

In 1493, the Pope of the Roman Catholic Church created the *Inter caetera* stating that in order to carry out the conquest of the New World, Spanish colonists would have to change the religious beliefs of the Indians there. Therefore, when the Spanish arrived to the New World, they also led what they believed to be a spiritual conquest in which they attempted to convert the Indians in the lands they conquered to Christianity. While these ideals were demanded upon the Indians in these conquered lands, the Indians were not as accepting of this new religion as the Spaniards would have hoped and even those they had tried to convert were not completely committed to the faith. This is because they thought their own beliefs were worth keeping since they had been accustomed to them for such a long time.

To begin, the Spanish gave spiritual demands for the Indians to follow which can be seen in the *Requerimiento* of 1514. In this document, the author explains that these people should “acknowledge the Church as the Ruler and Superior of the whole world” and further states how many of those individuals who have listened to preachings from priests have willingly become Christians themselves¹. By declaring that the Church is dominant over all the peoples, the Spanish are asserting their right to control the islands with the use of religious justification. Furthermore, by stating how others have converted after hearing the faith, they are attempting to pressure the Indians to willingly convert as well. Otherwise, they assume the consequences of spiritual war as indicated by the Spanish when they state, “we shall powerfully enter into your country and shall make war against you in all ways and manners that we can...and we shall take away your goods, and shall do you all mischief and damage that we can”². By declaring this in the last paragraph, it makes it seem as though the Spanish had the intention of arousing fear among the Indians, in order to make them feel obligated to comply with these terms of accepting

¹ *Requerimiento* (1514).

² *Requerimiento* (1514).

Christianity if they were not willing to convert like they required. And being a requirement, the Spanish only had the purpose of explaining this information with the expectation that all Indians submit to it, either willingly or out of fear.

However, this was not the case with how the Indians responded to the Spanish as demonstrated by the Indian Lords of Tenochtitlan, in their reply to the twelve franciscan priests that arrived to Mexico in 1524. In their response, it can first be seen how these Aztec lords were not as amenable to conversion to Christianity as the Spanish would have wanted. For instance, they explain that while they have great admiration for the words of the Lord which have been expressed, it doesn't seem right for them to destroy the laws and customs, such as the faith and service of their own Gods, that have been valued and preserved by their people³. This shows how the Indians were understanding of what these priests were saying. However, they did not see the point of giving up their own beliefs which had been a part of their culture for centuries, and did not feel comfortable making everyone convert for this reason. This is especially because they knew that some people would rebel against them or even the Spanish if they chose to force this decision of accepting a new God and faith. For example, they told them to “watch out that the common people do not rise up against us if we were to tell them that the gods they have understood to be such are not gods at all”⁴. They further warned the Spanish that they might fight back if they continued to force them stating, “watch out that we do not incur the wrath of our gods”. Ultimately, this act of defiance against the Spanish demonstrates that the Indians were also not afraid of the threats that the Spanish would make. They were willing to defend their beliefs and according to them, would “die before giving up and serving” their own Gods.

³ Taylor, William B., et. al. *Colonial Latin America a Documentary History* (Maryland: SR Books, 2002), 21-22.

⁴ Taylor, William B., et. al. *Colonial Latin America a Documentary History* (Maryland: SR Books, 2002), 22.

In addition to this, the Indians still maintained separate belief systems after the Spanish had colonized their lands. This is demonstrated by the 1579 painting of the map of Texupa, Mexico, which includes both a church the Spanish placed and a temple from the Indian's past. The church itself is centered on top of three ancient roadways and each of these roads leads to this building. The placing of the church in this way is representative of how the Spanish were attempting to lead the Indians to the right path by converting them to christianity while building a new Christian community over these lands. However, the indication of the ancient temple still being present on the map demonstrates how much of an importance the Indians still placed in their own beliefs. By continuing to have a place to worship their own Gods in this area, this shows how the Indians were not fully committed to the Christian faith by still practicing their own religion despite the Spanish attempts to convert them. Therefore, suggesting that the Spanish were not successful in their conversion efforts that they had been working on since the beginning of the spiritual conquest.

Overall, the Spanish's mission of converting the Indians did not go as planned because they responded differently than expected to the demands placed upon them. Instead of being frightened or easily persuaded to accept Christianity like the Spanish had wanted, the Indians were more defensive of their own faith and its importance to their culture's history. Moreover, the Indians still continued to practice their own religion more than half a century later without being affected by the Spanish's attempts to convert them, essentially showing how their effort to convert the Indians ultimately failed.