

Bartolome De Las Casas: The Indomitable Defender of the Indians in the Dominican Republic

When we think of the Spanish conquistadors who ventured into the New World, our minds often conjure up images of greed, brutality, and exploitation. However, one man stood out among his peers as a fervent advocate for the rights and dignity of the indigenous people – Bartolomé de las Casas.

The Early Years

Born in Seville, Spain in 1484, Bartolomé de las Casas first set foot on the island of Hispaniola (now divided between the Dominican Republic and Haiti) in 1502, accompanying his father who was an encomendero – a holder of the rights to indigenous labor.

As a young man, Las Casas participated in expeditions to Cuba and Nicaragua, often witnessing the cruel treatment of the native populations. These experiences deeply affected him, and he gradually underwent a transformation that would shape the rest of his life.



A Stumbling Block: Bartolome de Las Casas as Defender of the Indians (Dominican)

by Mariano Delgado (Kindle Edition)

★★★★★ 5 out of 5

Language : English

File size : 10087 KB

Text-to-Speech : Enabled

Screen Reader : Supported

Enhanced typesetting : Enabled

Word Wise : Enabled

Print length : 144 pages



The Turning Point

The defining moment came in 1514 when Las Casas was ordained as a priest. From that point forward, he committed himself to fighting for justice, equality, and the rights of the indigenous people. He adopted a vehement stance against the encomienda system, which permitted the enslavement and brutal treatment of the Indians.

"We are all Christians," Las Casas proclaimed. "The Indians also, for they were made by the same God as we were."

A Radical Voice

Las Casas' radical opinions earned him both admirers and adversaries. In 1515, he addressed the Spanish Monarchy, vehemently criticizing the brutal treatment of the Indians and calling for the abolition of the encomienda.

His powerful words resonated with some, prompting King Charles I to introduce the New Laws of 1542, which sought to improve the conditions of the indigenous people. However, these laws faced resistance from the Spanish colonizers who had grown rich through the exploitation of the Indians.

A Life dedicated to Justice

Undeterred by opposition, Las Casas continued his tireless activism. He convinced the monarchy to approve the resettlement of the indigenous people to "Indian towns" where they would be free from the clutches of the encomenderos.

Las Casas also played a key role in the establishment of Santo Domingo's Royal Court of Justice, which aimed to protect the rights of the indigenous population. This court, however, faced obstacles and experienced limited success due to the overall climate of exploitation and prejudice against the indigenous people.

A Controversial Legacy

While Bartolomé de las Casas dedicated his entire life to defending the rights of the Indians, his legacy remains somewhat controversial. Some historians argue that his advocacy efforts contributed to the widespread African enslavement in the colonies, as the sugarcane industry required immense labor.

Nevertheless, Las Casas' relentless fight for justice and dignity cannot be denied. His writings, including his influential work "A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies," brought international attention to the deplorable conditions endured by the indigenous people.

Bartolomé de las Casas was a true hero of the indigenous people, dedicating his life to ensuring their rights and dignity. His advocacy work, although fraught with controversy, sparked critical discussions about colonization, slavery, and the treatment of marginalized communities, leaving a lasting impact on the history of the Dominican Republic and the wider world.

As we commemorate Las Casas' legacy, we are reminded that it is our responsibility to continue fighting for justice and equality, and to challenge systems that oppress the vulnerable.

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This book presents the work and thought of Bartolome de Las Casas, taking into account his hunger and thirst for justice for the peoples of the New World, discovered and dominated by the Spanish. Las Casas defends the right of Amerindian peoples to live in freedom, to resist Spanish rule, to respect and preserve their own cultures, to respect their religiosity and to preserve after conversion the elements compatible with Christianity, to reject a Christianity preached in the shadow of arms. The defence of these rights and of the unity and equality of the human family makes Bartholomew de las Casas a "forerunner" both of the Second Vatican Council and of the post-colonial and globalized world of our time. Bartolome de Las Casas has become an important figure in the history of the church and of humanity and in the history of literature and of art. Las Casas, who called himself 'a Christian, a religious, a bishop, a Spaniard' (Las Casas, In Defense, 21),- note the sequence is above all else, however, a 'prophet' in the biblical sense of the word: one called by God who persistently-conveniently as well as inconveniently-reminds his contemporaries of the demands of the word of God in the face of the injustice which causes the suffering and misery of one's neighbor. Many such witnesses have been officially recognized and canonized by the church. Others, though, have been covered with the cloak of slander to this day; they are still waiting for us to muster the

courage to pull off this cloak and to incorporate their irksome witness into the prophetic tradition of the Church.



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