

26. Such also as have knowledge to make targets of horn.

27. Such also as can make armour of hides upon moulds, such as were wont to be made in this realm about an hundred years since and were called Scottish Jacks: such armour is light and defensive enough against the force of savages.

28. Tanners, to tan hides of buffs, oxen, etc., in the isles where you shall plant.

29. Whittawers of all other skins there.

30. Men skilful in burning of soap-ashes and in making of pitch and tar and rosin to be fetched out of Prussia and Poland, which are thence to be had for small wages, being there in manner of slavers.

The several sorts of trees, as pines, firs, spruces, birch and others, are to be bored with great augers a foot or half a yard above the ground, as they use in Vézelay towards Languedoc and near Bayonne in Gascony; and so you shall easily and quickly see what gums, rosin, turpentine, tar, or liquor is in them, which will quickly distil out clearly without any filthy mixture and will show what commodity may be made of them; their goodness and greatness for masts is also to be considered.

31. A skilful painter is also to be carried with you, which the Spaniards used commonly in all their discoveries to bring the descriptions of all beasts, birds, fishes, trees, towns, etc.

## BARTOLOMÉ DE LAS CASAS

### *From Letter to Philip, Great Prince of Spain*

Bartolomé de Las Casas (1474–1566) was a Spanish historian and Dominican missionary to the Americas, whose experience led him to oppose the oppression of the Indians of North America by European colonizers. First a soldier and then a member of expeditions to the West Indies, Las Casas learned of the oppression of Indians firsthand when he received, for his involvement in expeditions, land grants containing Indian inhabitants. At first, he concentrated on evangelizing the Indians, but he soon returned them to the Governor and began to work for their cause. The letter included here is one of a number Las Casas wrote over the course of his life in which he urged specific

people and institutions to adopt a less brutal method of colonization. This letter is reprinted from *In Defense of the Indians: The Defense of the Most Reverend Lord, Don Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas . . .*, translated, edited, and annotated by Stafford Poole (Dekalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1974).

### Illustrious Prince:

It is right that matters which concern the safety and peace of the great empire placed in your keeping by the divine goodness be reported to you, for you rule Spain and that marvelous New World in the name of the great Charles, your father, and you strive for immortal glory, not just with the imperial power but especially with the generous spirit and with the wisdom implanted in you by Christ. Therefore I have thought it advisable to bring to the attention of Your Highness that there has come into my hands a certain brief synopsis in Spanish of a work that Ginés de Sepúlveda is reported to have written in Latin. In it he gives four reasons, each of which, in his opinion, proves beyond refutation that war against the Indians is justified, provided that it be waged properly and the laws of war be observed, just as, up to the present, the kings of Spain have commanded that it be waged and carried out.

I hear that it is this man's intention to demonstrate the title by which the Kings of Spain possess the empire of the Indies and to bolster his position with arguments and laws, so that from now on no one will be able to slander you even tacitly on this point. I have read and reread this work carefully. And it is said that Sepúlveda drives home various other points at greater length in his Latin work (which I have not yet had the chance to see). What impression it has made on others I do not know. I certainly have detected in it poisons disguised with honey. Under pretext of pleasing his prince, a man who is a theologian offers honey-coated poison. In place of bread, he offers a stone. Great Prince, unless this deadly poison is stopped by your wisdom, so that it will not become widespread, it will infect the minds of readers, deceive the unwary, and arm and incite tyrants to injustice. Believe me, that little book will bring ruin to the minds of many.

In the first place, while claiming that he wants to vindicate your jurisdiction over the Indies, he tears to pieces and reduces your rights by presenting arguments that are partly foolish, partly false, partly of the kind that have the least force. Furthermore, if this man's judgment in this matter should be printed, [and] sanctioned with the royal license



and privilege, there can be no doubt that within a short time the empire of the Indies will be entirely overthrown and destroyed.

Indeed, if so many laws already issued, so many decrees, so many harsh threats, and so many statutes conscientiously enacted by the Emperor Charles and his predecessors have been ineffective in preventing so many thousands of innocent men from perishing by sword, hunger, and all the misfortunes of total war, and extensive areas of their highly civilized kingdoms and most fertile provinces from being savagely devastated; if the fear of God and the dread of hell have not even moderated (I shall not say curbed) the utterly ruthless and cruel spirits of the Spaniards; if the outcries of preachers and holy men that they were barred from the sacraments of the Church and were not forgiven in sacramental confession were of no avail, what will happen when evil men (for whom, according to the old proverb, nothing is wanting except the opportunity) read that a scholar, a doctor of theology, and the royal historian has published books approving those criminal wars and hellish campaigns and, by supporting arguments, confirms and defends the unheard-of crime whereby Christian men, forgetting Christian virtue, hold in slavery those people, the most unfortunate of all, who appear to have escaped the ferocity of that most cruel race by chance rather than by the mercy of the Spaniards? Furthermore, [what will happen when they read] that he teaches that soldiers may lawfully keep everything they take in these wars, even though they undertook the campaign with the evil intention of looting, that is, of pillaging by fire, sword, murder, plunder and violence, upsetting, overturning, and throwing into confusion all laws, divine and human, and that they are not bound to restore such goods because the Spaniards who do these things and shed the blood of the innocent consecrate their hands to God (as I hear Sepúlveda has written) and merit Christ's grace because they prevent the worship of idols?

Whom will they spare? What blood will they not shed? What cruelty will they not commit, these brutal men who are hardened to seeing fields bathed in human blood, who make no distinction of sex or age, who do not spare infants at their mothers' breasts, pregnant women, the great, the lowly, or even men of feeble and gray old age for whom the weight of years usually awakens reverence or mercy? What will they not do if they hear that there is a man teaching that they are consecrating their hands to God when they crush the Indians with massacres, pillaging, and tyranny — that they are doing the same as those who killed the Children of Israel who were adoring the calf? They will give more trust to him, as to someone who tells them what they want to hear, than

they would to the son of God himself if he were face to face before us and teaching something different.

If, then, the Indians are being brought to the point of extermination, if as many peoples are being destroyed as widespread kingdoms are being overthrown, what sane man would doubt that the most flourishing empire of the New World, once its native inhabitants have been destroyed, will become a wilderness, and nothing but dominion over tigers, lions, and wild beasts for the Kings of Spain? When the all-wise God commanded certain nations to be overthrown, he did not want them completely destroyed at once, lest the empty lands without human beings become the lair of wild animals which might harm the few Jews who were the new inhabitants.<sup>1</sup>

Therefore when Sepúlveda, by word or in his published works, teaches that campaigns against the Indians are lawful, what does he do except encourage oppressors and provide an opportunity for as many crimes and lamentable evils as these [men] commit, more than anyone would find it possible to believe? In the meantime, with most certain harm to his own soul, he is the reason why countless human beings, suffering brutal massacres, perish forever, that is, men who, through the inhuman brutality of the Spaniards, breathe their last before they hear the word of God, [or] are fed by Christ's gentle doctrine, [or] are strengthened by the Christian sacraments. What more horrible or unjust occurrence can be imagined than this?

Therefore, if Sepúlveda's opinion (that campaigns against the Indians are lawful) is approved, the most holy faith of Christ, to the reproach of the name Christian, will be hateful and detestable to all the peoples of that world to whom the word will come of the inhuman crimes that the Spaniards inflict on that unhappy race, so that neither in our lifetime nor in the future will they want to accept our faith under any condition, for they see that its first heralds are not pastors but plunderers, not fathers but tyrants, and that those who profess it are ungodly, cruel, and without pity in their merciless savagery.

Furthermore, since Sepúlveda's book is polished, painstaking, persuasive, and carefully built up throughout with many tricky kinds of argument, it will permanently deceive these thieves, these enemies of the human race, so that they will never come to their senses nor, admitting their crimes, flee to the mercy of God, who, in his unutterable love, is perhaps calling them to penance, nor will they implore his help. Under the pretext of religion, [Sepúlveda] excuses the criminal wicked-

<sup>1</sup>So we read in the seventh chapter of Deuteronomy.



ness of these men, which carries with it all the evils to be found anywhere in the lives of mortal men. He praises with lofty language these plunderers who loot with utmost savagery, and he commends their warlike virtue.

Finally, it is intolerable that a man to whom has been entrusted the duty of writing the imperial history should publish a destructive error that is in total disagreement with the words of the gospel and the meekness and kindness of which all Christ's teaching is redolent and which the Church, imitating its master, exercises toward those who do not know Christ. For men of the future will, with good reason, decide that a man who has gone wrong so disgracefully in a matter so clear has taken no account of the truth when writing history, a fact that, no matter how learnedly and gracefully that history will have been written, will tarnish the most celebrated victories of the Emperor.

Therefore I considered the many misfortunes, the great harvest of evils so deserving of rebuke, and the severest punishment which will arise from his teaching: offense against God, ill repute and hatred for our most holy religion, irreparable damage, the loss of so many believing souls, and the loss of the right of the Kings of Spain to the empire of the New World. I considered also that these opinions of his will spread through all the nations of the world the savage and firmly rooted practice of seizing what belongs to others and increasing one's property by shedding human blood (an evil reproach under which the Spanish people have labored for so long), which, Sepúlveda claims, are for the power and glory of Spain.

I could not contain myself. Mindful that I am a Christian, a religious, a bishop, a Spaniard, and a subject of the King of Spain, I cannot but unsheathe the sword of my pen for the defense of the truth, the honor of God's house, and the spreading of the revered gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ so that, according to the measure of the grace given to me, I might wipe the stain from the Christian name, take away the obstacles and stumbling blocks hindering the spread of belief in the gospel, and proclaim the truth which I have vowed in baptism, have learned in the religious life, and finally, however unworthy, have professed when consecrated bishop. For by all these titles I am bound to set myself up as a wall against the wicked for the defense of a completely innocent people, soon to be grafted onto the true house of Israel, whom the ravaging wolves unceasingly pursue. I am also obliged to block the road along which so many thousands of men are lured to their eternal destruction and to defend with my life my sheep, whom I

promised by a solemn oath to protect against every wolf, ecclesiastical or lay, who breaks into my sheepfold.

Finally, I want to set forth the true right of my prince, that is, the title by which he may possess the New World, and to hide [*sic*] the frightful and disgraceful crimes that my own people, the Spaniards, have inflicted in violation of justice and right during these last few years on the Indians, who have been ruined by terrible butchery, and to wash away the shame brought upon that name among all the nations.

Four things, therefore, that I must give a full account of are to be treated here.

First, I shall refute Sepúlveda's opinion claiming that war against the Indians is justified because they are barbarous, uncivilized, unteachable, and lacking civil government.

Second, I shall show that, to the most definite ruin of his own soul, Sepúlveda is wrong when he teaches that war against the Indians is justified as punishment for their crimes against the natural law, especially the crimes of idolatry and human sacrifice.

Third, we shall attack his third argument, on the basis of which Sepúlveda teaches that war can be waged unconditionally and indiscriminately against those peoples in order to free the innocent.

Fourth, I shall discuss how foreign to the teaching of the gospel and Christian mercy is his fourth proposition, maintaining that war against the Indians is justified as a means of extending the boundaries of the Christian religion and of opening the way for those who proclaim and preach the gospel.

When I have finished, the truth of this case and the magnitude of the crime committed by those who have maltreated the Indians by robberies, massacres, and other incredible misfortunes of war, and continue to do so, will be clear; and at the same time how groundless are the arguments of a man who is wrong both in law and in fact, by what design he was led to write that dangerous book, in what way he has distorted the teachings of philosophers and theologians, falsified the words of Sacred Scripture, of divine and human laws, and how no less destructively he has quoted statements of Pope Alexander VI to favor the success of his wicked cause. Finally, the true title by which the Kings of Spain hold their rule over the New World will be shown.

For this reason, Most Excellent Prince, I beg Your Highness to order this work, which I have written at the cost of much sweat and [many] sleepless nights, to be weighed and examined by learned men. If anything is found to be stated improperly or badly, I shall be most