

# New York Yearly Meeting

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Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)

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September 7, 2015

Dear Pope Francis, Bishop of Rome:

We in the New York Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends are called to answer “that of God” in our Indigenous neighbors as in every person. We therefore begin by expressing gratitude for your recent words in Bolivia, recognizing the humanity and dignity of the Indigenous Peoples of the Americas and of the world, and apologizing and asking forgiveness for “grave sins” and “crimes” against Native Peoples of America in the name of God. We too in the Religious Society of Friends have been complicit in the wrongs done to Native Peoples, and we unite with the call for justice that we hear in your words.

We believe that the deepest movement towards seeking forgiveness includes steps to remediate the evil that occurred as a result of those acts. In this case, the acts were founded in several papal bulls, notably the papal bull *Inter Caetera*, issued in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries, which expressed the doctrine that certain human beings, because they were not Christian, were not entitled to fundamental dignity and rights. In particular, rights that this Doctrine denied to them included the right to control over their ancestral homelands and the right to remain and live there in peace, the rights to self-government and civil organization, and even the right to life itself. The Doctrine of Discovery stated that any “Christian prince” whose representative first came upon such lands (“discovered” them, in the language of the papal bulls) was entitled to own and control the lands and to displace, kill, or enslave the inhabitants. This Doctrine is referred to as the Doctrine of Christian Discovery, or sometimes just the Doctrine of Discovery.

This Doctrine has led to and served as justification for exploitation, discrimination, and genocide carried out throughout the following centuries against many peoples of this earth, including the area now known as the United States of America. This Doctrine has been absorbed into our thinking, our culture, and our social fabric. It has been formally engrafted onto the law of the United States, as well as other nation-states, and remains in effect today. The harm that this has caused continues into our current age and today's society. The Doctrine continues to cause further harm and suffering to Indigenous peoples within the borders of the United States and in many other places around the world.

We are moved by the words of your encyclical *Laudato Si*, that “disregard for the duty to cultivate and maintain a proper relationship with my neighbor, for whose care and custody I am responsible, ruins my relationship with my own self, with others, with God and with the earth.” (*Laudato Si* 30) Jesus showed by example that we must be open and accepting of all as brothers and sisters, even those whose faith is different from ours, when He healed “pagans” such as the servant of the Roman centurion and the daughter of the Syrophenician woman, spoke with and accepted water from the Samaritan woman at the well, and gave the parable of the “good Samaritan” (Matthew 8:5-13; Mark 7:24-30; John 4 :7-27; Luke 10:25-37).

The traditional practices of our Indigenous sisters and brothers are founded in great respect for our common mother, the Earth. Traditional teachings require taking no more from the Earth than necessary to sustain life and preserve it, considering at every step the effect of one's actions for seven generations into the future. But the Doctrine of Christian Discovery expressed in the papal bull *Inter Caetera* denies Indigenous People full control even of the land that has been left aside for them to dwell on. Because Native Peoples were considered “pagans,” control of the land passed to and remains with those who claimed the land in the name of “Christian princes.” The time has come, we believe, to repudiate that doctrine so we may all join with our Indigenous sisters and brothers to meet “the urgent challenge to protect our common home [which] includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development” (*Laudato Si* 13).

In 2012, New York Yearly Meeting approved a minute of conscience, a formal statement repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery and calling for instituting the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples of 2007 as law of the land. A copy of that minute is attached. We believe that continuing revelation is available to all.

We direct this appeal to you in particular as you visit our country, because you, as Pope, are both the head of the Roman Catholic Church and the direct successor to those who issued these papal bulls, which we believe to be so contrary to the foundational teaching of Jesus and Holy Scripture, as well as your namesake Francis of Assisi. We call upon you and upon the Roman Catholic Church to repudiate and revoke, clearly and formally, this pernicious doctrine, which was enunciated by your predecessors, and we ask you in turn to call upon the nations and peoples of the world to repeal and renounce any laws, policies, or acts based upon this doctrine and to take appropriate steps towards healing the harm that has resulted from it.

Yours in peace,



Lucinda Antrim

Clerk, New York Yearly Meeting

**The 320<sup>th</sup> New York Yearly Meeting  
Summer Sessions**

**July 19 - 25, 2015**

Silver Bay, New York

**Friday, July 24 — Evening**

Friday, July 24, 2015, 7:15 p.m.

*Jeffrey L. Hitchcock (Rahway & Plainfield), Clerk  
Lucinda Antrim (Scarsdale), Assistant Clerk  
Andrew Mead von Salis (Brooklyn), Recording Clerk*

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2015-07-77. The Clerk introduced Emily Boardman (Cornwall), who read the portions, amended since its first reading this afternoon, of the proposed letter to Pope Francis, Bishop of Rome, urging repudiation of the centuries-old Doctrine of Christian Discovery and remediation of its past and continuing harms. (Minute 2015-07-59,-60.) She reported that each objection heard earlier has been addressed in whatever way may be feasible. A copy is **attached**.

Questions about the language were raised; explanations were given and some edits were made. The letter was approved for the Clerk to issue to the Pope.

## **Minute on the Doctrine of Discovery**

Approved July 25, 2012

New York Yearly Meeting Summer Sessions  
Silver Bay, New York

2012-07-25. Indian Affairs Committee Co-clerk Susan Wolf (Ithaca) presented the proposed minute regarding repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery (also known as the Doctrine of Christian Discovery), a principle of international law that originated in Christian church law and has long been invoked as a basis for past colonization of indigenous lands and peoples. She cited examples of current uses of land in America that Native peoples consider to be desecrations.

The Committee has engaged the Yearly Meeting on this issue and its current relevance in U.S. law in conversations, publications, and postings on its page of the Yearly Meeting Web site. On July 9, 2012, the Witness Coordinating Committee approved the minute repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery.

In worship, we heard that churches worldwide have credited Friends and Anglicans for bringing to their attention the injustice of the Doctrine of Discovery, which was promulgated in Jesus' name, and which has profited Friends' historic migrations and settlements as well as those of others. We also heard a call to repentance, confession and the necessity of ongoing stewardship. The Yearly Meeting approved the following minute as proposed, with one Friend standing aside:

We seek to live in a just peace with our fellow human beings, both as individuals, and as peoples.

The United States has formally declared its support for the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples of 2007. We now call on the United States Senate to enact the legislation that will make this the law of the land in the United States of America.

We repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery, which originated in the 15th century from Papal Bulls and European royal charters issued at that time. The Doctrine of Discovery mandated the seizure of lands belonging to any non-Christian peoples and encouraged the enslavement, exploitation, or eradication of those peoples. We cannot accept that the Doctrine of Discovery was ever a true authority for the forced takings of lands and the enslavement or extermination of peoples. It is reprehensible for the United States to use the Doctrine of Discovery as a legal doctrine to compel a jurisdiction over Indigenous Peoples or their lands.

We honor the inalienable rights of Indigenous Peoples to their homelands, water, spiritual practices, languages, cultural practices, and to self-government, all of which sustain life and the life of a People, and the autonomy of Indigenous Peoples. An Indigenous People has the right to make decisions and establish constructive arrangements with other nations, governments and peoples on their own behalf.

2012-07-26. At the request of the Indian Affairs Committee and the Witness Coordinating Committee, Friends directed the incoming Clerk and the General Secretary, in consultation with the incoming or continuing clerks of those committees, to disseminate widely the foregoing approved minute and its underlying concerns to the monthly meetings and Friends within New York Yearly Meeting, and to government officials, Friends organizations, other faith groups, Native nations, and other appropriate organizations.

2012-07-27. Friends approved minutes 25 and 26.