

# The Legacy of Bartolomé de Las Casas

by Benjamin Keen

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## Publication and Copyright

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*In this essay I wanted to summarize those teachings of Las Casas that appeared most relevant in the 1970s and seem no less relevant today: his anti-racism, his anti-colonialism, and what the editors of the first Spanish edition (1969) of his powerful tract De regia potestate (Concerning the Kingly Power) call his three "democratic dogmas": First, all power emanates from the people; second, power is delegated to rulers in order that they may serve the people; third, all important governmental acts require popular consultation and approval. At that time it was common for scholars to compare unfavorably Las Casas's writings on the justice of Spain's Indian wars and Spain's titles to the Indies with those of Francisco de Vitoria, celebrated as a founder of international law; these critics charged Las Casas with being intemperate and one-sided and praised Vitoria for what one called his "penetration and liberality of mind." I therefore tried to clarify the differences between the views of Vitoria and Las Casas on those subjects, stressing Vitoria's well-documented opportunism and Las Casas's greater realism and progressive vision. Following the lead of such scholars as Juan Friede and Marcel Bataillon, I also briefly traced the trajectory of Las Casas's intellectual development, noting that there were several Las Casas, that he was a different man at different stages of his long life, that experience progressively changed and radicalized his tactics and strategy in pursuit of the great objective of Indian liberation. For the rest, I decided to retain the essay's original character of an informal talk and, aside from correcting typos and making a few textual changes for greater clarity, have left it virtually intact. However, I have added citation footnotes and some explanatory footnotes that were needed to update my facts and interpretations.*

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In 1974 the world marked the 500th anniversary of the birth of Bartolomé de Las Casas, the principal organizer and ideologist of the sixteenth-century Spanish

movement in defense of the Indians."<sup>1</sup> Commemorations of that event took place in a much calmer atmosphere than once surrounded the name and memory of Las Casas. Controversy about the man and his ideas continues, but the number of his foes has declined, and the tone of the disputes between his friends and foes has grown more sedate. In a letter that Juan Friede wrote me in 1971, he recalled that when he read his first major study of Las Casas in the Instituto Fernández de Oviedo in Madrid in 1950, only one member of his audience -- Father Manuel Martínez -- could be called a *Lascasiano*. Since then, Friede noted, many of the scholars present at that meeting had moved into the Lascasian camp. The shift is no accident. It reflects the fact, I have written elsewhere, that "the great social and political movements of the twentieth century, the century par excellence of anti-racism and anti-colonialism, are confirming the truth of Las Casas's doctrines -- that life is transforming his 'utopian' ideals into reality."<sup>2</sup>

It is satisfying to those of us who have long defended Las Casas's doctrines and upheld the value of his historical testimony to observe his growing popularity. But this popularity can prove an impediment to clarity about Las Casas's doctrines, for not all of his many disciples understand the meaning of his heritage in the same way. Moreover, the wish to make Las Casas's ideas palatable may lead to dilution of his doctrines, to the manufacture of a Las Casas whose sharp edges are dulled, who radiates benevolence, and whose most advanced positions are discreetly overlooked. This has happened more than once in the past. Hence the need for careful, systematic study of Las Casas's doctrines, something I shall not attempt here. Instead I shall very briefly discuss the sources of his thought, its affinity with or divergence from other ideologies, and the most distinctive and currently relevant elements in his doctrines.

Scholars have long debated whether medieval or Renaissance influences were decisive in the formation of Las Casas's thought. In 1911 Eduard Fueter scornfully disposed of Las Casas as a man of typical medieval mentality "who possessed a great mass of dead erudition and never lost an opportunity to overwhelm the reader with proof of his Scholastic-theological learning."<sup>3</sup> To be sure, Las Casas had an immense fund of classical and medieval learning and was a master of the Scholastic method of disputation. His most famous opponent, Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, once described Las Casas as "most subtle, most vigilant, and most fluent, compared with whom the Ulysses of Homer was inert and stuttering."<sup>4</sup>

Certainly Las Casas was a spiritual son of Thomas Aquinas, the Church Fathers, and Aristotle (although he once referred to the latter as "a gentile burning in hell whose doctrine should be accepted only so far as it conforms to Christian thought").<sup>5</sup> Las Casas rested his most audacious positions (like his apology for Indian human sacrifice) on such firm theological foundations that the Spanish Inquisition never brought him to trial, although charges were laid against him before the Holy Office.

But Las Casas was also a child of the Renaissance. This was the Las Casas who based his argument for the rationality and equal capacity of the Indians above all on observation and experience, who offered an environmentalist interpretation of cultural differences, and who regarded with scientific detachment such deviations from European norms of conduct as human sacrifice and ritual cannibalism. This was the Las Casas who, speaking of geography, said of the ancients that, after all, "they did not know very much."<sup>6</sup>

To try to separate the old from the modern strands in the fabric of Las Casas's thought would be a hopeless task. Alberto Pincherle justly remarks that the medieval and Renaissance-humanist elements in the Lascasian ideology blend into an indissoluble and complex unity.<sup>7</sup> Viewing the problem of the old and the new in Las Casas dialectically, José Antonio Maravall sees Las Casas as illustrating the possibility that a formation of a very traditional type can lead an individual to positions more advanced, more clearly pointing to the future, than positions that are superficially more modern in character. "The impregnation of Las Casas's mind with medieval theology, philosophy, and juridical science that incorporated a rich classic, Aristotelian, and Platonic heritage," writes Maravall, "gave rise to ideas whose seeds are found in antiquity and whose full ripening awaited the eighteenth century." Impressed by the modernity of Las Casas's thought, Maravall claims that he synthesizes all the key elements of the Rousseauian system.<sup>8</sup> Maravall was not the first to make that discovery; the German writer Otto Walz had long ago (1905) already observed that Las Casas and Rousseau, despite all their differences, had much in common: "an ardent sensibility, tenderness, love of nature, dialectical power," and above all their belief in the natural freedom and equality of men.<sup>9</sup>

Progressive Renaissance elements, we may safely say, dominate the Lascasian ideology, and Las Casas may rightly be regarded as a Spanish representative of a Renaissance humanist type, the product of a new urban, individualistic, bourgeois culture (Las Casas was a son of Seville, a great commercial and cultural center even after it lost its political importance in the second quarter of the sixteenth century). The Russian scholar I. R. Grigulevich has noted that two characteristic traits of this humanist type were its revolt against abstract, Aristotelian modes of thought and its concern with the problems of war, poverty, and social injustice, concerns that Las Casas shared with such other sixteenth-century Spanish specimens of the social humanist type as Alfonso de Valdés and Juan Luis Vives.<sup>10</sup> The peculiar course of Spanish history determined some specific features of the Spanish humanist ideology, but its affinity with the humanist current of northern Europe is unmistakable.

Grigulevich has also called attention to Las Casas's chronological and spiritual links with Erasmus and Thomas More; Las Casas began his struggle in defense of the Indians in 1514, five years after publication of Erasmus's *In Praise of Folly*, two years

before the appearance of More's *Utopia*. We have some evidence that More and Erasmus actually influenced the development of Las Casas's thought. In a 1952 article, Marcel Bataillon noted some striking resemblances between the organization of More's utopian society and the details and even terminology of the project of peasant colonization in America, based on a system of association between free Indians and Spanish peasants, that Las Casas presented to the Council of the Indies in December 1517.<sup>11</sup> Recently Angel Losada found proof of Erasmian influence on Las Casas in the still unpublished *Apologia* read by him in his debate with Sepúlveda in 1550-1551.<sup>12</sup> In this work Las Casas defended Erasmian pacifism as "very obviously within the Christian doctrinal tradition" -- a daring statement in a time of severe repression of Spanish Erasmians and in a book dedicated to Philip II. Losada comments that Las Casas's citation of Erasmus opens up "unsuspected perspectives in the history of the ideological currents of those times" and describes Las Casas as "a Spanish Erasmian who was sufficiently skillful to avoid the serious difficulties in which other Erasmians became involved."<sup>13</sup>

Las Casas made his own notable contributions to the renovation of European thought, to the development of the Renaissance and Enlightenment world outlook. Central to his system is an optimistic conception of humans as beings free and rational by nature, capable of unstinted growth. Starting with this premise, Las Casas elaborated a rudimentary theory of cultural evolution. All humankind was one; all peoples, no matter how barbarous or savage they might be, were capable of advancing along the road to civilization, "provided that the method that is proper and natural to man is used; namely, love and gentleness and kindness." The theory viewed all peoples as being in different stages of development, ranging from the stage of very primitive beginnings to the highest stage attained by fully civilized nations illuminated by the Evangelical Law. Progress from the first savage state common to all nations to a higher stage was made through the agency of great teachers who emerged within a group, or came from other lands, and taught men the utility of living in houses, social intercourse, the utility of law and government, and other civilized ways. Las Casas's theory of cultural evolution enabled him to examine the customs and beliefs of an Indian people dispassionately and within the framework of that people's own culture. The theory also suggested comparison of Indian cultures with civilizations of other times and places that appeared to represent about the same stage of development. Las Casas used this approach to demonstrate the superiority of Aztec and Inca civilization over such cultures as the Greek and Roman. To document his theory, Las Casas wrote the great *Apologética historia sumaria*, an immense accumulation of ethnographic data designed to show that the Indians fully met the requirements laid down by Aristotle for the good life.

Although the elements of this scheme can be traced back to such ancient sources as Cicero and Thomas Aquinas, the political and social context in which Las Casas advanced his conception of the unity of humankind and the capacity of all races for progress gave his theory a profoundly revolutionary character.

The discovery and conquest of America inspired efforts to develop an ideology that could justify conquest and enslavement of the Indians. This ideology drew on such ancient or medieval doctrines as the Aristotelian doctrine that some men were slaves by nature and made to serve others and the teaching of the thirteenth-century Bishop Henry of Susa (Ostiensis), who justified war against infidels who refused to receive the Faith. Highly colored travel accounts and chronicles portraying the Indians as subhumans lacking all virtue and filled with all the vices provided collaborative material for this imperialist ideology. From such elements European writers constructed an early version of "the white man's burden." In the 1579 Latin edition of his famous atlas, *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*, for example, the great Flemish mapmaker Abraham Ortelius confidently announced Europe's historic mission of world conquest, in process of fulfillment by Spain and Portugal, "who between them dominate four parts of the globe." Ortelius declared that the inhabitants of Europe had always surpassed all other peoples in intelligence and physical dexterity. These qualities naturally qualified the Europeans to govern the other parts of the world.

By reason of Aristotle's immense prestige, Spanish apologists for Indian wars and conquests made special use of his doctrine of natural slavery. As early as 1519, Juan de Quevedo, Bishop of Tierra Firme, cited it in an attack on Indian capacity and morality at a meeting of the Council of the Indies presided over by Charles V. In his *Historia de las Indias*, Las Casas, who was present, recalled his reply to Quevedo:

The difference between what Aristotle meant and what the reverend Bishop affirmed is the distance between earth and sky; and even if the meaning were what the Reverend Bishop says it is, Aristotle was a pagan, and consequently we should use only that part of his doctrine that conforms to our holy Faith and the tenets of the Christian religion. Our Christian religion adapts equally to all the nations of the world and receives all nations, and strips none of its liberty or dominion, nor does it reduce any people to servitude on the pretext that they are slaves "by nature."<sup>14</sup>

Thirty-one years later, in his debate with Las Casas at Valladolid, Sepúlveda made the Aristotelian doctrine of natural slavery the cornerstone of his defense of Spain's Indian wars and the encomienda. In his rebuttal Las Casas argued that no nation or race of men were slaves by nature; mentally deficient individuals were found in every nation, but these mistakes of nature only confirmed the generic equality of men. In the *Apologética Historia*, which is the second or Spanish part of the documentation used by Las Casas before the junta of Valladolid, Las Casas offered an eloquent statement

of the unity of mankind. Despite its medieval cast, it is worth quoting in our time when some academic figures are reviving Sepúlveda's discredited doctrine of racial inferiority.

For all the peoples of the world are men, and the definition of all men, collectively and severally, is one: that they are rational beings. All possess understanding and volition, being formed in the image and likeness of God; all have the five exterior senses and the four interior senses, and are moved by the objects of these; all have natural capacity or faculties to understand and master the knowledge that they do not have; and this is true not only of those that are inclined toward good but those that by reason of their depraved customs are bad; all take pleasure in goodness and in happy and pleasant things and all abhor evil and reject what offends or grieves them....

Thus all mankind is one, and all men are alike in what concerns their creation and all natural things, and no one is born enlightened. From this it follows that all of us must be guided and aided at first by those who were born before us. And the savage peoples of the earth may be compared to uncultivated soil that readily brings forth weeds and useless thorns, but has within itself such natural virtue that by labor and cultivation it may be made to yield sound and healthful fruits."<sup>15</sup>

From Las Casas's conception of humans as naturally free and rational beings flowed his democratic tenet of self-determination. There were medieval precedents for this idea. But Las Casas's use of the old medieval formulas, usually associated with the protection of seignorial or other oligarchical interests, to defend the oppressed Indians of America gave them a new content. Las Casas developed the doctrine of self-determination most thoroughly in the little tract *De regia potestate*, written in the 1560s.<sup>16</sup> The editors of the first Spanish edition of 1969 call this treatise one of the most sensational books of political philosophy published in the sixteenth century. Las Casas wrote the book in response to an urgent American problem: the encomenderos of Peru had offered Philip II five million ducats in return for a grant of the perpetual encomienda, which would convert their Indian tributaries into hereditary serfs. Stirred to feverish activity by the maneuvers of the encomenderos, Las Casas, now in his seventies, organized a counter-campaign in Spain and the Indies. In Peru a congress of caciques representing the Indian towns empowered Las Casas to represent them in Madrid in the struggle against the perpetual encomienda. Meanwhile Las Casas wrote *De regia potestate* in order to convince the King and the Council of the Indies that the project was illegal and must prove disastrous to Indian and royal interests. (In the sequel the Council voted down the hereditary encomienda, primarily from fear that the encomenderos' program would in fact seriously threaten royal interests in the Indies.)

In his book Las Casas developed what his modern Spanish editors call three "democratic dogmas". First, all power derives from the people; second, power is

delegated to rulers in order that they may serve the people; third all important governmental acts require popular consultation and approval. "No state, king, or emperor," wrote Las Casas, "can alienate territories, or change their political system, without the express approval of their inhabitants." These democratic ideas had medieval antecedents. As late as 1518, the Cortes of Castile had lectured the young Charles I, the future Emperor Charles, in these words: "You are the paid agent of your vassals and, by an implied contract, you must do justice to your people." But in their new context, challenging the right of the king to dispose of his Indian subjects, those old ideas acquired a subversive tinge. Juan Antonio Liorente informs us in his *Historia antica de la Inquisicion en Espana* (1835) that the book was denounced to the Inquisition as contradicting the teachings of St. Paul and St. Peter about the obedience that subjects owed to rulers.

The severe Spanish censorship law of 1558, which punished with death the author of any book published without royal license, precluded publication of *De regia potestate*. But Las Casas (or some friend of his) arranged that it find its way into the hands of the German lawyer Wolfgang Griestetter, who had accompanied the Imperial ambassador, the Baron von Hohenberg, to Madrid. On his return to Germany, Griestetter had the book published in Frankfurt in 1571. Its authenticity, once doubted, has been established beyond question.

The Lascasian doctrine of self-determination influenced European political thought and action during the Renaissance and the centuries that followed. Dutch rebels cited Las Casas's shorter writings to justify their struggle for independence from Spain. In the seventeenth century Italian publicists repeatedly invoked the ideas of Las Casas in their denunciation of the Spanish occupation of Sicily and Naples. The Dominican Michele Pio also used Las Casas to protest Spanish conquest of Valtellina and Northern Italy.

Spanish American patriot leaders, overlooking Las Casas's insistence on the Indian right to self-determination, utilized the writings of Las Casas to justify the creole seizure of power from Spain. But in the Mexican province of Yucatán the creole priest Father Vicente Marí a Velásquez, who had attentively read Las Casas's *Brief Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, revived the Lascasian doctrine of self-determination in all its pristine purity. Father Velásquez maintained that as the overwhelming majority of the Yucatecan nation, the Indians had the right to select the form of government they thought best; that because all the land had been usurped from the Indians, it should be returned to them; and that all existing property titles, being founded on arbitrary seizure, should be declared null and void. The conservative reaction that triumphed in both Spain and Yucatán as a result of the restoration of Ferdinand VII silenced Father Velásquez, and the conservative creoles under whose auspices independence came to Yucatán were equally hostile to his ideas.

I must not leave the subject of Las Casas's political thought without some reference to the thought of Francisco de Vitoria, celebrated as a founder of international law, who also wrote on the justice of Spain's Indian wars and Spain's titles to the New World. Writers on these subjects commonly compare the views of Las Casas and Vitoria to the advantage of the latter. Professor John H. Parry of Harvard, for example, asserts in his work of synthesis *The Spanish Seaborne Empire* that Las Casas's "numerous polemical writings are vituperative, one-sided, and at times extravagant." By contrast, he is impressed by the "penetration and liberality of mind" that Vitoria displayed in his discussion of Spain's title to the Indies and considers it "the most distinguished and in many ways the most original discussion of the subject."<sup>17</sup> Likewise, Professor Guillermo Céspedes, in his concise account of early colonial Latin America, finds that Vitoria was "the most lucid intellectual analyzing the main philosophical and political issues raised by the Spanish colonization."<sup>18</sup> Let us see, then, how penetrating, liberal, and lucid was Vitoria's treatment of these topics in his famous lecture *De Indis* of 1539.

Vitoria begins by discussing the "seven false titles of conquest." Here we seem to be on Lascasian ground. Vitoria declares that the Indians, as rational beings, were true owners of their lands and estates, for paganism could not annul natural rights. Neither Pope nor Emperor could claim to exercise temporal jurisdiction over other princes, Christian or infidel. Refusal of the Indians to receive the Faith could not justify war, for faith cannot be imposed by force. Nor did Indian "crimes against nature," such as human sacrifice, justify war and conquest.

But what Vitoria so generously concedes to the Indians he soon takes away. We quickly learn that he regards certain Spanish titles to the Indies as legitimate. What are they? The most important is the first title, which he calls "the title of society and natural communication." By the Law of Nations the Indians are bound to receive Spanish visitors peacefully. A corollary of this title was the right of peaceful trade with the Indians. Refusal on the part of the Indians to permit the Spaniards to enter their lands, trade with them, and search for gold, pearls, and other things "of which," according to Vitoria, "the barbarians make no use or that are common to all who wish to use them" justified the Spaniards in waging war on them, occupying their cities, and enslaving them.

In the twinkling of an eye Vitoria has transformed his peaceful Spanish pilgrims in search of gold and pearls into soldiers who wage war against the Indians, enslave them, and take their lands. "What is the difference," asks Jaime Concha,

between the outright affirmation of natural slavery and this astute crescendo whose climax is enslavement and every kind of violence against the Indians? Clearly, once the right of trade and exploitation of resources has been established, a labor force



becomes necessary to work the gold mines and other mines. And who more suitable than those Indians who refused to accept on faith the Spanish soldier's protestations of friendship? There is not the least doubt the title of "natural sociability" ends in the legitimization of slavery. A strange "sociability" is that proposed by Vitoria.<sup>19</sup>

By contrast, Las Casas repeatedly defended Indian resistance to Spanish entrance into their lands in various writings. In *Los tesoros del Perú*, he wrote: "Every king . . . if he believes it proper for the peace, avoidance of bad customs, the security and preservation of the kingdom . . . can prohibit any person from entering his land, whether to engage in trade or to reside therein or for any other cause." With his customary realism, Las Casas showed that the famous right of "sociability" had no application to America for the Spaniards never came there as peaceful pilgrims but as invaders who advanced like Alexander the Great. On the supposed right of the Spaniards to possess themselves of Indian gold, pearls, and other valuables, Las Casas made this appropriate comment: "Is it possible that our most serene king Philip and the Kingdom of Castile would allow the French king or the French to penetrate our kingdom without permission as far as the silver mines of Guadalcanal or other places, in order to carry away silver and gold and other precious objects?"<sup>20</sup>

I omit detailed discussion of Vitoria's other justifications for Spanish wars against the Indians: They included Indian refusal to allow the Gospel to be preached to them; intervention to save innocent victims from Indian tyranny, human sacrifice, and the like; and the right of assisting a friendly people in a just war against its neighbor. From these and Vitoria's other titles Las Casas dissented. I will only cite a passage from Vitoria's general conclusion, notable for its candid opportunism:

"It seems to follow that if all these titles were lacking, so that the barbarians gave no cause for waging war against them, and if they did not want to have Christian princes, etc., there must also cease all expeditions and trade, to the great prejudice of the Spaniards and to the great injury of the interests of the princes, something which cannot be tolerated." This passage refutes Professor Parry's assertion that "Vitoria's interest was academic, part of a wider interest in the rights and wrongs of war and conquest." Jaime Concha observes more correctly that Vitoria's argument is not "a pure theological exposition, as Vitoria himself claimed; it is thought that is a slave to the concrete policy of the Indies, that follows and reproduces all its convolutions, all the uses and abuses against the Indians."<sup>21</sup>

Let me round off my discussion by briefly tracing the trajectory of Las Casas's intellectual development. I must stress, first of all, that there were several Las Casas, that he was a different man at different stages of his very long life. Marcel Bataillon and Juan Friede, in particular, have traced the evolution of Las Casas's ideas and of the strategy he pursued in seeking to achieve his goals. The *clérigo* who landed in Hispaniola in 1502 was no reformer, much less a revolutionary. Until 1514 he was a

priest-colonist chiefly concerned with feathering his own nest; he served as chaplain in conquests whose barbarity he vainly tried to curb, and was rewarded for his services with a Cuban *encomienda*. Not until his thirtieth year did he experience a conversion, apparently the awakening of a dormant sensitivity as a result of the horrors he had seen about him. Even after his conversion in 1514, he did not wholly shed his colonial mentality. Marcel Bataillon has shown in a very illuminating essay <sup>22</sup> that the *raison d'être* of Las Casas's successive reform projects of the period 1515-1520 was the organization of colonial exploitation on a more satisfactory basis than the *encomienda*, with conversion forming only its ideal background or ultimate justification. The Las Casas of this period still assigned a privileged status to the good colonist in a reformed colonial world and himself did not scruple to accept a share in the profits of colonial enterprise. The disastrous failure of his Venezuelan colonization project -- a fiasco produced by the slave-hunting raids of the very same Caribbean interests on whose cooperation Las Casas had naively counted -- produced what Bataillon calls his "second conversion." Las Casas himself tells us that after the fiasco of Cumana he felt he was dead and buried -- perhaps meaning that he was buried in the Dominican convent which he entered in 1522 and became dead to the world he had known. The Las Casas who "died" in 1521 was the priest-reformer who proposed to reconcile Spanish private interests and Indian welfare; the Las Casas who emerged from the convent in 1531 after years of immersion in juridical-theological study advanced a revolutionary creed based on unshakable doctrinal foundations. Henceforth the Lascasian ideology centered on the right of the Indians to their land, on the principle of self-determination, on the subordination of all Spanish interests, including those of the Crown, to Indian interests, material and spiritual. Las Casas ultimately advanced a program calling for the suppression of the *encomienda*, liberation of the Indians from all forms of servitude except a small voluntary tribute to the Crown, and the restoration of the ancient Indian states and rulers, the rightful owners of those lands. Over these states the Spanish monarch would preside as "Emperor over many Kings" in order to fulfill his sacred mission of bringing the Indians to the Catholic Faith and the Christian way of life. This was the only Spanish title to the Indies that Las Casas regarded as legitimate. The Kings' agents in the performance of this mission would be a small number of model religious who would cooperate with the native rulers, with the Indians separated from the corrupting and oppressive presence of lay Spaniards.

Experience progressively radicalized Las Casas in his tactics as well as his program. Beginning about 1540 he gradually shifted from moralistic tactics of preaching, persuasion, and threatening *encomenderos* with divine wrath to promoting practical political measures like the New Laws of 1542, which, if implemented, would have revolutionized the economic and social structures of the Indies. He also began to systematically use the spiritual arms of the Church: excommunication, interdict, and

denial of absolution to secure compliance with Indian protective legislation. But the violent reaction of the colonists, and the retreat from the Emperor Charles's relatively pro-Indian policy, which began with the accession of Philip II in 1556, defeated Las Casas's heroic efforts. By 1560, in the words of Juan Friede, "he was a venerable but quite uninfluential ancient who would not admit defeat." It was from the pen of this ancient that issued works like the *Tesoros del Perú* and *De regia potestate*, which carried his ideas to their logical, ultimate, "utopian" conclusion, and memorials to the king containing proposals that had not the slightest chance of acceptance. Las Casas had suffered an inevitable defeat. But the prophetic vision, the Chilean *indigenista* Alejandro Lipschutz reminds us, when based on a scientific understanding of the past and present, must ultimately be transformed into reality.<sup>23</sup> Such was the case with Las Casas. Despite tragic reverses and contradictory trends, today we can safely assert that life is transforming Las Casas's prophetic vision into reality.

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## Notes

1. We now know that the correct birth date of Las Casas is not 1474 but 1484, and most probably November 11, 1484. See Helen Rand Parish and Harold E. Weidman, "The Correct Birthdate of Bartolomé de las Casas, *Hispanic American Historical Review* 56 (1976), 385-403.
2. Juan Friede and Benjamin Keen, eds., *Bartolomé de Las Casas in History* (Northern Illinois University Press, De Kalb, Illinois, 1971), p.3.
3. Eduard Fueter, *Storia della Storiografia moderna*, 2 vols. (Naples, 1944), I, 358.
4. Sepúlveda is cited in Sir Arthur Helps, *The Life of Las Casas* (London, 1868), p. xi.
5. *Historia de las Indias*, ed. Juan Pérez de Tudela, 2 vols. (Madrid, 1957), Book 3, ch. 149.
6. Cited in Benjamin Keen, ed., *Latin American Civilization: History and Society, 1492 to the Present* (6th ed., Boulder, Colorado, 1996), p. 42.
7. Alberto Pincherle, "La dignità dell'uomo e l'indigeno americano," in *Atti del Congresso Internazionale di studi umanistici* (Rome, 1952), p. 127.
8. José Antonio Maravall, *Antiguos y modernos: La idea del progreso en el desarrollo inicial de una sociedad* (Madrid, 1966), p.447.

9. Otto Walz, *Fr. Bartolomé de Las Casas. Eine historische Skizze* (Bonn, 1905), p. 5.
10. I. R. Grigulevich, "Bartolomé de Las Casas-Oblichitel Kolonializma," in I. R. Grigulevich, ed., *Bartolomé de Las Casas. K Istorii Zavoivaniia Ameriki* (Moscow, 1966), p.14.
11. Marcel Bataillon, "The *Clérigo* Casas, Colonist and Colonial Reformer," in Friede and Keen, eds., *Las Casas in History*, pp. 384-385. Whether Las Casas borrowed from More or More from Las Casas remains a subject of dispute. Some *LasCasistas* even question Las Casas's authorship of the 1517 *Memorial* cited by Bataillon. A recent study by Victor N. Baptiste, *Bartolomé de Las Casas and Thomas More's Utopia: Connections and Similarities* (Culver City, California, 1990), offers a different hypothesis: He suggests that a first Latin draft of Las Casas's *Memorial de remedios* of 1516, proposing the establishment of associated communities of free Indians and Spanish peasants, was sent to Flanders, where King Charles resided in 1515. There it was shown to More by his close friend Erasmus, then a member of the Royal Council, and inspired him to write his famous work. Baptiste cites numerous tantalizing similarities between the two "utopian" schemes in support of his thesis.
12. Both Las Casas's *Apologia* and Sepúlveda's argumentation (also called *Apologia*) in the debate of 1550-1551 have been jointly published, with an introduction and Spanish translations by Angel Losada (Madrid, 1975). We also have an English edition of Las Casas's *Apologia: In Defense of the Indians. The Defense of the Most Reverend Lord, Don Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas, of the Order of Preachers, Late Bishop of Chiapa, Against the Persecutors and Slanderers of the Peoples of the New World Discovered Across the Seas*, translated, edited, and annotated by C. M. Stafford Poole (Northern Illinois University Press, De Kalb, Illinois, 1974).
13. Angel Losada, "The Controversy between Sepúlveda and Las Casas in the Junta of Valladolid," in Friede and Keen, *Las Casas in History*, 301-302.
14. Cited in Manuel M. Martínez, "Las Casas on the Conquest of America," in Friede and Keen, *Las Casas in History*, p. 329.
15. Cited in Keen, ed., *Latin American Civilization*, pp. 72-73.
16. My discussion of this book is based on the bilingual edition, *De regia potestate o derecho de autodeterminacion* (Madrid, 1969), by Luciano Perena, J. M. Perez-Prendes, Vidal Abril, and Joaquin Azcárraga, which contains an informative introduction.
17. J. H. Parry, *The Spanish Seaborne Empire* (New York, 1966), pp.139-143.

18. Guillermo Céspedes, *Latin America: The Early Years* (New York, 1974), p.84.

19. Jaime Concha, "Las elecciones sobre los indios de Francisco de Vitoria," *Atenea* (Concepcion, Chile), Año XLIII, Tomo CLIII, julio-septiembre 1966, pp. 116-117.

20. Cited in Manuel M. Martínez, "Las Casas on the Conquest of America," in Friede and Keen, *Las Casas in History*, pp. 330-331.

21. Parry, *Spanish Seaborne Empire*, p. 139; Concila, "Las elecciones," p. 117. Vitoria's position in 1539, requiring the Indians to allow Spaniards to travel to their lands, trade with them, and take away their gold and pearls, on pain of suffering war and enslavement, contradicted his views in a 1537 lecture, *De temperantia*, affirming the right of the Indians to self-determination and control over their natural resources (he later withdrew that passage from his lecture). Thus Vitoria's position in 1537 in general agreed with that of Las Casas and most Spanish theologians of the famed "School of Salamanca." What happened in the interval to change Vitoria's mind? Angered by the "harmful and scandalous" criticism to which Spanish colonial policies were being subjected in pulpits and lecture halls, Emperor Charles had ordered a stop to such discussion. In his debate with Sepúlveda of 1550-1551, Las Casas, who admired Vitoria's learning and intelligence, delicately hinted at the reason for his change of front, suggesting he was "a little careless" in his discussion of some of Spain's titles to the Indies because "he wished to moderate what seemed to the Emperor's party to have been rather harshly put...." *In Defense of the Indians*, p. 340. Vitoria himself alluded to the reason for his retreat; in a letter to his friend Fray Miguel de los Arcos he wrote that whoever dared criticize the conquest of America risked being declared the Emperor's enemy. A modern Spanish scholar and admirer of Vitoria, Luciano Perena, forthrightly states that Vitoria was afraid of being regarded as a revolutionary. "Derechos civiles y politicos en el pensamiento de Bartolomé de Las Casas," in *En el quinto centenario de Bartolomé de Las Casas* (Madrid, 1986), p. 118. Gustavo Gutierrez provides a thorough discussion of Vitoria's position and his differences with Las Casas in Chapter 12, "A Fact Looking for Justification," of his *Las Casas: In Search of the Poor of Jesus Christ* (Maryknoll, N.Y., (1993), pp.331-355. Noting that Vitoria was well aware of the atrocities committed in the Indies and was revolted by them, Gutierrez comments: "Here is the sensitive heart of a good person, the frustration felt by an illustrious professor--and fear on the part of a public personage who finds himself in confrontation with power."

22. Marcel Bataillon, "The *Clérigo* Casas, Colonist and Colonial Reformer," in Friede and Keen, *Las Casas in History*, pp. 353-440.

23. Alejandro Lipschutz, "La visión profética de Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas y los rumbos étnicos de nuestro tiempo," *Atenea*, 167 (octubre-diciembre 1967), pp.5-31.