

215: The Stones will Cry Out



It was the Sunday when Jesus road in humble triumph into the city of Jerusalem. The crowd greeted him with loud voices. *Some of the Pharisees in the multitude said to him, 'Teacher! Rebuke your disciples!' Jesus answered: I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.* Luke 19, 39, 40.

We Didn't Know

What is one to do with such a piece of news? A discovery made possible by technological advance. Ground-penetrating radar that revealed a cache of horrific proportions. Two hundred and fifteen bodies buried out of sight, out of mind, on the grounds of the Kamloops Indian Residential School.



'I told you so!' wailed one woman into former Senator Murray Sinclair's phone. 'I told you so.' They told us they ran away and were never seen again. They were disobedient children, ungrateful children. [Murray Sinclair](#) served as chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) that wound up its seven years of national convulsion in 2015. 'I'm not sure we'll ever get a final answer but I am absolutely convinced that the number is much higher. Perhaps as much as 5-10X higher because the records were so poor. They just didn't bother keeping track of [children who died](#).'



As I walk the trails of our four hectares that perch on the highest point of land in Southern Ontario, I remind myself that I live on the traditional lands of the Kanionkihaka in Kanekota territory. The land of the Headwaters, the watershed from which all rivers run, north, south, east and west, emptying into Lakes Ontario, Erie, and Huron, the original inhabitants Anishinaabek, Wendat and Haudenosaunee. At one point on the trails there is a metre-high carving of a

woman, a Wendat woman who reminds me if I forget.

Six years ago this week, Indigenous and settlers together were on the streets of unceded, unsundered Algonquin land holding copies of the Summary Report and Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, courageously delivered by Survivors and Commissioners. Yet we still say, excusing ourselves, 'I didn't know.' How is it we did not know? We also say, 'Those were the values of their day.'

One hundred and fourteen years ago, [Dr Peter Henderson Bryce](#), then Canada's federal chief medical officer submitted a report on the disastrous state of the Indian Residential Schools (IRS), pointing out in an article published in the *Ottawa Evening Citizen*, 'Suffice it to say that of the 1,537 pupils reported upon, 25 per cent are dead.'" He was silenced. A tireless crusader, Bryce was a thorn in the government's side, eventually forced out of public service.

Four hundred and sixty-nine years ago, the Spanish Dominican friar, Bartolomé de las Casas wrote the Spanish monarchs a chilling account of the wanton slaughter of Indigenous peoples by the *conquistadores*. We did know—or had the choice of knowing and turned it down.

And it's now a week since the news of the 215 reverberated across Turtle Island from the lands of the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc part of the traditional and unceded territory of the Secwépemc'ulucw. They knew. They knew what they would find. How long have they been trying to tell us?

I notice that Indigenous people speak as a collective, as a shared history—this happened to us. Settlers tend to speak in the first person—with individual histories—and, therefore, no responsibility. While our Indigenous neighbours continue to bear the deep scars of dispossession and genocide, of a quality of loss settlers can barely imagine, we turn a blind eye to a colonisation that continues, the most well-known manifestation the collusion of resource extractors with government as treaty-breakers. As with dead children hidden away, these are crimes.

What can be done? We mourn. If we dare, we take an imaginative journey into a pain that, if we allow it, is visceral, physical, mental, emotional, spiritual. Collaborators with a government determined to 'kill the Indian in the child', Christians built schools, we built schools and staffed them. We. We are the ones.

If there is nothing else you read, read this:

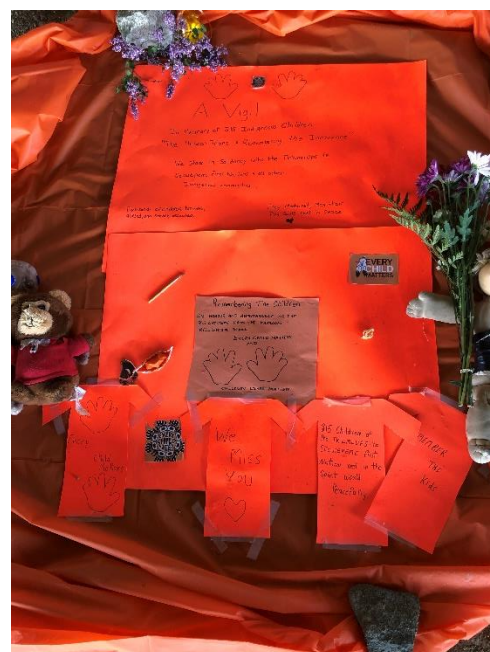
While the discovery of 215 children's graves at the former site of the Kamloops Indian Residential School have galvanized Canadian public opinion, the horrors of the Canadian Indian Residential School system were never a secret.

Generations of Ottawa administrators were fully aware of the system's deadly reputation, and while polite society at the time may have balked at the occasional story of abuse or mass-death, they largely endorsed the system's central mission of forcibly assimilating Indigenous children.

In archives, filing cabinets and desk drawers across Canada lie the paper trail of Indian Residential Schools: How abuse was overlooked, how neglect was institutionalized and how state coercion was used to take children from their families. Click [here](#) to read the article.



As the beneficiaries of conquest, we are responsible for a lack of clean water on so many reserves, for ongoing land theft, land, fauna and flora destruction, of systemic racism: the devastating impacts of settler colonialism. The TRC brought us stories, convulsing many of us in grief and guilt. We didn't know, we told ourselves. Truth is still being exposed, uncovered—with much more and many more graves to go. Reconciliation is yet a long way off. As Easter people, risen with Christ, what are we to do? As seekers after justice and right relations, disciples of Jesus, we must ask: what will justice look like. What is my action? Somewhere deep in the horror lies the pain of God and the promise of healing. Truth and Justice—and maybe, if we do our part, some day—Reconciliation. Truth. Justice. Reconciliation.



Calls for Action

1. Educate yourself and your families. Start here:
 - What were the Indian Residential Schools (IRS)? when? where? run by? funded by? why should I care?
 - [Summary Report](#) of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission with its 94 Calls to Action:
 - Just the 94 [Calls to Action](#):
 - Volume 4 of the Final Report on Missing Children: [Survivors Speak](#)
 - Read the Yellowhead Institute's [Status Update on Reconciliation](#)
 - Listen to the [testimonies](#) of Residential School Survivors
 - Read the [final report](#) of the National Commission on Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG)

The Canadian government pursued this policy of cultural genocide because it wished to divest itself of its legal and financial obligations to Aboriginal people and gain control over their land and resources. If every Aboriginal person had been 'absorbed into the body politic', there would be no reserves, no Treaties, and no Aboriginal rights.
TRC Summary Report, page 3

2. Write to our government, pressing home their responsibility to bring about change:
 - Clean water on all reserves, and an end to all boil-water advisories after so many years.
 - Secure the final legislation necessary to implement the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).
 - An end to permits to resource extractors without Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) of affected First Nations/communities; a rescinding of those that contravene the UNDRIP
 - An end to federal challenges of legal orders from the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal to secure access to health care and education for First Nations children.
 - A prioritisation to settle land claims.
 - A commitment to protect gravesites across former IRS sites until full investigations can be completed.
 - Write to responsible church bodies to demand/ensure that all documentation extant is shared with all stakeholders, with all due respect to the victims, while holding churches accountable for the part. Apologies without action are empty.

- Since the Commission on MMIWG was flawed and two years have passed since it was released, a renewal of the commission and its mandate.
 - Etc., etc.
3. Engage with your families, your neighbours. There are good lists online of the best books to read on the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island, their pre-contact past and the process of colonisation and dispossession.
 4. Engage with your churches: What do you know about the UCC's participation in Indian Residential Schools? What do you know about our [government's role](#)? The role of the RCMP? Why do people want to topple the statues of people like Sir John A. McDonald? Why do people want the name of Ryerson University changed? Who were Langevin and Cornwallis?

Music and Liturgies

Mumia Abu-Jamal and the death by police of Tamar Rice: [When a Child Dies](#).

Paul Robeson's rendition of [Sometimes I Feel like a Motherless Child](#).

God Weeps: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pll0exEecc4>

The Stones Will Cry Out

I am a ghost in my own land.
 You look through me as so much compost.
 My bones bear witness to your perfidy.
 You kidnapped me and my brother.
 You savaged my long hair;
 you burned the clothes my mother made
 from the hides of elk.
 You beat us, you starved us;
 you touched me in ways no one touches.
 Bench parties: that's what we called them.
 You stole my tongue.
 You knifed out my brother's tongue.
 He did not survive the beating.
 You seated me next to my sick friend.
 She died. I died.
 You thrashed the Indian out of me.
 Not quite.
 I live on beneath your feet, awaiting my rising.
 Do you ever wonder if there were swings and slides and sandboxes?
 No playgrounds but burial grounds.
 She ran away, you told them when they came looking for me.
 No, I lie here still.
 Though my body was crushed by unspeakable violations
 and my throat silenced in soils,
 the stones are crying out.
 ~LeeAnn McKenna~

Discover Repentance: A Litany

P1: Come, my people, come and look what was done by our Forebears.

P2: Come and discover the doctrines they created and used for their greed to oppress nations in my name.

P1: Come and repent, my people. Come to the Cross and repent to the descendants of the oppressed for the sins of your forebears.

P3: Come, for I have nailed your sins to the Cross of forgiveness but I want you to take part in repentance and reconciliation.

P4: Come and take part in healing and bearing the fruit of repentance for the descendants of the oppressed; come and seek their restoration.

P5: Come and see the magnitude of your forebears' sins and find salvation from their effects in the forgiveness of the cross.

P1: Come and repent to them, speak words of life to them and work for their healing and for their restoration.

P2: Come and repent: be ministers of reconciliation.

P.3: Come and repent: be ministers of healing.

All: Come and repent: be ministers of justice

Come and repent: be ministers of the Cross.

~ Ramone Romero, settler ~

~ Yours, Mine, Ours: *Unravelling the Doctrine of Discovery, Intotemak, special issue 2016* ~