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Las Casas on Faithful Witness

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SACRED ROOTS SPIRITUAL CLASSICS 8

*LAS CASAS
ON FAITHFUL
WITNESS*

*Edited by
Dr. Robert Chao Romero
and Rev. Marcos Canales*



GLOBAL MISSION

What “They” Say . . . What Will You Say?

Las Casas on Faithful Witness is such a powerful little book; it brings home to the reader deep truths about the human potential for the justification of extreme cruelty by corrupt theology and in contrast, our potential to be awakened by the Word of God to the call to justice. It also provides young people in our community a more nuanced and accurate picture of the history of the Latin American church than the standard secular description—critically important in an age when emerging generations are leaving the church at least partially because they lack any knowledge of the faithfulness and courage of believers who have embodied the full spectrum of the values taught and lived by Jesus. I hope that this book is well used in our churches and communities.

~ **Rev. Alexia Salvatierra, DMiss,**
Academic Dean of Centro Latino,
Fuller Theological Seminary

The present work is attuned to some of the questions and longings posed by younger Latinx generations seeking to connect gospel and justice amid their neighborhoods, cities, churches, and lives. *Las Casas'* model of integrative Christian witness offers readers a faithful example of advocacy for such a time as this. I commend the authors for this work that presents poignant challenges to the church's prophetic and critical role in realities of violence, racism, poverty, and suffering in the North American and Majority World contexts.

~ **Juan F. Martinez, PhD,**
author of *The Story of Latino Protestants in the United States*
and *Churches, Cultures & Leadership:*
A Practical Theology of Congregations and Ethnicities

Las Casas on Faithful Witness

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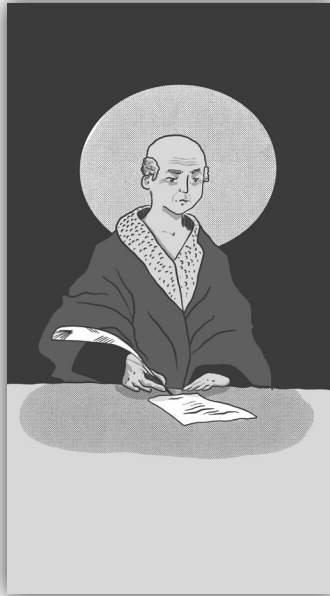
SACRED ROOTS SPIRITUAL CLASSICS



“Toward Ten Thousand Tozers”

Las Casas on Faithful Witness

SACRED ROOTS SPIRITUAL CLASSICS 8



Edited by Dr. Robert Chao Romero and Rev. Marcos Canales



Table of Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>Introduction</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Chapter 1</i>	
<i>Introduction to the Moral Dilemma of the Spanish Conquest</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Chapter 2</i>	
<i>"Getting Woke": The Spiritual Conversion of Bartolomé de las Casas</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>Chapter 3</i>	
<i>Violence and Conversion: "The Requirement"</i>	<i>37</i>
<i>Chapter 4</i>	
<i>Gender Violence, Patriarchy, and Colonization</i>	<i>45</i>
<i>Chapter 5</i>	
<i>"Blindspots": Las Casas and African Slavery</i>	<i>57</i>
<i>Chapter 6</i>	
<i>Labor, Laws, and Legalism: The Encomienda System and the Laws of Burgos.</i>	<i>67</i>

<i>Chapter 7</i>	
<i>The Great Debate (Part I):</i>	
<i>Personhood and the Image of God</i>	79
<i>Chapter 8</i>	
<i>The Great Debate (Part II):</i>	
<i>War, Evangelism, and the Church's Role</i>	95
<i>Afterword</i>	113
<i>Resources for Application</i>	117
<i>Soul Work and Soul Care:</i>	
<i>Loving Our Neighbors with Regular Soul Audits</i>	119
<i>Continuing the Conversation</i>	128
<i>Map of Important Places</i>	134
<i>A Letter to God's Friends and Fellow Warriors</i>	
<i>On Why We Read the Sacred Roots</i>	
<i>Spiritual Classics Together</i>	135
<i>The Nicene Creed with Scriptural Support</i>	151
<i>From Before to Beyond Time:</i>	
<i>The Plan of God and Human History</i>	155
<i>About the Sacred Roots Project</i>	158
<i>Scripture Index</i>	163

This book is dedicated to the memory and legacy of God's faithful witness, Bartolomé de las Casas. More than five hundred years ago, using all of the spiritual, emotional, and physical resources at his disposal, he repented of European colonialism and dedicated his life to dignifying the image of God of the diverse indigenous peoples of the Americas, decentering European Christianity, and planting the seeds of Christian racial justice which continue to bear fruit into the 21st century. As a miracle of God, we witness this fruit most clearly today in the living and thriving faith of the Christian "base" of Latin America and the U.S. Latina/o church, and in their resilience and hope.

To the millions of young Latinas and Latinos who struggle to reconcile their commitment to Jesus with justice, may they know that this is their legacy, too. May they know that God sees them and that they have a spiritual home in the five-hundred-year-old racial justice tradition of the Brown Church. And for the rest of our sisters and brothers in the body of Christ, may you feel God's warmest welcome, because the Brown Church is an entry point into the Beloved Community for all.



GLOBAL MISSION



Acknowledgments

The editors wish to thank Hank Voss for the special invitation to be a part of the Sacred Roots Spiritual Classics series. We are committed to God's church—local, global, past, present, and future—and we know that an important part of moving forward in these currently turbulent times is to look back at the treasures of wisdom which are hidden in Christ and which have been entrusted to the church over the past two thousand years for the sake of the Beloved Community from every tribe, language, nation, and tongue.

As an introduction to the faithful witness and extensive writings of Bartolomé de las Casas, this book is broken down into eight chapters based upon selections from three of Las Casas' books: *A Brief Account of the Destruction of the Indies* (1542), *In Defense of the Indians* (c. 1550), and *History of the Indies* (1561). Because modern English translations of many of Las Casas' works are difficult to come by, each selection represents an original English translation of the Spanish text. The English translations are designed to be readable in the style of the New Living

Translation Bible. Chapters seven and eight are exceptions to this translation approach. Though still accessible, these chapters lean toward a more literal and formal translation of the original Spanish language texts and include more “academic” footnotes to guide the reader. The editors took this different approach because chapters seven and eight represent translations of precise legal and theological arguments in the Scholastic tradition of the 16th century.

This translation work was a large task which required a group effort. An enormous thanks is owed to Rev. Sarah Gautier who translated chapters two through six. Dr. Robert Chao Romero translated chapter one, and Rev. Marcos Canales translated chapters seven and eight. Translation work is deeply personal, and the translations of this book reflect our unique and individual styles and vantage points as pastor-lawyer of a multicultural millennial congregation in Boston (Sarah), theologian-pastor of a Latina/o bilingual and intergenerational congregation in Pasadena (Marcos), and pastor-professor of Chicana/o Studies in Los Angeles (Robert). Together, we also represent a diversity of Latin American heritages from Puerto Rico, Costa Rica, Peru, and Mexico, as well as the Latino metropolis of Los Angeles. Each of us, in our own way, are descendants of the prophetic ministry of Las Casas.

What follows is a breakdown of the Spanish language texts used for the English language translations for each chapter.

Chapter One

Bartolomé de las Casas. *Brevísima Relación de la Destrucción de las Indias*. San Juan: Textos Clásicos Universales, 2019.

Bartolomé de las Casas. *Brevísima Relación de la Destrucción de las Indias*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015.

Chapter Two

Bartolomé de las Casas. *Historia de las Indias: Tomo IV*. El Camino Historia, 1875.

Bartolomé de las Casas. *Historia de las Indias: Tomo III*. Madrid: Imprenta de Miguel Ginesta, 1875.

Chapter Three

Bartolomé de las Casas. *Historia de las Indias: Tomo IV*. El Camino Historia, 1875.

Chapter Four

Bartolomé de las Casas. *Brevísima Relación de la Destrucción de las Indias*. San Juan: Textos Clásicos Universales, 2019.

Chapter Five

Bartolomé de las Casas. *Historia de las Indias: Tomo IV, V*. El Camino Historia, 1875.

Chapter Six

Bartolomé de las Casas. *Brevísima Relación de la Destrucción de las Indias*. San Juan: Textos Clásicos Universales, 2019.

Text from the Laws of Burgos were selected and modified into a more readable English translation from: <http://faculty.smu.edu/bakewell/BAKEWELL/texts/burgoslaws.html>. Accessed June 2021.

Chapters Seven and Eight

Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, Fray Bartolomé de las Casas.
*Apología de Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda contra Fray
Bartolomé de las Casas: y de Fray Bartolomé de las
Casas contra Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda.* Translated
by Angel Losada. Madrid: Editora Nacional, 1975.



Introduction

The need to be a part of urban justice is huge to me. Being a Chicana/o Studies major many injustices have been brought to light for me. I'll be honest, I have cried many times in class while watching videos or reading books and I have often asked God why . . . I would like to understand through His words/teachings. I hope to gain understanding and hopefully an answer to the many "whys" I have.

My student Elena wrote these words. Elena was a single mom who grew up in East Los Angeles as part of a Mexican immigrant family. When she came to UCLA as a transfer student, she was naturally attracted to courses which helped to explain the suffering she witnessed in her community. Why were the public schools she grew up in underfunded in comparison to the rich schools on the other side of town? Why did so many people in her city lack adequate healthcare? Why was more not being done to address mass incarceration and the school-to-prison pipeline? Why did others look down upon immigrant families like

hers, call them ugly racist slurs, and promote policies that would separate kids from their parents?

At the same time, Elena was a follower of Jesus. As a “baby” Christian who had recently gone back to church, she struggled to connect her faith with what she was learning in school. If God is a loving God, then why did he allow these types of injustices to exist? What did God’s Word have to say about poverty and racism? If God loves immigrants and the poor, then why do so many Christians actually promote injustice?

Elena is not alone in asking these difficult and important questions. In fact, 1.2 million young people are leaving the church in America each year, many because of the broken witness of numerous Christians toward immigrants, the poor, the disabled, and incarcerated.

The faithful life witness and writings of Bartolomé de las Casas offer understanding and answers to the many “why’s” being asked by so many young people today. Though he lived five hundred years ago, Las Casas wrestled with many of the same theological questions raised by Elena. As a pastor, he was also one of the first to write Christian books which documented and condemned racial abuses toward Native Americans. Some even say that Las Casas “invented” racial justice in the Americas.

Las Casas was born in Seville, Spain in 1484. Together with Christopher Columbus, he took part in the brutal military conquests of what is today Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the other islands of the Caribbean. While commissioned by the Spanish crown to find a new trade route to India and Asia, Columbus got lost and accidentally landed in what we today call the

Caribbean. At that time, the Caribbean islands were teeming with hundreds of thousands of diverse indigenous peoples made in the image of God. With the support of the Spanish crown, Columbus, Las Casas, and many others conquered the native peoples of the islands and forced them to work as slaves in the fields and gold mines. Tragically, the entire native population of the Caribbean would eventually disappear as a result of European genocide and colonization.

On June 4, 1514, at the age of thirty, Las Casas got “woke” while preparing a sermon for Pentecost Sunday. His conscience was stricken and his life was turned upside down after reading the following words from Sirach 34:18: “The sacrifice of an offering unjustly acquired is a mockery; the gifts of the impious are unacceptable.”¹ Las Casas reflected upon this text from the Apocrypha and realized that it was wrong to go along with the Spanish conquest and colonization of the Americas. As a priest and follower of Jesus, he realized that he could not both follow Christ and participate in the exploitation of the Indians. After this spiritual awakening, Las Casas repented of his wrongs, gave up all of his material possessions, and for the next fifty years dedicated his life to protesting the Spanish conquest and defending the native peoples. His justice ministry took the form of sermons, writings, labor reform, and even the development of peaceful church planting methods. This book traces the history of Las Casas’ spiritual conversion and advocacy by offering selections from three of his key works: *A Brief Account of the Destruction*

1 To read more of Ben Sirach, explore Bob Lay, ed., *Books Jesus Read: Learning from the Apocrypha*, Sacred Roots Spiritual Classics 5 (Wichita, KS: TUMI Press, 2022).

of the Indies (1542), *In Defense of the Indians* (c. 1550), and *History of the Indies* (1561).

A Brief Account of the Destruction of the Indies

A Brief Account of the Destruction of the Indies was written by Las Casas to the prince of Spain to bring attention to the genocide of native peoples by Spanish colonists. Las Casas hoped to convince the prince to tell his father, King Charles V, what was happening to the natives, and therefore promote reform. In Las Casas' words:

Like wild animals—wolves, tigers, or lions—who have not eaten in days, the Spaniards pounced upon these gentle lambs who possess all of the positive qualities we have just discussed. For the past forty years, the Spaniards have torn them apart, killed them, traumatized them, afflicted them, tormented them, and destroyed them using strange, new, and unspeakable forms of cruelty.

Based upon his own firsthand experience, in *A Brief Account*, Las Casas describes the brutal Spanish conquest of various countries that now constitute Latin America, including Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Nicaragua, Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela, Peru, and even Florida and Jamaica. He discusses themes such as Spanish military methods, slavery, gender violence, and colonization. As a tool of advocacy, *A Brief Account* appeals to the good will of the prince and king as stewards of government and instruments of God's justice (Rom 13).

In Defense of the Indians

The writings and justice ministry of Las Casas stirred great controversy in Spain and prompted what was called the “Great Debate,” or the disputation of Valladolid. As

part of the Great Debate which was held during two sessions in August 1550 and spring 1551, the country of Spain stepped back to ask the question: “Is it lawful for the king of Spain to wage war on the Indians, before preaching the faith to them, in order to subject them to his rule, so that afterward they may be more easily instructed in the [Christian] faith?”² The answer might seem obvious to us in the twenty-first century, but it was not so clear to the world five hundred years ago. In fact, the Great Debate represents one of the first times a nation paused to interrogate the morality of conquest and colonization.

As part of the Great Debate, Las Casas battled his foe: theologian and royal historian Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda. Drawing from the writings of Aristotle, Sepúlveda tried to persuade the king that the natives could be forcefully conquered and subsequently converted to Christianity because they were “barbarians” and “natural slaves.” In lumping the millions of diverse indigenous peoples of the Americas together and labeling them “barbarians” and “Indians,” Sepúlveda and his followers also invented the concept of “race” in the Americas.

Las Casas denounced Sepúlveda’s treatise as “venom wrapped in honey,” for it threatened to infect so many readers and empower so many evil opportunists that it would cause the damnation of many souls.³ Bartolomé de las Casas’ probing questions and observations are the

2 Lewis Hanke, *All Mankind Is One: A Study of the Disputation Between Bartolomé de las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda on the Religious and Intellectual Capacity of the American Indians* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1974), 67–68.

3 Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda and Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, *Apología de Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda contra Fray Bartolomé de las Casas: y de Fray Bartolomé de las Casas contra Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda*, trans. Angel Losada (Madrid: Editora Nacional, 1975), 115.

launching point of his response against Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda's theological, scriptural, and legal arguments. Las Casas tackles each of these arguments with unwavering passion, urgency, thoroughness, defiance, and theological and scriptural reflection in his infamous *Apología*, or *Defense of the Indians*. According to Las Casas, the Indians were God's precious children, made in God's image just as much as the Spaniards, and as a result, the good news of Jesus should only be shared with them through peaceful means and love:

[The Indians] are our brothers, redeemed by Christ's most precious blood, no less than the wisest and most learned men in the whole world . . . Christ wanted love to be called his single commandment. This we owe to all men. Nobody is excepted. "There is no room for distinction between Greek and Jew, between the circumcised and the uncircumcised, or between barbarian and Scythian, slave and free man. There is only Christ: he is everything and he is in everything."⁴

History of the Indies

Written a half century after Las Casas' initial conversion experience, *History of the Indies* consists of three books and more than a thousand pages. One might think of it as a more comprehensive version of his earlier *Brief Account*. In addition to offering a more robust account and systematic critique of the Spanish conquest, *History of the Indies* is also unique in so far as it offers Las Casas' own self-reflection in a type of diary form. Notably, he describes his own spiritual conversion to the cause of the Indians, and even his own shortcomings. Referring to himself in the third

4 Bartolomé de las Casas, *In Defense of the Indians* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1992), 39.

person, Las Casas narrates his own experience of getting “woke”:

[Las Casas] spent a few days in meditation on the matter until by dint of applying his readings to this and that case he was convinced Indians were being treated unjustly and tyrannically all over the Indies. He read everything in this new light and found his opinion supported; as he used to say, from the day the darkness lifted from his eyes, he never read any book in Latin or a vulgar tongue . . . which did not in some way provide the proof of Indian rights and Spanish injustice.⁵

As an introduction to the faithful witness and extensive writings of Las Casas, this book is broken down into eight chapters based upon selections from the three books just introduced. Each chapter treats a core topic from the life and teachings of Las Casas and includes five discussion questions. The discussion questions are geared toward real life application and address the key themes of Habitat (placing the writings of Las Casas into contemporary context), Head (analyzing with reason and logic), Heart (listening to our God-given emotions as a source of reflection), Hand (a practical action step), and Habits (drawing upon the faithful witness of Las Casas to develop lifelong habits of discipleship).

The eight chapters are broken down as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Moral Dilemma of the Spanish Conquest (*A Brief Account of the Destruction of the Indies*)

5 Bartolomé de las Casas, *History of the Indies*, ed. Andrée Collard (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1971), 208–9, cited in Robert Chao Romero, *Brown Church: Five Centuries of Latina/o Social Justice, Theology, and Identity* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2020), 54–55.

Chapter 2: “Getting Woke”: The Spiritual Conversion of Bartolomé de las Casas (*History of the Indies*)

Chapter 3: Violence and Conversion: “The Requirement” (*History of the Indies*)

Chapter 4: Gender Violence, Patriarchy, and Colonization (*A Brief Account of the Destruction of the Indies*)

Chapter 5: “Blindspots”: Las Casas and African Slavery (*History of the Indies*)

Chapter 6: Labor, Laws, and Legalism: The Encomienda System and the Laws of Burgos (*A Brief Account of the Destruction of the Indies*)

Chapter 7: The Great Debate (Part I): Personhood and the Image of God (*In Defense of the Indies*)

Chapter 8: The Great Debate (Part II): War, Evangelism, and the Church’s Role (*In Defense of the Indies*)

By way of conclusion, it is important to note that Bartolomé de las Casas was the father of what may be called “The Brown Church.” As I (Robert) have written in detail elsewhere, the Brown Church represents the five-hundred-year tradition of Latina/o Christian social justice movements in Latin America and the United States. Unknown to most people, the Brown Church has challenged such great evils as the Spanish Conquest and Spanish colonialism, the “sistema de castas,” Manifest Destiny⁶ and U.S. settler colonialism in the Southwest, Latin American dictatorships, U.S. imperialism in Central

6 Manifest Destiny – the nineteenth-century idea that God destined the United States to expand its territory and spread democracy and capitalism across North America.

America, the oppression of farmworkers, and the current exploitation and marginalization of undocumented immigrants.⁷ The Brown Church has done all of this in the name of Jesus. It is also worth noting that the Brown Church is older than the Protestant-Catholic divide, for it was born in 1511, six years before Luther nailed his famous Ninety-Five Theses on the door of All Saints' Church in Wittenberg. In that year, on the Sunday before Christmas, Dominican friar Antonio de Montesinos preached the first racial justice sermon in the history of the Americas. Evoking the words and imagery of John the Baptist, Montesinos condemned the Spanish conquest as unbiblical and launched the movement for indigenous rights that Las Casas would join just a few years later.

Another way of framing the Brown Church is to ask, "How has the Holy Spirit been at work in issues of justice in the Latina/o community over the past five hundred years?" The answer is: through a diverse group of Jesus-followers—women and men, indigenous, black, white, Asian, mixed race, rich, poor, formally educated, street-smart, Protestant, Catholic, evangelical, and Pentecostal—from all nations in Latin America and diverse Latino communities of the United States. This little known but important legacy can be traced back, in a continuous line, to the faithful witness, advocacy, and prophetic writings of Bartolomé de las Casas. Indeed, nearly all contemporary Christian justice ministry in the Americas can be traced back to spiritual legacy of Las Casas.

For Elena and millions of other Latina/o Christians who are wrestling with their spiritual identity and longing for

7 For more on this complex history, see Romero, *Brown Church*.

a way to reconcile their faith in Jesus, love of their God-given Latino cultural heritage, and passion for justice, this is good news. They no longer have to wander. They have a spiritual home. They belong to the Brown Church. Even better, they are the Brown Church! We are the Brown Church.

And for the rest of our sisters and brothers in Christ, the Brown Church welcomes you, too! The goal of the Brown Church is not the Brown Church, but the Beloved Community of all of God's children from every tribe, language, nation, and tongue. The Brown Church is a different entry point that most have forgotten, but its doors open wide to all!

The Text





GLOBAL MISSION



Chapter 1

Introduction to the Moral Dilemma of the Spanish Conquest¹

Excerpts from *A Brief Account of the Destruction of the Indies*

Argument/Summary

The things that have happened in the Indies since the marvelous discovery by the Spaniards have been so incredible that you would not believe it unless you saw it with your own eyes. The Spanish conquest was so astonishing that it can be compared with—no, it even overshadows—all of the famous stories of heroes throughout the world. The tales of conquest include the slaughter of innocent people, as well as other terrifying acts such as the massacre of entire towns, provinces, and kingdoms. Because not a whisper of these atrocities had reached the

1 The following passages were translated into English from the Spanish texts: Bartolomé de las Casas, *Brevísima Relación de la Destrucción de las Indias* (San Juan: Textos Clásicos Universales, 2019); Bartolomé de las Casas, *Brevísima Relación de la Destrucción de las Indias* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015).

ears of those living in Spain, I, Bishop and Brother Bartolomé de las Casas, traveled to the Spanish royal court to inform the Emperor, our lord, about all that was happening after I became a Dominican monk. I also shared these events with others, who, in shock and disbelief, pleaded with me to write a short history of the destruction of the Indies. I took their advice, but was disturbed to find that, just a few years later, many were still continuing these evils because their greed and ambition made them callous and morally bankrupt. They stopped being human and were given over to a depraved mind. As if all of this treachery and injustice were not enough—in fact they had perfected the art of genocide—they even had the nerve to ask the king for official permission to repeat their violent conquests and commit even worse things in other places.

This is why I decided to share this summary with you again, Your Royal Highness, the prince. I hope that you can persuade the king to put a stop to these plans being made by such evil men. Presenting a written account seemed to be the most convenient way to relay this information to you, your Royal Highness. This is the reason for the following brief history, or short account.

Prologue

From Bishop Brother Bartolomé de las Casas, to the most high and powerful Lord, the prince of Spain, Sir Philip, our Lord.

Most high and powerful Lord:

It is God's will that human beings are divided into kingdoms and people groups, and that they are ruled by kings who are supposed to be like fathers and shepherds to them

(Homer has said the same thing). Kings are unselfish and noble, and of strong moral character. If something wrong or evil occurs in their kingdom it is only because they are unaware of it. Once an evil is brought to their attention, they eradicate it immediately, with all deliberate speed. As God's Word says in the Proverbs of Solomon: "A king who sits on the throne of judgment winnows all evil with his eyes" (Prov 20:8). Because of the innate and natural virtue of the king, once he hears of such evil, he will not let it stand, even for a moment.

Mighty Lord, for more than fifty years I have witnessed firsthand the horrible evil, suffering, and devastation experienced by the indigenous kingdoms of the Americas. These kingdoms are so vast that they could even be considered an entirely New World. These numerous indigenous peoples have been entrusted by God and his church to the kings of Castile so that they might be governed fairly, come to know Christ, and prosper both materially and spiritually.

I know that if you, the Prince, had been made aware of even a few of the horrible things which have occurred, you would have soon pleaded passionately to the king to stop the so-called conquests being carried out by the Spaniards. These atrocities are tyrannical and despicable, and violate not only God's law, but also natural and civil law. If nothing is done, these appalling things will continue to take place. What makes these deeds especially vile is that, by contrast, the indigenous peoples are peaceful, humble, and meek, and do not pick fights with anyone. I could therefore no longer keep silent about what is happening because it is causing so much physical and spiritual death. I put together this brief account (so much more could be said) to make

it convenient for Your Highness to learn about all that is occurring.

I was subsequently asked by the Archbishop of Toledo, who is also a royal tutor, for a copy. I gladly gave him a copy of this brief account and was informed that he passed it on to Your Highness. Based upon the fact that Your Highness carries so many important responsibilities and are frequently traveling by both land and sea, you may not have had the chance to read it, or perhaps it has fallen to the back of your long list of important responsibilities. Unfortunately, in the meantime, the conquistadors² have continued to act with impunity as they slaughter millions of Indians, rob them of their own lands, and steal their priceless treasures. Like wolves in sheep's clothing, the conquistadors keep asking for royal permission to pillage and conquer these innocent people, but their conquests violate all principles of God's law and natural law, and they store up mortal sins worthy of an eternity in hell. In light of the seriousness of the matter, I thought it important to present Your Highness with this *Short Account*, which is only a very brief summary of the horrors which have taken place.

I beg Your Highness to read it. In your kindness and mercy, may this account be received as being from one of Your Highness' servants who has only the best intentions and wishes to see the flourishing of the public good and the Crown. It is my deepest hope that the revelation of these profound injustices will lead to an end of the violent conquest of the Americas by the Spanish. The natives are being crushed and destroyed by greedy and ambitious

2 Conquistador – Spanish word for “conqueror,” specifically one who participated in conquering the Americas in the sixteenth century.

men without rhyme or reason, who only wish to satisfy their own abominable appetites. My prayer is that this account may stir you, the Prince, to ask the king to put an end to, once and for all, the granting of royal permission to conquer native peoples and lands. May their demonic voices and requests be forever silenced.

Time is of the essence, your Royal Highness. If change does not occur, God will no longer bless—both spiritually and materially—the people and Crown of Spain.

Preface

The Indies were discovered in 1492, and Spanish Christians began settling the Caribbean the following year. It has now been forty-nine years. The first territory they entered was the fruitful and important island of Hispaniola³ which has six hundred leagues⁴ of coastline. It is surrounded by other extensive and significant islands on all sides which are filled with native Indian inhabitants and populations, the size of which compare with any other place in the world. The mainland is about 250 leagues away. About ten thousand leagues of the mainland coast have been discovered, and each day more is found. This land is filled with so many people, it is like a bee hive; it seems like God chose those lands to be home to most people of the human race.

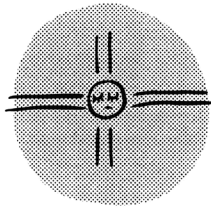
The natives are very diverse, and God has made them simple and innocent. They are virtuous and sincere, faithful to both the leaders of their own people and the Christians whom they serve. More than anyone else in

3 Hispaniola – present-day Haiti and Dominican Republic.

4 League – a unit of measuring distance roughly equivalent to three miles.

the world, they are humble, patient, and peaceful; never quarrelsome, hateful or full of vengeance. They are skinny, delicate, and unable to do much hard work, and as a result easily die from illness. Even the common people are as delicate as Spanish princes and the children of European lords born with a silver spoon in their mouth. They are very poor and do not seek after worldly possessions, and for that reason they are not arrogant, ambitious or greedy. Their food is basic and bland like that of the holy Desert Fathers. They cover their private parts and bodies with either a loincloth or a cotton fabric that is about one or two square yards. Some sleep on mats, and others on hanging nets which are called hammocks. They are naturally curious and pure of thought and mind. Spiritually, they are more ready to receive the gospel than any other people in the world that God has created; they are predisposed to receive our holy Catholic faith and receptive to good doctrine and virtuous customs. Once they begin to learn about and understand the Christian faith, and take part in worship and the sacraments of the church, I kid you not, they become so eager for more that the missionaries have to pray for the gift of special patience from God. Finally, I have heard many Spanish lay people say over the years—over and over again—that no one can deny they are such good people, and that, “These would be the most blessed people on earth if they only came to know Jesus.”

Like wild animals—wolves, tigers, or lions—who have not eaten in days, the Spaniards pounced upon these gentle lambs who possess all of the positive qualities we have just discussed. For the past forty years, the Spaniards have torn them apart, killed them, traumatized them, afflicted them, tormented them, and destroyed them using strange,



new, and unspeakable forms of cruelty. More will be said below, but when the Spaniards first arrived there were three million inhabitants on the island of Hispaniola; today, only two hundred have survived. The island of Cuba is almost as long as the distance from Valladolid to Rome, and yet today has virtually no indigenous people left. In the same way, the large and fertile islands of San Juan and Jamaica are completely devastated. Nor is a single creature left in the Bahamas, which are located just north of Hispaniola and Cuba and which comprise a collection of more than sixty islands. This is true even though the Bahamas, and other islands in the area such as the Isle of Giants, are more beautiful, flourishing, and fertile than even the Royal Gardens of Seville. The native population of these islands once numbered about 500,000, but was extinguished by being forcibly brought to the island of Hispaniola to replace its dwindling population. One good Christian man led an evangelistic expedition to find those left behind in the Bahamas who had escaped the grasp of the Spanish. After a three-year search, only eleven people were found, and I got the chance to meet them. More than thirty islands around Puerto Rico have also been depopulated and ruined through these same types of practices. All of these islands comprise more than two thousand leagues, and are now deserted and uninhabited.

Through their cruel and heinous acts, our fellow Spaniards have eradicated the equivalent of ten kingdoms on the mainland. Each one of these kingdoms was greater in size than all of Spain and Portugal combined. They have depopulated more than two thousand leagues of territory, equivalent to traveling roundtrip from Spain to Jerusalem, and back again. The diabolical exploits of the Christians has led to the unjust killing of more than twelve million

men, women, and children over the past forty years. In my accounting, I think it is even closer to fifteen million.

There have been two ways in which those so-called “Christians” have wiped out and decimated the indigenous peoples.

The first is through unjust, cruel, and arbitrary wars. Secondly, they have murdered anyone who has shown any resistance or even the slightest thought of resistance. This has led to a crackdown on native leadership and the annihilation of most men because the Spaniards spare only women and children in war, and place men in a type of horrible and brutal slavery that is not even fit for animals. All of the horrors suffered by the Indians boil down to one of these two hellish and evil policies.

At the end of the day, the reason why the Christians have done so many horrible things and killed so many innocent people is to get rich with gold. Like a buffet table, they try to stuff themselves with as many riches as possible, as quickly as possible. They do this to climb the social ladder because many of them come from lower class backgrounds.

The greed and status-seeking of the Spaniards is insatiable. The islands are lush and productive, and the Indians get taken advantage of because they are patient, peaceful, and submissive. The Spaniards have treated the Indians worse than their own animals—like dung in the town square. I know these things because I have been an eyewitness from the very beginning. They have not cared about the bodies or souls of the indigenous peoples, and so the Indians have died without knowing Jesus or having the benefit of true worship. There is one well-established and widely known truth which is recognized even by

the murderous and oppressive Spaniards: the natives throughout all the Indies never once did harm to the Christians. In fact, they even believed that the Spaniards came down from heaven—at least until they and their neighbors were subjected to all types of wrongs, robbery, killings, violence, and humiliation at the hands of those who claimed to be the ambassadors of Jesus.

Discussion Questions



The horrible racial injustices described by Las Casas occurred in what is now Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Cuba, and Puerto Rico five hundred years ago, and set the stage for African slavery and Native American genocide throughout North America. What is an example of a racial injustice that continues to occur in your community today?



According to Las Casas, many Spanish conquistadors committed atrocities because they wanted to get rich quick and become “upper class.” Compare this with what Paul says in 1 Timothy 6:10. How do these patterns play out in your country today?



The islands of the Caribbean were once filled with hundreds of thousands of diverse indigenous peoples made in the image of God. How does it make you feel to learn that these once flourishing communities were extinguished by those claiming to be followers of Jesus? If you were not a Christian, but heard about this history, how would you feel?



Las Casas could “no longer keep silent” about the abuses he witnessed, and as a result dedicated five decades of his life to advocacy on behalf of native communities. In fact, it is said that Las Casas “invented” Christian social justice in the Americas. Reflect upon Proverbs 31:8–9. What is one step that you and your congregation can take to live out these verses?



A false dichotomy is often created between “discipleship” and caring for immigrants, the poor, and all who are marginalized. Reflect upon Matthew 25:31–46. How can you incorporate Matthew 25 regularly into your daily discipleship practices?

Open your mouth for the mute,
for the rights of all who are destitute.
Open your mouth, judge righteously,
defend the rights of the poor and needy.

~ Proverbs 31:8–9



Chapter 2

"Getting Woke": The Spiritual Conversion of Bartolomé de las Casas¹

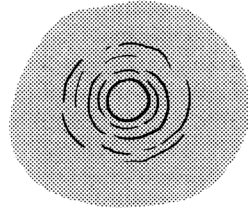
Excerpts from *History of the Indies*

Las Casas Gets "Woke"

In those days, greed increased across the islands and many indigenous people were enslaved and being mistreated, even murdered. Clergyman Bartolomé las Casas continued to send enslaved people to work in the fields and in the gold mines. He did his best to treat them kindly, because he felt bad for their suffering. However, Las Casas felt no obligation to liberate them or treat them as humans.

But one day everything changed. The governor, Diego Velázquez, left Xagua, along with his fellow Spaniards to

1 The following passages were translated into English from the Spanish texts: Bartolomé de las Casas, *Historia de las Indias: Tomo IV* (El Camino Historia, 1875); Bartolomé de las Casas, *Historia de las Indias: Tomo III* (Madrid: Imprenta de Miguel Ginesta, 1875).



establish the town of Espiritu Santo. When they left there was only one other priest in the area besides Las Casas. When the Day of Pentecost came, Las Casas went to preach mass in Xagua. As he prepared his sermon, reviewing former sermons from the book of Sirach,² Las Casas reflected on the suffering and treatment of the indigenous people. He reflected on his experience when he lived in Hispaniola.³

At that time, Las Casas bought and enslaved native people. He treated them without much care or concern. But the Dominican friars taught that you could not have a clear conscience if you held indigenous people as slaves. There was one clergyman who refused to listen to Las Casas for confession, because of the slaves who worked for him. When Las Casas asked why, he responded with what seemed like useless and empty arguments, only for Las Casas to interrupt him saying: "Enough, Father, truth comes in many disguises, but so do lies." After that, the clergyman stopped trying to convince Las Casas of his arguments against slavery and conceded to him, because Las Casas was a person of power and influence.

But the memory of this interaction with the clergyman caused him to reflect and reconsider his ignorance in enslaving people like everyone else and the immorality of his character as a result. After a few days of reflecting on his ignorance and immorality in light of the Scriptures, he experienced an awakening moment: Indigenous peoples were being treated unjustly and inhumanely all over the New World.

2 The Wisdom of Sirach is sometimes referred to as Ecclesiasticus.

3 Hispaniola – present-day Haiti and Dominican Republic.

Las Casas' awakening led him to see everything in light of this new revelation. He used to say, from the day he saw the light, he read an infinite number of books which all in some way proved the rights of the indigenous peoples and the injustices of the Spaniards.

Finally, Las Casas decided to preach against the injustice of the *encomienda* system⁴ that sanctioned the enslavement of natives. But he still held enslaved people on his property and could not preach with a clear conscience against the *encomienda* unless he renounced his ownership of slaves and returned them to Governor Diego Velázquez. Although Las Casas knew that the indigenous people were better off with him, because he would treat them with compassion, and another person might oppress and dehumanize them to the point of death, he had to let them go. If not, when he preached against the injustices of enslaving natives, someone would say: "You are enslaving indigenous people, too. If this is really an injustice, why do you not refuse to enslave them." So, Las Casas decided to stop using native people as slaves.

To understand how Las Casas renounced the enslavement of the indigenous people on his property, we need to understand the full story. That story begins with Las Casas' friendship with Pedro de Rentería.

Rentería was a wise man and a faithful Christian. He and Las Casas were good friends and business partners.

4 As part of the *encomienda* system, entire indigenous communities were "entrusted" (from the Spanish, *encomendar*) to individual Spanish landowners (*encomenderos*) who were granted tribute in the form of native labor. In exchange, Spanish landowners were charged with the provision of religious instruction. Lewis Hanke, *The Spanish Struggle for Justice in the Conquest of America* (Dallas: First Southern Methodist University Press, 2002), 19.

Rentería left Cuba to visit his brother on the island of Jamaica. While in Jamaica, Rentería chartered a boat to transport pigs, corn, and other resources they were lacking in Cuba. During this time, Las Casas came to his revelation about the enslavement of indigenous people, his decision to stop using natives as slaves, and his commitment to preach against their enslavement.

So, while Rentería was away, Las Casas went to see Governor Velázquez to tell him how he felt about himself and those who held indigenous people as slaves. Las Casas told the governor he could not forgive those who enslaved indigenous people. To forgive himself and to preach against the injustices of the *encomienda* system and the forced enslavement of people from the islands, he had to stop using them as slaves and renounce his ownership to the governor. Las Casas asked the governor to keep his plans a secret and not to redistribute⁵ the indigenous people before his partner, Rentería, returned from Jamaica. The native slaves were owned jointly by Las Casas and Rentería and Rentería would be negatively impacted by any redistribution that would occur.

Governor Velázquez was in shock at Las Casas' news. First, because Las Casas joined the message of the Dominican friars and made his opinion, renouncing the enslavement of native people, public. Second, because Las Casas did not seem to appreciate the benefits of holding slaves on his land, which had become prosperous, because Las Casas had a reputation for making money and managing his mines and plantations diligently.

5 Presumably, to redistribute these indigenous slaves to another Spanish landowner of the island.

The governor, thinking of wealth and prosperity rather than the danger to his own soul as a result of continuing slavery, said to Las Casas: “Father, think twice before you act and you regret your decision. I want to see you rich and prosperous. I do not accept your renouncement of enslaved indigenous people. Instead, I will give you two weeks to think about whether you want to make this decision or not.”

Las Casas answered: “Governor, thank you for your good wishes, but let us pretend these two weeks are already over. And if in two weeks I come to you regretting my decision and asking you to return the enslaved people I released to you and you return them to me, I pray that God will punish you and never forgive you for such sinful behavior. All I ask is that you keep this secret and not redistribute the enslaved persons before Rentería’s return, so that his estate will not be hurt by my decision.”

The governor promised and kept his word. From then on, Las Casas held him in high honor because he improved his government through better treatment of enslaved people and improved himself by listening to the teachings of Las Casas. The people on the Island also changed their minds about Las Casas when they learned that he had returned those he had enslaved. They saw this as the greatest demonstration of holiness someone who once enslaved people could demonstrate on the island. Many people were still blind and had not experienced the darkness lifting from their eyes like Las Casas had experienced.

Finally, on the Day of Assumption, Las Casas made his revelation public. He preached a sermon on the subject:

"The Contemplative and the Active Life." In his sermon, Las Casas spoke of the spiritual and practical acts of compassion toward the natives who were exploited and treated with carelessness. At that time, he revealed the secret he held with the governor about the release of the enslaved people on his estate. "Governor, I give you permission to share my decision with anyone you please and I announce it to everyone who hears my voice now."

Las Casas decried the blindness, injustice, tyranny, and cruelty committed against the indigenous people, whom he viewed as innocent and gentle people. He told them that anyone who enslaved native people could not earn their salvation, but should feel a responsibility to free them and used himself as an example. Las Casas knew this treatment of indigenous people put his own soul at risk, so he had to release them.

Everyone was shocked. They were left surprised at Las Casas' sermon and this astonishing revelation he shared. Some walked away feeling convicted, while others left thinking this must be a dream. The idea that they could be sinning because they used enslaved indigenous people was the same as saying they were sinning if they used animals on their estates.

The First Racial Justice Sermons of the Americas (1511)

It was Sunday and the town anticipated Friar Antonio de Montesinos' sermon. One week ago, the friar had preached against the enslavement of indigenous people, so today, they were ready to call him out for speaking against the king of Spain and against God.

When Friar Montesinos approached the pulpit, people anxiously waited to hear what he would say. He opened with Job 36: “Bear with me a little longer and I will show you that there is more to be said on God’s behalf.” He referenced the sermon from the week before, backing himself up with even more reason and authority. He affirmed that enslaving indigenous people was unjust and tyrannical. If someone enslaved an indigenous person, then they could not be saved in God’s eyes.

The friar knew his sermon was scandalous and went against what the king of Spain and his servants ordered. He told them to send letters to Spain to let them know his message was clear: liberate the indigenous people. He ended with this caution: the Spaniards were convinced they served God, but really they only served the king.

When Friar Montesinos walked away from the pulpit, the spectators were left frazzled. They were convinced the friar would retract his former sermon, but instead he confirmed his beliefs and condemned their actions. They thought, if the friar retracted his statement, God would approve of their actions.

As Las Casas witnessed the townspeople’s discontent, he felt heartbroken because he had never seen mistreatment of humans like this before. He thought it would take a miracle, some divine intervention, for the Spanish to see the harm they are causing the natives. Even after hearing the friar rebuke their actions, the townspeople ultimately neglected God.

The townspeople rallied together and decided to write a letter to the king. They were frustrated that Friar

Montesinos condemned their actions, especially because it was the king who had given them dominion over the indigenous communities. When the king read the letter from the townspeople, he sent for the high priest, upset that his friars were preaching against his rule. He told the high priest to either fix the situation, or he would.

In 1502, religious leaders from the Order of Saint Francis came to the island. They witnessed the abuse and exploitation of the indigenous lands and felt compassion for their loss and disbelief caused by the actions of the Spaniards. The religious leaders appointed Friar Alonso del Espinal to go to Castile, Spain and tell the king three things: (1) the Dominican Friars were preaching against the king's orders to exploit indigenous people; (2) the land could not sustain indigenous people if Spaniards continued to extract gold from the land for their revenue; and (3) they begged the king to end the tyrannical rule of the Spaniards and give all restitution necessary to restore the native people and their land.

Las Casas went into detail about the mistreatment of indigenous people caused by the *repartimiento*. The *repartimiento* was a colonial labor system imposed on the natives whereby Spanish officials were given a number of indigenous workers to work on farms or mines. Seven to ten percent of the adult male population worked at a time and interchanged positions every couple of weeks or months. Through the *repartimiento*, the Monastery of Vega was given indigenous workers which the Spaniards took as their forced laborers. When the Spaniards worked the natives in the field and mines, they gave them no food or drink for eight months at a time. The food that was

meant for the indigenous people was given to the friars in the monastery. This labor brought in tons of gold and pesos for the Spanish, while the indigenous people perished.

Discussion Questions



The sermons preached by Antonio de Montesinos were the first racial justice sermons ever preached in the Americas. Why do you think these messages made his original audience so uncomfortable? Why do you think that sermons about race and justice are still so controversial today?



How did Spanish colonization in the Indies harm the spread of the gospel? Can you think of modern-day parallels?



Similar to the conversion story of the Apostle Paul, Las Casas tells us that, “from the day he saw the light, he read an infinite number of books . . . which all in some way proved the rights of the indigenous people and the injustices of the Spaniards.” In modern terms, he “got woke” to the racial injustice which surrounded him. Have you ever prayerfully reflected upon the two thousand verses of Scripture which speak about God’s heart for justice and concern for the poor, and applied them to the circumstances which surround you?



What did Las Casas do practically in order to preach the subject of his sermons with a clear conscience? What takeaways are there for us as ministers of the gospel?



Las Casas was a life-long learner and says that he kept himself informed by reading an “infinite number” of books over the decades. What habits can you develop to keep yourself informed about what is impacting your community and how to respond with Jesus’ justice and compassion?



Chapter 3

Violence and Conversion: “The Requirement”¹

Excerpts from *History of the Indies*

El Requerimiento

The king gave an order to Governor Pedrarias² that required the allegiance of the indigenous people to the king of Castile. Like in the past, the king’s council ignored this order. Las Casas believed anything founded on injustice will fall apart, cause harm, and corrupt a nation.

The order read:

In the name of King Ferdinand and Juana, his daughter, queen of Castile and Leon, and all other royal members, we want to notify you to the best of our abilities that our

1 The following passages were translated into English from the Spanish text: Bartolomé de las Casas, *Historia de las Indias: Tomo IV* (El Camino Historia, 1875).

2 Governor Pedrarias – governor of Panama and Nicaragua.

Lord created heaven, earth, man, and woman whom we all descend from all over the world.

In the five thousand years since creation, many generations have created kingdoms all over the world and caused division, among those God chose St. Peter as a leader of humanity, despite their laws, sect, or beliefs. God placed St. Peter in Rome as the best place to rule the world, and allowed him to establish God's reign all over the world and rule over all people regardless of their faith. He was named pope, meaning admirable and great father, ruler of all people. When St. Peter was alive, everyone who lived saw him as Lord and superior King of all the universe. All their descendants obeyed him and so will everyone until the end of time.

The late pope gave these islands and mainland to the king and queen of Castile. Therefore, they rule over the land, and indigenous people are serving them willingly without any resistance. Out of their own free will they became and remained Christian. The king and queen received the allegiance of the indigenous people joyfully and they should be treated like European subjects.

We request you understand this text, and:

1. Recognize the church, high priest, and pope, as the rulers of the universe.
2. Recognize the king and queen of Spain as rulers of this land.

If you comply with the king, we will receive you in his name with love and charity, honoring your freedom. We will not force you to be baptized unless you accept God into your life and want to follow Catholicism.

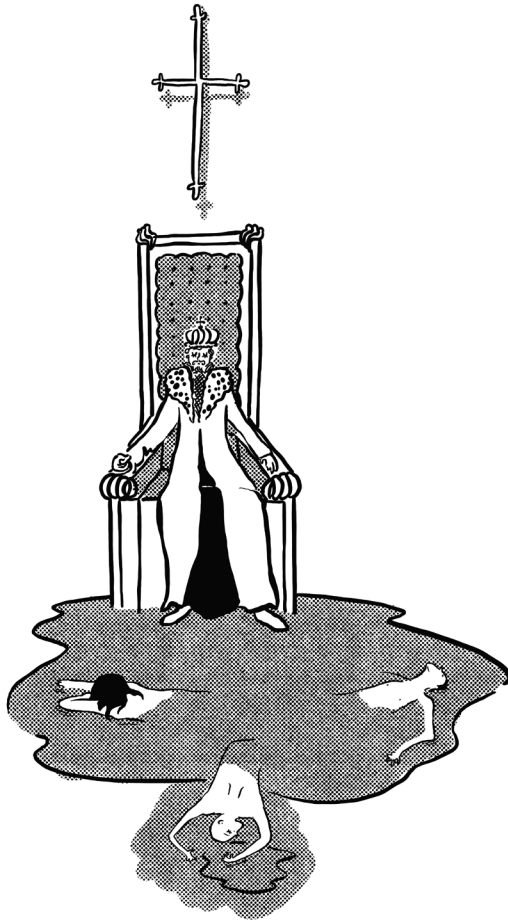
If you fail to comply, or take too long, with the help from God we will use force against you and declare war with

all possible means. We will enslave you, your wives, and children, and dispose of you however the king sees fit. We will take all your belongings and harm you as much as we possibly can for your disobedience. You will be responsible for all deaths and destruction because of your disobedience. We exempt the king and ourselves and all our accomplices.

We request legal signatures to this text to those who bear witness to our words.

Las Casas' Scathing Critique of *el Requerimiento*

Las Casas asks the reader to examine the content in the injunction, *el Requerimiento*. If we assume indigenous people understood Latin, it must have been disorienting for them to hear about God creating heaven, earth, and people. The natives believe in the Sun gods and other deities. What miracles did the Spaniards offer them to prove the Christian God was Creator over their Sun god and deities? The only proof the Spaniards offered was that God elected St. Peter as Supreme Lord. But the indigenous people had their own rulers, they were isolated from the rest of the world, and they did not know of St. Peter. Why would they honor St. Peter or the pope when they sold their ancestors' land to the Spanish colonizers? The indigenous people were forced to see a stranger as their ruler, not knowing whether the Spaniards had good or bad intentions because the Spaniards came with weapons and fierce messengers. What else could the Spaniards have expected? The Spaniards demanded allegiance, but did not collaborate to draft an agreement stating the duties of both parties. All the natives saw was a king who forcefully came to rule on ancient territory with no regard for their way of life, law, or people.



When the Cacique, or tribal king, of the Cenú province received *el Requerimiento*, he answered: "the pope and the king must have lost their minds." The king was at fault for accepting the usurped territory and sending his men to colonize a land so distant from their own.

Las Casas asks the authors of *el Requerimiento*, what weight would an indigenous person, who owned the property, give to the Spanish colonizers' piece of paper saying the property had been sold? The papal seals do not mean anything to them. Would they really be excommunicated from a church they were under obligation to subject themselves to? Or would the settlers and writers realize how ridiculous their injunction is?

Las Casas starts to craft an argument: the Spaniards understood the church and its obligation, because they believed in the teaching of Christian faith. They believed in the church and the pope, because they believed in the Holy Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But if people do not believe in the Holy Trinity, Christ, or his church, how could they believe in the pope? If people do not have knowledge of the pope, Christ, or the church, why would they believe? There was no reason for the natives to believe that the pope had the power to give away their land and their ancestors' land to colonizers ignorant of its existence. If they do not believe in the pope's power, why would they be subject to a king who sent Spaniards to settle on and profit from their land? Especially when the king and the Spaniards came with weapons and violent dispositions.

Let us see, if foreign kings came to Spain and wanted the Castilian king to submit without the consent of their people, would not they be justified to disobey and even

kill them? If neither kings nor their subjects are obligated to obey a foreign king's command to surrender their land, it is certainly unlawful and unjust to wage war upon indigenous people and enslave them.

The indigenous people have every right to fight back, because their land is being taken away, their people are being enslaved, and they are losing their resources. The immorality and irrationality of *el Requerimiento* reveals the ignorance of the king's council. The injunction and the king's council blasphemed Christianity; Las Casas does not know whether to laugh or cry at the absurdity of the council. The king's council prioritized the indigenous people's submission to the king rather than to Christ, their God and Creator. Another lie in *el Requerimiento* was that the natives willingly submitted when they were forced to do so by violence, tyranny, war, and slavery. God witnessed the indigenous peoples' dying bodies. Las Casas believes the indigenous people would have submitted to the king willingly, if they were converted to Christianity with peace and love. Like Las Casas, if the natives understood Latin, they would have responded to *el Requerimiento* by saying it was ridiculous.

Discussion Questions

Give justice to the weak and the fatherless;
maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute.
Rescue the weak and the needy;
deliver them from the hand of the wicked.

~ Psalm 82:3–4



The injunction which you read about was called *el Requerimiento*, or, "the Requirement." It was a legal document read by the Spaniards to indigenous communities in order to justify conquest and colonization in the name of Jesus. Can you think of any laws today that some Christians justify but which have the effect of harming immigrants and the poor?



Do you think that the Requirement gave the Europeans valid legal grounds to wage war on the Indians and seize their lands? Why or why not?



Speaking about the Requirement, Las Casas said, "I do not know whether to laugh or to cry." How does learning about the Requirement make you feel?



Read Psalm 82:3–4. What are some ways that followers of Jesus might speak up about human laws which conflict with God's laws?



Many Christians evaluate human laws based upon political beliefs or what they watch on cable news, instead of sacred Scripture. Or, they interpret Scripture in light of their political beliefs, instead of the other way around. What are some habits we can develop to guard against this mistake?



Chapter 4

Gender Violence, Patriarchy, and Colonization¹

Excerpts from *A Brief Account of the Destruction of the Indies*

Gender Violence and the Destruction of the Indigenous People

In the early 1500s, Europeans came to the Island of Hispaniola² to destroy and devastate the land of the indigenous people. It all began with the Europeans, coming in the name of Christ, who enslaved native women and children. At first, the people on the island shared their food freely with them. But, the Europeans were not content with the amount of food, so they started to demand more food—sometimes taking the amount of food that would feed three households of ten people for an entire month.

1 The following passages were translated into English from the Spanish text: Bartolomé de las Casas, *Brevísima Relación de la Destrucción de las Indias* (San Juan: Textos Clásicos Universales, 2019).

2 Hispaniola – present-day Haiti and Dominican Republic.

The indigenous people realized these Europeans were not angels from heaven.

To cope with the inhumane treatment, the people from the island began to hide what little food they had. Others sent their women and children into hiding. And others fled to the mountains to get away from the terrible treatment and conditions they endured at the hands of the Europeans.

In an effort to continue to control the native people, the Europeans beat and tortured them to give up the names of their local leaders. The brutal treatment reached a climax when one of the European commanders raped the wife of an indigenous chief.

After the rape, the people on the island strategized ways to remove the Europeans from their land. Unfortunately, the weapons they used were like children's toys compared to the Europeans and the indigenous people were unable to fight back.

The Europeans forced their way into their towns causing mass slaughters of everyone they found: children, elderly, and pregnant women. They cut people into pieces, placing bets on whether they could slice someone in two with only one stroke of the sword, or whether they could decapitate someone with a single blow. They took babies from their mothers while they breastfed and threw the babies against rocks that went into the river. They threw some people directly into the river, laughing and shouting jokes such as: "Try to wiggle out of this!" They slaughtered any indigenous person from the island who got in their way.

No one was spared their wrath. The Europeans did all of this in the name of Jesus and the apostles. They set up

gallows to string thirteen people together with their feet dangling just above the ground to burn them alive. Others were kept alive, but the Europeans slit their wrists as a sign to those hiding in the mountains: “You have been warned.”

With the indigenous leaders and chiefs, they tied them to sticks resting on pitchforks in the ground. They burned them alive at these stakes, causing agony as they died a slow and painful death.

I once saw four or five indigenous leaders tied up on the gallows ready to be burned alive. The howls of the leaders interrupted a Spanish commander’s sleep, so he gave the orders to strangle them to death. But the man in charge of their execution was entertaining guests at a party and did not want to leave to strangle them, so he put wooden sticks in their mouths to stop their cries and deliberately adjusted the heat to make their deaths more slow and painful.

Those natives who could run away to the mountains fled the inhumane and cruel treatment at the hands of the Europeans. But the Europeans sent wild dogs after them, tearing them to shreds and devouring their flesh.

In the rare event that an indigenous person killed a European, the Spaniards came to an unofficial agreement that for every European killed one hundred native people would be murdered.

The Kingdom of Maguá

Five kingdoms made up the island of Hispaniola. Each kingdom had its own king or queen and most of the local leaders throughout the island were fully submitted to the authority of their rule. Two of the kingdoms were Maguá and Higüey.

The Kingdom of Maguá means Kingdom of the Plain. This plain was vast—a wonder to behold—spanning about four hundred miles from the southern coast to the northern coast of the island with mountains lining both sides. There were over thirty thousand streams and rivers flowing throughout the area; a dozen of them were as big as the three main rivers in Spain: Ebro, Duero, and Guadalquivir. In the mountains, there was a province called Cibao, which was famous for mines filled with quality gold.

Guarionex was the king of Cibao and he had powerful local leaders who submitted to his rule. One of the local leaders had sixteen thousand men in his service and he provided all of those men to work for Guarionex. I met some of these men myself.

Guarionex was dutiful, mild-mannered, and devoted to the king and queen of Spain. For years, he ordered every house in the region to provide a gourd filled with gold as a gift to the king and queen of Spain. The people on the island did not know much about mining techniques to retrieve the gold from the land, so as gold became less and less available, Guarionex reduced the expectation of a gourd filled with gold to half.

But by then the Spaniards had a taste of the riches of the gold and continued to demand more and more gold from the indigenous people. In order to decrease the demand on the people of the island, Guarionex suggested that the king of Castile could occupy a portion of the land and his servants could mine the gold for themselves. The king of Castile agreed and overtook a section of Maguá that spanned from Isabela, the first European settlement on

the island, to Santo Domingo. This area was approximately 170 miles of land and would produce an annual income of over three million Castilians.³ In addition, the Spaniards established fifty or more large cities throughout the occupied region with a population size somewhere between sixty thousand and 100,000 people.

The relationship between Guarionex and the Spaniards took a dark turn when one of the commanders raped Guarionex's wife. The king could have rallied his vast army to retaliate against the Spaniards, but instead he ran away into exile to the area of Ciguayos under the protection of one of the powerful local leaders who supported Guarionex. But the Spaniards, realizing he ran away, sent their own army after him. When they tracked him down, they put Guarionex in shackles and chains on a ship headed to Spain.

Unfortunately, the ship was lost at sea, so Guarionex never faced the continued wrath of the Spaniards. But the gold that was on the ship was also lost, including a special quantity of gold they called the Great Nugget, which weighed approximately three hundred pounds. In this way, God passed judgment on the sins committed by the Spaniards against the indigenous people.

The Kingdom of Higüey

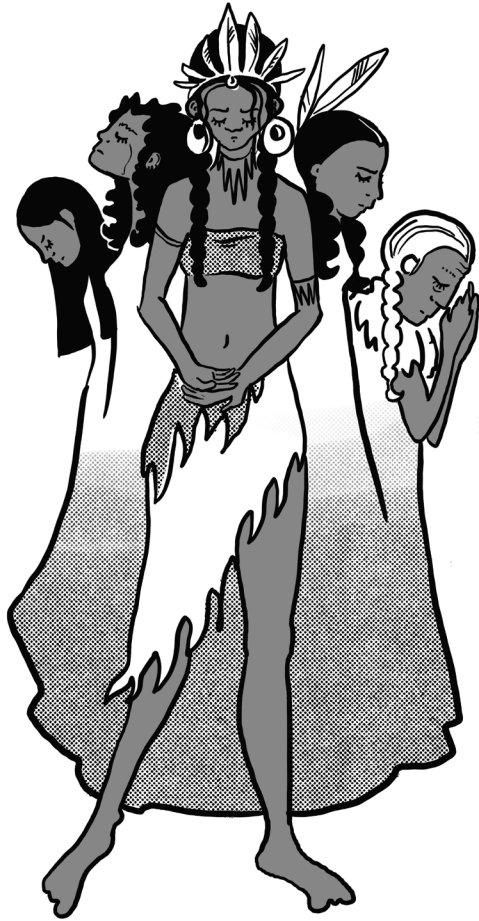
Another kingdom on the island of Hispaniola was Higüey. This region was under the leadership of an old and great queen named Higuanama. I saw the Spaniards string her up and burn her alive, along with numerous other locals on the island. They cut them into pieces; they devised

3 Castilian – a gold coin weighing 1.6 ounces.

ways of torturing them to death; and they enslaved those who remained alive. The Spaniards had so many ways of committing atrocious murders it would be impossible to write them all down. One could never list a thousandth of what actually took place at the hands of the Spanish. All I can say is that I swear before God that the indigenous people never gave the Spaniards any cause for the injury and injustice that was done to them during the death raids.

On the contrary, the native people behaved honorably toward the Spaniards. But instead of being treated with honor, they were robbed and massacred. And if they were able to escape death, they often found themselves sentenced to a lifetime of enslavement. In fact, I would go further: not a single indigenous person ever committed a capital offense, as defined by Spanish law, against the Spaniards while they were being massacred. Despite having just cause to retaliate, very few were guilty of sins that lie outside of human law, but rather inside the realm of God's law—like hatred, anger, or revenge against those who committed such atrocities against them.

It is my experience, over the many years living among the indigenous people, that they are like children who are not easily given over to knee-jerk reactions of revenge and retribution. Yet, I know beyond a shadow of a doubt that from the beginning of the occupation of the Europeans, that the native people had just cause for waging war, while the Europeans never had just cause for waging war against them. The actions of the Europeans in the New World were, without a doubt, the most wicked and unjust atrocities ever committed.



When the fighting finally ended, the natives who survived—namely young boys, women, and children—were enslaved by the Europeans. Some Europeans received thirty or forty slaves. Approximately a third received as many as one or two hundred enslaved people. The more you were in the good graces of the governor, the more slaves were given to you. The people who now owned the enslaved people were tasked with teaching them the truths of the Christian faith. Now, these cruel and wicked men, all of them ignorant and without a true revelation of Christ, were put in charge of the souls of the people of the island.

The owners of the enslaved natives sent the men into the mines to dig for gold under appalling and dangerous working conditions. They sent women to work in the fields of the owners' estates. They were tasked with the back-breaking work of tilling the soil and raising the crops. For their labor, enslaved men, women, and children were barely given food to eat and most of that food had no nutritional value. As a result, mothers who were breastfeeding their babies saw their milk dry up and their babies die. Men and women worked so many hours under these forced conditions that no new children were born. Men died in the mines from overwork and starvation. Women died in the fields for the same reasons.

Slaves were forced to carry heavy loads and even carry the people who enslaved them in hammocks for long distances. The enslaved were treated as animals, developing sores on their shoulders and backs from carrying excessive loads for such long distances. They were beaten and faced other cruel treatment on these long journeys—of which

no one could ever do justice to describing without causing horror and disbelief to those reading.

The indigenous people slowly began to die out due to this appalling treatment that can only be considered mass genocide.

In 1504, things continued to get worse after Queen Isabella of Spain died. Up until then only a small number of cities and towns had been partially destroyed through unjust militarized action. This destruction was kept silent from the queen, because she took a personal interest in the physical and spiritual welfare of the indigenous people.

But the reality is that wherever the Spaniards set foot throughout the Americas, they terrorized and oppressed the natives. Each torment was more inhumane than the last. And God finally abandoned them as they headed blindly into greater wickedness.

Discussion Questions



The gender violence described by Las Casas is deeply disturbing and may remind us of the gender violence which continues to our present day. Read Genesis 1:27. What does this verse teach us about the equal dignity of men and women in the eyes of God? What are some ways that sexism or gender violence play out in your community in violation of Genesis 1:27?



Historically, gender violence goes hand in hand with military conquest and colonization of other cultures and people groups. Why do you think there is such a connection?



How did you feel when reading about the gender violence committed by many Spaniards against indigenous women?



The gender violence and patriarchy imposed by the Spanish conquest have negatively shaped gender relations in Latino families and church structures for five hundred years. Within many Latino churches, these attitudes of machismo and patriarchy have translated into the unbiblical exclusion of women from positions of leadership and authority. Read Romans 16. What important positions of leadership did women hold in the early church in Rome? What are specific steps that you can take to empower female leadership in your church community?



Las Casas uplifts the memory of two queens—Iguanama of the Kingdom of Higüey and Queen Isabella. If one uses their imagination, it is not hard to picture Queen Iguanama as a type of Rachel, “weeping for her children, and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more” (Jer 31:15). Based upon Las Casas’ description, what do you think were the admirable qualities of these two queens? Do they remind you of any other strong women leaders from the Bible? What are steps we can take to remember and honor the women ministry leaders that God has placed in our lives?



GLOBAL MISSION



Chapter 5

"Blindspots": Las Casas and African Slavery¹

Excerpts from *History of the Indies*

The Establishment of African Slavery in the Americas

The Grand Chancellor, on behalf of the king, sent the clergyman Las Casas to the island. When Casas arrived, the first thing he did was go to the monasteries and report to the religious leaders, who already knew his plans to intervene on behalf of the indigenous people. He also prayed that God would enlighten him in everything he said or wrote to fulfill his will. When he finished reporting to the religious leaders, he carried out San Hieronimo's order for the Spaniards, adding that laborers would have good housing and freedom.

San Hieronimo's order was that:

1 The following passages were translated into English from the Spanish text: Bartolomé de las Casas, *Historia de las Indias: Tomo IV, V* (El Camino Historia, 1875).

1. The king allowed any Spanish laborer to immigrate to the island.
2. Anyone who departed from Seville, their hometown, until they reached the island, would be provided food.
3. In Seville, anyone would be allowed to stay in the House of Commerce² and be provided money to eat.
4. They would be given safe passage to the island.
5. They would be given one year of food on the island, until they could sustain themselves; especially if they could not work the land.
6. They would pay their debt to the king when they have the money.
7. The farms the king owned would be given to the laborers without enslaving the indigenous people or Africans.
8. They should be given supplies in order to work the land.
9. They should be given supplies of medicine.
10. The resources of towns would belong to the king, so that if the children of the laborers were questioned about their rights to the land, they could have access to it based on the record.

When the Spaniards found out that Las Casas did not plan on excusing the enslavement of indigenous people,

2 House of Commerce – a central trading house for the Spanish colonization of the islands.

they asked him about bringing a license, so that they could capture a dozen enslaved Africans. Las Casas said he would allow the Spaniards to capture African slaves, so that they could sustain themselves and liberate the indigenous people. Las Casas was not familiar with the ways in which the Portuguese violently captured African people and enslaved them. Las Casas said that if he was aware of the violence the Africans experienced, he would have stood for their liberation in the same way he stood for the indigenous people. The officials from the House of Commerce in Seville gathered and decided to capture and bring four thousand enslaved Africans to the islands of Hispaniola,³ San Juan, Cuba, and Jamaica.

The king granted licenses for the Spaniards to buy enslaved Africans and bring them to these four islands. The Genoese⁴ sold the licenses and African slaves for a high price, making a lot of profit. The Europeans were profiting from the purchase and enslavement of Africans, while African slaves and the indigenous people were the ones who suffered. They remained in captivity until there was no one left to kill.

The Spaniards came to the island of Hispaniola with the intent to: (1) exchange goods for gold, pearls, silver, and precious rocks; (2) convert the natives to Christianity; and (3) have the indigenous people subject to the king's rule.

Las Casas thinks the Spaniards could have gained all these treasures and converted the native inhabitants without killing anyone. Ultimately, he recognized that the Spaniards were not able to treat the indigenous people with respect

3 Hispaniola – present-day Haiti and Dominican Republic.

4 Genoese – Italians.



or honor. He believes the Spaniards' downfall was their blindness and insensibility. Las Casas wrestles with whether or not God will hold the Spaniards accountable for the oppression of the natives. For example, the king and his counselors should have given orders, laws, and mandates for the spiritual conversion and well-being of the indigenous people, not to acquire property for himself or his relatives and friends.

Las Casas wanted Spanish settlers who would cultivate and live off of the land. He wanted people who would marry the indigenous people and their descendants and would become the greatest republic on Earth: Christian and peaceful.

Instead, the settlers were heartless people who robbed and destroyed the land in the name of God. Las Casas says the king, his counselors, and all the people responsible have no excuse. They did not oppress the indigenous people for one day, or one year, neither ten, or twenty, but more than seventy years. People informed the Spaniards with positions of power through letters and testimony of the atrocities happening on the island, but nothing changed.

Las Casas sees the consequences of their cruelty in their revenue. When the king started his reign, there were more than 200 million ducats in gold and silver and pearls and precious stones. Now, the money has disappeared. They could have been the richest and happiest rulers in the world. Instead, all the money was thrown to wars and daily concerns.

Slavery and the Rise of Sugar Mills

Around 1505, La Vega was the first to make sugar in the Island of Hispaniola. He extracted sugar with wooden tools to squeeze the juice out of the reeds. Then in 1516, a surgeon named Velloso who lived in Santo Domingo, improved the instruments and made better sugar, including almond flavored sugar paste. Velloso designed a press drawn by horses to extract the juice from the cane.

The Hieronymite Fathers, from a Catholic religious order, tasted the sweet sugar and decided to provide Velloso with five hundred gold pesos from the royal treasury to start a sugar mill. Because of the Hieronymite Fathers' support, the island of Hispaniola had about forty sugar mills and the Canary Islands had seven to eight sugar mills. The expansion of the sugar mills and heavy consumption of sugar caused the cost of *arroba*, a unit of weight, to rise every day.

The indigenous people worked the mills. The Spaniards gained money through indigenous sweat. The intensive and dangerous labor caused them to die rapidly. Since the Spaniards saw the natives dying, they asked clergyman Las Casas to free the indigenous people in exchange for Africans. Las Casas' fervor to liberate the indigenous community and his desire to keep the king's favor caused him to buy enslaved Africans.

The Spanish council of islands decided to send four thousand African slaves to Hispaniola, San Juan, Cuba, and Jamaica. Slave traffickers could acquire licenses to engage in the slave trade for twenty-five thousand ducats. People from Genoese, Italy trafficked African people for a minimum of eight ducats.

Las Casas thought he was helping the Spaniards sustain themselves, while at the same time liberating the indigenous people. He soon realized he created larger obstacles to their freedom. He repented and judged himself for thinking enslaving Africans could replace forced indigenous labor. Even if Las Casas had good intentions, he recognized that was no excuse in God's eyes.

Over thirty thousand enslaved African people were trafficked to Hispaniola, and over 100,000 to all the islands. Even so, the indigenous people on the islands were not freed and continued forcibly working. The king and his council, who placed laws to liberate the indigenous people were absent, and the new members ignored the laws. The more sugar mills were built, the more the Spaniards coerced enslaved African people to work and make profit for the king. To run the sugar mills, the Spaniards forced eighty enslaved African people to work the water-powered mills and forty to work the presses. Since the Spaniards believed they needed more forced labor, the Portuguese increased the human trafficking from Guinea. Since the Africans saw the increasing demand for forced labor, they kidnapped their own and sold them to the Portuguese. Las Casas recognized that the Spaniards were guilty of the sins committed by the Africans and the Portuguese in kidnapping and trafficking African slaves.

The Spaniards used to believe that Africans could not die unless they were hanged. But when the African slaves forcibly worked on the mills and drank cane syrup concoctions, many of them died or got terribly ill. The fear of death and illness caused Africans to rise up and attack the Spaniards.

The Plague

Las Casas describes a plague that hit the island: dogs. Before the dogs, there were pigs who ate the vegetation on the island, but the dogs came and ate most of the pigs. The death of the pigs had great consequences for the Spanish settlers. Some of the Spaniards thought this was bad luck, but Las Casas reminds them of their colonization, oppression, and massacre of the indigenous people and their land. The island and its people, as an act of God's will, turned against them.

Discussion Questions

The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

~ 1 Corinthians 12:21–26



Slavery began in the Americas because Spaniards needed cheap labor for gold mining, sugar plantations, and other types of agriculture.

After the native slaves began dying off in large numbers, the Spaniards turned to African slavery and established a pattern of racialized labor which has continued in different forms throughout the centuries. Though slavery has been abolished, what are ways in which patterns of exploitative racialized labor continue in the United States and Latin America? What types of difficult jobs continue to be filled mostly by people of color in the U.S.?



What was Las Casas' major blindspot?



How does it make you feel to learn that Las Casas made such a major mistake in judgment with respect to African slavery? Do you think Las Casas did enough to repent and “own” his mistake?



The U.S. church has been deeply divided over issues of race for centuries and, at the same time, the Holy Spirit is orchestrating a radical ethnic and cultural transformation in the U.S. church. As part of this transformation, the North American church is “browning” as Caucasian representation is in decline and the fastest growth is occurring in immigrant communities from Latin America, Asia, and Africa. Various racial and cultural blindspots are occurring as part of this transition. Reflect upon 1 Corinthians 12:21–26. What does it mean to “give greater honor” to the parts of the body of Christ that lack it in society (v. 24); express “equal concern” (v. 25); and “suffer with” (v. 26)? How did Las Casas live out these verses in his day and age, and how might our contemporary racial blindspots be overcome by living out Paul’s admonitions?



What is one practice that you can implement on a regular basis in order to give greater honor to, and learn from, those members of the body of Christ who are looked down upon by society but not by God? How might this practice help you see your own blindspots?



Chapter 6

Labor, Laws, and Legalism: The Encomienda System and the Laws of Burgos¹

Excerpts from *A Brief Account of the Destruction of the Indies*
and the Laws of Burgos

The Laws of Burgos

The Laws of Burgos (1512–1513) were the first systematic laws given by the king of Spain to Spanish settlers in the Americas for the purpose of governing the latter's relationship with the indigenous peoples of the land. These laws started the official use of the Spanish legal term *encomienda*. According to the *encomienda* system, indigenous people were uprooted from their native

1 Text from the Laws of Burgos were selected from and modified into a more readable English translation from: <http://faculty.smu.edu/bakewell/BAKEWELL/texts/burgoslaws.html>. The remaining passages were translated into English from the Spanish text: Bartolomé de las Casas, *Brevísima Relación de la Destrucción de las Indias* (San Juan: Textos Clásicos Universales, 2019).

settlements and lands, and “entrusted”² to Spanish settlers. Natives were enslaved by Spanish settlers, and in exchange for indigenous labor, the Spanish landowners were charged with instructing them in the Christian faith.

What follows are selections from the Laws of Burgos:

We have determined that the indigenous leaders and their people have not embraced the Faith that we believe is necessary for salvation. They are lazy and immoral. They live far away from the Spanish villages, so even when the Spaniards attempt to indoctrinate them to correct their immorality they return home and return to their evil tendencies. They forget the Faith that was taught to them and go back to their own ways. When they come back to the Spaniards, it is as if they are being taught for the first time.

Therefore, for these reasons and many more, the native leaders and people will be forced to leave their homes to dwell on Spanish estates. When they are closer to the settlers, they can be taught our Faith and looked after as we desire.

The following laws are to be obeyed and observed:

First, since we are removing indigenous people from their homes to dwell near the settlers, we order that homes be built for the natives that have been given to Spaniards in *encomienda*. For every fifty indigenous people, four homes of thirty by fifteen feet are to be built. The indigenous people are ordered to plant five thousand root vegetables (three thousand cassava and two thousand yams), 250 pepper plants, and fifty cotton plants. The Spaniards will continue to instruct the indigenous people to plant in this manner according to the amount of people they have in

2 From the Spanish *encomendar*.

encomienda. These homes and fields will be next to the Spaniards' estates.

We further order that the settlers will build church buildings. The settlers will ring the bell of the church building at dusk and go with the indigenous people to the church building. The indigenous people will cross and bless themselves upon entry. They will recite the Ave Maria, the Lord's Prayer, the Apostles' Creed, and the Prayer to Mary (the Salve Regina). They will speak loud enough so that they will be heard, so that settlers can determine which indigenous persons are performing well and which are not, so they can correct them. Every two weeks, the settlers will be responsible for examining them to determine what they have learned and what they still need to teach them. To those who have the capacity to learn more, they will be taught the Ten Commandments, the Seven Deadly Sins, and the Articles of Faith. All of this teaching will be done with great love and gentleness.

We further order that after the natives have been brought to the settlers' estates, the mining of gold will be done in the following manner: Gold will be mined by the indigenous people for five months of the year. At the end of these five months, they will have forty days to rest. On the day they finish, the amount of gold mined will be certified. Then, the indigenous people will be released to go home for forty days of rest. During this time of rest, they will not be ordered to do any work, except sow seeds for food that is needed for the season. During this time of rest, the settlers will be responsible for indoctrinating them in accordance with the principles of Faith.

The *Encomienda* System and the Laws of Burgos: The Example of Nicaragua

Between 1522 and 1523, the dark days began for the people of Nicaragua. Governor Pedrarias Dávila arrived and began to rule in this beautiful and fertile land. No words could describe the fruitfulness and prosperity of the indigenous Nicaraguan people. The size of the towns was astonishing: some of them were as large as fourteen miles from one end of the town to another. They had enough quality local produce to supply food for their huge population. The land was flat and level. There were no mountains for locals to hide. So, despite the tyrannical reign of Governor Dávila, people did not want to leave their towns. The natives are naturally gentle and unaggressive. They stayed in their towns and put up with the persecution committed by the soldiers and the enslavement they inflicted upon the Nicaraguans.

Governor Dávila and those who came with him wrecked Nicaragua just as they had decimated other regions. They committed the same outrageous destruction and slaughter of the land and people. There could never be a complete list and description of the murder, cruelty, false imprisonment, and other crimes they committed.

One time, Governor Dávila sent fifty soldiers on horseback into the region of Rousillon to annihilate the entire population. They did not spare a single man or woman, elder or child. They committed this atrocity based on weak claims like: (1) the indigenous people did not come fast enough when they were summoned to do forced

labor; (2) they did not bring enough corn with them to give to the soldiers; or (3) they did not surrender enough people to become enslaved to the governor or his men. These weak claims were made by men driven by the Devil, and not a single indigenous person escaped.

The governor sent raids into other regions of Nicaragua, giving Spaniards permission to enslave as many of the harmless and peaceful indigenous people as they wanted. They chained people together so they could carry heavier loads. If they had four thousand natives chained together to carry these heavy loads, not even six of them would see their homeland again. They left those who could not carry the load on the side of the road to die. This mass murder of the indigenous people happened over and over again. When one of them complained of exhaustion from carrying the heavy load and from lack of food and rest, the Spaniards decapitated them. They aimed for a clean kill, so that they would not have to break the chains that held the line of enslaved people together. The decapitated head would fall off to the side, and the body to the other side.

Imagine the effect this had on those fellow indigenous people who were forced into this labor. In time, the natives realized they would not return home from such an atrocious journey. With tears streaming down their faces, they lamented their fate saying: “These are the roads we traveled for the Christians. Regardless of how hard the work, we thought we would return home to our wives and children. But that expectation is a dream of the past. We know this trip will be our last.”

Stolen Food, Forced Labor, and Other Atrocities

Another time, the governor decided to reallocate the enslaved.³ It was unclear whether this was done on a random whim, or whether it was carried out because he wanted to take the slaves away from those whom he was on bad terms with and give them to his friends. Because of this reallocation, the indigenous people did not sow enough grain for the harvest. The Spaniards stole all of the corn they grew for themselves and their families, leading to the death of between twenty and thirty thousand natives. Some mothers even decided to kill their children and eat them because of their starvation.

The land of Nicaragua was fertile soil and the Spanish settlers came into this fertile land to take it as their own. They forced the natives to work for them, they stole their food, and they stole land that was owned and worked by indigenous people. The Spaniards treated the whole indigenous population as if they owned them. They forced them to work day and night. They gave them no rest. They even forced children to work as soon as they could stand. If any indigenous person survived this abuse and oppression, the Spaniards took over their homes and all their possessions, leaving the native Nicaraguans with nothing. These atrocities toward the indigenous people of Nicaragua were even worse than what took place on the island of Hispaniola.⁴

The Europeans wiped out the Nicaraguans to near oblivion and quickened their demise, by forcing them to carry

3 The governor took slaves from certain Spanish landowners and reallocated them to others, presumably those whom were his friends.

4 Hispaniola – present-day Haiti and Dominican Republic.

loads over one hundred miles from the interior part of the country to the port. The indigenous people carried the wood needed to make ships. The Spaniards sent them into the hills to search for honey and wax where jaguars would rip them into shreds. The Spaniards even placed the burden of these heavy loads on pregnant women and the mothers of newborn babies.

The most egregious act of Governor Dávila was a system he created whereby he gave licenses to fellow Spaniards to demand that indigenous leaders hand over their own people to be enslaved. This system damaged the entire country. Demands for fifty enslaved people were made every four or five months or whenever someone received a license from the governor. These demands were coupled with the threat that, if the number of enslaved people asked for was not given, the native leader would be burned alive or thrown to wild dogs.

Slavery, like the kind imposed by the Spaniards, was unknown to the people in Nicaragua before the European arrival. As a result, the native leaders had at most three or four people who worked for them that they could offer to the Spaniards for enslavement. But most indigenous leaders had to find people. They rounded up all the orphans they could find. They might ask families with two children to give up one to become enslaved.⁵ In this way, they could meet the tyrannical demands of the governor. But the indigenous leaders did this against the backdrop of cries and screams of agony by the Nicaraguan people.

5 If a family had three children they asked for two, and so forth.



The frequency of these demands devastated Nicaragua. For a period of five to six years between 1523 and 1533, five or six slave boats patrolled the coasts and numerous innocent Nicaraguans were stolen and sold in Panama and Peru, where they all died. Time and time again, the indigenous people died quickly after they were taken from their own lands, especially after they were starved and forced to work for a full day. All the Spaniards wanted was to buy and sell them to force them to do work that others would never do.

More than 500,000 souls, each of them free before the Spaniards enslaved them, were taken from their homeland. Another 500,000 or 600,000 were murdered during the fighting initiated by the Spaniards, or as a result of the dehumanizing conditions they were subjected to. The carnage in Nicaragua continued for fourteen years. It was once the most densely populated place in the world. But after the Spaniards ravaged the land, only four to five thousand people remained. Those who remained were subjected to the abuses of the Spanish settlers.

Discussion Questions

And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations.

~ Revelation 21:22–26



The Laws of Burgos of 1512 “invented” the legal concept of “race” in the Americas. The Spanish lumped the diverse indigenous peoples of the Caribbean, as well as of North, Central, and South America into the racial and legal category of “Indian.” Although those in Spain at this time largely identified with their region of origin, in a similar manner, all people from Spain were similarly grouped together and called “Spaniard.” From that day to the present, many Latinas/os use “Spanish” as a racial label to signify that they are from a middle- to upper-class background, and look down upon those they call “Indian.” Have you ever heard a Latino person call themselves “Spanish” even though they might have some indigenous ancestry, or, use the term “Indian” in a pejorative manner?



The Laws of Burgos created the encomienda system. According to the encomienda system, Spanish land owners were “entrusted” with the care of native communities. What were the legal obligations of Spaniards toward Indians? What was the reciprocal obligation of Indians toward Spaniards? Was there specific language which made you shake your head in disgust or bewilderment?



Las Casas describes in vivid detail the brutal ways in which Spanish colonialism and the encomienda system played itself out in Nicaragua. Imagine that you are one of the 370 million indigenous people living in the world today in the United States, Latin America, Asia, Africa, or Australia. What might be some of your feelings and responses to this text?



As part of their obligations to the natives, Spanish *encomenderos*⁶ were required to teach the natives about the Ten Commandments (Exod 20:2–17; Deut 5:6–21). Read the Ten Commandments. How many ways did the Spaniards violate the Ten Commandments through their implementation of the *encomienda* system? Do you think that some people are still exploited through racialized labor systems in your country today? Why or why not? If so, what are steps we can take to be God’s instruments of justice and equity in the labor system?

6 *Encomenderos* – *Encomienda* owners.



Paul teaches that we are not to be conformed to the patterns of this world, but instead transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom 12:2). One major pattern of this world is looking down upon others who come from cultural backgrounds which are different than our own and failing to value the distinct image of God in them. According to Revelation 21:26, people of every ethnic group possess God given “glory and honor,” or “cultural treasure and wealth.” What is one thing you can do to incorporate the unique “glory and honor” of different cultures of the body of Christ into your ministry? Into your church leadership structure?



Chapter 7

The Great Debate (Part I): Personhood and the Image of God¹

Excerpts from *In Defense of the Indians*

Introduction

Previous chapters in this work have offered historical accounts of the exploitation and decimation of indigenous people throughout the Americas. The following two chapters introduce the theological, legal, and rhetorical arguments that Las Casas had to address in order to denounce and dismantle an active system of enslavement, exploitation, and *encomiendas* in the Americas. Note that the selections used in these chapters change in tone, vocabulary, and technicality since they are the translations of official recordings of both the arguments for and against

1 The following passages were translated into English from the Spanish text: Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda and Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, *Apología de Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda contra Fray Bartolomé de las Casas: y de Fray Bartolomé de las Casas contra Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda*, trans. Angel Losada (Madrid: Editora Nacional, 1975).

the colonization of indigenous peoples at the *Junta de Valladolid* (1550–1551). Though still accessible, these chapters represent a more literal and formal translation of the original Spanish language texts which contain precise legal, theological, and philosophical language reflective of the era of Scholasticism.² This watershed moment in Spanish history, also known as the Great Debate, was carried out as a trial and its careful consideration of both sides was conducted by the king of Spain. Las Casas was required to use probing questions to convince all those present and he needed rhetorical wisdom to debate Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda's positions which had created a theological justification for the colonial project in the Americas.

Sepúlveda's arguments justified the conquest and war ravaged against the indigenous peoples of the Americas based on a philosophical understanding and definition of indigenous peoples as "barbarians." This set a foundation for a just war based on a divine mandate that required the punishment of idolatry and cannibalism and the liberation of innocent members of these so-called barbaric peoples. Lastly, Sepúlveda argued that this just war against indigenous people in the "New World" paved the way for the proclamation of the gospel and the expansion of the Christian religion. Las Casas denounced Sepúlveda's arguments as "venom wrapped in honey" for it opened up the possibility of infecting many readers and empowering many evil opportunists, who would in turn cause the damnation of many souls.³ Therefore, Las Casas tackles

2 Scholasticism – a school of philosophical and theological thought dominant in medieval Europe from 1100–1700.

3 Sepúlveda and Las Casas, *Apología*, 115.

each of these arguments with unwavering passion, urgency, thoroughness, defiance, and theological and scriptural reflection in his infamous *Apología de Fray Bartolomé de las Casas*, or *In Defense of the Indians*. He understood that the context of this trial required intellectual sagacity since previous narratives of the committed atrocities had not convinced the king and Sepúlveda's supporters. In the remainder of this chapter, we will present summaries and selections of Las Casas' responses to Sepúlveda's first arguments which questioned indigenous people's humanity. Chapter eight will cover Las Casas' response to Sepúlveda's further arguments for justifying conquest for the sake of evangelism.

Remarks Against the Slanderers of the New World⁴

Anyone who teaches through speech or in writing that the inhabitants of the New World, vulgarly called *indios*,⁵ must be dominated and controlled through war—before the gospel is preached and announced so that they are more submissive and receptive to God's Word—are grossly mistaken in two aspects of the faith. First, they are erroneous regarding divine and human law as they abuse divine words and violate the sense of Scriptures, papal decrees, and the tradition of church fathers. Even more, they are mistaken in bringing up stories about the indigenous people that are nothing but myths and shameless constructs that stand against the miserable indigenous people and deliver them into a state of doom. They are also mistaken since they are going against the papal decrees of Supreme Pontiff Alexander VI whose words

4 Ibid., 121–23.

5 *Indios* – a Spanish derogatory term that continues to be used throughout the Americas to broad-brush all indigenous peoples as barbaric and culturally inferior.

violate and dismantle all personal opinions, as it will be revealed in our following arguments.

In the second place, the ignorance of their arguments is manifested in their narrow definitions about matters that concern an infinite multitude of people throughout vast and diverse regions; in their ignorance of such realities, they end up with a shameless and reckless assurance that those people possess severe defects, whether natural or through cultural customs. This leads toward a general condemnation of thousands upon thousands of people, when many of them see themselves as free of such defects.

All these things drag innumerable souls to doom and are counterproductive to the spread of the Christian religion since it shuts the eyes of many, blinded by the craze of ambition, which leads them to invest all their body and soul's energy into achieving wealth, empire, honors, and titles. Such enterprise leads them to kill with inhumane cruelty these innocent and humble peoples who have not hurt anyone, who are moderate, and who are prepared and willing to embrace God's Word.

Who will there be, under sane judgment, and at the very least theologically trained, who dares to accept the unchristian opinion or argument that originates such terrible wars, numerous deaths, multiple orphanhood, and such miserable evil? Do we not have Christ's word that declares: "See that you do not despise one of these little ones" (Matt 18:10); ". . . but woe to the one through whom they come" (Luke 17:1); "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters"; (Matt 12:30) and "Sufficient for the day is its own trouble" (Matt 6:34)?

Who is so evil that they would want to incite cruel, ambitious, proud, greedy, wild, and always idle men to steal their brothers' possessions and to destroy their souls at the same time without a legitimate cause for war, or only when it is done out of inevitable necessity?

What good may come from these warlike expeditions that serves God—who admires all things with unspeakable charity—so that it may be used as a counterpoint to so many evils, so many insults, and so many unusual deaths? At the same time, how can these people love our own? How can friendship be forged with them (a necessary condition to receive our faith), when children find themselves orphaned, wives are deprived of their husbands, parents are deprived of their children and friends; when loved ones are wounded; when loved ones are made prisoners, stripped of their goods, and turned from many to a few survivors; and when their princes are stripped of their jurisdiction and are afflicted with a miserable slavery, all of these as direct consequences of wars? Who, under these conditions, will like for the gospel to be preached to them? Is it not applicable the saying: “What you do not want done to you, seek to not do to others,” as well as a similar saying: “As you wish that others would do to you, do so to them” (Luke 6:31)? This is something that any person with an enlightened nature imprinted in their mind knows, learns, and understands. Therefore, it can be deduced that anyone who teaches that such meek sheep must be submitted to cruel war by voracious wolves, before being tended to with the word of Christ, slip up on a very clear issue and oppose natural law.

They also are mistaken when they affirm that “these wars are just if they are carried out properly”; in my understanding, what they are trying to say is “if these wars are carried out moderately then killing only those that are necessary to overpower them [is justified] since this will bring about the submission of the rest [of the population]”; as if we wish to have all the peoples of the New World locked in cages or dungeons and there slaughter as many heads of men as of cattle to be sold in the meat market any day for the sustenance and food of the people (allow me to use that metaphor).

And if those proponents would consider that war and death upon those fearful people lasts not one or a hundred days, rather ten and twenty years, with incredible destruction to indigenous peoples—who wander and hide in forests and jungles, dispersed, unarmed, naked and deprived of any human help and who are sliced by hundreds of Spaniards, stripped of their fortunes, reduced to misery and landlessness; they walk around stunned and terrorized by the incredible horror seen by such inhumane crimes perpetrated by such tyrants. . . . If those proponents of this war would see the agitated chests of those miserable and frightened peoples rushing into the deepest caverns of the earth to escape the hands of such bandits, then I am certain that they would speak more cautiously and sanely.

Response to Sepúlveda’s First Argument: Who Qualifies as Barbarians?⁶

God, author of all creatures, has not devalued these peoples of the New World in such fashion that they are

6 Sepúlveda and Las Casas, *Apología*, 125–43.



lacking reason and are made in the likeness of animals, so that the label barbarian seems fitting (savages and wild beasts as some argue and pretend to classify them). On the contrary, such peoples are meek and modest and more open and willing than other peoples in the world to abandon idolatry and receive in their provinces and villages God's Word and the proclamation of truth . . . however, now as a challenge to Sepúlveda's first justification for war, it is appropriate to remember that, according to Aristotle, Saint Thomas Aquinas and other doctors (throughout different instances in their works), there are four *clases*⁷ of barbarians.

First Class of Barbarians: Lacking Reason

The first class of barbarians is assigned this term improperly and in generalized ways to mean "every cruel, inhumane, wild and violent person distanced from human reason whether through anger's impulse or nature." Such persons, ignoring modesty, meekness, and human moderation become stiff, rugged, quarrelsome, intolerable, and cruel, and they are inclined toward crimes that only wild beasts living in the jungles would commit.

If this is the case, then Greeks and Romans are to be called barbarians as well, even though they live under political institutions that would claim otherwise. Their savage customs resemble the Scythians, whose whole province was considered exceptionally barbaric, according

7 This is the Spanish word *clases*. In the Spanish language, the realm of meaning for this word has both socioeconomic and biological (a way to categorize living beings) implications which formed racialized and classist societies throughout the Americas until this day.

to the witness of Saint Isidore of Seville, based on the cruel and inhumane customs of their population. In this number of barbarians, we must also account for our very own Spaniards, especially for the cruel works that they have carried out against those peoples—acts that surpass all barbarians. To this class of barbarians, Aristotle calls wild beasts for “the distinctive feature of barbarians is their brutishness, for the pains and damages they cause, so they are named notoriously beastly and barbaric, etc.”

Second Class of Barbarians: Lacking a Written Language

The second class of barbarians is identified as those who lack a literary language corresponding to their maternal language (for us, Latin is our literary language); therefore, they are unable to state what they think through a literary means. They are considered rude and lacking letters and scholarship. In this sense, a barbarian is one who, due to the differences in languages, is unable to communicate with someone who does not speak his or her language as Saint Paul (Corinthians 12) mentions.⁸ In this sense, John Chrysostom has named the holy Wise Men as barbarians for “a star called the wise men from their place of origin and these barbarians from far embarked on a pilgrimage.”

From Saint Chrysostom’s words, some can be called barbarians while also being wise, sane, prudent, and civilized. So, the Greeks in the primitive centuries called the Romans barbarians, and likewise Romans called Greeks and other peoples of the world barbarians. Then, it is quite clear that Aristotle did not refer to

8 “Therefore, if I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh shall be a barbarian unto me” (1 Cor 14:11, KJV). The original document states (*Corintios*, 12) or (Corinthians 12).

these kinds of barbarians in his book one of *Politics*, where he defined barbarians as those who are “by nature slaves, lacking capable intelligence to govern themselves or others.” However, Aristotle, in his book three of *Politics*, did address the reality of “barbarian kingdoms” as the second of the four classes of kings and kingdoms viable for self-governance. He affirms that these rulers, although in likeness to tyrants, are to be considered just and legitimate leaders according to the customs of their own countries. Their own subjects tolerate imposed tariffs, taxes, burdens, and work for these rulers even when these are severe. Aristotle also adds that “these kingdoms are firmer and more stable than most, since their subjects love and protect their prince, who often governs according to the customs of the country as the natural ruler in whose empire his children will succeed him.”

Third Class of Barbarians: Lacking Governance

The third class of barbarians refers to those who are incapable of governing themselves: neither through policies, nor the law; neither through the cultivation of friendship, nor the constitution of a republic; neither through the organization of a city as a political entity, nor the existence of princes, laws, or institutions. They do not enter matrimony or conform to certain rites; finally, they do not have trade, they do not sell or buy; they do not give or take in lease, they do not enter business partnerships, and they do not know the jurisdictional institutions of deposit, lease, and loan.

Certainly, eternal Law ordered, willed, and distinguished all things; kingdoms were separated from one another, and peoples were separated from one another according to Deuteronomy 32.⁹ God also established before each people, through divine inspiration, a prince, and rulers, according to Sirach 17.¹⁰ So, all kings and governors, even amongst the barbarians, are ministers of God according to the teachings of Divine Wisdom in Proverbs 8.¹¹ Considering this, according to eternal Law, each people having their respective ruler or prince, there are no justified motives that allow another people group to dominate or destroy foreign kingdoms under the pretext of sharing culture. This goes against the eternal Law that we read in Proverbs 22:28 “Do not move an ancient boundary stone set up by your ancestors.” Such an act of transgression is not an act of wisdom but of iniquity and a pretext to devastate others’ possessions. Thus, every people, for as barbarian as they may be, can defend itself from the attacks of another people culturally superior that attempts to subjugate it or deprive it from its liberty.

Fourth Class of Barbarians: Lacking Faith

The fourth class of barbarians refers to those that do not know Christ. In fact, any people group, regardless of their excellent political administration, any person, regardless of what a great philosopher he or she may be, are all exposed

9 “When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind, he fixed the borders for the peoples according to the number of the sons of God” (Deut 32:8).

10 “He appointed a ruler for every nation” (Sir 17:17, NRSV).

11 “By me kings reign, and rulers decree what is just; by me princes rule, and nobles, all who govern justly” (Prov 8:15–16).

to the greatest forms of barbarianism—that is, the worst vices, if one is not steeped with the mysteries of Christian philosophy. Of such vices one cannot be purged unless through the sacraments and by virtue of the Christian law, which is the only immaculate law that converts souls and frees and cleanses the hearts of people from all vices and idolatrous superstition.

On the other hand, if we want to be followers of Christ and of evangelistic truth, it is to our benefit that we consider barbarians, even those to the full extent of the word, as made in the image of God. They are not excluded from divine providence, and they are not unable to enter the kingdom of Christ since they are our kin redeemed with Christ's precious blood, and they are no less than the most sensible and wise people of the world. For that reason, we are obligated to practice Christian charity and kinship toward all kinds of people, even in their violent condition, extremely barbaric and stupid. Whoever seeks to have many subjects (following Aristotle's principle) and behaves toward them like a cruel butcher, an oppressive slave master seeking his own wealth, is a tyrant, not a Christian; he is a son of Satan, not a son of God; a bandit, not a pastor; he is inspired by a demonic spirit, not by a heavenly spirit. If you seek to instruct indigenous people in a moderate, tender, and humane manner, that is in a Christian manner, then you must attract them to Christ's fold through God's Word and deed, sharing Christ's tenderness. Then, this becomes an apostolic ministry; then you will receive the unfading crown of glory from the Lamb who was slain. But if you destroy those innocent people with sword, fires, death, scams, violence, tyranny, cruelty, and fierceness beyond what is considered barbaric, even as they are willing

to abstain from evil and to receive the Word of God, then you are sons of the devil and crueller than any criminal.

Based on the previous exposition on the four classes of barbarians, this discussion may be summarized into two broad categories. The first, second, and fourth classes characterize *barbarians* based on certain violent practices and mainly on the absence of faith. Now, the first class may include Christians if they are cruel, fierce, inhumane and blood thirsty; this label of barbarians fits certain Spaniards that afflicted indigenous peoples—who are truly innocent and the meekest people, with horrifying cruelty—terrible deaths, and hellish evils. Such Spaniards are then barbarians and worse than barbarians. These Spaniards also showed themselves barbarians when they took arms and they rebelled against the Emperor.¹² In the same way, the fourth class of barbarians belongs to those who lack Christian faith, so that all unbelievers are included in this category. The second broad category includes the third class of barbarians and it points to the strict sense of the term. Barbarians are those whose minds are clogged, stubborn, lacking reason, deprived of their abilities, cruel, fierce, corrupted by immoral customs and rebellious, either by nature or by sinful vices. Aristotle referred openly about this third class of barbarians.

Therefore, stop throwing around Aristotles' arguments in my face, you sinful men: your lies have dragged Sepúlveda to the defense of an immoral cause. You have

12 Las Casas alludes to Holy Roman Emperor Charles V and his son Prince Phillip, king of Spain. As noted by Angel Losada, Las Casas always defended and supported the divine and legal rights of the kings of Spain and the monarchy over the indigenous people (Sepúlveda and Las Casas, *Apología*, 143).

not understood or wanted to understand the differences between the classes of barbarians explained by the Philosopher¹³ as well as the holy doctors¹⁴ which support our position. May you have pity upon your own souls! May you put to death the vanity of your lies in the name of Christ and may truth live!

13 Philosopher – Aristotle.

14 Holy Doctors – important theologians of the Church as identified by the Roman Catholic Church.

Discussion Questions



The use of the term “barbarians” granted permission for the conquest of the lands, the bodies, and the souls of indigenous people in the Americas, a tactic that helped make indigenous people the “other” in comparison to the Spaniards. What are the categories, terms, labels, or processes used to identify the “other” in your context? Who are those “otherized” in your context and how are they being treated?



The previous chapters contained the accounts of the atrocities committed against indigenous peoples throughout the Americas. Take time to consider how those atrocities were justified and established by violent theologies, ideas, and arguments proposed by Las Casas’ opponents. How do Las Casas’ arguments and renunciation of such atrocities pave the way for bringing gospel and justice together? How did Las Casas’ arguments connect you to God’s heart for justice and the truth of Christ’s liberating gospel?



What parts of Sepúlveda’s arguments against the personhood of indigenous peoples disturbed or angered you the most? Which of these arguments do you still see influencing the racial injustices of our day and the church’s silence regarding such injustices?



What kind of faithful witness does Las Casas inspire you to embody? What vision of God's *shalom*¹⁵ are you called to advocate and announce so that cycles of violence, death, and conquest are broken?



Read Psalm 79 as a model of a prayer of lament. Write your own prayer of lament as a spiritual exercise that names the pain of human suffering and sin and God's presence amid that suffering.

15 Shalom – translation of the Hebrew word for peace.



Chapter 8

The Great Debate (Part II): War, Evangelism, and the Church's Role¹

Excerpts from *In Defense of the Indians*

Introduction

Las Casas concluded his rebuttal of Sepúlveda's first argument with a scolding tone against all those that would consider Sepúlveda's misappropriation of Aristotle's category of barbarian applicable to indigenous peoples. The second part of the Great Debate between Las Casas and Sepúlveda introduced the question of authority over land, peoples, and religion. In other words, who has the legal authority over unbelievers—those outside the

1 The following passages were translated into English from the Spanish text: Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda and Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, *Apología de Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda contra Fray Bartolomé de las Casas: y de Fray Bartolomé de las Casas contra Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda*, trans. Angel Losada (Madrid: Editora Nacional, 1975).

Christian faith? Who has the moral obligation to protect innocent lives amid unchristian lands and idolatrous barbarians? What method was necessary to wipe out idolatry from those living outside the Christian faith? More importantly, how will the gospel of Christ be shared to these barbarians so that they may convert to Christianity? In fact, Sepúlveda's second, third and fourth arguments answered these questions in detail, leading toward a justification for war as the means necessary to eradicate idolatry, save innocent lives and bring the good news of Christ to the New World. Since Sepúlveda applied the category of barbarians to indigenous peoples in the Americas, he paved the way for the superiority of Spanish "enlightened" and "faithful" ways to determine the church's role during the colonialization of the Americas. This logic facilitated the belief that God had divinely chosen and instructed the Spanish monarchy through the blessing of the Holy Roman Catholic Church to be the evangelistic agent in the New World.

On the other hand, Las Casas, having firsthand experiences of the complete distortion of this belief in the New World, rejected these arguments. Through careful legal reasoning, diligent exegesis of Scriptures, and support from early church fathers, Las Casas begins to debunk the Spanish power "over" indigenous peoples. This chapter contains major arguments against and in response to each of Sepúlveda's positions. Rather than accommodating the church's role to colonial projects in the Americas, Las Casas oriented his efforts to clarify the extent and the responsibility of the church's witness in relating to unbelievers. The church must not punish idolatry or idolaters since they are outside of her "jurisdiction" and as such she should not take on messianic roles. He

believed that Jesus' example paved the way for a more faithful, embodied, charitable and gracious gospel that did not need war as a method to secure evangelism. Las Casas' six anti-war arguments set the foundation for the church's pacifist role at a time when swords and the cross of Christ were unified tools of the Spanish crown. This revolutionary position once again made Las Casas a pastoral-activist-scholar beyond his time. Lastly, while Las Casas argued from a multidisciplinary approach, it must be highlighted that his arguments have the possibility of informing and considering our current approach to evangelism, public theology, ethics, and ministry leadership. The following selections are seeds for a continuous task of action-reflection processes that can nurture the very land, peoples, and communities we are inhabiting and are called to serve.

Response to Sepúlveda's Second Argument: The Punishment of Idolatry²

Regarding Jurisdiction over Unbelievers

To clarify this issue, we must suppose that we are able to punish the sins of unbelievers and that unbelievers are able to do so with us, whenever we are submitted to them, or they are submitted to us or when they are within our authority. This can take place for four reasons. The first is place of residence or their location, in other words, when unbelievers live among Christians. The second is a legal reason connected to someone's or their parents' litigation processes being reviewed by our courts (they are under our jurisdiction and are subject to our laws). The third is servanthood: unbelievers fall under our jurisdiction when

2 Ibid., 145–245.

they become our vassals in a formal arrangement where they promise faithful obedience and service to a feudal lord as repayment for access to land. The fourth is a crime committed in another's empire, a crime against the ruler of that territory or the things and people under his jurisdiction.

Now, let us address those unbelievers that inhabit kingdoms ruled by unbelieving rulers, such as the Moors, the Turks, the Scythians, the Persians, and those we are currently discussing, the indigenous peoples. Without a doubt, regardless of the horrible crimes they commit within and outside of their territories, and their enmity against God, neither the church nor Christian rulers have the power to judge or punish them for such crimes, since they lack the necessary and fundamental jurisdiction to punish someone. Therefore, in this case, neither Caesar, prince or king have jurisdiction over indigenous peoples; rather they are considered private persons and all their legal actions do not carry any weight according to civil law, canon law, and Pope Innocent IV.

Regarding the Church's Jurisdiction over Unbelievers

Unbelievers who have never accepted Christ are not actually subjects of Christ, and consequently they are not subjects of the church or its jurisdiction and authority. In Christ, there are two kinds of power: habitual (or potential) and actual. We say that unbelievers are only potential subjects of Christ not actual subjects of Christ; if this is so then they are not under the authority and jurisdiction of Christ until they convert or die, or until the end of the world when Christ exercises his full power over all,

condemning the evil ones and rewarding the good and all things will be in actuality submitted to him. Therefore, neither the church nor the pope in all things have the same power as Christ, although some for flattery attribute this quality to them. What can be deduced is that the power of the church and the pope of Christ extends only to those peoples who voluntarily received the sacrament of baptism, that is, those faithful that are on their way to eternal happiness.

Now, it can be argued that the church does have “potential” power over unbelievers since they can convert into believers if they accept the Christian religion, they enter Christ’s fold, and they accept being subjects of the pope and the church. In other words, since the unbeliever is a potential believer, then the church only has potential power over that person awaiting their embrace of the faith in Christ. That unbelievers are submitted to the church only potentially and not in actuality is supported by Saint Thomas Aquinas with these words: “unbelievers do not in actuality belong to the church, yet they do belong in potentiality. This potentiality has two foundations: the first and most important is the virtue of Christ that is sufficient for the salvation of all humankind, and the second is the free will of humankind.” For example, a parish priest of a church who does not have any parishioners is still a parish priest and rector in potential; now, when the parish has parishioners such a parish priest may use and exercise the act of his jurisdiction since there is now matter, subjects, and people under the exercise of his authority. The power that he had in potential can now be enacted.

Regarding the Punishment of Idolatry

The church's responsibility is not to remove by force the worship of idols or to punish idolatrous peoples since they are not her subjects, and idolaters and unbelievers are not under her authority. It must be considered that according to the texts from our church councils, neither Christ nor his disciples, during a time in which everyone was infested with idolatry, never tore down idols or sent others to break them violently; if this would have been the case, the Gospels would have stated it plainly. Without a doubt, if this was convenient or just, Christ and his disciples would have done it without fear of reprisal from the rulers whom they would have terrorized either with their miracles or their words.

This is the true Christian position in this matter: first, may God grant us the land in our possession, which means that the idolaters who possess those idols are converted. Then, they will break the idols and idolatry will be removed. In other words, our first role is to teach idolaters the gospel truth and through reason take them into the embrace of the church. Only then, we will lawfully tear down their idols (as Saint Augustine proposes) but more so as they themselves worship, the gospel light they will break and stomp along with us these impure demonic images.

Regarding Deuteronomy and Joshua

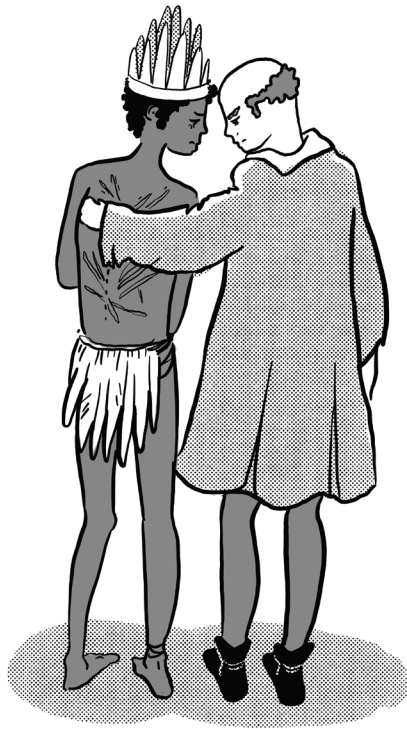
We must still respond to the scriptural examples that Sepúlveda uses to justify a course of action against indigenous peoples, mainly by citing Deuteronomy 7 and the book of Joshua. We read in these texts that

God destroyed seven people groups inhabiting the Promised Land because of their crimes. Sepúlveda pretends to strengthen his argument by citing Saint Cyprian, whose text he inverts and alters as is his usual custom.

Therefore, my illustrious Doctor Sepúlveda, I would like for you to explain why God did not order the destruction of many more idolatrous peoples that lived during those times? In fact, except for the Jewish people and the descendants of Adam until Christ, the whole world was involved in idol worship. The only exceptions are a few noble and pious men such as Job, Melchizedek and others whom God wanted to know the truth as they lived among Gentiles. This is all contained in Genesis, Deuteronomy, and almost all the books of the Old Testament, as well as the witness of Saint Paul and Barnabas in Acts of the Apostles, chapter 14, verse 16,³ which means that God allowed people groups to adopt diverse rituals and idolatrous ceremonies.

Anyone who uses these verses (provided by Sepúlveda) to try to prove that all unbelievers and idolaters must undergo the sword of war precisely because God ordered the children of Israel to engage in such behavior against the Egyptians and the Canaanites, must also be ready to accept that it is lawful to steal someone's goods, avenge one's own injuries, and must embrace and act (as I have previously noted) according to Judaism. The words of our Savior teach us that we cannot get salvation without surpassing Jewish justice and righteousness (Matt 5).

3 "In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways" (Acts 14:16).



Response to Sepúlveda's Third Argument: Saving Innocent Lives⁴

This is the third argument that Sepúlveda proposes to justify military expeditions against indigenous peoples: the church must use and apply the act of coercive authority upon unbelievers if there is a case where unbelievers are violently oppressing innocent people, if people are being sacrificed to their gods, and if cannibalism is taking place. For it is well known that some of these indigenous people carry out such practices in their own land. We will eliminate his errors through the following explanation.

The Church's Pacifist Role

First, the true motives which are used to justify the church's jurisdiction in this matter must be considered. Neither the fact that human sacrifice is an act against natural law nor the principle that allows men and the church through natural law to free those who are oppressed and killed unjustly, are sufficient reasons for waging war against indigenous peoples. According to Proverbs 24: "Rescue those who are being taken away to death; hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter" (Prov 24:11). Here is the true motive that does not exempt the church from this obligation. Those innocent peoples potentially belong to the church; they are under her protection; so, it is the responsibility of the church and the pope, who is her head, to look after their salvation, which cannot be reached when innocent people are dead.

Therefore, it is the church and the pope's concern, who was entrusted by Christ the pastoral care of the whole world,

4 Ibid., 247–313.

to stop the killings of these innocent people so that their souls, whose salvation should be of special interest, shall not eternally perish. Therefore, it is the church and the pope's responsibility, as the universal pastor and caregiver of the whole world, to exercise jurisdiction in this matter with authority and in Christ's name. This authority, however, is not to be used to punish or subjugate unbelievers or idolaters for that crime (since it does not concern the church to judge those who are outside of her, then the Lord will judge them—according to the first epistle of Saint Paul to the Corinthians, chapter 5—as this passage has previously and extensively received my comments). In fact, this authority is to be used to provide all that is necessary to prevent the killing of those innocent people.

If such unbelievers are found committing such crimes, that is, the sacrificing of children to gods or for children to be eaten, even though the church is responsible for stopping such evil, it is not always necessary to wage war. A serious degree of consideration must be given in such instances, for it could be that in stopping the death of a few innocents we sacrifice a countless mass of men without them meriting it. This can also bring about the destruction of an entire kingdom and we can end up planting hatred toward the Christian religion so that they will forever refuse to hear the name of Christ and his doctrine; this is truly contrary to God's and the church's intent. Moreover, we must abstain from war, and we must tolerate such evil, at least for some time and in certain cases in perpetuity (as I will explain later). On the other hand, we must think of a sensible and Christian manner through which we warn people to abstain from such cruelty—including God's Word which cleanses everything, and through

warnings, pleas, and exhortations. Now, this practice of sacrificing the innocents is not present in all the peoples of the Indies. And in the cases where this exists, it is not a great multitude that is involved in this practice; otherwise, all would have been dead by now. So, all regions are now fully populated.

Las Casas' Six Anti-War Arguments

As a summary, six arguments are presented to uphold my position. First, according to reason, when faced with two evils, if you cannot avoid one, you must choose the lesser of the two evils. Second, it is demonstrated that more innocent people will perish due to war than those who will be liberated; any prince or governor or ruler that does not act against, or that allows for war to take place, fatally sins and is obligated to provide restitution. Third, in the midst of war it is hard to distinguish between the innocent and the guilty since chaos and confusion reign in wartime. Fourth, if the punishment for the crimes [of human sacrificing] or the “remedy” used to prevent such crimes causes greater crimes in quantity and quality and it brings about the dismay of the republic, then the punishment of the crimes is a vice, not a virtue or an act of justice. Fifth, based on the principle of the common good and public interest, the priority consists in preventing the destruction of the republic and inflicting any kind of spiritual harm. Sixth, the probable hope and passionate belief that the indigenous peoples will convert through the preaching of the faith, as a long trajectory of previous experiences has revealed. Lastly, it is important to add one universal reason to abstain from war against indigenous people: God and his holy church, whom without according

to the Lord's design there is no salvation, would be frustrated since God desires the salvation of all men and that they all come to the knowledge of the truth (2 Pet 3:9).

Response to Sepúlveda's Fourth Argument: War Paving the Way for Evangelism⁵

Sepúlveda argues that “war against the indigenous peoples is allowed so that Christian religion may be spread through the opening of doors for preachers of the gospel.” Truly, I am stunned to think what kind of spirit has possessed a man like Sepúlveda—who is an elder theologian and an eminent Greek and Latin linguist—to spread such venom across the world. His purpose in this has caused the extensive indigenous empires to be seen as loot and booty of cruel thieves that act against the law of Christ. Until now, it is the uncontrolled ambition of the Spanish that has perpetuated such crimes, which no people in history, even the fiercest, has ever perpetrated. Sepúlveda tries with all his strength to broaden these crimes with his permissive arguments which only contributes to the destruction of what is left of the peoples in that world. God, who is just and righteous, is also outraged and God will pour out the fury of God's anger against Spain, even ahead of the end times.

Sepúlveda's Use of Saint Augustine

Sepúlveda argues that Saint Augustine's letter to Donatus the heretic supports his point. He affirms that Saint Augustine teaches that in the early church Gentiles had to be drawn into faith in Christ through a tender and pacifist manner. Later, things changed as the church's power increased and

5 Ibid., 315–57.

they could force Gentiles to enter into Christ's fold according to "the parable of the wedding banquet." Here, Sepúlveda makes three mistakes: (1) he affirms that the decrees made by the church and the emperors against the heretics must apply also to the unbelievers, without making a clear distinction between the various kinds of unbelievers. Some are the Moors and the Jews who live under Christian rulers. There are also heretics and those who fall away from the faith. Others are the Turks and the Moors who attack us with war, and finally there are the unbelievers and idolaters who live in the most remote regions. (2) Another mistake that Sepúlveda makes is his ungodly interpretation of "the parable of the wedding banquet." (3) Lastly, he fails to make distinctions as to when the church has or has no jurisdiction over unbelievers as actual subjects or private persons.

The Main Issue:

The Parable of the Wedding Banquet (Luke 14:16–24)

Regarding the main issue, this parable does not prove that which Sepúlveda argues. Sepúlveda attempts to prove that Christ wanted his church, once established in strength and in power, to coerce men to receive the gospel truth, not just baptizing them using force, but also through the uprooting of idol worship and defeating of their power. This tactic allowed no obstruction for the preaching of the gospel. I would like for Sepúlveda to explain why God wanted the church and the Christian rulers to be the ones to use force against unbelievers when God had previously trusted angels to attract unbelievers to himself.

Until now, there has not been any [holy doctor of the faith] that has interpreted this parable as Sepúlveda has; namely that unbelievers who have never heard of the Christian faith must be compelled by Christian rulers with guns to abandon idol worship and enter Christ's fold, the church. In other words, the requirement of physical and external compulsion as necessary for this conversion. I would love for Sepúlveda and his companions to show us some passage in Scripture where this parable is commented upon and interpreted in the same way that he does. Namely, that the gospel (that is, the good and pleasant news) and the forgiveness of sins must be announced with guns and bombs, with armed soldiers, and with a warlike apparatus that chases down Gentiles. What does the good news have to do with the wounds, captivities, deaths, fires, and the destruction of entire cities and warlike evils present in every war?

Christ's words regarding this parable, "compel them to come in" (Luke 24:23), signify that Christ himself, or through angels, or other people, tends to move intellectually and toward himself those who do not know the truth. This can be through visible or invisible miracles, but Christ never uses any coercion of the will. This is the literal sense of the parable. Therefore, Christ did not want to condone the use of external violence but a persuasive approach. Saint John Chrysostom's words clearly affirm this interpretation as well as Saint Thomas Aquinas when he says: "Such compulsion found in the Gospel of Luke 14 is not coercive, but it is effective persuasion, whether with harshness or tenderness." Regarding such interior and persuasive compulsion, Saint Augustine adds: "O happy necessity which compels one to what

is better.” And Seneca, “I give thanks to my weakness that forces me to not do what I must not do.” This is the compulsion that Christ wanted to teach us through the literal sense of this parable.

Now, how can our preachers—who are accompanied with a crowd of soldiers that are actually thieves—say to an indigenous person: “The kingdom of God has drawn near”? Instead, they should say: “The kingdom of hell has drawn near to both you who are going to exhale your spirit without faith and the sacraments’ grace, and to us who are going to kill you and who will ransack your homes.” Is it possible for those who through cruel wars tear apart and destroy a defenseless multitude of people be the ones to heal the sick? Or that those who through terrible desolations pollute the pure air with the stench of cadavers be the ones who resurrect the dead? Will they be the ones to cast out demons or will they lose their souls? Following this path, will we be able to fulfill Christ’s principle of “from grace you have received, give out of that grace”? Does the devastation of provinces graciously communicate faith to its inhabitants who are forced to become fugitives and destroyed to the point of annihilation? Oh, the blindness of human understanding! Oh, what a deplorable disgrace! When Christ sent his own to preach the gospel, he recommended meekness: “Behold, he said, I am sending you out like sheep among wolves” . . . Shame on you! Shame on those, who against Christ’s law, like voracious wolves and cruel thieves, under the pretext of preaching the gospel you greedily plunder the kingdoms of the Indies filled with innocent people! But the Lord lives and you will not escape God’s hands!

Discussion Questions



A central theme in these passages is idolatry. Sepúlveda and his followers pointed to the visible idols of the indigenous peoples as an excuse for violence and empire. Las Casas called out their hypocrisy by exposing their blind obedience to the invisible idol of greed. What are some of the invisible idols in the Christian church today which lead people to sin?



Even though he was a learned theologian, Sepúlveda used many sloppy biblical arguments to justify war for the sake of evangelism. What were some of his main arguments? Read Deuteronomy 7; Joshua 5–6; and Matthew 5–8. How might the beatitudes of Jesus reframe our perspective on the use of violence and war in comparison with the Old Testament period. What are some ways that we uncritically use and justify violence today in society?



According to “civil religion,” the people of one country declare that God is on their side and that the people of other nations are less favored. Sepúlveda claimed falsely that God favored the Spaniards, and that the Spaniards were like the modern-day Israelites. In order to justify military conquest and colonization, he and other Spaniards compared the indigenous peoples of the Americas with the pagan Canaanites and Amalekites of the Old Testament. What are the dangers of this type of civil religion? Read Revelation 7:9–12 and Revelation 21:1–22:2. How does the idea of civil religion clash with these central biblical texts?



The indigenous genocide described by Las Casas occurred throughout North, South, and Central America, as well as the Caribbean islands such as Puerto Rico, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica, St. Lucia, and the Cayman Islands. Literally tens of millions of indigenous peoples lost their lives through European colonialism from 1492 to the 1900s. How do you think God feels about this? One way to honor the memory of those who lost their lives and their descendants is by doing a Land Acknowledgment. Do some research about the area where you live. Who were the first nations of the city, region, and state you now call home? Acknowledge this tragic history and pray for God's healing. For more ideas on land acknowledgments from a Christian perspective, see the following resource which was created by InterVarsity Christian Fellowship: <https://mem.intervarsity.org/resources/simple-protocol-opening-prayers/>



Thankfully, five centuries later, the fusion of Christian evangelism and literal military conquest is a rare occurrence. Unfortunately, some of the same underlying attitudes which justified evangelistic coercion still undergird many of our contemporary evangelistic practices. Reread the parable of the wedding banquet (Matt 22:1–14) and Las Casas' response to Sepúlveda's fourth argument. How might your ideas of evangelism, church planting, teaching, and preaching be challenged or transformed?



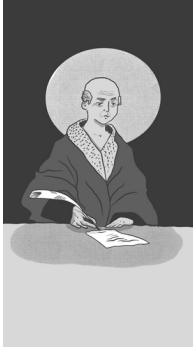
GLOBAL MISSION

Afterword





GLOBAL MISSION



Afterword

In the previous pages, it has been our goal to uplift the writings and legacy of God's faithful witness, Bartolomé de las Casas, in order to present a different side of the story and a different perspective of the Christian faith. This volume has also endeavored to address Las Casas' humanity and flaws, and demonstrate that his ideas and understanding evolved over time—as hope for us all. The horrors of the Spanish conquest were absolutely horrible and should never be downplayed or justified. Yet, at the same time, God raised up Las Casas, an imperfect but devoted follower of Jesus, to challenge the misrepresentations of Christianity which were occurring in his time, and to plainly declare one simple message in word and deed: “The conquest is opposed to Christ. The diverse indigenous peoples of the Americas are equally made in the image of God and deeply loved by Him.” Half a millennium ago, using all of the spiritual, emotional, and physical resources at his disposal, he repented of European colonialism and dedicated his life to dignifying the image of God of the diverse indigenous

peoples of the Americas, decentering European Christianity, and planting the seeds of Christian racial justice which continue to bear fruit into the 21st century. As a miracle of God, we witness this fruit most clearly today in the living and thriving faith of the Christian “base” of Latin America and the U.S. Latina/o church, and in their resilience and hope.

For those who struggle to reconcile their faith in Christ with their concern for biblical justice because of contemporary misrepresentations of Jesus, we pray that the writings of Las Casas may bring comfort and let you know that you are not alone. Five centuries ago, Las Casas wrestled with similar tensions and the disconcerting witness of others who sought to conflate Jesus with racial injustice. But he fought. He struggled. And he persevered for the sake of the Good News of Jesus Christ. In so doing, Las Casas gave birth to the five-hundred-year Christian social justice tradition of the Brown Church. May we draw strength from Las Casas’ inspiring example, find our spiritual home in the Brown Church, and go and do likewise. All are welcome!

Dr. Robert Chao Romero
Rev. Marcos Canales

Resources for Application





GLOBAL MISSION

Soul Work and Soul Care: Loving Our Neighbors with Regular Soul Audits

By Hank Voss

No one presumes to teach an art until he has first carefully studied it. Look how foolish it is for the inexperienced to assume pastoral authority, since the care of souls is the art of arts!

~ Gregory the Great, c. 590

Your leaders . . . keep watch over your souls and will give an account for their work.

~ Hebrews 13:17a

Each Sacred Roots Spiritual Classic has a “Soul Work and Soul Care” resource to illustrate how Christian leaders across cultures and generations have found a particular spiritual classic helpful in pastoral ministry. “Soul work” includes the *personal* work of watering, weeding, pruning, and fertilizing the garden of one’s own soul. In a similar way, “soul care” involves the *pastoral* work of nurturing growth in another’s friendship with God. When Jesus discusses “soul work” and “soul care,” he often uses metaphors from the medical and agricultural professions. Like a doctor for souls, or a farmer caring for an orchard of fruit trees, congregational leaders who hope to serve as “soul surgeons” can learn much from the wisdom of those who have gone before.

Christian Witness and God’s Heart for Justice

Las Casas was awakened to God’s heart for justice through the “reading” of a spiritual classic by a pastor during a Sunday morning church service.¹ He then spent time in solitude and meditation before making a radical commitment to renounce the social injustice that surrounded him in his context. For the rest of his life, Las Casas devoted himself to studying what God’s Word has to say about justice and then advocated for the oppressed. Las Casas’ life points to a number of helpful disciplines for nurturing the kind of soul that can faithfully participate in Christian witness over many decades. In this section we briefly note some spiritual disciplines that can help us grow to be more like Las Casas in our own context—study, soul audits, and neighborhood audits.

Study

Las Casas reported that “from the day he saw the light, he read an infinite number of books.”² This intensive study helped him better understand the injustice he witnessed and how much this injustice grieved God’s heart. Earlier in this book, a discussion question from chapter two asked: “Have you ever prayerfully reflected upon the two thousand verses of Scripture which speak about God’s heart for justice and concern for the poor, and applied

1 The text that “woke” Las Casas came from a spiritual classic called *Wisdom of Sirach*. As a Roman Catholic, Las Casas would have considered Sirach to be Scripture. As Protestants, we identify the Apocrypha, of which Sirach is a part, as a spiritual classic, not canonical Scripture. But Las Casas’ experience with Sirach provides a great example for all Christians of how God can use a spiritual classic to open eyes and change hard hearts.

2 See chapter two above.

them to the circumstances which surround you?” This question invites us to explore the discipline of study.

Studying what the Bible has to say about the poor can be a transforming experience. Consider taking a year to read the Bible through cover to cover and note every passage that speaks of God’s heart for the poor, the oppressed, the orphan, the widow, and the immigrant. Or consider studying a list of passages related to these topics.³ Richard Foster, in his classic book *Celebration of Discipline*, lists study as one of the four inward disciplines especially helpful for the Christian life.⁴ Foster’s four steps of study are listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Richard Foster’s Four Steps of Study

Step One: Repetition	<i>Regularly channeling the mind in a specific direction, we ingrain habits of thought.</i>
Step Two: Concentration	<i>Centering the mind, we focus attention on the thing being studied.</i>
Step Three: Comprehension	<i>Understanding what is being studied, we gain insight, discernment, and true perception of reality.</i>
Step Four: Reflection	<i>Defining the significance of what is being studied, we may see things from God’s perspective and better understand ourselves.</i>

Foster lists a number of ideas for participating in the discipline of study. He suggests taking a “study retreat” where you go away for a period of time to study a topic.

3 For a sample list of relevant passages see Ronald Sider, *Cry Justice: The Bible on Hunger and Poverty* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1980).

4 Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 54–66.

Some set aside a regular time daily or weekly for study. As you study the Bible's teaching about the poor, notice how your perspective is moved. See if you can identify Foster's four steps in your own life as you study God's heart of justice for the poor.

Loving Our Neighbors with Regular Soul Audits

Concern for the poor is at the heart of Christian mission. The message proclaimed by the teachers of the church over the last two thousand years is one we need today. As John Bunyan notes in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Christians often become distracted and enticed by the things of this world. The way of Jesus seems hard, and we leave Christ's path to explore Vanity Fair. Table 1 lists several practices the church has used to keep its focus on the people who are a first priority for Jesus (Luke 4:16–21) and his followers (Gal 2:10). Just as many undergo an annual physical or financial checkup, so we do well to make regular soul checkups in relation to our love for the poor and our willingness to be involved in ministries of justice. Table 2 provides a number of spiritual practices useful for conducting a soul or ministry audit in relation to this aspect of Christian mission. Table 3 provides specific guidance for how to identify the poor in your community.

Table 2: Spiritual Practices, Soul Audits, and Participating in Christ’s Mission to the Poor

Tool	Notes
<i>Sabbath</i>	<i>Sabbath is a gift to the poor. Practicing sabbath also provides space in the life of all believers to do the hard and dangerous work of worship. Weekly worship calls us away from the idols of our age and into alignment with the mission of Jesus. Find ways to explore a personal and corporate practice of sabbath in your discipleship community.</i>
<i>Almsgiving in Lent</i>	<i>Forty Days of Focus: For over fifteen centuries millions of believers have annually prepared for Easter with a forty-day period of fasting, prayer, and special attention to the poor (almsgiving). Consider adopting an increased emphasis on care for the poor each Lent leading up to Easter. Perhaps re-reading Christian Mission and Poverty could become part of your annual Lenten discipline? Perhaps money saved from fasting from food can be invested in care for the poor in your community? If not during Lent, when does your community conduct an annual audit of its care for the poor?</i>
<i>The Tithe</i>	<i>Tithing is a great place to begin to battle the seduction of the love of money (1 Tim 6:10). An annual audit of one’s finances can reveal whether we are truly following Jesus in caring for the poor. We must beware becoming like Judas, who talked about the poor loudly while secretly rejecting Jesus in practice (John 12:1–8). What percentage of your annual budget is spent in care for the poor? If care for the poor is a top priority for Jesus, is it also a top priority for you as reflected in your finances?</i>

For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the *fatherless* and the *widow*, and loves the *foreigner* residing among you, giving them food and clothing.

~ Deuteronomy 10:17–18

Followers of Jesus participate in his proclamation of good news to the poor in word and deed. This participation is especially aimed at embracing widows, orphans, and immigrants with the good news about a God who loves them. Individuals and churches pursuing participation in the mission of Jesus will do well to regularly audit their engagement with the poor in their own community. As we learn to love the poor in our midst we are better prepared to love the poor in increasingly distant places, even to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

Table 3: Missional Practices, Neighborhood Audits, and Participation in Christ’s Mission to the Poor

Audit Category	Notes
Care for “Widows”	<i>In both the Old Testament and in the New Testament (1 Tim 5) care for elders, especially for elderly women, is an important aspect of mission. Churches today might include not only the elderly, but also the many single parents who struggle to care for children while living in challenging situations. Where are the elderly in your community? Are there forgotten elders with needs your church could meet? Are there single parents you might come alongside to encourage in some way? Participation in Christ’s mission in the world always brings blessings. What blessings might you miss by not participating in these missional opportunities?</i>
Care for “Orphans”	<i>Jesus loves children, and he has taught his followers to love them too. North American society today places a low value on unwanted children. Unwanted orphans in the womb are often killed before they are born. Once born, unwanted children are often placed in unwelcoming homes. Where in your community is there opportunity for you as an individual or as a community of disciples to welcome orphans? How might you work for a more just society that loves and welcomes all children into safe and secure homes?</i>
Care for “Immigrants”	<i>Jesus was a refugee for part of his life. Throughout biblical times, care for the foreigner or immigrant in the land was a litmus test for the faithfulness of God’s people. God’s people had once been poorly treated immigrants, and they were constantly reminded in Scripture to never forget this fact and to therefore welcome and care for the stranger in their midst. Where are the immigrants in your community? How might you welcome them into your home, your church, and your community?</i>

To learn more about practical ways to love the poor and the neighbors in your own community and around the globe consider the following resources:

Blomberg, Craig L. *Christians in an Age of Wealth: A Biblical Theology of Stewardship*. Biblical Theology for Life. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013.

Davis, Don. “Our Distinctive: Advancing the Kingdom among the Urban Poor.” In *Multiplying Laborers for the Urban Harvest: Shifting the Paradigm for Servant Leadership Education*, 15th ed., 23–29. Wichita, KS: The Urban Ministry Institute, 2013.

———. “Christian Mission and the Poor.” In *Foundations for Christian Mission*, 4:175–226. Capstone Curriculum. Wichita, KS: The Urban Ministry Institute, 2005.

———. “Jesus and the Poor.” In *Foundations for Christian Mission*, 4:251–56. Capstone Curriculum. Wichita, KS: The Urban Ministry Institute, 2005.

Davis, Don, and Terry Cornett. “Empowering People for Freedom, Wholeness, and Justice.” In *Foundations for Christian Mission*, edited by Don Davis, 4:310–39. Capstone Curriculum. Wichita, KS: The Urban Ministry Institute, 2005.

Draper, Andrew T., ed. *Christian Mission and Poverty: Wisdom from 2,000 Years of Church Leaders*. Sacred Roots Spiritual Classics 4. Wichita, KS: TUMI Press, 2021.

Ellul, Jacques. *On Being Rich and Poor: Christianity in a Time of Economic Globalization*. Translated by Willem Vanderburg. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014.

Marchant, Colin, ed. “Lausanne Occasional Paper 22: Christian Witness to the Urban Poor.” Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 1980. <http://www.lausanne.org/all-documents/lop-22.html>.

Peacock, Barbara L. *Soul Care in African American Practice*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2020.

Voss, Hank. “Poor, Theology of The.” In *Encyclopedia of Christianity in the Global South*, edited by Mark A. Lamport and George Thomas Kurian, 651–52. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018.

Christian Community Development Association. CCDA provides an annual conference, a regular newsletter, and a wide variety of resources for churches and individuals seeking to love their neighbors well. www.ccda.org.

Continuing the Conversation

The study of Las Casas is a universe in itself. His impact on the world and the church was so enormous that his books still sell thousands of copies, and students and scholars from all over the world continue to scour his writings for answers to perennial pastoral and human problems. There is even a term for those who have devoted themselves to studying his life and writings—“Las Casistas.” Human rights centers have been named after Las Casas in famous universities and numerous books and articles continue to be written about his legacy. As in his own day, Las Casas is still controversial. Las Casas has been criticized by some conservative Spanish authors for exaggerating the abuses of the conquest and perpetuating a “Black Legend” about Spaniards. If you are interested in learning more about Las Casas, you can easily find a few more books to read, pursue graduate studies in history, theology, or political science on the topic, or even make Las Casas your lifelong hobby!

To begin further exploration of the life and legacy of Las Casas, see:

<http://www.lascasas.org>

<https://www.bfriars.ox.ac.uk/study/research/las-casas-institute-for-social-justice/>

De las Casas, Bartolomé. *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*. Edited by Nigel Griffin. London: Penguin Books, 1992.

———. *History of the Indies*. Edited by Andrée Collard. New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1971.

———. *In Defense of the Indians*. Edited by Stafford Poole. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1992.

Bartolomé de las Casas in History: Toward an Understanding of the Man and His Work. Edited by Juan Friede and Benjamin Keen. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1971.

Hanke, Lewis. *The Spanish Struggle for Justice in the Conquest of America*. Dallas: First Southern Methodist University Press, 2002.

———. *All Mankind Is One: A Study of the Disputation Between Bartolomé de las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda on the Religious and Intellectual Capacity of the American Indians*. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1974.

As discussed in the introduction, Bartolomé de las Casas can be considered the father of the Brown Church. The Brown Church can be defined as the prophetic ecclesial community of Latinas/os that has contested racial and social injustice in Latin America and the United States for the past five hundred years. As an additional part of his important legacy, Las Casas also invented “Brown Theology.”

Beginning with Antonio de Montesinos and Las Casas, and as a natural outgrowth of its prophetic advocacy efforts and praxis, the Brown Church has developed a unique body of social justice theology based upon the Christian Scriptures. I call this Brown Theology. Brown Theology rejects the narrow presentation of Christianity as eternal “fire insurance” which leaves most of life untouched by God’s love and redemption. According to this narrow conception of Christianity which has been around in

Latin America since colonial times, we believe in Jesus so that we can be forgiven and so that we can go to heaven after we die. Notwithstanding the critical importance of heaven and forgiveness, this short-sighted version of Christianity presented during the conquest of the Americas ignores the biblical value of justice and the social dimensions of Jesus' redemption. It thereby allowed for the genocide and dehumanization of native and African communities, and the presentation of a corrupt and distorted gospel: "It is okay for us to decimate and enslave millions of 'Indians' and thousands of African slaves because we are saving their souls by sharing Christianity with them. Without us they would just go to hell."

Brown Theologians throughout the centuries—Bartolomé de las Casas, Archbishop Oscar Romero, Gustavo Gutiérrez, Justo González, Ada María Isasi-Díaz, Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, C. René Padilla and Samuel Escobar to name a few—have challenged this narrow and unbiblical view of the gospel and have proclaimed that Jesus came to save, redeem, and transform every aspect of our lives and the world. His salvation extends over all of God's good creation which has become twisted and corrupted as a consequence of sin. This includes everything messed up and broken in our world—whether personal, familial, social, or global. It includes our personal emotional brokenness and dysfunctional family relationships, but also poverty, racism, slavery, human trafficking, oppression of immigrants, warfare, lack of clean water, AIDS, gang violence, and lack of educational opportunity. Nothing and no one is left out.

This holistic and all-encompassing nature of the salvation of Jesus Christ is summed up by the Apostle Paul in the book of Colossians:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross (Col 1:15–20; italics added).

If you are curious about learning more about theological reflection from a distinctly Latina/o perspective, as well as the five-hundred-year history of the Brown Church, here are some books to get you started on your journey:

Armas, Kat. *Abuelita Faith: Women on the Margins Teach Us about Wisdom, Persistence, and Strength*. Ada: Brazos Press, 2021.

Costas, Orlando. *Christ Outside the Gate: Mission Beyond Christendom*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1982.

Escobar, Samuel. *A Time for Mission: The Challenge of Global Christianity*. Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 2003.

García-Johnson, Oscar. *The Mestizo Community of the Spirit: A Postmodern Latino/a Ecclesiology*. Princeton Theological Monograph 105. Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2009.

González, Justo. *Mañana: Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990.

———. *Santa Biblia: The Bible Through Hispanic Eyes*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996.

González, Karen. *The God Who Sees: Immigrants, the Bible, and the Journey to Belong*. Harrisonburg: Herald Press, 2019.

Humphreys, José. *Seeing Jesus in East Harlem: What Happens When Churches Show Up and Stay Put*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2018.

Kohn Rivera, Natalia, Noemi Vega Quiñones, and Kristy Garza Robinson. *Hermanas: Deepening Our Identity and Growing Our Influence*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2019.

Martell-Otero, Loida I., Zaida Maldonado Pérez, and Elizabeth Conde-Frazier. *Latina Evangélicas: A Theological Survey from the Margins*. Eugene: Cascade Books, 2013.

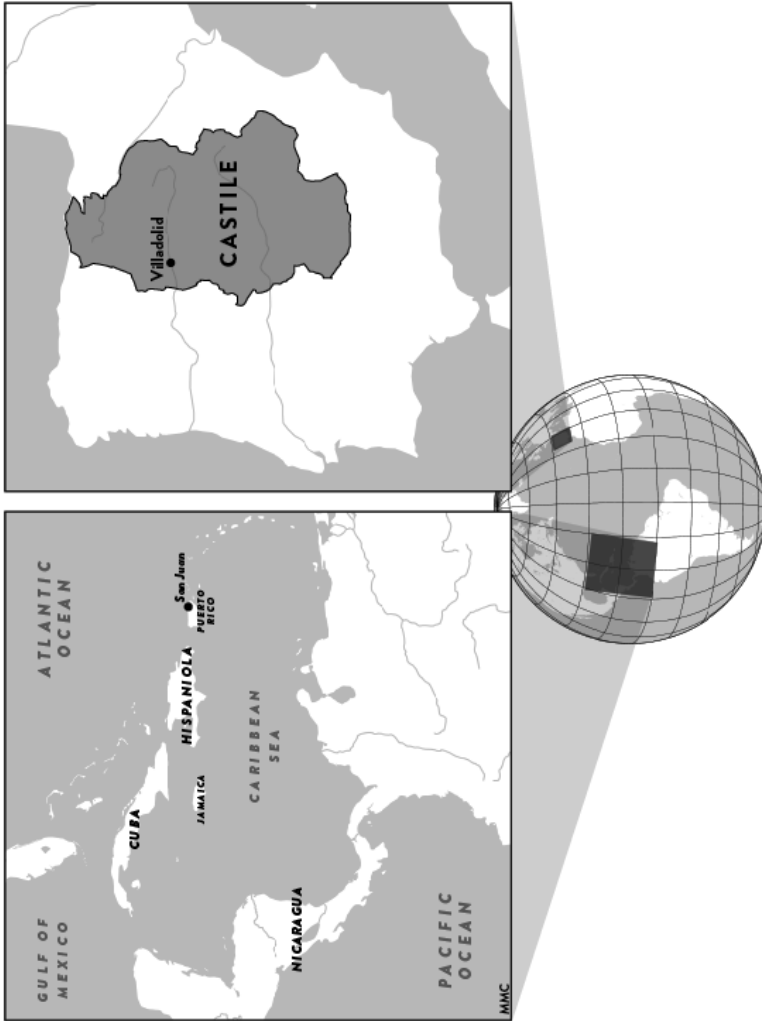
Martínez, Juan Francisco. *Walk with the People: Latino Ministry in the United States*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2016.

Padilla, C. René and Tetsunao Yamamori. *The Local Church, Agent of Transformation: An Ecclesiology for Integral Mission*. Buenos Aires: Kairos Ediciones, 2004.

Rodriguez, Daniel and Manuel Ortiz. *A Future for the Latino Church: Models for Multilingual, Multigenerational Hispanic Congregations*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2011.

- Romero, Robert Chao. *Brown Church: Five Centuries of Latina/o Social Justice, Theology, and Identity*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2020.
- Salvatierra, Alexia. *Faith-Rooted Organizing: Mobilizing the Church in Service to the World*. Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2014.
- Van Opstal, Sandra Maria. *The Next Worship: Glorifying God in a Diverse World*. Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2016.
- Villafañe, Eldin. *The Liberating Spirit: Toward an Hispanic American Pentecostal Social Ethic*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993.

Map of Important Places



A Letter to God's Friends and Fellow Warriors On Why We Read the Sacred Roots Spiritual Classics Together

Scholars like big books; small books change the world.

~ Rev. Dr. Glen Scorgie

Dear Friends and Fellow Warriors,

Greetings in the strong name of Jesus! What a joy to know that Jesus calls us “Friend” (John 15). What an honor to stand with sisters and brothers from every century and culture to shout, “Worthy is the Lamb!” What a privilege to serve in the Lamb’s army, not fighting flesh and blood, but God’s *internal* (the flesh), *external* (the world) and *infernal* (the Devil) enemies. In light of this cosmic struggle, we put on a wartime (not peacetime) mindset as we follow Jesus. Moses stated that God is present and at work in every generation (Ps 90:1), and the Sacred Roots Spiritual Classics are for those who desire to be used within their sphere of influence like David was used by God in his generation (Ps 57:2; Acts 13:36).

Our Context: A Battle with God’s Internal, External, and Infernal Enemies

Scripture teaches our daily need to choose a missional mindset (Matt 6:10). God’s kingdom never advances in neutral territory. Every inch in creation, including each inch of our soul, is a contested battlefield. God’s enemies are threefold. First, there is an *internal* enemy hiding within the heart of each redeemed child of God. God

loves us, even though we often battle a “Judas-heart”—a tendency to betray our Lord (John 12:6). Scripture names this brokenness the “flesh,” the old “man” or the “sin nature” (Rom 8; Gal 5–6). We work to kill (“mortify”) this sin lest it succeed in killing us (Rom 8:13).

Second, as followers of Jesus, we battle all *external* enemies opposing the Lamb’s kingdom. Sickened by sin, polluted by greed, corrupted by self-centeredness, idolatry and oppression; our world is not the way it is supposed to be. What God created good has been twisted and now often grieves the Holy Spirit. We choose to stand with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in refusing to bow to the principalities and powers of the age (Dan 3), or to accept the besetting sins of our ethnicities, nations and generations. Scripture and our sacred roots shine painful yet purifying light on our blind spots.

Finally, we are not ignorant of the Devil’s schemes. We may not know if a demon’s name is “Screwtape” or “Legion,” but we do know that an *infernal* enemy opposes God’s kingdom *shalom*. He is the Devil, Satan, the Father of Lies, the Accuser, and one day soon he and his demons will be completely crushed. In this time between the times, the Lamb’s followers resist and renounce the Devil and all his ways with the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God.

Our Mission: To Be Faithful Stewards and Wise Servants in Our Generation

Scripture contains a number of “history” psalms (Pss 78, 105, 106, 136; Neh 9:6–38; cf. Heb 11). These songs challenge us to reflect on women and men who chose to serve God in their generation—Abraham and Sarah,

Moses, Phinehas, Rahab, David, Esther and many others. History psalms also warn of those who ignored or refused to participate in God's work (Pharaoh, Dathan, Abiram, Og). Leaders like Rahab the prostitute (Matt 1:5; Heb 11:35; Jas 2:25) and King David were far from perfect (Ps 51). Yet Scripture declares that leaders like David "served the purposes of God in his own generation" (Acts 13:36).

Do you want God to use you in your generation? Are you willing to be a David or Esther today? God is already at work in our communities, schools and workplaces. Sometimes the neighborhoods with the greatest challenges (those with giants like "Goliath" and armies of Philistine enemies) are the very places God finds servants and stewards he can use (1 Sam 17; 1 Cor 4:1).



Like King David, Prince Kaboo of the Kru people in Liberia chose to participate in God's work in his generation. As a child, Prince Kaboo (1873–1893) was taken hostage by a rival tribe and was about to be executed when he experienced a supernatural deliverance. After weeks of traveling through the jungle, Kaboo arrived at a mission station near

Monrovia, Liberia's capital. There, as a fourteen-year-old teenager, he wholeheartedly gave his life to Jesus Christ.

Prince Kaboo took on the name Samuel Kaboo Morris at his baptism, and he spent the next four years working and

studying Scripture—especially Jesus’ teaching about the Holy Spirit as recorded by his friend John (John 14–17). Kaboo was fascinated with the Holy Spirit, for he had personally experienced the Holy Spirit’s powerful deliverance. Eventually, the missionaries told Kaboo they had taught him all they knew and that if he wanted to learn more about the Holy Spirit, he would need to travel to the United States. Kaboo felt the need for more training about the Holy Spirit before being ready to return to the Kru as an evangelist. With no shoes or money, Kaboo walked to Monrovia’s harbor to find passage to New York—trusting his Father in Heaven to provide.

Kaboo’s story is powerful. The ship that transported Kaboo experienced revival with the captain and many crew coming to Christ. Within a few hours of arriving in New York, Kaboo led seventeen men to Christ at an inner-city rescue mission. On his third day in the United States, the eighteen-year-old evangelist preached at a Sunday school meeting and revival broke out with a new missionary society organized that very day. God provided money for Kaboo’s college tuition, housing, books and necessities. By the end of his first week in America, Kaboo had arrived in Fort Wayne, Indiana to begin studying at Taylor University—an evangelical college committed to raising up workers for the harvest fields who walk in the power of the Holy Spirit (Matt 9:36; Acts 1:8).

Prince Kaboo’s arrival at Taylor University transformed not only Taylor University’s campus, but also the whole city of Fort Wayne. On his first Sunday in town, Kaboo walked to the front of the church and asked for permission to pray. As he prayed, the power and presence of the Holy

Spirit descended on the congregation in a way none had ever experienced before. The pastor reported, “what I said and what Sammy said I do not remember, but I know my soul was on fire as never before. . . . No such visitation of the Holy Spirit had ever been witnessed” by our congregation.¹



Two years later, on May 12, 1893, at the age of twenty, Prince Samuel Kaboo Morris died from an illness contracted after traveling through a snowstorm to preach. Since his death, Kaboo’s story has influenced thousands of students at Taylor University and elsewhere to participate with the Holy Spirit in mission and seek the Spirit’s power in witness. John Wengatz was a student at Taylor in 1906, the year he first read Kaboo’s story. Some fifty years later, after a lifetime invested as a missionary in Africa, Wengatz remarked “my tears never cease to flow as I read that unrepeatable story.”² Although Kaboo died at twenty, he was used mightily by God in his generation. Will those who tell the story of your life say the same?

Our Vision: Toward Ten Thousand “Tozers”

If you are pursuing God with the same passion and hunger displayed by Samuel Kaboo Morris, than you will be glad to meet A. W. Tozer (1897–1963). Tozer grew up poor without the opportunity to complete high school. While working in a tire factory he heard the good news

1 Lindley Baldwin, *Samuel Morris: The African Boy God Sent to Prepare an American University for Its Mission to the World* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1987), 59.

2 John Wengatz, *Sammy Morris: Spirit-Filled Life* (Upland, IN: Taylor University Press, 1954), Preface.

about Jesus, repented and believed. At nineteen, he began to preach, becoming one of the most influential pastors in his generation. His books *The Pursuit of God* and *The Knowledge of the Holy* have helped millions know and love the Triune God revealed in Scripture. When asked how he learned to read Scripture with such clarity and theological depth, Pastor Tozer would often point to his “friends” and “teachers.” These teachers were a list of some thirty-five Christian spiritual classics read and reread throughout Tozer’s life. Sacred Roots Spiritual Classics (SRSC) are for those with a hunger for the Holy Spirit like Prince Kaboo and a desire to be used like Pastor Tozer.

The Sacred Roots Project envisions ten thousand Christian leaders, serving in challenging ministry contexts across North America, engaging with spiritual classics in community by the year 2030. Will you join this growing community as we pursue God together by reading and discussing spiritual classics with gospel friends and kingdom coworkers (Matt 9:35)?

A larger dream also informs the Sacred Roots Project—a dream that imagines a million Christian workers equipped to serve among the global poor (Matt 9:36–38). The Center for the Study of Global Christianity reports that in the middle of 2020 there are approximately two and a half billion people living in urban poverty.³ This number will increase to over four billion by the year 2050. Sacred Roots dreams of equipping one million Christian leaders among this great multitude—women and men like Prince Kaboo—with access to excellent editions of some of the greatest spiritual classics the Christian tradition has

3 For the most current statistics, see www.gordonconwell.edu/center-for-global-christianity/resources/status-of-global-christianity/.

produced. Ultimately, the goal is increased faithfulness as leaders mature in representing Christ in local churches that are centered on Scripture, grounded in Great Tradition truth (Nicene), and engaged in contextually relevant witness to Christ's love in thousands of diverse contexts.⁴

Our Strategy:

Scripture, Friendship and Spiritual Classics

Sacred Roots' strategy is simple. We believe fresh readings of Christian spiritual classics can lead Christian leaders into a deeper engagement with the God revealed in Scripture and into deeper friendships with one another.

Christian spiritual classics strengthen and deepen our roots in Scripture and help us produce the Spirit's fruit. One day Jesus asked a serious student of the Bible a simple question, "*How do you read it?*" (Luke 10:26). Of the more than three hundred questions asked by Jesus in the Gospels, few are more relevant today. Faithfulness in our generation demands that we learn to read Scripture in a way consistent with the foundational truths held by followers of Jesus in every culture since the first century. We read Christian spiritual classics to discover faithful and fruitful readings of Scripture. As Dr. Davis has noted, the church's "Great Tradition" perennially opens our eyes to new riches in Scripture's "Authoritative Tradition."⁵

A truth believed by all Christians, in all places, and at all times is that there is one God who exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. From "before to beyond time," an eternal

4 Don Davis, *Sacred Roots: A Primer on Retrieving the Great Tradition* (Wichita, KS: The Urban Ministry Institute, 2010), 35–45.

5 Ibid.

friendship between the Trinity's three persons has existed at the center of reality. Spiritual friendship provides the start and heart of truth. Just as spiritual classics can reveal new riches from Scripture, so they help us grow in love for God and neighbors. They can provide practical help in deepening our friendships with the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit and with other believers—both with believers in this generation and with those surrounding us in the great cloud of witnesses (Heb 12:1; 13:7). Why do Christian leaders desperately need to pursue strong friendships? Start with these three reasons.

1. First, each of us has eyes far too small to see what God wants to show us! No one can begin to grasp the great things God is doing across 100 billion galaxies and throughout the many generations since the universe's creation. Friends, standing in different places provides additional eyes to see from different perspectives what God is doing in the world and across history.
2. Second, each of us battles a sinful nature that distorts our perception of the truth. We need friends who speak truth to us, sharpening us like iron sharpening iron (Prov 27:17).
3. Third, all of us view creation through a particular culture's time and place. Each culture exists with a unique version of virtue and vice. Friends who speak to us from other cultures and centuries often affirm virtues in our culture, but they can also reflect ways our culture's vice habitually offends against kingdom *shalom*.

In sum, Sacred Roots Spiritual Classics help us grow in our friendship with God and neighbor (Matt 22:37–40). Neighbors include the living Christian leaders with whom we read and discuss this spiritual classic. However, “neighbor” also includes the author (or authors) of this spiritual classic. These women and men walked faithfully with God and neighbor. Their life and teachings produced good fruit in their generation and then continued to do so in the lives of other Christian leaders—often across many cultures and centuries. As an editorial team, we can personally testify to the fruitfulness of the time we have spent with our “friends,” the “ancient witnesses” in the Sacred Roots Spiritual Classics. If you choose to invest in careful conversation with these saints of old (Heb 13:7), we are confident you will not only experience practical fruit in the present, but you will also gain new friends for eternity.

Tactical Notes: Christian Leaders Are Christian Readers

Throughout church history, fruitful Christian leaders have been intentional readers. Augustine (d. 430), a pastor and bishop in Africa, was challenged to a new level of ministry by reading a spiritual biography about an Egyptian Christian leader named Anthony (d. 356).⁶ Protestant leaders like Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Wesley, Elizabeth Fry, Phoebe Palmer and many others all published editions of spiritual classics for Christian leaders in their generation. Charles Harrison Mason (d. 1961), founder of the largest Pentecostal denomination in North America (Church of God in Christ), was called to ministry through a reading

6 Athanasius, *Renewal in Christ: Athanasius on the Christian Life*, ed. Jeremy Treat, Sacred Roots Spiritual Classics 6 (Wichita, KS: The Urban Ministry Institute, 2022).

of the autobiography of missionary and evangelist Amanda Smith.⁷ More recently, leaders like C. S. Lewis, A. W. Tozer, James Houston, and Rick Warren have encouraged Christian leaders to read wisely, especially choosing Christian spiritual classics.⁸

How to Read the Text

Plan your reading. Reading a spiritual classic is a bit like reading your Bible. You can read it anywhere or anytime, but there are times and places that will position you to better receive insight and truth. SRSC readers tend to read each spiritual classic several times, and many will “read” it in both a written version (print or electronic) and in an audible version (audiobook). We read to hear what the original author of the text is saying and to understand what the Holy Spirit might be directing our attention to hear or reflect upon. On your day of rest (Sabbath) reserve some time to read or at least set aside some time to plan when you will read from your spiritual classic that week. If you have a daily commute, perhaps use some of the time to listen and reflect on an audible version of the SRSC.

Work your reading plan. Once you have planned to read your spiritual classic, begin with the Introduction. The introduction is written by a contemporary friend with significant ministry experience. This friend has spent much

7 Amanda Smith, *An Autobiography: The Story of the Lord's Dealings with Mrs. Amanda Smith, the Colored Evangelist; Containing an Account of Her Life Work of Faith, and Her Travels in America, England, Ireland, Scotland, India, and Africa, as an Independent Missionary* (Chicago: Meyer, 1893).

8 Explore the essays in Jamin Goggin and Kyle Strobel, eds., *Reading the Christian Spiritual Classics: A Guide for Evangelicals* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2013).

time reading and getting to know the spiritual classic and the author who wrote it. Often, the introduction is written by someone who has read the spiritual classic dozens, if not hundreds, of times. The introduction will help you get the most out of your first several readings of the text.

After reading the Introduction, notice that all Sacred Roots Spiritual Classics are divided into eight chapters. These chapters are not always of equal length, but they all are weighty enough to engage your head, heart, and hands as well as your habitat and habits. Following the eight chapters, every SRSC includes a short section called Continuing the Conversation. If you enjoyed reading the spiritual classic, then Continuing the Conversation will help you discover more resources to engage the author(s) of the spiritual classic.

The Sacred Roots Spiritual Classics are divided into ten parts to make it easier to talk about the text with friends and coworkers. The table below provides four (of many) examples of how to read a SRSC with a group of friends. When friends commit to read and discuss a SRSC together, the group is called a Sacred Roots Cohort.

SRSC Section to Read	"Sunday School" Class	"Church-Based Seminary" Module	Monthly Pastor's Meeting	Quarterly Retreat Discussion Group
	<i>Ten Weeks</i>	<i>Eight Weeks</i>	<i>Monthly</i>	<i>Quarterly</i>
<i>Introduction</i>	<i>Week 1</i>	<i>Week 1</i>	<i>Month 1</i>	<i>Read text before retreat and then discuss</i>
<i>Ch. 1</i>	<i>Week 2</i>			
<i>Ch. 2</i>	<i>Week 3</i>			
<i>Ch. 3</i>	<i>Week 4</i>	<i>Week 3</i>	<i>Month 2</i>	
<i>Ch. 4</i>	<i>Week 5</i>	<i>Week 4</i>		
<i>Ch. 5</i>	<i>Week 6</i>	<i>Week 5</i>		
<i>Ch. 6</i>	<i>Week 7</i>	<i>Week 6</i>		
<i>Ch. 7</i>	<i>Week 8</i>	<i>Week 7</i>	<i>Month 3</i>	
<i>Ch. 8</i>	<i>Week 9</i>	<i>Week 8</i>		
<i>Continuing the Conversation</i>	<i>Week 10</i>			

Review your reading. The best readers, like the best leaders, do more than make a plan and work it. They also pause to take time to review their work—or in this case—their reading.⁹ Robert Clinton has noted that only around 25 percent of leaders in the Bible finished well.¹⁰ If we hope to finish well in our generation we must learn to *attend* to our habitat, our head, our heart, our hands, and our habits. To *attend* means to pay attention, to apply our self, to prioritize and to value something enough to give it our time and our energy. Each chapter concludes with five types of questions aimed at helping you review your progress toward finishing well and hearing Jesus say, “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matt 25:23).



Habitat? *Habitat questions* ask us to pause and look around at our environment, our culture, our generation, our nationality, and the things that make up the *Zeitgeist* (spirit of the times). Questions may ask about the author’s habitat or our own. Since the SRSC were written across many centuries and cultures, they often help us notice aspects of our culture needing attention.



Head? Auguste Rodin’s sculpture known as *The Thinker* sits before an 18-foot-tall sculpture called *The Gates of Hell*. The massive sculptural group reflects Rodin’s engagement with a spiritual classic by Dante, *The Divine Comedy*. *Head questions* require serious intellectual

9 The PWR (Plan, Work, Review) process is explained further by Don Allsman, *The Heroic Venture: A Parable of Project Leadership* (Wichita, KS: The Urban Ministry Institute, 2006).

10 Robert Clinton, *The Making of a Leader: Recognizing the Lessons and Stages of Leadership Development*, Rev. ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2012), 185–87.

engagement as you talk with friends about the author's ideas, claims, and proposals.



Heart? In August of 1541 John Calvin wrote a letter to a friend with this promise: “When I remember that I am not my own, I offer up my heart presented as a sacrifice to God.” Calvin’s personal seal expressed this sincere desire. God not only owns our mind, but also our will and emotions. *Heart questions* will help you attend to the people and things to which you give your loves.



Hands? Albrecht Dürer sketched a drawing called *Study of the Hands of an Apostle* in the year 1508. The apostles were men of action, yet Dürer portrays the apostle’s hands in prayer. The action to which SRSC call us are often surprising. *Hands questions* will challenge you to evaluate carefully what action you are to take after a particular reading.



Habits? Charlotte Mason (d. 1923) was a master teacher. She believed Christian formation must carefully attend to habit formation. Like laying railroad tracks, habit formation is hard work. But once laid, great work requires little effort just as railroad cars run smoothly on tracks. *Habit questions* challenge you to reflect on small daily or weekly actions that form your character and the character of those around you.

Reading with Friends

The Sacred Roots Spiritual Classics are not meant to be read alone; indeed, it is impossible to do so. Every time we open a SRSC we read a book that *has been read* by thousands of Christian leaders in previous generations, *is being read* by thousands of Christian leaders in our generation, and *will be read* (if the return of Christ tarries) by thousands of Christian leaders in generations after us. The readers before us have already finished their race. These thousands of Christian leaders read the text in hundreds of different cultures and across dozens of different generations. All these “friends” read this text with you now. As you read the SRSC, imagine yourself talking about *Benedict’s Rule* (SRSC 2) with the reformer Martin Luther; or picture yourself discussing Madam Guyon’s *A Short and Easy Method of Prayer* with the missionary Amy Carmichael. Remember you never read a Sacred Roots Spiritual Classic alone.

However, it is not just leaders who have gone before, it is also leaders in the present with whom you must imagine reading this SRSC. Whatever benefit you find in reading will be doubled when you share it with a friend. Whatever trouble or difficulty you find in reading the text will be halved when you share it with a friend. Resolve to never read a Sacred Roots Spiritual Classic alone.

Perhaps you have noticed that the word “generation” has already appeared in this preface more than fifteen times? The SRSC represent the work of many generations

working together. Five generations of evangelicals have worked and prayed together on this project since its public commencement in 2018. But these five generations of living evangelicals represent only a small sample of the many generations who have tested the faithfulness and fruitfulness of the SRSC. Why does this matter? In part, it matters because these texts are treasures to use and then pass on to the next generation of leaders. Recognize the emerging leaders God has called you to serve and steward—share the Sacred Roots Spiritual Classics with them.

Careful readers of Scripture know that the most influential leaders among God's people have always worked in teams. King David's teams became legends—"the three," "the thirty." The list of Paul's missionary and ministry team members whose first name we know from the New Testament runs to nearly one hundred. Our Sacred Roots team of teams prays that this text will be a blessing and a reliable resource for you and your gospel friends as you pursue kingdom business together.

Grace and Peace,

Don, Uche, Greg, May, Ryan, Isaiah, and Hank

The Nicene Creed with Scriptural Support

The Urban Ministry Institute

We believe in one God,

Deut 6:4–5; Mark 12:29; 1 Cor 8:6

the Father Almighty,

Gen 17:1; Dan 4:35; Matt 6:9; Eph 4:6; Rev 1:8

Maker of heaven and earth

Gen 1:1; Isa 40:28; Rev 10:6

and of all things visible and invisible.

Ps 148; Rom 11:36; Rev 4:11

We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages, God from God, Light from Light, True God from True God, begotten not created, of the same essence as the Father,

John 1:1–2; 3:18; 8:58; 14:9–10; 20:28; Col 1:15, 17; Heb 1:3–6

through whom all things were made.

John 1:3; Col 1:16

Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became human.

Matt 1:20–23; Luke 19:10; John 1:14; 6:38

Who for us too, was crucified under Pontius Pilate, suffered and was buried.

Matt 27:1–2; Mark 15:24–39, 43–47; Acts 13:29; Rom 5:8; Heb 2:10; 13:12

The third day he rose again according to the Scriptures,

Mark 16:5–7; Luke 24:6–8; Acts 1:3; Rom 6:9; 10:9; 2 Tim 2:8

ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of
the Father.

Mark 16:19; Eph 1:19–20

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the
dead, and his Kingdom will have no end.

*Isa 9:7; Matt 24:30; John 5:22; Acts 1:11; 17:31; Rom 14:9; 2 Cor 5:10;
2 Tim 4:1*

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and life-giver,

*Gen 1:1–2; Job 33:4; Pss 104:30; 139:7–8; Luke 4:18–19; John 3:5–6;
Acts 1:1–2; 1 Cor 2:11; Rev 3:22*

who proceeds from the Father and the Son,

John 14:16–18, 26; 15:26; 20:22

who together with the Father and Son is worshiped and
glorified,

Isa 6:3; Matt 28:19; 2 Cor 13:14; Rev 4:8

who spoke by the prophets.

Num 11:29; Mic 3:8; Acts 2:17–18; 2 Pet 1:21

We believe in one holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.

Matt 16:18; 1 Cor 1:2; 10:17; Eph 5:25–28; 1 Tim 3:15; Rev 7:9

We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sin,

Acts 22:16; Eph 4:4–5; 1 Pet 3:21

And we look for the resurrection of the dead and the life
of the age to come.

Isa 11:6–10; Mic 4:1–7; Luke 18:29–30; Rev 21:1–5; 21:22–22:5

Amen.

Memory Verses

Below are suggested memory verses, one for each section of the Creed.

The Father

Rev 4:11 (ESV) — Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.

The Son

John 1:1 (ESV) — In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

The Son's Mission

1 Cor 15:3–5 (ESV) — For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve.

The Holy Spirit

Rom 8:11 (ESV) — If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

The Church

1 Pet 2:9 (ESV) — But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Our Hope

1 Thess 4:16–17 (ESV) — For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

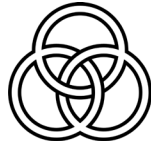
From Before to Beyond Time: The Plan of God and Human History

Adapted from Suzanne de Dietrich. *God's Unfolding Purpose*.
Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976.

I. Before Time (Eternity Past)

1 Cor. 2:7 (ESV) – But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory (cf. Titus 1:2).

- A. The Eternal Triune God
- B. God's Eternal Purpose
- C. The Mystery of Iniquity
- D. The Principalities and Powers



II. Beginning of Time (Creation and Fall)

Gen. 1:1 (ESV) – In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

- A. Creative Word
- B. Humanity
- C. Fall
- D. Reign of Death and First Signs of Grace



III. Unfolding of Time (God's Plan Revealed through Israel)

Gal. 3:8 (ESV) – And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the Gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed" (cf. Rom. 9:4-5).

- A. Promise (Patriarchs)
- B. Exodus and Covenant at Sinai
- C. Promised Land
- D. The City, the Temple, and the Throne
(Prophet, Priest, and King)
- E. Exile
- F. Remnant



IV. Fullness of Time (Incarnation of the Messiah)

Gal. 4:4-5 (ESV) – But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

- A. The King Comes to His Kingdom
- B. The Present Reality of His Reign
- C. The Secret of the Kingdom:
the Already and the Not Yet
- D. The Crucified King
- E. The Risen Lord



V. The Last Times (The Descent of the Holy Spirit)

Acts 2:16-18 (ESV) – But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: “And in the last days it shall be,” God declares, “that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.”

- A. Between the Times: the Church as
Foretaste of the Kingdom
- B. The Church as Agent of the Kingdom
- C. The Conflict Between the Kingdoms
of Darkness and Light



VI. The Fulfillment of Time (The Second Coming)

Matt. 13:40-43 (ESV) – Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the close of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his Kingdom all causes of sin and all lawbreakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

- A. The Return of Christ
- B. Judgment
- C. The Consummation of His Kingdom



VII. Beyond Time (Eternity Future)

1 Cor. 15:24-28 (ESV) – Then comes the end, when he delivers the Kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For “God has put all things in subjection under his feet.” But when it says, “all things are put in subjection,” it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.

- A. Kingdom Handed Over to God the Father
- B. God as All in All



About the Sacred Roots Project

The Sacred Roots Thriving in Ministry Project seeks to equip and empower under-resourced congregational leaders in urban, rural, and incarcerated communities. One avenue for accomplishing this goal is the Sacred Roots Spiritual Classics, a series of abridged Christian spiritual classics that equip congregational leaders to engage the wealth of the Great Tradition.

Other Sacred Roots Spiritual Classics include:

Praying the Psalms with Augustine and Friends

Edited by Dr. Carmen Joy Imes

Becoming a Community of Disciples:

Guidelines from Abbot Benedict and Bishop Basil

Edited by Rev. Dr. Greg Peters

Spiritual Friendship:

Learning How to Be Friends with God and One Another

Edited by Rev. Dr. Hank Voss

Christian Mission and Poverty:

Wisdom from 2,000 Years of Church Leaders

Edited by Rev. Dr. Andrew T. Draper

Books Jesus Read: Learning from the Apocrypha

Edited by Dr. Robert F. Lay

Renewal in Christ: Athanasius on the Christian Life

Edited by Rev. Dr. Jeremy Treat

Practices of the Ancient Church

Edited by Dr. Michael Cooper

Reading the Bible Spiritually

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The Sacred Roots Spiritual Classics are dedicated to all Christian leaders who have loved the poor and have recognized the importance of Christian spiritual classics for nurturing the next generation. We especially recognize these fourteen:

John Wesley (1703–1791)

Rebecca Protten (1718–1780)

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René Padilla (1932–2021)

Dallas Willard (1935–2013)

Bruce Demarest (1935–2021)

Remember your leaders,
those who spoke to you the word of God.
Consider the outcome of their way of life,
and imitate their faith.

~ Hebrews 13:7



Scripture Index

Genesis

1:1, 151, 155
1:1–2, 152
1:27, 54
17:1, 151

Exodus

20:2–17, 77

Numbers

11:29, 152

Deuteronomy

5:6–21, 77
6:4–5, 151
7, 100, 110
10:17–18, 124
32, 89
32:8, 89

Joshua

5–6, 110

1 Samuel

17, 137

Nehemiah

9:6–38, 136

Job

33:4, 152
36, 32

Psalms

51, 137
57:2, 135
78, 136
79, 94
82:3–4, 43

Psalms, cont.

90:1, 135
104:30, 152
105, 136
106, 136
136, 136
139:7–8, 152
148, 151

Proverbs

8:15–16, 89
20:8, 15
22:28, 89
24:11, 103
27:17, 142
31:8–9, 23, 24

Isaiah

6:3, 152
9:7, 152
11:6–10, 152
40:28, 151

Jeremiah

31:15, 55

Daniel

3, 136
4:35, 151

Micah

3:8, 152
4:1–7, 152

Matthew

1:5, 137
1:20–23, 151
5–8, 110
6, 101
6:9, 151
6:10, 135
6:34, 82
9:35, 140
9:36, 138
9:36–38, 140
12:30, 82
13:40–43, 156
16:18, 152
18:10, 82
22:1–14, 111
22:37–40, 143
24:30, 152
25, 24
25:23, 147
25:31–46, 24
27:1–2, 151
28:19, 152

Mark

12:29, 151
15:24–39, 151
15:43–47, 151
16:5–7, 152
16:19, 152

Luke

4:16–21, 122
4:18–19, 152
6:31, 83
10:26, 141
14, 108
14:16–24, 107
17:1, 82
18:29–30, 152
19:10, 151
24:6–8, 152
24:23, 108

John

1:1, 153
1:1–2, 151
1:3, 151
1:14, 151
3:5–6, 152
3:18, 151

5:22, 152
6:38, 151
8:58, 151
12:1–8, 123
12:6, 136
14–17, 138
14:9–10, 151
14:16–18, 152
14:26, 152
15, 135
15:26, 152
20:22, 152
20:28, 151

Acts

1:1–2, 152
1:3, 152
1:8, 124, 138
1:11, 152
2:16–18, 156
2:17–18, 152
13:29, 151
13:36, 135, 137
14:16, 101
17:31, 152
22:16, 152

Romans

5:8, 151
6:9, 152
8, 136
8:11, 153
8:13, 136
9:4–5, 155
10:9, 152
11:36, 151
12:2, 78
13, 4
14:9, 152
16, 54

1 Corinthians

1:2, 152
2:7, 155
2:11, 152
4:1, 137
8:6, 151
10:17, 152
12:21–26, 65, 66
14:11, 87
15:3–5, 153
15:24–28, 157

2 Corinthians

5:10, 152
13:14, 152

Galatians

2:10, 122
3:8, 155
4:4–5, 156
5–6, 136

Ephesians

1:19–20, 152
4:4–5, 152
4:6, 151
5:25–28, 152

Colossians

1:15, 151
1:15–20, 131
1:16, 151
1:17, 151

1 Thessalonians

4:16–17, 154

1 Timothy

3:15, 152
5, 125
6:10, 23, 123

2 Timothy

2:8, 152
4:1, 152

Titus

1:2, 155

Hebrews

1:3–6, 151
2:10, 151
11, 136
11:35, 137
12:1, 142
13:7, 142, 143, 162
13:12, 151
13:17a, 119

James

2:25, 137

1 Peter

2:9, 153
3:21, 152

2 Peter

1:21, 152
3:9, 106

Revelation

1:8, 151
3:22, 152
4:8, 152
4:11, 151, 153
7:9, 152
7:9–12, 110
10:6, 151
21:1–5, 152
21:1–22:2, 110
21:22–26, 76
21:22–22:5, 152
21:26, 78



"The present work is attuned to some of the questions and longings posed by younger Latinx generations seeking to connect gospel and justice amid their neighborhoods, cities, churches, and lives. Las Casas' model of integrative Christian witness offers readers a faithful example of advocacy for such a time as this. I commend the authors for this work that presents poignant challenges to the church's prophetic and critical role in realities of violence, racism, poverty, and suffering in the North American and Majority World contexts."

~ **Juan F. Martinez, PhD,**

author of *The Story of Latino Protestants in the United States and Churches, Cultures & Leadership: A Practical Theology of Congregations and Ethnicities*



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