Truth and Racial Healing

Historical and Theological Perspectives on Catholic Indian Boarding Schools

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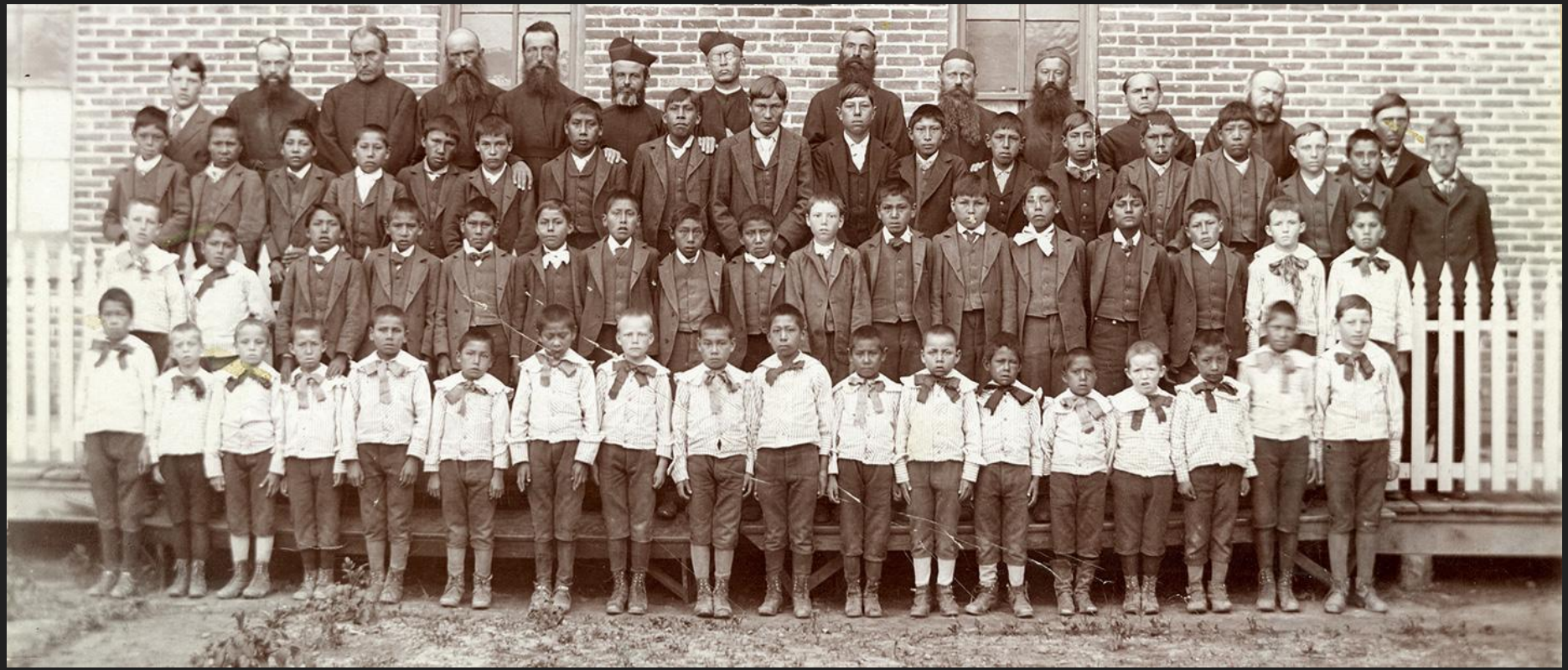

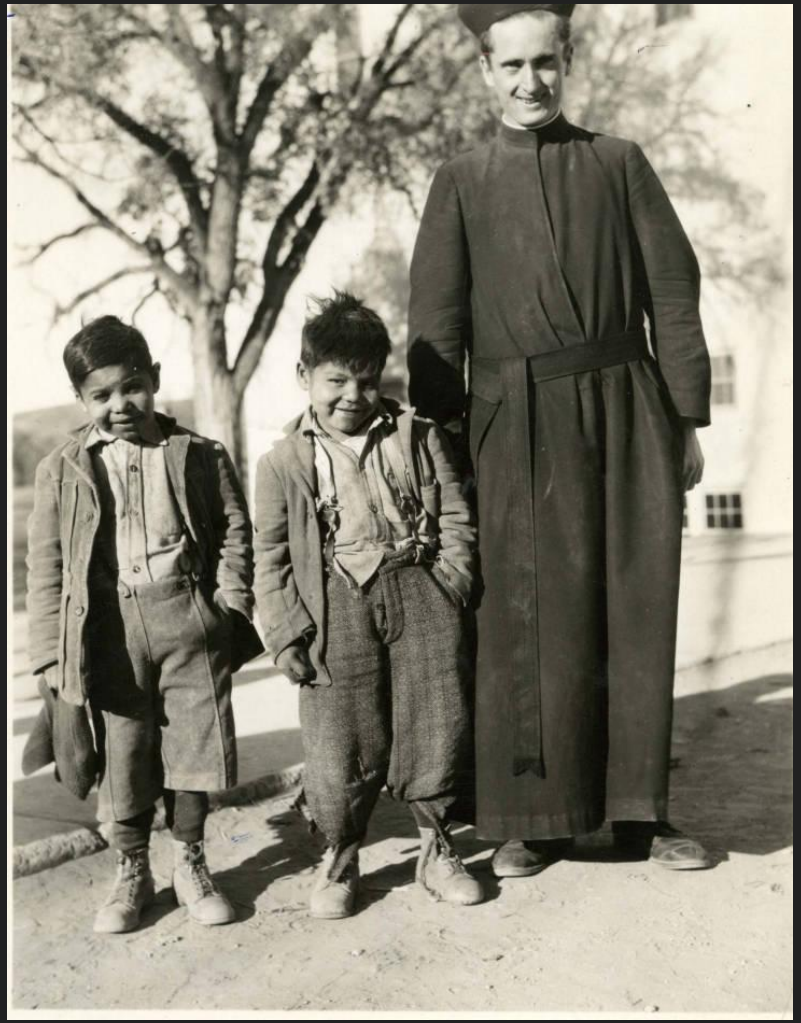

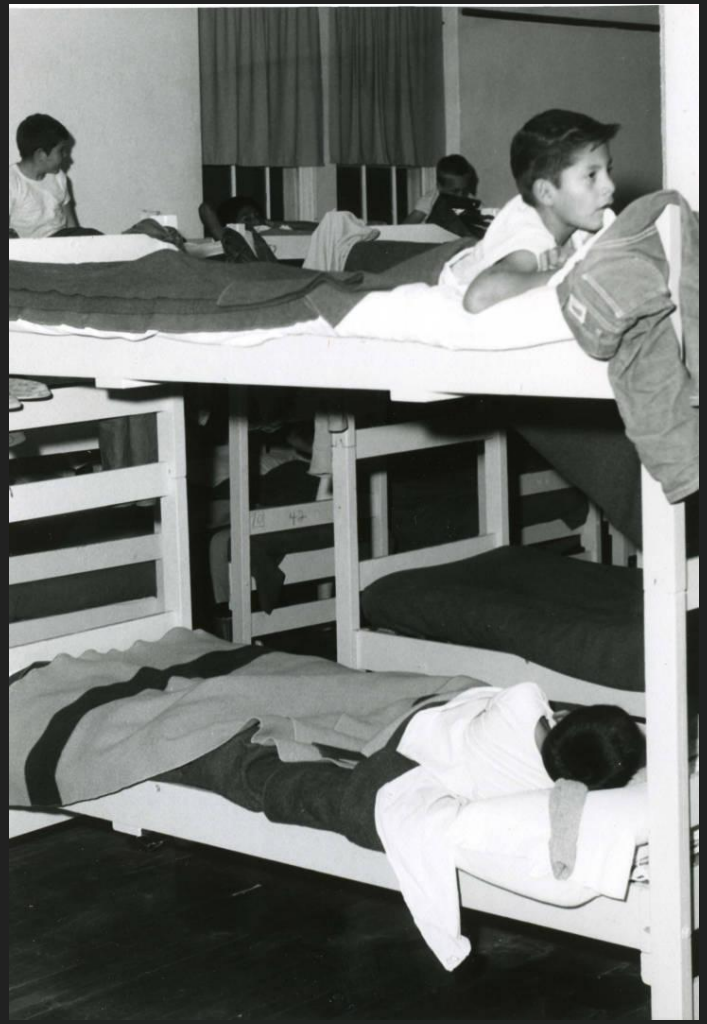

“I found it very ironic. [They] told me one thing and then they showed us Christ on the cross who had long hair… I just didn't understand. But… back in those days you don't ask questions”

Generations of Impact

Generations of Impact

Historical trauma defined as a “cumulative emotional and psychological wounding” across generations. - Braveheart, 2003

Ban and Remove All Churches On Our Reservations!!

Like Comment

The Burning of Canada's Churches

Dozens have gone up in flames, and the prime minister's response is tepid.

Catholic Theological Response

“The Church’s participation in Canada’s residential schools, whose explicit and primary goal was the destruction of Indigenous culture, was a direct repudiation of the Council of Jerusalem. It was, to be blunt, heretical.” - Salkeld, 2021

Catholic Theological Response

“[T]he suggestion that Catholics could not have known any better given the basic attitudes of the time does not hold water. While it is always a delicate business to pass moral judgment on those of another historical era and it is true that we can never know the level of culpability in an individual’s heart, **we can say that, as a Church, we should have known better. And, in any case, what good is a Church whose moral compass is indistinguishable from that of the ambient culture?”** - Salkeld, 2021

Papal Apology

“Listening to your voices, I was able to enter into and be deeply grieved by the stories of the suffering, hardship, discrimination and various forms of abuse that some of you experienced, particularly in the residential schools. **It is chilling to think of determined efforts to instil a sense of inferiority, to rob people of their cultural identity, to sever their roots, and to consider all the personal and social effects that this continues to entail: unresolved traumas that have become intergenerational traumas.**

All this has made me feel two things very strongly: **indignation and shame**. **No! Without real indignation, without historical memory and without a commitment to learning from past mistakes, problems remain unresolved and keep coming back.** We can see this these days in the case of war. The memory of the past must never be sacrificed at the altar of alleged progress.”

Papal Apology

“**Dear brothers and sisters, many of you and your representatives have stated that begging pardon is not the end of the matter. I fully agree: that is only the first step, the starting point. I also recognize that, ‘looking to the past, no effort to beg pardon and to seek to repair the harm done will ever be sufficient’ and that, ‘looking ahead to the future, no effort must be spared to create a culture able to prevent such situations from happening**’ (Letter to the People of God, 20 August 2018). An important part of this process will be to conduct a serious investigation into the facts of what took place in the past and to assist the survivors of the residential schools to experience healing from the traumas they suffered.”

Toward Healing

Approach to Reconciliation

- Confrontation
- Understanding
- Healing
- Transformation/Transcendence

A Spiritual Commitment

- Healing is for everyone.
- Recognition of this work as sacramental.
- Repairing the Mystical Body of Christ.
- “Clearly, the content of the faith cannot be transmitted in a way contrary to the faith itself.” - Papal Apology

Pope Francis

“[T]hinking about the process of healing and reconciliation with our indigenous brothers and sisters, never again can the Christian community allow itself to be infected by the idea that one culture is superior to others, or that it is legitimate to employ ways of coercing others… In order to defeat this culture of exclusion, we must begin with ourselves: bishops and priests, who should not feel themselves superior to our brothers and sisters in the People of God; pastoral workers, who should not understand service as power. This is where we must start. **You are key figures and builders of a different Church: humble, meek, merciful, which accompanies processes, labours decisively and serenely in the service of inculturation, and shows respect for each individual and for every cultural and religious difference.**”

Catholic Theological Response

“Christianity’s complicity with colonialism has a long and sad history. But it is also the case that, when Christianity is at its missionary best, the missionaries themselves clearly see that Christianity cannot be identified with any one culture and that sharing **the Gospel means freeing people from oppressive systems, not imposing them.”** - Salkeld, 2021

The Difficult Journey Toward Healing

“The actual work of reconciliation will not be in the pope’s hands. Through issuing his apology, Pope Francis has called upon the whole body of Christ to now take the steps necessary to face our history as a Church in North America and seek to right our relationship with Indigenous peoples… **The Catholic Church is the inheritor of a difficult legacy, nuanced as it is, that marks a deep stain on the integrity of the faith that clearly acted against its own core beliefs. Yet it is also the very realization of that fact that holds the faith together and reminds us that despite the failings of our past, this Church is full of goodness rooted in the Gospel truth**. Our baptismal calling is at the root of our need not only to admit and atone for this history but to also deepen our faith and trust that God pulls us in the right direction by doing so.” - Black Elk, 2022

Deconstructing the False Binary

- “This is one of the great challenges of colonial history and the impact it has on modern peoples. Colonialism is a form of literal, cultural, and spiritual warfare. **And like all wars, it breeds intergenerational hatred between two apparent sides.** Colonialism creates a binary that is very difficult to dismantle even centuries later.”

  Black Elk, M. (Forthcoming 2023)

- How do we start to overcome this perceived binary?

Barriers to Healing

- We have to want to Heal.
- We need to believe that healing is possible.
- We need to believe one is worthy of healing.

Resources

- National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition
- Guide to Catholic Records About Native Americans (Marquette University)
- Department of the Interior Report on Federal Indian Boarding Schools
- Red Cloud Truth and Healing Website
- Papal Visit to Canada
- Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission
- How Tradition Catholic Teaching Can Help Us Think About Truth, Reconciliation, and Reparations by Brett Salkeld
- Residential Schools and the Difficult Journey Toward Healing by Maka Black Elk
- Email: makablackelk@redcloudschool.org