

MISSIONARY OBLATES OF MARY IMMACULATE APOLOGY

LAC STE ANNE ALBERTA 1991 JULY

Next year, 1992, marks the five hundredth anniversary of the arrival of Europeans on the shores of America. As large scale celebrations are being prepared to mark this occasion, the Oblates of Canada wish, through this apology, to show solidarity with many Native people in Canada whose history has been adversely affected by this event. . . . As well, recent criticisms of Indian residential schools and the exposure of instances of physical and sexual abuse within these schools call for such an apology. . . . We apologize for the part we played in the cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and religious imperialism that was part of the mentality with which the Peoples of Europe first met the aboriginal peoples and which consistently has lurked behind the way the Native peoples of Canada have been treated by civil governments and by the churches. We were, naively, part of this mentality and were, in fact, often a key player in its implementation. We recognize that this mentality has, from the beginning, and ever since, continually threatened the cultural, linguistic, and religious traditions of the Native peoples.

We recognize that many of the problems that beset Native communities today—high unemployment, alcoholism, family breakdown, domestic violence, spiraling suicide rates, lack of healthy self-esteem—are not so much the result of personal failure as they are the result of centuries of systemic imperialism. Any people stripped of its traditions as well as of its pride falls victim to precisely these social ills. For the part that we played, however inadvertent and naive that participation might have been, in the setting up and maintaining of a system that stripped others of not only their lands but also of their cultural, linguistic, and religious traditions we sincerely apologize. . . .

In sympathy with recent criticisms of Native Residential Schools, we wish to apologize for the part we played in the setting up and the maintaining of those schools. *We apologize for the existence of the schools themselves*, recognizing that the biggest abuse was not what happened in the schools, but that the schools themselves happened . . . that the primal bond inherent within families was violated as a matter of policy, that children were usurped from their natural communities, and that, implicitly and explicitly, these schools operated out of the premise that European languages, traditions, and religious practices were superior to native languages, traditions, and religious practices. The residential schools were an attempt to assimilate aboriginal peoples and we played an important role in the unfolding of this design. For this we sincerely apologize.

We wish to apologize in a very particular way for the instances of physical and sexual abuse that occurred in those schools. . . . Finally, we wish to apologize as well for our past dismissal of many of the riches of native religious tradition. We broke some of your peace pipes and we considered some of your sacred practices as pagan and superstitious. This too had its origins in the colonial mentality, our European superiority complex, which was grounded in a particular view of history. We apologize for this blindness and disrespect. . . .

. . . Sincerity alone does not set people above their place in history. Thousands of persons operated out of this mentality and gave their lives in dedication to an ideal that, while sincere in its intent, was, at one point, naively linked to a certain cultural, religious, linguistic, and ethnic superiority complex. These men and women sincerely believed that their vocations and actions were serving both God and the best interests of the Native Peoples to whom they were ministering. History has, partially, rendered a cruel judgment on their efforts. . . .

Recognizing that within every sincere apology there is implicit the promise of conversion to a new way of acting. We, the Oblates of Canada, wish to pledge ourselves to a renewed relationship with Native Peoples which, while very much in line with the sincerity and intent of our past relationship, seeks to move beyond past mistakes to a new level of respect and mutuality ...

Reverend Doug Crosby OMI

President of the Oblate Conference of Canada

On behalf of the 1200 Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate living and ministering in Canada