

2. Native Rights Under God and King

El Requerimiento (The Requirement)

The *Requerimiento* was a speech read aloud in Spanish or Latin when Spaniards encountered a group of native peoples. The document presented an ultimatum for natives to submit to the superiority of Christianity and the political authority of Spain, or be warred upon. The wording of the document resembles demands for submission characteristic of the Islamic *jihad* or holy war. Anti-Muslim versions of the *Requerimiento* may have existed in Spain during the *reconquista*. The pseudo-legalistic language of the document was designed by jurists and theologians convened by King Ferdinand of Spain in response to the debate over Spain's right to wage "just war" against the natives in the name of Christianity. The speech was standardized and approved by the King around 1512. The following is an excerpt from the *requerimiento*, translated from Spanish.

"On behalf of His Majesty, I, his servant and messenger, notify and make known as best as I can that God our Lord, one and eternal creator of heaven and earth, gave charge of all peoples to one man named Saint Peter, so that he was lord and superior of all the men of the world, and gave him all the world for his lordship and jurisdiction....Almost all who have been notified of this have received His Majesty and obeyed and served him, and serve him as subjects and turned Christian without reward or stipulation...and His Majesty received them as subjects and vassals....Therefore I beg and require of you as best as I can that you recognize the Church as lord and superior of the universal world and the Pope, in its name, and His Majesty in his place as superior and lord and king...and consent to what the religious fathers declare and preach...and His Majesty and I in his name will receive you and will leave your women and children free, without servitude so that with them and with yourselves you can freely do what you wish...and we will not compel you to turn Christians. But if you do not do it, with the help of God, I will enter forcefully against you, and I will make war everywhere and however I can, and I will subject you to the yoke and obedience of the Church and His Majesty, and I will take your wives and children, and I will make them slaves, and I will take your goods, and I will do to you all the evil and damages that a lord may do to subjects who do not obey or receive him. And I solemnly declare that the death and damages received from such will be your fault and not that of His Majesty, nor mine, nor of the gentlemen who have come with me."

Source: Kevin Terraciano, A New History of Colonial Latin America