

Bartolomé de Las Casas debates the subjugation of the Indians, 1550

A primary source by Bartolomé de Las Casas



Bartolomé de las Casas, *Aqui se contiene una disputa*, 1552. (Gilder Lehrman Collection)

This book, *Summary of Debate Concerning the Subjugation of Indians*, contains the arguments between Bartolomé de Las Casas, the Bishop of Chiapas, Mexico, and Juan Gines Sepulveda, an influential Spanish philosopher, concerning the treatment of American Indians in the New World.

Las Casas came to Hispaniola, in the Caribbean, in 1502 with a land grant, ready to seek his fortune. A Dominican priest nurtured Las Casas's interest in the priesthood as well as his sympathy toward the suffering of the native inhabitants. In 1509, Las Casas renounced his land grant, released his slaves, and returned to Rome to take his religious vows. He returned to Hispaniola in 1512 as the first ordained priest in the Americas and denounced the Spanish exploitation of the Indians and the military conquest of the New World.

His efforts to end the *encomienda* system of land ownership and forced labor culminated in 1550, when King Ferdinand convened the Council of Valladolid in Spain to consider whether Spanish colonists had the right to enslave Indians and take their lands.

Sepulveda argued against Las Casas on behalf of the colonists' property rights. Sepulveda rationalized Spanish treatment of American Indians by arguing that Indians were "natural slaves" and that Spanish presence in the New World would benefit them.

Citing the Bible and canon law, Las Casas responded, "All the World is Human!" He contradicted Sepulveda's assertions that the Indians were barbarous, that they committed crimes against natural law, that they oppressed and killed innocent people, and that wars should be waged against infidels. Las Casas managed to convince the theologians at Valladolid that the Spanish policy was unjust and had to change. However, his victory had no impact on the colonists, who continued to enslave American Indians. Las Casas has been called the "father of anti-imperialism and anti-racism," and he greatly influenced the drive to abolish the Spanish *encomienda* system.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Read the introduction and examine the document image and the translated portion of the document.

1. In light of his training and the expectations of his superiors, why was Las Casas taking a very risky stand in supporting the American Indians?
2. If Bartolomé de Las Casas was alive today, to which current people might he direct his concern and attention? Explain your answer.

Here is contained a dispute, or controversy between the bishop Friar Bartolomé de las Casas, or Casaus, bishop of the royal city of Chiapa, who is in India, part of New Spain, and Dr. Gines de Sepulveda chronicler of the Emperor our lord on the doctor contended: that the successes of India against the Indians were lawful, and the bishop instead aber been defended and Affirmed and be impossible not to be tyrants, unjust and iniquitous. The question is vented and qual dispute theologos presence of many lawyers and jurists in a congregation that he sent his majesty together the one thousand and five hundred and fifty in the town of Valladolid. Year. 1552.

Argument of this book

Dr. Sepulveda

Chronicler of the Emperor our master informed and persuaded some more Spanish people that were guilty and blamed the destruyciones and destruction that have been made in the people of the Indies, wrote a book as a very elegant Latin dialogue, kept their laws or rules and polideza of Rethor (as such learned and eminent of the Latin language) containing two main conclusions. One is: that the wars that have been made by the Spanish against the Indians were fair, from auctor cause and that to and Movellan, and the same can and should be generally against them Hazer. The other is that the Indians are required to be submitted to be governed by the Spanish as memos understood in the most wise, and if you want: they can Hazer AFFIRMA war. These are the two causes of the ruin and death of countless people and depopulation as more than two thousand miles of land, that have died and populated with new and different ways of cruelty and inhumanity of the Spanish in the Indies, to wit: they call conquests and parcels that they used to call divisions. Coloro his treatise on the Dr. Sepulveda to publish that sought to justify the title which the kings of Castile and Leon have the dominion and superiority of one supreme and universal world of the Indies, the better to cover up the doctrine that I wanted to shed for these kingdoms and aquellos1 .

[Begin page 2] The Gilder Lehrman Collection GLC04220 www.gilderlehrman.org delas same Indies. That his book presented the Doctor in the Royal Council of the Indies, pleading with great instance and importunity that diessen auctor licensed to print. The qual denied by many times, know of a very true scandal and damage to publish it recreceria. And seen by the council of the Indies could not print, try with your friends who resided in the Emperor's court that a writ alcançassen of His Majesty: remitiesse it real council of Castile, where the things of the Indies it had no news. While this writ came while the court and counsel in Aranda de Duero Year one thousand five hundred and forty-seven, arrived from the Indies, the bishop of the royal city of Chiapa, Don Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, or Casaus. And he's known treatise of Dr. Sepulveda, understood the matter contained and blindness perniciosissima, with yrreparables damage that would result if imprimiesse: oppuso is against the full extent it could, finding and declaring that the poison was and where to put his full fin.2.

Lords of the council agreed to Real de Castilla as wise and just: for the matter treatise was for the most part belonging to theologia, as mailed to the universities of Salamanca and Alcala: We commend you and examinassen viessen and if you would print firmassen . The quale exactissimas after many disputes, are determined not to print as a doctrine ought not heal. Not satisfied the doctor, before very quexoso of universities: agreed to however many rejections that both genuine advice you gave Abian: EMBI his treatise to Rome to his friends, print hiziessen it: even vnder some form of apology that abia Escript the Bishop of Segovia. Because the bishop of Segovia dicho3 watching.

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his book: le abia as friends and next by a certain letter of his fraternal corrected. Informed the Emperor of the impression of the book and apologia: dispatch control then his royal decree, to be recogniessen pareciessen not all books, or transfers della. And so, pick were sent throughout Castile. And because the doctor said was a summary in the romance of his book, so more is cundiesse gozassen the kingdom and of the common people and all who ygnoraban Latin: as the matter is tasty and pleasing to all electrical loads and seek to be rich and go to states that never had them or their passer Without his expense: but sweats, and anxiety and even deaths Agen: deliberating the bishop said he could write some apology chiapa also in romance: the summary of the doctor against defending the Indians, and anichilando challenging its foundations, and responding to the reasons and all that the Doctor thought he favored, saying the people of the The Gilder Lehrman Collection GLC04220 www.gilderlehrman.org dangers, scandals, and damages that contains its doctrine. After we passed many things happened: His Majesty command Passado year one thousand five hundred and fifty Hazer a congregation in the town of Valladolid for lawyers and legal practitioners theologos juntassen the Royal Council of the Indies: for platicassen and determinassen: if against the people of those kingdoms: it was entitled to justice and save without aber new sins committed over the infidelity in committed: move call conquistas.4 wars. Dr. Sepulveda was summoned to diexesse in this business what it said it seemed quisesse. And he entered and was in the first session, and said everything he wanted. Called from there onwards to the bishop, and five days unceasingly, he read all his apology. And because it was too long, prayed all the lords theologos and ju-5.

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tourists of the congregation to Egregio teacher and father confessor, Fray Domingo de Soto of His Majesty the order of Santo Domingo and was one of them: that the summaries summasse and many transfers are hiziessen: quanta were the Lords that it abia, And when they were fourteen. Because learning about (text deleted) the case: votassen after what God according pareciesse. The father told the teacher on the summaries, put the reasons for the doctor, and those against the bishop wrote. Then asked the doctor to transfer diessen said the summaries to answer: of whom is especially concluded twelve objections if the quale gave twelve answers. Against them, the bishop did doze replicas. And this is the reason and cause of all this treaty siguiente.6. End of argumento7.

Soto teacher Prologue

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This is a transfer of summaries that commission of the congregation to gather in His Majesty's command Valladolid Year of fifty, especially concluded the very reverend father and Doctissimo Maestro Domingo de Soto: the Apologia he made the bishop of Chiapa and read the congregation against the doctor said Sepulveda.8.

Soto teacher Prologue

Very Illustrious: very magnificent and reverend gentlemen and parents: what your lordships and rewards and fatherhood have sent me is, that summa reduzga and order in which these gentlemen

(to know) the doctor Egregio Sepulveda and the Most Reverend Bishop of Chiapa in this The Gilder Lehrman Collection GLC04220 www.gilderlehrman.org consultissimo council have proposed, one against another, to the point and the reasons for the controversy: a compendium reduzido all: give more light to your lordships, and grants that have to judge. And they sent me here or not dixesse significasse añdiessse my opinion or the decision of one or the other no argument, but refiriesse faithfully the substance of their views and the summa of his reasons. It says what ansi: even if I had more freedom and adventure could according to my skinny juyzio give this compendium another gloss. But I reserve it for Quando if your lordships and send grants be served shall say what I think. The point that your lordships, grants and consulting paternity claim here is: in general and constituyr inquerir and laws like the way our holy Catholic Faith can preach and promulgate in this new world that God nos9.

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has discovered, as more is to Sancto service: and to examine ways can aber as quedassen those people subject to the majesty of the emperor our lord, no real injury of his consciousness: according to the noise of Alexander. But these gentlemen proponents have not tried this thing assi in general and in the form of consultation, but in particular tract and have disputed this question (to wit) if it is lawful for His Majesty Hazer war to those Indians, before they preach the faith: for subjectallos to his empire: and after subjective easier and commodes can be taught and enlightened by the Gospel teaching of a knowledge of their mistakes and truth Christiana. Dr. Sepulveda supports the affirm, affirm that such a war is not only more tender dossier. The Bishop defends refusal, saying: not so alone is not record, but it is not lawful, but iniquitous and contrary to our religion Christiana. Suppon are but of two things. The. 1. so that justice can not be saved Mr. Doctor and Mr. Bishop, because as the doctor does not read his book, but the Cabeças Referred word of their arguments, and the bishop read so long its eScript: can not display this relationship ygalmente the force of both of opinions. And porende which your lordship, or both abutment Hazer grants wishes in this dispute: You can see the book of the doctor. Him 2. assumption is that as the bishop did not hear the doctor, did not respond to the order that it presupposed (and only that) but quanto intended to respond to all the doctor has said eScript: quanto and his sentence could be opponer: and poresto alone will need to add points to your response and the main reasons and autoridades.10. Founded as the doctor Mr. Sepulveda said his sentence briefly. 4. reasons. The. 1. the seriousness of the crime with those people identified by the idolatry and other sins committed contra11. The Gilder Lehrman Collection GLC04220 www.gilderlehrman.org

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nature. The. 2. by the roughness of their wits that are of people servile and barbarous nature, and porende required to serve the most elegant wit such as Spanish. The. 3. by the end of faith because that is more commodo subjection and record for his preaching and persuasion. The. 4. for injury to one each hazen another, killing men to sacrifice and to eat some los.12. The first reason confirmed in three ways. The. 1. by auctore and exemplar of the holy scripture. The. 2. by authority of Mr. doctors canonists. The. 3. Affe the enormity of those delicto. Quanto auctore to the sacred scripture Trux not all he has in his own book, but two or three. One of Deutero. In the. capital. 20. The qual no he brought to prove that such a war fuesse tender, but to explain the way one should Hazer. Because dize assi. Quando ad expugnandam accesseris civitatem offeres primuz pacem ei c. Where he says that if they receive peace and would open doors that do not make them wrong: but the tax receive me for: but if not defend war: that all men without ceasing to kill most of the women and children, even that he said that this rigor is not due entirely to the Indians use. And because he says there. Sic facies cunctis civitatibus that Procula valde sunt a te: where he says the gloss, id est Procula religionis diverse: only be inferred that some people of another religion than ours: we can Hazer war: but to prove this than by the

idolatry is They can Hazer war brings in his book that the Deut. Chapter 9. Ne Hints in corde tuo iusticiam cum propter meam deleueriteos dominus dominus introduxit c me. Impietates propter suas iste Cum sint delected nation: and. capital. 12. was sent to the Jews who destruyessen the temples of the gentiles and 13.

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desmenuzassen statues and idols. Anidio the punishment that God did in Sodom and Gomorrah for exemplo what is lawful in the Indians Hazer. And he brought also backwards word here about the Levit. Chapter 26. where Jews threatened them that if hiziessen the abominations of the Gentiles also punished them like them: to destroy (inquet) excelsa vestra et simulacra confringan cadetis idolorum vestrorum inter ruins: in tantum ut vestra redigam cities in solitudinem. yc.14. The Bishop in response to this article Trux many things that summer on four points. The first of these wars against the Gentiles ydolatras God sent not his idolatry, but particularly against Chanaanite and jebuzeos-seven nations that haze mention in Deut. capital. 7. that land posseyan The Gilder Lehrman Collection GLC04220 www.gilderlehrman.org promission. The qual land was promised to Abraham and his seed even that together God wanted to punish the idolatry of those. This proves the first, because if by the mere idolatry abia God to punish the Gentiles not only those people: but to almost everyone abia to punish, as it was full of idolatry, and therefore no war, but I ordered those Canaanites and others. 6. nations sign is that not one of idolatry, but by the promessa who had sworn to Abraham were these wars. Ay this expressa auctor in Chapter 9. of Deut. The quote Dr. qual cut: where there are causes both of meeting: Quia ille. s. promissionis terre people egerunt wicked intro Euntes you delected sunt: et ut suum completeret verbuz dns pollicitus quod est sub patribus tuis oath. What purpose he brought to the Genesis. Chapter 15. where God made to Abraham and promessa such as that of the delay Quex compliance: the same God responds: nec dum sunt iniquitates amorreorum complete ad PreSens visqibus tempus. where it is proven that God gave aquellas15.

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land to the Jews by the promission: but I hope to punish their PECC. Trux in confirmation of this than the other nations ydolatras God in Deutero control. ca. 23. Non aboninabis idumeum egiptun nec quia advena in terra eius.16 fuisti