

“Islands of the Ocean Sea”: The Requerimiento and European Expansion in the New World

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THE REQUERIMIENTO WAS A JOKE, and a pretty good one at that. Bartolomé de Las Casas famously could not decide whether to laugh or to cry when he read it. Francis I had no such concerns, laughing out loud when he was told of its contents. Even the conquistadors themselves, tasked with reading the document to the assembled masses of New World natives to justify their own ongoing conquests, laughed until they cried at words they were ordered to read, even going so far as to suggest that the document would be better understood if it were read to natives already caged and chained and therefore in a better position to hear and understand the arguments of the theologians. These contemporary fits of mirth only got worse as time went on. Rulers, philosophes, politicians—anyone who heard the tales of this remarkable document and its purported uses—have wondered at its absurdity and its audacity. Did the Spanish truly believe that armed invaders muttering a complicated theological and genealogical treatise—in Spanish—to uncomprehending natives, who, apart from not being able to understand the language, had no earthly concept of the ideas, arguments, and worldview represented in its few pages, somehow legitimized the armed conquest, subjugation, and enslavement of whole peoples? This “strange blend of ritual, cynicism, legal fiction, and perverse idealism,” in Stephen Greenblatt’s words, was a farce, and just about everyone other than the canon lawyers was stupefied or horrified by its implications.¹ Needless to say, history’s judgment on the *Requerimiento* has been unceasingly harsh.

Yet the *Requerimiento* becomes significantly less funny if we suppose that, in addition to being a type of performance art aimed at ceremonially establishing a relatable Spanish justification

¹ Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 98.



for conquest, the central argument of the document became the basis not only for Spanish but for all European conquests in the New World. Far from being easily dismissed, as historians and contemporaries have often done, the effort to justify Spanish violence against natives through a medieval religious concept of conversion and just war that lies at the heart of the document was also at the center of French and English colonial enterprises far into the seventeenth century. Though those powers rejected Spanish claims of exclusive sovereignty over the entirety of the Indies, France and England adopted the *Requerimiento's* transmutation of violence into just war. Conversion of natives was to be, in the last analysis, the fallback justification for all European colonial efforts, the most common and diffuse concept that legitimized violence against natives who had done Europeans no appreciable harm. Written to defend Spanish violence against the natives of the “islands of the Ocean Sea,” in the words of its author, the *Requerimiento's* linguistic and eschatological transmutation of violence into a *casus belli* requiring a war against the infidel resurfaced in patents, histories, and propaganda from Roberval in Canada to Hakluyt, and from the Virginia Companies to the Puritans in Massachusetts. Far from being a joke, the *Requerimiento* was in fact the founding document of the most commonly cited justifications for all European colonization in the New World, and its legacy stretches far into the modern history of the Americas.

At its core, the *Requerimiento* was an effort to marshal contemporary understandings of canon law to justify the ongoing use of violence against natives in the New World. Converting the Spanish conquest into a just war would legitimize the effort in the minds of theologians and lawyers in Spain and of King Ferdinand, who ordered the writing of the document in the first place. Thus, the *Requerimiento* has two parts: first, a recitation of what the natives must do (i.e., accept Christianity) and, second, detailed threats of what will occur if the natives do not comply. It begins with a genealogical recitation of the mythical Donation of Constantine, which delivered the temporal authority of the Roman Empire into the spiritual hands of the Catholic Church, and continues with the Donation of Alexander: “God our Lord gave charge of [all peoples] to one man named Saint Peter,” who was succeeded by many subsequent popes, all of whom were accorded the same sort of reverence as an “admirable great father and governor of men.” After “one of these popes” donated the entirety of “the islands of the Ocean Sea” to the Spanish king and queen, the people of the islands accepted Christianity and lived happily. So far so good: a medieval concept of papal sovereignty over the temporal world (about which more below) and a recitation of the bulls of Alexander VI of the late fifteenth century. However, the crux of the matter came at the end in a warning of what would happen if the natives did not accept Christianity:

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 that shall accrue from this are your fault and not that of Their Highnesses or ours nor of these gentlemen who come with us.²

² There are numerous versions of the *Requerimiento*, in English and Spanish. This is my translation of the original Spanish given in Bartolomé de Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias* (Charleston, SC: Nabu Press, 2010), bk. 3, chap. 58.

This formula was an old one, dating back, in some accounts, to eighth-century Muslim demands for conversion, yet in its updated version of 1512, it legitimated violence in a clear and understandable manner for those Europeans who subscribed to a Christian worldview. A native rejection of Christianity, in the minds of early sixteenth-century lawyers, was a *casus belli*; the entire operation in the New World was thus a just war, and all violence was not only acceptable but in fact required—and not, according to the document, the fault of the Spanish committing it! Though it was enacted, as Patricia Seed has aptly demonstrated, as a ceremony of possession, the reading of the *Requerimiento* was secondary to its importance in legitimizing for Spaniards and other Europeans the ongoing Spanish violence against natives who had not injured the Spaniards in any clear way.³

As hard as it may be to imagine today, the theory of papal sovereignty underlying the *Requerimiento* was far from the most universalist of contemporary notions of the rights of the papacy vis-à-vis the infidel. In the early sixteenth century, two theories of papal jurisdiction over infidels held sway, both popularized by thirteenth-century prelates.⁴ The first was that of Hostiensis, the bishop of Ostia in the mid-thirteenth century, who argued that because of Christ’s death and redemption of all sins, he and his successors, personified by Saint Peter and the papacy, possessed *dominium* over the entirety of the world, including even infidels who had never heard the gospel.⁵ This was a totalizing claim, an argument for papal sovereignty over the temporal world far in excess even of what bulls such as *Unam sanctum*, which owed much to Hostiensis’s theories, claimed. It also meant, as Las Casas would argue in an effort to discredit the theory, that the papacy had the right—and even the duty—to allow the Spanish to colonize by force the lands of the New World, since the natives had no claim to sovereignty or property rights.⁶ This view was popular among those who saw the New World natives as Aristotle’s natural slaves, the most famous of whom was Juan Gines de Sepúlveda.

In contrast, the *Requerimiento* was based on the several bulls of Alexander VI from 1493 and therefore relies on a less-complete theory of papal sovereignty. Just after the Mongol invasion of Europe was miraculously halted in eastern Europe in 1241, Pope Innocent IV, himself a canon lawyer, formulated a theory of papal sovereignty over infidels in *Quod super his* that provided them with sovereignty and *dominium*. Innocent, in James Muldoon’s words, believed “the pope

³ Patricia Seed, *Ceremonies of Possession in Europe’s Conquest of the New World, 1492–1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), chap. 3.

⁴ It should come as no surprise, as James Muldoon and others have pointed out, that the late thirteenth century should be the time when the church first systematically applied its statutes of Roman and canon law to the question of infidels other than the Muslims, with whom Christian Europe had dealt for centuries. This was the era of Marco Polo, of the conquest of the pagan Baltic lands, and, probably most significantly, the era of the Mongol hordes. In some ways, Spanish relations with the New World natives were prefigured two centuries previously. See James Muldoon, “Papal Responsibility for the Infidel: Another Look at Alexander VI’s *Inter caetera*,” *Catholic Historical Review* 64, no. 2 (1978): 168–84, at 172.

⁵ This section relies heavily on Anthony Pagden, “Dispossessing the Barbarian: The Language of Spanish Thomism and the Debate over the Property Rights of the American Indians,” in *Theories of Empire, 1450–1800*, ed. David Armitage (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 1998), 168–84; Muldoon, “Papal Responsibility for the Infidel”; and James Muldoon, “John Wyclif and the Rights of Infidels: The *Requerimiento* Re-examined,” *Americas* 36, no. 3 (1980): 301–16.

⁶ Note that there was little debate over the rights of infidels who had heard the gospel preached but had rejected it. They were heretics and were to be treated as such. This is also important for the history of the *Requerimiento*. See Silvio Zavala, *The Political Philosophy of the Conquest of America*, trans. Teener Hall (Mexico City: Editorial Cultura, 1953), 24.

is to seek the conversion of the infidels, but they are not to be forced to accept baptism. Should an infidel ruler forbid the entry of missionaries, however, the pope could call upon Christian rulers to protect the missionaries so that he could fulfill his responsibility for ensuring the preaching of the Gospel throughout the world.”⁷ This doctrine was less extreme in its papalist universalism than Hostiensis’s because it did not deny infidels *dominium*, and therefore, it did not permit Christians to simply expropriate infidel property upon contact with them. That notion, in turn, meant that the Spanish would have to find some sort of *casus belli* in order to legally and morally take possession of native land in the New World. Setting up that *casus belli* was the purpose of the *Requerimiento*.

The origins of the *Requerimiento* are well known but should be briefly summarized here.⁸ In short, the outrage following the Dominican friar Antonio de Montesinos’s 1511 sermons assailing the harsh acts of the early conquistadors led to a reconception of Spanish rights in the New World and to a movement to codify by what authority the Spanish Crown could rule native peoples and use native lands. Following centuries of precedent, Ferdinand of Aragon, regent of Castile following Isabella’s death in 1504, called together a *junta* of theologians and lawyers to discuss the pertinent canon and Roman legal theories. The *junta* was led by Juan López de Palacios Rubios, a renowned canon lawyer and chair at Valladolid. His work *Islands of the Ocean Sea* was heavily based on the Alexandrine bulls, which themselves were based on Innocent’s more progressive understanding of the rights of infidels.⁹ The upshot of all this was the *Requerimiento*, a document written and distributed to conquistadors with instructions to read it to the natives they encountered so that the Spanish conquest would be legally justified, at least according to the current European ecclesiastical legal regime.

The formulation of just war that Palacios Rubios concocted involved the theory of *ius predicandi*, or the right, inherent in Innocent’s bull, that all Christians had to preach the gospel, and the corollary that all infidels had the right to hear it.¹⁰ Thus, if the New World natives did not allow the preaching of the gospel, they became heretics, and the Spanish had every right under the canon law to seize their property and persons. The point of the *Requerimiento* was to justify violence against natives, and it did this through a relatively conservative legal theory of just war. Theologians and conquistadors might have laughed, but lawyers didn’t, neither in Spain nor Rome nor, importantly, in Paris or London. Palacios Rubios had provided Spain with a clear legal authority to colonize the New World through the use of violence in defense of faith, a concept that would have fallen flat with the natives themselves but found much favor with other Europeans, the document’s intended audience.

The *Requerimiento* might have been ridiculed from all sides from the moment it was written, yet its main tenets on the transmutation of violence from crime to just war—and therefore the legitimation of violence done by Spaniards to natives—lived on for all the other European colonizers of the subsequent centuries. After searching for some other justification for their conquests, Spanish, English, and French theorists and colonizers all fell back on the doctrine of religious

⁷ Muldoon, “Papal Responsibility for the Infidel,” 172.

⁸ See, esp., Anthony Pagden, *Spanish Imperialism and the Political Imagination* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), chap. 1.

⁹ Juan López de Palacios Rubios, *De las islas del mar Océano* (1512; Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1954).

¹⁰ Andrew Fitzmaurice, “Moral Uncertainty in the Dispossession of Native Americans,” in *The Atlantic World and Virginia, 1550–1624*, ed. Peter Mancall (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 380–84; Pagden, “Dispossessing the Barbarian,” 164–69.

conversion and its legitimation of violence that was the central premise of the *Requerimiento*. The process started with Spaniards, including Las Casas and Francisco de Vitoria, who castigated its central tenets, insisting that the pope had no temporal jurisdiction and therefore could not grant Spain *dominium* over the New World.¹¹ Vitoria refused to countenance the argument in the *Requerimiento* that the preaching of the gospel was key to the promulgation of a just war. After all, by the time Vitoria was writing, that exact point had become a central Protestant heresy and could no longer be used to justify Catholic doctrine.¹² However, even Vitoria was forced in the end to agree that Spain's conquest, while not exactly morally permissible, was acceptable because ending it would be too injurious to the monarchy.¹³ Vitoria could find no basis for violence done to natives, yet he also could not admit that the conquest itself was unsanctioned. He, like others in the Salamanca School and elsewhere, had to salve his conscience with the hope that better treatment of the natives would alleviate the discrepancy. On a more prosaic level, Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, one of the members of the Pedrarias Dávila expedition that first brought the *Requerimiento* to the New World, recounts a story of the first time the document was read to the assembled natives in 1513. Met first with stony silence, then with arrows, Oviedo and his associates had to admit to Pedrarias Dávila that the document did not, in fact, work and asked if "your honor [would] be pleased to retain it till we have one of these Indians in a cage, in order that he may learn it at his leisure and my lord bishop explain it to him?" Hilarity ensued among the Spaniards. Neither in the halls of Salamanca nor in the huts of Hispanola did the *Requerimiento* find favor as a justification for violence, though for very different reasons. Yet the core legitimation of violence in a just war was to live on both inside and outside Spain.

French complaints about the *Requerimiento* began with Francis I and focused on the exclusivity embodied in the papal bulls that lay at its heart. Somewhat late to transoceanic exploration, France sent its first voyage to the New World in 1524 when Giovanni da Verrazzano set off to find the Northwest Passage. So began French interest in the far north of the American continent, a legacy followed by Cartier, Roberval, and Champlain. When the Spanish ambassador complained about France's breach of the papal bulls and the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1524, Francis replied with a laugh: "The sun shines on me just the same as on the other, and I should like to see the clause in Adam's will that cuts me out of my share in the New World!"¹⁴ As was to

¹¹ Francisco de Vitoria covers this territory several times. See "On the Power of the Church," 5.1–5, and "On the Indies," 2.2, in *Vitoria: Political Writings*, ed. Anthony Pagden and Jeremy Lawrance (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 139ff. and 259ff.

¹² Andrew Fitzmaurice notes that once Vitoria developed his theory of natural rights and extended it to all non-Christians, there was very little in the canon or Roman law that could justify the conquest. See Fitzmaurice, "Moral Uncertainty in the Dispossession of Native Americans," 384–88.

¹³ Vitoria ends "On the Indies" with the lament: "The conclusion of this whole dispute appears to be this: that if all these titles were inapplicable, that is to say if the barbarians gave no just cause for war and did not wish to have Spaniards as princes and so on, *the whole Indian expedition and trade would cease*, to the great loss of the Spaniards. And this in turn would mean a huge loss to the royal exchequer, which would be intolerable" (Pagden and Lawrance, *Vitoria: Political Writings*, 291).

¹⁴ Quoted in Germán Arciniegas, *Caribbean: Sea of the New World*, trans. Harriet de Onís (New York: Knopf, 1946), 118. As luck would have it, the Spanish did not have Adam's will, but they did have a carefully researched genealogy of Charles V that stretched all the way back to Adam. This would seem a fool's errand, given that everyone should be able to trace a lineage to the First Man, but the Habsburg version found in the Biblioteca Nacional lends imperial dignity to Charles through a connection to important historical characters: David, Solomon, Osiris, Isis, Noah, Roman emperors, Visigothic kings, and others, both mythical and real. See MSS 3290, Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid.

be expected, Francis rejected the *Requerimiento's* theories of exclusivity on which the Spanish based their claim of control over the entirety of the New World, not just the areas they had settled. This was made clear in the mid-1530s, when Clement VIII, responding to complaints from Francis about Spanish exclusivity, declared that the bulls themselves only gave Spain the right to colonize the New World in the places they settled and did nothing to prevent other European powers from colonizing areas outside Spanish control.¹⁵ This was to be an ongoing concern for Spain, up to and including Spanish frustration with the English settlement at Jamestown in the early seventeenth century.¹⁶

The largest French undertaking to the New World in the sixteenth century, that of the sieur de Roberval in 1540–41, demonstrated that while Francis might have rejected papal claims of sovereignty inherent in the *Requerimiento*, he fully subscribed to the theory of a just-war legitimization of violence against natives that was the real core of the document. His charter to Roberval gave the explorer sweeping powers in the Saint Lawrence area. Roberval was ordered to “converse with these foreign peoples” and live among them if necessary. He was to build towns and forts, and most important, he was to commit those foreign peoples to the service of God. He was to construct “churches for the communication of our Holy Catholic faith and Christian doctrine” and was to instruct the natives “with reason and order in the fear and love of God.” To perform these miracles, Roberval was to use his men-at-arms and mariners to bring the natives “into our hands by friendly means or by force of arms, main force or any other types of hostilities.”¹⁷ Here we see the familiar justification of violence against natives in a colonial effort: that of religious conversion. So while Francis rejected the Spanish demand that he abide by the bulls’ territorial exclusivity, he justified his efforts at violent conquest on the same religious basis as had the Spanish in the *Requerimiento*. It was a formula oft repeated. As it happened, the Roberval expedition came to little, and he and his colonists turned back in 1542.

In 1577, after a lull corresponding with the upheavals of the French Wars of Religion, the seigneur de La Roche obtained an authorization to found New France from Henry III. Once again, the civilizing mission at the heart of Spanish colonial efforts translated the French effort of violent conquest into a religious just war. The goal of the expedition was “to tak[e] possession of some newly discovered lands and countries occupied by barbarous peoples,” and to do so would demonstrate the French king’s “zeal and fervent devotion . . . for God’s service as a Christian.”¹⁸ This mission, as well, came to nothing, and France was left with little to show for its colonial efforts in Canada. By the time the French founded lasting settlements at Quebec and Trois-Rivières in the early seventeenth century, the entire Saint Lawrence valley had been depopulated by a combination of war, disease, and migration of the Iroquois and Algonquin natives of the area. Therefore, there was little need to justify violence because there were few people on whom to make war. However, in later eras, the French were more than willing to turn to violence to obtain their ends, and did so, as the official historian of New France, Marc Lescarbot, wrote to the king in 1618. There was no point in applying the “policy of nations” in Canada, he wrote,

¹⁵ Marcel Trudel, *The Beginnings of New France, 1524–1663*, trans. Patricia Claxton, Canadian Centenary Series (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973), 11.

¹⁶ William S. Goldman, “Spain and the Founding of Jamestown,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., no. 68 (July 2011): 427–50.

¹⁷ Trudel, *Beginnings of New France*, 36–37; and Brian Slattery, “French Claims in North America, 1500–59,” *Canadian Historical Review* 59, no. 2 (1978): 139–69 (quotation on 163).

¹⁸ Trudel, *Beginnings of New France*, 55–56.

because the people did not follow the dictates of Christianity, and “your children [the French] have an unshakeable resolution to dwell there.” The implication was that violence in pursuit of colonization was acceptable because religion so dictated, and European rules of conduct did not therefore apply.¹⁹ The initial French rejection of the *Requerimiento* rang hollow; French thinkers and rulers were more than happy to appropriate its central tenets for their own use.

The history of English colonization in the New World is littered with attacks on Spanish barbarism in the treatment of natives and in motives of conquest. Yet this Black Legend, based primarily on Spanish accounts of violence against natives, including those of Las Casas and Vitoria themselves, served as a model for the English, despite their rhetoric to the contrary. From Elizabeth to the Virginia Companies to the Puritans, religious conversion was at the heart of English justifications for colonization and for violence. Ironically, it was the Protestant English who, denying the exclusivity of the *Requerimiento* as a basis for sovereignty in the New World, adopted the core values of conversion as justification for violence. No less than the Spaniards who read the *Requerimiento* to uncomprehending natives, English settlers at Jamestown and Boston sought to couch their territorial land grabs in the language of religious conversion.

In much of the literature, the dominant issue is that of property rights and the English practice of land purchases from natives.²⁰ Yet the dry narrative of property rights and land purchases obscures the main issue: that of the forceful dispossession of natives of their land and, in many cases, of their lives. For the English in North America struggled with the same reality as their Spanish counterparts in South America: namely, how to legitimize their domination of the peoples living in lands they seized. Because of previous contact with European diseases, there were fewer people living in areas the English sought to control, but there were still many. And from the earliest moments of English colonial exploration, that reality was evident. Henry VII's 1496 patent to John Cabot and his sons proved the basis for most ensuing English colonization efforts in terms of rights, although not in terms of its mission. Eschewing papal and religious decrees, Henry authorized Cabot and his sons to “conquer, occupy and possess whatsoever such towns, castles, cities and islands by them thus discovered that they may be able to conquer, occupy and possess.”²¹ The goal of the expedition was trade and commerce, and Henry did not envision a need for legitimacy beyond that. The rights of the people living in those “towns, castles, cities and islands” were not considered.²² However, by the time of Elizabeth, when English colonization efforts increased dramatically, there was a greater need for a religious purpose to settlement and colonization in the world of the Reformation, and one in which the Black Legend required some sort of distancing from perceived Spanish methods. Writing in 1585, Richard Hakluyt the Elder mused in verse on the possible paths English “planting” might take:

¹⁹ Cornelius J. Jaenen, “French Sovereignty and Native Nationhood during the French Regime,” in *Sweet Promises: A Reader on Indian-White Relations in Canada*, ed. J. R. Miller (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 25.

²⁰ See, e.g., Francis Jennings, *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 128ff.

²¹ H. P. Biggar, ed., *The Precursors of Jacques Cartier, 1497–1534: A Collection of Documents Relating to the Early History of the Dominion of Canada* (Ottawa: Government Printing Bureau, 1911), 8.

²² Throughout the early colonial period, the Spanish were far more engaged in efforts to justify and legitimize their conquests and subsequent treatment of the New World natives. It is a central irony of the Black Legend that it is only owing to the damning self-reflection of Spanish prelates, lawyers, and writers that the basis for anti-Spanish calumnies became widely known. See Barbara Fuchs and Emily Weissbourd, eds., *Representing Imperial Rivalry in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015).

To plant Christian religion without conquest, will bee hard.
 Trafficke easily followeth conquest: conquest is not easie.
 Trafficke without conquest seemeth possible, and not uneasie.
 What is to be done, is the question.²³

Commercial efforts were his clear choice, and at first most English efforts were couched in commercial terms. In her 1584 patent to Sir Walter Raleigh for his voyage to Virginia, Elizabeth granted him striking powers of commercial control over Virginia. He and his heirs “shall haue holde, occupie, and enioye to him, his heires and assignee, and euery of them for euer, all the soile of all such lands, territories, and Countreis, so to bee discovered and possessed as aforesaide, and of all such Cities, castles, townes, villages, and places in the same, with the right, royalties, franchises, and iurisdictions, as well marine as other within the saide lances, or Countreis, or the seas thereunto adioyning, to be had, or used, with full power to dispose thereof.”²⁴ What happened to the people living there was left unsaid, but the implication, once again, is that they were to be dealt with using violence if, as the commission to Roberval from Francis I stated, kind words could not do the job.

Commerce might have provided Elizabeth, and later the Virginia Companies, with their *raison d'être*, but it was not enough of a justification for many supporters of English colonization efforts. A deeper moral significance was needed to give the project a legitimacy it would not otherwise have had, and religion was the most likely and useful. As early as 1587, Hakluyt the Younger wrote to Raleigh to justify the conquest of natives: “for nothing is more glorious or honorable [that] can be handed down to the future than to tame the barbarian, to bring back the savage and the pagan to the fellowship of civil existence and to induce reverence for the Holy Spirit into atheists and others distant from God.”²⁵ Here we again see the connection between conversion and violence, for how else are the natives to be brought back to the “Holy Spirit” than through coercion? Somewhat later, Richard Eburne answered that question, suggesting that the English should “plant as well as preach, and subdue as well as teach.”²⁶ In his *Discourse of Western Planting*, Hakluyt suggested that instead of granting Spain the right to evangelize the New World, Alexander should have instead left it to God to “bring somme nation or other upon them to take vengeance of their synnes and wickedness.”²⁷ Either way, destruction was the outcome of the refusal of New World natives to accept Christianity, even before they knew what it was.

This trend in English thought on just war as a central justification for the dispossession of, and violence against, Native Americans dominated the moral outlook of the Puritans in what would become Massachusetts and Rhode Island. Watching in dismay as the Virginia and Plimouth colonies struggled in their early years, John Winthrop reasoned that the problem had to be the moral foundations of the colonies, which were clearly lacking in Virginia, at least. Instead of what he called a “carnal” motivation based on commerce and greed, Winthrop, writing in 1629 in his *Essay on the Considerations about the Plantation*, saw a battle to “carry the Gospell into those

²³ Richard Hakluyt the Elder, *Inducements to the Liking of the Voyage Intended Towards Virginia* (1585). Quoted in David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 61.

²⁴ Cited from http://avalon.law.yale.edu/16th_century/raleigh.asp.

²⁵ Quoted in Armitage, *Ideological Origins of the British Empire*, 76.

²⁶ Richard Eburne, *A Plaine Pathway to Plantations* (London, 1624), 6.

²⁷ Richard Hakluyt, *A Particuler Discourse Concerning the Greate Necessitie... Known as Discourse of Western Planting* (1584), ed. David B. Quinn and Alison M. Quinn (London: Hakluyt Society, 1993), 100.

parts of the world, to help on the cominge in of fullness of the Gentiles and rayse a Bulworke against the kingdome of the Antichrist."²⁸ So far, so good, since creating a "Bulworke" against the Antichrist did not necessarily require violence against the natives. Yet his colleague Reverend John White of Dorchester was more honest about what this Bulworke would entail. Writing the next year, White saw all colonization as a religious act, and he sought first to teach the natives and bring them to the "True Religion" by peaceful means. If that failed, however, then it was incumbent on the Puritans to force them to do so. The "planting of Colonies," he wrote, "deserves honour, and approbation above the most glorious Conquest. . . . And that by how much the subduing of Satan is a more glorious act, than a victory over men; and the enlargement of Christs Kingdome, then the adding [to] new mens dominiums; and the saving of mens soules, then the provision for their lives and bodies."²⁹ It was this last phrase that showed White's true colors: the saving of men's souls was more important than the safety of their persons. That the Puritans under Winthrop believed this is borne out by the subsequent history of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, especially the outbreak of the Pequot War in 1636. By the end of that bloody struggle, the Pequots had been destroyed as a people, and the right of the English colonizers to commit violence against them was inextricably tied—as it had been for the Spanish—to a religious conception of just war. It was not until the end of the century, when John Locke espoused his agricultural justification for European colonization in *A Letter on Toleration* and the *Second Treatise*, that the English turned away from religious war as the last, best font of legitimacy for their expropriation of and violence against New World natives.³⁰

The *Requerimiento* did not have a long or illustrious life as a document or as a performance. The ridicule it suffered, and its patent inefficacy, saw it lose favor quickly. Cortés and Pizarro honored its reading more often in the breach, and the Crown outlawed it in 1556.³¹ Still, its core argument lived on in the justifications given for violence against natives in both North and South America. For in the end, there was no moral justification for the acts of Europeans who sailed across the seas and took lands and attacked peoples who had never done them harm other than a medieval religious conception of the right to preach the gospel and have it heard. French and English legal and ecclesiastical thinkers strove to delineate justifications other than those espoused by Pope Innocent IV and his successors, but for nearly two hundred years, none was as effective at justifying violence through religious war. And even after Locke formulated his agricultural theory of colonization in the 1680s, the lure of a just war lived on, both in America and in Europe. In fact, if one looks carefully enough, one can see echoes of Palacios Rubios in many of history's calls to violence, all the way to the present day. Formulated to assuage the conscience of a king and to warn off potential rivals in the New World, the *Requerimiento* is a document whose central message far outlived its usefulness, and its legacy elides the barriers historians so often erect between the medieval and the modern. A

²⁸ Quoted in Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, "The 'Iberian' Justifications of Territorial Possession by Pilgrims and Puritans in the Colonization of America (1620–30)," in *Entangled Histories of the Early Modern British and Iberian Empires and Their Successor Republics* (Austin: University of Texas–Austin, 2014), 15–16. Cited by permission of the author.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 21.

³⁰ Armitage, *Ideological Origins of the British Empire*, 98–100.

³¹ Robert A. Williams, *The American Indian in Western Legal Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 93.