

Redress and Reconciliation for Indigenous Peoples in the Form of Apologies: An Inadequate and Abysmal Procedure that Supports Settler Colonialism

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To reach redress and reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples, establishments such as the Catholic Church as well as the Canadian Government decided to issue “apologies;” however, these attempts are unauthentic as they support settler colonial ideals, and further promote the marginalization of Indigenous Peoples. This paper critiques current attempts of redress and reconciliation for Indigenous Peoples by contending these “apologies” are insincere. Drawing on various frameworks provided by scholars such as Borrows, Palmater, Corntassel and Holder, as well as Tavuchis and James, this paper analyzes apologetic attempts made by the Catholic Church, former Canadian Prime Minister, Stephen Harper (2008), and Pope Francis (2022) to argue that “apologies” are not only inadequate forms of reconciliation, but also insinuate absolute disregard and disrespect towards all Indigenous Peoples. Most importantly, this paper claims that the Canadian Federal Government must implement strategies of reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples by including them in policy-making decisions.

KEY WORDS apologies, reconciliation, redress, settler colonialism, two-spirit

The Prime Minister of Canada and its other institutions, such as the Catholic Church, appear to seek reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples. One of the most common ways this is manifested is through “apologies,” statements that are generally intended to address unjust actions and promote reconciliation (Blatz, Schumann, and Ross 2009, 229). It is worth noting that reconciliation and redress are not simple or easy tasks—neither is the act of an authentic apology. Apologies are arguably a minor first step forward towards redress and reconciliation; thus, given the implementation of federal legislation such as the *Indian Act*[1] one would assume the task of creating an authentic apology is of the utmost importance for the Canadian Federal Government. However, due to the entrenchment of settler colonial ideals[2] in the policies and practices of the Canadian Federal Government (Lawrence 2003), many attempts to reconcile with Indigenous Peoples in the form of apologies have been unsuccessful, as they do not align with the criteria associated with authentic apologies (Corntassel and Holder 2008, 468–9). This paper begins by providing a brief explanation of Canada’s attempts to erase Indigeneity, Settler colonial ideals refers to practices of

“assimilation through elimination” of Indigenous people by the Canadian Federal Government. This includes, but is not limited to practices of enfranchisement, forceful citizenship, “bleeding out the native” through Blood Quantum, and creating “Indian Reserves” (Lawrence 2003). followed by the history of residential schools to highlight the areas in which the Canadian Federal Government continuously fails to address the experiences of Indigenous Peoples and Two-Spirit Indigenous identities. The second part of this paper identifies the characteristics of an apology and compares them to expressions of sympathy in order to provide a basis for an authentic apology. This analysis will thereafter be applied to an apology articulated by the former Prime Minister of Canada, Stephen Harper (2008), representing his insincere effort (on behalf of the Federal Government of Canada) to reconcile with Indigenous Peoples. Considering that the Catholic Church was an institution directly involved in the operation of residential schools (NPR 2022), this section will also discuss (the rejection of) Pope Francis’ 2022 apology.

Finally, attempts of redress through apologies will be critiqued as it enforces settler colonial ideals. Overall, I argue that apologies are inadequate forms of reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples that support settler colonialism through carefully formatted syntactic and semantic properties. Most importantly, since attempts of “authentic apologies” insinuate absolute disregard and disrespect towards Indigenous Peoples, this paper challenges the Federal Government of Canada to not only adopt policies that include them in the processes of reconciliation and redress, but in policy-making decisions as well.

Background: Canada’s Heinous Attempts of Erasing Indigeneity

An apology is defined as “an admission to blameworthiness and regret by the actor” (Bruce and Barry 1981, 272). Apologies allow the actor to admit blameworthiness in hopes of obtaining a pardon from the targeted audience (Bruce and Barry 1981, 272). In the context of state and institutional apologies, these are “issued for historic wrongs: incidents and abuses in the distant (and not so distant) past for which acknowledgement has never been given and redress never made...” (MacLachlan 2015, 442). Since the “wrongs in question damage our trust in specific institutions, and also shake our trust in government oversight and regulation of those institutions” (MacLachlan 2015, 442), the state’s purpose in delivering these apologies is to mend the relationship between the public and the state. According to Blatz, Schumann, and Ross, some scholars believe that apologizing for historical injustices is “necessary to heal the wounds caused by past harms” (2009, 229). However, apologies are less effective when the concerns of the victimized group are ignored (Blatz, Schumann, and Ross 2009, 237). For example, when considering Germany’s apology as redress for Nazi atrocities towards Jewish victims, those pertaining to the LGBTQ2S+ community and other marginalized categories such as Romany people are often excluded due to political pressure (Blatz, Schumann and Ross 2009, 236). Similarly, past Canadian

apologies have neither directly recognized the diverse experiences of Two-Spirit Indigenous Peoples, nor addressed the present impact of rampant homophobia in most Indigenous communities in Canada (Ristock et al. 2019, 770). Thus, these types of apologies are likely to be less effective as they exclude people that have been negatively impacted by the actions of the individual or government body attempting to apologize.

Before further analyzing apologies, it is essential to address how the Canadian government tries to erase the presence of Indigenous Peoples: *what is Canada's involvement in eradicating Indigenous peoples' presence in society?* This is an important question to consider as the Canadian government and the Catholic Church are seeking to (inadequately) apologize for one of the more egregious atrocities inflicted upon Indigenous Peoples: residential schools.. This section provides information on residential school systems and the attempted colonization of Queer and Two-Spirit Indigenous Peoples. By contextualizing Canada's horrendous actions towards Indigenous Peoples of many intersecting identities through residential schools, I advance the argument that apologies are not only inadequate, but do not encapsulate Canada's legacy of ethnic cleansing.

Residential Schools: Breaking Spirits

One of the most horrific attempts to erase Indigeneity occurred through residential schools. Even though many Canadians have heard this term, according to the Assembly of First Nations only ten percent understand the brutal, violent, and traumatic experiences (AFN 2021). The first church-run residential school opened in 1831 (NCTR 2023). With the exception of Newfoundland, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island (Canadian Geographic 2023), by the 1880s (NCTR 2023) all provinces and territories in Canada built federally funded, church-run residential schools (Canadian Geographic 2023). Residential schools had clear objectives: the assimilation and colonization of Indigenous Peoples (ibid). To achieve this goal, the Canadian government enacted the *Indian Act*, which forced over 150,000 children to attend residential schools (NCTR 2023). Residential schools operated for over 150 years, as the last residential school did not close until the late 1990s in Saskatchewan (Canadian Geographic 2023).

Drawing on Mi'kmaq lawyer, professor, and activist, Dr. Pamela Palmater, the following section outlines explicit details about the reality of residential schools. There is no ambiguity regarding the purpose of residential schools: they are designed to "eliminate Indigenous Peoples as 'distinct legal, social, cultural, religious and racial entities'" (Palmater 2020, 97). Admittedly, Canada executed a cultural, physical, and biological genocide which resulted in the deaths of more than two million Indigenous Peoples (Palmater 2020, 97). It is important to recognize that Canada wants to remove Indigeneity completely: not only in its physical form by 'educating'[3] Indigenous children in residential schools, but also the absolute removal of "'legal, social, cultural, religious and racial entities'" (Palmater 2020, 97). The types of heinous acts committed towards Indigenous children include, but are not limited to direct killings, serious bodily and mental harm, enticing physical destruction, preventing births, and forced

family transfers (Palmater 2020, 98-9). Simply reading these general categories is not enough to imagine the horrendous and inexplicable acts committed towards Indigenous children, which consist of “deliberately infecting children with smallpox; rape; sodomy; torture; solitary confinement; electric chairs; (sexual) assaults; starvation, beatings and tortures to death; and Indigenous women and girls forcefully sterilized (not to bear children) and subject to abortions” (Palmater 2020, 98-9).

Colonizing Identities: The Case of Two-Spirit and Queer Indigenous Peoples

Given the fact that Canadian apologies have not directly addressed the suppression of Two-Spirit and Queer Indigenous Peoples (Ristock et al. 2019, 770), it is equally important to contextualize their unique settler colonial experiences. Settler colonialism imposes a national, hegemonic identity that is purely heterosexual. Early European settlers targeted Two-Spirit traditions amongst Indigenous cultures (Brayboy 2018) because it was a strong source of identity. All Indigenous societies acknowledged three to five gender roles: “female, male, Two-Spirit female, Two-Spirit male and transgendered” (Brayboy 2018). As scholar and activist Qwo-Li Driskill states, “sexual assault, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia are entangled with the history of colonization” (Driskill 2004, 51). This section will draw upon Driskill’s essay, which outlines personal traumas related to settler mentality and violent acts of oppression towards Indigenous identities. In order for the general settler population to understand Indigenous sexual and gender identities, the universal term ‘Two-Spirit’ was officially adopted from the Ojibwe language in Winnipeg, Manitoba in 1989 (Brayboy 2018). It is worth noting that despite the importance of Indigenous identities, a ‘universal, English term’ was required to classify Indigenous Peoples. This term is not always translatable with the same meaning among Native languages (Brayboy 2018), which the general (White), colonizing population seems to disregard. In simpler terms, the identities of Indigenous Peoples cannot be easily translated into White communities due to the unfamiliarity of Native traditions: for instance, Driskill identifies as a Two-Spirit person, which is the closest description available in English terms (Driskill 2004, 52). The forced creation of a word that loses Indigenous identity significance—in order to satisfy the dominant, (White) English, settler population—is a form of settler colonialism itself. Instead of compromising the integrity of Indigenous identities, emphasis should be placed on learning the traditions that constitute Indigenous identities: one belief being that “some people are born with the spirits of both genders and express them so perfectly” (Brayboy 2018)—to possess the ability to see the world through “the eyes of both genders...is a gift from The Creator” (Brayboy 2018).

It is thus apparent and vital to recognize that Indigenous Peoples are not only colonized by land, but also through their identities (Driskill 2004, 52); as a result, women are not accepted as leaders, and those of extra-ordinary genders and sexualities are oppressed (Driskill 2004, 52). When analyzing apologies, Two-Spirit and Queer identities of Indigenous Peoples are completely disregarded—this is problematic as it

continues to internalize the dominant culture's sexual values, while simultaneously shaming, degrading, and colonizing Queer sexualities and genders (Driskill 2004, 54). For instance, when settler colonials such as Christopher Columbus encountered Two-Spirit people, they were "thr[own] into pits with their war dogs and were torn limb from limb" (Brayboy 2018). These actions are inhumane and are often (conveniently) left out of important conversations regarding redress and reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples. Working towards reconciliation and healing from historical trauma requires the acknowledgment and engagement of Two-Spirit identities: Beth Brant (Bay of Quinte Mohawk) expresses, "'Much of the self-hatred we carry around inside us is centuries old. To deny our sexuality is to deny our part in creation'" (Driskill 2004, 55). It is therefore inconceivable to reconcile with Indigenous Peoples when core aspects of their identities are neglected and continuously subjected to colonialism.

Apologies and Expressions of Sympathy: Malevolent Acts Towards Reconciliation

Offering apologies as a form of reconciliation has become a common practice in the political sphere: in fact, since states, corporate entities, and religious figures are all tendering apologies, many refer to this time as the "'Age of Apology'" (Corntassel and Holder 2008, 467). Before contextualizing apologies with Indigenous Peoples, it is important to address the rather paradoxical nature of apologies as proposed by Nicholas Tavuchis: "... 'an apology, no matter how sincere or effective, does not and cannot undo what has been done. And yet, in a mysterious way and according to its own logic, this is what it manages to do'" (Corntassel and Holder 2008, 467-8). For instance, government apologies for historical injustices are typically formal and "attempt to redress a severe and long-standing harm against an innocent group" (Blatz, Schumann, and Ross 2009, 221).

In addition, "a government is unlikely to offer an apology when it anticipates a major political backlash" (Blatz, Schumann, and Ross 2009, 223). Thus, these calculated apologies are notable for many reasons: first and foremost, reconciliation as an act from the Canadian Federal Government does not necessarily use apologies to "undo" the actions of the past. Instead, this paper argues that apologies are used to reinforce settler colonial ways to "forget" the past, or more specifically, reduce residential schools to a faint memory. This argument is consistent with government apologies as they tend to praise the current laws and dissociate from the injustices that occurred long ago to provide a (false) sense of present, contemporary justice (Blatz, Schumann, and Ross 2009, 223). As Norman Ravvin explicates, "the Canadian past is too often made to go away quietly without struggle" (Norquay 2010, 21). In a similar manner, therefore, by addressing apologies to Indigenous Peoples, the Federal Government attempts to eradicate the truth, history, and reality of residential schools and their remaining effects on Indigenous Peoples, while simultaneously creating the falsehood that justice has been given to the events that occurred "long ago" (Blatz, Schumann, and Ross 2009, 223).

Before outlining the characteristics of an apology, it is worth briefly mentioning a secondary, but nevertheless important factor: the actual delivery of an apology. The delivery of an apology is always on the settler colonial's terms. As Gibney and Roxstrom contend, the state controls *when* the apology will be given, and the manner in which it will be given (Corntassel and Holder 2008, 468). This ironically demonstrates the 'power' and 'control' the nation-state seeks to maintain, even when *trying* to reconcile for the same 'power' and 'control' that continues to drive the unjust treatment of Indigenous Peoples. In fact, this perpetuates the same power imbalances and further places assimilative pressures on the "less powerful group" (Corntassel and Holder 2008, 468). This leads to the question, what constitutes an authentic apology? The following are the criteria Matt James accredits to an authentic political apology:

recorded officially in writing, names the wrongs in question, accepts responsibility, states regret, promises non-repetition, does not demand forgiveness, is not hypocritical or arbitrary and undertakes efforts to engage with those whom the apology is addressed. (Corntassel and Holder 2008, 468-9)

This framework will be applied to the analysis of Stephen Harper's 2008 apology because each of aforementioned criterion are carefully constructed to induce a premeditated response from the public. The research of Blatz, Schumann, and Ross offers interesting insights into similar patterns of official government apologies from multiple countries (2009, 223-29). For instance, their research yields that a promise of forbearance is present in eighty-five percent of apologies directed towards injustices (Blatz, Schumann, and Ross 2009, 227) and seventy-seven percent of apologies offer a method of reparation (Blatz, Schumann, and Ross 2009, 228). However, when analyzing apologies as acts of reconciliation, it is also important to distinguish the difference between apologies and expressions of sympathy.

Contrary to apologies, expressions of sympathy 'place the blame on the individual.' For example the phrases, "We are sorry you feel this way" and "We are sorry for ____" do not convey the same message. The former is an expression of sympathy and places the burden (or the blame) on the other individual instead of claiming responsibility. In comparison, the latter addresses the wrongful action they committed. In relation to apologies addressed to Indigenous Peoples for residential schools, a statement such as "We are sorry you feel upset about residential schools" is categorized as an expression of sympathy— (although this paper would not consider this sympathetic at all)—because it does not accept any blame, and places the burden of 'feeling upset' on the individual/group to whom this statement is addressed. This is an important distinction because it allows one to identify the authenticity of an apology, while also aligning with Matt James' third criteria for a genuine apology. Despite this criterion seeming self-explanatory, the Canadian government reputedly fails to address these basic foundations for an apology. For instance, an apology administered by Jane Stewart in 1998 used nondescript and guarded language to indicate that residential school experiences are "historical" occurrences (Corntassel and Holder 2008, 473). Through these carefully articulated apologies, the government also distributes their narrative of the Indigenous residential school experience: meaning, not only did[4] Indigenous

children suffer in residential schools, but the government alters their experiences through the settler colonial narrative they seem to appropriate. This paper criticizes the ongoing failed government efforts to address the injustices Indigenous Peoples endured in residential schools and the continuation of their effects experienced today. There is a clear issue in which these apologies are deeply rooted in settler colonial ideals, yet an alternate approach to creating a genuine apology has not emerged. Since the Canadian Federal Government refuses to listen to statements by Indigenous survivors such as Chief Robert Joseph (Corntassel and Holder 2008, 474), perhaps an apology can be created in unison with Indigenous survivors so their narrative (the one that matters) will actually be recognized and addressed. This paper recognizes that this task is difficult, especially considering Canada's rejection of a truth commission strategy for a set of policy recommendations in 1998 (Corntassel and Holder 2008, 473). However, it is imperative to create and implement a new, effective action towards reconciliation. If the Canadian Federal Government cannot formulate an efficacious apology—which is a minor step towards reconciliation—how will Indigenous Peoples ever receive the justice they deserve? The fact that another approach has yet to be implemented further indicates the Canadian Government's lack of interest in genuine reconciliation, therefore proving the fallacious nature of apologies towards Indigenous Peoples.

Apologies: Supporting Settler Colonial Ideals

The apology that will be primarily analyzed was presented by the former Prime Minister of Canada, Stephen Harper, in 2008, which is directed to residential school survivors. The second part of this section will analyze the more recent apology delivered by Pope Francis in 2022, which was meant to address the church's involvement in operating residential schools (NPR 2022). The latter section also discusses the rejection of the Pope's apology by many Indigenous Peoples and scholars as it lacks mention of sexual abuse and does not accept responsibility by the Catholic Church as an institution (NPR 2022).

An Analysis of Harper's 2008 "Apology"

When analyzing Stephen Harper's apology on behalf of the Federal Government of Canada, there are many apparent points worth noting[5]. To begin, Harper commences his speech with an introduction that credits the contributors to this apology—an act that is completely inappropriate because it shifts the attention towards "praising" the settler colonials that crafted this apology, instead of focusing on Indigenous Peoples and the effects of residential schools. In fact, this superiority complex that praises the Canadian Federal government is seen throughout the speech in many forms—both semantically and physically. For example, when Harper states for the first time that "Canada recognizes residential schools were 'wrong,'" he receives a rather lengthy applause that he accepts (APTN News 2018, 3:19–26). In addition, Harper uses the past tense of almost all the verbs in the apology—clearly indicating that residential schools

are ‘in the past.’ More specifically, Harper expresses that residential schools are a “sad chapter in our history” (APTN News 2018, 2–2:03). Not only does this comment dismiss the experiences of residential school survivors, but the usage of “chapter” indicates that Canada’s history is continuously being written, and once the reader metaphorically “flips the page,” the experiences of Indigenous Peoples disappear. This is further expressed when Harper states, “the abuse they suffered” (APTN News 2018, 6:44–8). Thus, the semantic and syntactic structure of this speech is very contradictory: Harper insinuates that Canada “understands there are lingering effects of residential schools today,” yet he repeatedly uses the past tense both in metaphors and in verbs, indicating that the transpired events are “over.”

The paradoxical structure of this apology solidifies this paper’s contention that this apology, like many others, is not a genuine step toward reconciliation. The type of language used is also worth addressing, as Harper utilizes rather feeble verbal constructions to convey the realities of residential schools. For instance, Harper states that residential schools “separated children from families” (APTN News 2018, 2:25–30)—the employment of “separated” describes the harsh reality of children being torn away from their families, with some never returning home. Moreover, when addressing Indigenous children, Harper repeatedly refers to them as “helpless,” which once again, employs the superiority of the government and their responsibility as the “only ones” that can, and should, “save the Indigenous children.” The word “helpless,” by its very definition, means “unable to defend oneself or to act without help” (New Oxford American Dictionary 2010). Here, it is important to make a clear distinction: Indigenous children were not born “helpless,” nor were their parents unwilling to provide aid or protection. As previously mentioned, the Canadian government implemented specific measures through the *Indian Act* that forced children to attend church-run and federally-funded residential schools (NCTR 2023). Indigenous children and parents did not have an alternative choice: this was a deliberate tactic employed by government and church entities to assimilate Indigenous children. In fact, towards the end of Harper’s apology, he apologizes for “failing to protect you [‘you’ referring to Indigenous children in residential schools]” (APTN News 2018, 9:07–9). By using the subject pronoun ‘we’ to represent Canada and its citizens, Harper creates the façade of a united nation-state, which further represents the malicious intentions of the government by reducing Indigenous sovereignty within Canadian borders.

However, there is one particular segment that completely discredits this apology: “while some former students have spoken positively about their experiences at residential schools, these stories are far overshadowed...” (APTN News 2018, 5:11–30). Similar to the (second) United Church apology of 1991, which states, “we recognize that in spite of the good that came of them, the residential schools caused pain to so many”[6], this section attempts to reduce the harm inflicted by residential schools on Indigenous Peoples by contending there are “positive experiences” that emerged from these establishments—an absolutely absurd allegation! These particular lines specifically indicate that there is no regret, no intention to refrain from repeating the same actions, and no genuine concern for the well-being or healing of the Indigenous Peoples who wrongfully suffered in residential schools. Finally, Harper ends the speech with “God Bless you all” (APTN News 2018, 12:47), which directly refers to Christianity

and reinforces the dominant White-nation culture and religion of Canada. When applying James' criteria of a genuine apology, Harper's apology meets the following criteria: "recorded officially in writing and names the wrongs in question (to a certain extent)" (Corntassel and Holder 2008, 468-9). The apology fails all other criteria as Harper refers to Indigenous Peoples as "Aboriginals," asks for forgiveness, and ultimately apologizes for "failing them" (APTN News 2018, 10:24). A notable point is a reference to "failing" Indigenous Peoples, as Canada "failed" Indigenous children—by implying this responsibility (Canada as the protector of Indigenous Peoples and children, even though it is this very nation that deliberately inflicts tortuous and inhumane acts), Harper is completely discrediting Indigenous Peoples as a sovereign nation, further insisting on Canada's power as a settler colonial state. This is a reoccurring theme throughout the apology. When Harper mentions the location of the deliverance of this apology, " 'The House of Commons', central to our life as a country" (APTN News 2018, 7:26), not only does Harper reinforce the importance of Canadian parliament, but also neglects the Indigenous land upon which the apology is delivered—once again, disrespecting Indigeneity.

Overall, Harper's apology is more of a "history lesson" from the settler colonial narrative—a speech—instead of a genuine apology. While it mentions some of the residential school practices such as prohibiting languages (APTN News 2018, 4:20-41), the apology is vague and does not provide any context or actual details of the events that transpired, and those that still continue to occur in present-day society. This apology embodies the "superiority complex" of Canada as a settler colonial state, and therefore, this paper argues that it does not meet the criteria of an authentic, nor quasi-apology—it is a speech that was delivered for the political sake of addressing residential schools in Canada, but it is not any type of apology: rather, this apology is disrespectful towards all Indigenous Peoples. Not only is this speech inauthentic, it was also delivered by Stephen Harper—the same man who one year later claimed that Canada "'has no history of colonialism' " (Palmater 2020, 97). This statement undisputedly proves the inauthentic nature of this apology, as well as Stephen Harper's stance on residential schools.

In candid terms, Harper's apology does not accomplish any real form of reconciliation. Instead, it supports the central settler colonial ideal of regulating "native identity" (Lawrence 2003, 3). Efforts to obtain this ideology are also seen in the Government's attempts to impose "citizenship" on Indigenous communities by disguising it as a "gift." Citizenship is a necessary factor to a "multicultural" nation. Without the legal distinction between White settler identities and non-White settler identities such as "precarious migrants" (Maynard 2019, 127), coupled with asserted territorial sovereignty (Speed 2019, 77), the racial logics of White supremacy—and by extension settler colonialism—would be nonexistent. Thus, settler nations such as Canada and the United States employ citizenship as a strategic ploy to maintain White sovereignty on acclaimed territory; meaning, land residents prior to settler colonialism—Indigenous Peoples—are eradicated, while settler colonials establish their sovereignty as a "White Nation." The solicitation of this tactic is present in Indigenous Communities on Turtle Island, which is completely geared towards the "elimination of Indigenous persons, languages, systems of governance and relationships to land"

(Maynard 2019, 129). It is evident that residential schools were constructed to remove any form of Indigenous identity. If Stephen Harper desired to provide a genuine apology on behalf of the Federal Government of Canada, perhaps he should have followed the principles of decolonization, which require the deconstruction and reshaping of Canada's understanding of Indigenous identity (Lawrence 2003, 3). Instead, this apology lacks any form of sincere willingness to learn or understand Indigenous identity. In addition, it aspires to eradicate Indigenous Peoples by removing two fundamental aspects of Indigeneity—language as power and land as life (Alfred and Corntassel 2011, 144). Efforts to abolish these links are ascribable to places of memory and history as they are rooted in land relations, which directly contrasts the notion of multiculturalism. In particular, land for Indigenous Peoples is beyond the White settler views of economic assets (OECD 2020, 137), as it is profoundly connected with spiritual, cultural, and traditional values (ibid, 142). To illustrate, Mohawk seaway land is pervaded with meanings attached to swimming, fishing, and river living from the past, making any seizure of this territory an undeviating violation and disrespect to Mohawk experiences (Simpson 2014, 53). Hence, in establishing White settler regimes^{7[5]} to “manage diversity,” North American governments deliberately undertake an approach to ensure the deprivation of a fundamental aspect of Indigenous identity—land. Thus, Stephen Harper's “apology” is one of many that supports settler colonial ideals by not addressing the realities of residential schools as attempts to completely eliminate Indigenous Peoples. Most importantly, it does not address the current intergenerational effects of residential schools, nor mentions their ultimate failure to eradicate Indigeneity, which is attributed to the continuous resilience of Indigenous Peoples!

Pope Francis' Rejected 2022 Apology: Understanding Indigenous Peoples' Perspectives

It is evident that the Catholic Church and the Federal Canadian government attempted to reconcile with Indigenous Peoples in the form of apologies. These apologies differ slightly, making it important to analyze the Catholic Church's tactics independently. However, what is more prevalent is the rejection of these apologies from Indigenous communities. Instead of recreating subpar apologies, the perspectives and responses from Indigenous Peoples must be recognized, understood, and implemented. Recently, Pope Francis delivered an apology in Maskwacis, Alberta (2022) to Indigenous Peoples for “abuses in the country's church-run residential schools” (NPR 2022). Although this was a historic moment—occurring seven years after being requested in 2015 by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) Call to Action No. 58 (Campbell 2022)—this apology has received various emotive responses from Indigenous Peoples, with many rejecting the apology because it did not mention sexual abuse, nor accept responsibility by the Catholic Church as an institution (NPR 2022). To fully understand the sentiments towards this apology by Indigenous communities, it is essential to analyze the Catholic Church's past and the TRC's Call to Action No. 58, which states:

We call upon the Pope to issue an apology to Survivors, their families, and communities for the Roman Catholic Church's role in the spiritual, cultural, emotional, physical, and sexual abuse of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children in Catholic-run residential schools. We call for that apology to be similar to the 2010 apology issued to Irish victims of abuse and to occur within one year of the issuing of this Report and to be delivered by the Pope in Canada. (Indigenous Watchdog 2022)

This is an important statement, specifically the request of issuing an apology similar to Irish victims of abuse, because it demonstrates the deliberate disregard towards Indigenous Peoples. For context, in the 1990s, investigations into the predatory behaviour of priests and nuns became prominent in Ireland (Formicola 2011, 537). This led to the creation of the Irish Child Abuse Commission (2000) and the publication of the Ryan Report which revealed information of over 14,000 sexual abuse victims (Formicola 2011, 537-8). Notably, this report exposed both the government's and church's "collusion in 'perpetrating an abusive system' towards children" (Formicola 2011, 538). In 2010, Pope Benedict XVI released a seven-page pastoral letter that addressed Irish victims, parents, church leaders, and abusers (CBC News 2010). This letter described the sexual and physical abuse by priests, as well as a "misplaced concern for the reputation of the Church and the avoidance of scandal, resulting in failure to apply existing canonical penalties and to safeguard the dignity of every person" (Pope Benedict XVI 2010). The TRC's Call to Action No. 58 requested a similar apology, yet received one that specifically did not include mention of sexual abuse, nor the acknowledgement of the Catholic Church's profound involvement. Instead, Pope Francis addressed the experiences of Indigenous Peoples and children by stating:

[...] I think back on the stories you told: [...] the policies of assimilation ended up systematically marginalizing the Indigenous Peoples; [...] through the system of residential schools your languages and cultures were denigrated and suppressed; [...] children suffered physical, verbal, psychological and spiritual abuse; [...] taken away from their homes at a young age, and how that indelibly affected relationships between parents and children, grandparents and grandchildren. (CBC 2022)

When reading Pope Francis' apology in its entirety, this is arguably the most descriptive section outlining the effects of the residential school system. In comparing the TRC's Call to Action No. 58 request with Pope Francis' apology, it is evident that it does not adequately address sexual abuse, nor the involvement of the Catholic Church. This is further supported by a later statement where Pope Francis mentions:

[a]lthough 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. (CBC 2022)

Once again, the Catholic Church is depicted in a "positive perspective"[8], rather than an institution that fostered and actively participated in the assimilation of Indigenous Peoples and their children.

What is most important about the TRC's request is the deliberate disregard from Pope Francis to administer an apology similar to the apology administered to Irish people. Why is this the case? Why can the Catholic Church assume responsibility for the sexual abuse of Irish Catholics, but not Indigenous children? Accordingly, Pope Francis' apology upholds assimilation policies by failing to mention the Doctrine of Discovery [9], not recognizing the sexual abuse and intergenerational trauma that Indigenous Peoples continue to endure, and further protecting the Catholic Church as an institution with 'no-fault.' More specifically, this paper contends that the deliberate disregard to administer a similar apology is due to the receiving community: Irish Catholics (who

share similar religious beliefs and ethnic traits) versus Indigenous Peoples. By using carefully constructed language to shift the blame to “individual Christians,” this insinuates that the individual, independent from the Catholic Church, remained autonomous in the unjust actions they perpetrated in residential schools. Once again, this excuses the Catholic Church for orchestrating these inexplicable events. Dr. Pamela Palmater provides an eminent response explaining the rejection of Pope Francis’ apology from an Indigenous perspective:

The Pope skipped over the Catholic Church’s complicity and cover-up of the sexual abuse of thousands of Indigenous children over many generations. His failure to acknowledge the church’s role — both at the individual level and as an institution and governing body — not only deflects responsibility but also serves to put more children at risk. His failure to also recognize its role in genocide was a glaring omission that hurt many Indigenous Peoples. (Palmater 2022)

On the basis of these extremely valid sentiments, it is important to formulate justice for Indigenous Peoples that addresses each of these factors. Similar emotions are expressed by Lori Campbell, granddaughter of a residential school survivor who spent over twenty-five years searching for her birth mother and siblings (Campbell 2022). Reconciliation requires all Canadians to listen to Indigenous communities and respect their culture—administering subpar apologies that willfully neglect the needs and desires of Indigenous Peoples is completely disrespectful. Indeed, some Canadian politicians and officials such as Prime Minister Trudeau agreed the apology was insufficient (NPR 2022). However, complicit agreement cannot be the only action taken towards reconciliation. In order to progress with reconciliation, those same politicians and officials must act on their acclaimed “accordance” with Indigenous Peoples. For instance, the Vatican must release all residential school records as requested by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2015 (Campbell 2022). The words of these prominent political figures and the Catholic Church must be followed by actions, as the failure to engage in acts of genuine reconciliation will further prove the inauthentic nature of apologies as forms of reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples in Canada.

Redress Through Apologies and its Alignment with Settler Colonialism

In contemporary usage, apologies in Canada as forms of redress align with settler colonialism due to the way redress is pursued as “a liberal politics of recognition and redistribution, apologies, compensations, and even forgiveness for historical injustices” (Yoneyama 2010, 664), which are instrumentalized as objects of exchange in the public sphere. Simply put, redress is meant to remedy or compensate for wrongdoings, “which could positively affect citizen engagement in future state processes” (Borrows 2014, 497). For instance, Borrows sublimely explains that “most arguments against residential school redress do not generally deny that Indigenous Peoples suffered harm in these institutions” (Borrows 2014, 501). Rather, most issues regarding residential school redress are found in determining “ [the] scope, cost, fairness, and appropriateness of addressing them [residential schools]” (Borrows 2014, 501). Simply put, these factors are not adequately considered when issuing redress. Although the Canadian government has many avenues of redress available as outlined

in the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action*, 2012 (Canada 2023) and the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*, 2021 (UNDRIP) (TRCC 2012), this section will only focus on redress through the form of apologies: in particular, their inability to adequately address residential school systems (Borrows 2014, 501).

When considering the aforementioned discussion of apologies through their frameworks provided by the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* and *UNDRIP*, the government does mention some form of harm suffered by Indigenous Peoples, but this reference is grossly inadequate. It is evident that redress through apologies is not an effective way to remedy injustices because it often selectively chooses the areas considered “worthy” of acknowledgement. This connects to Gibney and Roxstrom’s argument (Corntassel and Holder 2008, 468), where the nation-state controls the manner in which reconciliation is distributed. Perhaps, most importantly, that redress through apologies does not provide genuine efforts to mitigate and mend relationships. This may correlate with the fact that these reports only suggest obligations on the Canadian federal government—it is not legally binding legislation (Government of Canada 2021).

According to Chief Robert Joseph (Kwagiulth Nation), restitution reduces the experiences of residential school survivors and further demonstrates Canada’s intention to institutionalize racism once again (Corntassel and Holder 2008, 474). In the case of apologies, this deceitful attempt to ‘provide support’ and ‘reconcile’ represents the Canadian Federal Government’s distinct position that residential schools are ‘an action of the past,’ which further supports settler colonial ideals that ‘history is over.’ Institutionalizing Indigenous Peoples through redress further marginalizes Indigenous Peoples by having them accept the settler state “as the sovereign power that could grant them rights” (Speed 2019, 82). This deceitful tactic is cleverly constructed on the part of the Canadian Federal Government because it allows the nation-state to achieve what it desires most: complete sovereign power. Since Indigenous Peoples generally represent survival and resurgence in the face of ongoing colonialism (Tallbear 2013, 514), it follows that the Canadian Federal Government seeks to dismantle this sovereign nation, thereby achieving total sovereign power.

Indigenous Peoples are in the constant process of explaining their frustration from the treatment they receive from Canadian public and governing institutions. One Indigenous Community Leader explains, “‘They’re [mainstream society]...always trying to help the Indian...it’s everywhere, it’s inherent in Western superiority, this kind of need...but they need to change other people’...” (Madariaga-Vigundo 2012, 17). Thus, institutionalizing Indigenous Peoples through redress would exemplify and heighten these sentiments, producing an even more exploited Indigenous population. Although redress is intended to be a tool for minority groups to exercise their civic voice, it is ultimately a tool entrenched within settler colonial ideals of assimilation and “national cohesion” (James 2013).

Conclusion: Canada’s Overt Failure to Administer Genuine Reconciliation

Due to their incontrovertible inauthenticity, the Canadian Federal Government’s efforts at redress and reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples, specifically through the form of

apologies, qualify as complete failures. According to James' (2013) criteria for an authentic apology (of which there are eight), the Canadian Federal Government's issued apologies thus far only seem to meet the following criteria: "recorded officially in writing" (Corntassel and Holder 2008, 468-9). Most importantly, there is no sense of genuine reconciliation, which is most apparent through the lack of sustained, inclusive, and meaningful engagement with Indigenous Peoples. Although reconciliation takes many forms and is a continuous process, a step towards reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples (in the context of apologies) can focus on the process of storytelling. Drawing on Little, this process involves speaking about narratives that may cause further political disagreement: "as Moon (2006) contends, talking about reconciliation needs to involve narratives which are not reconciled, which are not forgiving, which do not apologize, which call for punishment" (Little 2012, 86). This process differs from previous apologies because it requires addressing unsettled narratives such as sexual abuse towards children and the genocide of Indigenous Peoples (Palmater 2022). Contrastingly, the current policies of redress are ingrained with assimilation and institutionalization, which further promote the marginalization and exploitation of Indigenous Peoples by aligning with settler colonialism. Through the analysis of Stephen Harper's 2008 "apology," this paper proves that the apologies proclaimed by the Canadian Federal Government do not take significant, if any, action to genuinely reconcile with Indigenous Peoples. Rather, these carefully constructed apologies support settler colonial ideals and explicitly disrespect all Indigenous Peoples.

A Genuine and Just Future Requires the Inclusion of Indigenous Peoples

It is important to acknowledge that Indigenous Peoples want to be part of the conversation regarding Canadian policies, but they are deliberately excluded by the Canadian Federal Government (similarly to how they are excluded as a founding nation). For instance, Indigenous Peoples realize the "dominant group holds the policy-making power" (Madariaga-Vigundo 2012, 17); regarding immigration, an Indigenous Service Provider explains that "as the First Nations of Canada, Natives feel it is their right to be informed and involved in shaping public policies, including ones related to immigration" (Madariaga-Vigundo 2012, 17). It is thus apparent that Indigenous Peoples wish to be "better informed, consulted and included in policy-making processes" (Madariaga-Vigundo 2012, 18). However, it is even more discernable that the Federal Government of Canada, in its current state, has no interest in genuine reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples: instead, their proposition of redress is entrenched with iniquitous intentions and their apologies are at best, eminently subpar. Therefore, this paper challenges the Federal Government of Canada to withhold their contentions of a 'meaningful reconciliation' with Indigenous Peoples by including them not only in the processes of reconciliation and redress but policy-making decisions as well. As Chief Robert Joseph states:

Aboriginal people should be a part of this new reflection and dialogue because they have much to contribute. They have been subjected to genocidal intentions and attempts of total assimilation. They have survived and understand how they have made it to this time. In addition, aboriginal people have been multicultural since the beginning of time as they know it. (Robert 2012, 10)

Genuine reconciliation will never be achieved without the inclusion of Indigenous Peoples. Through residential schools, they endure the horrendous actions of settler colonialism, which the dominant White settler population will never fully understand. It is essential to consider these experiences because they are (unfortunately and unjustly) distinct to Indigenous Peoples. An apology and financial redress are certainly not enough to compensate for the intergenerational trauma and continuous effects of residential schools on Indigenous Peoples. If the Federal Government of Canada wants true reconciliation (as they claim), the aforementioned efforts require substantial revisions to be inclusive of the experiences of Indigenous Peoples. Most importantly, the Federal Government of Canada must revise their multicultural framework and break away from its settler colonial ideals. As Borrows suggests, “Indigenous peoples’ own laws and political traditions could be applied to further address the responsibilities we have toward one another in Canada” (Borrows 2014, 501). This means incorporating Indigenous law as it has many sources that allow “healthy disagreement and a dynamic source of reasoning” (Borrows 2014, 502). An application is seen in Anishinaabe law, which “demonstrates how one might meaningfully accept responsibility for harms flowing from residential schools” (Borrows 2014, 502). As prominent Anishinaabe leaders recognize that their tone and approach could be altered to address residential schools more effectively (Borrows 2014, 502), the Canadian Government should have no issue following suit. While it is recognized that this stance is perhaps too optimistic, as a Treaty Person[10], the issues of Indigenous Peoples are not just concerns—they are everyone’s problems (Mackey 2016). As a collective population, everyone needs to re-think alliances and find respectful and productive ways to have two sovereign nations live together (Mackey 2016). Following the Two-Row Wampum, everyone must focus on the river, not the canoes—respect, reciprocity and renewal are important factors necessary to break out of the cognitive prison and claim responsibility for the unjust treatment of Indigenous Peoples (Mackey 2016).

In the words of Chief Robert Joseph, “We are all responsible and as Aboriginal people, like myself, we can help with the unique experiences that we have. It begins with you and I” (Robert 2012, 10). Being a Treaty Person is a responsibility that every Canadian citizen conveys: it is of the utmost importance to support and alleviate the physical and emotional burdens that residential schools place on Indigenous Peoples—remaining silent only condones, and by extension, approves the unjust behaviour the Federal Government of Canada (and all its institutions) inflict on Indigenous Peoples.

Appendix A

The following excerpt is Stephen Harper’s 2008 “Statement of Apology to former students of Indian Residential Schools” in English (Government of Canada 2008).

Note: This excerpt is the official statement found on the Canadian government’s website. This paper analyzes the oral delivery of the apology presented by Stephen Harper at the House of Commons on June 11th, 2008.



Statement of Apology – to former students of Indian Residential Schools

The treatment of children in Indian Residential Schools is a sad chapter in our history. For more than a century, Indian families and communities have lost 150,000 Aboriginal children from their families and communities. In the 1870s, the federal government, partly in order to meet its obligation to educate Aboriginal children and partly to promote economic development and administration of these schools, two primary objectives of the Residential Schools system were to remove and isolate children from the influence of their homes, families, traditions and cultures, and to assimilate them into the dominant culture. These objectives were based on the assumption Aboriginal cultures and spiritual beliefs were inferior and unequal. Indeed, some sought, as it were, to “kill the Indian in the child.” Today, we recognize that this policy of assimilation was wrong, has caused great harm, and has no place in our country.

One hundred and thirty-two federally-supported schools were located in Newfoundland, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island. Most schools were operated as “joint ventures” with Anglican, Catholic, Presbyterian or United Churches. The residential school system, in which very young children were often forcibly removed from their homes, often taken far from their communities. Many were inadequately clothed and housed. All were deprived of the normal upbringing of their parents, grandparents and communities.

First Nations, Inuit and Métis languages and cultural practices were prohibited in these schools. In many cases, the children died while attending residential schools and others never returned home. The government now recognizes that the consequences of the Indian Residential Schools policy were profoundly negative and that this policy has had a lasting and harmful impact on the lives of many former students and their families. While some former students have spoken positively about their experiences at residential schools, these stories are far overshadowed by tragic accounts of the emotional, physical and social abuse and neglect that many children, and their separation from powerless families and communities. The legacy of Indian Residential Schools has contributed to social problems that continue to exist in many communities today.

It has taken extraordinary courage for the thousands of survivors that have come forward to speak about the pain, suffering and abuse they suffered. It is a testament to their resilience as individuals and to the strength of their cultures. Regrettably, many former students are not with us today and their voices are missing from this apology from the Government of Canada.

The government recognizes that the absence of an apology has been an omission. Therefore, on behalf of the Government of Canada and all Canadians, I stand before you, in this Chamber so central to our life as a country, to apologize to Aboriginal peoples of Canada a role in the Indian Residential Schools system. To the approximately 80,000 living former students and all family members and communities, the Government of Canada now recognizes that it was wrong to forcibly remove children from their homes and to apologize for having done this. We now recognize that it was wrong to separate children from rich and vibrant cultures and traditions, that it created a void in many lives and communities, and we apologize for having done this. We recognize that the Indian Residential Schools system undermined the ability of many to adequately parent their own children and sowed the seeds for generations to follow, and we apologize for having done this. We recognize that, far too often, these institutions gave rise to abuse or neglect and were inadequately controlled, and we apologize for failing to protect you. Not only did you suffer these abuses as children, but as you became your own children from suffering the same experience, and for this we are sorry.

The burden of this experience has been on your shoulders for far too long. The Indian Residential Schools system, and as a country. There is no place in Canada for the attitudes that inspired the Indian Residential Schools system to ever again prevail. You have been working on reconciliation from this experience for a long time and it is time we move forward, joining you on this journey.

The Government of Canada sincerely apologizes and asks the forgiveness of the Aboriginal peoples of this country for failing them so profoundly. In moving towards healing, reconciliation and resolution of the sad legacy of Indian Residential Schools, we are guided by the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement begun on September 19, 2007. Years of work by survivors, communities, and Aboriginal organizations culminated in an agreement that gives us a new path forward together in partnership. A cornerstone of the Settlement Agreement is the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission. This Commission provides an opportunity to educate all Canadians on the Indian Residential Schools system. It will be a positive step in forging a new relationship between Aboriginal peoples and the Government of Canada based on the knowledge of our shared history, a respect for each other and a desire to move forward together with a renewed understanding that strong families, strong communities and vibrant cultures and traditions will contribute to a stronger Canada for all of us.



On behalf of the Government of Canada
The Right Honourable Stephen Harper,
Prime Minister of Canada

June 11, 2008

Appendix B

L'extrait suivant est la "Présentation d'excuses aux anciens élèves des pensionnats indiens" de Stephen Harper en 2008 (Government of Canada 2008).

Note: Cet extrait est la déclaration officielle que l'on trouve sur le site web du gouvernement canadien. Cet essai analyse la présentation orale des excuses par Stephen Harper à la Chambre des communes le 11 juin 2008.



Présentation d'excuses aux anciens élèves des pensionnats indiens

Le traitement des enfants dans ces pensionnats est un triste chapitre de notre histoire.

Pendant plus d'un siècle, les pensionnats indiens ont séparé plus de 150 000 enfants autochtones de leurs familles et de leurs communautés. Dans les années 1870, le gouvernement a commencé à séparer les enfants autochtones du système fédéral à commencer à jouer un rôle dans l'établissement et l'administration de ces écoles. Le système des pensionnats indiens avait deux principaux objectifs : isoler les enfants des influences de leur culture, de leur langue et de leur communauté, et de leur culture et de leur langue, et de leur communauté.

Ces objectifs reposaient sur l'hypothèse que les cultures et les croyances spirituelles des Autochtones étaient inférieures. D'ailleurs, certains croyaient, selon une vision raciste, que les enfants autochtones n'étaient pas capables de s'adapter à la culture et à la langue de l'enfant.

Aujourd'hui, nous reconnaissons que cette politique d'assimilation était erronée, qu'elle a fait beaucoup de mal et qu'elle n'a aucune place dans notre pays.

Cent trente-deux écoles financées par le fédéral se trouvaient dans chaque province et territoire, à l'exception de la Colombie-Britannique. Les pensionnats étaient dirigés conjointement avec les Églises anglicane, catholique, presbytérienne ou unie. Le gouvernement du Canada a dirigé un système d'éducation dans le cadre duquel de très jeunes enfants ont souvent été arrachés à leurs familles et à leurs communautés. Bon nombre d'entre eux étaient nourris, vêtus et logés de façon inadéquate. Tous étaient privés des soins et du soutien de leurs parents, de leurs grands-parents et de leurs communautés.

Les langues et les pratiques culturelles des Premières nations, des Inuits et des Métis étaient interdites dans ces écoles. Certains de ces enfants ont connu un sort tragique, et d'autres ne sont jamais revenus chez eux.

Le gouvernement reconnaît aujourd'hui que les conséquences de la politique des pensionnats indiens ont été très néfastes et que cette politique a causé des dommages durables à la culture, au patrimoine et à la langue autochtones. Bien que certains anciens élèves aient dû surmonter de nombreuses difficultés, les pensionnats, leur histoire est de loin assombrie par les témoignages tragiques sur la négligence, l'abus émotionnel, physique et sexuel d'enfants sans défense, et ainsi que la séparation de leurs familles et communautés impuissantes.

L'héritage laissé par les pensionnats indiens a contribué à des problèmes sociaux qui persistent dans de nombreuses communautés aujourd'hui.

Il a fallu un courage extraordinaire aux milliers de survivants qui ont parlé de leur expérience et ont permis à leurs familles et à leur communauté de leur résilience personnelle et de la force de leur culture. Malheureusement, de nombreux anciens élèves ne sont plus des nôtres et sont décédés avant d'avoir reçu des excuses du gouvernement du Canada.

Le gouvernement reconnaît que l'absence d'excuses a nui à la guérison et à la réconciliation. Nous, le gouvernement du Canada et les Canadiens et Canadiennes, le ne livrer devant vous, dans cette chambre si

vitale à notre existence en tant que pays, pour présenter nos excuses aux peuples autochtones pour le rôle joué par le Canada dans les pensionnats indiens.

Aux quelque 80 000 anciens élèves toujours en vie, ainsi qu'aux milliers de survivants et à leurs familles, le gouvernement du Canada adresse aujourd'hui qu'il a eu tort d'arracher les enfants à leurs foyers et s'excuse d'avoir agi ainsi. Nous reconnaissons maintenant que nous avons eu tort de séparer les enfants de leur culture et de leur langue, et de leur communauté, et ainsi violé dans de nombreuses communautés, et nous nous excusons d'avoir agi ainsi.

Nous reconnaissons maintenant qu'en séparant les enfants de leurs familles, nous avons réduit la capacité de nombreux anciens élèves à s'identifier à leur propre culture, à leur langue et à leur communauté, et ainsi violé dans de nombreuses communautés, et nous nous excusons d'avoir agi ainsi.

Nous reconnaissons maintenant que, beaucoup trop souvent, ces institutions dominaient liés à des cas de services ou de négligence et n'étaient pas contrôlés de manière adéquate, et nous nous excusons de ne pas avoir fait davantage pour protéger les enfants pendant votre enfance, mais en tant que parents, vous étiez impuissants à éviter le même sort à vos enfants, et nous le regrettons.

Le fardeau de cette expérience pèse sur vos épaules depuis beaucoup trop

longtemps. Ce fardeau nous revient directement, en tant que gouvernement et en tant que pays. Il n'y a pas de place au Canada pour les attitudes qui ont inspiré le système des pensionnats indiens. Vous n'êtes pas en mesure de le faire. Vous tenez de vous remettre de cette épreuve depuis longtemps, et d'une façon très concrète, nous vous rejoignons maintenant dans ce cheminement.

Le gouvernement du Canada présente ses excuses les plus sincères aux peuples autochtones du Canada pour avoir si profondément manqué à son devoir envers eux, et leur demande pardon.

Entrée en vigueur le 19 septembre 2007, la Loi sur les excuses du gouvernement aux pensionnats indiens s'inscrit dans une démarche de guérison, de réconciliation et de règlement des tristes séquelles laissées par les pensionnats indiens. Des années d'efforts de la part des survivants, des communautés et des gouvernements autochtones ont conduit à un entente qui nous permet de prendre un nouveau départ et d'aller de l'avant en partenariat. La Commission de vérité et de réconciliation est au cœur de la Convention de règlement. La Commission constitue une occasion unique de reconnaître et de célébrer les contributions des survivants et des pensionnats indiens. Il s'agit d'une nouvelle relation d'établissement d'une nouvelle relation entre les peuples autochtones et les autres Canadiens et Canadiennes, une relation basée sur la connaissance de notre histoire commune, sur un respect mutuel et sur le désir de créer une nouvelle vision de la conviction renouvelée que des familles fortes, des communautés solides et des cultures et des traditions bien vivantes contribueront à bâtir un Canada fort pour chacun et chacune d'entre nous.

Stephen Harper

Au nom du gouvernement du Canada
le vice-président Stephen Harper,
président honoraire du Canada

le 11 juin 2008

Notes

[1] The Indian Act (now R.S.C. 1985, c. I-5) is a coercive piece of federal legislation that governs Indigenous people in Canada and the “associated onslaught of so-called ‘civilizing’ programs” such as residential schools, child welfare policies and restricting Indigenous people’s traditional governance (Borrows and Rotman 2023, 3).

[2] Settler colonial ideals refers to practices of “assimilation through elimination” of Indigenous people by the Canadian Federal Government. This includes, but is not limited to practices of enfranchisement, forceful citizenship, “bleeding out the native” through Blood Quantum, and creating “Indian Reserves” (Lawrence 2003).

[3] ‘Educating’ is placed in quotations as a criticism of this term: Indigenous children were raped, tortured, and killed, yet these realities are masked by the term “education.”

[4] Past tense is used here because it is referring to a specific event in time. It is understood, acknowledged, and argued that these sentiments and effects remain present today.

[5] See Appendix A for the English excerpt of this apology and Appendix B for the French version of this apology (la version française se trouve à l'annexe b).

[6] Personal conversation with Dr. Lisa Davidson on March 23rd, 2022.

[7] Such as multiculturalism in Canada and the notions of “salad bowl” and/or “melting pot” in the United States.

[8] Through the following phrase: “...there were many outstanding instances of devotion and care for children...” (CBC 2022), Pope Francis tries to diminish the Catholic Church’s involvement.

[9] Where non-Christian individuals did not have the same rights to land and sovereignty as Catholics (ICP, 2020).

[10] This includes a personal reference to myself.

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