

Women, Religion, and Peace in an American Indian Ritual

Kristin Herzog

I will tell you something about stories,
[he said]
They aren't just entertainment.
Don't be fooled.
They are all we have, you see,
all we have to fight off
illness and death.

You don't have anything
if you don't have the stories.

Their evil is mighty
but it can't stand up to our stories.
So they try to destroy the stories
let the stories be confused or forgotten.
They would like that
They would be happy
Because we would be defenseless then.

He rubbed his belly.
I keep them here
[he said]
Here, put your hand on it
See, it is moving.
There is life here
for the people.

And in the belly of this story
the rituals and the ceremony
are still growing.

The poem prefaces Leslie Marmon Silko's novel *Ceremony*, the story of a young American Indian who regains the wholeness and meaning of his life by rediscovering his ancient tribal roots and rituals.¹ It is a story of the American Southwest, especially the Pueblo-

Laguna people. Anyone even vaguely familiar with American Indian culture knows that the groups were originally as different from each other as modern-day Swedes are from Albanians or Catalans, if not more so. There were more than 2,000 independent culture groups in Columbus's time, and they spoke 500 different languages belonging to fifty distinct language groups, some as different from each other as Chinese and English.² It was the primitivity of white thought which lumped all the groups together under the absurd term of "Indians." Hundreds of years of forced acculturation have not erased the most essential distinctions among them.

There is something, however, that many of the more than 300 culture groups surviving today have in common: they have been able to retain or rediscover their ancient beliefs and practices to an extent remarkable in view of the pressures to assimilate a Euroamerican worldview. Their traditions were not "primitive," but sometimes involved highly sophisticated thought systems, developed long before Columbus's time. Westerners have largely disregarded them because they equated culture with literacy, even though Europeans knew from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, not to speak of the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, that oral traditions can be unsurpassed in terms of aesthetic or religious quality.

This article concentrates on the Dekanawida-Hayonwatha materials, a narrative and a ritual of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) which have been current among them for at least four centuries. The reason for this cultural survival is undoubtedly to be found in what Leslie Silko imagines as "life . . . for the people . . . in the belly of his story" where "the rituals and the ceremony are still growing." The story told by the materials is especially enlightening for our time on three points: (1) the high status of women in Haudenosaunee society and the "feminine principle" incorporated in their politics; (2) the understanding of statecraft as sacred responsibility toward all of creation, and (3) their understanding of peace as justice and wholeness in the social order, built on subtle psychological insights.

The epic of Dekanawida, a mythical story about an historical Iroquois lawgiver, dating back to about the fifteenth century, forms the basis of a whole body of ritual literature. Closely related to or even woven into the narrative is the Great Law, outlining all the rules of Iroquois League politics and rites. Both of these culminate in the Condolence Ritual, which proscribes the forms of mourning for a deceased high chief and his symbolic resurrection in the successor.³ The three texts exist in various complete or fragmentary versions,

some in print and some in manuscript form. In the beginning they had been handed down orally with the aid of pictographs and mnemonic strands of wampum— shells or beads used for concrete evidence of treaties and for symbolizing and memorizing the tribal tradition. From the 1770s on native ritualists had begun writing the rituals down with the help of an orthography borrowed from missionaries, and from the 1880s on they were written down in English.⁴

Dekanawida and Hayonwatha (Hiawatha) were probably two distinct beings in the original narrative, but in some legends they have become fused over the centuries into a single folk hero with the attributes of a demigod. Longfellow's *Hiawatha* confuses the historical Haudenosaunee lawgiver with a demigod of the Ojibway. The main versions of the narrative agree that Dekanawida was a prophet and a mystic born of a poor virgin mother among the Hurons, that he had miraculous powers and through a vision felt compelled to end the continuous fighting between neighboring groups. They also agree that Hayonwatha, an Onondaga who had experienced serious bereavement, became the disciple of Dekanawida and the practical organizer of the League which comprised the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca. The third most important character in the narrative is an evil man, Thadodahho, an Onondaga tyrant and cannibal, crippled and snake-haired on the outside, malicious and perverse inside, who eventually is healed and converted and becomes the "Fire-Keeper"—a kind of president and keeper of the sacred wampum—of the League's Council.

Since the narrative, the related laws, and the Condolence Ritual are designed to overcome personal grief as well as hostility among the various nations, the whole body of literature can be understood as the record of a revitalization movement among several groups.⁵ It is difficult, however, to trace the historical core of the process. The origin of the League is dated by the Haudenosaunee chiefs around 1390, by white scholars about 1570. White people probably did not know about it until 1640. But during the following centuries the League impressed and influenced people as diverse as Benjamin Franklin and Karl Marx, and it was one of the models on which the Constitution of the United States was based. Some of its principles resemble those of the United Nations.⁶

The prevailing symbolic value of Haudenosaunee world-view and the survival of their rituals should not, however, blind us to the fact that Dekanawida's vision has been embodied in terms of the Great League of Peace for only a limited time or in broken and sporadic

ways. New stereotypes are as bad as old ones, and the point is not to picture an ideal social system but to get a better perspective on Western tradition by observing the strengths and weaknesses of a completely different social order.

All written versions of the epic available today developed during a time of political upheaval. After 1880 the hereditary chiefs of the Haudenosaunee (Six Nations) found themselves under intense pressure to give way to democratically elected chiefs whose offices were based on merit instead of lineage. To conservative Haudenosaunee, this change threatened the complete breakup of their tradition, and it was in response to this threat that the leaders, with the help of white ethnologists, began to codify their oral tradition into written dialects as well as into English in order to give authority to their government. Naturally, these nineteenth-century records of an ancient tradition contained some "feedback" of contemporary rights and fights, uses and abuses, which may have little connection with the actual historical beginnings.⁷ However, even to speculate that the Great Peace of the Haudenosaunee may some day turn out to be "a magnificent ethnological fiction that is never quite replicated during three hundred years of known Iroquois history,"⁸ does not invalidate its meaning. If Jewish or Christian believers discover that the Exodus or the ideal loving and sharing among the first Christians are supported only by thin threads of historical evidence, that discovery does not necessarily weaken their faith in the power and truth of their tradition. It is the same with the Haudenosaunee "bible," which is the epic of Dekanawida and the Great League. Whatever the origins, the prevailing tradition itself is an historical datum.

There is another parallel between the Haudenosaunee epic and the Jewish and Christian Scriptures: it is senseless to search for the "best" or "most accurate" version. There are only versions which excel in some aspect: in the beauty of mythological imagery, in political detail, narrative coherence, or the use of material which can be considered of ancient origin. The versions known publicly are here treated as a composite; occasionally the notes will indicate the "synoptic" differences.⁹

The narrative is replete with mystical elements. The prophet's power is seen as supernatural from his birth. The child survives some drowning attempts of the grandmother, who does not understand his virgin birth until a messenger tells her in a vision that this is a special child who will bring peace to the nations (14).¹⁰ As a young man Dekanawida performs some miracles to prove he will be able to bring

the peace he prophesied (16,73). But he is also the intelligent, charismatic human leader: He knows the right moment and the right approach for winning over one chief and one group after the other for the Great League. The aim of his mission is not only the ending of the intense warfare but also the overcoming of cannibalism and senseless blood feuds which decimated whole clans. The death cult was to be transformed into a life-affirming order of society.¹¹ The prophet's genius lies not in mere political diplomacy but in laying bare and healing the hidden psychological causes of private and public hostility. He also realizes that wholeness and peace will not prevail without women's full participation in the political process. Peace for him is the embodiment of law and justice between men and women, clans and nations, deriving power not only from their political union but from their common source of divine creation.

Dekanawida's power is exemplified in the story by various conversions. One concerns Hayonwatha, who is cured by the prophet from his cannibalistic appetite as well as from intense grief and depression. Another one relates to Thadodahho, the snake-haired Onondaga tyrant.¹² Merged with these is the story of a converted woman, Jikon-sahseh, who is later known as the "Peace Queen" or "Mother of Nations." We have to consider these various conversions to understand the basic human transformation that is implied in Dekanawida's Karihwiyo—"the Good Tidings of Peace and Power" (71).

Hayonwatha before his conversion is portrayed at a moment when he carries human flesh to a kettle on his fire. He does not realize that Dekanawida is watching him from a smoke hole in the roof, just above the fire. When Hayonwatha bends over the kettle and suddenly sees Dekanawida's face reflected in the water instead of his own, he is so intensely struck by the power of this image that he reconsiders his way of life. Dekanawida speaks to him about the Good News and wins him over to become his co-worker. Hayonwatha's first assignment is to bring the Good News to Thadodahho, who belongs to his own people, the Onondaga. But the perverse wizard, who kills anybody approaching him uninvited and whose hate is only surpassed by his fear, does not accept the message of peace. Moreover, Hayonwatha seems to have fallen under his evil spell, because his three daughters suddenly fall ill and die. Soon thereafter a terrible accident causes the death of Hayonwatha's wife.¹³ He is now so overcome with grief that he "splits the sky" (strikes southward) to begin a long wandering in the wilderness, trying to ease his wounded soul. When he rests at night beside his fire, he picks up shells from the lake shore, threads them on

strings of jointed rushes and meditates: if I would find anybody as burdened with grief as I am, I would take these shell strings and turn each one of them into comforting words; the shells would signify the truth of my words. When he repeats these phrases one night after having approached a Mohawk village, Dekanawida overhears him, takes his strings of wampum and does exactly what Hayonwatha had envisioned: he uses shell by shell and string by string to speak the words of comfort which restore the sanity of mind to the bereaved man. The narrative functions here as projection and interpretation of a ritual, because Dekanawida's words are the words which to this day are used in the Requickenning Address, a part of the Condolence Ritual, comforting the nations mourning the loss of a chief: "Now, we wipe away the tears from thy face" — "Now, then, we beautify again the sky for you" — "Now, we attach the Sun again in its place for thee" (B131, B151f.).

After Hayonwatha has thus been restored to sanity, he is able to cooperate with Dekanawida in winning over the Oneidas, the Cayugas, and the Senecas to join the Great Peace. The Mohawks had been persuaded earlier to accept the Good News of Peace and Power by observing one of Dekanawida's miracles. Even the Onondaga chiefs are drawn to the League—except for Thadodahho. Dekanawida and Hayonwatha, therefore, combine their powers to bring about the transformation of the pervert.¹⁴ At this point the narrative takes on an eschatological tension. Thadodahho repeatedly utters a cry of either defiance, fear, or eager expectation: "A-son-keh-ne-eh" (it is not yet, or, it has not yet occurred [79,87]). He is still evil enough to trouble the waters of the lake which Dekanawida and all the other chiefs are trying to cross. But the bearer of peace can calm the waves (89). Finally the whole group is able to cross the water in their canoes and to march up to the wizard's house. The chiefs are beginning to sing the great peace hymn, intending to cure the tyrant through their song:

I come again to greet and thank the League

But Thadodahho's mind remains unaffected by their singing, since they hesitate and make mistakes in their ritual song.¹⁵ It is only when Dekanawida sings the hymn flawlessly and, approaching the ugly cripple without hesitation, touches his body, that the mind of Thadodahho is made sane. Being overwhelmed by Dekanawida's message and touch as well as by the chiefs' willingness to submit to the converted man's authority, Thadodahho has been won over. Even his body is straightened and strengthened, as Dekanawida tells the chiefs: "We have now accomplished our work and completed every-

thing that was required with the exception of shaping and transforming him (by rubbing him down), removing the snake-like hair from him and circumcising him” (91).¹⁶ The chiefs then take their turn in “rubbing down” Thadodahho, a gesture of intense comforting and healing.

Thadodahho’s installation as Fire-Keeper for the Great League cannot take place before a woman is present to confirm his authority. She is Jikonsahseh, “this great woman our mother” (91) who has undergone a conversion of her own. She had not been practicing cannibalism, murder, or warfare, but she had upheld the status quo by feeding “men of bloodthirsty and destructive nature” passing by her house “on their war expeditions” (71). Early in his mission Dekanawida visits her and explains to her the damaging nature of her generosity. “I shall, therefore, now change your disposition and practice . . . I now charge you that you shall be the custodian of the Good Tidings of Peace and Power, so that the human race may live in peace in the future . . . You shall therefore now go east where I shall meet you at the place of dangers (to Onondaga)” (71).

When the great moment of Thadodahho’s conversion is near, Dekanawida has made sure Jikonsahseh is present. Together with the chief warrior, she is appointed to place deer antlers on Thadodahho’s head to confirm his authority (92).

The Great Law then states that this symbolic act is binding for all future investitures. But women’s empowerment in the League went much further, as Dekanawida declares, “I now transfer and set over to the women who have the lordships’ title vested in them, that they shall in the future have the power to appoint the successors from time to time to fill vacancies caused by death or removals from whatever cause” (97). He further gives women the authority to remove from office any chief who has, despite repeated warnings, not done his duty (34, 106). The specific ritual for this procedure states:

So you, _____, disregard and set at naught the warnings of your women relatives. So you fling the warnings over your shoulder to cast them behind you.

Behold the brightness of the Sun and in the brightness of the Sun’s light I depose you of your title

You shall now go your way alone, the rest of the people of the Confederacy will not go with you, for we know not the kind of mind that possesses you. As the Creator has nothing to do with wrong so he will not come to rescue you from the precipice of destruction in which you have cast yourself (35).

Matrilineal laws also involved property rights. "Women shall be considered the progenitors of the Nation. They shall own the land and the soil. Men and women shall follow the status of the mother" (42).

The Great Law safeguarded the order and peace of society in many other ways. There were no majority decisions quenching the concerns of the minority. Any decision had to be unanimous. At the council fire, the chairman

was provided with an eagle wing to clear the agenda of extraneous issues and a great black pole to flick aside crawling or subversive things. By its method of counseling, the council strove for harmony and attained unanimity through regularized procedures and set committees. Often unable to roll their words into one bundle, they could always, like a university faculty, bury the issue in the ashes.¹⁷

The power of the Lords was checked and balanced by the power of the people lodged in the General Council of the women and that of the men (46). Moreover, the character requirements of a "Lord" were strict:

The Lords of the Confederacy of the Five Nations shall be mentors of the people for all time. The thickness of their skin shall be seven spans—which is to say that they shall be proof against anger, offensive actions and criticism. Their hearts shall be full of peace and good will and their minds filled with a yearning for the welfare of the people of the Confederacy . . .

It shall be the duty of all of the Five Nations Confederate Lords, from time to time as occasion demands, to act as mentors and spiritual guides of their people and remind them of their Creator's will and words (37).

Integrity was more emphasized than intelligence and personal power, since it was believed that "naturally superior" men would be influential anyway and might become too powerful if made into Confederate chiefs. Also, war chiefs could not at the same time be League chiefs.¹⁸

An important part of the Great Law is the creation of symbols which remind the participating nations of their unity and their obligations.

I am Dekanawidah [sic] and with the Five Nations' Confederate Lords I plant the Tree of the Great Peace.

.....

Roots have spread out from the Tree of Great Peace, one to the north, one to the east, one to the south and one to the west.

The name of the roots is the Great White Roots and their nature is Peace and Strength.

.....

We place at the top of the Tree . . . an Eagle who is able to see afar. If he sees in the distance any evil approaching or any danger threatening he will at once warn the people of the Confederacy (30).

A bunch of shell strings (wampum) is the symbol of the Confederacy's council fire (44); five arrows bound together represent the unity of the five nations (45). The most dramatic image of peace is the uprooting of the tall pine tree which they had planted:

[I]n uprooting the tree a chasm would form so deep that it would . . . reach the swift current of the waters under it, into which the weapons of war would be thrown, and they would be borne and swept away forever by the current so that their grandchildren would never see them again. And they then uprooted the great tree and they cast into the chasm all manner of weapons of war which their people had been in the custom of using, and they then replaced the tree in its original position (102).

All political processes in the spirit of Dekanawida are sacred rights and obligations, binding the people to the Great Creator as well as to all of nature.

Whenever the Confederate Lords shall assemble for the purpose of holding council, the Onondaga Lords shall open it by expressing their gratitude to their cousin Lords and greeting them, and they shall make an address and offer thanks to the earth where men dwell, to the streams of water, the pools, the springs and the lakes, to the maize and the fruits, to the medicinal herbs and trees, to the forest trees for their usefulness, to the animals that serve as food and give their pelts for clothing, to the great winds and the lesser winds, to the Thunderers, to the Sun, the mighty warrior, to the moon, to the messengers of the Creator who reveal his wishes and to the Great Creator who dwells in the heavens above (32).

Added to this religious aspect of political affairs is, in the Condolence Ritual, the psychological one. The Haudenosaunee developed subtle psychological insights, on the personal as well as the social level, at a time when Europeans were still ignorant in these matters.¹⁹ The Condolence Ritual is always prompted by the death of a high chief.

Far beyond being merely comforting, it is an amazingly beautiful paean to life, culminating in the “resurrection” of the deceased in the form of his ritually installed successor. The two moieties, or halves, of the League—Mohawks, Onondagas, and Senecas on the one side, and Oneidas and Cayugas on the other—confront each other in the ritual. The group that has lost a high chief—either by murder or by natural death—is pictured as a grieving widow who has to be comforted by the other group. They try to clear her eyes of tears and her throat and ears of the ashes of grief. She is envisioned as being unable to grasp reality or see the sun. The corpse is provocatively elevated between the groups, but in the progression of the ritual it is lowered and finally flushed to the underworld (B143). The “water-of-pity” is poured down the throat of the grieving tribes for the purging of depression, paranoia, gall trouble, and all kinds of other havoc created by death, “the Being Malefic in Itself” (B154), “the Faceless One, the lineaments of whose face our ancestors failed to discern, the Great Destroyer” (B144).

Now, verily, therefore, they take up the Water-of-pity and now, then, let them say, “We now pour into thy body the Water-of-pity.” Oh, my offspring, it shall, therefore, come to pass when this “Water-of-pity settles down in thy body it shall at once begin the work of restoring to order the organs which have been disarranged and disordered in thy body, and will bring order to thy mind also; all things will be restored and readjusted (B146).²⁰

In the case of a murdered chief, the ritual is designed to assuage the urge for revenge or possibly even for cannibalism. Twenty strings of wampum are to be paid to the aggrieved party in case of a murder (B155). Here definitely an attempt is made to overcome the ancient tradition of blood feuds by rational means of compensation.²¹ In the end, the mourners can once more perceive reality when the comforters “beautify again the sky” for them, as Dekanawida did for Hayonwatha (B51). The “duty of requickening” comes to a climax when the matron who owns the title of the deceased chief takes the arm of the newly elected successor and raises him to full stature to face the expectant clans. Eating and drinking and amusements with dream tellings end the ceremony. The men are invited to dance with the women of the opposite moiety, which symbolizes the restoration of social order.

Besides the Dekanawida narrative, the Great Law, and the Condolence Ritual, we have many other sources today, written as well as oral, which give us insight into Haudenosaunee tradition. They all confirm the basic understanding of reality expressed in these texts. The

Haudenosaunee social organization cannot be called a matriarchy. It is rather an attempt to balance the powers between the sexes.²² Women did not take care of government affairs, but they would choose, admonish, or depose the men who did. Women did not go to war, but no war could take place without their consent. They could simply withhold the necessary supply of dried corn and moccasins for a war of which they did not approve. Before the Revolutionary War, every Haudenosaunee *ohwachira*—an organized body of persons tracing descent from a common mother—elected a woman trustee chief on grounds of ability and character. She had highest authority, but never acted without advice from other mothers of her *ohwachira*. Women trustee chiefs had the power to adopt a whole tribe as a sister people or to decide whether an individual prisoner should be adopted, tortured, or killed. Adult women had the right to call for a council and to cast votes not only for themselves, but for their children as well. They also had the power of referendum, that is, they could propose for discussion “any questions which might be agitating the minds of the people.”²³ Besides owning all land and houses, women named and owned their children.

For more specifically religious matters, women as well as men were elected as “Faith-Keepers” for life, being entrusted with the proper observance of rituals and the counseling of individuals. Such women were also in charge of psychiatric cures. Women “were present at all public rituals and joined in the dances.”²⁴ In the homes, grandmothers would hold family prayers of thanksgiving. Women’s power of fertility was needed for plant growth. A woman could work magic at night by dragging her garments over the cornfield. At the midwinter festival, women, men, and children confessed their sins in public. At the Dream Feast, not bad deeds, but bad thoughts were purged from the tribe, and the women saw to it that everything was done properly. A Faith-Keeper called at each longhouse—the typical Haudenosaunee structure for home as well as Council house—to ask its matron about the dreamers in her family. Five days of the festival might be occupied with bringing the fears and worries of the year, as they appeared in dreams, out into the open to be interpreted by the group. “The Iroquois planter made everyone’s mental worries a group matter. The whole group must help with the cure or the whole group would suffer,” because repressed or uninterpreted bad dreams might come true.²⁵

Where, then, did this seemingly perfect system of social order fail? The French overpowered the confederacy militarily in the seventeenth century, and the American colonies could not forgive them their

loyalty to the British Crown in the eighteenth. What was basically a Stone Age culture could not withstand attacks of Iron Age nations. But there were also “inside” failures. The Hurons and other neighboring groups were jealous and afraid of the powerful Confederacy. Peace negotiations according to the laws of the League often seemed fruitless. In a series of military victories in the seventeenth century, the Haudenosaunee destroyed or adopted a great number of groups who were either their direct enemies or allies of those who became their fiercest foes, the French.²⁶ The Great Peace had become a military crusade for maintaining that peace. If we look back into some details of the League’s laws, we can understand the development:

When the Confederate Council of the Five Nations has for its object the establishment of the Great Peace among the people of an outside nation and that nation refuses to accept the Great Peace, then by such refusal they bring a declaration of war upon themselves from the Five Nations. Then shall the Five Nations seek to establish the Great Peace by a conquest of the rebellious nation (52).

Another problem built into the “Constitution” of the Five Nations was the lack of legal representation by adopted foreign nations. It hurt the pride of these nations to be admitted by courtesy only, and this in turn discouraged other groups from joining the League. The Haudenosaunee practiced racial discrimination by calling themselves the *Ongwehonweh* (original beings), thereby assigning second-class status to all other nations.²⁷

All of these flaws, however, are paralleled in modern Western society. The Haudenosaunee military reasoning is completely in line with modern-day arguments—in East as well as West—for a “just war.” Notions of racial superiority and a disregard for the rights of ethnic minorities have not been overcome by any of the superpowers. Contemporary nuclear issues threaten us as intergroup warfare threatened the Haudenosaunee; war might imply annihilation of all who engage in it.

Cannibalism and blood feuds, the other issues Dekanawida tried to overcome, have their parallels in our day. Extravagant amounts of beef-eating and other thoughtless consumerist habits seem to devour the very “flesh” of Third World nations.²⁸ Mistaken notions of nationalism lead to feuds as senseless as tribal revenge. Brutal torture, for which the Haudenosaunee at one time were famous because they used it as a means to test the courage of their prisoners before killing or adopting them, is still practiced in “left-wing” as well

as “right-wing” countries, as any Amnesty International report demonstrates. The task, then, is to keep searching for old or new ideas and practices which might lead beyond self-defeating old habits. We can be challenged by the great vision as well as by the failures of the Haudenosaunee, just as we are challenged by the Judeo-Christian origins as well as by later perversions of this tradition.

In summary, the epic of Dekanawida challenges our ways of looking at women, religion, and peace in the following ways:

1. The Haudenosaunee had worked out a balance of power between the sexes. Although all hunting and gathering groups accorded women a major role in their everyday affairs, the Five Nations excelled in developing an intricate political system on this basis.

The Haudenosaunee also tried to overcome personal and social injustice and senseless violence by some acts and attitudes our society usually considers “feminine,” and therefore too innocuous and ineffective to establish political peace. Visions, dreams, and supernatural powers; comforting the grief-stricken to keep them from insanity and revenge; considering the physical and emotional needs of “evil” persons and even submitting at times to the authority of former “enemies”; ritually “singing away,” that is, praying over, a cannibal’s demonic spirit—all these gestures seem far removed from the harsh facts of contemporary international tension. However, as long as we disregard the psychological roots of warfare and murder, e.g., artificial “enemy images” or the fear of losing face and space, we will not achieve peace. As long as women are kept out of high-level decision-making, national policy will lack balance and equality, and politicians will lack the nurturing qualities needed to build a social structure of peace. As long as a leader proclaiming, “I have a dream . . .” has to die to effect political change, we have not understood the practical power of dreams.

2. The Confederacy remained a sacred institution. The chiefs were and remain priests. However, each group, even the newly adopted ones, freely practiced its specific religious traditions.²⁹ The Haudenosaunee saw statecraft, like all of life, as dependent on powers beyond their understanding and control, but also as a sacred responsibility toward all of creation, including generations “whose faces, still unborn, are coming toward thee” (B157). Even in our day, almost every ceremony begins and ends with a Thanksgiving Speech, reminding those present of their kinship with the sun (“our elder brother”), the moon (“our grandmother”), the earth (“our mother”), corn, beans, and squash (“our sisters”). Also berries and herbs, rivers

and trees, winds and birds are mentioned.³⁰ The anthropocentric Western religions could benefit from being reminded of ties to the whole cosmos and of our inability to achieve peace without concern for worldwide ecology, the stewardship of the earth, not just of one nation.

3. The Haudenosaunee did not think of peace as mere absence of war, but as a just social order, the health of society, divine law.

To the Iroquois, peace *was* the law. They used the same word for both . . . In their thought peace was so inseparable from . . . life . . . that they had no separate term by which to denominate it. . . . The root word which, in various combinations, is used to express "peace" [among the Haudenosaunee], is the same as that used for "noble" and "the Lord" in their translations of the Bible.³¹

The spirit of Dekanawida can challenge us to think of peace as divine and human justice, public as well as private order, built on common psychological truths and social needs. American Indian religion has often been regarded as *mythos*, not *logos*, as "primitive" in comparison with the so-called "higher" religions.³² Actually, the Haudenosaunee belief in a male Creator deriving power from his grandmother, Sky-Woman;³³ their certainty of *orenda*, an impersonal spiritual power inherent in all plants, animals, and human beings; and their strong expression of gratefulness to the deity are only some of the traits which make this religion comparable to any of the world religions. Patriarchal religion and politics have strongly influenced the Haudenosaunee. But to this day the women show a remarkable self-assurance,³⁴ and the rational, mechanical aspects of Western culture have not erased the nations' powers of intuition and ritual. "There is life here for the people ... in the belly of this story," as Leslie Silko puts it.

Notes

¹Leslie Marmon Silko. *Ceremony*. (New York: New American Library, 1977) 2.

²See Alan R. Velie. *American Indian Literature: An Anthology*. (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1979) 3.

³It is hard to define the Dekanawida-Hayonwatha materials in terms of genre. If I use the term "epic," I realize that it may not be appropriate in all respects, but it indicates the function of the story beyond what the terms "myth" and "narrative" imply. In the title of this article I use the term "ritual" for the combination of the narrative, the Great Law, and the Condolence Ritual, because in a larger sense American Indian stories are rituals, and vice versa. I have dealt more specifically with various literary aspects of the Dekanawida

story in *Women, Ethnics, and Exotics: Images of Power in Mid-Nineteenth-Century American Fiction*, (Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1983). Parts of this article are taken from the last chapter of that book.

⁴The two main texts of the narrative and the Great Law which are available in print were published by William N. Fenton as "The Constitution of the Five Nations," Book III of his volume *Parker on the Iroquois* (Syracuse: Syracuse Univ. Press, 1968) 1-155. Arthur C. Parker, partly of Seneca ancestry, was a renowned anthropologist of the 1920s whose monographs on the Iroquois were edited by Fenton. The first of these texts was written down by the Mohawk Seth Newhouse (1842-1921) in Indian English and reviewed by Albert Cusick, a New York Onondaga-Tuscarora. The second version is an official compilation of the chiefs of the Haudenosaunee Council, approved by them in 1900. It originated in the chiefs' dislike for the Newhouse version, but the latter remained the more popular form.

Besides these two printed versions, there are manuscripts in the hands of William Fenton, the most important one going back to chief John A. Gibson, the acknowledged native authority of this tradition, who died in 1912. Fenton translated Gibson's Onondaga text with the help of various native speakers.

Paul A. Wallace retold the story of the Iroquois League in *The White Roots of Peace* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Philadelphia Press, 1946), merging various versions, including those of Fenton's manuscripts. Fenton himself summarized the history of the texts and its implications for contemporary Haudenosaunee in "The Lore of the Longhouse: Myth, Ritual, and Red Power," *Anthropological Quarterly*, 48 (1975), 131-147.

The most up-to-date edition of the Condolence Ritual is found in John Bierhorst, ed., *Four Masterworks of American Indian Literature: Quetzalcoat/ The Ritual of Condolence/ Cuceb/ The Night Chant* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1974), 121-183.

⁵Anthony F.C. Wallace. "The Dekanawideh [sic] Myth Analyzed as the Record of a Revitalization Movement." *Ethnohistory*. 5 (Spring, 1958) 118-130.

⁶See Thomas E. Sanders and Walter W. Peek, eds., *Literature of the American Indian* (Hollywood: Glencoe Press, 1973) 187, and Peter Farb, *Man's Rise to Civilization: The Cultural Ascent of the Indians of North America*, rev. 2nd ed. (New York: Dutton, 1978) 90f.

⁷William N. Fenton. "The Lore of the Longhouse." *Anthropological Quarterly*. 48 (1975) 139.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid., 133. Fenton speaks against the search for the one true version. My merging of the available versions is, of course, not exhaustive, but is merely pointing out the highlights pertaining to my topic.

¹⁰Page references in parentheses within the text are from Fenton, *Parker on the Iroquois*, except for references to the Condolence Ritual, which will have a B added before the number because they are from John Bierhorst, ed. *Four Masterworks of American Literature*. (NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1974).

¹¹Ibid., intr., 110.

¹²The Parker texts do not mention Hayonwatha's cannibalism and relate that part of the story to Thadodahho.

¹³In the Newhouse version, Hayonwatha loses seven daughters through the wiles of Ohsinoh, a famous shaman. In the Chief's version, the accident relates to his third and last daughter, who was pregnant, not to his wife.

¹⁴According to the Parker texts, Dekanawida alone heals Thadodahho.

¹⁵The cure through singing is mentioned only in the Newhouse version. About the power of song in another Native American tradition, see Ruth Underhill, *Singing for Power: The Song Magic of the Papago Indians of Southern Arizona* (1938; rept. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1976). About the great resurgence of singing among the Haudenosaunee since 1964, see the text accompanying three records of *Iroquois Social Dance Songs*, published by Irocrafts, Ohsweken, Ont., Canada.

¹⁶Fenton, "The Lore of the Longhouse," 140, interprets the "seven crooks" removed from Thadodahho's body as "monstrous sexual organs."

¹⁷Ibid., 142.

¹⁸Elizabeth Tooker. "The League of the Iroquois: Its History, Politics, and Ritual." *Handbook of North American Indians*, vol. 15, Bruce G. Trigger, ed. (Washington, D.C. Smithsonian Institution, 1978) 429.

¹⁹Wilcomb E. Washburn. *The Indian in America*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1975) 24.

²⁰The term "offspring," which could also be translated as "nephew," is used by the three "elder" nations (Mohawks, Onondagas, Senecas) for the two "younger" nations (Oneida, Cayuga), who in the ritual play the part of the mourning widow. Kinship terms were used in all proceedings of the five nations. In fact, one aspect of Dekanawida's vision is simply the projection of kinship relations to a political level. See Fenton, "The Lore of the Longhouse," 131.

The "Water-of-Pity" is reminiscent of actual Haudenosaunee medical practice. A midwife would drop an infusion of poplar bark down a baby's throat to purge its bowels, and a hunter could be revived by dropping a sacred Little Water medicine down his throat. See Bierhorst, *Four Masterworks*, 177. Physical, psychological, and religious wholeness cannot be separated in American Indian beliefs. Barre Toelken makes this point with respect to the Navahos in his report "Seeing with a Native Eye," in *Seeing with a Native Eye: Essays on Native American Religion* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976) 11: "The Navahos would say that there is probably nothing that can be called nonreligious," and 14f.: "For the Navaho . . . almost *everything* is related to health. For us health is a medical issue."

²¹Tooker, "The League of the Iroquois," 423f. For a similar struggle to abolish the law of retaliation for murder among the Cherokees in the early nineteenth century, see Thurman Wilkins, *Cherokee Tragedy: The Story of the Ridge Family and of the Decimation of a People* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1970) 27, 38. The Cherokee Blood Law had demanded the spilling of blood whenever somebody had been killed, whether accidentally or not. A fugitive from justice had to be substituted for by a relative who, though innocent, would die.

²²Irene Schumacher's *Gesellschaftsstruktur und Rolle der Frau: Das Beispiel der Irokesen* (Berlin: Duncker & Humboldt, 1972) 136, points out that there was no *complete* equality between the sexes among the Haudenosaunee. Women were too much tied to the home and were in the end dependent upon the men's willingness to follow their counsel. But the relative balance of authority between the sexes has been confirmed by ethnologists for all hunting and gathering societies. The classic study in this respect is still Frederick Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, in the Light of the Researches of Lewis H. Morgan*. With an Introduction and Notes by Eleanor Burke Leacock (New York: International Publishers Co., Inc., 1942, 1972. See also Karen Sacks, "Engels Revisited: Women, the Organization of Production, and Private Property," in *Woman, Culture and Society*, ed. by Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1974) 207-222; and Ruby Rohrlich-Leavitt, Barbara Sykes, and Elizabeth Weatherford, "Aboriginal Woman: Male and Female Anthropological Perspectives," in *Women Cross-Culturally: Change and Challenge*, ed. Ruby Rohrlich-Leavitt (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1975) 567-580.

²³J.N.B. Hewitt. "Status of Women in Iroquois Polity Before 1784." *Smithsonian Institution Annual Report*. (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1932) 485.

²⁴Ruth M. Underhill. *Red Man's Religion: Beliefs and Practices of the Indians North of Mexico*. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1965) 177.

²⁵Ibid., 179.

²⁶Paul A.W. Wallace. *White Roots of Peace*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1946) 47-52.

²⁷See Parker, "Constitution of the Five Nations," 50, and Wallace, *White Roots of Peace*, 54. Fenton, in his introduction to Parker's texts, states that the term "implied their racial superiority." "The Constitution of the Five Nations," 9.

²⁸A basic book on this subject is Frances Moore Lappe's *Diet for a Small Planet* (New York: Ballantine Books, Inc., 1971).

²⁹See Frank G. Speck, *The Tutelo Spirit Adoptions Ceremony*. (Harrisburg, PA: Historical Commission, 1942) 2.

³⁰See Elizabeth Tooker, "Iroquois Since 1820," in *Handbook of North American Indians*, 456.

³¹Wallace, *White Roots of Peace*, 6f.

³²See Walter H. Capps's Introduction to *Seeing with a Native Eye*, ed. by Walter H. Capps 2; and Ake Hultkrantz, "The Contribution of the Study of North American Indian Religions to the History of Religions," *ibid.*, 89, 93.

³³An artistic as well as textual introduction to the Haudenosaunee beliefs about creation is the 1982 *Akwesasne Notes Calendar*, available from Akwesasne Notes, Mohawk Nation, via Rooseveltown, N.Y. 13683.

³⁴See Randle, "Iroquois Women," 170, 180.

Critique

Herzog's article is organized around three threads which she proposes as useful for strengthening the fabric of contemporary U.S. society. The three threads, teased from an exploration of a portion of the Dekanawida-Hayonwatha stories (narrative and ritual of the Haudenosaunee) are:

1. the high status of women in Haudenosaunee society
2. the understanding of statecraft as a sacred responsibility toward all creation
3. peace as justice and wholeness in the social order.

The threads found in stories dating back to about the 15th century provide a view of beliefs denominated by the Haudenosaunee society as being praiseworthy and of good report.

Traditions and rituals are not a mirror of reality. Indeed they are often developed as a formal goal, exceeding the grasp, for what should be valued rather than what is. As goals unconsummated by the present generation, stories may be set forth seeking a promise of fulfillment by the next.

The *Bible's* Psalm 78, for example, provides a different culture's similar acknowledgement of the use of stories for educating, training