

Commentary



AUGUST 2022

The journey ahead: The next steps for reconciliation after the papal visit

The July 2022 visit of Pope Francis was both historic and vital for Indigenous peoples. The trip was built around a series of apologies for the church's role in residential schools and the colonization of Indigenous peoples more generally. To shed further light on these issues, MLI hosted a webinar that explored the significant and potential impact of the Pope's recent visit from two perspectives: that of the affected Indigenous peoples and communities and the Roman Catholic Church. The discussion considered Indigenous expectations, church priorities, and the public interest in this large-scale effort of meaningful reconciliation.

We are pleased to release an edited transcript of this event.

Ken Coates:

Good afternoon, we're delighted to have you here with us today for the second of our webinars dealing with the pope's visit, titled "The journey ahead: The next step to reconciliation after the papal visit." My name is Ken Coates. I'm a Canada Research Chair at the University of Saskatchewan, and a Distinguished Fellow of the Macdonald-Laurier Institute.

We're joined today by two people, with a third person who will hopefully be joining a bit later once we are able to make connection with him. Our panellists today are Michael W. Higgins, who's a distinguished professor emeritus of Catholic thought at Sacred

Heart University in Connecticut, and Melissa Mbarki, my colleague at the Macdonald-Laurier Institute, a policy analyst and outreach coordinator in our Indigenous Affairs Program. And we're hoping that Chief Cadmus Delorme of the Cowessess First Nation will be able to join us as well.

As you may recall, for those who were able to join us on the first webinar, we explored the whole question of: Why was the pope coming? What were people expecting? What were their hopes and expectations? Were they reasonable? Did we legitimately expect the pope would be able to meet all of the challenges and demands placed on him as he came to this country?

The events themselves went off with grace on the part of the pope, and grace, certainly, on the part of Indigenous peoples, particularly residential school survivors. There was great dignity among all the audiences that he addressed and the people who surrounded him. I'm going to do is start this off by asking our panellists, Melissa and Michael, in the first instance, to tell us their thoughts. What was it like? Did things meet your expectations? Melissa, you were in the middle of all of this – how did it go?

Melissa Mbarki:

I thought the pope delivered on his apology; that's what he came to Canada for. That's what his visit specifically was for. And he delivered that to survivors who were in the crowd. You could have heard a pin drop when he apologized, and it literally took the words out of me. I cannot express how I felt in that moment; I was feeling the emotions with everybody in the crowd. And it was quite something to hear, because a lot of people waited decades to hear this apology. And it was heartfelt, it was sincere. He spoke the words that survivors wanted to hear. And for many, this potentially was closure for them; acknowledging the abuse that they had gone through, this was a closure for their time spent in residential schools. It was very impactful. And my grandmother was a survivor of a residential school, and I took that apology for her. I accepted it, I welcome that, because that's our only way forward – to heal and to learn from this whole experience, not only just survivors, but Canada in general. And to know that we're on the road to reconciliation, and this is a start of it.

Ken Coates:

I don't think anybody expected this was the end of the path to reconciliation, but a good start. And I remember doing interviews in the 1980s with Roman Catholic priests who'd been involved in residential schools in Yukon. And it was really interesting how incredibly defensive they were. People were criticizing the residential schools, and they're like: no, they're wrong, these schools

are great things, they were wonderful, we did all this great work for the children. And to see how far we've come, you know, 30 years and in the broad sweep of history. Thirty years is relatively fast. So thank you very much, Melissa, I appreciate that. Michael, over to you.

Michael W. Higgins:

I'm going to do something a little different this time, Ken. Something I ordinarily wouldn't do in a webinar like this and that is to read a couple of paragraphs from an article that I was commissioned to write for a British journal that has a large, international readership. They wanted to know something about what was happening in Canada with the pope. And so I wrote this and then I realized I don't think it could be better than what I had actually written. So I won't read the whole article. Don't worry. It's just a few minutes of it, but I think it speaks directly to how I have understood the visit and the inevitable consequences.

In quoting Charles Taylor on secularization, Pope Francis noted that it represents a challenge for our pastoral imagination. An occasion for restructuring the spiritual life in new forms and new ways of existing in applying this bold exercise to pastoral imagination in the Canadian context, and interestingly, Francis actually quoted the Canadian in relation to this. Indeed, in the new world context, Francis is calling for nothing less than a spiritual revolution. How do we address the corrosive effects of colonization, the deliberate and systematic effort to eradicate the cultures and spiritualities of the First Peoples, the appalling record of Eurocentric hegemony, with its presumed civilizational superiority in a way that moves beyond theory, exerted Tory rhetoric and deft spiritual manoeuvring.

The theologian Frederick Bauerschmidt concisely calculates the options this way: Christians, and I quote, must take as their role models not Sepúlveda, the Spanish Renaissance humanist who argued in favor of the slavery of Indigenous peoples and who justified the conversion by conquest of the Americas, but rather the martyred Trappist monks of Tibhirine in Algeria, who died because they would not abandon their Muslim neighbours and, quote, now the option, in other words, is either aggressive proselytizing or authentic witness. Well, for centuries, we chose the former; the consequences are clear, we're living with them now. Francis repeatedly calls for the recognition of the special genius of the Indigenous peoples, their harmony with creation, the richness of their many languages, which we ruthlessly suppressed, and the paramount need to move through truth to reconciliation, and then and only then forgiveness.

For me the most telling and effective moments that spoke to the pastoral instincts of the pope were his kissing of the hand of an elder, and his return of a pair of child's moccasins to a former chief, as he had promised when he first received them last spring in Rome – tactile moments, moments of embrace gestures of conversion. Now, for sure, the political squabbling and ecclesial debate in the background often move to the foreground. But Francis relished the personal encounter over the ideological jostling and the political posturing. And, of course, once freed from the script and protocol, he spoke his mind freely on the plane back to Rome, conceding that, indeed, what happened to the Indigenous peoples was genocide, at the controverted. And I mean controverted, not just controversial. The doctrine of discovery reflects a colonial mentality that must be repudiated. His critics, in the end, got what he wanted. But they got what he wanted on his terms, the pilgrimage of penance would not be compromised. The person of encounter would be prioritized, the deepest empathy assured, reverencing the other was his imperative. So that's my opening remarks. And I say them most succinctly there. I never say anything, succinctly, but that's as compressed as it gets.

Ken Coates:

Well, that was that was beautiful, Michael, a very thoughtful exploration of a very thoughtful visit. I think people expected the pope to behave in the sort of small-p political terms, and to use the sort of the language of apology, the language of compensation, the language of technical reconciliation. I should just mention to our viewers that Chief Delorme will be joining us shortly. So Michael, I'll turn this question to you. The pope's visit was a Catholic event, but a lot of the comments and critiques were evaluating it as though it was an official or state visit. And I'm wondering about the Catholicism of it all. It seems to me that that's an important part of this visit. This is a pope visiting his own flock and visiting his own congregations, not just Canada and not just survivors of residential schools, but the Catholic Church in Canada. Can you speak to that a bit?

Michael W. Higgins:

The Vatican is a sovereign power, a political state, one that has ambassadors all over the world in most political jurisdictions, and it's been at this business for a very long time. And Canada has its ambassador to the Holy See separate from its ambassador to Italy itself. Everything the pope does has a political flavouring at some point. And when it comes to Canada, it was not primarily a state visit, but the prime minister and governor general showed up. He's not giving an address to Parliament. And he specifically was identifying unique areas in which he was talking to Indigenous

constituents, survivors of residential schools, and Catholic leaders. That is true.

In some way, it was kind of a mismatch here. When Pope Francis went to the United States at the invitation of the American government, he gave an address to both houses of Congress. And he highlighted four specific figures in American history, two of them Catholic and two of them non-Catholic, that were shapers of the moral sensibility of the country. When Benedict went to Britain, he spoke to Parliament. So those are very specifically politically-coloured events. The political colouration was still there in his visit to Canada, but it was more on the margins. It was primarily a pastoral visit, or what he called a pilgrimage of penance. So it had a penitential component to it. And it was specifically designed to affect healing, or at least the beginning of the healing process. And, very important to understand, he came as a consequence of an invitation that originated in the Truth and Reconciliation calls to action, specifically number 58.

It took a while for Rome to work on it. But I don't blame Rome for this. I think that the kindness of this was basically more Canadian than it was Rome. But nonetheless, he came as a response of their request. Now, the Canadian bishops, of course, formalized that invitation and the prime minister had asked him before to come. But this occasion was, in so many ways, pastoral as well as political and that's where the jostling comes from. Those who wanted to turn it entirely political were defeated. But at the same time, if it had been only pastoral only to Canadian Catholics, it would have been detrimental. So really, if you put it within the context of a spiritual pilgrimage of penance, then it's really for the nation to observe.

Ken Coates:

Yes, thanks, Michael. We're going to have Chief Delorme joining us shortly. In the meantime, Melissa, we've talked about the pope's visit from the time it was first announced. You personally had really high expectations. So I'm interested in what this meant to you personally. You talked about that a little bit about accepting the apology on behalf of your grandmother. But when you said that this was a start, I wanted to ask what you think this is the start of?

Melissa Mbarki:

I think in order for us to move forward, we needed to hear that apology. We needed to hear it from the federal government, we needed to hear it from the church, and we needed to hear it from the people who were involved in residential schools. I tried to go in with no expectations. I really didn't want to say, you know what,

this is what he should say, and this is how we should interpret it. What he did do, and what I was quite happy about, was his acknowledgement of the assimilation in these schools. That's exactly what they were. They weren't there for education. They weren't there to ensure these kids got to a grade 12. They were there to take away culture, language, and to assimilate. Recognizing that fact is a huge step in reconciliation. They are no longer classified as just educational institutions, because they weren't. My stepdad was in a residential school, and he came out with a grade six level of education, and he had to go back and work hard to get his grade 12. My grandmother was able to make it to a grade 12 level. Now we're picking up pieces in our communities, in terms of language and culture, and we're trying to give these back to our people. They now acknowledge that these very basic, core aspects of our identity, things that shape us as people, were taken from us at young ages. It's definitely acknowledging this dark part of our history is the first step. Now the next thing is how do we move forward. What are the next steps? And how do we get there?

Ken Coates:

We're going to talk about that shortly. But I'd like to welcome Chief Cadmus Delorme. Chief, thanks very much for joining us. And those of you who've been on our seminars and webinars before, we'll know that Chief Delorme was the chief of a community that is setting out a new pathway in Western Canada and across the country for community empowerment and embracing the future. I watch with admiration what the chief is doing on a regular basis. And you found yourself chief in the middle of this conversation in the question of the graveyards near the site of the former residential school. So let me put you on the spot and just ask you to tell us what you thought of the pope's visit. At the end of the day, were you satisfied with what happened? How was it received in your community? I'm delighted to hear what you have to say.

Chief Cadmus Delorme:

Thanks, Ken. And good afternoon, everybody, or good day, wherever you're listening from. Last Monday on Cowessess – there was a Roman Catholic residential school on Cowessess from 1898 to 1996, the doors closed, but the Roman Catholic Church left in 1974, and Indian Affairs took over then – we had ceremony, we had it live, it was streamed at our hall, and there were both Cowessess citizens, residential school survivors, and some Roman Catholic faith goers from the local communities that came and joined. And then we had a pow wow for song and dance, to make sure we created an environment and how it was triggering my thoughts to the words that were spoken.

As to my thoughts on the day the words were spoken, I just want to educate everybody on what number 58 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission says. It states the Roman Catholic Church's role in the spiritual, cultural, emotional, physical and sexual abuse of First Nations, Inuit and Métis children in Catholic-run residential schools. I did not hear that. I'm not trying to be critical of the pope. But when we say that number 58 was fulfilled, there was a missed opportunity there. The intent was to accept responsibility.

I give credit there, but there was a deep hole left in the acknowledgement of the full role the church played in the system. And so, as you know, in conclusion, it's after the fact. Canada, Saskatchewan and where I am, we have to understand that we're all changing our attitudes and adjusting our thoughts to what reconciliation truly means, so that our children and children yet unborn can have a brighter future. We got to feed off the journey. So can I leave my comments there.

Ken Coates:

You've left some phenomenal comments on the table, chief. To ask a little bit more deeply about what you've said, it makes it sound like the community's response was less than overwhelming, less than enthusiastic, but sort of a bit disappointed. Is that a fair observation?

Chief Cadmus Delorme:

Thanks. I'm not a residential school survivor. As the chief of a First Nation my leadership role is to provide a safe environment for our survivors on each of their individual journey of healing and what they have endured. There were mixed feelings. Some didn't come, some stayed home, they just didn't want to be around people. Some came, some took in the whole day and they accepted it. I had one person walk out of the livestream when the head dress was presented. It's not one feeling. It's the realization that each survivor and family of survivors is on their healing journey. That day was for Canada to now know that our action is when the pope leaves. Now that the words were spoken, action now must come next. And so feelings were mixed that day.

Ken Coates:

And understandably so. And chief, you make a good point that not only is that it's every survivor's individual journey, it's every survivors individual history. Their experience of residential school varied enormously in terms of the kinds of abuse, violence and discrimination that they faced, and sometimes also

some love and affection and some guidance. But a real mixed bag to say the least.

Michael, if you don't mind me going back to you quickly. You talked about a revolution. I watched the events very closely, I watched the commentary very closely. You see that the ground has shifted, the Earth has shaken, and the storm has hit - that the world has been turned into a new path. I heard a bunch of people saying, well, much ado about nothing, it really wasn't what we expected, or we wanted more of this and less of that. But I'm going to take you at your word. You know the church very well. So what is this revolution? And what is the new direction that the church is going to be heading in?

Michael W. Higgins:

I think, first of all, it's important to recognize that Pope Francis is a Jesuit and the Jesuits think in long- and deep-terms. My sense is that what Francis was doing was, in part, what he drew from that passage I quoted from Charles Taylor that he lifted from *The Secular Age* and addressed in the Basilica. He also quoted from Bernard Lonergan, one of the great foundational thinkers in Canadian history. So he was situating himself within the Canadian context by using those two particular pillars of Canadian Catholicism, not just Canadian Catholicism but Canadian context. And what he was also doing was, I think, what we call in ecclesial terms synodality. He's changing the way the church operates, its *modus operandi*, as it relates to the world.

Now, when you got a billion people in your community, that's not an easy ship to turn around. And you have thousands of middle managers or bishops who basically run these individual entities throughout the Catholic world. But getting the change and beginning to move toward a more humble church, to begin to recognize the importance of living co-sympathetically and co-creatively with other jurisdictions, faiths and cultures is a primary component of Pope Francis' efforts to bring the Roman Catholic Church back to its new agenda of change, which was ushered in 1962.

I think I said in the last webinar that Pope Francis is continuing the tradition that abruptly ended in 1963, with the death of Giuseppe Roncalli, John XXIII. So you're going back and re-energizing a view of the church that is rather different structurally from the Roman Catholic Church that we have seen during the pontificate, particularly of John Paul II and Benedict XVI. So when we're talking about a spiritual revolution, we're not talking about something that deals exclusively with structures; in fact, it primarily deals with a conversion of the heart. What Pope Francis understands is if we're going to move toward a genuine reconciliation,

and forgiveness and healing, there must be a conversion in the heart. There must be a way of moving beyond the way we have perceived things.

You have to remember that while Pope Francis is of Italian origin, he's an Argentinian. He knows the history of the ravages of the conquistadores in Latin America, he's not unaware of that. And at his address in Brazil, he talked very specifically about the struggles and plight of Indigenous peoples who have been marginalized and abused. It is not unique to this pontiff. I mean, as archbishop of Buenos Aires, as the head of the Latin American bishops or CELAM [Conference of Latin American Bishops], he's been active in a lot of these discussions for some time. For me, the spiritual revolution is a revolution that is ushered in and it'll take time. I mean, we're talking about the Roman Catholic Church – a huge global institution, sometimes ossified, sometimes energized, and he is only the Bishop of Rome. But, as our Indigenous friends have indicated, sometimes these things start with the Bishop of Rome, they just don't end with the Bishop of Rome.

Ken Coates:

Good point, Michael, thanks very much. And we have a couple of questions. One person asks if Indigenous people see this as a successful visit. Does it meet their general expectation? Melissa, I'm going to ask this question to you first, if you don't mind, about what do you as an Indigenous person hope to see come out of this event? And what are your personal hopes for steps forward? Part of me is an historian, and Michael Higgins picks up on this, this is a massive historical event that we'll be talking about 100 years from now. That's fantastic. But pragmatically, Melissa, what do you expect to happen next?

Melissa Mbarki:

I never thought I would see the apology in my lifetime, to be honest. I just didn't think this was something that was going to happen or something that I was going to hear. And what I do hope is that it shifts our communities to a more healthy path forward. I do hope to see more resources for survivors today; some of the youngest survivors are my age, I went to school with them, I see them struggle every day when I go back to my home community. I am looking at just what they face. And one of my biggest hopes is that we have resources to help them; these are the people who need it, these are the communities who need, they need help in all kinds of ways, whether we need facilities for the youth or the elders. This is what I want to see for my community – a positive pathway forward, with the church, the government, Indigenous

people, and Indigenous communities working together to make this happen. That's my long-term goal. And that's always been my goal to see my people thrive and to see them make their way out of this. I just hope to see a better future for the children that come after me and for the generations that come after.

Ken Coates:

Thanks, Melissa. Chief, a somewhat different question that came in from one of our listeners is on residential schools. We've known about what happened in residential schools for a long time in your communities; it's been known about for generations. The word started to get out in the 1960s and 1970s. It became a crescendo and then a loud scream in the 1980s and 1990s and beyond, with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. There's nothing new about what the Pope said. It wasn't as though he was admitting to a deep, dark secret. He was talking about something that we knew about for a very long time in your community. Where does reconciliation with the Catholic Church, and the Catholic generally, fit in your community priorities.

Chief Cadmus Delorme:

Thank you. Cowessess First Nation, we are a nation and community of good neighbour mentality. The other church on Cowessess, up to 2019, was a part of the Roman Catholic Church. It burnt down. I just want to explain to you what the response was. That morning, it burned down in the middle of the night. That morning, I got there at about quarter to 8am. It was nothing but just a cement hole. And one car would pull up and someone would pop their head out of the window. It was winter time and kind of cold. They were like, it couldn't have burnt down any sooner and they just drove away. The next one would pull up and say, oh, that's the last memory I have of my mum and dad getting married in there and these are elderly people today.

And why I start off with that is the church's role in the Marieval residential school, it varies. So what is our strategic direction today? Our strategic direction is to help Cowessess citizens find a peace in their heart in the rest of their days so that their kitchen tables, when they're talking with their kids and grandkids today, can have an inner peace. Some want more Roman Catholic relations – when we have our events, maybe, the local priest will come – and some don't want a Catholic person on Cowessess. And so our strategic direction is to make sure our kitchen tables are not adding on to the intergenerational trauma and that we got to understand faith is needed in every home. Prayer is needed in every home. And it's a challenge in how to balance the mixed emotions, because forgiveness is a commitment, it's in the feel-

ings, which is what we have to manage and balance. And I mean that in a strategic-minded way. So the more we can have open areas for people to talk truthfully, I do believe the church can play a role in the future when it comes to kitchen tables to make sure that every home has faith, if that's spirituality or religion. We don't judge as long as every kitchen table has a faith. And so that is the challenge and the strategy moving forward.

Ken Coates:

Great answer. I always struggle with the reality. My view basically, is that if you look at Truth and Reconciliation, an awful lot of the effort has gone into focusing on the non-Indigenous people, you know, what do you have to learn, how do you have to behave, whether it's land, rent, recognitions, acknowledgments or other things of that nature. And not so much on what non-Indigenous people, not just Catholics, can do in responding to the pope's challenge to actually help your communities, Melissa and Chief Delorme.

I mean, you've talked about something that worries me; there's a lot of pain, a lot of difficulties, those are hard memories to get rid of and overcome. And I love your emphasis, both of you, in finding different ways on peace, of finding a tranquility, or finding sort of a comfortable place to be in the world. I'm really interested in what both of you think – so maybe I'll start you first, Melissa, and then go back to the chief – what should non-Indigenous people be doing in response to this acknowledgement? This acknowledgement is basically an indictment of one of the most fundamental pillars of Canadian policy for over a century. Should we all apologize? Can we do something practical? Melissa, what's your thought?

Melissa Mbarki:

Canadians can listen to our stories, and be empathetic with us. We're not asking for judgment, we're not asking for you to agree with us, we're not asking for opinions on how we should react to this apology. Even today, it's been a little over two weeks, we still have survivors that are still processing that, and they're still going through the motions of what just went on, and they're still processing that internally, because it does bring up a lot of memories, and it does bring up a lot of hard feelings towards the church. So just allowing us to go through those emotions and allowing us to, when we're ready and when survivors are ready to speak their truth, to be able to share with the country what their experience was. Sometimes I find we're not doing that. Sometimes I find we need to have a hard answer today on what we thought of the pope coming to Canada, even prior to the apology. Let us process that,

let us internalize it, let us get our thoughts together, and we'll share with you what we took from it. And I think there needs to be more empathy out there, especially in the coming years. We still have communities that are searching the grounds for children; we need to be mindful of them and just speak with kindness to others. And if we can do that this world would be a lot better place.

Ken Coates:

Thanks, Melissa. Chief, do you want to add to what Melissa had to say?

Chief Cadmus Delorme:

Thanks Ken. And well said Melissa. I just want to add regarding the unmarked graves that have been going on and are still yet to come in this country, I learned two things. I'm a proud Indigenous person, I'm a proud Saskatchewan and I'm a proud Canadian, and there's two things I learned. One for Indigenous people – the unmarked graves validation is validation of the pain, frustration, anger and tiredness of trying to remain Indigenous in a country that is still somewhat oppressive to Indigenous people. To my Canadian friends and family, the shield is down – admitting, I don't know much about the truth between Indigenous people and Canada. Where we're at right now, in our relationship, is truth. We got to understand that what we always thought is really not the truth. And so we have to really focus on adjusting our compass just a little bit. And it's on both sides, it's on both the Indigenous and the non-Indigenous. It's not just one side.

Second, Indigenous people are rights holders in this country. We're not shareholders, we're not stakeholders, we're rights holders. And there's nothing wrong with admitting that. And then lastly, quick making us so political in this country. We're not just section 91 or 92 of the Canadian *Constitution*, we have a key role. And once we get it, this country – in faith, economic and social – would be so much a better place. But it all begins with truth. We got to go through a journey of creating uncomfortable conversations, because that's what reconciliation is. First, we have to accept the truth, then we all got to realize we inherited something, and we have a responsibility to do something about it. It's not just for us to acknowledge it and say get over it, that's the past. No, we all have a responsibility to do something on what we inherited.

Ken Coates:

Chief, powerful words, from both of you. Really evocative. And I always think of how residential schools started closing down in the 1960s and 1970s. And for a lot of younger people – not for Mi-

chael and myself, the old guys in the room – that’s sort of before their lives, right. And I worry about how that happened a long time ago. What both of you are talking about as the fact; don’t call it residential schools, call it assimilation, oppression, call it those other things that are current realities for Indigenous people. And we’re breaking the mold in some really interesting ways.

What your community is doing in Cowessess is turning the world on its head in some fascinating ways. Modern treaties in the Yukon are doing amazing things. When the Mi’kmaq and Maliseet buy the largest seafood company in Canada and bring it under Indigenous control, when you get billion-dollar projects being run by First Nations in British Columbia, the world is changing. And we should celebrate all those as part of a new path and build those ones into the new truth and reconciliation.

And chief, I say this sort of directly and personally – friendship is the most important part of reconciliation, in my view. When you get past the point of seeing people as a political entity, and you see them as your friends and colleagues and your co-citizens of the country. And I think this notion of rights holder that you’re talking about is vital. You’re not here on sufferance, and you don’t get government things because government is being generous to you. That part is really critical.

So, Michael, because you got the easy questions before, you’ve had some wonderful responses from from Chief and Melissa. This is from Father Andrew, who asked a question: A majority of Indigenous Canadians are faithful Christians. How do you ensure that their experience of Christian faith is heard within these elite conversations, which seems to see this reality as sort of an inconvenient truth? Many Indigenous people are faithful Christians. I think that’s an unchallengeable statement. But it isn’t one that fits with how non-Indigenous Canadians prefer to see what’s going on, even with the church’s apology. I wonder if you’d comment on that.

Michael W. Higgins:

I was struck by a comment made by an Indigenous priest on the CBC who was quite disturbed by the fact that the church had missed the opportunity of incorporating many Indigenous rituals into the Catholic celebrations and different views that occurred during the papal visit. And I think that that’s a justified criticism. It is one thing to profess the value of inculturation to recognize the limitations of the traditional Eurocentric catechesis. We know the consequences of these things. What is important is to be able to enter into authentic communication and dialogue with Indigenous cultures and spiritualities and I put it in the plural, because it is as much a mistake to talk about Indigenous culture and spirituality as if it was a hegemonic unified monolithic reality as it is to talk about the Catholic Church in the same way. Many Catholic

leaders, particularly at the level of, for instance, the Society of Jesus, the original black robes, but the Sisters of St. Ann and others have broken out of the pattern of the past and have for several decades in the realization that that to move forward means to recognize that the way things were done were inadequate, and sometimes destructive.

How does one move forward then, if not by bringing into the conversation a level of authenticity and hearing that doesn't operate from the point of view of some kind of civilization or supremacy. We know what's best, we know how we can move forward, we don't really need to listen, because we don't have anything that we need to learn. I want to give you an example of sometimes what happens when this kind of attitude becomes encrusted in structures. Many years ago, we had a major conference on global

To move forward means to recognize that the way things were done were inadequate, and sometimes destructive.

communication in the Vatican. Actually, it was in the city hall in Rome. And there were a number of luminaries and I was sitting beside Marshall McLuhan son's Eric. Marshall McLuhan was a convert to Catholicism, and Eric has continued the tradition of his father and his work. And the church wanted to know about globalization from the point of view of this great media figure, one of the great men of media genius of the last century.

So I was sitting beside Eric and his wife and as is typical of the Roman system, you have introductions, archbishops, cardinals, diocastery heads, and everyone else. And then when Eric got up to speak, many of the principals walked right off the dais and they left. And she turned to me horrified, and she simply says what's this level of discourtesy. And I said, no, they don't consider it discourteous, they just don't feel that they have anything to learn. And so that's why they leave.

Well, leaving the dais, leaving the room, leaving the table is not an option under Pope Francis. You stay at the table. And if you look at the record of his meetings, his audiences, and his conversations with various people throughout the world in Rome, and sometimes bringing public very strong, deep concerns, he sits

and he listens. He doesn't get up. He doesn't. This is unusual for a pontiff – he doesn't pontificate, he actually listens to them. There are numerous instances when we've had this on record. And so when I was talking about a spiritual revolution earlier, I wasn't being glib. I think that's what we have in hand. And you got to remember that for many of us, and for many of the church in Canada, the Catholic Church, but other churches as well, we've lived a life of quiescence. I mean, we just sleep through are relatively pacific and uncomplicated history. And we look sometimes with superiority at other civilizations and say, look how riven they are, the US in particular. The discovery or the realization that we have at the heart of our early history genocidal policy, that's really quite shattering thing to discover. And the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the other work that's been going on for decades, it made a strong important gradualist approach, but it took the discovery of the unmarked graves to actually make it a national moment, in fact, an international moment as far as the media was concerned.

I think the pope that people visit is not unlike that. Yes, we know a great number of these things. But what do we do? What did Francis do to help to crystallize a new knowledge to help us find a new way of moving forward, one that is not political or designed, basically, to placate or to mitigate, but actually to essentially reform and to rethink the way we've been thinking. And you'll see that's really to ask of an institution, but particularly the institution of 2000 years. Vintage is a tough challenge, but it's far less a challenge and much more meaningful for individual Catholics to be able to incorporate it in their lives to begin to change. Pope Francis has made it absolutely clear that there's an ecclesiological image the notion of the church is a pyramid is over. The pyramid is upside down. The pope isn't at the top, he's at the bottom with the leadership. Now that shift in an image means that a great deal of responsibility is now going to have to be accepted by faithful Catholics and important levels of operation. But it also means they have to be given responsibility and power for accountability. You can't just do this as a political gesture. You have to be intentional about what you want to achieve.

Ken Coates:

That is really important, Michael, to help us understand the long-term spiritual significance and organizational significance of these things. The words on the page are one thing, but the significance behind them are something very different. So Melissa, if one of the things that commentators said about the pope's visit is they were disappointed by the absence of specific commitments, for

example, the pope didn't come in and say we're going to honour our financial commitment that we made, or we're going to deliver the documents back from the Vatican and make them available in Canada to the communities, or we're going to take the artifacts out of some of the Vatican museums and make them available to folks in their own community. So what's your what's your thoughts on this? I mean, should the pope have made more specific promises? Or was this a time to really listened to the deep meaning that Michael has been talking about?

Melissa Mbarki:

I was kind of hoping that we would have more substance to the apology – that at the end of the day, we'd have some action items from the church and for the pope to say, okay, we're going to start releasing some of your artifacts back to your communities, and this is how we're going to go about doing it, or we're going to help your communities in this way, whether we need programs for youth, elders, the community as a whole. But there was definitely nothing substantial, nothing to say, okay, this is going to happen in a year, in two years, or in five years. There was nothing of that sort. So then I have to question, did he come here just for the apology first? And is this work going to happen after? And if so, that's something that we need to start working on today to say, okay, in a year from now, this is what's going to happen. Five years from now, this is what we want to see happen.

I think for communities that had residential schools or communities that were impacted by residential schools, it fell short on that front. It didn't give us anything to work with. And if it was just the apology that he came for, then that should have been clear from the beginning, like the pope is just coming to apologize. Everything else is going to get worked out after the fact. It's been two weeks, and we still really haven't heard a whole lot of what the next steps are. And I'm just waiting for that. I'm waiting to see how we're actually going to implement this apology into our communities and what kind of work is ahead of us.

Ken Coates:

Yeah, very fair questions. So chief, what does it mean if the pope is going to walk the walk? I know you well enough to know, you would never sort of be so bold as to tell the pope what to do. But you can tell us what communities might like to see the pope follow up on. As you know, two weeks in the history of the Catholic Church is a tiny spot in time. But over the next six months or so, I think communities do expect to see something. What kinds of things would you hope the Roman Catholic Church would do as a follow up to this visit?

Chief Cadmus Delorme:

Thanks Ken. We got to ask ourselves, what is the end goal for First Nations? I don't want to exclude Métis and Inuit, but I'm just going to focus on First Nations – what is the end goal? The end goal is that we control our destiny, that we can be proud Indigenous people, and share our beautiful land with Canada and be ourselves. Well, what was the role the church played? Well, the church tried to brainwash Indigenous people. The way we prayed at one time and still do today, wasn't the way. That our language wasn't the language. Our vertical lineage kinship, from grandma to mom to daughter to granddaughter, wasn't the way. So what can the church do now for action? What can the pope do?

Well, number one, is to publicly state that that doctrine of discovery, the papal bull, is not valid, it has a very colonial mindset to it, and to start to reverse it. That is very key to controlling our destiny. And that would change the mindsets legally in this country to really make sure reconciliation really does happen. But that is really key and that was missed.

Secondly, regions. You got churches in every region in this country. It is now up to the regions to start to assess what role they play in that area, to help empower the language to help learn more from those Indigenous nations. You can't just have one macro plan across this country that is unreal, because everybody in this country is at a different healing journey as well. But Cowessess, we got Grayson just north of us, we got Roman Catholic faith goes in our region. It's now time that we come together. The church has resources, it has money, the church is a very asset rich organization. What role can the church play to make sure that my children and I could speak our language, could walk around with a braid and know the spiritual significance. The church must commit to action. It's financially but it's also learning as well and empowering. So hopefully, that kind of gives a highlight. But we got to focus on the end goal of proud Indigenous people.

Ken Coates:

Well, that is a goal that we can all share chief. And of course, communities are making major steps in that way. Let me let me end with asking all three of you a very short answer to a very, very complicated question of another viewer. What is your position regarding Pope Francis repeatedly asking for forgiveness for the abusers and their complicit enablers, some of whom are still alive, rather than promising genuine justice accountability and restitution to residential school survivors? A very thoughtful question. So Michael, I'll ask you first and then to Melissa, and then the chief.

Michael W. Higgins:

I think what the chief commented on earlier makes a lot of sense to me, that is, remedial or healing initiative has to happen at the local level and there has to be regional accountability. I think that's absolutely crucial in order to affect the kind of change, the kind of meaningful apology, the kind of restitution, the kinds of reparation that is required. I think it's quite problematic to be expecting Rome to do this, frankly, historically, and politically. The pope is back on the Tiber; change in this country will happen through the leadership of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops and Roman Catholics in this country.

I think it's a bit of a red herring to go on about the doctrine of discovery. Historians hugely debated the legitimacy of this interpretation. We have a strong chronicle by the historians that it was abrogated around 1531 with Pope Paul III (talking about the original conception that appears in Alexander VI). Papals bulls, I mentioned this last time, are abrogated all the time. The Vatican formally repudiated the document in a report that it gave to the UN to its permanent mission in 2010. In 2016, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops provided a very detailed historical chronicle of how various popes over the centuries have repudiated the teaching of the Borgia Pope, and have celebrated the teaching of Paul III, and we affirmed it over the centuries. So if we get caught up with a specific notion and becomes obsessed about it, I don't consider the subsequent historical nuancing; I think we still find ourselves in an orbit of contestation that is not going to be helpful in terms of the larger healing.

I worry a bit about the fact that that there are expectations for healing that are going to be focused on the Bishop of Rome, rather than on the fact that this is a Canadian problem, but not a uniquely and only Canadian problem. It's a problem that faces many of the new world countries including Australia and New Zealand and others as well, in terms of how they dealt with Indigenous peoples. It is that kind of a universal problem. But to put it within a limited, constrictive and not exactly accurate historical perspective, so the repudiation of the doctrine is done. I mean, Pope Francis said again on the trip in the conversation, because he's a pope that loves to move beyond the script, as we discover on many occasions, that when he was asked about whether this was in fact, genocide, he said it was genocide. And he used presumably his English translation from the Spanish, you can be calm about this, I recognize this as genocide. And when addressed on the matter of the doctrine of discovery, though he didn't repeat the phrase, what he said is: we must repudiate this mentality of colonization.

I just wonder about whether we're going to find ourselves in a position of institutional paralysis by having expectations that can't be delivered on precisely because it's just simply more complicated and nuanced than we expect. And we're talking about a global institution. When you go to Rome, and many representatives and Indigenous representatives were in Rome – and I'm sure they were quite taken aback by not only just its splendor, but by the magnitude of its trajectories and connections and tentacles with religious orders, religious communities, ecclesial communities, other governments and whatnot – what we received from Pope Francis, and you said this in the opening comment in relation to the grace of the Indigenous peoples, was the grace of this pope. And I hope that that becomes a marker on the pathway forward.

I share to some degree Melissa's anxiety, that it's been a couple of weeks that we haven't heard. Well, they have – there have been several conversations in Rome, the pope has addressed it in various ways. This has to be the Canadian Church's issue, this is an issue for the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. They are the primary leaders on this brief. And then, of course, there's a lot of lay Catholics in this country who are as anxious and as angry as many of our Indigenous residential school survivors expecting leadership on this matter. Dropping it and putting it off to Rome, that's not the right way forward, I think.

Ken Coates:

Thank you, Michael. Melissa, last thoughts.

Melissa Mbarki:

There's two things that I asked myself when it comes to Indigenous issues. What can I change today in my lifetime? What kind of change can I see in the next 10 or 20 years? The second thing I always ask myself is, how will this benefit Indigenous communities? You know, are we asking for something tangible that is genuinely going to help survivors? So it's always these two things that I go in with, it's always these two questions that I ask. And if it's something that seems out of my lifetime, something that may never happen, then that's not my battle. I'm looking at what we can do today, how we can help survivors. And that's the only way that I will move forward on issues. And that's where and when I questioned things, and just having that mentality. I can help people today. I'm not looking at years down the road. I want to help people today. And now.

Ken Coates:

You're a lovely pragmatic person. Melissa, I love the spirit. Chief, the last word to you, what are your last thoughts on this topic?

Chief Cadmus Delorme:

Thanks, everybody. Reconciliation is a means to an end. And we are going to get there. How fast we get there depends on our actions, attitudes, belief and understanding that we inherited this. And the pope's visit has come and gone. And so now today as Canadians, we're still here, and we're still going to be here in 10 years, we're still going to be here in 20 years. So let's make action today. And our kids one day will look back and say they really did make action at that time that made it easier for us today. Or they we can get give it to them and they could inherit it. I don't want to give it to them. So as Canadians, as Indigenous people, let's just grab the whatever situation we're at, own it, and let's do something about it.

Ken Coates:

These are wonderful thoughts to conclude our conversations, the second of our webinars on the pope's visit. I guess what I'm taking from all of you in this conversation is, in fact, let's not focus on what the pope does. Let's focus on what we do. And partly for the Catholic Church, the "we" are the Canadian Council of Bishops, there's no question. It's Indigenous communities themselves. And it's non-Indigenous people, and how they react to all of this.

My view is the pope's visit laid bare some things that we knew about Canada but didn't want to say out loud. First Nations talked about it a lot. Academics have talked about it a lot. But the public at large has been reluctant to use the language of genocide. And even the doctrine of discovery comment was interesting. You know, we came over and discovered Indigenous people, and you sort of say, well, they weren't lost and you didn't discover them. They were here. They've been here forever. So I think the message we take from all of this is a really important one – and that is the pope doesn't tell us what to do, unless you're a Catholic, I guess, Michael. The pope gives direction to the Catholic Church as an institution. And there's some powerful messages there.

The question is, as Melissa points out, will we pick up this mantle, where we actually sort of take advantage of the public notoriety that surrounds these issues right now, and do what Chief Delorme is talking about? Indigenous communities in this country are already in the middle of a revolution, Michael, with great respect,

and I love your knowledge of the church. The Catholic Church is lagging behind Indigenous communities in their response to the challenges that you're facing. And I think it's fair to say they're not waiting for the Catholic Church to do all the things it should do. The Catholic Church has an opportunity to be a partner with Indigenous communities in the future, and I hope they embrace that. But I also hope that we find a way to look for those positive constructive changes that Melissa and the chief were talking about. There's far more of them. We love to focus on conflict, not achievement, but we have to focus on reconciliation, rather than crisis, and the rebirth and revitalization of culture.

The three of you have been wonderful colleagues and friends again on this call. This has been a fabulous webinar. Melissa Mbarki, Michael W. Higgins, Chief Cadmus Delorme, thank you very much for participating. And thanks to all our audience members for listening in what was another wonderful conversation about the pope's visit. Thank you everybody, and farewell.

constructive *important* *forward-thinking*
high-quality *insightful*
active

Ideas change the world

WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING ABOUT MLI

The Right Honourable Paul Martin

I want to congratulate the **Macdonald-Laurier Institute** for 10 years of excellent service to Canada. The Institute's commitment to public policy innovation has put them on the cutting edge of many of the country's most pressing policy debates. The Institute works in a persistent and constructive way to present new and insightful ideas about how to best achieve Canada's potential and to produce a better and more just country. Canada is better for the forward-thinking, research-based perspectives that the **Macdonald-Laurier Institute** brings to our most critical issues.

The Honourable Jody Wilson-Raybould

The **Macdonald-Laurier Institute** has been active in the field of Indigenous public policy, building a fine tradition of working with Indigenous organizations, promoting Indigenous thinkers and encouraging innovative, Indigenous-led solutions to the challenges of 21st century Canada. I congratulate **MLI** on its 10 productive and constructive years and look forward to continuing to learn more about the Institute's fine work in the field.

The Honourable Irwin Cotler

May I congratulate **MLI** for a decade of exemplary leadership on national and international issues. Through high-quality research and analysis, **MLI** has made a significant contribution to Canadian public discourse and policy development. With the global resurgence of authoritarianism and illiberal populism, such work is as timely as it is important. I wish you continued success in the years to come.

The Honourable Pierre Poilievre

The **Macdonald-Laurier Institute** has produced countless works of scholarship that solve today's problems with the wisdom of our political ancestors. If we listen to the **Institute's** advice, we can fulfill Laurier's dream of a country where freedom is its nationality.

M A C D O N A L D - L A U R I E R I N S T I T U T E



323 Chapel Street, Suite 300,
Ottawa, Ontario K1N 7Z2
613-482-8327 • info@macdonaldlaurier.ca



[@MLInstitute](https://twitter.com/MLInstitute)



facebook.com/MacdonaldLaurierInstitute



youtube.com/MLInstitute



linkedin.com/company/macdonald-laurier-institute