

Friar Vincent Valverde's Message to Inca Atahualpa 16 November 1532

It is proper that you should know, most famous and most powerful king, that it is necessary that Your Highness and all your subjects should not only learn the true Catholic faith, but that you should hear and believe the following: First, that God, three in one, created heaven and earth and all things in the world, and He offers the prize of eternal life to the good, and punishes the wicked with perpetual suffering. In the beginning this God created man...in his own likeness...This man Adam sinned by breaking the command of his creator, and with him all men hitherto born and to be born till the end of the world have sinned. No man or woman is free of this taint, nor will be, with the exception of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, being the Son of the true God, descended from heaven, was born of the Virgin Mary to redeem the whole of mankind and free it from the bondage of sin. He at last died for our salvation on a wooden cross like the one I have in my hands for which reason we as Christians worship and revere it. This Jesus Christ rose by His own virtue from the dead, and after forty days He ascended into heaven and sits on the right hand of God, our Almighty Father. He left on earth His apostles and successors [to preach the gospel]...It was His will also that Saint Peter, His apostle, should be the prince over the apostles...and that all other pontiffs of Rome, the successors of St. Peter...should have the same supreme authority God gave him.

Therefore the holy pope of Rome...has conceded the conquest of these parts to Charles V...so that, having subjected these peoples and their kings and lords...he alone may reign over and rule and govern these peoples, bringing to them the knowledge of God and obedience to His church...Thus the great emperor Charles V has chosen as his lieutenant and ambassador Don Francisco Pizarro, who is now here, so that Your Highness' kingdoms may also receive the same benefit. He will establish a league and alliance of perpetual friendship between His Majesty and Your Highness, so that Your Highness and all your realms will become tributaries...and become his vassal and deliver your kingdom wholly into his hands...This comes first. Secondly...you shall give true obedience to the pope...and receive and believe the faith of Jesus Christ...and scorn and utterly repudiate the abominable superstition of your idols...If you refuse, know that you will be constrained with war, fire, and the sword, and all your idols shall be overthrown and we shall oblige you by the sword to abandon your false religion and to receive [inevitably] our Catholic faith and pay tribute to our emperor and deliver him your kingdom. If you seek obstinately to resist, you may rest assured that God will suffer that you and all your Indians shall be destroyed by our arms, even as Pharaoh of old and all his host perished in the Red Sea.¹

Discussion Questions

What stands out in this cross-cultural encounter?

What message was transmitted?

¹ Garcilaso de la Vega, *Comentarios Reales de los Incas* (1609). The above excerpt is from *Royal Commentaries of the Incas, and General History of Peru*. Translated by H. V. Livermore, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1966, pp. 680-681.