

Truth and Reconciliation Commission

An impression of said commission by Mel Boerema, August 2017

This past spring I was talking with an elder from the community I serve, Piikani Nation part of Niitsitap – Blackfoot Confederation, as I was already reading things on this issue and it comes up constantly in our community, I asked him for his opinion. He is in his late 70's now and has been involved in National Native Affairs for Piikani and First Nations as a hole, as well as being a rancher. He informed me that he was invited and was suppose to be at a Truth and Reconciliation Commission meeting that day, but he said he is not sure what they mean by Reconciliation anymore. He had been involved from the beginning and had become disillusioned with the whole of it. He who had been through the residential school system along with his generation was not sure what was met by reconciliation.

The residential school system, especially as seen in the west was just one of the tools of the Dominion of Canada to deal with “the Indian problem”. The problem was that they were there! I who am Canadian, must own what has happened, that crimes against the First Nations of Canada have been, and are being committed against. What must be owned is that these crimes where not the actions of good will gone bad, but a deliberate plan to do away with First Nations People.

In response to the calls to action, 58-61:

#58, Apologies from the Pope: Yes of course, but keep in mind that the Roman Catholic Church is a State Church, and works as an arm of, or with or over said state government. Other state churches, such as the Anglican, and Presbyterian, which joined with the Methodist to form the United, were also as State Churches arms of said state; they become one and the same.

#59, On those state church educations practices in regard to the residential school; this must become part of history that is not forgotten as in other failure of joining state with church, of why the church must not be a part of culture but a mirror of righteousness to culture.

#60, Respect of indigenous spirituality, we need to ask what we mean by respect, in the proper sense of respect I do not have to approve of your faith or you mine to show respect, but in our present culture, the word means you must support my view, even if it is apposed to your view. If we follow the cultural excepted view of respect as the Church we will not be reflecting righteousness but being part of more harm.

#61, The Church funding community-controlled projects, is a step into Church and State partnership and we already have seen where that leads the church.

I would like to add some observations from other books I have read on the Hudson Bay Company, and recently a book by James Daschuk, "Clearing the Plains" – "disease, politics of starvation and the loss of aboriginal life. When the Hudson Bay owned Rupert's Land they viewed the Native People as necessary business partner. The Hudson Bay Company was only concerned with profit, but that profit was dependent upon the work and good will of the Native population of Rupert's Land. In the last few years of Hudson Bay Company's control over Rupert's Land they were losing trade to Canadian companies who would bring in professional hunter, replacing the indigenous people. These Canadian Company and later after confederation United States Company's use alcohol as a trade good, for quick profit, and as a means of removal of indigenous population for control over the area.

When disease like smallpox enter an area, the Hudson Bay Company, even after they had sold rights to the Dominion of Canada would send in medicine and train their clerks to vaccinate First Nations People, as the health of the First Nations people were essential to the partnership that brought them profit. While the Dominion of Canada was only willing to intervene when an epidemic was in danger of spreading beyond the First Nations Community. The difference in action is the Hudson Bay saw the First Nations as a needed partner, while the Dominion of Canada saw the First Nations People as a barrier to their dominion.

1876 is the date of Confederation of the Dominion of Canada, with our first Prime Minister Sr. John Macdonald, who in his first year as prime minister created the Indian Act, which gave the government control of Indians and their land. It is Sr. John Macdonald in 1883 that would authorize the creation of residential schools in the Canadian west. It is his cabinet minister who would say that the residential schools were to kill the Indian in the child. But it was not just what was happening in the residential school. Prime Minister Sr. John Macdonald is quoted in Parliament saying about the Indian Reserves in Western Canada, he was keeping indigenous people on the brink of starvation. During the early years of Reserve life, the Northern Piikani, population was reduced to just a fraction of its original size due to disease and starvation, some Prairie Cree communities were completely wiped out, one of the reason so little was said about the deaths of children in the schools, as their families back home may have been dying as well.

This is our History as Canadians, this is how the West was won!