

How has the Anglican Church Responded?

At the 39th General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada, the Synod voted to repudiate — or deny the validity — of the Doctrine of Discovery. The motion (A086) also requested that each Diocese and the larger Church:

- be made aware of the doctrine and its effects
- review ways that its systems still manifest the effects of the doctrine
- reflect upon its history and encourage all Anglicans to seek a greater understanding of Indigenous Peoples
- support Indigenous efforts to assert their sovereignty and have their inherent rights respected
- put pressure on Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II to publicly repudiate the claimed validity of the doctrine

The motion was submitted by the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples, but it is up to the whole Church — and indeed country — to take action to stand against the effects of the Doctrine of Discovery.

Want to know more?

To learn more about Truth and Reconciliation work in the Anglican Church of Canada, please visit:

<http://www.anglican.ca/reconciliationtoolkit>

Other titles in the series

- The Royal Proclamation of 1763
- UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
- The TRC 94 Calls to Action

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The Primate's Commission
presents

A FIRST LOOK

THE DOCTRINE OF DISCOVERY



The General Synod of
The Anglican Church of Canada

THE DOCTRINE OF DISCOVERY



Illustration of Christopher Columbus arriving in America. Credit: L. Prang & Co, Boston

What is the Doctrine of Discovery?

The **Doctrine of Discovery** (sometimes called the Doctrine of Christian Discovery) is a set of beliefs and legal framework born out of a series of edicts issued by the pope in the 15th century.

The edicts (known as Papal Bulls) asserted that any lands not inhabited by Christians were empty, unowned, and available to be discovered and claimed.

The term “*terra nullius*” literally means “nobody’s land” and was applied to North America.

What were the effects?

In applying the **Doctrine of Discovery** to what is now known as North America, colonial powers were able to take over and profit from the lands that had been inhabited by Indigenous Peoples from time immemorial. It enabled them to accumulate massive wealth by engaging in unlimited resource extraction.

Further, the use of this doctrine was the basis for dehumanizing Indigenous Peoples.

The doctrine was used as a criteria for gauging humanity. If there were no Christians (as defined by the Church powers) on the land, the land was considered empty — there were no humans.

This denial of the essential humanity of Indigenous peoples laid the groundwork for the many ways that racism and injustice manifested in the history of North America including:

- The residential school system
- The Indian Act
- The illegalization of Indigenous language and spiritual practice



First Nations protest - 2012 /The Canadian Progressive

Where can we see the effects today?

We can still see the results of the **Doctrine of Discovery** at work today, through:

- Resource extraction without the free, prior and informed consent of the Indigenous people of the land
- Discrimination against Indigenous peoples as seen in the over-representation of Indigenous peoples in the child welfare system and the justice system
- The denial of the right of Indigenous Nations to self-determination and control their own traditional systems of governance and spiritual practice.