

# No Regrets: Suggested Improvements for Public Apologies

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## Abstract

We critically evaluate the Canadian Association of Social Workers' Acknowledgement Statement of 2009 to determine whether it is adequate to the task of an ethically genuine public apology, or instead is an expression of personal regret. We compare the statement to other apologies for the same wrong, in order to challenge the social worker's response.

**Keywords:** Public apology, personal regrets, moral relationships, moral repair, aboriginal schools

## 1. Background-Introduction

Elaine Spencer and Tera Dahl-Lang participated in a large social work conference in 2009 at which the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) issued a public acknowledgement for the past treatment of Aboriginal people. Disappointed at the way the apology took place and its content, they consulted with a philosopher, Jim Gough. This paper is designed to help us understand and improve the situation. If there is a need for an apology, then some wrong has been committed that justifies or gives us a reason to apologize for the wrong done.

Culpability is established. A self-imposed duty is voluntarily established for someone to take responsibility for the wrong and to address the wrong. A relationship has been broken between the wronged group and the offending group (Feinberg, 1974). Trust and respect have been lost and need to be regained. This opens up the need for a transformation of one relational situation into an ethically better one. A moral repair (Walker, 2006), or in religious terms a redemption, is in order. A relationship problem has been identified and a repair to this relationship is needed. The success of the apology as a moral remedy can only be measured in the successful or genuine repair of the relationship, which is transformed from one of mistrust, dishonor, and non-confidence to one of renewed confidence and a restoration of the dignity and respect accorded all members of the relationship.<sup>1</sup>

There is an ethical and significant difference between the personal expression of regret and the sincere and genuine expression of an apology<sup>2</sup> for a wrong, either (i) directly intended or committed or, (ii) not directly intended or committed by the recipient of some advantage or good enjoyed at the expense of another party harmed by this

unintended benefit. In the personal expression of regret the individual making such an expression describes his or her feeling of “I wish this had not happened” while in an apology there is a measure of responsibility taken by the individual issuing the public apology, implying a degree of embarrassment at the situation, a feeling of remorse for a wrong committed, a feeling that the apology will help to initiate a process of moral repair to a relationship that has suffered as a result of the unjustified harm committed. We can be responsible for repairing a relationship in cases (i) and (ii), where I unfairly benefited by a wrong committed by my ancestors, like stealing land and then using it to create intergenerational wealth—at the continued expense of intergenerational poverty (Feinberg, 1974). The expression of a personal regret does not address the latter but rather perpetuates it.<sup>3</sup>

There needs to be a process of turning around and away from what was a failure to a relationship renewal that transcends irrelevant conditions that separate the past situation from the present redress of it. There needs to be an overcoming of the distancing problem, which is the irrelevant distancing of the significance or ethical importance of past problems or issues to the current situation in a relationship. Sometimes, for example, those in the present claim that “the past is too distant from the present to illuminate anything about the present situation” (MacMillan, 2008, p. 14), which is to set up an immutable barrier to change, a false analogy or precedent (Gough, 1999). An apology is, in part, for the dominant/majority group, who may have benefited from wrongdoing but may be “unaware” of the wrong; the apology establishes the wrongness and brings it into the awareness of the majority (and ideally should stop further wrongdoing, altering the course of relationships for the better for all members). The subordinate/oppressed/minority group is not served by the apology alone, as they have been aware all along of the wrongdoing and have experienced the negative consequences of it all along. It is the action after the apology that counts to transform the prior failed relationship and redress the ethical wrong to this group (Nobles, 2008).<sup>4</sup>

There may be an objection that a public apology is an attempt by those currently holding political authority or power to control or rewrite history, putting a favorable twist on a problematic situation without a serious and honest attempt to address the continuing systemic conditions that caused the failure which the apology addresses (MacMillan, 2008). If this is both the intention and consequence of the apology, then it fails to function as a genuine apology. By contrast, a genuine public apology is transformational in the sense that it is designed to (a) “set the record straight,” change a prevalent misperception of the past relationship; (b) establish the ethical basis for a precedent about how other similar relationships should be changed for the better,<sup>5</sup> consistent with (a) and (b); and (c) bring about significant changes to the ethical character of the relationship between an offending group and the group harmed, changes that will have measurable effects to produce a process to remedy past wrongs committed and prevent future similar wrongs. Finally, a genuine apology must (d) bring the force of collective ethical will (of the oppressor and oppressed) together to transform the situational control (Cooper, 2004) of past relational oppression to a new pathway of open freedom to create a new possibility for those inside the institutions which often foster or house manipulation, coercion and bullying of the oppressed (Gough, 2012).

First, our strategy will be to compare the effects of different apologies for the same situation or problem to determine how different relationships satisfy conditions (a)–(c) and are transformed or not transformed by the apology (Fingarette, 1963). Second, since an apology is an attempt to avoid a denial or an excuse, it must exhibit some moral high ground above the regret or excuse alternatives rather than functioning as an expression of personal negative consequences to the party making the apology. So, third, we will address the critical question of whether a public apology by a dominant, offending group actually succeeds in achieving what an apology should achieve or not (Coombs & Holladay, 2008). If an apology functions as an excuse and not as an act

of contrition designed to remedy a previous wrong in a relationship in order to renew the relationship to its authentic potential, then it is not an apology (Becker & Becker, 1991, pp. 344–46). It may have other purposes, like protecting one's public image or public perception from harm, rather than addressing the harm to the other party.

## **2. The Role of Social Workers in a Public Apology**

The role of social workers in implementing unethical government policies in residential schools and the broader role of social work as a profession participating in the cultural genocide of Indigenous families (i.e., through the mass apprehension of Indigenous children and placement in non-Indigenous homes—a clear continuation of cultural genocide) (CASW 2005a) provides us with a good case of a harm that may be addressed by a public apology to remedy this past wrong. This wrong was known or popularly labeled as the “60's scoop” (Blackstock, 2003) but actually continued for many decades (Sinclair, Hart, & Bruyere, 2009), and given the massively disproportionate numbers of Aboriginal children in care (for example in Alberta, 50%–60% of children in care through Children's Services Authorities are of Aboriginal heritage, when the Indigenous population is approximately 4% of the population of the province), this harm remains significantly disproportionate across the population of the province (Sinclair, Hart, & Bruyere, 2009, p. 45). The inter-generational harm<sup>6</sup> caused by residential schools is best captured by Nietzsche's claim about how the mob or civilization decides moral values and in the process supplants the values of those who do not share its values (Nietzsche, 1969c). The spiritually and morally weak overpower the morally and supposedly spiritually superior group, who should be defining themselves as the most qualified and knowledgeable to do so.

For the highest man shall also be  
the highest lord on earth. Man's fate  
knows no harsher misfortune than  
when those who have power on earth

are not also the first men. That makes  
everything false and crooked and  
monstrous. And when they are even  
the last, and more beast than man, then  
the price of the mob rises and rises,  
and eventually the virtue of the mob  
even says, ‘Behold I alone am virtue.’  
(Nietzsche, 1969b, p. 358)

The social workers who supported the residential school policy, supported those in power<sup>7</sup> who were not also the first men. This is more than a political issue; it is an unnatural perversion of the natural order of the world—which cannot be dismissed with a sweep of the hand as a minor mistake since it involves a systematic overturning of natural values that form the foundational base of human rights (Gough, 1986).

The subjective individual's integrity which is supposed to be respected in society is replaced by “impersonal relations” which are “relations among persons who appear to one another not as persons, that is, unified totalities that are ends in themselves, but rather as compartmentalized roles, offices, skills, and so forth” (Norton, 1991, p. 146). “[D]epersonalization, by eroding the foundation of individualism, attacks the foundation of community” (Norton, 1991, p. 147).

## **3. Important Normative Conditions of an Apology**

The starting point for our inquiry into the ethical nature and effects of an apology is normative, that is based on accepted or normal standards of conduct in relationships, which remains problematic since norms themselves as standards are always open to criticism.<sup>8</sup> We are putting such criticisms on hold to ask the practical question of whether or not a public apology can work and under what conditions it can be considered not to work. So, we will consider apologies from the test conditions (i) – (xiv) below.

- (i) An apology involves a relationship. In the relationship there are often three parties. First, there is the offender who has harmed the relationship and

someone in it. Second, there is the offended person who has been harmed by the offender in the relationship. Third, and just as important as the other two, there is the group, public, society or government (who represents the society or public) who is complicit in the failed relationship or functions as the offender or the offended. A group's responsibility may be negative in that it failed to do something when it was in a position of power to do something positive to either prevent harm or not encourage it occurring. In this case, "mind your own business" does not apply since a group is the individual's business. For example, the person who is an active witness to a racial slur and doesn't express repulsion is a negative, contributing party to the slur and the group's acceptance of it as a possible precedent-forming norm. No one is let off the hook by doing nothing, simply standing by passively.<sup>9</sup>

- (ii) The goal of public apologies is to retrospectively recognize and appropriately react to wrongs in the past, wrongs with consequences for current and future relationships (Sterba, 2013, pp. 5-6). The wrong is big enough for a public apology, recognizing the public's responsibility (Becker & Becker, 1992, p. 1049).
- (iii) It is ethically better, because of its truth revealing aspect, to admit mistakes and take responsibility for them rather than to deny the mistake, try to cover up the mistake, transfer responsibility to someone else for the mistake, or to avoid the situation as a mistake altogether. As the social existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre (1956) pointed out, to avoid making a decision is actually to make a decision for which one is ethically responsible.

- (iv) The function of a public apology is to recognize and implicate the public from one generational period of a collective in the group responsibility for the wrongs committed by past or previous generations of the same collective. The public is important as a public witness to the apology as an act of genuine contrition. The witness in one generation provides testimony for the next generation in the court of public scrutiny.<sup>10</sup> The public is an important part of the accountability process. A private apology just does not have the same effect on the relationship and the offender/offended as a public one. One could make a private apology but the judgment of public recognition (Becker & Becker, 1992, p. 1045) is important in the case of many apologies. A political leader or statesperson who represents, in his or her person, the collective must act to change the moral compass of individuals in similar positions in the state, as well as the state itself and not just his unique or particular situation in it, moving it away from the disposition or tendency to produce the wrong or wrongs. Similarly we know that the CEO of a company is held accountable for a company's failed policies or failed implementations of policies while she is in a position of authority in the company (Goodpaster, 2007). The buck stops at the top, so we expect an apology from the Prime Minister, the CEO or some similarly situated individual representative of a dominant group who has committed some wrong in the past. A public apology is recognition of one's public responsibility to correct a mistake. This change should not be temporary or expedient. Instead it should permanently transform a process, moving it away from one defective relationship and one set of outcomes, to a better one (Gough, 2000).

- (v) An appropriate reaction to wrongs in the past is to assign, accept and recognize one's responsibility for past wrongs done by the members of one collective (of which the apologizer is a continuing member) to the members of the offended collective. If, for example, I am a second, third or fourth generation member of a collective that has wronged another collective, then my position is not neutral. I have gained an advantage at the cost of others.<sup>11</sup> The political, ideological and sociological system in place will continue to advantage me no matter what minor compensations or costs I incur because of complicity with past wrongs. Doing nothing, when I could correct a situation, is still doing something by omission that could be wrong (Dolgoft, Harrington, & Loewenberg, 1988).
- (vi) The effect of a genuine public apology should be to transform the relationship in a way or ways that cause it to function better to achieve mutually agreed goals, between the two conflicting collectives. This should happen so that significant ethical and dispositional changes result, even if incremental and gradual, to both collectives in order to set out on a course or direction that should, if effective, avoid future wrongs to the relationship. To begin the process of transformation, someone needs to take the first step. Generally, the first step should be taken by the person with the most power to do the most good in rectifying the situation (Nietzsche, 1969a, pp. 572-574). To transform a relationship does not involve an appeal to general or universal standard practices or procedures, rules, codes or even formalized law-governed decisions. The first step in transformation involves empathy for the situation of the other. This is not pity. As Nietzsche (1969a) correctly pointed out, pity is a self-consuming and potentially self-destructive emotion,

whereas genuine empathy and sympathy are not destructive. In relational terms, pity (other than self-pity) retains control of the situation in the person who pities the other. At the same time, pity can weaken the person who is pitied by causing them to avoid the strength necessary to overcome their situation. Pity does not transform a relationship in a positive direction, but empathy combined with genuine sympathy for the situation of the other person can be positively transformative.

- (vii) The public apology should recognize the effects on the quality and character of the individuals involved when there is a misdistribution of burdens/wrongs and benefits/rights, so that the hearts and minds of the offenders and offended are changed. For example, the resentment of those harmed, the envy of those who lost at the expense of those who gained, the loss of self-esteem in the offended, all need to be remedied by a solution that is ongoing into the future. This is a matter of restoring and even re-creating the integrity of the individuals within the restored and re-created relationship. Only an apology that is perceived by all members of the relationship to be sincere, honest, and genuine can work to facilitate this rejuvenation of the relationship. A dishonest, insincere, or not genuine apology, one done for the sake of appearances ("to look good") or expediency ("it seems to work under current conditions") is not one that has real hope of success in achieving the necessary moral repair (Walker, 2006) of the failed relationship which it was intended to address and redress. It is commonplace to notice that "In long-term relationships anyway, very few people can in practice consistently act in a manner at odds with an attitude they really hold... sooner or later we can expect the attitude to show in the person's acts" (Harvey, 1999, p. 31).

#### **4. Significant Failures to Satisfy the Normative Conditions of an Apology**

- (viii) The goal of a public apology is not to excuse the current members of a collective from the acts committed by their ancestors. Many collective wrongs are intergenerational. Many people recognize their own identity in the identity and situation of their ancestors or predecessors (Malpas, 2000). The excuse, in this case, serves as a rationalization and not as a reason either for a public apology or for one which is not genuine. It displays evidence of a lack of integrity in its disrespect for those in the past, instead of creating a communication path where we engage in “constructing a dwelling place where we can know together and feel at home with others” (Hyde, 2012, p. 117). The parallel situation could involve the unacceptable rationalization of those who discriminate against those who are not fully aware of the harm. Women, for example, may have experienced discrimination in the workplace for centuries but not realized what was happening to them. It doesn’t follow that what happened to them was acceptable because of their failure to recognize it. The harm is not diminished if those harmed cannot fully know, appreciate and express the harm they experience at the hands of others—children or people who are significantly mentally disabled, for example, since this violates a known principle of rectification (Sterba, 2013, p. 151). An excuse is defined as: “A condition pertaining to an agent that precludes his or her blameworthiness for wrongful action”, and is not a justification. A justification, on the other hand, is “a circumstance that renders an action permissible even though it would have been impermissible in the absence of the circumstance”

(Becker & Becker, 1991, p. 344). It is important not to confuse one with the other (Austin, 1964). Finally, this opens up the question of whether the expression of regret for an action is an excuse or a justification. If the expression of regret is a condition pertaining to an agent that precludes his or her blameworthiness for wrongful action, then it functions as an excuse and not a justification. A public apology is not supposed to be the expression of an excuse, however, so if the function is to express regret, then the nature of an apology has not been satisfied. There is no necessity or even any sense that a relationship needs to be transformed or that guilt needs to be identified in the case of regret. We discuss this later at (ix) below.

- (ix) The goal of a public apology is not to moralize from a self-proclaimed morally superior current perspective on the primitive and uninformed inferior decisions and actions of a previous generation. The defective strategy of the moralizer seems to be to detour in a relativistic way from the responsibility of the informed generation to apologize for the previous generation’s actions (Coady, 2006). But this moralization is regressive and not transformative. To be transformative a relationship needs to grow and become more efficient in the recognition that all parties in the relationship need to expand their competencies to make autonomous decisions for themselves. For example, the mother and father need to become less protective and paternalistic of their offspring, as difficult as this is for them, in order to transform the relationship into one in which a parity of interest in fostering and advancing autonomy predominates over heteronomy (Gough, 1986). If the relationship is successfully transformed, there should be a trust and confidence in the new relationship from all participants in it,

with the security that any failures will be addressed in a way which continues the transformation process.

- (x) An inappropriate reaction is to consider one's reaction to wrong as needing a legalistic disclaimer to get oneself off the "legal hook." The process is informative to set the borders for what one can legally be accountable for and for what one is not legally responsible under the existing law. This may be to attempt an escape from one's ethical responsibility by hiding behind the limited conditions of one's legal responsibility.<sup>12</sup> The law often limits responsibility in ways that morality does not. For example, legally I may only be responsible for how I acted rather than what I intended, but morality may take both considerations into account in assessing my actions. The legal option is important but can't work to necessarily satisfy the moral responsibility. The reason why it can't work is that an informal relationship between collectives is not meaningfully governed by legal mandates. Legal entitlements are not identical to ethical ones (Becker & Becker, 1991, p. 690). I may legally, because of a contract, owe you compensation for your material losses but this does not necessarily cover the cost of a loss of your reputation, your sense of self-esteem or self-worth. The latter loss is ethically significant, despite any reductionist accounts' attempts to reduce all appropriate reaction to monetary compensation based on legal precedents and assigned material values. The recent public emphasis on apologies as opposed to legal compensation is an interesting development illustrating both the influence of feminist thinking in ethics about the importance of relationships and the importance of ethics as distinct from legality (Friedman & Bolte, 2007). So, an apology must correct for a situation, harm, an ongoing problem in a more

personal, involved way that is not mandated by the legal framework. The athlete who has harmed another player in a game relationship may follow the legal conditions of his or her contract with the other person but this will not be sufficient to remedy the disabled relationship or even perhaps compensate for non-material harms.

- (xi) An inappropriate reaction to a previous wrong in a relationship is to follow the dictates of expediency—to do what it takes to give the public impression that something has been mended, someone has been chastised, and someone has sought forgiveness in a contrite and modest way. This is an attempt to superficially improve the relationship in appearance only, perhaps to preserve one's reputation in the community, one's standing in society, and one's status in a position of authority. The athlete needs to recover from a blow to his or her well-crafted persona, a persona that has been the basis for creating wealth through product endorsements. Sometimes this takes the form of what has come to be called "the politically correct reaction," often denigrated as a superficial form of expediency designed to satisfy the self-interest of the perpetrator not the victim (Coady, 2006).
- (xii) An inappropriate reaction to wrongs in the past is to express simple regret for the wrongs having occurred with no recognition of the continuing influence of the past wrongs on both the offended and offending collective. This is a subjective, personal response to one's own situation and not a response to the situation of others. Simple regret could indicate that the person voicing the regret has (a) distanced himself (de Beauvoir, 1989, p. 118) from the problem or the situation, that is, failed to transcend the material conditions of his own situation in the present

or to accept any responsibility for something that went wrong; (b) failed to de-center from a focus on oneself to a wider vision, which is a failure to recognize oneself in the picture of the relationship that failed, failure to position oneself in a relationship with those in the past who contributed to an ongoing and cumulative wrong; and (c) put himself in the position of providing the grounding for a distancing excuse: it was an accident, it was relative to a different time, place, culture, degree of enlightenment/education or historical period. All of these strategies are connected in a strategy designed to distance oneself in an excuse or expression of regret, as noted earlier in our discussion at (v). That is, the strategy could go in the direction in which (b) may be a cognitive developmental failure which precipitates (a) and finally (c). Alternatively, it could proceed from a failure to imagine or conceive of any situation significantly and relevantly different from one's own in (a), to (b) failure to escape the central focus on oneself as the source of all values that matter, culminating in the search for some way of bringing about (c) an excuse to escape any blame and hence any responsibility (Austin, 1964). The search in (c) for an excuse may be due to the failure to focus on the wider picture or scope of the implications and issues involved in the situation and one's place in it (b) and may create the distancing problem in (a). The failure in (a) is a failure to understand the systemic nature of the wrong committed, a wrong which often is built into a system which supports further wrongs of the same or similar kinds. That is, no amount of distancing oneself can work to eliminate the idea that reciprocity inheres in trans-generational relationships (Sterba, 2013, p. 151) as much as it does in current negotiations. The failure in (b)

is a failure of reflective consciousness, when an individual fails to recognize that decisions take place and are influenced by context, context which both frames decisions and is re-framed by them. As one social worker aptly puts it: "The willingness to learn and ponder these issues, the decision to accept our Codes as the important part of decisions, the ability to self-reflect on our motivations and biases, our honesty, and our propensity to know when we need assistance all involves the type of person we are" (Meacham, 2007). The wider the individual believes the context of involvement to be, the better the individual has de-centered (Cooper, 2004). The narrower the individual believes the context of involvement to be, the more the individual needs to enhance his or her focus, widen his participation in the world in his relationship with others.<sup>13</sup>

- (xiii) An inappropriate reaction to the wrongs of the past is to assign a motive to the past wrong which is implicitly denied (but not argued) as part of the consciousness of the current version of the collective in the position to produce a genuinely reformatory apology. First, motives are difficult to assign independently of overt normative behavior. Second, if motives are interpreted based on behavior then there is significant room for error or, at least, different variations in interpretation. Third, the assigner of the motive may himself or herself have a motive for assigning a particular motive and not some other (Appiah, 2005, p. 235). So, if I already don't believe you, then in a particularly biased way, I have a motive to assign a motive of deceit to you (Curtler, 2004, pp. 71-73). Fourth, if motives are important then they are so because they are connected as an intention to an action, a decision to an outcome, or a cause to an effect. Only if overt decision-based behavior can be changed are motives important

in the evaluation of the situation. Otherwise they are irrelevant, especially if they function as no more than subjective speculation.

- (xiv) The public apology should not be used in place of reparations or compensation for wrongs to minimize current unfair advantages in material conditions (Harvey, 1999, p. 132). One cannot be a substitute or replacement for the other. A misdistribution of material advantages is not the only consideration in whether or not an injustice has occurred. For example, a major power-producing company in Canada wanted to expand its water-generating facilities adjacent to an Aboriginal reserve. It kept making higher and higher monetary offers all of which were rejected by the elders of the Nation. In other contexts, we could hear people say “offer me enough money and I would sell anything I own” but clearly not here. What was wrong? The adjacent property was part of an ancient burial ground of this people. It was their connection—metaphysical or spiritual and material—to their ancestors, their living history, their people, and their “selves” that formed a “fundamentally social organization of the integrated natural and preternatural worlds” (Callcott & Nelson, 2004). The question was: What would you take to sell yourself, transform yourself into a piece of property for the use of another? When the power company realized that this question was clearly outrageous, a blockage in communication was removed. Material re-distribution wasn't the issue but rather self-identity of individuals as members of a people was the issue. At this point, the discussion changed focus between the two parties. The relationship was not one that could be subsumed under the categories of reparation or compensation by the first peoples, although that was the relationship the power company mistakenly had in mind. This completely mistaken

understanding may be due to lack of any attempt at understanding on the part of the company, so the first peoples clearly deserved an apology since the ethical implications of this mistake were clearly serious and compromised a full appreciation of the “place” this was for the Aboriginal people (Malpas, 2000).

## **5. How to Test a Public Apology for Ethical Acceptability**

A genuine public apology should contain evidence of (i)—>(vii), with unacceptable public apologies satisfying a significant set of the possibilities outlined in (viii) —>(xiv). The significance or extent of the ethical failure can be measured in terms of the number of missed or met conditions from (i) —>(xiv) with minor failures only missing one or two of the conditions, at most, and more serious failures not measuring up to a majority of conditions spelled out from (i) —>(xiv). First we will briefly consider three public apologies found in the public domain in order to determine how they generally function within the framework of a genuine apology. Second, we test a CASW (2009) statement of a public acknowledgment, and some of the circumstances in which it occurred, to determine to what extent it fits into the framework of a genuine public apology. Finally, we suggest ways that the CASW (2009) statement could be improved to satisfy some of the minimal conditions of a genuine public apology. We present this challenge because “in institutions where information is given, decisions are explained, comments are invited, dissent is expressed, protests are not blocked, and mistakes are rectified... this allows for misunderstandings to be corrected early, and for genuine oversights to be amended” and because “within institutions far more harms and injustices occur because of a lack of awareness and understanding than through malice” (Harvey, 1999, p. 128).

The first example is from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (2004). “In a speech delivered during the signing of the Public Safety Protocol

between the Assembly of First Nations and the RCMP, the RCMP's Commissioner apologized to Canada's Aboriginal people for the RCMP's involvement in the Indian Residential School legacy, May 2004." It is significant that the RCMP sometimes, like social workers, is charged with carrying out a policy that was not their decision. (Numbers in brackets have been added for clarity of later analysis.)

Many Aboriginal people have found the courage to step outside of that legacy of this terrible chapter in Canadian history to share their stories. [1] You heard one of those stories today. To those of you who suffered tragedies at residential schools we are very sorry for your experience. [2] Healing has begun in many communities as you heard today, a testament that is a testament to the strength and tenacity of aboriginal people and aboriginal communities. [3]

Canadians can never forget what happened and they never should. [4] The RCMP is optimistic that we can all work together to learn from this residential school system experience and ensure that it never happens again. [5]

The RCMP is committed to working with Aboriginal people to continue the healing process. Your communities deserve better choices and better chances. [6] Knowing the past, we must all turn to the future and build a brighter future for all our children. [7]

We, I, as the Commissioner of the RCMP, am truly sorry for what role we played in the residential school system and the abuse that took place in that system. [8]

Notice that there is an attempt to bridge the gap of time, not use the past as an excuse for

the present or even future, and an expression of the continuity of a process of "healing" (3, 6) for a better future in the relationship (7). As well, there is a recognition that the wrong committed was serious yet the oppressed demonstrated "tenacity, strength and courage" (3), and a recognition that the harm suffered was undeserved and continues across temporal borders affecting "the future of all our children" (7). Taken at face value, this public apology expresses recognition of what happened, without any excuses, and a commitment to change the relationship over time.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Apology for Residential Schools (Parliament, 2008) contains the following statements among others (numbered for convenience of analysis):

I stand before you today to offer an apology to former students of Indian residential schools. [1] The treatment of children in these schools is a sad chapter in our history. [2]

Today, we recognize that this policy of assimilation was wrong, has caused great harm, and has no place in our country. [3]

The government now recognizes that the consequences of the Indian residential schools policy were profoundly negative and that this policy has had a lasting and damaging impact on aboriginal culture, heritage and language. [4]

While some former students have spoken positively about their experiences at residential schools, these stories are far overshadowed by tragic accounts of the emotional, physical and sexual abuse and neglect of helpless children, and their separation from powerless families and communities. [5]

Again, there is no overt attempt to "sugar coat" or offer superficial excuses for the failed relationship but a clear statement of an undeserved

wrong (3), although—obviously—the fact that it was lately recognized as a wrong doesn't simply make it wrong now and not then. Just the opposite is the case. For the oppression to be wrong it doesn't have to be recognized as such by the perpetrator, which would be a ridiculous relativist claim.<sup>14</sup> There is a clear recognition of the government's responsibility both then and now to change their relationships with the oppressed people as indicated in the list of specific harms for which it is directly responsible (5). The power imbalance is noticed as significant (powerless families, 5) and the significance of this damage for future relationships is made clear (Feinberg, 1974).

Prime Minister Harper's statement was followed by a statement from Liberal Party Leader Stephane Dion (Parliament, 2008), who echoed the Prime Minister's statements and added some emphasis of his own.

Today's apology is about a past that should have been completely different. [1] But it must be also about the future. [2] It must be about collective reconciliation and fundamental changes. [3]

It must be about moving forward together, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, into a future based on respect. [4] It is about trying to find in each of us some of the immense courage that we see in the eyes of those who have survived. [5]

Dion uses the now familiar phrase of "reconciliation" (3) which has become commonplace as a result of the success of the "truth and reconciliation commission" struck after the fall of South African Apartheid and which is a benchmark for the transformation of relationships. You can bring about a successful reconciliation in a relationship not by the use of compensation but only by the use of an apology or something that functions like an apology. Some Aboriginal thinkers on this issue state we should be calling it conciliation as we cannot have re-conciliation, since there has not been a historical conciliatory relationship to start with or to return to or recreate. It would be a fresh

relationship and a first one that is based on equality.<sup>15</sup> Similarly Dion stresses shared responsibility (4) for this transformation and repeats the courage of the oppressed (5). All three of these apologies could be improved but all of them seem to fit somewhat into an attempt to satisfy the framework conditions of a genuine public apology, as we outlined in (i)–(viii), and to avoid most of the faults we identified in (ix)–(xiv), above.

Now it will be useful to compare and contrast these three public apologies for the same ongoing relationship failure to the apology offered by social work associations, who represent both social workers and the ethical values of the social work profession. The statements (ACSW, 2009) were offered at the Conference of the Alberta College of Social Workers on March 26, 2009, by CASW President Veronica Marsman and ACSW Vice-President Bob Johnson. In this case, by comparing it with the conditions of an acceptable apology, we find some serious ethical problems with the CASW public apology, the circumstances in which it occurred, and the unfortunate message it seems to have implied.

- (a) The statement claims that the President of the Canadian Association of Social Workers "acknowledges" the wrong committed by social work practitioners in the past and the president says "today we express deep regret for these actions," which is mirrored by the ACSW vice-president's assertion that "We truly regret events that undermined your community and culture." If these statements are to constitute an appropriate apology to morally repair a failed relationship, then we should find evidence to support this claim or else evidence to indicate the contrary. Notice that "acknowledging" does not have the same ethical implication as "accepting responsibility for changing the negative impact of...," in this or any other public context, since only the latter identifies how the role of social workers compromised their situation as professionals, particularly professionals who should be helping the disadvantaged.

The forceful expression of “regret” fails to forge any path to a new relationship of conciliation by demonstrating that the process that contributed to the first wrong will never be employed to produce another wrong at a later date.

- (b) In the third paragraph of the statement there is an attempt by the person making the apology to distance or disassociate herself from the situation for which she issues an apology. This has the negative effects of (i) negating the effect of the apology, and (ii) making the transformation of the relationship in need of repair not the issue to be addressed. The distancing happens because the cause of the failure to which the apology is addressed is described as a historically distant “mindset” such that: “the residential schools were indicative of a larger colonial mindset that viewed Aboriginal culture and beliefs as inferior.<sup>16</sup> The colonial mindset supported a vast array of actions that continue to have a negative impact on individual Aboriginal People and their communities across the country.” However, this is a red herring diversion (Michalos, 1970, p. 67) away from the actual cause—which continues to the present day—which is that one group retains a sense of superiority over another, creating a relationship in which one sees itself as empowered over another. Unfortunately, this unequal relationship remains today despite the demise of any colonial mindset, which suggests the mindset was not the primary cause nor the singular cause but a contributing cause or else the effect of the primary cause (Michalos, 1970, p. 108). Therefore the so-called apology fails to address the actual cause of the failure of the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples (Boyd, 2003, p. 151).
- (c) In the fourth paragraph, there is an acknowledgement of a failure, satisfying

condition (x) of an apology, then an expression of regret, violating conditions (viii) and (ix) of an apology by focusing on the reaction of the person making the apology: “today we express deep regret for those actions”. This is an interesting response, along the lines of Nietzsche’s idea that he, who names himself, owns his place in history (Nietzsche, 1969b, p. 361). But this particular naming of oneself is one which again distances the individual from the actions by expressing her individual reaction, emotion or response. In itself, this is irrelevant to transforming a defective relationship. This ownership relationship is defective because the blame is transferred from me to impersonal history, when I am indeed implicated as much as any historical figure—there but for the grace of god(s) go I—since, it is questionably claimed, my historical situation is not determined by me but by impersonal fate or forces beyond my control.

In the fifth paragraph, there is a vague and indeterminate recognition as a means to learn from mistakes in the past not to repeat them in the future: “Although we cannot change the past we can recognize the lessons learned from it and we can prepare for the future. As we consider what has occurred over the last century we must learn from the past to ensure the negative practices are not repeated in the future.” For example, what are the “negative practices” that should not be repeated in the future? The promise for the future is too vague to constitute a program or a process for which anyone could be held accountable or responsible for implementing and achieving success. There is no indication that a relationship will be repaired or transformed, who will take responsibility for this transformation, what specifics will occur to remedy the failed relationship, and so on. “[W]e cannot change the past” sounds like an excuse based on the accidents of the past infecting the situation of the present, beyond our control and intentional will to do otherwise. But in one sense this is just

false. We can change the past because of what we do in the present. That is, we can change the present population's understanding of the past in their present so that it is only after we have "understood the story of the other" that we "will discover to what extent" we "are truly prepared to understand the other side" and thus make necessary changes to our "own stories" (MacMillan, 2008, p. 151).

The fifth paragraph also states "The historical treatment of Canadian Aboriginal Peoples reflects both social justice and human rights concerns. Many Aboriginal children, families and Aboriginal communities continue to suffer." Clearly, the suffering of these communities will continue because this statement recognizes that something took place in the past but not that it continues to take place in the present. There is no reaching out to the present population to engage them in a collaborative process of decision making to transform a defective relationship into one that doesn't fail. It sounds like some isolated historical practices were the problem and that if these practices are not repeated in the future, then the situation will be remedied.

(d) The attempt in the sixth paragraph to find redemption for a failed relationship in a present day Social Work Code of Ethics "that is founded upon the values and principles of social justice and human rights" is a superficial assertion of the superiority of the present over the inferior past, a rationalization of the enlightened present over the repugnant past. This is a failed attempt to overcome a failed relationship and replace it with one that works. The suggestion that the relationship which has failed because of a "colonial mindset" will be corrected by a return to a colonial mindset rooted in the 16th to 19th century European notion that justice could be remedied by an appeal to human rights is inconsistent. The European colonial mindset was and continues to be consumed by a documented human rights solution (Constitutions, Charters, Agreements) (Gough, 1986) while the Aboriginal culture has suffered as

much by this application of the colonial mindset as by any other. This is a sad reminder of the continuation of significant differences in mindset between two cultures and a continuation of the same mindset in the dominant culture. As MacMillan puts it: "If you do not know the history of another people, you will not understand their values, their fears, and their hopes or how they are likely to react to something you do" and "there is another way of getting things wrong and that is to assume that other peoples are just like you" (MacMillan, 2008, p. 159). In paragraph six, there is a stark reminder of the failure to address the failed relationship between cultures with the claim that: "Today our professional standards have moved social work beyond the colonial mindset of a hundred years ago." There has been no movement beyond this mindset but rather an extension of the moral community protected by this mindset to Aboriginal peoples, who do not share this mindset. Aboriginal peoples may have become persons within this group but the relationship failures remain.

(e) In paragraph seven, there is a faint recognition that the apology should address moral repair of a relationship in the claim that "much pain continues to exist and...much work still needs to take place to heal the damage that was done" but no recognition that an appeal to procedures designed to impartially and dispassionately regulate relations between strangers (CASW Code, 2005a) will never transform a non-caring or unconcerned relationship into a caring and concerned relationship. If something needs to be healed, then the application of a code of ethics will not do the healing (Curtler, 2004, p. 56). It is not a balm. If a relationship, metaphorically, needs healing because it has produced pain then no appeal to judicial or legal process can accomplish that. The litigation process

is impersonal and not about healing. It can only provide material compensation if one's rights are violated. It cannot heal. The victim is often left to heal him or herself. So, the problem is identified, but the solution or means to rectify it, will do nothing but fail again. What needs to happen is the transformation of a (distancing or detached) relationship into a (personal) relationship of trust and confidence in the dignity and integrity of different peoples, with different histories and an expressed openness to different "mindsets" (Maalouf, 2000, p. 145).

- (f) In terms of its position, as much as possible, a genuine apology should be "from the heart" and so not contain any superficial use of clichés and phrasing couched in meaningless words for the sake of impressing an audience, but rather express a sincerely felt emotion of regret, sorrow, reconciliation and remorse for those adversely affected in a relationship. Psychologists have identified the essential relationship between emotion and rational decision making, rejecting the rational/emotional split of some traditional philosophies and their attendant ethics (Goleman, 1995, pp. 27–29). We can speculate that the emphasis on phrasing may be an attempt to anticipate possible litigation and to frame the story in acceptably defensible legal terms. This may be the difference between demonstration and argumentation, where it is not the argument that should lead the way to a resolution but the act, actions or demonstration (Tindale, 1999, pp. 38-39).
- (g) Finally, in paragraph seven, the process of change is identified as "an evolution of the Social Work profession," which is hardly enlightening. An evolution is a process of gradual change brought about in a non-deliberative way, involving no prior design or intelligent planning, involving an adaptation of an organization to changing

environmental conditions. This is simply too vague and indeterminate. In order to be able to change a relationship it is necessary to set goals, identify deliberate means and provide guidelines for achievements in the growth of a plan to identify when completion dates have occurred. The apology needs to identify what will constitute redemption, a process of transforming a relationship from one that is failing to one that is achieving its goals, satisfying the interests of those involved in the relationship (Nobles, 2008). A commitment to "learn from the past and work towards a just society" while "moving forward together on a path into the next century" lacks direction for the movement, lacks the intention to identify the means or process that will facilitate change in the character of the relationship to the benefit of the integrity of those involved in it. As one writer puts it, "Examining the past honestly, whether that is painful for some people or not, is the only way for societies to become mature and to build bridges to others" (MacMillan, 2008, p. 150) so that "public acts where the past is admitted can help to heal wounds" (MacMillan, 2008, p. 151) between peoples. Abuse and disrespect will need to be changed to concern, caring and a sense of integrity in the relationship and the partners to it.

## **6. One Mindset Relationship to Another: Significant Mistranslations of Process**

When an apology is addressed by one group to another, there needs to be an understanding of what will work as a means to achieve the necessary moral repair of the relationship (Walker, 2006) or renegotiation of the relationship. The CASW statement of a public apology was an ACKNOWLEDGEMENT only, and given only to the Social Workers in attendance, and a few invited guests. This is significantly very unlike the apologies issued by Prime Minister Harper, Liberal leader Stephane Dion, or the Commissioner of

the RCMP. It was not given publicly in the presence of widely invited Indigenous persons and representatives of their groups. What interested us was the context and circumstances of the apology, which provide insight into the meaning that was conveyed by it. It seemed to be the intention of the ACSW organizers to have the “honored guests”—the elder and national/provincial representative persons—enter alone without a procession or grand entry, a significant demonstration of disrespect. In essence, this, to us, was another example of non-consultation, and non-understanding or wishing to understand protocol by ACSW and CASW, which they may not have understood to be of significant importance. No relationship involving two people or two cultures can be repaired by one member of the relationship without the genuine attempt to involve and take direction from the second member in the process. So, for example, often an apology is made by the dominant powerful group to the less powerful group but without negotiation between these two the powerful group continues to control the nature, consequences and perception of the apology. “You should forgive me because I apologized to you” says the harmer to the harmed. The harmed, who has never been a part of the process, justifiably continues to feel oppressed and under the control and power of the apologetic harmer. Why? This may happen because the power relationship has not changed. The situation of members in the relationship has not structurally changed (de Beauvoir, 1969). The harmed individuals’ subservient position in the relationship has not changed. This is similar to the case of the indigenous people but there are some significant differences.

There is a difference between a market based society (MBS) composed of individuals that McPherson (1965) called possessive individualists engaged in what social commentator and economic historian Veblen (1973) called conspicuous consumption, and an Indigenous community (IC) where there is a connection between members of the community, the natural world inhabited by members of the community, and so-called previous generations in a cycle of life that is not divided

into sequential or durational time slices (past-present-future) (LaDuke, 1992). The relationships between individual members in MBS are defined as between strangers negotiating for personal advantage with cooperation being something that needs to be negotiated—for personal advantage. The relationships between individual members in IC involve a personal recognition of identity integration of the individual member with the generations that precede the current membership and the generations which follow the current membership in an integrated relationship with the growth and integrity of the natural world. It is possible for members of IC to become members of MBS but it seems more difficult—because of the depth of natural integration—to identify them with IC. Any interconnected relationship between members of IC and MBS will be difficult to manage and negotiate since what constitutes the integrity of MBS is significantly different from members of IC. So, any apology to members of IC by members of MBS will need to involve a genuine expression of tolerance for difference and recognition of the significance of the differences in order to negotiate a repair of the relationship as a result of the apology. Without waxing too political, it was this difference that Karl Marx identified between the community of the family and the structure of capitalist relationships between consenting adults.

Mutual recognition and acceptance of the apology will require that action follows the voicing of a redemptive attempt to identify change. Without any action to carry out the proposal of change, then the apology and the lack of effects based on it will inevitably raise charges of hypocrisy.<sup>17</sup>

The first step in a genuine apology is to courageously, in a position of moral integrity, break the silence. The second equally important, if not more important, step is to bring about change in the relationship. In this genuine process there should be the recognition of a wrong, since otherwise the voice creates false hope, makes the relationship worse, by not instilling trust and fosters a significant ethical gap between claim and action or real change (Austin, 1962). While the intent of the CASW and the hosting organization

for the acknowledgement, the Alberta College of Social Workers (ACSW) is not examined, nor impugned here, the conditions for a transformative and morally repairing apology were not met. Two conditions for a more successful apology, and subsequent action (in the form of policy and practices) to begin a conciliation with Aboriginal peoples and Nations harmed by social workers and social work processes and practices, are: 1. A fundamental shift in attitude, leading to, 2. The creation of the disposition to allow for the skills to produce transformational words and actions that in turn may produce conciliation with all our Nations and peoples. This is the start of a change in mindset.

## **7. Conclusion and Recommendations**

The public apology contains an implicit ethical imperative. It is a performative utterance, like saying “I will” in response to the swearing of an oath to faithfully discharge an obligation (Austin, 1962), that functions contractually as a promissory note to bind the promise maker to the full satisfaction of the conditions of the promise. The use of this performative utterance creates a special ethical relationship of a self-created set of ethical obligations or duties. The ethical commitments of the promise maker are voluntarily incurred. The acceptance of the apology to create a conditional relationship of conciliation<sup>18</sup> indicates that something needs to be accomplished. The process of the apology is not finished with the uttering of the words. Something must be performed by the promise maker, and the performance needs to be evaluated by the promise recipient and the promised obligations discharged. Ethical expectations are raised in this special relationship, expectations which need to be realized to complete the process of the apology. So, this suggests the following critically considered recommendations:

1. There should be a mandatory period of time in which the promise maker and promise recipient meet to re-evaluate their special relationship, in particular to determine what—if anything ethically significant—has changed in this relationship. A promise kept is ethically

bona fide but a promise not kept is significantly wrong because of the unrealized expectations created in the promise. Society is not a bystander to this process. We are all a witness and an active supporter of it otherwise the public notion of the apology and its effects may be lost. We are the witnesses who are crucial chroniclers of our history, tellers of our stories and narratives.

2. The character of the relationship and the apologizer must not just change but be publicly seen to change for the better of the relationship with the person or persons to whom the promise is directed. Backsliding is not an option for it would ultimately destroy the trust and confidence in public apologies, rendering them useless and false.<sup>19</sup> So, a public demonstration of the efforts of the apologizer and redemption of the relationships will serve to close the gap of intention to action, reconciling good intentions with good actions. The public apology needs to be followed up, in a reasonable length of time, with a joint announcement on the part of the two parties as to what has been accomplished in their changed relationship: what actions have taken place to redeem the situation of the offended by the offender. Only if this happens can the offender reasonably expect forgiveness in the transformation of the relationship. This public disclosure is cathartic but also redemptive, bringing about some transformation in the act itself (Harvey, 1999, p. 139).
3. There must be a feedback loop or reciprocity (Becker & Becker, 1992, pp. 1075-1077). The seductive disinterestedness of time cannot be allowed to lull us into complacency. There must be some evidence that the dignity and respect shown those who received the apology has been institutionalized, situated within a wide social context, embedded in a different set of practices towards the offended group by opening

up more opportunities for them to express their cultural heritage, unique social contributions, and important place in the social matrix. Again, because this is a public apology, the public through education programs needs to know that the mistakes of the past will not and cannot be repeated, renewing the place of those disenfranchised in the social mix. It strikes us as no surprise to see the rise of the “Idle-No-More” movement in light of the Canadian federal government’s inaction on a range of Aboriginal issues, including following through on the conditions of prior public apologies.<sup>20</sup> Conversely, the tactic of implicit support offered by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (through non-intervention in the peaceful protests, to date) goes some ways towards affirming the conditions of their apology. Finally, the Alberta College of Social Workers (2013) recently issued a press release which passively supports the movement, which we take as a sign of ongoing interest, attention, and ultimately, hope.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> See Gough (1986) for an argument grounding human rights in the natural and necessary dignity and respect that should be accorded all human beings.

<sup>2</sup> An ethically and politically questionable, non-genuine use of an apology was disclosed in a strategy document produced by the office of British Columbia Premier Christy Clark, in which apologies to ethnic groups in the province for past wrongs would be used to gain their political votes in the next provincial election. This caused the resignation of one assistant and caused some in her own party to call for her resignation for this backfired political mistake; Clark apologized publicly for the plan to use apologies politically (CBC News 2013).

<sup>3</sup> The expression of regret, sincere or not, may simply be a self-serving way of the beneficiary of oppression attempting to diminish his or her unwanted feeling of guilt, while not being sincerely concerned with rectifying the offensive situation and defective relationship that spawned it.

<sup>4</sup> Prime Minister Harper's government in Canada was criticized during a period from December 2012 to February 2013 by the "Idle-No-More" social movement of aboriginal peoples for not changing the government's relationships with aboriginal peoples after the 2008 public apology, which made that commitment explicit and created the expectation of significant change.

<sup>5</sup> This precedent condition is based on the principle of logical consistency and social equality; namely, treat like cases alike, unless there is some significantly relevant ethical reason to override this principle of fairness and logical equity and not to treat them equally.

<sup>6</sup> This trade-off strategy between possible harms is based on the negative utilitarian theory expressed by John Stuart Mill, which tells us the right thing

to do is to decrease the maximum amount of harm when deciding what to do. However, this view faces a critical challenge called the inter-subjective utility comparison problem, which claims that each individual's pains and harms are unique to that person. So, how is it ever possible to compare qualitatively different subjective harms? This could make the strategy effectively unworkable. See Mill (1985).

<sup>7</sup> A look at the Canadian Association of Social Worker's Code of Ethics (2005a) and Guidelines for Ethical Practice (2005b) indicates that social workers still have an ethical and professional obligation to society to obey the laws of legally constituted governments, which illuminates an obvious inconsistency between protecting the interests of clients, harmed by these laws, and maintaining allegiance to these laws. This is a conflict that social workers need to confront in their practice.

<sup>8</sup> While social norms may be relative to place and context, ethical norms are not relative to time, circumstance, situation, or historical perspective—even though knowledge of these ethical norms is limited. We cannot argue this claim here, but a simple example should help. If it is wrong to discriminate against women because of their gender alone, then it has always been wrong to do so, despite differing social and political norms at different times in history or different places on the planet. The recognition of this wrong may vary, while the wrong remains invariant.

<sup>9</sup> This is a version of negative utilitarianism such that doing nothing can still bring about as much harm and the same quality of harm as deliberately doing something (Mill, 1985) and a version of Jean-Paul Sartre's claim that we cannot escape responsibility by doing nothing, when doing nothing itself has clearly understood consequences (Sartre, 1956).

<sup>10</sup> Witnessing is often overlooked but very important in ethical deliberations and decisions. The testimony of reliable witnesses has the force of an expert-based perspective and the force of personal experience along with the authority of someone who is willing to make his or her voice heard in the context of an ethical issue and decision. Witnesses who

make their voices heard in the context of professional ethics are often classified as “whistle blowers,” are protected in many legal statutes, and are important in identifying, confirming, and supporting ethical issues and culprits. Often social workers fulfill this role of a knowledgeable and informed witness, so it is important to recognize the significance of witnesses whose voices make a great difference in identifying and resolving ethical issues.

<sup>11</sup> This was, and some argue still is to a limited extent, the situation of white males in North American societies, whose status and opportunities in all parts of society were elevated unfairly, not by virtue of any special talents or abilities they possessed. This incurred a loss of advantage to non-whites and non-males, which can be measured in socially diverse areas such as politics, education, and a wide number of vocations. This unfair advantage to white males was built on systemic discrimination, which occasioned the controversial policy of reverse discrimination or affirmative action, in order to quickly elevate members of the disadvantaged groups to a position they would have achieved, in the numbers they would have achieved, had they not been subject to the loss of advantage. Young white males cry foul because they did not directly orchestrate or directly participate in this discrimination, but they did benefit unfairly from it.

<sup>12</sup> This is sometimes a strategy identified as legalism, which is the claim that the laws are always ethically correct, so—on ethical grounds—should always be obeyed absolutely. This overlooks the prior and more fundamental ethical obligations that underpin legal systems and statutes, an underpinning that may not be represented accurately in certain specific legal statutes. The law is fallible and the way to check that is against certain fundamental and prior ethical considerations.

<sup>13</sup> Duane Massing, Social Work Instructor Emeritus, Grant MacEwan University, Edmonton, Alberta, in personal correspondence with Elaine Spencer has called this the failure “to see the big picture” in particularizing ethical decision making. See Sterba (2013).

<sup>14</sup> It has often been recognized that men, as oppressors, blame women, the oppressed (sometimes called “blaming the victim”), for male sins and transgressions in religious and other contexts, which is a version of the “she asked for it” irrational response perpetuated in male and female conflicts for centuries.

<sup>15</sup> Personal conversation between Elaine Spencer and Jeanette Villeneuve of Blue Quills First Nations College, near St. Paul, Alberta.

<sup>16</sup> For accuracy and clarity, we should note that there is not one single Aboriginal culture or set of beliefs but rather an overlapping set that is based on distinctively different peoples, with different histories and traditions, who nonetheless share some overlapping constants and values.

<sup>17</sup> This is both a logical problem, when one acts inconsistently with one’s avowed intentions, and an ethical problem, when one hypocritically fails to act on what one espouses as the right thing to do, as the smoking mother tells her children not to smoke, while she continues to smoke.

<sup>18</sup> This is not a case of reconciliation because there is no reconstitution of something that has been originally agreed but rather an attempt to form an original agreement.

<sup>19</sup> In any strict sense, backsliding cannot be avoided; but this is precisely where we need the public to “pay attention” through its media and publicly ask pertinent questions. Backsliding is possible through tactics like: avoidance of any considerations of change, suppression of the opposing interpretation, counter persuasion to change the perception of the situation after the fact such that, in the case of the latter: “If counter persuasion is successful, the threat to the system is minimized. If unsuccessful, the establishment has still gained time and avoided any significant revision of establishment ideology and structure” (Bowers & Ochs, 1971, p. 41).

<sup>20</sup> Updates on any activities of the group “Idle-No-More” can often be found on the news website <http://www.rabble.ca>