

Reviewing and Repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery in 2017- A personal Journey

The Anglican Church of Canada has officially repudiated the **Doctrine of Discovery**. This doctrine led to a desire to eradicate all Aboriginal People, around the world, leaving Europeans as the dominant people. The doctrine became an instrument of genocide, pain, and a knife in the heart of Christianity. It is a wound that will not be healed until we look at it honestly and personally reflect upon it. It often establishes a framework for our attitudes toward minority people in our society today. Aboriginal Canadians, immigrants of non-European heritage and people who express their spirituality in Non-Christian ways are seen as outsiders. Some of this societal prejudice has its roots in this ancient and ignorant doctrine.

I have reproduced the doctrine here. I invite you as part of your Lenten reflection to read it and internally challenge your response to it, asking yourself “Would Jesus support this doctrine?” Then in reflection, “Does this doctrine, in anyway, shape my attitude toward my neighbours, immigrants and others who worship God in a different pathway than myself?” “Do I accidentally through my attitudes keep this doctrine alive in my heart?”

Papal Bull Dum Diversas, 18 June, 1452 (Doctrine of Discovery)

Pope Nicholas V issued the papal bull Dum Diversas on 18 June, 1452. It authorised Alfonso V of Portugal to reduce any “Saracens (Muslims) and pagans and any other unbelievers” to perpetual slavery. This facilitated the Portuguese slave trade from West Africa.

The same pope wrote the bull [Romanus Pontifex](#) on January 5, 1455 to the same Alfonso. As a follow-up to the Dum diversas, it extended to the Catholic nations of Europe, dominion over discovered lands during the Age of Discovery. Along with sanctifying the seizure of non-Christian lands, it encouraged the enslavement of native, non-Christian peoples in Africa and the New World. (North and South America, Australia and New Zealand)

Nicolas wrote “We, weighing all and singular, the premises, with due meditation, and noting that since we had formerly, by other letters of ours, granted among other things free and ample faculty to the aforesaid King Alfonso -- to invade, search out, capture, vanquish, and subdue all Saracens and pagans whatsoever, and other enemies of Christ wheresoever placed, and the kingdoms, dukedoms, principalities, dominions, possessions, and all

movable and immovable goods whatsoever held and possessed by them and to reduce their persons to perpetual slavery, and to apply and appropriate to himself and his successors the kingdoms, dukedoms, counties, principalities, dominions, possessions, and goods, and to convert them to his and their use and profit -- by having secured the said faculty, the said King Alfonso, or by his authority, the aforesaid infante, justly and lawfully has acquired and possessed, and doth possess, these islands, lands, harbors, and seas, and they do, of right, belong and pertain to the said King Alfonso and his successors”.

In 1493 Alexander VI issued the bull [Inter Caetera](#) stating one Christian nation did not have the right to establish dominion over lands previously dominated by another Christian nation, thus establishing the Law of Nations.

Together, the Dum Diversas, the [Romanus Pontifex](#) and the [Inter Caetera](#) came to serve as the basis and justification for the Doctrine of Discovery, the global slave-trade of the 15th and 16th centuries, and the Age of Imperialism.

This was a Roman Catholic doctrine. The Protestant Reformation soon historically followed in this period. While most things from the Roman Catholic tradition were abandoned, this doctrine was quietly embraced and followed. Partially because it was self-serving and because the supporters of the new churches were economically benefitted by the impact of this doctrine. This included the Anglican Church, the Lutherans, the Calvinists Churches and the Mennonites.

In 2017 we are more educated and know more about our world, as well as our Christian roots than Pope Nicolas V did in his day. Should we continue to allow an attitude from 1452, before Columbus, shape our moral and societal outlook today? It is important that as we prepare for the Resurrection of Easter, we follow Jesus, our Christ with an attitude of restoration, respect and love.

Blessings as we journey to the Cross of Good Friday and the joy of the Resurrection, “The gift of the promise of Eternal Life”.

Vicar Dave

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