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Views

Today: **Wednesday, April 30, 2008**

Truth and Native Abuse

How one man's wild claims threaten success of Truth and Reconciliation.

By **Terry Glavin**
 Published: April 30, 2008

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Kevin Annett: dubious mission.

TheTyee.ca

When Noam Chomsky says Canada's famously defrocked United Church minister Kevin Annett is "more deserving of the Nobel Peace Prize than many who have received it in the past," you can take his word for it if you want. And if you like, you can believe Nobel Peace Prize winner Mairead Corrigan-Maguire of the Belfast Peace People when she calls Annett "a courageous and inspiring man."

It's important to be fair, and to allow that sometimes people say things without really knowing what they're talking about and they might one day regret the things they've said.

But if you do believe these things, I'm afraid there are quite a few more things you are going to have to believe, because you can't have it both ways. If Kevin Annett really is prize-worthy and courageous, you will also have to believe this:

-One of Canada's most respected First Nations' leaders is trafficking in children from Northern British Columbia in a profitable pedophilia ring that's run out of the West Hastings Street premises of the swish Vancouver Club. His clients are Vancouver judges, politicians, and church leaders.

-Back in the 1930s, a team of German doctors arrived at the Kuper Island Indian residential school and began conducting strange medical experiments on the children. Employing large hypodermic needles, they injected some sort of toxin directly into the chests of the school's young inmates, and several were killed as a result.

-As recently as the 1950s and 1960s, aboriginal children at a Vancouver Island medical research facility were tortured with electrodes implanted in their skulls. At least one child was beaten to death with a whip fitted with razors.

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-At the Hobbema and Saddle Lake Indian residential schools in Alberta, children were incinerated in furnaces. At St. Anne's Indian residential school in Fort Albany, Ontario, children were executed in an electric chair. At McGill University in Montreal, there is a mass grave containing the bodies of aboriginal children killed in experiments undertaken by the Central Intelligence Agency's top-secret MK-ULTRA program.

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These are just a few of the stories Annett has been circulating since the early 1990s. He has failed to produce a shred of evidence. RCMP investigators who have looked into Annett's allegations always come up empty. Some of these stories the RCMP hasn't investigated because nobody's reported them, for reasons Annett explains as a distrust of the police.

'Eagle Strong Voice' and his followers

If you think this sort of thing is courageous to the point of being worthy of the Nobel Prize, then you may be happy to know that Annett is busy with another one of his crusades against church and state, with new claims about a network of mass graves across Canada containing the remains of perhaps thousands of aboriginal children, murdered by priests and nuns.

You might also be pleased to know that Annett is back with a new name (he has lately taken to calling himself Eagle Strong Voice) and his followers have established a new group, called the Friends and Relatives of the Disappeared, and they're off on a "wave of church occupations" across Canada.

Their routine is to show up with the media in tow, and then issue eviction notices, and then submit unanswerable demands that the churches confess to the mass graves they've been hiding. And then they demand that the churches return the remains of the children they've killed to the tribes they came from.

It all started in the early 1990s, when Annett was a promising but problematic novice minister whose first assignment was to serve the dwindling, white working-class congregation of St. Andrew's in the mill town of Port Alberni. It wasn't long before senior United Church officials discovered to their dismay that Annett was turning his Sunday services into something resembling a series of cathartic, guerilla-theatre testimonials about Satanic ritual abuse. The long and short of it is the United Church put its foot down. Its version of events is a matter of public record.



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Annett's version appears in his self-published *Hidden from History: The Canadian Holocaust*, his autobiographical *Love and Death in the Valley*, and his recently-released, 110-minute autobiographical documentary, *Unrepentant: Kevin Annett and Canada's Genocide*.

If you like, you can believe that the reason 10 Canadian publishers turned down Annett's first book, and the reason why his second book appears under the imprint of 1st Books Library, a vanity press in Bloomington, Indiana, and the reason his documentary was also produced in the United States, is that the powers that be in Canada are determined to conceal their terrible crimes.

Or, you might instead take into account the fact that Annett's stories are the subject of Canadian court injunctions claiming libel and defamation. Annett has responded to these legal admonitions by pleading with Amnesty International for adoption as a "prisoner of conscience." Amnesty has declined to oblige him.



Journalists compound the harm

Still, Annett is interviewed sympathetically on CBC's *As It Happens*, and it is commonplace for journalists to report Annett's claims unchallenged, no matter how bizarre, and without first inquiring into his history of allegation-making. His documentary film *Unrepentant* has earned favourable reviews in such "progressive" Canadian journals as Briarpatch. It has won awards at independent film festivals in New York and Los Angeles.

This matters.

It matters because the story of secret residential-school mass graves is an urban legend.

For years, RCMP investigators have been chasing down these stories and they always come up with nothing. But they persist, like the alligators in New York's sewers.

It matters because the thousands of aboriginal people who really did suffer unspeakable torment in residential schools deserve something rather more from us than our complicity in the act of dumping their very real suffering down a rabbit hole into the same parallel universe where you'll find alien abductions, Masonic plots, crop circles, and 9-11 conspiracies.

It matters for lots of reasons.

Annett enjoys the backing of not a single representative tribal organization, and in early April, when he released what he claims is a list of the locations of 28 mass graves of children who died in church-run residential schools, he also announced the formation of the "International Human Rights Tribunal into Genocide in Canada" to carry out its own investigations.

At risk, Truth and Reconciliation

Meanwhile, after a generation of bitter and hard-fought struggle, the Assembly of First Nations, the Canadian churches that ran the schools and the federal government have embarked upon a \$2 billion settlement process that includes the Indian Residential Schools **Truth and Reconciliation Commission**.

On April 28, Justice Harry S. LaForme, a judge on the Ontario Appeals Court and a member of the Mississauga Nation, was appointed its chairman. The

commission, inspired by the post-apartheid stabilization process in South Africa, will soon begin its hearings.

Among ordinary Canadians, there already exists a perfectly understandable but stubborn reluctance to believe the heart-rending truth about what actually did happen in some of those institutions. The abuse and the cruelty was sometimes almost beyond belief. And there is no shortage of pundits in this country who are all too eager to encourage that tendency to disbelieve the survivors' stories.

If the Truth and Reconciliation Commission gets dragged into the strange, alternative reality where Annett and his followers thrive, the commission's purpose could be easily defeated. If that happens, we will have lost an historic opportunity to see justice properly done in finally turning the page on one of the darkest and most disgraceful chapters in Canadian history.

Blind alleys

This matters.

It matters because Annett has alleged that perhaps "hundreds" of tiny corpses are buried in a mass grave behind a former United Church residential school building situated on Tseshahat reserve land, near Port Alberni -- and now I want you to stop reading this for a moment and try to imagine what it would be like to be a Tseshahat person reading that same sentence. Tseshahat Chief Coun. Les Sam says he can't imagine what Annett is taking about.

It matters because at Kuper Island, where the Penelakut people have lived from time out of mind, Annett has reported unmarked graves associated with murders at the Catholic residential school that once operated there. Islander Robert Sam, a Penelakut elder who attended the residential school, says he'd heard stories about school children who drowned trying to swim away from the school, but no, certainly nothing about these graves.

Annett and his followers have alleged there are skeletons "between the walls" and under the foundations of buildings at Alert Bay, on Cormorant Island. Namgis tribal administrator George Speck says "no one has a clue" what would make Annett say these things. At Meares Island, Annett says corpses of schoolchildren were stored in the basement of a residential school building, and the bodies of other children are buried in an unmarked grave nearby. Ahousat Coun. Angus Campbell says it's nonsense: "People would know if it was there."

It goes on and on like this, but if you persist in pointing out the spectacular unlikelihood that any of Annett's stories are true, you will almost certainly find yourself accused of "smearing" him. That's what happens if you're white, anyway. If you're aboriginal, you may find yourself called a "police informant" or a "provocateur," or you'll be accused of having been a "collaborator and abuser" during your time in residential school. Annett has levelled just these accusations against his detractors.

He has **accused them** as well of complicity in "a criminal conspiracy to perpetrate and conceal acts of war, genocide, murder, ethnic cleansing, slave labour, sterilization, land theft, pedophilia" and other such crimes, and accused of conspiring to assault Annett, defraud him, and defame him in order to conceal those crimes.

Among those individuals who stand accused of these things are several Canadian journalists, judges, and corporate executives, former prime minister Jean Chretien, the RCMP, the United Church of Canada, former United Nations' Human Rights Commission chair Mary Robinson, former New Democratic Party cabinet minister John Cashore, and the Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council. Even Annett's ex-wife has been implicated.

Paranoid accounts?

Everybody's out to get him. His supporters die mysteriously, there are shadowy stalkers, night-time visits from people who dump dead deer on his porch, and a "goon squad" run by the federal government. Mysterious people severed the brake lines on Annett's car, twice. Bureaucrats with the Insurance Corporation of British Columbia levy suspiciously high fines when Annett gets into car accidents. Even corrupt tax collectors from the Canada Revenue Agency are in on it. Believe it if you like. But the truth of all this actually matters.

It matters to me because I can count several old friends and colleagues among the people who show up as villains, collaborators and stooges in Annett's conspiracy, and I know a thing or two about Annett from when we were both young socialists, back in the 1970s.

It's personal because as a young reporter, I covered trials of pedophile priests. I came to know their victims as friends. I also came to know brave and kind clergymen who taught in residential schools, and I co-authored a book about residential schools with the former inmates of St. Mary's Mission.

One does not need to exaggerate or embellish anything about what happened in those places.

The terrible reality

It has lately become routine to hear Annett defended along the lines of, well, he may be wrong about some things, but at least he is bringing this terrible history into the light. Or he is forcing us to confront a "Canadian holocaust" that the news media in this country finds too hot to handle.

This is not true, either. You could fill a steamer trunk with clippings of articles about Indian residential schools that have appeared in Canadian newspapers in recent years. There have been stories about the chronic sexual abuse in the schools. There have been reports from criminal trials. There have full accounts of the policies and laws and regulations that were intended to employ the schools in a project of churning out obedient regiments of brown-skinned white people.

There have been feature treatments of the schools' degeneration into child-labour camps, and the part the schools played in reducing once-proud nations to broken remnants. And there have been stories about the heroic efforts First Nations' leaders have made to force the churches and the federal government to squarely face all that shame.

There were front-page stories a century ago, too. In 1897, senior Indian Affairs officials started blowing the whistle on the cavernous, shoddily-built, creaking institutions, pointing out that you couldn't have built more efficient incubation vectors for contagious disease, and for mass death, if you tried.

Back then, P.H. Bryce, the Indian department's chief medical officer, conducted a study of 1,500 children interned in 15 different Indian residential schools across Canada. He found that one in four of the children never made it out alive. A separate study of the Kuper Island school found that four of every 10 children sent there over a 25-year period never survived to graduate.

This is sufficiently damning. It is not necessary to assert, as Annett does, that infectious diseases were deliberately employed as part of a plot to "cull" Canada's aboriginal population. Everybody knows what happened. It is no secret, and is not even a secret that there are mass graves.

This is not a revelation.

From the late 18th century until well into the 20th century, wave after wave of epidemic diseases rolled through Indian villages across the Canadian prairies. The sicknesses swept over the mountains, down through all the valleys of the western slopes, up and down the West Coast, and up and back again.

At the time of the first smallpox epidemic, almost a third of the aboriginal people in what is now Canada lived in the tribal territories that came to be called British Columbia. Then there was smallpox, measles, chickenpox, diphtheria, influenza, mumps, tuberculosis, and typhoid. By the 1950s, the countryside was a vast, forested necropolis.

This is not a hidden history.

A landscape of tombs

This history lives on in the epics handed down in the oral literature of the aboriginal peoples, and in the horrific first-hand accounts of settlers and missionaries. It survives in fur trade journals, colonial correspondence, newspaper accounts, hospital records, Indian residential school studies, and sometimes in the very shape of the land itself.

There is hardly a cove or a bay in the 1,500 sea miles between Victoria and Gingolx where you can put a shovel in the ground without unearthing human bones. In the interior, anyone who has spent any time traversing the territories of the Stlatlimx, the N'lakapamux, the In-Shuck-ch or the Secwepemc will have noticed the tumuli, the overgrown burial places, the forlorn little cemeteries. And you will hear the stories from the people themselves.

You don't even have to leave town. In almost all the reserve villages remaining around Vancouver and Victoria, you will see that beside the old churches, there are plots filled with simple wooden crosses, or sometimes just mounds, where crosses may once have been. Now and then you will even come across rusted and gnarled pieces of iron sticking up out of the ground, from what's left of the graceful, wrought iron crosses of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate.

These graves come from the times when the sick died so quickly and in such numbers that it's a wonder the few survivors could bring themselves to bury the dead at all.

Indian country, as we used to call it, is a vast landscape of tombs. And the dead are still there, among and between the houses of reborn, thriving villages, and among and between the crumbling ruins of mission chapels, church-run tuberculosis hospitals, dormitories, and residential schools.

After all this suffering, the very least we owe the dead, and the living, is the truth.

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Widely-published, Victoria-based writer Terry Glavin contributes this occasional column, Dissent, to The Tye. His most recent book is *Waiting for the Macaws and Other Stories from the Age of Extinctions* (Penguin).

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Belief

 **Bailey** 11 hours ago

Given the horrendous history of man's abuse of his fellow humans the last couple of centuries, many people find themselves ashamed and appalled just to have to share the species with the perpetrators.

It's not only aboriginal people who have suffered these abuses, though from Cortez on, they certainly have suffered as much as any group. The list of victims goes on and on. Blacks, slaves, Jews, Muslims, Christians, Gypsies, Armenians, the mentally ill and the mentally disabled, once even the 'educated'. All these and more have sometimes suffered institutional abuses, imprisonments and exterminations at the hands of some group or other.

These are established historical truths, not paranoid delusions, but some who come to grips with these truths are so damaged by them that they themselves are unable to disengage themselves from the emotional and spiritual pain it causes.

There is a great temptation to believe that any species capable of this must be capable of any horror. But the truth is that, even though evil does exist, most people are not evil.

Most people are perfectly ordinary, good natured and would never do such things. But neither would they go very far out of their way to find out about it, or do much about it if they did, unless their noses got rubbed in it pretty hard.

But some people are just...um...sensitive to such information. An understatement, I know.

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So you do get this belief sometimes. This willingness to cast aside both trust and doubt, and let the shame create belief. And that belief can go very far beyond the actualities that generated them. It can become self referential and recursive, and build into a sort of resonant crescendo.

The only defence is in the nature of evidence. Such claims are always susceptible to evidence. Applying basic reality checking, while consciously remembering that most people are decent enough, can save one from this kind of overdone storytelling.

Working to help make amends helps, too. After the damaging understanding that bad things were done, there can be healing in trying to make things right.

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Residential schools.

 **ME2** 9 hours ago

I think, if one were to document the deaths from the white man's diseases which occurred in the home villages at the same time as those in the residential schools referred to in the article above, you would likely find the school rate was much lower than the village rate.

This is particularly true of the Spanish flu pandemic of 1918, in which 20-40 million people died worldwide, and which hit aboriginals particularly hard.

The main problem arising out of the current discussion of Residential schools is that all the documentation of those days that we are told of has been sifted through with the deliberate intent of finding ONLY negative information.

More than a phoney "Truth and Reconciliation" exercise, what is really needed today is a thorough examination of ALL the information related to the issue, **the positive info as well as the negative.**

Although there is plenty of positive info, the anti people will fight tooth and nail to suppress it, holding that there is no positive side, lest it interfere with their carefully nurtured guilt trip.

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