



Association of Pittsburgh Priests

Box 2106 ♦ Pittsburgh, PA 15230

June 11, 2023

Your Holiness:

We, the undersigned belong to the Association of Pittsburgh Priests, a diocesan-wide organization in the Diocese of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA, of ordained and non-ordained women and men who act on our baptismal call to be priests and prophets. Our mission, rooted in the Gospel and the Spirit of Vatican II, is to carry out a ministry of justice and renewal in ourselves, the Church and the world. We wrote to you previously on October 19, 2020 in regard to the Doctrine of Discovery and the Papal Bulls which undergird this doctrine. We now write to you, first of all, to thank you for the Joint Statement of the Dicasteries for Culture and Education and for promoting integral human development on the Doctrine of Discovery, issued on March 30, 2023.

In this document, the Joint Statement declares that the “doctrine of discovery is not part of the teaching of the Church and that the Papal Bulls associated with it “did not adequately reflect the equal dignity and rights of indigenous peoples”. Furthermore, the declaration asserts that “it is only just to recognize these errors, acknowledge the terrible effects of the assimilation policies and the pain experienced by indigenous peoples, and ask for pardon”. We take the statement to be an implicit petition for pardon to our indigenous brothers and sisters. We want to thank you very sincerely and profoundly for this statement which no doubt is long overdue. It is a first step in addressing the incredible crimes committed against our indigenous brothers and sisters.

However, there are some assertions in the statement which we are unhappy with and find inaccurate such as the declaration that “the doctrine of discovery” and the papal bulls associated with it “have never been considered expressions of the Catholic faith”. On a review of the Papal Bulls, we find this to be akin to sophistry and obfuscation. For instance, in the first Papal Bull issued on June 18, 1452 by Pope Nicholas V entitled “Dum Diversas” and sent to King Alfonso V of Portugal, the Pope granted to King Alfonso permission “to invade, search out, capture, vanquish, and subdue all Saracens (Muslims) and pagans whatsoever, and other enemies of Christ wheresoever placed, and the kingdoms, dukedoms, principalities, dominions, possessions and all movable and immovable goods whatsoever held and possessed by them and to reduce their persons to perpetual slavery”. Now, while one may argue that this statement is not an article of faith in the strict sense it is clearly the teaching of the Church at that time and as Columbus and others fell upon the lands of the Americas, their bringing the cross and the sword was clearly the doctrine of discovery in action.

In subsequent centuries the monarchs of Europe, the British, French, German, Belgian, the Netherlands and Italy adopted these Bulls as guidelines as they further refined the doctrine of discovery. One could argue that the Catholic Church and the Papal Bulls had nothing to do with these Monarchs and their atrocities, but this seems to be an evasion.

In conclusion, Your Holiness, we would like to reiterate our thanks to you and the Dicasteries for your renunciation of the doctrine of discovery. However, we believe that we have to go much further and seek restorative justice. It would be wonderful if the Church seriously considered reparations for all the injustices and iniquities visited upon the peoples of Africa, Asia and the Americas in which the doctrine of discovery played no small part. This could stand as a stellar example for all the countries of the world which used the doctrine of discovery to subjugate, enslave and harm less powerful peoples.

Faithfully yours,

Rev. Regis Ryan, for the APP Board of Directors