



THE LEGACY OF THE DOCTRINE OF DISCOVERY

Welcome

Today we have come together to learn, explore, and reflect on the roots of racism in our world. Some of you may already be familiar with the material that will be presented, while for others this may be new information. It is hoped that for all of us, this time will provide an opportunity for new insights and better understanding.

Some of this experience will be uncomfortable, but don't block the pain, the questions, the feelings. Stay with them as they can touch us in ways that provide greater awareness and deeper insight. None of what we share is about guilt but rather about an honest look at the reality of racism. Guilt rarely changes behavior, rather, it often tends to strengthen our denial. So, let's leave those things at the door and enter into this experience together knowing that it is our call as well as our challenge as MERCY.

Opening Prayer

We invite you to open your time together with a short service, beginning with this traditional prayer:

*Oh Great Spirit, Whose voice I hear on the wind
And whose breath gives life to all the world
Hear me!*

*I am small and weak,
I need your strength and wisdom.
Let me walk in beauty and make my eyes ever
Behold the red and purple sunset.*

*Make my hands respect the things you have made
And my ears sharp to hear your voice.
Make me wise so that I may understand
The things you have taught my people
Let me hear the lessons you have hidden
In every leaf and rock.*

*I need strength,
Not to be greater than my brothers and sisters,*

*But to fight my greatest enemy
Myself.*

*Make me always ready to
Come to you with clean hands and straight eyes.
So when life fades, as the fading sunset,
My spirit may come to you without shame.*

Aho (amen)

Reading

The Papal Bulls issued in the 1400's played a central role in the conquest of the New World. These documents supported the strategy to ensure Europe's exclusive right to the lands discovered by the explorers of that time.

*These Bulls stated that any land not inhabited by Christians was available to be "discovered," claimed and exploited by Christian rulers, and declared that the "Catholic faith and the Christian religion be exalted and be everywhere increased and spread, that the health of the faith should be cared for and that barbarous nations be overthrown and brought to the faith itself." This "Doctrine of Discovery" became the basis of all European claims globally. In the US Supreme Court in the 1823 case *Johnson v McIntosh*, Chief Justice John Marshall's opinion in the unanimous decision held "that the principle of discovery gave European nations an absolute right to the New World lands." In essence American Indians had only a right of occupancy, which could be abolished.*

In the Doctrine of Discovery we find the roots of injustice that continue to impact Indigenous people even today.

Quiet reflection

Petitions

For the inhumanity, violence and oppression of Indigenous people....

For the effects of forced assimilation that attempted to destroy a people, their culture, language and traditions....

For our complicity in allowing this injustice to continue unrecognized and unreconciled....

*Together: we ask forgiveness of God and that of our Indigenous brothers and Sisters
We pray for the courage to acknowledge our blindness,*

*For the strength to work to uproot the injustice
And for the will to work toward right relationship with not only with Indigenous people
but all the communities of color.*

Closing from the Ojibway people

*Grandfather,
Sacred one,
Teach us love, compassion and honor,
That we may heal the earth
And heal each other.*

Introduction to the Doctrine of Discovery



We have all heard the story of how Christopher Columbus “discovered” America and took possession of the land, claiming it for the king and queen of Spain. Columbus viewed this as his right under the international laws of Western Christendom. But how can you discover a land when it is already inhabited by highly advanced civilizations?

The land that Columbus, and subsequent explorers came to, had people who were highly skilled, with well-structured governments, and advanced scientific knowledge. The pyramids in Central and South America were built well before the pyramids in Egypt. Huge communities across the Americas were established with educational facilities, spiritual centers, and highly evolved agricultural systems. Yet they were treated as if they were illiterate heathens and in need of being saved by the invaders when, in fact, this was not true at all.

This conquest was condoned by what is called “**The Doctrine of Discovery.**” This doctrine was based on 3 Papal Bulls. The first, *Dum Diversas*, was issued on June 18, 1452. The second was *Romanus Pontifex*, issued by Nicholas V on January 8, 1454. The third, *Inter Caetera*, was issued on May 4, 1493 by Alexander VI. These Bulls led to England’s King Henry VII giving John Cabot the power to “investigate, claim and possess lands.” All of these documents supported Europe’s strategy to ensure its exclusive right to the lands “discovered” during this period of exploration.

The documents declared war against all non-Christians through the world and specifically sanctioned and promoted conquest, colonization, and exploitations of non-Christen nations and their territories. Globally, Indigenous people who refused to convert were either enslaved or put to death. Even the Indigenous people who did convert were permitted only the right of occupancy of the land, not ownership, the same as the animals.

This initial history had an impact on shaping the thinking and actions of generations to come. It is not surprising, then, that the Indigenous people of the Americas were captured, enslaved and sent to work on the mines and plantations of the Caribbean. Later it also led to the capture and enslavement of African Indigenous who were brought to the United States as slaves to work the plantations and foster the economic growth of a new nation. Washington and Jefferson both had slaves on their plantations. So is it any wonder that our constitution gave rights to only white men of means and did not outlaw slavery?

This deeply embedded history has contributed to the on-going racial divide experienced globally. Until we are willing to acknowledge this reality and its accompanying white privilege, racial justice will never happen. Exploring this issue is not about guilt but more about recognizing this inheritance and determining to make the changes necessary in our own personal lives.

Prayer and reflection can lead us to a conversion of heart. Difficult as this task may be it is our call and challenge to begin the journey. Holding one another in prayer may we move forward together, committed to the task of personal and communal transformation.

Some points to ponder and reflect:

- Were you aware of the “Doctrine of Discovery” before reading this introduction?
- If you knew about the Doctrine, how and where were you introduced to it?
- If you never heard of the “Doctrine of Discovery” before reading this, why do you think that is so?
- How do you feel after reading/learning about this proclamation?

For the next hour we are going to view a documentary film entitled “The Doctrine of Discovery: Unmasking the Domination Code.” As we view this well-documented film, be conscious of any new learnings that will help you to better understand the roots of racism. Be aware of your feelings as the film progresses. This is not about feeling guilt but rather about being informed and better educated so an increased understanding will develop.

After the film:

Let's just spend a few moments of quiet. After about 5 minutes, distribute the questions for reflection. Allow 30 minutes for people to quietly reflect, either staying in the space or walking elsewhere. Remind them to return to the space.

Reflection Questions:

- Were you taught anything about the Doctrine of Discovery in your educational background?
- Were you taught anything at all about the cultures that were here prior to colonization?
- Did this film change the way you view world history, the history of the United States or the history of the church?
- If you had been taught about the Doctrine of Discovery would it have changed your world view? Would it have perhaps made you question the way institutional structures are put in place?
- Does this perhaps help you understand why trust is hard for people of color?
- Does this information make you want to learn more about those people who have been pushed to the margins?
- How do you think you might go about forming relationships with Indigenous communities or other communities of color?

After some time with the reflection questions, invite participants to share either in a large or small group depending on their numbers. If in small groups, perhaps there could be a few minutes at the end for highlights of the small group sharing with the entire group.

Closing

End with a few minutes of quiet and then invite anyone who wishes to share a petition or prayer.

For Further Learning

Please consider deepening your education and transformation with the use of these resources:

BOOKS

[The Truth about the Doctrine of Discovery](#), Meru El Muad'dib

[Pagans in the Promised Land](#), Steve T. Newcomb

[Unsettling Truths-The Ongoing Dehumanization Legacy Of the Doctrine of Discovery](#), Mark Charles and Soong-Chan Rah

FILMS ON AMAZON PRIME

Columbus In America

Curse of the Axe, Rewriting American History

Columbus Day Legacy

YOU TUBE VIDEOS

[On the Doctrine of Discovery](#), Reverend Kathleen Owens (45 min.)

Mark Charles on [Race Trauma and the Doctrine of Discovery](#) (60 min.)

[Doctrine of Discovery](#) (43 min.)

Discovered or Stolen, Repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery (6 min.)