

Attuning to God calling for a just future.

In July 2022, Pope Francis apologised to the Canadian Indigenous People. *"With shame and unambiguously, I humbly beg forgiveness for the evil committed by so many Christians against the Indigenous peoples,"* Pope Francis said. He added, *"I am here because the first step of my penitential pilgrimage among you is that of again asking forgiveness, of telling you once more that I am deeply sorry. Sorry for the ways in which, regrettably, many Christians supported the colonising mentality of the powers that oppressed the indigenous peoples. In the face of this deplorable evil, the Church kneels before God and implores forgiveness for the sins of her children."*

Historical Background.

A Papal Bull of 1493- *"The Doctrine of Discovery"* permitted colonisers a right to acquire territory, to trade and to preach Christianity to the natives whose territory they discovered.

Native American Indians were considered pagans and only given a right of occupancy in their own land.



How this fits into the tenets of faith in Jesus, is being questioned widely lately. What would Jesus have meant when he said, "Go to the ends of the world and proclaim the Good News"?

In *Laudato Si*, 143 we read, *"...there is a need to incorporate the history, culture and architecture of each place, thus preserving its original identity. Ecology, then, also involves protecting the cultural treasures of humanity in the broadest sense...."*

By 1883 residential schools were authorised to educate children who were separated from their families so *that they can be civilised.*

The intent of the colonisers and missionaries was to civilise the children, so that they become like themselves. The differences of spirituality, culture, language and lifestyles were neither learned or acknowledged. A knowing of the richness of Indigenous traditions wasn't sought and a dialogue for enriching intermingling was missing.

In May 2009, the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous People (I.P.)/Tribals sought for a study on the impact of the Doctrine of Discovery on the I.P. The study revealed a violation of Human Rights (HR) which was in time institutionalised in law and policy by governments at all levels.

Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which ran from 2008 to 2015, reported that Church run residential schools were *"a systematic, government-sponsored attempt to destroy Aboriginal cultures and languages and to assimilate Aboriginal peoples so that they no longer existed as distinct peoples."*

A report followed by the Canadian government stated that more than 6,000 children are estimated to have died because of the abuse by Church-run residential schools. The Commission had earlier sought an apology from the Church for its involvement in the torture of Indigenous children.

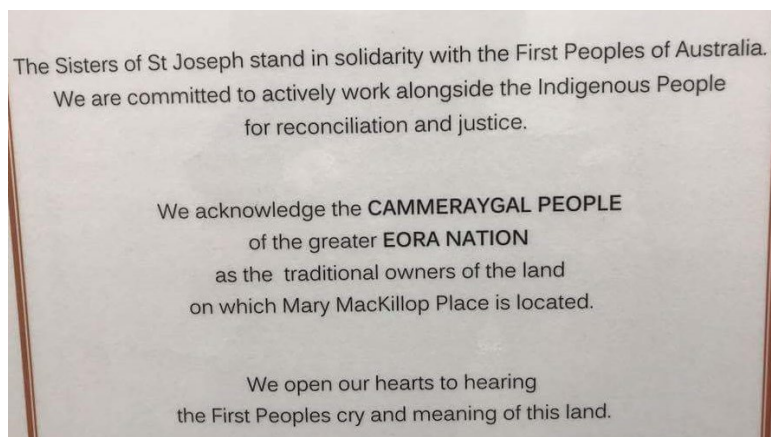
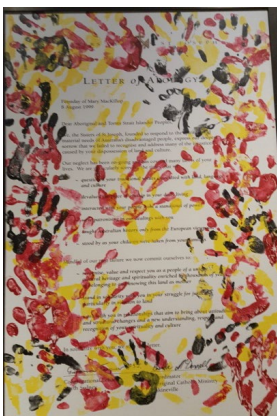
Nearly 139 residential schools which educated tribals had very poor health conditions. The schools were overcrowded and underfunded. Till September last year 2021, more than 1,300 unmarked graves were discovered on grounds where Church-run schools once stood. Children were abused physically and sexually; they were beaten, forced to practise Christianity and not allowed to speak their native languages.



In Veritas Splendor (7) Pope John Paul II upholds our search for truth...Referring to Mth 19: 16+ he writes, “In the young man, we can recognize every person who seeks wholeness, and the question is more about *the full meaning of life*.... This is in fact the aspiration at the heart of every human... the quiet searching and interior prompting which sets freedom in motion.”

The seventh IPA Assembly in Sydney had the opening ritual led by Aboriginals who enabled participants to experience a grounded Animistic Spirituality in song and dance.

In the living spaces of the convent occupied by Assembly participants, the Sisters of St. Joseph convent had plaques displaying the dignity with which the Aboriginal community was upheld .



PBVM communities in Australia express the dignity similarly, their respectful sensitivity was inspiring.

Sr. Marlette Black, PBVM, as IPA Networker from 2004 – 2013, always started her reflections with an acknowledgment to the First people of the land.

Issues of Indigenous People/Tribals is relevant in our local regions and continues to be a strong call of IPA. (*Directions of 7th IPA Assembly*)

Our mission to Indigenous/Tribal people across the globe, can be reviewed from a new lens. Understanding Pope Francis' apology and the historical background which led to it, can guide our reviews to be relevant in our mission. We can continue educating IP/Tribals desiring a modern development or carefully support a safeguarding of their rich heritage.

- How do we mingle with every I.P/Tribals and culture to whom we reach out?
- How do we incarnate the Word in their culture?
- How do we accept nourishment from our encounter with the God of our Call?
- How do we tap on their wisdom and spirituality which is deeply connected with Earth?

Wherever we run boarding schools, may need a clear and critical policy to review, which may need us to first learn the systems used before modernity crossed paths.

(Pictures taken at the St. Joseph's convent, Sydney)

Submitted by,

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