

A Prophetic Challenge to the Church: The Last Word of Bartolomé de las Casas

Luis N. Rivera-Pagán

*We were always loyal to lost causes . . . Success is for us
the death of the intellect and of the imagination.*

Ulysses (1922)

James Joyce

*Perhaps there is a dignity in defeat that hardly belongs to
victory.*

This Craft of Verse (1967)

Jorge Luis Borges

*To see the possibility, the certainty, of ruin, even at the
moment of creation; it was my temperament.*

The Enigma of Arrival (1987)

V. S. Naipaul

To the memory of Richard Shaull (1919-2002), first Henry Winters Luce Professor in Ecumenics

When things fall apart

In 1566, after more than five decades of immense and exhausting endeavors to influence and shape the policy of the Spanish state and church regarding the Americas, years of drafting countless historical texts, theological treatises, colonization projects, prophetic homilies, juridical complaints, political utopias, and even apocalyptic visions, Bartolomé de las Casas knows very well that the end is at hand: the end of his life and the end of his illusions of crafting a just and Christian empire in the New World. It is a moment of searching for the precise closure, the right culmination and consummation of a human existence that since 1502 had been intimately linked, as no other person of his time, to the drama of the conquest and Christianization of Latin America, a continent, as has been so aptly asserted, “born in blood and fire.”

He painfully knows that there will be no time to finish his *opus magnum*, the ***History of the Indies***. Originally conceived as six volumes, each one intended to cover a decade between 1490 and 1550, it will be left partially written, with only the first three decades discussed. In his will, Las Casas makes provision for the preservation of that precious manuscript on which he has worked incessantly for almost forty years. It will survive as a clandestine subversive text for three centuries, will not be published until the second half of the

nineteenth century, only very recently has been the object of a truly scholar critical edition, and still lacks a complete and adequate English translation.

In the prologue to the *History of the Indies*, drafted apparently in 1552, Las Casas reveals the diverse objectives of the book:

- To call the attention of the readers to the terrifying disparity between the missionary purpose of the encounter between Christians Europeans and Native Americans and the brutal exploitation of the second by the first.
- To refute the, in his views, many mistakes and deceptions written by other Spanish historians, like Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés and Francisco López de Gómara, who, according to Las Casas, confuse and conflate historiography with sycophancy.
- To proclaim the humanity of the indigenous peoples, their rationality, their personal and collective freedom. “All peoples are human,” is the leitmotiv and guiding principle of the text.
- To record a dissenting testimony with the hope that his *History* will one day be read, by future generations or even maybe at the eschatological moment of reckoning in which his nation, Spain, might hear, with fear and trembling, the fateful hymn – *dies irae, dies illa, solvet saeculum in favilla* . . .
- To ease his profound agony of witnessing a tragic performance of human cruelty, to exorcise the stain of complicity in the atrocities performed.

The *History* is a splendid expression of a passionate obsession, similar to that expressed in Coleridge’s famous verse,

Since then, at an uncertain hour,
That agony returns,
And till my ghastly tale is told,
This heart within me burns.

The *History* would not be a totally forgotten text. Several chroniclers of the Iberian expansion in the Americas would use it as a source for their own books. It became indispensable for all studies on the early encounters between Europeans and Native Americans, for it contains long and detailed extracts from Christopher Columbus’s lost notes and journals regarding his transatlantic expeditions. In fact, all editions of the so-called Diary of Columbus’s first journey (1492-1493) derive directly from Las Casas’s *History*.

It also became a crucial source for the cognition of many contemporary events, of greater or lesser importance. The *History* contains the first recorded homily in the Americas, an earth shaking sermon preached by the Dominican friar Antonio de Montesinos, the fourth Sunday of Advent of 1511 in which this

ardent priest, after reading the biblical passage of John the Baptist, *ego vox clamantis in deserto* (Mt. 3: 3) preaches these scathing words to the leaders of the Spanish colonial establishment:

“You are in mortal sin . . . for the cruelty and tyranny you use in dealing with these innocent people. Tell me, by what right or justice do you keep these Indians in such a cruel and horrible servitude? On what authority have you waged a detestable war against these people? . . . Why do you keep them so oppressed? . . . Are not these people also human beings? . . . Be certain that in such a state as this you can be no more saved than a Moor or a Turk . . .”

The *History* is also the source for the fascinating stories regarding the Caribbean cacique Hatuey, leader of the native resistance who preferred to be burned at the stake rather than be baptized and share heaven with the Christians. Las Casas is the original crafter of the legendary image of this tragic and courageous native who chose death rather than submission.

Yet, during his last year of existence, Las Casas fears that his life long struggle may have been fruitless. What had always moved him to write and act was his intense awareness of possessing a unique historical mission; yet this vocation seems to be floundering. Since his first public intervention, a sermon preached the Day of the Assumption of Our Lady, August 15, 1514, till his last writings more than five decades later, he would be possessed by one obsessive passion: to be the prophet of Spain, a man called by God to be the scourge of the conscience of his nation and to be the defender of the autochthonous communities, in whose misery he perceived “Jesus Christ . . . not once, but thousand times whipped, insulted, beaten, and crucified . . .” If his first writings exude enthusiasm and optimism, the time is now at hand to contemplate the tragic fate of historical action. It is the time in which all things seem to fall apart.

It is the time, under the shadow of death, to look back at his life, a life of a man of letters and a man of action, a man of the church and of the people, a priest, a Dominican friar, a theologian, a prophet, and a bishop. The hour comes of final reckoning, in which the past overwhelms the mind with its fateful irreversibility, and the future with the certainty of its dissolution. His was the bitter honor of having many public noisy detractors and many secret silent admirers, ever since that day, half a century earlier, in which he had the enigmatic intuition of been called to a prophetic vocation. For Las Casas, that kairotic occasion was linked to a biblical text: *Ecclesiasticus* 34: 20-21.

To offer a sacrifice from the
possessions of the poor
is like killing a son
before his father's eyes.
Bread is life to the destitute,
and to deprive them of it is murder.

As in the most famous case of another Catholic bishop, St. Augustine, the reading of a biblical text, in a rather mysterious way, forged a sense of unique identity, vocation, and mission. It also, as for St. Augustine, shaped a lifetime of ardent disputes and bitter antagonisms.

Under the shadow of death, the awareness of been unable to fulfill one's vocation can be the most shattering human experience. Paradoxically, it could be even more intense if that person has acquired, due to his writings and deeds, prestige. That feeling of utter existential failure is what probably led José María Arguedas, a widely respected Peruvian writer, to leave unfinished, in 1969, what he thought would have been his best literary achievement, the novel *El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo*, and instead put an end to his anguished life with his own gun. The same feeling of despondency probably also impelled Primo Levi, enjoying international acclamation as the most austere and sober witness of the Shoah, to conclude, by his own will, his nightmares of Auschwitz. A similar hopelessness led William Styron, at the height of his reputation as an author, to contemplate with all seriousness suicide as a possible end of his painful spiritual sorrows. There are, indeed, times when, as Jeremiah or Job, one is inclined to lament: "Cursed be the day on which I was born" (Jeremiah 20: 14), "let that day be darkness" (Job 3: 4), times when, as Yeats wrote:

"Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold
 . . . and everywhere
 The ceremony of innocence is drowned . . .

Times when, as Albert Camus wrote, suicide seems to be the most serious philosophical problem.

The epistle to the Royal Council of Indies: A challenge to the Crown

Suicide have I written? That tragic end might be considered by people like Arguedas, Levi, Styron, or Camus. Not, however, by Las Casas. His intense prophetic self-awareness places him in the category of those who, when the final hour comes, go out fighting. Aware of the imminence of his death, he writes two epistles, short and sharp, restating the principles that had guided all his endeavors. These will constitute his last battle cry. One of the letters is to the Royal Council of Indies, the other to the recently elected Pope, Pius V. For a man accustomed to write compendious, copious, dense and labyrinthine texts, they are surprisingly, and refreshingly, brief, clear, and precise. Both are important epistles, drafted in an era in which the writing of letters was an exquisite literary art.

This inaugural lecture is mainly devoted to the epistle to the Pope, but we should not lose sight of the fact that in Las Casas's mind both texts belong together, as his last word to the state and the church regarding a matter that he considers of the most importance for the future of the Christian faith and of humanity. More

important, in his view, than the controversy then acrimoniously dividing Western Christendom: the Protestant Reformation and the Council of Trent.

The tone of his farewell letter to the Council is sharp and blunt. The old bishop, of more than eighty years of age, refuses to mellow. Las Casas becomes an Iberian Jeremiah confronting the unfaithful king of Judah. The letter reiterates what he has been proclaiming during five decades. It emphasizes the missionary purpose of the Spanish dominion of the New World, excoriates the Spanish conquest and enslavement of the indigenous communities, calls for a radical change in the colonial policy, defends his ministry as protector of the Native Americans, proclaims the sacramental obligation of restitution as a requirement for the divine absolution of Spain's sins, and warns the authorities about an imminent eschatological divine condemnation.

The issues are not only political and economic. For the author, a bishop and theologian, the overarching theme is theological: the tragic history of God's grace and human sinfulness. The whole first book of the *History of the Indies* is guided by two conflicting ideas: First, the encounter between Christian Spaniards and Native Americans was a crucial act in the eschatological redemption of all nations, and as such it was a manifestation of divine grace. Second, Spain, the divinely chosen people, has proven to be as rebellious and sinful as the Old Testament Israel. It might thus be fated to share its same tragic destiny.

Always a man of letters, inclined to the process of dialogue and debate, he suggests that the Council convene a board of the best theologians and jurists to discuss the situation created by the violence, dispossession, and servitude suffered by the Native Americans. He also tells the Council that he has sent to the court two treatises ("tratadillos") that could illuminate and guide the deliberations of that advisory board. At the end of the letter, as a terrifying explosion of a volcano, comes the harsh enumeration of eight conclusions that such a theological and juridical board should discuss:

"First, all the wars usually called conquests were and are unjust and tyrannical.

Second, we have illegally usurped all the kingdoms of the Indies.

Third, all encomiendas are iniquitous and tyrannical.

Fourth, those who possess them and those who distribute them are in mortal sin.

Fifth, the king has no more right to justify the conquests and encomiendas than the Ottoman Turk to make war against Christians.

Sixth, all fortunes made in the Indies are to be considered as stolen.

Seventh, if the guilty of complicity in the conquests or encomiendas do not make restitution, they will not be saved.

Eighth, the Indian nations have the right, which will be theirs till the Day of Judgment, to make just war against us and erase us from the face of the earth."

There is in this letter, as in his will, drafted in 1564, a sense of urgency, for, who knows with certainty when the final Day of Judgment will occur? There is, in these last writings, an awareness of the proximity not

only of his own individual death, but also something like the intuition, shared by several of his contemporaries, that the end of all times, the consummation, both hoped and dreaded, of human history might be at hand. Las Casas fears that it might be a day of condemnation and punishment for his own nation, Spain. “A day,” as he writes in his will, “in which God will pour his indignation and anger over Spain, for she has all, in greater or lesser degree, participated in the bloody riches stolen and illicitly acquired, and in the massacres and violence suffered by the Native Americans.”

The acts of the Council solemnly note that the letter was respectfully read, heard, and . . . filed.

The letter to the Pope: A challenge to the Church

For a Roman Catholic bishop to write a letter to the Pope seems initially neither surprising nor illicit. In sixteenth century Spain, it could be both.

Early in that century, the crown had been able to exact from Rome extensive regulatory formal authority over the church in the Americas. The *Patronato Real* (Royal Patronage), based upon several Papal decrees enacted under the relentless pressure of Ferdinand V, gave the crown ample powers over the demarcation, administration, and finances of the American dioceses, including the nomination of bishops. Ferdinand, Charles V and Philip II will consider those Papal documents –Alexander VI’s 1493 bulls *Inter caetera* and *Eximiae devotionis*, his 1501 bull *Eximiae devotionis*, and Julius II’s 1508 bull *Universalis ecclesiae* – as the juridical foundation of their royal patronage over the American church.

The royal patronage over the American church could even be said to function as sort of a royal vicariate, or at least such was the import of the legislative and juridical actions in ecclesiastical matters undertaken by the court. According to a Spanish scholar, the Royal patronage, “created a peculiar situation, extraordinary in canon law, characterized by a transfer to the state of powers and functions traditionally exercised exclusively by the supreme ecclesiastical authority.” As the sixteenth century evolved, this peculiar regime in which the crown had assumed, in the words of another scholar, a “quasi-pontifical character,” began to acquire a precise juridical status in the emerging labyrinth of the Laws of Indies, a process that Rome observed with apprehension but also with some powerlessness. The law required of all bishops and archbishops, before their entrance into office, to swear fealty to the crown and loyal obedience to the royal patronage. One of its consequences was that controversial matters between church and state, in the Americas, were usually submitted to the crown, rather than to Rome, for a normative resolution.

Even when the discursive rhetoric of many formal documents regarding church and state affairs, like the 1493 bulls or the notorious *requerimiento*, emphasized Papal authority, it was eminently clear that the power

for historical action was in the hands of the state. The rhetoric might be ultramontane, but the political praxis was strongly royalist. The Burgos capitulations, signed in 1512 by the crown and the first three bishops named to the Americas, was one of the first expressions of that royal patrimony. It is a document with a strong juridical tenor, in which the crown establishes the boundaries of the functions and attributes of the American episcopacy. For the court, the Burgos Capitulations became a paradigm of the jurisdiction it desired to exercise over ecclesiastical affairs.

This certainly does not mean that the relations between church and state were devoid of conflicts, or that the Pope always agreed to remain a spectator at the margins of the exceptional historical drama unfolding in the Americas. In 1537, Pope Paul III enacted the bull *Sublimis Deus*, in which he used very strong language to call for the recognition and respect of the humanity and freedom of the autochthonous communities. The Pope also sent a brief to the Archbishop of Toledo, *Pastorale officium*, urging the highest ecclesiastical hierarch of Spain to protect the liberties and rights of the Native Americans. The reaction of the court of Charles V was swift and energetic, forcing the Pope to retract, in 1538. The traumatic events of the May 1527 sack of Rome, in which the imperial troops rampaged through the city, looted everything they could, and humbled ignominiously the *Vicarius Christi*, were still painfully fresh in the memory of the Roman authorities and prescribed supreme prudence before engaging in any possible confrontation with the Emperor.

One key dimension of the Royal Patronage was the *pase regio*, the royal *exequatur* or *placet*. According to it, all communications between Rome and the American church had to be sent first to the Council of Indies for its examination and approval. It was an important strategic resource for the centralizing politics of the Hapsburg monarchy. It was a strategy to impede the emergence, within the ranks of the church, of any serious challenge to the colonial metropolitan policies.

Las Casas's letter to Pope Pius V consciously disregards the *pase regio*. The very act of writing to the Pope without previously submitting the text to the Royal Council of Indies violates one of the main juridical premises of the church and state relations in the Americas. It is a transgression of the ecclesiastical policy so carefully crafted by the Spanish court. True to form, even to his last breath, Las Casas would be the perennial dissenter. As bishop of Chiapas, he had imposed a set of norms that rigorously conditioned sacramental absolution of the Spaniards to the restitution of all goods and riches acquired on the basis of conquests or slavery of the Native Americans, a move that forced him to exile from his diocese; as a theologian, he printed and distributed, in 1552 a series of polemic treatises regarding the *status confessionis* in the New World, without requesting any official permission to do so; as a dying prophet he disregards the law of the state and

appeals directly to the Pope.

Las Casas begins in a rather professorial tone, devoid of the reverent language so frequent in communications to the successor of saint Peter:

“What things are necessary for the correct way of preaching the Gospel to the infidels, and to render just and legitimate the wars against them, I have declared in the book that I sent to Your Beatitude . . . To Your Beatitude I beseech intensively, by the blood of our Redemption, to command that my book be examined and, if found right, that it be stamped . . . “

Las Casas holds onto the illusion that reason will, in the end, prevail over irrationality, goodness over evil, grace over sin, if only the main protagonists of the historical drama will think things through adequately. He has the hope that, despite all the economic and political interests intertwined in the conquest of the Indies, despite the *conquistadores*'s quest for power, profit, and prestige, he might be able to convince the crown, the royal council, and the Pope to follow the right path. Persuasion by means of the right arguments, the quotation of the proper authorities and texts, the coherence of logical reasoning: this is the illusion that has impelled him to write so many books, like his two apologies against Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda in which he buried his adversary, as well as the readers, under a deluge of references, authoritative quotations, and arguments. If only the authorities, those who have the power to make decisions, would read his books and take the time to pay attention to his words!

There is no absolute certainty about the book he sent to the Pope and whose official approval he is requesting. It might be *De unico vocationis modo omnium gentium ad veram religionem*, a text with a tortuous, and still somewhat obscure, manuscript history. In it, one of the most important missiological books written in the sixteenth century, Las Casas vigorously insists that there is only one way to convert the innumerable gentiles and infidels that the Iberians were encountering in their global expeditions: the way of the apostles, through devout preaching, deeds of love, sacrifice, compassion, and confidence in the Holy Spirit. With extensive quotations from biblical, patristic, doctrinal, and canonical sources, this book is one of the most passionate and ardent defenses of the peaceful and nonmilitary missionary expansion of the Christian faith ever written.

It makes a powerful case for a peaceful non-military extension of the Christian faith as well as a strong critique of the linkage between cross and sword that, in Las Casas's view, was corrupting the evangelizing of the Native Americans. He considers the Spanish wars against the Native Americans illegal, immoral, and sinful. They violate human, natural, and divine law. It was, indeed, a theme of ardent discussion among Spaniards theologians for the entire sixteenth century. Las Casas asks the Pope that his manuscript be

examined by a board of theologians appointed by the Pope and its suggested policy be declared official doctrine of the church.

Why is it so urgent for the Church to condemn the military conquests of the Native American nations? Here comes a shocking statement, an eschatological warning to the Pope: “. . . so that the truth be not hidden for the damnation and destruction of the Church, as the time may come (which might be already at hand) in which God unveils our blemishes and our nakedness is shown to the whole pagan world.” Las Casas had warned the Royal Council of Indies that the final Day of Judgment might be near and that it might entail the eternal damnation of Spain. Now he admonishes the Pope that unless the Church acts decisively on behalf of the oppressed Native Americans, it might also find itself condemned in that imminent fateful Doomsday. That day, he suggests, the Church might appear as blemished and naked in comparison with the Gentiles and infidels. For a bishop to admonish a Pope in this manner is, indeed, a dramatic expression of audacity.

But this is just the prologue to other daring requests to the Pope. Veiled as petitions, they are indeed radical challenges to the Church. Las Casas demands from the Pope an official normative declaration regarding the affairs of the Indies with its corresponding anathemas.

“Since so many are the flatterers who in secret, like dogs with rabies, bark against the truth, to Your Beatitude I humbly beseech that a decree be enacted in which are declared excommunicated and anathema, all those who affirm that wars against the infidels are just if waged to combat idolatry, or for the convenience of spreading the Gospel, specially in regard to those infidels who have never injured or are not injuring us.”

Idolatry was frequently used as a *casus belli* against the Native Americans. Columbus invoked idolatry as a justification to begin the American slave trade. Hernán Cortés initiated the war against Tenochtitlán, only after formally declaring it a crusade against idolatry. Sepúlveda, among others, had emphasized idolatry as a legitimate reason to conquer the Native Americans through war, for idolatry is not only a grave blasphemy against divine and natural law in itself, but also the source of their alleged moral depravations: human sacrifice, cannibalism, and sodomy. The Franciscan missionaries rationalized Cortés’s conquest as a divine punishment against the idolatry of the natives, and tried to explain to the Mexican elders the demonic origin of their religious practices. The condemnation of sacrilegious idolatry became a benchmark for the conquest and enslaving of native communities. The “extirpation of idolatry”, so well studied regarding Perú by Pierre Duviols, was one of the ideological foundations of what Robert Ricard aptly named the spiritual conquest of the autochthonous communities. Therefore, Las Casas’s request to the Pope that the invocation of idolatry for doing violence to the Native Americans be declared anathema goes to the heart of one of the main ideological resources behind the conquest of the Americas. The demand is grandiose, as will also be the silence of Rome.

The second principle that Las Casas requests to be included in the Papal decree of anathemas is one very dear to his mind.

“Or those who assert that the infidels are not true lords and owners of their properties; or those who affirm that they are unable to understand and receive the Gospel and eternal salvation, on the basis of their alleged lack of intelligence or acuity of mind, which in fact they do not lack, those Indians whose rights I have defended till my death, for the honor of God and the Church.”

Are the Native Americans equal to the Europeans in rationality and free will? This was, alas, a crucial question during the Christian expansion in early modernity. Aristotle’s vision of the distinction between the Greeks, as a people of culture, and the “barbarians,” and his discussion of just war and slavery, in the first part of his *Politics*, were refurbished in the encounter between Christians Europeans and the indigenous American communities. His arguments regarding the justice of warfare against the barbarians and their legitimate enslavement became relevant for the sixteenth century theological discussions on war and slavery. “Barbarian” became a frequent term of reference to the Native Americans. It is found in Francisco de Vitoria, Sepúlveda, and in many other sixteenth century writers. Probably the best definition of what was meant by “barbarian” is provided by José de Acosta: “We call ‘Indians’ all the Barbarians that have been discovered in our time by the Spanish and the Portuguese . . . people who are not only deprived of the light of the Gospel but also unaware of civilization.” Barbarians are ignorant of both Christian faith and literary culture. They lack knowledge of Christ and of the alphabet. They are, therefore, inferior. Thus, according to the discourse of several court intellectuals, like Sepúlveda, the Native Americans are unfit for self-government. They can be considered *natura servi*, fated by nature to servitude. For their own benefit, civilized Christians should rule them. If they resist, the war to subjugate them is, in principle, just and legitimate.

Las Casas devoted an extended section of his Apology against Sepúlveda to refute the vilification of the Native Americans implied by their categorization as barbarians. He also penned an ambitious and long manuscript on their cultural and cultic traditions, to prove the dignity of their culture and religiosity. That text – *Apologética historia sumaria* - is the longer and most passionate defense of the Native American cultures written in the sixteenth century. It also inaugurated a romantic tradition, which through Montaigne forged the mythical image of the *bon sauvage*.

In the letter to the Pope, Las Casas comes back to this crucial issue and requests a decree of anathema against any negation of the rationality of the Native Americans, their personal liberty, their right for public sovereignty or private ownership, or their ability to understand and accept the mysteries of the Christian faith. In all those essential dimensions of humanness, insists Las Casas, there is no fundamental ontological

distinction between Europeans and Native Americans, and thus no legitimate justification for dispossessing them of their political sovereignty, their private goods, their personal freedom, or for abrogating their right to the ecclesiastical sacraments. A much quoted text of the *Apologética* gives expression to the principle that underlies his lifelong exertions: “All the nations of the world are human and all share in the same definition: they are rational beings. All have intellect and will, as created in God’s image and similitude.”

This has been the core of his struggles of more than five decades, for the sake of, as he writes to the Pope, “those Indians whose rights I have defended till my death, for the honor of God and the Church.” Now, at the moment in which death is the only future for his flesh, he recapitulates that long dispute, in a sharp challenge to the *Vicarius Christi* to rebuke and condemn all those who question the rationality, the political rights, the personal liberty, or the capability to the faith of the Native Americans. And then, always certain of his ability to persuade by means of logical argumentations and authoritative references, Las Casas concludes: “In my book I have clearly shown that all those assertions are against the sacred canons, as well as against natural law and the commandments of the Gospel, and I will confirm it even more, if that were possible, for I have exhaustively researched and corroborated this matter.”

The next three requests to the Pope have to do with the church itself: the identity, vocation, and mission of the Christian Church in the New World. Mindful of the way in which the Royal Patronage has modeled a Church loyal to the State, Las Casas demands from the Roman Pontiff that he:

“Order the bishops of the Indies that, under holy obedience, they be concerned about those natives, who, with hard labors and tyrannies (more than what it could be believed), carry on their meager shoulders, against all natural and divine law, a heavy yoke and unbearable load, which makes it necessary that Your Holiness instruct those bishops to defend their cause, becoming a protecting wall for them, even to spill their own blood, as by divine law they are obliged, and that in no way they accept their appointment, if the King and his Council would not support them and uproot so many tyrannies and oppressions.”

The Church as the protector and defender of the Native Americans. That, in short, is his audacious request to the Pontiff, the vision of this obstinate and pugnacious dying bishop and prophet. Such conduct, according to Las Casas, is not optional. It is not a model of behavior that the Church might or might not assume. The bishops are obliged to follow this daring and perilous conduct “by natural and divine law,” even if it entails the way of the cross, the sufferings and death of martyrdom. Instead of the bishops pledging their fealty to the state policies, as done by the first American bishops in the Burgos capitulations, they should demand from the court an oath of support in the uprooting of “so many tyrannies and oppressions,” before accepting their nominations to their dioceses.

Las Casas probably has in mind his previous failed attempt to use the power of the episcopacy in

Chiapas to make right a situation of social oppression. If, he seems to be suggesting, this time the Pope intervenes with a clear mandate to the American bishops and is willing to steer the Church in the direction of becoming the defender and protector of the indigenous communities, then there is hope for the future. Therein lies his amazing challenge to the Roman Pontiff.

The next request has to do with a sensitive issue in the evangelization of the Native Americans during the sixteenth century: language. Las Casas indicates the problem with his usual judgmental tone, but also with uncommon brevity: "Openly and unjustly the bishop ignores the language of his subjects, and does not attempt to learn it well." Therefore, the Pope should order that the American prelates learn the native languages. "I humbly beseech Your Beatitude to order them to master the language of their sheep, showing that they are so commanded by divine and natural law, for at the moment many awful indignities occur . . . caused by the negligence of the bishops in learning the language of their parishioners."

One of the most impressive achievements of the contemporary Spanish missionary efforts had to do precisely with the alphabetization of the Native languages and the translation of homilies, liturgies, religious plays, prayers, and biblical texts, into them. Yet, as Acosta would note two decades later, this was mainly the labor of friars within the religious orders. Most diocesan bishops and priests were reluctant to invest the time and energy required by the mastery of those languages. The debate whether to encourage the priesthood to learn the native languages or, on the contrary, to compel the natives to learn Spanish, frequently pitted the religious orders against the regular ecclesiastical ministry. This linguistic dilemma has to do with the proper communication of the Christian faith. But, as Las Casas is convinced, at a deeper level, it has also to do with the quality and character of its inculturation. Inculturation of the faith, in analogy to the Incarnation, begins with linguistic assimilation as an immersion in the culture of a community and its particular symbolic universe. The identification of the Church with the indigenous cultures has to traverse inevitably the complex path of linguistic identity.

If the previous requests are difficult to satisfy, the last one is even harder. The Church has not only to defend the Native Americans and to assimilate their language and culture; it should also share their poverty, their dispossession. The American Church, however, is getting immensely rich in material goods thanks to the exploitation of the land and the work of the Native Americans. Several years later Acosta will bewail the enrichment of priests and bishops, but will consider it a minor price in exchange for the preaching of the Christian faith. Not Las Casas. For the Bishop of Chiapas it constitutes a sinful scandal. "Immense scandal and no less detriment to our most holy religion is that in such a new place bishops and friars and priests are

getting rich and live sumptuously, while their recently converted subjects remain in so great and incredible poverty, that many of them die daily in profound misery, due to the tyranny, hunger and excessive work that they suffer.”

The contrast between ecclesiastical enrichment and the poverty of the Native Americans entails, for Las Casas, an intensely severe sentence: the Church is guilty of complicity in the dispossession, misery, and agony of the autochthonous communities. Now we discover the acuteness of his initial admonition that in the Day of Judgment the Church might be revealed to the Gentile nations as naked and blemished. The Church cannot reproach the conquistadores or encomenderos, if she does not deal with her own complicity in the oppression of the native peoples. Thus, the drastic and radical challenge of the dying bishop to the new Pope.

“Therefore, to Your Holiness I humbly beseech to declare those ministers to be obliged by natural and divine law, as in fact they are, to restitute all the gold, silver, and precious stones they have acquired, for their wealth is taken from human beings who endure extreme need and who today live in misery, with whom, by divine and natural law, they are even beholden to share their own possessions.”

From his 1514 homily, when for the first time he denounced the enslavement of the Native Americans, till this last text, fifty-two years later, one theme is constantly repeated in the writings of Las Casas: the salvation of the Christians depends upon their disposition to restitute everything they have acquired by conquest and slavery. The duty of restitution is at the heart of the sacrament of penance and at the core of Las Casas’s episcopal practice, prophetic message, and theological disquisition. The surprising conclusion, therefore, of Las Casas’s letter to the Pope, is that in the history-making encounter between Christian Europeans and Native American infidels, what is mainly at stake and in doubt is the salvation of the first, the Christian Europeans. They – the Spanish state and the Roman Church - are called to do penance and to beg for divine forgiveness and absolution. This is indeed an extraordinary inversion of the usual understanding of the matter, in the history of the global expansion of the Christian faith.

Only now, after dispatching his farewell letters to the Royal Council of Indies and to the Pope, can this bold and old bishop, theologian, and prophet rest in peace, eternally. Only now, can Las Casas, as the biblical Simeon (Lk. 2: 29), exclaim: *Nunc dimittis servuum tuum, Domine . . . in pace.*

Appendix

Bartolomé de las Casas’s Petition to His Holiness Pope Pius V (1566)

What things are necessary for the correct way of preaching the Gospel to the infidels, and to render just and legitimate the wars against them, I have declared in the book that I sent to Your Beatitude, and I hope to expand them further. To Your Beatitude I beseech intensively, by the blood of our Redemption, to command that my book be examined and, if found right, that it be stamped, so that the truth be not hidden for the damnation and destruction of the Church, as the time may come (which might be already at hand) in which God unveils our blemishes and our nakedness is shown to the whole pagan world.

Since so many are the flatterers who in secret, like dogs with rabies, bark against the truth, to Your Beatitude I humbly beseech that a decree be enacted in which are declared excommunicated and anathema, all those who affirm that wars against the infidels are just if waged to combat idolatry, or for the convenience of spreading the Gospel, specially in regard to those infidels who have never injured or are not injuring us. Or those who assert that the infidels are not true lords and owners of their properties; or those who affirm that they are unable to understand and receive the Gospel and eternal salvation, on the basis of their alleged lack of intelligence or acuity of mind, which in fact they do not lack, those Indians whose rights I have defended till my death, for the honor of God and the Church. In my book I have clearly shown that all those assertions are against the sacred canons, as well as against natural law and the commandments of the Gospel, and I will confirm it even more, if that were possible, for I have exhaustively researched and corroborated this matter.

As experience, teacher of all things, confirms that in these times it is necessary to renew all the canons that command the bishops to take care of the captives, of afflicted men and widows, even to the point in which their blood might be shed for them, as they are obliged by natural and divine law, to Your Beatitude I humbly beseech that, by the renewal of those canons, order the bishops of the Indies that, under holy obedience, they be concerned about those natives, who, with hard labors and tyrannies (more than what it could be believed), carry on their meager shoulders, against all natural and divine law, a heavy yoke and unbearable load, which makes it necessary that Your Holiness instruct those bishops to defend their cause, becoming a protecting wall for them, even to spill their own blood, as by divine law they are obliged, and that in no way they accept their appointment, if the King and his Council would not support them and uproot so many tyrannies and oppressions.

Openly and unjustly the bishop ignores the language of his subjects, and does not attempt to learn it well. Therefore, I humbly beseech Your Beatitude to order them to master the language of their sheep, showing that they are so commanded by divine and natural law, for at the moment many awful indignities occur in the presence of Your Holiness, caused by the negligence of the bishops in learning the language of their parishioners.

Immense scandal and no less detriment to our most holy religion is that in such a new place bishops and friars and priests are getting rich and live sumptuously, while their recently converted subjects remain in so great and incredible poverty, that many of them die daily in profound misery, due to the tyranny, hunger and excessive work that they suffer. Therefore, to Your Holiness I humbly beseech to declare those ministers to be obliged by natural and divine law, as in fact they are, to retribute all the gold, silver, and precious stones they have acquired, for their wealth is taken from human beings who endure extreme need and who today live in misery, with whom, by divine and natural law, they are even beholden to share their own possessions.

Inaugural lecture as Henry Winters Luce Professor in Ecumenics and Mission, delivered on April 9, 2003, at Princeton Theological Seminary.

There is a convenient edition of Las Casas's writings, *Obras completas*, in 14 volumes (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1988–1998), published under the supervision of the Spanish scholar Paulino Castañeda Delgado. The secondary bibliography is immense. Essential works are the following: Manuel Giménez Fernández, *Bartolomé de las Casas, Vol. I: Delegado de Cisneros para la reformación de las Indias* (Sevilla: Escuela de Estudios Hispanoamericanos, 1953), Manuel Giménez Fernández, *Bartolomé de las Casas, Vol. II: Capellán de Carlos I, poblador de Cumaná* (Sevilla: Escuela de Estudios Hispanoamericanos, 1960), Isacio Pérez Fernández, *Inventario documentado de los escritos de Fray Bartolomé de las Casas* (Bayamón, Puerto Rico: CEDOC, 1981), Isacio Pérez Fernández, *Cronología documentada de los viajes, estancias y actuaciones de Fray Bartolomé de las Casas* (Bayamón, Puerto Rico: CEDOC, 1983), Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Las Casas: In Search of the Poor of Jesus Christ* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), and Marcel Bataillon (avec la collaboration de Raymond Marcus), *Études sur Bartolomé de las Casas* (Paris: Centre de Recherches de l'Institut d'Études Hispaniques,

1966).

A suggestive analysis of the inner conflicts and ambiguities of Las Casas's concept of a Christian and just empire in the New World is provided by Nestor Capdevila, *Las Casas, une politique de l'humanité: L'homme et l'empire de la foi* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1998).

John Charles Chasteen, *Born in Blood and Fire: A Concise History of Latin America* (New York: Norton, 2001).

Philip II ordered the confiscation of Las Casas's writings, after the bishop's death, according to Enrique Rosner, *Missionare und Musketen: 500 Jahre lateinamerikanische Passion* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Josef Knecht, 1992), 212.

Spain's Real Academia de la Historia decided to publish it in 1821, a project that immediately reawakened such a heated controversy and offended the national pride of so many Spaniards that its fulfillment had to wait until 1875-1876, when it was printed in five volumes.

Historia de las Indias (primera edición crítica), in Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, *Obras completas*, volumes 3-5.

There is an incomplete English translation: Bartolomé de las Casas, *History of the Indies* (translated and edited by André Collard) (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), a rather unsatisfactory rendering of this important work.

Historia general y natural de las Indias, islas y tierra firme del mar Océano (1535, 1547) (Madrid: Ediciones Atlas, 1959).

Historia general de las indias (1552) (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1941).

"The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (II, 582-585), in *The Complete Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912), 208.

E. g. Antonio de Herrera y Tordesillas, *Historia general de los hechos de los castellanos en las islas y tierra firme del Mar Océano* (1601-1605) (Madrid: Real Academia de la Historia, 1934-1957) and Antonio de Remesal, *Historia general de las Indias Occidentales y particular de la gobernación de Chiapa y Guatemala* (1619) (Guatemala: José de Pineda Ibarra, 1966).

Cf. Oliver Dunn, and James Kelley, Jr., *The Diario of Christopher Columbus's First Voyage to America, 1492-1493. Abstracted by Bartolomé de las Casas*, transcribed and translated into English, with notes and a concordance of the Spanish (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989) and the seventh volume of the series *Repertorium Columbianum, Las Casas on Columbus: Background and the Second and Fourth Voyages*, edited by Nigel Griffin with an introduction by Anthony Pagden (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 1999).

Historia de las Indias [HI], I, 3, cs. 3-7, 1757-1774. Lewis Hanke baptised this sermon as "the first cry for justice in America," in his now classic book *The Spanish Struggle for Justice in the Conquest of America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1949), 15-22.

HI, I, 3, cs. 21 and 25, 1843-1845, 1863-1864.

HI, I, 3, c. 79, 2080-2085.

See Isacio Pérez Fernández, "El perfil profético del padre Las Casas," *Studium*, Vol. 15, 1975, 281-359, of the same author, "La fidelidad del Padre Las Casas a su carisma profético," *Studium*, Vol. 16, 1976, 65-109, and Ph.I. André-Vincent, "Le prophétisme de Barthélemy de Las Casas," *Nouvelle revue théologique*, Vol. 101, 1979, 541-560. Henry Raup Wagner calls Las Casas "the Jeremiah of the Spaniards." Henry Raup Wagner, with the collaboration of Helen Rand Parish, *The Life and Writings of Bartolomé de las Casas* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1967), 242. According to Rosner, Las Casas, in his historical books, "war weniger Chronist als vielmehr prophetischer and theologischer Interpret der Geschichte" (*Missionare und Musketen*, 213).

HI, I, 3, c. 138, 2366.

Toribio Motolinia, a Franciscan missionary, in a letter to Charles V, accused Las Casas of national betrayal. The humanist Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda accused him of heresy. The pugnacious bishop survived both indictments. "Carta de Fray Toribio de Motolinia al Emperador Carlos V" (enero 2 de 1555), in *Historia de los indios de la Nueva España: Relación de los ritos antiguos, idolatrías y sacrificios de los indios de la Nueva España, y de la maravillosa conversión que Dios en ella ha obrado*, edición de Edmundo O'Gorman (México, D. F.: Porrúa, 1984), 203-221. Sepúlveda, "Proposiciones temerarias, escandalosas y heréticas que notó el doctor Sepúlveda en el libro de la conquista de Indias, que fray Bartolomé de las Casas, obispo que fué de Chiapa, hizo imprimir 'sin licencia' en Sevilla, año de 1552, cuyo título comienza: 'Aquí se contiene una disputa o controversia,'" in Antonio María Fabié, *Vida y escritos de don Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas, Obispo de Chiapa* (Madrid: Imprenta de Miguel Ginesta, 1879), Vol. II, 543-569.

Demetrio Ramos Pérez, "La 'conversión' de Las Casas en Cuba: El clérigo y Diego Velázquez," in André Saint-Lu et al.,

Estudios sobre Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas (Sevilla: Universidad de Sevilla, 1974), 247-257 and Rubén García, *La conversión a los indios de Bartolomé de las Casas* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Don Bosco, 1987).

The Revised English Bible, with the Apocrypha (Oxford University Press and Cambridge University Press, 1989,) section of the Apocrypha, 122. The Latin text used by La Casas is even stronger. "To offer a sacrifice from the possessions of the poor is like killing a son before his father's eyes" is rendered: *Qui offert sacrificium ex substantia pauperum, quasi qui victimat filium in conspectu patris sui*. The expression *ex substantia pauperum* ("from the substance of the poor") implies that what is taken from the dispossessed is decisive for their existence. The crux of the matter seems to be the life or death of the Native American peoples. Las Casas quotes this text in two slightly different ways in *HI*, l. 1, c. 24, 473, and *HI*, l. 3, c. 79, 2081.

José María Arguedas, *El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1990, orig. 1969); *The Fox from Up Above and the Fox from Down Below*, translated by Frances Horning Barraclough (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000). For a discussion of the relationship between Gustavo Gutiérrez, the theologian, and Arguedas, the novelist, see Brett Greider, *Crossing Deep Rivers: The Liberation Theology of Gustavo Gutiérrez in the Light of the Narrative Poetics of José María Arguedas* (Ph. D. doctoral dissertation, Graduate Theological Union, 1988).

Roberta S. Kremer, editor, *Memory and Mastery: Primo Levi as Writer and Witness* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001).

William Styron, *Darkness Visible: A Memoir of Madness* (New York: Random House, 1990).

William Butler Yeats, "The Second Coming" (1919/1920), in *The New Oxford Book of English Verse, 1250-1950*, chosen and edited by Helen Gardner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 820.

Le mythe de Sisyphe: essai sur l'absurde (Paris: Gallimard, 1942), 15: "Il n'y a qu'un problème philosophique vraiment sérieux: c'est le suicide."

I have discussed the fascinating linkage between worldly curiosity and the epistolary as a literary genre in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in an essay on Columbus's famous 1493 letter to Luis de Santangel. See "Paradise Found: Columbus's Rhetoric of Possession," in Luis N. Rivera-Pagán, *Essays From the Diaspora* (México, D. F.: Centro Luterano de Formación Teológica, Publicaciones El Faro, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, Centro Basilea de Investigación, 2002), 37-59.

Which of the two letters was written before the other is of interest for a detailed chronology of Las Casas's life, but it is methodologically preferable to see both texts as conjoined expressions of his intention of uttering his final prophetic and theological word. Pérez de Tudela Bueso believes the Council of Indies letter to be from 1565. *Obras escogidas de Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, Vol. V: Opúsculos, cartas y memoriales* (editadas por Juan Pérez de Tudela Bueso) (Ediciones Atlas, 1958), 536-538. Isacio Pérez Fernández, the most important contemporary student of Las Casas, considers it to have been written and sent in 1566. *Inventario documentado de los escritos*, 779-792.

Reproduced as appendix in Bartolomé de las Casas, *De regia potestate o derecho de autodeterminación* (ed. por Luciano Pereña et al.) (*Corpus Hispanorum de Pace*, Vol. VIII) (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1969), 282-283.

Apparently he refers to *De Thesauris in Peru* (in Latin) and *El tratado de las doce dudas* (in Spanish), written two or three years before and dedicated to Philip II. Published in *Obras completas*, Vol. 11.1 and Vol. 11.2, respectively.

The eighth conclusion indicates a key difference between Francisco de Vitoria and Las Casas. Whereas Vitoria analyzes the justice of the Spanish wars against the Native Americans, Las Casas explains why the wars of the Native Americans against the Spaniards are just.

John Leddy Phelan, *The Millennial Kingdom of the Franciscans in the New World* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1956). For a brief synopsis of the growth and ebb of apocalyptic urgency in the sixteenth century American missionary enterprise, see Marcel Bataillon, "Novo mundo e fim do mundo," *Revista de historia* (São Paulo), No. 18, 1954, 343-351.

Obras escogidas de Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, Vol. V: Opúsculos, cartas y memoriales, 540.

Ibid., 538: "... y a esto ninguna cosa proveyeron" ("regarding this petition, they did not take any action") is the austere testimony of Alonso de la Veracruz, an Augustinian friar who, accompanied by two Dominican friars, members of the small coterie of devout followers of Las Casas, read the letter to the Council, in representation of the ailing bishop. The attempts of some Spanish scholars to demonstrate a positive reaction from the authorities to Las Casas's demands might be understandable nationalism, but miss the heart of the confrontation. Las Casas was requesting something that the Council of Indies was constitutionally unable to concede: to declare illegal and illegitimate the Spanish dominion of America as it

had historically taken place.

See Pedro de Leturia, S I., *Relaciones entre la Santa Sede e Hispanoamérica, Vol. I: Época del Real Patronato, 1493-1800* (Caracas: Sociedad Bolivariana de Venezuela, 1959) and William Eugene Shiels, S. J. *King and Church: The Rise and Fall of the Patronato Real* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1961).

Reproduced in Shiels, *King and Church*, 283-289, 294-295 and 310-313.

Relaciones, I, 101-152. See also Manuel Gutiérrez de Arce, "Regio patronato indiano (Ensayo de valoración histórico-canónica)," *Anuario de estudios americanos*, Vol. 11, 1954, 107-168, Alberto de la Hera, "El Patronato y el Vicariato Regio en Indias," in *Historia de la Iglesia en Hispanoamérica y Filipinas* (siglos xv-xix), obra dirigida por Pedro Borges (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1992), Vol. I, 63-79.

Gutiérrez de Arce, "Regio patronato indiano, 109.

Shiels, *King and Church*, 184.

Manuel Giménez Fernández, *Nuevas consideraciones sobre la historia, sentido y valor de las bulas alejandrinas de 1493 referentes a las Indias* (Sevilla: Escuela de Estudios Hispano-Americanos de la Universidad de Sevilla, 1944) and, of the same author, "Algo más sobre las bulas alejandrinas de 1493 referentes a las Indias," *Anales de la Universidad Hispalense*, Sevilla, Año 8, Núm. 3, 1945, 37-86; Año 9, Núm. 1, 115-126.

For a concise analysis of the origin, evolution, and conflicting evaluations of the *requerimiento*, see Benno Biermann, O. P. "Das Requerimiento in der spanischen Conquista," *Neue Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft*, Vol. 6, Beckenried, Suiza, 1950, 94-114. Also Luis N. Rivera-Pagán, *A Violent Evangelism: The Political and Religious Conquest of the Americas* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster - John Knox Press, 1992), 32-41.

Alberto de la Hera, "El regalismo indiano," in *Historia de la Iglesia en Hispanoamérica*, Vol. I, 81-97.

Reproduced in Shiels, *King and Church*, 319-325. The signing prelates were Fray García de Padilla, Pedro Suárez de Deza, and Alonso Manso, nominated bishops for the recently created dioceses of Santo Domingo, Concepción de la Vega, and San Juan, respectively.

For Las Casas, it became the wrong paradigm, a model of mistaken docility and submissiveness of the church to the state. See Luis N. Rivera-Pagán, *Las Capitulaciones de Burgos: Paradigma de las paradojas de la cristiandad colonial*, in *Más Voces: Reflexiones Teológicas de la Iglesia Hispana*, edited by Luis Pedraja (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 47-66.

Helen Rand Parish reproduces the Latin text of the bull and the brief, with a Spanish translation, in *Las Casas en México* (México, D. F. Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1992), 303 –305, 310-312. There are English versions of both documents in Bartolomé de las Casas, *The Only Way*, edited by Helen Rand Parish and translated by Francis Patrick Sullivan, S. J. (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 114-115, 156-157 and in Bartolomé de las Casas, *In Defense of the Indians*, translated by Stafford Poole, C. M., (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1992), 100-103. In his anthology of ecclesiastical normative documents regarding the Spanish empire, Francisco Javier Hernáez reproduces *Pastorale officium*, but not *Sublimis Deus*, though he includes *Veritas ipsa*, a variant of *Sublimis Deus*. He blames Las Casas for the "exaggerated news" regarding the mistreatment of the Native Americans as the source for the Pope's concern and reproduces some of the most denigrating testimony against the Native Americans ever expressed in the sixteenth century. Francisco Javier Hernáez, *Colección de bulas, breves y otros documentos relativos a la iglesia de América y Filipinas* (1879) (Vaduz: Klaus Reprint, 1964), Vol. I, 101-104. *Pastorale officium* and *Veritas ipsa*, but not *Sublimis Deus*, are included in *America Pontificia. Primi saeculi evangelizationis, 1493-1592* documenta Pontificia ex registris et minutis praesertim in archivo secreto Vaticano existentibus, collegit et edidit Josef Metzler (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1991), Vol. I, 359-361, 364-366. For a detailed analysis of these Papal documents, see Alberto de la Hera, "El derecho de los indios a la libertad y a la fe: la bula *Sublimis Deus* y los problemas indios que la motivaron," *Anuario de historia del derecho español*, Vol. 26, 1956, 89-182. Parish has given a closer look to the origin of these documents, including another 1537 Papal bull, *Altitudo divini consilii*, regarding the performance of some sacraments and liturgical ceremonies in the New World (*Las Casas en México*, 15-28, 82-90).

The abrogating Papal brief, *Non indecens videtur*, is reproduced, in Latin with a Spanish translation, in Parish's *Las Casas en México*, 313-315. Francisco de Vitoria does not mention *Sublimis Deus* in his 1539 lectures on the Native Americans (*De Indis*, I). Jeremy Lawrance suggests that the lecture might have been inspired by the controversy about the Papal decrees. However, Vitoria deals mainly with matters regarding the justice of the wars against the Native Americans, not their slavery, which is the main theme of the Pope's bull. Francisco de Vitoria, *Political Writings*, edited by Anthony Pagden and Jeremy Lawrance (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 233, n. 3. José de Acosta barely alludes to it once in his 1588 important book on the Christianization of the Americas. José de Acosta, *De procuranda indorum salute* (2 vols.), translated and edited by G. Stewart McIntosh, (Tayport: Scotland, UK: Mac Research, 1996), Vol. I, 114. Las Casas, for one,

quoted both documents as valid and normative. Probably thanks to his influence many readers tend to disregard their revocation. Cf. Lewis U. Hanke, "Pope Paul III and the American Indians," *Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 30, 1937, 56-102, Manuel María Martínez, "Las Casas-Vitoria y la bula *Sublimis Deus*," in André Saint-Lu et al., *Estudios sobre Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas* (Sevilla: Universidad de Sevilla, 1974), 25-51, and Gustavo Gutiérrez, "Las Casas y Paulo III," *Páginas* (Lima), Vol. 16, No. 107, febrero 1991, 33-42.

There are conflicting evaluations of the royal patronage. Gutiérrez de Arce considers it a very useful tool to achieve the Christianization of the Americas. Shiels is of the opinion that it "dealt a shattering blow to the independent administrative machinery of the universal church. In fact, it made the Spanish church a state church" (*King and Church*, 192).

Manuscript in the National Library of Paris, ms. 325, fol. 312. Published for the first time in 1866 in the second volume of the *Colección de documentos para la historia de México*, edited by Joaquín García Icazbalceta (Nendeln, Liechtenstein: Kraus Reprint, 1971, 599-600). Reproduced in *Obras escogidas*, vol. V, 541-542 and in *Obras completas*, vol. 13, 370-371. English translation in Luis N. Rivera-Pagán, *Essays From the Diaspora*, 108-110. It is a text neglected by scholars, with the exception of Isacio Pérez Fernández, *Inventario documentado de los escritos*, 762-776. Gutiérrez considers it "a very significant text" (*Las Casas*, 90), without however analyzing it. The manuscript appears to be incomplete, it lacks the introduction and conclusion typical of such epistles. It might be a preliminary draft.

Juan Friede rightly stresses the importance of the letter as an act of legal disobedience. But, he does not perceive the originality of the challenges that the letter raises to the *Roman Church*, not to the *Spanish state*. Juan Friede, *Bartolomé de Las Casas: precursor del anticolonialismo* (México, D. F.: Siglo XXI, 1974), 214-216.

Cf. Luis N. Rivera-Pagán, "Prophecy and Patriotism: A Tragic Dilemma From the Cross of Terror," in *Surviving Terror: Hope and Justice in a World of Violence*, edited by Victoria Erickson and Michelle Lim Jones (Grand Rapids, MA: Brazos Press, 2002), 87-101, 315-31 and Luis N. Rivera-Pagán, "Violence of the *Conquistadores* and Prophetic Indignation," in *Must Christianity Be Violent? Reflections on History, Practice, and Theology*, edited by Alan Jacobs and Kenneth Chase (Grand Rapids, MA: Brazos Press, 2003, forthcoming).

One apology is written in Spanish, published for the first time in 1958 (reproduced in *Obras completas*, Vol. 10, 101-193) and the other in Latin, published for the first time in 1975 (reproduced in *Obras completas*, Vol. 9, 43-667). Regarding the dispute between Las Casas and Sepúlveda, the standard text is Lewis Hanke, *All Mankind is One: A Study of the Disputation between Bartolomé de Las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda in 1550 on the Intellectual and Religious Capacity of the American Indians* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1974).

Anthony Pagden, "Introduction," in *Las Casas on Columbus*, 9: ". . . until his death Las Casas remained convinced that the entire deleterious process of conquest could be undone if only those in authority would listen to his voice. All of his writings . . . were directed toward this end."

It was first printed in the twentieth century in a Latin and Spanish edition with a fine introduction by Lewis Hanke. Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, *Del único modo de atraer a todos los pueblos a la verdadera religión* (México, D. F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1942). It is reproduced in *Obras completas*, Vol. 2. There is an English version: Bartolomé de las Casas, *The Only Way*, edited by Helen Rand Parish and translated by Francis Patrick Sullivan, S. J. (New York: Paulist Press, 1992).

It is hard to avoid the impression that Las Casas was under the influence of an author whose name he avoids for it had become disreputable in a nation under the shadow of the Inquisition: Erasmus of Rotterdam. There are resonances in his texts of the writings in which Erasmus censures Christianization by military force: *Dulce bellum inexpertis* (1515), *Querela pacis* (1517), *Consultatio de bello turcico* (1530), and *Ecclesiastes sive concionator evangelicus* (1535). See Marcel Bataillon, *Erasmus et l'Espagne* (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1991 [1937]).

Vitoria deals with all possible pros and cons of the conquering first and converting afterwards approach in his *De Indis*, I. Sepúlveda was the most prestigious promoter of conversion *manu militari* in his book about the justice of the wars against the Native Americans. See his *Democrates secundus, sive de iustis belli causis*, edición crítica y traducción castellana por A. Coroleu Lletget, in Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, *Obras completas*, (Pozoblanco: Excmo. Ayuntamiento de Pozoblanco, 1997), Vol. III, 38-134. Acosta, in his *De procuranda indorum salute*, defends the conjunction of military coercion and missionary persuasion, while, at the same time, trying to spell its limitations. Acosta argues that Las Casas's position does not take into account the ferocity and backwardness of the Native American "barbarians." Cf. Luis N. Rivera-Pagán, *La evangelización de los pueblos americanos: algunas reflexiones históricas* (San Luis de Potosí, México: Colegio de San Luis, 1997).

Is Las Casas a "pacifist"? In his letter to the Pope, he alludes to possible theoretical conditions required to render wars against infidels "just and legitimate." It is an awkward theme in the text, but it serves as a reminder that in several of his writings he distinguishes between unbelievers who have never attacked any Christian nation and those who have. The distinction basically refers to Native Americans and Muslims. Though there might be hypothetical reasons to justify war against the first, the history of their encounters shows, or so Las Casas thinks, that the Christians have always been the

aggressors and oppressors and that, therefore, in their conflicts, the guilty ones are the Christians. On the contrary, in his view, the hostility between Christians and Muslims comes because the second have usurped lands of the first and are always attempting to subjugate the Christian nations.

Las Casas also accepts the traditional interpretation of Augustine's texts regarding state coercion of heretics, but rejects the attempts to expand that repressive norm to all infidels. He engages Sepúlveda in a discussion about Luke 14: 23: "Compel people to come in . . ." (*compelle intrare*), a Gospel text cited by Augustine to justify state coercion of heretics. It was a much quoted biblical text in the theological debates regarding the conquering wars in Americas and it was also used to validate compulsory attendance of Native Americans to Christian proselytizing activities. See Bruno Rech, "Las Casas und die Kirchenväter," *Jahrbuch für Geschichte von Staat, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft Lateinamerikas*, Bd. 17, 1980, 26-43.

Las Casas differentiates between infidels who de iure and de facto are under the jurisdiction of Christian rulers (Jew and Muslim minorities in Christian nations), those who are so de iure but not de facto (residents of lands formerly Christian but conquered by Muslim armies), and those who have never been so neither de iure nor de facto, like the Native Americans. And then there are the heretics, who are always de iure subject to the Catholic Church and state. The possible legitimacy of military force or state coercion against unbelievers differs, therefore, according to their specific category of infidelity. Thus, the same state that might be justified in waging war against the Ottomans and strengthening the Inquisition against the heretics, should refrain from military actions against the Native Americans.

Las Casas, however, leans towards a negative appraisal of war, for "war . . . is the most wretched and pestilential of all things under heaven and is utterly opposed to Christ's life and teaching" (*In Defense of the Indians*, 359).

Christopher Columbus, *A New and Fresh English Translation of the Letter of Columbus Announcing the Discovery of America*, translated and edited by Samuel Eliot Morison (Madrid: Gráficas Yagües, 1959), 14: "Their Highnesses can see that I shall give them . . . slaves, as many as they shall order, who will be idolaters."

Hernán Cortés, *Documentos cortesianos, 1518-1528* (ed. José Luis Martínez) (México, D. F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México/Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1990), 165: "In as much . . . the natives of these regions have a culture and veneration of idols, which is a great disservice to God Our Lord, and the devil blinds and deceives them . . . I propose to bring them to the knowledge of our Holy Catholic faith . . . Let us go to uproot the natives of these regions from those idolatries . . . so that they will come to the knowledge of God and of His Holy Catholic faith."

Christian Duverger, *La Conversion des Indiens de Nouvelle-Espagne avec le texte des "Colloques des douze" de Bernardino de Sahagún (1564)* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1987).

Vitoria, Las Casas, and Acosta, however, pace Sepúlveda, perceive the difficulty of using the Old Testament injunctions against idolatry as models for the Christianization of the Native Americans. What is at stake in the Old Testament is the extirpation of idolatry by means of the extermination of the idolaters. The Spanish enterprise, however, is missionary. It attempts to extirpate idolatry by means of the conversion of the idolaters, not their annihilation. In many parts of the Americas, however, the end result was similar: the elimination of idolatry thanks to the death of the idolaters.

Pierre Duviols, *La lutte contre les religions autochtones dans le Pérou colonial: l'extirpation de l'idolatrie entre 1532 et 1660* (Paris-Lima: Institut Français d'Études Andines, 1971). Robert Ricard, *The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico: An Essay on the Apostolate and the Evangelizing Methods of the Mendicant Orders in New Spain, 1523-1572*, translated by Lesley Byrd Simpson (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966).

The Politics, book I. Bruno Rech analyses the way Las Casas read Aristotle in his article "Bartolomé de las Casas und Aristoteles," *Jahrbuch für Geschichte von Staat, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft Lateinamerikas*, Bd. 22, 1985, 39-68.

Lewis Ulysses Hanke, *Aristotle and the American Indians* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970) and Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

De Indis, I, 233: "This whole dispute . . . has arisen again because of these barbarians in the New World, commonly called Indians, who came under the power of the Spaniards some forty years ago . . ." Nestor Capdevila points out a crucial semantic difference between Vitoria and Las Casas. While the first refers to the Native Americans as *barbaros . . . quos indos vulgo vocant* ("barbarians commonly called Indians"), Las Casas alludes to them as *Novi Orbi habitatores, quos vulgo Indos appellamus* ("inhabitant of the New World, which we commonly call Indians"). Capdevila (*Las Casas: une politique de l'humanité*, 270). For the literary context of the two quotations, see *Obras de Francisco de Vitoria: Relecciones teológicas. Edición crítica del texto latino, versión española, introducción general e introducciones con el estudio de su doctrina teológico-jurídica*, editadas por Teófilo Urdanoz, O. P. (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1960), 642 and Las Casas, *Obras completas*, Vol. 9, 76.

Democrates secundus, 39: "If the war with which the monarchs of Spain have subjugated and attempt to subjugate under their dominion those barbarians . . . commonly called Indians . . . is just or not . . . is a very important issue."

De procuranda indorum salute, 4.

Regarding the ontological distinction between literary and oral peoples, see Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, & Colonization* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1995).

See Luis N. Rivera-Pagán, "Qui est l'Indien? Humanité ou bestialité de l'indigène américain," *Alternatives Sud. L'avenir des peuples autochtones: Le sort des "premières nations"* (Centre Tricontinental, Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgique), vol. vii, no. 2, 2000, 33-51. Acosta oscillates between attributing to them bestiality or childish immaturity. In an earlier draft of his *Democrates secundus*, Sepúlveda tended to apelike them, and Vasco de Quiroga bishop of Michoacán, considers them as children in need of paternal guidance. Vasco de Quiroga, *Información en derecho* (1535), introducción y notas de Carlos Herrejón (México, D. F.: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1985).

Democrates secundus, 130. On the debate about whether the Native Americans were slaves by nature and the ways Aristotle was read in that discussion, see Celestino del Arenal, "La teoría de la servidumbre natural en el pensamiento español de los siglos XVI y XVII," *Historiografía y bibliografía americanistas*, Vols. 19-20, 1975-76, 67-124.

In this context, it might be appropriate to recall Montaigne's famous dictum in his essay "Des cannibales" (1580): "chacun appelle barbarie ce qui n'est pas de son usage." *Essais de Michel de Montaigne*, présentation, établissement du texte, appareil critique et notes par André Tourmon (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1998), Vol. I, 344.

Apologética historia sumaria. As many of Las Casas's writings, it was first published in its integrity only in the twentieth century (1909). *Obras completas*, Vols. 6-8.

Juan Durán Luzio, "Bartolomé de las Casas y Michel de Montaigne," in his book *Bartolomé de las Casas ante la conquista de América* (Heredia, Costa Rica: Editorial de la Universidad Nacional, 1992), 223-285, José Luis Abellán, "Los orígenes españoles del mito del 'buen salvaje'. Fray Bartolomé de las Casas y su antropología utópica," *Revista de Indias*, Año 36, Núms. 145-146, julio-diciembre de 1976, 157-179, and José Antonio Maravall, "Utopía y primitivismo en Las Casas," *Revista de Occidente*, No. 141, diciembre 1974, 311-388. Maravall's description of Las Casas as a "Rousseau avant la lettre" (Ibid., 350) and Bruno Rech's assertion that the Spanish bishop is a "Vorläufer von Rousseau" are misleading ("Las Casas und die Kirchenväter," 35). The sixteenth century theologian and the eighteenth century philosophe are both counter cultural and were both viewed in their times as *enfant terribles*, but they inhabit very different theoretical and ideological niches, as Nestor Capdevila (*Las Casas: une politique de l'humanité*, 66-76) and Gustavo Gutiérrez (*Las Casas*, 299-301) have emphasized.

Whether it was legitimate to enslave Native Americans was a controversial issue among sixteenth theologians and jurists. See Luis N. Rivera-Pagán, "Freedom and Servitude: indigenous Slavery in the Spanish Conquest of the Caribbean," in *General History of the Caribbean. Volume I: Autochthonous Societies*, edited by Jalil Sued-Badillo (London: UNESCO and Macmillan Publishers, 2003), 316-362.

The Spanish theologians and missionaries debated the capability of the Native Americans to participate in the sacraments. Acosta defends their right to six of the seven sacraments but opposes their priestly ordination, for it is wrong to consecrate to the ministry "the dregs of the people." *De procuranda indorum salute*, Vol. II, 146.

Apologética historia sumaria, c. 48; *Obras completas*, Vol. 7, 536.

Las Casas's view of the slavery of the Africans is the object of a long bibliography. Among the most important contributions are: Silvio A. Zavala, "¿Las Casas esclavista?" *Cuadernos americanos*, Año 3, No. 2, 1944, 149-154; Robert L. Brady, "The Role of Las Casas in the Emergence of Negro Slavery in the New World," *Revista de Historia de América*, núms. 61-62, enero-diciembre 1966, 43-55; Fernando Ortiz, "La leyenda negra contra fray Bartolomé de las Casas," *Cuadernos americanos*, No. 5, 1952, 146-184; Vol. 217, No. 2, marzo-abril de 1978, 84-116; and Isacio Pérez Fernández, O. P. "Estudio preliminar" a Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de África: Preludio de la destrucción de Indias. Primera defensa de los guanches y negros contra su esclavización*, edición y notas por Isacio Pérez Fernández, O. P. (Salamanca-Lima: Editorial San Esteban-Instituto Bartolomé de las Casas, 1989). Despite the attempts of several of these scholars to present Las Casas as a strong defender of the liberty and political rights of both, Native Americans and Africans, in his last texts, like the letter to the Council of Indies and the Pope, the issue of black slavery is absent, at a time in which, however, the African slave trade was increasing exponentially. I have tried to develop a more nuanced view of Las Casas's complex perspective on this issue in "Bartolomé de las Casas y la esclavitud africana," in *Sentido histórico del V centenario (1492-1992)*, edited by Guillermo Meléndez (San José, Costa Rica: Departamento Ecueménico de Investigaciones, 1992), 63-84. See also Capdevila, *Las Casas: une politique de l'humanité*, 79-87. For the general issue involved, see David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1961) and Alphonse Quenum, *Les Églises chrétiennes et la traite atlantique du XV^e au XIX^e siècle* (Paris: Éditions Karthala, 1993). From a rather apologetic perspective, the Papal decrees regarding the beginnings of the African slave trade by Christian Europeans are minutiously analysed by Charles-Martial de Witte, "Les bulles pontificales et l'expansion

portugaise au XVe siècle," *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique*, vol. 48, 1953, 683-718; vol. 49, 1954, 438-461; vol. 51, 1956, 413-453, 809-836; vol. 53, 1958, 5-46, 443-471.

Antonio de Valdivieso, bishop of Nicaragua, was assassinated in 1550 by a group of Spaniards irritated by the his censure of their mistreatment of the natives. Gil Gonzalez Dávila, *Teatro eclesiástico de la primitiva iglesia de la Nueva España en las Indias Occidentales* (1649) (Madrid: José Porrúa Turanzas, 1959), Vol. II, 157-159. Enrique Dussel has written on sixteenth century bishops as "protectors of the Indians." Enrique Dussel, *Les évêques hispano-américains: défenseurs et évangélisateurs de l'indien (1504-1620)* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1970). On the assassination of another Central American bishop, 430 years later, see Luis N. Rivera-Pagán, "For Times Such As This. Oscar Romero: Bishop, Prophet, Martyr," in *Essays from the Diaspora*, 89-107.

Linguistic translation and inculturation, as analogical implications of the doctrine of the incarnation, have become important themes in modern missiological theology. Cf. Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989) and Andrew Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000).

De procuranda indorum salute, Vol. I, 143: "For that is what the Spaniards are looking for after such a long ocean voyage, and it is through the metals [gold and silver] that commerce works, that the judges preside, and more often than not the priests preach the Gospel."

Francesca Cantú, "Evoluzione e significato della dottrina della restituzione in Bartolomé de las Casas," *Critica storica*, Vol. 12, Nos. 2-3-4, Roma, 1975, 55-143, 231-319.

Luciano Pereña, Isacio Pérez Fernández, and Marianne Mahn-Lot argue that certain instructions of Pope Pius V regarding the Native Americans were probably influenced by Las Casas's letter and were the Papal response to it. Luciano Pereña, "Estudio preliminar," a Bartolomé de las Casas, *De regia potestate* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1969), cxii-cxiii, Pérez Fernández, *Inventario documentado de los escritos*, 773-776, and Marianne Mahn-Lot, *Bartolomé de las Casas et le droit des indiens* (Paris: Payot, 1982), 247, 260. I do not find their arguments compelling and certainly those Papal instructions fell considerably short from the bold demands of Las Casas.

It falls beyond the scope of this essay to examine the ways in which Latin American liberation theologians have read Las Casas. It might be symptomatic that the longest and, in my opinion, most enticing book up to now written by Gustavo Gutiérrez is his monograph on Las Casas.

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