



# History Revisited

*“Forget the former things;  
do not dwell on the past.  
See, I am doing a new thing!  
Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?  
I am making a way in the wilderness  
and streams in the wasteland.  
(Isaiah 43:18-19, NIV)*



**INDIGENOUS  
PEOPLES DAY**

Every October when I was in grade school we sang the same song: “In fourteen hundred and ninety-two, Columbus sailed the ocean blue.” I learned about this brave sailor, who challenged the thinking of the time that the earth was flat and if one went too far west they would fall off the map.

I marveled at his tenacity. When he could not get Italian supporters for his voyage, he went to King Ferdinand of Spain and his wife, Isabella. (I especially liked hearing about Isabella since most of my history lessons in school had very few women of prominence. Betsy Ross sewing a flag in Philadelphia was the only other woman I remember.)

I was taught that Columbus “discovered” the new world and brought Christ to the heathens. I actually wrote a newsletter once at my first parish saying that the name “Christopher” meant “Christ-bearer” and that he was spreading the faith to those who had never heard.

Then I went on a mission trip to the Dominican Republic and visited a large, modern museum of history, where I learned of Columbus’ brutality and the genocide of the indigenous Taino people. He instituted slavery and engaged in horrific acts of inhumanity.



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Then I went on a mission trip to the Dominican Republic and visited a large, modern museum of history, where I learned of Columbus’ brutality and the genocide of the indigenous Taino people. He instituted slavery and engaged in horrific acts of inhumanity.

According to an article in the Philadelphia Tribune (9/2/18), “Council Must Stop Celebrating Columbus Genocide,” by Michael Coard, “the atrocities of Columbus were so bad that Governor Francisco De Bodadilla arrested him for his many crimes and sent him back to Spain in shackles.” So much for my “Christ-bearer.”

Across our country a number of states have changed “Columbus Day” to “Indigenous Peoples Day” or “Native Americans Day,” including Alaska, Minnesota, South Dakota and Vermont. Numerous cities and universities have followed suit.

What does this have to do with the church? In 2012 the General Conference of The United Methodist Church engaged in an “Act of Repentance and Healing for Indigenous People.” We learned how the church’s history was one of promoting genocide with no respect for the culture and rights of indigenous people all over the globe. We said we were sorry, but we also promised to improve some of our ways of knowing, living and being.

According to our 2016 Book of Resolutions (BOR, page 319) “In 1452 the Papal Bull Romanus Pontifex (an official statement issued by Pope Nicholas V) declared war against all non-Christians throughout the world, sanctioning and promoting the conquest, colonization and exploitation of non-Christian nations and their territories.”

#### **“Christian Doctrine of Discovery”**

The BOR further explains that, “In 1823 the “Christian Doctrine of Discovery” was adopted into law by the U.S. Supreme Court. Chief Justice (John) Marshall observed that Christian European nations had assumed dominion over the lands of America, and upon discovery, Native American Indians had lost their rights to complete sovereignty as independent nations and retained a mere right of occupancy in their lands.”

Much of that thinking came about as a result of a belief that we had the right to claim the belongings of others because of our superior Christian faith. I don’t believe there is any rationale for claiming the property of others in the teachings of Jesus.

There is a Columbus Day—a three-day-weekend holiday—every year. But instead of celebrating a villain’s dubious “discovery” that led to brutal conquest, exploitation and genocide, we can find ways to celebrate the indigenous people of the world. We can honor their origins, cultures and survival and rejoice in their kinship with us as members of the human family created and loved by God.

So, I urge you to explore these indigenous histories and cultures—their past and present—through relevant experiences. Visit a museum, read a book, watch a movie. Offer a “show and tell” experience in church, sharing a story about how we as Christians need to live with others in healthy, respectful and sustainable ways.

Some of the history that we were taught years ago needs to be revisited and revised. As we consider the former things of old, we should forget or reject some stories that no longer seem valid. Instead, it is time to perceive new things that God is doing in our midst and celebrate new wisdom for our times.

*- Bishop Peggy Johnson*

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