



A Perspective of Indigenous Concerns and Issues

--Al MacLeod



The meetings between the Indigenous, Inuit & Métis Delegations, bishops and Pope Francis:
March 28-April 1, 2022.

With content from: Reuters: Philip Pullella; Catholic Register: Michael Swan; CTV News/Canadian Press

Clearly the apology given by Pope Francis at the historic meeting with First Nation, Inuit and Métis delegations on April 1, 2022 has set the path for Catholics and all Canadians to walk along together with our Indigenous Brothers & Sisters. Archbishop Richard Smith of Edmonton says the apology from Pope Francis was a historic milestone, a springboard for reconciliation and is just the first step on the road to healing.

Natan Obed, president of Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, said that he couldn't help but think about how people can change the world. He thought about how there can be a path toward justice: "Behind the cover-ups, behind the indifference over a 100 years, behind the lies, behind the lack of justice, this Pope — Pope Francis — decided to go right through it and decided to speak words that First Nations, Inuit and Métis have been longing to hear for decades."

The Pope made it clear to the bishops that an apology must be followed up with concrete action, especially at the local level. Speaking in Italian, here are a few of his comments:

"For the deplorable behaviour of those members of the Catholic Church, I ask forgiveness from God and I would like to tell you from the bottom of my heart that I am very pained"

"I join my brother Canadian bishops in apologising...The Church stands with you and wants to journey with you"

Francis also spoke of "unresolved traumas that have become intergenerational traumas"

"I feel shame – sorrow and shame – for the role that a number of Catholics, particularly those with educational responsibilities, had in all these things that wounded you, in the abuses you suffered and in the lack of respect shown for your identity, your culture and even your spiritual values"

"Clearly, the content of the faith cannot be transmitted in a way contrary to the faith itself...Jesus taught us to welcome, love, serve and not judge. It is a frightening thing when, precisely in the name of the faith, counter-witness is rendered to the Gospel."

It is important to point out that the work is only just begun. The Indigenous groups involved in the delegation also requested the church provide reparations to support healing, return Indigenous artifacts and release residential schools documents. Archbishop Smith was quick to point out: "Indigenous peoples across the country are distinct and they're autonomous. We've got to be really careful to avoid a perpetuation of colonial mentality, whereby we say to them: 'Here are your problems - we know how to fix it and here's what we will do for you'...Those days are over."

According to the Catholic Register:

A major concern to be dealt with is what is known as The Doctrine of Discovery. This 'wrecking ball' document which dates to 1493 assumed that all Indigenous lands were *terra nullius*—'No one's land'—open to be claimed by Western explorers in the name of Western empires in the Americas. The effects of this doctrine and the legal concept of *terra nullius* have been widely debated for the last half century. Ever since the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops announced the meetings with Pope Francis, the Assembly of First Nations has made no secret of its expectation that the Pope will renounce the corrosive legal doctrine that fueled Europeans settling Canada.

"I am asking the Holy Father to renounce and formally revoke the 1493 Doctrine of Discovery and replace it with a new papal bull that decrees Indigenous peoples and cultures are valuable, worthy and must be treated with dignity and respect," Assembly of First Nations National Chief RoseAnne Archibald told *The Catholic Register* in an email before the originally scheduled December meeting with the Pope. How uncomfortably the Doctrine of Discovery sits in our history now presents the Church and Canadians with a further challenge along that path to reconciliation.

As far as Pope Francis visiting Canada, he stated that he was happy to know that Catholics among [Indigenous] were devoted to St. Anne (the mother of Mary) whose feast day is July 26. "This year, I would like to be with you on that day," he said. Nothing has been confirmed at this time.

Where does all this leave us as Catholics and Christians? What role can we play? What role are we expected to play? The foundation to being an active part to this process is to learn and show empathy. Our Catholic Social Teachings illustrate that:

- † We proclaim human life is sacred and the dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society
 - † Human dignity must be protected and a healthy community will be achieved only if human rights are protected and responsibilities are met
 - † We are one human family whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences may be.
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- † Learn more about the history of the Indigenous peoples of Huronia by visiting the Barrie Native Friendship Centre, the Martyrs' Shrine, Ste. Marie-among-the-Hurons, the Huron/Ouendat Village and other sites that exhibit our interaction with the local First Nations and Métis
 - † Participate in one of the Blanket Exercises that St. Mary's will present in May
 - † Wear an orange shirt occasionally—particularly on Sept 30
 - † Get to know the Indigenous parishioners of St. Mary's
 - † PRAY

While it is not officially confirmed at this writing, it would appear that Pope Francis will visit Canada in late July. The 4-day trip may include stops in Edmonton, Quebec City and Iqaluit.



St. Kateri Tekakwitha, pray for us.