

Doctrine of Discovery

In the Prayers of the People, we prayed:

We give thanks to Thee, O Lord, for the beauty and richness of the land upon which we worship, while lamenting the way in which the Tewa people were deprived of their ancestral homes. We ask for a spirit of reconciliation to come upon our church as we seek to heal the wounds of past in- justices

Tomorrow New Mexico and other states will observe Indigenous Peoples Day. Recently our Bishop and the Diocese of Navajoland provided for a Clergy Conference dealing with the issues of Indigenous Peoples and centering on the Doctrine of Discovery.

The Doctrine of Discovery originated in Papal bulls, declarations, in 1455 and 1493 that provided the right of European monarchies to seize the lands of indigenous peoples as “newly discovered lands.”

In 1792 the doctrine was claimed for the United States by then Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson in dealing with the lands of indigenous peoples.

The papal bulls and the doctrine were cited by the U.S. Supreme Court in deciding a case in 1823. The legal precedent has been cited in various Supreme Court cases as late as 2005.

The doctrine has been primarily used to support decisions invalidating or ignoring aboriginal possession of land in favor of modern governments

The General Convention of the Episcopal Church passed a resolution repudiating the doctrine in 2009. Other denominations have joined in the repudiation. Multiple requests have been sent to Pope Francis, asking that he rescind the Papal Bulls on which the legal precedent stand.