

WALTER CURRIE

Most Rev. Chancellor:

Thursday evening in this auditorium I heard Dr. Currie's opening address to members of the Conference of the Aboriginal Cultures of Atlantic Canada. As I listened, the rather harrowing impression grew upon me that I was being compelled to look at my own civilization through his eyes, and indeed through the eyes of his ancestors. What was even more disturbing was that I was experiencing, his own Ojibway (or, as he would correct me, his Ish-na-ba) culture infiltrating the way I looked at things--indeed, irradiating that 'look' from within.

Few people have the power to persuade us that we might regain something of what we have lost by opening our souls to the spirituality of another people, that many of the tensions generated in our culture might truly be resolved were we honestly to work toward a multi-cultural brotherhood, a racial fusion of minds and souls. Not that we would have to abandon our Judeo-Christian heritage in doing so, or the remarkable technology which has developed from that world-view. Nor that native peoples would surrender their visionary fellowship with nature and become assimilated to us. Rather that two cultures would blend, continuously illuminating each other. Perhaps that Christ would become reconciled

with Manitou.

This--and he will correct me, I know, if I am wrong in saying so--is what Dr. Currie stands for and is the living centre from which his work and his challenge emanate.

Born in Chatham, Ontario, October 1, 1922, Walter Currie at age twenty entered the Royal Canadian Air Force as a radar mechanic, spending two of his four years' service with the Royal Air Force in England. He received at the University of Western Ontario his bachelor's degree in 1952, and his teaching certificate one year later. This, in time, was followed by a graduate degree at Arizona State University in 1979. During this time Dr. Currie began his career in education which was to culminate in his reputation as the architect of secondary and university education for Canada's native peoples. That educational history has centred itself in the classroom at all levels and in both provincial and federal houses of government. Elementary school teacher and principal in North York, Ontario; superintendent work with Ontario's Ministry of Education; advisor to, or president of, at least twelve special committees on native affairs in Ontario and Saskatchewan; Professor and Chairman of the Institute of Indian and Eskimo Studies at Trent University where he was instrumental in founding the first academic

Department of Native Studies in this country; Assistant Director of the Gabriel Dumont Institute of Native Studies and Applied Research in Regina; Professor of Native Studies at the University of Saskatchewan; Commissioner of the Ontario Commission of Human Rights in 1972; recipient of Canada's Centennial Medal in 1967.

I cannot begin to emunerate Dr. Currie's published work in the fields of native peoples and Canadian legislation; in Indian culture and heritage; in teacher-training and in native education.

In conclusion it might be said that Dr. Currie has devoted his life to the task of consciousness-enlarging, if not to the act of consciousness-changing among all the peoples of Canada. What he would have us learn is what an old Ojibway family in an Indian legend took for granted during a particularly severe storm when one clap of thunder followed another:

"Did you hear what was said?" the old man asked.
"No", his wife replied, "I didn't catch it."

What both knew was that the Thunder Bird had something to say to them.

Most Reverend Chancellor, I ask that you confer upon This man of vision, the degree of Doctor of Laws, Honoris Causa.