



An Apology Isn't Enough; Reconciliation Must Happen on Indigenous Peoples' Terms

July 30, 2022 by Educator Barnes

On Monday, during a speech in Alberta, Canada, the Pope apologized for the harm to Indigenous children at residential schools operated by the Catholic Church. He also promised a serious investigation into the matter.

The Pope said, “In the face of this deplorable evil, the Church kneels before God and implores his forgiveness for the sins of her children.” Although Indigenous Peoples span locations and tribal affiliations and are not a monolith, many felt this apology wasn’t enough.

Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission was created as part of the residential schools class action settlement. Last year, Canada held its first National Day for Truth and Reconciliation to mourn and acknowledge the children harmed or who had died at the residential schools.

Last year, Roseanne Archibald, National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, said, “We need more than an apology. We need reparations. We need justice. We’re not going to get that by having a lovely visit with the pope in the Vatican.” She also wanted people to be clear about how this tragedy is discussed. Archibald said, “I don’t like to call them schools – they were institutions of assimilation and genocide.”

One specific ask some Indigenous people have made is for the Pope to rescind the Catholic Church’s Doctrine of Discovery. Rebecca Nagle, a Cherokee writer who hosts the podcast This Land, explained what this doctrine was on Twitter.

For the unfamiliar, the Doctrine of Discovery was a series of papal bulls that said Christian Nations became the rightful owner of any land they found occupied by non-Christian people. Europeans used it to colonize most of the earth. It’s never been rescinded.

While the Pope was still in Canada this week, a mass service he was leading was interrupted. Two cousins, who are both Anishinaabe, held up a banner with the words, “Rescind the Doctrine.”

Some Catholics argue that rescinding the doctrine is unnecessary since it has been abrogated and has no legal power.

However, this is not how reconciliation works. The people who caused harm do not get to tell the people who were harmed what they need. They don’t get to stop at an apology. The harm should be repaired, and the harmed should dictate the terms of the reconciliation.

Until residential schools living survivors receive reparations, until the families of those that have died or even had to attend these schools receive reparations, until every single body is recovered, until the Doctrine of Discovery is rescinded, until the stolen land is given back, and

until every other request made by Indigenous Peoples are met, this apology means absolutely nothing.

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