



Requerimiento (1513)

The Requerimiento—Spanish for “requirement” or “requisition”—was a legal document prepared by the government of Spain, a Catholic kingdom. Whenever the Spanish took possession of a new territory in the Americas, they were supposed to read the document to the indigenous inhabitants. The document informs the indigenous people that they are subjects of the king and queen of Spain on the authority of a 1493 papal declaration (titled Inter caetera). The document also explains to the indigenous people their legal obligations as Spanish subjects, including an obligation to become Christian.

On the part of the king, Don Fernando, and of Doña Juana, his daughter, queen of Castille and Leon, subduers of the barbarous nations, we, their servants, notify and make known to you, as best we can, that the Lord our God, living and eternal, created the heaven and the earth and one man and one woman, of whom you and we, and all the men of the world, and all those who come after us, were and are descendants. But on account of the multitude which has sprung from this man and woman in the five thousand years since the world was created, it was necessary that some men should go one way and some another, and that they should be divided into many kingdoms and provinces, for in one alone they could not be sustained.

Of all these nations, God our Lord gave charge to one man, called St. Peter, that he should be lord and superior of all the men in the world, that all should obey him, and that he should be the head of the whole human race, wherever men should live and under whatever law, sect, or belief they should be; and he gave him the world for his kingdom and jurisdiction. And he commanded him to place his seat in Rome, as the spot most fitting to rule the world from; but also he permitted him to have his seat in any other part of the world, and to judge and govern all Christians, Moors, Jews, Gentiles, and all other sects. This man was called Pope, as if to say Admirable Great Father and Governor of men. The men who lived in that time obeyed that St. Peter and took him for lord, king, and superior of the universe; so also they have regarded the others who after him have been elected to the pontificate, and so has it been continued even till now, and will continue till the end of the world.

One of these pontiffs who succeeded that St. Peter as lord of the world, in the dignity and seat which I have before mentioned, made donation of these isles and Terra-firma to the aforesaid king and queen and to their successors, our lords, with all that there are in these territories, as is contained in certain writings which passed upon the subject as aforesaid, which you can see if you wish.

So their highnesses are kings and lords of these islands and land of Terra-firma by virtue of this donation; and some islands, and indeed almost all those to whom this has been notified, have received and served their highnesses, as lords and kings, in the way that subjects ought to do, with good will, without any resistance, immediately, without delay, when they were informed of the aforesaid facts. And also they received and obeyed the priests whom their highnesses sent to preach to them and to teach them our holy faith; and all these, of their own free will, without any reward or condition, have become Christians and are so, and their highnesses have joyfully and

benignantly received them, and also have commanded them to be treated as their subjects and vassals; and you too are held and obliged to do the same.

Wherefore, as best we can, we ask and require you that you consider what we have said to you, and that you take the time that shall be necessary to understand and deliberate upon it, and that you acknowledge the Church as the ruler and superior of the whole world, and the high priest called Pope, and, in his name, the king and queen Doña Juana, our lords, in his place, as superiors and lords and kings of these islands and this Terra-firma by virtue of the said donation, and that you consent and give place that these religious fathers should declare and preach to you the aforesaid.

If you do so, you will do well and that which you are obliged to do to their highnesses; and we, in their name, shall receive you in all love and charity, and shall leave you, your wives and your children, and your lands, free, without servitude, that you may do with them and with yourselves, freely, that which you like and think best; and they shall not compel you to turn Christians unless you yourselves, when informed of the truth, should wish to be converted to our holy Catholic faith, as almost all the inhabitants of the rest of the islands have done. And besides this, their highnesses award you many privileges and exemptions and will grant you many benefits.

But if you do not do this, and maliciously make delay in it, I certify to you that, with the help of God, we shall powerfully enter into your country, and shall make war against you in all ways and manners that we can, and shall subject you to the yoke and obedience of the Church and of their highnesses; we shall take you and your wives and your children, and shall make slaves of them, and as such shall sell and dispose of them as their highnesses may command; and we shall take away your goods and shall do you all the mischief and damage that we can, as to vassals who do not obey, and refuse to receive their lord, and resist and contradict him; and we protest that the deaths and losses which shall accrue from this are your fault, and not that of their highnesses, nor ours, nor of these cavaliers who come with us.

And that we have said this to you and made this Requisition, we request the notary here present to give us his testimony in writing, and we ask the rest who are present that they should be witnesses of this Requisition.

Source: Arthur Helps, *The Spanish Conquest in America, and Its Relation to the History of Slavery and to the Government of Colonies* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1856), 1:358-361, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/yale.39002022179379>. Public domain.

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