

The History of Mexico, Chapter 2

2. The *Requerimiento*

[Each time the *Requerimiento* was read the names of the ruling monarch and the speaker were inserted. The translated version below was delivered by Pedrarias Dávila, who served as governor of Panama from 1514 to 1526.]

On behalf of Fernando V, (1) King of Spain, Defender of the Catholic Church, subduer of barbarians, and on behalf of Queen Juana, (2) his beloved daughter, I, Pedrarias Dávila, their servant, messenger, and captain, bring you word of God Our Lord, one and eternal. He is creator of earth, of heaven, and of the man and woman from whom all of us are descended and from whom all future humans will descend. A large number of humans have been born during the more than five thousand years since the earth was created. Since no one area could sustain so many people, humans were forced to scatter widely and divide themselves into many kingdoms and provinces.

Our Lord selected one of these people, Saint Peter, to lead the humans on earth. All people, regardless of where they were or what their nationality or religion was, were placed under his jurisdiction. The Lord instructed Peter to govern from Rome, which was the best place from which to administer the earth. He also exercised power in other parts of the world so he could judge and govern Christians, Moors, Jews, gentiles, and those of other faiths. Peter was referred to as the Pope, which meant admirable, elder, father, and guardian. He was father and governor of all mankind. They regarded Peter as master, king, and ruler of the world that they inhabited. The popes who have been elected since then have been regarded similarly. Future popes will also be treated in this way.

One of the pontiffs, who succeeded Peter, granted these islands and the mainland to our King and Queen and to their successors. You can inspect the documents that recorded this grant. (3) As a result of this property transfer, their Highnesses exercise

sovereignty over these islands and over the mainland. Almost everyone who has been informed of this grant has received their Highnesses and has willingly obeyed and served them as subjects and has not offered resistance. As soon as they received this information, they welcomed and obeyed the priests that our Highnesses sent to teach our Holy Faith. All of them freely, joyfully, and without reservation became Christians and remain faithful. Their Highnesses received them with great joy and ordered that they be treated as other subjects and vassals. You are obligated to act in a similar manner.

Finally, I implore you to fully consider what I have told you. You may take the necessary time to discuss this information and to recognize the Church as owner and administrator of the entire world. You must also recognize our Holy Father, the pope, and the King and Queen, our masters, as rulers of these islands and of the mainland. By virtue of the pope's grant, their Highnesses have dispatched priests to teach you our faith.

If you behave properly and perform your obligations to their Highnesses, I, in their name, will receive you with all love and kindness and will protect your wives, children, and land, and will not impose servitude upon you. Rather than having Christianity forced on you, you are free to do what you wish. After having learned of our Holy Catholic Faith, you may accept Christianity, as almost all the residents of the other islands and of more distant lands have done. If you do so, His Highness will bestow many privileges on you and will shower you with favors.

However, if you do not do this, or if you maliciously delay your response, you are hereby notified that, with God's support, I will launch an all-out attack to force you to submit and obey the Church and their Highnesses. Furthermore, I will enslave you and your women and children, and dispose of them as our majesty may command. Also I will seize your goods and inflict harm on you. You will be treated as disobedient vassals. You will be to blame for the resulting injury and death. The blame will not lie with me, their Highnesses, or the soldiers who accompany me. You

have been warned. I request that the scribe who is present with me record this warning. May all who are present serve as witnesses.

Notes:

1. Fernando V was King of Castile and Aragón.
 2. Juana was Queen of Castille and León.
 3. The documents referred to are Pope Alexander VI's bull that awarded Spain and Portugal sovereignty over the Americas.
- Author's translation of the Spanish original, contained in endnote 117 of *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias* by Bartolomé de las Casas (Alicante: Universidad de Alicante).