
Chief Dan George was one of those elders who have so integrated their long experience with their personality and thinking that their very bearing expresses a philosophy of life. Those who met him, who heard him speak or saw him in films felt every word and gesture emerge from an interior wisdom. This expressiveness was a conscious mission for Dan George, both for his own people and for those of us whose culture had lost certain important values we could re-
discover in his. His person radiates from every fragment he has left us, rendering them precious.

Dan George lived in an oral tradition, in which the word is carried on the living breath and resonates with an individual voice. The transition to the printed page was obviously difficult for him, and we often sense his fear of how much is being lost. He feels the need to set the scene of his remarks, to give us some impression of the emotion he feels as he speaks the words.

Often the communication is most effective in transcripts of tape-recordings and conversations or notes from speeches, as in Statements by Chief Dan George (Native Readings for Students, Number 1, Department of Native Studies, Brandon University, no date), or "I Never Scorned God," page 59 of the book under review. The language is straightforward and pithy, the spirituality natural and understated. At other times, he turns to poetic rhythms and images, often moving and effective but sometimes raising suspicions of an alien hand.

Much of the power of Statements comes from Dan George's traditional strong Indian feeling for the total context of the point he is making. He expresses, in fact, a large, thoroughly considered view, based on what he considers the foundation of his culture — a subject almost never mentioned by anthropologists, but emphasized in almost every Indian text: the love of the land. We humans live in a universe to which we belong and which we share with other beings — elements, plants, animals and spirits — to whom we should be close and whose rights we should respect. We should receive from all with gratitude, and realize our obligation to respond with our own human contribution. In the end, we give ourselves back to the earth from which we were born; or, in parallel terms, we re-enter the spiritual dimension present throughout our lives.

The carriers of this tradition succumbed under guns, prejudice and contempt. An imposed rule forbade the traditional forms in which the Indian view could be expressed. The result was a tragic demoralization, a loss of sense of self and worth.

But Indians at their lowest point are only a more visible symptom of the problems and deficiencies of the culture that oppresses and destroys its own members more subtly but no less inevitably. The short-term advantages of insensitivity, selfishness and domination lead ultimately to the loss of what is beautiful and precious in ourselves and our world.

The Indian must move from being a negative sign to being a positive teacher. He must recover his identity and reenergize the members of the dominant culture, reawakening the love they felt for the earth in the early times of their history and their lives. The Indian must learn two cultures and join the strengths of both in his thinking and expression and in his life. This is a heavy burden, but one he bears for both peoples.

Dan George's thinking is traditionally Indian in never considering one side without the other. Physical and spiritual, pain and joy, childhood and old age, can be understood only together. To omit one side is to fall into sentimentality or despair. To reduce Dan George's statements to fragments, as done in the present book, risks distorting both his meaning and his emotion.

Any book by the author must be gratefully received. But Dan George will
make his written contribution only when a complete collection of his statements is presented with equally affectionate, but more respectful editing.

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