

Minutes of Conscience on the Doctrine of Discovery

from New England and Philadelphia Yearly Meetings

MINUTE FROM NEW ENGLAND YEARLY MEETING on the DOCTRINE of DISCOVERY

This work has taken three years and the education and ongoing work within New England Friends has been recognized as the "work of a generation"

Committee on Racial, Social, and Economic Justice, clerk Rachel Carey-Harper (Barnstable), expressed appreciation and gratitude for the wisdom and guidance of Jamie Bissonette Lewey, Mother Bear, and other traditional tribal people in New England who have invested much energy and love in their commitment to stay with us on this journey, sharing their experience of the Doctrine of Discovery.

We know that to simply say "we repudiate this doctrine" does not do enough. We need to make amends, we need to learn more, and we need to find out how to do more. What would it mean to truly live in a way that acknowledges and works to rectify this terrible injustice? We need to move from empire to beloved community, knowing the history of papal injunctions to justify the claiming of land and how tightly this way of thinking underlies the charter granted to William Penn as well as many other examples of the ways that this doctrine continues to inform so many aspects of how we live in the world now, our policies, practices, and possessions. It is important to reflect on the local specificities of the history of the doctrine of discovery here in New England: from whence come the titles to our meetinghouses? A Friend from Bolivia, an Aymara woman who knows in deep personal experience what it means to live under the Doctrine of Discovery, has gradually come to see and feel the presence of this doctrine not only in Bolivia but here among Quakers in the United States. This is not just an historical question; it is a present question; it is a future question. At its heart is failing to see the light in all people, failing to see that all people have needs, failing to see people at all. Every day we give ourselves permission to do things that rest upon our privileges and we can daily personally take responsibility for how we live with each other, recognizing that no one of us is any more precious than anyone else. We cannot change the past, but we can change how we record history and the stories we tell, so that the truth of our actions is openly explored. We need to recognize that there is much work to do in our own Quaker communities, in our souls. We share this world.

Friends approved the following Minute:

The Doctrine of Discovery was used to justify Christians "right" to dominate, exploit and claim the lands of non-Christians that they "discovered." In the days of European exploration and colonization, governments relied on the Doctrine of Discovery, which has its roots in racism, to commit great harm against Native peoples. This doctrine has justified policies of deception, forced removal, sterilization, enslavement, and genocide. The doctrine has not disappeared or been revoked. It has force of law globally and serves as a framework of oppression fully intact in US federal Indian law today. In 2012 the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) focused on encouraging global repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery.

We as New England Yearly Meeting repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery. We are beginning a journey to consider the moral and spiritual implications of how we benefit from and have been harmed by the doctrine as individuals and meetings. The workings of this doctrine are invisible to most of us. Our first work is to remove the logs from our eyes so that we may see. We need to learn more, find ways to seek forgiveness, and to ask how the Spirit might lead us. We have heard powerful testimonies of how these issues have affected our lives. We encourage consultation with Indigenous Peoples to restore the health of ourselves and our planet. We recognize that this is our work to do. On this path, respectfully traveled in love, our goal is true healing so the Light of God can be answered in everyone. Our intention is to walk toward being in right relationship with the whole human family and the planet.

Philadelphia Yearly Meeting (PYM) Minute on the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN DRIP)

Preface:

Affirming our testimonies of peace and equality, we seek to live in just and equitable peace with our fellow human beings, both as individuals and as peoples. We recognize the early role of Philadelphia Quakers in the history of relations between Friends and the Indigenous Peoples of North America. We desire to continue the legacy of William Penn's quest for right relationship with Indigenous Peoples by working to improve recognition of Indigenous Peoples and their rights.

The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN DRIP) is an international human rights instrument adopted by the UN General Assembly on Sept. 13, 2007 after more than 20 years of negotiations. It was originally approved by 143 countries. As of 2008, only 4 countries had not endorsed it: The United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. It is now endorsed by all, the final endorsement occurring on December 16, 2010, when President Obama officially endorsed the UN DRIP for the United States. The UN DRIP affirms the fundamental rights of Indigenous Peoples to exist as unique cultural groups.

Indigenous Peoples have rights to own and control their lands, resources, spiritual practices, languages, and cultural practices, and to self-government. We honor the inalienable rights that sustain the existence of Indigenous Peoples.

This minute would put the PYM Religious Society of Friends on record supporting Indigenous Peoples' calls for justice and fairness in dealing with state and national governments. Following the lead of Baltimore Yearly Meeting, New York Yearly Meeting, the American Friends Service Committee, and Canadian Yearly Meeting, as well as of individual Quaker monthly meetings and other religious groups such as the Unitarians and Episcopalians, our endorsement would serve as a continuing reminder of our need to support and to lead in practices of healing and restorative justice and to walk faithfully with our Native brothers and sisters as they seek healing and justice in the 21st century.

Minute:

We hereby minute our approval of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN DRIP) as endorsed by countries around the world. We call on Friends in our monthly meetings within PYM to likewise show their support by considering a minute of approval and by acting on their support through further study, education, and advocacy. We ask that monthly meetings communicate their actions on the UN DRIP with the Indian Committee, who will report their witness and share their work with Philadelphia Yearly Meeting.

Approved at Annual Sessions, July 28, 2013

What we choose to emphasize in this complex history will determine our lives... The future is an infinite succession of presents, and to live now as we think human beings should live, in defiance of all that is bad around us, is itself a marvelous victory. Zinn