

GlobeSalon

When is an apology not enough? or too much?

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Hello, I'm Patrick Martin, Comment Editor of The Globe and Mail, and This is GlobeSalon.

Today, we welcome readers to a new feature on globeandmail.com: Whenever major news developments or burning issues arise, we have gathered an impressive list of commentators to join us in discussion, salon-style — as if we've invited these people into our living room to discuss pivotal events.

There are about two dozen "salonistas" and you can read the lineup and **see their biographies and pictures here**.

Not all of them will join us every time. Today, we'll be joined by historian Margaret MacMillan, now at St. Antony's College at Oxford; by pollster and author Michael Adams; CAW economist and new author Jim Stanford; Christian broadcaster Lorna Dueck; former PQ cabinet minister Joseph Facal; Michael Higgins, president of St Thomas University in Fredericton and noted scholar on the Vatican; former chief of staff to Brian Mulroney and former ambassador Norman Spector; author William Johnson, a past president of Alliance Quebec; Halifax lawyer and former Trudeau adviser Brian Flemming; Nobel laureate and science advocate John Polanyi; Globe and Mail columnist Marcus Gee and more.

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On other occasions, we'll be joined by the likes of Naomi Klein, Preston Manning, Mark Kingwell and Lysiane Gagnon.

This is not a comprehensive gathering representative of absolutely all Canadians, but our own subjective selection of people we believe our readers would like to hear from. We will learn and adjust as we go on, for this is a new experience for all of us.

But today, our topic is the Prime Minister's apology yesterday, on behalf of all Canadians, to aboriginal Canadians.

Yesterday, we asked our salonistas to view Stephen Harper's speech and tell us:

What do you think of this apology? Is it as "historic" as some people say?

What do think of apologies in general? In other countries? What do they achieve?

Is this part of a national trend to reasonable accommodation v. assimilation? Is this a good thing?

Is there a place for assimilation?

Editor's Note: In keeping with the nature of this discussion, we will be fully moderating reader comments to ensure the highest level of debate. We will be strictly enforcing our written guidelines on comments. Please "Join the Conversation" but please do so in the spirit we hope to create for the GlobeSalon.

Now, we'll hear their responses. The debate will continue throughout the day. Please check back frequently for the latest updates.

First to Margaret MacMillan in Oxford, who's had a few hours headstart on the rest of us:



Margaret MacMillan: Patrick, I had a chance to watch the prime minister's apology for the residential schools and the subsequent speeches. I wish I were in Canada to take part in a moving moment in Canadian history. I hope, as I am sure almost all Canadians do, that as a society we can collectively start to tackle the problems that so many aboriginal communities face.

But, please, let the apology not become an icon, something that we pull out from time to time and admire and then put away again. Let it not be something that makes us feel good about ourselves so that we can avoid thinking about the things that should shame us.

Apologies are a fashion today, and on the whole a good one. This past February, the Australian government finally said sorry for the decades-long practice of seizing its Aboriginal children from their families and giving them to white families to be brought up "white."

Apologies are good both for those who are admitting their past sins and those who receive them. Accepting the past, as the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission showed, is an important step towards moving into the future. But words are cheap if they are not preceded by serious thought and followed by serious action.

What did it really do when Tony Blair apologized for the Irish potato famine? Or when the descendant of the notorious Elizabethan Sir John Hawkins apologized for slavery? Are such apologies anything more than easy sentimentality? And what do apologies mean when they are not accompanied by any significant acts of restitution? Australia's Prime Minister Kevin Rudd said

"sorry," but significantly did not explain what his government was going to do about the lot of present-day Aboriginals.

What is Canada going to do for today's Aboriginals? I am still waiting to know. I don't want to think that dwelling on the past a way of avoiding dealing with the present.

Patrick Martin: Lorna Dueck joins us from Burlington, Ont.



Lorna Dueck: I was in the House yesterday and I can tell you all the senses were engaged for the process of apology. I first noticed that the sombre House was dominated by drums. An interesting technique which First Nations used to fully alert our spirits to the occasion. Aboriginal people explain the sound is symbolic of a heartbeat for their people — the beating heart of nationhood, the beating heart of the Creator, a mother's heartbeat. The sound has several interpretations but it is always a tone calling out to the spirit and it's sound was repetitive all through yesterday's ceremony.

The sight of survivors of the Indian Residential Schools wiping away tears, the aroma of sweetgrass wafting in symbolism to cleanse negative thoughts, the touch of many in embrace. It was a day like no other in Ottawa and I think it was deeply historic for it returned our nation to the path of truth.

We faced the truth that we grossly violated basic human dignity. We faced the truth that we were wrong and destructive in our approach to First Nation Canadians and we are sorry. Among the repentant were church leaders of all the denominations who had been agents for the schools. When the final "I'm sorry" was issued in the House, aboriginal leaders took over the agenda and responded. Despite all the spiritual abuse of the past, their reply was still spiritual, and it modeled that for respect and honour to be restored, we need to build on something very different than physical solutions.

These are issues of the heart, and time will tell if we have the richness of spirit to overcome the estrangement that our faulty policies launched. This apology is the first step forward to that future.

Patrick Martin: Now to Jim Stanford in Toronto:



Jim Stanford: Yesterday's solemn event in the Commons invoked in me a sense of awe and gratitude for the human will to survive, more than pity for the victims of this horrific experiment in white-supremacist social engineering.

Because against all the odds, Aboriginal Canadians have survived. Their culture, their language, their fighting spirit, and their pride are still here, a century and a half after the government first tried to systematically wipe them out — by "killing the Indian in the child" through kidnapping, indoctrination, and physical, sexual, and psychological abuse. Yes, they've paid an immense price (and hundreds of thousands continue to suffer from those crimes every day). But they're still here, and that's something to celebrate.

And they'll need that fighting spirit and will to survive to move to the next step in their struggle for full equity and participation. Because it's clear that the Harper government won't move beyond this apology (which was historically important, whatever Prime Minister Harper's political motives and calculations in agreeing to make it) unless it is forced by the sheer might of political pressure.

Indeed, the elephant in the room yesterday was the glaring contradiction between the apology's stirring and sincere words, with the reality of continuing Conservative policy — ripping up the Kelowna Accord, rejecting the UN declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples (one of only four countries in the world to do so), withholding the resources we need to address First Nations poverty. Unless and until that changes, white society will have a lot more to apologize for down the road.

Patrick Martin: Now, from Michael Higgins in Fredericton.



Michael Higgins: Apologies by institutions or sovereign powers can have the ring of inauthenticity about them. They may be more the result of expert strategy than genuine remorse, more the result of political expediency than moral necessity.

Pierre Elliot Trudeau was not inclined to issue apologies over past mistakes. The Japanese-Canadian community would have to wait for Brian Mulroney for satisfaction. Mr. Trudeau had his reasons — the dangers inherent in assuming moral culpability for past errors, the pitfalls of revisionism, etc. — and although not insensitive to the consequences of bad policies, he preferred other courts of redress to public apologies.

Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, it is reliably alleged, had some serious reservations over his predecessor's grand millennial ceremony of confession, reparation, and penance acknowledging historic failures of the church. His reasons were not entirely unlike Trudeau's.

But Prime Minister Stephen Harper's apology to the aboriginal peoples of Canada is different in kind and impact. The full recognition of the egregious indignities inflicted upon our aboriginal peoples has been long in coming, regularly resisted through all manner of subterfuge, intrigue, manipulation, and empty professions of solicitous oversight.

Content is critical but the tone just as essential in persuading the citizens of Canada that our Prime Minister is sincere in his apology, that he speaks for us all, that for all the evasions and politicking that preceded yesterday's event, the PM spoke from a text that was far from bloodless.

An apology, in the end, to effectively work its power is more than compensation and calculation, more than a conversion of mind. It is a conversion of heart — national heart. Stephen Harper did not disappoint.

Patrick Martin: What does Joseph Facal, in Montreal, think about that?



Joseph Facal: By expressing what looked and sounded like a sincere and profound apology, Mr. Harper went beyond the "profound regrets" offered 10 years ago by Jean Chrétien's government. It was the right thing to do. Politics being what it is, other political leaders had to follow through.

Among the many fundamental questions this raises, one troubles me particularly. Western liberal societies (and only these) now live in a permanent culture of guilt, contrition and victimhood. Canada, with its long standing image of itself as a self-righteous model for the rest of the world, is at the forefront of this.

This apology comes after the ones to Canadians of Chinese descent and to Maher Arar. Others are waiting in line. Of course, many past injustices have been buried and will remain so: How many Canadians know what happened in 1871, 1896, 1905, 1912 ? (Want a clue? Yup, it had to do with

linguistic rights and cultural assimilation). Granted, not many groups had such a powerful and compelling case to put forward as aboriginals.

But how are we to determine how to deal with future claims? On the ad-hoc basis of public emotion and political expediency? Or by setting up cumbersome public inquiries each time, which will obviously highlight all the wrongs and little of the good, incapable of not looking at the past through today's moral eyeglasses? There is probably no way to establish an objective hierarchy of deserving sufferers though we know deep down in ourselves that there is one. Frankly, I don't know the answer. One thing I do know for sure: Lawyers are already licking their chops.



Michael Adams: In 1998, when Environics last asked the Canadian public about an apology to aboriginal people for those who had been victims of the residential schools system, (after a message delivered on behalf of the Liberal government of Jean Chrétien by Jane Stewart the minister of Indian and Northern Affairs) the large majority, 69 per cent, agreed with the government's move. About 24 per cent did not. Ten years later and an apology delivered by our Prime Minister, I believe it will attract almost universal support.

In 1998, Phil Fontaine called the government's action and "an historic step." The same man said much the same yesterday.

Canadian aboriginal peoples have been and still are the victims of colonialism and racism. The values of those whose ancestors or surrogates forcibly took this land from the ancestors of today's aboriginals are a mix of ignorance, guilt, and racism and idealism.

We — I mean non-aboriginals — don't even know what to call these people: Are they Indians, are they aboriginals, are they indigenous peoples, are they First Nations, Métis, Eskimos, Inuit? Are they Canadians? Should we respect them or pity them? How many of them are there anyway? Has anybody ever seen or heard a good news story about Canada's aboriginal people? Is the news really only bad? Can anybody name aboriginal heroes or icons? Who is their Obama? Who is their Oprah? Their Colin Powell, their Bill Cosby? Their 50 Cent?

Has anybody ever talked to an aboriginal person? Do you drop a loonie in the cup of the guy in front of your local Tim Hortons or do you pass by hoping he would just go back to the reserve or somehow disappear?

Residential schools: oh you mean a few Indian kids were sexually abused by a bunch of frustrated Catholic priests who should have been married in the first place. Two obviously predictable tragedies rolled into one. Makes perfect sense to me.

I don't know the answer to many of these questions but I can tell you I'm determined to find some of the answers. About a year ago, I instigated a project to report the voices of our urban aboriginal people living in one of our 10 big cities across Canada, and to take to a sampling of those 7,000 plus young aboriginal people who have won scholarships from the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation and to dig deeper into the public opinions, attitudes and values of ordinary Canadians.

Our great national project is finding a way for people of diverse backgrounds to somehow get along with each other: French and English, Catholic and Protestant, immigrants from Christian (or post-Christian) Europe and those from another 130-plus non-Christian, non-European countries somehow peaceably, amicably going to school with, working with, competing for party

nominations with "the other." I now firmly believe that Canada's next great socio-cultural challenge is dialogue and reconciliation with Canada's aboriginal peoples.

Apologies are the first step. Empathy is the second. Understanding is third. After that, good things, very good things, I believe, can happen.

The idealism and aspirations of aboriginal and non-aboriginal Canadians will eventually find common ground. I think we will all grow and become better humans in the process.

Nine years from now, in 2017 on our 150th anniversary as a nation/country, I want a party as fabulous, international, emotionally evocative and symbolically meaningful as our centenary celebration Expo 67 — but this time, bringing aboriginal peoples from around the world to Canada to celebrate their and our achievement together.

Go for it Canada! As yes, I want Phil Fontaine there too and I don't want him to be the only person crying with tears of joy.

Patrick Martin: William Johnson, in Gatineau, Que., offers his response:



William Johnson: I spent the summer of 1960 studying an aboriginal community on Hudson's Bay. Yes, the horror story of the Pied Piper actually occurred — in Canada. Generations of children did vanish, not into a mountain, but into planes and trains. Relocated far from home, they were purged of their culture and reprogrammed. An appalling number died of tuberculosis. Others returned to their parents unrecognizable.

Now the ghosts of the past come screaming back from the chambers of horror, accusing, telling their stories, demanding redress. They won an apology. Money is distributed.

But dispossession survives in aboriginal communities. Degradation is now internalized, vested. Rampant alcoholism, irresponsibility, sexual abuse, disease, violence and suicide perpetuate the work of the black robes. Residential schools, transformed into prisons, have taken over reserves.

We apologize, but we cannot cure what we wrought. The schools were but one instrument whereby whole cultures were dismantled, shattered. In fact, psychologist Roland Chistjohn, himself an aboriginal, concluded after studying the effects of residential schools for the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples: You can't separate out the effect of the schools from the entire impact of aboriginal experience over hundreds of years. He found no notable difference between those who had attended residential schools and those who had not.

An apology is owed, but collecting it will little avail the "survivors" if it strengthens their inner sense of being victims, an abdication of personal responsibility. That paralysis, the most pernicious legacy of their colonial experience, remains to be exorcised.

Regeneration, renaissance, cannot come from others, nor will it emerge from grappling with the past. Quebec showed a way: It broke a century's societal deadlock by enacting its Quiet Revolution.

Only aboriginal leaders can discover and activate from within the resources needed to lead their people out of residential schools into a land of promise.

Patrick Martin: Brian Flemming in Halifax has some concerns about all this:



Brian Flemming: Why do I always feel uneasy when political leaders make public apologies for the "sins" of our ancestors?

Perhaps it's because public apologies are comparable to grief counselling techniques in which victims are forced to relive a tragic event. Is either practice good psychologically for victim or apologist? Some experts say it's not.

My unease is also rooted in this question: Was every aboriginal child in residential schools abused physically, sexually or emotionally? If not, what percentage of the children suffered significant abuse? What percentage wound up believing they'd had a good experience? We should be told.

I am uneasy because I suspect Canadians, in general, and prime ministers, in particular, do not fully comprehend how much society has moved in the last century from the "politics of integration" to the "politics of identity." Is it possible that the policy-makers who established residential schools thought they were helping aboriginal children?

Most minorities in Canada today feel entitled to celebrate their ethnic identities rather than integrating completely into a broad, amorphous Canadian identity. Will they still want that privilege in 2050? Who knows? What new apologies will surface then?

My final unease is that this apology will not be the last. When, for openers, will descendants of Acadians who were cruelly expelled from the Maritimes in 1755 get their apology — and their cheques?

When will the Ottawa Valley Irish and the Cape Breton Scots who had their languages and culture taken from them get their apology — and their cheques?

When will African-Nova Scotians, many of whom had ancestors who were slaves in Canada, not in the United States, get their reparations?

Or should Canada simply emulate Australia by creating an annual "Sorry Day" so we can seek plenary pardons from the all descendants of people who suffered historic wrongs?

Patrick Martin: In Toronto, John Polanyi:



John Polanyi: On the question of public apologies, the more we can agree about our shared history, the more likely we are to have a shared future. Apologies, since they are the distillation of debate, represent a step on the way to agreeing. Steps are what we need. Agreement will always be beyond reach in a healthy society.

Scientists devote a lot of time to arguing about the history of their subject. For example: "Did x deserve the Nobel Prize? Should it not more properly have gone to y?" This is only partly out of a love of gossip. It is because they care about science.

Unless we can agree to some extent about our history, it will end. I am very much of that view.

Norman Spector: I applaud the Prime Minister's apology, and the opportunity this provides to learn more about a shameful chapter in our history. That said, I would have liked to hear about



some more recent history — in order to enhance understanding of the complexity of aboriginal issues, and so as not to play into the hands of those whose goal it is to trash our country (figuratively and literally).

For example, for all our imperfections as a country, I wonder how many Canadians know that the death knell for assimilationist policies was sounded as far back as 1973, when the Supreme Court handed down the Calder decision and Mr. Trudeau decided to negotiate land claims. I wonder, too, why Mr. Dion — aside from apologizing for past Liberal governments — did not refer to the entrenchment of aboriginal and treaty rights in the 1982 Constitution — an act of inclusion in which aboriginal groups rejoiced at the time. Finally, Jack Layton missed a fine opportunity to mention the Nisga'a agreement negotiated by an NDP provincial government, which established a constitutionalized third order of government that, among other powers, runs its own school board.

In creating national narratives, words matter — and I was also uncomfortable with some of the language used by our leaders. "Truth and reconciliation" has become a quasi-metaphor for the South African experience, and no two policies to inter-communal relations could have been further apart than apartheid and assimilation. As for the use of the terms "survivors" and "never again" in relation to residential schools, Auschwitz was about burning babies, not about "killing the Indian in the child," and I doubt you'll find even one person who'd reflect back on the Holocaust experience as having been at all positive.



Antonia Maioni: Patrick, the real challenge of this apology is not only to remember, but to understand what happened. As a mother, I found it troubling and difficult to explain to my children what exactly is going on, especially in trying to put the many stories and experiences of residential schools in context. As a teacher, I believe it is important for students to be able to absorb these events so as to understand them in a larger historical context. As a scholar, I agree with John Polanyi that the facts need to be laid bare so that we can agree to a shared history, even if that process is painful and controversial.

We can argue about the process of reparations or reconciliation, as there does not seem to be a consensus on that score, but it is difficult to argue against this kind of apology as a special moment in Canadian history.

Patrick Martin: In Toronto, The Globe's own Marcus Gee has something to say:



Marcus Gee: Those who support the apology argue that it will promote healing among natives and allow them to move forward. I fear that instead it may only lead them to dwell on the grievances of the past. Those grievances are real enough. Awful things happened in the residential schools. Those who suffered deserve the compensation and the sympathy they are getting. But the apology campaign has reinforced the tendency in the native leadership to blame everything on the government and focus its energy on getting more from Ottawa — more money, more land, more compensation, a more heartfelt apology. That reinforces dependency and breeds a culture of complaint that traps natives in a cage of futile resentment.

The idea has taken hold that, because residential schools sought to assimilate natives, the answer to their troubles is to reject the Canadian mainstream and seek revival in native traditions, native self-government and other separate paths.

Those paths lead to a dead end. A true revival will mean facing the fact that not all native troubles stem from white misdeeds and that picking at the scab of past oppression heals nothing. A true revival will mean striving for a way to succeed as integrated (not assimilated) participants in 21st century Canada.

To move forward, natives need to focus not on what was done to them in the past but what they can do for themselves in the present.

Patrick Martin: I think Jim Stanford has something he'd like to say about Marcus Gee's last comment:



Jim Stanford: National Chief Phil Fontaine just gave a moving address to our big CAW convention here in Toronto. He talked about the apology and its historical significance. He also thanked the skilled trades members in our union who have been volunteering to build clean water facilities in several aboriginal communities in Canada, and presented the CAW with an aboriginal "gratitude" mask. He has an awesome dignity but determination about him. Frankly, I'd like to see him as Prime Minister for all of us — not just leader of the First Nations!

Maybe that would address Marcus's fear about aboriginals' so-called turn away from the "mainstream!" Listening to Fontaine, I get the impression there's nothing he and his people would love more than access to mainstream opportunity, mainstream health outcomes, and mainstream living standards.



Marcus Gee: I've met Fontaine, Jim, and he's an impressive individual. What troubles me about the residential schools issue is how it has come to dominate discussion of native problems. Listening to some native leaders, it almost seems as if they think what happened in the schools explains all the dysfunction and suffering in native communities. It's much more complicated than that and I fear that by focusing almost to the point of obsession on the schools, natives are putting on a mantle of victimhood that weighs them down instead of taking them forward.

Patrick Martin: Randal Oulton of Toronto has just asked some interesting things in the comments area of this article. Here's what he wrote:

"Hello, Patrick, interesting read. I'm curious as to why all the commentators assembled for this were non-Indians?"

"I think it's very appropriate that Lorna Dueck was on the panel, at any rate, to bring in the viewpoint of the faith communities, and to remind us that the Indians are, amongst other things, also a faith community, something we are used to overlooking."

"Brian Flemming raises an interesting point, which I wonder if we're all dodging because of the terrible consequences of thinking it through: 'Is it possible that the policy-makers who established residential schools thought they were helping aboriginal children?'"

"I would propose that it is in fact quite likely that was one of the motives for many people involved. Were those Canadian policy-makers any less self-assured in their idealism than today's? Are yesterday's government policies mixed with Christian idealism any more damaging for some than today's government policies mixed with secular idealism? Who are we harming today, by knowing what is best for them, and making sure — whether they want it or not — that they get it. Are

Canadians any less arrogant in our assuredness in our own goodness? Sometimes the most brutish evils are delivered with the best of intentions.

"By dodging our side of the story, we may perhaps risk repeating our mistakes all over again, with Indians, or with other groups."



Patrick Martin: Mr. Oulton: On your first point, we have invited Stephen Kakfwi, former premier of the Northwest Territories, and former president of the Dene Nation, to write his response to the Prime Minister's apology. He says:

"Is this the dramatic turning point we have all been fighting and praying for? The Prime Minister has said "sorry" to the First Peoples of this country. I don't know exactly what motivated him. I imagine that political and legal factors were carefully weighed. Or is it because he understands what it is to be a father? Surely all parents can imagine the horror of having your children forcibly stolen as little more than babies, to return as young adults . . . strangers, who no longer speak your language. You completely missed their childhood . . . They did too.

"Whatever the PM's reasons, I hope the Canada he represents will now work with us to restore strong, healthy and vibrant families, communities, and Nations, not begrudgingly, but because it is the right thing to do. Today, you offer an apology, which I accept. But that restoration work will deliver the forgiveness, which you also seek."

[The full commentary by Stephen Kakfwi will be published Friday, and will be found then on the both the Home Page and Opinions Section of globeandmail.com].

Perhaps some of our salonistas will take up Mr. Oulton's other observations.



William Johnson: Some of the comments from the general public on this discussion have trivialized yesterday's apology, suggesting that people at home by the fire or drinking in a bar were more concerned about what happens to the Toronto Maple Leafs. I think that confuses matters of passing interest — such as the love life of Julie Couillard and Maxime Bernier — with matters that go to the very identity and cohesion of our country.

In my lifetime, Canada has existed with two deep fault lines, two cleavages left over from the 17th and 18th centuries. The second has caught most attention: The alienation of much of the French-speaking population as a result of the fall of New France. Though still far from entirely healed, that historic wound seems to be on the mend. But the earlier wound — a clash of civilizations from the time that the Europeans invaded — shows no sign yet of improving.

Yesterday's apology is very important in that respect because of its solemnity, its performance in the very political heart of our country. The issue was brought into our mainstream, to the attention of every Canadian. It means that it is now on the national agenda as never before. That in itself is a reason for some hope.

Patrick Martin: Norman Spector in Victoria wants to chime in here.

Norman Spector: Patrick, for some time, and to an increasing extent, we've been unable to have serious discussions of what it would take to solve serious problems facing this country.



In a different climate, yesterday's apology would have been both meaningful and useful. In modern times, it was an ideal opportunity for politicians to blame their predecessors and present themselves (and I include aboriginal leaders in this observation) as representing a fresh approach.

The media lapped up the drama, the colour, the symbolism, the potential for confrontation and the emotion. And there was virtually no discussion of the difficult work and the hard choices that would be required to actually do something about the problem.

I fear that the caravan will move on, just as it did on health care.

Patrick Martin: Margaret Wente, whose column on this subject **Whose truth? What reconciliation?** was published in today's Globe, wants to weigh in responding to Mr. Oulton and others:



Margaret Wente: Yesterday's apology was a fine and moving moment. But I do not think it will do much to restore "strong, healthy and vibrant families and communities," as Mr. Kakfwi so eloquently puts it.

In fact, both the native leadership and the government continue to collude in perpetuating the illusion that families and communities can thrive on remote reserves cut off from the mainstream of society, with no way to support themselves, no future for their kids, and trapped in welfare dependency. This is just a recipe for more of same — poverty, despair, and dysfunction.

The only reserves that have any hope of prospering are those that are located close to commercial opportunities and jobs. It's no accident that aboriginals who leave the reserves fare better on the whole than the ones who've stayed behind.

We have to start telling the truth, which is that the only way aboriginals can become self-sufficient and take charge of their future is by becoming better educated and joining the modern economy.

Patrick Martin: David Beers in Vancouver has just connected with us:



David Beers: I can't agree with Norman Spector that an official apology from the colonizer to the colonized is the time to brag about progress made by the colonizer in the past several decades. I believe such self-congratulation would signal insincerity. Nor can I agree with Norman's problem with pursuing "truth and reconciliation" within Canada, as the phrase "has become a quasi-metaphor for the South African experience, and no two policies to inter-communal relations could have been further apart than apartheid and assimilation."

Apartheid and assimilation both assume the culture of the colonized is worthless and poisonous to the divinely ordained superior culture of the colonizer. In which case you either wall the heathens out, or "convert" — assimilate — them. Both actions flow from the same basic assumption.

In a recent review for *The Tyee* of two histories of residential schools in B.C. (Jan Hare and Jean Barman's *Good Intentions Gone Awry*, based on the letters of Emma Crosby, and *The Letters of Margaret Butcher*, edited by Mary-Ellen Kelm) Crawford Kilian gauged this mindset among two women who helped run such schools in Port Simpson and Kitamaat.

"For modern readers, however, it's striking to see that Emma expressed zero interest in the people the Crosbys were trying to convert. She never discusses the Tsimshians' culture or history . . . She refers in passing to the dirt and disease of the natives, but doesn't even mention the catastrophic smallpox pandemic that a decade earlier had killed a third of the native population on the B.C. coast . . ."

"Maggie Butcher, a 46-year-old nurse and midwife" offered this assessment of her students: "They are a slow, indolent, dirty people . . . bound very strongly by custom and superstition. Matron says the young folk who have been educated in this school and at Coqualeetza will have more chance when some half dozen of the old folks of the village, who still hold fast to their ancient customs, are dead and one hopes that it is so. In all our bunch of 37 children, there are only two who appear cunning and they are half-breeds'."

Maggie and Emma likely would have felt right at home in South Africa. And we must apologize unreservedly for all that has flowed from such thinking.

Patrick Martin: So I have a question for Michael Higgins, our resident Vatican specialist. Michael, with all this talk of apologies, why hasn't the Catholic Church apologized for its role in the residential schools? Other churches have.



Michael Higgins: Good question, Patrick. Given the size and reach of the Roman Catholic Church in Canada, it is not unreasonable to conclude that it is a national entity, but ecclesiologically and canonically it is not. Unlike many of the major denominations and principal players in the administration of the residential schools, the Roman Catholic Church consists of jurisdictionally independent dioceses and archdioceses that do not function as a national unit. They are accountable through their bishop or ordinary to Rome and not to some pan-national body that enjoys special theological or legal status.

This is also true of the religious orders and congregations of women and men that exercised oversight for residential schools or maintained a ministry to, or presence in, aboriginal communities. Indisputably, some of these bodies, like the Oblates of Mary Immaculate and the Society of Jesus, have issued apologies, negotiated compensations, and effected reconciliation protocols. Roman Catholic leaders are not absent from the scene but they do not speak for the national episcopate per se.

Patrick Martin: Norman Spector wants to follow up on that thought.

Norman Spector: But Michael, why has Rome not apologized?

Michael Higgins: Norman, it would be like the UN apologizing for every misdeed for every member. Rome has certainly taken strong stands — particularly under John Paul II — on pro-indigenous issues but does not see itself as the final moral arbiter on the local scene.

Norman Spector: Michael, I would feel more comfortable with that analogy if it weren't for the fact that Cardinal Bernard Law has been given several appointments in Rome since he resigned as head of the Archdiocese of Boston in 2002 — under circumstances with which I believe you are familiar.

Michael Higgins: I share your view, Norman, regarding Boston's former Cardinal Archbishop and the folly of appointing him Archpriest at Santa Maria Maggiore.

Patrick Martin: Gwyn Morgan, also on the West Coast, has just returned to his home and is ready to comment:



Gwyn Morgan: I'm happy that the apology was sincere and fulsome. I'm sad that one of the five previous prime ministers since the end of the residential schools ended failed to do it earlier. I'm happy that the many wrongs have been clearly articulated for Canadians to understand. I'm sad that the dedicated and caring work of the majority of residential school workers has been repudiated by the unforgivable abuses of some. I'm happy that aboriginal Canadians have the opportunity to move beyond victimhood to taking responsibility for creating a better future for their children. I'm sad that the abuse by strangers in the residential schools has too often been replaced by abuse by family members at home.

Patrick Martin: Lorna Dueck has some final thoughts . . .



Lorna Dueck: Thankfully we don't have to vote on each other's ideas, but if we did, Michael Adams wins mine. He hits the heart of this while other comments sound like we're putting the gas pedal to public policy discussions at an inappropriate time. We all agree on the need for more effective solutions. Those are different discussions than apology. Apology is a reality that sparks the spiritual imagination. It is deeply personal, relational and motivating. When someone gives or receives an apology it prompts an internal decision. It means both parties have asked: "What can I do about this thing that binds and restricts me?" The aggressor can repent, and apologize, the victim can release. Truth, even without reconciliation, helps all move forward in new freedoms — freedom to change, to respect, to grow, to win. The possibilities ignited through the spiritual imagination are immense.

Patrick Martin: Margaret MacMillan in Oxford wants to add something to Lorna Dueck's comment:



Margaret MacMillan: This surely is not about winning or losing in a debate but having a discussion — and a very important one at that. I cannot agree with Lorna Dueck that it is somehow heartless and inappropriate to ask what useful next steps can come out of this apology. The act of apology may be, as she says, motivating. It can also be a momentary thing which makes the giver feel good and the receiver hopeful that maybe this time things really will get better. The danger too, as others in this discussion have pointed out, is that the past gets blamed for everything. But are we doing any better now? Assimilation, we say confidently, was a wicked policy. Okay, then what are the alternatives? This is precisely the moment at which we ought to be asking such difficult questions. What ought we do? What can we do? What can be done to save the lives of aboriginal peoples stuck in miserable villages where there are no jobs? to get the young a decent education and give them a future? There seem to me to be an awful lot of words around and lashings of fine sentiments, but not nearly enough hard thinking. I am worried that Canada will wake up from this happy moment one day soon and find that nothing has changed.



Patrick Martin: Well, folks, we're going to leave it there. That wraps it up for our first GlobeSalon. Thank you to all who contributed and thank you to all who followed along and to those who commented. I look forward to the next time we convene GlobeSalon.

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