

[Letterhead of NYYM]

CALL TO POPE FRANCIS, BISHOP OF ROME, AND TO THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH,  
TO FORMALLY REPUDIATE AND REVOKE THE "DOCTRINE OF CHRISTIAN DISCOVERY"

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 2013, 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.