships that exist in the world and its ecosystems. By destroying balances of this kind people destroy alternatives—they make it more and more difficult to adapt to change, to crisis, and to the unexpected."²⁶ In effect, Beck and Walters see the study of Native American traditions as a descriptive enterprise that aims "to better understand the profoundness of strength, beauty, and vitality of this dimension of American Indian People."²⁷

As I read their argument, Beck and Walters identify a primary tension that the study of Native American traditions and history must resolve: the core relationship in non-Indian settings between abstract knowledge and manipulative power, both of which proceed in disrespectful ways. They relate, rightly, that Native American traditions do not attempt simply to explain and to control the world. Moreover, they note that these traditions are neither sectarian nor evangelical. We must also account for Beck and Walters' claim that Native American traditions are *practical* systems of *knowledge*. The claim that religious life can be a system of pragmatic references to the actual world proposes, in effect, a way of understanding "religion" that is little explored, and which undercuts many scholarly claims that Native American religious systems are not rational. Beck and Walters' proposition is also controversial because the idea that being religious constitutes a way of being mindful is not commonly accepted.

Unfortunately, Beck and Walters explore these issues in contradictory ways. One can see from this extended quotation that Beck and Walters are strongly opposed to dogmatic religions, or to sciences, which attempt to understand the world in ways that belong properly to the gods, the unknown, natural

laws and forces. Such a view needs comment because, while they may be rehearsing a familiar gulf between science and religion, they describe Native American traditions in theistic ways, which may not be appropriate for Native American peoples, and in terms natural scientists would recognize: natural laws and forces. No one would disagree, I suspect, that religious persons concern themselves profoundly with the unknown.²⁸

Beck and Walters also fail to mediate between the individual's experience of the world and that of the social group as a whole. They chose "the word spiritual to help us define the word religion." In so doing, they wish to differentiate between "ordinary" and "intangible" reality, and by intangible they mean "spiritual."²⁹ They understand the spiritual in subjective, emotional terms, contending that "organized religions" often fail to recognize "the emotions and sacred moments that are their guiding vision." They also equate religious emotion with "mystical experience."³⁰ As a result, therefore, Beck and Walters understand *the sacred* (my italics) in similarly subjectivist ways: "*Sacred* [their italics] means something special, something out of the ordinary, and often it concerns a very personal part of each one of us because it describes our dreams, our changing, and our personal way of seeing the world." They also declare that "the sacred is something that is shared," that the sacred is a collective phenomenon, but they do not do justice to this social dimension.³¹ Other subjectivist terms dominate Beck and Walter's narrative, and distract from the collective character of religious life that they also wish to highlight. They think that "reverence," "awe," "divinity," "belief," and the "unseen" can be used to describe Native American religious life. Beck and Walters sum up their view: "As we discuss the sacred, we might say there are two sides to it: the personal, *ecstatic* [their italics] side that individuals find hard to describe, and the part of the sacred that is shared and defined year after year through oral histories, ritual, and other ceremonies and customs." In these ways, Beck and Walters desire to mediate between non-Indian divisions of reality into the objective and the subjective, but use language that focuses on religious emotion. In their way of thinking in terms of analogies, religion can be glossed as divinity = intangible = awe = personal belief. This model focuses on individualistic religious sensibilities, rather than on the collective character of Native American insights into, and responsibility for, the nature of the world. Such an equation does not help us to understand their thesis that Native American religious traditions are real, practical, and collective ways of *knowing* the world.

Whatever the overall usefulness of their perspective, Beck and Walters reveal that any understanding of "religion" rests fundamentally on one's insights about it. Sam D. Gill begins in such a place, but ends with an altogether different definition of religion. Wanting to separate himself from the European equation of religion with church and state—what I call the myth of Christian Civilization—leads Gill toward a less ethnocentric proposition. Accepting the principle not only that humankind shares a single nature, but that being can be defined as *homo religiosus*, Gill crafts an open-ended definition:

We will consider as religious those images, actions, and symbols that both express and define the extent and character of the world, especially those that provide the cosmic framework in which human life finds meaning and the terms of its fulfillment. We will also consider as religious those actions, processes, and symbols through which life is lived in order that it may be meaningful and purposive.³²

As we shall see, this definition proposes an understanding of “religion” that is quite different from the assumptions that inform ethnohistorical scholarship.

Gill’s view of the religious is both provocative and controversial. In the first place, Gill redefines the noun “religion” as the adjective “religious.” He suggests, in so doing, that the abstraction “religion” has something vitally to do with human life as it is actually lived; in this way, Gill’s definition speaks to some of Beck and Walters’ concerns. Gill also takes a humanistic stance (one that other scholars of Native American life might emulate) which declares that the study of Native American “religions” must concern itself with the actual lives of Native American persons. As a consequence, we should consider the ways in which people *act* religiously, rather than focus on what they ostensibly *believe*. Gill’s definition insists that the abstraction “religion” means nothing apart from the human ideation, valuation, and personal and collective activity that constitute meaningful life. As Gill has explored the implications, he has come to propose a performative view of Native American religious life, a view that urges an investigation of the oral and non-verbal modes of cognition and expression, especially those that have a ritual and, therefore, collective character.³³ In addition, Gill’s definition avoids an ethnocentric definition of religion in terms of gods, the sacred, worship, belief (and thereby the supernatural), dogma, institution (and thereby both nature and culture). Instead, Gill favors an emphasis that stresses the motivated, responsible actions of persons whose lives attempt an alignment with the purposes of cosmic beings.

As with every other investigator of “religion” inside and outside Religious Studies, the English language trips Gill into a non-humanistic emphasis that distracts from his performative argument. His phrase—“images, actions, and symbols”—raises a thorny question about the religious actor. Images and symbols are, as Gill is well aware, reifications of human behaviors, merely abstractions referring to motivated human interaction. Neither images nor symbols are normally understood (in English, at least) as capable of action in their own right. In any case, and even in this slip of the tongue, Gill relocates our attention on religion as a belief system to one that highlights human religious thought and behavior as an irreducibly socio-linguistic phenomenon.

Thus, one learns from Gill both an explicit and a tacit lesson in thinking about religion and religiousness comparatively, and about the ways in which “religion” may particularly be associated with non-Indian ideological and institutional order, and religiousness with all people whatever their cultural condition. As applied to Native American religious traditions, to distinguish between

religion and the religious highlights meaning-making activity, rather than church and belief, and so gives us a more precise concern for not only pursuing Native Americans' points-of-view in general, but also their concern for meaning in local and particular times and places. This concern is well put, because if we are learning anything at all about American Indian religious persons, the conclusion must be that they are, as they have always been, masters of their own meanings.³⁴ Tacitly, Gill's definition reveals the conceptual distortions associated with reification as a mode of abstraction: to mistake motivated religious activity for religion as a cultural pattern tends to reduce meaning to the mechanical and impersonal functions of symbolic systems.³⁵ Such a reduction of the purposeful—Religious Studies' scholars call that purposive activity "intentionality"—explains much of what Religious Studies has to offer historians, anthropologists, and ethnohistorians as they attempt to make sense of Native American life.

My readers will notice that I also struggle with this intellectual problem of reification in this volume. In the early essays, particularly in Chapters Three and Four, my newfound enthusiasm for ethnohistory expressed itself in my pervasive use of garden-variety anthropological jargon. My readers will also see, I hope, that the newer essays attempt to balance disciplinary modes of discourse with careful attention to Native American religious life as perception, thought, and behavior. Scholars of Native American life, I have come to learn, must serve many competing masters.

Two essays written for this volume explore the ways in which scholars have either ignored Native American religious life, or have misinterpreted those traditions in ethnocentric ways. Chapter One reviews the major interpretations of Eastern Algonkian life and history, and the ways in which self-described rationalist scholars dismiss those interpretations as romantic and idealist—as non-empirical and subjective belief, in other words. The chapter also demonstrates that both idealists and rationalists misinterpret Algonkian religious traditions, and that they do so in precisely the same categorical ways. Chapter Two assesses a closely related issue, namely the claim of Religious Studies scholar, Åke Hultkrantz, that the concept of the supernatural (and all that such a concept entails) is foundational, and empirically demonstrable, for Native American religious systems. This chapter also engages seriously Hultkrantz's claim that scholars have misunderstood the empirical character of Algonkian religious life. To do so, the chapter reassesses A. Irving Hallowell's trailblazing essay "Ojibwa Ontology, Behavior, and World View." Accordingly, Chapters One and Two question the non-Indian objectivist/subjectivist paradigm that misconstrues Native American religions. These essays identify a major problem that emerges from the complex ways in which European languages tend to emphasize theological, cognitive, and social assumptions that distort Native American realities. The chapters argue, alternatively, that Hallowell articulated a relational, intersubjective understanding of Algonkian religious life that has great value for achieving a cross-cultural perspective.

The historical chapters (Chapter Three to Seven) also focus on problems central to understanding Algonkian religious traditions and their history. The first two, Chapters Three and Four, written while I was still a member of a History Department, deal with the Wabanaki peoples. They address some of the ways in which a careful study of Wabanaki mythological traditions can reveal otherwise undocumented, indigenous perspectives about religious life and intercultural contact. Seventeenth-century European documents reveal little about the moral tensions that the Algonkians recognized both in their tribal lives and in their relations with non-human persons. These essays show that traditions about cannibal giants and the compassionate culture hero, Gluskap, opened a way in which I could see that Algonkians assessed and judged European social behavior in unique terms. While they are themselves not historical documents, nineteenth- and twentieth-century Algonkians used these stories to reflect on their moral and multicultural situation. These stories indicate that the Algonkians recognized ethical criteria by which their ancestors had apparently made sense of the claimed superiority of European colonizers, and which guided their responses to post-contact conditions.³⁶ These stories not only express a precise way of thinking about social life, some of them articulate a troubled moral rejection of European social life. Thus, an Algonkian way of thinking about the religious meaning of sociality came to direct my inquiry: the stories about the cannibal giants and Gluskap reveal a hitherto unrecognized relational logic that suggests the systematic integrity of Algonkian thought and religious life. I learned that these nineteenth- and twentieth-century stories are also congruent with what can be reconstructed of the seventeenth-century Algonkians' historical behavior.³⁷ They also helped to explain the Algonkians' revulsion toward the impersonal, profit-seeking, individualistic, and overly abstract hierarchial forms of European life. Chapters Three and Four eventually informed the cultural background of my history of Wabanaki-Euramerican relations, *The Embattled Northeast*. Since that work presented a narrative history of trade, diplomacy, and war, the book did not examine the interdisciplinary issues this present volume reassesses. Religious history, I have come to learn, requires an altogether different methodology.

Chapters Five to Seven, written after I joined a Religious Studies Department, explore the ethnographic and historical course of the Algonkians' relational and religious logic that I discovered among the Wabanaki. This logic, I was learning, escaped the rationality of objectivity and subjectivity scholars commonly apply to Native American history. By center-staging intercultural dialogue—not just discourse, but vitally charged communication—these essays move toward balancing missionary and Algonkian perspectives. Specifically, they reconstruct the dialogical processes by which the Montagnais adjacent to the French settlement of Quebec scrutinized the astounding religious claims of French missionaries. The burden of these chapters is twofold. They establish that a variety of factors impeded the missionaries' ability to communicate with the Montagnais. They also reconstruct the Montagnais' responses to the missionaries

to document both their experience of cultural confusion and the traditional logic by which they assessed Jesuit truth claims.

Building on both the opening interpretive and the historical chapters, Chapter Eight assesses the common assertion that Algonkians “converted” to Catholicism. The chapter reevaluates suggestive methodological perspectives from mythological and socio-linguistic studies. This chapter argues by way of a conclusion that Algonkians shaped Catholicism in ways that fit their own ways of thinking about the world, ways that gave them religious means to ensure their ongoing community life. I argue that Algonkians took an active role in missionization and that the result was an intersection, rather than a displacement, of worldviews.

With the exception of some minor editing to eliminate duplication of argument and documentation, and to standardize tribal names, the previously published essays (Chapters Three to Seven) are reprinted here as they first appeared. I have chosen not to recast these essays for several reasons. First, the decision is a matter of personal honesty. Since my overall concern in this book is to critique constructively the literature on the Eastern Algonkian peoples (and by extension the scholarship on Native American life in general), it seems important to let the essays stand. I believe that my readers will better appreciate my broad disciplinary criticism if they can see that I recognize my own gradual shift in understanding. Besides, I would be disingenuous to reproach others for failing to resolve issues with which I have also struggled. In being honest about my intellectual difficulties with understanding Algonkian religious life, I hope also that my readers can see that I am not engaging in personal attacks against the scholarly arguments I critically engage in these essays. Second, the essays themselves present evidence of my growing awareness of the problem of intellectual ethnocentrism; especially in Chapters Three and Four, I could see the missionaries’ and even the Algonkians’ ethnocentrism, but not my own. Chapters Five to Seven reveal that I came to distance myself from non-Indian cosmological assumptions, including widespread views about “religion,” “belief,” and “conversion.” A comparison of these essays will show my readers that I have won my insights through hard work and reflection. Finally, as I discussed my plan-of-action with Andrea Bear Nicholas, chair in Native Studies at St. Thomas University, two issues emerged clearly. We came to agree that my readers (Native and non-Indian alike) should be able to see both my intellectual struggle and the manner of its self-correction. We also think that it is important to admit that interpretive work only slowly moves toward clarity and that its conclusions must always be open-ended, responsive to new voices, new data, and new methodological perspectives.

Andrea Bear Nicholas also reminds me that, since colonialism continues to affect contemporary Wabanaki peoples, it is important to alert my readers to what my study does not engage. I can imagine the long-range history of colonialism Nicholas has in mind, although this study focuses only on the seventeenth

century. That history would include a realistic portrayal of the missionaries' cultural and religious arrogance that led over centuries to the dismantling of native societies, to undermining their leadership, kinship relations, and confidence in their way of life. That history would trace the imposition of authoritarian politics, the rule of alien forms of law, the denial of sovereignty, the processes of economic marginalization, territorial displacement and dispossession, the gradual but inexorable imposition and internalization of alien ways of thinking and valuing. Such a history has yet to be written for the Wabanaki, or any other Native American people. Although they are not this book's primary focus, these issues form the background of the seventeenth-century cases I examine.

Because of the conceptual problems that my early essays rehearse, I have become conscious that the study of comparative cosmology is pivotal to understanding Native American cultural life and its history. If a cosmology is a conceptual map of the world, then it becomes easier to recognize that Native American peoples have distinctive philosophies of being, ways of knowing, and rigorously relational ethical systems. My two Wabanaki essays (Chapters Three and Four) demonstrate that I had not yet come to understand adequately the differences in Native and Euramerican cosmologies. For example, while nothing in these essays suggests that I ever thought that "nature" is an appropriate cross-cultural category, the essay on the cannibal giant (Chapter Three) indicates at least that I was unconscious about the issue, probably because I had not yet appreciated the complexity of Hallowell's contribution to Algonkian studies. In this initial foray into Algonkian worldview, I use "natural" as an adjective either to indicate "world" or to point to the ordinary, given, and ethical character of the Algonkian cosmos. As I apply the term "natural" to the cannibal giants, I seem to associate them with wildness as a characteristic of nature. Such usages are inaccurate since the thrust of that essay is to demonstrate that in Algonkian life cannibals are categorically monstrous because they are anti-social and unethical.³⁸ In retrospect, I can see that I was unaware of my own categorical assumptions, and also that, by beginning to follow the Algonkians' logic about the cannibal giants, I was starting to see something of the religious character of their social life.

Readers who become concerned with the integrity of my overall argument about the religious character of the Algonkians' social life and non-Indian difficulties in thinking about their worldview (explored in greater depth in Chapter Four on the relationship between myth and Wabanaki Catholicism) will come to understand some of the ways in which this terminological problem can be corrected. "World" or "cosmos" can well substitute for nature, and "unethical" could stand for "natural" as I use these terms in the cannibal giant essay. But I also hope that readers come to appreciate that such a terminological shift would be too easy. What is at issue is not simply a range of terms and their misuse. Far more seriously, such inappropriate terminology reveals how poorly comparative culture was understood in the late 1970s.

Although I had read his work, I had clearly not internalized A. Irving Hallowell's 1960 argument that Algonkian people do not recognize "nature" as a cosmological domain separate from their own. Apparently, I did understand Hallowell's insistence that the term "supernatural" did not apply to Algonkians because they did not recognize nature as a domain separate from human beings. The Wabanaki essays are silent on the issue of supernaturalism, which I first address in Chapter Six. After I began to teach and study Native American religious traditions, I learned that Religious Studies scholars (as I explore in Chapter Two) commonly represent Native American religious life in terms of natural, cultural, and supernatural categories. Some scholars seem to recognize that such categories do not fit Native American cosmologies, but even they fail to explore the categorical difference. Among the cases I discuss, for example, both Calvin Martin (Chapter One) and James Axtell (Chapter Eight) reject the supernatural category and discuss Algonkian traditions as though they were and are supernaturalistic.

The larger issue—that Algonkian and Euramerican cosmologies differ in specific ways—I myself did not yet understand in my Wabanaki studies. Like my colleagues in all the disciplines, I operated in terms of an unconscious cosmological system that I did not recognize as an untested, unverified, and non-empirical explanation of other people's realities. In two essays (Chapters Three and Four), for another example, I use the terms "belief," "faith," "sacral," "spiritual" and "spiritual forces," "otherworldly relations," and "two worlds" as though they were all opposed to nature and culture. Sometimes I used these terms to indicate a subjective, religious state of being. In Chapter Four, I refer to the "conversion" of the Kennebec Wabanaki, but the chapter itself argues for syncretism. In other words, I have come to realize that in the Wabanaki essays I was only partially engaging Algonkian ways of being, knowing, and valuing.

Readers may find it useful to know that my historical training did not include the scholarly study of Native American religious traditions. Not only were such issues completely ignored in Native American Studies (in which I was also self-trained), Religious Studies was also in its infancy. As my overall argument in this volume indicates, scholars still misunderstand both Native American religious traditions and their histories. Not surprisingly, even scholars of religion contest the nature of the field, its methods, and its findings. In these circumstances, such interdisciplinary study combining history, anthropology, and Religious Studies is still uncommon and to its absence can be traced much of the interpretive confusion I document in the new essays in this volume. By highlighting intellectual ethnocentrism, I seek to define several issues with which ethnohistory has struggled in making sense of cultural similarities and differences. Whatever their complicated combinations and permutations, the cases I document in Chapter One (which examines the tension between romantic and rationalist modes of explanation), in Chapter Two (which focuses on the problem of comparative cosmology), and in Chapter Eight (which critiques the