

A RESOLUTION

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REPUDIATING the DOCTRINE OF DISCOVERY

The Episcopal Diocese of Colorado

Repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery & Steps Toward Conciliation

Preamble

As people who freely live and work on the lands of Colorado, whose original inhabitants were deprived of those all-encompassing benefits nearly 150 years ago, we, as Episcopalians, are compelled to respond. We are mindful of many different Christian denominational responses to the Doctrine of Discovery and subsequent edicts resulting from its adoption and must now look at the work we have begun to do and expand our vision.

The Doctrine of Discovery is defined as “the idea that Christians enjoy the moral and legal right based solely on their religious identity to invade and seize Indigenous lands and to dominate Indigenous peoples.”¹

We, the Episcopal Diocese of Colorado are called by the wider Episcopal Church, that has repudiated the Doctrine of Discovery to work for the full inclusion of Indigenous people in the life, work, and leadership of the Church.² We must acknowledge and work to repair the long-term damage done to our Indigenous siblings. The violence and damage through the centuries were sanctioned by the Christian Doctrine of Discovery and the institutions fostered by its adoption.

Members of the Colorado Coalition of Indigenous Allies therefore, propose a resolution to repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery. With this resolution, our intent is to educate ourselves, our churches, and our communities. We begin the process of acknowledgement, apology, and repair for our complicity in the land theft, genocide, and cultural assimilation of Indigenous peoples.

A Note Concerning Reparations

Our understanding of reparations is **walking together in justice**. The root of reparation is “repair.” This means to mend, put back together or in order, return to sound, good or

¹ “Statement on the Doctrine of Discovery and Its Enduring Impact on Indigenous Peoples.” World Council of Churches, February 17, 2012. <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/statement-on-the-doctrine-of-discovery-and-its-enduring-impact-on-indigenous-peoples>.

² “The Acts of Convention.” <https://digitalarchives.episcopalarchives.org>

complete condition. We are referring to this true use of the word and not necessarily the historical use inferring compensation or return of land. It is an example of the Jewish tradition of Tikkun Olam, which is any activity that improves the world, bringing it closer to the harmonious state for which it was created. Tikkun Olam implies that while the world is innately good, its Creator purposely left room for us to improve upon the Creator's work. (https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3591946/jewish/Tikkun-Olam.htm)

Financial Impact

While there may be opportunities for Diocesan financial support; this resolution is primarily about creating right relationship with our Indigenous kin.

Resolution

Resolved, that the Episcopal Diocese of Colorado repudiates the Doctrine of Discovery as fundamentally opposed to the concept of *imago dei*, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and the human dignity given to every person by God.

Resolved, that we, as members of the Episcopal Diocese of Colorado, name and confess our historical and present participation in, and benefit from, the displacement of Indigenous peoples throughout Colorado and the suppression of culture, language, traditions, and subsequent trauma that still affects Indigenous people.

Education

We acknowledge and lament the devastating results of Christian colonial theology, settler mentality of domination, and nearly 500 years of international policies that give advantages to some (North Americans, Christian, and/or those of European descent) while simultaneously oppressing Indigenous Peoples.

Resolved, to dedicate ourselves to the work of conciliation, decolonization and anti-racism, towards healing, and repair with our indigenous kin through truth-telling, and learning and embracing Indigenous perspectives.

Resolved, to create opportunities for experiential educational programs with Indigenous guidance to nurture deeper understanding and solidarity.

Resolved, to support these educational and relational efforts in faithful embodiment of the Gospel of reconciliation in both word and deed, including creating opportunities for reparative action.

Boarding Schools

We acknowledge and lament the many efforts of forced assimilation such as Indian Boarding schools, forced adoptions, and ongoing cultural genocide. The boarding schools were founded by the Federal Government, and often run by various Christian denominations, including Episcopalian. Much of the effort was aimed at assimilation rather than education; their often brutal methods resulted in long lasting, intergenerational trauma. We further acknowledge that as members and beneficiaries of the dominant social norms set in motion by the Doctrine of Discovery, our cultural complicity with the atrocities practiced in the Indian boarding schools.

Resolved, to educate ourselves about the abuses of boarding schools nationwide, to learn about the lasting trauma caused by them, to support cultural regeneration efforts, and trauma-healing sought by our Indigenous siblings.

Resolved, to form intentional relationships with Indigenous leaders in strengthening and reawakening cultural lifeways, language, arts and crafts. In response to the horrific traumas inflicted on children and families through assimilation camps, we commit resources to assist culture camps, events, and other revitalization efforts.

Resolved, to cooperate with the Episcopal Boarding School Commission by investigating the complicity of the Diocese of Colorado in the Boarding School movement.

Land Justice

We acknowledge and lament the devastating results of broken treaties and land theft through colonial and settler mentality that continues to oppress Indigenous peoples.

Resolved, to listen and follow the lead of our Indigenous Relatives as we seek to repair the harms of the past with our words and our actions, and to faithfully steward land and habitats with humble response to Indigenous guidance and teaching for the care of Creation.³

Resolved, to advocate for Indigenous Nations seeking to preserve their lands held sacred for many centuries and for Indigenous Nations seeking to remedy damage to their lands caused by extractive mineral and other damaging practices.

³ *The Inclusive Bible: The First Egalitarian Translation*. Rowman and Littlefield Publishers. *God blessed [the first male and female] and said, "Bear fruit, increase your numbers, and fill the earth – and be responsible for it!"* Genesis 1:28

Resolved, to dedicate ourselves to the work of repair, conciliation, and healing through the support of Indigenous cultural revitalization. We commit to listen and watch for new permutations of racist ideologies and policies that have their root in the Doctrine of Discovery.

Resolved, that in order that this resolution not fade, the Bishop and the Diocesan Standing Committee empowers the Colorado Coalition of Indigenous Allies to continue the work of this Resolution.

Appendix

The Doctrine of Discovery and its Ongoing Impact

The roots of this Doctrine may be found in the 1452 papal bull⁴ *Dum Diversas*, issued by Pope Nicolas to King Alfonso V of Portugal, authorizing him to “capture, vanquish, subdue the Saracens, pagans, and other enemies of Christ to “put them into perpetual slavery,” and “take all their possessions and property.” This resulted in the initial trafficking of slaves and the acclamation of land along the west coast of the African continent. This also initiated genocidal conquest in the name of Christian discovery.⁵

In 1493, Pope Alexander VI issued the *Inter Caetera* bull at the request of King Ferdinand of Aragon and Queen Isabella of Castile, in which he authorized Spain and Portugal to colonize the Americas and convert and enslave the Native peoples as subjects. It also justified the enslavement of Africans. “And we make, appoint, and depute you and your said heirs and successors lords of them with full and free power, authority, and jurisdiction of every kind...”⁷ This edict retroactively sanctioned the “discovery” of Guanahani Island (the Bahamas) by Cristoforo Columbus in 1492, and the conquest of its Indigenous peoples, as well as the other islands and peoples of the Caribbean.

The Doctrine of Discovery was embraced by the monarch of England, King Henry VII, in the early 1500s. The philosophy of discovery and dominance was affirmed in his patent to John Cabot and his sons which permitted them to investigate, claim, and possess any new lands as long as they did not intrude on Spanish or Portuguese territories.⁶

⁴ Prior to the 1700s, the Pope in Rome would issue an edict, quite formal and solemn, to express its teachings, especially ones considered infallible. After that, the teachings were issued in letters to local bishops in a more informal, pastoral style, even if still in Latin.

⁵ Charles, Mark, and Soong-Chan Rah. *Unsettling Truths: the Ongoing, Dehumanizing Legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery*. IVP, an imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2019.

⁶ “Patent Granted by King Henry VII to John Cabot and His SONS, March 1496.” Patent Granted by King Henry VII to John Cabot. <https://www.heritage.nf.ca/articles/exploration/1496-cabot-patent.php>.

Although prior to the reformation, this established a direct link between the papal bulls and the English people whose monarch would become the head of the Church of England. No English monarch has repudiated Henry VII's patent to Cabot. This patent was quoted by Supreme Court Chief Justice John Marshall to justify ruling in *Johnson vs. McIntosh* in 1823 which denied native inhabitants title rights to land.⁷

The Declaration of Independence was adopted on July 4, 1776. The familiar statement within this foundational document states, "We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal" and yet, just a few lines after Native people are referred to as "merciless Indian savages" and have subsequently been denied basic human rights.⁸ The Doctrine of Discovery went on to be further expressed in the concept of Manifest Destiny, the idea that expansion to the Pacific was the young nation's right, where title to the land lay with its discoverer. All along its western border, the U.S. pressed for more land to accommodate the expanding nation. As one of the largest land acquisitions, the Louisiana Purchase doubled the size of the United States and rapidly expanded and weaponized the government's persecution of Native Americans over their right to live on and care for their land. Throughout the nation's history, the U.S. had used the term *Indian Territory* to talk about land that was still under the control of Native peoples. "Indian Territory" moved farther west as the U.S. frontier pushed westward. Even in the east, the Indigenous peoples were not safe – in 1830 President Andrew Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act, authorizing the Army to force Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, and Seminole tribes out of Georgia and surrounding states. This set the stage for the Cherokee Trail of Tears and other forced relocation marches. By 1890, Native population fell to an all-time low. The 1890 census records 237,196 Native people—a decrease of approximately 95 percent from a population in 1491 that some historians estimate at more than 100 million.⁹

As the Native Americans were moved from their ancestral lands, their cultures were further attacked by the formation of assimilation camps, often called "Indian Residential Schools". Established in the United States during the early 19th century, their primary objective was the "civilizing" or assimilation of Native American children and youth into an Anglo culture. This required the children to give up the language and religion of their birth and subjected them to the repeated disparagement of their own culture. By 1898, epidemics that broke out in the schools made parents afraid to enroll their children. In response, and with perhaps the best intent but the most misguided action, the Board of Indian Affairs acted. "On this account the new education of American Indians as it has been founded in recent years by devoted men and women undertakes to solve the

⁷ "Johnson and Graham's Lessee v. McIntosh." https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johnson_v._McIntosh

⁸ "The Declaration of Independence." Constitution Facts - Official U.S. Constitution Website. Accessed July 31, 2021. <https://www.constitutionfacts.com/us-declaration-of-independence/read-the-declaration/>.

⁹ U.S. National Library of Medicine. www.nlm.nih.gov/nativevoices/timeline/379.html

problem of civilizing them by a radical system of education not merely in books, nor merely in religious ceremonies, but in matters of clothing and personal cleanliness, Colorado housed the following boarding schools: None of these schools were run by the Episcopal Church ¹⁵

1. [Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School](#), Hesperus CO.
2. [Good Shepherd Industrial](#), Denver CO
3. [Grand Junction Indian School](#), Grand Junction, Colorado
4. [Southern Ute Boarding School](#), Ignacio, Colorado
5. [Ute Mountain Boarding School, Towaoc, Colorado](#)

Biblical Foundation for Repudiation & Restoration

The idea that one nation or race of people has a priority in the affections of God is a false one, for in the Hebrew scriptures we read:

Genesis 27: God created humankind in His image, in the image of God He created him, male and female. He created them.

Jeremiah 3:17 The Inclusive Bible

When that time comes, Jerusalem will be the Throne of God nations will gather there in the Name of YHWH and they will no longer follow the dictates of their own stubborn hearts.”

And in the Book of Revelation, *After that*,

I [John], saw before me an immense crowd without number, from every nation, tribe, people, and language. They stood in front of the throne and the Lamb, dressed in long white robes and holding palm branches. Revelation 7:9 The Inclusive Bible

The concept of restoration is one of the oldest in our Judeo-Christian tradition, for in Leviticus we read:

Count off seven “weeks” of years – seven times seven years – so that the Seven Sabbaths of years come to a period of forty-nine years. Then on the tenth day of the seventh month – the Day of Atonement – sound the trumpet throughout all your land. Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim freedom in the land for all its inhabitants. It is your year of Jubilee: each of you is to return to your ancestral land, to your own family... In this year of Jubilee, all of you are to return to your ancestral land... You must not sell land in perpetuity, for the land belongs to me, and you are

only foreigners and tenants. Leviticus 25:8-10, 13, 23 The Inclusive Bible

In another text, from the story of Zacchaeus, found in Luke's Gospel, we hear:

When everyone saw this, they began to grumble, "Jesus has gone to a sinner's house as a guest." Zacchaeus stood his ground and said to Jesus, "Here and now I give half my belongings to poor people. If I've defrauded anyone in the least, I'll pay them back fourfold." Jesus said to the tax collector, "Today salvation has come to this house, for this is what it means to be a descendant of Sarah and Abraham." Luke 19:7-9 The Inclusive Bible

And finally, God's words from Joel 2:25-32:

I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter, my great army, which I sent among you. "You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of the LORD your God, who has dealt wondrously with you. And my people shall never again be put to shame. You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the LORD your God and there is none else. And my people shall never again be put to shame.

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