

functional integrity of the communities from which the children came and to which they would return.

Christian teachings were a fundamental aspect of residential schools. Aboriginal children were taught to reject the spiritual ways of their parents and ancestors in favour of the religions that predominated among settler societies. As their traditional ways of worshipping the Creator were disparaged and rejected, so too were the children devalued. They were not respected as human beings who were equally loved by the Creator just as they were, as First Nations, Inuit, or Métis peoples. Rather, their Christian teachers saw them as inferior humans in need of being 'raised up' through Christianity, and tried to mould them into models of Christianity according to the racist ideals that prevailed at the time. The impact of such treatment was amplified by federal laws and policies that banned traditional Indigenous spiritual practices in the children's home communities for much of the residential school era.

Spiritual violence occurs when

- a person is not permitted to follow her or his preferred spiritual or religious tradition;
- a different spiritual or religious path or practice is forced on a person;
- a person's spiritual or religious tradition, beliefs, or practices are demeaned or belittled; or
- a person is made to feel shame for practising his or her traditional or family beliefs.

There is plenty of evidence to support our conclusion that spiritual violence was common in residential schools.

The effects of this spiritual violence have been profound and did not end with the schools. At the Alberta National Event, Survivor Theodore (Ted) Fontaine could have spoken for many Survivors when he said, "I went through sexual abuse. I went through physical abuse, mental, spiritual. And I'll tell you ... the one thing that we suffered [from] the most is the mental and spiritual abuse that we carried for the rest of our lives."⁶⁹

At the Saskatchewan National Event, Survivor and Elder Noel Starblanket, National Chief of the National Indian Brotherhood (later the Assembly of First Nations), talked about the intergenerational spiritual impacts of the residential schools. He said, "My great-grandfather ... was the first one to be abused by these churches and by these governments, and they forced his children into an Indian residential school and this began that legacy. They called him a pagan, a heathen ... and that was in the late 1800s. So I've been living with that in my family since then."⁷⁰

That Christians in Canada, in the name of their religion, inflicted serious harms on Aboriginal children, their families, and communities was in fundamental contradiction to what they purported to be their core beliefs. For the churches to avoid repeating their failures of the past, understanding how and why they perverted Christian doctrine to justify their actions is a critical lesson to be learned from the residential school experience.