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15. The principal source for the mythology and ritual of Enemyway is Berard Haile, *Origin Legend of the Navajo Enemy Way*, (New Haven: Yale University Publications in Anthropology 17, 1938).
16. Haile, *Enemy Way*, pp. 207-13.
17. See Gill, *Sacred Words*, chap. 4, for a fuller discussion of the concept of inner form.
18. For a fuller discussion see Sam D. Gill, "Prayer," *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1986).

Prayer as Person:

The Performative Force in Navajo Prayer Acts

Doc White Singer, an old man knowledgeable in the traditions and ways of Navajo religion, told me about prayer. He said, "Prayer is not like you and me. It is like a holy person; it has a personality five times that of ours." I have heard other Navajos refer to the act of prayer variously as a person who knows everything, as a person who can take you on a journey down under the earth or up to the sky, and as a person who is all-powerful. The extent of the references to prayers as active agents, or more familiarly as persons, has led me to believe that this reflects the Navajo conception that prayer acts are active forces that can render effects on the world. In other words, the Navajo conception of prayer acts emphasizes their pragmatic character. In the recent philosophical vernacular of J. L. Austin, Navajos see their prayer acts as "performative utterances," that is, as groups of words the utterance of which is actually the doing of an action.¹

Scholars have occasionally recognized that Navajos believe that their prayers affect the world, but their view of how that takes place has been to see prayer as magically compulsive. Gladys Reichard, in her *Navaho Prayer: The Compulsive Word*, analyzed the rhythmic substructure in Navajo prayers to demonstrate various repetitious patterns which, she argued, garner magical forces of compulsion.²

In this chapter I am going to exemplify a different approach by focusing on the structure of a prayer act commonly performed in Navajo ceremonials. I want to show that it is due to the structure of the prayer act, rather than to its magically compulsive character, that Navajos see it as an active agent in their world.

The uttering of the prayer plays an integral part in satisfying the needs which motivate the prayer utterance. From this point of view I

think we can more accurately understand the Navajo notion of prayer as a person capable of effective actions.

An Outline of Navajo Ceremonialism

I must preface my analysis with a brief outline of Navajo ceremonialism. The passing of seasons, the cycle of life, and the efforts to subsist seem to take a position in Navajo ceremonialism secondary to the exigencies of maintaining health. Most Navajo ceremonies are motivated by someone's illness. The acceptance of a persistent illness triggers a process bent on restoring health. First a diagnosis is made upon information collected by using techniques of divination to determine the cause of the illness. Normally there need be no physiological relationship between the cause and the symptoms felt. The diagnosis leads to a recommendation for a curing way and a specific ceremonial within that way. A figure called a singer maintains the traditional knowledge of the prayers, songs, and procedures of the various ceremonial ways. Singers normally specialize in only one or two of the many ceremonials because of the enormous task of learning the songs, prayers, and ritual procedures necessary to perform the ceremonial. A singer must be procured and arrangements made for the ceremonial performance, which may last from one to nine nights, including the intervening days. Singing is heard almost constantly throughout, yielding to prayers intoned at focal points in ritual acts. The variety and complexity of the rites which constitute the ceremonials reflect the richness and sophistication of Navajo religious thought.

Holyway Ceremonials

The prayer act which I have chosen for analysis is found in the context of a commonly used ritual way of curing known as Holyway. Holyway is used for illnesses whose cause is directly attributed to a holy person (*diyin dine'ê*). Holy people are spiritual entities which Navajos identify with the power of creation and the life force of all things. The anger of the holy people is commonly traced to some trespass by the person suffering. Navajos say that the holy people place a spell (*áltíí*) upon or within the sufferer. The theory of curing calls for the removal of the spell and the restoration of the suffering person.

Many ceremonials may be performed within the general classification of Holyway, and each of these has an extensive associated story tradition telling of the original performance of the ceremonial. This kind of story features a heroic figure who journeys into forbidden places or performs forbidden acts. Predicaments of various kinds, ranging from his illness to his complete annihilation, are the consequences of these trespasses. Holy people are brought to aid the hero in his predicament, healing and restoring him by performing a ceremonial over him. The full ritual procedures, including prayers and songs, are normally told in the story as archetypical for the Navajo use of that ceremonial. The stories inform the meaning of the ceremonial. Navajos maintain a close association between the ceremonial and its stories. They identify the sick person with the hero of the stories.

Holyway Prayer

The prayer act I have chosen is distinctive to Holyway. It is intoned during the prayer stick and offering ceremony, which is performed each morning of the first four days of all Holyway ceremonials. Prayer sticks are usually short hollow reeds that are prepared and decorated with particular holy people in mind. Offerings of small bits of semiprecious stone of various colors are prepared. Cycles of songs accompany the readying of these ritual materials and their placement in cloth or cornhusk bundles. The subject in the ceremony, referred to as the one-sung-over, is given these objects to hold while he or she intones the prayer in litany fashion with the singer.³ At the conclusion of the prayer the singer takes the bundles and ritually presses them several times to various parts of the one-sung-over's body. Then, as songs are sung, an assistant takes the bundles outside the ceremonial structure to deposit them in places appropriate to the holy people.

The prayer from this ritual as performed in the Holyway ceremonial Navajo Windway is as follows:

Dark Wind youth chief, who runs along the top of the earth,

I have made an offering for you,
I have prepared a smoke for you!

This very day you must remake my feet for me,
 This very day you must remake my legs for me,
 This very day you must remake my body for me,
 This very day you must remake my mind for me,
 This very day you must remake my voice for me!

This very day you must take your spell out of me by which you are
 bothering me,
 This very day you have removed your spell from me by which you were
 bothering me,
 You have left to take it far away from me,
 You have taken it far away from me.

This very day I shall recover,
 This very day my body is cooling down,
 This very day my pains are moving out of me!

With my body cooled off, I am walking about,
 With my body light in weight, I am walking about,
 With a feeling of ease I am walking about,
 With nothing ailing me I am walking about,
 Immune to every disease I am walking about,
 With pleasant conditions at my front I am walking about,
 With pleasant conditions at my rear I am walking about,
 As one who is long life and happiness I am walking about,
 Pleasant again it has become,
 Pleasant again it has become!⁴

This prayer is normally repeated several times, changing only the name of the holy person and his attributes. This grouping constitutes a prayer set.

The prayer text can be divided into constituent parts to facilitate analysis and discussion of the prayer act. First, the name of a holy person is mentioned along with his distinctive attributes. Next, two phrases mention the making of an offering and the preparation of a smoke. Following this a passage beseeches the holy person to remake the one praying, referring specifically to the feet, legs, body, mind, and voice. Next is a passage which describes the removal and dispersion of the inflicted spell. It is followed by the statement of the consequent recovery taking place. The prayer concludes with a description of an accomplished state of pleasantness.⁵

NAME MENTION

The names of the holy people, mentioned in the first prayer constituent, normally refer to those who are active characters in the corresponding ceremonial origin story. For example, Dark Wind, who is named in this Navajo Windway prayer, appears frequently in Navajo Windway stories. In one instance his help was sought to cure the hero, Older Brother, and his brother and two sisters when they ate a forbidden plant and became ill.

OFFERING/SMOKE

The second constituent, "I have made an offering for you, / I have prepared a smoke for you!" refers to the prayer stick and offering bundles. The hollow prayer stick reeds are cut in designated lengths and filled with tobacco. The open ends of the reeds are sealed with moistened pollen, and a rock crystal is held so that the enlivening light entering the smoke hole of the ceremonial hogan is directed to the tips of the prayer sticks. The prayer sticks are placed in cloth bundles containing fragments of turquoise, abalone, white shell, and jet as offerings.

The purpose for designating the prayer sticks and bundles as offering and smoke is illuminated by an event commonly recounted in ceremonial origin stories. In Holyway stories a sequence of episodes describes the procurement of the help of the holy person who is believed to be offended by the sufferer's trespass. This help is considered essential, for only the holy person can relieve the situation. An intermediary is sent to the holy person bearing a gift of one laced bundle. He presents this gift to the holy person with a ritual gesture, but the holy person makes no acknowledgment. The intermediary returns with two laced bundles, but the response is the same. After trying three and four such bundles, without success, those seeking his help conclude that they must be approaching the holy person incorrectly. They seek the help of someone who, they are told, knows the right address and gift. An episode is sometimes necessary to tell how this information is obtained, but eventually forthcoming is a description of the proper gift for the sought-after holy person and the design of the prayer stick which must accompany it. With these prepared, the intermediary returns to the holy person, who immediately acknowledges the gift and says to the

messenger, "Go ahead then, my grandchild, prepare me a smoke." A cloth is laid down upon which the smoking elements are prepared. Tobacco is placed in the pipe and a rock crystal is held up to the sun so the sunlight may be directed to light the pipe. After the holy person smokes, the messenger is given the pipe to smoke. The holy person addresses the messenger, "All right, my grandchild, what can happen to him!" He knows the desires of the messenger without ever being asked. He continues, "I will positively return to my grandchild! What can happen to him? In four days I will follow you." But the messenger is unsatisfied with a four-day delay and implores the holy person to return with him immediately. Yielding, the holy person says, "All right, my grandchild, let us go then!" And they depart to perform the cure for the suffering hero.

The meaning of the words which name a holy person and announce that an offering and smoke have been made may be understood at various levels. In the limited context of the immediate ritual acts of the prayer stick rite they are simple descriptive statements which refer to the completed manual tasks of preparing the prayer sticks and the offering bundles. At this level of meaning the words perform in a locutionary sense, in Austin's vernacular, in that they refer to, or describe, an event which has taken place.⁶ This is confirmed by the perfective mode of the Navajo verbs used to designate completed acts.⁷ Recall the phrases, "I have made" (*'ishta*) and "I have prepared" (*nádjííłá*).

But when these constituents are seen in light of Navajo religious tradition as borne in story, another level of meaning is revealed. The words of these first two prayer constituents make reference not only to the manual acts which precede the prayer utterance but also to the events told in the stories which established the Holyway procedures for getting the help of a holy person. Here the words of the prayer, along with the ritual acts associated with the prayer sticks and offerings, constitute the proper procedures for acquiring this helper. The utterance of this part of the prayer in the appropriate ritual context amounts to the acts necessary to establish the kind of relationship with a holy person that obliges him to respond to certain requests made of him. It is the relationship of "grandfather" to "grandchild." It is the performance of the speech act as conventionalized in ceremony that seeks to establish a relationship, and

thus it carries, in Austin's terms, an illocutionary force. The performance of this part of the act has a certain conventional force.

IMPERATIVE TO REMAKE

The next constituent of the prayer amounts to an imperative to remake: "This very day you must remake my feet for me," and so on. This passage confirms the performative effect of the preceding passage in that it assumes that the holy person is attentive and that a relationship is established in which the holy person may be addressed directly in an imperative verbal mode. It does not humbly ask a favor of the holy person; it beseeches the holy person to remake the feet, legs, body, mind, and voice of the sufferer.

The significance of the catalog of body parts is illuminated in Navajo creation stories. The Navajo conception of life is presented as a humanlike form (*bii'gistiín*) which stands within all living physical forms—mountains, rivers, plants, and animals. The placement of the humanlike inner life form within the outer physical form is the basic act of creation as revealed in the study of Navajo creation stories.⁸ This act focuses on the correspondence of the inner and outer forms at these particular body parts. The correspondence is often expressed in ritual by the manual act of pressing at the body parts concerned, effecting life entering the physical form. Thus, the act of remaking in Holyway is an act of re-creation. It is enacted in Holyway ritual as the prayer stick and offering bundles are pressed to the body of the one-sung-over at these named places.

REMOVAL AND DISPERSION

The prayer constituent beseeching the holy person to act has a pragmatic effect in that the utterance of the words exerts a force upon the holy person addressed. The constituent bears an illocutionary force of an "exercitive type" in Austin's categorization. These exercitives are the exercising of power, rights, and/or influence.⁹ Following the utterance of words which effect an obligatory relationship between the one praying and the holy person addressed, a response to the beseechment should be anticipated. According to the conventional response the holy person should fulfill his obligation by removing the spell and allowing the return of health. Austin reminded us that the exercitive force of beseechment

invites, by convention, a response or sequel. And indeed the next constituent of the prayer describes the progressive removal and dispersion of the inflicted spell.

This very day you must take your spell out of me by which you are
bothering me,
This very day you have removed your spell from me by which you were
bothering me,
You have left to take it far away from me,
You have taken it far away from me.

The Navajo verbal modes of the constituent reveal a shift from the imperative—"you *must* take it out of me" (*shá'aádtídtíít*)—to the perfective mode—"you *have* taken it out of me" (*shqhanéinilá*) and "you *have* taken it away" (*dahnídinilá*). Beginning with an imperative, "You must take it out of me," the prayer constituent concludes in the perfective indicating the completion of the act of removal.

RECOVERY

The expected response to the imperative to remake is thus begun, but it is a partial one, for it only removes the bothersome object. The concluding constituents describe the recovery taking place.

This very day I shall recover,
This very day my body is cooling down,
This very day my pains are moving out of me!

Again the verbal mode of this constituent is telling. The Navajo verb of the phrase "I shall recover" is in the iterative mode, indicating the repeated return to a state once held. The verb, *náádideshdáát*, would translate literally something like "I shall start right now to go again like I went before." It indicates that the action is beginning in the immediate present. The Navajo verb translated as "is cooling" (*hodínook'eet*) is in the progressive mode, indicating that the action of cooling is taking place as the words are being uttered. Hence, the shift in verbal mode indicates that the act is initiated and is progressing as the prayer is being uttered.

PLEASANTNESS REGAINED

The prayer utterance closes with the repetition of the verb *naasháadoo*, rendered here as "I am walking about": "With my body cooled off, I am walking about, / With my body light in

weight, I am walking about," and so on. *Naasháadoo* is a verb in the progressive mode, with a continuative aspect. In other words, the form of the verb indicates that the action is in progress and that it will continue or endure. The other verbs in this passage are in the perfective mode, indicating that the action has been completed.

This passage maintains the correspondence between the prayer and the episode in the ceremonial origin story. It presents in summary the curing of the hero and his recovery to a state of good health. The state of health is expressed in terms of coolness, lightness in weight, feeling of easiness, and a state of immunity to disease. These terms clearly refer to the physical state, but the state of health is also expressed as being surrounded by a pleasant environment, designated by the Navajo word *hózhóó*. This was the condition obtained at the completion of the process of creating life on the earth's surface. When the world had been created with all of its living features, two holy people were sent to the tops of the mountains to view the new creation. From these high vantage points they found a world which they described as *hózhóó*, "simply beautiful." Thus, through the prayer act the one-sung-over regains a condition of *hózhóó*, an environment fitting the pristine beauty of creation, in which he or she may walk about.

Finally, the words of the prayer identify the one-sung-over with long life and happiness. "As one who is long life and happiness I am walking about." In English the terms *long life* and *happiness* have an admirable enough character, but they are two of the most important terms in Navajo religious language—*sq'ah naghái bik'eh hózhóó*.¹⁰ In creation stories these terms are personified as a young man and woman whose beauty was without equal. They were among the first of the forms to be created. They are described as the means by which life moves through time. They are the kinetic force of life. They are also identified with speech and thought, which are essential to the process of creation and the maintenance of life through time. Hence, from the perspective of Navajo religious traditions, the identity of the one-sung-over with long life and happiness is the ultimate expression of health regained.

The prayer concludes with the conventional phrase, "Pleasant again it has become," which is repeated twice for each prayer in the set and an additional two times after the concluding prayer.

The Prayer as a Pragmatic Act

The pragmatic effect of uttering the prayer must be realized in the context of the situation motivating the act. In this case it is a part of a ceremonial enacted to cure an individual who is sick. The one suffering the illness is the one who utters the prayer with the singer. At the surface level the prayer is uttered as a prayer of intercession by the singer and as a prayer of petition and beseechment by the one-sung-over. But on the basis of my analysis of the prayer as a ritual act in a religious tradition, other levels of meaning have been revealed. The structure of the prayer is identical to the effect the prayer seeks, the restoration of health. It mentions the name and distinctive attributes of the holy people who are thought to be responsible for the suffering. It reports that an offering and smoke have been prepared for the holy people, and it engages them in binding relationships of reciprocity. It beseeches these holy people to remake the sufferer, an act they are obliged to perform. The subsequent removal of the spell, its dispersion to a place far away, and the return to health are described by the prayer as they take place.

It is clear that the significance of the prayer is dependent not only on the situation that motivates its utterance but also on the intended pragmatic effect. But it must be observed that the physical symptoms of the sickness which motivate the act and their physiological causes are not the primary field intended to be affected by the prayer act. It is not directed toward physical symptoms or to their physiological causes but rather toward the establishment of relationships with spiritual entities, the holy people. The illness suffered is attributed to the impairment of spiritual relationships. The physical symptoms of illness are only the manifestation of this situation. Hence, at its core the prayer act is a religious act, yet it functions at one level as a medical act. In terms of Navajo thought the prayer act is significant as a religious act of communicating at a spiritual level. This is what is distinctive of any act of prayer. The effect of this religious act is thought to be reflected in the return of physical health. But it is impossible to perceive the pragmatic character of the prayer act as curative in a physical sense without first considering it as a religious act.

Much effort has been expended in the study of Navajo ceremonials from the perspective of Western scientific medical practice.¹¹ Theories of psychological techniques, of physical therapeutics, and folk pharmacology have been advanced to demonstrate the pragmatic significance of the ceremonial practices. Where these are found to be inadequate, theories of magical control have been advanced. Still, these explanations seem partial and inadequate. They are burdened with a host of insoluble problems when held against the whole fabric of Navajo ceremonialism. In order to realize more fully the significance these prayer acts have for Navajo people, Navajo ceremonials must be considered as religious events in which Navajos participate in the meaningful way of life revealed to them by the holy people as told in stories set in a primordial era. The pragmatic effects of the prayer are directed toward the spiritual realm. But as the prayer text shows, there is an expected attendant change in the physical world.

The prayer act is therefore not simply a curing act, but a religious act of curing. When it is seen as a total integrated act, illuminated by the religious traditions, it becomes evident that it is meaningful to those who perform it not simply because it cures physical ailments, but because it performs the acts which institute and maintain a particular way of life. Its semantic structure is composed of a sequence of words and related actions significant in Navajo religious tradition for what they do as they are performed. In the context of a Holyway healing ceremonial the prayer act is significant in being among those things a Navajo does in response to certain culturally recognized needs. It is the performance of an act of curing as much as is the administration of an injection of drugs by a physician in the Western scientific medical tradition.

The ritual prayer act focuses on spiritual rather than physical conditions. Yet Navajos recognize a correspondence between the physical and the spiritual world in much the same way that a sign serves as the vehicle for an abstract referent. This is demonstrated in the prayer act analyzed. When the relationship with the holy person was reestablished and he removed the spell, the consequence was described in terms of a renewed state of physical health.

The entire prayer act, including the manual gestures and the speech utterance, operates as a performative and in the perlocution-

ary sense, in Austin's terms, because it attests to the generation of a force that causes something to be accomplished—generally, to bring about a change in the state of health of the one praying. We can state in simple terms the perlocution: by performing a sequence of several conventional acts which constitute the act of prayer, the one praying is cured of an illness suffered.

I have used Austin's classification of types of performative not as a guide to the analysis of the prayer act but rather as a way to state more clearly the pragmatic character of the prayer act. The prayer act has been seen as performative in all three of the types Austin describes—locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary. It has also been shown that the type of performative is dependent upon the extent of the context allowed to inform the act. In its most limited ritual context the prayer act can be seen only as a performative of the locutionary type. The prayer utterance has a certain referential relationship to the manual acts performed. When considered as a religious act patterned upon an episode described in story, it is recognized as a performative of the illocutionary type. The prayer act beseeches a holy person to respond to a given situation. Finally, when seen as a religious act of curing the prayer act is recognized as a performative of the perlocutionary type. By performing the act the Holy Person is beseeched to act so that health is restored.

Doctrines of the Infelicities

But these acts do not always obtain the expected results. After the performance of a Navajo ceremonial motivated by the need for a physical cure, it is not uncommon that the expected physiological or psychological effect is not gained. The person often remains ill or dies. In Austin's discussion, he observed that there is nothing automatic about performatives since they are not mechanical acts. He demonstrated that the failure of such an act must be accounted for in terms of contexts and intentions rather than in terms of veracity. Austin presented six rules, all of which must be upheld for a performative to be effective. The rules amount to what he called a "doctrine of the infelicities," which demonstrates the important point that the performative is happy or unhappy as opposed to true or false.¹²

Navajos have not been silent on the occasions when ceremonials fail to cure. A systematic appraisal of the Navajo explanations given

for failure would essentially amount to a Navajo doctrine of the infelicities. If formalized, it would include these rules:

1. The diagnosis must be correct and complete. If the diagnosis discerns the wrong cause, an inadequate ceremonial process will be used and, consequently, will be ineffective. Further, if multiple causes are only partially detected, only a partial cure will be effected.

2. The circumstances and location of the ceremonial performance must be appropriate. The ceremonial must take place in a properly consecrated enclosure. It must take place only during the appropriate seasons of the year. The participants, particularly the singer and the one-sung-over, must have proper and serious intentions. They must demonstrate these intentions by observing specific dietary and social restrictions before, during, and after the performance of the ceremonial.

3. The elements of the ritual process must be performed exactly as required by the conventions of the religious tradition as held in the memory of the singer performing the ceremonial. This requires that (a) prayers must be uttered word perfect; (b) ritual objects must be accurately prepared and properly used; (c) songs must be sung correctly and in proper sequence; and (d) the entire ritual process must be performed completely, accurately, orderly, and timely. Errors in any of these areas may result in the failure to cure.

The character of these restrictions has commonly been observed as consistent with the nature of magical acts, since exact repetition of formula and act is often considered distinctive of the character of a magical act. However, when the ritual process is seen as a sequence of performative acts, it becomes clear that the attention to accuracy is a matter of the proper execution of conventional acts. It will be recalled that in the archetypes described in story, the presentation of an inappropriate offering to a holy person effected no response and the hero continued to suffer. It is clear that careful and accurate performance of the prayer act is semantically necessary for the effect of the utterance of the prayer act to be felicitous.

Conclusion

In the above analysis I have shown that the act of prayer is a religious act of curing, and that when seen in this light the perfor-

mance of the act has significant pragmatic effects. The way Navajos respond to ill health is not adequately understood when such central ritual elements as prayer are viewed as either magically compulsive acts or as pseudoscientific medical practices. For the Navajo health is synonymous with a state of new creation and sickness is a disruption of that state. In other words, sickness is a state of disorder. Navajo prayer acts serve to reestablish order by a process of remaking or re-creating. As an especially critical part of this process, Navajo prayer acts may be seen as a language of creation with a performative force.

I must emphasize that magic and mystery have not been removed from this religious curing process. They have been placed in the more appropriate sphere of the acts of the Navajo holy people, rather than being associated with the character of the performance of Navajo prayer acts.

The Navajo consider an act of prayer to be a person, indeed, a kind of holy person.¹³ Upon the basis of the semantic analysis of prayer as a performative act, I believe that it is clear that this is far more than a pleasing metaphor. At the conclusion of the era of creation the holy people departed from the earth's surface to go to their own domain. Upon leaving they indicated that they would never again be seen as they were at that time. With this departure a great communications gap was created between the Navajo people and the holy people. The Navajo were left on the earth with the responsibility for maintaining the world as it had been created and the kind of life that had been revealed to them. They were given prayers, songs, and ceremonial ways as the means to do so. Bridging the gap between the earth people and the holy people is a crucial element in Navajo ceremonial practices. This is accomplished by uttering prayers who are thought of as messengers who have unique communication and travel abilities. It may be concluded that the very idea of the prayer act as a performative force is embedded in Navajo religious thought.

NOTES

1. Summaries of Austin's work (*How to Do Things with Words*, ed. J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa, 2d ed. [Cambridge: Harvard University

- Press, 1975]) can be found in numerous works, including Ruth Finnegan, "How to Do Things with Words: Performative Utterances among the Limba of Sierra Leone," *Man*, n.s. 4 (1969):537-52; Stanley J. Tambiah, "Form and Meaning of Magical Acts: A Point of View," in *Modes of Thought*, ed. Robin Horton and Ruth Finnegan (London: Faber & Faber, 1973), pp. 199-229; and Benjamin Ray, "Performative Utterances in African Ritual," *History of Religions* 13 (1973): 16-35.
2. In my study of Navajo prayer, *Sacred Words: A Study of Navajo Religion and Prayer* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981) I did not find a single challenge to Reichard's view of prayer as compulsive magic; see esp. pp. 191-98 for my critique of her approach.
 3. I refrain from calling the subject of the healing ceremonials the "patient" and the performing specialist the "medicine man," as has often been the custom, because I feel that this indicates a predisposition toward an explanation based on medical ideology, thus precluding the perspective of religion. For photographs of a prayer stick rite see my *Songs of Life* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1979), Plates XVII-XXI.
 4. This prayer text is taken from Leland C. Wyman, *The Windways of the Navajo* (Colorado Springs: Taylor Museum of Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, 1962), pp. 182-83. I have made some changes in the translation based on a careful analysis of the mode and aspect of Navajo verbs. It resembles more closely the translation of the prayer in Wyman's *Beautyway, a Navaho Ceremonial* (New York: Pantheon, 1975), pp. 98-102. Both are texts recorded by Berard Haile. I wish to thank Clark Etsitty for his help in this translation task.
 5. This is but one of eight major classes of prayer that I have identified and analyzed. See *Sacred Words*.
 6. For a definitive discussion of Austin's classifications of performatives, see esp. lectures 8-10 in *How to Do Things with Words*.
 7. The Navajo verb is capable of distinguishing as many as four different aspects and six different modes by alterations of the stem. The modes distinguished are: *imperfective*, indicating that the action is incomplete but is in the act of being accomplished or about to be done; *perfective*, indicating that the action is complete; *progressive*, indicating that the action is in progress; *iterative*, denoting repetition of the act; *usitative*, denoting habituality in performing the act; and *optative*, expressing potentiality and desire. The aspects are: *momentaneous*, action beginning and ending in an instant; *repetitive*, action repeated; *semelfactive*, action which occurs once and is neither continued nor repeated; and *continuative*, action which is continued. See Robert W. Young and William Morgan, *The Navajo Language* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1972), p. 42.

8. For the most extensive discussion of this concept see Berard Haile, "Soul Concepts of the Navaho," *Annali Lateranesi* 7 (1943): 59-94.
9. For Austin's discussion of five general classes of illocutionary forces, see lecture 12 in *How to Do Things with Words*.
10. For a thorough linguistic analysis of these terms, see Gary Witherpoon, *Language and Art in the Navajo Universe* (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1977), chap. 1.
11. An approach dubbed by William James as "medical materialism" in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Collier, 1962), p. 29.
12. In lecture 2 in *How to Do Things with Words* Austin states that the failure to satisfy any one of the following six conditions will result in the performative being infelicitous or unhappy: (A.1) There must exist an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect, that procedure to include the uttering of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances, and further, (A.2) the particular persons and circumstances in a given case must be appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked. (B.1) The procedure must be executed by all participants both correctly and (B.2) completely. (C.1) Where, as often, the procedure is designed for use by persons having certain thoughts or feelings, or for the inauguration of certain consequential conduct on the part of any participant, then a person participating in and so invoking the procedure must in fact have those thoughts or feelings, and the participants must intend so to conduct themselves, and further (C.2) must actually so conduct themselves subsequently.
13. The fact that "person" for the Navajo is not restricted to human person is essential to an understanding of Navajo religion. For an especially illuminating discussion of the concept of person as it applies to the Ojibwa, see A. I. Hallowell, "Ojibwa Ontology, Behavior, and World View," in *Culture in History: Essays in Honor of Paul Radin*, ed. Stanley Diamond (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), pp. 18-52.

Holy Book in Nonliterate Traditions

Toward the Reinvention of Religion

There is radical incongruity in the title "Holy Book in Nonliterate Traditions." A holy *book* is a volume of writings, and we might assume that it is to be read. Nonliterate peoples obviously neither read nor write. It therefore seems clear that nonliterate peoples can neither create nor use holy books.

Why then would I want to consider such a topic? Have I not in my opening sentences thoroughly exhausted the topic? The choice of title for this presentation is a self-conscious one, and its incongruity is intended not to stifle thought but to stimulate it. I avoided alternate titles like "Holy Book in Primal Societies" or "Myth as Scripture in Nonliterate Traditions." Such titles resolve too quickly the issues regarding the study of religion and the role of scripture in this study. We might consider the title "Holy Book in Nonliterate Traditions" something of a *koan*, but I assure you that what I have to say will proceed at only the most preliminary stages in the enlightenment process. Nonetheless I hope that by following it we will be led toward a reinvention of religion.

The Adversities of "The Book"

The original observation that, because of their mode of communication, nonliterate peoples cannot create or use holy books does not preclude that such people may be aware of literacy and books, that they may comprehend such a notion as writing, that they may evaluate writing and express clearly their views on it. When placed in the context of literacy, nonliterate peoples have often consciously chosen to maintain their exclusively oral mode of communication, and they expound the benefits of the oral mode