

Waiting for the next volley

by BROCK'S BANTER

By Brock Weir

In many ways, the proverbial ball is back in our collective court.

Last week, following moving delegations at the Vatican from representatives from many of our First Nations, Inuit and Metis communities, one of the more elusive of the 94 Calls to Action resulting from the final report of the Truth & Reconciliation Commission of Canada finally, ?kinda, sorta? came to pass.

First published in 2015, the 58th Call to Action was very clear in its goal:

?We call upon the Pope to issue an apology to Survivors (of Residential Schools), their families, and communities for the Roman Catholic Church's role in the spiritual, cultural, emotional, physical and sexual abuse of First Nations, Inuit, and Metis children in Catholic-run residential schools. We call for that apology to be similar to the 2010 apology issued to Irish victims of abuse and to occur within one year of the issuing of this Report and to be delivered by the Pope in Canada.?

In the 2010 apology to Irish victims of sexual abuse within the church, Pope Benedict XVI ? now Pope Emeritus ? said he could ?only share in the dismay and the sense of betrayal that so many of you have experienced on learning of these sinful and criminal acts and the way Church authorities in Ireland dealt with them.?

?You have suffered grievously and I am truly sorry,? he said in a letter. ?I know that nothing can undo the wrong you have endured. Your trust has been betrayed and your dignity has been violated. Many of you found that, when you were courageous enough to speak of what happened to you, no one would listen. Those of you who were abused in residential institutions must have felt that there was no escape from your sufferings. It is understandable that you find it hard to forgive or be reconciled with the Church. In her name, I openly express the shame and remorse that we all feel.?

Speaking directly ?to priests and religious who have abused children,? he added: ?You betrayed the trust that was placed in you by innocent young people and their parents, and you must answer for it before Almighty God and before properly constituted tribunals. You have forfeited the esteem of the people of Ireland and brought shame and dishonour upon your confreres. Those of you who are priests violated the sanctity of the sacrament and the Holy Orders in which Christ makes himself present in us and in our actions. Together with the immense harm done to victims, great damage has been done to the church and to the public perception of the priesthood and religious life.?

The apology issued by Benedict XVI's successor, Pope Francis, was slightly different in tone.

They are very different men with very different approaches to the office, to be sure, but while Pope Francis had many kind and thoughtful words on the First Nations' traditions as stewards of the land, with great languages and cultures all their own, the apology in my view stopped short of getting to one of the main roots of the issue.

?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 that some of you have experienced, particularly in residential schools. It's 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 pertinent personal and social efforts 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. Indignation because it is not right to accept evil and without a commitment to learning from past mistakes, problems can 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. I also feel shame. I have said this to you and now I'm repeating it, sorrow and shame, for the role that a number of Catholics, particularly those with educational responsibilities, have 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. All these things are contrary to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. For the deplorable conduct of these members of the Catholic Church, I ask for God's forgiveness and I want to say with all my heart: I am very sorry.?

It's a good start, but, in my view, it doesn't quite meet the intent of the Call to Action. It was not a message delivered in Canada as originally called for ? although the Pontiff did leave the door open to continuing the ?journey? in Canada soon, potentially as early as this summer ? nor does it specifically speak to the role of the Roman Catholic Church.

Instead, in my view, it's an apology for the actions of certain individuals within the Church rather than its institutional role in the system.

Perhaps some further introspection will be in the offering before these sentiments can be delivered personally on our soils, but, until then, the ball is once again in our court to continue focusing on tackling the other Calls to Action that have been sadly mouldering away in so many quarters.

Now that the door is open for the Church taking their share of responsibility for what transpired, this is an opportunity to once again review the 94 Calls to Action see what we can accomplish as individuals and as part of a greater whole.

It's also an opportunity for some of us to get over any kind of ?news fatigue? over the continuing harrowing legacy of the residential school system in this country.

Our collective, to borrow a phrase from the Pope, indignation over the discovery of the graves of 215 children in the grounds of a residential school in Kamloops, has inexplicably dissipated in many quarters almost in alignment with the number of graves which continue to be discovered, a number which is now in the thousands. We need to re-harness this feeling of horror and dismay in order to do our part on this ?journey? towards a better, more equitable future.