

Jordan Brady Loewen ([00:00:08](#)):

Hello, and welcome to the Mapping the Doctrine of Discovery Podcast. The producers of this podcast would like to acknowledge with respect the Onondaga Nation, firekeepers of the Haudenosaunee, the Indigenous peoples on whose ancestral lands Syracuse University now stand. And now introducing your host, Philip Arnold and Sandy Bigtree.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:00:30](#)):

Welcome, everyone, to the first episode of Mapping the Doctrine of Discovery. My name is Phil Arnold. I'm associate professor and chair of the Religion Department at Syracuse University, also core faculty in Native American studies, also the founding director of the Skä•noñh Great Law of Peace Center. And I'm here with-

Sandy Bigtree ([00:00:50](#)):

Hi. I'm Sandy Bigtree. So I grew up a few miles north of the Onondaga Nation, who are today, the central fire of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. The Confederacy is comprised of the Mohawks, the Oneida, the Onondaga, the Cayuga, the Seneca, and the Tuscarora. Traditional clan representatives still meet at Onondaga in the way that they had, before the doctrines of discovery, before colonialism. In fact, this system of goes back thousands and thousands of years. And it was founded at Onondaga Lake, which is currently in the area called Syracuse, New York right now.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:01:34](#)):

Growing up in Syracuse, I was raised in an educational system that never really spoke about these traditions or this long legacy of the Haudenosaunee which, in fact, influenced American democracy that we know today. The founding fathers of the United States were heavily influenced by this form of governance, because it was a governance of peace that had sustained over thousands and thousands of years.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:02:02](#)):

This is the introduction to the first of a series of podcasts that we're going to be having on the Doctrine of Christian Discovery. And we hope that you'll continue to listen in. The Doctrine of Christian Discovery is essentially the key to understanding so much of what ails us today in the world. So the Doctrine of Discovery is quite simply the Doctrine of Christian Discovery. That is the relationship between how religion justified and encouraged the taking of lands for European monarchs and the Vatican from Indigenous peoples around the world.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:02:44](#)):

As a historian of religion, I'm very concerned that people know about the Doctrine of Discovery. And this is an area of concern that is shared with Indigenous peoples around the world. So let's begin. Let's just lay out what the Doctrine of Christian Discovery is.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:03:03](#)):

So we all learned about Columbus in grade school. In 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue. But what does that have to do with the Doctrine of Discovery? Why does Columbus, who actually was never in North America or continental United States certainly, play such an important role in American history in American identity? Why are there so many statues to Columbus all over this country?

Philip P. Arnold ([00:03:32](#)):

There are a lot of important questions, a lot of important issues around an American worldview that have to do with Columbus. So actually before Columbus, before the age of discovery, as we characterize it now in the mid-1400s, there were a series of Papal Bulls, which are actually just letters from the pope to kings and queens and other members of what was then the Christian Church.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:03:58](#)):

And in a succession of popes, these popes gave sanction to Christian monarchs to seize lands, goods and enslaved non-Christian people beginning in West Africa, and then eventually around the world for the purposes of creating an empire Christendom. So it was the combination of monarchs and the pope and the Vatican together would claim lands of Indigenous peoples.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:04:27](#)):

When Columbus set foot on the shore of the Dominican Republic, he came with two flags, one representing the Vatican, the other representing Spain. So those two flags, in a sense, sanctioned the taking of lands, the enslavement of people and all their worldly goods.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:04:48](#)):

So this is essentially the origins of the Doctrine of Discovery when Christianity is used as a weapon against Indigenous people. For example, in 1452, Pope Nicholas V authorizes King Alfonso V of Portugal to a "invade, capture, vanquish, and subdue all Saracens and pagans to reduce their persons to perpetual slavery and take away all their possessions and property." So this is an example of Christians assuming the superiority of their own world for the purpose of taking lands and property from others.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:05:32](#)):

From 1493, May 4th, 1493, in other words, six weeks after Columbus's return to Spain, Pope Alexander VI, this infamous Borgia pope calls for barbarous nations to be subjugated and brought to the Catholic faith and Christian religion "for the purposes of propagation for the Christian empire or Christendom."

Philip P. Arnold ([00:05:56](#)):

So this was designed, the age of discovery, was designed to enrich the Catholic Church to fight and to subdue all non-Christians and enemies of Christ. So it's 15th century appearance, the Doctrine of Discovery, it really doesn't become a doctrine until the US Supreme Court issues a decision in 1823. It's called Johnson v. M'Intosh. And its chief justice, John Marshall, who writes the unanimous opinion that outlines the Doctrine of Discovery as foundational to US property law.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:06:34](#)):

That is to say that the Doctrine of Discovery is after the Supreme Court decision understood to be foundational. When Christians enter the lands of non-Christian people, those lands are automatically deeded to the sponsoring nation state. And this is a fundamental importance for us in religion, because at the time, US governmental institutions were deeply suspicious of anything Catholic. This was a Protestant nation. This was a Protestant nation building exercise that they were involved with.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:07:14](#)):

And any kind of hint of allegiance to a pope or to a supreme king or queen or aristocracy was considered anathema to the US system. But nevertheless, around the issue of land and free title to land, this Protestant nation and the Catholic pronouncements of the pope of the 15th century came together in this US Supreme Court decision. So this Catholic principle of discovery morphed into a Protestant nation building exercise.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:07:52](#)):

In 2005, there was another US Supreme Court decision. Fast forward to 2005 in *Oneida Nation v. Sherrill*, the court at that time included Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. And she's the one who writes the court's opinion. It was a eight to one decision. She writes the court's opinion that shoots down the Oneida Nation's claim to lands that were stolen, and the Oneida Nation is trying to regain lands that were stolen historically by the state of New York in opposition to a treaty that was written between the Haudenosaunee and George Washington in 1779.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:08:36](#)):

And that first citation of that decision in 2005 says under it cites the Doctrine of Discovery. And under the Doctrine of Discovery, according to this quote, under the Doctrine of Discovery fee titled to the lands occupied by Indians when the colonists arrived became vested in the sovereign. First, the discovering European nation and later the original states and then the United States. So in other words, the Doctrine of Discovery is still seen as a vital principle of law and property law in the United States. All right.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:09:13](#)):

So land claims, the land claims that have been issued since that time, are null and void. So there is no remedy according to this for the return of lands illegally taken either the United States or whomever else around the world because of the Doctrine of Discovery. And so what I'm trying to indicate here is that the Doctrine of Discovery, the Doctrine of Christian Discovery, is still operative and is still a cause for important conversations that are going on among Indigenous peoples around the world.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:09:47](#)):

So this sounds really big. It sounds enormous, maybe a little depressing. But I have found, in teaching the Doctrine of Discovery over 30 years, that students learning about this, the origins of missionization, conquest, and colonialism, and this kind of... So the Doctrine of Discovery becomes a kind of grand universal theory or a theology of oppression and world domination that students at least can understand and appreciate its origins and what it has done. And then, what we can maybe do about it.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:10:21](#)):

The Doctrine of Discovery has morphed into other kinds of world domination including destructive capitalism, endless warfare on the emphasis on warfare. We have very little investment in peace in the United States. But the Haudenosaunee among others are completely oriented around a message of peace that has unified them. And it's that message of peace for the Haudenosaunee that influenced the founding fathers. We'll get into that in future podcasts.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:10:53](#)):

So the Doctrine of Christian Discovery, since the time of Columbus in the America certainly, unleashed a destructive worldview upon non-Christian peoples. Their bodies, lands possessions were all used for the

purposes of Christendom. That is the empire of Christianity. The Doctrine of Christian Discovery, therefore, is the foundation of genocide against Indigenous peoples, also environmental destruction, devaluing women in particular.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:11:28](#)):

It's also the origins of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, chattel slavery, and the destruction of Mother Earth. It's not just a law or a legal principle as is used today. But it has to do with the cosmology and an engine of civilization or a civilizing force. But what we want to really get into are the religious dimensions today of the Doctrine of Discovery and why it's so invasive into Indigenous communities and peoples.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:12:02](#)):

So the Doctrine of Discovery is essential for understanding the role that religion plays in today's society. The Doctrine of Discovery is a unifying theme. The religious roots of the Doctrine of Discovery helps explain the taking of Indigenous lands throughout the Americas and other places around the world. And today, the seizure of commodities, of resources on Indigenous lands by multinational corporations. So there are a whole host of things that the Doctrine of Discovery helps us to understand and unpack.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:12:47](#)):

The Doctrine of Discovery justified the conversion of native people. When they came into Haudenosaunee territory, specifically Onondaga, they arrived with a deed to 600 square miles of land, right in the heart of Onondaga Nation territory. This is sacred land. It's a sacred lake where thousands of years ago, a peacemaker came and provided the instructions on how separate Indian Nations could unite under this law of peace, these principles of peace.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:13:26](#)):

That great law of peace existed for thousands of years. It was effective. And it was a different way of orienting to what was perceived as a creator or a God, a Christian God, was outside of this earth. But our creator is embedded in every facet of life and all the beings of life that sustain our lives. We are part of this regenerative of force of creation.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:13:57](#)):

When the Jesuits arrived here, they immediately renamed us and gave children the names of saints or Christian biblical names and destroyed our matrilineal clan system. And the church reorganized our families into patriarchal families with the father at the helm. And then, they assigned us a familial second name, a surname.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:14:24](#)):

So right from the beginning they arrived, the churches were built. We had to attend those churches. We were prohibited from performing our ceremonies. And our very identity and names were changed into a Christian identity. So it was immediate when the church moved in here. It was immediate. And it just reorganized our entire societal structure.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:14:51](#)):

That was the activity largely of the Jesuits initially coming from Canada and acting on behalf of the Vatican and also France simultaneously. The Doctrine of Discovery has those two pillars. It's when

Christians enter the lands of non-Christian people. The lands and all their property, and their very bodies of non-Christians are automatically deeded to the sponsoring nation and to be committed to the service of furthering and extending the church or Christendom, the empire of Christ.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:15:32](#)):

These were the motivations behind the Jesuits actions in Onondaga Nation territory. But that's not unique around the world. When Columbus landed in the Caribbean, he placed a flag for Spain and across for the church. So those two elements of the Doctrine of Discovery, the state and the church, acting together was sanctioning this land taking, many would say land theft, of Indigenous peoples.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:16:08](#)):

What they encountered for the most part were people interested in what they had to say at least initially. But when more was found out about these early discoverers, they realized that they weren't there just to visit to have an exchange. But they were there to conquer and dominate. And this has been the legacy, the legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery and how it has impacted us continue to impact us today.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:16:36](#)):

Now it was in 1823 that the US Supreme Court, under Johnson... or sorry, under John Marshall, that they decided the Johnson v. M'Intosh decision in which the Doctrine of Discovery was essentially moved from this Catholic principle of land-taking, conquest, and domination into a Protestant state-building context, so this Catholic idea moved into a Protestant nation-building context.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:17:09](#)):

What is interesting and important is that, at the time, Protestants and Catholics literally hated one another. They were killing one another. But on this issue of Christians appropriating everything that non-Christians had, they agreed on that principle. So after it becomes this principle of law of property, then this becomes literally the law of the land in US property law. Every law student during their studies is introduced to the Doctrine of Discovery.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:17:50](#)):

And the shift was made again into our culture. We talk about the game of lacrosse and how the very creator twins in our myths created this earth. They were opposing forces. And that was absolutely necessary to create the energy that created the night sky in the day sky or created roses with thorns on the stems. It was an interactive force. And it just said the twins played lacrosse.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:18:23](#)):

When the Jesuits came, they even took the game. Well, I have to be clear. We call it dehontsigwaehs, which means they bump hips. And when the Jesuits came, they renamed it to lacrosse because they said the stick resembled the Bishop's crosier. So they put it the very game of our creation story. They Christianized it and made it a Christian story.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:18:49](#)):

And so doing that, it wasn't so much an interactive game that created this life force. It was a battle where good conquered evil. And so, that's what was taught back to the native children who had their

culture stripped from them, the boarding schools. They were taught this game that is close to their hearts and their very identity and relationship with this earth that it became this Christian context of warfare where good conquered evil.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:19:22](#)):

And in so doing that, you had to determine what was evil. And it was the non-Christians who were you evil. And Christians became the good powerful force. And they were justified in destroying everything in their wake to Christianize it.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:19:43](#)):

Another thing that the Doctrine of Discovery helps clarify is the motivational forces behind the age of discovery of conquest, of manifest destiny. There is a theology of conquest that helps us understand the early contact right up until the present.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:20:02](#)):

In the 15th century, the church and the monarchs and Christians of the time were convinced that the second coming of Christ was at hand and that people in the world had to ready themselves, ready the land, ready the place for the second coming.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:20:24](#)):

Now, the second coming is what defines American Christianity from early contact to the present as well. So you who can write the history of Christianity around this apocalypticism or millennialism. But just so in the 15th century, these explorers were motivated to leave their homes and conquer the world in the name of Christ.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:20:52](#)):

This was a motivating factor. Remember that the crusades happen about 400, 500 years earlier. And that is motivated by the retaking of the Holy Land from the Muslims, from the Saracens. And essentially that too can be seen as an apocalyptic move, as a millennial move. So the urgency of this task is what is driving these explorers partly in terms of their theology.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:21:26](#)):

Well, in the 15th century, likewise, so the emphasis of Christianity from the 15th century, certainly until the present has been the urgency of dealing with the end of all things, the end of time. The end of time is the promise of Christianity that Christ will return, and the earth will return to the garden of Eden, that all Christians will be gathered together. And it's this promise of Revelation in the New Testament that has driven religious intensity in the America's and is also the religious intensity behind missionization, between conquest and domination.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:22:10](#)):

Today, we have, in the United States and around the world, Christian fundamentalism, fundamentalisms of all type, which have also this urgency, the drive to the end. What Sandy is saying is that Indigenous peoples emphasize creation, the beginning, the regeneration of the world, where Christianity in this form has emphasized consistently the urgency of the end and preparing ourselves for it.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:22:39](#)):

So this is what we refer to as the theology of conquest and the deep cultural factors in our society today that are driving us towards the end have their root in the Doctrine of Discovery. And even though it has been traumatic for so many people around the world, it's been traumatic for Indigenous peoples around the world, it's what motivated the assimilationist movement in the 20th century, where various Christian denominations were setting up Indian boarding schools around the world but particularly here in the United States and Canada.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:23:21](#)):

Those were all organized and managed by Christian denominations. And the thinking was that in order to save the lives and souls of these non-Christian people, these Indigenous people, they had to be subjected to the trials and tribulations of what it meant to be Christian.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:23:45](#)):

Today, the horror of those places is being revealed through unearthing these unmarked children's graves, for example, where it's up to something like 8,000 children's graves, mostly in Canada, but also in places like Carlisle and other places in the United States.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:24:07](#)):

So the drive for assimilation, missionization is always an ongoing kind of phenomenon. So we have to look at the deeper impulses of the Doctrine of Discovery and how it's driving us today.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:24:21](#)):

Now, of course, legal scholars are interested in the Doctrine of Discovery environmentalists as well, because this also helps explain why the drive to use up the earth, why to not treat it as a limited resource, or as our mother, as native people refer to it, or as Turtle Island, as a living being. So how the Doctrine of Discovery then gets wedded to resource extraction and other economic activities is important for environmentalists as well.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:24:54](#)):

Well, part of the theology of a Christian also is to attain these great treasures in the afterlife, and they carry it into this life as well. I mean, the doctrines were written. The earlier one was first in West Africa, where there was a lot of gold that was excavated.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:25:11](#)):

And then Columbus's first letter back to Spain mentioned the gold that he discovered in the Americas. And that's when the Papal Bull was written. So it's the acquisition of great wealth and entitlement the Christians feel they have coming to them. So you have to get all the native people under control. So you can get at their resources and obtain this great wealth and empowerment.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:25:39](#)):

And it's always about attaining salvation or attaining wealth or attaining power. It's just the antithesis to an Indigenous sensibility of the earth sustaining us. And our power is living in balance with the earth. So really butts heads. We have uncoding the doctrines of discovery, the codes of domination. The rest begins to unfold.



Philip P. Arnold ([00:26:05](#)):

Yes. What we're talking about is competing value systems. Now, I'm not suggesting that all Christians hold this theology of domination, not by a long shot because there have been many Christian denominations, something like 350 denominations, have repudiated the Doctrine of Discovery since 2009.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:26:28](#)):

But think about what the consequences of that are. Think about how this shifts a theological framing of what Christianity means for those different denominations. How do they have to transform themselves to something else so that we can actually live in a multi-religious society? We've never really done that before, frankly.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:26:55](#)):

But that's really problematic when your religion is built on the hierarchy of a God that sits above you and judges you and bestows goodness upon you.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:27:06](#)):

Exactly.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:27:06](#)):

It's completely different. So even though many people are feeling remorse and coming on board to resend the Doctrines of Discovery, it's the system that has created them of a hierarchical way of thinking.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:27:21](#)):

Right. And so in dialogue with Indigenous peoples and other peoples of color that have been subjected to these systems of domination, that will help clarify these theological dimensions so that we can push and move towards a different way of thinking about the place of religion in our lives.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:27:44](#)):

So, we think that this is a fundamental issue from top to bottom. It helps explain white supremacy in the United States. It helps explain manifest destiny, the idea that we're somehow given this continent by God, to be sanctified and to create the perfect society. There are lots of things. But at the center of all of this is the religious dimension. And I think we need to focus on that as well as focusing on the environmental, the legal and other dimensions of the Doctrine of Discovery.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:28:24](#)):

Well, a certain cause for discussion with all these different categories. But again, as, Oren Lyons has often said, they do not acknowledge a category of religion. And as Sid Hill always says, peace cannot be obtained until you're in proper relationship with the natural world.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:28:43](#)):

So these categories or compartmentalizing the way you're thinking about things, have to stretch our concept of what does it mean to be a human being, living in proper relationship with this natural world.



So it's going to be a process. It's going to be a long process. But we have to begin these difficult discussions.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:29:07](#)):

One of the features of the Doctrine of Discovery and this term comes from the academic study of religion is this notion of deus otiosus. It's a phrase that means God the obscured, God the abstract, God that is outside of the world. And this is something that Sandy had just mentioned.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:29:30](#)):

The Christian God is not in the world. The sacred is not in the world. There are places of power for Christians. There's the Holy Land. Those are places of a manifestation of the sacred in physical form manifestation like Jesus Christ in the world. But that sacred reality has been removed, is outside the world, is transfigured and transcendent.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:30:01](#)):

For Indigenous peoples, most of the time, all of the time, specifically the Haudenosaunee, the sacred is embedded in the world, in the natural world. And so it's the duty of human beings to create a society that can live in balance with the natural world upon which human beings depend.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:30:26](#)):

For example, when there the statement water is life, and this is almost a universal Indigenous framework, when they say water is life, they're actually meaning that we have to follow water, we have to let water govern our choices in our society. We have to listen to the water. And so, elaborate ceremonies are established, so one can do just that. This would be considered heretical to many Christians and certainly the Christians of the 15th century, this was considered evil. So those contrasting notions of divinity, I think, are most stark and at odds with one another.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:31:13](#)):

There are some languages, Indigenous languages, where the word love has at its root, the word for water. And again reflecting on we cannot know peace unless we're in proper relationship with the natural world, constantly reiterating what our clan name is, our responsibilities to the clan animal we're named after, or we're involved with in some way. It's constant reiteration that we are in one place with this natural world. That's how a good mind is established.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:31:48](#)):

When we have ceremonies, we don't pray. It's an act of gratitude. We don't ask for anything. We give thanks. We dance to relive the moments that sky woman created the soil on the back of turtle. She did it with a dance of gratitude. And the soil grew. So when we have ceremonies, we dance in that same counterclockwise direction. And we're thinking about that. We're thinking of the soil in perpetuating this life and this regeneration that we can be part of when we begin to understand our real relationship on this earth.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:32:30](#)):

So you can think about the consequences of those different theological frameworks, right? I'll call it theology for the moment. It's kind of a stretch to call this Haudenosaunee value system theology. But

they are working out of a sense of what is sacred in the world. And that has to do with creation and regeneration.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:32:50](#)):

Economic development, for example, has the form of making sure that it's always renewable, always regenerative, always regenerating itself. But in the case of deus otiosus, when God is transcendent and above, then there is a kind of natural hierarchy that's established in order to reach the deity above. And in millennialism, economic development takes the form of using up the world, adding now today at a kind of alarming pace.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:33:25](#)):

And so, I think that's why people are right now during the time of climate change, they're taking very seriously these Indigenous values and trying to listen to these deeper understandings of how to live in balance with the natural world. But this will have an effect on the way we tend to think about religion and not just the economics of it but the deeper abiding relationships that we have to the world around us.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:33:54](#)):

You talk about environmentalists today are trying to reflect in this different relationship. And I often hear them state their stewards of the land. They want to become better stewards of the land. Well, Haudenosaunee do not view themselves as being stewards of the land. It's more in effect the land as a steward of us as human beings. So we have to unpack even our language. It's going to take some time. But we are fundamentally colonized in our brains from the English language and just every facet of life, what controls everything.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:34:32](#)):

It is a big job. It's a big job. But it's so full of possibilities too. I mean, when I teach the Doctrine of Discovery to my students and I do so in every one of my classes, it does help. I mean, initially, you might be just kind of jolted by the sheer magnitude of the violence against the earth or the violence against native people.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:34:59](#)):

But then, it helps us to understand what really ails our society today. What ails our religions today? Growing up in a kind of evangelical Protestant tradition when I was young, I always had this uneasy feeling like, "This is not right. This is not really what I want to be doing."

Philip P. Arnold ([00:35:27](#)):

And it's one of the reasons I got into the academic study of religion is that I knew that there were other alternatives, religious alternatives out there. And people had been thinking about this for generations. And yet being raised in this particular tradition at a young age, 12, 13 years old pressured into making a decision, a commitment, I said, "No, thank you," even at that young age. So something unsettling about the lack of tolerance for other paths, other religious paths, I think is now coming to the foreground around the world today.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:36:15](#)):

Even if you look at the sacrality of food that sustains our bodies and how it's grown in the agricultural practices, the Haudenosaunee even in planting their crops, it was an act of gratitude. Never would they till the earth. They would like plunge a stick and put the seeds down there and build mounds up over the seeds and padding the earth, and they were like three sister gardens that nourished the plants, nourished each other. And in this process of agriculture, top soil was actually created as you're extracting food from these plants. And when the Revolutionary War happened, there were soldiers that were writing these accounts of these spectacular gardens that were two miles wide.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:37:06](#)):

These three sister gardens and the soil was the deepest they'd ever seen. Yet, they were instructed by George Washington to burn all the crops because they were trying to wipe the Haudenosaunee off their own land. So pass another century and these children are now forced to go to boarding schools, they're teaching the children how to garden in the proper way, and that's to use a tilling machine where you just dig up all the microbes that are underneath the soil.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:37:37](#)):

And that happened from the East Coast all the way to the West Coast, and our soil is so depleted today because you don't know how to grow food, that it's an interactive regenerative activity. And if we don't pick up on this soon, I mean, we could be feeding so many more people if we learn these ancient processes.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:38:00](#)):

You mentioned the good mind.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:38:01](#)):

Well, that's kind of the core of identity among the Haudenosaunee. It's all about finding peace if you're in proper relationship. So how do you come to this good place of thinking to obtain that? And it's a constant reiteration. Whenever there is a meeting, there is a Thanksgiving address is recited, and the purpose of that is to acknowledge that you're part of this grand cosmos of interactive beings that regenerate and regenerate.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:38:35](#)):

And so whenever there's a serious meeting, you have to go through this process to be sure your thinking is in the best place possible. It's been referred to as the good mind. And so, that after you converse about something, you come together so your minds are all in agreement. The Haudenosaunee do not ever vote. But they go through this lengthy process of attaining this good mind so they can make decisions that will affect everything in the best way.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:39:05](#)):

In fact, we don't even call our chiefs like a hierarchical chief. The name for the clan representatives is Royanie<sup>1</sup> and it translates loosely to men of the good mind. So it's just part of the culture to always be trying to attain this rightful place of thinking so that all life can be respected to live out its purpose and duties to one another.

---

<sup>1</sup> Mohawk spelling.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:39:36](#)):

So, for example, Sandy was just giving you example of leadership among the Haudenosaunee has to do with being a leader that is always attentive to the subtle messages of creation and regeneration, and being thankful constantly, and being at the service of one's people where elected leaders in the US system, for example, tend to focus on what they can get from their appointments. What will personally serve them? What kinds of money can they make out of being a leader in the US system? It's almost completely different kind of criteria for leadership.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:40:25](#)):

Right, or bartering who can win the contest of bartering the best.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:40:29](#)):

Right.

Jordan Brady Loewen ([00:40:32](#)):

Do you need help catching up on today's topic or do you want to learn more about the resources mentioned? If so, please check our website at [podcast.doctrineofdiscovery.org](http://podcast.doctrineofdiscovery.org) for more information. Now, back to the conversation.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:40:50](#)):

I had mentioned earlier about all the gold that was excavated from West Africa. It was just channeled back to the Vatican, I mean, the Vatican stores this enormous wealth. And then with the discovery of the America's Columbus discovered the gold, soon after that, Cortez discovered silver. I mean, it was all just shipped over to Europe. So you've got the monarchs and the church sitting on all this wealth and they're the spiritual center.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:41:27](#)):

So anyone looking to the church, they're building these incredible churches, the Renaissance, all the art, the music that just poured out of that. That's where the followers could go to church and experience the wealth and the gold and the beauty.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:41:45](#)):

I mean, our sons have gone to these mining towns in Pennsylvania to coach, and Clay is in a really old little town. And all the houses are just along the strip, like three feet back from the curb of the road. There's no space for a garden. These homes are so depressing. And they're within inches from one another. And you see this whole city where people live this way. But on nearly every other corner, there is this magnificent church of all denominations. And you know these people are devout Christians, and they're attending these beautiful glorious churches. And then, they return to the poverty of their home. And there's barely a place to even grow a blade of grass, let alone have a garden.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:42:34](#)):

And what conditions people to think this is okay, that this existence is okay. And they're going to find salvation in their God, as long as they go to this gorgeous, beautiful church, and then those that can live in the next stratosphere and earn money, well, they're going to want to be attaining the wealth that

they see in these churches. They feel entitled this belongs to them. It's their theology of riches and goodness and lots of stuff and gold and shiny things and art.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:43:10](#)):

It started with the construct of the Vatican and then all the other churches that followed because these were the sacred centers that all Christians were to go there and see this every week, all the wealth. And it should be available to them because they're all aspiring to their riches in heaven. If some people are able to attain those riches here on earth, why shouldn't they?

Philip P. Arnold ([00:43:34](#)):

Yeah. I think you have the relationship between personal salvation and consumerism. Consumerism is a kind of 19th century phenomenon. But the personal salvation can be seen in the notion of the consumer, that whoever can attain the most personal wealth is understood to be saved.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:43:58](#)):

Yeah, or more spiritual.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:43:59](#)):

Or more powerful or more spiritual somehow.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:44:02](#)):

I mean, look at Christmas, everybody's just shopping and shopping. And that's the biggest consumers day of the year.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:44:11](#)):

Yeah. And without Christmas, there would be no economy in a way.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:44:15](#)):

Right. And then weddings. And then it's just-

Philip P. Arnold ([00:44:19](#)):

So how this theology of conquest, as we're talking about it, gets wedded to economy, gets wedded to consumerism is what's at stake for a more viable future. You can't just use up the world. It's not an unlimited resource. Contrast that with the Haudenosaunee or Indigenous value system. Some people call it sustainability. But it's really not that. It's really about regeneration of leaving. People did not just maintain or sustain their environment. They grew their environment. They made it better.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:45:01](#)):

They made their Indigenous people all over the world. Now, studies in that Brazilian tribes in the Amazon rainforest actually built tons and tons of topsoil through their agricultural activity. Now, rather than mining, rather than extraction, you have a value of regeneration, of growing, of flourishing, you could say. And that's what Indigenous peoples are really focused on, and the Haudenosaunee too.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:45:36](#)):

And there's acknowledgement at the spirit of the plant. And you go, and when you forage, you never take all that you can carry away. You never take the first plant you see. You are always leaving it for someone else and for the plant itself. And you pay respect, and you just take what you need, burn sweet grass or whatever to give your gratitude to these plants. But it's always being mindful that it's there for everybody. And that's what perpetuates and cues into this notion of regeneration, because it's regeneration of the whole, of the earth.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:46:15](#)):

You could think about the Indigenous framing of a gift economy. So you are given a gift of life, and then you reciprocate with a gift that preserves that life or grows that life. In a monetary economy, there's only a one dimension. And that is all things flow towards the self, towards the human being. And the being upon which human beings rely does not matter.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:46:45](#)):

So you have gift economy and profit economy. And they operate in different directions. But what helps clarify that, of course, is religion and this notion of how these different systems are tied up with understandings of the divine or the sacred.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:47:09](#)):

Something very important that people listeners have to appreciate is that given all of this trauma for Indigenous people, all this trauma over centuries, the Haudenosaunee have still stuck to the great law peace and still practiced that today. So through conquest, through initial conquest or attempted conquest by the Jesuits, the attempted destruction of them by George Washington or the revolutionary war or New York State, or them being reduced onto small reservation territories or the boarding school system or whatever else we might be talking about, through all of that, the Haudenosaunee and particularly the Onondaga Nation where we're located have maintained their traditions, their great law peace, the longhouse process that was given to them as part of their original instructions, thousands of years ago.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:48:13](#)):

And today, the Onondaga Nation is one of only three federally recognized Native American nations that are still governing themselves by their pre-American system of governance. They are not governed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, as most native nations are.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:48:32](#)):

They have stuck to this idea that they are sovereign. They are independent of the United States, of any state. And so, they have been active in the United Nations. So we are free. In other words, the Onondaga Nation has enabled us to be free to really look and look at this topic of the Doctrine of Discovery squarely in the face. We can really have a very frank conversation about all the difficulties of the Doctrine of Discovery because they're not encumbered by some Christian Church that they might belong to as for example, some of the Mohawk communities are, or they're not encumbered by evangelical Protestantism as for example, the Sami are Scandinavia.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:49:33](#)):

The Onondaga Nation are very traditional. They've managed to keep to these values in such a way that makes this kind of project in this place a much more viable option for doing this work.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:49:48](#)):

Vine Deloria had once set over dinner that Onondaga maintains the clearest trail back to the precolonial state of Indigenous nations in this country.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:50:05](#)):

And that's because they signed treaties with George Washington in 1794.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:50:09](#)):

Right, and they've upheld their treaty.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:50:10](#)):

Yeah. So, they maintain that they are a sovereign entity. They travel on their own passports around the world.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:50:19](#)):

And they never collect any-

Philip P. Arnold ([00:50:22](#)):

They refused to accept any money from the federal government. They only accept what has been guaranteed them by treaty. So that's an important point for what has enabled us to do this work here in Syracuse. Theology of conquest is one in which there is tenuous relationship to the sacred. There is a yearning, a desire for the sacred.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:50:52](#)):

Essentially all through European history, European Christian history, we'll say, even before there was a Europe, Christians have been out of place. They haven't been associated with their sacred places. And this is true today.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:51:10](#)):

So being out of place or distant, and when the site of the hierophany, the manifestation of the sacred is remote in a foreign country somewhere else, that means you're surrounded essentially by a profane world, a world that is in a fallen state. And the prestige, what some historians of religion like David Carrasco call the prestige of the sacred, prestige of the ceremonial center is that one always wants to go back to that sacred place.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:51:53](#)):

Now, Indigenous peoples are always in their place, or they're more adjacent to their sacred places. In the history of Christianity, Muslims, in particular, occupy the sacred place. And Christians and European kingdoms, the Vatican and other places, they're not in their sacred place, in the ultimate sacred place. So how do you get back?

Philip P. Arnold ([00:52:26](#)):

How do you get back to that place? This defines a theology of conquest in a sense to get back to their sacred place, to Jerusalem, to have that place completely and totally required the creation of the empire



of Christ and all the goods and stuff of the world to create that kingdom, to re-attain that sacred place. I'm talking about this theology as a theology of place. So you conquer the rest of the world to attain your sacred place.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:53:04](#)):

The other thing is that there has to be in this theology, there is this urgency, this drive of the millennium, the urgency of time. Time is of the essence because the return of God, of Christ, into the world who is not here is going to be happening at any moment. And one has to be prepared for that return.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:53:28](#)):

So preparing the place at the appointed time is what's driving these impulses of a theology of conquest and domination and absolute control of the world. You can get the sense that this urgency is also part of our economic strategy of using up the stuff of the earth, hurrying towards something. And so, it's that kind of sense of place and of time, and this is expressed by Vine Deloria among others, that is folded into this theology of conquest. That's my guess.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:54:08](#)):

And it's a place. It's a utopian place. It's all imagined. Utopia means no place.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:54:11](#)):

Right. No place or perfect place or heaven kind of-

Sandy Bigtree ([00:54:16](#)):

Doesn't exist.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:54:17](#)):

It's a place that exists in the mind in the imagination. How does one create that utopia by the utilization of all the stuff of the earth into the creation of this perfection that is part of this millennialism that we've been discussing?

Philip P. Arnold ([00:54:36](#)):

So what we're describing here is a kind of grand theory, universal theory, or theology of oppression, world domination that's connected to missionization, conquest, and colonialism. And this is one of the things I want to emphasize that we both want to emphasize that this is as much a concern of people in religion, as it is with people in law or in government or in environmental studies or in Indigenous studies.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:55:08](#)):

To get at the real root causes, we've been looking at religion as a root cause of world domination. So this dream of Christendom, this dream of a united Christian empire eliminates diversity of Indigenous ceremonies, traditions, languages, spiritual insights. It also morphs into other forms of world domination, destructive capitalism, for example, the movement of multinational corporations into Indigenous territories for the last bits of stuff needed for consumerism, world war, endless war and, probably most urgent of all, climate change. This is something that then becomes a way of interpreting what's going on in terms of climate.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:56:01](#)):

To turn here a little bit. So since 2009, the Doctrine of Discovery, and the repudiation of the Doctrine of Christian Discovery, have been taking place among a number, a great number of Christian organizations, religious organizations, but particularly want to emphasize here Christian organizations because they have really been at the forefront, a certain number of activists, Christian activists within their own denominations have been taking on this issue as one that they should be concerned about for a variety of reasons.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:56:39](#)):

But nevertheless, there are people that have been interested in promoting an awareness within their own denominations about this cancer within Christianity. And I think it's to those people that we really have... One of those constituencies is these people that are trying to convince others in their denominations. Let me list a few.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:57:04](#)):

So beginning in 2009, the US Episcopalians were the first to denounce the Doctrine of Christian Discovery. And this is a rather smallish denomination. But they were really very much concerned with England's, particularly the Monarch of Henry VII and his imposition, his discovery motivations around 1496, that becomes the first kind of foray into this.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:57:34](#)):

Then next, the Anglican Church of Canada, of course, also connected with the British empire. Various Catholic groups have repudiated the Doctrine of Discovery. Although the Vatican itself has not, this is something that we can work on. Disciples of Christ, Friends, Presbyterians, United Church of Christ, United Church of Canada, Methodists, Unitarian Universalists, the Mennonites, and also the World Council of Churches representing something like over 300 different denominations has denounced the Doctrine of Christian Discovery. So this is really something to build on. This is something that is encouraging in the end.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:58:20](#)):

Well, it shows that people are paying attention and they're horrified, frankly, from this history. And we're holding these conferences to try to present new ways of thinking about religion, our responsibilities as human beings, how we can reconnect to the regenerative power of the earth and spirit material, spirituality of the earth. Repudiation is just a start. But it shows interest and maybe it's out the opening of a door so we can work together and try to unpack what has created so much destruction, pain, and devastation on this planet.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:59:06](#)):

And the Indigenous people are sort of the canaries in the coal mine if you like. I mentioned that I became the founding director of the Skä•noñh Great Law of Peace Center. Well, we repurposed that Jesuit-fortified mission that Jesuit Fort, which reopened in November 2015, and we did that with a collaboration between various colleges and universities in this area and the Onondaga Nation.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:59:29](#)):

Phil pulled together several academics who are committed to these deep discussions that may present a step forward for all of us. But we need this interaction to unpack the horror that's been forced on all of us.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:59:45](#)):

And what we do there at the Skä•noñh Center is first introduce... We take a values approach and the need for a different set of values for us to have a future. So we talk about the Haudenosaunee, and the Haudenosaunee whose colonized name is really Iroquois.

Sandy Bigtree ([01:00:02](#)):

Right. Again, the Jesuits named us the Iroquois. They also renamed each of us individually and tried to give us Christian names to replace our clan names. But, yeah, it pretty much unpacks a lot of what this country is dealing with and even on the larger stage of global issues where this founding great law of peace happened was at Onondaga Lake. It's a sacred lake to the Haudenosaunee people. But it was industrialized for its salt by the colonists. And it remains the second most chemically polluted lake in the world today.

Sandy Bigtree ([01:00:37](#)):

And we think that this story needs to be told because it really has a lot out of power. It's kind of a vortex of where the colonists met the Indigenous peoples of this continent, the same Indigenous peoples that met with founding fathers to establish the American democracy that has become a global influence. And with that said, of course, there was so much left out of that-

Philip P. Arnold ([01:01:04](#)):

Exactly.

Sandy Bigtree ([01:01:05](#)):

... government, because women were excluded. The environment was excluded. But we need to start unpacking this now if we're going to have a future together.

Philip P. Arnold ([01:01:14](#)):

What we're saying is that the story needs to change. So what we've dedicated ourselves to it, the Skä•noñh Center is telling another story of Western democracy, the women's movement, other things that have been influenced by the Haudenosaunee in American culture and world really global culture.

Philip P. Arnold ([01:01:34](#)):

The stories of Columbus's white supremacy manifest destiny just will not sustain us into the future. And that's the reason why we've developed this podcast on the Doctrine of Discovery. So as to foreground, Indigenous experiences and wisdom, that will help us to have a more viable future.

Sandy Bigtree ([01:01:57](#)):

And to together identify the problem which arrived with Columbus through the Doctrines of Christian Discovery. We really need to unpack all of this and just look at what was created. We want to thank you all for listening. And this has helped fulfill a dream of mine. When I was in my 20s, I was approached by

the Onondaga Nation to try and bring non-native people into their territory to learn some of what we've been talking about today.

Sandy Bigtree ([01:02:27](#)):

And I've spent 30 to 40 years trying to sort out how to do this. And this is a culmination of our work together. And want to thank you for listening. And, please, tune in again and listen to some of the guests we will have because they're really phenomenal. This is really, I believe, a direction for making a real change in this world right now.

Philip P. Arnold ([01:02:50](#)):

I think you'll really enjoy hearing our guests, who we've known for sometimes decades. This is a unifying issue on the Doctrine of Discovery. I think all of us could learn so much more. And we hope that you'll continue to listen in.

Sandy Bigtree ([01:03:05](#)):

Yes. Thank you. And be well.

Philip P. Arnold ([01:03:09](#)):

NYA•WEÑHA SKÄ•NOÑH.

Sandy Bigtree ([01:03:09](#)):

NYA•WEÑHA SKÄ•NOÑH.

Jordan Brady Loewen ([01:03:20](#)):

The producers of this podcast were Adam DJ Brett and Jordan Brady Loewen. Our intro and outro is social dancing music by Oris Edwards and Richard Cook. This podcast is produced in collaboration with Syracuse University Engaged Humanities and the Department of Religion along with Indigenous Values Initiative and the American Indian Law Alliance.