



Archevêque de Montréal

PENANCE, ENCOUNTER, HOPE

July 21, 2022

« I am about to embark on a penitential pilgrimage, which I hope, with God's grace, will contribute to the journey of healing and reconciliation already undertaken. »

(Pope Francis: Angelus, July 17, 2022)

Pope Francis calls his apostolic journey to Canada a penitential pilgrimage, embarking on a pathway marked by **penance** for the abuses and wrongdoings that Indigenous youth suffered under Catholic organizations who ran residential schools for them, their families and their communities. It is a pathway proposing a meaningful **encounter** in order to convey sincere apologies. It is also inspired by a vision of **hope** that this pathway to truth also becomes a pathway to reconciliation.

Together with Pope Francis, all of us need to recognize that members of the Catholic Church in Canada « have contributed to the policies of cultural assimilation » (Angelus). The papal pilgrimage is the culmination of a long process that began in October 1990 when the abuses suffered in residential schools began to be discussed. From July 1991 to the present, apologies have been offered by the religious communities and dioceses directly involved in the operation of these residential schools, by all the bishops of Canada (September 2021) and by the Pope within the framework of a meeting at the Vatican (from March 28 to April 1, 2022).

It is a journey that has been unfolding for thirty years. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), which worked from June 2008 to December 2015, was a milestone at the heart of a major national effort to uncover the truth about the Indigenous residential schools, with a focus on reconciliation.

The TRC's Calls to Action (June 2015) asks "... We call upon the Pope to issue an apology to Survivors, 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 Métis children in Catholic-run residential schools. We call for that apology [...] be presented by the pope in Canada..." (n. 58). The requested visit will take place at the end of July, which coincides with celebrations for the feast of St. Ann, an important feast for many Indigenous people.

This visit of Pope Francis to Canada is a time of grace in which God himself calls us to walk together. We are all human beings. We all must learn from each other. Something, we easily forget.

The pathway to truth and reconciliation is a long road, but today, it is the pathway to life and hope for a future open to compassion, justice and solidarity.

In Jesus Christ, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life,

† Christian Lépine
Archbishop of Montreal