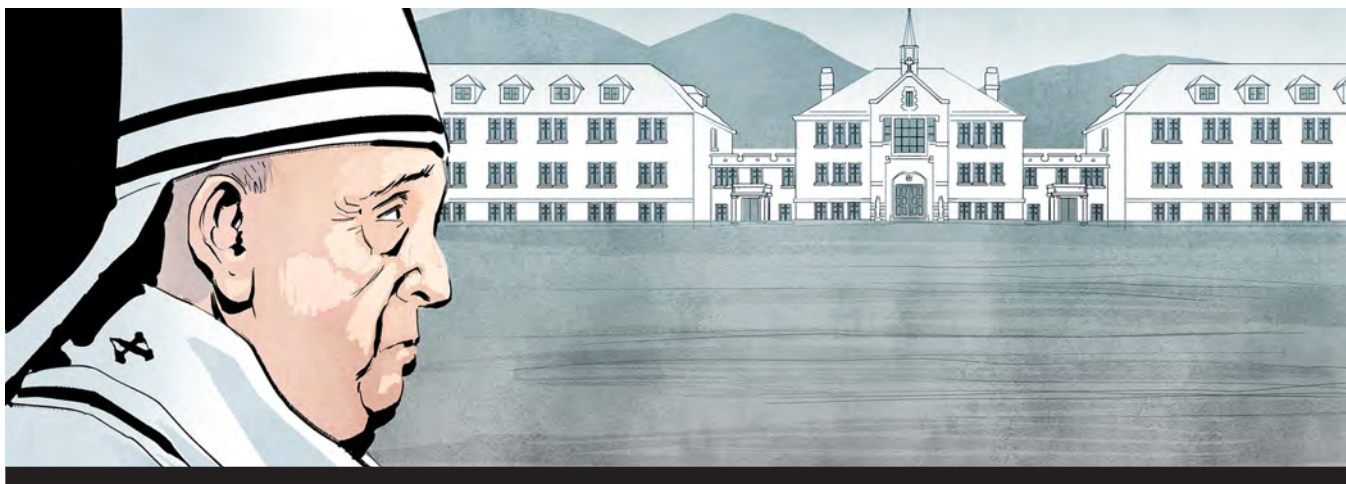




NATIONAL

A PONTIFF'S HEARTFELT APOLOGY

— POPE FRANCIS EXPRESSES SHAME OVER CANADA'S RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS



It was a moment Indigenous Peoples in Canada had waited on for decades. On April 1, Pope Francis delivered an emotional apology on behalf of the Catholic Church. He said he was sorry for the Church's role in running Canada's Indian Residential Schools.

The apology came after a series of groundbreaking meetings at the **Vatican**. Thirty First Nations, Inuit, and Métis representatives attended the meetings. The group had travelled to Italy from Canada for an audience with the world's highest-ranking Catholic clergyman.

OUR DARK HISTORY

Pope Francis's apology addresses a dark time in Canada's history. Beginning in the 1880s, more than 150,000 Indigenous children were taken from their homes. They were sent to government-funded Residential Schools. The last such school, outside Regina, closed its doors less than 30 years ago, in 1996.

The 1930s was the height of the Residential School era. In those days there were 80 of these facilities operating in Canada. More than 60 percent were run by the Catholic Church.

The aim of the schools was to educate, **convert**, and **integrate** Indigenous children. The goal was to make them part of mainstream Canadian society.

According to the thinking of the day, First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children would **assimilate** once removed from their parents and community. They were kept in schools for most of the year.

This government policy was based on a **colonial** world view. This view assumed that Euro-Canadian society and Christian religions were superior to Indigenous cultures. Only now has Canada finally admitted the wrong. This treatment of Indigenous children was a historical injustice. Some even call it cultural **genocide**.

SCHOOLS? OR PRISONS?

The schools were like prisons. Students were physically and emotionally bullied and abused.

DEFINITIONS

ASSIMILATE: to become part of a group, society, etc., or to make someone or something become part of a group, society

COLONIALISM: the practice by which a powerful country controls another country or other countries

CONVERT: to change to a new religion, belief, etc., or to make someone do this

GENOCIDE: the intentional killing of a large group of people who belong to a particular race or country

INTEGRATE: to become part of a group or society, or to help someone do this

VATICAN: the main offices of the Catholic Church in Rome, including the building where the Pope lives



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They were punished if they spoke their own languages. When they came home, they often found they didn't fit in.

The schools were crowded, dirty, and cold. Thousands of children died of smallpox, measles, flu, and tuberculosis. To this day nobody knows how many.

Their treatment in death was frequently just as **callous** as their treatment in life. In recent months, there has been a horrible discovery. The remains of more than 1000 people have been found in unmarked graves. Nearly all were children. The graves are on the grounds of former Residential Schools. Investigators fear many more such graves will be located.

'SHAME AND SORROW'

Pope Francis asked God and those who survived the schools to accept his apology.

"I feel... sorrow and shame for the role that... Catholics... have had in all these things," he said. "[They] wounded you. [I regret] abuses you suffered and the lack of respect shown for your identity, your culture, and even your spiritual values.

"I ask for God's forgiveness. I say to you with all my heart, I am very sorry."

A STEP FORWARD

The Catholic Church had already apologized for its role in Residential Schools. However, this statement came from the Pope himself. That was seen as a big part of the healing process.

Delegate Gerald Antoine, chief of the Dene Nation, said the apology gave him hope.

"Today is a day that we've been waiting for and certainly one that will be uplifted in our history," he said.

Natan Obed led the Inuit delegation. He also said the Pope's apology was a step forward.

"Today we have a piece of the puzzle," he said. "We have a heartfelt expression from the church delivered by the Pope."

The **pontiff** will apologize directly to the larger Indigenous community in Canada in July. He will visit Edmonton, Quebec City, and Iqaluit.

BUT IS IT ENOUGH?

Pope Francis's words were welcomed. Still, some also stressed that talk alone can't undo the harm that survivors have suffered. They want the Church to direct funding to services for children and grandchildren of Residential School survivors. They say these kids were badly **traumatized** by their families' experiences.

In 2006, the Catholic Church agreed to set up a \$79-million foundation. It was to provide addiction and mental health programs, job training, and language preservation for survivors. However, tens of millions of the promised sum have yet to be paid, Indigenous authorities say. Bishops are now trying to raise \$30 million over the next five years for the cause.

Some say it's too little, too late. Still, Jennifer Wood believes things are moving in the right direction – and the pontiff's apology helps. She and four siblings suffered through their time in Residential Schools.

"When I heard the words from the Pope I was very relieved," she said. "I almost let out a big breath. It would've really hurt if the apology didn't happen." ★

DEFINITIONS

CALLOUS: unkind, cruel, and without sympathy or feeling for other people

PONTIFF: another word for Pope

TRAUMATIZE: to shock and upset someone severely and for a long time