

BARTOLOMÉ DE LAS CASAS:

HIS POSITION IN  
REGARD TO SLAVERY

by

Robert Clinton Adams

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A Thesis

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A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Spanish  
Sam Houston State University

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

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Robert Clinton Adams

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Robert C. Adams

## ABSTRACT

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### Purpose

It is the purpose of this thesis to show Bartolomé de Las Casas' position in regard to slavery during and after the Spanish Conquest in the New World. Since the enslavement of both the American Indian and the African Negro soon became one of the principle issues of the Conquest, the purpose of this thesis is to show that Las Casas, who at one time was a slave owner, completely changed his position in regard to slavery and spent many years fighting for his beliefs.

### Methods

In this study, the writer has read as much of the available material as possible as a preliminary to setting forth his own view. The writer has read a number of Las Casas' works, has made a study of books written by writers who have done extensive research pertaining to Las Casas and to slavery, and finally has read a portion of the works of persons who bitterly opposed Las Casas.




## Findings

That Bartolomé de Las Casas was guilty of owning slaves is very true. What is completely out of the ordinary, however, is that he made such a radical change in his thinking. This thesis shows that the best years of his life were spent proclaiming the inherent and inalienable right of all men to liberty.

Many of Las Casas' ideas and plans were criticized as being acts of madness. His adversaries denounced him as a lunatic, a religious fanatic and a hypocrite. This study shows, however, that Bartolomé de Las Casas never abandoned a strong desire to liberate the enslaved from the cruelties of the Conquest and, at the same time, to liberate Spain from her sins.

Approved:

  
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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The Spanish Conquest of the New World has been the topic of discussion of many scholars and historians through the years. The many questions concerning the Conquest that have arisen are due in part to the vast array of unusual persons produced by the Conquest.

One of the most unusual persons living during the Conquest was the Dominican friar, Bartolomé de Las Casas. The man has been referred to in many ways: noble apostle to the Indians, saintly fanatic, authentic expression of the true Spanish conscience, principal creator of the "Black Legend" about Spain, and promotor of slavery. It is because of this last statement--promotor of slavery--that there has been so much controversy concerning Las Casas. There are those who have found it difficult to discern the exact stand taken by Las Casas regarding slavery and others who have openly declared that he both promoted and practiced slavery.

Since the enslavement of both the American Indian and the African Negro soon became one of the principal issues of the Conquest, the purpose of this thesis is to show that Las Casas definitely changed his position in

regard to slavery. It must be clearly understood that Las Casas did not always stand in opposition to servitude and slavery.

As a young man he was as unemotional towards slavery as any Spaniard who participated in the Conquest. Las Casas, being a native of Andalusia, was familiar with slave trade, for Seville was well provided with domestic slaves, whose lot was not a particularly hard one. He admitted that it was such a common sight to see Negro slaves in Spain that he never actually considered their condition nor the manner of their capture or sale.<sup>1</sup> Las Casas owned his first slave at the age of twenty-two, an Indian lad whom his father had sent to him as a present. After he had participated in the conquest of Cuba, Las Casas took possession of more Indian slaves to work his newly-acquired land. Even after Las Casas had joined the Dominican order of friars and had begun his long, hard struggle to free the Indians from bondage, he suggested to the Spanish Crown that since the Africans had long been enslaved by various civilizations, they be contracted to come to America to work in place of the Indian.<sup>2</sup>

Las Casas, during his early years, was as guilty as any man who had ever participated in the sale and degradation of human beings. This work will show that the beliefs of Las Casas in regard to slavery--whether it be that of the American Indian or the African Negro--completely changed.



In this study, the writer has used as much of the available material as possible and has examined all interpretations as a preliminary to setting forth his own view. The writer has read a number of Las Casas' works, has made a study of various books written by writers who have done extensive research pertaining to Las Casas and to slavery, and finally has read a portion of the works of persons who bitterly opposed Las Casas.

Although this paper pertains to a struggle over ideas in the sixteenth century, it is relevant to the present. The thesis deals with an old problem, the relationship between two civilizations. It was Thomas Jefferson who wrote a few days before he died on July 4, 1826, "that the mass of mankind has not been born with saddles on their backs, nor a favored few booted and spurred, ready to ride them legitimately, by the grace of God."<sup>3</sup> Today there are still problems among our civilizations. The races still do not tolerate the differences of color and custom. Taking into account the unsolved racial problems of today, we can see that the battles of the sixteenth century have still not been won.

Two scholars, Lewis Hanke and Ramón Menéndez Pidal, have done outstanding research that relates to the work of this thesis. Mr. Hanke has made translations and interpretations of the works of Las Casas, has gathered information pertaining to the life of the Dominican friar, and has prepared a vast amount of material in which he analyzed and

commented on the value to mankind of such a person as Bartolomé de Las Casas.

The work provided by Ramón Menéndez Pidal has also been of value to the writer of this thesis. In his book, El Padre Las Casas. Su Doble Personalidad, he shows that Las Casas was in reality a sick man suffering from a split personality and illusions. Pidal indicates that Las Casas did more harm than good by continually stirring up trouble for the Spanish government.<sup>4</sup> Pidal's comments have not only provided contrasting information about Las Casas but have also shown that there is a need for establishing Las Casas' position in relation to slavery.

FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER I

<sup>1</sup>Francis A. MacNutt, Bartholomew de Las Casas (New York and London: The Knickerbocker Press, 1909), p. xv.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., xvi.

<sup>3</sup>Saul K. Padover, A Jefferson Profile (New York: The American Book Company, 1965), p. 344.

<sup>4</sup>Ramón M. Pidal, El Padre Las Casas. Su Doble Personalidad (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, S. A., 1963), p. x preface.



## CHAPTER II

### A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF BARTOLOMÉ DE LAS CASAS

The Spanish wars against the Moors enlisted under the Christian standard knights from many parts of Europe. Among these foreign noblemen were two French gentlemen called Casaus. During the seige of Seville one of the Casaus brothers was killed. After the city was taken in 1252, the surviving Casaus shared in the spoils and founded there a family. The name Casaus assumed the more Spanish form of Casas, though it continued to be spelled in both ways for several centuries.<sup>1</sup>

From the Casas forebearers descended Bartolomé de Las Casas, who was born in Seville, in 1474. Curiously enough we know very little about the details of his life, except as he reveals them to us in his own writings.<sup>2</sup> No writer wrote down a description of his physical appearance and no painter recorded it. We know who some of his friends and enemies were, and the effect Las Casas had upon them, but total information on the man is very limited. We must depend upon his writing to study his life, and Las Casas did not bother to provide much data. He was busy fighting for the rights of the Indians, and apparently felt no need to write an autobiography.

Las Casas was well educated, for he completed his studies and obtained the degree of licentiate in law at the University of Salamanca. His studies in grammar, ethics, physics and the use of the Latin tongue were to aid him all through his life.

It was during Las Casas' stay in Salamanca that his father accompanied Christopher Columbus on his second voyage to America. Upon Las Casas' return from Salamanca to Seville, he found himself in constant contact with the men whose voyages and discoveries were thrilling Europe. The excitement of exploration overwhelmed the young Las Casas, for in 1502 he made his first trip to America as a member of the expedition of Don Nicolás de Ovando.<sup>3</sup> The expedition reached Hispaniola on the fifteenth of April, and thus did Bartolomé de Las Casas first land in the New World.

Later Las Casas, in his terrible indictment of his countrymen's destructive invasion of the peaceful islands peopled by "innocent and genial heathen," described the first Indians with whom he came in contact. He wrote:

All these infinite peoples were created by God the most simple of all others, without malice or duplicity, most obedient and faithful to their rules, whom they serve; the most humble, patient, loving, peaceful, and docile people, without contentions or tumults; neither factious nor quarrelsome, without hatred, or desire for revenge, more than any other people in the world.<sup>4</sup>

When Las Casas first arrived, however, he was no different from any of the other gentlemen adventurers who

were bent on acquiring speedy fortunes in a land of supposed riches. It is probable that Las Casas came to take over land in the islands previously acquired by his father. His affairs prospered and soon Las Casas grew rich. His yearly income from his property amounted to 100,000 castellanos.<sup>5</sup> He procured more slaves to continue the mining and the cultivation of his estates. Las Casas did as every other Spanish gentleman in regard to the Indians. When the Indians became disgruntled or hostile, the proper act on the part of the Spaniards was to war against them. Two goals were accomplished by such action: the Indians were kept quiet and the slave labor was well enforced. Las Casas says that during eight years this "pestilential disorder" took root without there being a man who spoke or heeded or thought anything about it.<sup>6</sup>

In the month of September of 1510, the first Dominican friars, four in number, arrived in Hispaniola from Spain under the leadership of their Prior, Pedro de Córdoba.<sup>7</sup> As the day after their arrival was Sunday in the octave of all saints, the Prior preached a sermon on the glories of paradise prepared for the saints. At the close of his sermon, he invited the people to bring their Indians to church after dinner. Many Indians came, and the Prior, with the assistance of interpreters, gave them their first exposition of Christian doctrine.

Las Casas was deeply moved by Pedro de Córdoba's sermon to the Indians. The message was really the start



of an effort to carry out the instructions of the Spanish sovereigns to instruct the Indians and convert them to Christianity. In the year 1510 Las Casas took holy orders. He indicated that the Prior's memorable sermon influenced him at a critical moment of his life.<sup>8</sup>

The newly-ordained priest immediately went to work. One of Las Casas' first duties was the continuance of the religious instruction to the Indians. He speedily acquired great fame throughout the colony because of his virtues and learning, and his influence over the Indians became well established. To show appreciation for his work, the Spanish government gave to Las Casas a valuable "repartimiento" of land and Indians.<sup>9</sup>

And then came the awakening of Las Casas. Having been invited to say mass and preach on the feast of Pentecost in 1514, and while searching for a suitable text, Las Casas happened upon the following verses of scripture:

He that sacrificeth of a thing wrongfully gotten,  
his offering is ridiculous, and the gifts of  
unjust men are not accepted.  
The most High is not pleased with the offerings  
of the wicked; neither is He pacified for sin by  
the multitude of sacrifices.  
Who so bringeth an offering of the goods of the  
poor is as one that killeth his son before his  
father's eyes.  
The bread of the needy is their life; he that  
defraudeth him thereof is a man of blood.  
He that taketh away his neighbor's living,  
slayeth him; and he that defraudeth the  
labourer of his hire is a bloodshedder.<sup>10</sup>

The truth must have jumped out at Las Casas: how was he to care and protect the Indians if he himself held them in bondage?

From this point on, Bartolomé de Las Casas launched into a lifelong discourse upon the blindness, the injustice, the tyranny and cruelty that marked the treatment of the Indians.

FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER II

<sup>1</sup>MacNutt, Bartholomew de Las Casas, 1.

<sup>2</sup>Lewis Hanke, Bartolomé De Las Casas: Historian, (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1952), p. 3.

<sup>3</sup>Bartolomé de Las Casas, Historia de las Indias (Vol. I of the series, Cronistas de Indias, ed. Augustín Millares Carlo. 3 vols.; México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1965), p. xi.

<sup>4</sup>Bartolomé de Las Casas, Brevísima Relación de la Destrucción de Las Indias (Vol. I of the series, Tratados translation by Augustín Millares Carlo and Rafael Moreno. 2 vols.: México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1965), p. 15.

<sup>5</sup>Bartolomé de Las Casas, Apologética Historia de las Indias (Madrid: Nueva biblioteca de autores españoles, 1909. Ed. by Manuel Serrano y Sanz), p. 87.

<sup>6</sup>Las Casas, Historia General, tom. iii., p. 87.

<sup>7</sup>MacNutt, Bartholomew de Las Casas, 40.

<sup>8</sup>The writer feels that the critical moment of Las Casas' life refers to the fact that he had made his fortune by the enslavement of these very Indians that were being converted to Christianity.

<sup>9</sup>Though he had readily become the protector of the Indians against his callous-hearted countrymen, Las Casas' conscience on the subject of repartimientos was not yet fully awakened.

<sup>10</sup>The Old Testament, a new translation by Ronald Knox (New York: Sheed and Ward, Inc., 1950) pp. 1047-1048.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE INTRODUCTION OF NEGRO LABORERS TO THE INDIES

Early in his career, Las Casas committed an error which he later sincerely and frankly deplored with touching humility, and which has served all his enemies ever since as ground on which to bring a grave charge against him. In order to save the Indians from the heavy work that was destroying them, Las Casas drew up a plan which proposed the introduction of Negro laborers to the islands. In his plan, Las Casas suggested that each laborer should have expenses paid as far as Seville, the place of embarkation. While they waited in Seville, the India House [Casa de Contratación] was to lodge and feed them. Their passage to Hispaniola was to be provided and their food furnished for one year.<sup>1</sup> At the end of the year, any laborer still having difficulty in making a living was to receive further assistance from the Spanish government. Las Casas suggested that the laborers be given free land, free tools, and permanent and hereditary rights as owners.

The Spanish colonists consented to Las Casas' plan and agreed to free their Indians in return for work of Negro laborers. It is not known why the Spaniards so readily agreed to the plan. It probably made no difference



to them who did the work. Perhaps the reason for their consent was that the consciences of Spaniards twinged more easily for Indians than for Negroes. Iberian peoples had become accustomed to having Moslem Negro slaves.

One writer states, "Spaniards never fought, however, as hard or as consistently against Negro slavery as they did on behalf of the Indians, not even Las Casas."<sup>2</sup>

The latter portion of this statement is questionable. Slavery was slavery to Las Casas, regardless upon whom it was inflicted. How could justice be done by reducing one race to slavery and at the same time breaking the bonds of another race? Las Casas' plan was not devised to free the Indians by enslaving the Negroes. The recommendation did cost Las Casas dearly, however, and later exposed his reputation to unjustified attacks, some of which even represented him as having introduced Negro slavery into America; others as having been betrayed by blind zeal in favor of the Indians into promoting the slave trade at the expense of the Africans.<sup>3</sup>

The most formal accusation made by a reputable historian against Las Casas is found in Robertson's History of America, Vol. III, in which he charges the apostle of the Indian with having proposed to Cardinal Ximénez de Cisneros

...to purchase a sufficient number of Negroes from the Portuguese settlements on the coast of Africa and to transport them to American in order that they might be employed as slaves in working in the mines and tilling the ground. Cardinal Ximénez however, when solicited to



encourage the commerce, peremptorily rejected the proposition because he perceived the iniquity of reducing one race of men to slavery when he was consulting about the means of restoring liberty to another. But Las Casas, from the inconsistency natural to men who hurry with headlong impetuosity towards a favourite point, was incapable of making the distinction. While he contended earnestly for the liberty of the people born in one quarter of the globe, he laboured to enslave the inhabitants of another region and in the warmth of his zeal to save the Americans from the yoke, pronounced it to be lawful and expedient to impose one still heavier on the African.<sup>4</sup>

It would be difficult to stray further from the facts, for Las Casas neither "laboured to enslave the inhabitants of another region" nor did he "pronounce it lawful" to increase African slavery. The moral aspect of the question of slavery was not under consideration and when one examines Las Casas' recommendation, it is reduced to this: he advised that Spanish colonists in America should be allowed the privilege, common in Spain and Portugal, of employing Negro labor. Since Spaniards might work Africans in Spain, it implied no approval of slavery as an institution, to permit them to do the same in the colonies. Had Las Casas been interested solely in bringing in Negro slaves to save his Indians, he undoubtedly would have done two things: first, he would have made an estimate as to how many slaves would be needed to relieve the Indians; secondly, he would have advised the Spanish government to contact a number of fast-working, reliable "black-birders" to fill the order.<sup>5</sup>

The original basis of the charge that Las Casas favored the introduction of Negro slavery into America

is contained in a passage in Herrera's Historia de las Indias Occidentales, written in 1598, thirty-two years after the death of Las Casas:

As the licentiate Las Casas encountered much opposition to the plan he had formed for helping the Indians and seeing that the opinions he had published had produced no result, in spite of the extraordinary credit he enjoyed with the Flemish Chancellor, Juan Selvagi, he had recourse to other means to attain the same ends. He asked in 1517 that the importation of Africans be permitted to the Spaniards settled in the Indies, in order to diminish the labour and sufferings of the Indians in the mines and on the plantations, and that a good number of labourers be enrolled in Spain who would emigrate to the Indies upon the conditions and with the advantages (to the African laborers) which he proposed. This new proposition was approved by the Cardinal of Tortosa, Adrian, by the Grand Chancellor, and the Flemish Ministers. The Chamber of Commerce at Seville was consulted to learn what number of Africans Cuba, San Juan, Santo Domingo, and Jamaica would require. It was replied that it would be sufficient to send four thousand. This answer being almost immediately made known by some intriguer to the Flemish governor of Bressa, this Courtier obtained the monopoly of the trade from the sovereign and sold it to some Genoese for twenty-five thousand ducats on condition that during eight years no other license should be granted by the King. This arrangement was extremely harmful to the population of the islands, especially to the Indians for whose benefit it had been granted; in fact had the trade been free, all the Spaniards might have engaged in it, but as the Genoese sold their right at a very high price, few Spaniards were able to pay, and the importation of blacks was almost nil. The King was counselled to pay back the twenty-five thousand ducats from his treasury to the governor and recover his rights, which would pay him well and be of great advantage to his subjects. Unfortunately the King had little money then and, as he was left in ignorance of much concerning the affairs of the Indies, nothing of what was most important was done.<sup>6</sup>



There is no reference in this passage to the introduction of Negro slavery. In another passage Herrera states that a royal ordinance given on September 3, 1500, to Don Nicolás de Ovando, the Governor of Hispaniola, granted permission to import Negro slaves.<sup>7</sup> If this was the case, the ordinance was granted two years before Las Casas made his first voyage to America. In 1503, the Governor of Hispaniola asked that no more Negro slaves be sent because they escaped and lived among the natives whom they corrupted.<sup>8</sup>

The Portugese had been bringing Negroes from the west coast of Africa and selling them in Lisbon and Seville since the first half of the fifteenth century.<sup>9</sup> During half a century before Las Casas came on the scene the southern provinces of Spain were well provided with slaves. The working and living conditions of these slaves were not particularly bad, and the children of these slaves were reared as Christians. The slave system was well recognized by the laws of the Kingdom--indeed by the laws of all Christendom. Las Casas had become a man of such humane temperament that any kind of injustice, regardless upon whom inflicted, revolted him; but he could not see that additional injury would be done to the Negroes by permitting Spaniards who owned them to take them also to the Colonies. It can hardly be required, even of Las Casas, to be several centuries in advance of his times in denouncing a commonly accepted usage of slaves. Toleration of an

established order is very different from the extension of its worst features to lands where it is unknown and among people unable to support its burdens. Las Casas lived in a century among a people hardened to oppression and cruelty. The development of the moral sense of the Spanish people, as it has been with all groups, was only slowly progressive; therefore, the betterment of racial conditions was accomplished by evolution rather than by revolution. Thus if the moral vision of Las Casas did not detect the injustice shown to the Negroes, simultaneously with his knowledge of what was happening to the Indians, his failure cannot be justly attributed to indifference to one race of people or to the inconsistency of trying to benefit one race at the expense of another.

Las Casas was himself the first to admit to his error. He expressed his repentance for his lack of knowledge of the conditions of African slavery in the following passage, which occurs in the fourth volume of his Historia General:

The cleric Las Casas first gave this opinion that license should be granted to bring Negro slaves to these countries [the Indies] without realizing with what injustice the Portuguese captured and enslaved them, and afterwards, not for everything in the world would he have offered it, for he always held that they were made slaves by injustice and tyranny, the same reasoning applying to them as to the Indians.<sup>10</sup>

Fuller and more mature consideration of the entire question of slavery in all its aspects brought Las Casas to

the conviction that the entire system must everywhere be condemned. In chapter 128 he made these comments:

He [Las Casas] very shortly after repented, judging himself guilty of inadvertence; and as he saw--which will be later perceived--that the captivity of the Negroes was quite as unjust as that of the Indians, the remedy he had counselled, that Negroes should be brought so that the Indians might be freed, was no better, even though they had been rightfully procured; although he was not positive that his ignorance in this matter and his good intention would exculpate him before the divine justice.<sup>11</sup>

Had Las Casas' project been accepted and carried out as he saw fit, no increased injustice would have been done to the Negroes, for it was the high death rate among the cruelly driven Indians that left such gaps in the number of laborers that could only be filled by bringing in laborers from elsewhere. Many of Las Casas' suggestions concerning slavery were rejected; but as fate would have it this blamable one concerning the importation of Negro slaves was accepted. As a result this well-meaning man came to be known as a promotor of slavery.



FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER III

<sup>1</sup>MacNutt, Bartholomew de Las Casas, 98.

<sup>2</sup>Lewis Hanke, Aristotle and the American Indians, (London: Carter and Hollis, 1959), p. 9.

<sup>3</sup>MacNutt, Bartholomew de Las Casas, 99.

<sup>4</sup>William Robertson, History of America (London: W. Strahan; T. Cadell, 1887), Vol. III, p. 486.

<sup>5</sup>"Black-birders" is a slanderous term that refers to slavers or those running slave markets.

<sup>6</sup>Antonio De Herrera, Historia General de las Indias Occidentales (London: Ed. by Henry Stephens, 1740). pp. 101-102.

<sup>7</sup>Herrera, Historia General, Lib. IV., 104.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., Lib V., 120.

<sup>9</sup>José Antonio Saco states that the traffic began in 1442 and that a company was organized in 1444, the yearly import of slaves being between seven and eight hundred Negroes--Historia de la Esclavitud, tom. iii, p. 277.

<sup>10</sup>MacNutt, Bartholomew de Las Casas, 105.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 105-106.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE NEW LAWS

Bartolomé de Las Casas never gave up the struggle to free the enslaved Indians and Negroes in the New World. Throughout the Indies, Mexico, and Guatemala Las Casas travelled and told other Spanish priests of the miserable conditions of the Indians. He especially stressed the injustice and evil effects of the encomienda system.<sup>1</sup> Miguel de Salamanca, the oldest of the priests in the New World, wrote a memorial which is found in Las Casas' Historia de Las Indias. This memorial contains the substance of all the subsequent attacks against the encomienda:

The greatest evil which has caused the total destruction of those lands (the Indies and Mexico) and which will continue, unless a remedy be found, and which is neither just nor can it or ought it be allowed in reason, is the encomienda of the Indians as it now exists, that is to say, being allotted for life in order that, working as they are worked, all the profits deriving from their work goes to those who hold them in encomienda; . . . also it is against God and his will and his Church.<sup>2</sup>

The Spanish King, Charles V, accepted this memorial and decreed that the Indians were to be free and be treated as freedmen; but as earlier attempts to ease the burdens of the Indians had failed, so this decree had no direct effect.<sup>3</sup>

Las Casas and other Dominicans decided that a set of laws needed to be drawn up, approved by the King, and

rigidly enforced. The direct purpose of the laws would be to abolish forever the encomienda system. It was with this intent that Las Casas travelled to Spain in 1539 determined either to win real assistance for the Indians or to abandon his work for them to labor in other mission fields.<sup>4</sup>

There is the feeling that while it is true that Las Casas returned to Spain to defend the Indians, he also came to defend himself against two possible charges. First, as shown in the previous chapter, Las Casas had left himself open to the accusation of being a promoter of slavery. The passage of the new laws, or the Leyes Nuevas as they officially became known, would be a strong defense for establishing Las Casas' position in regard to slavery. Second, as Las Casas had travelled through much of the New World accusing and damning many of his fellow Spaniards for their unjust treatment of the Indians and the Negroes, many sources were now accusing him of being a traitor to his king and to his country. But as Manuel Gonzales Calzada has stated, "The New Laws verify that Las Casas was not considered as an enemy of Spain; much to the contrary, he was always favoured by the Emperor and his most faithful servants, and the fact is that the friar (Las Casas) never attacked Spain, but rather evil Spaniards who by their actions always defamed their native country."<sup>5</sup>

Fortunately for Las Casas other Spaniards charged their countrymen with cruelty. Lewis Hanke gives this account:



Friar Motolinía stated in the History of the Indians of New Spain that "countless" natives were destroyed in labor at the mines... The royal official Alonso de Zurita stated that in the Popayan province the bones of dead Indians were so thick that one could never lose the way. Governor Francisco de Castañeda in Nicaragua reported that Spaniards on horseback hunted down Indians and lanced them. The historian Pedro Cieza de León, who participated in the Peruvian Campaigns, wrote that there were great cruelties and much injury done to the natives.<sup>6</sup>

Much material was written about the diseases brought to the New World by the Spaniards and about their filthy habits. Many pictures and woodcuts were done to present the dark picture of Spanish cruelties to those who could not read.

The mentioning of these slanderous reports has not been made to blacken further the history of Spain, but rather to provide necessary background for a consideration of the New Laws. Emperor Charles V had to be convinced that the plight of the Indians was indeed serious. The many reports received by him concerning the Indians and the ever-persistent efforts of Las Casas worked on the conscience of the King. Special recognition should go to Las Casas. His constant and vociferous efforts were largely responsible for the passage of the Laws. There are those who have since denounced Las Casas as an "insensate fanatic" or a "paranoid."<sup>7</sup> The conclusion of the late Pelham Box is a valid answer to those who would denounce Las Casas:

...It is not the least of Spain's glories that she produced Bartolome de Las Casas

and actually listened to him, however ineffectively.<sup>8</sup>

The New Laws formally approved by Charles V at Barcelona on November 20, 1542, have been, as Henry Stevens declared, "at once the pride and humiliation of Spain."<sup>9</sup> These laws merit some description. They include regulations to establish procedures for the Council of the Indies, as well as ordinances for the Indians.

The individual laws stated that the Council should meet each day, that the members should not accept bribes nor be engaged in private business, and should take special care to preserve and increase the Indian population.

Then follow detailed regulations strongly in favor of the Indians. Many studies have been made concerning these regulations. The work done by Manuel Gonzales Calzada has been used for this study.<sup>10</sup> A resume of this work is as follows:

It was commanded that henceforward, for no reason can an Indian be made a slave. Indians who until now have been enslaved were to be put at liberty. Indians were not to carry loads unless absolutely necessary. No free Indian was to be taken to the pearl fisheries against his will. Most grievous of all, in the estimation of the conquistadores, were the provisions regarding encomiendas. Those holding Indians without proper title or those who had mistreated the Indians would lose them. The climax comes in Law No. 35 which states that hence forth no encomienda is to be granted to anyone, and when present holders of encomiendas die, their Indians will revert to the crown.<sup>11</sup>

These New Laws revoked or limited the right of Spaniards to demand service and tribute from the Indians,

and it is not difficult to imagine the repercussions that took place in the New World. The laws led to a near revolt in Mexico, a serious rebellion in Peru in which the Viceroy was killed, and provoked grave unrest throughout the empire.<sup>12</sup> Both Las Casas and King Charles V must have known what the reaction would be to such radical laws. Why, then, did Charles approve these laws?

To Bartolomé de Las Casas the answer was simple and clear. The encomienda system made invalid the just title of the king of Spain to the Indies. This very system marked the king as a beast and a tyrant rather than the true lord he was. The encomienda system was in no way beneficial to the Indians. Therefore, since the system actually enslaved the Indians and at the same time negated the king's just title, it must be wiped out.

Ramón Menéndez Pidal has stated that it is commonplace to look upon the New Laws as Las Casas' greatest personal success.<sup>13</sup> A strong advocate of Las Casas, yet an objective and impartial man, Lewis Hanke, has said that Las Casas and the New Laws had provoked the greatest revolutionary change in the administration of the great, seafaring Spanish empire.<sup>14</sup>

Would the New Laws have really benefited the Indians as much as Las Casas thought if the crown had stood firm against all the pressures to change them? Would the Indians have fared better under the administration of the Spanish



Crown than under the rule of individual Spaniards? No one knows the true answer to these questions, for Charles V was persuaded to reverse his decision and allow the continuation of the dreaded encomienda system. One fact is certain, and that is that the New Laws caused the greatest battle of the colonial period. And by playing such an important role in this battle Bartolomé de Las Casas further established his position in regard to slavery.

FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER IV

<sup>1</sup>The Spaniard who received a grant of Indians or a native pueblo, or pueblos, was an encomendero. The system was known as an encomienda.

John Francis Bannon, Indian Labor in the Spanish Indies (Boston: D. C. Heath and Company, 1966), p. 2.

<sup>2</sup>Las Casas, Historia de las Indias, Lib. 3, caps. 135-136.

<sup>3</sup>The "earlier attempts" refers to the official sanction in 1512 of the Laws of Burgos. These laws were actually the first cry for justice in America by Friar Antonio de Montesinos. The last soon proved to be unenforceable.

<sup>4</sup>Lewis Hanke, The Spanish Struggle for Justice in the Conquest of America (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1949), p. 87.

<sup>5</sup>Manuel Gonzales Calzada, Las Casas el Procurador de los Indios (México: Obra Premiada en el Certamen Cultural de la Cooperativa Talleres Gráficos de la Nación, 1948), p. 232.

<sup>6</sup>Hanke, The Spanish Struggle for Justice, 89.

<sup>7</sup>Ramón Menéndez, Pidal, El Padre Las Casas, XIC.

<sup>8</sup>Hanke, The Spanish Struggle for Justice, 91.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid. The English translation of the New Laws brought out in 1893 by Henry Stevens, is quite rare today.

<sup>10</sup>González Calzada, Las Casas, 232-245.

<sup>11</sup>Note that the statement "...their Indians will revert to the Crown..." refers to the fact that the Indians were considered to be subjects of the Spanish Crown. The natives were often referred to as "Crown Indians."

<sup>12</sup>Hanke, The Spanish Struggle for Justice, 83.

<sup>13</sup>Ramón Menéndez, Pidal, El Padre Las Casas, 150.

## CHAPTER V

### THE DOCTRINE OF NATURAL SLAVERY

The Age of Discovery must be considered as one of the epochs of greatest intellectual activity in all history. During these years there developed a new philosophy, a vision of the earth, and a new science of nature. The immensity and the strangeness of the newly discovered lands had a great impact on men's minds. In a period of approximately seventy-five years more territory was discovered by Europeans than in the previous thousand years.

Of all the ideas churned up during the early tumultuous years of American history, none had a more dramatic application than the attempts made to apply to the natives there the Aristotelian doctrine of natural slavery: that one part of mankind is set aside by nature to be slaves in the service of masters born for a life of virtue free of manual labour.<sup>1</sup> Learned authorities such as the Spanish jurist Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda not only upheld this view with great tenacity but also felt that the American Indians were such barbarians that war against them, to force them to be Christians, was not only necessary but lawful. The Dominican friar Bartolomé de Las Casas opposed this idea scornfully. The controversy became so violent that the

Spanish king, Charles V, whose conscience must have troubled him, actually suspended all expeditions to America while a junta of important theologians, jurists and officials in the royal capital of Valladolid listened to the arguments of Las Casas and Sepúlveda. This official meeting took place in 1550, after Cortez had conquered Mexico, Pizarro had destroyed the Inca empire, and many other Spaniards had carried the banner of the mother country to far corners of the New World.

Las Casas could be in Valladolid in 1550 to confront Sepúlveda because he had returned to Spain for the last time in 1547, at the age of seventy-three, after many years of experience in Indian affairs. As soon as he reached Spain, Las Casas began to organize for the battle against Sepúlveda. It was indeed a bold step for Las Casas to engage such a scholar as Sepúlveda in learned combat, for this humanist who stepped forward to give comfort to Spanish officials and conquistadores possessed one of the best trained minds of his time; supported his views with many learned references; and enjoyed great prestige at court.<sup>2</sup> Sepúlveda had become one of the principal scholars in the recovery of "true" Aristotle. His Latin translation of Aristotle's Politics was considered his greatest contribution to knowledge. Naturally when Sepúlveda began to write on America, he was saturated with the theories of Aristotle, including his much discussed concept that certain men are slaves by nature.

In order to prepare for the official dispute with Las Casas, Sepúlveda composed a treatise which sought to



prove that wars against Indians were just and a preliminary to their Christianization. He took most of his notes from one of his earlier works, entitled Demócrates, which was written in dialogue form. In the dialogue, Leopoldo takes the role of a man who believes the conquest unjust, while Sepúlveda, speaking through Demócrates, kindly but firmly opposes Leopoldo's ideas and convinces him in the end of the complete justice of wars against the Indians and the obligation of the king to wage them.

The fundamental idea put forward by Sepúlveda was a simple one and not original with him.<sup>3</sup> Thomas Aquinas had written, centuries before, that wars may be waged justly when their cause is just and when the authority carrying on the war is legitimate and conducts the war in the right spirit and the correct manner.<sup>4</sup> Sepúlveda applied this doctrine to the New World.<sup>5</sup> He stated that war against the Indians was necessary and lawful for four reasons:

1. For the gravity of sins which the Indians had committed, especially their idolatries and their sins against nature.

2. For the rudeness of their natures, which obliged them to serve persons having a more refined nature, such as the Spaniards.

3. For the spread of the faith, which would be more easily accomplished by the prior subjugation of the natives.

4. For the protection of the weak among the natives themselves.<sup>6</sup>

The two important questions treated by Sepulveda at Valladolid were:



1. What justifies war against the Indians?

2. How should this war be waged?

In order to justify war against the Indians, Sepúlveda argued that all Indians in America were rude persons born with a limited understanding. These Indians were to be classed as natural slaves and ought to serve their superiors and their natural lords.<sup>7</sup> Those who exceed the Indians in prudence and ability, even though physically inferior, are their natural lords.<sup>8</sup> According to Sepúlveda, the Spaniards had an obvious right to rule over the barbarians because of their superiority. He stated that no people in Europe could compare with the Spaniards in braveness, sobriety, frugality, freedom from gluttony and lasciviousness, and Christian spirit. At this point, Sepúlveda launched into an account of the many benefits bestowed by Spain on America. Among these benefits he mentioned the bringing of iron, wheat, barley, vegetables, horses and other livestock, many varieties of trees, books, culture, excellent laws and, the one supreme benefit, the Christian faith.

As Sepúlveda had shown a need for waging war on the Indians, he then explained in detail how just war was to be waged. The following is a brief report of his proposal:

First the barbarians are to be invited to accept the great benefits the Conqueror proposes to bestow, to permit themselves to be instructed in the "true religion and the best laws and customs," and to recognize the rule of the king of Spain. [In what language was this invitation to be made?] If they are thus approached and admonished, "perhaps without using arms," they will

submit themselves and their possessions to the Spaniards. [Las Casas knew that this meant turning themselves over to slavery.] If they request an opportunity to deliberate upon the offer, sufficient time shall be granted. If they reject the Spanish proposal, they are to be conquered, their goods confiscated, and they are to be punished by enslavement.<sup>9</sup>

It should be kept in mind that Charles V had purposely called for this debate because he was confused and troubled as to how Spain should deal with the American Indians and how they should be Christianized. Probably never before or since has a mighty emperor ordered his conquests to cease until it could be decided whether they were just.<sup>10</sup>

There can be no doubt that the eloquent presentation of the learned Sepúlveda must have impressed both the king and the panel of jurors who were to judge the debate. But as Sepúlveda was well prepared, Las Casas was even better prepared to face an endless debate on a subject that he had spent a lifetime studying, writing, and fighting against, that subject being the enslavement of the American Indians. Las Casas did not talk or write on this subject from hearsay. He was by the year 1550 a hardened veteran. He had lived with and taught the Indians. He had seen the countless cruelties inflicted upon the Indians by his Spanish countrymen. One has but to thumb through Las Casas' Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias to get an idea of what the Conquest was like. And as one writer has written, "...if he [Las Casas] exaggerated on details he was right

in fundamentals and his truth is not affected by the use hypocritical foreigners made of his works."<sup>11</sup>

Facing Sepúlveda's wholesale denunciation of Indian character, Las Casas presented to the judges his 550-page Latin Apología, which is his only major writing not yet published.<sup>12</sup> This treatise, consisting of sixty-three chapters, was dedicated to demolishing Sepúlveda's theory of natural slavery. In making his presentation, Las Casas had to proceed very carefully. He could openly attack and discredit Sepúlveda's ideas; but Las Casas knew that he was to be more respectful of Aristotle, "who was after all the dominant philosopher in Renaissance times and whose ideas had prepared the philosophical substratum of Catholicism."<sup>13</sup> Any attack on Aristotle was regarded as a dangerous heresy. Even so, during a much earlier debate over the Aristotelian doctrine of natural slavery, Las Casas described Aristotle as a "gentile burning in Hell, whose doctrine we do not need to follow except in so far as it conforms with Christian truth."<sup>14</sup>

At Valladolid, however, Las Casas chose his words very carefully so as to stress clearly his viewpoints without openly slandering Aristotle and offending the debate judges. Reading from his Apología, Las Casas began his debate by describing the abilities and achievements of the Indians. The purpose of this was to meet the contention that the Indians were semi-animals whose property and



services could be commandeered by the Spaniards. Las Casas astonished the judges with his claim that the American Indians compared very favourably with the peoples of ancient times. "In several respects," stated Las Casas, "the Greeks and Romans were inferior to the American Indians."<sup>15</sup> The Indians clearly were more religious because they offered more and better sacrifices to their gods than did the ancient peoples. The Mexican Indians were superior to the ancients in rearing and educating their children. Their marriage arrangements were reasonable and conformed to natural law and the law of nations. Indian women were devout workers, even working with their hands if necessary to comply fully with divine law, a trait which Las Casas felt many Spanish matrons might well adopt. Las Casas even spoke of the greatness of the temples of Yucatán, stating that they were not less worthy of admiration than the Egyptian pyramids.

Las Casas made these opening statements about the Indians to show that they were "prudent and rational beings, of as good ability and judgement as other men and more able, discreet, and of better understanding than the people of many other nations."<sup>16</sup> In this way Las Casas had discredited the theory of natural slavery and in so doing, had not offended the judges.

When the judges asked Las Casas how, in his opinion, the Conquest should proceed, he replied that when no danger threatened, priests alone should be sent. In



particularly dangerous parts of the Indies, fortresses should be built on the borders and, little by little, the Indians would be won over to Christianity by peace, love, and good example.<sup>17</sup>

In explaining how the Conquest should be continued, Las Casas never diverged from the views he had originally stated years before in his treatise entitled Del único modo de atraer a todas las gentes a la religión verdadera.<sup>18</sup>

The doctrine of this treatise was simple enough. Las Casas quoted the words of Christ, "Go ye and teach all nations," and he insisted that the American Indians be included. Las Casas insisted that the teaching must be carried on in a peaceful manner. The Indians were to be given all the time they needed to think about the truths that were presented to them. For no reason was force to be applied to hurry the Indians into their acceptance of the Christian faith. According to Las Casas, "haste or violence repels rather than attracts those who are not yet Christians."<sup>19</sup> Wars against the Indians were unjust and tyrannical and those that had fought these wars had committed mortal sin. Las Casas insisted that any Spaniard who had killed an Indian should from that time on be responsible for the maintenance of the slain Indian's wife and family. In order to express his contention forcefully, Las Casas cited from the last will of Queen Isabella:

Forasmuch as when the islands discovered... were granted to us by the Holy Apostolic See, our principal intention...was to provide for attracting and winning to us the natives, and

to convert them to our holy Catholic faith,... they (the Spaniards) shall not consent, or furnish occasion that the Indian natives and inhabitants of the said islands sustain any injury... And if they (the Indians) have received any injury, they (the Spaniards) shall correct it....<sup>20</sup>

Las Casas continued his debate by telling the judges that "so enormous are the errors and scandalous propositions, contrary to all evangelical truth and to all Christianity that the Doctor Sepúlveda has accumulated, set forth, and coloured with misguided zeal in the royal service, and that no honest Christian would be surprised should we wish to combat him...as a mortal enemy of Christendom...."<sup>21</sup>

After five days, Las Casas closed his case in a prophetic manner:

The injuries and loss which have fallen the Crown of Castile and León will be visited likewise on all Spain, because the tyranny wrought by their devastations, massacres, and slaughters is so monstrous, that the blind may see it, the deaf hear it, and the dumb recount it, while after our brief existence, the wise shall judge and condemn it. I invoke all...to witness that I free my conscience of all that has been done; and that I have fully exposed all woes to his Majesty; and that if he abandons the government of the Indies to the tyranny of the Spaniards, they (the Indians) will all be lost... For these reasons, God will punish Spain and all her people with inevitable severity. So may it be!<sup>22</sup>

Following the debate, the judges, exhausted and confused by the sight and sound of this mighty conflict, fell into argument with one another and came to no definite decision. The facts that are available today do not support either contestant. What, then, was the real meaning of the great debate at Valladolid? It is not surprising

that Sepúlveda became the hero of all Spaniards who wished to continue to wage war against the Indians and to keep them in bondage under the encomienda system. Sepúlveda's doctrine of natural slavery, however, never did triumph. His various books were never allowed to be published in Spain in his lifetime.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand Las Casas was allowed to publish a whole galaxy of treatises. He continued to write and talk as he pleased as long as he lived, and even after his death in 1566 his books circulated everywhere, to the consternation and fury of conquistadores.<sup>24</sup>

Did the debate have any positive effect? Though even now all the facts are not known, we do know that the conquests were not stopped, nor was the problem of a just war in the Indies resolved. Las Casas continued writing memoranda to the King and the Council of the Indies on the subject. He even tried to get the Pope to excommunicate anyone who waged war against the Indians. It is doubtless true that the conquest of the Philippines from 1570 onward was carried on by relatively peaceful means and the law of 1573 on new discoveries was drawn up in such generous terms because of the battle which Las Casas fought at Valladolid.<sup>25</sup>

The debate had another significance. At a time when many persons were not sure whether the Indians could be saved at all, Las Casas raised his voice on their behalf. He asked: "Are these Indians not men? Do they not have rational minds? Are you not obliged to love them as you love yourselves?"<sup>26</sup>



The Valladolid debate stands, not as a personal struggle between a friar and a scholar, but as the record of a crucial event in the history of humanity. Because Sepúlveda's ideas failed to triumph, Spain, speaking through the mouth of Barolomé de Las Casas, made a contribution toward the development of a most important hypothesis--the idea that the Indians were not beasts, not slaves by nature, but men capable of becoming Christians, who should be brought into the Christian civilization rather than held in bondage or destroyed. His beliefs continued to be useful to those persons in the following centuries who have worked in the belief that all the peoples of the world are human beings with the potentialities and responsibilities of men.



FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER V

<sup>1</sup>Lewis Hanke, Aristotle and the American Indians (London: Hollis and Carter, 1959), pp. 12-13.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 31.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 40.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 40. Of course the question comes to mind who is the authority and exactly what is the "right spirit and correct manner."

<sup>5</sup>Though Sepúlveda did formulate ideas and apply doctrines concerning the New World, he never saw the New World. All of his theory was based on hearsay and reading of reports. This was to be one of Las Casas' strongest arguments.

<sup>6</sup>Hanke, Aristotle, 41.

<sup>7</sup>This idea of some men being natural slaves because of their backwardness and their inferiority comes from his teachings in his "Politics," Aristotle Dictionary, Ed. by Thomas P. Kiernan (Philosophical Libraries Inc., 1962), pp. 144-159.

<sup>8</sup>Mention of physical inferiority probably refers to the fact that the Spaniards were not used to the hardships of the Indians who had lived off nature all of their lives.

<sup>9</sup>Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, Demócrates segundo o de las justas causas de la guerra contra los indios (Madrid: 1951) p. 29.

<sup>10</sup>Hanke, The Spanish Struggle for Justice, 117.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 91.

<sup>12</sup>Hanke, Aristotle, 54. The manuscript is in the Bibliotheque Nationale (Paris) and is being transcribed and translated into Spanish by Ángel Losada.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 17.

<sup>14</sup>Las Casas, Historia de Las Indias, Lib. III, 134.

<sup>15</sup>Hanke, Aristotle, 54.

<sup>16</sup>Hanke, The Spanish Struggle for Justice, 121.

<sup>17</sup>Dangerous regions existed in the Indies because the cruelties of the Spaniards had caused great distrust and hatred among the Indians.

<sup>18</sup>The Latin text was prepared by Augustín Millares Carlo. Atenozenes Santamaría has prepared a Spanish translation. Lewis Hanke has done extensive work in English with the same treatise, entitled The Only Method of Attracting All People to the True Faith.

<sup>19</sup>Hanke, The Spanish Struggle for Justice, 74.

<sup>20</sup>MacNutt, Bartholomew de Las Casas, 290-291.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 289-290. This denunciation by Las Casas of Sepúlveda's arguments is to be found in its entirety in Lewis Hanke's The Spanish Struggle for Justice, page 121.

<sup>22</sup>Most of Sepúlveda's works did not reach print until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 291-292.

<sup>24</sup>Hanke, The Spanish Struggle for Justice, 130.

<sup>25</sup>The Law of 1573 was an ordinance sent out by Phillip II on July 13, 1573, which was designed to regulate all future conquests by land or by sea. These future conquests were to be carried out by peaceful means. The law decreed that the word "conquest" was to be replaced by the term "pacification."

<sup>26</sup>Hanke, The Spanish Struggle for Justice, 131.

## CHAPTER VI

### COLONIZATION IN THE NEW WORLD

Bartolomé de Las Casas was faced with many disappointments during his fifty years of struggling with the Indian problems. Many of his ideas were laughed at and many of his plans failed completely. One of his greatest plans, which won royal approval, failed completely when put to the test. His plan, which was the culmination of several years of agitation at court, was to colonize the northern coast of Venezuela, then referred to as Tierra Firme,<sup>1</sup> with Spaniards who would till the soil, be friends with the Indians, and start an ideal Christian community in the New World.

There are several reasons for the failure of Las Casas' proposal. It was most difficult to find the proper volunteers for such an undertaking; those Spaniards who wished to come to the New World were certainly not interested in agriculture; and finally, the Indians would not always cooperate. The merit of Las Casas' plan, however, lies not in the outcome, but rather in the fact that he once again was struggling for some means of protecting the Indians from slavery and destruction at the hands of the Spaniards.

Las Casas' dream was that of a new world in which Spaniards, armed only with tools, seeds, and supplies



furnished by the King, would farm and live side by side with the Indians of Tierra Firme in such a way that their faith and their skill would be absorbed by the natives. There would be two goals accomplished by such an endeavor: the same peasants would develop the King's newly-discovered lands and thus increase the royal revenue; and most important of all, the Indians would become Christians--not by force--but by their own choosing.

Las Casas' plan for colonization cannot be regarded as merely a curious experiment. It was an important step in the history of Spain groping for a policy which would ensure justice for the Indians. During the early part of the Conquest, no consistent effort had been made by the Spanish government to bring farmers to the New World. Las Casas realized the need of building up colonies in the New World that consisted of a citizenry not dependent on Indians for support.

Las Casas, therefore, went to Spain and obtained support from the Crown. He brought with him a report, to be presented to the court, which was a composite of all his thinking on the problem of Indian-Spanish relationship since his great awakening in 1514. The report was simple but revolutionary. The Indians were not to be given to individual Spaniards, but were to live in communities established by the Spanish monarch.<sup>2</sup> Forty farmers with their families were to be sent to each town. Each farmer would live and work with five Indians and their families.



After the King's portion was set aside, the royal quinto<sup>3</sup>, they would share the profits in a brotherly way. The Indians would prosper and learn, rather than die as slaves. Salaried supervisors were to be placed in each town to protect the Indians and punish any Spaniards who mistreated them. These supervisors were also to see that attempts were made to educate and convert the Indians.

Las Casas also advised the King to establish in Tierra Firme ten fortresses, one every hundred leagues. In each fortress were to be placed one hundred Christians, governed by a captain whose only interest was in pacifying the Indians. A bishop was to be appointed for every one hundred and fifty leagues and many friars were to be sent to Tierra Firme "because one friar is worth more than 200 armed men."<sup>4</sup> To meet the expense of this plan, the King was to take a part of the gold and pearls seized by Spaniards who had so cruelly treated the Indians.

On October 12, 1518, Las Casas began his work as a "Representative of the Indians" for the colonization scheme.<sup>5</sup> In his Historia de las Indias, Las Casas relates this first attempt made in Europe to recruit sturdy workers for American lands. It was most difficult to persuade Spanish peasants to leave their native soil and travel to strange lands. The biggest drawback, however, was the hostility and interference of the feudal lords of Spain who were most displeased at this interference with their laborers. Traveling through Castile, Las Casas was asked to leave many towns because

the lords thought that he was robbing them of the workers. Though many of the townspeople were interested in the project, the hostility of the lords prevented Las Casas from securing, all told, more than a handful of farmers to go to the New World.

The skepticism Las Casas found so prevalent throughout Castile with respect to his plan to recruit workers and his disheartening experience in recruiting induced him to drop the project. The King and his advisers came to realize that the emigration of any considerable number of farmers from Spain simply could not be achieved.

Las Casas, however, continued to strive for his great accomplishment--the freedom and salvation of the Indians. Chapter after chapter of his Historia de las Indias is filled with the passionate story of his battles in the period from April 1519, when his recruiting activities ended, until May 1520, when the King at last gave him a grant of land in Tierra Firme.<sup>7</sup> Las Casas perceived that his efforts to obtain support for his plan of colonization would come to naught, unless he could convince the King and his advisers that some material benefit would accrue to the royal revenues. Las Casas now turned his attention to forming a plan which would serve two purposes: the Indians would be converted to Christianity and the Crown would recognize a profit. He conceived the plan of forming a new order of knighthood, whose members would be known as knights of the Golden Spur.<sup>8</sup> These knights were to number

fifty men, each to furnish two hundred ducats and thus provide for the expenses of founding the colony.<sup>9</sup> They were to wear a garment of white cloth marked on the breast with a red cross. This type of dress was to distinguish them in the eyes of the Indians from all other Spaniards. The carefully selected knights were to operate in a territory of one thousand leagues along the coast of northern South America. In return for the colonization rights received from the King, Las Casas guaranteed to pacify and convert the Indians of Tierra Firme, to organize them into villages so that within two years the King would have at least ten thousand taxpaying vassals, to explore the land and report on its economic possibilities--all this without cost to the crown.<sup>10</sup>

The most obvious flaw in this plan was the difficulty, or perhaps the impossibility, of finding the fifty knights. Las Casas failed to reckon with the realities of human nature. His colony was to be a Utopia,<sup>11</sup> inhabited by Spaniards who were free from the strong desire to obtain gold and only pre-occupied in cultivating sentiments of the purest altruism.<sup>12</sup> Mixed with these Christian knights were to be the gentle-mannered Indians,<sup>13</sup> in whom shone all the qualities of primitive man, unspoiled by contact with the evils of civilization, and who were thirsting to know and accept the truth. These Indians were to "furnish the human material on which the knights were to exercise their virtues, and all were to be thus united in bonds of



loving fraternity and disinterested industry..."<sup>14</sup> Even had the fifty selected knights been found, there was little chance that they would have remained untarnished by the corrupting influence of a new country. Most good men of the highest principles and best intentions went from Spain to the New World in the sixteenth century, "but few resisted the temptations which beset them."<sup>15</sup>

Though they were not what he had hoped for, Las Casas departed from San Lucar on November 11, 1520, with his group of men. They arrived in Puerto Rico early in February 1521. According to one historian, Pedro Gutiérrez de Santa Clara, it was a motley crew that Las Casas had gathered. These farmers "had forgotten their spades and their cows, and began to fancy themselves gentlemen..."<sup>16</sup>

The complete story of this ill-fated expedition has been recorded by Las Casas in his Historia de las Indias. Sickness, stormy weather, an Indian uprising in part of Las Casas' territory, conniving Spaniards--all of these hampered the expedition until Las Casas finally gave up his colonization plan for Tierra Firme. Las Casas knew that as long as he did not have complete control of the land to be colonized, other Spaniards with different attitudes toward the Indians were bound to create disturbances which would make peaceful relations impossible. Las Casas, however, never strayed from the doctrine that peaceful means alone would convert the Indians. As if to prove the validity of Las Casas' doctrine, records exist in the Archivo General



de Indias which tell how certain Indians of Tierra Firme, because of good treatment, turned Christian a few months after Las Casas left this region.<sup>17</sup>

The cause of Las Casas' early failures in colonization was simply that Spaniards willing to risk their lives and fortunes in the New World were not interested in becoming farmers. Although many of them had been farmers in Spain, they had hopes of becoming men of wealth and position in the New World. While it is true that the successive failures were discouraging, yet fifteen years after his attempt to colonize the northern part of Venezuela Las Casas was in Guatemala, again trying to colonize and convert the Indians.<sup>18</sup>

In order to substantiate his idea for colonization in Guatemala, Las Casas had prepared a lengthy treatise on The Only Method of Attracting all People to the True Faith. The doctrine of this treatise was basically the same that Las Casas had preached for so many years: war against the Indians was both unjust and contrary to Christ's teachings; the only way to colonize and convert the Indians was by peaceful means. As there was no great change in Las Casas' plan, and as he had previously failed in his attempts to colonize, why did the Spanish officials grant him permission to come once again to the New World? Las Casas had been troublesome for so long that the Spanish officials welcomed an opportunity to be rid of him. Moreover, it is possible that no one believed that Las Casas would succeed any more than he previously had. There is also the possibility

that this time Las Casas might not escape with his life, for he planned to colonize in the only land left unconquered in Guatemala, the province of Tuzutlán. The Spaniards had tried to subjugate the Indians of this region three times and as often had returned, "holding their heads." They had named this province Tierra de Guerra, "Land of War." What chance would a middle-aged friar have of accomplishing a feat which hitherto had been impossible for Spanish soldiers?

It was to this province and these people that Las Casas offered to go. He intended to persuade the Indians voluntarily to become vassals of Charles V. He also intended to teach them and to spread the Christian faith. Las Casas carried with him these words:

Men do not consider what we say but what we do-- we may philosophize interminably, but if when the occasion arises we do not demonstrate with our actions the truth of what we have been saying, our words will have done more harm than good.<sup>19</sup>

Las Casas made two requests that were speedily granted. He asked that any Indians in Guatemala won by peaceful means should not be divided among the Spaniards but should depend directly upon the crown, with only moderate taxes to pay, and that for five years no Spaniards, except Las Casas and his brother Dominicans, would be allowed to come to the Tierra de Guerra. In this manner the Spaniards would cause no scandal in the province.

Las Casas and his companions--Friars Rodrigo de Andrada, Pedro de Angulo, and Luis Cáncer--approached the

problem of colonization in a hostile province in a most unusual way. Upon arriving in Guatemala in 1537, they began to compose some ballads in the Indian language of the Tierra de Guerra.<sup>20</sup> These ballads were actually a history of Christianity. They told of the creation of the world and the fall of man, his exile from Paradise, and the life and works of Jesus Christ. After these ballads were completed, Las Casas found four Christian Indian merchants accustomed to trading in the Tierra de Guerra. The friars taught the four Indians all the verses, and trained them, moreover, to sing them "in a pleasing manner."

In August 1517, the four Indians left with their merchandise. The friars had added such things as scissors, knives, mirrors, and bells. As soon as they crossed the Quiché frontier,<sup>21</sup> the Indians went directly to the Cacique.<sup>22</sup> They offered the Cacique the first pick of the wares and then spent the remainder of the day bartering with the public. When the day's business was over, there was still a large crowd of Indians gathered. The four merchants then began to play on their castanets and timbrels and to chant the ballads. Such music had never before been heard in the Quiché land, but if the form attracted their attention, the words of the verses made a still deeper impression on the listeners, and most of all on the Cacique.<sup>23</sup> The following day the Cacique requested that the songs be sung again and the merchants be asked for explanations concerning the meaning of the stories. The merchants told him that



they could only sing the words. If he wanted to learn more he would have to send for certain holy men who would be most happy to come and teach him about the mysteries of the verses. This gave the four Indians an opportunity to describe the Dominican friars. They told how these were good men who hated gold and whose only desire in life was to teach people about the Christian faith.

The Cacique was very interested in finding out more about this new variety of Spaniard, so very different from the other Spaniards he had met in battle. He was still dubious of the Indians' stories, however, for he ordered his younger brother to return with the four Indian merchants. The Cacique told his brother that he was to take gifts to the friars and was to learn carefully and secretly all he could about these Spaniards.

Naturally this was the opportunity that Las Casas and his companions had so long awaited. They properly impressed the young Indians and within two weeks it was decided that Fray Cáncer would return with the Indian youth as the first convoy to his brother, the Cacique.

The remainder of the story of colonization reads almost like a fairy tale. The Cacique was converted to Christianity and was given the Christian name, Don Juan. He was very influential in persuading his people to accept Christianity. For ten years Don Juan and the Dominican friars worked strenuously--"they destroyed idols, built churches, and won souls." Las Casas christened the land as Tierra de Vera Paz, "Land of True Peace."<sup>24</sup>



But even as the land was christened, much disturbance was going on between the Spanish colonists and the Indians. The old story was being retold: The Spaniards were seeking to exploit the Indians and many of the Indians were starting to drive out all Spaniards from their land.

The end of the experiment is chronicled in a sad letter sent by Las Casas to the Council of the Indies on May 4, 1556. He wrote the letter so that it might be known that the Quiché Indians had revolted and that many Spaniards, some friars included, had been killed. The significance of the name--Land of True Peace--and the possibility of winning the Indians by peaceful means faded away.

Las Casas' plan to bring the Indians to Christianity by peaceful means apparently had once again failed. Yet these ideas cited in his treatise, The Only Method of Attracting All People to the True Faith, were never wholly forgotten. Friars in other parts of the Spanish empire in the New World were inspired by this treatise and by the Vera Paz experiment to follow the same ideal in their own territory<sup>25</sup>--Las Casas' ideal of bringing the faith peacefully to the Indians of the new world discovered by the Spaniards.

FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER VI

<sup>1</sup>Lewis Hanke makes mention of this reference in his book, The Spanish Struggle for Justice, 34. He explains that Las Casas chose this particular area as the best suited for colonization because the Conquest had not alienated the Indians of the Tierra Firme region.

<sup>2</sup>Las Casas was working with both King Ferdinand II and Cardinal Jiménez de Cisneros. By 1497, Cisneros had died and Charles V had come to the Spanish throne.

<sup>3</sup>The "quinto," or one-fifth of all the profits of the New World, was to go to the Spanish treasury.

<sup>4</sup>Hanke, The Spanish Struggle for Justice, 59.

<sup>5</sup>Jiménez Fernández, Bartolomé de las Casas, 171. Cardinal Jiménez de Cisneros had proclaimed Las Casas as "Procurador (advisor) de los Indios."

<sup>6</sup>Las Casas, Historia de las Indias, Lib. 3, 104.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 132.

<sup>8</sup>MacNutt, Bartholomew de las Casas, 120.

<sup>9</sup>The "ducat" refers to any of several gold or silver coins used in some European countries; their value varied from about 83¢ to about \$2.32.

<sup>10</sup>Hanke, The Spanish Struggle for Justice, 63-66.

<sup>11</sup>Utopia refers to the imaginary island described as having a perfect political and social system; this was the subject of a book written in 1516 by Sir Thomas More.

<sup>12</sup>Las Casas insisted that the selected knights had to be totally concerned for the welfare of the Indians--thus the writer's use of the word, altruism.

<sup>13</sup>Las Casas had been criticized for his continual reference to the "gentle-mannered Indians." Many of the Indians, including those of the Chiribichi and Maracapana coast, were far from being gentle. This coast was included in the King's concession to Las Casas.

<sup>14</sup>MacNutt, Bartholomew de Las Casas, 122.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Pedro Gutiérrez de Santa Clara, Historia de las guerras civiles del Perú (1544-1588) y de otros sucesos de las Indias (ed. by Manuel Serrano y Sanz, Madrid: Nueva Biblioteca de autores españoles, 1904), I: 36-40.

<sup>17</sup>Hanke, The Spanish Struggle, 70.

<sup>18</sup>Hanke, Bartolomé de Las Casas, 13-14. It is believed that the complete failure to colonize Tierra Firme was the reason that Las Casas entered a Dominican monastery on the island of Hispaniola and, for almost ten years, did not disturb the Spaniards as they continued their conquest.

<sup>19</sup>Las Casas, Del único modo, 273.

<sup>20</sup>Hanke, The Spanish Struggle, 79. In order to communicate with the Indians, most of the friars--Las Casas included--learned various Indian dialects. Friar Luis Cáncer knew the language of the Tierra de Guerra.

<sup>21</sup>MacNutt, Bartholomew de Las Casas, 192. The Indians of the Tierra de Guerra were known as the Quiché Indians.

<sup>22</sup>The word "cacique" is an Indian term meaning leader or chief.

<sup>23</sup>MacNutt, Bartholomew de Las Casas, 194.

<sup>24</sup>Hanke, The Spanish Struggle for Justice, 81.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 82.



## CHAPTER VII

### FIFTY YEARS AS A WRITER

It has been emphasized repeatedly in this work that Bartolomé de Las Casas has been the object of much criticism. He always challenged his opponents to refute his allegations or to contradict his facts. In a letter sent to a friend in 1556, Las Casas wrote:

It is moreover deplorable that having denounced this destruction of peoples to our sovereigns and their councils a thousand times during forty years, nobody has yet dreamed of proving the contrary and, after having done so, of punishing me by the shame of a retraction...I defy any living man, if he be not a fool, to dare deny what I allege, and to prove the contrary.<sup>1</sup>

His enemies were devoid of scruples, and used every means to destroy his influence. He was said to be a mad man who spent his time arguing for the rights of savage Indians and any facts provided by him were considered to be exaggerations. Las Casas was said to be a heretic. He was disloyal, and he was trying to bring ruin on the interests of Spain in the New World. A Franciscan contemporary, Fray Toribio de Paredes de Benavente, is often noted as one of the bitterest and most outspoken critics of Las Casas. His Carta Al Emperador Carlos V of January 2, 1555, does indeed lash out strongly against

the Dominican. It is opposed not to his aims, however, but to some of his methods and to much of the exaggeration found in his writings.<sup>2</sup> Other contemporaries that opposed Las Casas were the Bishop of Burgos and Lope Conchillos. They were of the bureaucratic class that opposed Las Casas' reforms.

The most formidable of all Las Casas' foes was the Spanish jurist, Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda. This practised debater stood for theocracy and despotism, defending the papal and royal claims to jurisdiction over the New World.<sup>3</sup>

It may take forever to persuade his countrymen that Las Casas was not a madman or a disloyal Spaniard. Intense opposition to his ideas has never ceased. One writer, in a prominent Madrid newspaper, declared in 1927 that Las Casas was not really in his right mind.<sup>4</sup> A prominent jurist has publicly labeled Las Casas as being very closely related to the Communists, a sort of "pre-Marxian who preached the class struggle."<sup>5</sup> One of Spain's greatest living scholars, Ramón Menéndez Pidal has written a book in which he refers to Las Casas as a man of double personality--paranoid--at times bitterly attacking his countrymen.<sup>6</sup> As recently as 1938 a strong movement was set afoot to change the name of "Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas" street in Sevilla, and only by the energetic resistance of a Cabinet minister was the name preserved in a street of the city of his birth.<sup>7</sup> Because of his contributions to the laws of the Indies, in 1955 it was proposed that Las Casas be one of the jurists whose

busts would grace the facade of the Faculty of Law at the University of Seville. Strong resistance was expressed and only after a lively battle was the proposal finally accepted.<sup>8</sup>

That there have been so many charges and accusations made against Las Casas is in no way surprising. During the entire fifty-year period after his awakening he wrote steadily on behalf of the Indians. From his pen came memorials, letters, treatises, histories, theological tracts, and political disquisitions. "I have filled many sheets of paper, more than 2000 in Latin and Spanish," he wrote in 1562, and he understated rather than exaggerated the figure.<sup>9</sup> It is from these many writings that we can best learn about Las Casas, for it is here that he poured out his inner feelings.

Comment is to be made on the various available works of Las Casas, not in any chronological order, but rather in their order of importance.<sup>10</sup>

One of Las Casas' greatest writings was a treatise entitled The Only Method of Attracting All People to the True Faith, recently printed in Mexico for the first time.<sup>11</sup> This treatise shed glory on Las Casas' name and therefore is worthy of special attention.

This treatise was the first of Las Casas' argumentative writings. The doctrine was simple enough. Las Casas followed this statement by declaring that wars against the Indians were tyrannical and unjust and strayed from the teachings of Christ. It was made clear that all the gold,



silver, pearls, jewels, and lands taken from the Indians were sinfully obtained and must be restored.

Las Casas used the first four sections of chapter five of the writing to explain that all mankind had been offered the free gift of the faith by God. As for the accusations that the Indians had no capacity to receive the faith, Las Casas insisted that the issue was that the Indians were part of mankind; therefore they had to be included.

Las Casas then began to discuss the main topic, which is that "the way to bring into the bosom of the Christian faith and religion men who are outside the church must be a method which persuades their understanding and which moves, exhorts and gently attracts the will." It is God who moves the spirit of man. Miracles also help, and some things are to be accepted on faith. Finally the priest, by living a proper life, would help to inspire the infidels to accept the faith. Las Casas repeatedly returned to his central idea that the preaching and converting must be done by peaceful means. It must be "bland, suave, sweet, pleasing, tranquil, modest, patiently slow, and above all peaceful and tranquil." Las Casas showed a remarkable understanding of mankind when he stated:

Anyone who proposes to attract to a knowledge of the true faith must avail himself of the force of habit and repetition. That is to say, he must as frequently as possible propound, explain, distinguish, determine, and repeat the truths which they appreciate

in the faith. He must also induce, persuade, plead with, supplicate, follow, attract, and lead by the hand those individuals who are to embrace the faith. If the missionaries proceed in this manner, the infidel will welcome an opportunity to learn the faith which he is told about...<sup>12</sup>

Las Casas' argument now moved into another area.

He started with Adam and showed that since the beginning the holy fathers have shown a paternal spirit in dealing with mankind. The books of prophecy show that the faith was taught "as rain and snow fall from heaven, not impetuously, not violently, not suddenly like a heavy shower but gradually, with suavity and gentleness, saturating the earth as it falls."<sup>13</sup>

Chapter six is a shorter chapter than the first five--only ninety-two pages. This chapter is devoted to dismissing immediately the warlike method of preaching the faith. War brings with it these ills:

The clash of arms, sudden and furious attacks and invasions; violence and grave disturbances; scandals, deaths, and slaughter; rape, plunder, and destruction; the separation of parents from their children; captivities; the robbing of kings and natural lords of their estates and domains; the devastation and desolation of innumerable cities... all these evils fill the world with tears...<sup>14</sup>

War is irrational, violates the commandment which charges every man to love his neighbor as himself, and "...it will lead infidels to depreciate religion and avoid those who are preaching the faith."<sup>15</sup>

Peace, however, is very desirable and Las Casas refers to Jesus' order that one should always enter another's house with the salutation, "Let there be peace in this house." Las Casas adds, "peace is such a great good that nothing which men long for is more beautiful, more precious, more pleasing, or more useful."<sup>16</sup>

The last chapter, seven, shows that Las Casas was not writing such a theological discussion for its own sake. He was trying to show that those who had taken part in the wars against the Indians had committed mortal sin and were responsible for the upkeep of the families of the murdered Indians. Ecclesiastics who had used or permitted the use of force in converting the Indians were also guilty of sin.

The Vera Paz experiment in Guatemala was solidly based on the ideas expounded in the treatise, The Only Method of Attracting All People to the True Faith. This treatise clearly exemplifies the position of Las Casas in regard to the enslavement and destruction of the Indians in the New World.

Of all Las Casas' many works there are two very lengthy writings that remain important to anyone studying the Conquest. Originally these two works--the Historia General and the Historia Apologética--were designed to form a single work. Because of the length of the two writings, Las Casas changed them into separate works. Work was



begun on these in 1527 while Las Casas was living in the Dominican monastery near Puerto de Plata.<sup>17</sup>

The Historia Apologética deals with natural history, the climate, the flora, fauna, and various products of the Indies, the different races found there, their character, costumes, habits, and forms of government. Though this work is less informative as far as actually telling of the abuses and injustices under which the Indians suffered, it is of value to this thesis. Las Casas' purpose was "to put before his countrymen an accurate description of the New World and its inhabitants that should vindicate the latter's right to equitable treatment at the hands of their invaders and conquerors."<sup>18</sup> There can be no doubt that Las Casas wrote this apology as part of his scheme of defending the Indians.

Perhaps Las Casas' most intellectual effort was the detailed account of the discovery, exploration, and settlement of the New World--the Historia de las Indias. The composition occupied whatever spare time Las Casas was able to grab from his many other occupations during some thirty-five years. Las Casas had begun to collect documents and take down evidence shortly after he first reached America in 1502, and long before he became concerned with the fate of the Indians.<sup>19</sup> The spark which set Las Casas afire with the determination to record what he felt to be the true history may have been the publication, at Toledo in 1526,

of a Sumario de la natural historia de las Indias by the royal official, Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés.<sup>20</sup> In Las Casas' opinion, Oviedo had a low opinion of the Indians and was in no way interested in their warfare. Las Casas believed that the whole world would be led astray if they accepted Oviedo's version of the history of Spain in America.

At any rate Las Casas began to write his Historia in 1527, and thereafter the manuscript of this enormous work followed him wherever the battle on behalf of the Indians carried--"across the immense Atlantic in tiny vessels many times, along the tropical coasts of the islands, into the forests of Guatemala, onto the upland Plateau of Mexico, to the monasteries while he recruited friars for work in America, and into the complicated court circles where he labored with a skill worthy of a hardened political campaigner."<sup>21</sup>

From the moment that Las Casas first began his Historia he never wavered from his objective: to leave for posterity the "true" account of the Spanish conquest of America. Las Casas gave eight reasons or justifications for the composition of his Historia de las Indias:

1. For the honor and glory of God and manifestation of His inscrutable justice.
2. For the common spiritual and temporal welfare of all the many people of the New World, if they are not destroyed before the Historia is completed.
3. Not to please or to soothe the kings but to defend the honor and fame of the noble monarchs of Castile in disclosing to them the

terrible harm wrought in their vast provinces overseas, and the reasons for these evils.

4. For the welfare of all Spain inasmuch as, once it is known in what the good and evil of the Indies consists, then also will be known what is good or evil for all Spain.

5. To provide a clear, accurate, and pleasing account of "many ancient things" since the discovery.

6. To free his nation from the very grave error of believing that the people of the New World are not men, for they have considered them, and still do, as "brutal beasts incapable of attaining virtue or becoming Christians," and they have consistently corrupted the good customs the Indians have and have increased the evil in them.

7. To give a true picture of the virtues and sins of Spaniards in the Indies.

8. To describe the number and greatness of admirable and prodigious achievements of Spain in the Indies, which surpassed the work of all previous time, to the end that future generations may be stimulated to imitate the good deeds accomplished and to fear to repeat the evil done.<sup>22</sup>

No one, whether a supporter or opponent of Las Casas, who has read the Historia de las Indias in its entirety would doubt that the work has exercised a great influence in the formation of the world's opinion of the Spanish conquest.

Las Casas had occasion for writing the following two special treatises, Octavo Remedio<sup>23</sup> and Brevísima relación de las destrucción de las Indias.<sup>24</sup> These treatises were written during the years 1542 and 1543 while Las Casas was fighting so violently against the encomienda system. Both of the compositions were written to forward Las Casas' cause--the abolition of the encomienda system in the New World.



The Octavo Remedio was a stern condemnation of the whole encomienda system. Las Casas wrote in detail twenty reasons for the necessity of stopping the encomienda. The treatise was written as if Las Casas were listing twenty sins that had been committed by Spain. In order to be forgiven these sins, Spain had to stop destroying the honor and glory of God by ceasing the destruction of the Indians. The Octavo Remedio greatly influenced Charles V's decision in regard to the passage of the New Laws.<sup>25</sup>

The Brevisima relación is probably Las Casas' most controversial treatise. The work, presented in 1542 to Charles V, was a bitter denunciation of Spanish treatment of the Indians. It caused "oceans of words to flow in the sixteenth and succeeding centuries, including our own."<sup>26</sup> The Brevisima relación was a bloody description of the Spanish conquest and was "quickly translated into most of the languages of Europe."<sup>27</sup> The work was written with such force and violence that it "served as the choicest weapon of anti-Spanish propagandists everywhere."<sup>28</sup> Protestant controversialists quoted him as being against popery, and discovered in the conduct of the Conquerors the evidences of Catholic depravity.<sup>29</sup>

No one would deny that Las Casas probably exaggerated the details of the Conquest in his Brevisima relación: but the essential truths are there and still withstand exploitation or exaggeration. Anyone who reads extensively in the chronicles and reports left by the Spaniards will find

conclusive evidence that supports and supplements many of the accusations which had previously been made by Las Casas.<sup>30</sup>

Many persons have tried to combat the black legend of Spanish cruelty in America and in so doing have frequently attacked Las Casas. The result has been that in their attacks they have so often quoted Las Casas that they have helped to further his cause.

FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER VII

<sup>1</sup>MacNutt, Bartholomew de Las Casas, Preface XXII.

<sup>2</sup>Bannon, Indian Labor, 44. Fray Torifio is more commonly referred to by his Indian name, Motolinía--the Poor One. Although he was interested in helping the Indians, he wanted to do nothing that would offend the Spaniards.

<sup>3</sup>MacNutt, Bartholomew de Las Casas, Preface XXI.

<sup>4</sup>Hanke, The Spanish Struggle for Justice, 177. "El Padre de Las Casas no estaba en sus cabeles," was the statement made by Dr. G. García Arista y Rivera, which appeared in a Madrid newspaper.

<sup>5</sup>Toribio Esquivel Obregón, Apuntes para la historia del derecho en México (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1937-43), II:ol.

<sup>6</sup>Ramón Menéndez Pidal, El Padre Las Casas, Su Doble Personalidad (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, S. A., 1963), 15.

<sup>7</sup>Hanke, Aristotle, 110.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 111.

<sup>9</sup>Antonia María Fabié, Vida y escritos de Don Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas, Obispo de Chiapa (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, S. A., 1879), II:578.

<sup>10</sup>The various works of Las Casas will appear in this thesis in such a way because the writer feels that some of the writings are more important to the purpose of this paper--that of showing the position of Las Casas in regard to slavery.

<sup>11</sup>The preparation of this work was done in Mexico in 1941. As has been previously stated, Millares Carlo, Santamaria, and Hanke have all done translations of this writing.

<sup>12</sup>Las Casas, Del Único Modo, 95.



<sup>13</sup>Here we see a good example of the expressive mildness of Las Casas' writing in this treatise. The style is far different from that employed in other works such as The Destruction of the Indies. This work clearly illustrates a violent side of Las Casas.

<sup>14</sup>Las Casas, Del Único Modo, 397.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 421.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 167-169.

<sup>17</sup>Previous mention has been made to Las Casas' stay in the monastery on the island of Hispaniola.

<sup>18</sup>MacNutt, Bartholomew de Las Casas, Preface XXV.

<sup>19</sup>Hanke, Bartolomé de Las Casas, 14.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 14.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 16-17.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 74-75.

<sup>23</sup>The source of the "Octavo Remedio" is Las Casas' Colección de Tratados. The actual title of this treatise was Remedies for the Existing Evils, with Twenty Reasons Therefor. It is often referred to as the Eighth Remedy because the eighth argument is actually the key to the entire work. Las Casas states that the Indians are overloaded and worn out by duties because they have to appease four lords: the Spanish king, their own chiefs, the Spaniard to whom they have been commended, and the overseer.

<sup>24</sup>Two sources of this treatise are Las Casas' Colección de Tratados (Buenos Aires, 1924) and MacNutt's Bartholomew de Las Casas (New York, 1909). The English translation for this treatise is the Very Brief Account of the Destruction of the Indies. The treatise will be referred to as Brevísima Relación in this report.

<sup>25</sup>The New Laws have been dealt with previously in this thesis. See Chapter IV, pages 18-19.

<sup>26</sup>Hanke, Bartolomé de Las Casas, 7.

<sup>27</sup>MacNutt, Bartholomew de Las Casas, Preface XXVI.

<sup>28</sup>Hanke, The Spanish Struggle for Justice, 88.

<sup>29</sup>MacNutt, Bartholomew de Las Casas, Preface XXVII.

<sup>30</sup>A good example of this statement is the Política Indiana (Madrid, 1648) written by Juan de Solórzano Pereira.

## CHAPTER VIII

### CONCLUSION

It has been the purpose of this work to assign to a noble Spaniard, Bartolomé de Las Casas, his true place among those great spirits who have defended and advanced the cause of just liberty. It in no way diminished Las Casas' glory to say that he was not the first, nor the only Spaniard to defend the liberty of the Amercian Indian. Likewise it in no way blackens Las Casas' image to present the historical fact that he was not always the champion of the Indians, for he himself readily admitted to his sin of owning and working slaves. If this appears unusual, one must realize that Las Casas was born in an age of discovery, exploration and conquest. He was part of the wealthy Spanish society where manual labor was unknown. He lived in Seville where Negro slaves were very commonplace. Naturally when Las Casas came to the New World he accepted the fact that slaves were a necessity in order to work the plantation and the mines.

That Bartolomé de Las Casas was guilty of slavery is not unusual. What is completely out of the ordinary, however, is that he made such a radical change in his thinking, and in an age of both civil and religious despotism, his voice



was loudly raised in proclamation of the inherent and inalienable right of all men to liberty.

As Las Casas plunged into the campaign against slavery, he soon realized that he had to fight for both the enslaved and for himself. In his desperate attempt to save the Indians, Las Casas devised a plan whereby Africans would be contracted to come to the New World and furnish the much-needed labor. Although in the beginning this was apparently just a plan to provide laborers, Las Casas realized his pitfall. He quickly admitted his mistake and advocated that his plan be abandoned. Even though Las Casas insisted that all forms of slavery should be done away with by Spain, his reputation had been forever damaged. His adversaries, and there were many, never stopped attacking him. They now had new ammunition--Las Casas was the slaver responsible for the introduction of Negro slaves into the New World. The belief that Las Casas was responsible for Negro slavery has been kept alive through the ages by men who have tried to cover up the Spanish cruelties during the Conquest by denouncing Las Casas as a lunatic, a religious fanatic or a hypocrite.

It may take a long time to persuade mankind that Las Casas was none of these. His vehemence, his exaggeration, his unwillingness to sugar-coat the pill of his continuous criticism, and his incorrigible habit of speaking his thoughts freely aroused much resentment.

Las Casas was preeminently a man of action. His gift of universal sympathy co-existed with an uncommon practical ability to devise theories and reforms that commanded the attention of all Spain. When the Spanish government organized a formal inquiry into the justice of the methods used to extend its empire, Las Casas was there ready to combat the best that the opposition had to offer. It was truly a bold step for Las Casas to engage such a scholar as Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda in learned combat. Sepúlveda had come to give comfort to Spanish officials and conquistadores. He was also Spain's foremost authority on the theories of Aristotle, including the popular concept that certain men are slaves by nature. It was upon dangerous grounds that Las Casas was treading as he argued that the wars against the Indians and their enslavement were scandalously unjust and that all conquests must stop if the royal reputation was to be kept unsoiled. He persisted in his belief that if the Indians were converted by peaceful means, they would afterwards become faithful Spanish subjects.

Though a stale-mate was reached at the great Valladolid dispute, Las Casas had branded a large question mark in the mind of the Spanish government as to how the Conquest was to be continued, and so doing, he established his position in regard to slavery.

Not all of Las Casas' experiments were successful, and many met with such disastrous results that persons of

lesser quality than he would have completely given up the struggle. Perhaps Las Casas' plans for colonization were too filled with visions of Utopia. Perhaps his altruistic imagination often elevated him so far above the realities of the world that he completely forgot about the many frailties of human nature. The fact still remains that although Las Casas failed in his colonization scheme, it was still a step towards obtaining justice for the Indians. The final outcome of Las Casas' plan for colonization of the New World should not be considered a failure, for in the years to come other colonizers followed his ideal of peacefully bringing to the faith the Indians of the New World.

Even as old age overtook Las Casas, he continued his struggle against slavery, employing now his most effective weapons--pen and paper. Though he had written all his life, some of his most outstanding works were done after Las Casas returned to Spain in 1546 for the last time. He opened up his heart and his mind to allow to surge forth his convictions concerning the Spaniards of the Old World, the Indians of the New World, and the proper relationship between the two civilizations. It was through his writings that Las Casas attempted to leave for posterity his strong belief that only by saving the Indians could Spain hope for salvation. The destruction of the one would surely lead to the destruction of the other. Las Casas here demonstrated his double personality--a never ending desire to liberate the Indians from the cruelties of the



Conquest and slavery, and, at the same time, an equally strong desire to liberate Spain from her sins.

Las Casas further established his position in regard to slavery by serving as a reformer at the court in Spain, a friar in Hispaniola, a promotor of the plan to conquer and Christianize the Indians of Venezuela and Guatemala, a fighter on behalf of justice for the Indians in bitter debates among jurists, ecclesiastics, and conquerors, a successful agitator before the court of Emperor Charles V on behalf of the New Laws, and a protector and attorney for the Indians during the last twenty years of his life.

The deeds of such a man as Bartolomé de Las Casas must be considered as one of the milestones on the long road, still under construction, which slowly leads us towards a civilization based on the dignity of all men.

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## APPENDIX

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