



Background: Repudiating the Doctrine of Christian Discovery in CPJ's Equity and Anti-Oppression Statement

Citizens for Public Justice, May 2022

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.

And what does the Lord require of you?

To act justly and to love mercy

and to walk humbly with your God. - Micah 6:8

CPJ has a history of raising awareness in its community about the need to include justice for Indigenous peoples in its work. This includes activism in the 1970s and 1980s on Indigenous rights in the context of pipeline proposals and increasing autonomy for First Nations communities¹ and supporting the Royal Commission of Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) and publishing books on Indigenous sovereignty in the 1990s.² More recently, in 2016, CPJ released a statement on its commitment to implement UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), and committed to “undertake a study of all our program areas with a view to discerning how our work might more fully resound with the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, in the framework of the UNDRIP, and how our current efforts could enhance reconciliation efforts underway throughout Canadian society – especially among people of faith”.³ In 2020, CPJ released a report on *Restoring Indigenous Rights*.⁴ This brief history likely excludes other actions that CPJ has taken as an organization to support Indigenous rights, but highlights several examples of how Indigenous rights have been part of CPJ's understanding of public justice for some time.

As part of CPJ's facilitated sessions to develop the public Equity & Anti-Oppression Statement, a working group composed of board members Tenielle Patterson, Ian Van Haren, and Monica Tang, and staff member Emilio Rodriguez, discussed how it is important for CPJ to incorporate this long-standing perspective into its statement on Equity and Anti-Oppression. This followed discussions about the historical relationship between Indigenous Peoples and Christian churches and how this could be addressed in CPJ's Equity & Anti-Oppression Statement.

As the initial draft of the Preamble of the EAO document states, we recognize the role our own faith community has had in creating and perpetuating systems of oppression and inequality. Christian theology was used to justify sovereignty over Indigenous lands and people and expropriation of territory. We believe acknowledging this history and clearly repudiating it seems appropriate in the context of CPJ's public Equity & Anti-Oppression statement. Many of the inequalities that CPJ is concerned with in its research and activism

are linked to distorted theologies that affirmed racial hierarchies or diminished the humanity or *Imago Dei* (image of God) of non-European persons.

As the working group considered how to proceed, we felt it was important to start with the Doctrine of Christian Discovery, as this was foundational for how settlers first engaged with Indigenous peoples in the Americas, and shaped the legal systems that were created and inequalities that ensued. As a working group, we spent time considering the responsibilities of Christians and Christian organizations in responding to the Doctrine of Christian Discovery (DoCD). In our collective learning across a spectrum of ecumenical resources,⁵ we learned about the Doctrine of Discovery, discussed its impacts on the areas CPJ works in, and reflected on our responsibilities as people of faith and board members and staff at CPJ.

Consistent with CPJ's history, and in line with the actions of many denominations and ecumenical organizations in Canada to repudiate the DoCD,⁶ we recommend making specific statements in the Equity and Anti-Oppression statement to include the repudiation of the DoCD and to affirm our commitment to reconciliation. In addition, a specific statement of repudiation is consistent with the Truth and Reconciliation (TRC) Call to Action #49 which encourages Christian churches and denominations "to repudiate concepts used to justify European sovereignty over Indigenous lands and peoples, such as the Doctrine of Discovery and terra nullius".

Overall, our goal is to specifically acknowledge the harm of the DoCD and then repudiate it, laying the foundation for the affirmation and commitments in the EAO statement, particularly as they relate to reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.

As a continuation of the commitment in CPJ's 2016 statement on the TRC,⁷ let us all continue reflecting on the DoCD's wide-ranging consequences in the areas of addressing poverty and socio-economic impacts on Indigenous peoples, the reverberations for creation and climate justice, and Canada's approach to migrants and refugees.

¹ <https://cpj.ca/1970s-sinking-roots-seventies-canada/> and <https://cpj.ca/1980s-big-appetite-faith-fed-advocacy/>

² <https://cpj.ca/1990s-cpj-eye-several-storms/>.

³ <https://cpj.ca/statement-cpj-trc-calls-action/> This statement includes a more detailed account of various initiatives at CPJ in support of Indigenous communities in Canada.

⁴ <https://cpj.ca/report/restoring-indigenous-rights/>

⁵ Here are some of the resources we consulted:

Setting the Context: Original Alexander VI papal encyclical, “Inter Caetera”:

<https://www.papalencyclicals.net/Alex06/alex06inter.htm>

Excerpts from Native America, Discovered and Conquered: Thomas Jefferson, Lewis and Clark, and Manifest Destiny, a book by Robert J. Miller, pp. 2-5, 12, 25. 95

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/54f8b4cfe4b0b230c7abfe97/t/56f162d8f699bb3c4bac75f0/1458660056895/DOCTRINE+Miller+Nat+Am+Disc+Cong+EXCERPT+March2016.pdf>

Understanding the DoCD’s impacts on lands, history, and the modern church:

Anglican Church of Canada film: “Stolen Lands, Strong Hearts”: (Canadian context, with insights from Lorraine Land, a former CPJ staff member): <https://www.anglican.ca/primate/tfc/drj/doctrineofdiscovery/>

Some denominational and theological reflections and resources:

Christian Reformed Church Task Force Report:

https://www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/doctrine_of_discovery.pdf

Canadian Friends Service Committee. Indigenous Peoples, Doctrine of Discovery (2018):

<https://quakerservice.ca/our-work/indigenous-peoples-rights/doctrine-of-discovery/>

United Church of Methodists social principles and resolutions: <https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/doctrine-of-discovery-3331>

Methodists for Social Action: webinar series: (this series explores the impacts of the DocD around the world) <https://www.mfsaweb.org/stealing-the-earth>

⁶ Some examples include:

Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops: <https://www.cccb.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/catholic-response-to-doctrine-of-discovery-and-tn.pdf>

Christian Reformed Church:

<https://www.crcna.org/news-and-events/news/synod-repudiates-doctrine-discovery>

United Church in Canada: <https://united-church.ca/sites/default/files/doctrine-discovery-backgrounder.pdf>

Anglican Church of Canada: <https://www.anglican.ca/wp-content/uploads/Doctrine-of-Discovery.pdf>

Presbyterian Church in Canada: <https://presbyterian.ca/justice/doctrine-of-discovery/> and <https://presbyterian.ca/wp-content/uploads/Report-RE-Doctrine-of-Discovery-GA-2019.pdf>

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada: <https://eft.elcic.ca/news.cfm?article=607>

Mennonite Church Canada: <https://www.commonword.ca/ResourceView/82/19087>

Canadian Baptists of Atlantic Canada: <https://baptist-atlantic.ca/our-convention/departments/intercultural-ministries/cbacs-resolution-in-response-to-the-truth-and-reconciliation-commission/>

The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada has made a commitment to “Review existing resources developed by church bodies and/or create a short study resource for EFC affiliates to articulate its significance and implications for engagement.” in response to the “The Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Call to Action #49, repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery and other legal fictions that claim jurisdiction over Indigenous lands and peoples” <http://www.theefc.ca/SevenCommitments>

(If you know of other relevant examples, please feel free to share and we can add to this list.)

⁷ <https://cpj.ca/statement-cpj-trc-calls-action/>