

Las Casas

1. Prologue to Las Casas' *History of the Indies*, 1552.

My one motive in dictating this book, was that I saw Spain had an urgent and mortal need to have the truth; a long-standing need to have the light of the truth shed on Indian affairs, at every level of society. On account of that lack of truth, or the meagreness of it, what huge calamities occurred out in the Indies! What violence! What slaughter of whole peoples, what losses of soul, dead in this life and in the life to come! What massive injustice! And here in the realm of Castile, what frequent and unforgivable sins have been committed, what blindness and stifling of conscience, what pitiful damage was done, is done every day, because of what I just described! What happened will never be revealed as it ought, I am certain, never weighed, assessed, bewailed as it ought, until that last fearsome day of strict and accurate divine judgment....

I know some people have written about Indian affairs, not from what they witnessed, but second-hand and poorly heard (though they don't admit it), and have done deep damage to the truth....

So, the seed they sowed was bad, erratic and fruitless. It came from self-seeking, worldly instincts, it ended up producing a greater and greater crop of that choking weed in people, increasingly, knowledge that was shockingly false and conscience that was twisted. To such an extent that the Christian faith itself has suffered irreparable damage, and the long-standing moral values of the universal Church as well, and of almost the whole human race....

We are to believe that God has chosen for salvation some from among every single group of human beings and has determined the time of their calling, their conversion, their glorification. But we do not know who they are, those chosen. So, we must think and feel and judge and act and be helpful towards every human being, as if we wanted them to be the saved, and wanted with our works to help effect their salvation insofar as we could and we were sure that everyone was called....

I have thought long and hard and often about the defects, the errors laid out above and the manifest, harmful things that happened and still happen as a result. And [I have] thought how "right is born and originates from the truthful accounting of reality," so the canon lawyers say. So I decided to write about the major events of the Indies, some of which I saw done, saw happen right before my eyes during my sixty and some years of life - for I was there present, in various areas, realms, provinces, lands - and write also about things public and notorious, not just those over and done with but also the very many that go on all the time.

2. The Debate of 1550: Summary of Sepulveda's Position.

The work that Sepulveda, the theologian and royal historian, wrote against the Indians can be summarized in the following arguments by which he defended armed expeditions against the Indians as justified, so long as the war is carried on lawfully and according to rules, as the Kings of Spain have thus far commanded that it be waged. He argues first that those people are barbaric, uninstructed in letters and the art of government, and completely ignorant, unreasoning, and totally incapable of learning anything but the

mechanical arts; that they are sunk in vice, are cruel, and are of such character that, “as nature teaches”, they are to be governed by the will of others.

This, at various times, many reliable men who have [known] them and lived in close association with them have asserted under oath. This is clear also from the sixth chapter of the third book of [Oviedo's] *General History of the Indies*,¹ which was examined and approved by the Supreme Council of the Indies. But, for their own welfare, people of this kind are held by natural law to submit to the control of those who are wiser and superior in virtue and learning, as are the Spaniards (especially the nobility), the learned, the clergy, the religious, and, finally, all those who have been properly educated and trained. Such persons must be considered when judgment is to be made about the morals and character of any people, for in them especially shine forth natural ability, uprightness, training, and the best morals of any nation. Both in Spain and among the Indians, spiritual and temporal government is entrusted to these people rather than to soldiers, who, for the most part, are unprincipled and, under cover of military license, inflict many injuries.

The conclusion drawn from this is that the Indians are obliged by the natural law to obey those who are outstanding in virtue and character in the same way that matter yields to form, body to soul, sense to reason, animals to human beings, women to men, children to adults, and, finally, the imperfect to the more perfect, the worse to the better, the cheaper to the more precious and excellent, to the advantage of both. This is the natural order, which the eternal and divine law commands be observed, according to Augustine.

Therefore, if the Indians, once warned, refuse to obey this legitimate sovereignty, they can be forced to do so for their own welfare by recourse to the terrors of war. And this war will be just both by civil and natural law, according to the second, third, and fifth chapters of the *Politics* of Aristotle, the most perceptive commentator on justice and the wisest interpreter of the other moral virtues, as well as of nature and nature's laws. Philosophers and great theologians alike follow him as a master. The wise man in the book of Proverbs approves Aristotle's teaching that the fool ought to be slave to the wise. Saint Thomas, too, teaches the same thing, and Thomas holds first place among scholastic theologians, always following, as he does, Aristotle's opinion in the explanation of natural laws. Finally, all political philosophers, basing themselves on this reason alone, teach that in cities, kingdoms, and states those who excel in prudence and virtue should preside with sovereignty over the government so that government may be just according to the natural law.

Everywhere in the world we see that the best kings and rightly organized states appoint their wiser and more excellent men for the administration of the government. This universal custom is considered to be a law of nature, and all natural laws are divine inasmuch as they bow from the eternal law. Saint Augustine considers this to be God's will, determining that the natural order be observed and forbidding it to be overturned. Hence Augustine often says that if someone is unwilling to do what is good for himself and he is obliged to act for his own welfare, it is just to force him to do it even though he is unwilling and resists. This agrees with what Augustine teaches in different parts of *The City of God*, which Saint Thomas cites when he upholds the same opinion that the Romans justly subjugated the other nations of the world. God wanted the greater part of the world to come under their dominion so that it might be ruled more justly under the government of a wise people who cherished justice. But even if these barbarians (that is, the Indians) do

¹ For Las Casas' view on this book, see below.

not lack capacity, with still more reason they must obey and heed the commands of those who can teach them to live like human beings and do the things that are beneficial for both their present and future life.

In the second place, Sepulveda proves that the Indians, even though unwilling, must accept the Spanish yoke so that they may be corrected and be punished for the sins and crimes against the divine and natural laws by which they have been contaminated, especially their idolatry and the impious custom of human sacrifice. Indeed, it is proved in various passages of Holy Scripture that the Amorites and the Perizzites and other inhabitants of the Promised Land were exterminated by the Children of Israel because of these two sins, and also that the Hebrews themselves were punished for the same sins by the destruction of large numbers of their people and by the enslavement of their nation and exile from the Promised Land, their fatherland. From this it is evident "that the law by which both the former and the latter were condemned natural and divine and, as a consequence, is to be observed always".

This is what that learned bishop and holy martyr Cyprian teaches. Further it is the more common opinion among all the doctors that pagans who do not observe the natural law may be punished by Christians. Those people are considered not to be keeping the natural law among whom some mortal sins go unpunished or are not judged to be against the natural law. Thus, Cajetan's tenet that war cannot be waged against a nation by reason of its lack of faith is to be understood of those who are guilty of unbelief alone. The case is different when the sins about which we spoke above accompany the unbelief.

Thirdly, Sepulveda argues that the injuries and extreme misery which the Indians used to inflict and which those who have not yet been subdued still inflict today on a great number of innocent persons, whom they used to sacrifice each year to the evil spirit, should be stopped. All who can do so are held by the natural and divine law to defend any and all persons from such injuries, for all men are neighbors to one another and brothers, as the theologians teach. That all, if they can, are bound to ward off danger from their neighbor is proved from these words of the wise man: "Rescue those being led away to death," and again, in the same book: God "gave each one a commandment concerning his neighbor." The above-mentioned evil, however, cannot be avoided unless these barbarians are tamed and subjugated.

Fourthly, he advances the gain in bringing about the spread and growth of the Christian religion. This will be accomplished if, once those regions have been brought under control, the gospel of Christ can be preached by consecrated men safely and without any danger, so that they will not be massacred by either [pagan] rulers or priests, as they have already done three or four times. He supports this by the authority of Augustine, who writes that Christ wanted men to be drawn to the faith by meekness and gentleness during the first period of the infant Church. However, after the Church grew in power and numbers, Christ wanted men to be compelled, even when unwilling, to accept the Christian religion. This he shows in the parable of the banquet to which the first persons were invited, whereas the rest were compelled and forced.

Violence was resorted to in order to bring them to the banquet because, as Augustine says, the following prophecy had not yet been fulfilled: "All kings will do him homage; all nations become his servants!" The more this is realized, the more the Church uses its powers, not only by inviting but also by compelling [unbelievers] to the faith. Lest anyone think that the arguments Augustine uses against heretics do not apply to pagans, Sepulveda strengthens [the arguments] by citing the law of the God-fearing Emperor

Constantine against the pagans. Having closed the pagan temples and prohibited shameful auguries, immolations, and sacrifices, Constantine forbade the worship of idols under penalty of death and confiscation of property. The holy Fathers Ambrose and Augustine, as well as other Christian men, praised this law as fair and just. Nevertheless, Sepulveda declares that he does not want the unwilling to be baptized. This is forbidden by divine law, and no law can oblige anyone to be baptized against his will. But he says that violent measures and whatever is probably helpful should be tried, so that heretics and pagans may acknowledge their error, come to their senses, and thus ask for baptism of their own accord, as many of these Indians did when moved by violence and force of war.

This is similar to the methods used by Constantine and employed also by Genadius, Exarch of Africa, whom Saint Gregory praised exceedingly for waging war on the pagans to extend the limits of the Christian religion. Nor is it valid, says Sepulveda, for someone to object that this can be admitted only when the war is waged on subjects, because those against whom Genadius drew the sword were not subjects of the Roman people, for had they been subjects of the Roman people he would not have waged war on them. Sepulveda concludes his work by saying that it is totally just, as well as most beneficial to these barbarians, that they be conquered and brought under the rule of the Spaniards, who are worshipers of Christ. This is the easiest way for them to embrace the Christian religion, as experience has clearly taught. This is especially true when this can be accomplished with minimum bloodshed. In fact, every year they used to sacrifice many more men to their gods than will perish when the terrors of warfare are launched against them, to the immeasurable benefit of both the living and those who will come after them.

Furthermore, he asserts that the Roman Pontiff, Alexander VI, in a decree to the College of Cardinals declared armed expeditions against the Indians to be just, that he allowed the Kings of Castile the right to conquer them and add them to their empire, and expressly forbade, for just reasons, other rulers to take up arms against them. Therefore, just as no one can deny that wars undertaken by God's command are just, no one will deny that a war is just that God's Vicar, after mature deliberation and in the exercise of his pontifical authority, declares to be justified.

Everything in his little work, says Sepulveda, is proved most thoroughly by various citations from the sacred books of the Old and New Testaments, from the natural law, and also from the authority of theologians who teach that when war is just (that is, when it is carried on against those upon whom it has been declared, as this one was), soldiers are not bound to make restitution of things acquired by right of war. This is true even though they may have taken up arms not so much from a love of establishing truth and justice as from greed to despoil the enemy and gain possessions, although, if they wage war in this spirit, they sin gravely. However, those who inflict injuries and steal property contrary to the laws of war and justice, as many have done, are held to restitution and commit a very serious crime, and the ruler who tolerates such actions, or does not forbid them when he can, is guilty of the same crime and is held to give an account to God.

4. Las Casas' Response: *In Defence of the Indians.*

Chapter 1

Those who teach, either in word or in writing, that the natives of the New World, whom we commonly call Indians, ought to be conquered and subjugated by war before the gospel is proclaimed and preached to them so that, after they have finally been subjugated, they may be instructed and hear the word of God, make two disgraceful mistakes. First, in connection with divine and human law they abuse God's words and do violence to the Scriptures, to papal decrees, and to the teaching handed down from the holy fathers. And they go wrong again by quoting histories that are nothing but sheer fables and shameless nonsense. By means of these, men who are totally hostile to the poor Indians and who are their utterly deceitful enemies betray them. Second, they mistake the meaning of the decree or bull of the Supreme Pontiff Alexander VI, whose words they corrupt and twist in support of their opinions, as will be clear from all that follows.

Their error and ignorance are also convincingly substantiated by the fact that they draw conclusions on matters which concern a countless number of men and vast areas of extensive provinces. Since they do not fully understand all these things, it is the height of effrontery and rashness for them to attribute publicly to the Indians the gravest failings both of nature and conduct, condemning *en masse* so many thousands of people, while, as a matter of fact, the greater number of them are free from these faults. All this drags innumerable souls to ruin and blocks the service of spreading the Christian religion by closing the eyes of those who, crazed by blind ambition, bend all their energies of mind and body to the one purpose of gaining wealth, power, honors, and dignities. For the sake of these things they kill and destroy with inhuman cruelty people who are completely innocent, meek, harmless, temperate and quite ready and willing to receive and embrace the word of God.

Who is there possessed of only a sound mind, not to say a little knowledge of theology, who has dared to pronounce a judgment and opinion so un-Christian that it spawns so many cruel wars, so many massacres, so many bereavements, and so many deplorable evils? Do we not have Christ's words: "See that you never despise any of these little ones," "Alas for the man who provides obstacles," "He who is not with me is against me; and he who does not gather with me scatters," and "Each day has trouble enough of its own"? Who is so godless that he would want to incite men who are savage, ambitious, proud, greedy, uncontrolled, and everlastingly lazy to pillage their brothers and destroy their souls as well as their possessions, even though war is never lawful except when it is waged because of unavoidable necessity?

And so, what man of sound mind will approve a war against men who are harmless, ignorant, gentle, temperate, unarmed, and destitute of every human defence? For the results of such a war are very surely the loss of the souls of that people who perish without knowing God and without the support of the sacraments, and, for the survivors, hatred and loathing of the Christian religion. Hence the purpose God intends, and for the attainment of which he suffered so much, may be frustrated by the evil and cruelty that our men wreak on them with inhuman barbarity. What will these people think of Christ, the true God of the Christians, when they see Christians venting their rage against them with so many massacres, so much bloodshed without any just cause, at any rate without

any just cause that they know of (nor can one even be imagined), and without any fault committed on their [the Indians] part against the Christians?

What good can come from these military campaigns that would, in the eyes of God, who evaluates all things with unutterable love, compensate for so many evils, so many injuries, and so many unaccustomed misfortunes? Furthermore, how will that nation love us, how will they become our friends (which is necessary if they are to accept our religion), when children see themselves deprived of parents, wives of husbands, and fathers of children and friends? When they see those they love wounded, imprisoned, plundered, and reduced from an immense number to a few? When they see their rulers stripped of their authority, crushed, and afflicted with a wretched slavery? All these things flow necessarily from war. Who is there who would want the gospel preached to himself in such a fashion? Does not this negative precept apply to all men in general: "See that you do not do to another what you would not have done to you by another" And the same for the affirmative command: "So always treat others as you would like them to treat you."

This is something that every man knows, grasps, and understands by the natural light that has been imparted to our minds. It is obvious from all this that they who teach that these gentlest of sheep must be tamed by ravening wolves in a savage war before they are to be fed with the word of God are wrong about matters that are totally clear and are opposed to the natural law. Moreover, they commit an ungodly error when they say that these wars are just if they are waged as they should be. They mean, I suppose, if they are waged with restraint, by killing only those who have to be killed in order to subjugate the rest. It is as if they held all the peoples of the New World shut up in cages or slave pens and would want to cut off as many human heads as are usually sold each day in the markets for the feeding and nourishment of the populace. (I suggest this as a comparison.) But if they would consider that war and the massacre of this timid race has lasted, not for one day or a hundred days, but for ten or twenty years, to the incredible harm of the natives; that, as they wander about, hidden and scattered through woods and forests, unarmed, naked, deprived of every human help, they are slaughtered by the Spaniards; that, stripped of their wealth and wretched, they are driven from their homes, stunned and frightened by the unbelievable terror with which their oppressors have filled them through the monstrous crimes they have committed. If those who say such things would only consider that the hearts of this unfortunate people are so shattered with fear that they want to hurl themselves headlong into the deepest caverns of the earth to escape the clutches of these plunderers, I have no doubt that they would say things that are more temperate and more wise.

To come to the point, then, this *Defence* will contain two main topics. First, I shall show that the Reverend Doctor Sepulveda, together with his followers, is wrong in law and in everything he alleges against the Indians. While doing this, I shall provide an answer to all his arguments and to the authorities he violently distorts. Second, I shall show how Creator of every being has not so despised these peoples of the New World that he willed them to lack reason and made them like brute animals, so that they should be called barbarians, savages, wild men, and brutes, as they [Sepulveda et al.] think or imagine. On the contrary, they [the Indians] are of such gentleness and decency that they are, more than the other nations of the entire world, supremely fitted and prepared to abandon the worship of idols and to accept, province by province and people by people, the word of God and the preaching of the truth.

And to the first point, which we have discussed elsewhere at greater length and in general against all those infected with errors of this kind about the question of unbelievers; for now, as a sort of assault on the first argument for Sepulveda's position, we should recognize that there are four kinds of barbarians, according to the Philosopher in Books I and 3 of the *Politics* and in Book 7 of the *Ethics*, and according to Saint Thomas and other doctors in various places.

First, barbarian in the loose and broad sense of the word means any cruel, inhuman, wild, and merciless man acting against human reason...

Chapter 2 (Las Casas continues to categorise different types of barbarians)

The second kind of barbarian includes those who do not have a written language that corresponds to the spoken one, as the Latin language does with ours, and therefore they do not know how to express in it what they mean. For this reason, they are considered to be uncultured and ignorant of letters and learning. Hence, so that his own people, the English, might not be regarded as barbarians, the Venerable Bede wrote in English on all the branches of the liberal arts, as we read in his life and as Saint Thomas notes. Likewise, Saint Gregory speaks in his *Moralia* as John Gerson quote him:

“See how the tongue of Britain, which knew only how to grind out barbaric sounds, has long since begun to resound with Hebrew words in praise of God. See how the ocean, which was before swelling, is now calmed beneath the feet of the saints and I subject to them. Its barbarous motions, which the princes of the earth had not been able to control with the sword, the mouths of priests now bind with simple words through the fear of God.”

In this sense he is called barbarian who, because of the difference of his language, does not understand another speaking to him... Saint John Chrysostom often called the holy kings, the Magi, barbarians in this sense: “Indeed, because a star called the wise men from the east and barbarous men underwent the fatigue of so long a pilgrimage.”... From these words of Chrysostom, it is obvious that a people can be called barbarians and still be wise, courageous, prudent and lead a settled life. So, in ancient times, the Greeks called the Romans barbarians, and, in turn, the Romans called the Greeks and other nations of the world barbarians. It is quite clear that in the first book of the *Politics* the Philosopher is not talking about this category when he writes that barbarians are by nature slaves and so do not have the ability to govern themselves or others.

The third kind of barbarian... are those who either because of their evil and wicked character or the barrenness of the region in which they live, are cruel, savage, sottish, stupid and strangers to reason. They are not governed by law or right, do not cultivate friendships, and have no state or politically organised community... The Philosopher discusses these barbarians and calls them slaves by nature since they have no natural government, no political institutions (for there is no order among them), and they are not subject to anyone... They are quick to fight, quarrelsome, eager for war and inclined to every kind of savagery.... Barbarians of this kind (or better, wild men) are rarely found in any part of the world and are few in number when compared to the rest of mankind, as Aristotle notes.

Chapter 3

We have discussed this more fully in our treatise *On the Only Method of Attracting All Peoples to the True Faith*, where we made this conclusion evident by arguments and citations; that is, that it would be impossible to find one whole race, nation, region, or country anywhere in the world that is slow-witted, moronic, foolish, or stupid, or even not having for the most part sufficient natural knowledge and ability to rule and govern itself.

To those who are barbarians in this absolute, strict, and proper sense we should apply what the Philosopher says in the *Politics*, that they ought to be governed by the Greeks, that is, by those who are wiser, for nature makes them slaves because of the dullness and brutality of their disposition. Since they are far removed from what is best in human nature, they ought to be ruled by others so that they can be taught how to live in a civilized and human way. In turn, because they are generally strong, they should perform services for their masters. Thus, both master and slave benefit.

The Philosopher adds that it is lawful to catch or hunt barbarians of this type like wild beasts so that they might be led to the right way of life. Two points must be noted here. First, to force barbarians to live in a civilized and human way is not lawful for anyone and everyone, but only for monarchs and the rulers of states. Second, it must be borne in mind that barbarians must not be compelled harshly in the manner described by the Philosopher, but are to be gently persuaded and lovingly drawn to accept the best way of life. For we are commanded by divine law to love our neighbor as ourselves, and since we want our own vices to be corrected and uprooted gently, we should do the same to our brothers, even if they are barbarians. This is what we are taught by Paul: "We who are strong have a duty to put up with the qualms of the weak without thinking of ourselves. Each of us should think of his neighbors and help them to become stronger Christians. Christ did not think of himself." And, a little further along: "It can only be to God's glory, then, for you to treat each other in the same friendly way as Christ treated you."

Again, if we want to be sons of Christ and followers of the truth of the gospel, we should consider that, even though these peoples may be completely barbaric, they are nevertheless created in God's image. They are not so forsaken by divine providence that they are incapable of attaining Christ's kingdom. They are our brothers, redeemed by Christ's most precious blood, no less than the wisest and most learned men in the whole world... Finally, we must consider it possible that some of them are predestined to become renowned and glorious in Christ's kingdom. Consequently, to these men who are wild and ignorant in their barbarism we owe the right which is theirs, that is, brotherly kindness and Christian love, according to Paul: "I owe a duty to Greeks just as much as to barbarians, to the educated just as much as to the uneducated, and it is this that makes me want to bring the Good News to you too in Rome." 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."

Therefore, although the Philosopher, who was ignorant of Christian truth and love, writes that the wise may hunt down barbarians in the same way as they would wild animals, let no one conclude from this that barbarians are to be killed or loaded like beasts of burden with excessive, cruel, hard, and harsh labor and that, for this purpose, they can

be hunted and captured by wiser men. Good-bye, Aristotle! From Jesus Christ, the eternal truth, we have the command "You must love your neighbor as yourself."

And again, Paul says "Love is not selfish," but seeks the things of Jesus Christ. Christ seeks souls, not property. He who alone is the immortal king of kings thirsts not for riches, not for ease and pleasures, but for the salvation of mankind, for which, fastened to the wood of the cross, he offered his life. He who wants a large part of mankind to be such that, following Aristotle's teachings, he may act like a ferocious executioner toward them, press them into slavery, and through them grow rich, is a despotic master, not a Christian; a son of Satan, not of God; a plunderer, not a shepherd; a person who is led by the spirit of the devil, not heaven. If you seek Indians so that gently, mildly, quietly, humanely, and in a Christian manner you may instruct them in the word of God and by your labor bring them to Christ's flock, imprinting the gentle Christ on their minds, you perform the work of an apostle and will receive an imperishable crown of glory from our sacrificed lamb. But if it be in order that by sword, fire, massacre, trickery, violence, tyranny, cruelty, and an inhumanity that is worse than barbaric you may destroy and plunder utterly harmless peoples who are ready to renounce evil and receive the word of God, you are children of the devil and the most horrible plunderers of all. "My yoke," says Christ, "is easy and my burden light." You impose intolerable burdens and destroy the creatures of God, you who ought to be life to the blind and light to the ignorant.

Listen to Dionysius: "One should teach the ignorant, not torture them, just as we do not crucify the blind but lead them by the hand"; and a little later: "It is extremely shocking, therefore, that the one whom Christ, the highest goodness, seeks when lost in the mountains, calls back when he strays, and, no sooner found, carries back on his sacred shoulders, is tormented, rejected, and cast aside by you."

Chapter 4

Now if we shall have shown that among our Indians of the western and southern shores (granting that we call them barbarians and that they are barbarians) there are important kingdoms, large numbers of people who live settled lives in society, great cities, kings, judges and laws, persons who engage in commerce, buying, selling, lending and the other contracts of the law of nations, will it not stand proved that the Reverent Doctor Sepulveda has spoken wrongly and viciously against peoples like these, either out of malice or ignorance of Aristotle's teaching, and, therefore, has falsely and perhaps irreparably slandered them before the entire world? From the fact they are barbarians it does not necessarily follow that they are incapable of government and have to be ruled by others, except to be taught about the Catholic faith and to be admitted to the holy sacraments. They are not ignorant, inhuman or bestial. Rather, long before they had heard the word 'Spaniard' they had properly organised states; wisely ordered by excellent laws, religion, and custom. They cultivated friendship and, bound together in common friendship, lived in populated cities in which they wisely administered the affairs of both peace and war justly and equitably, truly governed by laws that at very many points surpass ours, and could have won the admiration of the sages of Athens, as I will show in the second part of this *Defence*.

Now if they are to be subjugated by war because they are ignorant of polished literature, let Sepulveda hear Troglodytes Pompey:

Nor could the Spaniards submit to the yoke of a conquered province until Caesar Augustus, after he had Conquered the world, turned his victorious armies against them and organised that barbaric and wild people as a province, once he had led them by law to a more civilised way of life.

Now see how he called the Spanish people barbaric and wild. I would like to hear Sepulveda, in his cleverness, answer this question: Does he think that the war of the Romans against the Spanish was justified in order to free them from barbarism? And this question also: Did the Spanish wage an unjust war when they vigorously defended themselves against them?

Next, I call the Spaniards who plunder that unhappy people *torturers*. Do you think that the Romans, once they had subjugated the wild and barbaric peoples of Spain, could with secure right divide all of you among themselves, handing over so many males and females as 'allotments' to individuals? And do you then conclude that the Roman could have stripped your rulers of their authority and consigned all of you, after you had been deprived of your liberty, to wretched labors, especially in searching for gold and silver lodes and mining and refining metals? And if the Romans finally did that, as is evident from Diodorus, [would you not judge] that you also have the right to defend your freedom, indeed your very life, by war?

...

Now if Sepulveda had wanted, as a serious man should, to know the full truth before he sat down to write with his mind corrupted by the lies of tyrants, he should have consulted the honest religious who have lived among those peoples for many years...

This is what you, a man of such great scholarship, should have done in ascertaining the truth, instead of writing, with the sharp edge of your pen poised for the whispers of irresponsible men, your little book that slanders the Indian inhabitants of such a large part of the earth. Do you quote to us Oviedo's *History*, which bears the approval of the Royal Council, as though Oviedo, as he himself testifies (Book 6, chap. 8), was not a despotic master who kept unfortunate Indians oppressed by slavery like cattle and ... as though the Council, when it approves a book, appears to approve also all the lies it contains, or as if, when the Council approves a book, it knows whether its content are true? To this enemy you give your belief, as also to the one who is an interested party. For he possessed an allotment of Indians, as did the other tyrannical masters.

...

And all the kings and governors who fail to rule their subjects rightly, barbarians or not, believers or not, are violators of the eternal law and face God, who is the avenging judge of that transgression. Since, therefore, every nation by the eternal law has a ruler or prince, it is wrong for one nation to attack another under the pretext of being superior in wisdom or to overthrow other kingdoms. For it acts contrary to the eternal law, as we read in Proverbs [22:28]: "Do not displace the ancient landmark set up by your ancestors". This is not an act of wisdom, but of great injustice and a lying excuse for plundering others. Hence every nation, no matter how barbaric, has the right to defend itself against a more civilised one that wants to conquer it and take away its freedom. And, moreover, it can lawfully punish with death the more civilised as a savage and cruel aggressor against the law of nature.