

...To the Other Side of the Sky: Catholicism at Kahnawake, 1667-1700

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RÉSUMÉ

Cet article décrit le développement du catholicisme chez les Mohawk de Kahnawake, le plus vieux centre permanent de résidence des autochtones au Canada, situé à dix milles au sud-ouest de Montréal. L'auteur soutient que la conversion au catholicisme chez les Mohawk a été une tentative consciente d'articuler, exprimer et réinterpréter les traditions religieuses et politiques comprises dans le récit épique de création *Tharonhiawakon* et dans la Grande Loi de la Paix. La pratique du catholicisme à Kahnawake est revue dans la perspective des ces traditions.

The Mohawk village of Kahnawake is best known as the home of the "Blessed" Kateri Tekakwitha, the "Lily of the Mohawks". Kateri is the first Native American to be made a candidate for canonization by the Roman Catholic Church. She was beatified on June 22, 1980 by Pope John Paul II in St. Peter's Basilica. Kateri's life is well documented, as is the religious milieu of the Kahnawake village during her lifetime. The Jesuit historian, Claude Chauchetiere, described Kahnawake's "conversion" to Catholicism in his *Annual Narrative of the Mission of Sault St. Louis*¹ (JR 63: 101-245; Blanchard 1981). A contemporary

¹ Kahnawake [The Place by the Rapids] was called "Sault St. Louis" by the French. The Kahnawake Mohawk in turn were called "Indians of the Saut" by both the French and the English. The Iroquois name for this northern Mohawk village was Kahnawake, a designation that appears as Caughnawaga, Cognawaga, Cagnawaga, etc. in the literature. There are well over seventy forms of the spelling

of Chauchetiere's, Pierre Cholenec, also wrote letters after Kateri's death discussing her influence on the Jesuit mission at Kahnawake (Cholenec 1676a, b). Later historians such as Charlevoix (1744), Burtin (1891, 1884), Devine (1922) and Bechard (1976) have also written extensively on this subject. The long interest of the Catholic Church in Kateri Tekakwitha has insured that a good deal of information about her life and times has been recorded and survived. Any individual nominated for canonization by the Church has his/her life submitted to a close scrutiny by the Sacred Congregation of Rites, which compiles a complete dossier on the candidate. Kateri's dossier, or *Positio*, documents her life and the miracles that have been attributed to her intercession since her death (Holland 1940).

The great interest in Kateri and in early Kahnawake on the part of the Church has been a boon to research as well as a serious disadvantage. Not surprisingly, all of the major writers on Kahnawake's founding years have been Roman Catholic priests, and most of these have been missionaries at Kahnawake, actively involved in promoting Kateri's "cause" within the Church. In order to understand Kateri's life, the practice of Catholicism amongst the seventeenth century Iroquois [at Kahnawake and in the other settlements as well], and the birth of the "Praying Indian" villages²

of the village's name that appears in historical documents and in the literature. A partial listing appears in Volume One of the *Handbook of the North American Indians* (Hodges 1907). The Kahnawake settlement was located on the south shore of the St. Lawrence River, ten miles west of Montreal. The village moved five times, advancing progressively west, but always remaining in the same general vicinity. These migrations are described in the *Jesuit Relations* and summarized in Devine (1922). For an excellent summary of Mohawk history, discussing the relationship of the northern and southern Mohawk groups see Fenton and Tooker (1978).

² A discussion of the "Praying Villages", reserve settlements of Christian natives, located near European towns or forts, is offered in James Axtell's essay "The Invasion Within" (1981). While Axtell certainly covers most of the bases, he makes a serious mistake of treating the natives of the northeast as a homogeneous cultural group. Axtell does distinguish the French Jesuit methods of conversion from the English Puritan and Anglican, but in an effort to treat both as a single response to barbarism, fails to detect subtle, yet decisive differences. Finally, it should be pointed out that the English "Praying Indian" towns were in fact regarded as cesspools for storing the remnants of societies now lost to war, disease and migration. The natives of the English Praying Towns were never a force to be reckoned with; they were rather, internment camps for the vanquished. The French Praying towns [like Kahnawake], however, were not populated with the vanquished.

in North America, a broader, cultural context to conversion must first be developed. Such a task requires detailing the events surrounding the establishment of Kahnawake, and employing interpretive skills to view these events, as the Iroquois lived them. Specifically, the Kahnawake Mohawk's "conversion" to Catholicism must be examined in light of: 1. traditional Iroquois world-view, 2. Iroquois religion, and 3. the historical context of early Iroquois contact with the French.

I. IROQUOIS WORLD VIEW

The most salient aspect of Iroquois world view of concern here is that dealing with the perception the Iroquois had of this world, the "Sky World", and passage between these two. As Daniel Brinton has pointed out, the Iroquois had no concept of *creatio ex nihilo* (1868). Rather, they posited the existence of a "Sky World" and believed the earth to be a duplication of that world. This process of duplication was initiated when Aientsik, the earth mother, fell from the sky, was rescued by a flock of geese and laid to rest upon the carapace of the Great Turtle.

Iroquois culture was also regarded as a duplication of the Sky World. For example, when the Iroquois culture hero, Okwiraseh, established the sequence of Iroquois ceremonialism, he did so saying: "So then I leave the four ceremonies or ritual matters which are before you. I have patterned [these] after the ceremony as it is being carried out in the place where the earth meets the sky. And it is actually so [because] the pleasure of those in the upper sky is most important. So then, I patterned from there because I decided and desired that the ceremonies that will be going on here on the earth, on the under side of the sky, shall be the same as those" (Hewitt 1928: 560). The similarities between the upper world "beyond the sky" and the earth are further symbolized

Kahnawake was vital to the defense of New France. St. Francis [Abenaki] kept the New England frontier in a constant state of unrest until the close of the Seven Years War. What is more important, the French "Praying Indians" knew of their value to the French and the English and maximized their pivotal role between the two and manipulated the French and the English to gain the best advantage over both.

by the two names given to the principal spirit of the Iroquois pantheon. In some instances this "man-being" is referred to as Tharonhiawakon, and in others as Dehaenhiyawakho, meaning "He Holds Up the Sky" and "He Holds Up the Earth", respectively. According to Hewitt, this dual meaning reflects the Iroquois belief that the Sky World and the Earth were similar (Hewitt 1895).

Initially, the task of transforming the earth into the image of the Sky World was assumed by Tharonhiawakon, Aientsik, Okwiraseh, Haduigowa and the other man-beings from the "other side of the sky". On the eve of his last day on earth, however, Okwiraseh passed this responsibility on to man, charging him to continue the process of creation by transforming the earth: "I have planted human beings on the earth for the purpose that they shall beautify the earth by cultivating it, and dwell therein. Now he saw that he the Elder Brother came up over it and caused it be daylight on the earth here present, and that the daylight was beautiful and the light rays were beautiful and it was agreeably warm" (Hewitt 1928: 511). Okwiraseh also promised to remain in contact with man and through dreams to communicate his wishes to the earth in this way.

The important place of dreams within Iroquois world-view was established by the early writers of the *Jesuit Relations* [JR]; (see also Tooker 1964: 86-91; Wolf 1919: 35-41; and Wallace 1958). In addition to these writers, others such as Lafitau (1974 (I): 231-236), Charlevoix (1961 (II): 156) and La Potherie (1722) have all commented upon the importance of dreams for the Iroquois. Anthony Wallace's analysis of Iroquois dream-beliefs deserves special mention in this context. In his essay "Dreams and Wishes of the Soul: A Type of Psychoanalytic Theory Among the Seventeenth Century Iroquois" (1958) Wallace presented the Iroquois "culture of dreams... as a useful escape valve in Iroquois life. In their daily affairs, Iroquois men were brave, active, self reliant and autonomous; they cringed to no one and begged for nothing. But no man can balance forever on such a pinnacle of masculinity, where asking and being forgiven are unknown. Iroquois men dreamt; and without shame, they received the fruits of their dreams and their souls were satisfied" (1958: 247).

Citing Ragueneau's *Relation* of 1649 as a case in point, Wallace argued that the Iroquois themselves looked upon dreams with this

"Freudian perspective". In his *Relation*, Ragueneau writes that "in addition to the desires which we generally have that are free, or at least voluntary in us [and] which arise from a previous knowledge of some goodness that we imagine to exist in the thing desired, the Huron believe that our souls have other desires, which are, as it were, inborn and concealed. These they say, come from the depths of the soul, not through any knowledge, but by means of a certain blind transporting of the soul to certain objects; these transports might be in the language of philosophy called *Desideria Innata*, to distinguish them from the former, which are called *Desideria Elicita*."

"Now, they believe that our souls make these natural desires known by means of dreams, which are its language. Accordingly when these are accomplished, it is satisfied; but on the contrary if it not be granted what it desires, it becomes angry. Most of the Hurons are very careful to note their dreams, and to provide the soul with what it has pictured to them during sleep" (Kenton 1927 (I): 503-504).

What Ragueneau fails to disclose is the ultimate source of these "dreams and wishes of the soul" in Iroquois world view. Dreams were believed to originate on the "other side of the sky", and most likely with one of the man-beings of the upper world. "Tarenawagon, said the Wise Ones, informed the soul of what was needed through the medium of the dream" (Wolf 1919: 43). This belief was reported in many of the *Relations*, for example in a dream divination described by de Quens in 1655. According to de Quens, the dreamer awoke and informed his village that he had received a visit from Tharonhiawakon. Speaking for the Sky Holder, the dreamer said: "I am he who holds up the Sky, and the guardian of the earth; I preserve men and give victories to warriors. I have made you masters of the Earth and victors over so many nations: I made you conquer the Hurons, the Tobacco Nation, the Ahondihronnons, Tiraguenrek... In short, I have made you what you are: and if you wish me to continue my protection over you, hear my words and execute my orders" (Kenton (2): 80-81).

Because of their importance and place in Iroquois world-view, dreams were ritualized, their meanings guessed and fulfilled. The Iroquois believed that failure to satisfy a dream would result in sickness to the dreamer (Hewitt 1928: 610; JR 33: 189; JR 17: 163;

JR 10: 169). Dreams were considered in planning a military campaign (JR 10: 183; JR 33: 225; JR 23: 153-155). Dreams could dictate conditions of trade, diplomacy and were given great weight in national and local councils (JR 10: 171). In some cases, dreams would inspire social and cultural movements that ultimately led to a complete restructuring and revitalization of Iroquois society. Most notably, the role that dreams played in the revitalization of Handsome Lake comes to mind here (Parker 1913: 22-24; Wallace 1969).

II. IROQUOIS RELIGION

Iroquois religion must be understood as a mode of communicating and travelling from the earth to the other side of the sky. For the Iroquois, religion was a contract between the *ongwe honwe*, or “real men” of the earth, and the *ongwe shona*, or “first people” of the Sky World. The terms of this contract were simple: 1. men agreed to feel thankful and content for the good works of creation and the beings of the other side of the sky agreed to continue to provide the earth’s bounty; and 2. the men of earth agreed to continue the work of creation, and the man beings of the Sky World agreed to continue to provide direction and inspiration to this activity through dreams. Both feeling thankful and dreaming then, were regarded as important religious obligations for the Iroquois.

Iroquois tradition states how, after the earth was formed and the Sky Holder had returned to the other side of the Sky, men forgot their obligation to feel contentment for the earth and they began fighting amongst themselves. At this time, the culture-hero Okwiraseh, appeared and instituted four rituals that were to be performed at different seasonal festivals throughout the year. These four rituals are: The Great Feather Dance, the Skin Covered Drum Dance, the Man’s Personal Chant, and the Great Bowl Game. The purpose of these four rituals was also made quite clear by Okwiraseh: “Then you human beings shall too assemble yourselves. The whole body of people must assemble. So then I ordain for you that you shall in the first place, mutually rejoice yourselves; in the next place, that you shall mutually congratulate one another that so many persons again see the new [season]...

So then it will come to pass thus, that all persons will rejoice; they must keep thinking, "I am thankful that I am alive, and in good health, and that I have again seen the performance of the ceremony that he ordained for us... (Hewitt 1928: 560).

In addition to these four rituals, Okwiraseh ordained that at midwinter, the human beings should act out and guess the meanings of their dreams from the previous year (Blau 1963). In the event that a man did not dream, or could not recall his dreams, Iroquois culture prescribed certain rituals for inducing a dream-consciousness. Among these were the sweat lodge, often combined with fasting, chanting, self mutilation, and other means of sensory deprivation.

The Iroquois' use of the ritual sweat lodge is well documented. Lafitau describes their use among the Mohawk, and they are described in the *Jesuit Relations* as well. From the *Relations* we learn that sweating and fasting were regarded as common in the Sky World (JR 10: 155-157) and that after a sweat, a man was charged with great spiritual power. From Le Jeune's *Relation* of 1653 we learn that the Iroquois used sweat lodges to induce dreams, prior to making decisions about upcoming military campaigns (JR 60: 181). The 1637 *Relation* describes the construction of a sweat lodge: "On this day the sorcerer Tonneraouanont, who was beginning to play his pranks in this village, and had undertaken to cure the sick, came towards evening to have a sweat in our cabin, to get knowledge of this disease. They crossed four or five poles in a ring, making a sort of little arbor, which they surround with the bark of a tree. They crowded within this, twelve or thirteen of them, almost upon one another... In the middle there were five or six large, red-hot stones. As soon as they entered they covered themselves, as usual with robes and skins, in order to retain this heat" (JR 13: 203). In James Smith's description of a Kahnawake Mohawk sweat lodge, the participants poured a combination of herbs, tobacco and water over the hot stones (Smith 1978: 110). Smith's account also includes the text of certain prayers uttered in the sweat lodge ritual. The *Jesuit Relations* contain instances of sweat lodge participants addressing their souls (JR 13: 213), or singing about their dreams and war songs (JR 19: 259).

Other means were also used to induce dream-consciousness. The *Relations* mention staring at fire (JR 8: 123) or water (JR 33:

193-195). Some individuals were able to induce dreams by shaking turtle shell rattles for long periods of time (JR 15: 179) or else by singing themselves into a frenzy (JR 33: 195). Finally, one of the most common methods involved extended fasting (JR 13: 237; Lafitau 1974 (I): 219). Fasting was sometimes associated with the vision quest that took place in many Native American societies at the time of puberty (Benedict 1923). Fasting was associated with seclusion (Hewitt 1903: 142) and believed by the Iroquois to increase power. Rituals of fasting and seclusion were described and analyzed by Converse (1908: 107-110), Lafitau (1974 (I): 236, Hewitt (1910: 178), Waugh (1919: 153) Goldenweiser (1913: 470) and Shimony (1961: 215-216).

Although lacking extensive references, we know that on some occasions the Iroquois combined fasting with self mutilation as a means of inducing a vision (JR 12: 69-71). Additionally, the use of fetishes, charms and other potents has been described at Kahnawake by Lafitau and attributed to creating trances: "We see them go visibly into the state of ecstasy which binds all the senses and keeps them suspended. The foreign spirit appears to take possession of them in a palpable and corporeal manner and so to master their organs as to act in them immediatly. It casts them into frenzies of enthusiasm and all the convulsive movements of a sybil... In this state of enthusiasm their spirit seems absorbed in that which possesses them. They are no longer themselves» (1974 (I): 243). Yet another example of shamanism and clairvoyance is contained in O.M. Spencer's journal of captivity, describing a Kahnawake woman's life in the Ohio Valley (Spencer 1968: 116-117).

III. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In addition to the cultural context presented above, Kahnawake's involvement with Catholicism demands an appreciation of certain historical events that preceded formal establishment of the Kahnawake settlement on the south shore of the St. Lawrence River in 1667. Among these are: (1) early contacts between the Jesuits and the Iroquois, (2) the effects of trade on Iroquois religion, and (3) Mohawk motives for establishing a settlement at Kahnawake.

1. *Early Jesuit-Iroquois contacts.* The Jesuits became involved with proselytization from the very foundation of the colony of

New France.³ Initially Jesuit efforts were directed towards the Montagnais and other Algonquin peoples living on the north shore of the St. Lawrence River. The Jesuit superior in New France, Le Jeune, soon became discouraged by the Jesuit's lack of success among the Montagnais, a fact that he attributed to the difficulties experienced by the missionaries in leading a nomadic life-style⁴ (JR 6: 147). Le Jeune expressed great hope that the Jesuits would be able to re-focus their efforts among the Huron and other sedentary Iroquois nations (JR 6: 61). When this effort was undertaken, the Jesuits did in fact meet with considerable success. However, as the writers of the *Relations* admitted, "conversion" to Catholicism did not eliminate the observance of tradition amongst the Huron. In some instances, individuals received baptism because they were instructed to do so in a dream (JR 15: 73; 17: 137; 23: 171). The Huron regarded the Jesuits as powerful medicine men and "sought baptism almost entirely as an aid to health" (Tooker 1962: 88). Also, the Jesuits were believed to be able to control the weather, to see into the future, and to have abilities attributed to traditional Iroquois shamans (JR 8: 97; 10: 95, 109; 17: 119).

³ It is important to point out that the Jesuits employed methods of proselytization distinct from those of their Franciscan and Dominican counterparts in South and Middle America. As Peter Duignan has shown, the Jesuit posture was "to assume a thousand masks, being all things to all men and with holy cunning accepting the limitations imposed by the local situation. Rather than destroy and condemn what they found, they tried to re-shape and re-orient existing practices and beliefs in order to establish a common ground on which to begin conversion" (1958: 726). See also George Healy's essay on "The French Jesuits and the Idea of the Noble Savage" (1958) for a discussion of Jesuit perception of native culture.

⁴ In the *Relation* of 1633 the Jesuit, Le Jeune, wrote "I may be mistaken; but if I can draw any conclusions from the things that I see, it seems to me that not much ought to be hoped for from these savages as long as they are wanderers; you will instruct them today, and hunger snatches your hearers away, forcing them to go and seek their food in the rivers and the woods" (JR 6: 147). Four years later the Montagnais [the subject of Le Jeune's 1633 *Relation*, were soundly defeated by the Iroquois. On April 27, 1637 the Montagnais approached Le Jeune and asked for assistance in establishing a permanent settlement near Quebec City. "We have said he, [the Montagnais chief] two powerful enemies who are destroying us, - one is our ignorance of God, which is killing our souls; the other is the Hiroquois, who are slaughtering our bodies" (JR 7: 163). Together, the Jesuits and Montagnais established Sillery, the first of the French Praying Indian towns. Unlike the later Iroquois mission, the Sillery "reserve" was a refuge for the castoffs of war. As soon as the Montagnais made peace with the Iroquois, however, they had no more need for Sillery and they resumed their nomadic lifestyle.

Huron beliefs about the Jesuits were often supported by circumstance and accident. In one incident reported in the *Relations* a medicine man blamed a drought on a Jesuit cross. The people of the village ordered the priest to take down his cross, and the Jesuit refused. He then explained to the people how Catholics prayed for rain, and fortunately for him, it rained. Such incidents reinforced the belief amongst the Huron that the Jesuits were powerful medicine men, an image that the priests were not quick to discourage.

After the defeat of the Huron in the Iroquois-Huron wars in 1648, many Huron converts were adopted into settlements of the Five Nations. These converts were ministered to by French missionaries to the Five Nations such as Isaac Jogues and Pierre Fremin. This wholesale adoption of the Huron by the Iroquois had two important effects on future developments of Iroquois religion: (1) the Five Nations Iroquois came to share many of the Huron attitudes and beliefs about the Jesuits, and (2) the adoption of the Catholic Huron contributed an element of complexity to traditional Iroquois society. Missionaries like Isaac Jogues attempted to use this stature in their conversion efforts. In Jogues' case, the ploy clearly backfired.⁵

2. *Effects of contact on Iroquois religion.* Missionary work and trade were inexorably bound together in New France. As Ragueneau

⁵ Isaac Jogues was captured in 1642 by a band of Mohawk warriors and brought to the village of Ossernenon [west of Albany on the Mohawk River] where he was adopted into the Turtle Clan. Jogues ministered to the needs of the adopted Catholic members of the community and regularly preached the gospel. Also, in typical Jesuit fashion, Jogues encouraged the widely held belief that his mass kit and altar were powerful sorcerer's tools. On one occasion Jogues threatened to use these tools to bring death and disease to the Mohawk if they did not accept his religious teachings.

Jogues managed to escape from the Mohawk and to book passage from Albany to France. He was resolved, however, to return to the Mohawk Valley and resume his mission. Consequently, soon after he arrived in France, Jogues petitioned his Jesuit superiors to allow him to return to North America. This request was granted and in his last written communication he wrote: "I shall go and not return, but I shall be happy if God will accomplish the sacrifice I have begun, and if the blood I have spent in that land, be as the earnest of that which I will give with all my heart from all the veins of my body" (Withrow 1886: 52).

In his absence from the Mohawk Valley, Jogues' prophecy had proven true and the Mohawk had suffered an outbreak of smallpox. Now, when he reappeared in their midst, a warrior struck Jogues dead with a single blow of a war axe.

pointed out, trade was considered "necessary for the maintenance of the faith in all these regions, for the good of the French colonies, and the support of New France" (AN 5, (4): 22). Where the Jesuits and the Intendant disagreed, however, was over the question as to whether or not to sell brandy to the natives. French commercial interests in competition with Dutch and English traders felt it necessary to exchange brandy for furs. Although the Jesuits tried to prevent this practice, and even succeeded in having a Royal Proclamation issued preventing the use of brandy in the fur trade, its use continued to play an important role in the economy of New France.

The Iroquois soon came to regard alcohol as a means of inducing dream-consciousness. In one case reported in the *Jesuit Relations*, a missionary was attempting to ascertain if an Iroquois captive had been baptized. The following exchange took place: "Ask him, said the father, if he is baptised, and what he is called. "What is that", he replies, "to be baptised?" "That", the Indian who was questioning him said, "is to receive the water of great importance which effaces all the spots and stains from our souls". He - who imagined that this water of importance of which they meant to speak was brandy, and that there was none better in the world - exclaimed, "Ah! the Dutch have often given me of that water of importance; I drank so much of it and became so tipsy that it was necessary to bind my feet and hands for fear I should injure some one". Everyone began to laugh at that fine baptism" (JR 29: 153-155).

In an early monograph on the use of brandy in New France, *Histoire de l'Eau de vie en Canada*, François Vachon de Belmont discussed the association made by the Iroquois between the dream quest and drinking. Belmont wrote that the Iroquois believed that through drinking brandy, they would "experience a new sort of elation that promptly and effectively achieved the end of taking them out of themselves" (Belmont 1952: 46). More recently, the anthropologist Edmund Carpenter has written on this subject. According to Carpenter, "the seventeenth century Iroquois used alcohol to stimulate their mystical faculties. The various configurations around dreaming and the vision quest, present in their culture long before liquor was introduced, quickly became associated with it" (Carpenter 1959: 148).

The Jesuits noted when supplies of alcohol were scarce that it was a common practice for the Iroquois to combine small amounts of alcohol into one, large aggregate. "When they have only enough brandy to induce drunkenness for only one, if four are present, three will not even take a taste. But one will be chosen to have the privilege of becoming inebriated. Many say that they cannot become intoxicated on a single glass of brandy, that there is only one degree of drunkenness worth while, the sort which they call "*gannontiouaratonseri*", complete insobriety. And when they begin to feel the effects of the brandy they rejoice, shouting, "Good, good, my head is reeling". Then, they begin to chant their "*gannonhaoury*", into which they put all the evil that comes to mind" (JR 61: 159). Belmont made similar observations in his *Histoire* (1952: 52).

3. *Mohawk motives for founding Kahnawake*. The Mohawk had a number of reasons for establishing a village at Kahnawake.⁶ The Mohawk desired free trade with all of their native neighbors, the French and the English. This trade was disturbed from 1609 until 1666 during the Iroquois Wars. Although a formal peace was not negotiated between the French and the Five Nations until 1701, by 1666 the Mohawk had already initiated this process. Thus, by 1667 the Mohawk were able to settle close to Montreal and to exploit the valuable St. Lawrence beaver trade. In addition to the obvious economic advantages gained by settling on the St. Lawrence River, the Mohawk had other reasons for establishing this new settlement as well.

It is clear that in the early part of the seventeenth century, the Iroquois came to regard alcohol as a ritually effective sub-

⁶ Jesuit writers have tended to treat the Kahnawake Mohawk as outcasts from the more traditional villages along the Mohawk River. Such a contention ignores three important facts: (1) The Mohawk regarded the lands from the Mohawk River Valley as far north as the St. Lawrence Valley as their own. The Mohawk name for the Island of Montreal is *Kawenote Teiontiakon*, meaning "The Place Where the People Divide", a reference to the frontier character of the St. Lawrence Valley. At the time of contact, the Mohawk had been temporarily evicted from their northern lands by the Montagnais. (2) The Kahnawake site was ideal for defense purposes. The village was protected by the Lachine Rapids, and Lake St. Louis. Finally, (3) the Kahnawake site allowed the Iroquois to completely dominate the fur trade. So successful were the residents of Kahnawake in this last respect that by the mid-eighteenth century two thirds of the furs coming through Canada were channeled through Kahnawake to illegal markets in Albany (see Trelease 1962).

stance for inducing dream-consciousness. Soon, however, the Iroquois learned of the debilitating effects of alcohol. They learned that constant use created a dependency and that traders tended to cheat them of their furs when they drank. The frequent use of alcohol reduced the sacred efficacy of the induced dream-consciousness, a state of being that is appreciated for its novelty. By the decade of the 1660's the Relations contain numerous references to problems in Iroquoia arising from drunkenness. By the time peace was tentatively made with the French in 1666, there were sufficient numbers of Iroquois prepared to establish a new settlement, one that would prohibit the consumption of alcohol.

Establishing a new settlement in the north also solved another problem stemming from the Five Nation's adoption of so many Catholic Huron. As Fenton and others have pointed out (1951) Iroquois culture allowed for a great deal of ritual diversity from local settlement to local settlement. However, within the local settlement, total participation in religious ceremonies was expected. Such total participation was not possible for those settlements that included Catholics. The Catholics had ceremonies that did not have the support of the non-Catholics; and the Jesuits who ministered to the Catholics discouraged their converts from total participation in the traditional ceremonies. At the new village of Kahnawake, Catholic Mohawk could practice their religion and still remain active in the affairs of the Mohawk Nation and the Iroquois Confederacy. Also, because the village was newly established in 1667 it was possible to prohibit the use of alcohol within its bounds, before a tradition of its use could become established. In this latter concern, both the Mohawk and the Jesuit were in complete agreement.⁷

⁷ When the prohibition against alcohol was relaxed in the mid-eighteenth century, there was an exodus from Kahnawake. Throughout seventeenth, eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth century Iroquois history, alcohol has symbolized the very worst aspects of European culture. When the Seneca prophet, Handsome Lake preached his visionary gospel of renewal, one of the targets of his attack on white culture was alcohol. Also, it is interesting to note that when members of the Kahnawake settlement left the St. Lawrence Valley to reclaim lands in the Adirondaks, one of the first rules instituted as the new settlement of Ganienkeh was one prohibiting the consumption of alcohol within the settlement. The irony is that oftentimes when people from Ganienkeh wish to drink, they travel back to Kahnawake. The original village of abstinence has become a center for the consumption of alcohol.

IV. CATHOLICISM AT KAHNAWAKE

The Mohawk residents of Kahnawake were called the "Praying Indians" by the French and English. Amongst their own people the Kahnawake Mohawk were known as *ongwe honwe tehatiisontha*, or "Real Men Who Make the Sign of the Cross". From the very beginning the consumption of alcohol was strictly prohibited at Kahnawake. Claude Chauchetiere reports that the expression "I am off to Kentake" [Kahnawake's first site] came to mean "I am swearing off drinking" for the Iroquois (JR 63: 128). Chauchetiere also writes that a pole was erected outside of the Kahnawake village, symbolizing the pledge to give up drinking alcohol. All new members of the Kahnawake community were required to hang the vice of alcohol on this pole before entering the village.

The enforcement of the prohibition against drinking alcohol was the responsibility of the war chief and the "dogique" at Kahnawake. Both of these positions were filled by the traditional Iroquois council at the village. This council collaborated with the Jesuits in preventing French traders from opening up a tavern in Kahnawake and nearby Kentake. The prohibitions were described in the *Relation* of 1679: "What has placed this mission in the good condition which will be made evident in the course of our account, and what has maintained it in its fervor during the twelve years since it was established has been the fundamental law that has always been observed, by which no drunkenness is suffered therein and no persons are received who are addicted to that vice, unless they are resolved upon correcting it. They are admonished to this effect the moment they offer themselves as residents here; and are publicly notified, on the part of all the elders, that, if they become addicted to this sin, they will be expelled" (JR 61: 239).

Not satisfied with enforcing this prohibition in just their own settlement, emissaries from Kahnawake travelled south to preach against drinking in the Mohawk River villages (JR 62: 69). The effects of these efforts were soon seen at Kahnawake: "The fame of this excellent regulation having gone abroad through all the villages of the Iroquois, the effect has been that in large numbers they leave their own country, in which the excesses which drink causes are horrible; so that in order to free themselves from them,

they come and settle down in this territory, in which, as they say, there is no drinking. It is this which has populated this mission with Iroquois, who are continually flocking to it from all the nations, especially from that of the Mohawk" (JR 61: 239-242). By the year 1679, two thirds of the Mohawk were in residence at Kahnawake, a fact that greatly disturbed the English.

The Jesuit opposition to alcohol was more fundamental than a concern over their converts' welfare, and extended to other, more traditional religious practices of the Iroquois. For the Iroquois, getting outside of the confines of one's body was considered a religious experience. Morality was deeply personal and was defined for the individual Iroquois in the course of a dream, trance, or a vision quest. The community did not participate in having the dream, only in helping the individual dreamer to guess its meaning and make it come true. For the Jesuit, on the other hand, the laws of morality emanated from a single god, and were the same for all men. Jesuit commitment to reason and logic was a commitment to discovering these laws of morality. Even the "Spiritual Exercises" of St. Ignatius Loyola exhibit this proclivity towards the rational.

The Kahnawake Mohawk received no opposition from the Jesuits about honoring the festivals and rituals of thanksgiving (Shea 1855: 303). The eight major festivals were celebrated throughout the year, and in some instances were joined to equivalent Catholic feast days. For example, the Harvest Festival coincided with the Catholic feasts of All Souls and All Saints; Green Corn coincided with Corpus Christi; Midwinter with the Feast of Circumcision, and so on. These festivals are still celebrated in this fashion at Kahnawake today.

The Jesuits did not offer their support to dream divinations and the rituals used to induce dream consciousness. In fact, they were opposed to these practices before Kahnawake was established, but powerless to prevent them (Kenton 1927 (2): 191-192). At Kahnawake they were credited with more rights and able to enforce their wills, within certain restraints. It must be pointed out that while Kahnawake was a community of Catholic Mohawk, it was none-the-less a traditional Iroquois settlement located within the national bounds of the Mohawk territory of Kanienkeh. Decisions that were made in and for the Kahnawake community were made in a traditional Iroquois council, according to the precepts of the Great

Law of Peace. However, because of the close proximity of the settlement to Montreal and the respect accorded to the Jesuits, some compromises were necessary. The Jesuits made these compromises occasionally (Duignan 1958) and the Mohawk made them as well. Thus, when the decision was made to ban dream divination at Kahnawake, the people carried this mandate out: "Last Autumn, an old man asked to be allowed to live here [at Kahnawake] with his rather numerous family, and this favor was granted him. Shortly afterward he gives a feast; and the inhabitants of the village being present there at, he declares that he is ill, and that he must fulfill a dream in order to be cured. The leader of our Christians rises at once, and says aloud, in the name of the assembly: "No, that shall no be done, for it would be a sin. We will eat what thou hast prepared for us only after having prayed to God". This was done" (JR 58: 85).

The requirement for dreaming, or else inducing a dream-consciousness was integral to Iroquois religion and world view and could not be entirely dispensed with at Kahnawake. The problem faced by the Mohawk was to develop a ritual means for travelling to the "other side of the sky", consistent with their own, traditional beliefs, and compatible with Catholicism. Such a ritual was developed in the form of *hotouongannandi*, translated by Chauchetiere as "public penance" (JR 64: 125).

Chauchetiere described the practice of "public penance" at Kahnawake in a letter to his brother in France: "You will be pleased to hear from me respecting the austerities practiced by certain savage women - Although there may be some indiscretion in their doing so; but it will show you their fervor. More than five years ago, some of them learned, I know not how, of the pious practices followed by the nuns in Montreal who are hospital sisters. They heard of disciplines, of iron girdles, and hair shirts. This religious life began to please them very much and three of them formed an association, in order to commence a sort of convent; but we stopped them, because we did not think that the time had yet come for this. However, even if they were not cloistered, they at least observed Chastity; and one of them died with the reputation of sanctity three years ago this Spring. They, and some others who imitated them would be admired in France, if what they do were known there. The first who began made her first attempt about Christmas in the year 1676, when she divested herself of her

clothing, and exposed herself to the air at the foot of a large cross that stands in our cemetery. She did so at a time when the snow was falling, although she was pregnant and the snow that fell upon her back caused her so much suffering that she nearly died from it, as well as her child, whom the cold chilled in its mother's womb. It was her idea to do this – to do penance for her sins, she said. She has had four companions in her fervor who have since imitated her. Two of them made a hole in the ice, in the depth of winter, and threw themselves into the water, where they remained during the time that it would take to say a rosary, slowly and sedately. One of the two who feared that she would be found out, did not venture to warm herself when she returned to her cabin but lay down on her mat with lumps of ice adhering to her shoulders. There have been several other inventions which men and women have discovered for the purpose of tormenting themselves, and which constitute their usual exercise of penance" (JR 62: 175-177).

Two items require clarification at this point: the source of the Mohawk women's knowledge of the practices of the nuns in Montreal, and traditional Mohawk attitudes towards virginity. Chauchetiere maintains that the women in question never visited Montreal. In fact, such visits were quite common before Chauchetiere arrived in the village in 1678. By the time Chauchetiere was in residence at Kahnawake, the village had moved upriver to the Lachine Rapids, making transport to Montreal by canoe much more difficult. Apparently the custom had been discontinued by that time. Earlier *Relations* allude to Mohawk women visiting Montreal and spending time with the Hospital Sisters at Hotel Dieu and Marguerite Bourgeoys' community, the Congregation of Notre Dame. Kateri Tekakwitha is known to have visited Montreal and the nuns with Father Pierre Cholenec and some other companions in 1676. She was a guest at the Hotel Dieu and witnessed the practice of "culpa" by the sisters. She was not responsible for introducing these practices to Kahnawake however, where by this date they were already in full use.

⁸ The "dogique" was a man chosen in council to lead prayers and instruct catechumens. The early *Jesuit Relations* refer to this individual as the "Captain of Prayers"; in Iroquois terms the dogique probably corresponded to the Pine Tree Chief, or to the "Faith Keepers" of the Handsome Lake epoch.

It was Kateri, however, who first proposed forming an association of virgins at Kahnawake. Traditionally the Iroquois believed that virginity created great power in an individual and communities maintained special residences for women who chose to remain virgins. These "convents" were supported by the community, the women seldom leaving the confines of the longhouse selected for their use. Lafitau writes that this custom was in effect "until the arrival of Europeans who made foolish virgins of them by giving them brandy. At Onondaga they [the virgins] came out of their retreat intoxicated and did a thousand extravagant things in the village; at Agnie [Mohawk country] they did the same thing and, when some of them had too conspicuously dishonored their profession, the elders were so much ashamed of them that they resolved in the council to secularize these irregular girls whose scandalous conduct had dishonored the tribe" (Lafitau 1974 (I): 130). Iroquois virgins were called *Ieouinnon* (*ibid*: 129).

At Kahnawake, in a milieu free of the contaminating influences of alcohol that had destroyed the tradition of ritual virginity among the Iroquois, it was again possible to resurrect this institution. One, early celibate group that was formed at Kahnawake was described by Chauchetiere: "The women, to the number of eight or ten, began the practice; and the wife of the dogique - that is to say, of him who Leads the Singing and Causes the Prayers to be said aloud; and in this capacity she assembled the devout women of whom we have spoken, who call themselves sisters. They tell one another their faults, and deliberate together upon what must be done for the relief of the poor of the village... The sort of monastery that they maintain here has its rules. They have promised God never to put on gala dress [for the savage women have some taste, and take pride in adorning themselves with porcelain beads; with vermillion, which they apply to their cheeks; and with earrings and bracelets]. They assist one another in the fields; They meet together to incite one another to virtue; and one of them has been received as a nun in the Hospital of Montreal.

"There are married people here who have for a long time lived as brother and sister. There are aged women, veterans of the faith, who instruct others as missionaries would do, and God thereby supplies the want of these which we experience" (JR 62: 179-181).

From Chauchetiere's *Relation* of 1689 we learn that "many confraternities are being founded among them... with the object

of mutually assisting one another to live as Christians and to prepare themselves for the most heroic actions" (JR 64: 125). One of these confraternities was called "Kateri's Band" and was composed of women devoted to an imitation of Kateri's spirituality.

Severe mortifications and penances were witnessed by the Jesuits at Kahnawake often giving rise to some concern on their part (JR 63: 217). "Savages, both men and women, covered themselves with blood by disciplinary stripes with iron, with rods, with thorns, with nettles; they fasted rigorously, passing the entire day without eating, - and what the savages eat during half a year is not sufficient to keep a man alive. These fasting women toiled strenuously all day - in summer working in the fields; in winter cutting the wood. These austerities were almost continual. They mingled ashes in their portion of Sagmite; they put glowing coals between their toes, where the fire burned a hole in the flesh; they went bare legged to make a long procession in the snows; they all disfigured themselves by cutting off their hair, in order not to be sought in marriage" (JR 63: 219).

Kateri's austerities were particularly well known: "During her lifetime she made an agreement with a friend to make each other suffer, because she was too weak to do so by herself, owing to her continual illness. She had begged her companion to do her the Charity of severely chastising her with blows from a whip. This they did for a year without anyone knowing it, and for that purpose they withdrew, every Sunday, into a cabin in the middle of the cemetery; and there, taking willow shoots, or thorns, which here are very long; but since they have heard of disciplines, of iron girdles, and of similar instruments of penance, the use of these daily becomes more general" (*ibid*).

The Kahnawake converts learned the language of Catholicism and justified their penances with reference to sin. When the Jesuits assured the natives that they had sufficiently suffered for their sins, the Mohawk then insisted on suffering for sins they were yet to commit, and for the sins of their neighbors. Some women included their children in these mortifications and explained that this was done "for the purpose... of teaching [the child] penance in good season. The mother stood there on account of her past sins; she kept her innocent daughter there on account of sins to come, which this child would perhaps commit when grown up" (JR 63: 219).

In his study of "Altered States of Consciousness" that appeared in *Trance and Possession States* (Prince 1966) Arnold Ludwig isolates five "methods" for producing altered states of consciousness. These are: 1) a reduction of stimulation, 2) an increase in stimulation, 3) increased alertness or mental involvement, 4) the presence of somatopsychological factors, and 5) decreased alertness. In Kahnawake's early years (1667-1700) we see indications of culturally accepted practices that reflected four of the five "methods" listed above. These are: 1) the reduction of stimulation brought on through the isolation and confinement of Iroquois virgins, 2) the greatly increased stimulation produced through the practice of "culpa", including bathing in ice water, beatings, and other rituals of self inflicting pain, 3) increased mental alertness brought about through repetitious prayer, and 4) somatopsychological conditions created by the hypoglycemia that accompanies fasting.

The Jesuits were hesitant to write of these effects at Kahnawake, and tried to discourage the practice of culpa. However, in one unpublished letter by Pierre Cholenec we see an indication of the affect of culpa on one Mohawk woman's consciousness. This letter was written in February of 1680, three months before Kateri Tekakwitha's death. "Of these two young women, who are Mohawks... there is one especially who is small and lame, who is the most fervent, I believe, of all the village, and who, though she is quite infirm and nearly always ill, does surprising things in these matters. And she would beat herself unmercifully, if she were allowed to do so. Something quite important happened to her lately, which Father and I could not marvel enough at.

"While scourging herself as usual with admirable ardor [for she exceeds in this particular over all the other women, with one exception of Margaret] and that in a very dark spot, she found herself surrounded by a great light, as if it were high noon, lasting as long as the first shower of blows, so to speak, of her scourging, for she scourged herself several times. Insofar as I can judge from what she told me, this light lasted two or three misereres" (Cholenec 1680).

⁹ Jacques Cartier recorded the presence of a virginal society at Hochelaga while on his 1534 exploration. He mistakenly referred to the group as a brothel (Cartier 1924: 186).

The Jesuits unwittingly contributed to the creation of a ritual system for allowing Iroquois to travel again, to the other side of the sky. For example, when they preached to the Iroquois about the "Holy Spirit" they used the Iroquois expression "Rotkon" (Hewitt 1928: 608-609). Other forms that appear in the *Jesuit Relations* are *ocki*, *okhi*, *oki*, *onkagui*, *ogui*, *oski*, and *otkis*. Variants of this cognate also appear in Lafitau and in Abbe Piquet's Mohawk catechism, as well as a Kahnawake Mohawk translation of the Gospels made by Joseph Onosahenrat. Hewitt notes that *otkon* is "the common Iroquois descriptive epithet and name applied to any object or being which performs its functions and exercises its assumed magic power or *orenda*... The term is often applied to fetishes and to similar things. As a qualifier it is equivalent to the English mysterious, monstrous, devilish, or rather, demoniac; but as a noun, or name, to monster, demon, devil, goblin, witch, or wizard" (Hewitt 1928: 608-609). *Otkon* is also the base for *hotouongannandi*, the term used by the Iroquois to describe their practice of "public penance". In fact, *hotouongannandi* literally translates as "They are making magic", a reference to the affective impact of culpa on the Mohawk. In effect, by referring to penance in this fashion, the Iroquois acknowledged that the practice helped to elevate them out of the ordinary and experience the reality of the sky world.

Hotouongannandi was by no means the only route to religious ecstasy at Kahnawake. Another popular devotion, already discussed, involved the repeated recitation of the rosary, a devotion similar to the religious chanting practiced traditionally by the Iroquois. Such devotions were known in European convents and monasteries to induce hallucinations and extended trances. Catherine of Sienna for example, was known to have experienced union with Christ while reciting the rosary. Catherine was the patron saint of Kateri's band and a popular focus of devotion in early Kahnawake. Repetitious prayer is also known to have contributed to similar visions for the Carmelites John of the Cross, Theresa of Avila and Theresa Lisieux. Chauchetiere's 1681 letter to his brother describes these practices at Kahnawake: "There is a savage woman who says the rosary fully twenty times a day; and another who says it six times in her day, by dividing it in a very ingenious fashion. They find out all their devotions by themselves, for they call one Rosary, that, "of the five wounds", another "the rosary of the ten virtues of

the Blessed Virgin... another "The Rosary of the twelve beads... All of these are recited while they are going to or returning from their fields. Here is also something touching. While making my rounds in the village at eight or nine o'clock in the evening, I have heard the air resound on all sides with voices issuing from all of the cabins. All were saying their prayers aloud, before retiring to rest; and this is done every night, not a single person failing to do so. Thus have these former maneaters become lambs through the grace of Jesus Christ" (JR 62: 181-183).

The Jesuits obviously regarded the recitation of the rosary an important devotion at Kahnawake. When the missionary Luc Nau wrote to France to ask a benefactor for support he noted that he personally required nothing but that the natives "were in need of everything" (JR 69: 37) and requested Mde. Aulneau to send rosaries to the mission. Nau even specified the kind of beads preferred by the Mohawk: "My only recommendation, with regard to these beads, is that they be of six decades, and that the wire chain they are strung on be stronger" (*ibid*).

Just as the founding members of the Kahnawake village had travelled throughout the other Iroquois cantons preaching abstinence from alcohol, so by the dawn of the eighteenth century, apostles from Kahnawake brought word of *hotouongannandi* to the Iroquois. Soon, the zeal and devotion of Kahnawake was evident in the southern Iroquois villages and became the subject for discussion in the *Relations* (JR 61: 167-237). By the year 1720, most of the proselytization amongst the Iroquois was performed by the Mohawk, freeing the Jesuits for service in the west.

CONCLUSIONS

When in 1979 the Postulator General for Jesuit Causes, Father Jerome Fajella, reviewed Kateri's life, he wrote that "to be properly understood, these penances [of Kateri's] must not be considered without taking into account the Iroquois background against which they were practiced" (Bechard 1979: 21). When such a consideration is made, the extremes of Catholicism at Kahnawake begin to make sense.

For the Iroquois, the universe traditionally consisted of the earth and the place "on the other side of the sky". Iroquois religion

reflected this dualism and the continuity between the earth and the sky world and required that individuals maintain the balance between these two worlds by remaining forever content, and by communicating with the other side through dreams. These dreams would either come naturally, and then be made public, or else they would be induced through some ritual means. At the time of first contact with the European, alcohol was introduced to the Iroquois through the fur trade and it soon became a ritual ingredient in the vision quest. As the dangers of using alcohol became evident, however, the Iroquois made definite moves towards discouraging its use.

After the settlement of the Peace of 1666, the Mohawk re-established their presence in the St. Lawrence Valley at Kahnawake. This "mission" settlement was a community of Catholic converts from the Mohawk Valley and adopted Catholic Hurons. In an effort to cooperate with the Jesuits, the residents of Kahnawake accepted certain compromises to their traditional ritual structure, although through the institution of *hotouongannandi* and other rituals acceptable to the Jesuits they retained the experience of the vision quest in their culture. The Kahnawake settlement also saw the renewal of another Iroquois tradition: communities of self-professed virgins, secluded from the rest of the settlement for spiritual reasons.

The drama of culture-contact at Kahnawake presents us with a case where both the natives and the Jesuits [representing the European society] evaluated and manipulated the culture of the other to secure the best end for themselves. The Mohawk were not witless followers of the Jesuits. They used the Jesuits to gain advantageous trade concessions from the French and had to give something up in return. What did they give? To the Jesuit's way of thinking, the Mohawk gave up their traditional religion and beliefs. In fact, the Mohawk modified their religious practices and developed a syncretistic system of ritual that yielded the desired affect, yet was compatible with Catholicism.

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