

What's in a School's Name?
The Names Given to Indian Residential Schools

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October 25, 2018

Preface

I thank you for inviting me to speak and for feeding me. At my age, talking and eating are my two greatest pleasures.

I will talk for about 15 minutes. This talk is designed to generate a discussion.

In fact, I have heard via the grape vine that there has already been some discussion about me and about what I might say.

My talk has four parts:

1. Introduction;
2. What the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report says;
3. The Names of the Schools; and
4. Conclusion.

I will tell you when I'm making the transitions.

Introduction

All hallows evening is coming in a few day, and it is a time to remember the dead and Christian saints.

So, here is a question to ponder:

When Christian churches founded schools in Canada, what names did they give to them?

Perhaps you thought that these schools were named after:

1. Saints;
2. Days in the Christian calendar; and

3. Important church leaders.

Everyone probably got the church leaders correct. We are in Westley Hall, named after the Methodist evangelist and heretical Anglican who was not allowed to preach in many English churches. If you had these three, then give yourself part marks—but only part marks.

Now, I'm going to take a side step to look at.

The TRC Report

The Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC)—reports on Indian Residential Schools in Canada.

You have all heard of the Report, but probably not many have read the 7 volumes, 3,500 pages, 1.5 million words.

It seems to me that some people would have read the Summary and the Legacy volumes.

If you read the whole report, you probably noticed that these two volumes do not reflect what is in the report. (This is strange.)

Nevertheless, I will read the first couple of sentences from the Introductory volume (The History, Part 1). You have probably heard these words before because they have been quoted many times:

“For over a century, the central goals of Canada’s Aboriginal policy were to eliminate Aboriginal governments; ignore Aboriginal rights, terminate the Treaties; and through a process of assimilation, cause Aboriginal peoples to cease to exist as distinct legal, social, cultural, religious, and racial entities in Canada. The establishment and operation of residential schools were a central element of this policy, which can best be described as cultural genocide.”

The Commission goes on to define cultural genocide as “the destruction of those structures and practices that allow the group to continue as a group.”

After hearing these two sentences, a strong claim and an equally strong condemnation, you probably think the schools and residences would be named after the fallen angel “Lucifer.”

This is the story, but as critical academic we should ask: is it true?

Is there contrary evidence to the TRC explanation? If so, how important is this evidence?

The Names of the Schools

It is not until an appendix in Volume 4, over 2,200 pages after the sentences I read, that the names of the 139 (or 143) schools are revealed.

As you expected, the list contains:

1. Saints—St. Cyprian’s, St. Mary’s, and St. Paul’s;
2. Religious days—All Saints, Assumption, and Sacred Heart.
3. Church leaders—Grollier and Stringer, the two residential hostels in Inuvik. (I worked in Stringer Hall for a year.)

There are no surprises here!

Now, you may be wondering what is the surprise?

You may be surprised to learn that at least 55 of the schools and residences (about 35%) had Indigenous names.

Schools were named after:

1. Famous Indigenous Chiefs—Crowfoot, Poundmaker, and Old Sun;
2. Tribes and bands—Assiniboia, Chipewyan, and Mohawk;
3. Places and communities—Ahousat, Kitamaat, and Wabissca.

By now, I hope you are wondering why churchmen, who were intent on decimating Indigenous people and their cultures, would give Indigenous names to so many schools and residences.

That is what I have been wondering.

One obvious answer is: “Political correctness”.

These religious people knew that if they appeased Indigenous parents and leaders, they were more likely to send their children to school. If kids did not come to school, the supervisors and teachers could not turn them into good Christians.

Naming the schools with Indigenous names would help make the children feel more comfortable, stay longer, not run away, and hopefully not burn the school down.

But, the oldest residential school in the Agreement was established by Church of England, called the Mohawk Institute, and it was opened in 1832, long before political correctness was dreamed up.

Take another side step: when this school was opened, John A Macdonald was a 17 year old school boy living in Kingston. One wonders why people think that he was the architect of Indian Residential Schools when he didn't become Prime Minister until 35 years later in 1867.

By 1867, there were 8 Indian Residential Schools operating.

As you are pondering this fact, let me give you a few related facts.

1. If church leaders were truly hostile to these people, why did many of them learn the languages, write grammars, and create orthographies for Indigenous languages? (J.W. Tims, *Grammar and dictionary of the Blackfoot Language*.)
2. Why did so many school administrators proudly allow tribal elders to give Indigenous names to their children?
3. And, why did those children use those names so often throughout their lives?

4. Why do these children, who are now quite old, still keep in contact with the children of the men and women who named them?
5. And finally, why did a number of the Indigenous girls name their own children after their residential supervisors?

Of course, as Canadians, we know that Indigenous names are very common.

The word “Canada” is an Indigenous word; so are Manitoba, Winnipeg, Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Ottawa, and the small Alberta towns of Okotoks, and Ponoka. So are Aklavik, Inuvik, and Tuktoyaktuk. Everyone knows about the Salish Sea between Vancouver Island and Washington State. An Indigenous name.

Some navy ships were named after Indigenous tribes: HMCS Athabaskan and HMCS Haida, for example. We even have the Iroquois class of destroyers.

Indeed, the list of Indigenous names that are used in Canada is very long.

Given all this, I wonder why the Commission did not report and explain these data. It was right in front of their eyes?

This led me to wonder if an answer that differs from the TRC answer is more reasonable.

Perhaps you can think of possible explanations for these data. This is your task.

Conclusion

It is time for Canadian journalists and academics to examine this report with much greater care. There are a number of things, like the names of the schools that need to be examined carefully.

These things need to be explained better.

There are a number of errors in the Report that should be corrected. It would be best if the Commissioners corrected the errors but the National Centre could correct the errors.

It is time for people to do more than simply read the Summary and Legacy volumes and then to echo the Commission's words.

Finally, since we are in Westley Hall and it is close to all hallows eve, perhaps Canadian churches deserve a little more charity (a Halloween apple) than they have been getting.

Nevertheless, we do not need any more saints or any more martyrs, but we need fresh eyes to look at the Report.

As the Commissioners have said, and I agree, without "truth" there can be no "reconciliation".

Thank you very much for listening.

Do you have an explanation that is better than the Commission's?

Additional Issues

The number of schools.

Why were 16 schools not included in the Agreement?

The number of children who attended the schools: The TRC Report quotes Stephen Harper's public apology in 2008, saying 150,000. The Commission simply quotes this number and references the P.M.s statement.

The list of children attending each of the schools so we know the length of time children went to residential schools at various eras.

Some of the stories from survivors were not cross-checked to determine if they were true. Some seem to be questionable.

12 Calls to Action recommend that we sign on to the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous people. Thus, there are more calls to do this than any other direct action.

One call says that Aboriginal, Indigenous, and Canadian law should be integrated. How would this work?

The number of schools and residences included.

The sad story of Charlie Wenjack needs to be corrected. He did not attend a RC residential school and he was not abused by Roman priests and nuns.

Perhaps the Commission began its work with a preconception and then spent 6 years and over \$60 million gathering and organizing evidence to support that preconception.

Let me re-read one sentence again: Canada and the churches caused "Aboriginal peoples to cease to exist as distinct legal, social, cultural, religious, and racial entity."

Obviously, this statement is factually untrue, but no one has corrected the error.

Other evidence leads me to think that this answer may be true. The Report shows that 3,201 children died in IRSs, about 50 percent as a result of TB. Senator Sinclair has talked about over 6,000 dying without any hesitation and without any evidence. No one has questioned him. That is strange.
