Joint Statement To The Pontifical Council For Justice And Peace

ICTMN Joint Statement
5/6/16

The following statement was made from the Long March to Rome Gathering in Florence, Italy from April 30-May 4, 2016:

Greetings to Pope Francis and the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace,

Let us begin with some historical context. In 1992, the Indigenous Law Institute (ILI), founded by Birgil Kills Straight (Oglala Lakota Nation) and Steven Newcomb (Shawnee, Lenape Nations) began a global campaign, calling upon the Holy See, during the papacy of Pope John Paul II, to formally revoke the Inter Caetera papal bull of May 4, 1493. That campaign continues now in 2016, during the papacy of Pope Francis.

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In 1993, the ILI wrote an open letter to Pope John Paul II regarding its call for a ceremonial papal bull revocation. The UN Human Rights Centre delivered that open letter to the Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See to the United Nations. The Holy See’s Permanent Observer Mission sent the UN Human Rights Centre a letter stating that the ILI letter had been sent to the Vatican in Rome. The Haudenosaunee also began working on the papal bulls issue in the early 1990s with the Traditional Circle of Elders and Youth.

Although the Holy See was not responsive to that first letter from the Indigenous Law Institute, the ILI, the American Indian Law Alliance, and the Haudenosaunee have continued on with the campaign calling for a revocation of the papal bull of May 4, 1493, as representative of a series of fifteenth century papal decrees of domination and dehumanization. After more than 20-years that campaign has gained a great deal of momentum throughout the world, with the ILI, the Haudenosaunee, the American Indian Law Alliance, the Yakama Nation, the Assembly of First Nations, the Apache Nde Nnee Working Group, and many others, now calling for the issue of “the Doctrine of Discovery” to be dealt with. This overall momentum has resulted in the Long March to Rome gathering for several days in Florence, Italy in May 2016, and has resulted in this face-to-face meeting with the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace.

Let us turn now to the focus of our discussion. As you know, after the first historic voyage of Cristobal Colón (Columbus) to the islands that came to be called the Caribbean, Pope Alexander VI, issued several papal bulls to the monarchies of Castile-Aragon (Spain) and Portugal. The first two of those documents are dated May 3 and May 4 of that year. How ironic, then, that May 4, 2016 is the day we are meeting with the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace at the Vatican.

The purpose of our visit is to discuss, from our perspective, the significance of those and other such papal documents. When we look at the specific wording of a series of papal decrees (inter
alia, Dum Diversas (1452), Romanus Pontifex (1455), Inter Caetera (1493)), we see that they called for non-Christian nations, so-called “pagans,” to be invaded, captured, vanquished, subdued, reduced to perpetual slavery, and for all their possessions and property to be taken away from them in order to benefit Western Christendom with global empire and dominations (“imperi et dominationes”) riches, wealth, and vast areas of real estate. Such language is evidence of Christendom’s bid to establish a system of Christian domination all across Mother Earth by means of a Doctrine of Christian Domination found in the papal bulls.

The papal bulls of 1493 called for “the propagation of the Christian Empire” (imperii christiani propagationem), and for the reduction (reducere), subjection (subjecere), and domination (e.g., “sub actuali domino temporali aliquorum dominorum Christianorum constitute non sint”) of non-Christian nations (“barbare nationes”) by reducing and dominating them (“deprimantur”).

The ILI’s research, led by Steven Newcomb, shows that Christendom’s pattern of domination and dehumanization were and continue to be directed in a deadly and destructive manner at our Original Free Nations and Peoples, and our territories, on Great Turtle Island-Abya Yala, throughout the vast continental and hemispheric area now typically called in English “the Western Hemisphere” and “the Americas.” Because the patterns of domination and dehumanization expressed in the papal bulls of May 3 and 4, 1493, have become embedded, inculcated, habitualized, and institutionalized in language, thought, and behavior, those patterns have not become “ipso facto obsolete” as Archbishop Celestino Migliore claimed with regard to Inter Caetera papal bull in a letter to the Indigenous Law Institute dated July 5, 2005.

Furthermore, the embeddedness and institutionalization of the linguistic and behavioral patterns of domination and dehumanization we are talking about, are in part an outgrowth and consequence of the papal decrees of the fifteenth century and other such documents of Western Christendom. Other examples of that linguistic and behavioral tradition include the 1496 John Cabot charter issued by Henry VII, a Catholic king, as well as the charter issued to Jacque Cartier in 1534, issued by Francis Premier, a Catholic king. Francis Premier received permission from Pope Clement VII to colonize other areas, so long as the French king directed his efforts at locating non-Christian places where Spain and Portugal had not yet laid claimed or attempted to constitute a right of Christian domination.

Here’s the point we are coming to: There has been no “abrogation” of the pattern or paradigm of domination-dehumanization which the Holy See set into motion over a period of a century, and which has been ongoing for more than five centuries. It is still being directed at our Original Nations and Peoples throughout “the Western Hemisphere,” and against Original Free Nations elsewhere such as in Australia and Aotearoa (“New Zealand”). The papal bull Sublimis Deus did not, for example, abrogate the establishment of a system of domination in all those areas claimed by Spain on the basis of the 1493 papal bulls, which Spain understood to be a grant “ganaran y conquistaron de las Indias” (“to win and to conquer [dominate] the Indies.”) (We have seen this Spanish language is on the back of one of the original papal bulls stored at the Archives of the Indies).

Allow us to provide an excellent example as to why Apostolic Nuncio Migliore’s statement was incorrect when he claimed to the ILI that “the bull Inter Caetera, like other documents of that era,
has become “*ipso facto* obsolete and with no effect,” and why it is not true, as Nuncio Migliori said in a letter addressed to Onondaga Faithkeeper Oren Lyons, that the *Inter Caetera* bull was “abrogated” by the bull Sublimis Deus of 1537. In his book *A Violent Evangelism* (1992), theologian Dr. Luis Rivera-Pagán states, “In the juridical area, the Alexandrian bulls maintained their authorized character, as shown by the first sentence in the first law of the first chapter of the third book of ‘the Compilation of the *Leyes de Indias*’ (1680), which recognizes them [those papal documents] as the first foundation of the possession in perpetuity of the Americas by the Crown of Castilla.”:

*By donation from the Apolostolic Holy See ... we are Lord of the Western Indies, isles and mainlands of the Ocean See, discovered and to be discovered and incorporated in our Royal Crown of Castilla ... [so that] they [those isles and mainlands] may always remain united for their great perpetuity and firmness, we forbid them being taken away. And we order that at no time may they be separated from our Royal Crown of Castilla. ...* (Recopilación 1841, 3.1.1, 2: 1). (p. 32)

Dr. Rivera-Pagán ended his discussion of this point by saying, “This law is based on consecutive royal declarations by Carlos V and Filipe II, who during the sixteenth century propounded the doctrine of Castilian dominion in perpetuity over the Ibero-American peoples. All those declarations allude to the Alexandrian bulls as the crucial point of reference.” (Ibid.) Then this: “Although we cannot dwell on this point, it is appropriate to point out that at the beginning of the nineteenth century the papal grant *in perpetuity* was used as a justification for discrediting the Latin American independence movement.” (Ibid). (emphasis added)

The above examples provide a key illustration of how the patterns which were promulgated in those ancient papal decrees, and other such documents of domination, have become institutionalized in the laws and policies of various states. From our standpoint, the Holy See bears present day responsibility for setting forth against our nations and peoples a deadly and destructive language system of domination ("*sub actuali dominio temporali aliquorum dominorum Christianorum constitute sint*”). The truth of this is found in one sentence of the *Inter Caetera* papal bull of May 4, 1493: “We have confidence [or trust] in Him from whom empires and dominations and all good things proceed.”

In our view the Holy See needs to put as much time, effort, energy, and money into assisting with the restoration of our languages, cultures, lands, and sacred places as it put into attempting to destroy and dispossess us from those features of our existence to begin this. Furthermore, open the Vatican archives to our scholars; disclose and repatriate your holdings of any of our cultural and spiritual items and ancestral remains; support the Oglala Lakota Nation in relation to the Sacred Black Hills, address the uranium mining contamination in the Southwest of the United States; take the telescope down at Mt. Graham in the Apache Nation territory; support restoration and healing for our Nations.

We look forward to further and fruitful discussions on this important matter, and propose, among other things, a series of international convenings with the Holy See, to discuss from our respective viewpoints, yours and ours, the significance of the papal bulls of the fifteenth century, and the paradigm of domination and dehumanization. Furthermore, it is time for the Holy See to
explicitly oppose the use of the doctrine of discovery and domination by state governments in their relations with Original Free Nations and Peoples.

Sincerely,

Barbara Dull Knife, Oglala Lakota Nation

Loretta Afraid of Bear Cook, Oglala Lakota Nation

Belinda Ayze, Dine Nation

Chi’qwax, Jode Goudy, Chairman, Yakama Nation

Keith Matthew, Shuswap Nation

David Close, Himkokapskap, Cayuse Nation


Steven Newcomb, Shawnee, Lenape Nations, Indigenous Law Institute