Imagining Governance to Save the Planet? Try the Great Law of Peace as a Model of Covenantal Leadership

By JACK MANNO

The gathering perfect storm of environmental crises and peak everything has prompted many proposals and initiatives for reforming existing international governance systems and/or creating new ones to avert catastrophe and/or create new social contracts for the aftermath.[1] Accomplishing the goals of these proposals—to reduce humanity's overall destructive impact on planetary life-support systems (degrowth)—appears unlikely yet inevitable. It is unlikely that enough people will take effective leadership yet inevitable that the task will be ours, whether by decision or necessity. The hope is that it can happen peacefully and be consistent with environmental and democratic ideals.

A twenty-first century governance system will need to be effective enough to counter powerful economic and political forces seeking to claim and control every last drop of increasingly valuable, remote, and dangerous fossil fuels and deep-mined raw materials.[2] Such governance will require an astonishing degree of either brute force or widespread and meaningful democratic legitimacy based on a citizenry of people who understand that their own and their children's fate depends on the success of their government and vice versa. If democratic ideals are to prevail, governance institutions will need to coordinate at the local level, where environmental crises are personally experienced, and simultaneously at the global level. The key to building new governance institutions that are both effective and democratic is a widespread sense of belonging, of solidarity among the citizenry, of fairness in shared sacrifice, and a widely accepted belief in individual responsibility for taking leadership for the effectiveness and fairness of the governance system.

What is crucial in these definitions of governance and leadership is belonging. A governance institution promotes conditions in which effective popular leadership can thrive only if the institution also stimulates and harnesses the powers of fellow-feeling, of belonging. Depending on the scale of governance, this can mean belonging simultaneously to a clan, a family, an enterprise, a neighborhood, a nation, and a planet. At the core of this sense of connectedness is recognition of interdependence. I benefit when those with whom I belong benefit and vice versa. Formal expression of right action and rules of proper behavior in a defined situation—in other words, policies—will be seen as legitimate to the extent that they are trusted and understood as advancing the welfare of the whole and, in turn, the welfare of the individual. Policies, and the governance systems that attempt to enact them, lose legitimacy when they are seen as deliberately benefiting some at the expense and exploitation of others, when the domination of some over others undermines the general sense of connectedness and interdependence. Similarly, a governance system and its leadership must associate themselves explicitly with an understanding that we all depend on and are responsible for the continued good functioning of ecological life-support systems on which all life and communities thrive.

People are far more likely to endorse governance that makes space for leadership to emerge, in other words, governance that encourages and responds to individual and popular initiative. As this argument makes clear, what can most undermine governance and leadership are narrow definitions of who belongs in the group and the conviction that what benefits one's group must come at the expense of a rival group. Thus the main task of environmentally responsible governance is the construction of shared identities of belongingness to communities of interdependence, the very definition of ecosystems, both local and global. As Aldo Leopold taught, the great task of a land ethic is to expand what constitutes the community for which one feels care and with which one experiences connection. In his words, "All ethics so far evolved rest upon a single premise: that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts. The land eth-

ic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants and animals, or collectively the land."[3] Multiple scales of governance of the type now required to move humanity toward sustainability must intensify this sense of connectedness that people experience, physically, psychically, and spiritually with their local communities and ecosystems while simultaneously being alert to a powerful connection and dependence on ecological and political stability at larger and smaller scales.

Ron Engel, a theologian and philosopher who was one of the drafters of the Earth Charter and an editor and author of the IUCN volume *Governance for Sustainability*,[4] argues that global institutions must rest on foundational political agreements with shared yet differentiated responsibilities. According to the authors of *Governance for Sustainability*:

> a sustainable society demands a people with a strong covenantal identity. Sustainability requires what a covenantal commitment alone can offer: sacrifices for the common good, including the survival and well-being of all members, self-limitations on individual and collective behavior, and responsibilities that reach across generations.

Are there governance models we can turn to as we imagine this sort of environmentally responsible, democratically legitimate, multi-scale governance? It's time to learn from the Great Law of Peace, the founding "Constitution" or "Covenant" of what is widely known as the Iroquois Confederacy but which is known by its citizen/members as the Haudenosaunee (People of the Longhouse). The Great Law of Peace was formed in a ceremony on the shore of Onondaga Lake at the southern edge of the Lake Ontario Watershed around a thousand years ago. It was the culmination of a conflict-resolution saga, which takes days to retell. At the ceremony, a man known as the Peacemaker inspired the leaders of five nations (Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca), who had been in a state of near-constant warfare and social turmoil for many years, to bury their weapons beneath a tall white pine, the Tree of Peace, and adopt a system of governance that formed tight social and political bonds between independent nations that recognize common interests and common dependence on the gifts of nature and common responsibilities to nature's laws.

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Incredibly, the Confederacy, under assault by settler colonialism and attempted cultural and physical genocide for nearly five hundred years, continues to deliberate at its capital at the longhouse in Onondaga, making it one of the longest continually functioning democratic institutions in the world. Haudenosaunee history tells us that the roots of the Tree of Peace grew out from Onondaga in the four directions and that any nation or people in the world can follow those roots back to their source; if the people are willing to live by the Great Law of Peace, they will find shelter there. In our time of environmental and social crises, we should begin to consider following those roots to find a governance model of a participatory democracy grounded in shared responsibility for ecological and human well-being.

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At the opening meeting of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in May 2012, the Haudenosaunee delegation suggested that they could help the world through sharing their experiences of governance:

> The universal laws of nature will prevail. These are the laws that direct the lives of indigenous peoples. Respect, understanding, adherence, and promotion of these laws are vital to our survival as a species. We can help here. We understand our relationship and responsibility to these laws. They are simple and absolute. We must work together: cooperation rather than competition. We must learn again to share, trials and tribulations as well as health and well-being. The Haudenosaunee ancient philosophy of "one dish, one spoon," to share equally—and these words that go with it, "Nobody owns the woods, but everybody is responsible," has guided us.
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> We are out of balance. There are over seven billion people in the world today. Each soul will need water, food, and a place to live. The crisis we face today is one of inequity—a lack

> of fairness for the people. We share in common with all life the need for water, food, and shelter. We must return to the concept of "one dish, one spoon." Of all the uncertainties in our lives today, there is one certainty and that is: our fate as nations and peoples is in our own hands; our conduct will determine what happens to us. At the end of our day, we will continue on a good life or suffer the consequences of wrong decisions.[5]

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The idea of taking lessons on governance from the Haudenosaunee is far from new. Donald Grinde and Bruce Johanson, working in collaboration with Haudenosaunee leaders and keepers of the stories of their ancestors, compiled considerable evidence of how the Iroquois Confederacy influenced the framers of the US Constitution. In 1988, a concurrent resolution was adopted by the 100th US Congress acknowledging "the contribution of the Iroquois Confederacy of Nations to the development of the United States Constitution." Congress noted that "the original framers of the Constitution, including, most notably, George Washington and Benjamin Franklin, are known to have greatly admired the concepts of the Six Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy," and that "the confederation of the original Thirteen Colonies into one republic was influenced by the political system developed by the Iroquois Confederacy as were many of the democratic principles which were incorporated into the Constitution itself."[6]

Johansen and Grinde report that Indian confederacies were widespread in North America at the time of the European invasion and had "evolved to co-ordinate governance across geographic distances that seemed huge to European eyes at the time, and to permit maximum freedom to nations within the confederations, and individuals within nations."[7] While the Great Law was a comprehensive international agreement involving all aspects of Haudenosaunee collective life, for our purposes it is most important to note that it specifically included and reinforced an ethic of responsible resource management, a perspective of respect and gratitude toward the natural world, a requirement to consider the impacts of decisions on future generations (those "whose faces are coming from beneath the earth"), and clear assignment of stewardship and leadership responsibilities.

Contemporary Haudenosaunee leaders have been instrumental since the 1970s in publicly warning of the coming environmental calamities. Haudenosaunee intellectuals and spiritual spokespeople carried the message from the Great Law in a collection of essays titled *Basic Call to Consciousness*.[8] In 1992, they helped organize a highly visible presence at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, the Earth Summit, and they were influential in the decades-long effort that led in 2007 to the United Nations General Assembly's adoption of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. According to the authors of *Basic Call*, "When the United Nations of the world was proposed toward the end of World War II, researchers were dispatched to find models in history for such an organization. For all practical purposes, the only model they found concerned the Constitution of the Five Nations, whose author had envisioned exactly that."

The 1970s, with its many political and cultural upheavals, was a crucial time for Indian Nations. They were embroiled in struggles and crises throughout the Americas. The Chiefs of the Grand Council of the Haudenosaunee Nations chose emerging young leaders among their people to carry a message. They were of a new generation, some college educated, all of them eloquent and precise speakers of English, able to articulate Haudenosaunee history, perspectives, and values in ways that the colonizers' heirs might understand. They set out together on a tour known as the White Roots of Peace. The roots referred to those of a tall white pine, the Great Tree of Peace. In 1977, the young speakers traveled to Geneva, Switzerland, to a meeting of NGOs credentialed to the United Nations. There they delivered a message, a Basic Call to Consciousness they called it. They told the NGO representatives that the economic and political systems that now controlled most of the Americas and much of the rest of the world was based on seeking ever more efficient ways to exploit and destroy. They warned the gathering in Geneva that "if these processes continue

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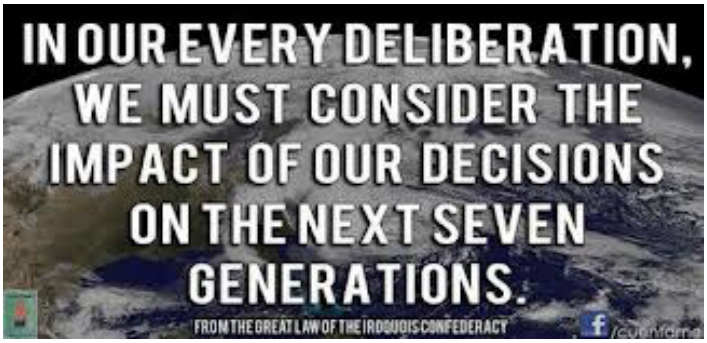
unabated and unchanged at the foundation of the colonizers' ideology, our species will never be liberated from the undeniable reality that we live on a planet of limited resources, and sooner or later we will exploit our environment beyond its ability to renew itself."

Nearly half a century later, at the first International Conference on Degrowth in the Americas, where this paper was first presented, scholars and activists met in Montreal to imagine and refashion economies and societies that acknowledge that limited resources preclude unlimited growth. Yet the growth imperative is deeply entrenched in our systems of governance and our cultures. Current governments depend on continuing high rates of growth for their legitimacy and effectiveness. And thus we find ourselves in concurrent environmental, political, and economic crises that open possibilities, perhaps even inevitabilities, that we re-form governance.

I suggest that we look at the Great Law of Peace as a guide, a model of what might be possible. The Great Law is a system of governance resilient enough to have survived over 400 years of sustained, deliberate, and vicious efforts to destroy it. As we consider models and rediscover the art of bringing people together to discuss civic values, such as democracy, participation, deliberation, rights, and responsibilities, we can look at a thoroughly tested and surviving model indigenous to Turtle Island (North America).



Some of the Haudenosaunee fundamental principles are covenantal, involving basic agreement on the core responsibilities of a human being. Many have their origins in the Great Law of Peace, while others like the Thanksgiving Address are much older and are attributed to the Original Instructions given to the Haudenosaunee by the Creator. They include the following:[9]

Righteousness. Also known as the "Good Mind," righteousness is an alignment of one's mind with natural law and the welfare of one's clan and nation.

Diversity within unity. Unity is necessary for individual and national development. Each individual has a responsibility to find and nurture one's special gifts given by the Creator, and the community is responsible for helping one identify and cultivate those gifts.

Freedom. This principle includes freedom from want, from coercion and violence. It also includes freedom of speech and freedom of religion.

Consensus. There is an expectation that extensive public debate will lead to consensus and the requirement that the process continue until it does.

Checks and balances. A complex system of checks and balances exists between nations, clans, war chiefs, and peace chiefs, and between women and men.

Condolence. The Peacemaker recognized that the Haudenosaunee were overwhelmed by grief from years of violence that clouded people's minds. The Great Law prescribes a way of greeting each other after a period of absence that involves a mutual ceremony recognizing the losses each person has endured since last they were together.

Gratitude. All meetings and important events begin with the "Thanksgiving Address," a ritual oration in which each element of creation is thanked for continuing to perform its duties and thereby making life possible.

Clear responsibility for the commons. The Great Law of Peace distinguishes between who is responsible for the land and resources in settled areas—the women—and who in the "woods"—men. Proper behavior and responsibility in both is delineated.

Open borders. People have full rights in any of the nations, except the right to hold high office, and that too can be granted to an individual through the designated process of appointing leaders.

Families and clans as fundamental social structure. Perhaps the most important social institution is the clan. Through the clans, which cross the Haudenosaunee Nations, international relations become family relations. All authority springs from them. Issues are discussed within the clans and presented to a clan council made up of women. The clan council selects the clan mother who chooses the chief to represent the clan in council. The process of selecting chiefs begins very early when a young boy is observed, importantly for how he treats women and girls. Everyone is born into one's mother's clan.

APPLYING THESE PRINCIPLES TO GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

The following are what I consider to be some of the

most important principles embedded in the Great Law of Peace:

Gratitude, duties, and healing. Because most of the important declarations and manifestos of "western" political history have been composed in response to a long history of harsh treatment and oppression, it is understandable that they emphasize primarily individual liberty and human rights. Yet environmental crises require everyone to grasp our dependence on healthy ecosystems, air, water, sunshine, and the rest of creation. Instilling within the institutions of global governance a ritual expression of gratitude that the earth and all the elements are continuing to carry out their duties as part of all decision-making meetings is important. It could help make gratitude and responsibility a part of everyone's awareness. A covenant that expresses the duties required of all human beings to live lightly and responsibly (like the Earth Charter[10]) should be a foundation of any new institution.

The central role of female authority. The balance of power designed by the Peacemaker includes balance between women's and men's power and responsibilities. Their roles are distinct and complementary. While the chiefs are men, women lead the clans. A person inherits her or his clan identity from the mother, and property is traditionally passed down through her family. A man was expected to join the longhouse of his wife. It is believed that when women watch the children they are also observing the future leaders. They may be more careful in decision making since they bring forth life and with that comes a fuller awareness of the future generations the Great Law requires be considered in all decisions. While gendered social roles are discounted in the contemporary dominant liberal social paradigm, it is certainly possible that what the Haudenosaunee consider women's authority could be embedded in global institutions in such a way as to be yielded by both women and men. But to fully adopt the Great Law as a model, a women's "standpoint" needs to be formally recognized and represented in global environmental institutions.

The Canandaigua, Two Row, and Haudenosaunee Confederacy Wampum Belts. Image by Lindsay Speer, 2008

Commons and ecosystem services. It is essential that new institutions recognize and support local control and responsibility for land and resources and in particular recognize traditional and native peoples rights and responsibilities for their homelands. This is particularly important if mechanisms to pay environmental caretakers for the work involved and riches forgone in maintaining and sustaining "exploitable" natural resources are utilized.

Sovereignty in an interdependent world. The Great Law clearly distinguishes between decisions of the clans and families and decisions to be made by the nation or the Confederacy. Outside of a fairly narrow range of decisions affecting the wellbeing of all the member nations, the Confederacy has little authority over the individual nations. The new institutions need to have a narrow mandate focused on international cooperation in environmental restoration and protection.

Clan identification. Perhaps the most important of the social institutions for stability and sense of identification with non-human nature is the clan system. Through it international relations become literally family relations. It may also be the most difficult to imagine in our new environmental institutions. Perhaps teams or clubs could be created. These clubs could be represented, somewhat in the way NGOs increasingly represent interest groups and social movements in international deliberations today. Membership could entail rights as well as duties, such as river-keepers, wolf allies, soil builders, foresters, midwives, tree doctors, keepers of the ceremonies, and others. A portion of a person's political representation might function through these clan-like groupings linked internationally. Remembering that the essential feature of the clan system is that everyone is born into one's mother's clan, mechanisms would be required to institutionalize female authority and matrilineal rights.

The new institutions should include a commitment to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. By recognizing and honoring the rights of indigenous peoples in all its deliberations, the new environmental institutions will communicate and col-

laborate with indigenous nations based on mutual respect, equity, and empowerment.

The Haudenosaunee Environmental Task Force, the environmental organization serving the Confederacy, has drafted an environmental protection process.[11] It proposes three questions to guide decision making: What effect will our decision have on peace? What effect will our decision have on the natural world? What effect will our decision have on future generations?

That sums up the meaning of the Great Law of Peace as a model for environmental governance.

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NOTES

1 See the Global Environmental Governance Project at www.environmentalgovernance.org/; see also F. Biermann, "Global Environmental Governance: Taking Stock, Moving Forward," Annual Review of Environment and Resources 33 (2008): 277-294.

2 See the recent the recent report by the Carbon Tracker initiative concerning the financial bubble in fossil fuel stocks at http://www.carbontracker.org/carbonbubble. For a discussion of the reasoning for keeping fossil fuels in the ground, see T. Princen, J. Manno, and P. Martin, "Keep Them in the Ground: Ending the Fossil Fuel Era," in Is Sustainability Still Possible? State of the World 2013, ed. The Worldwatch Institute (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2013), at http://www.worldwatch.org/bookstore/publication/state-world-2013-sustainability-still-possible.

3 Aldo Leopold, A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949).

4 K. Bosselmann, R. Engel, and P. Taylor, Governance for Sustainability: Issues, Challenges, Successes (Gland, Switzerland: IUCN, 2008), 47.

5 UNPFIP Network, "Haudenosaunee Statement on the Doctrine of Discovery," May 2012, at http://unpfip.blogspot.com/2012/05/haudenosaunee-statement-on-doctrine-of.html.

6 See US Senate, H. Con. Res. 331, 100th Cong. (1988), at http://www.senate.gov/reference/resources/pdf/hconres331.pdf. The Tuscarora became the sixth nation of the Haudenosaunee confederacy in 1722.

7 D. Grinde and B. Johansen, Exemplar of Liberty: Native America and the Evolution of Democracy (Los Angeles: American Indian Studies Center, 1991), 21., The Tuscarora became the sixth nation of the Haudenosaunee confederacy in 1722.

8 Akwesasne Notes, ed., Basic Call to Consciousness (Summertown, TN: Native Voices, 2005).

9 This summary is drawn largely from Paul Wallace, White Roots of Peace (Santa Fe, NM: Clear Light Books, 1994), Gregory Shaaf and Jake Swamps, The US Constitution and the Great Law of Peace (Santa Fe, NM: Center for Indigenous Arts and Cultures, 2004), and the many conversations and interactions I have had with Haudenosaunee leaders, faithkeepers, chiefs and clan mothers.

10 See the Earth Charter Initiative at www.earthcharterinaction.org/content/.

11 Brenda E. LaFrance and James E. Costello, "Haudenosaunee Environmental Protection Process (HEPP): Reinforcing the Three Principles of Goodmindedness, Peacefulness, and Strength to Protect the Natural World" in Preserving Tradition and Understanding the Past: Papers from the Conference on Iroquois Research, 2001–2005, ed. Christine Sternberg Patrick (Albany, NY: New York State Education Department, 2010), at http://www.nysm.nysed.gov/publications/record/vol_01/pdfs/CH06LaFrance.Costello.pdf.

THE TWO ROW WAMPUM RENEWAL CAMPAIGN

The Two Row Wampum Renewal Campaign is a year-long educational and advocacy effort to commemorate the first agreement (treaty) between the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois Confederacy) and the incoming Europeans, the Dutch, who at that time were entering and beginning to trade and settle near the "Eastern Door" of the Confederacy (Kanienkehaka [Mohawk] Country) around 1613.

Jack Manno and Shirley Hill during the Two Row Wampum trial run 2012.

The Haudenosaunee taught the sailors what foods they could gather, how to grow crops in this ecosystem, where to hunt, and how to survive. They encouraged trade and mutual understanding. An agreement was reached that welcomed the Dutch as long as they and their descendants agreed to live in peace and friendship, and with respect for the land and waters of this area. This agreement was recorded in a belt of beaded wampum, as was the custom of the Haudenosaunee (and other Native peoples), known as the Guswenta or the Two Row Wampum. The two rows symbolize the Dutch—in their sailing ships with their customs, songs, and ways of life—and the Haudenosaunee—in their canoes, with their customs, songs, and ways of life—traveling down the river of life together, respecting each others' ways, in peace and friendship as long as the grass is green, the sun rises in the east and sets in the west, and water flows downhill (forever). In the four hundred years since that agreement was made, its obligations have passed from the Dutch, to the English and French, to the United States and Canada. The Haudenosaunee Confederacy continues to meet at Onondaga (in central New York) and continues to believe that the Two Row describes our obligations to each other. The Two Row history also includes an understanding that the chain that secures our relations with each other must occasionally be polished and brightened. This is what this summer's paddle down the Hudson is all about. It is sponsored by the Onondaga Nation; the Neighbors of Onondaga Nation (NOON), an ally organization; and nearly one hundred additional co-sponsors. It is supported by the Grand Council of Chiefs of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy.

Over one hundred Native paddlers from over twenty territories, nations, and reservations—and an equal number of allies—will travel together down the Hudson River, from the likely location of the negotiations that led to the Two Row agreement in Albany to New York City. The symbolic enactment will begin with a cultural and educational festival in Albany on Saturday, July 27, and the flotilla will set off the following morning. We will paddle between nine and fifteen miles each day and camp along the route. There will be several educational and cultural events, some large and others small. The gatherings will feature cultural sharing and talks by Haudenosaunee and other Native leaders and allies. The itinerary is still being finalized. For more information visit http://honorthetworow.org.

Onondaga Chief Jake Edwards teaching with a reproduction of Two Row Wampum Belt