

Reading Guide for:

- * Two key Papal Bulls: ***Romanus Pontifex*** (1455) and the ***Inter Caetera*** (1493)
- * The Spanish ***Requerimiento*** (1513)
- * Bartolome de Las Casas: ***Brief Account of the Devastation of the Indies*** (1542)
- * Edward John: ***Study on the Impacts of the Doctrine of Discovery*** (2014)

The Two Papal Bulls

“Papal Bulls” are statements by the Pope that are binding statements of policy because they come from the Pope. The two you see here were written in Latin more than 500 years ago. The prose is rather turgid ... they didn’t use much punctuation then ... but see what you can pick up about the principles that the Pope is putting forward. The 1455 Bull was written after the Portuguese had started sailing down the coast of Africa and brought Christianity to the Peoples there, which earned the Pope’s accolades and appreciation. It deals mostly with the rights of Portugal in relation to further exploration down the coast of Africa, but had other implications when Christopher Columbus showed Europeans another world existed across the Atlantic. The 1493 Bull was written after Columbus returned and was intended to resolve a dispute between Spain and Portugal that arose because of the 1455 Bull. While resolving the dispute, it also created certain principles regarding the rights of Indigenous Peoples, a perspective that later came to be known as “the Doctrine of Discovery.” What was the nature of the dispute? How did the Pope resolve it? And what “legal” principles did the Doctrine put in place?

The Requerimiento

Although from the Pope’s perspective the big reason for going to what Europeans considered “the New World” was to bring Christianity to the heathens, there was some debate about just how that should be done. The Requerimiento was intended to outline the standards that were to be met when encountering Indigenous Peoples. What were they?

De Las Casas

Las Casas started out as a missionary intending to bring Christianity to Indigenous Peoples, but was disgusted at the behaviour of the conquistadors and early colonists. This document is an excerpt from his report back to the Pope and Spaniards about what was really going on. I have to warn you it is heavy reading.

Ed John

Ed John is a lawyer and hereditary Chief of the Tl’azt’en Nation. He has occupied many roles in BC and internationally over the years and was for a time involved with the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. He did this paper looking back on the “Doctrine of Discovery” and its implications for Indigenous Peoples while he was a member of the Permanent Forum.