

Historical Route of a Papal Bull – Doctrine of Discovery

During the Festival of the Dedication of the Temple in Jerusalem, the religious authorities press Jesus to identify himself. Their concerns are sinister in intent. Jesus answers claiming that he was sent into world by the Lord God Almighty and that he was doing only what his Father asked of him to do. Jesus points out that his words and actions demonstrate these truths. In response to this answer, some of the religious authorities pick up stones planning to hurl them at Jesus and to put him to death immediately. Jesus walks away and escapes. Jesus crosses the Jordan River to continue teaching and healing in the wilderness near the place where he had been baptized.

Along the banks of the Jordan River, Jesus receives a message from two friends and learns that their brother Lazarus was dying. After taking a couple of days to finish the work which the Lord God Almighty had set out for him, Jesus journeys to Bethany arriving at the home of Martha and Mary. Unlike the religious authorities in Jerusalem, Martha welcomes Jesus and has no difficulty identifying Jesus as the Anointed One sent by the Lord God Almighty to usher in a new and wonderful creation.

Read John 11:32-44. What catches my attention in this gospel reading?

When Mary learns that Jesus was drawing close to her family home, she rushes out and her neighbours follow her, some wanting to support Mary and Martha in their grief. Mary finds Jesus. Sobbing, Mary kneels at the feet of Jesus and declares her faith in what Jesus is capable of doing in healing the sick. All three of these siblings have listened to Jesus teach and experienced healing in their lives. Mary tells Jesus that their brother Lazarus has died. Jesus responds to the pain which Mary and Martha are experiencing with compassion. As the author of the gospel story notes, **“Jesus is greatly disturbed in spirit and greatly moved.” John 11:33.** Jesus asks Mary and Martha to take him to the place where they have wrapped and laid the body of their brother.

Along the way, Jesus listens and hears some of the neighbours muttering among themselves like wolves in sheep’s clothing. Among themselves, these neighbours are saying that if Jesus could have arrived earlier, then Jesus could have healed Lazarus just as he had made the man who had been born blind able to see. Again, Jesus is greatly disturbed. But this time, the author of the gospel story identifies how Jesus responds to this muttering, noting **“Jesus begins to weep.” John 11:35.**

At the tomb, Jesus is decisive. Even though the body of Lazarus has lain in this tomb for four days, Jesus commands Mary, Martha, and some of their neighbours to move the slab of stone out of the way so they do as they have been directed.

Jesus then gives thanks to the Lord God Almighty who sent him into this world that his prayers are heard.

Jesus cries out in a loud voice, **“Lazarus! Come out!” John 11:43.**

Even though his whole body had been bound with strips of cloth, Lazarus stands up and begins to walk out of the cave which had been his grave. With enthusiasm, Mary and Martha along with some of their friends set Lazarus free.

Jesus teaches about the generosity of the Lord God Almighty and then demonstrates that he too has the same power to set people free from affliction, sorrow, and even death.

Reread John 11:32-44. What is God saying to us in this gospel reading?

Over almost 2000 years, an evolution in theology took place in Christianity. In this generation, members of the Church are coming to realize that we have lost our way and need to find a new way forward. The Church is being called out of our tomb and we are looking for others to unbind us from the destructive dynamics of colonization. In the teachings of gospel readings, Jesus calls us to wholeness and to discover new life.

By June 1452, Pope Nicholas V issued a theological and political document known as a papal bull called **Dum Diversas** based on the understanding that made Europeans superior to all other Human Beings. “(Alfonso V of Portugal was given) full and free permission to invade, search out, capture, and subjugate the Saracens (Islamic Peoples) and pagans and any other unbelievers and enemies of Christ wherever they may be and to reduce their persons into perpetual servitude.” This papal bull legitimized the practice of slavery and became the template for further papal bulls giving the same authority to accomplish the same purposes. European kings in the name of Christ could subjugate Islamic Peoples and Indigenous Peoples found anywhere in the world. Through these documents, the Doctrine of Discovery was articulated to guide those who set out across the oceans to find new lands.

Another papal bull issued in May 1493 by Pope Alexander VI known as **Inter Caetera** extended these policies and practices to Ferdinand II of Aragon and Queen Isabella I of Castile so that Spain was given full political sovereignty over lands in what we know to be the Americas. This papal bull further articulated the Doctrine of Discovery, identifying Indigenous Peoples in a hierarchy below European Peoples, at best as “children” to be assimilated into European nations or at worst as “savages” to be conquered, enslaved, and killed. This Doctrine of Discovery has been in effect for a few hundred years and has yet to be repudiated.

In June 1497 when Giovanni Caboto, known in English as John Cabot, arrived on the shores of Newfoundland, he planted the flag of King Henry VII and claimed the land for England. Giovanni Caboto carried a sword which had been blessed by the Pope, plunged it into the soil, sang a Christian chant, and then baptized this new found land. The English King commissioned Giovanni Caboto, saying “And that the aforesaid John and his sonnes...may subdue, occupie, and possesse all such towns, cities, castles, and yles of them founde, which they can subdue, occupie and possesse...as our vassailes and lieutenantes...” These ceremonies legally crystalized “the sovereignty of the monarch” in accordance with English law. It didn’t matter that this explorer believed that he had found the eastern shores of Asia instead of the shores of Turtle Island.

In May 1534, Jacques Cartier rounded the tip of northern Newfoundland on his way up the St. Lawrence waterway in search of the riches of eastern Asia. When Jacques Cartier arrived on the shores of the Gaspé Peninsula, he planted a cross emblazoned with the coat of arms of King Francis I, plunged a sword given to him by the Pope into the soil, sang a Christian chant, baptized the peninsula, and claimed these lands and all her riches for France.

The Doctrine of Discovery is based on another Latin term “terra nullius” which means “nobody’s land”. Since Indigenous Peoples were considered to be “pagans” and “the enemies of Christ”, this legal concept identified all new found lands to be empty. Indigenous Peoples from coast to coast to coast have pointed out that the Settlers from Europe and their descendants arrived and then claimed the lands and waters here in the name of their respective Sovereigns as if millions of Indigenous Peoples were not living here with complex sets of trading relationships, systems of governance, laws, knowledge, medical care, ways of providing mutual aid, and spiritual practices. The Assembly of First Nations maintains that the presumed racial superiority of European Christian peoples was used to dehumanize, exploit, and subjugate Indigenous Peoples. Lands and waters which had been entrusted to their care by Creator/Great Spirit for thousands of years were seized and given to “civilized” persons as their private property.

Saysewahum Sylvia McAdam comes from Nahiyah Nation (Big River Cree Nation) in Saskatchewan and is one of the women who founded the grassroots Idle-No-More movement. Dr. McAdam points out that the planting of crosses and swords in the soil of these new found lands in the names of their Churches and Monarchs is like saying, “I have fairy dust, but you can’t see it...but you have to believe me, I have fairy dust...and if enough generations of your children believe that I have fairy dust, it’s going to be the truth.” For Dr. Saysewahum Sylvia McAdam, this is how the sovereignty of the Crown continues to be in effect in Canada today. Dr. John Borrows from Neyaashiinigmiing (the Chippewas of Nawash) on the Saugeen Peninsula in Ontario identifies the Doctrine of Discovery as “legal fiction”. Both professors teach law at different universities in Canada bringing their respective understanding of their own Indigenous Peoples laws and ethics to courtrooms.

In spite of the ongoing impact of the Doctrine of Discovery, two treaties were signed which identified Indigenous Peoples as sovereign nations involved in complex trading relationships and as allies in North America. In 1701, the Great Peace of Montreal was signed in between the French Governor with representatives of the Five Nations of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy as well as with over 30 other First Nations from the shores of the Atlantic Ocean to the southern shores of the Great Lakes. These Indigenous Peoples had become allies with the French. After the British defeated the French on the Plains of Abraham in 1759, King George III of England published his understanding about relationships between non-Indigenous Settlers and Indigenous Peoples in the Royal Proclamation of 1763, identifying the rights of Indigenous Peoples to their traditional territories as sovereign nations under the protection of the Crown. In 1764, the Treaty of Niagara was signed by the Superintendent of the British North American Department of Indian Affairs Sir William Johnson, the leadership of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, and delegations from 24 First Nations living around the Great Lakes. The intentions of the Treaty of Niagara 1764 were to maintain peace and friendships among allies. For Indigenous Peoples, this treaty was not a historical written document but a living covenant between two separate Peoples to journey together respecting each other and sharing the lands and waters for as long as the sun shines, the grasses grow, and the rivers flow.

Although treaties were signed between colonial governments and Indigenous Peoples on this part of Turtle Island to establish peaceful relations, to maintain friendships, and to share these lands and waters, over the years policies and practices of Settlers and Newcomers worked to eradicate Indigenous

languages and Indigenous forms of governance as well as their knowledge, cultural heritage, spiritual practices, and ceremonies.

In June 1969, the government of Canada attempted to abolish the Indian Act of 1876 and the successive revisions of this Act. However, Indigenous Peoples pointed out that injustices had not been addressed and that nothing was going to be put in place to honour the intention of treaties with some of the First Nations already negotiated or respect the Indigenous Peoples without any treaties in place. In 1982, The British North American Act was set aside and Canada took the sole responsibility for maintaining treaty relationships and agreements with Indigenous Peoples although Canadian politicians and theologians did not realize what this meant. Since that time, the Supreme Court of Canada has given direction to politicians about the need for substantial changes in establishing and maintaining right relationships between various levels of government and Indigenous Peoples. In 1996, The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples concluded after five years of extensive research. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples made 400 recommendations concerning treaties, self-governance, housing, health, education, and economic development. However, many of these recommendations have yet to be implemented. In June 2008, the federal government issued a formal apology for the harm perpetrated by the forced assimilation of Indigenous children and youth in Canada...harm done to the children themselves as well as to their families and their Indigenous communities from which they were taken. In June 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission completed the work of gathering memories of what Indigenous Peoples experienced in these residential schools by listening to residential school survivors from coast to coast to coast. The harm arising from the implementation of policies and practices in the operation of residential schools was identified as cultural genocide. 94 Calls to Action are listed in order to dismantle these racist policies and practices in Canada and to prevent further incidents of cultural genocide from happening.

Since May 2021, unmarked graves have been found at a number of Indian Residential Schools with the remains of children and youth who did not return to their families and Indigenous communities. Particular First Nations communities challenged churches who operated residential schools to provide documentation about names of Indigenous children and youth who attended as well as the names of non-Indigenous People who worked in these institutions. Funding for the means to search the grounds of other Indian Residential Schools to find the remains of other children and youth was requested by Indigenous Peoples. The federal government was challenged to provide further funding to support residential school survivors, their descendants, and their communities with more mental health resources towards coping with the impact of intergenerational trauma and collateral violence. As our Prime Minister learned recently, Indigenous communities want tangible efforts made towards Reconciliation not more promises or media promotions.

Christian communities are also being challenged to dismantle the theological framework undergirding the Doctrine of Discovery. We no longer can put ourselves in positions to determine who belongs inside the Church and who does not belong...who is going to heaven and who is going to be cast into lakes of fire...who are the sheep and who are the goats...who follows the doctrines of the Church and who needs to be educated to learn the right way of thinking about God and worshipping this God...who are acceptable to God and who will be rejected by God. For too many centuries, Christian communities

have excluded others who do not hold the same ideas and practices, particularly of those who do not think, look, and speak as those in positions of power. Those who have been marginalized and excluded become dehumanized, subjugated, and dispossessed. Christian communities are being challenged to leave behind theologies connected with beliefs and practices in retributive justice. For centuries, God was depicted as an angry, vengeful figure while Human Beings were understood to be marred by Original Sin and in need of a sacrificial offering to save us from eternal damnation. The focus in these Christian nations had become the meaning and work of the death of Jesus in appeasing the wrath of a Holy and Righteous Lord God Almighty.

When Canon Andrew Wesley spoke on Indigenous Sunday in June 2019, he recounted how his parents raised him to learn as his Muskego Cree Ancestors around James Bay and the waterways which drained into Hudson Bay had learned to be in right relationship with Creator/Great Spirit as well as with those who walked on two legs, those who walked on four legs, the winged creatures, those who swam in the waters, those who crawled on the surface of the earth, plants, trees, flowers, lichen, Grandfather Sun, Grandmother moon, the stars in the night sky, and all of those more-than-human beings who are all kin. On Sunday afternoons, his father took him to visit with Elders to learn how to walk in a good way. Both of his parents taught him and his siblings how to start the day and end the day giving thanks and praying for those in need. As member of an Indigenous community, he learned to discover his gifts and developed his abilities to care for Creation and survive in the abundance of all Creator provided. As a survivor of residential school, Canon Wesley stated that he didn't deserve to be treated the way he was treated. As a member of the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples, Canon Wesley was part of that group of indigenous leaders who felt safe enough in 1992 to share memories of their experiences of residential schools with then Primate Michael Peers. In his sermon, Canon Andrew Wesley introduced me to the realization that Indigenous cultural heritage and spiritual practices were established for thousands of years before Missionaries arrived with the Bible and Books of Prayers. Indigenous political and theological understanding was based on principles of restorative justice. Creator/Great Spirit provides more than what Human Beings need. For Indigenous Peoples following their traditional ways, Creator/Great Spirit engages Human Beings in many conversations during our lives while both watching what we do and listening to what we say. Human Beings learn to respond to this generosity and abundance by being responsible with the many gifts of Creation and demonstrating our gratitude for all that we have been given. For Indigenous Christians, the birth of Jesus becomes another one of many signs of the generosity and affection which Creator/Great Spirit bears towards all of creation. The One who sends a unique Human Being who is both fully divine and fully human into the world demonstrates in a very tangible way the strength of love which overcomes all manner of hatred and violence directed by Human Beings towards other Human Beings as well as towards all aspects of the natural world. Through the anguish of death and the power of the resurrection, Creator/Great Spirit continues to demonstrate generosity and immense affection, continuing to create new life and provide for all of our needs. Human Beings are born not as sinful creatures in need of salvation but as members of a complex web of relationships among many relatives who all demonstrate the generosity and affection of Creator/Great Spirit. As such, for Indigenous Christians, the teachings of Jesus guide Human Beings to be in right relationships

Reread John 11:32-44. What is God asking us to be and do?

Today, as we celebrate All Saints Sunday, we are challenged to honour those who demonstrate generosity and love not only towards every Human Being but also to all of creation.

Show compassion to those in pain.

Learn from others how they establish and maintain right relationships with Creator/Great Spirit.

Pray for wisdom and work to help others to know the generosity and love of Creator, the Eternal Word, and Great Spirit.

Challenge political and theological frameworks which dehumanize others and take away the means for Human Beings to care for themselves and their descendants.

Celebrate diversity among Human Beings as equals with unique gifts to enrich our common life.

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