

Pax Christi Maine Renounces the Doctrine of Discovery

Whereas, in 1452 and 1455 Pope Nicholas V issued two papal bulls, *Dum Diversas* and *Romanus Pontifex*, which gave authority to King Alfonso V of Portugal to enslave human beings and to “invade, capture and vanquish all Saracens and other pagans and enemies of Christ” and “to take away all their possessions and property,” followed by Pope Alexander VI’s Papal Bull (*Inter Cetera*, 1493) authorizing Spanish monarchs (via Christopher Columbus and others) to claim sovereignty over newly “discovered” land occupied by non-Christian, “barbarous nations,” and these patterns of thought and behavior were subsequently imitated by other European monarchs which led to the unfortunate treatment of aboriginal peoples and usurpation of their lands; and

Whereas, the contents of these papal bulls and royal decrees, which came to be known as the Doctrine of Discovery, became embedded in US law in 1823 (US Supreme Court case *Johnson v. M’Intosh*), ruling that the US, as successor to European “potentates” has the “ultimate title” (right of territorial domination) over all lands within its boundaries, with the Indians having merely the “right of occupancy” (like cattle or rabbits, according to Oren Lyons) and this precedent in law was used as recently as 2005 in the US Supreme Court decision denying the Oneida Indian Nation (New York) restoration of its right of sovereignty over land set aside for it under treaties of the 18th Century; and

Whereas, Indigenous peoples have repeatedly called for a public repudiation of the ideology of conquest and discovery, which have been used as a justification for the conquest of Indigenous peoples and as the current basis for settler laws concerning Indigenous peoples, which calls include the March 2013 request by the Onondaga Nation to Pope Francis to renounce the Doctrine of Discovery; and

Whereas, the World Council of Churches Executive Committee in February 2012 denounced the Doctrine of Discovery as “fundamentally opposed to the gospel of Jesus Christ and as a violation of the inherent human rights that all individuals and peoples have received from God,” and the Episcopal Church of the USA (in 2009), the Anglican Church of Canada (in 2010) and numerous other Christian denominations have officially repudiated the Doctrine of Discovery; and

Whereas Pope John Paul II acknowledged in a speech on November 1, 1992 that the Roman Catholic Church had erred in condemning Galileo for claiming that the earth revolves around the sun, which sets a precedent for revised understanding after hundreds of years;

Whereas the four initiatives of Pax Christi USA are “Spirituality of Nonviolence and Peacemaking”, “Disarmament, Demilitarization and Reconciliation”, “Economic and Interracial Justice in the United States” and “Human Rights and Global Restoration”;

Therefore, Pax Christi Maine:

Renounces the Doctrine of Discovery formulated in the papal bulls of the 15th Century which legitimized the subjugation by Christian, European monarchs of indigenous peoples in North America and other parts of the globe, and the usurpation of their lands on the basis of their being non-Christian and “barbarous.”

Requests that Pax Christi USA and Pax Christi International study issues surrounding the Doctrine of Discovery (including its relationship to the 2007 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, now adopted by the USA, Canada, England, Australia, Holland, New Zealand, etc.) with the consideration of appealing to Pope Francis for repudiation by the Roman Catholic Church.

Adopted by PaxChristi Maine members assembled at the retreat in Belfast Maine on October 27, 2013.