

CHARTING A PATH FORWARD: THE VISIT OF POPE FRANCIS AND THE APOLOGY HE OFFERED

Presentation by
Archbishop Donald Bolen

- ▶ Why focus on the apology?
- ▶ -it points a way forward
- ▶ -it is the Church's responsibility to interpret the apology
- ▶ -it was a significant moment in Church and Canadian history

Expectations before the delegation and the papal visit

- that it would acknowledge all that Indigenous people suffered at residential schools, including how Indigenous children were taken from their homes and separated from their parents and grandparents; how Indigenous languages were suppressed, and cultural and spiritual traditions were denigrated; how many children suffered physical, sexual, psychological, emotional and spiritual abuses; how many children died while at residential schools;
- that it would take responsibility on behalf of the Catholic Church for the suffering that was experienced at Catholic-operated residential schools and that remains a legacy of those schools;
- that it would acknowledge the trauma of survivors and the intergenerational trauma experienced by many First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities;

Expectations before the delegation and the papal visit

- that it would express real lament and sorrow, and a commitment to make changes in light of what has been learned through the truth and reconciliation process;
- that it would be offered at the site of a former residential school, preferably one where ground penetrating radar had identified possible unmarked graves; many specific requests for the pope to visit particular places (n.b. Saskatchewan, Kamloops, Winnipeg) were extended, each with hopes and expectations;
- that the apology would be connected to reparation, financial support, and other means of responding to the waves of suffering that were the legacy of residential schools;

Expectations before the delegation and the papal visit

- that it would be accompanied by a commissioning of Canadian bishops to follow up with an action plan, preferably an action plan embedded in the papal visit itself, that would move the church towards real conciliation through practical steps of solidarity; this invited a focus, even in the planning of the visit, on the importance of “the day after the apology”;
- that it would address how the schools were an extension of a colonization which led to the taking of Indigenous lands and marginalizing of Indigenous peoples, and that the pope would repudiate the papal bulls which provided support to the colonizers and the understanding that they were ‘discovering’ lands which could then be claimed and occupied, with no regard for the fact that the lands had been inhabited by Indigenous peoples for thousands of years.

► Dealing with the visit as a whole



THE CONTENT OF THE APOLOGY: THE CHILDREN WHO DIDN'T COME HOME

- ▶ The visit to the grave site in Maskwacis
 - ▶ The NCTR banner
 - ▶ The moccasins
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THE CONTENT OF THE APOLOGY: ACKNOWLEDGING THE SUFFERING

- ▶ “I think back on the stories you told: how the policies of assimilation ended up systematically marginalizing the indigenous peoples; how also through the system of residential schools your languages and cultures were denigrated and suppressed; how children suffered physical, verbal, psychological and spiritual abuse; how they were taken away from their homes at a young age, and how that indelibly affected relationships between parents and children, grandparents and grandchildren.”

► Maskwacis:

“I am here because the first step of my penitential pilgrimage among you is that of again asking forgiveness, of telling you once more that I am deeply sorry. Sorry for the ways in which, regrettably, many Christians supported the colonizing mentality of the powers that oppressed the indigenous peoples. I am sorry. I ask forgiveness, in particular, for the ways in which many members of the Church and of religious communities cooperated, not least through their indifference, in projects of cultural destruction and forced assimilation promoted by the governments of that time, which culminated in the system of residential schools.”



► Vespers, Quebec City:

“I think in particular of the sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable people, scandals that require firm action and an irreversible commitment. Together with you, I would like once more to ask forgiveness of all the victims. The pain and the shame we feel must become an occasion for conversion: never again!”



THE CONTENT OF THE APOLOGY: AN APOLOGY ON BEHALF OF THE CHURCH

Maskwacis: Although Christian charity was not absent, and there were many outstanding instances of devotion and care for children, the overall effects of the policies linked to the residential schools were catastrophic.

What our Christian faith tells us is that this was a disastrous error, incompatible with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is painful to think of how the firm soil of values, language and culture that made up the authentic identity of your peoples was eroded, and that you have continued to pay the price of this.

Sacred Heart Church, Edmonton: It pains me to think that Catholics contributed to policies of assimilation and enfranchisement that inculcated a sense of inferiority, robbing communities and individuals of their cultural and spiritual identity, severing their roots and fostering prejudicial and discriminatory attitudes; and that this was also done in the name of an educational system that was supposedly Christian.

CONTENT OF THE APOLOGY: COLONIZATION AND POLICIES OF ASSIMILATION

- ▶ Meeting with Indigenous Delegations in Rome, April 1, 2022: “The chain that passed on knowledge and ways of life in union with the land was broken by a colonization that lacked respect for you, tore many of you from your vital milieu and tried to conform you to another mentality. In this way, great harm was done to your identity and your culture, many families were separated, and great numbers of children fell victim to these attempts to impose a uniformity based on the notion that progress occurs through ideological colonization....”

► : Iqaluit

“'Honour your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God gives you' (Ex 20:12). That possibility did not exist for many of your families; it vanished when children were separated from their parents and their own nation was perceived as dangerous and foreign.... How evil it is to break the bonds uniting parents and children, to damage our closest relationships, to harm and scandalize the little ones!”

- ▶ Lac St Anne: “In this blessed place, where harmony and peace reign, we present to you (God) the disharmony of our experiences, the terrible effects of colonization, the indelible pain of so many families, grandparents and children.”
- ▶ Citadelle de Québec: That ‘history of suffering and contempt’, the fruit of the colonizing mentality, ‘does not heal easily’.”

- ▶ Maskwacis: “It is necessary to remember how the policies of assimilation and enfranchisement, which also included the residential school system, were devastating for the people of these lands.”

- ▶ Vespers, Québec City: "...thinking about the process of healing and reconciliation with our indigenous brothers and sisters, never again can the Christian community allow itself to be infected by the idea that one culture is superior to others, or that it is legitimate to employ ways of coercing others."

CONTENT OF THE APOLOGY: RECOGNITION OF TRAUMA WHICH CONTINUES, INCLUDING INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA

- ▶ Meeting with Indigenous Delegations in Rome, April 1, 2022: “It is chilling to think of determined efforts to instill a sense of inferiority, to rob people of their cultural identity, to sever their roots, and to consider all the personal and social effects that this continues to entail: unresolved traumas that have become intergenerational traumas.”


▶ Maskwacis:

▶ “These are traumas that are in some way reawakened whenever the subject comes up; I realize too that our meeting today can bring back old memories and hurts, and that many of you may feel uncomfortable even as I speak. ... To remember the devastating experiences that took place in the residential schools hurts, angers, causes pain, and yet it is necessary.”

“I thank you ...for telling me about the heavy burdens that you still bear, for sharing with me these bitter memories.”

► Maskwacis:

“An important part of this process will be ... to assist the survivors of the residential schools to experience healing from the traumas they suffered....Know that I am aware of the sufferings and traumas, the difficulties and challenges, experienced by the indigenous peoples in every region of this country.”

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A CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION OF INDIGENOUS SUFFERING

- ▶ Maskwacis: “In the face of evil, we pray to the Lord of goodness; in the face of death, we pray to the God of life.”
- ▶ Lac Ste. Anne: “Lord, as the people on the shores of the Sea of Galilee were not afraid to cry out to you with their needs, so we come to you, Lord, this evening, with whatever pain we bear within us. We bring to you our weariness and our struggles, the wounds of the violence suffered by our indigenous brothers and sisters.... Lord, help us to be healed of our wounds. We know, Lord, that this requires effort, care and concrete actions on our part; but we also know that we cannot do this alone.”

- ▶ Sacred Heart Church: “This is the way forward: to look together to Christ, to love betrayed and crucified for our sake; to look to Christ, crucified in the many students of the residential schools.... One cannot proclaim God in a way contrary to God himself. And yet, how many times has this happened in history! While God presents himself simply and quietly, we always have the temptation to impose him, and to impose ourselves in his name. It is the worldly temptation to make him come down from the cross and show himself with power....

- ▶ “Brothers and sisters, in the name of Jesus, may this never happen again in the Church. May Jesus be preached as he desires, in freedom and charity. In every crucified person whom we meet, may we see not a problem to be solved, but a brother or sister to be loved, the flesh of Christ to be loved. May the Church, the Body of Christ, be a living body of reconciliation!”



- ▶ Table discussion question:
- ▶ In what ways can we make our own the apology extended by Pope Francis, and in what ways might we be able to carry it forward in relations with Indigenous people in our parishes, schools and communities?

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