

**For Christ and King:
The Doctrine of Christian Discovery
UUCF – 05/15/2016**

Time For All Ages by Rev Scott Sammler-Michael
Wonder Box – a wallet ... “Look What I Found!”

I want you all to imagine a kid named Billy Boston, who goes to McDonalds, and as Billy is walking to his table he looks on the floor, and there he sees a wallet. He picks it up, opens it, and finds \$467.42. A woman’s drivers license is in there, too. Does the wallet belong to Billy Boston? NO!

Now imagine that this is a school cafeteria. *Billy Boston* walks in, and finds something he really likes – “Look at this guitar! – someone must have left it for me – I found it, its here, and nobody else is here to say it belongs to them. I Love my new guitar.” Is *Billy Boston* right? Probably not – most likely someone did not just leave a 1967 Les Paul Custom, in Tobacco Sunburst, in a school cafeteria for Billy to just ‘find.’ They would have just taken it to his house.

Now imagine Billy Boston is walking through the woods. And out of nowhere he sees, leaning up against a tree, a brand new dirt bike. Oh, it’s the kind of dirt bike Billy Boston always dreamed of having – and it is not locked! The bike has a little bag under the seat that has the name ‘Muffy’ painted on it. Billy Boston says, ‘Wow, someone came all the way out here in these woods to leave me a brand new bike.’ Is Billy right? NO. He should probably just leave the bike right there.

Now I want you all to close your eyes, and think back 500 years or more. Back before Christopher Columbus or anyone from Europe had ever come to the United States. Imagine that person from Europe came here, looked at this beautiful place we call Virginia, saw its rivers and trees, its mountains and valleys, its deer and birds, its men, women and children. Imagine that person said, “This is all mine!” – would that be right?

Well that is what happened. In 1492 Europeans claimed Columbus *discovered* America – but there were people already here – living, raising families, fishing and calling it home – they had been here for a long time; they considered this their home. In our area, these people were called Algonkian. They lived here and loved their homeland. But Europeans came, and saw that they worshipped a different god – not the Jesus of Europe but the Great Spirit, a sky-god who oversaw all life and relationships and nature itself.

The Europeans were encouraged by kings and priests to take all the land and anything growing on it or found inside it or living on it – even the people; they moved the Algonkian people away, sometimes they made war against them, all because they claimed the European God gave it to them. This is our theme for today – exposing “The Doctrine of Christian Discovery” – America was not discovered – it was conquered. **May we remember just because we find something does not mean it belongs to us.**

READING - from *Pagan's in the Promised Land*

Our Together Time sets up a simplistic understanding of the Doctrine of Discovery. The Doctrine of Christian Discovery was issued by Pope Alexander VI in 1493 to give both legal and religious justification for the kingdoms of Europe to conquer any land they came upon that was not inhabited by Christians or ruled by another European Christian

nation.

The Doctrine of Christian Discovery lives in our metaphors of "manifest destiny" and a "shining city on a hill," and remains a central tenet of United States Law, especially in how we deal with and think about Native Americans. The Doctrine of Christian Discovery helps explain racism and why our nation has so often been at war.

Another reason to examine this doctrine comes from Cognitive Science – the study of how the mind creates its perceptions and assumptions of the world. Cognitive Science examines the formation of values, and beliefs – even what our culture calls "reason" and "the rule of Law."

In his book *Pagans in the Promised Land*, Dr. Steven Newcomb writes, "It is my central contention that the American Indian Nations [in the United States] have always been entitled to retain a free and independent existence. The US Government, however, has denied Indian nations a free existence and expropriated the vast majority of Indian lands by means of a dominating conceptual system..."

One of the most significant findings of cognitive research is that *legal thinking* is a product of the human imagination – not, as some assert, an earthly reflection of the mind of God nor the order of the Universe. A culture's legal thinking is created in the cognitive unconscious, where largely unexamined [structures of thought live and breathe]. [The Doctrine of Christian Discovery is just such an unexamined conceptual system.]

Two unexamined cultural metaphors arising from this Doctrine are: 1) Indian Lands (the North American Continent) are the promised land (lands promised by God to European Christians). And 2) These European Christians are a chosen people – chosen by God to take over the lands of North America.

Using the Bible as justification, American Indians are seen in the American imagination as the Canaanites or Pagans in the Promised Land." [1]

SERMON

Here are the underlying assumptions in the conceptual system called Discovery.

"The North American Continent is the land promised by God to the European Christians. These European Christians are a chosen people – chosen by God to take over the lands of North America.

Therefore, Native Americans were pagans in the promised land to be conquered and driven forth."

~ Now before you get worried, rest assured –

I didn't drag you out of bed this morning for some screed about how much we have to atone for what was done to Native Americans.

You are all educated, compassionate, you've wrestled with this issue.

I am also not about to give a lecture on cognitive theory – there are many better suited for that, besides – it's hard to keep a straight face when y'all start nodding off.

We will tell stories, examine the record, pose questions, criticizing old assumptions buried deep

A focus on the Doctrine of Christian Discovery began anew in 1992, the 500th anniversary of the voyage of Christopher Columbus.

It became more urgent when in 2007 the United Nations passed the *Declaration of the*

Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which includes a summons to repudiate the Doctrine of Christian Discovery.

In the ensuing 9 years, a growing number of religious organizations joined the call to repudiate this Doctrine, including the World Council of Churches.

In June 2012 the Unitarian Universalist Association passed a Resolution calling for the repudiation of the Doctrine. Only the US, Canada and Australia have refused to repudiate this doctrine.

Religious institutions felt called to demand this because it was religion that proclaimed and justified it

~ You remember the tale you heard when you were a child – “In 14 hundred and 92 – Columbus sailed the ocean blue.”

The story most of us were told was that Columbus “Discovered” America. That word is carefully chosen.

We know when Columbus arrived he found peoples who had lived here for millennia, great civilizations of vast diversity;

some were warlike, some pacifistic;

some were hunters, some were agricultural;

Native Americans lived on the shore, in the mountains, on the plains, in the desert, in the forest. Some built great cities; some were nomadic

They had language, culture, religion, music, art; and despite all the romanticizing of native peoples, many were not so good to the earth nor to one another.

~ There were more than 40 million native Americans when Columbus reached North America; by 1920, there were fewer than 400,000 – 99% fewer than 1492. And the only perspective from which Columbus ‘discovered’ anything is that of White Christian Europe.

When Columbus returned to Europe with spices, fruit, animals and people, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella wanted to claim this “new world” for Spain.

They also wanted to avoid unnecessary legal trouble or excessive warfare with other European nations, so they convened a conference of European powers in Rome to get the blessing of the Vatican.

In 1493, Alexander VI issued a Papal Bull outlining the Doctrine of Christian Discovery, legitimizing the conquest and colonization of the whole world in the name of spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ.

That ruling remains part of American jurisprudence to this day; it forms the foundation for all American “Indian” Law, as it is still called.

Allow us to share some of this pronouncement.

“From Alexander, servant of the servants of God, To the illustrious sovereigns, our very dear son in Christ, Ferdinand, king, and our very dear daughter in Christ, Isabella, queen of Castile, Leon, Aragon, Sicily, and Granada,

~ Among other works, well pleasing to the Divine Majesty ..., this assuredly ranks highest, ... that barbarous nations be overthrown and brought to the faith.

In the islands and countries already discovered are found gold, spices, and very many other precious things of diverse kinds and qualities. Wherefore, as becomes [Christian]

kings and princes, ... as was the fashion of your ancestors, you have purposed to bring under your sway the said lands, with their inhabitants, and to bring them to the [Christian] faith.

Hence, heartily commending ... this your holy and praiseworthy purpose, we exhort you ... that with eager zeal for the true faith ..., you purpose, as is your duty, to lead the peoples dwelling in those ... lands to embrace the Christian religion ...”

*“... Should any of said lands have been found by your envoys and captains, [we] give, grant, and assign to you and your heirs and successors **forever**, all the [found] dominions, cities, camps, places, and villages. And all rights, to any discovered and to be discovered towards the west and south, by drawing and establishing a line from the Arctic pole to the Antarctic pole, wherever lands are found and to be found in the direction of India, or towards any other quarter.”*

In other words – the entire world,
With this proviso however, that none of the islands and main-lands, found and to be found, discovered and to be discovered, ... be in the actual possession of any Christian king or prince... [2]

This papal Bull legalizes white supremacy

~ The whole world one finds one can claim for Jesus, unless another Euro-Christian got there first: This is why Thomas Jefferson bought the Louisiana Purchase from France, not from Native Peoples; only European nations had *legitimate* ownership of non-Christian lands according to International Law.

This is why Europeans always had priests as part of their colonizing war parties - first the sword, then the cross

Rulers have always sought the blessing of the priests; The cry “For *Christ* and King” first began with Constantine when he Christianized the Roman empire

The Crusades – beginning in 1095 CE – foreshadowed the Doctrine of Discovery –

Back then the Pope had armies and could marshal armed forces of dozens of nations.

So when Alexander VI issued the DOCD in 1493, people already believed this was an apt doctrine.

The idea that *any* government was legitimate *without* the sanction of God was unthinkable – *the only reason to tolerate any government was because it was the will of God* – but the Doctrine of Discovery added that White Supremacy and Christian Dominion-ism were the will of God.

Perhaps the most troubling thing about the Doctrine of Discovery is that it remains vital to American Law.

In 1823 our Supreme Court found in Johnson vs. M’Intosh, that the Doctrine of Christian Discovery “gave an exclusive right to extinguish the Indian title of Occupancy, either by purchase or conquest.”

This was justified, the Court found, “by the character and religion of the Indians, the superior genius of Europe, ... and the ample compensation to the Indians by “bestowing on them civilization and Christianity.”

In other words, if Indians wanted to be left alone, or permitted a chance to enter American society, they had to dress like us, wear their hair like us, speak our language only, give up their culture and religion so they can pray like us and be ‘saved’: and

thereby *perhaps* not be driven away.

The Court also established the idea of *terra nullis*, the idea that Indian Lands were 'empty,' no matter how many natives lived there, whether the desert, their cities, or their hunting grounds; any place there were no European Christians [was deemed empty]."[3]

Now it is a tricky business to look back on history and make value judgments; I am not interested in castigating the people, but in criticizing the reasoning, and our own assumptions, as well as repudiating heinous doctrines.

The religious enterprise commands a discipline to recognize our assumptions, examine their origin and validity: to ask, "Why do I think this is true? How are my values formed? What enters my heart, mind and soul making me think the way I think, often in ways of which I am not aware?"

One consequence this 'Discovery' doctrine has on contemporary America, is the notion of 'might makes right.'

This is not merely a bumper sticker, but a legal opinion from that same Supreme court case; *Johnson vs M'Intosh*, declaring "the rights of discovery are required to be maintained and established by the sword as the 'right of the strongest.'"

☺ ~ I am merely placing this before us.

We have to figure out what we're going to make of this doctrine as a culture in the light of day, not in the dark recesses of casual conformity.

Some urge us to not dwell on such things – that the 500 years of European colonization and white supremacy were merely a stage in the development of humanity.

I urge us not to be swayed by such fuzzy notions of perpetual progress or the seep of history as inevitable change and improvement; there is no such evidence.

It is true the United States was founded on sound principles, values larger than the men who wrote them ~ The Declaration of Independence cries,

"All men are created equal," But of course, who did that leave out? [ask the folks]

Women, slaves, non-christians, even non-landowners.

America *has* undergone a slow evolution of freedom.

We have rightfully re-interpreted the spirit of those words over the centuries to enrich our notion of who is worthy of full citizenship – who belongs in the human family; this is the hallmark of the American experiment

For instance, in the 2012 elections we saw the tent of humanity stretched broader in the legal imagination of the American people when four states voted by ballot to uphold the marriage rights of Gay Americans, pushing freedom in the proper direction.

This is no small event - these are special times

But it is WE who bend the moral arc of the universe – it doesn't just happen without our effort and courage We bend it today by examining how the Doctrine of Christian Discovery legalized racism and the exploitation of native peoples; it is a sign of a healthy religious life to expose our deepest unexamined assumptions to the light of truth and justice.

The Doctrine of Christian Discovery is an abhorrent doctrine encouraging the wholesale theft of native lands, property and people; it is a direct violation of the separation of Church and State:

The US Supreme Court based its findings upholding this doctrine saying, [quote] these “barbarian savages will undoubtedly have their lives improved by the civilizing influence of Christianity,”

~ This remains US legal precedent

- they cited Joshua 13 – those who brought their Bibles may follow along –

“So Joshua led the Israelites across the Jordan into the land of Canaan, giving them the land promised to them by the Lord, and the Lord saw that the Israelites subjected the peoples they found there, seizing their property, and drove them forth.”

The whole body of US Indian Law is based on ancient Judeo-Christian texts written for desert nomadic people 2700 years ago; this law rests on the abuse of fundamental human rights crafted in violation of the wall of Separation of Church and State.

The Legal imagination resulting from the concept of “Discovery” plants and legitimizes the seed of division, warfare and white supremacy as well as Christian Dominion-ism, scourges of which our nation must cleanse itself and for which it must atone and pay reparations.

Now - none of this is our fault.

We are born into a world whose habit of reflecting on root causes is discouraged; We are born into a world that wants to avoid uncomfortable examination of basic assumptions. We are not taught how the very fabric of history has pre-disposed us to think of our world in certain ways – for us to say, “whatever happened in history was what had to happen,” or “the natives are probably better off today than they would have been if we never came because of everything our civilization bestows.”

Nonsense - God I pray we never go there.

History and legal theories influence our values and beliefs - notions planted in us by millions of cultural messages throughout our lifetimes, from Western films, to cartoons, to songs, churches; But now we know. So what we shall we do?

We know today the *real* story of conquering the Americas - the massacres, giving indigenous people blankets that had been spread over the dead and dying corpses of small pox victims so the natives would die in an early form of germ warfare; the introduction of alcohol; cultural genocide;

we need not dwell on the story – we know it.

One thing we can do is demand the repudiation of the Doctrine of Christian Discovery
Repudiating this heinous Doctrine is a spiritual task because it is based on a spiritual text

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Brothers and sisters beliefs have consequences, cognitive science shows our beliefs are shaped by our imaginations, our imaginations are shaped by our basic assumptions about the world, many of which we are unaware and never have cause to examine.

So let us examine them, and chase that which divides and brings death from our souls

Exposing unexamined assumptions churning in the core of our imaginations is a hallmark

of the religious life – *why do I think what I think? – why do I believe what I believe? –*

these are the most important questions religious people ask

May we engage this examination with courage, honesty, love of country and ourselves. Amen ...

***SPOKEN BENEDICTION**

“Please join hands for both our spoken and sung benedictions”

Beliefs have consequences

Beliefs are composed in our imaginations

Our imaginations are influenced by historical assumptions

Let us courageously expose the errors of bygone ages lurking in our minds, clouding our vision of the better world we know should exist

The union of church and state inevitably brings evil

Let us repudiate the Doctrine of Christian Discovery

Let us do so with love for ourselves, our country, and compassion for those crushed by the arrogance of our ancestors