

Burke, Re-covenanting and the Apology for the Residential Schools¹

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Abstract

Along with nineteen other recommendations in their 2012 interim report, The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada advised that “the Government of Canada distribute a framed copy of the “Statement of Apology to Former Students of Indian Residential Schools for prominent public display and ongoing educational purposes” in every secondary school in Canada (Truth and Reconciliation Commission 29). In a country that no longer insists on flying the flag or displaying the picture of the queen, an apology from the representative of the Canadian people to Indian Residential School survivors may become a fixture of every secondary school in the nation. Drawing on Kenneth Burke’s cycle of order, pollution, sacrifice and rebirth, this paper analyses Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s Apology for the Indian Residential School System and its media coverage as a process of re-covenanting. By rhetorically splitting the totem of Canada into a sinning chapter and an essential national character, members of the totem domain were able to sacrifice the totem of the sinning Canada through the humiliation of the confession of sin and apology by the Prime Minister. After this purifying sacrifice, the totem was regenerated to its unpolluted state, completing the narrative of re-covenanting in line with monotheistic and more universal religious structures and reaffirming our commitment to the values of the apology.

KEYWORDS: Indian Residential School System, public apologies, Kenneth Burke, Stephen Harper, Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Here are the steps

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In the Iron Law of History

That welds Order and Sacrifice

Order leads to Guilt

(For who can keep the commandments!)

Guilt needs Redemption

(For who would not be cleansed!

Redemption needs Redeemer

(Which is to say, a victim!)

Order

Through Guilt

To victimage (Hence: Cult of the Kill)...

(Burke, *The Rhetoric* 4-5)

Introduction

Along with nineteen other recommendations in their 2012 interim report, *The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* advised that “the Government of Canada distribute a framed copy of the “Statement of Apology to Former Students of Indian Residential Schools” for “prominent public display and ongoing educational purposes” in every secondary school in Canada (*Truth and Reconciliation Commission* 29). Meanwhile, a stained-glass window commemorating the apology has been installed on Parliament Hill in Ottawa. In a country which no longer insists on flying the flag or displaying the picture of the queen, and where prayer is not allowed in public schools, an apology from the representative of the Canadian people to Indian Residential School survivors may become a fixture of every secondary school in the nation. Stephen Harper’s apology may be on its way to becoming a defining covenant for the nation of Canada.

While the religious undercurrents of epideictic speech such as public apologies are occasionally overtly stated, as in the hopes that the South African

Truth and Reconciliation Commission would function as a “secular equivalent to the ancient Christian Rite of Reconciliation” (Daye 2) with Archbishop Desmond Tutu as “confessor of the nation,” (Daye 160) in the Canadian context, collective apologies, such as Stephen Harper’s 2008 apology to the former students of Indian residential schools, are couched in more secular terms such as “healing” and “forgiveness.” However, rhetorical analysis reveals that contemporary collective apologies, no matter how secular they might appear, are guided by deeply entrenched myths and religious narratives and, in order for their meaning and power to be fully understood, must be examined with these in mind. Particularly, collective apologies must be examined in the light of the concept of re-covenanting², as such apologies serve to re-define and renew a group’s commitment to its core beliefs.

Re-Covenanting and the Burkean Order

Whereas a promise refers to a vow to do or not do a specific action, a covenant is an agreement to exist in concert with a set of principles binding for all time. In Old Testament theology, covenants also differ from contracts in that contracts are secular legal or economic agreements, such as deeds and work contracts (Tucker 488), while covenants are “the means the ancient world took to extend relationships beyond the natural unity by blood” (McCarthy, cited in Niehaus 226). Moreover, unlike a promise or a contract, a covenant relies on an already existing relationship. As Niehaus notes, “a covenant assumes some past history of relationship (however minimal) between two parties... [and] changes the relationship between the two covenanting parties and takes it to a different level”(235). Similarly, Lawrence W. Rosenfield notes that epideictic practice “calls upon us to join with our community in giving thought to what we witness” (133)³, stressing that epideixis occurs between members of an existing community and serves to strengthen that community. A covenant between two nations may, for example, bind them to mutual assistance in the case of third party aggression, while a covenant of marriage allows a couple’s relationship to become more intimate. I see the apology for the residential schools as doing just this: taking an existing relationship to a new level. With the apology, the nation of Canada redefined its relationship with its aboriginal people and rededicated itself to acting in harmony with the principles of human rights and equality as embodied in the

² I take this term, and much of the theory behind it, from the work of Danielle Celermajer.

³ The topic of collective apology as epideictic practice (see Villadson, Vivian) deserves more than this perfunctory acknowledgment as such notions undoubtedly add to our understanding and have influenced our modern conceptions of public apologies; however, such a discussion is beyond the scope of brief paper.

Charter of Rights and Freedoms ("Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms"). It is a means to create unity amongst not just the government and the indigenous population, nor even just the government and the citizens of Canada as a whole but also between settler/immigrant Canadians and the indigenous population.

From its very beginnings in Mesopotamia and Ancient Israel the notion of covenant has always been connected to the nation. In his examination of "The Covenant of Grace," 19th century Puritan theologian, Charles Hodge notes that the Mosaic covenant is: 1) a re-enactment of the covenant made with Adam; 2) a national covenant, giving land and "national security" based on obedience; and, 3) part of a sacrificial system. This categorization pertains to the apology in several ways. First of all, just as the Mosaic covenant is a re-enactment of the Adamic covenant, the apology can be seen as a re-enactment and reinterpretation of previous national covenants, most notably, *The Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. This is what Celermajer has coined re-covenanting: through the apology we update and recommit ourselves to our national values. Secondly, the apology is most definitely a national covenant. It is made by the head of the nation -- the Prime Minister, in the national temple -- the House of Commons. Important to my argument that the apology is a process of covenanting following the Burkean Order is the fact that covenants are intimately connected to notions of sacrifice. The root word of the Hebrew term for covenant, *berith* is simply to cut ("Covenant"); thus we see that from the beginnings of Judeo-Christian thought covenants have been sealed with sacrifice. The term sacrifice is derived from the Latin *sacrificium*, which is a combination of the terms *sacer* ("set apart from the secular or profane for the use of supernatural powers" ("Sacrifice") and *facere* (to make). Thus, a sacrifice makes something sacred. Through the apology, Stephen Harper willfully offers himself which seals the covenant through symbolic- sacrifice by humiliation.

Following Burkean logic, once the covenant (or order) has been broken (or rejected), a sacrifice must be made in order for the covenant to be restored (and order to be reaffirmed). In his *The Rhetoric of Religion*, Burke gives this more complex explanation of his general theories using the Old Testament as an example:

One can start with the creation of a natural order (though conceiving it as infused with a verbal principle): one can next proceed to an idea of innocence untroubled by thou-shalt-not's, one can next introduce a thou-shalt-not; one can depict a new Covenant propounded on the basis of this violation, and with capital punishment; one can later introduce the principle of sacrifice... to the idea of outright redemption by victimage. (216)

The Concept of the Totem

I take the notion of the totem from Durkheim who theorized that the totem was the ultimate symbol of the group's commitment to itself. The feelings inspired by society are transferred onto the totem as the totem becomes this complex reality represented in simple form. The totem, the collective symbol that represents both god and society, allows people to imagine society and express social unity.

Though Durkheim did refer to the totem as the "flag" of primitive societies, he was hesitant to apply the concept in reverse; that is, he never stated that flags or other symbols of nations had totemic qualities. However, national politicians have never shied from using Durkheimian concepts to describe the nation. In his inaugural speech, Lyndon Johnson pronounced that America was a nation of "believers who believed in themselves" (cited in Marvin and Ingle 18). Inadvertently or not, Johnson was making the Durkheimian pronouncement that nations are defined as worshipping the totem of themselves.

Durkheim argued that the profane routines of daily life weaken the commitments of the group and hence the power of the totem. For societies to overcome their individualistic tendencies, they must continually come together in ritual to recreate themselves, thus regenerating the power of the totem. What is implied is that participants in such rituals become "more committed to shared beliefs and institutions of their respective communities after such participation than they were before" (Etzioni 47). In regenerating the totem, the group regenerates itself, redefining and strengthening its own identity and values in a new covenant.

Recently, several theorists have attempted to map the Durkheimian notions of the totem onto post-industrial societies with updated references to Bellah's notion of civil religion. Adding the theories of Rene Girard to traditional Durkheimian scholarship, communications theorist Carolyn Marvin and clinical psychologist David W. Ingle argue that national identity is built on sacrifice. They argue that secular, nationalist religions "organize killing energy by committing devotees to sacrifice themselves to the group" (767).

Marvin and Ingle (6 – 8) theorize that totem rituals are played out in domains. The totem domain is comprised of politicians and the armed forces that are charged with protecting the totem. In Habermasian terms, this is "the sphere of public authority" (Habermas 30). Marvin and Ingle argue that the totem domain must offer sacrifices to the totem to keep it alive: soldiers sacrifice their own lives and politicians symbolically sacrifice themselves through rituals such as elections in which they are humiliated in hopes of being born again, regenerated. Citizens occupy the popular domain and help to maintain the totem through fertility rather than sacrifice. The affiliative domain is made up of groups who contend that they

represent the society, as it ought to be, and may even oppose the totem: affiliative groups can be thought of in more familiar contemporary sociological terms as subaltern counterpublics. Marvin and Ingle give examples as varied as the KKK, the Black Panthers, the Hell's Angels, Quakers, and Freemasons as affiliative groups in the USA. In his response to the apology, Phil Fontaine states that "we [Aboriginals] are and always have always been an indispensable part of the Canadian identity. Our peoples, our history and our present being the essence of Canada. The attempts to erase our identities... impoverished the character of this nation" (Fontaine par 9). I see the opposition parties, particularly the NDP under Jack Layton, who headed the call for the apology, but more importantly, Aboriginals as our most important affiliative groups in Canada. Though Aboriginals may oppose the totem, they also present themselves, at least themselves in the historical past, as representing the society as it ought to be, with a healthier respect for the community, elders, and the environment.

Though he did not deal with politics to the extent that he examined myths and literature, Burke noted that, logologically, "the idea of 'Lord' (or Master) applies equally to supernatural and worldly governance." Burke openly asks what happens to our need for a "Sacrificial King" in the "era of Post-Christian science" (*Grammar* 31), speculating that "for a purely worldly order of motives, we should expect a correspondingly worldly kind of 'defilement,' with its call for a correspondingly worldly need of cleansing by sacrifice" (*Rhetoric* 224). As the French Romantic Nationalist Michelet wrote, "my noble country, you must take the place of the god who escapes us" (Babik 379). Whereas theorists such as Girard point out that the ultimate religious scapegoat, capable of forming a whole new covenant and washing away original sin, is god himself (as exemplified by Jesus Christ), in a secular context the ultimate community scapegoat must be the god of the community: its totem. As Durkheim expressed, the totem allows us to better imagine our society by distilling and focussing our feelings toward it onto a single thing, in this case, individual. As Eliade (11) notes, while the Spanish and Portuguese conquistadors took possession of land in the name of Jesus Christ, the English took possession in the name of the King or Queen of their nation. Combine this with Robespierre's pronouncement that in order for France to be reborn, Louis XVI must die (Cayley) and one realizes that in looking for a totem leader of the English and French settler-state of Canada, we must not turn to an overtly religious totem, but to the ruler of the secular nation. In Canada, The Charter of Rights and Freedoms, our institutions such as universal health care, and ideas such as multiculturalism are embodied in our national leader, the Prime Minister. For contemporary political theorists such as Marvin and Ingle, in post-industrial societies, this ritual of the killing of the totem is generally not completed through death but rather accomplished through the humiliation of the totem domain

leader via election campaigns or, as I argue, the more recent phenomenon of public apologies. This scapegoating of the totem, Prime Minister Stephen Harper, is necessary for the purification through regeneration of the essence of the nation and thus, complete re-covenanting to rebuild and maintain a national identity through the cycle of order, pollution, sacrifice, and redemption.

Pollution of the Order and Splitting of the Totem

In 1990, native leader Phil Fontaine revealed the extent of abuse that took place in the Indian residential schools to the stunned and previously ignorant Canadian public. In an interview with the iconic news anchor Barbara Frum on the Canadian Broadcast Corporation prime time news show, *The Journal*, the native leader stated that in his grade three class at a residential school, every boy “experienced some aspect of sexual abuse.” (“Phil Fontaine’s Shocking”). As the order of sacrifice which Burke discusses is social rather than personal, the breach stage of the drama begins, not with the actual transgression of the social order, but rather, with the revelation of the transgression to the wider community (Kampf) – in this case, the media calling public attention to the transgression. This interview marked the Transgression of the Order and the beginning of the cycle of re-covenanting.

Pollution of the order necessitates sacrifice for regeneration: the polluted totem must die in order to be reborn, cleansed. This sacrifice took the form of the humiliation of the national apology by the totem: Prime Minister Stephen Harper. Yet how do we sacrifice the polluted totem without killing its seed, so necessary for regeneration? In some manner the polluted totem must be separated from the core community beliefs that it embodies in order for continuity to be maintained. Media theorists Dayan and Katz argue that the transformative ceremony organizes time into two sections: pre and post ceremony (161). The time before the ceremony is reified and killed as the ceremony marks a return to the society’s true identity before it was polluted (Alberoni cited in Dayan and Katz).

In his study of inter-state apologies, Shiping Tang notes that national myths often serve to divide abhorrent parts of a country’s history from its national essence. He gives the example of the 20th century liberal Italian philosopher and politician Benedetto Croce’s attempt to propagate the myth that fascism was “a parenthesis in Italian history and an external virus that had penetrated its [Italy’s] healthy historical body” (Fogu cited Lebow, Kansteiner, and Fogu 143; cited in Tang 735). Along these lines, Australian sociologist and activist Danielle Celermajer argues that modern national apologies seek to separate the past state of the nation, the sinning-nation, from its current state: its essence. She illustrates this with examples from national apologies such as Chirac’s statement that the Vichy period was, “an insult to our past and our traditions” (qtd in Celermajer 21). Similar

to how the ancient Israelites sought to separate themselves from their idol-worshipping past and propagate their essence as a god-fearing nation with the Abrahamic Covenant, the apology helps define Canada-present as existing in accord with The Charter of Rights and Freedoms, in juxtaposition to its racist, discriminatory past. Two separate totems have emerged from the formerly unified Canada: the polluted Canada-past, embodied by the institution and administrations that supported the residential schools, and the pure, regenerated essence of the nation that is Canada-present, embodied by the post-apology Prime Minister, Stephen Harper.

The humiliation of the totem of Canada-past began years before Harper's 2008 apology, with accusations of sexual abuse at residential schools, admission of wrong doings from churches, documents such as the 1998 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, the 2006 class action deal, and the 2007 compensation package ("A Timeline"). In the lead up to the apology, the media humiliated the prime minister by presenting Harper as being bullied by Aboriginal people, arguably the lowest status people in Canada. A quick search of titles of the articles which were published before the apology reveals a variety of sources "demanding" an apology from the prime minister. The prime minister is portrayed as being pushed around by other ministers, members of the opposition, and even Aboriginal people with article titles such as "Fontaine Threatens to Reject Residential School Apology". In an article from *The Globe and Mail* article from March 2007, the opposition "demands" to know why the prime minister "refuses to apologize" to the residential school survivors for the "unspeakable acts [which] were committed upon them". This reference can be seen as an attempt to embarrass the prime minister, associating Harper with the unapologetic sexual abuse of children.

The culmination of the humiliation occurred on the day of the sacrifice itself, June 11th, 2008. *The Globe and Mail* reported that, on that day, leaders of the opposition "won applause with jabs at the Conservatives for refusing to endorse the United Nations Declaration on the rights of Indigenous peoples" (Curry and Galloway). Meanwhile, *The Globe and Mail* reported that Inuit leader Mary Simon stared defiantly at the prime minister, stating that her culture was still strong despite Canada's attempts to kill it (Curry and Galloway).

We see this ideological separation between the sinful Canada-past and the soon-to-be purified Canada-present during the liminal period of the apology ritual itself, with Stephen Harper's repetitive use of time denoting words and phrases.

Today, we recognize that this policy of assimilation was wrong, has caused great harm, and has no place in our country ... the government *now* recognizes that the consequences of the Indian

Residential Schools were profoundly negative... We *now* recognize that it was wrong to separate children... We *now* recognize that, in separating children from their families, we undermined the ability of many to adequately parent their own children. We *now* recognize that, far too often, these institutions gave rise to abuse or neglect and were inadequately controlled [my emphasis] (Harper).

The language used in the coverage of the apology, of “moving forward” from a “sad chapter” not only echoes both Chirac’s statements but countless other leaders who have attempted to separate their ideal nation from historically regrettable periods, such as Bill Clinton’s 1998 description of slavery as “one of the most difficult chapters” in American history (qtd in Craemer 278). In fact, Harper’s reference to the residential school era as “sad chapter” (Atkinson; “Government of Canada Asks Forgiveness”; “PM Cites ‘Sad Chapter’”; “Residential School Apology”) was the most quoted specific phrase in all of the articles analyzed. The record seems to be skipping with British Columbia Premier Gordon Campbell citing a “tragic *chapter* in our history [my emphasis]” (Atkinson). Jack Layton almost directly repeated Chirac’s reference to the Vichy period by calling the time of the residential schools “one of the most shameful eras of our history” (“PM Cites ‘Sad Chapter’”). Even native leaders joined in propagation of the division between the totems Canada-past and Canada-present, as Phil Fontaine referred to the era of the residential schools as a “dreadful chapter” in our past (“PM Cites ‘Sad Chapter’”). Media commentators were also keen to use this phrase and thus disseminate the notion of the separation of the past, sinning nation from its present, essential state. In his live coverage of the event, one of Canada’s most celebrated anchormen, Mike Duffy described the residential school era as a “black part of Canadian past history” while the editorial the day after the apology in *The Montreal Gazette* referred to “a dark chapter” in our history (“Apology is the first step”). This theme is also evident in the references to past wrongs and historical injustices, particularly in terms such as “dark past” which highlight how different a time and place it was then, than Canada is now (“Residential School Apology Resonates”). Similarly, many media commentators on the apology noted that attitudes now are different than they were in the past, during the “sad chapter.” After explaining how Trudeau’s government did not even entertain the idea of an apology when issuing the red paper, Duffy simply states, “[h]ow things have changed.” (“Residential School Apology”) We also see this in repeated references to past wrongs and injustices such as the Angus Reid Poll which asked Canadians if they thought the government should apologize for “past unjust treatment” of native people (“Harper will issue long-awaited apology”), as though there is nothing wrong with how native people are being treated now. Similar turns of

phrase were repeated in the French language press as *Le Devoir* referred to turning “une page somber de l’histoire canadienne” (Castonguay) and quoted Stéphane Dion as saying that, with the apology, we came face to face with “one of the darkest chapters” [my translation] in our history. In his Interim Report for the TRC, even Justice Murray Sinclair, refers to the “une triste episode” (Pensionnats autochtones). Such minimizing euphemisms hide the fact that, time-wise, this “chapter” encompassed almost 90% of Canada’s history as a nation. Moreover, it is a disavowal of the fact that Canada, past and present, may simply be a racist society; instead, such statements support the narrative that it is only this era of our history, and not Canada as a whole which needs to be ready for sacrifice. Only the past, sinning nation need be killed, leaving what is newly defined as the essence, for regeneration. Canada can be resurrected from the seed, now purified of its sinning “chapter” by the ritual humiliation of Stephen Harper’s apology. The re-covenanting process is seen to wipe to slate clean even though the realities of ongoing colonialism have not been acknowledged.

Rebirth

In the rituals of totem regeneration, “nationalism comes after sacrifice” (Marvin, 1994, p. 277): “the alienating of iniquities from the self to the scapegoat amounts to a rebirth of the self” (Burke 407). In the last third of his apology, the prime minister moves on to the theme of regeneration and rebirth. He states that the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement “gives us a new beginning and an opportunity to move forward together in partnership... forging a new relationship between aboriginal peoples and other Canadians” (“PM Cites ‘Sad Chapter’”).

Six months after the apology, *The Globe and Mail* Parliamentary Reporter Bill Curry discussed the transformation of Stephen Harper during the apology process. Noting that, Michael Wernick, the deputy minister of Indian Affairs, stated, “I certainly get the impression the PM has had a personal transformation and this may have a substantial impact on his worldview.” Curry quotes another Conservative official as stating that, in learning about the residential schools, Harper, “went through an evolution in his own thinking.” He reminds us that in 1996, as a Reform MP, Harper had argued against granting a posthumous pardon to Louis Riel and that in 2000 Harper praised Flanagan’s book “First Nations: Second Thoughts” which questions native rights and “infuriated native leaders.”

Paralleling the fact that, just before the apology, the titles of articles contributed to the humiliation of the Stephen Harper as victim, after the apology, the titles of articles raised the status of the Prime Minister from victim to saviour. The first article in the *Canadian Jewish News* after the apology, regarding the event

was titled, simply, "Apology Praised." The allusion, consciously or unconsciously, of the title is that Harper has been deified through the apology process and is now worthy of worship, is particularly noteworthy from a paper which posts Shabbat times on its front page

Celermajer argues that the recent political apologies are "an acknowledgement of a collective failure to live up to an ideal ethical principle and... a new covenant for now and into the future" (247). Just as Israel promised to maintain its new image of itself as a god-fearing nation as juxtaposed to its idol-worshipping past, Canada now defines its essence as a follower of human rights, embodied in The Charter of Rights and Freedoms, in juxtaposition to the discriminatory, racist "chapter" in its past. Though, through the act of re-covenanting, the apology is said to "bring the historical community back into alignment with the ideal community" (35), it is not simply a return to the past, but a rebirth.

Conclusion

Though I see the whole process of the apology and its media coverage as constituting a re-covenanting, I feel the need to point out that some of the articles even made direct references to what can only be seen as a covenant with references to "redefining the relationship between First Nations and government" (my translation) ("Phil Fontaine veut une discussion nationale"); as with some of the other archetypal themes discussed in this article, the Aboriginal Canadians cited by the media seemed to be more cognizant of these underlying religious themes than non-Aboriginals. On CTV's coverage of the event, residential school survivor Andrea Curly states that she is thinking of the apology in terms of "treaty belts, wampum belts... the silver covenant chain... things we need to go back to look at the relationship that was to be put there in the first place. Those are the kinds of things we need to look at if we want to go forward" ("Residential School Apology"). We must remember that the common notion of religion as something separate from everyday life impedes recognition of the underlying religious narratives at work in epideictic practice and perhaps, allows those with a different *weltanschauung*, such as Aboriginals, to more easily see below the surface.

Some may view this exploration as a cynical analysis of a sincere attempt at reconciliation between two historically antagonistic groups which have been brought into conflict because of colonization. I have been, and surely will be, misinterpreted as seeing the apology as a useless public relations campaign by the Federal Government – but this is not the case: epideixis, with its assignment of value, is fundamental to creating and transforming human ethical systems and, indeed all our institutions. Burkean James Boyd White states that words produce

"...the methods by which culture is maintained, criticized, and transformed" (279). Such epideictic practices as the public apology are our methods of maintaining, criticizing, and transforming our ethical identities as individuals and as nations. As Robert Ivie writes "[h]umans, living within language and defined through symbolic action, may hope to reform their identities and relations to one another by means of tragicomic narrative and ritual dramas" (242). When one defines one's identity anew through narrative and ritual, one is more likely to behave and relate to others in a manner more in tune with that new identity. If, in defining its essence as a humane and egalitarian society in alignment with The Charter of Rights and Freedoms through this process Canada begins to act more in tune with this identity, then, surely, this is reason enough to applaud the apology.

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Appendix A: Statement of Apology to former students of Indian Residential School

The treatment of children in Indian Residential Schools is a sad chapter in our history.

For more than a century, Indian Residential Schools separated over 150,000 Aboriginal children from their families and communities. In the 1870's, the federal government, partly in order to meet its obligation to educate Aboriginal children, began to play a role in the 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 was infamously said, "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 every province and territory, except Newfoundland, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island. Most schools were operated as "joint ventures" with Anglican, Catholic, Presbyterian or United Churches. The Government of Canada built an educational system in which very young children were often forcibly removed from their homes, often taken far from their communities. Many were inadequately fed, clothed and housed. All were deprived of the care and nurturing of their parents, grandparents and communities. First Nations, Inuit and Métis languages and cultural practices were prohibited in these schools. Tragically, some of these 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 damaging impact on Aboriginal culture, heritage and language. 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 sexual abuse and neglect

of helpless 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 publicly about the 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 died never having received a full apology from the Government of Canada.

The government recognizes that the absence of an apology has been an impediment to healing and reconciliation. 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 for Canada's 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 we 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 now recognize that, in separating children from their families, we 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 now 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 parents, you were powerless to protect 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 burden is properly ours as a Government, and as a country. There is no place in Canada for the attitudes that inspired the Indian Residential Schools system to ever prevail again. You have been working on recovering from this experience

for a long time and in a very real sense, we are now 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.

Nous le regrettons

We are sorry

Nimitataynan

Niminchinowesamin

Mamiattugut

In moving towards healing, reconciliation and resolution of the sad legacy of Indian Residential Schools, implementation of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement began on September 19, 2007. Years of work by survivors, communities, and Aboriginal organizations culminated in an agreement that gives us a new beginning and an opportunity to move forward together in partnership.

A cornerstone of the Settlement Agreement is the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission. This Commission presents a unique 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 other Canadians, a relationship 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