

## **Catholic responses on Call to Action 48 and questions on the "Doctrine of Discovery"**

The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Canadian Religious Conference, the Canadian Catholic Aboriginal Council, and the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace have responded to Call to Action 48 by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and also addressed questions about the legal concepts known as "Doctrine of Discovery" and *terra nullius*. The four organizations represent Bishops, institutes of consecrated life, societies of apostolic life, Indigenous People, and Catholic laity. Their two documents were developed in consultation with the Aboriginal Council, and are dated March 19, 2016, the Solemnity of Saint Joseph, who is the principal patron saint of Canada.

The first of the two texts expresses support for the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People. It affirms that "its spirit can point a way forward to reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada." It also points out that the Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See to the United Nations "explicitly endorsed this Declaration on numerous occasions." In 2010, when the Government of Canada had announced it would support the UN Declaration, Bishop Pierre Morissette, then President of the CCCB, had signed a joint letter in which religious leaders acknowledged their appreciation for the government's endorsement and urged it "to work in partnership with Indigenous peoples on a respectful process for the full endorsement and implementation" of the UN Declaration. The complete text is available at <http://www.cccb.ca/site/images/stories/pdf/catholic%20response%20call%20to%20action%2048.pdf>.

The second text reflects on the "Doctrine of Discovery" and the notion of *terra nullius* (no-one's land). It "considers and repudiates illegitimate concepts and principles used by Europeans to justify the seizure of land previously held by Indigenous Peoples and often identified by the terms 'Doctrine of Discovery' and *terra nullius*." It states "that now is an appropriate time to issue a public statement in response to the errors and falsehoods perpetuated, often by Christians, during and following the so-called Age of Discovery." After formulating five principles which reject how these legal notions have been used to disenfranchise Indigenous Peoples, the document provides an appendix which gives an historical overview of the development of the two legal concepts vis-a-vis Catholic teaching and of their repudiation. The complete text is available at <http://www.cccb.ca/site/images/stories/pdf/catholic%20response%20to%20doctrine%20of%20discovery%20and%20tn.pdf>.

Both documents appeal to all Catholics -- laity, members of institutes of consecrated life and of societies of apostolic life, deacons, priests, and Bishops -- to make seven commitments in order to "continue to walk together with Indigenous Peoples in building a more just society where their gifts and those of all people are nurtured and honoured." These commitments include:

- Working with Catholic educational institutions and formation programs in telling the history and experience of Indigenous Peoples
- Working with seminaries and other formation centres to promote a "culture of encounter" by including the history of the Indian Residential Schools and of Canadian missionary work with its "weaknesses and strengths"
- Encouraging partnerships between Indigenous groups and health care facilities
- Encouraging a restorative justice model within the criminal justice system
- Supporting the national inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women
- Deepening relationships, dialogue and collaboration with Indigenous People
- Inviting Catholic parishes and institutions to become better acquainted with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

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