

unity," an observation that still seems valid.⁵ The American mystique is usually claimed and thus endorsed and confirmed even by culturally more or less distinct underprivileged groups within American society, which, given the pervasiveness of American civic nationalism, could be characterized as centripetal.

Canadian society strikes one as centrifugal. Various tensions have marked Canada's history and still impinge on its presence: formerly separate British North American provinces versus Canada's federal organization; Britain's impact versus that—dominant now—of the United States; and, most important, English versus French Canada, a conflict that goes back to the fall of New France in 1759/60, when, as a result of their defeat in the Seven Years' War, the French lost not only Lower Canada (today's Québec), but their control over the St. Lawrence, Ohio, and Mississippi River valleys and the Great Lakes area, that is, the whole hinterland of the English Atlantic seaboard colonies, the war thus ending what the English Canadian writer Hugh MacLennan, in his novel *Two Solitudes* (1945), calls „the vastest encircling movement in recorded history.”⁶ Due to its internal contradictions, Canada has always had its famous identity problem. In the academic sphere, inhabiting and continually studying rather than resolving that problem is now even considered an adequate expression of Canada's identity, which makes the country a very scholarly experiment in nationhood.⁷ Jacques Godbout, a French Canadian writer, does not see Canada in a crisis, but defines the country's identity as crisis: „Pas de crise, pas de pays.”⁸ Such a postmodern concept of nationhood would not even be advanced in jest in the U.S., whose self-assurance and sense of mission seem immune to academic cerebrations. The Canadian identity problem also extends to Québec, once such a homogeneous province. Québec,

⁵ Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology* (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor, 1960), 78.

⁶ Hugh MacLennan, *Two Solitudes* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1945), 100.

⁷ Cf. Jonathan Kertzer, *Worrying the Nation: Imagining a National Literature in English Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), esp. 192-200.

⁸ See *ibid.*, 174.