**Political Correctness**

Among the synonyms for “dependency” are the following: helplessness, weakness, defenselessness, vulnerability, subservience, subordination, inferiority.

The vast majority of Manitoba Child and Family Services (CFS) cases involve Indigenous children. On the one hand, politicians and Indigenous leaders at all levels despair that Indigenous children are being apprehended and taken from their parents and families. On the other, when children returned to their abusive families are harmed, or murdered, the same leaders loudly protest.

As retired judge Brian Giesbrecht sadly pointed out in his thoughtful March 16 article for the Frontier Centre for Public Policy, there are no easy answers. (I know of no one who cares more about the wellbeing of children than Mr. Giesbrecht, most of whose life has been devoted to preventing their harm.)

But if we don’t even talk about the real problem, we can’t fix it. And to this date, we’re still not talking about it. Of the 10,500 Manitoba children in CFS care in 2016, 9,200 were Indigenous. How many of these Indigenous children were born into alcohol and/or drug cultures, on reserves and inner cities? And what is being done about that?

Everyone is afraid of the racist label. It’s often used to shut caring people up. But is political correctness to blame for the broken lives of all these vulnerable children?

Yes, it is.

The history of the treatment of Indigenous Canadians under our made-in-Canada apartheid system is well known. Dozens of studies, commissions, reports, apologies and compensations spanning many decades have helped us thoroughly understand the history behind the dysfunctionality of many Indigenous communities and families across our country.

As a nation, we finally acknowledge and accept responsibility for that history. We regret it. We are sorry for it. We want reconciliation. But without truth, there will be no reconciliation, and when politicians at all levels, especially Indigenous leadership, bemoan the role of child protection agencies in caring for children, they are reacting only to the symptoms of dysfunction, not its direct cause.

The symptoms are abuse and neglect at home, and children taken from those homes and families. In hushed tones, most people will agree that the direct cause of both symptoms is alcohol and substance abuse, but only a few will identify themselves and say so publicly.

If there were no alcohol and substance abuse, how many Indigenous children would be CFS children?

Rather than bickering and protesting over which level of government should have control of children’s protective services, whether too many children are taken from their families or how we handle the aftermath of cases of children who are abused and murdered by their parents or others, wouldn’t it be better for the children if we faced the truth - together - and talked about their parents’ alcohol and other addictions?

Why are politicians at all levels afraid to talk about that?

Political correctness is, dangerously and tragically, a cowardly way to disguise the truth.

Recent meetings on this subject have resulted in many of the same historical and predictable reactions: *studies will probably gather dust; not enough Indigenous control; too much non-Indigenous government interference; not enough money.* The list goes on, always emphasizing negatives and not offering workable solutions.

One participant at a recent meeting proposed that instead of foster care, there are aunties and grandmothers who can care for abused and neglected children. Arguably, in many cases this may be true, and has been true, but how did that system work for Tina Fontaine, who lost her father in a drunken brawl and who ran away from her auntie to be with her drug addicted mother, to be drug involved and sexually exploited, then to be murdered? And how many children, not murdered and not removed from their parents, endure lives of daily abuse and/or neglect, many choosing suicide?

A well-known principle of adulthood is that people must take responsibility for their actions, and their children. Nothing good will ever come from simply blaming history and colonization for bad parenting. The culture of entitlement and dependency imposed by the *Indian Act* and the treaties has resulted in this most shameful blot on Canada’s history and current reputation.

Just as dangerous, through our welfare system and the Canada Child Benefit (?), we encourage young addicted Canadians to keep having babies with fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS), many of whom later become addicts themselves, child abusers and worse. This cycle continues and is far from being broken.

It’s true there are no easy answers, but real leadership means taking action to change forever the system which has led to this sorry mess, and it means tough love for abusive and neglectful parents.

Those things in life that we value most are usually the hardest to achieve. The most important values in life I can think of would be healthy families and healthy children who are safe, nurtured and happy. For far too many Indigenous children, safety, nurture and happiness are missing. For this we can blame whomever and whatever we want, but only caring, courageous and firm leadership can fix this problem.

Thus far, that leadership has been absent.

Yes, doing the right thing is hard. Let’s do it anyway.

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