

ANALYSIS OF THE LANGUAGE OF RESPONSIBILITY:
SIX CHURCH APOLOGIES TO ABORIGINAL PEOPLE

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ABSTRACT

The Mandate of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission emphasizes that “the truth of our common experience is the road to freeing our spirits and paving the way to reconciliation.” Our study focused on whether or to what degree the texts of previous apology statements of the churches corresponded to the experiences of the Aboriginal people in Residential Schools. The language of a full apology does not simply express regret (“we are sorry”); it also describes and takes clear responsibility for the specific actions that required an apology. This project applied a linguistic analysis to the texts of six public apologies to Aboriginal people by four Canadian churches between 1986 and 1998. Our detailed textual analysis focused on whether, in these documents, the churches named themselves as the agents responsible for the abuses that they, their members, or staff committed in the Indian Residential Schools of Canada. In the six texts, we found only one sentence that explicitly took responsibility for a specific harmful action. We believe that this method of analyzing past apology texts may be useful for evaluating other, more recent statements.

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PART ONE: INTRODUCTION

The Mandate of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission begins with these premises:

The revelations of the abuses committed in the Indian Residential Schools of Canada created a compelling desire to put the past behind us so that we could work together towards a stronger and healthier future. The truth-telling and reconciliation process is part of the overall holistic and comprehensive response to this shameful period of the Canadian story. We see the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as a profound commitment to establishing a new relationship between the Aboriginal Peoples and those who came after them to this country. The truth of our common experience is the road to freeing our spirits and paving the way to reconciliation.

We understand that one of the many ways in which the TRC is pursuing this goal is through research (e.g., Responsibilities, 3a). During the hearings, survivors and their families have told the truth of their experiences in the Residential Schools. The purpose of our research was to determine what correspondence exists between their “revelations of abuses committed in the Indian Residential Schools of Canada” and the texts of apologies made by the churches that were in charge of those schools.

We are reporting here the results of the research that we proposed in our presentation to the Commissioners during the time for Expressions of Reconciliation in Victoria, B.C., on Saturday, April 14, 2012. The completed research project presented in this report was an interdisciplinary discourse analysis of archival material, namely, the texts of six public apologies that four churches made between 1986 and 1998.

It is important to emphasize what our specific goals were. We have written this report to the Commissioners, not to the churches. The primary goal was to assess whether or to what degree the language of the six statements clearly acknowledged these churches’ responsibility for the abuses in the schools they operated; that is, whether or not these statements themselves had been a step toward truth-telling. The secondary goal was to establish simple and objective criteria that could be useful for evaluating subsequent apologies or other statements of responsibility.

Finally, we are not suggesting how Aboriginal people should view the churches’ statements. The choice to accept or reject an apology is clearly an individual choice and not one that outsiders like us can have any insight into.

WHAT IS AN APOLOGY?

We start with the assumption that an apology is language. Actions that redress or compensate the victim may accompany or follow the apology, but the apology itself is a spoken or written act. Moreover, a full apology is the precise use of language that expresses both *regret* (e.g., “we are sorry”) and *responsibility* (e.g. “that we did this”).

It is this dual requirement that separates an apology from an expression of sympathy. A speaker can say he or she is “sorry” (or regrets) that something happened without being responsible for having done it. The distinction is clear in the common practice of equating a full apology with “taking responsibility for one’s actions.” For example, suppose that a driver struck a little girl who was riding her bicycle on the sidewalk. A neighbour can express sympathy by saying to the parents, “I’m so sorry your little girl was injured.” However, if the driver was making a full apology, he would not say “I’m so sorry your little girl was injured.” In order to clearly take responsibility for his actions, he would say, “I’m so sorry that I injured your little girl.”

Because most apologies include an expression of regret, our focus in this report is on the language of taking responsibility. The clearest and most direct language is to say explicitly “We take responsibility for,” “we are responsible for,” or an equivalent term such as “we are accountable for.” For example,

“We take responsibility for those who abused you or your children.”

Lacking this most direct expression of responsibility, there is an alternative form of language that also takes responsibility by (1) describing what someone *did* that required an apology and (2) naming the apologizer as the *agent* of these actions. In grammatical terms, the apologizer is the agent of a specific behavioural verb in active voice. For example,

“We are sorry that our members or staff abused you or your children.”

The verb “abused” is a specific behavioural verb in active voice; it describes what someone did. “Our members or staff” names the church or its representatives as the agent responsible for the action.

There are many ways to avoid the language of responsibility. The phrasing may avoid using a specific behavioural verb in active voice and instead use an indirect form that does not describe what the apologizer did; for example,

“We are sorry that inexcusable things happened.”

“Happened” does not describe anything that anyone did, and “inexcusable things” is vague, not specific.

“We are sorry that we were blind.”

“Were blind” describes a state of being, not any behaviour.

These are expressions of sympathy that do not describe anyone doing anything wrong.

The phrasing may also avoid naming the apologizer as the agent of the actions; for example,

“We are sorry that **such things happened.**”

“Things happened” does not name anyone who was responsible.

“We are sorry that **children were abused.**”

“Were abused” does not name the abusers.

Again, these are expressions of sympathy, but none of them acknowledges the church or its members or staff as the responsible agents.

Obviously, the full text of an apology often includes many other elements, such as a promise to act differently and an offer to reconcile or to remedy the effects of the harm the apologizer did. It is also common for the full text to include an explanation of why they did it, but it is crucial that this explanation does not obscure a description of what they did or their responsibility for what they did. Explanations and responsibility are two different issues.

WHY ARE FULL APOLOGIES DIFFICULT TO MAKE?

This section examines the context of a public apology, which turns out to be one full of many different obstacles. These barriers are particularly salient for the churches in relation to the Residential Schools, so they faced some difficult choices.

To apologize or not to apologize?

First, consider the choice of whether to make an apology at all, starting with the possibility of not doing so:

1. Openly refusing to apologize for having done wrong is likely to incur public disapproval and even be seen as compounding the wrongdoing. Imagine that, after a victim had called for an apology, a church remained silent or said publicly that it was not going to apologize.
2. The act of refusing would also violate the church’s own ethical and moral principles (e.g., repentance), as well as the principles of the individuals making the decision.
3. A refusal would insult or demean the individual victims, many of whom are still part of the church.
4. Refusing to apologize would utterly abandon the opportunity for reconciliation, making it clear that the church would not move towards healing.

However, having decided to make an apology, there are also several negative consequences to apologizing fully (i.e., naming the church as the agent responsible for doing specific harm):

5. The public admission of wrongdoing is always hard, especially when the acts are so difficult even to talk about, for example, removing children from their families, abusing them physically, psychologically, or sexually, and forcing assimilation.
6. A full apology acknowledges an ethical or moral failing, which is especially difficult for churches, which aspire to very high standards.
7. An apology implies abasing oneself before the offended party. The residential schools were (and churches still are) hierarchical. An apology reverses that status: The representatives of the churches must humble themselves before those over whose lives they once had virtually absolute power.
8. Legal advisors may have warned that acknowledging responsibility as part of a full apology means conceding liability. Therefore, the legal consequences of a full apology could involve considerable cost for the institution, whose officials are accountable for its financial status.
9. Those who committed the acts were not “the church” as a body and probably not the person making the apology. It would be easy to argue that current members should not apologize for things they did not do.

In short, to apologize fully risks several unwelcome effects, but refusing to apologize would have even worse consequences. In other words, the choice is between “a rock and a hard place.” The restorative sequence from apology to reconciliation turns out not to be a smooth path but one full of many obstacles. In all of the following, it is important to keep in mind that, in making apologies, the churches had to make hard choices about which path to take.

To apologize fully or not?

Given the many negative consequences of either refusing to apologize or making a full apology, it would be understandable to try to avoid both. There is an apparent third choice, which is to make an apology that falls short of being a full apology, that is,

a statement that includes the part of an apology that expresses sympathy or regret *without the part that accepts agency or responsibility.*

Although this choice is understandable, it is ultimately undesirable because it is not a full apology and risks many of the consequences of refusing to apologize. Most important, it does not take the essential step toward reconciliation, which is truth-telling.

Given the above analysis, it is possible to reconsider each of the difficulties, outlined above, that might follow from choosing to apologize fully. Are these obstacles to a full apology in fact insurmountable?

1. It is hard to publicly admit serious wrongdoing—but it is possible and even admirable.
2. For a church to admit ethical or moral failing is difficult—but again it is possible and even exemplary.
3. Churches are often ambivalent about their hierarchical status; they also admire humility.
4. The legal risks of an apology are often overstated and without precedent in Canadian law; there are also protected alternatives.
5. The apology need not say that either the individual making it or the current members are personally responsible for the actions of the past. Instead, they are taking responsibility as part of the collective and historical identity of their church. As one church pointed out, “we are the bearers of many blessings from our ancestors, and therefore we must also bear their burdens” (United Church, 1998).

Thus, a full apology, which faced these obstacles and accepted responsibility, would be admirable and even exemplary, and would open the way to reconciliation. This report’s analysis of the six texts focused on which choice each church made: Did they make a full apology that took responsibility for the harm they did or a partial apology that avoided taking responsibility?

PART TWO: METHOD OF ANALYSIS

The statements of apology

We analyzed the full text of six formal statements from four different churches, as presented on their websites:

- The United Church of Canada, 1986
- The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1991
- The Oblate Order of Mary Immaculate, 1991
- The Anglican Church of Canada, 1993
- The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1994
- The United Church of Canada, 1998

Preparing the texts for analysis

We put the texts into the six tables shown in Part Three. The first column of each table has the complete, verbatim text. Initially, each new paragraph in the original text started a new row in its table (#1, #2, #3, etc.).

Then, within each paragraph, we identified phrases (groups of words) that alluded to **something that someone who represented the church had done that harmed an aboriginal person or persons**. These phrases, which could range from one word to a clause or sentence, are in boldface in the first column. It is important to note that we did not decide what the churches should apologize for. Instead, we located the topics that each church chose to include in their statement.

If a paragraph had more than one phrase in boldface (i.e., more than one reference to something the church chose to include), we subdivided that paragraph into more rows. Thus, some paragraphs made no reference to any harmful actions and are therefore a single row in the table, while other paragraphs became several rows (#1a, #1b, #1c, etc.).

Our analysis focused on the details of each phrase in **boldface**, that is, each reference to a harmful action, although we always took into account everything in the row as well as in the preceding context.

The analysis criteria

We developed an analysis for identifying whether each phrase met the basic criteria for an apology that took responsibility for what they did. The middle columns (2, 3, and 4) show our decisions for each of the criteria. There were three main criteria.

Active voice. Column 2 shows whether or not the reference to what they did was a verb in active voice (e.g., “our members or staff *abused* you or your children”) and, if not, what alternative form the reference used. The five alternative forms below did not meet this criterion. For example,

- a verb in passive voice (e.g., “children *were abused*”)
- a linking verb (e.g., “there *was* abuse”)
- a verb in infinitive form (e.g., “attempted *to abuse*”)
- a noun or gerund (e.g., “instances of *abuse*” or “practices that bordered on *abusing*”)
- an adjective or adverb (e.g., “*abusive* acts” or “acted *abusively*”)

Behavioural verb. When there was a verb in active voice, the next decision was whether it was a behavioural verb as well (e.g., *abused*), that is, a verb that described someone doing or having done something. This decision is also in Column 2. The alternative form that did not meet this criterion was

- a “state” verb, that is, one that described an attitude, perception, feeling, or mental state instead of an overt behaviour (e.g., “we hoped” or “we believed”).

Agency. Column 3 records whether the phrase named the church (including its members or staff) as the grammatical *agent* of the active behavioural verb. The alternatives that did not meet this criterion included the following:

- naming others as the agent
- naming an abstract agent
- lacking an agent entirely

(Linking verbs and state verbs have a subject, but they do not name an agent of any action—because they do not describe an action.)

Additional analysis

In addition to the above grammatical features, we noticed and systematically recorded three other features that were relevant to a full apology.

Limitations or qualifications. Column 4 records aspects of the phrase that limited or qualified it as a statement of responsibility:

- *Minimization*; e.g., “played a role,” “some,” “sometimes,” “opportunity,” “instances,” “mistakes.”
- *Justification*; e.g., “naive,” “historical circumstances,” “confused,” “religious zeal,” “the system.”
- *Generalities*; e.g., “failures,” “damage,” “how we behaved,” “these things,” “negative aspects.”
- *Impersonal modifier*; e.g., “*the* schools” rather than “*our* schools.”

Finally, we also recorded two features that applied to the text as a whole:

Apologizing to whom. The summary for each text notes whether it directly addressed Aboriginal Peoples, survivors of the Residential Schools, or other appropriate groups or individuals, that is, whether it used second person or, instead, referred to them in third person.

Direct references to responsibility. The summary for each text also includes whether or not it used terms like “are responsible,” “take responsibility,” or “are accountable.”

PART THREE: ANALYSIS OF INDIVIDUAL APOLOGY TEXTS
(in chronological order)

THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA (1986)

In 1981, Alberta Billy told “the stunned members of the United Church Executive General Council” that “The United Church owes the Native peoples of Canada an apology for what you did to them in residential school.” (<http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/article/25-years-later%3A-the-united-church-of-canada%E2%80%99s-apology-to-aboriginal-peoples-47418>).

“In 1986 the Moderator apologized to First Nations peoples within the United Church for the times in which the church had linked acceptance of European culture and the corresponding suppression of First Nations cultures to the sharing of the gospel of Jesus Christ. (While there was no direct reference to residential schools in this apology, it is clear that the schools were an important part of the national policy of assimilation.)”
(<http://www.united-church.ca/aboriginal/relationships/apologies>)

Source of text: <http://www.united-church.ca/beliefs/policies/1986/a651>

<i>Full text and references to harm or harmful actions</i>	<i>The language of responsibility</i>		
	<i>Is the verb active and behavioural?</i>	<i>Is the agent the church, its members, or its staff?</i>	<i>Limitation or qualification?</i>
#1 “Long before my people journeyed to this land your people were here, and you received from your elders an understanding of creation, and of the Mystery that surrounds us all that was deep, and rich and to be treasured.”			
#2a “ We did not hear you when you shared your vision.”	No. “ Hear ” is a state verb, not behavioural.	No., State verbs do not describe an action with an agent.	“ Did not hear ” covers many possibilities: not noticing, not trying to understand, or refusing to listen.
#2b “In our zeal to tell you the good news of Jesus Christ we were closed to the value of your spirituality. ”	No. “ Were ” is a linking verb with a participle that describes a harmful state but does not describe anything they did.	No. Linking verbs do not describe an action with an agent.	Religious “zeal” is a justification.

THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA (1986) continued

<i>Full text and references to harm or harmful actions</i>	<i>The language of responsibility</i>		
	<i>Is the verb active and behavioural?</i>	<i>Is the agent the church, its members, or its staff?</i>	<i>Limitation or qualification?</i>
#3 “We confused western ways and culture with the depth and breadth and length and height of the gospel of Christ.”			“Confused” is a justification.
#4 “We imposed our civilization as a condition of accepting the Gospel.”	Yes: “imposed”	Yes: “We”	The harm they described was cultural and general with no specifics about how they imposed their civilization. Also, the extenuating motivation was the Gospel.
#5a “We tried to make you like us”	No. The harm that they did (i.e., “to make you like us”) is in the infinitive. The verb that is in active voice (“tried to”) qualifies what they did and limits its impact .	Yes: “We”	They only “tried” to do harm, with no description of the actions with which they “tried” nor of the extent to which they succeeded in “[making] you like us.”
#5b “and in doing so we helped to destroy the vision that made you what you were.”	No. As in #5a, the harmful act (“to destroy the vision that made you what you were”) is in the infinitive. The verb in active voice is “helped to.”	Yes: “We”	There is no description of their destructive actions nor of the extent to which their help did “destroy the vision.”
5c “As a result, you, and we, are poorer and the image of the Creator in us is twisted, blurred and we are not what we are meant by God to be.”	No. Linking verb (“are”)	No. Linking verbs do not describe an action with an agent.	“Poorer” is vague. The construction separates “you” and “we.” “We” are the ones whose image is twisted and not what God meant “us” to be.
#6 “We ask you to forgive us and to walk together with us in the spirit of Christ so that our peoples may be blessed and God's creation healed.”			This contradicts the above statements of respect for native spirituality. It invites aboriginal peoples to walk now “in the spirit of Christ” instead of in their own religious tradition, implying that only in this way would they be blessed and healed.

Summary

We divided the text into nine parts; six of these parts included phrases that alluded to what they did that required an apology. The topics of those phrases are listed below.

Only #4 used an active, behavioural verb with the church as the agent. However, this description was quite abstract and did not hint at what they did to Aboriginal Peoples when they “imposed our civilization.”

The text addressed “you” and “your people” directly. It asked for forgiveness but did not use the term “apologize” or an equivalent. The word “responsible” or an equivalent did not occur.

List of topics covered in all six statements of apology	Topics Included in the Statement of Apology by The United Church of Canada (1986)
Culture, religion, language, assimilation	“imposed our civilization” “tried to make you like us” “helped to destroy the vision that made you what you were”
Damage, pain, suffering	
Taking children, harming family or community	
The schools	
Physical, sexual, and/or sexual abuse; disciplinary practices	
Effects of their actions	
Insensitivity, not hearing	“did not hear you” “were closed to the value of your spirituality”
Unspecified	“you, and we, are poorer”
Specific	

THE CANADIAN CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS (1991)

On their website, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB) explains that “The Catholic community in Canada has a decentralized structure. Each Diocesan Bishop is autonomous in his diocese and, although relating to the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, is not accountable to it. Approximately 16 out of 70 Catholic dioceses in Canada were associated with the former Indian Residential Schools, in addition to about three dozen Catholic religious communities. Each diocese and religious community is corporately and legally responsible for its own actions. The Catholic Church as a whole in Canada was not associated with the Residential Schools, nor was the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops.”

(<http://www.cccb.ca/site/eng/component/content/article/257-indigenous-peoples/3207-catholic-statement-of-regret-on-the-former-residential-schools>) However, the CCCB, following a general meeting in Saskatoon in March, 1991, made the following “Catholic Statement of Regret on the Former Residential Schools.”

Source of text: http://www.cccb.ca/site/images/stories/pdf/apology_saskatoon.pdf

<i>Full text and references to harm or harmful actions</i>	<i>The language of responsibility</i>		
	<i>Is the verb behavioural and in active voice?</i>	<i>Is the agent the church, its members, or its staff?</i>	<i>Limitation or qualification?</i>
#1 “For two days we listened, discussed, struggled and prayed about our relationship with the aboriginal peoples in the context of Indian Residential Schools.”			
#2 “We identified and acknowledged the positive and negative aspects of the schools , began an analysis of the current situation and explored possibilities for a new relationship with the aboriginal peoples.”	No. The noun (“ aspects ”) is neutral, and the reference to harm they did is in an adjective (“ negative ”).	No. “ Negative aspects ” does not have an agent. (“We” is the agent of “identified and acknowledged.”)	“ Negative aspects ” is extremely vague and does not specify what they did. Also, its placement between “positive aspects” and “possibilities for a new relationship” attenuates the effect.
#3a “We are sorry and deeply regret the pain, suffering and alienation that so many experienced. ”	No. The nouns (“ pain, suffering and alienation ”) describe harmful effects but not what caused them.	No. “ Pain, suffering, alienation ” have no agent.	“ The pain ” (vs. “ <i>your pain</i> ”) distances it from those who experienced it.
#3b “We have heard their cries of distress, feel their anguish and want to be part of the healing process.”	No. The nouns (“ cries of distress ” and “ anguish ”) describe harmful effects but not what caused them.	No. Nouns are not behavioural verbs, so there is no agent. (“We” is the subject of “have heard” and “want to be, “ which are state verbs.)	The focus is on having (now) “ heard their cries, ” not on describing what had caused the “ distress ” and “ anguish. ”

THE CANADIAN CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS (1991) continued

<i>Full text and references to harm or harmful actions</i>	<i>The language of responsibility</i>		
	<i>Is the verb behavioural and in active voice?</i>	<i>Is the agent the church, its members, or its staff?</i>	<i>Limitation or qualification?</i>
#4 “We recognize that the negative experiences in the Residential Schools cannot be considered in isolation from the root causes of the indignities and injustices suffered by aboriginal peoples in our country.”	No. There is a neutral noun (“ experiences ”) with what they did implied in the adjective (“ negative ”).	No. The implicit agent is abstract (“root causes”). (“We” is the subject of “recognize,” a state verb.)	“ The negative experiences ” is distancing (vs. “ <i>your</i> negative experiences”). Also, because this statement consistently refers to aboriginal peoples in third person, it is not clear whose country is “our country.”
#5 “Therefore, we: pledge our solidarity with the aboriginal peoples in their pursuit of recognition of their basic human rights;”			
#6 “reiterate our respect for the dignity and value of their cultures and spiritualities and reaffirm the principle of inculturation;”			
#7 “will support aboriginal peoples in pressing governments at all levels to respond to their legitimate aspirations;”			This places blame on the government as an extenuating circumstance and places the church on the side of aboriginal peoples.
#8 “urge the federal government to assume its responsibility for its part in the Indian Residential Schools;”			Again, the responsibility is on the government.
#9 “urge our faith communities to become better informed and more involved in issues important to aboriginal peoples.” (Note: #5 – 9 were italicized in the original.)			

THE CANADIAN CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS (1991) continued

<i>Full text and references to harm or harmful actions</i>	<i>The language of responsibility</i>		
	<i>Is the verb behavioural and in active voice?</i>	<i>Is the agent the church, its members, or its staff?</i>	<i>Limitation or qualification?</i>
#10 “All dioceses in which Residential Schools were located and that are represented here agree to set up, in collaboration with aboriginal peoples, a process for disclosure, which respects confidentiality, and for healing of the wounds of any sexual abuse that occurred in Residential Schools. ”	No. “ Occurred ” means only that “ sexual abuse ” happened, not that someone did it.	No. There is no agent; “ sexual abuse ” simply “ occurred. ”	“ Any sexual abuse ” implies the possibility of little or no abuse (vs. “ <i>the</i> sexual abuse”).
#11 “We have considered the request by some for a federal public inquiry. While we are committed to uncovering the truth, we do not think that an inquiry of that nature is the best vehicle for healing. The dioceses preferred to commit themselves to establish local forums of dialogue and other avenues for listening that will bring together former students and their families and the religious, clergy and lay staff who were involved in the schools so that they may reflect on their experience and work together towards healing and reconciliation.”			

THE CANADIAN CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS (1991) continued

<i>Full text and references to harm or harmful actions</i>	<i>The language of responsibility</i>		
	<i>Is the verb behavioural and in active voice?</i>	<i>Is the agent the church, its members, or its staff?</i>	<i>Limitation or qualification?</i>
#12 “The group that assembled here this week is firmly committed to building a renewed relationship with the aboriginal peoples and is very aware that much work still remains to be done. We intend to meet again and have selected a Steering Committee for one year with the mandate to propose to the concerned Catholic bodies (CCCB, Religious Congregations) a mechanism to follow up, coordinate, network and plan with native leaders and our ecumenical partners.”			
#13 “As Church, we are sent by the Lord Jesus Christ to liberate humanity from all oppression, especially from sin and evil, (Evangelii Nuntiandi, No. 8), so that all may have life and have it more abundantly. (Jn. 10:10) Our gathering this week has been motivated by this basic mission.”			This emphasizes that their mission comes from an evangelistic Christian theology, a position that is inconsistent with #6, which reiterates their respect for the spiritualities of aboriginal peoples.

Summary

We divided the text into 14 parts; five of these parts included phrases that alluded to what they did that required an apology. The table below lists the topics of those phrases.

The analysis revealed that none of these phrases used an active, behavioural verb with the church as the agent.

This text did not address Aboriginal Peoples; it referred to them in third person. The word “responsibility” only occurred in #8, where it referred to the federal government’s responsibility.

List of topics covered in all six statements of apology	Topics Included in the Statement of Apology by The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (1991)
Culture, religion, language, assimilation	
Damage, pain, suffering	“the pain, suffering and alienation” “their cries of distress ... their anguish”
Taking children, harming family or community	
The schools	
Physical, sexual, and/or sexual abuse; disciplinary practices	“the wounds of any sexual abuse”
Effects of their actions	
Insensitivity, not hearing	
Unspecified	“negative aspects of the schools” “negative experiences”
Specific	

THE OBLATE ORDER OF MARY IMMACULATE (1991)

The Oblate Order of Mary Immaculate operated the majority (almost 75%) of the Indian Residential Schools in Canada and the vast majority of the schools under Catholic auspices.

“On the 24th of July 1991, in the presence of media representatives and between 15,000 and 20,000 Native people gathered at Lac Ste Anne (Alberta) for their annual pilgrimage, the Oblate Superiors of the Canadian Region, through their President, the Reverend Douglas Crosby, O.M.I., voiced an apology to the Native peoples for certain aspects of their missionary presence and ministry among Native peoples.”

Source of text: http://www.saskatoonrcdiocese.com/social_justice/truth-and-reconciliation-2012/assets/Booklet_Apology_2.pdf

<i>Full text and references to harm or harmful actions</i>	<i>The language of responsibility</i>		
	<i>Is the verb active and behavioural?</i>	<i>Is the agent the Oblate Order, its members, or its staff?</i>	<i>Limitation or qualification?</i>
#1 “The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate in Canada wish, after one hundred and fifty years of being with and ministering to the Native peoples of Canada, to offer an apology for certain aspects of that presence and ministry. ”	No. What they did is only implied in nouns (“ certain aspects of that presence and ministry ”).	No . Nouns do not have an agent. Also, it is “ that presence and ministry ” rather than “ <i>our</i> presence and ministry.” “The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate in Canada” are the subject of “wish,” which is a state verb, not a behavioural verb.	This paragraph introduces a broad historical theme that soon becomes causal and therefore an implicit justification.
#2 “A number of historical circumstances make this moment in history most opportune for this.”			It is now explicit that “historical circumstances” form the context of this text.

THE OBLATE ORDER OF MARY IMMACULATE (1991) continued

<i>Full text and references to harm or harmful actions</i>	<i>The language of responsibility</i>		
	<i>Is the verb behavioural and in active voice?</i>	<i>Is the agent the Oblate Order, its members, or its staff?</i>	<i>Limitation or qualification?</i>
#3a “First, there is a symbolic reason. Next year, 1992, marks the five hundredth anniversary of the arrival of Europeans on the shores of America. As large scale celebrations are being prepared to mark this occasion, the Oblates of Canada wish, through this apology, to show solidarity with many Native people in Canada whose history has been adversely affected by this event. ”	No. “ Has been affected ” is passive voice.	No. The agent of the passive verb is impersonal (“ this event ”), which refers to “the arrival of Europeans on the shores of America in 1492.” (“The Oblates of Canada” are the subject of “wish,” which is not a behavioural verb.)	It is the arrival of Europeans 500 years ago that “ adversely affected ” Native people. The purpose is “to show solidarity,” which implies standing with Native people against “ this event. ”
#3b “Anthropological and sociological insights of the late 20th century have shown how deep, unchallenged, and damaging was the naive cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and religious superiority complex of Christian Europe when its peoples met and interrelated with the aboriginal peoples of North America.”	No. “ Was ” is a linking verb. Only the adjective “ damaging ” implies harm	No. Linking verbs do not describe an action with an agent. The implicit agent is an abstraction: “ naive cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and religious superiority complex of Christian Europe. ”	“ Naive ” is an extenuation; it implies not knowing better. Thus far, the statement proposes that there was a unified and monolithic attitude of Christian Europe at the time of first contact and that recent academic insights have revealed this.
#4 “As well, recent criticisms of Indian residential schools and the exposure of instances of physical and sexual abuse within these schools call for such an apology.”	No. What they did is in nouns and modifiers (“ instances of physical and sexual abuse ”).	No. The abuse was “ within these schools ” (vs. “ <i>our</i> ” schools,” with no indication of who was responsible.	“ Instances ” implies that the “ physical and sexual abuse ” was not widespread.

THE OBLATE ORDER OF MARY IMMACULATE (1991) continued

<i>Full text and references to harm or harmful actions</i>	<i>The language of responsibility</i>		
	<i>Is the verb behavioural and in active voice?</i>	<i>Is the agent the Oblate Order, its members, or its staff?</i>	<i>Limitation or qualification?</i>
#5 “Given this history, Native peoples and other groups alike are realizing that a certain healing needs to take place before a new and more truly cooperative phase of history can occur. This healing cannot however happen until some very complex, long-standing, and deep historical issues have been addressed.”			
#6 “It is in this context, and with a renewed pledge to be in solidarity with Native peoples in a common struggle for justice, that we, the Oblates of Canada, offer this apology:”			“This context” refers to the above view of history, which they offer as the framework for the statement that follows.
#7a “We apologize for the part we played in the cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and religious imperialism that was part of the mentality with which the peoples of Europe first met the aboriginal peoples and which consistently has lurked behind ”	Yes: “played” However, this active, behavioural verb (“played”) is neutral and does not describe what they did, which is only implied in an abstract noun with modifiers (“ cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and religious imperialism ”).	Yes: “we”	“ The part we played ” minimizes responsibility. The historical justification emerges again here. The “ imperialism ” was part of the “mentality” outlined earlier.
#7b “ the way the Native peoples of Canada have been treated by civil governments and by the churches. ”	No. Passive voice: “ have been treated ”	Yes, partially: The agent named first is the “ civil government, ” then “ the churches ” in general.	The full sentence comprising #7a and 7b is difficult to parse. It seems to say that they played a part in the imperialism that was itself part of a mentality of early Europeans and that this hidden mentality was responsible for how the government and churches treated the Native peoples.

THE OBLATE ORDER OF MARY IMMACULATE (1991) continued

<i>Full text and references to harm or harmful actions</i>	<i>The language of responsibility</i>		
	<i>Is the verb behavioural and in active voice?</i>	<i>Is the agent the Oblate Order, its members, or its staff?</i>	<i>Limitation or qualification?</i>
#7c “We were, naively, part of this mentality and were, in fact, often a key player in its implementation.”	No. Linking verb (“were”). What they did is in a neutral noun (“implementation”).	No. Linking verbs do not describe an action with an agent.	“Part of” and “often” both qualify their responsibility. “Naively”(which means having been “deficient in worldly wisdom or informed judgment”) is a justification.
#7d “We recognize that this mentality has, from the beginning, and ever since, continually threatened the cultural, linguistic, and religious traditions of the Native peoples.”	Yes: “has threatened”	No. The agent of “threatened” is “mentality,” an abstraction. (“We” is the subject of “recognize,” a state verb.)	“The Native peoples” is third person (vs. “you,” the people they were addressing).
#8a “We recognize that many of the problems that beset Native communities today--high unemployment, alcoholism, family breakdown, domestic violence, spiraling suicide rates, lack of healthy self-esteem--are not so much the result of personal failure as they are the result of centuries of systemic imperialism.”	No. Linking verb (“are the result of”).	No. Linking verbs do not describe an action with an agent.	This names six effects of the “centuries of systemic imperialism” but does not name what they did that led to these effects. The phrase “not so much the result of personal failure” still puts some blame on the victims.
#8b “Any people stripped of its traditions as well as of its pride”	No. “Stripped” is a verbal adjective and implicitly passive voice: “people [who have been] stripped.”	No.	In the context of #8a, it is the systemic imperialism that “stripped” people. The victims are presumably part of “any people” (vs. “you”).

THE OBLATE ORDER OF MARY IMMACULATE (1991) continued

<i>Full text and references to harm or harmful actions</i>	<i>The language of responsibility</i>		
	<i>Is the verb behavioural and in active voice?</i>	<i>Is the agent the Oblate Order, its members, or its staff?</i>	<i>Limitation or qualification?</i>
#8c “falls victim to precisely these social ills.”	No. “Falls victim” acts as a linking verb (analogous to “becomes”).	No. Linking verbs do not describe an action with an agent.	Again, #8c & 8d make up a sentence that is difficult to parse. Together, they seem to mean that “Stripping a people of its traditions and pride inevitably makes them the prey of the above social ills.” This statement is in present tense as a general principle, i.e., it is social philosophy rather than an apology.
#8d For the part that we played , however inadvertent and naive that participation might have been, in the setting up and maintaining of a system ”	Yes: As in #7a, the active, behavioural verb (“ played ”) is neutral and does not describe what they did, which is in the gerunds (“ the setting up and maintaining of a system ”).	Yes: “we”	They “ played a part ” that “might have been” “inadvertent and naive.” Also, “ the setting up and maintaining of a system ” is more distant from responsibility than “we set up and maintained <i>our</i> system.”
#8e “[a system] that stripped others of not only their lands but also of their cultural, linguistic, and religious traditions we sincerely apologize.	Yes. “stripped”	No. The agent (“a system”) is an abstraction. (“We” is the agent of “apologize.”)	This phrase uses a strong verb in active voice (“stripped”) to refer to many kinds of harm. However, it is quite impersonal: “a system” stripped others” rather than “our system” (or even “the system we were part of”) stripped “Native peoples” or “you.”
#9a “Beyond this regret for having been part of a system ”	No. “Having been part of” is a gerund form of “have been.”	No. The gerund is based on a linking verb, which could not describe an action with an agent.	This reiterates that they were only “ <i>part of a system</i> .”

THE OBLATE ORDER OF MARY IMMACULATE (1991) continued

<i>Full text and references to harm or harmful actions</i>	<i>The language of responsibility</i>		
	<i>Is the verb behavioural and in active voice?</i>	<i>Is the agent the Oblate Order, its members, or its staff?</i>	<i>Limitation or qualification?</i>
#9b “ which , because of its historical privilege and assumed superiority did great damage to the Native peoples of Canada, ”	Yes: “ Did ” is active and behavioural but also neutral and non-specific. The reference to what they did is in the noun (“ great damage ”), which is the object of this verb.	No. “ Which ” refers to “a system.”	The ultimate cause is the “historical privilege and assumed superiority” of “a system.” #9a and 9b bring together the earlier “mentality” (of historical privilege and assumed superiority) and the actions of “a system.”
#9c “we wish to apologize more specifically for the following:”			
#10a “In sympathy with recent criticisms of Native Residential Schools, we wish to apologize for the part we played in the setting up and the maintaining of those schools. ”	Yes: However, as in 7a and 8e, the active, behavioural verb (“ played ”) is neutral and does not describe what they did, which is in the same gerunds as 8e (“ setting up and maintaining ”). Also, it implies that the criticism is only for administrative actions (“ setting up and maintaining those schools ”).	Yes: “ We ”	This is the sixth reference to their “ part ,” usually as a qualification or limitation on their responsibility (“ the part we played ”). Again, “ <i>those</i> ” schools” (vs. “ <i>our</i> schools”) distances them from their direct responsibility for their schools.
#10b “We apologize for the existence of the schools themselves ”	No. An abstract noun (“ existence ”) is not an action.	No. There is no agent for “ the existence of the schools. ” (We” is the agent of “apologize.”)	This puts special emphasis on the abstract “ existence of the schools, ” with no direct suggestion of who or what was responsible for their existence.
#10c “recognizing that the biggest abuse was not what happened in the schools, but that the schools themselves happened ... ” [ellipsis is in original]	No. The verb is “ happened, ” which is not a behavioural verb. All dictionary definitions of “happen” include “by chance.”	No.	This says that the biggest abuse is that “ the schools happened ” and a lesser abuse was “ what happened in the schools ”—both without an agent or action.

THE OBLATE ORDER OF MARY IMMACULATE (1991) continued

<i>Full text and references to harm or harmful actions</i>	<i>The language of responsibility</i>		
	<i>Is the verb behavioural and in active voice?</i>	<i>Is the agent the Oblate Order, its members, or its staff?</i>	<i>Limitation or qualification?</i>
#10d “that the primal bond inherent within families was violated as a matter of policy,”	No. “ Was violated ” is passive voice.	No. This implies that an abstract “policy” was responsible, although it is not grammatically the agent.	
#10e “that children were usurped from their natural communities ,”	No. “ Were usurped ” is passive voice.	No. Omits the agent	
#10f “and that, implicitly and explicitly, these schools operated out of the premise that European languages, traditions, and religious practices were superior to native languages, traditions, and religious practices.”			This connects #10d and #10e to the historical theme.
#10g “The residential schools were an attempt to assimilate aboriginal peoples ”	No. Linking verb plus infinitive (“ were an attempt to assimilate ”)	No Linking verbs do not describe an action with an agent	What they did is in the infinitive (“ to assimilate ”), which is qualified as “ an attempt .”
#10h “and we played an important role in the unfolding of this design . For this we sincerely apologize.”	Yes. “ Played ”	Yes. “ We ”	“ We played an important role ” (a variation of “played a part”) in a “ design ” that was “ unfolding .”
#11a “We wish to apologize in a very particular way for the instances of physical and sexual abuse that occurred in those schools .”	No. “ Occurred ” (like “happened”) is not an active behavioural verb. What they did is in nouns (“ instances ” and “ abuse ”) with adjectives.	No. “ Occurred ” cannot have an agent.	The abuse was only “ instances ” (i.e., relatively rare), and it simply “ occurred ” sometimes. Also: “ <i>those schools</i> ” (vs. “ <i>our schools</i> ”) distances them from the church’s responsibility.

THE OBLATE ORDER OF MARY IMMACULATE (1991) continued

<i>Full text and references to harm or harmful actions</i>	<i>The language of responsibility</i>		
	<i>Is the verb behavioural and in active voice?</i>	<i>Is the agent the Oblate Order, its members, or its staff?</i>	<i>Limitation or qualification?</i>
#11b “We reiterate that the bigger issue of abuse was the existence of the schools themselves ”	No. Linking verb (“was”).	No. Linking verbs do not describe an action with an agent.	This is a shortened version of 10c, above. It stresses that even the “instances of physical and sexual abuse” were a lesser issue than “ the existence of the schools themselves. ” Again: “ <i>the schools,</i> ” not “ <i>our schools.</i> ”
#11c “but we wish to publicly acknowledge that there were instances of individual physical and sexual abuse. ”	No. “Were” is a linking verb	No. Linking verbs do not describe an action with an agent.	Two words (“ instances ” and “ individual ”) emphasize that the abuse was rare.
#11d “Far from attempting to defend or rationalize these cases of abuse in any way,”	No. What they did is in a noun phrase (“ these cases of abuse ”).	No. There is no agent.	“ These cases ” depersonalizes the abuse into something that occurred without agent or actions.
#11e “we wish to state publicly that we acknowledge that they were inexcusable, intolerable, and a betrayal of trust in one of its most serious forms. ”	No. Linking verb (“were”).	No. Linking verbs do not describe an action with an agent.	This phrase condemns “ these cases of abuse ” as “ inexcusable, intolerable, and a betrayal of trust in one of its most serious forms, ” but does not name the Order as the agent.
#11f “We deeply, and very specifically, apologize to every victim of such abuse and we seek help in searching for means to bring about healing.”	No. What they did is implied at the end of a noun phrase (“ every victim of such abuse ”).	No.	

THE OBLATE ORDER OF MARY IMMACULATE (1991) continued

<i>Full text and references to harm or harmful actions</i>	<i>The language of responsibility</i>		
	<i>Is the verb behavioural and in active voice?</i>	<i>Is the agent the Oblate Order, its members, or its staff?</i>	<i>Limitation or qualification?</i>
#12a “Finally, we wish to apologize as well for our past dismissal of many of the riches of native religious tradition. ”	No. The acts of dismissing are implied in a noun (“ dismissal ”).	No What they did is not in a verb, but “ our ” is the implied agent.	- “ Past ” implies “not since.” - “ Dismissal ” means “rejecting serious consideration of.” It does not describe systematic destruction of “ native religious tradition. ” - “ Many ” means not dismissing all of them.
#12b “ We broke some of your peace pipes and we considered some of your sacred practices as pagan and superstitious. This, too, had its origins in the colonial mentality, our European superiority complex which was grounded in a particular view of history. We apologize for this blindness and disrespect.”	Yes: (“ broke ”)	Yes: (“ we ”)	This is the only instance of the Oblate Order (or any of the churches) using an active, behavioural verb with themselves as agent to describe something specific that they did. However, the rest of the section returns to the historical theme developed throughout the text.
#13 “One qualification is, however, in order. As we publicly acknowledge a certain blindness in our past, we wish, too, to publicly point to some of the salient reasons for this. We do this, not as a way of subtly excusing ourselves or of rationalizing in any way so as to denigrate this apology, but as a way of more fully exposing the reasons for our past blindness and, especially, as a way of honoring, despite their mistakes , those many men and women, Native and white alike, who gave their lives and their very blood in a dedication that was most sincere and heroic.”		No. Because there is no verb, there cannot be an agent.	“ Despite their mistakes ” is an extreme minimization for several reasons: - “ Mistakes ” is a euphemism and usually means isolated and fairly trivial actions. - It is further attenuated by being part of a parenthetical aside within a context of “honoring” those who made these “ mistakes. ” - The pronoun “ their mistakes ” explicitly refers to “Native and white alike,” so it seems to blame them equally.

THE OBLATE ORDER OF MARY IMMACULATE (1991) continued

<i>Full text and references to harm or harmful actions</i>	<i>The language of responsibility</i>		
	<i>Is the verb behavioural and in active voice?</i>	<i>Is the agent the Oblate Order, its members, or its staff?</i>	<i>Limitation or qualification?</i>
#13 continued	No. “ Mistakes ” is a noun, not a description of what they did.		The beginning of this section seems to refer to everything they are apologizing for (from #10a to #12b) as “a certain blindness in our past.” This section also introduces a “qualification,” pointing to “some of the salient reasons” for “a certain blindness” while at the same time emphasizing that this is a “qualification” that is not “excusing ourselves” or “rationalizing in any way” but instead “exposing the reasons for our past blindness.” What follows, however, are justifications.
#14a “Hindsight makes for 20-20 vision and judging the past from the insights of the present is an exact and often cruel science. When Christopher Columbus set sail for the Americas, with the blessing of the Christian Church, Western civilization lacked the insights it needed to appreciate what Columbus met upon the shores of America. The cultural, linguistic, and ethical traditions of Europe were caught up in the naive belief that they were inherently superior to those found in other parts of the world.			

THE OBLATE ORDER OF MARY IMMACULATE (1991) continued

<i>Full text and references to harm or harmful actions</i>	<i>The language of responsibility</i>		
	<i>Is the verb behavioural and in active voice?</i>	<i>Is the agent the Oblate Order, its members, or its staff?</i>	<i>Limitation or qualification?</i>
#14a continued Without excusing this superiority complex, it is necessary to name it. Sincerity alone does not set people above their place in history. Thousands of persons operated out of this mentality and gave their lives in dedication to an ideal that, while sincere in its intent, was, at one point, naively linked to a certain cultural, religious, linguistic, and ethnic superiority complex. These men and women sincerely believed that their vocations and actions were serving both God and the best interests of the Native peoples to whom they were ministering.”			
#14b. “History has, partially, rendered a cruel judgment on their efforts, showing how, despite much sincerity and genuine dedication, their actions were sometimes naive and disrespectful ”	No. linking verb (“ were ”)	No. Linking verbs do not describe an action with an agent The possessive pronoun (“ their actions ”) refers to the “thousands of persons” in #14a, above.	The adjectives characterize what they did as “ sometimes ... disrespectful ,” while also justifying it as “ naive .”
#14c in that they violated the sacred and cherished traditions of others.”	Yes: “ violated ”	No. The “thousands of persons” from #14a could mean the Oblate missionaries. However, in the full context of #14a, they could equally be all Europeans with “this mentality.”	The characterization “sometimes naive and disrespectful” (in 14b) qualifies “ violated ,” but there is no specification of how “ they violated the sacred and cherished traditions .” As in #8e, referring to aboriginal peoples as generic “ others ” creates even more distance than using third person.

THE OBLATE ORDER OF MARY IMMACULATE (1991) continued

<i>Full text and references to harm or harmful actions</i>	<i>The language of responsibility</i>		
	<i>Is the verb behavioural and in active voice?</i>	<i>Is the agent the Oblate Order, its members, or its staff?</i>	<i>Limitation or qualification?</i>
#14d “Hence, even as we apologize for some of the effects of their actions , we want at the same time to affirm their sincerity, the goodness of their intent, and the goodness, in many cases, of their actions.”	No. This is a noun phrase (“ some of the effects of their actions ”).	No. There is no verb, so no agent. Presumably “ their ” implies the Oblates here, because they would not be apologizing for the actions of all Europeans.	“ Some of the effects of their actions ” lacks any specifics of either the “ actions ” or their “ effects .”
#15 “Recognizing that within every sincere apology there is implicit the promise of conversion to a new way of acting. We, the Oblates of Canada, wish to pledge ourselves to a renewed relationship with Native peoples which, while very much in line with the sincerity and intent of our past relationship, seeks to move beyond past mistakes to a new level of respect and mutuality.”	No “ Mistakes ” is a noun.	No.	As in #13, “ mistakes ” is mild and non-specific reference to what they did.
#16 “Hence we renew the commitment we made 150 years ago to work with and for Native peoples. In the spirit of our founder, Blessed Eugene De Mazenod, and the many dedicated missionaries who have served in native communities during these 150 years, we again pledge to Native peoples our service. We ask help in more judiciously discerning what forms that service might take today.”			
#17 “More specifically, we pledge ourselves to the following:” [the asterisks below are in the original:			

THE OBLATE ORDER OF MARY IMMACULATE (1991) continued

<i>Full text and references to harm or harmful actions</i>	<i>The language of responsibility</i>		
	<i>Is the verb behavioural and in active voice?</i>	<i>Is the agent the Oblate Order, its members, or its staff?</i>	<i>Limitation or qualification?</i>
#18 “We want to support an effective process of disclosure vis-a-vis Residential Schools. We offer to collaborate in any way we can so that the full story of the Indian Residential Schools may be written, that their positive and negative features may be recognized, and that an effective healing process might take place.”	No: “ Negative features ” is a noun with the harm implied in the adjective.	No. It was the schools that had “ negative features .”	The “full story” would include “positive and negative features .” Also, The sentence repeats “ <i>the</i> ” (not “ <i>our</i> ”) Indian Residential Schools.”
#19 “We want to proclaim as inviolable the natural rights of Indian families, parents and children, so that never again will Indian communities and Indian parents see their children forcibly removed from them by other authorities .”	No. “ Forcibly removed ” is a verbal adjective and adverb.	No. “ Other authorities ” are the implied agent, but it is not clear who these were, although “ authorities ” implies the police or government agents (not the Oblate Order).	In the context, this is a criticism of the actions of “ other authorities ” by the Oblate Order.
#20a “We want to denounce imperialism in all its forms ”	No. “ Imperialism ” is an abstract noun, not a verb that describes what they did.	No. No agency is implied for the noun. “We” is the subject of “denounce,” not of the “imperialism.”	
#20b “and, [we] concomitantly, pledge ourselves to work with Native peoples in their efforts to recover their lands, their languages, their sacred traditions, and their rightful pride.”			Parts #3b, #7a, #8b, #12a, and #14c refer to Native peoples’ loss of language, traditions, and pride, but only #7a (“we played a part...”) names the Order as the agent of this loss.

THE OBLATE ORDER OF MARY IMMACULATE (1991) continued

<i>Full text and references to harm or harmful actions</i>	<i>The language of responsibility</i>		
	<i>Is the verb behavioural and in active voice?</i>	<i>Is the agent the Oblate Order, its members, or its staff?</i>	<i>Limitation or qualification?</i>
#21a “*We want, as Oblates, to meet with Native peoples and together help forge a template for a renewed covenant of solidarity. Despite past mistakes and many present tensions , the Oblates have felt all along as if the Native peoples and we belonged to the same family. As members of the same family it is imperative that we come again to that deep trust and solidarity that constitutes family.”	No. “ Mistakes ” and “ tensions ” are nouns.	No. Presumably the Oblates made the “ past mistakes ” have some role in the “ many present tensions ” that exist between the Oblates and Native peoples. However, none of this is explicit.	As in #13 and #15, what they did is summarized as “ mistakes. ” “The Oblates have felt <i>all along</i> as if ... we belong to the same family” with “deep trust and solidarity.” This claim is inconsistent with this document’s repeated invocation of a mentality of superiority that set them apart and above Native peoples.
#21b “We recognize that the road beyond past hurt may be long and steep but we pledge ourselves anew to journey with Native peoples on that road.”	No. “ Hurt ” is used as a noun, not a verb.	No. No indication of who inflicted the “ past hurt. ”	

Summary

We divided this text into 49 parts; 40 of these parts included phrases that alluded to what they did that required an apology. The table on the next page lists the topics of those phrases.

The analysis revealed that only five of these statements used an active, behavioural verb with the church as the agent. Four of these (#7a, #8d, #10a, and #10h) described “playing a part [or role]” in imperialism, a system, or a design. Only #12b specified what they did: “**We broke some of your peace pipes.**”

With one exception (#12b), this statement referred to Native peoples in third person, so it did not address them directly. The word “responsible” or an equivalent did not appear in this statement.

List of topics covered in all six statements of apology	Topics Included in the Statement of Apology by The Oblate Order of Mary Immaculate (191)
Culture, religion, language, assimilation	“cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and religious superiority complex of Christian Europe” “cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and religious imperialism” “the implementation [of this mentality]” “threatened the cultural, linguistic, and religious traditions of the Native peoples” “stripped of its traditions as well as of its pride” “setting up and maintaining of a system [that]stripped others of not only their lands but also of their cultural, linguistic, and religious traditions” “having been part of a system” “attempt to assimilate aboriginal peoples” “this design” “dismissal of many of the riches of native religious tradition” “violated the sacred and cherished traditions of others” “imperialism in all its forms”
Damage, pain, suffering	“great damage”
Taking children, harming family or community	“ the primal bond inherent within families was violated” “children were usurped from their natural communities” “children forcibly removed ”
The schools	“the setting up and the maintaining of those schools” “the existence of the schools themselves” “the biggest abuse was not what happened in the schools, but that the schools themselves happened” “the existence of the schools themselves”
Physical, sexual, and/or sexual abuse; disciplinary practices	“instances of physical and sexual abuse” “instances of physical and sexual abuse” “instances of individual physical and sexual abuse” “cases of abuse” “betrayal of trust” “such abuse”
Effects of their actions	“the problems that beset Native communities today-- high unemployment, alcoholism, family breakdown, domestic violence, spiraling suicide rates, lack of healthy self-esteem” “these social ills” “the effects of their actions”
Insensitivity, not hearing	
Unspecified	“certain aspects of that presence and ministry” “whose history has been adversely affected” “the way the Native peoples of Canada have been treated” “mistakes” “actions were sometimes naive and disrespectful” “past mistakes” “negative features” “past mistakes and many present tensions” “past hurt”
Specific	“broke some of your peace pipes”

THE ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA (1993)

The Anglican church or its local dioceses operated the second most residential schools (after the Catholic). Primate, Archbishop Michael Peers, made this statement at the Anglican National Native Convocation held in Ontario in August, 1993. He spoke in first person and said he would (later) tell the bishops what he had said, which creates the impression of personal rather than official apology.

Source of text: <http://www.anglican.ca/relationships/files/2011/06/Apology-English.pdf>

<i>Full text and references to harm or harmful actions</i>	<i>The language of responsibility</i>		
	<i>Is the verb active and behavioural?</i>	<i>Is the agent the church, its members, or its staff?</i>	<i>Limitation or qualification?</i>
#1 “My Brothers and Sisters: Together here with you I have listened as you have told your stories of the residential schools.”			
#2 “I have heard the voices that have spoken of pain and hurt experienced in the schools, and of the scars which endure to this day. ”	No. Having done harm is only implied in the nouns (“ pain ,” “ hurt ,” and “ scars ”) and not in verbs.	No. There is no agent who inflicted the “ pain and hurt ” (which were simply “ experienced ”) or the “ scars ” (which “ endure ”).	This sentence is about hearing (now) about harm done in the past, with no indication that the church was involved. “ The schools ” (vs. “our schools”) distances the church from responsibility.
#3a “I have felt shame and humiliation as I have heard of suffering inflicted by my people, ”	No. Implicit passive voice (“ suffering [that was] inflicted ”).	Yes: “ by my people ”	
#3b “and as I think of the part our church played in that suffering. ”	Yes. “ Played. ” However, this verb is neutral and does not describe doing harm, which is only implied in the noun (“ suffering ”).	Yes: “ Our church ”	“ The part out church played in that suffering ” does not say what they did that caused “ that suffering. ” It also explicitly avoids sole responsibility. Note also “ that suffering ” (vs. “ your suffering ”).
#4 “I am deeply conscious of the sacredness of the stories that you have told and I hold in the highest honour those who have told them.”			

THE ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA (1993) continued

<i>Full text and references to harm or harmful actions</i>	<i>The language of responsibility</i>		
	<i>Is the verb behavioural and in active voice?</i>	<i>Is the agent the church, its members, or its staff?</i>	<i>Limitation or qualification?</i>
#5 “I have heard with admiration the stories of people and communities who have worked at healing, and I am aware of how much healing is needed.”			
#6 “I also know that I am in need of healing, and my own people are in need of healing, and our church is in need of healing. Without that healing, we will continue the same attitudes that have done such damage in the past. ”	Yes: “ Have done. ” However, this is a neutral verb, and doing harm is implied in a noun (“ damage ”).	No. The agent is “ attitudes. ” (“We” refers to the possibility of continuing the same attitudes, not to having done “ such damage. ”)	“ Such damage ” is an anaphoric reference to earlier terms such as “pain,” “hurt,” “suffering,” and “scars, all of which were equally general. The focus is on their own need of healing, not on taking responsibility.
#7 “I also know that healing takes a long time, both for people and for communities.”			
#8 “I also know that it is God who heals, and that God can begin to heal when we open ourselves, our wounds, our failures and our shame to God. I want to take one step along that path here and now.”			Does this contradict the work at healing by people and communities (in #5)?
#9a “I accept and I confess before God and you, our failures in the residential schools. ”	No. Doing harm is only implied in a noun (“ failures ”).	No. There is no verb, so no agent is possible. The church’s agency is strongly implied (“ our ”).	“ Failures ” is very general, without any particulars. As in #1 and #2, “ the residential schools ” distances the schools from the church’s responsibility.
#9b “ We failed you. We failed ourselves. We failed God.”	Yes: “ failed ”	Yes: “ We ”	“ We failed you ” occurs with having failed themselves and God as well. Do all three refer to the same actions?

THE ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA (1993) continued

<i>Full text and references to harm or harmful actions</i>	<i>The language of responsibility</i>		
	<i>Is the verb behavioural and in active voice?</i>	<i>Is the agent the church, its members, or its staff?</i>	<i>Limitation or qualification?</i>
#10a "I am sorry, more than I can say, that we were part of a system "	No. Linking verb (" were ")	No. Linking verbs do not describe an action with an agent.	As in #3b, the church was only " a part. "
#10b " [a system]which took you and your children from home and family. "	Yes: " took "	No. The agent is abstract (" a system ") of which they were part.	
#11a "I am sorry, more than I can say, that we tried to remake you in our image "	No. The offence is in the infinitive (" to remake ") with a mitigating verb in active voice (" tried ").	Yes: " we "	They only " tried " to " remake you in our image. " There is no description of the means by which they tried nor of the extent to which they succeeded in doing so.
#11b taking from you your language and the signs of your identity. "	No. " Taking " is a verbal noun.	Yes: " we " is implied in #11a.	
#12 "I am sorry, more than I can say, that in our schools so many were abused physically, sexually, culturally and emotionally. "	No. This is passive voice (" were abused ") with the details in adverbs (" physically, sexually, culturally, and emotionally ").	No. There is no agent of the passive voice.	
#13 "On behalf of the Anglican Church of Canada, I present our apology."			
#14 "I do this at the desire of those in the Church like the National Executive Council, who know some of your stories and have asked me to apologize."			
#15 "I do this in the name of many who do not know these stories."			

THE ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA (1993) continued

<i>Full text and references to harm or harmful actions</i>	<i>The language of responsibility</i>		
	<i>Is the verb behavioural and in active voice?</i>	<i>Is the agent the church, its members, or its staff?</i>	<i>Limitation or qualification?</i>
#16 “And I do this even though there are those in the church who cannot accept the fact that these things were done in our name. ”	No. “ Were done ” is passive voice.	Yes: “ In our name ” implies the church’s agency.	“ These things ” is extremely vague; it is an anaphoric reference (in noun form) to the harmful actions mentioned above.
#17 “As soon as I am home, I shall tell all the bishops what I have said, and ask them to cooperate with me and the National Executive Council in helping this healing at the local level. Some bishops have already begun this work.”			
#18 “I know how often you have heard words which have been empty because they have not been accompanied by actions. I pledge to you my best efforts, and the efforts of our church at the national level, to walk with you along the path of God’s healing.”			“To walk with you along the path of God’s healing” presupposes that is this the path the survivors also choose.
#19 “The work of the Residential Schools Working Group, the video, the commitment and the efforts the Special Assistants to the Primate for this work, the grants available for healing conferences, are some signs of that pledge, and we shall work for others.”			
#20 “This is Friday, the day of Jesus’ suffering and death. It is the anniversary of the first atomic bomb at Hiroshima, one of the most terrible injuries ever inflicted by one people on another.”			

THE ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA (1993) continued

<i>Full text and references to harm or harmful actions</i>	<i>The language of responsibility</i>		
	<i>Is the verb behavioural and in active voice?</i>	<i>Is the agent the church, its members, or its staff?</i>	<i>Limitation or qualification?</i>
#21 “But even atomic bombs and Good Friday are not the last word. God raised Jesus from the dead as a sign that life and wholeness are the everlasting and unquenchable purpose of God.”			
#22 “Thank you for listening to me.” [Michael, Archbishop and Primate]			

Summary

We divided this text into 26 parts, 12 of which included phrases that alluded to what they did that required an apology. The table on the next page lists the topics of those phrases.

The analysis revealed that only two of these statements used an active, behavioural verb with the church as the agent (#3b and #9b). However, in both of these statements, the description of harm was general, with no specifics of how they treated the children.

The text addressed “you.” The word “responsible” or an equivalent did not appear.

List of topics covered in all six statements of apology	Topics Included in the Statement of Apology by The Anglican Church of Canada (1993)
Culture, religion, language, assimilation	“tried to remake you in our image” “taking from you your language and the signs of your identity”
Damage, pain, suffering	“pain and hurt “ and “scars ” “suffering” “suffering” “damage”
Taking children, harming family or community	“were part of a system” “took you and your children from home and family”
The schools	
Physical, sexual, and/or sexual abuse; disciplinary practices	“abused physically, sexually, culturally and emotionally”
Effects of their actions	
Insensitivity, not hearing	
Unspecified	“failures” “failed you” “these things”
Specific	

THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA (1994)

“The history of the relationship between Aboriginal People and The Presbyterian Church in Canada has been complex and often difficult. In 1994, The Presbyterian Church in Canada confessed its role in the tragic legacy of the Indian Residential Schools. The church is committed to walking with Aboriginal Peoples on a journey toward reconciliation and living out the spirit of the confession.”

In 1994, the 120th General Assembly adopted ‘The Confession of The Presbyterian Church.’ It was presented to First Nations peoples at the Forks National Site in Winnipeg on October 8, 1994.

Source of text: <http://presbyterian.ca/healing/>

<i>Full text and references to harm or harmful actions</i>	<i>The language of responsibility</i>		
	<i>Is the verb active and behavioural?</i>	<i>Is the agent the church, its members or staff?</i>	<i>Limitation or qualification?</i>
#1. “The Holy Spirit, speaking in and through Scripture, calls The Presbyterian Church in Canada to confession. This confession is our response to the word of God. We understand our mission and ministry in new ways in part because of the testimony of Aboriginal peoples.”			

<p>#2. “We, the 120th General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, seeking the guidance of the Spirit of God, and aware of our own sin and shortcomings, are called to speak to the Church we love. We do this, out of new understandings of our past not out of any sense of being superior to those who have gone before us, nor out of any sense that we would have done things differently in the same context. It is with humility and in great sorrow that we come before God and our Aboriginal brothers and sisters with our confession.”</p>			
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THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA (1994) continued

<i>Full text and references to harm or harmful actions</i>	<i>The language of responsibility</i>		
	<i>Is the verb behavioural and in active voice?</i>	<i>Is the agent the church, its members, or its staff?</i>	<i>Limitation or qualification?</i>
#3a. “We acknowledge that the stated policy of the Government of Canada was to assimilate Aboriginal peoples to the dominant culture, and that The Presbyterian Church in Canada co-operated in this policy. ”	Yes: “ cooperated ”	Yes: “ The Presbyterian Church in Canada ”	It was the Government’s policy “to assimilate Aboriginal peoples to the dominant culture.” The church only “ co-operated in this policy. ”
#3b. “We acknowledge that the roots of the harm we have done are found in the attitudes and values of western European colonialism,”	Yes: “ have done ” “ <i>We have done harm</i> ” puts what they did into a noun object of the verb (vs. “we have <i>harmed</i> you”).	Yes: “ We ”	The “ harm ” is not specific. The main point is that its “roots” are in the “attitudes and values of western European colonialism.”
#3c. “and the assumption that what was not yet moulded in our image was to be discovered and exploited. ”	No. passive voice (“ was... moulded ” and “ was to be discovered and exploited. ”)	No. Passive voice without agent.	“ What was not yet moulded in our image ” is undefined. Also, “ to be discovered and exploited ” by whom?
#3d. “As part of that policy we, with other churches, encouraged the government to ban some important spiritual practices through which Aboriginal peoples experienced the presence of the creator God. For the Church's complicity in this policy we ask forgiveness.”	No. What they did (“ to ban some important spiritual practices ”) is in the infinitive. The verb that is in active voice (“ encouraged ”) is milder.	Yes, partially: “ We, ” but the other churches also “ encouraged, ” and the government did the actual banning.	This may contradict #3a, which attributes the initiative to the Government of Canada. The specifics of what the government banned and of “the Church’s complicity” are not included.

THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA (1994) continued

<i>Full text and references to harm or harmful actions</i>	<i>The language of responsibility</i>		
	<i>Is the verb behavioural and in active voice?</i>	<i>Is the agent the church, its members, or its staff?</i>	<i>Limitation or qualification?</i>
#4a. “We recognize that there were many members of The Presbyterian Church in Canada who, in good faith, gave unstintingly of themselves in love and compassion for their Aboriginal brothers and sisters. We acknowledge their devotion and commend them for their work. We recognize that there were some who, with prophetic insight, were aware of the damage that was being done and protested.”	No. Passive voice (“ damage that was being done ”). Contrast this to “were aware that we were doing damage.”	No. Passive voice without agent.	The context is one of “good faith,” “giving unstintingly,” “love and compassion,” and “devotion.” So the emphasis is on their good works more than on unspecified “ damage .” In this context, there were “some” with “prophetic insight” who were “aware ... and protested.” (We assume that this is an allusion to the Biblical meaning of “prophetic” as speaking out against wrong-doing.)
#4b. “but their efforts were thwarted . We acknowledge their insight. For the times we did not support them adequately nor hear their cries for justice, we ask forgiveness.”	No. Passive voice (“ were thwarted ”)	No. Passive voice without agent. “Thwart” means “to effectively oppose,” but “ efforts were thwarted ” (without an agent) does not identify who effectively opposed those protesting the damage.	The use of “ thwarted ” strongly implies that those with authority in the church successfully silenced the protests. It was rare in the six texts even to imply (as here) that the authorities had a responsibility to be aware of and stop “the damage.”
#5a. “We confess that The Presbyterian Church in Canada presumed to know better than Aboriginal peoples what was needed for life. The Church said of our Aboriginal brothers and sisters, ‘If they could be like us, if they could think like us, talk like us, worship like us, sing like us, work like us, they would know God as we know God and therefore would have life abundant.’”			These are attitudes and possible causes, not actions or effects.

THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA (1994) continued

<i>Full text and references to harm or harmful actions</i>	<i>The language of responsibility</i>		
	<i>Is the verb behavioural and in active voice?</i>	<i>Is the agent the church, its members, or its staff?</i>	<i>Limitation or qualification?</i>
#5b. “In our cultural arrogance we have been blind to the ways in which our own understanding of the Gospel has been culturally conditioned, and because of our insensitivity to Aboriginal cultures, we have demanded more of the Aboriginal peoples than the Gospel requires , and have thus misrepresented Jesus Christ who loves all peoples with compassionate, suffering love that all may come to God through him. For the Church's presumption we ask forgiveness.”	Yes: “ have demanded ”	Yes: “ We ”	This phrase implies - that the Gospel has requirements for the situation of dealing with a new and different culture. - that demanding what “ the Gospel requires ” would have been sensitive to Aboriginal peoples. - and that they simply did not properly understand the Gospel. It does not say what they did that corresponded to having “ demanded . . . more than the Gospel requires. ” The focus is not on having done harm to Aboriginal peoples but on misrepresenting Jesus Christ.
#6a. “We confess that, with the encouragement and assistance of the Government of Canada, The Presbyterian Church in Canada agreed to take the children of Aboriginal peoples from their own homes and place them in residential schools. ”	No. “ Agreed ” is a state verb, with what they did in the infinitive (“ to take ” and “ to place ”). Contrast this to “we took the children...”.	No. State verbs do not describe an action with an agent.	The main verb (“ agreed ”) stops short of explicitly stating that they actually did what they had agreed to do. What they agreed to do (or did) was “with the encouragement and assistance of the Government of Canada.”
#6b. “In these schools, children were deprived of their traditional ways, which were replaced with Euro-Canadian customs that were helpful in the process of assimilation. ”	No. Passive voice (“ were deprived ” and “ were replaced ”) Also a linking verb (“were helpful”).	No. Passive voice without agent. #3a above specifically attributed the policy of assimilation to the government, so the government is the implied agent (not the church).	“ In these schools ” (vs. “ <i>our schools</i> ”) distances them from the Church. This sentence does not specify what they did that “ deprived ” and “ replaced ” traditional ways; it only characterizes what they did as “ helpful. ”

THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA (1994) continued

<i>Full text and references to harm or harmful actions</i>	<i>The language of responsibility</i>		
	<i>Is the verb behavioural and in active voice?</i>	<i>Is the agent the church, its members, or its staff?</i>	<i>Limitation or qualification?</i>
#6c. “To carry out this process, The Presbyterian Church in Canada used disciplinary practices which were foreign to Aboriginal peoples, ”	Yes: “ Used, ” which is neutral. The harmful actions were “ disciplinary practices. ”	Yes: “ The Presbyterian Church in Canada ”	What they did is only characterized as “ foreign, ” which does not necessarily imply that these “ practices ” were wrong or harmful. The discipline was for “this process” of assimilation.
#6d. “and [used disciplinary practices that were] open to exploitation in physical and psychological punishment beyond any Christian maxim of care and discipline. ”	No. Linking verb (“ were ”). What they did is implied in the nouns and adjectives (“ exploitation ” and “ physical and psychological punishment ”).	No. Linking verbs do not describe an action with an agent.	This phrase says that these practices were “ open to exploitation, ” not that they did exploit them. It also sets the standard as a “ Christian maxim of care and discipline. ”
#6e. “In a setting of obedience and acquiescence there was opportunity for sexual abuse, ”	No. Linking verb (“ was ”). The harm is in a noun and adjective (“ sexual abuse ”).	No. Linking verbs do not describe an action with an agent.	“ Opportunity ” means “a favourable juncture of circumstances” or “a good chance for advancement or progress.” “Obedience and acquiescence” implies that the victims acquiesced. “In <i>a setting</i> ” does not specify “our schools.”
#6f. “ and some were so abused. ”	No. Passive voice (“ were abused ”).	No. Passive voice without agent, which names no one as the abuser(s).	“ Some ” implies a few anonymous victims (vs. “ <i>many children</i> ”).
#6g. “ The effect of all this, for Aboriginal peoples, was the loss of cultural identity and the loss of a secure sense of self. ”	No. Linking verb (“ Was ”). The harmful effects are nouns (“ loss ”) and modifiers (“ of cultural identity ” and “ a secure sense of self ”). These do not describe what they did that caused these losses.	No. Linking verbs do not describe an action with an agent.	“ The effect of all this ” means that the cause was “ all this. ” So the cause could be everything in this paragraph (#6a – 6f). However, only #6c) has an agent.

THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA (1994) continued

<i>Full text and references to harm or harmful actions</i>	<i>The language of responsibility</i>		
	<i>Is the verb behavioural and in active voice?</i>	<i>Is the agent the church, its members, or its staff?</i>	<i>Limitation or qualification?</i>
#6h. “For the Church’s insensitivity we ask forgiveness.”			
#7. “We regret that there are those whose lives have been deeply scarred by the effects of the mission and ministry of The Presbyterian Church in Canada . For our Church we ask forgiveness of God. It is our prayer that God, who is merciful, will guide us in compassionate ways towards helping them to heal.”	No. Passive voice (“ have been deeply scarred ”).	No. “ The effects ” The Church had a mission and ministry, which had “ effects ,” and it was these “ effects ” that scarred lives. Yet “ the mission and ministry ” and their “ effects ” are abstractions that could not have “ deeply scarred ” anyone.	This phrasing does not specify anything they did in the name of their “ mission and ministry ” that had scarring “ effects .” Also, “there are those” implies individual instances, not a large number.
#8. “We ask, also, for forgiveness from Aboriginal peoples. What we have heard we acknowledge. It is our hope that those whom we have wronged with a hurt too deep for telling will accept what we have to say. With God’s guidance our Church will seek opportunities to walk with Aboriginal peoples to find healing and wholeness together as God’s people.”	Yes: “ have wronged ”	Yes: “ We ”	“ Have wronged ” is very general: - Instead of specifics, this acknowledges “ what we have heard .” However what they heard (and when) are not in this document. - This also describes the harmful actions as “ a hurt is too deep for telling .” The last sentence seems to assume that the ‘healing and wholeness’ will be possible only within the church.

Summary

We divided the text into 20 parts, 16 of which included phrases that alluded to what they did that required an apology. The table below lists the topics of those phrases.

The analysis revealed that five of these statements used an active, behavioural verb with the church as the agent (3a, 3b, 5b, 6c, and 8). However, all five were general and did not provide any specifics of what they actually did to Aboriginal peoples.

The text did not address Aboriginal peoples; it referred to them in third person. The word “responsible” or an equivalent did not appear.

List of topics covered in all six statements of apology	Topics Included in the Statement of Apology by The Presbyterian Church in Canada (1994)
Culture, religion, language, assimilation	“co-operated in this policy [of assimilation]” “what was not yet moulded in our image was to be discovered and exploited” “encouraged the government to ban some important spiritual practices” “children were deprived of their traditional ways, which were replaced with Euro-Canadian customs that were helpful in the process of assimilation.”
Damage, pain, suffering	“harm” “damage” “have wronged with a hurt too deep for telling”
Taking children, harming family or community	“ take the children of Aboriginal peoples from their own homes and place them in residential schools.”
The schools	
Physical, sexual, and/or sexual abuse; disciplinary practices	“demanded more of the Aboriginal peoples than the Gospel requires” “disciplinary practices which were foreign to Aboriginal peoples” “[disciplinary practices that were] open to exploitation in physical and psychological punishment beyond any Christian maxim of care and discipline” “there was opportunity for sexual abuse, and some were so abused.”
Effects of their actions	“loss of cultural identity and the loss of a secure sense of self” “lives have been deeply scarred”
Insensitivity, not hearing	“efforts [of those who protested]were thwarted”
Unspecified	
Specific	

THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA 1998

In 1997, the 36th General Council, the United Church adopted a social policy position (<http://www.united-church.ca/beliefs/policies/1997/r271>), which stated that “any healing initiative will be inadequate in the absence of a clear statement of repentance and contrition.” In this policy position, they resolved to “recommit ourselves to living out the apology of The United Church of Canada to native congregations offered in 1986,” which led to their second apology.

Source of text: We found several slightly different versions of the 1998 apology issued at different times on United Church websites; we chose the latest one:

www.united-church.ca/beliefs/policies/1998/a623

<i>Full text and references to harm or harmful actions</i>	<i>The language of responsibility</i>		
	<i>Is the verb active and behavioural?</i>	<i>Is the agent the church, its members, or its staff?</i>	<i>Limitation or qualification?</i>
#1a “As Moderator of The United Church of Canada, I wish to speak the words that many people have wanted to hear for a very long time.” On behalf of The United Church of Canada I apologize for the pain and suffering that our church's involvement in the Indian Residential School system has caused.	Yes: The clause is equivalent to “our church’s involvement ... has caused the pain and suffering.” However, “ caused ” does not describe what they did; it only describes the effects in nouns (“ pain and suffering ”).	No. The agent is “ involvement ”	The church had only an “ involvement, ” which limits their responsibility “ The pain and suffering ” (vs. “ <i>your</i> pain and suffering”) distances it from the victims. Similarly, this phrase refers to “ the [entire] Indian Residential School system ” (vs. “ <i>our</i> Indian Residential Schools”).
#1b “We are aware of some of the damage that this cruel and ill-conceived system of assimilation has perpetrated on Canada's First Nations peoples. For this we are truly and most humbly sorry.”	Yes: The clause is equivalent to “this ... system has perpetrated damage.” The verb is appropriate because it usually refers to committing a crime (or something like a crime), especially when combined with “ damage. ”	No. The agent is “ this cruel and ill-conceived system of assimilation. ” The church is the subject of the state verbs (“we are aware” and “we are truly and most humbly sorry”).	

THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA (1998) continued

<i>Full text and references to harm or harmful actions</i>	<i>The language of responsibility</i>		
	<i>Is the verb behavioural and in active voice?</i>	<i>Is the agent the church, its members, or its staff?</i>	<i>Limitation or qualification?</i>
#2a “To those individuals who were physically, sexually and mentally abused as students of the Indian Residential Schools in which The United Church of Canada was involved, I offer you our most sincere apology.”	No. Passive voice (“were abused”) with the details in adverbs (“physically, sexually, and mentally”).	No. Passive voice with no agent.	This phrase does not directly connect the church with the abuses, which happened (without agents) to “students in Indian Residential Schools.” It was these schools “in which the United Church of Canada was involved”—not with the abuses.
#2b “You did nothing wrong. You were and are the victims of evil acts that cannot under any circumstances be justified or excused.”	No. There is a neutral noun (“acts”) and a condemnation of the acts (as “evil” and “that cannot . . . be justified or excused”), neither of which describes what they did.	No. The “evil acts” have no agent. This says that the victims “did nothing wrong” but does not say who did.	
#3a “We know that many within our church will still not understand why each of us must bear the scar, the blame for this horrendous period in Canadian history.”	No. There is an abstract, neutral noun (“period”) and a characterization of this period (as “horrendous”).	No. A “period . . . in Canadian history” cannot have (or be) an agent.	This “period” was over a century and a half, with multi-generational effects in the present.
#3b “But the truth is, we are the bearers of many blessings from our ancestors, and therefore, we must also bear their burdens.”	No. The noun (“burdens”) implies the effects of what they did but does not name their actions.	No. “Their burdens” were from the unspecified actions of “our ancestors,” who are clearly distinct from the contemporary “we” who “must also bear their burdens.”	This section implies accepting responsibility for something the church did. However, the focus is on themselves and their burdens—not on First Nations peoples and their burdens.
#4 Our burdens include dishonouring the depths of the struggles of First Nations people and the richness of your gifts. We seek God’s forgiveness and healing grace as we take steps toward building respectful, compassionate, and loving relationships with First Nations peoples.	No. The verb is “include.” What they did is in a gerund: “dishonouring . . . the struggles . . . and the richness” (vs. “we dishonoured”).	No. “Dishonouring” has no agent. Responsibility is only implied in “our burdens.”	“Dishonouring the depths of the struggles of First Nations people and the richness of your gifts” are vague or general. This section uses both third and second person for First Nations people.

THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA (1998) continued

<i>Full text and references to harm or harmful actions</i>	<i>The language of responsibility</i>		
	<i>Is the verb behavioural and in active voice?</i>	<i>Is the agent the church, its members, or its staff?</i>	<i>Limitation or qualification?</i>
#5a We are in the midst of a long and painful journey. As we reflect on the cries that we did not or would not hear,	No “ Hear ” is a state verb. “ Did not or would not hear ” could have been entirely mental processes, not actions.	No. State verbs do not describe an action with an agent.	This acknowledges not only that “ we did not ... hear ” but also that they made a choice not to listen (“ would not hear ”). If “ would not hear ” means that there were witnesses (or authorities) who refused to act, it would be an admission, rare in the six texts, that responsibility extends beyond those who were causing the cries.
#5b and how we have behaved as a church.	Yes. “ behaved ”	Yes. “ we ... as a church ”	This does not specify “ how we have behaved ” or to whom.
#5c As we travel this difficult road of repentance, reconciliation, and healing, we commit ourselves toward ensuring that we will never again use our power as a church to hurt others with attitudes of racial and spiritual superiority.	Yes. “ Use our power ... to hurt ” is an active verb plus infinitive, a structure that (in the United 1986 text) used the active behavioural verb to qualify what they did. However, in this context, the combination emphasizes what they did.	Yes. “ we ”	This would be a very strong statement if it were not in the negative (“ we will never again ”). It promises future change and only implies that, in the past, “we <i>did</i> use our power as a church to hurt others.”
#6 “We pray that you will hear the sincerity of our words today and that you will witness the living out of our apology in our actions in the future.”			

Summary

We divided this text into 11 parts, 10 of which included phrases that alluded to what they did that required an apology. The table below lists the topics of those phrases.

The analysis showed that three of these 10 parts (#5a, b, and c) used an active, behavioural verb with the church as the agent. However, all three are general, with no specific actions. The specific topics set out in the policy position (<http://www.united-church.ca/beliefs/policies/1997/r271>) did not appear.

With occasional exceptions, the text used third person. The words “responsible” or equivalent did not appear.

List of topics covered in all six statements of apology	Topics Included in the Statement of Apology by The United Church of Canada (1998)
Culture, religion, language, assimilation	“dishonouring the depths of the struggles of First Nations people and the richness of your gifts” “hurt others with attitudes of racial and spiritual superiority”
Damage, pain, suffering	“pain and suffering” “some of the damage”
Taking children, harming family or community	
The schools	
Physical, sexual, and/or sexual abuse; disciplinary practices	“physically, sexually and mentally abused”
Effects of their actions	
Insensitivity, not hearing	“the cries that we did not or would not hear”
Unspecified	“evil acts” “this horrendous period in Canadian history” “burdens [from our ancestors]” “how we have behaved as a church”
Specific	

PART FOUR: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Overall Summary

A full apology requires not only an expression of regret but an explicit admission of responsibility. The language of responsibility is simple and straightforward (“we did ...”). Our analysis focused on whether and how often the churches chose to make full apologies.

We divided the six texts into 129 parts; 89 of these included phrases that alluded to something the church was responsible for and that required an apology. We found that

- Only 16 of the 89 phrases used language that expressed responsibility, that is, an active, behavioural verb with the church, its staff, or its members as the agent.
- Only one of the 89 also included any specific details of what they had done (“We broke some of your peace pipes”).
- None of the texts used explicit phrases such as “we take responsibility.”
- Only two of the texts addressed Aboriginal Peoples directly, in second person. Two others used primarily third person and very occasionally used second person. Two used entirely third person.

In short, although an explicit admission of responsibility is the least complex form of language, 88 of these 89 phrases did not use this form.

We did not expect that everything in each text would express explicit responsibility for a specific harm, but it was surprising to find only one instance. We examined what the six texts were using instead of the language of responsibility in the other 88 phrases: About a quarter of phrases used nouns, linking verbs, and passive voice instead of behavioural verbs in active voice. Another quarter did not name the church as agent, usually by having no agent at all. Almost half qualified their statement of responsibility by justifying it or describing it in general or vague terms. Many phrases include two or more of these alternatives. Thus, despite different writing styles and different topics for which they were apologizing, the churches avoided expressing responsibility in similar ways.

One way to account for the similarities in the texts is to point out, more broadly, that everyday language use includes familiar ways of avoiding direct language, whether as politeness (e.g., “Would you mind doing this for me?”) or to avoid unpleasantness (e.g., euphemisms) or to avoid responsibility (e.g., “Mistakes were made”). On first reading, the texts of these statements do not appear unusual, much less to be avoiding taking responsibility--precisely because they use familiar, almost stereotypic forms. It is only by closer examination that we can recognize that these familiar phrasings are not statements of responsibility.

Conclusions

We return to the goals of the Commission, which emphasized “the truth of our common experience as essential to the process of reconciliation.” The survivors and their families have told the Commissioners their truths--the painful details of the many ways in which churches did great harm to them and to Aboriginal Peoples as a whole.

In our analysis of their statements, the churches have neither accepted responsibility for nor explicitly described what they did. It may be that the spirit of each text, taken as a whole, was intended as an apology, but none of these texts overcame the obstacles outlined in the introduction. As a result, they did not lay bare the details of the truth as the survivors’ stories have done. We re-emphasize that we are not implying how Aboriginal people should respond to these statements. Their criteria would be more varied and personal than our analysis.

Instead, our focus is to assess for the Commissioners whether, in these texts, the churches had contributed to the process of truth-telling. More broadly, we wish to propose clear criteria for judging whether other, subsequent statements from the churches take full and specific responsibility for specific acts of harm. What the churches, their members, and staff did to cause the suffering that the survivors are describing is a part of the truth that only the churches can tell.

NOTE

We intend this report to be accessible to a wide lay audience. The original proposal (http://web.uvic.ca/psyc/bavelas/2004Apologies_report_with_preface2012.pdf) includes academic information such as theoretical and legal details as well as references.

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Janet Bavelas was educated at Stanford University (A.B., Psychology; A.M., Communication Research; Ph.D., Psychology), then made her academic career in the Department of Psychology at the University of Victoria, becoming a full professor in 1986. Her research focuses on all aspects of language use, whether in laboratory experiments or applied settings. She has written three books and about 80 articles or chapters on topics as diverse as face-to-face dialogue, equivocal communication, hand and facial gestures, dyadic interaction, communication in medical or psychotherapy interactions, and social justice issues. In 1995, she was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada. She has been an active Emeritus Professor since 2005. Website: <http://web.uvic.ca/psyc/bavelas/>.

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Mr. Gerwing received his high school education in a Saskatchewan boarding school for boys operated by Benedictine monks. He subsequently joined the monastery and became a Catholic priest. He left that life at age 36. His education includes a B.A. (Philosophy), an M.A. (History) at Marquette University in Milwaukee, and an M.Ed. from the University of Alberta, and he has studied French, German, Latin, Greek, and a bit of Hebrew. His master's thesis, "The Chicago Indian Treaty of 1833," was published in the *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, Summer 1964. As an educator for most of his professional career, he has written over 500 articles for magazines and newspapers. While an instructor at Red Deer College in the 1970's, Mr. Gerwing was part of nationwide seminars on Canadian cultural identity, and he has also worked extensively in multicultural community activities in western Canada. He retired to Victoria, BC, in 2000.