
Gathered Stones

A Chronological Account of Canada's Indian Residential Schools

With particular attention to the Catholic Church's record, the partnership between church and state, and the limits of what the evidence shows

Every numbered paragraph carries an evidence label and source numbers keyed to the Works Cited, so each statement can be checked.

Prepared 7 October 2026

A Word Before Reading

and how to check what follows

This is an account written to be read slowly. It is about children, and about the adults who built, ran, resisted, and failed the institutions that held them. It tries to hold two things together that are often pulled apart: the plain weight of what was done, and the fact that the people involved were not of one mind. Some were zealous for the system, some quietly worked against its harshest edges, and many were simply carried along by a policy larger than any one of them.

The brief for this account asked that the Catholic Church's record be told truthfully, including the good will that tried to protect the dignity of Indigenous people, without evading real responsibility. That is how it is handled here. The Catholic Church ran the largest share of the schools, was named in the largest share of legal claims, and was the last of the churches to apologize at the papal level. Those facts sit in this account beside the evidence of language work, advocacy, and intervention for sick children, because a defence that left them out would not be believed.

How the labels work

DOCUMENTED	Stated in a record or report that the cited source describes or reproduces (government, church, commission, or news reporting of such records).
TESTIMONY	Rests on a person's recollection or testimony.
DISPUTED	Contested, or comes from a source with an identified viewpoint; the claim is attributed, not endorsed.
SUPPLIED DOC	Comes from the background document supplied with the request and has not been independently verified here.
OUR READING	This account's own reading or framing. Where a number in brackets is absent, no source is claimed.

Bracketed numbers such as [4, 12] point to the Works Cited at the back, numbered in order of first appearance. Sources are typed (primary, news, scholarly, reference, advocacy, Catholic-affiliated) so the reader can see where a viewpoint sits. Quotations are kept short and exact.

A Timeline

Date	Event	Source
1659	Propaganda Fide instructs missionaries to adapt to local customs.	[1]
1840s	Church-run schools for Indigenous children established; Oblates arrive in the West.	[2]
1874	Lacombe publishes Cree dictionary and grammar.	[3]
1879	Davin report urges industrial schools with church cooperation.	[4]
1883	Government authorizes three industrial schools, following missionary requests.	[5]
1892	Formal government-church agreement; per-capita funding.	[6]
1894 / 1920	Compulsory attendance amendments to the Indian Act.	[4]
1907	Dr. Peter Bryce, the department's chief medical officer, reports on 35 prairie schools; report not published.	[7]
1922	Bryce publishes The Story of a National Crime.	[8]
1931	Peak of about 80 schools operating.	[9]

Date	Event	Source
1951 / 1969	Compulsion removed; government takes over from churches.	[10]
1966	Chanie Wenjack dies after running away; inquest follows.	[11]
1993-98	Anglican, Presbyterian and United Church apologies.	[12]
1996	Last school closes (some sources say 1997).	[9]
2005 / 2008	\$1.9 billion settlement announced; Harper apology.	[13]
2015	TRC final report; 3,201 recorded deaths.	[14]
2021	Kamloops radar announcement; church fires follow.	[15]
2022	Pope Francis apologizes (1 April).	[16]
2023	Pine Creek excavation finds no remains.	[17]

I. Before the System

The 1600s to 1879: two seeds

§1.1 DOCUMENTED Church schooling for Indigenous children is older than Canada. Jesuit missionaries ran a boarding school near Quebec in the French period, a Jesuit day school opened at Wikwemikong in 1836, and church-run schools for Indigenous children were operating by the 1840s. Early day schools struggled because parents resisted missionaries' efforts to move their families toward French and Christian ways of living and learning. [2, 18]

§1.2 DOCUMENTED Rome's stated mission policy points the other way from what later happened. In 1659 the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (Propaganda Fide) instructed missionaries to adapt to local customs and not to combat them unless plainly contrary to faith or morals, and an 1845 instruction urged developing native bishops. A scholar of the 1659 instruction adds that Propaganda's own vicars and missionaries often failed to practise it. [1, 19, 20]

§1.3 OUR READING The distinction matters for what follows. Rome's published ideal was cultural accommodation. What reached the Canadian prairies in the 1880s was shaped less by that ideal than by treaty obligations, government money, and settler expectations.

§1.4 DOCUMENTED The Oblates of Mary Immaculate reached the Red River region in the 1840s and founded missions in as many Indigenous communities as they could. They were often pioneers among non-Indigenous Canadians in the study of Indigenous languages, compiling dictionaries and grammars. Albert Lacombe's *Dictionnaire de la langue des Cris* (Montreal, 1874) runs to roughly 700 pages, with French-Cree and Cree-French sections, notes on dialects, kinship terms, word roots, and the Creed and Commandments set in parallel columns of Cree and French. His *Grammaire de la langue des Cris* appeared the same year. [3, 21, 22]

§1.5 DOCUMENTED A map printed with the dictionary marks 38 missions, Catholic and Protestant alike. An Oblate source credits Lacombe with translating the New Testament into Cree syllabics, and a reviewer describes Émile Grouard printing Christian texts in Indigenous languages on a Paris-made press at Lac La Biche in 1883, noting that Grouard and other early missionaries were open to mediating culture and language in a way that contrasted with the assimilationist pattern of the later residential schools. [3, 23, 24]

S1.6 DOCUMENTED The question of what Indigenous families themselves wanted deserves care. Education was raised by both sides in the negotiations of Treaties 1 to 7, and each treaty carried a provision for it. Treaty 6 leaders later complained that promised schools had not been established on every reserve. [25, 26, 27]

S1.7 OUR READING So the demand for schooling is documented. What is not shown in the sources reviewed is a demand for compulsory, distant boarding. The treaty promise was for teachers and schools in communities; the system that grew was something larger and harder. Both can be true at once: many families wanted education, and the institution that was built exceeded and distorted what they asked for.

S1.8 DOCUMENTED In 1879 Nicholas Flood Davin reported to the government after visiting American industrial schools. He argued that only boarding schools could separate Indigenous children from their parents and culture, causing them “to be merged and lost” in the wider nation, and urged cooperation with the Christian churches to open them. [4, 8]

II. A Partnership Is Formed

1880 to 1920: the state asks, and the churches answer

S2.1 DOCUMENTED Three industrial schools were authorized in the West in 1883. Bishop Vital-Justin Grandin’s biography records that this followed requests from him and other missionaries, and Lacombe helped formulate the proposal, becoming the first principal of St. Joseph’s Industrial School at Dunbow. The Catholic leadership was not merely recruited; at this stage it was an advocate. [5, 28]

S2.2 DOCUMENTED In 1892 the federal government and the Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian and Methodist churches formalized the arrangement, with per-capita funding meant to control costs. Competition between denominations for funding soon strained the formula. A United Church writer later said the churches were “addicted to the funding and prestige of government support,” while noting the government never gave enough to run the schools properly. [6, 29]

S2.3 DOCUMENTED Competition ran along sectarian lines. Grandin believed the department favoured Protestants and argued that the treaties had been made with the Indians, not with denominations. [5]

S2.4 DOCUMENTED Attendance became compulsory by amendment in 1894 and, for children aged seven to fifteen, in 1920, with Indian agents and later the RCMP enforcing it. Parks Canada’s revised designation of Lacombe says that, although he had limited involvement in running the school, he advocated separating children from their families, suppressing Indigenous languages, and coercion to force attendance. A Catholic outlet argues that some missionaries advised against compulsion; that is a claim from a Catholic source and the sources do not name them. [2, 4, 30, 31, 32]

S2.5 DOCUMENTED Language policy came from the department. In 1890 Hayter Reed, then Indian commissioner for Manitoba and the North-West Territories and from 1893 to 1897 the department’s deputy superintendent general, wrote that the native language was “only to be used as a vehicle of teaching” and was to be dropped as soon as practicable; principals were told to concentrate on English. His biography records that he regarded industrial schools as the best means of assimilating the young, in a prairie network of ten schools run by churches and largely federally funded. This was sixteen years

after Lacombe's dictionary appeared. [3, 33, 34]

§2.6 DOCUMENTED The man at the head of the department for the compulsory-attendance years was Duncan Campbell Scott, who served as deputy superintendent general of Indian Affairs from 1913 to 1932. Parks Canada calls him the chief federal official responsible for expanding and running the residential school system, and describes a system aimed at cultural assimilation at the lowest possible cost to government. Giving evidence in 1920 to the House of Commons committee on the Indian Act amendments, he stated the aim plainly: to continue until every Indian in Canada had been “absorbed into the body politic” and there was “no Indian question” and no Indian Department. The Canadian Encyclopedia gives the statement in this context, before the amendment became law, and a provincial education resource reproduces it; the committee transcript itself has not been consulted here. [35, 36, 37, 38]

§2.7 DOCUMENTED The record also shows how far his hand reached over money and policy. The 1920 amendment compelling attendance of children aged seven to fifteen was passed under his direction. Dr. Peter Bryce, the department's own chief medical officer, an early whistleblower and advocate for the health of Indigenous children whose story is told in Chapter III, later wrote that action on his 1909 recommendations was blocked “owing to the active opposition of Mr. D. C. Scott.” That account is a partisan source, written after his forced retirement. A First Nations Caring Society sheet likewise says Bryce's proposals came into direct conflict with Scott's work to reduce the department's spending. The TRC, as quoted by The Tyee, records Scott giving as one reason for rejecting Bryce's idea of converting the schools into children's sanatoria that the churches would not give up “their share of the joint control.” [38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43]

§2.8 OUR READING This is the context for a question that naturally arises: did church operators adopt the department's English-only line partly to stay in favour with the officials who controlled the money? The argument in its strongest form runs as follows. The line was continuous at the top. Reed gave the English-first direction in 1890, only sixteen years after Lacombe's dictionary appeared, and held the department's highest post from 1893 to 1897; Scott held it from 1913 to 1932 with the same assimilationist aim (the officials between them were not examined here). The government paid the per-capita grants, the denominations competed for the same funds, and Grandin's complaint of Protestant favouritism shows that churches watched the state's favour closely. Under those conditions an operator faced a stable, decades-long incentive to align with the priorities of the department's head, language included, and the short gap between the vernacular scholarship of the 1870s and the English-first direction of 1890 fits a change driven from above. That is a reasonable inference. It is not a documented finding, and it has two limits. First, timing and incentive are not motive: no source reviewed shows any church or order changing its language practice in order to win favour, and the Catholic-affiliated sources describe resistance instead, which needs corroboration. Second, the TRC-quoted remark about “their share of the joint control” shows operators defending their position against the department, not only deferring to it. The hypothesis is best held as plausible, supported in outline, and unproven in particular. [3, 5, 33, 34, 35, 43, 44]

III. The Physician's Warning

1904 to 1922: Dr. Bryce counts the dead

§3.1 DOCUMENTED Dr. Peter Henderson Bryce was appointed medical inspector to the Departments of the Interior and Indian Affairs in 1904. In 1907 the minister asked him to inspect thirty-five schools in Alberta, Manitoba and Saskatchewan (eight industrial and twenty-seven boarding). He surveyed principals and visited the schools himself. [7, 39]

§3.2 DOCUMENTED His findings were grave. CTV reports that up to a quarter of 1,537 pupils had died, mostly of tuberculosis, and a Toronto Metropolitan University page says that at one school 69 per cent of former pupils had died. Wikipedia's summary of his report cites a range of 15 to 24 per cent as an average, so the headline figure depends on which schools and which pupils are counted. Bryce wrote that "this trail of disease and death has gone on almost unchecked" by serious efforts of the department. [7, 39, 40, 45]

§3.3 DOCUMENTED The causes he named were mundane and fixable: poor construction, poor ventilation, and sick children housed with healthy ones. Indian hospitals and sanatoria were funded at as little as half the per-capita rate of non-Indigenous facilities, so even treatment was substandard. [46, 47]

§3.4 DOCUMENTED The department did not publish the report, though it leaked to the press. Scott blocked its release and its recommendations; Bryce was sidelined in 1914, was forced into retirement in 1921, and in 1922 published his own account as *The Story of a National Crime*. [7, 8, 40, 41, 48]

§3.5 DOCUMENTED How did the churches respond? The record shows opposition, but not unanimity of recorded voices. A Victoria newspaper in November 1907 reported that comments on Bryce's report had brought "protests from the Roman Catholic authorities," who had the larger number of pupils. Historian John Milloy described Catholic officials responding defensively. A medical-history study notes that publication provoked opposition from many church officials and that principals widely criticized Bryce. [40, 49, 50]

§3.6 OUR READING A natural question is whether that reaction was unanimous. The sources reviewed say "many" and "widely", never "all". This research found no named Catholic who publicly sided with Bryce, and no source stating that none did. The honest statement is: defensive reaction is documented; a range of private reactions is likely but not documented in the sources accessed.

§3.7 DOCUMENTED One case shows what a principal faced. Ovide Charlebois, an Oblate, became principal of St. Michael's school at Duck Lake in 1903; by the end of 1910 nearly half of the students from a nearby reserve had died, and conditions were unsafe and unsanitary. He later became a bishop, and the biography records his later defence of Indigenous people against the influence of settlers. It does not record what he thought of Bryce. [51]

IV. Two Hands on One Plow

The churches and the state, and where each stood

§4.1 DOCUMENTED The supplied background document argues that the system was created and directed by the government: it set policy, provided the money, made attendance compulsory, and retained oversight, while churches operated most schools under contract. That framing is supported on the government's side. The government set per-capita rates, rejected Bryce's costly recommendations, and, in the document's account, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) found it never established or enforced adequate health and safety standards, largely because it was determined to keep costs to a minimum. [7, 30]

§4.2 DOCUMENTED The churches were not passive. They volunteered, believing it was their mission to convert and civilize; they lobbied for schools; and the Oblates kept a commission in Ottawa to represent their schools to the department. In 1935 the Catholic hierarchy asked the deputy superintendent to split the department's schools branch into Catholic and non-Catholic sections, alleging anti-Catholic and anti-French bias. [18, 52, 53]

§4.3 DOCUMENTED In 1939 the Oblate general superintendent, Plourde, wrote that sending Catholic students with tuberculosis to non-Catholic sanatoria was "akin to persecution," in a letter that also used inflammatory comparisons. In 1940 the principal of St. Mary's in Kenora and the Archbishop of St. Boniface intervened to stop sick students being moved to a government hospital, through letters and telegrams that also involved the children's parents. The APTN account describes the episode as a battle with Ottawa and as involving manipulation of the parents. [53, 54]

§4.4 DISPUTED These episodes cut two ways, and the record should say so. They show Catholic leaders contesting the state over the care of sick children, which is a form of the advocacy this account has been asked to document. They also show sectarian rivalry and pressure on parents. Reasonable readers will weigh them differently. [53, 54]

§4.5 DISPUTED On language, Catholic-affiliated sources report that Oblate bishop Gabriel Breynat argued to the department from 1935 that Native languages and syllabics should be taught in the schools to keep "Indian languages and Indian life ... from passing into oblivion," and that the department rejected his proposal. They also say many Oblates, who were mostly French and often more comfortable in Aboriginal languages than English, used native languages in catechism and chapel and did not comply fully with the English-only rule. These are claims from Catholic sources and no independent confirmation has been found. [44, 55]

§4.6 OUR READING Taken together the evidence supports a middle reading rather than either extreme. The state held the levers of money, compulsion and standards, and church officials often argued with it. But the churches also asked for the schools, ran them, shared the profit of the funding, and sometimes defended their own turf more fiercely than the children's interests.

§4.7 OUR READING The contrast with the Vatican's stated policy is real but should be stated precisely. Rome's published missionary instructions (1659, 1845) favoured accommodation and native clergy. The

schools in Canada were run under a federal contract and an English-language mandate. No source reviewed shows Rome directing the schools or the language policy, or disciplining local orders for departing from Rome's ideal. Grandin's hope for a native clergy produced only one candidate who persevered, ordained in 1890. [1, 5]

V. The Long Closing

1930 to 1996: attrition, reform, and the last doors

§5.1 DOCUMENTED The number of schools peaked at about 80 in 1931. A Library and Archives Canada list for that year counts 44 Roman Catholic, 21 Church of England, 13 United Church and 2 Presbyterian schools. Recorded student deaths were concentrated before the 1950s. [4, 9, 56]

§5.2 DOCUMENTED Reform came slowly. Mandatory attendance was removed from the Indian Act in 1951. Departmental inspectors recommended abolishing residential schools in 1958. In 1969 the partnership between government and churches ended and Ottawa took over the remaining schools. By 1979 only twelve schools were still operating. The Oblates withdrew from school administration in the early 1970s. The last school closed in 1996 (some sources say 1997). [6, 9, 10, 21, 57]

§5.3 DOCUMENTED Children ran away, and some died doing it. The TRC's records, as summarised by Maclean's, show at least 33 runaways who died. The best-known case is Chanie Wenjack, aged twelve, who left the Cecilia Jeffrey school near Kenora in October 1966 and died of hunger and exposure a week later while trying to walk home. His death prompted the first inquest of its kind, and the jury asked why children had to leave their communities for school at all. [11, 58, 59]

§5.4 DISPUTED Some details of Wenjack's story are contested. A critical essay argues that popular retellings overstate abuse, noting that he attended a public school in Kenora while boarding at the residential school and that his friend testified at the inquest that he ran away because he was lonely. The essay comes from an opinion journal, and the inquest record itself has not been checked here. Both accounts agree that a lonely twelve-year-old died trying to reach his father. [11, 60]

VI. Memory, Rumour, and the Record

How a hard history gets told, and retold

S6.1 OUR READING Children’s gossip, and the unexplained disappearance of runaways, would plausibly have generated stories that blended fact and legend, as happens in many closed institutions. No study was found that documents this for these schools, so it is offered as an interpretation, not a finding.

S6.2 DOCUMENTED What the sources do show is that disappearances had a factual basis. At least 33 runaways died, the TRC recorded that parents were often not told of illness or death, and, in the Commission’s words, “No one took care to count how many died.” A survivor of the Kamloops school told a reporter, before the 2021 radar announcement, that there had been “rumours of a graveyard.” [14, 58, 61]

S6.3 TESTIMONY The TRC treated survivors’ testimony, gathered from several thousand witnesses, as a record alongside government and church documents. Critics, such as a retired professor writing in the *Western Standard*, argue that the testimony was self-selected and untested by cross-examination and should be corroborated. The TRC’s own position was that truth meant both what is revealed in government and church documents and the truth of lived experience as told by survivors. The critical claim comes from an opinion source, and individual cases have not been adjudicated here. [14, 62]

S6.4 TESTIMONY Survivor memory is also mixed, as memory is. The memoirist Ron Gosbee acknowledges “good priests, good nuns, and good teachers” while arguing that the institution’s management pushed such people out in favour of harsher ones. One memoir is not a survey, but it shows the texture that a single verdict would erase. [63]

S6.5 OUR READING The practical rule this account follows is simple. Where a claim rests on a government or church record, it is marked DOC. Where it rests on a person’s memory, it is marked TEST. Where reasonable people dispute it, it is marked DISP. A reader can check each against its citation.

VII. Naming the Wrong

1986 to 2015: apologies, settlement, and the Commission

S7.1 DOCUMENTED The church apologies came in sequence. The United Church of Canada made a general apology to Indigenous peoples in 1986 and a specific apology for its part in the residential schools in 1998; sources differ on which date they call the first. The Anglican primate, Archbishop Michael Peers, said in 1993, “I am sorry, more than I can say.” The Presbyterian Church apologized in 1994. Some Catholic religious orders, including the Oblates, issued apologies, but the Catholic Church in Canada as a whole did not at that time. [12, 13, 64, 65]

S7.2 DOCUMENTED The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops said in 2008 that it had not apologized in the name of the Church in Canada, with a rationale, reported elsewhere, that each diocese and religious community was legally responsible for its own conduct. Legal claims were distributed unevenly: about 72 per cent named the Catholic Church, about 18 per cent the Anglican Church, and fewer than 10 per cent each the Presbyterian and United churches. [13, 18]

§7.3 DOCUMENTED A \$1.9-billion compensation package for about 65,000 survivors was announced in 2005. On 11 June 2008 Prime Minister Stephen Harper apologized in the House of Commons, and Archbishop Fred Hiltz of the Anglican Church said he was moved by it. [13, 66]

§7.4 DOCUMENTED The TRC delivered its final report on 15 December 2015 after six years of work. It recorded 3,201 student deaths between 1867 and 2000 in its register, and estimated more than 150,000 children had passed through the schools. Chair Justice Murray Sinclair said, “The journey to reconciliation has already begun.” Sinclair has also said the true number of deaths may exceed 6,000. [9, 14, 67]

§7.5 DOCUMENTED The Commission called on the Pope to apologize in Canada. Sinclair described the Pope as the “spiritual and moral leader” of the Church and said survivors were disappointed that no “clear and emphatic public apology” had come. When Harper met Pope Francis in June 2015, he only drew attention to a letter from a minister; the Vatican’s statement did not mention an apology. [66, 68, 69]

VIII. A Hard Season

2021 to 2022: radar, headlines, fires, and an apology

§8.1 DOCUMENTED On 27 May 2021 the Tk’emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation announced the results of a ground-penetrating radar survey at the former Kamloops Indian Residential School. The announcement spoke of the “confirmation of the remains of 215 children.” The radar specialist, Sarah Beaulieu, later described about 200 “probable burials” with “multiple signatures that present like burials,” and said, “Only forensic investigation with excavation will provide definitive results.” Chief Rosanne Casimir clarified that it was “not a mass grave.” [70, 71, 72]

§8.2 DOCUMENTED Radar detects soil disturbances; it does not itself identify remains. Many news reports nonetheless said remains had been “found,” a gap that a Catholic outlet and several critics have pointed out. That the headlines ran ahead of the evidence is documented in the wording of the stories; what followed from it is a matter of interpretation. [70, 73, 74]

§8.3 DOCUMENTED Excavation results are few. At Pine Creek, Manitoba, a four-week dig in 2023 under a Catholic church basement, prompted by 14 radar anomalies, found no evidence of human remains, only animal bones and fire debris. Chief Derek Nepinak said the result took “nothing away from the difficult truths” the families had lived, and that it “should not be deemed as conclusive of other ongoing searches.” The school’s recorded student deaths (21) rest on records, not radar. [17, 75, 76]

§8.4 DOCUMENTED Other sites differ. At Muskowekwan First Nation in Saskatchewan, the First Nation reports at least 35 unmarked graves, some physically unearthed during water-line construction in the early 1990s. At Star Blanket Cree Nation, the community announced in 2023 a child’s jaw bone fragment found alongside more than 2,000 radar “hits.” At Cowessess, 751 radar reports were announced at a cemetery where many graves are no longer marked, and each report could represent more than one set of remains. [57, 77, 78]

§8.5 DISPUTED Critics, including a Fraser Institute summary of the book *Grave Error* and a professor writing for a Catholic education site, argue that no unmarked graves have been proven and that where

excavations occurred, no residential-school burials were found. The same summary concedes that most sites have not been excavated. That makes “no bodies found” accurate for the few dug sites and unproven for the rest. One excavation with no remains (Pine Creek) is documented here; the broader claim is not established. The Star Blanket bone fragment was announced by the community, and no independent analysis of it was found. The sources reviewed run through about 2024; later developments are not covered. [70, 79, 80]

§8.6 OUR READING None of this alters the core record. The TRC’s count of 3,201 deaths comes from school and government records, and the existence of school cemeteries, many unmarked and neglected, is documented independently of radar. Even the critics cited here do not dispute that real deaths and real graves exist; their dispute is over the radar claims and the media’s handling of them. [14]

§8.7 DOCUMENTED In the weeks and months after the Kamloops announcement, churches burned. A CBC review counted 33 churches burned to the ground in Canada between May 2021 and December 2023; investigators determined 24 were deliberately set and others remained under investigation. Eleven in western Canada burned in the weeks after Kamloops in cases ruled arson. In one Alberta case a youth was arrested, charged and convicted. [15, 81]

§8.8 OUR READING On motive, the sources describe suspicion, anger, and mixed feelings in affected communities, with Indigenous leaders expressing shock and anger at the destruction and, in one community, “mixed feelings” given the church’s history. No source reviewed shows any nation or its officials organizing the burnings. The reading that these were individuals acting on their own is consistent with the record: the one case found with a named outcome involved a youth. Most cases remain unsolved, so motives are unknown, and the timing supports a link without proving one. [15, 81, 82]

§8.9 DOCUMENTED On 1 April 2022 Pope Francis apologized to Indigenous delegates at the Vatican for the “deplorable conduct” of some Catholics in the schools, saying he was “deeply grieved” by survivors’ stories of suffering and abuse. Chief Cadmus Delorme of Cowessess had said earlier that an apology was “one stage of many in the healing journey.” [16, 64, 83]

IX. The Churches Side by Side

Where responsibility differs

§9.1 DOCUMENTED The table below sets out the figures the sources give. The sources disagree on the Catholic share of schools (roughly 60 per cent in most summaries, 62 of about 139 schools by one count, and 46 per cent, or 64 schools, in an Archdiocese of Toronto FAQ, which may use a different counting method). The range is shown rather than choosing one. [13, 65, 84, 85]

§9.2 DOCUMENTED Table: the churches compared. Figures are as reported in the sources cited in the paragraph above; they differ by source and counting method. [13, 56, 65, 84, 85]

Church	Share of schools	Share of legal claims	Apology
Roman Catholic	About 60% in most summaries; 46% (64 schools) in one archdiocesan count; 62 schools in another	About 72%	Individual orders earlier (e.g., Oblates); bishops' 2008 statement declined a national apology; Pope Francis, 1 Apr 2022
Anglican	About 25-30%; 32 schools in one count	About 18%	1993 (Archbishop Peers)
United	About 10-15% (combined with others in some summaries)	Under 10%	1986 (general); 1998 (residential schools)
Presbyterian	Combined with United in some summaries (about 10%)	Under 10%	1994

§9.3 DOCUMENTED Several facts bear on the Catholic Church in particular. It ran the largest share of schools, was named in the largest share of claims, and did not make a papal apology until 2022, though individual orders did earlier. The United Church, by one account, did not so much start residential schools as absorb them from predecessor churches. [13, 16, 29]

§9.4 DOCUMENTED Evidence of good will is also on the record. Bishop Grandin showed, in his biographer's words, "more than usual sympathy for indigenous peoples" and ordained the first Métis priest in the northwest. The Oblates produced dictionaries and grammars of Indigenous languages. In 1905 the Oblates and the department closed the St. Boniface industrial school and replaced it with schools on reserves, closer to families. Catholic leaders contested the state over the treatment of sick children, and Bishop Breynat pressed for syllabics in the classroom. [5, 21, 44, 54, 86]

§9.5 DOCUMENTED The counterweights are equally on the record. Parks Canada says Lacombe advocated coercion and the suppression of languages. The TRC, as the City of Winnipeg summarises it, identified Grandin as leading the campaign for residential schools. Catholic authorities protested Bryce's findings. And the Church's apology at the papal level came last. [16, 31, 49, 87]

§9.6 OUR READING A fair summary is that the same individuals could be both sympathetic to Indigenous people and instruments of a coercive policy. That is a genuine moral quandary, and the record supports describing it that way without excusing it.

X. What We Can and Cannot Say

The limits of this account

§10.1 OUR READING This account was built from web sources read in excerpt, not from archives or complete books, so it is a careful synthesis, not original historical research. Several points should be checked before it is relied on in print.

§10.2 OUR READING Open items: (1) The “50 per cent” remark attributed to Scott in the supplied document is traced only to a secondary citation (Milloy, 1999, p. 51, via a Caring Society sheet), is undated there, and does not appear in Bryce’s 1922 text; it is therefore not used in the body of this account. The 1920 “body politic” statement, by contrast, is now confirmed by two independent secondary sources and Parks Canada’s footnote to the 1920 committee evidence, though the transcript was not consulted. (2) No named Catholic who defended Bryce was found, nor any Canadian staff memoirs outside Catholic-affiliated sources. (3) The Catholic-sympathetic claims about Oblate resistance to English-only rules need independent corroboration. (4) The status of the Kamloops site and other digs after about 2024 is not covered. (5) The United Church’s 1986 and 1998 apologies are described differently across sources. (6) Percentages of schools by denomination vary by source and method. (7) The suggestion that interchurch rivalry for government favour influenced the language policy rests on an argument from the department head’s aims and control of funds (§2.8), not on direct evidence of any church changing its practice.

§10.3 OUR READING Several sources are marked Advocacy or Catholic in the Works Cited so the reader can see where a viewpoint sits. Such sources are used here only for the claims they are best placed to make, and are flagged as contested where that applies.

A Closing Reflection

Whatever one concludes about blame, the children are the centre of this story, and the adults who held power over them, in government and in the churches, answer to that. A truthful record is a form of respect for them. It asks us to keep the dead in view, to be slow to caricature the living, and to be honest about what we do not yet know. May the work of remembering be done with care.

Works Cited

Numbered in order of first citation in the text. All web sources were accessed on 7 October 2026, mostly through search-result excerpts rather than full text; items marked “read in excerpt only” should be opened in full before being relied on. Type labels: PRIMARY (original or institutional record), SCHOLARLY, REFERENCE (encyclopedic), NEWS, CATHOLIC (church-affiliated or Catholic-sympathetic), ADVOCACY (identified viewpoint), SUPPLIED (requester’s document).

- [1] “Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples.” Wikipedia (1659 instruction; 1845 *Neminem profecto*).
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