

The Papal bull *Inter Caetera*, 1493 (excerpts)

Alexander, bishop, servant of the servants of God, to the illustrious sovereigns, our very dear son in Christ, Ferdinand, king, and our very dear daughter in Christ, Isabella, queen of Castile, Leon, Aragon, and Granada: health and apostolic benediction.

Among (*inter*) other (*caetera*) works well pleasing to the Divine Majesty and cherished of our heart, this assuredly ranks highest, that in our times especially the Catholic faith and the Christian religion be exalted and everywhere increased and spread, that the health of souls be cared for, and that barbarous nations be overthrown and brought to the faith itself. . . .

We have indeed learned that you, who for a long time had intended to seek out and discover certain lands and islands remote and unknown and not hitherto discovered by others, to the end that you might bring to the worship of our Redeemer and profession of the Catholic faith their residents and inhabitants, having been up to the present time greatly engaged in the siege and recovery of the kingdom itself of Granada, were unable to accomplish this holy and praiseworthy purpose; but the said kingdom having at length been regained, as was pleasing to the Lord, you, with the wish to fulfill your desire, chose our beloved son, Christopher Columbus, whom you furnished with ships and men equipped for like designs, not without the greatest hardships, dangers, and expenses, to make diligent quest for these remote and unknown countries through the sea, where hitherto no one had sailed; and they at length, with divine aid and with the utmost diligence sailing in the ocean sea, discovered certain very remote islands and even mainlands, that hitherto had not been discovered by others; and therein dwell very many peoples living in peace, and, as reported, going unclothed, and not eating flesh.

Moreover, as your aforesaid envoys are of opinion, these very peoples living in the said islands and countries believe in one God, the Creator in heaven, and seem sufficiently disposed to embrace the Catholic faith and be trained in good morals. And it is hoped that, were they instructed, the name of the Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ, would easily be introduced into the said countries and islands. Also, on one of the chief of these aforesaid islands the above-mentioned Christopher has already caused to be put together and built a fortress fairly equipped, wherein he has stationed as garrison certain Christians, companions of his, who are to make search for other remote and unknown islands and countries. In the islands and countries already discovered are found gold, spices, and very many other precious things of divers kinds and qualities. . . .

In order that you may enter upon so great an undertaking with greater readiness and heartiness endowed with benefit of our apostolic favor, we, of our own accord, not at your instance nor the request of anyone else in your regard, . . . do . . . give, grant, and assign forever to you and your heirs and successors, kings of Castile and Leon, all and singular the aforesaid countries and islands thus unknown and hitherto discovered by your envoys and to be discovered hereafter, provided however they at no time have been in the actual temporal possession of any Christian owner, together with all their dominions, cities, camps, places, and villages, and all rights, jurisdictions, and appurtenances of the same. And we invest you and your aforementioned heirs and successors with them, and make, appoint, and depute you lords of them with full and free power, authority, and jurisdiction of every kind, with this proviso however, that by this our gift,

grant, assignment, and investiture no right acquired by any Christian prince is hereby to be understood to be withdrawn or taken away.

Moreover we command you in virtue of holy obedience, that, employing all due diligence in the premises, as you also promise—nor do we doubt that you will act in accordance with your devoted loyalty and royal greatness of spirit—you should appoint to the aforesaid countries and islands worthy God-fearing, learned, skilled, and experienced men, in order to instruct the aforesaid inhabitants and residents in the Catholic faith and train them in good morals. And under penalty of excommunication to be incurred *ipso facto*, should any thus contravene, we strictly forbid all persons of no matter what rank, estate, degree, order, or condition, to dare, without your special permit or that of your aforesaid heirs and successors, to go for the sake of trade or any other reason whatever to the islands and countries after they have been discovered and found by your envoys or persons sent out for that purpose.

And inasmuch as some kings of Portugal, likewise by apostolic grant made to them, have similarly discovered and taken possession of islands in the regions of Africa, Guinea, and the Gold Mine, and elsewhere, and divers privileges, favors, liberties, immunities, exemptions, and indulgences have been granted to them by the Apostolic See, we through similar accord . . . do grant to you and your aforesaid heirs and successors, that in the islands and countries thus discovered and to be discovered by you, you may, and rightly can, use, employ, and enjoy freely and legally, . . . these favors, privileges, exemptions, liberties, faculties, immunities, and exceptions, the terms of all of which we wish to be understood as being sufficiently expressed and inserted, as if they were inserted word for word in these presents. . . .

Given at Rome, at St. Peter's, on the 4th day of May in the year 1493 of the incarnation of our Lord, in the first year of our pontificate.