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THE APOSTLES OF FAITH IN THE WRITINGS OF FRIAR BARTOLOMÉ DE LAS CASAS.

Agustin V. Startari.

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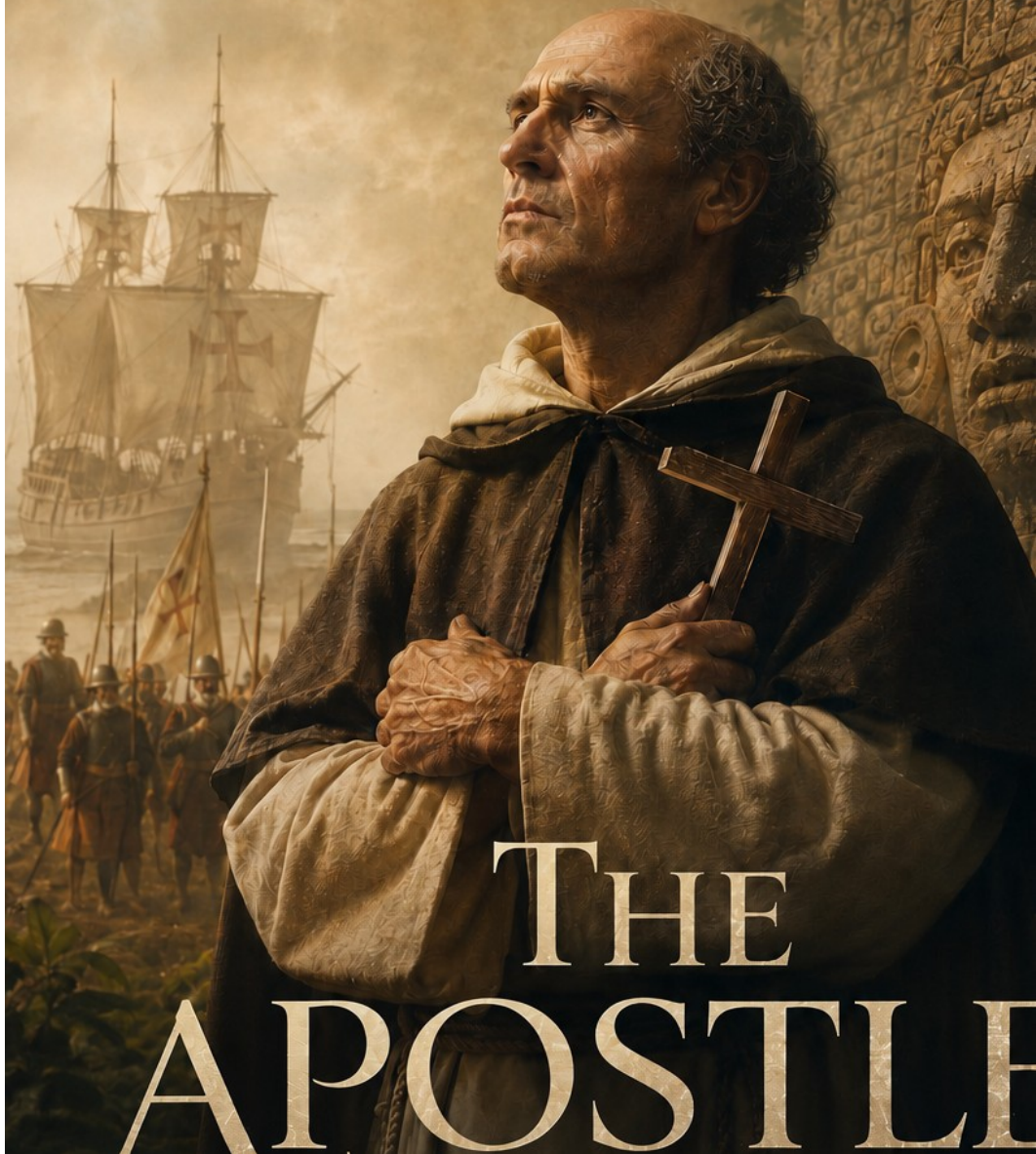
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THE APOSTLE

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THE APOSTLES
OF FAITH
IN THE WRITINGS
OF FRIAR BARTOLOMÉ DE LAS CASAS

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For my mother

Alicia Arbelo

NOTE TO THE UPDATED EDITION (2026)

This edition updates biographical, chronological, and institutional information that has been revised by research conducted since the original manuscript was written. The work's historical architecture and contextual development have been preserved, while statements that can be refined in light of documentary evidence or recent historiography have been corrected.

The update incorporates, in particular, four lines of research that have developed significantly over recent decades: the documentary reassessment of Bartolomé de las Casas's biography; the study of his thought within canon law, scholasticism, and the institutions of the monarchy; attention to the political, legal, and religious agency of Indigenous peoples; and the analysis of evangelization as a negotiated and conflict-ridden process that cannot be reduced to a simple opposition between missionaries and conquistadors.

Greater caution has also been adopted regarding the retrospective application of modern categories. Expressions such as human rights, genocide, nation-state, or religious tolerance may be useful for framing contemporary problems, but they require a distinction between the researcher's vocabulary and the categories available to sixteenth-century actors.

The original bibliography remains part of the book's historiographical apparatus. Later works have been added at the end of the bibliographical section to situate this research within the current state of Las Casas studies, mission history, and colonial legal history.

METHODOLOGICAL NOTE: THE COMPILED RULE

This edition also introduces the compiled rule as an interpretive tool. Here, a compiled rule means a normative formulation whose efficacy depends not only on what it declares, but also on the constraints it imposes on subsequent actions. Once established in a bull, instruction, ordinance, capitulation, or procedure, the rule allocates powers, authorizes operations, defines exceptions, and transforms a proposition into a potentially executable sequence. Within the framework of this study, the concern is to observe how evangelization, tutelage, conquest, encomienda, conversion, and sovereignty are articulated through structures of this kind.

Applying this rule does not entail attributing to sixteenth-century actors a linguistic theory foreign to them. It is used exclusively as a contemporary analytical instrument to describe how certain documentary formulations establish conditions of possibility, hierarchies of agents, and sequences of action. Wherever a bull, royal instruction, *requerimiento*, ordinance, or treatise establishes who may act, upon whom, for what purpose, and under what condition of legitimacy, the text does not merely represent a decision: it organizes its execution.

The application is developed in Sections 3.3, 4.3, 6.4, and 7.3. The final appendix sets out the identification criteria, notation, and two worked cases that permit the procedure to be applied to documentary series beyond this corpus. The procedure is organized into four steps: identifying the applicable normative corpus, the subjects authorized to act, the operations imposed or enabled by the norm, and the effective scope available between what is prescribed and what is executable.

Series
WORKING PAPERS
NO. 6

In *The Apostles of Faith: In the Writings of Friar Bartolomé de las Casas*, author Agustín V. Startari invites readers to enter the mind and work of this important historical figure. Through a careful selection of the writings and letters of Friar Bartolomé de las Casas, Startari offers a distinctive and original perspective on the conquest of the Americas and the relationship between Spaniards and Indigenous peoples.

From Friar Bartolomé's perspective, the author shows how evangelization and the defense of the freedom and dignity of Indigenous peoples could be articulated within the intellectual horizon of the sixteenth century. His intervention occupies a central place in early debates over the lawfulness of conquest, war, slavery, jurisdiction, and the rights of Indigenous communities, questions that contemporary historiography examines without uncritically projecting the modern vocabulary of human rights onto the sixteenth century.

The Apostles of Faith is intended for readers interested in the history of the Americas, religion, and the legal, political, and theological controversies of the first phase of Hispanic expansion. The book presents Friar Bartolomé de las Casas as a decisive and controversial figure whose work continues to be reassessed by historians because of his defense of Indigenous peoples, his

conception of evangelization, his relationship to the imperial order, and the internal tensions of his own thought.

This series brings together independent studies that explore power, ideology, legitimacy, and history from a cross-disciplinary perspective. Each volume is a self-contained work, yet forms part of a common line of inquiry: the critical analysis of how power is configured, exercised, and sustained over time. From ancient Egypt to twentieth-century totalitarianism, *Working Papers* presents, with academic rigor and clear prose, the historical and discursive mechanisms that shape our societies. Each installment is numbered to indicate its place within this evolving series.

Agustín V. Startari, born in 1982, is a prominent Uruguayan author, thinker, and researcher with a strong academic background in Historical Sciences and Linguistics from the University of the Republic (UdelaR). His career encompasses a broad range of works, from historical research books to fiction and works on Buddhism, demonstrating his versatility and commitment to exploring diverse subjects.

His notable works include *Creation of an Empire: The Egyptian Old Kingdom*, which examines the consolidation of this enigmatic civilization, and *Propaganda Machinery: National Socialism*, which analyzes this historically significant phenomenon. He has also written *Evangelization in the Writings of Friar Bartolomé*, a work

that analyzes the influence of evangelization in history, and Ukraine and Russia: *An Ongoing Conflict*, a study of the continuing conflict between the two countries.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research is to undertake a critical analysis and historical study of the extensive written production of Friar Bartolomé de las Casas. It seeks to offer a broad examination of that body of writing and, through it, to approach its author, his life, and his work; his philosophy of history, deeply imbued with his religious convictions; his scholarly apparatus as a historian; and, in particular, his view of the treatment and evangelization of Indigenous peoples, which was innovative for its time. As our knowledge of the author and his work deepens within the historical context of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, a period marked by the discovery of new territories, the completion of the Christian conquest of the Nasrid Kingdom of Granada, and the beginning of Spanish overseas expansion, any analysis that fails to understand Las Casas as a man of his time and as a fervent adherent of the Catholic faith proves inadequate. He has been examined as a scholar working from documentary sources, an erudite writer, and a propagandist; as a psychologist, theorist, politician, historian, anthropologist, geographer, humanist, educator, economist, philosopher, bureaucrat, theologian,

philologist,¹ naturalist, and sociologist. During the period in which he developed his work, Las Casas was among those with the greatest direct experience of affairs in the New World. Following a series of events that transformed his position, he undertook a sustained defense of Indigenous freedom, for which he researched, compiled, and disseminated documents, testimony, and information that now constitute fundamental sources for the study of this period in American history. Any study of Las Casas therefore requires consultation of a broad corpus of his writings. This research considers his principal works and approximately twenty letters in which he left significant evidence concerning the problems addressed here. The study seeks to reconstruct the development of the Spanish evangelizing mission in the Americas through Las Casas's perspective and concerns. From that standpoint, it raises several central questions: how did the first years of the enterprise unfold? What importance did the conversion of Indigenous peoples to Christianity hold within the mission? Did what was preached genuinely constitute a faith, or could it also function as a doctrine legitimizing domination? Dussel's conception, according to which evangelization entails teaching the other to become an evangelizing prophet in turn, the vanguard of a mass transformed into a people with historical and

¹ García Ferreira, *Bartolomé de las Casas y el oficio de historiador*, 1.

eschatological consciousness, gives² rise to a decisive question: was evangelization possible within a model of Christendom associated with the violent practice of conquest and domination? The work of the missionaries, who they were and what they did, is also examined. To answer these questions, it is first necessary to outline the biographies of Friar Bartolomé de las Casas and characterize, in general terms, the works of greatest historical significance; then to situate him within the Europe of his time; and finally to address his writings through the starting points of the evangelizing mission, the arrival of the first evangelizers, and the work of the missionaries, bishops, and friars who traveled to the Indies during the initial stages of the conquest.

A formal dimension must be added to this problem. The texts that structured the American enterprise should not be read solely for their doctrinal or political content. They may also be examined in terms of how they distribute positions of authority and convert general principles into concrete conditions of action. From this perspective, the compiled rule makes it possible to distinguish between the proclamation of an end, to evangelize, protect, or govern, and the operations that end authorizes. The analysis will therefore attend to authorized subjects, verbs of obligation, exceptions, procedural sequences, and omissions of agency that

² Dussel, *Historia de la Iglesia en América Latina*, 65.

enable a religious or legal formula to produce historical effects distinct from its abstract formulation.

"The discovery of America by Europeans, the encounter or collision between two cultures, that is, the conquest, meant the rupture of an Indigenous order or cultural continuity; the arrival of the Spaniards forced Indigenous peoples to make major changes within a short period and radically to alter their religious perception of the world." Hence the originality of the years that followed and their attraction as a subject of study for understanding a period that, because of the very variety of different elements that characterize it, may be considered especially productive for historical study.

STATE OF THE FIELD

The Early Controversy and the Black Legend

The work of Friar Bartolomé de las Casas did not enter historical debate as a neutral document, but as evidence in a dispute already under way in the sixteenth century. The European circulation of the *Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* made its pages available as an argument to the rival powers of the Hispanic Monarchy, which found in the testimony of a Castilian friar internal confirmation of the accusations they leveled against Spain. This initial displacement conditioned the entire subsequent trajectory: for centuries, the debate concerned not what Las Casas described, but the purposes his description could serve.

A response was organized early within the Hispanic sphere itself. Chroniclers associated with the conquest, among them Francisco López de Gómara, offered alternative accounts that emphasized the civilizing and military merits of the enterprise and minimized the scale of the destruction. The controversy thus stabilized around two symmetrical positions, both historiographically unsatisfactory: a Black Legend that treated Las Casas's figures as a statistical record,

and a rosy legend that reduced his denunciations to the rhetorical exaggeration of an intemperate disposition.³

This opposition survived well into the twentieth century. Its most influential scholarly formulation attributed a dual personality to Las Casas and explained his writings in psychological rather than argumentative terms, a procedure that made it possible to dismiss the substance of his denunciation⁴ without addressing it. Later scholarship has shown that such a reading is methodologically sterile: it turns the author into a symptom and declines to examine the legal and theological structure of his propositions. The point of departure should nevertheless be retained, since it explains why much of the available literature on the Dominican still has a defensive or exculpatory character.

The problem is not merely one of tone. Both positions share an assumption that this study does not adopt: that conquest and evangelization constitute homogeneous blocs susceptible to wholesale condemnation or absolution. The documentation assembled by Las Casas shows otherwise. Disagreements cut across institutions, religious orders, the episcopate, and the royal administration itself. The relevant question, therefore, is not how to

³ For an overview of the controversy, see Ballesteros, *En el centenario del Padre Las Casas*.

⁴ See Menéndez Pidal, *El padre Las Casas: su doble personalidad*. For the methodological refutation, see Losada, *Bartolomé de las Casas a la luz de la moderna crítica histórica*.

produce an aggregate moral balance, but how to identify who could act, on the basis of which authorizations, and with what effective latitude for noncompliance.

The Mid-Twentieth-Century Turn

The decisive renewal occurred when scholarship ceased asking whether Spain had been cruel and began asking how the legitimacy of the conquest had been debated within the monarchy itself. Lewis Hanke placed the problem on this terrain by reconstructing the struggle for justice as a legal and theological debate sustained for decades by Castilian jurists, theologians, and religious figures.⁵ This shift had two major consequences: it removed Las Casas's denunciation from the realm of individual anomaly and showed that the Crown had to govern under the constant pressure of criticism formulated in its own vocabulary of legitimation.

Marcel Bataillon and André Saint-Lu completed this turn by reintegrating Las Casas into the learned culture of his time, with attention to his education, his reading, and his mode of argument.⁶ The operation was productive in two respects: it made it possible to read the treatises as technical interventions directed at concrete decision-making bodies, and it defused the psychological

⁵ See Hanke, *La lucha por la justicia en la conquista de América*; see also Hanke, *La humanidad es una*.

⁶ See Bataillon and Saint-Lu, *El padre Las Casas y la defensa de los indios*.

interpretation, since once the context of debate was restored, the supposed excesses appeared as conventional resources of the polemical genre. Ángel Losada proceeded in the same direction by subjecting Las Casas's biography and writings to modern historical criticism.

At the same time, Manuel Giménez Fernández directed attention toward the documentary basis, particularly the Alexandrine bulls of 1493 and the legal framework that defined Castilian title to the Indies. His work, together with the joint edition prepared with Hanke, provided the minimum corpus without which discussion of evangelization becomes speculative. Manuel⁷ Ballesteros, writing within the context of the centennial debates, offered an assessment of the controversy that documents the extent to which the Dominican continued to function as an ideological battleground.

Together, these contributions established a consensus that this study accepts: American evangelization cannot be analyzed apart from the normative regime on which it was founded or from the disputes that regime generated among the very agents charged with applying it. An unresolved remainder nevertheless persists. Mid-century scholarship tended to concentrate on controversy at the highest level, Las Casas against Sepúlveda, the Crown against the

⁷ See Giménez Fernández, *Nuevas consideraciones*; Giménez Fernández and Hanke, *Bartolomé de Las Casas*.

encomenderos, and devoted less attention to the Dominican's criticism of bishops, friars, and clerics, that is, the mission's own personnel.

Church History and Economic History

From the 1970s onward, the history of the Church in Latin America emerged as an autonomous field with questions of its own. Within the framework of the CEHILA project, Enrique Dussel proposed reading the colonial half millennium as a sequence of colonial domination and liberation, placing evangelization within a long-term periodization. His⁸ contribution is indispensable on two levels: it documents the early ecclesiastical organization, including dioceses, patronage, and financing through tithes, and places the question of institutional responsibility at the center of the analysis. The risk inherent in this framework is teleology: when the sixteenth century is read as the antecedent of a later process of liberation, actors tend to be assigned in advance to the categories of precursors and obstacles.

Economic and social history introduced a necessary corrective. Guillermo Céspedes del Castillo described Hispanic America as an administrative and fiscal structure in which the mission occupied a

⁸ See Dussel, *Historia de la Iglesia en América Latina*; Dussel, *Historia general de la Iglesia en América Latina*.

defined, rather than external, position.⁹ Frank Moya Pons showed that the gold economy organized Indigenous labor and settlement in the Antilles during the first decades, precisely when evangelization was being established. Silvio Zavala had¹⁰ previously demonstrated the structural character of the encomienda, while Sonia Corcuera de Mancera, working from the perspective of cultural history, examined how religious discipline operated upon concrete everyday practices.¹¹

This body of scholarship makes it possible to formulate precisely the problem that runs through the present book. If the encomienda was both the mechanism for extracting labor and the formal institution charged with religious instruction, then the contradiction denounced by Las Casas was not an accident of implementation, but a feature of the design. Framed in this way, the question ceases to be moral and becomes institutional: what obligations did the norm articulate, which subjects were authorized to execute them, and what occurred when the two levels diverged?

A persistent asymmetry must also be noted. Economic historiography described the structure competently, but rarely integrated the analysis of normative and doctrinal texts; Church history and theology examined those texts in detail, but devoted less

⁹ See Céspedes del Castillo, *América hispánica*.

¹⁰ See Moya Pons, *Después de Colón*.

¹¹ See Zavala, *La encomienda indiana*; Corcuera de Mancera, *El fraile, el indio y el pulque*.

attention to the mission's material conditions. Much of the difficulty in explaining why evangelization produced such unequal results derives from this division of academic labor.

Recent Renewal

The last two decades have substantially transformed the state of the field. Lawrence Clayton produced a documented biography that replaces hagiography with a reconstruction attentive to the Dominican's failures, revisions, and abandoned projects.¹² José Cárdenas Bunsen shifted the focus toward canon law and the manner in which Las Casas's writing is constructed as legal argument: his treatises do not merely describe grievances, but assemble authorities, distinctions, and precedents in order to produce normative effects. Kenneth Pennington, working along the same lines, explicitly examines Las Casas as a jurist within the Hispanic legal tradition.¹³

This approach has direct methodological consequences. If texts operate as components of a procedure rather than as confessions of temperament, then the appropriate unit of analysis is not authorial intention, but the architecture of rules that the writings seek to modify. The edited volumes coordinated by David Thomas Orique

¹² See Clayton, Bartolomé de Las Casas: *A Biography*.

¹³ See Cárdenas Bunsen, *Escritura y derecho canónico en la obra de fray Bartolomé de Las Casas*; Pennington, "Bartolomé de Las Casas."

and Rady Roldán-Figueroa consolidated this shift while also opening a transatlantic turn: the question of the Indies ceased to be read as an exclusively American matter and came to be examined as a circulation of texts, people, and decisions among the Americas, Castile, and Rome.¹⁴

Daniel Castro introduced the most uncomfortable objection of this cycle by describing Las Casas's position as another face of empire: a form of ecclesiastical tutelage that, in claiming protection for Indigenous people, reaffirmed the authority of Church and Crown over them.¹⁵ The criticism is relevant, and this study incorporates it, though not in its strongest version; Section 6.5 discusses it in detail. Reducing Las Casas's project to a variant of domination makes it impossible to explain why it encountered systematic resistance among colonial agents themselves; a mere modulation of power would not have provoked conflict of that magnitude.

Ryan Dominic Crewe reconstructed the mendicant enterprise in New Spain as a prolonged process of negotiation with Indigenous communities, while Nancy van Deusen documented both the litigation undertaken by Indigenous people transported to Castile

¹⁴ See Orique and Roldán-Figueroa, *Bartolomé de las Casas, O.P.*; Roldán-Figueroa and Orique, *The Transatlantic Las Casas*.

¹⁵ See Castro, *Another Face of Empire*.

and the persistence of slavery after the New Laws of 1542.¹⁶ Both contributions definitively shift the analytical axis: evangelization cannot be explained solely by what missionaries decided, but must also account for what subject populations accepted, litigated, reinterpreted, or rejected. Indigenous agency ceases to be a nuance and becomes a variable in the process.

Historiographical Gaps and the Position of This Study

The preceding survey reveals three gaps that delimit the subject of this book. The first concerns the target of Las Casas's criticism. The literature has examined in detail his polemic against the conquistadors and theorists of just war, but has treated his censure of the clergy only in scattered fashion: the friars' lack of training, their ignorance of Indigenous languages, the accumulation of episcopal revenues, the hasty administration of baptism, and the complicity of religious personnel with encomenderos. This internal criticism, sustained until the final years of his life, constitutes the central focus of the present study.

The second gap is documentary in a more restricted sense. Discussion generally relies on a small number of major texts, the Short Account, the History of the Indies, and the dispute with

¹⁶ Crewe, *The Mexican Mission*; Van Deusen, *Global Indios*; Van Deusen, "Why Indigenous Slavery Continued in Spanish America after the New Laws of 1542."

Sepúlveda, while the minor corpus is cited only fragmentarily. Letters, memorials, petitions, replies, and short treatises were written for specific authorities and therefore contain the most precise formulations concerning the conduct expected of missionaries. This book uses them as a series, not as illustrations.

The third gap concerns articulation. Norm and practice are generally studied separately, with the result that noncompliance appears as an unexplained deviation. The concept of the compiled rule, presented in the methodological note, is introduced to bridge this gap: it makes it possible to describe the enterprise in the Indies as a body of texts and authorities that defined powers, obligations, and ends, and then to examine the effective scope for execution, adaptation, or violation available to each agent. The purpose is not retrospectively to apply a theory foreign to the sixteenth century, but analytically to organize what bulls, instructions, and laws did explicitly.

The limits of the research must also be stated. It does not draw on unpublished archival documentation: its basis consists of critical editions and the available specialist literature, and several references derive from documentary compilations. Its contribution therefore lies not in the discovery of new sources, but in the systematization of a little-explored dimension of the Las Casas corpus and in the

framework that allows the norm authorizing the mission and the practices that contradicted it to be read together.

On this basis, the book proceeds in three movements. The opening chapters reconstruct the European framework and the normative regime that defined Castilian title and the obligation to evangelize. The middle chapters examine the establishment of the mission and the material obstacles that conditioned it. Chapter VI analyzes religious agents and Las Casas's criticism of them in order to establish the extent to which his proposal for peaceful evangelization was compatible with the colonial structure that made it possible. Chapter VII incorporates the actions of the American populations themselves, without which the process cannot be described accurately, and Chapter VIII tests the central hypothesis against the vocabulary of the corpus itself.

CHAPTER I

The European Framework and the Normative Regime

In less than two centuries, the West gave birth to modern Europe amid the suffering caused by the privations of the age (famine, the Black Death, international conflicts, civil wars, and the final Asian invasion in the east). Traditional powers disappeared: the Holy Roman Empire and the papacy declined in Germany and Italy before the rise of the cities, while the Byzantine Empire came to an end after the Ottoman capture of Constantinople in 1453.

The principal actors of the new Europe had already assumed their places. In the west, England, though defeated, and victorious France emerged strengthened from the Hundred Years' War. In the south, Spain, advancing toward unity, dominated the western shores of the Mediterranean, opposite the Ottoman Empire, master of the eastern shores. Muscovite Russia grew, strengthened by its Byzantine tradition and Orthodox faith. The Scandinavian countries regrouped in the north. In Central Europe, Austria laid the foundations of its future power.

According to Georges Duby (1987), the structural changes of the "Old Continent" were evident not only in the political and

institutional spheres, but also affected the economy and the ideas associated with it.

1.1. The Great Discoveries

Within this context, perhaps the most momentous of the peaceful revolutions that marked the end of the Middle Ages was the one that produced a decisive transformation in navigation and consequently made the Portuguese and Castilian voyages possible.

In the fifteenth century, the Christian peoples of Europe knew only a limited portion of the world: Europe, North Africa, and certain regions of Asia. The accounts of Marco Polo, the thirteenth-century Venetian traveler, had nevertheless circulated reports of a great and wealthy empire in eastern Asia, from which silk came, and of a large island called Cipangu (Japan).

By contrast, much of the geographical configuration between Africa and Asia remained unknown. It was imagined that the African coast turned eastward toward Asia and that the Indian Ocean was an inland sea enclosed between the two continents. Geographical knowledge was limited, and the desire to expand it largely reflected concrete expectations of economic utility. Distant territories acquired importance when they offered high-value commodities, including spices.

Atlantic expansion did not arise from geographical curiosity. The spice trade, whose goods reached Europe through Muslim and Italian intermediaries, together with the growing scarcity of gold and silver, made any route that bypassed those intermediaries or opened direct access to source markets potentially profitable. This dual incentive, the supply of high-value goods and the acquisition of precious metals, explains the willingness of the Iberian crowns to finance ventures of uncertain outcome. It also anticipates the tension that would run through the entire American period: the same expedition justified by a religious purpose was sustained economically by the expectation of acquiring metal.

The technical innovations of the period, including the sternpost rudder, the compass, improvements in sail plans, and the emergence of the caravel, made prolonged oceanic navigation without resupply stops materially possible. Their institutional consequence is more important here than their description. Once it became feasible to reach territories whose existence had not been recorded by any Christian power, the problem arose of determining to whom they belonged. Technology created the object that law had to allocate, and that allocation was resolved through the instruments examined below.

Europe had always proved to be a continent eager for technological advances, possessing "an astonishing vitality, a passion for applying theoretical knowledge to practical ends, with

the result of rapid advances in military, naval, and commercial technology."

Using these new navigational methods, Castilians and Portuguese competed during the fifteenth century to explore the central Atlantic and the west coast of Africa.

The Castilians took the initiative during the first third of the fifteenth century. Beginning in 1402, they established themselves in the Canary Islands, which they occupied gradually and slowly. Around 1418-1420, however, the Portuguese began to settle the Madeira Islands.

From 1434 onward, the situation began to change, and Portugal acquired a growing advantage over Castile in Atlantic affairs, aided by the planning promoted by Prince Henry, later known as "the Navigator." His role was to encourage, organize, and finance explorations of the African coast, thereby contributing indirectly to the technological development of the vessels that made Atlantic expansion possible. Both before and after his death, Portuguese activity remained persistently concentrated along the coasts of Africa. In 1434, Portuguese navigators succeeded in passing Cape Bojador.

According to Céspedes del Castillo, from 1482 onward, voyages of discovery pursued a fundamental objective that remained

unchanged over time: to reach the Far East and thereby establish the long-desired maritime trade relations between the East and Western Europe. The Portuguese were the first to meet this challenge through the voyage of Bartolomeu Dias, who discovered the Cape of Good Hope. A very small Castilian sector pursued the same goal, though with less success and by a more difficult route.

Once this voyage had been completed, Céspedes del Castillo argues, Portugal had won the contest. Castile's only hope of recovering lost ground lay in the supposed sphericity of the Earth, which meant, at least in theory, that the East could be reached from Europe by sailing westward, through latitudes where no treaties prohibited navigation. These were the principal reasons why, in 1492, the king of Aragon and the queen of Castile decided to risk the undertaking.

The Portuguese advantage transformed rivalry into a question of title. Although effective possession was sufficient to sustain a trading post, the claim to exclusivity over routes and territories required a foundation that neither crown could produce independently. This gave rise to the sequence of instruments that regulated the competition: the Treaty of Alcáçovas-Toledo of 1479, which delimited zones of navigation and recognized established positions; the bulls of 1493, which granted Castile title over lands discovered to the west; and the Treaty of Tordesillas of 1494, which

adjusted the line through bilateral agreement. This chain constitutes the first example of the structure central to this study: each text rests upon the preceding one and enables operations that its predecessor had not authorized.

The final quarter of the fifteenth century was therefore a period of demographic, economic, and commercial expansion, reflected in the emergence of new mercantile powers and the reconfiguration of trade routes. The Atlantic ports of Seville, Lisbon, Antwerp, and London began to compete with traditional centers such as Lyon, Venice, Genoa, Milan, and Florence.

1.2. States and the Economy

In light of these transformations, the Late Middle Ages, and more specifically the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, may be considered the period in which the state shifted from its medieval to its modern form. The new concept of the state acquired increasing force in relation to the traditional notions of Regnum or the Christian Commonwealth.

This process had begun in the late thirteenth century. It was interrupted throughout the fourteenth century by wars, epidemics, and revolutionary uprisings, and regained momentum during the fifteenth century, when princes recovered their strength and democratic convictions withered.

The strengthening of monarchies had a decisive consequence for what follows. Administrative centralization, the expansion of royal powers, and the consolidation of fiscal and bureaucratic apparatuses endowed the crowns with a capacity for governance they had not previously possessed and, with it, a negotiating position in relation to Rome. The issue was not simply that kings had become more powerful: they possessed institutions capable of carrying out complex commissions on a sustained basis, including ecclesiastical ones. Without this administrative capacity, the delegation of powers over the American Church examined in the following chapters would have been impracticable.

At the communal level, the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries witnessed several attempts at religious regeneration. "One of the highest expressions of this tendency was found in the congregations of regular observance, which were urged to restore the original discipline of the order. The congregation of San Benito of Valladolid, which began its course in the late fourteenth century, had one of the most distinguished trajectories."

Despite various sincere projects of reform, demographic crisis, the ravages of war, declining vocations, and the campaigns launched by eminent authors such as Wyclif, Chaucer, and Lorenzo Valla undermined the prestige of the monastic or conventual estate as such. Internal Franciscan disputes continued

well into the fifteenth century, "when Eugene IV chose to establish a division between Observants and Conventuals, granting them broad autonomy."

Interventions by lay or ecclesiastical commendatory abbots in monastic life, ostensibly to protect the monasteries, were accompanied by interventions from European monarchs eager to bring the churches of their respective countries under their influence. In France, the Pragmatic Sanction of 1438 and the Assembly of Tours of 1493 addressed, among other matters, the reform of French monasteries. The Catholic Monarchs undertook something similar, entrusting the initiative to figures such as the Franciscan Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros and the Hieronymite Hernando de Talavera.

1.3. The Catholic Monarchs: The Religious Enterprise

The period from the eighth to the eleventh centuries saw growing Muslim power, although centers of resistance remained in the north of the peninsula. The conquered territories gradually underwent Arabization and became politically independent of the Arab Empire. In the tenth century, Abd al-Rahman III transformed al-Andalus into an independent caliphate, including religious independence. It was a period of considerable cultural prosperity, owing to innovations in science and letters and the particular attention devoted to urban development.

The marriage in 1469 of Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon, the Catholic Monarchs and heirs to the two most important kingdoms of present-day Spain, decisively altered the course of the reign.

Any description of the Iberian Peninsula at the end of the fifteenth century must address the complex dynastic union of Castile and Aragon, initially articulated through the marriage agreements concluded between Isabella and Ferdinand. This compact conditioned the distribution of powers between the two members of the future monarchy and constitutes an essential precedent for understanding its subsequent political configuration.

These dynastic considerations were combined with other elements characteristic of Spain at the time, including the establishment of the Inquisition in Castile and the continuation of religious persecution.

Although positions differ and much has been written on the subject, the Inquisition as an institution was established under the Catholic Monarchs, who requested a founding bull from Rome and ultimately obtained it in 1478.

With regard to religious persecution, the obvious subject is the so-called Reconquista, a long historical process of major significance for peninsular history and later constructions of political identity. It was not a homogeneous and continuous occupation lasting eight centuries, but a changing succession of political formations, frontiers, conquests, alliances, and coexistence between Christian and Muslim powers. After the Nasrid Emirate of Granada had been defeated, on March 31, 1492, the Catholic Monarchs signed the decree expelling the Jews from their realms.

The conjunction of these elements reveals the distinctive state of mind of a nation that then perceived itself to be living through a crucial moment in its history. While witnessing "the passing of the Gothic amid a Baroque explosion," three features appeared to

correspond to Iberian reality at the time: "immorality, religiosity, and militarism."

Thus, from the eighth century onward, the history of Hispanic Christendom was indeed the history of the slow and continuous restoration of European Spain; of the perpetual advance of a tiny kingdom that grew from the mountain ranges and gorges of Asturias until it reached the Mediterranean Sea.

Across eight centuries and amid the manifold diversity of each, as would later occur in the Americas, the entire history of the Castilian Monarchy was also a fabric of conquests, the founding of cities, the reorganization of new provinces won from Islam, and the expansion of the Church throughout the new dominions: the transplantation of a people, a language, a faith, and a civilization.

In this sense, the Granada War, begun in 1482, concluded in 1492 with the incorporation of the Nasrid Kingdom of Granada into the Crown of Castile. This event strengthened the monarchy of the Catholic Monarchs, but did not immediately unify all peninsular territories institutionally under a single state structure: Castile and Aragon retained distinct laws, institutions, and administrations within the dynastic union. At the same time, the policy of religious uniformity had intensified in preceding years: the tribunal of the Castilian Inquisition had been authorized by

Sixtus IV in 1478, and in 1492 the expulsion of Jews who refused conversion was decreed.

"For Spain, this policy entailed a radical change; an attitude of coexistence, neutrality, and, to some extent, tolerance toward non-Christian confessions gave way to an uncompromising, rigorous, and coercively persuasive attitude."¹⁷

Accordingly, both the expulsion of the Jews in 1492 and the completion of the Reconquista formed fundamental parts of the Catholic Monarchs' program of unity. The territorial configuration of the Catholic Monarchy was completed with the annexation of the Kingdom of Navarre in 1512.

Given the religious character of this undertaking, the authorization of Pope Sixtus IV was required and obtained to establish the Inquisition in 1478.

This struggle against Islam and against the Protestant perceived as an invader was what, above many divisions and conflicting interests, united all the Christian kingdoms of the peninsula in a common cause and, within them, kings and nobles, clerics and vassals, trades and estates. All risked their lives for a cause deemed worthy of death, one that would achieve the union that gave Spain the basis for conceiving of itself as an empire.

¹⁷ Céspedes del Castillo, *América hispánica*, 157.

Within a few years of the Inquisition's founding, the papacy in practice relinquished its supervision in favor of the Spanish sovereigns.

The Spanish Inquisition thus became an instrument closely associated with the monarchy, although ecclesiastics, and Dominicans in particular, performed central functions in its operation.

The precedent established by this institution should be retained. The Castilian Inquisition was created by pontifical concession and, in practice, placed under royal direction: the Crown appointed inquisitors, controlled the Council that governed it, and administered its resources. The papacy retained the basis of authority while ceding its exercise. This formula, a title of ecclesiastical origin combined with de facto monarchical administration, would recur in the Americas through the patronato and explains why evangelization in the Indies could be presented simultaneously as a religious obligation and a governmental power. The precedent does not operate here by analogy: it is the same procedure applied to a new territory.

In foreign affairs, the combination of the traditional Mediterranean policy of the House of Aragon with Castile's drive for conquest, having secured control of the Canary Islands against

Portugal through the Treaty of Alcáçovas (1479), produced an extraordinarily expansionist policy.

"... The Catholic Monarchs ... in 1479 signed the Peace of Trujillo in Portugal, thereby recognizing Portugal's circumnavigation voyages and acquired possessions; they signed the Treaty of Alcáçovas, which granted the Canary Islands to Castile ... this political unity was also spiritual, since they imposed the desire to unify religious beliefs ..." ¹⁸

One consequence was royal support for Christopher Columbus's project, which came to fruition in 1492 with the discovery of America. Through the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494), Castile secured the use and possession of a New World whose immense extent was still unknown. Following the discovery of America in the late fifteenth century, the Spain forged by the Catholic Monarchs became, within a few decades, the world's most powerful empire, colonizing the territories of the New World and establishing its dominance in Europe.

This Reconquista, through which Spain reconquered itself, may be seen as the best preparation for the conquest of America, undertaken "in perfect providential continuity." The same spiritual impulse that mobilized the entire Spanish people continued to drive them toward the Canary Islands and the Antilles, and from there to Tierra Firme and New Spain.

¹⁸ Cresto, *España y Portugal y la vida medieval*, 8.

1.4. The Papacy and the Government of the Church

In 1417, Martin V (1417-1431), elected pope by the Council of Constance, finally restored the unity of the Church. "Active and energetic, he succeeded in imposing his authority upon the Papal States, which had broken away from the Holy See, and worked tirelessly to raise Rome from its ruins. He nevertheless achieved little with regard to the Church's internal reform, although this should perhaps be attributed more to circumstances than to the man himself."

The ensuing pontificates trace a curve of weakening universal authority and strengthening the Roman court. Nicholas V, Callixtus III, Pius II, Paul II, and Sixtus IV consolidated the papacy as an Italian principality and a center of Renaissance patronage, while ceding powers to national churches and the sovereigns who supported them. The consequence relevant to this study is functional rather than moral: a papacy in need of allies and resources was positioned to grant extensive powers to those who undertook costly enterprises in its name. When Alexander VI issued the bulls of 1493, he was not inaugurating a policy, but applying to the Indies an already established practice of delegation.

Certain events reveal the limited power of the popes during this period, including the subjection of the French Church to royal authority and the restriction of ecclesiastical powers in Germany.

The period inaugurated by Sixtus IV (1471-1484) is known in papal history as the Age of Corruption, and it indeed marked the beginning of a grave period for the Church.

For approximately fifty years, the sacred character of the pontifical institution underwent a total eclipse. Humanists and politicians occupied the throne of Saint Peter and, driven solely by ambition, ruled as absolute masters over the Papal States and transformed Rome into the center of a brilliant culture:

"None of these pontiffs recognized the signs of a revolution taking shape everywhere against the Church, and their indifference to it permitted its rapid spread."¹⁹

Innocent VIII was succeeded by Alexander VI (1492-1503), who "undertook immense activity on behalf of his children and supporters, for whom he wished to secure wealth and dignities." His nephew (or perhaps son), Cesare, received the rank of cardinal at eighteen, without having been ordained a priest, and later bishoprics and duchies. Alexander VI was then allied with King Louis XII of France, who granted Cesare the Valentinois and the hand of a French princess. With the monarch's assistance and the consent of the pope, from whom he obtained whatever he desired, the young cardinal seized Romagna and claimed it as his possession.

¹⁹ Mitre Fernández et al., *Historia de la Edad Media*, 312.

1.5. Norm and Execution in the Formation of Title

This institutional framework permits observation of the first operation of the compiled rule. Expansion rested not upon a single order, but upon the superimposition of pontifical provisions, royal prerogatives, capitulations, administrative powers, and religious obligations. Each level constrained and enabled the next. Evangelization thus appears not only as a declared purpose, but as a condition of legitimacy incorporated into an architecture of government. This architecture will be decisive in understanding why, in the Indies, the same Christianizing formula could serve as a limit to violence in certain texts and, at the same time, be integrated into mechanisms of appropriation, labor, and obedience.

The four elements that will organize the subsequent analysis are already present at this stage, though in embryonic form. The corpus consists of bilateral treaties and pontifical grants; the authorized subjects are the crowns and, by delegation, the captains of the enterprises; the enabled operations consist of navigation, occupation, settlement, and evangelization; and the effective scope appears in the absence of any verification mechanism other than the executor's own report. The following chapters show how this structure became denser when transferred to the Indies, without thereby becoming more determinate.

CHAPTER II

Bartolomé de las Casas: Biographical Profiles and Works

Evangelizers, as such, were responsible for preaching the faith of Jesus Christ and the Christian virtues. This doctrine understood the Gospels as canonical books recounting the life, teachings, and miracles of Jesus Christ. In some sense, these preachers embodied the Four Evangelists: Saint Matthew, Saint Mark, Saint Luke, and Saint John. The evangelizers of the Indies were therefore expected, in the eyes of the Church, to be men endowed with special graces, capable of transmitting the principles of their religion among the future "new Christians."

It is therefore essential to know, however briefly, the origins and characters of these men who in some manner assumed the spirit of the holy Evangelists and who each preached, in his own way, his faith and judgment concerning that "great mission."

It is also appropriate to clarify that the subject is a man who, beyond his achievements, or perhaps because of them, led an unusual life. Over the course of his long life, he was successively a priest, friar, bishop, retired bishop, and statesman at court. He defended the cause of the Indians before several Spanish sovereigns; influenced the decisions of three popes; and assisted,

and was assisted by, officials, jurists, and Indigenous chiefs. He wrote thousands of pages, appeared before countless commissions, drafted protective laws, and crossed the Atlantic at least ten times, a remarkable record. In total, Bartolomé de las Casas spent "fifty arduous years directing perhaps the greatest effort on behalf of civil rights and racial justice in the history of humankind":

"Given his famously electric nature, no one who encountered him, then or now, has remained indifferent: one was either with him or against him."²⁰

2.1. Friar Bartolomé de las Casas

Historians and biographers have encountered numerous difficulties in writing Las Casas's biography, and different accounts exist concerning his origins, his family's social standing, dates, and other details.

"Almost the only sources for studying his life are his own writings, and he did not trouble to provide the information that any serious biographer would require."²¹

"It is curious that we know scarcely more about his life than what he himself revealed in his writings. We know virtually

²⁰ Hanke, *La lucha por la justicia en la conquista de América* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1949), quoted in García Ferreira, *Bartolomé de las Casas y el oficio de historiador*, 1.

²¹ See Hanke, foreword to Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, XII.

nothing about his father or other members of his family, or about the early influences that must have helped shape his mentality and habits."²²

Las Casas's date of birth was disputed for many years. The documentary research of Helen Rand Parish and Harold E. Weidman made it possible to correct the traditional chronology: it is now generally accepted that he was born in Seville in 1484, not in 1474 or on the earlier dates proposed in older scholarship. Debate persists regarding the converso origins of his family and certain details of his early education, making it advisable to distinguish documented facts from later biographical reconstructions.

When Bartolomé de las Casas was approximately eight or nine years old, he had an experience that he would recall decades later. In 1493, after Christopher Columbus returned from his first voyage, he saw in Seville several Indigenous people who had been brought from the Caribbean. His father, Pedro de las Casas, would participate in Columbus's second voyage, but Bartolomé did not travel to the Americas at that time.

Many years later, writing about that unforgettable Holy Week of 1493, Las Casas recalled, "I saw them (Columbus and the 'Indians' whom he had brought from the distant lands) where they were

²² See Hanke, foreword to Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, XII.

living near the Arch of San Nicolás, called the Arch of the Images."

In discussing that momentous day in Seville in 1493, Helen Rand Parish, one of the most renowned Las Casas scholars, notes an apparently insignificant detail. "Las Casas did not see the Indians for the first time from above, with a haughty and disdainful gaze, but from below, through the eyes of a child, eyes filled with wonder and admiration."

Las Casas traveled to Hispaniola in 1502 as part of the large expedition led by Governor Nicolás de Ovando. More recent historiography has been cautious regarding some traditional details of his studies and prior educational itinerary. On the island, he entered the colonial world and came to benefit from the encomienda system, an experience that would prove decisive in the later transformation of his thought.

During his early years in the Caribbean, he participated in the colonial order and held an encomienda. This stage is fundamental to understanding Las Casas's development: his later criticism did not proceed from a position external to the system, but from someone who had initially participated in it and then radically revised his judgment concerning the legitimacy of exploitation and war against Indigenous peoples.

After returning to Europe, he completed his ecclesiastical education and was ordained a priest. The longstanding claim that he was the first priest ordained in the Americas cannot be sustained as established fact: subsequent research places his ordination in Rome in 1507. The revision of this point exemplifies how Las Casas's biography has changed as new documents have been incorporated.

For a time, Bartolomé served as an interpreter in preaching to the Indians. At that moment, Friar Antonio de Montesinos delivered his famous sermon on the first Sunday of Advent, in which he asked, "Are these not persons...?" This had a profound impact on Las Casas and marked a decisive change in his life.

The priest thus began the process that would make him one of the colonial system's most persistent critics and an advocate of peaceful evangelization. He was not the first to denounce abuses, since Antonio de Montesinos's sermon of 1511 constitutes a decisive precedent, but Las Casas transformed that denunciation into an exceptionally enduring program of religious, legal, and political intervention.

"During his time in America, two events occurred that affected him profoundly. One was the sermon delivered by the Dominican Friar Antonio Montesinos, reproaching the Spanish colonists for their conduct toward the Indigenous population;

the other was a massacre perpetrated by the Spaniards on the island of Cuba, which he witnessed. Influenced by these events, he resolved to direct all his efforts toward changing that situation."²³

During the conquest of Cuba, Las Casas served as a cleric among the expedition led by Diego Velázquez and had direct contact with the violence of occupation. He again received Indigenous people in encomienda, but the Cuban experience, together with the Dominican preaching begun in Hispaniola, was decisive in the moral crisis that culminated in his renunciation of the system.

At Pentecost in 1514, he publicly relinquished his encomiendas and began to preach with greater fervor and force against the entire system.

He traveled with Montesinos to Seville in 1516. Both intended to "admonish the king" that conquest and slavery were destroying the native population and therefore requested far-reaching reforms.

Following the death of King Ferdinand that same year, 1516, he presented his memorials "Abuses" and "Remedies" to Cardinal Cisneros, requesting that Indigenous people live in settlements with communal lands, organized under an administrator, and pay

²³ Camps, foreword to Las Casas, *Brevísima relación*, 14.

tribute to the Crown. He was appointed "Protector of the Indians."

In 1517, he presented the new king, Charles I, with a project to repopulate the mainland with farmers instead of soldiers. He departed for Venezuela with many peasants, but almost all abandoned him to engage in the lucrative slave trade. A group of Indigenous people revolted and killed several friars and officials, and he was therefore compelled to abandon his plan for peaceful colonization.

Frustrated in his plans, in 1522 he entered the Dominican Order in Santo Domingo, the capital of Hispaniola. During the following years, he deepened his study of theology, patristics, and Sacred Scripture and continued to develop arguments against the enslavement and exploitation of Indigenous peoples. The 1530s saw various royal measures restricting Indigenous slavery, but these did not constitute a uniform or definitive abolition throughout the Americas.

His sermons calling for humane treatment and even the freedom of the Indians were considered "scandalous" by many Spaniards, as was his counsel in the confessional. They complained to the authorities, and the Audiencia prohibited him from preaching for two years. He then began gathering material

for his extensive History of the Indies. In its introduction, the author wrote:

"I wished to begin writing about the most important matters, some of which for more than sixty years I have seen with my own eyes take place and occur in these Indies, being present in various regions, kingdoms, provinces, and lands within them, as well as matters that are public and notorious, not only among past deeds, but many that remain perpetually in operation."²⁴

In this work, Las Casas rendered "one of his most valuable services to history by preparing an abridgment of a copy of the original autograph journal kept by Columbus during his first voyage."

Likewise, "the extensive work under consideration requires an overall assessment and judgment both as a reliable historical source and in strictly historiographical terms. Opinions about it abound, which is itself an initial relevant fact: the history of the first decades of Spanish colonization in the New World cannot be addressed without reference to the history written by Las Casas."

In his introduction to the History of the Indies, Las Casas also states that he writes in order to "free my Spanish nation from the error in which it persists concerning the treatment to be accorded to the Indian nations."

²⁴ Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, foreword, vol. 1, 19.

This point may be identified as the beginning of his struggle against assaults upon the Indian, using the pen as his weapon. He subsequently produced an innumerable series of treatises, documents, and other writings.

In 1531, he wrote a lengthy Memorial for the Council of the Indies and traveled secretly to Spain, returning with a law favorable to the native population. He then went to present it in Mexico and afterward in Peru. Later, he traveled by invitation to Tezulutlán to repeat his experiment in peaceful conversion, achieving excellent results in only two years without shedding a drop of blood.

Together with another friar, he visited the camp of Enriquillo, an Indigenous guerrilla leader, and they persuaded him to abandon his position. Las Casas thus demonstrated that peaceful procedures could attract anyone to the Christian faith. Drawing upon this experience and that of Tezulutlán, he composed his first major treatise: *The Only Way to Draw All Peoples to the True Faith*.

Las Casas described this work as "the study of the truly natural, general, uniform, and only method ... by which the elect or predestined are to be called and invited to the faith of Christ and the Christian religion."

In it, he argued that the native peoples were rational and highly capable human beings, and that conquest by "fire and sword" was a mistaken method. Conversion had to result from preaching and good example, with respect for the rights of the native population, especially their freedom and property.

At the end of the 1530s, he returned to Spain to seek support and missionaries and continued his campaign on behalf of Indigenous peoples. The New Laws of 1542 were connected to a broader reform process in which Las Casas exerted significant influence. Recent research has shown, however, that their promulgation did not amount to complete emancipation or a definitive rupture with Indigenous slavery: implementation was uneven, encountered strong resistance, and later coexisted with exceptions, authorizations for war, and other forms of coerced labor.

During this period, he completed his Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies. As in all his works, he demonstrated great erudition: command of classical authorities and detailed knowledge, acquired either through what he had seen or what had been reported to him firsthand, supported his claims. Nevertheless, he was, and continues to be, described as an exaggerator because his figures and data are truly appalling and,

according to some authors, do not correspond to the numbers that actually prevailed in those lands.

On the basis of this work, Hanke describes the bishop as "a forceful and skillful propagandist."

The Short Account "shows that, beyond being a skilled polemicist, he was a first-rank combatant whose erudition and intellectual depth are demonstrated in texts supported by a documentary and bibliographical corpus that remains astonishing even today."

Agustín Rivera, who devoted himself to analyzing the Short Account, reached a conclusion with which we agree: "Las Casas's detractors have shrewdly exploited his numerical errors without ever refuting his essential truths."

In 1543, he was proposed for the bishopric of Cuzco in Peru, a position he declined. That same year, he accepted the bishopric of Chiapa; he was consecrated bishop in 1544 and subsequently traveled to his diocese accompanied by a contingent of Dominicans.

Having accepted the bishopric of Chiapa, he was consecrated in 1544. His pastoral project sought to apply rigorously the principles he had defended concerning Indigenous freedom, restitution, and noncoercive evangelization. Sources differ regarding the precise

composition and size of the party that accompanied him, making it unnecessary to characterize it as the largest missionary contingent assembled up to that time.

He wished to create a model diocese. He lived in poverty, dressed in his white habit, and ate little so as not to burden the people. He also had the consolation of seeing other friars, including Franciscans, accept his emancipatory ideas.

The "important" people of the province, however, made his life impossible, blinded by ambition and arrogance and even threatening to kill him. He therefore resigned in 1547, after residing in Chiapas for little more than six months, and returned to Spain to meet with Prince Philip.

In 1550, he engaged in intense confrontations with the proslavery theologian Sepúlveda. In these disputes, he generally received assistance from his Dominican brothers, including Melchor Cano. He also continued writing constantly, retiring to a monastery, composing letters to numerous individuals, or presenting papers before a royal junta, and was frequently consulted at court on American affairs.

He died a holy death in 1566 at the monastery of Atocha in Madrid, at the age of eighty-two.

Like his entire life, the literary activity and productivity of the bishop of the Indies are astonishing. His writings range from natural and political history and theological and legal treatises to pamphlets;

"I have written many sheets of paper, more than two thousand, in Latin and in the vernacular."²⁵

In the words of Agustín Yáñez, it may be said that "it seems impossible that so many journeys, vicissitudes, and undertakings of various kinds could have left the space and tranquility required to write so copiously."

Las Casas indeed spent his life writing memorials in which he expounded upon the advantages of the form of colonization he proposed, the peaceful method of preaching the faith in the Indies, the need to abolish the system of granting Indians to Spaniards, the moral and economic responsibility of Spaniards in their relations with the Indians, the injustice of virtually all Spanish actions in the Americas, and "the importance of insisting that the Indians truly understand Christianity before baptizing them."

"It is no mere coincidence that the only known portrait of Las Casas ... depicts him holding a pen. For it was above all with a pen that he expressed himself and acted."²⁶

²⁵ "Carta dirigida, probablemente hacia 1562, a los dominicos de Chiapa," in Yáñez, foreword to Las Casas, *Doctrina*, XIX.

Among the historical figures belonging to the first generations of travelers to the Americas after their discovery, Friar Bartolomé de las Casas has remained one of the most balanced, in contrast to others whose historical legacy is wholly adverse and, indeed, disastrous, including Francisco Pizarro, Diego de Almagro, Pedro de Valdivia, and Hernán Cortés. It is nevertheless known that Las Casas sometimes exaggerated the data on which he based his arguments and explanations in order to achieve his objectives. The difference lies in his militant opposition to the injustice committed against the "Indians," for he was a principal witness to the dark process endured by millions of people inhabiting this immense territory at the time of encounter.

His writings are "the preferred sources both for Las Casas's biographers and for historians of Spanish colonization; they consist of his innumerable works..."

²⁶ Bataillon and Saint-Lu, *El padre Las Casas y la defensa de los indios*, 64.

CHAPTER III

Points of Departure

This chapter shifts the analysis from the institutional framework and Las Casas's career to the concrete implementation of the American enterprise. The aim is not merely to reconstruct a sequence of voyages, bulls, and instructions, but to observe how territorial expansion, pontifical authority, and the obligations of evangelization began to be articulated as parts of a single apparatus of action. From this point onward, the religious mission ceases to be an abstract purpose and is examined in its historical conditions of execution.

3.1. The Beginning

On August 3, 1492, while funeral rites were being held in Rome for the recently deceased Pope Innocent VIII, Christopher Columbus departed from the port of Palos with his three caravels in search of another, unknown world. On October 12, 1492, Columbus and his companions reached unfamiliar shores, but they did not suspect that they had discovered a new continent for European civilization, much less that they had reached the Church's "continent of hope."

It appears that a priest, Father Pedro de Arenas, accompanied the first voyage as chaplain and may have celebrated the first Eucharist on the American continent.

When Columbus returned to Spain, the Catholic Monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabella, hastened to inform the new Pope Alexander VI of the discovery. The pope celebrated the news with great festivities in Rome and, as successor to Him who said:

"Go into all the world and preach the Gospel," he replied to Ferdinand and Isabella: "By virtue of holy obedience, we command you, just as you promise and as we do not doubt you will fulfill, to send to the aforesaid lands and islands upright and God-fearing men, learned, instructed, and experienced, to teach the said Indigenous people and inhabitants in the Catholic faith and instruct them in good morals, exercising the utmost diligence in the lives of those whom you are to send."

"The king is obliged to labor with great diligence, as much as or more than he devoted to acquiring the dominion here, so that the Indians, the native inhabitants of these Indies, might convert to the faith and love it. He must not only send prelates, but also other zealous preachers if the former are insufficient for their conversion and instruction in good morals. This is required by the strict command the pope imposed upon him through the bull of donation, which clearly showed that one of the principal considerations that moved him to make the said

donation was that the faith might be planted in those lands, and with it the other virtues, insofar as possible..."²⁷

Approximately fifty years later, Las Casas would state that the Catholic Church was effectively obliged, by divine command and canon, to travel to those lands and preach the word of God, the Gospel, and the faith of Jesus Christ, since those lands were inhabited by "infidels, heretics, and apostates, who are de jure subjects of the Church and the Supreme Pontiff and of the other spiritual prelates."

In Proposition II of his Thirty Juridical Propositions of 1541, he states:

"Saint Peter and his successors had and have a necessary obligation, by divine precept, to exercise the utmost diligence so that the Gospel and faith of Jesus Christ may be preached throughout the world to all its infidels, concerning whom there is probable reason to believe that they will not resist evangelical proclamation and Christian doctrine."²⁸

The pope's response in promoting the preaching of the Gospel in the recently discovered lands, beyond his position as the Church's highest representative, reflected the fact that the most consequential feature of the period's Western mentality was a Christian worldview: "Christianity became Europe's most intense

²⁷ Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, bk. 3, chap. 9, 459.

²⁸ "Treinta proposiciones muy jurídicas" (1541), in Las Casas, *Doctrina*, chap. 2, 34.

passion and ultimately defined the Western character. The Church exercised dominion over every aspect of life: private, social, political, economic, and intellectual."

Although the distinction between temporal and spiritual power was very clear in theory, it proved impossible to maintain in practice, given the partially shared understanding of responsibilities and objectives. This understanding was substantially broadened and reinforced "as a consequence of the discovery of America, through several papal bulls beginning in 1493.... These were the beginnings of an unprecedented situation in which the pope, unable to organize and finance the propagation of the faith in the New World and in other places where European expansion was taking shape, transferred the task to the kings of Castile and Portugal, granting them immense authority over the clergy of both empires as patrons of the colonial Church and vicars of the pope in matters of ecclesiastical discipline. Hence the name of the resulting system: Royal Patronage in the Indies, and Padroado in the Portuguese colonies."

The Catholic Monarchs and their successors then began to receive numerous grants concerning the right to occupy the new lands and exercise dominion over their inhabitants. Through a donation, the pope, who possessed the authority to grant newly

discovered territories to Christian princes, applied this principle to divide the American continent between Spain and Portugal.

"Bull of Pope Alexander granting the Catholic Monarchs and their successors all that they shall gain and conquer in the Indies.... Dated in the year 1493."²⁹

This was the first time in history that the papacy, or the Church, granted a nation the dual power to colonize and conduct missions. It thereby combined the temporal and the supernatural, the political and the ecclesial, the economic and the evangelical, effectively producing something resembling an expansionist and military theocracy. This ambiguity formed the basis of the entire Spanish enterprise of colonial evangelization or missionary colonization.

Hispanic civilization reached the Americas at the height of its cultural, military, and even religious strength and confronted other cultures that differed from it in every respect and were therefore regarded as inferior.

With the generous support of its people, its unemployed warriors, nobles eager for new titles, many poor people seeking enrichment, and religious personnel and priests, among whom were many saints and learned men, Spain undertook the dual political-economic and spiritual conquest.

²⁹ Giménez Fernández, *Nuevas consideraciones*, 3.

Accordingly, from 1493 onward, through bulls such as *Inter caetera*, *Dudum siquidem*, *Eximiae devotionis*, *Universalis Ecclesiae*, *Romanus Pontifex*, *Omnimoda*, and *Sublimis Deus*, popes including Alexander VI, Julius II, and Adrian VI granted the lands while entrusting their evangelization to the crowns.

Evangelization in the Americas was therefore missionary action conducted under the direction of the Spanish monarchs in Hispanic America, by papal grant and consistently through a series of bulls.

"That the Catholic faith and the Christian religion may be exalted above all in our times, and may everywhere be enlarged and extended, and that the salvation of souls may be sought and barbarous nations subjected and brought to the Christian faith."³⁰

To carry out this work, the Crown acquired the right to intervene in numerous areas that until then had belonged exclusively to the Catholic Church: collecting tithes, organizing the Church in the Americas and sending missionaries, presenting candidates for all ecclesiastical offices, and deciding upon the construction of cathedrals and churches. All these powers were defined through the establishment of the Royal Patronage and Royal Vicariate, which made the Spanish Crown the protector of

³⁰ Bull *Inter caetera* (May 3), in Giménez Fernández, *Nuevas consideraciones*, 167.

the Church and, on occasion, even its supervisor, since the monarch's approval eventually became mandatory for documents sent by the Vatican to the Americas.

"That alliance of throne and altar was accepted by both parties when neither understood the extent that, over time, so many privileges granted and so many obligations acknowledged would acquire."³¹

At that moment, however, neither could the monarchy dispense with the authority delegated to it by the papacy, since strengthening its own authority was essential, nor could the bishop of Rome, as the visible head of a universal religion, fail to embrace the newly opened possibility of evangelizing new worlds;

"Lacking the economic and administrative resources to undertake the task directly, the solution was to delegate it to Christian princes who had demonstrated their devotion to the pontiff and their capacity to support an expansionist, militant, and generally triumphant Christianity.... In the short term, these circumstances made possible the rapid Christianization of the Americas, with a success that may be considered spectacular...."³²

In mid-1501, the Crown selected Nicolás de Ovando, Commander of Lares, to bring order to all the social forces that had operated almost without control for more than eight years and

³¹ Céspedes del Castillo, *América hispánica*, 226.

³² Céspedes del Castillo, *América hispánica*, 226-227.

to direct those forces toward consistency with the general policy that the monarchs sought to impose in the Indies.

"Their Highnesses determined to appoint and send a new governor to this island of Hispaniola; and consequently, in governing it, he was at that time governor of all the Indies, because until then, and for some years afterward, there was no other on any island, mainland, or part of them. This was Don Friar Nicolás de Ovando, of the Order of Alcántara."³³

"The instructions the monarchs gave Ovando contained specific orders for managing matters relating to the Indians, whose exploitation by the Spaniards was recognized by the Crown. In³⁴ several clauses of these Instructions, the monarchs insisted that the Indians were to be treated well....

...Apparently, the Crown's most evident concern involved the Christianization of the Indians and the protection the governor was to afford them so that Spaniards would not rob them or seize their property or relatives against their will. Yet, in formal ignorance of the Indians' actual situation, the monarchs ordered that they pay taxes like the Crown's other subjects. Tribute was established contractually through an agreement between the governor and the Indigenous chiefs, so that both parties would be satisfied."

³³ Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, bk. 2, chap. 3, 213.

³⁴ "Instrucción al comendador de Lares fray Nicolás Dovando de la Orden de Alcántara, sobre lo que había de facer en las islas e tierra-firme del mar Océano, como gobernador dellas," Granada, September 16, 1501.

In the supplementary Instructions of Zaragoza for Ovando, the monarchs spoke of the "reduction of the Indians into settlements governed by a Spanish administrator and a chaplain.... The chaplain was to teach the native people to pay the tithe to the Church and, to the king, the tributes that they lawfully owed as vassals."

The same Instructions then ordered that Indians be taken and compelled to work on estates and in royal mines, with each paid whatever the employer considered just.

"Among the other clauses of his instructions [to Ovando], one was of the greatest importance and most strongly enjoined and commanded, namely: that all the Indians dwelling and residing on this island should be free and not subject to servitude, nor harassed or wronged by anyone, but should live as free vassals, governed and preserved in justice, as were the vassals in the kingdoms of Castile. He was likewise ordered to arrange for their instruction in our holy Catholic faith; and regarding this concern, the good treatment and conversion of these peoples, the blessed queen was always most solicitous."³⁵

These significant clauses, which sought to treat the Indian as a free person even though he could be compelled to work in service to the Crown, support the assertion that "under no circumstances did the Crown sacrifice its own interests, which were identical to

³⁵ Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, bk. 2, chap. 3, 214.

those of the colonists." The Crown understood very well that, in Pierre Chaunu's words, the mining economy was the core of Hispanic colonial America.

They also permit the provisional conclusion that, whatever advantages or provisions favored the Indians, the principal purpose of all the provisions established by the Instructions of 1501 was to satisfy the requirements of the *Inter caetera* bulls of 1493, whose highest priority was the Christianization of the Indians, and "possibly to influence the pope's pending decision, in mid-1501, to grant the Crown the right to collect ecclesiastical tithes in the Indies for itself, in order to contribute to the expenses incurred by the monarchs for the exaltation of the Catholic faith in the New World."

The documentary sequence makes the mechanism more precise. Expressions such as command, instruct, endeavor, convert, treat as free, or satisfy the provisions of the bull are not equivalent: they assign obligations to different agents and insert them into a chain of compliance. In terms of the compiled rule, the legitimacy of colonial action is formulated as a series of cumulative conditions. The Crown may issue orders because it presents itself as obligated by a pontifical grant; its officials may act because they receive instructions; Indigenous labor is admitted within limits formulated as compatible with Christian instruction.

Historical conflict arises precisely when practical execution selects some of these conditions and neutralizes others.

3.2. The Arrival of the First Evangelizers

Consequently, four months later, on September 25, 1493, Columbus departed Cádiz on his second voyage with an expedition much larger than the first. Among the religious personnel sent was the Benedictine Bernardo Boyl, vested with ecclesiastical functions for the new enterprise. Bartolomé de las Casas did not participate in this voyage: he reached Hispaniola in 1502 with the expedition of Governor Nicolás de Ovando.

"In the instructions the monarchs gave the Admiral [Columbus] in the year 1497 ... provision must be made for certain religious and clerics, persons of good character, to travel to the said Indies, so that there they may administer the Holy Sacraments to those who are there and endeavor to convert the native Indians of the said Indies to our Holy Catholic Faith, taking with them the instruments and objects required for divine worship and the administration of the Holy Sacraments."³⁶

"Their Highnesses, desiring that the holy Catholic faith be increased and enlarged, order and charge the said Admiral [Columbus] to endeavor and labor to bring all the inhabitants of the said islands and mainland to conversion to our holy Catholic

³⁶ Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, bk. 1, chap. 126, 480-481.

faith, and, to assist in this work, Their Highnesses send there the devout father Friar Buil..."³⁷

The bull *Piis fidelium* states in detail:

"Alexander, ... to the beloved son Bernardo Boil... As our most beloved son in Christ Ferdinand, King, and our most beloved daughter in Christ Isabella ... recently informed us, devoted and united in such fervor and desiring that the Catholic faith flourish and be exalted in the lands and islands until now unknown to all, ... they decreed that you be sent to those regions, so that there, by you and by other suitable secular or religious priests designated by you, the word of God may be preached and sown among the native people and inhabitants of the said lands and islands, who now have no knowledge of the faith."³⁸

It later adds:

"We grant you the broadest faculties, license, power, and authority to travel there and reside for as long as you wish, together with those companions of your Order or any other, designated by you or by the King and Queen themselves, without any need for a license required for this purpose from our superiors or from any others."³⁹

"You shall preach and sow the word of God in order to convert the said native people and inhabitants to the Catholic faith, whether by yourself or by other suitable secular or religious

³⁷ Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, bk. 1, chap. 81, 344.

³⁸ Bull *Piis fidelium*, in Giménez Fernández, *Nuevas consideraciones*, 198.

³⁹ Giménez Fernández, *Nuevas consideraciones*, 199.

priests of any order, baptizing and instructing them in the faith ... you shall erect, build, and construct any churches, chapels, monasteries, houses of any orders ... and pious places with bell towers and other appurtenances, without authorization from anyone; you shall receive professed members of the mendicant orders in the houses you construct and build for them and grant permission for them to reside there...."⁴⁰

It is thus clearly demonstrated that missionaries, or evangelists, enjoyed every advantage the Crown could provide. There appears to have been concern that the conquest acquire a missionary character, as Las Casas understood:

"I say that Your Highnesses should not consent to any foreigner trading or establishing a foothold here, except Catholic Christians, since this was the end and the beginning of the undertaking; that it should serve the increase and glory of the Christian religion, and that no one should come to these regions who is not a good Christian...."⁴¹

The most active instrument of evangelization was therefore the total commitment of the mendicant orders, which were later joined by the Jesuits:

"The monasteries, places, and houses erected and built, and the monks and brothers residing in them, may freely and lawfully use, enjoy, and possess each and every grace, privilege, liberty,

⁴⁰ Giménez Fernández, *Nuevas consideraciones*, 199.

⁴¹ Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, bk. 1, chap. 48, 244.

extension, immunity, indulgence, and indult generally granted to other monasteries...."⁴²

These first ecclesiastics, or at least most of them, remained outside Spain for scarcely a year. The delegate Boyl clashed with Columbus over the treatment that should be accorded to the Indians.

"This Father Friar Buil brought ... very extensive powers from the pope in spiritual and ecclesiastical matters. This may have been so and appears plausible, but because he remained on the island for so short a time and soon returned, he neither exercised his office nor revealed whether he possessed it."⁴³

Resentful, Columbus ordered the daily food ration of the ecclesiastics to be reduced and even suspended, and they soon returned to the Old World in December 1494. The only ones who remained in Hispaniola were the Franciscans Rodrigo Pérez, Juan Deleudeule, and Juan Tisim O Cosin; three lay brothers, Juan de la Deule and Juan Tizín among them; and the hermit Jerónimo Ramón Pané, who has been described as the first teacher, catechist, and anthropologist of the New World.

In 1495, still under Roman tutelage, the Catholic Monarchs ordered that groups of missionaries accompany the conquistadors they appointed to the discovered lands.

⁴² Bull *Piis fidelium*, in Giménez Fernández, *Nuevas consideraciones*, 201.

⁴³ Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, bk. 1, chap. 81, 344-345.

"Economic gain and social advancement were, for the overwhelming majority of immigrants, the motives that led them to cross the Atlantic. Only two very small groups traveled to the colonies for different purposes, at least in theory: the friars who emigrated for religious reasons."⁴⁴

Hispaniola was the place where Franciscans, Dominicans, and Mercedarians tested the most appropriate method for carrying out their mission properly. They began by catechizing children and continued with adults. In 1502, they began building churches in Santo Domingo on Hispaniola. Giving free rein to their apostolic zeal and accompanied by several secular priests, they proceeded to the other islands, thus beginning the process of "civilizing," in the sense they gave the term at the time, the inhabitants of the Antilles.

The encomienda method was used from the beginning of colonization. Once a territory had been discovered and conquered, plans were drawn and a village bearing the title of city was founded.

The surrounding lands were distributed among the conquistadors, whose principal obligations included caring for, defending, and catechizing the Indians in their territory. When a conquistador was given possession of a territory, he was told: "To

⁴⁴ Céspedes del Castillo, *América hispánica*, 225.

you, XX, are entrusted so many Indians under such-and-such chief, and you shall teach them the matters of our holy Catholic faith." Hence the terms *encomienda* and *encomendero*. At his own expense, the *encomendero* maintained in his grant a person in charge, whether priest or layman, who taught Christian doctrine to the Indians each day and was therefore called a *doctrinero*. From time to time, a missionary passed through, examined candidates, baptized those sufficiently prepared, and administered the other sacraments to them.

In general, the first evangelizers in Latin America sought to use as their model the method of evangelization employed by the Early Church.

The first evangelizing measure adopted by the Spanish missionaries was to destroy the Indigenous people's sacred places and objects of religious worship because all of them were deemed pagan. The severity of the procedure was mitigated by first ordering the Indigenous people themselves to destroy their cultural property; if they refused, the military did so with great violence. Christianization sought to eradicate ancient traditions, authorities, and values by presenting them as perverse or inadmissible.

The first evangelizers in Latin America generally used the method of baptizing first and proceeding to catechesis afterward.

"After the Indians gave the Spaniards a very warm reception and offered abundant food, the children were baptized, which was the first matter customarily undertaken...."⁴⁵

There is a clear continuity with the procedures of Spain's still recent Reconquista: advance, preach, baptize, and raise crosses, churches, and new settlements for Christ.

The missionaries' education was also cited to justify this method. The first evangelizers in the Americas, especially the Franciscans, belonged to the school of Joachim of Fiore. Moreover, according to Pope Boniface VIII's bull *Unam sanctam* (1302), no one could be saved without being baptized in the Catholic Church and subject to the Roman Pontiff. For this reason, the first American missionaries hastened to baptize Indigenous people, hoping to catechize them later while "the end approached." The missionaries also maintained that the conversion of the entire world to the Catholic faith had to be completed before the end of the world.

Their commitment to this task, or this belief, was such that cases occurred like the one Las Casas recounts:

"They dismembered the child, although before he finally died a friar baptized him."⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, bk. 3, chap. 29, 532-534.

⁴⁶ Las Casas, *Brevísima relación*, 76.

Despite this, the first evangelizers in Latin America assigned importance to catechesis, but at an adult age; their capacity for catechetical instruction extended only to those already baptized. Catechesis was not highly active during the first ten years of evangelization, because Indigenous languages first had to be learned. The first major obstacle encountered by Europeans and Americans attempting to understand one another in this "strategy" was the absence of a common language. It is estimated that at the time the Americas contained 125 language families and 600 languages, many of them difficult to learn. Missionaries therefore resorted to general languages, meaning those that had achieved the widest circulation.

Missionaries likewise moved quickly from mime and gesture to the use of interpreters. After recognizing the imprecision of translations, however, they began to study the languages themselves. Dictionaries, grammars, catechisms, confession manuals, and sermon collections consequently appeared in Indigenous languages and in languages studied by the friars.

Given the organization of the Hispanic Empire, the Church functioned to a significant degree as an institution responsible for and conscious of the Hispanic worldview, since ecclesiastics controlled the universities, schools, printing presses, and other cultural institutions.

Most of the Hispanic intellectual elite consisted of priests. Moreover, no member of the intellectual elite who was not a missionary traveled to the Americas to perform a cultural function. This fact meant that nobles and warriors, or ordinary colonists, traveled to the Americas to defend the interests of the Crown or the Patronage, while the Church became effectively committed to the evangelization and acculturation of the discovered peoples. In other words,

"The specifically Christian existential understanding, the faith and living tradition that by its nature transcends every human culture or civilization, became bound to the 'ethical-mythical core' of a particular culture, the Hispanic."⁴⁷

The Hispanic people and Christianity became almost identical. For the conquistador, this identity was nearly always absolute: being Spanish and being Christian were one and the same. The same was true from the Indian's perspective: being Spanish, belonging to Spanish civilization, and being Christian were identical.

"Only the missionary body, and not all of it, gradually discovered the need to distinguish clearly between 'Hispanism' and 'Christianity,' between the understanding of the Christian faith and the 'ethical-mythical core' of Hispanic civilization."⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Dussel, *Historia de la Iglesia en América Latina*, 65.

⁴⁸ Dussel, *Historia de la Iglesia en América Latina*, 67.

3.3. Norm and Execution in the Foundation of the Mission

Before turning to subsequent developments, it is useful to consider how the texts examined in this chapter organized missionary action. Read as a compiled rule, these documents do not merely declare an evangelizing purpose: they distribute powers, authorize operations, and establish conditions of legitimacy. The interpretive procedure consists of identifying four elements: the applicable normative corpus, the subjects authorized to act, the operations that the norm imposes upon or permits them to perform, and the effective scope that remains between what is prescribed and what is executable.

The corpus applicable to this initial stage is limited and precise. The Alexandrine bulls of 1493 establish title and purpose; *Piis fidelium* authorizes the dispatch of religious personnel; and the instruction issued to Nicolás de Ovando in 1501, together with the supplementary provisions of Zaragoza, translates that purpose into concrete administrative duties. These are distinct levels: the first establishes the foundation, the second authorizes agents, and the third establishes the procedure of⁴⁹ government. The efficacy of the whole resides in none of them separately, but in the chain that

⁴⁹ Bulls *Inter caetera* and *Piis fidelium*, in Giménez Fernández, *Nuevas consideraciones*; "Instrucción al comendador de Lares," in Moya Pons, *Después de Colón*.

permits the foundation to be invoked in justification of the procedure.

The authorized subjects appear in a hierarchy. The monarchs receive the pontifical commission and become the holders of the obligation; the governor acts as a delegated executor, with power to organize settlements and labor; designated religious personnel operate as agents of doctrine, but without authority over the distribution of labor; and colonists, upon receiving Indians, assume a subsidiary duty to instruct them. This fourth delegation is decisive because it transfers the obligation to evangelize to the very subject whose economic interest depends upon the labor of those whom he is required to instruct.

The prescribed operations are expressed through verbs of obligation of varying intensity. The norm commands the dispatch of upright and learned men, the pursuit of conversion, the inducement of the native population, their reduction into settlements and instruction in doctrine, and prohibits permitting harm to befall them. None of these verbs is accompanied by a deadline, a measure of results, or an authority responsible for verification. The prohibition of harm, formulated in absolute terms, lacks a determinate sanction; the obligation to instruct specifies neither minimum content, language, nor duration.

This asymmetry creates the scope at issue. Between the norm and its execution lies not a void, but an administered space: the encomendero may declare the duty of instruction satisfied through minimal practices; the governor may subordinate doctrine to production without contradicting any text; and the religious agent, who does bear the specific duty, lacks authority to intervene in the organization of labor. Two material constraints documented by the chapter compound the problem: the very small number of agents available during the first years and the financing of worship through tithes, which incorporated the clergy into the same extractive circuit it was expected to supervise.

The result is not noncompliance in the strict sense. It is a selective execution that satisfies the declarative level and disables the operational level, without requiring any authority to assume the cost of the contradiction. This description makes it possible to formulate precisely the problem that runs through the following chapters: when Las Casas's denunciation states that evangelization is not taking place, it is not recording the absence of norms, but the existence of a procedure in which the obligation was assigned to those with the least incentive to execute it and the least exposure to oversight.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ On the structural character of delegation to the encomendero, see Zavala, *La encomienda indiana*.

CHAPTER IV

The Beginning of Missionary Work

The arrival of religious personnel and the progressive organization of the Church make it possible to examine the distance between mandate and practice. Missionary work developed within a colonial structure in which coexistence, catechesis, encomienda, jurisdiction, and exploitation could overlap. This chapter follows that tension at the operational level: how evangelization was organized, which actors carried it out, and how their procedures were conditioned by the institutions and interests present in the conquered territories.

4.1. The Beginning of Missionary Work

Evangelization might be said to have begun with Columbus's arrival on October 12, 1492, when he planted a cross in the land he had discovered. The Mediterranean merchant, however, was not prepared for missionary action, although he never excluded it from his purposes. More explicitly, it may be said that on November 27, 1493, "American evangelization began when Columbus's second voyage reached Hispaniola with the aforementioned Juan Boyl."

Moreover, in 1511 the first three permanent dioceses of Spanish America were erected: Santo Domingo and Concepción de la Vega in Hispaniola, and San Juan de Puerto Rico.

"The monarchs ... petitioned Pope Julius II, as I have said, to erect churches and create bishops; he erected a metropolitan church and head of the archbishopric, which he called Hyaguatensis. I have been unable to determine in which province and place the monarchs intended to establish and request it, and the pope to construct it, unless it was in the province of Xaraguá, which in this island's prosperity was as its court.... As a bishopric, he erected another that he named Bayunensis; and I do not know where he intended to locate this one ... and he named the other cathedral church Maguensis, which must have been in La Vega...."⁵¹

Over time, these churches, dioceses, and bishoprics would change location, and Las Casas is mistaken in some particulars. After Santo Domingo, established in 1511 as noted above, came Puerto Rico (1511), Concepción de la Vega (1512), and the abbey of Jamaica (1515). In 1547, Santo Domingo was elevated to an archdiocese and became the head of the Church in the Caribbean.

It may be said that evangelization in the Americas initially lacked missionary organization. Neither the religious orders, the Casa de Contratación, nor the monarchy yet possessed a clear plan for conducting missions in the new lands. "Everything was the

⁵¹ Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, bk. 3, chap. 1, 433.

product of improvisation," since America had been discovered unexpectedly. Clerics and religious personnel, both priests and lay brothers, therefore arrived with various conquistadors or merchants.

Within this context, the arrival of the first missionaries rested on three elements. The first was the assistance that monarchs, as Christian rulers, were required to provide during the opening stages of the conquest. In fulfillment of their obligations toward the Church, Ferdinand the Catholic and Charles I financed travel, equipment, and the material means of establishing missions in American territory. Second, the receptiveness of the conquistadors favored a warm welcome, since they sought to give their wars of conquest a veneer of doctrinal and even holy mission, in the manner of medieval crusaders. Finally, growing denunciations of colonists' abuses against the Indians made necessary the presence of men who, from the perspective of the period, could impose order and meaning upon a chaotic world.

The first order to reach the Americas was the Franciscan Order, which had established itself on Hispaniola by 1500.

"There came ... twelve friars of Saint Francis, religious men, who brought a prelate named Friar Alonso del Espinal, a devout

and venerable man, and then the Order of Saint Francis came here with the express purpose of establishing itself."⁵²

The first Dominicans, members of the Order of Preachers, arrived beginning in 1510.

In this sense, the evangelization of the island of Santo Domingo began only in 1500 with the dispatch of the Franciscan mission, which was enlarged by seventeen new religious personnel in 1502. In 1505, the Franciscans established the mission of the West Indies.

The scandals within the Spanish community and the disregard shown by the Crown and colonists for the welfare of the Indians "were being observed by a group of men who arrived in Hispaniola in September 1510 intending to preach the Gospel in the new lands of the Indies." They were Dominicans led by Father Friar Pedro de Córdoba, who was twenty-eight years old at the time:

"In the year 1510, I believe in the month of September, Divine Providence brought the Order of Saint Dominic to this island.... The primary mover, and the one whom God divinely inspired to bring the Order here, was a great religious of the Order named Friar Domingo de Mendoza, brother of Father Friar García de Loaysa.... For his holy purpose, he found at hand a religious named Friar Pedro de Córdoba.... Father Friar

⁵² Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, bk. 2, chap. 3, 214.

Domingo de Mendoza found this blessed man [Friar Pedro de Córdoba] disposed to assist him in pursuing this enterprise, and he persuaded another, named Father Friar Antonio de Montesino."⁵³

According to Las Casas, the life of this small religious community was one of extreme poverty. In addition to lacking material means, "these friars had decided to observe the rules and vows of the Order with even greater rigor and refrained even from begging alms for their own subsistence." Their principal objective was to preach the Gospel to the Indians.

Antonine Tibesar suggests that Las Casas, because of his sympathies toward his Order, exaggerates at this point in describing the conditions under which these friars lived. He portrays them as exceptionally difficult and uncomfortable, regretting that the Dominican is the only source for this account.

"This and other observations by Tibesar appear to gain force when one recalls that, despite their reinforced vows of poverty, the Dominicans had secured several grants from the Crown, as may be seen in the Royal Decree of Tordesillas of November 20, 1510, ordering that the Dominicans be favored and given good sites for their monasteries."⁵⁴

The initial period of this religious group's residence in Hispaniola likewise appears to have been marked by almost total

⁵³ Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, bk. 2, chap. 54, 381-382.

⁵⁴ Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, bk. 2, chap. 54, 381-382.

social marginalization and a lack of integration with the other Europeans.

The presence in Hispaniola of two "rival" orders, the Dominicans and the Franciscans, who had already been there for ten years when the Dominicans arrived, together with the fact that Christianizing work extended beyond the evangelization of a few Indigenous boys who were sons of chiefs, stimulated Dominican apostolic zeal and "led them openly to confront a system in which encomenderos and Franciscans appeared to coexist."

The orders fundamentally disagreed over the method of evangelization and over determining when a catechumen could be considered a convert and when he met the precise conditions for receiving the Eucharist.

By the end of the following year, approximately a year and a half after their arrival on the island, the Dominicans had seen enough to become convinced that something was gravely wrong with the island's supposed "program of evangelization." Their sound theological education at Salamanca enabled the friars to undertake a mature reflection on the contradictions between proclaiming the Good News of salvation and the reality surrounding them.

In 1511, therefore, the Dominican group changed its mode of action. It began to preach from public pulpits against the exploitation of the Indians and "to declare the state of sin in which our countrymen who held and oppressed these people lived."

Missionaries were thus also called upon to act as defenders of Indigenous people against abuses by encomenderos and officials, whom they continually reminded that the Indigenous population stood equal to them before God.

In that year, 1511, the Dominican friar Antonio de Montesinos opened the way for hundreds of denunciations of the mistreatment inflicted upon the Indians by making such abuses public in a sermon whose resonance reached Spain.

"For a very small sector of opinion in the Antilles, matters were already clear by approximately 1510: the Indians were fully human, though manifestly pagan, and identifiable with the innocent 'noble savage' of the Golden Age. The courageous sermon of the Dominican Antonio de Montesinos belongs to this line of thought. In 1511, he directly denounced all those who treated the Indians cruelly; denied them any right to subject the native people to servitude or wage war upon them; recalled that the Indians had lived in peace until the colonists arrived with their greed and sins; and proclaimed that the Indians were not beasts, but human beings with rational souls whom a true Christian should love as brothers, not oppress as servants. Montesino's admirable sermon was only the beginning of a

forceful defense of the Indians, based on the Christian premise that all human beings are brothers and equal before God."⁵⁵

He thus charted the course for the struggle to defend the Indian against exploitation by the conquistador.

"Father Friar Antonio Montesino possessed the gift of preaching; he was extremely severe in reproving vice and, above all, highly impassioned and most effective in his sermons and words. To him ... they entrusted the first sermon on this subject [the defense of the Indians], which was so new to the Spaniards of this island, though its novelty consisted in nothing more than affirming that killing these people was a greater sin than killing bedbugs. Because it was Advent, they agreed that the sermon should be preached on the fourth Sunday.... They invited the second Admiral, who governed the island, the king's officials, and all the learned jurists who were there.... [...] All willingly agreed, [...] for each already wished to hear what they had so often been told concerned them...."⁵⁶

"Vox clamantis in deserto," the friar began, quoting John 1:23, "you are all in mortal sin, and in it you live and die, because of the cruelty and tyranny you inflict upon these innocent victims...."

He continued:

"Tell me, by what right and by what justice do you hold these Indians in such cruel and horrible servitude? By what authority

⁵⁵ Céspedes del Castillo, *América hispánica*, 228.

⁵⁶ Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, bk. 3, chap. 3, 440-441.

have you waged such detestable wars against these peoples who lived meekly and peacefully in their lands, where, through unheard-of deaths and ravages, you have destroyed infinitely many of them? How do you keep them so oppressed and exhausted, without giving them food or tending to their illnesses, so that from the excessive labor you impose they fall ill and die, or rather, you kill them, in order to extract and acquire gold each day? And what care do you take that someone instruct them, so they may know their God and Creator, be baptized, hear Mass, and observe feast days and Sundays? Are these not men? Do they not possess rational souls? Are you not obliged to love them as yourselves? Do you not understand this? Do you not feel it? How can you remain asleep in such profoundly lethargic slumber? Know for certain that, in the state in which you live, you can no more be saved than the Moors or Turks who lack and reject the faith of Jesus Christ."⁵⁷

Christmas Day 1511 was chosen for this sermon. It recounted, portrayed, and denounced the conditions in which the Indians lived, laboring under coercive and unhealthy conditions. It ultimately became a grave denunciation and accusation of the Crown, which was presented as merely concealing the entire exploitative system for its own benefit.

The discourse left them astonished and confused, "many as though deprived of their senses, others more hardened, and some slightly contrite, but none, as I later understood, converted."

⁵⁷ Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, bk. 3, chap. 4, 441-442.

Friar Bartolomé de las Casas is the only known source on this subject, and following Montesinos the controversy over the conquest of America began:

"By this time, the religious of Saint Dominic had considered the sorrowful life and exceedingly harsh captivity suffered by the native people of this island, and how they were being consumed, while the Spaniards who possessed them paid no more heed than if they were useless animals. After their deaths, the Spaniards regretted only their loss in the gold mines and other enterprises. Yet they showed no greater compassion or kindness toward those who remained in the rigor and severity with which they customarily oppressed, exhausted, and destroyed them. In all this there were degrees among the Spaniards.... Some were exceedingly cruel, without pity or mercy, considering only how to enrich themselves with the blood of those wretched people...."⁵⁸

Montesinos's discourse rested upon a humanitarian principle and the Christian philosophical concept of the Indian's human nature, his status as a neighbor, and his right to freedom. His denunciation was therefore directed not only against individuals, but also against the institution governing the entire system, the Crown.

"Thus ... they began to compare right with fact, as spiritual men and great friends of God, and to discuss among themselves the

⁵⁸ Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, bk. 1, chap. 177, 174.

falsity and enormity of so unprecedented an injustice, saying: 'Are these not men? Must the precepts of charity and justice not be observed and fulfilled toward them? ... Are we not obliged to preach the law of Christ to them and labor with all diligence to convert them?...'"⁵⁹

The first question to resolve was whether the Indians were rational beings, something that, astonishingly, few considered during the initial period. For a significant portion of the clergy, evangelization was the sole justification for the Spanish presence in the Americas, and it was the duty of the Spanish monarchs to devote every effort to Christianizing the Indigenous population. Montesinos not only affirmed the humanity and rational character of the Indians, but also established that the Spaniards had no right to exploit them or compel them to serve.

In several writings, Las Casas expresses this certainty held by "his own," the Dominicans:

"The Indians possess the fullness of humanity.... All these peoples are souls, created and formed in the image and likeness of the Most High Trinity; all those peoples and all the nations of that entire world are free, and they do not lose that freedom by receiving and recognizing Your Majesty as universal lord. Rather, if their commonwealths suffered any defects, Your

⁵⁹ Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, bk. 1, chap. 177, 174.

Majesty's dominion should remedy and purify them, so that they might enjoy an improved freedom."⁶⁰

"In no way is it possible that an entire race or nation alone ... should be so completely stupid, feeble-minded, and idiotic as to possess absolutely no capacity to receive evangelical doctrine, although it is true that everywhere human beings differ from one another in the greater or lesser subtlety and ingenuity of their intellect and reason."⁶¹

This "challenge" issued by Montesinos in the name of the Dominicans was immediately understood by all concerned. On the very day of the discourse, the king's officials therefore decided to punish the friar. They also asked Father Córdoba to require the friar to account for his words and explain why they "could not possess Indians when the King, who was lord of all the Indies, had granted them." Father Córdoba and the other Dominicans expressed solidarity with the accused by "denying absolution to encomenderos until they set the Indians free."

"In response to the discontent and anger, the father vicar replied that what the friar had preached represented his own opinion, will, and consent and that of them all. After examining and discussing the matter thoroughly among themselves, with much counsel and mature deliberation, they had determined that it should be preached as evangelical truth and as necessary to the salvation of all the Spaniards and of the Indians of this

⁶⁰ Las Casas, *Doctrina*, X.

⁶¹ Las Casas, *Del único modo*, chap. 5, § 0, 3.

island, whom they saw perish each day without receiving more care than beasts of the field. They were bound to this by divine precept and by the profession they had made in baptism, first as Christians and then as friars who preached the truth. In doing so, they did not intend to disserve the king, who had sent them here to preach what they believed necessary for souls, but to serve him with complete fidelity. They held it certain that, once His Highness was fully informed of what was taking place here and of what they had preached concerning it...."⁶²

The protest of the viceroy who sanctioned Montesinos had no effect, since he was told that the sermon expressed the opinion of everyone in the monastery, the Dominican community, "which had considered and discussed what its representative [Montesinos] should say at the appointed time and in the presence of the authorities."

"All agreed that the friar should retract the following Sunday what he had preached, and they reached such blindness that they told the friars that, if they failed to do so, they should prepare their meager belongings to embark for Spain...."⁶³

This group of authorities secured Montesinos's agreement to preach again the following Sunday and retract everything he had denounced. Before an astonished congregation, however, he did

⁶² Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, bk. 3, chap. 4, 443.

⁶³ Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, bk. 3, chap. 4, 443-444.

nothing more than denounce Spanish practices toward the Indians once again, with even greater vehemence and severity than before.

"He began to establish the foundations of his sermon and to recount everything he had preached in the previous sermon, corroborating with further reasons and authorities his assertion that those peoples were held unjustly and tyrannically in oppression and exhaustion.... When his sermon ended, he returned home, while everyone in the church remained in an uproar, grumbling and more indignant against the friars than before."⁶⁴

Seeing that direct action against the friars was impossible, the authorities decided to write to the king to report the situation and accuse the Dominicans of "sowing new doctrines."

Ferdinand thus recognized the danger posed by movements that questioned the Crown's right to exercise sovereignty and unlimited authority over the lands and peoples of the New World. He therefore responded rapidly while exerting pressure upon the head of the Dominicans in Spain.

At the same time, these sermons would not have been regarded as so dangerous had Hispaniola not contained a highly receptive body of colonists who possessed no Indians or had been deprived of them. This cannot be described as a revolt, but it may be identified as a problem serious enough for the authorities "to be

⁶⁴ Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, bk. 3, chap. 5, 444-445.

compelled to appeal to the Crown for answers against the Dominicans."

One course taken by the dispute was a revival of the longstanding rivalry between Dominicans and Franciscans. Father Friar Alonso de Espinal, superior of the Franciscans living in Hispaniola, "appears to have been sufficiently committed to the encomenderos that he could not refuse to defend them at court against the accusations Montesinos had made against them."

Las Casas seeks to be charitable toward this religious: "quite venerable ... but not learned."

The protest of the Dominicans in the Americas did not cease, and Friar Antonio de Montesinos was appointed to defend their position before the court. This produced a controversy because it confronted the economic interests of the colonists. In defense of his arguments, Montesinos presented a memorial based principally upon a passage from Ezekiel, Chapter 34, which he had read in Saint Thomas:

"Vae pastoribus Israel qui pascebant semet ipsos."

The Junta of Burgos convened in 1512 to decide the case. It resulted in the promulgation of the Laws of Burgos (1512-1513), which sought to regulate Indigenous labor and evangelization without dismantling the system of colonial exploitation. Their

limitations were evident: they did not halt the violence, coerced labor, or demographic catastrophe affecting the populations of the Antilles. The junta reached the following conclusions:

"First ... the Indians are free, and Your Highness and the queen ... ordered that they be treated as free, which shall be done. Second, they shall be instructed in the faith, as the pope commands in his bull.... Third, they shall work, but the labor must be such that it does not impede instruction in the faith and is beneficial to them, the commonwealth, and Your Highness.... Fourth, this labor shall be such as they can endure, giving them time for recreation.... Fifth, they shall have their own homes and property.... Sixth, they shall have intercourse with the settlers who travel there.... Seventh, they shall receive suitable wages for their labor, not in money, but in clothing and other goods for their homes."⁶⁵

The most prominent figures in the debate over this momentous subject were Friar Bartolomé de las Casas, Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, and Francisco de Vitoria. Through their writings, they developed bodies of doctrine that supported the legitimation of the conquest from different perspectives.

While these issues were being resolved, evangelizing work continued. Small groups of Dominican, Augustinian, and Franciscan friars gradually embarked, first for New Spain beginning in 1523, and later for Peru beginning in 1534.

⁶⁵ Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, bk. 3, chap. 8, 455.

4.2. The Advance of the Missionaries

In 1513, Vasco Núñez de Balboa crossed the Isthmus of Panama and sighted the ocean he named the South Sea. The ecclesiastical organization of Tierra Firme also began during these years. The configuration of the first mainland dioceses was a gradual process subject to changes of see and jurisdiction. It is therefore more accurate to speak of early episcopal institutionalization in Castilla de Oro than to attribute without qualification a single status as the "first" mainland diocese to Panama. Expeditions departed from this area for Central America and subsequently for South America.

"In those places where encomiendas were not distributed because of the unhealthy climate, rugged terrain, distance from settlements, or any other reason, as occurred throughout most of the continent, missionaries from the religious orders were the protagonists of conquest (evangelization)."⁶⁶

Those first missionaries entered forests, deserts, and mountain ranges where the Indians lived dispersed and, risking their lives, gathered them in a specified place. With their assistance, the missionaries built a combined dwelling and chapel where they taught doctrine and celebrated Mass. The Indians erected their homes around it, forming what were called doctrinas, which

⁶⁶ Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, bk. 3, chap. 34, 136.

became the origins of many parishes, bishoprics, towns, and cities in the Americas.

A religious remained there for years until the doctrina had grown and become an established parish. It then passed into other hands, while the missionaries said a final farewell to their converted faithful and proceeded to another region in search of unknown places, where they learned other languages, communicated with other Indians, and formed new doctrinas, repeating the history.

Thus, in the sixteenth century, missionaries from the Franciscan, Dominican, and Mercedarian orders evangelized the territories of present-day Guatemala, Nicaragua, Honduras, and El Salvador.

The evangelization of Mexico deserves particular mention. In 1516, Hernán Cortés brought the Mercedarian Father Bartolomé de Olmedo on his expedition to Mexican territory. The systematic evangelization of Mexico, however, did not begin until 1524, with the arrival of the first twelve Franciscan missionaries. Nevertheless, from the outset, through the presence of Friar Bartolomé de Olmedo and the secular priest Juan Díaz, Christianity was presented to the Indians.

"With the presence of the twelve Franciscan apostles, systematic evangelization may be said to have begun in Mexico, by which

we mean the most important missionary effort in all the Americas."⁶⁷

"At this time, twelve religious of Saint Francis arrived, all foreigners from Picardy, highly devout persons of considerable learning and distinction and great zeal, to devote themselves to converting these peoples...."⁶⁸

On May 13 or 14, 1524, the "Twelve Apostles of New Spain" in fact disembarked at Ulúa. They were twelve Franciscans of exceptional courage and extensive learning who began systematic evangelization.

This evangelization was directed principally toward Indians already conquered by Hernán Cortés and pacified by force of arms. On July 2, 1526, twelve Dominicans also arrived. On May 22, 1533, the Augustinians established a presence with seven fathers.

The beginnings were modest, but new missionaries arrived each year, and the creole population soon produced vocations. In 1559, the Franciscans in New Spain (Mexico) had eighty houses and 380 religious; the Dominicans, forty houses and 210 religious; and the Augustinians, forty houses and 212 religious. Religious personnel traveled on foot from the low-lying coasts to elevations of 2,200 meters in Mexico or 2,500 in Toluca; crossed innumerable rivers

⁶⁷ Dussel, *Historia general de la Iglesia en América Latina*, 309.

⁶⁸ Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, bk. 3, chap. 95, 152.

(Motolinía recounts crossing twenty-five in only ten kilometers), tropical forests fraught with danger, parched and desolate deserts, and difficult snow-covered summits; and overcame unfamiliar diseases, millions of insects, unsafe roads, and, finally, the immense diversity of peoples, races, languages, and religions they sought to evangelize.

Beginning with this initial conquest and the establishment of systematic evangelization, dioceses were founded throughout the conquered territories. The Diocese of Carolense was erected in 1519; in 1526 it became Tlaxcala. It was followed by Mexico in 1530, made an archdiocese in 1546; Comayagua (1531); Nicaragua (1531); Coro in Venezuela (1531); Santa Marta and Cartagena (1534); Guatemala in the same year; Antequera (1535); Michoacán (1536); Chiapa (1539); Guadalajara (1548); Vera Paz (1561); Yucatán (1561); and finally Durango in 1620.

In this way, the hierarchy gradually assumed responsibility for the Church and thus ensured the continuity of missionary efforts. It included distinguished bishops such as Zumárraga in Mexico, Quiroga in Michoacán, Fuenleal in Santo Domingo, and Maraver in Guadalajara.

The passage from norm to practice reveals another characteristic of this structure. A compiled rule does not in itself guarantee the moral outcome it proclaims: it determines a field of possible actions

and a regime of justification. In missionary experience, terms such as doctrina, reducción, encomienda, conversion, and pacification could operate as procedural categories. Their effective meaning depended upon the agent executing them, material conditions, and the concrete relationship among mission, labor, and coercion. This difference between formulation and execution would be central to Las Casas's criticism.

4.3. Norm and Execution in Missionary Expansion

The expansion described in this chapter occurred under a normative corpus denser than that of the foundational stage. To the bulls and governmental instructions were added the Laws of Burgos of 1512, the capitulations regulating each individual enterprise, the travel licenses controlling which religious personnel could embark, and the formula of the *requerimiento* that had to be read to populations before any armed action. Density did not mean greater determinacy: as the levels multiplied, so too did the available combinations for justifying opposing decisions.

The distribution of authorized subjects changed significantly. The mendicant orders obtained their own jurisdiction over religious instruction and acted with relative independence from the colonial episcopal hierarchy, which allowed them to gather populations and maintain criteria distinct from those of civil government. At the

same time, the encomendero retained his subsidiary duty of instruction, and the captain of the enterprise received authority to execute the requerimiento. Three different agents were thus authorized to intervene upon the same population for purposes the norm declared convergent.

The prescribed operations can be organized into two series. The first comprises the verbs of instruction: to gather, reduce into settlements, teach doctrine, baptize, and monitor the persistence of rites. The second comprises the verbs of subjugation: to require, accept submission, and, in the event of refusal, wage lawful war and reduce to servitude. Both series were authorized by the same corpus, and the second was conditioned upon a formal speech act: after the requerimiento was read, a negative response or silence produced the legitimacy of coercion.⁶⁹

This is the point that a reading in terms of the compiled rule makes precise. The problem of missionary expansion does not consist in executors having betrayed a peaceful norm, but in the corpus containing two equally invocable paths of execution, with the shift from one to the other depending upon a verbal procedure whose verification remained in the hands of the interested party. There is no deviation from the rule: a bifurcation is inscribed within

⁶⁹ On the administrative organization of this stage, see Céspedes del Castillo, *América hispánica*.

it. Practices incompatible with one another could therefore be presented simultaneously as fulfillment of the evangelizing mandate.

The effective scope was further widened by three conditions documented in this chapter. The number of available religious personnel was disproportionate to the extent of the territories, making prolonged instruction materially impossible in most cases. Linguistic diversity rendered the requirement of intelligible teaching inapplicable without prior investment in language learning that the norm neither ordered nor funded. The distance between the authority issuing the norm and the agent executing it reduced oversight to the executor's own report.⁷⁰

The analytical consequence is twofold. First, it explains why mass baptism could become consolidated as the dominant form of compliance: it was the only operation in the first series that was verifiable, brief, and capable of being recorded. Second, it explains why the criticism examined in Chapter VI had to be directed against religious agents themselves, not only against the conquistadors: those who administered this minimal compliance were precisely the subjects to whom the norm had assigned doctrinal authority.

⁷⁰ See Dussel, *Historia de la Iglesia en América Latina*.

CHAPTER V

Obstacles in the Evangelizing Process

Once the establishment of the mission has been reconstructed, its limitations become the central problem. Las Casas's denunciations show that evangelization did not develop in a sphere separate from the colonial economy, but in constant contact with the pursuit of wealth, forced labor, violence, and legal forms of subjugation. This chapter examines those obstacles not as incidental episodes, but as conditions capable of altering the meaning and results of the evangelizing project.

5.1. Gold and Wealth

The arrival of the Spaniards in the Americas constituted the first experience of the "face-to-face": "The Admiral [Columbus] and the others ... who had never known them" [the Indians] confronted them for the first time. The Europeans, however, immediately fell upon them: "As soon as they knew them, like most cruel wolves, tigers, and lions starved for many days, they fell upon them [the Indians]. And for the past forty years, to this very day [1552], they have done nothing but dismember, kill, distress, afflict, torment, and destroy them through strange, new, varied, and unprecedented forms of cruelty never before seen or read of."

Las Casas continues his discourse by directly attacking the entire system of European expansion and domination. For our theologian, the whole system was unjust, beginning with its fundamental project:

"They killed or caused the loss of one hundred thousand victims through the labor they imposed because of their greed for gold ... through their avarice to possess gold and wealth."⁷¹

The American conquest indeed generated a broad controversy between advocates of evangelization as the sole instrument of colonization and those who considered the use of other means lawful. In both cases, three problems remained present throughout the process of colonial settlement on the continent: relations with infidels, the power of pope and king, and just war against the Indians.

The American debate over these questions was inextricably connected to the conquest's mercantile objective, which was as important as, if not more important than, its evangelizing purpose, to the extent that Las Casas, an advocate of evangelization, had to concede space to the former:

"All things obey money, and evangelized Indians are instruments for acquiring gold."⁷²

⁷¹ Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, bk. 1, chap. 18, 101.

⁷² "Tratado comprobatorio del imperio soberano," in Las Casas, *Tratados*, 56.

Mercantilism and evangelization were two sides of the same coin, and the process of conquest cannot be understood if the importance of either is eliminated or denied. This is one of the obstacles Las Casas identifies when criticizing the friars: the Spaniards' "thirst for gold" caused those whom Las Casas called "bad Christians" to damage the friars' work.

"From the beginning until today, the Spaniards have taken no more care that the faith of Jesus Christ be preached to those peoples than if they were dogs or other beasts. Indeed, as a matter of deliberate policy, through the many afflictions and persecutions they have caused them, they have prohibited religious personnel from preaching, because it appeared to them an impediment to acquiring the gold and wealth promised by their greed."⁷³

Preaching the faith was set aside from the beginning, despite the royal mandate and the character of religious crusade that this mission was supposed to possess, and that it did possess on paper, in laws and bulls.

"On all the islands, the Indians always perished each day in the mines and in other labor, without any greater concern from one day to the next for their spiritual welfare than for their lives."⁷⁴

In the words of Sonia Corcuera de Mancera, this may be attributed to how "weariness, disenchantment, and, to a certain

⁷³ Las Casas, *Brevísima relación*, 117-118.

⁷⁴ Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, bk. 3, chap. 39, 145.

degree, frustration gradually overtook the very friars who had arrived in New Spain intending to construct ... a new world."

Along the same lines, Las Casas uses this obstacle to enter the debate surrounding the discourse of Conquest:

"The most pernicious blindness always possessed, until today, by those who have governed the Indies in arranging and ordering the conversion and salvation of those peoples has reached such depths that they have devised, implemented, and commanded that *requerimientos* be made to the Indians, requiring them to come to the faith and render obedience to the kings of Castile, failing which war shall be waged upon them with fire and blood, and they shall be killed and taken captive, and so forth. This conversion and salvation have always, in truth, been postponed in deed and effect, even though in words they have displayed, adorned, or concealed something else."⁷⁵

He places the established discourse of conquest into question: the discourse of religious crusade, which treated evangelization, the conversion of souls, and their salvation as its primary objective, while in fact "they displayed something else" and sought their own benefit in the name of faith. As noted above, conquest was supposed to possess an essentially missionary meaning in the intentions of the monarchs and in the laws and decrees issued by the Crown and Council of the Indies. In practice, however, that

⁷⁵ Las Casas, *Brevísima relación*, 50.

missionary meaning was often denied by concrete actions that contradicted what the laws proposed.

On this subject, as on others, Las Casas draws no distinction among those living there. His expression "those who have governed the Indies" includes bishops and the religious leaders present. He describes them as blind to what was taking place and obstructing their missionary work:

"The capitulation concluded between the monarchs and the first bishops ... reveals the blindness then prevailing among the members of the king's Council, the king's limited knowledge of the destruction of these wretched peoples, and no less the ignorance of the bishops and the blindness of the Council members who advised the king to compel the bishops, through an almost violent form of contract, to bind themselves not to impede, directly or indirectly, the Indians from continuing to extract gold."

The bishops' ignorance described by Las Casas is evident, since they neither saw nor sought reasons to remove the Indians from the gold mines or slave labor for any cause, "although they should have been cautious not to bind themselves to what might be unjust and evil, concerning which they possessed no certain knowledge. Still more, the act itself might have aroused suspicion when it spoke of extracting gold and serving, unless perhaps they

imagined that extracting gold was no different from gathering fruit from trees."

5.2. Destruction

Hispanic expansion proceeded in the manner of the Roman Empire, the kingdoms of the medieval Crusades, and the Arab caliphates: a region was occupied militarily, pacified, placed under organized government, and its population converted to the religion of the invaders. In the Roman case, their gods were taken and incorporated into the Pantheon.

"This was normal for a terrestrial empire! But if that empire called itself Christian, the missionaries and prophets could do no less than rise and cry out to heaven, as Montesinos did...."⁷⁶

In Las Casas's texts, as in those of many analysts and scholars of the conquest, an evangelizing model based on power becomes visible: political and economic power appropriates the Church under the pretext of helping it evangelize. This may be described as caesaropapism, which was surely the toll the European Church had to pay for a long period in order to travel the paths of evangelization. Under this model, moreover, a people evangelized from outside develops its own syncretism and remains only superficially Christianized.

⁷⁶ Dussel, *Historia de la Iglesia en América Latina*, 80-89.

This model is represented by the theology of Ginés de Sepúlveda, Las Casas's adversary. His ideas in *Democrates* alter may be summarized as follows:

"Saint Augustine affirms that it is a greater evil for a soul to perish without baptism than for innumerable people, even innocent ones, to have their throats cut."

In other words, religion, and the eternal salvation it supposedly brings, is so important that it authorizes any harm, whether physical or material, to free the Indians from idolatry and, in Sepúlveda's words, heresy.

Whether the intention of the person arguing in this way is good or bad, it appears clear that conquistadors found here a justification for almost all their excesses, and that such theology was responsible, or at least complicit, in many atrocities of the conquest. Las Casas therefore rose against it, describing it not as Christian, but as Islamic, calling it "the religion of Muhammad." He opposed to it one of his most famous statements:

"A pagan Indian alive is worth more than a Christian Indian dead." That is, this may be read to mean "that Christianity grants the human person a freedom and dignity so great that, without respect for them, religion itself loses its value."⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Rimli, *Historia universal*, 411.

At the culmination of his argument, Las Casas cites Matthew 5:45: God is not a God of victories, but "makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." It follows that Christianity must not cause pagans any material harm under the pretext of evangelizing them, for God himself granted them "the heavens and the earth ... benefits common to all human beings without distinction, and made them natural lords of all these things, no more some than others."

It follows that the attempt to evangelize through power or threats constitutes a great "blindness among Christians" and an obstacle to the evangelizing process.

Nor should it be forgotten that the Church, prudently organized to confront the Reformation, may have reduced its missionary flexibility, although such hardening occurred much earlier: its origins must be sought in the early Middle Ages, the Crusades, and the struggles against Islamic power.

In the *Treatise Proving the Sovereign Empire*, Las Casas writes that the foundations of Christianity repudiated force as an instrument for expanding the faith; the Gospel could be received only through the free and spontaneous will of infidels. Discovery granted no right to the kings of Castile or to the Church. Indigenous kings were sovereigns, and the Indians were the owners of the Americas.

The title of the kings of Castile to universal and supreme dominion was founded upon preaching the Gospel and converting the Indigenous population. This principle was what enabled the Church to cede them that right. In no way, however, did this act eliminate the sovereign rights and freedom of the native peoples, nor their ownership of lands and estates.

By 1535, Las Casas was fully convinced that preaching the faith was the only justification and foundation for the dominion of the Spanish monarchs in the Americas:

"And this, Sire, is the first step and the gateway into these lands: first, that these peoples accept God through faith and as their God, and afterward the king as their lord. For the final cause and entire foundation of Your Majesty, as king of Castile, possessing action and title in these lands, is the preaching of the faith."⁷⁸

Likewise, "Christendom was beginning its glorious expansion, and pontifical bulls provided theological justification for the plunder of peoples...."

"Upon these meek sheep, endowed by their Maker and Creator with the qualities stated above, the Spaniards, as soon as they knew them, fell like most cruel wolves, tigers, and lions starved for many days. And for the past forty years, to this very day, and today still, they have done nothing but dismember, kill, distress,

⁷⁸ Las Casas, "Carta a un personaje de la corte," in Giménez Fernández, *Nuevas consideraciones*, 144.

afflict, torment, and destroy them through strange, new, varied, and unprecedented forms of cruelty never before seen, read, or heard of...."⁷⁹

The following passage again shows that Las Casas describes Spanish treatment of the Indians as profoundly inhuman and destructive. As he himself explains, the conquest was the destruction of the Indies:

"It should be noted ... that in all parts of the Indies where Christians have gone and passed, they have always inflicted upon the Indians all the aforesaid cruelties, massacres, tyrannies, and abominable oppressions against those innocent peoples. They added many more, greater, and newer forms of torment and always became more cruel, because God increasingly abandoned them to fall and collapse into reprobate judgment and feeling."⁸⁰

These accounts help explain the subsequent emergence of the Black Legend. Those who support this legend criticize the work of Spain and Portugal, describing them as intolerant because of the tabula rasa method, exploitative because of the extraction of gold and silver, enslaving because of their conduct toward the Indian, and finally superficial, "because the new Christianity established in the Americas was merely superficial and quasi-pagan." Others, who defend the Hispanist legend in the present day, arrange the

⁷⁹ Las Casas, *Brevísima relación*, 34.

⁸⁰ Las Casas, *Brevísima relación*, 45.

period's documents and testimony in such a way as to present Spain as so profoundly missionary that it is almost identified with the Catholic Church, and even characterize its work as perfect. To do so, they rely more upon the letter of laws and documents than upon reality. Yet for the native peoples of the Americas, life showed that wherever Christians were present, destruction followed.

In this sense, while studying the bulls of Alexander VI, Bartolomé analyzes the issue and demonstrates that the pope never justified war or violence as a means of propagating the faith in the Indies. Queen Isabella herself defended the Indians and prohibited others from "causing them any type of harm in their persons or belongings."

The truth is that the Catholic Monarchs pursued a policy of military expansion, mercantilist economics, and evangelization that sought to unify Europe and the world within the Catholic Church under the sign of the cross. Such a generous purpose required means, however, and those means were purchased with the gold and silver that the Indians extracted from American mines.

"The exploitation of these precious metals, like the colony's agricultural and livestock production, established an entire

socioeconomic system with artificial and monopolistic privileges that in practice obstructed evangelization."⁸¹

The "thirst for gold," closely associated with war against Indigenous peoples, and the destruction employed to achieve that objective profoundly hindered the evangelization of the Indies and constituted an obstacle that missionaries had to confront.

"They found all the settlements they encountered empty because reports of them had already spread throughout the land, and the people had long heard of the Gospel they preached and of the honor that those who called themselves Christians brought to the faith in Jesus Christ."⁸²

The obstacle becomes an even greater problem: if infidels, through the calamities of war, find themselves wounded, burdened, and anguished by the loss of their children, their property, and their own freedom, and compelled to lament their unhappy fate, what reason could voluntarily move them to listen to what is proposed concerning faith, religion, justice, and truth? How could they adhere to what is preached to them?

"If ... infidels are offended and harmed by the heavy burdens, afflictions, and intolerable losses brought by war; if, instead of the gentleness of the voice, the display of a modest countenance, the expression of meekness, the peaceful delicacy of words, and all that may delight or gently attract; if, instead of

⁸¹ Dussel, *Historia de la Iglesia en América Latina*, 90.

⁸² Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, bk. 3, chap. 43, 161.

these inducements, they encounter continuous hostile and dreadful cries; [...] the harsh and horrible din of clashing weapons that scatter corpses everywhere; [...] how is it possible to attract their souls to hear the truths of faith and religion? ... The human soul is dismayed by terror; it is disturbed, saddened, and afflicted by shouting, fear, harsh words, and still more by torments, and consequently refuses to listen and consider."⁸³

The bishop of Chiapa, who strongly repudiated these acts and was, as noted, a great advocate of Christianizing the Indians, repeatedly insisted upon this subject:

Las Casas's position is clear: if a person has already suffered irreparable evils and harms such as those caused by wars and destruction, "what will he think about ... the things he has suffered and continues to suffer, or the Christian faith and religion? Will he think about matters of which he has never heard, which he has never believed, and which he did not even dream could exist in nature?..."

"What may be expected from the forerunners of evangelical preaching under the new method devised by these men, namely, that infidel peoples must be dominated through war before the faith is preached to them? We say that they are undoubtedly forerunners not of Christ, but of the Antichrist..."⁸⁴

⁸³ Las Casas, *Del único modo*, chap. 6, § 2, 407.

⁸⁴ Las Casas, *Del único modo*, chap. 6, § 6, 459.

According to Las Casas, haste or violence, far from attracting those who were not yet Christians, repelled them, and this was precisely what occurred:

"Infidels should be given time to reflect upon the truths presented to them. No pressure, much less force, should be used to hasten their acceptance of the faith."⁸⁵

And thus "throughout all Tierra Firme, the name of Jesus Christ and the Christian religion became so infamous that no one could sufficiently describe or even imagine it."

Evangelization is also seen to occupy a secondary position. The primary aim was conquest and subjugation of the Indian, an attitude treated as the preliminary step toward Christianization.

Initial contact was generally violent rather than peaceful, and was not carried out through bishops or friars, as Las Casas demanded.

"A method contrary to the one we have been defining would be ... that infidels should first be subjected, whether they wished it or not, to the dominion of the Christian people...."⁸⁶

One of the principal reasons for Las Casas's denunciations was surely the inequality between the parties. On one side, he describes Spaniards blinded by the search for new sources of gold and

⁸⁵ Giménez Fernández and Hanke, *Bartolomé de Las Casas*, 51.

⁸⁶ Las Casas, *Del único modo*, chap. 6, § 1, 397.

wealth; on the other, people of natural goodness, humble and serene meekness, virtuous inclinations, sound intellects, and a ready or exceptionally ready disposition to receive the holy faith and be instructed in the Christian religion:

"It is evident from infinite testimony and arguments ... that the native inhabitants of this island possess a meek, peaceful, and modest natural quality and condition, that they had few, light, and almost no weapons, and that we greatly surpassed them with ours. Had we lived among them as Christians, we would have required neither weapons, arquebuses, horses, nor fierce dogs to attract them all."⁸⁷

Those who were expected to present themselves as apostles of faith and demonstrate the virtues of Christianity in those lands appear, in certain sources used by Las Casas, not as exemplary Christians, but as their moral negation. In his capacity as a historian, Las Casas transcribes part of a letter sent to the king of Castile by the bishop of the Province of Santa Marta, dated May 20, 1541:

"In these regions there are no Christians, but demons; no servants of God or king, but traitors to His law and their king. For in truth, the greatest obstacle I find to bringing Indians at war into peace, and those at peace to knowledge of our faith, is the harsh and cruel treatment that peaceful Indians receive from Christians. They are consequently so wary and alert that nothing

⁸⁷ Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, bk. 2, chap. 1, 203.

can be more hateful or abhorrent to them than the name of Christians. Throughout this land, in their language, they call them yares, which means demons; and without doubt they are right, because the deeds performed here are neither those of Christians nor of men who possess reason, but of demons...."⁸⁸

Las Casas "reverses" the discourse of conquest upheld by the Spaniards, which treated the Indians as irrational. The irrational ones are the Spaniards because they act as they do, the bishop of Chiapa asserts.

"The Spaniards immediately seize upon any of their superstitions or any response they receive from the devil to blaspheme these peoples, and they believe that because of those superstitions they have a greater right to rob, oppress, and kill them. This arises from great ignorance of the blindness, errors, superstitions, and idolatry of ancient paganism, in which Spain was no less submerged. And among our people that ignorance has always been accompanied by great malice, used to justify their cruel deeds...."⁸⁹

The bishop offers several examples of how wars undertaken by the Spaniards destroyed or harmed the friars' work. One is especially illustrative:

"[...] Father Friar Jacobo was moved to travel with four religious of his Order of Saint Francis to that kingdom to pacify, preach, and bring to Jesus Christ the remnant of those peoples [...]. I

⁸⁸ Las Casas, *Brevísima relación*, 82-83.

⁸⁹ Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, bk. 3, chap. 23, 515.

believe these religious went in the year thirty-four, sending ahead as messengers certain Indians from the Province of Mexico to ask whether the people approved of those religious entering their lands to give them knowledge of the one God, who was the true God and Lord of all the world. They entered into council and held many assemblies, first gathering extensive information concerning what kind of men these persons called fathers and friars were, what they intended, and how they differed from the Christians from whom they had received so many injuries and injustices. Finally, they agreed to receive them on condition that only they, and no Spaniards, enter their lands. The religious promised this because the viceroy of New Spain had granted them such authority and commissioned them to promise that no more Spaniards would enter there, but only religious, and that Christians would inflict no injury upon them.

They preached to them the Gospel of Christ, as they customarily did, and the holy intention of the Spanish monarchs toward them. The people developed such love and appreciation for the doctrine and example of the friars, and rejoiced so much at the news of the kings of Castile, of whom during all the preceding seven years the Spaniards had never informed them that there was any king other than the one who tyrannized and destroyed them there, that forty days after the friars entered and preached, the lords of the land brought and surrendered all their idols to be burned and afterward brought their children, whom they loved more than the light of their eyes, to be taught. They built

churches, temples, and houses for the friars, and invited them to other provinces to preach and give knowledge of God and of the man they said was the great king of Castile. Persuaded by the friars, they did something that had never been done in the Indies until that day, while all the instances fabricated by certain tyrants who destroyed those kingdoms and great lands are falsehoods and lies. Twelve or fifteen lords possessing many vassals and lands, each acting independently, assembled their peoples and obtained their votes and consent, and of their own free will subjected themselves to the lordship of the kings of Castile, receiving the Emperor, as king of Spain, as supreme and universal lord. They made certain marks as signatures, which I possess together with the testimony of the said friars.

The religious calmed them as best they could, having no answer to give. They went to find the thirty Spaniards, told them of the harms they had caused, and required them to leave. They refused and instead led the Indians to believe that the friars themselves had brought them there, which was consummate malice. Finally, the Indians resolved to kill the friars. The friars fled one night after certain Indians warned them. After they had gone, the Indians recognized the innocence and virtue of the friars and the wickedness of the Spaniards and sent messengers fifty leagues after them, begging them to return and asking forgiveness for the

disturbance they had caused. The religious, as servants of God zealous for those souls, believed them, returned to the land, and were received as angels. The Indians rendered them a thousand services, and they remained another four or five months."

Reading between the lines, Las Casas appears to tell us that in the only case in which a genuine transformation of the Indians was achieved, even to the point that they were sent as missionaries, no nonclerical Spaniards participated. He further emphasizes the effectiveness of evangelization when the Indians begged the friars to return and then received them as angels. In Las Casas's words, the participants were only "good Christians."

It is clear that the appearance of the conquistadors destroyed the friars' work and represented a considerable problem for the Christianization of the "new lands."

Las Casas also recognizes that Indigenous people distinguished between Spaniards and Christians, in contrast to the habitual identification in the Hispanic imagination between national and religious affiliation. From Indigenous experience, the Spaniard could appear as an enemy without that condition necessarily being confused with the figure of the religious.

In Spain, by contrast, something like a "temporal messianism" existed through which the destiny of nation and Church, Hispanic

Christendom, became unified, with the Hispanic nation understood as the instrument chosen by God to save the world. It was "the consciousness of being the chosen nation...."

One was Christian by virtue of being Hispanic, being baptized, and observing certain precepts of the Church, without this actually requiring conduct to be united existentially with the Gospel. The Indians, however, perceived the opposite: Spaniard and Christian were not identical.

Missionaries generally pacified the Indians through preaching, persuasion, and direct contact.

"When the religious arrived, the Indians received them as angels from heaven and listened with great affection, attention, and joy to the words that the friars were then able to make them understand."⁹⁰

The influence of Hispanic civilization nevertheless arrived gradually, and baptized Indians became part of the encomiendas. Some submitted to the system, while others withdrew to the mountains, ranges, forests, and deserts, thereby partially returning to paganism.

Las Casas offers another very clear example:

⁹⁰ Las Casas, *Brevísima relación*, 87.

"I believe ... religious went in the year thirty-four, sending ahead as messengers certain Indians from the Province of Mexico to ask whether the people approved of those religious entering their lands to give them knowledge of the one God.... Finally, they agreed to receive them on condition that only they, and no Spaniards, enter their lands."⁹¹

It is evident that, for our cleric, the problem lay chiefly in the conduct of Spaniards and many religious personnel toward the Indian and toward the mission they supposedly possessed: for them, war against the Indian was just and necessary.

For the process of evangelization, this represented an obstacle because it contradicted Christian dogmas and turned the Indians against them, causing them to despise and consequently reject the religion.

"All those peoples are prevented from receiving the Christian faith and religion because the Spaniards, their wretched tyrant encomenderos, occupy them night and day in the mines ... and because they persecute and expel from the Indian settlements the religious who preach the faith, instruct them in doctrine, and give them knowledge of God, so that there will be no witnesses to their violence, cruelties, continuous thefts, and murders...."⁹²

⁹¹ Las Casas, *Brevísima relación*, 81.

⁹² "Treinta proposiciones muy jurídicas," Proposition 27 (1541), in Las Casas, *Doctrina*, chap. 2, 46.

Las Casas's criticism may therefore be read as a dispute over the conditions under which the colonial order was executed. Las Casas does not merely denounce results; he attempts to invalidate rules of action that converted Indigenous resistance, idolatry, or economic interest into sufficient grounds for expanding coercion. Against these rules, he proposes others: the initial freedom of the Indigenous person, prior preaching, consent, persuasion, and the subordination of the Spanish presence to the evangelizing purpose. The controversy does not merely oppose moral opinions. It opposes different systems for deciding which actions are admissible and under what conditions they may be presented as Christian and legitimate.

CHAPTER VI

The Missionaries and Their Actions

The analysis now centers upon the religious agents themselves. Bishops, friars, and clerics did not constitute a homogeneous body or act under a single interpretation of the mission. Differences in their education, methods, and relationships with authorities make it possible to refine Las Casas's criticism and distinguish evangelization conceived as persuasion from practices that ultimately associated conversion, discipline, and coercion. This internal diversity is

essential to avoiding a uniform reading of ecclesiastical action in the Indies.

6.1. The Missionaries

From the beginnings of the evangelical mission in the Americas, the monarchs and the pope intended that "upright and God-fearing men, learned, instructed, and experienced, be sent to teach the said Indigenous people...."

This initiated an unprecedented missionary deployment that would contribute from the Iberian Peninsula to configuring a new ecclesiastical map in the Americas. The friars who disembarked did not, however, constitute a homogeneous group: "some carried in their baggage an Erasmian humanism that privileged a religion centered upon Christ ... others emphasized a committed spirituality and absolute renunciation of the world."

These ecclesiastics had to be selected carefully and, above all, be highly qualified for the mission. To this end, Las Casas presents these religious figures on several occasions by emphasizing their qualifications:

"The friars of Saint Dominic, our Order, agreeing to travel to preach to and convert those peoples who lacked the remedy and light of doctrine required to save their souls, as the Indies still do today, sent religious who held degrees in theology, men of

great virtue and holiness, each with a lay brother as companion...."⁹³

[Provisional Bishop of Concepción and La Vega] "Don Carlos de Aragón, doctor of theology from Paris and a most distinguished preacher, whom everyone followed wherever he preached in order to hear him."

Virtually all bishops who arrived in the Indies held university degrees, although several did not. The same was not true of friars and other clerics, whose levels of training and education varied widely, ranging from university graduates to inexperienced clerics with limited studies. The conquistadors presented a marked contrast: most came from areas far removed from cities and distant from the great schools and universities:

"The conquistadors were neither theologians, although for Spain's glory learned men were not lacking among them, nor saints, although saints were not lacking either; most came from the Spanish and European countryside, where paganism had not entirely disappeared...."⁹⁴

The bishops, by contrast, were above all theologians and great preachers, especially the Dominicans. Alonso Manso, cited by Las Casas, provides a clear example:

⁹³ Las Casas, *Brevísima relación*, 87.

⁹⁴ Dussel, *Historia de la Iglesia en América Latina*, 132.

"The first bishop ... of all the Indies to arrive, already consecrated, on the island of San Juan was Licentiate Don Alonso Manso, whom we have said was a canon of Salamanca. He was a theologian and a person of very good life, not highly experienced in worldly affairs, an upright, humble, simple, and straightforward man, and because of these virtuous qualities he was highly esteemed by the king and queen. They commissioned him to visit the University of Salamanca...."⁹⁵

As noted above, these missionaries were selected with great care from among all the religious personnel who wished to come to these lands. This is an important fact: nearly all, if not all, wished to cross the Atlantic to the Americas to perform this missionary work or for some other purpose. Those who came were therefore often "the esteemed" of the king and queen, persons connected to the principal religious authorities in Spain and elsewhere:

"This doctor ... [Bishop Don Carlos de Aragón], being Aragonese, as was Treasurer Pasamonte, and a person of such great authority on this island and in Castile with the King and Conchillos, the Aragonese secretary, and being a doctor of Paris, a preacher of great gifts, and a knight, was even said to be related to the King...."⁹⁶

This clearly indicates that the bishops in Hispaniola in particular lived comfortably, since they enjoyed royal protection. Various papal bulls also guaranteed the Church and its authorities control

⁹⁵ Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, bk. 3, chap. 35, 132-133.

⁹⁶ Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, bk. 3, chap. 35, 133.

over ecclesiastical tithes, which meant that "one-tenth of agricultural and livestock production was used to sustain worship and those who preached it."

Among other powers and privileges, these missionaries also controlled a group of Indians in encomienda whom they employed for their personal needs, including the extraction of gold from mines.

"When the Bishop ... [Alonso Manso] arrived at his bishopric and the island of San Juan, because it was understood in Castile that the principal enterprise through which men accumulated money and acquired gold here was to possess an allotment of Indians and send them to the mines, while no account was ever taken or a word spoken of how the Indians died each day in the mines, being killed there and in the other labors organized for extracting gold, the lord bishop must have petitioned the King to give him an allotment as was given to others. In the end, he possessed an allotment of Indians and used their service. I cannot say whether he sent them to the mines or contented himself with employing them only in other labors, such as cultivating the fields where bread and everything else required to maintain the household was produced."⁹⁷

Bishops clearly had, as always, multiple occupations, and it appears that matters of faith did not greatly concern them.

⁹⁷ Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, bk. 3, chap. 35, 132-133.

"A few months after arriving on that island [Cuba], Bishop Don Alonso Manso sought to levy personal tithes upon its Spanish residents, taking a tithe of what each acquired through his own person; and I believe he also intended to claim a share of the gold they gained and acquired from the mines and other enterprises conducted with the Indians...."⁹⁸

Moreover, bishops had at their disposal what was extracted from the Indians to maintain those residing there:

"[From the Indians] ... the little they possessed or had remaining for use in their communities to meet many needs has been taken, including for public works, the salaries of governors and other officials, and, above all, matters of divine worship, the maintenance of religious personnel, and other such expenses...."⁹⁹

Beginning in 1553, Indigenous people were also compelled to provide sustenance to priests, under a legal agreement between the Royal Audiencia and the Church, through the *camarico*. This was a type of tax consisting of the daily delivery to the community's religious hierarchy of two chickens and the assignment of three or four women to make bread, gather fruit, and prepare food for the horses. Most religious personnel eventually collected the tax in silver coin.

⁹⁸ Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, bk. 3, chap. 35, 133.

⁹⁹ Las Casas, "Memorial al rey a favor de los indios de la Nueva España" (ca. 1555), BAE, vol. 100, 451, in Bataillon and Saint-Lu, *El padre Las Casas y la defensa de los indios*.

In 1537, however, Pope Paul III, in a remarkable acknowledgment considering the period, its context, and the opinions of his predecessors, recognized that American Indians were "human beings endowed with soul and reason."

Pope Paul III affirmed:

"The Indians are true men. These Indians and all who may later be discovered by Christians may by no means be deprived of their freedom or property, even though they are not in the faith of Jesus Christ; they may freely and lawfully enjoy their freedom and property, shall not be slaves, and anything done to the contrary shall be null and without effect."¹⁰⁰

Some historians see behind this "merciful bull" the perverse outcome of political struggles between the Catholic Church and the monarchical hierarchies of the sixteenth century. These confrontations, openly expressed on many occasions, were sufficiently bitter to cast doubt upon the view that the pope's declaration arose simply from pious Christian thought.

Subsequent centuries and events confirmed that recognizing the Indians as human beings had served as the sole justificatory reason for undertaking the evangelizing crusade rigorously and systematically. The mass arrival of ecclesiastics in the Americas on

¹⁰⁰ Yáñez, foreword to Las Casas, *Doctrina*, XI.

a mission to "convert animals to Christianity" would be difficult to understand.

The bishops were also unquestionably always peninsular Spaniards. Despite some efforts, relatively few non-Spaniards, including mestizos, were admitted to holy orders. Mestizos in fact encountered serious obstacles, such as the absence of purity of blood, in advancing through an ecclesiastical career.

Despite this, religious personnel, when recognized as such, were almost always received favorably, as noted above, and on some occasions as true kings or "messengers from heaven":

"When the religious arrived, the Indians received them as angels from heaven and listened to their words with great affection, attention, and joy."¹⁰¹

In certain cases, these conditions facilitated the missionaries' work and permitted results that the sources present as particularly significant.

"Although the Admiral gives testimony concerning the natural virtues he observed among these people who lived in the Lucayan Islands, we later learned incomparably more of their natural goodness, simplicity, humility, meekness, peacefulness, virtuous inclinations, sound intellects, readiness or exceptional disposition to receive our holy faith and be imbued with the Christian religion. Those of us who had much intercourse with

¹⁰¹ Las Casas, *Brevísima relación*, 87.

them on this island of Hispaniola, repeatedly in spiritual and divine matters, communicated Christian doctrine to them and administered all seven Holy Sacraments, especially hearing their confessions, giving them the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist, and attending them at death after they had become Christians."¹⁰²

Within this context occurred what, in our view, is a little-remembered episcopal achievement:

"One of the most beautiful and most forgotten stages in Latin America's struggle on behalf of the Indian."¹⁰³

Bartolomé de las Casas had been invited by Marroquín, bishop of Guatemala from 1533 to 1563, to evangelize the formidable Indians of Tezulutlán, the "Land of War," in Guatemala. Drawing upon this experience, Las Casas wrote his work *The Only Way* and personally converted these Indians; thereafter the land and its inhabitants would be called "Vera Paz," the Land of True Peace.

In missionary work, the first evangelizing strategy adopted by preachers was the distribution of Indians under the *encomienda* regime, assigning Spanish colonists the role of educators in both Christian doctrine and European language and customs. The failure was, as is well known, evident; the Spanish clergy began to

¹⁰² Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, bk. 1, chap. 40, 202.

¹⁰³ Dussel, *Historia de la Iglesia en América Latina*, 95.

distrust conversions and mass baptisms conducted at musket point.

Beginning with the Laws of Burgos (1512), evangelization would be entrusted principally to the mendicant orders, although the encomienda regime was not abandoned. The friars would act with remarkable independence from the colonial ecclesiastical hierarchy, attempting to isolate the Indians within their communities because they believed that contact with Spaniards, far from facilitating conversion, hindered it, since, as noted, the Indians saw Spaniards as their enemies.

Baptism thus became the evangelizers' most important instrument, as this example clearly shows:

"When they intended to burn him [an Indian they considered a 'traitor'] tied to a stake, a religious of Saint Francis told him as best he could that he should die a Christian and be baptized. He replied, 'Why should I become like the Christians, who are evil?' The father answered, 'Because those who die as Christians go to heaven, where they always see God and rejoice.' He asked again whether Christians went to heaven, and the father replied that those who were good did. He concluded by saying that he did not wish to go there, since they went and were there."¹⁰⁴

The cleric's approach to the chief reveals the priority accorded to Christianization even under extreme circumstances. The

¹⁰⁴ Las Casas, *Brevísima relación*, 47.

episode shows the extent to which baptism could acquire immediate value for some missionaries as a path to salvation, even when the conditions for a prolonged process of religious instruction did not exist. The scene does not in itself demonstrate that all evangelization was reduced to baptism, but it does reveal the tension between sacramental urgency and the doctrinal formation that the Church itself declared necessary.

Under this evangelizing strategy, missionaries traveled from village to village, baptized Indians, preached to them in their own languages or through interpreters, and thus conducted mass Christianization.

There is, moreover, no doubt that with regard to missionary action, the undertaking begun by Montesinos constitutes a point of reference.

Although this famous initiative has already been discussed, the action of the first Dominican friars on Hispaniola, who decided through their preaching to bear witness to what they had seen, heard, and touched with their own hands, marks a before and after in the course of evangelization in the Indies. It was no longer sufficient to repeat a theology placed at the service of Empire. It was time to preach the Truth, bringing their concerns into the light of day and making them known to the island's colonial authorities.

"It was Advent, and, as is well known, the friars chose Friar Antonio de Montesinos to deliver the homily, which was prepared and signed by the entire community. Needless to say, the homily shook the island like an earthquake. Basing himself upon the preaching of John the Baptist, Montesinos cast a thunderbolt through his own words."¹⁰⁵

The fundamental characteristic of Friar Antonio de Montesinos's sermons is that they constituted the first milestone in the controversy over the justice or injustice of the conquest of America. They were delivered in the distinctive setting of the city of Santo Domingo, capital of the island of Hispaniola.

Through this great dispute and the agitation of consciences produced by these missionaries, a genuine process began in pursuit of colonial reconversion, one seeking to humanize and regulate relations between Spaniards and Indians in the Americas according to principles of justice.

The sermons delivered by the Dominican Friar Antonio de Montesinos during that distant Advent of 1511, and reported by the impassioned Friar Bartolomé de las Casas in his History of the Indies, were the prelude to this process. Las Casas himself tells us:

"Those friars who had come to this island had scandalized the world by sowing a new doctrine, condemning them all to hell because they possessed the Indians and used their service in the

¹⁰⁵ Dussel, *Historia de la Iglesia en América Latina*, 99.

mines and other labors, contrary to what His Highness had ordered, and because their preaching was nothing other than an attempt to deprive him of the dominion and revenues he possessed in these regions."¹⁰⁶

"These missionaries sincerely loved their Indians, souls who appeared to them simple, humble, and obedient, a remarkable embodiment of the worthy and innocent savage of the Golden Age. They even idealized them as a kind of pure angel..."¹⁰⁷

Beyond this most famous and representative instance of a mode of action, other cases were carried out by other evangelizers:

"Four religious were sent [to the island of Cuba] by the Reverend Friar Pedro de Córdoba ... three priests and one deacon of his Order of Saint Dominic ... named Friar Gutierre de Ampudia, as their vicar ... Friar Bernardo de Santo Domingo ... Friar Pedro de San Martín ... and Friar Diego de Alberca, deacon. They ... traveled with great determination and zeal to preach to and convert the peoples of that island....

They preached during Holy Week and Easter, delivering sermons that edified and pleased everyone. For the octave of Easter, they asked the father cleric to preach because they wished to hear him. He accepted and, so that the doctrine he had preached for seven or eight months against the oppression of the Indians might be confirmed, since some did not believe that oppressing and killing people was sinful, others doubted, others

¹⁰⁶ Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, bk. 3, chap. 5, 445.

¹⁰⁷ Céspedes del Castillo, *América hispánica*, 232.

mocked, and still others murmured, he collected all the propositions he had preached on the subject during that entire period, including the harshest and most rigorous, and together, in the presence of the religious, presented and affirmed them again with greater vehemence and freedom than before.

The religious were astonished by his fervor and the fearlessness with which he affirmed a matter so new and bitter to them, telling them that in that state they could not be saved. At the same time, the religious rejoiced to see that there was a cleric who ... preached so freely on behalf of truth.

The following Sunday, Father Friar Bernardo himself preached and took as his theme *Ego sum pastor bonus*, applying his entire sermon to making them understand that they were not shepherds of those peoples, but hirelings, tyrants, and hungry wolves who tore them apart and devoured them. Our Spaniards were greatly astonished and disturbed by that sermon, though not reformed. As the religious saw and heard each day that the Indians were treated without mercy and perished suddenly in groups, Father Friar Bernardo preached on the day of the Most Holy Trinity and delivered so threatening and terrible a sermon that it made even the cleric's flesh tremble. Among other words, he said: 'Since we arrived, we have preached to you concerning the evil state in which you live because you oppress, exhaust, and kill these

peoples. Not only have you refused to reform yourselves, but, as we understand, you act worse each day, shedding the blood of so many people who have done you no harm. I ask God that the blood He shed for them be judge and witness against your cruelty on the day of judgment, when you will have no excuse by claiming ignorance of matters that were not told and required of you, since the injustice you inflict upon these peoples has been declared to you. You yourselves are witnesses of your deeds and will witness the punishments that will come upon you because of them.' He added many other words condemning that tyranny, at which all were greatly saddened and lowered their heads, but not one was converted."

According to Céspedes del Castillo:

"The evangelizers, the religious counterparts of the conquistadors, also belonged to the Middle Ages: as peaceful, generous, and spiritual conquerors, they traveled to the New World to create an earthly paradise; they could never realize their dreams."¹⁰⁸

In our view, the friars genuinely devoted to and enthusiastic about their evangelical mission ultimately embraced a providentialist interpretation of history: the discovery and conquest had been nothing more than God's instrument for

¹⁰⁸ Céspedes del Castillo, *América hispánica*, 233.

opening the New World to its true destiny, that of harboring a new Christendom composed solely of saintly missionaries and angelic Indians, an authentic City of God that would provide corrupt Europe and the entire world with an example of what Christian life could and should be in its purest expression.

There is a clear allusion to the Early Church, which in some cases, including Las Casas's, was adopted as a model.

6.2. Las Casas's Criticism of the Clergy: Five Axes

Las Casas's criticism of religious agents does not constitute a collection of isolated reproaches. Examined together, it is organized around five axes that recur in stable formulations across nearly forty years of writing: war as a means of entry, administration of the sacraments, the education of preachers, the language of preaching, and clerical wealth. Each axis permits the same analysis: which norm is invoked, what authority the censured agent possesses, and which operation is required or prohibited. This organization reveals that the censure is directed not toward individual defects of conduct, but toward a systematic mismatch between the function assigned to the clergy by the normative corpus and the practices that the same corpus tolerated.

Las Casas maintained a critical attitude toward the missionaries' work, especially when he considered them to have departed from

their evangelizing mission, although his judgment is sometimes conditioned by firmly held religious and doctrinal convictions. His assessments vary. In certain passages, he presents some religious, particularly Dominicans, as exemplary envoys of God, described almost as saints who traveled barefoot through inhospitable regions to evangelize. In others, especially during the final years of his life, he severely censures missionary practices without systematically distinguishing among religious orders.

These criticisms led to several confrontations with religious personnel themselves and even with his parishioners. For example, after Viceroy Tello de Sandoval suspended the New Laws in Mexico, Las Casas immediately confronted his parishioners by denying the sacraments to those who possessed slaves or failed to return what they had obtained through *encomiendas*, and by suspending the licenses of almost all confessors. *He then drafted* his Confessional, or Notices and Rules for Confessors, which his contemporaries regarded as extremely rigorist. Bartolomé consequently became the object of general hostility, including that of Mercedarian monks. Even Bishop Marroquín, formerly his ally, turned against him.

Hostility toward the Sevillian prelate intensified in Chiapas when he attempted a new assessment of tribute. Summoned by Tello de Sandoval, who had repeatedly censured his conduct, to

attend a meeting of New Spanish prelates concerning the Indians, Las Casas departed for Mexico in 1546, at a time when even the Dominicans, always supporters of Las Casas, had joined the petition for suspension. They argued that the encomienda would sustain a nucleus of powerful Spaniards who would advance the colonial structure, which would decline if the Indians were entrusted solely to an inefficient and corrupt official administration. At that Junta, several principles proposed by Las Casas were accepted, but neither Viceroy Mendoza nor the bishops wished to implement them because they were considered excessively rigorous.

A political action contrary to everything Las Casas and his companions had preached thus produced a confrontation between him and several sectors of colonial society. Of particular importance is the confrontation with his colleagues, "whom he opposes while expecting them to support him and to find in his Confessional *the* reasons for understanding the error of the encomienda."

Following these events, Bartolomé decided to return to Spain. Upon arriving, he prepared for the Council a memorial "Concerning the Indians Who Have Been Made Slaves," in which he again condemned the enslavement of native peoples without qualification. The Sevillian then entered a celebrated polemic with

Ginés de Sepúlveda, whose *Democrates alter sive de justis belli causis apud Indos* the Council of the Indies had until then prevented from being published. In it, Sepúlveda defended the lawfulness of wars of conquest against the Indians on the grounds of their allegedly inferior state of civilization.

The sacraments. The first axis is one that Las Casas exercises, rather than merely articulates. By conditioning absolution upon restitution of what had been obtained through *encomienda*, denying the sacraments to those who retained slaves, and suspending the licenses of confessors who failed to apply this criterion, he transformed strictly pastoral authority into an instrument of pressure upon the colonists' economic conduct. The hostility it provoked, including that of the Mercedarians and Marroquín himself, measures the procedure's efficacy: it was the only point at which his criticism did not depend upon another party accepting it.¹⁰⁹

War. The second axis is also the most fully developed. The objection is not that war is cruel, but that it is incompatible with the act it purports to prepare: if faith requires assent, no procedure that produces terror can generate it. Las Casas directs the argument against religious personnel and bishops who accepted the inverse sequence, first subjugate and then preach, and formulates it in terms

¹⁰⁹ Las Casas, "Respuesta de fray Bartolomé de las Casas a las cuestiones que le fueron propuestas sobre los asuntos del Perú," in Las Casas, *Doctrina*.

of lawfulness, not expediency. Here the censured agent possesses doctrinal authority and uses it to legitimate a military operation that he was not empowered to authorize.¹¹⁰

There is no doubt that the principal criticism formulated by the bishop of Chiapa concerns war against the Indians. He severely criticizes religious personnel who support violent initial contact followed by evangelization.

"Because many flatterers secretly bark against the truth like rabid and insatiable dogs, I humbly beseech Your Beatitude to issue a decree declaring excommunicated and anathematized any religious who says that war waged against infidels is just solely because of idolatry or so that the Gospel may be preached more effectively, especially against those gentiles who have never injured us and do us no injury."¹¹¹

He maintains that declaring war upon peoples in order to subjugate them and using this "most horrendous" method as a means of promulgating the Gospel, or evangelical law, "would not have befitted the royal dignity of the most meek and benevolent Jesus...."

He explains that no justification can support this method of promulgating the Gospel and waging lawful and just war against

¹¹⁰ Las Casas, *Del único modo*, chap. 6.

¹¹¹ "Petición a Su Santidad Pío V" (1564), chap. 6, II, in Las Casas, *Doctrina*, 161-163.

"gentiles." He clarifies the matter in *The Only Way to Draw All Peoples to the True Religion*, a book in which he criticizes both the treatment of the Indians and their circumstances. Above all, however, he seeks to explain how they should be evangelized and which paths missionaries should follow. He proposes a model of Christianization based on Gospel passages in which Jesus sends out the apostles. In other words, what they were doing was wrong:

"Religious personnel devoted to preaching to and instructing the Indians of our Western world err and incur grave guilt, even though they possess episcopal power and authority, when they insist upon correcting and, still more, punishing those same Indians for any sin they find committed before or after their conversion, through terrible corporal afflictions such as whipping, imprisonment, and other penalties inflicted by their own hands...."¹¹²

He cannot understand how the Spanish Crown and the pope, having in the Indians untouched soil upon which to work and reestablish the Early Church free from impurities, concern themselves more with exploiting the Indians and obtaining wealth than with sending New Spain preachers whose conduct is more faithful to the Gospels.

He also establishes persuasion and charity as the only methods of conversion, consistently condemning war and violence:

¹¹² Las Casas, *Del único modo*, chap. 7, § 6, 657.

"The method of moving, directing, attracting, or guiding the creature ... toward true religion must accord with the manner, nature, and condition of the creature itself, that is, a sweet, gentle, attentive, and mild method¹¹³, so that of its own motive ... and with a willing disposition, it may listen to everything proposed and explained concerning the faith and true religion."¹¹⁴

He therefore calls for improvement in the bishops' work, which was in fact poor, and demands that they understand that the Indians are human beings and condemn those who "wage war" upon them. This is their duty as Christians; failure to do so means that they are not fulfilling their obligations as Christians and bishops.

"Because experience, the teacher of all things, demonstrates the need in our time to renew all the canons commanding bishops to care for poor captives, afflicted men, and widows, even to the shedding of their blood for them, as they are obligated by natural and divine law, I humbly beseech Your Beatitude to renew these sacred canons and command the bishops of the Indies, under holy obedience, to exercise complete care for those native peoples. Oppressed by the

¹¹³ "Gentle, mild, sweet, and delicate." These four words and their synonyms appear inflected, combined, and paraphrased without cease throughout his extensive work. He also contrasts them with their opposites, harshness, hardness, severity, and cruelty, which were practiced by the Spaniards in those lands. He generally prefers four synonyms to three in order to persuade and move his audience more forcefully.

¹¹⁴ Las Casas, *Del único modo*, chap. 5, § 2, 15.

greatest labors and tyrannies, beyond what can be believed, they carry upon their frail shoulders, contrary to all divine and natural law, a most heavy yoke and an unbearable burden. Your Holiness must therefore command the said bishops to defend their cause, placing themselves as a wall before them even to the shedding of their blood, as they are obligated by divine law, and in no way to accept such dignities unless the King and his Council support them and eradicate so many tyrannies and oppressions."¹¹⁵

Education. The third axis transfers censure from content to personnel. Las Casas observes that the normative corpus required the dispatch of learned and experienced men, while practice admitted clerics without adequate studies or age. The consequence at issue is not mediocrity in the abstract: a preacher incapable of expounding doctrine transforms the obligation to instruct into a formality and disables from within the only procedure Las Casas recognizes as legitimate. In his argument, the quality of the agent is a condition of the act's validity.¹¹⁶

Las Casas is concerned with preaching because he repeatedly insists that it was performed poorly. One reason he gives is the missionaries' lack of preparation:

¹¹⁵ "Petición a Su Santidad Pío V," in Las Casas, *Doctrina*, 161-163.

¹¹⁶ Las Casas, "Carta al rey y al Consejo de Indias sobre los desvíos de algunos frailes en el trato con los indios y en los remedios necesarios," in Giménez Fernández and Hanke, *Bartolomé de Las Casas*, 66.

"From the discovery of the Indies until now, there has been neither order nor coordination in preaching the faith throughout those lands. Instead, there have been many confusions, opinions, and disagreements among preachers because many of them lacked the learning, age, and experience required for so elevated a work."¹¹⁷

He explains that poor preaching resulted from the missionaries' lack of preparation. As noted above, not everyone arriving in the Indies with a mission to preach was a doctor or licentiate; worse still, they lacked age and experience, despite Spain's recent evangelical mission within its own territory.

"On every island, there should be an ecclesiastic responsible for protecting the Indians and punishing Spaniards who mistreat them.... No priest should be admitted who does not possess the instruction necessary to preach correctly in the native language on religious or other matters..."¹¹⁸

Language. The fourth axis is the most technical and the one most readily recognized by a contemporary reader. If conversion requires understanding, ignorance of the catechumen's language is not a practical deficiency, but a fundamental defect that invalidates the act. Las Casas attributes it above all to the episcopate. The

¹¹⁷ "Carta de Las Casas a Felipe II antes de que sea rey," in Ballesteros, *En el centenario del Padre Las Casas*, 18.

¹¹⁸ "Relaciones que hicieron algunos religiosos sobre los excesos que había en Indias, y varios memoriales de personas particulares que informan de cosas que convendría remediar" (ca. 1516), in Gíménez Fernández and Hanke, *Bartolomé de Las Casas*, 7.

contrast with the mendicant orders, which translated catechisms and preached in Indigenous languages, functions in his writing as proof that the requirement could be fulfilled. Where the will existed, the language was learned; where it did not, the omission reveals the agent's effective priority.¹¹⁹

The problem of language appears along the same line of reflection. The bishop sees the absence of concern for learning the parishioners' language as abandonment of the Indian and disregard for the people and cultures of the Indies. It may even be seen as a form of concealed conquest, the replacement of one culture by another.

"It is openly and unjustly [something appears to be missing here] that a bishop should be ignorant of the language of his subjects and fail to labor with every care to learn it. I therefore humbly beseech Your Beatitude to command them to learn the language of their sheep, declaring that they are bound to do so by divine and natural law, because at every moment many grave and unworthy things occur in the presence of Your Holiness because the bishops disdain to learn the language of their parishioners."¹²⁰

This criticism falls directly upon the bishops, since, with regard to the friars, for example, Céspedes del Castillo tells us:

¹¹⁹ See Céspedes del Castillo, *América hispánica*.

¹²⁰ "Petición a Su Santidad Pío V," in Las Casas, *Doctrina*, 161-163.

"The friars translated doctrinal texts into Indigenous languages, and sermons were delivered in them."¹²¹

To understand the foundations of Indigenous religion, the missionaries learned different languages. Although this took time, once they achieved the objective, they began to catechize the native people in Indigenous languages, and the latter began to learn the foundations of Christianity.

Wealth. The fifth axis connects clerical conduct to the economic structure examined in Chapter V. The censure is not ascetic: Las Casas expressly recognizes that poverty is an instrument, not an end. What he denounces is the position of the bishop who receives tithes and controls Indians in *encomienda* while being required to supervise their treatment, that is, an agent whose power of oversight is nullified by his own proprietary interest. It is the same figure Chapter III identified in the *encomendero*, now transferred to the ecclesiastical level.¹²²

He also criticizes bishops for traveling to the Americas to enrich themselves. He sees wealth as their priority, while "saving souls was not," and missionary work was set aside. This criticism surely arose in part from his sympathy for the Dominican Order,

¹²¹ See Céspedes del Castillo, *América hispánica*.

¹²² See Dussel, *Historia de la Iglesia en América Latina*.

whose members take vows of poverty and for whom poverty is an instrument within the Order's apostolic structure.

"It is a very great scandal and no less a detriment to our most holy Christian religion that, in that new plantation, bishops, friars, and clerics should enrich themselves and live magnificently while their recently converted subjects remain in such extreme and incredible poverty that many die miserably each day from tyranny, hunger, thirst, and excessive labor. I therefore humbly beseech Your Holiness to declare that such ministers are obligated by natural and divine law, as they indeed are, to restore all the gold, silver, and precious stones they have acquired, because they have carried off and taken them from people who suffered, and still live in, extreme need, to whom they are also obligated by divine and natural law to distribute their own property."¹²³

Las Casas maintains that Christian tradition and law, though rigorous in requiring poverty, affirm that it is an instrument and not an end in itself. The vow of poverty taken by religious personnel is essential to the apostolic purpose. For Las Casas, the decisive fact is that Jesus sends the disciples stripped of power, violence, and wealth.

The personal poverty of each religious is essential to establishing a common life with the Indians. It belongs to the

¹²³ "Petición a Su Santidad Pío V," in Las Casas, *Doctrina*, 161-163.

essence of consecrated life and is therefore directly connected to the evangelical mission.

Even more important in this regard is Las Casas's denunciation to the king and Council of the Indies, around 1541, in which he accuses certain friars concerning their treatment of the Indians:

"I recommend that the clerics sent there be virtuous, because the Indians pay greater attention to their deeds than to their words, and most provide the worst example."¹²⁴

This is not the bishop of Chiapa's only denunciation of his colleagues. Another example follows, in which he exposes his former companion Francisco Marroquín and his "economic and spiritual affairs":

"Fragoso reports on the economic and spiritual affairs of the bishoprics of Chiapas and Nicaragua. Alonso Maldonado, president of the Audiencia, holds more than 60,000 Indians in subjection, and he, his friends, and his relatives live from their labor.... The Indians are not Christianized, and even Francisco Marroquín ... has enslaved Indians and attacked the Bishop of Chiapas in a sermon."¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Las Casas, "Carta al rey y al Consejo de Indias sobre los desvíos de algunos frailes en el trato con los indios y en los remedios necesarios," in Giménez Fernández and Hanke, *Bartolomé de Las Casas*, 66.

¹²⁵ Hanke, on "Cartas de fray Bartolomé de las Casas, obispo de Chiapas, y fray Antonio de Valdivieso, obispo de Nicaragua, al príncipe don Felipe," October 25, 1544, in Giménez Fernández and Hanke, *Bartolomé de Las Casas*, 96.

Denunciations and criticism of missionary work are constant in the available sources, especially the letters, in which he simply observes and states what is occurring:

"The Pontiff is warned that the bishops and other ecclesiastics ... enrich themselves while their flocks die of hunger or are overwhelmed by labor."¹²⁶

Las Casas drew upon half a century of experience laboring over affairs in the Indies, acquired in both Spain and the Americas. He therefore constantly presented the circumstances of the missionaries to the pope and monarchs. Sources and evidence are thus abundant in showing, from Las Casas's perspective and that of many who followed him, what was occurring in the Indies.

Another factor that, in Las Casas's view, made evangelization in the Americas highly problematic was the missionaries' confusion over what type of infidels the Indians were and how they should "confront" them when instructing them in doctrine. Bartolomé repeatedly states in his writings that knowledge of the catechumen is fundamental to the process. To this end, he writes and describes the differences among infidels:

"There are four categories of infidels. The first consists of infidels who dwell among Christians and are subject to Christian

¹²⁶ Las Casas, "Petición a Su Santidad Pío V del obispo de Chiapas d. fray Bartolomé de Las Casas" (ca. 1566), in Giménez Fernández and Hanke, *Bartolomé de Las Casas*, 199-200.

kings, such as the Jews and Moors who formerly lived in Castile....

The second category of infidels consists of those who hold de facto, by force or violence alone, lands and dominions belonging to Christians, such as the Turks and Moors of Africa and the Holy Land and parts of Hungary and other regions and kingdoms that once belonged to Christendom.

The third category of infidels consists of heretics and apostates, who are de jure subjects of the Church and the Supreme Pontiff and the other spiritual prelates.

The fourth category and distinction consists of those infidels who neither possess usurped lands that belonged to us, nor have wrongfully dispossessed us of them, nor at any time caused us harm, injury, or evil, nor intend to do so. Likewise, neither at present nor in past centuries were they subjects of the Christian Empire or of any member of the Church, de jure or de facto, in any manner, as is true of many nations in the world.... It is entirely clear that the nations of the Indies belong to the fourth category and that they hold and possess their kingdoms and lands by natural law and the law of nations.... No king or emperor, nor the Church, may therefore wage war upon or harass them in any way....

War waged against infidels of this fourth category so that through war they may be subjected to the Empire of the Christians and thereby prepared to receive the Christian faith and religion, or so that any obstacles to this end may be removed, is reckless, uncertain, perverse, and tyrannical."

For Las Casas, therefore, evangelizing cultures did not consist solely in "baptizing" them or replacing them by confronting them in war, but in "regenerating" them through more organized work by bishops and missionaries and through encounter with the values of the Kingdom, rather than solely with the interests of ecclesiastical power.

"The theologian of the Indies speaks of an option for the poor in the Jesuian sense, that is, as a sacrament of God's Gratitude, which thereby becomes a fundamental factor in every cultural or interreligious dialogue."¹²⁷

Comparison among orders clarifies the scope of these censures. In his writing, the Dominicans appear as the positive term of comparison. Montesinos and Pedro de Córdoba belonged to them, as did Las Casas himself, which requires his treatment of the others to be read with caution. His judgment of the Franciscans is divided: they are recognized for learning languages and providing sustained instruction, but censured for the practice of mass baptism that this

¹²⁷ Losada, *Bartolomé de las Casas a la luz de la moderna crítica histórica*, 75.

same capacity made possible. The Mercedarians and much of the secular episcopate bear the weight of his proprietary censure. Antonine Tibesar observed that this distribution partly reflects the author's affiliation, and the observation is pertinent. It does not, however, invalidate the series, because the five axes are supported by documentation directed to different authorities, including memorials to the Council, letters to the king, and petitions to Rome, and not solely by Las Casas's own testimony.¹²⁸

Considered together, the five axes share a structure. In each, an agent endowed with authority by the normative corpus exercises it in a direction that nullifies the declared purpose of that same authority: the religious who legitimates war, the preacher who cannot preach, the bishop who does not understand his subjects, and the prelate whose revenue depends upon those he is required to protect. This is why Las Casas's criticism of the clergy is analytically more productive than his denunciation of the conquistadors. Against the conquistador, he argues from outside another's conduct; against the religious, he argues from within the same system of authorizations. His objection therefore cannot be dismissed without calling into question the foundation that legitimated the Spanish presence.

¹²⁸ Antonine Tibesar's observation is cited in Dussel, *Historia de la Iglesia en América Latina*.

6.3. The Campaign against Idolatry

The evangelization of the American territories was conducted by the regular clergy until the completion of the Council of Trent in the 1580s. This first stage of evangelization was a massive and comprehensive enterprise in which, as noted above, mass conversions were commonplace. The principal objective was to eliminate the most prominent features of paganism and curb the power of ministers of Indigenous religions, but missionaries generally contented themselves with administering mass baptisms and providing cursory doctrinal education, although some approached the task more seriously.

"As Toribio de Motolinía¹²⁹ reported: during the five days I remained in that monastery [the monastery of Quecholac], another priest and I baptized fourteen thousand two hundred

¹²⁹ In 1546, Las Casas took part in a painful incident at the Franciscan monastery of Tlaxcala, where Friar Toribio de Benavente asked the bishop to baptize an Indigenous person. The man had traveled a great distance to be baptized, and Las Casas dressed and prepared to conduct the ceremony. Before beginning, however, he began to catechize him, discovered that he possessed insufficient knowledge of Christian doctrine, and therefore refused to baptize him. Benavente became enraged and neither forgot nor forgave Las Casas, who likewise remembered the Franciscan's attitudes and doctrines. They believed that the faith had to be preached rapidly, even by force. Here the proverb applied: "Better good by force than evil by choice." Hanke, *La humanidad es una*, 5.

and some persons by count, anointing all with oil and chrism."¹³⁰

The limitations of this policy soon became evident: idolatry concealed itself behind Christian worship, and Indigenous religion continued to operate. Missionaries had to confront above all the problem of evangelizing complex civilizations. In response to this reality, and in conjunction with the Counter-Reformation, the form of evangelization changed, and the secular clergy assumed greater participation.

A new evangelizing policy was implemented, in which zeal against pagan forms of idolatry was much greater and was accompanied by the emergence of more fervent worship among the Spaniards, intended to foster a more substantial Christianity among Indigenous people. The extirpation of idolatry would not, however, prove a simple process.

The campaign against it took several forms, ranging from the burning of idols to their commodification, always within the Western effort to undermine representations associated with the material forms it sought to destroy.

¹³⁰ "Relaciones que hicieron algunos religiosos sobre los excesos que había en Indias, y varios memoriales de personas particulares que informan de cosas que convendría remediar" (ca. 1516), in Giménez Fernández and Hanke, *Bartolomé de Las Casas*, 64.

[Upon Las Casas's arrival in Cuba] "After the Indians gave the Spaniards a very warm reception and offered abundant food, and the children were baptized, which was the first matter customarily undertaken ... the father began to discuss with the chief an exchange for images...."

This example shows how, through a peaceful procedure and after baptism, missionaries sought to obtain Indigenous objects of worship. Las Casas does not specify the fate of those images in this instance, although other passages permit the inference that they were frequently destroyed by religious personnel.

The bishop of Chiapa offers another example in which religious symbols were destroyed, although they were obtained without direct violence:

"Forty days after the friars entered and preached, the lords of the land brought and surrendered all their idols to be burned and afterward brought their children, whom they loved more than the light of their eyes, to be taught. They built churches, temples, and houses for the friars, and invited them to other provinces to preach and give knowledge of God and of the man they said was the great king of Castile."¹³¹

Despite this, from the outset Las Casas presents the inhabitants of those lands as people without idolatry, religion, or elements

¹³¹ Las Casas, *Brevísima relación*, 80-81.

referring to it, except for certain priests, or sorcerers, who did nothing more than maintain contact with supernatural beings.

"The religion they possessed was none at all, because they had neither temples, idols, sacrifices, nor anything in this regard resembling idolatry. They had only priests, sorcerers, or physicians ... who were believed to speak with demons, or the demons clarified their doubts and gave them answers to what they asked."¹³²

From this perspective, the campaign against idolatry lost part of its foundation if Indigenous practices were denied the very status of religion. The argument again reveals Las Casas's conviction that these peoples could and should be guided toward the Christian faith.

Bartolomé likewise extends this idea to demonstrate that the objective of suppressing idolatry was nothing more than a pretext used by conquistadors to justify war against them:

"The Spaniards immediately seize upon any of their superstitions or any response they receive from the devil to blaspheme these peoples, and they believe that because of those superstitions they have a greater right to rob, oppress, and kill them. This arises from great ignorance of the blindness, errors, superstitions, and idolatry of ancient paganism, in which Spain was no less submerged. And among our people that ignorance

¹³² Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, bk. 3, chap. 23, 514.

has always been accompanied by great malice, used to justify their cruel deeds...."¹³³

"As for sacrificing and eating human beings, as Gómara claims, I¹³⁴ believe it is not true, because I always heard that in that kingdom of Yucatán there were human sacrifices, but it was not known what eating human flesh was.... This is the language of the Spaniards and of those who write of their horrible exploits. They seek to defame all these nations in order to excuse the violence, cruelties, robberies, and massacres they have inflicted, and continue to inflict every day and today...."¹³⁵

The question of human sacrifice required many explanations from Las Casas, especially in his dispute with Sepúlveda. Bartolomé accepted that the Indians were in "probable error" because of such acts, but added:

"Our own Spanish people, who now reproach the Indians for their human sacrifices, customarily sacrificed prisoners and their horses...."

He later added:

¹³³ Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, bk. 3, chap. 23, 515.

¹³⁴ Francisco López de Gómara (1511-ca. 1562), ecclesiastic and chronicler of the Spanish court. He served as Cortés's chaplain and wrote *Historia general de las Indias* (1552), a work prohibited by Philip II. This was a reason for his conflict with Las Casas, since the work supported the use of force as an instrument of colonization.

¹³⁵ Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, bk. 3, chap. 117, 231.

"Is there a better form of worshiping God than through sacrifice?"¹³⁶

At the same time, the Spanish conquistador carrying out the conquest came from a society that had fought Islam since the eighth century and had done so in the spirit of the medieval Crusades, without forgetting the Roman inheritance of "first destroy, then pacify or Christianize." The question, therefore, is why they should have changed at this moment when the methods previously used had produced favorable results for Spain.

The conquistador's conception was thus virtually the same as during the Spanish Reconquista: so long as even a single native person remained, idolatry would survive. The extirpators therefore compelled native people themselves to destroy their temples, although there were not enough hands to demolish the innumerable religious constructions erected over thousands of years. In analyzing these episodes, however, some historians reach remarkable conclusions. Pease, for example, concludes:

"Because the viceregal and ecclesiastical authorities could not demolish all the religious structures at that time, they placed crosses upon them."¹³⁷¹³⁸

¹³⁶ Las Casas, "Defensa," chap. 35, in Hanke, *La humanidad es una*, 35.

¹³⁷ Thus fostering syncretism.

¹³⁸ Pease, quoted in Dussel, *Historia de la Iglesia en América Latina*, 75.

The extirpators of idolatry sought to suppress Indigenous religious knowledge as a doctrine that organized and gave meaning to the world, interpreting it as false doctrine because of its opposition to Christianity. Idolatry could thus be treated as a form of religious choice attributed to subjects considered capable of receiving the Gospel but persisting in other beliefs. Practices of repression, surveillance, and collaboration among different centers of power, directed toward political and cultural uniformity, developed on this basis.

Extirpation, understood as a means of extending the reach of evangelization, would create an entire body of ethnographic knowledge designed to understand idolatrous practices in order to eradicate them. Idolatry was thus regarded as a form of resistance to evangelization.

From this perspective, Las Casas's insistence upon the sole peaceful method of evangelization acquires a structural function. His project seeks to recompile the relationship between authority and action: it eliminates violence as an acceptable condition of entry, restricts intervention by conquistadors, requires the word to precede other action, and situates Indigenous will within the procedure of conversion. It abandons neither the Christianizing horizon nor imperial sovereignty, but modifies the rules through which both may be executed. This tension explains both the radical character and the historical limitations of his proposal.

6.4. Norm and Execution in the Criticism of the Clergy

The criticism assembled in this chapter may be described more precisely if it is understood as an attempt to reformulate the rule rather than solely as moral denunciation. The corpus Las Casas invokes and produces *includes the* bull *Sublimis Deus* of 1537, the New Laws of 1542, his own treatises, *particularly The Only Way to Draw All Peoples to the True Religion*, the *Confessional* intended for confessors in the Indies, memorials addressed to the king and Council, and petitions submitted to the Holy See. Each text operates at a different level of the procedure, and this distinction explains their unequal results.

With regard to subjects, it should be noted that Las Casas does not argue solely from the position of an observer. As a bishop, he possesses effective powers: he may deny absolution, condition access to the sacraments, suspend confessors' licenses, and establish criteria for restitution. In this *sense*, the Confessional constitutes the most effective component of his intervention because it does not propose a general principle, but introduces a verifiable condition into a procedure he himself administers. The hostile response it provoked, even among religious personnel, confirms that it operated upon a real power rather than an exhortation.¹³⁹

The operations his reformulation seeks to impose reverse the established order. Where practice permitted the issuance of a *requerimiento* followed *by instruction*, The Only Way requires preaching before any subjugation; where baptism functioned as the initial verifiable act, the reformulation subordinates it to the catechumen's prior understanding; where the *encomienda* operated as the framework of *instruction*, the Confessional turns it into an object requiring restitution. The operation is technical: it does not deny the corpus's evangelizing purpose, but alters the sequence of authorized verbs and thereby removes the coercive path without needing to challenge Castilian title.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ Las Casas, "Respuesta de fray Bartolomé de las Casas a las cuestiones que le fueron propuestas sobre los asuntos del Perú," in Las Casas, *Doctrina*.

¹⁴⁰ Las Casas, *Del único modo*, chap. 6.

The scope for noncompliance explains the outcome. The powers controlled by Las Casas belonged to the sacramental and pastoral level; those determining effective execution, including the distribution of Indians, licenses of conquest, assessment of tribute, and implementation or suspension of laws, belonged to the viceroy, the audiencias, and the Council. The junta of New Spanish prelates could therefore accept several of his principles without implementing any of them: acceptance occurred at the declarative level, while execution remained regulated by norms that the declaration did not modify.

This also explains the final orientation of his writing toward Rome and the Council. The petitions and memorials of his final years did not seek to persuade executors, but to modify the level at which conditions of legitimacy were established, thereby reducing the available paths. This strategy is consistent with the diagnosis: if the problem lies in the existence of two authorized forms of execution, the solution is to remove one from the corpus, not to appeal to the conscience of those who choose between them.¹⁴¹

Finally, this reading makes it possible to locate precisely both the scope and the limitation of Las Casas's project. Its scope lies in identifying violence not as an individual excess, but as an enabled alternative, and in attempting to suppress it at the normative level.

¹⁴¹ Las Casas, "Petición a Su Santidad Pío V" (1564), in Las Casas, *Doctrina*.

Its limitation lies in the fact that suppressing the coercive path did not alter the purpose of conversion or the asymmetry between the person who articulates religious truth and the person required to receive it. The reformulated rule remained a rule of incorporation; what changed was the manner in which that incorporation could be executed legitimately.

6.5. The Objection of Ecclesiastical Tutelage

The reading of Las Casas's intervention proposed in this chapter must confront the most consistent objection it has received in recent scholarship. Daniel Castro maintained that Las Casas represents another face of empire: a reformer whose defense of Indigenous people, always formulated on their behalf and never with them, strengthened ecclesiastical authority over American populations while leaving Castilian sovereignty intact. Under this reading, protection is a mode of domination, and the historical effect of Las Casas's project was to displace Indigenous agency rather than enable it. The objection deserves to be considered in its strongest formulation because, in its weaker version, it is trivially true.¹⁴²

Three elements of the objection are indisputable, and this study has recorded them. The first is the tutelary structure: Las Casas negotiates, litigates, and writes on behalf of Indigenous populations,

¹⁴² Castro, *Another Face of Empire*. For subsequent discussion of this position, see Roldán-Figueroa and Orique, *The Transatlantic Las Casas*.

and at no point proposes that they define the terms of the relationship themselves. The second is the persistence of the purpose of conversion, precisely established in Section 6.4: the reformulation suppresses the coercive path without abandoning the objective of incorporation. The third is the content of his concrete projects, which included forms of social and economic reorganization inspired by European models. None of this is disputed here.

What is disputed is the inference. It does not follow from the project's tutelary character that it is a modulation of colonial domination, and the evidence assembled in this chapter demonstrates why the inference fails at three verifiable points.

The first is the resistance the project actually encountered. A form of power that reinforces the system in which it operates does not provoke the reaction documented across the five axes examined: hostility from the secular episcopate, opposition from the Mercedarians, estrangement from former allies such as Marroquín, repeated censure by Viceroy Tello de Sandoval, and formal acceptance followed by deliberate nonimplementation by the junta of New Spanish prelates. An instrument of domination does not have its confessional licenses suspended, *nor is* its Confessional described as excessively rigorist. Castro's objection cannot explain the magnitude or source of this resistance; the reading proposed

here can, because it identifies in each axis an authority whose declared purpose was compromised by Las Casas's demand.¹⁴³

The second point is analytical and is supplied by the count in Chapter VIII. The objection treats the Las Casas corpus as discourse about Indigenous people, and at that level the tutelary characterization is appropriate. The count shows, however, that the corpus operates by imposing duties upon authorized agents: the verb obligate appears eleven times compared with one instance of prohibit, and the subject of these obligations is never the Indigenous person, but the encomendero, bishop, confessor, or king. Tutelage describes the addressee of the discourse; obligation describes the operation performed by the text. By identifying the two levels, the objection attributes a property of the utterance to the procedure.

The third point is empirical and is the most difficult to accommodate within Castro's framework. If Las Casas's doctrine had displaced Indigenous agency, those who litigated for their freedom before the courts of Castile would not have invoked precisely the norms that this doctrine helped produce. The proceedings documented by Nancy van Deusen show the opposite: the tutelary text became a procedural instrument in the hands of those under tutelage, complete with legal vocabulary, evidence, and

¹⁴³ On the reaction of the New Spanish prelates, see Dussel, *Historia de la Iglesia en América Latina*.

witnesses. This effect is not a marginal accident; it is the predictable consequence of a strategy that, as shown, operated by enabling enforceable obligations rather than articulating unenforceable prohibitions. The framework of tutelage as domination cannot generate this consequence because, within it, the ward possesses no authority to exercise.¹⁴⁴

The scope of this response must be delimited precisely. Nothing above makes Las Casas a precursor of Indigenous self-determination or dissolves the asymmetry between one who claims possession of religious truth and one required to receive it. That asymmetry remains, and Sections 6.4 and 7.2 formulate it without qualification. What the evidence refutes is not Castro's observation concerning the tutelary character of the project, which is correct, but his reduction: the conclusion that this character exhausts the nature of the intervention and makes it functionally equivalent to the practices it opposed.

The difference between observation and reduction is not rhetorical. A tutelary intervention that imposes verifiable obligations upon agents of domination produces effects that domination would not have produced by itself, and some of these effects escaped the control of the person who initiated them. Recognizing this does not

¹⁴⁴ Van Deusen, *Global Indios*; "Why Indigenous Slavery Continued in Spanish America after the New Laws of 1542," *The Americas* 80, no. 3 (2023): 395-432.

require idealizing the author; it requires distinguishing between the position from which he argues and the procedural consequences of his argument. This is precisely the distinction that the apparatus of this book makes possible and that a reading centered solely upon the position of the enunciator cannot achieve.

Finally, it is appropriate to indicate what evidence would decide the controversy against the reading defended here. It would be sufficient to demonstrate either that the Las Casas corpus produced no effective restriction upon the authorized operations of colonial agents or that the resistance it provoked came exclusively from marginal actors without executive authority. Both demonstrations are possible, and neither has been made. Until one is, the characterization of the project as a simple variant of domination remains an interpretive hypothesis rather than an established result.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵ For a review of the state of the debate, see Orique and Roldán-Figueroa, *Bartolomé de las Casas, O.P.*

CHAPTER VII

Indigenous Agency in the Evangelizing Process

The preceding chapters examined evangelization from the perspective of those who executed it: the norm that authorized them, the powers it distributed, and the practices it tolerated. This focus excludes a variable that Las Casas's own sources repeatedly record and that recent historiography has made a central object of study. American populations were not the passive terminus of the procedure. They imposed conditions, distinguished among agents, litigated, selected elements of Christianity, and preserved their own practices in admissible forms. This chapter assembles that evidence and incorporates it into the analytical framework used thus far, with one preliminary warning: all available documentation was produced by Europeans, and Indigenous agency must therefore be read through foreign categories and in records prepared for other purposes.¹⁴⁶

This mediation does not invalidate the observation, but determines its scope. When a chronicler records that a community sent messengers, deliberated in council, or demanded guarantees, he registers conduct that his own interpretive framework had no need

¹⁴⁶ On the limitations of colonial documentation for reconstructing Indigenous perspectives, see Van Deusen, *Global Indios*.

to invent and that frequently contradicts the image of submission promoted elsewhere in the same text. These internal disjunctions in the source make it possible to reconstruct Indigenous decisions without attributing to them a voice the documentation does not preserve.

7.1. Imposed Conditions and Negotiation

The episode at Tezulutlán, examined in Chapter V, constitutes the clearest case. The sequence transcribed by Las Casas does not describe acceptance; it describes negotiation. The community receives messengers, enters into council, holds several meetings, gathers prior information concerning what kind of men the friars were and how they differed from the Christians already known, and only then agrees to receive them under an explicit condition: the friars must enter alone, without any Spaniard. The religious had to commit themselves to this condition and possessed prior authorization from the viceroy to do so.¹⁴⁷

Analyzed under the framework of the preceding chapters, the episode reveals a notable displacement. The condition imposed by the community operates as an effective restriction upon authorized operations: it prohibits the entry of an agent whom the normative corpus authorized to enter. It derives not from a bull or royal

¹⁴⁷ Las Casas, *Brevísima relación*, 117-118.

instruction, but from the negotiating capacity of those who were to be evangelized, yet it produces the same type of effect as a norm. The distinction Indigenous people drew between friars and conquistadors, the same distinction Las Casas sought to establish in writing, appears here as an operational criterion prior to any agreement.¹⁴⁸

The case is not isolated. The sources record communities that abandoned settlements before the Spaniards arrived, accepted religious personnel while rejecting encomenderos, requested doctrinal instruction to obtain protection from labor demands, and demanded fulfillment of broken promises. In all these cases, Indigenous conduct intervenes in the execution of the procedure, even though it does not participate in its formulation.

7.2. Appropriation, Translation, and Persistence

The second field of agency is reception. The mass evangelization of the first decades produced a situation that missionaries themselves described as failure: numerous baptisms without sustained instruction, attendance at worship without abandonment of previous practices, and acceptance of doctrine in terms that did not correspond to what missionaries intended to transmit. The extirpators of idolatry interpreted this outcome as deliberate

¹⁴⁸ Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, bk. 3, chap. 29.

resistance and, in a sense, were correct: the persistence of forms of worship under Christian forms required an active operation of reinterpretation, not simple inertia.

The translation of doctrinal texts into Indigenous languages illustrates the mechanism precisely. Catechizing in the people's own languages required establishing equivalences between Christian concepts and terms available in American languages, and this operation was not neutral: every equivalence transferred into Christian vocabulary a preexisting semantic charge that missionaries did not control. Indigenous interpreters and collaborators who participated in preparing catechisms and grammars thereby intervened in defining the content taught to them. Later syncretism was not only an effect of incomplete evangelization; it was also a product of the translation procedure itself.¹⁴⁹

Recent historiography has also shown that the reorganization of populations into doctrinas and settlements, conceived as an instrument of control, generated spaces in which communities could reconstitute forms of their own authority under Christian designations. Confraternities, cabildos, and ritual offices functioned both as structures of the Church and as frameworks of local continuity. The mendicant enterprise in New Spain depended to a

¹⁴⁹ See Corcuera de Mancera, *El fraile, el indio y el pulque*; on preexisting structures of meaning, see Conrad and Demarest, *Religión e imperio*.

considerable degree upon agreements with Indigenous elites who thereby obtained recognition and jurisdiction.¹⁵⁰

This level permits correction of an asymmetry in Las Casas's argument. Las Casas denied American populations the status of organized religion and constructed his defense upon that denial: peoples without true idolatry could be guided without violence. Later documentation shows the opposite, precisely where his peaceful model was applied: conversion produced appropriations that no missionary had anticipated. Evangelization without coercion did not eliminate cultural transformation; it made that transformation negotiated.

7.3. Norm and Execution: The Indigenous Person as a Procedural Subject

The third level received the least attention in the first edition of this work and is the most relevant to the framework employed here. The New Laws of 1542 and the doctrine of the Indian's natural freedom, defended by Las Casas among others, had an effect beyond their declaration: they made the Indigenous person a subject capable of appearing before a court. During the following decades, Indigenous people transported to Castile litigated before peninsular courts to claim their freedom, invoking precisely the norms

¹⁵⁰ See Crewe, *The Mexican Mission*.

promulgated by the Crown and presenting witnesses, evidence, and genealogies.¹⁵¹

This fact is analytically decisive. A compiled rule distributes powers, and thus far that distribution has been examined among Spanish agents: monarchs, governors, bishops, friars, and encomenderos. Litigation shows that the same structure, in a manner unforeseen by its drafters, granted procedural capacity to those who were the objects of the norm. The Indigenous person claiming freedom in Valladolid does not stand outside the procedure: he uses it, and does so with the vocabulary supplied by the legislation itself.

This opening was subject to severe limitations. Indigenous slavery persisted for decades after 1542 through forms the legislation did not reach or the administration tolerated, and the burden of proof fell upon the claimant within¹⁵² an unfamiliar language and legal system. The result was not the norm's effective force, but its unequal application: a scope for noncompliance that reproduced at the judicial level the same structure identified by the preceding chapters at the missionary level.

The assessment of the procedure can thereby be completed. The enterprise in the Indies operated through texts that authorized

¹⁵¹ See Van Deusen, *Global Indios*.

¹⁵² Van Deusen, "Why Indigenous Slavery Continued in Spanish America after the New Laws of 1542," *The Americas* 80, no. 3 (2023): 395-432.

actions and distributed powers, while execution depended upon agents with divergent interests. Chapters III through VI showed how this distance between norm and practice systematically favored executors. This chapter shows that the same distance left, at certain points, a space usable by those whom the norm constituted as its object. Indigenous agency neither compensates for nor relativizes the asymmetry of the colonial process; it clarifies how that process actually functioned, which is the only way to explain it without reducing it to a seamless imposition.

CHAPTER VIII

The Corpus as Data: Verbs of Obligation

The preceding chapters treated the texts of the enterprise in the Indies as statements that distribute powers and authorize operations. This treatment was qualitative: it identified which norm was invoked, which agent was authorized, and which operation was required. A different form of verification remains. If the central hypothesis is correct, if the efficacy of these texts depends upon the manner in which they impose obligations upon subsequent actions, then this property must be observable on the linguistic surface of the corpus and, in principle, measurable. This chapter subjects the hypothesis to that test.

The procedure belongs to corpus linguistics rather than historical criticism, and its scope and limitations should therefore be stated at the outset. The purpose is not to count words in order to illustrate a conclusion already reached through other means, but to establish whether the distribution of deontic forms confirms, qualifies, or contradicts the proposed reading. As will be seen, the result does all three at once.

8.1. Delimitation of the Corpus and Procedure

The corpus analyzed consists of the passages transcribed in this volume: 118 block quotations totaling 7,274 words. It is a derived sample, not a corpus constructed for analysis, and this condition determines everything that follows. The passages were selected for their argumentative relevance to the preceding chapters, not according to criteria of statistical representativeness. The resulting frequencies therefore describe the corpus actually cited, not the entirety of the works from which it derives. Every claim made here applies to this sample and requires verification against the complete editions.

Each passage was classified according to the source identified in its note, producing four classes: passages from the Las Casas corpus in a broad sense, including chronicles, treatises, letters, memorials, and petitions, comprising eighty-two cases and 5,448 words; passages from secondary literature, twenty-four cases and 1,046 words; passages from normative documents, including bulls, royal instructions, laws, and collections of royal decrees, four cases and 239 words; and eight passages without an attributable reference, totaling 541 words, counted separately.

The counting unit is the inflected deontic verb form, grouped by lemma. Twelve lemmas were recorded: *mandar* (to command), *deber* (must/ought), *poder* (may/can), *procurar* (to endeavor),

inducir (to induce), reducir (to reduce), consentir (to permit), obligar (to obligate), prohibir (to prohibit), requerir (to require), together with the periphrases haber de plus infinitive (to be required to) and ser necesario (to be necessary). The selection follows a functional criterion: these are the forms through which a statement imposes, enables, restricts, or exempts, that is, the forms that operationally perform what the preceding¹⁵³ chapters described as a distribution of powers. Imperative futures and jussive subjunctives without an explicit modal verb are excluded because their identification requires contextual disambiguation case by case. Their inclusion would increase the absolute figures without predictably altering the relative proportions.

One final caution must be noted. Only four transcribed passages are normative, an insufficient basis for any robust comparative claim. The figures for this class are provided for completeness and treated as indicative, never probative. The comparison this chapter can sustain is the internal comparison within the Las Casas corpus, where the base exceeds five thousand words.

¹⁵³ The count was conducted on the passages transcribed in this volume by identifying the inflected forms of each lemma and grouping them manually; the figures can be verified through direct inspection of the quotations and their notes.

8.2. Distribution of Deontic Forms

Deontic density, expressed as occurrences per thousand words, orders the classes as follows: 12.6 in normative passages, 9.0 in the Las Casas corpus, 5.7 in secondary literature, and 3.7 in passages without a reference. The progression is consistent with expectations: a text that commands contains more command forms than a text that comments, and a text that comments contains more than one that narrates. The fact that twentieth-century secondary literature presents a density equivalent to half that of the sixteenth-century corpus confirms that the measured property is not an artifact of the count, but a feature of the type of discourse.

The relevant finding, however, lies not in overall density, but in the internal composition of the Las Casas corpus. Of its forty-nine occurrences, the dominant lemma is *obligar* (to obligate), with eleven cases, followed by *poder* (may/can), with nine, *deber* (must/ought), with eight, and *mandar* (to command), also with eight. At the opposite extreme, *prohibir* (to prohibit) records only one case, as does *ser necesario* (to be necessary).

Lemma	Las Casas Corpus	Normative Documents	Secondary Literature
<i>obligar</i> (to obligate)	11	-	2
<i>poder</i> (may/can)	9	1	3
<i>deber</i> (must/ought)	8	1	1
<i>mandar</i> (to command)	8	-	-

Lemma	Las Casas Corpus	Normative Documents	Secondary Literature
procurar (to endeavor)	5	1	-
requerir (to require)	2	-	-
consentir (to permit)	2	-	-
haber de + infinitive (to be required to)	2	-	-
prohibir (to prohibit)	1	-	-
ser necesario (to be necessary)	1	-	-
Total	49	3	6
<i>Per 1,000 words</i>	<i>9.0</i>	<i>12.6</i>	<i>5.7</i>

Distribution of deontic forms in the passages transcribed in this volume (n = 118 quotations; 7,274 words). The eight passages without an attributable reference, totaling 541 words, record two occurrences and are excluded from the table.

8.3. The Asymmetry between Obligation and Prohibition

The ratio between obligar (to obligate) and prohibir (to prohibit), eleven occurrences to one, constitutes the principal finding of this count and permits an interpretation that the preceding chapters had suggested without being able to demonstrate. Las Casas does not construct his intervention as a prohibition directed against the conquest. He constructs it as an imposition of duties upon agents whom the legal order had already authorized to act.

The difference is technical and has precise consequences. Prohibiting a practice requires authority to repeal the norm enabling

it, authority that Las Casas did not possess: he could not annul a capitulation, revoke an encomienda, or suppress the *requerimiento*. Obliging an agent, by contrast, operates within the existing framework and may be exercised from subordinate positions: a bishop may impose duties of restitution upon a parishioner, a confessor may condition absolution, and a memorial may remind the king of an obligation he himself assumed before the papacy. The preference for the lemma *obligar* is not a stylistic feature; it is the linguistic trace of a strategy adapted to the powers actually available.

The second finding of interest is the balance between *poder* (may/can) and *deber* (must/ought), nine occurrences to eight. Both lemmas operate upon the same object, the agent's action, but in opposite directions: one states what is permitted, the other what is required. Their appearance in nearly identical proportions suggests that the Las Casas corpus moves constantly between the two levels and that its characteristic procedure consists of confronting a power with the duty accompanying it. This is exactly the operation described in Section 6.4 as a reformulation of the normative sequence, now observable in lexical distribution.

The eight instances of *mandar* (to command) require a different reading, because in most of them the subject is not Las Casas, but the authority quoted. They constitute reported discourse, the reproduction of another's command invoked by the text as a

standard against which observed conduct may be measured. This use confirms the procedure described in Chapters III and IV, where denunciation is constructed through contrast between normative formulation and its execution.

Finally, it is useful to specify what this count does not prove. It does not prove that normative documents display greater deontic density than the Las Casas corpus, because a base of four passages is insufficient. It proves nothing concerning the chronological development of Las Casas's lexical preferences, because the sample is not systematically dated. Nor does it replace reading: the figures indicate where to look, not what to conclude. What it does establish is that the property attributed to the corpus in the preceding chapters has an observable correlate and that this correlate can be measured through an explicit and replicable procedure.

The natural extension of this exercise is to apply the same count to complete editions of the History of the *Indies*, *the Short Account*, *The Only Way*, and *the treatises*, and to construct a normative subcorpus of comparable size containing the cited bulls, instructions, and laws. These two series would make it possible to test the hypothesis that can only be formulated here: that the obligational force of the texts of the enterprise in the Indies declines as the statement approaches the agent responsible for executing it.

CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions of this study do not lead to a simple opposition between conquest and evangelization, nor do they permit an automatic identification of conquistadors with violence and missionaries with its negation. An examination of the writings of Friar Bartolomé de las Casas reveals a more complex setting: Castilian expansion in the Americas articulated political, economic, legal, and religious interests within a single enterprise, although these components did not always coincide in their methods, priorities, or effects. Evangelization constituted an integral part of that expansion from its earliest normative formulations and, at the same time, supplied one of the most powerful languages from which the abuses of conquest could be challenged.

The first central result is therefore the distinction between the declared purpose of the colonial order and the concrete practices through which that order was executed. Pontifical bulls, royal instructions, laws, capitulations, and provisions directed to governors, encomenderos, and religious personnel established a vocabulary of legitimacy that presented Christianization as both an obligation and the foundation of the Spanish presence. The existence of this normative framework did not, however, determine by itself the conduct of those who acted in the Americas. Between

norm and practice lay a decisive space of selection, noncompliance, adaptation, and conflict. Within it may be found both the economic exploitation and violence denounced by Las Casas and the reform efforts promoted by religious personnel, jurists, and sectors of the Crown itself.

This separation between norm and execution explains why the American experience cannot be adequately described through a single logic. The pursuit of gold, labor, territory, and prestige coexisted with the ambition to extend the Christian faith. At times the two purposes reinforced one another; at others they entered into open contradiction. The *encomienda* constitutes one of the clearest examples: it could be justified formally through obligations of protection and religious instruction while functioning in practice as a mechanism for extracting labor and wealth. Christianization did not stand outside the colonial structure, but was incorporated into it, and precisely for this reason disputes over the legitimate method of evangelization acquired political, economic, and legal consequences.

Las Casas intervened in this conflict from within the Christian and Hispanic intellectual universe. His criticism entailed neither the abandonment of evangelization nor the denial of the universality of the faith he professed. What he increasingly questioned was the possibility of regarding as Christian a conversion obtained through violence, fear, servitude, or prior subjugation. In his thought, faith

required preaching, persuasion, understanding, and freedom. This requirement radically altered the conditions under which the Spanish presence could be declared legitimate because it deprived armed conquest of the capacity to present itself automatically as a necessary preparation for evangelization.

"The men of the Church, principally bishops, missionaries, and priests, together with very few laymen, who attempted to carry out the mission on many occasions unconsciously conflated Hispanic and Christian elements as though they were identical."¹⁵⁴

The preceding passage makes it possible to specify a second result of the study. One of the mission's fundamental problems was the tendency to identify the Christian with the Hispanic. When the two categories overlapped, religious conversion ceased to refer exclusively to acceptance of a doctrine and began to entail incorporation into European forms of authority, residence, labor, education, family organization, and community life. This identification explains part of the depth of the transformation accompanying evangelization. It involved not merely replacing one body of beliefs with another, but intervening in the systems of meaning within which those beliefs made sense.

¹⁵⁴ Dussel, *Historia de la Iglesia en América Latina*, 130.

From this perspective, evangelization must be analyzed simultaneously as religious practice and as a process of cultural transformation. The destruction of idols and ritual places, the reorganization of populations, the foundation of doctrinas, churches, and monasteries, the education of children, the preparation of catechisms and grammars, and the introduction of new social institutions profoundly modified the spaces in which Indigenous communities reproduced their ways of life. This transformation was never unilateral or complete, however. Indigenous peoples interpreted, negotiated, resisted, selected, and combined elements of Christianity with prior traditions, generating forms of appropriation and syncretism that frequently escaped the evangelizers' control.

Recognition of Indigenous agency requires abandoning a representation in which native people appear solely as passive objects of conquest or evangelization. The very sources used by Las Casas reveal communities capable of setting conditions for receiving religious personnel, distinguishing between friars and conquistadors, abandoning settlements, preserving religious practices, accepting certain elements of the new faith, and rejecting others. Even when colonial documentation describes such conduct through European categories, the process of incorporation into the Christian and Hispanic order can be seen to have been contested. Conversion was

neither a single nor a uniform act, but a sequence of encounters, translations, impositions, negotiations, and local responses.

Las Casas's position acquires particular importance precisely because he perceived that Spanish violence could destroy the very conditions that made evangelization possible. If those who presented themselves as Christians plundered, enslaved, killed, or subjected the populations they sought to convert, the name of religion became associated with those practices. For him, the contradiction was not merely moral, but also functional: the conquistadors' conduct produced rejection of the message the missionaries sought to communicate. His defense of peaceful evangelization cannot therefore be understood as a peripheral element of his thought, but as a direct criticism of the compatibility between coercion and faith.

"Which of the saints, or of the divine envoys whom we know God has sent, affirmed through the terror of the sword that he was an envoy?"¹⁵⁵

Las Casas's question concentrates an essential part of his program. In confronting the word with the sword, he did not reject only certain individual excesses. He disputed the criterion by which an action could be recognized as Christian and, by extension, legitimate. War, the formal *requerimiento*, Indigenous resistance, or

¹⁵⁵ Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, bk. 1, chap. 6, 457.

imperial authority alone ceased to constitute sufficient grounds for imposing conversion. The addressee's freedom became a condition of validity for the evangelizing act. This operation explains the political significance of his writing and helps clarify why his texts exceeded the strictly religious sphere.

The compiled rule makes it possible to formalize this result without projecting onto the sixteenth century a theory its actors did not possess. The enterprise in the Indies operated through sets of texts and authorities that defined powers, obligations, prohibitions, and purposes. Bulls established a mission; royal instructions translated it into duties; laws delimited procedures; colonial institutions distributed capacities for action; and concrete agents interpreted, executed, or violated those restrictions. In this sense, power manifested itself not only as sovereign decision or material violence. It also operated through normative forms capable of ordering which actions could be presented as lawful, necessary, Christian, or just.

Las Casas attempted to intervene in this normative architecture. His memorials, treatises, letters, and histories did not merely denounce events already completed. They sought to modify the rules under which future events could occur. When he demanded that Indigenous people be recognized as rational and free human beings, he restricted the arguments available to justify their

enslavement. When he denied the legitimacy of forced conversion, he reduced the field of actions that could be executed in the name of faith. When he defended peaceful preaching, he incorporated new conditions into the evangelizing procedure. His writing was therefore a political as well as a historiographical and theological practice.

The analysis nevertheless also requires precise acknowledgment of the project's limitations. Las Casas defended the rationality, freedom, and political capacity of Indigenous peoples to a degree extraordinary for his context, but he did not propose the intact preservation of their religious systems or the suspension of the Christianizing project. His peaceful evangelization remained oriented toward a profound transformation of beliefs and, in several of his projects, toward forms of social and economic reorganization inspired by European models. Rejection of physical coercion did not by itself eliminate the cultural asymmetry between one who claimed possession of religious truth and one who was to be converted.

This tension constitutes one of the study's most important findings. Las Casas can be simultaneously an opponent of colonial violence and an actor situated within the universalist horizon of Hispanic Christendom. Reducing him to a precursor of human rights erases part of that historicity; conversely, reducing him to a mere agent of European expansion makes it impossible to

understand the genuine force of his criticism. His singularity lies precisely in having carried the theological, legal, and historical categories available in his own world to consequences capable of challenging fundamental aspects of the imperial order that the same world had produced.

Las Casas's historiographical significance also derives from the manner in which he constructed knowledge about the Indies. His work combines testimony, documentary compilation, legal argument, providential interpretation, ethnographic description, and political combat. This combination requires using him as a source with a twofold caution. His texts contain indispensable information concerning the conquest and American societies, but were written for concrete purposes and within controversies in which the author sought to persuade readers, authorities, and adversaries. His exaggerations, rhetorical selections, and moral oppositions do not invalidate the source; they form part of what must be explained historically.

For the same reason, images of meek Indigenous people, cruel Spaniards, exemplary religious, or conquistadors ruled by greed should not be read as transparent descriptions of homogeneous groups. They also function as polemical categories through which Las Casas distributes responsibility and legitimacy. The value of his work increases when it is studied on both levels: as a repository of

facts and testimony and as a discursive intervention intended to modify the perception and regulation of conquest. This dual condition explains both its extraordinary influence and the controversies it has generated since the sixteenth century.

The research thus makes it possible to answer the question running through the manuscript: it was indeed possible within the sixteenth century itself to formulate a model of evangelization incompatible with the violence of conquest. Las Casas constitutes one of its most systematic expressions. This finding does not imply, however, that evangelization and cultural domination were completely separated. Even the peaceful model retained a purpose of conversion and reorganization that transformed the Indigenous symbolic and social universe. The decisive difference lay in the means employed, the status attributed to the other, and the conditions of legitimacy governing Spanish action, not in the renunciation of all religious transformation.

Conquest and evangelization in the Americas must ultimately be understood as intertwined but nonidentical processes. They shared institutions, actors, and spaces and often supported one another, but also produced internal conflicts capable of altering law, imperial politics, and Christian reflection itself. Las Casas occupies a central place in this fracture. His work reveals that the colonial order was

not ideologically monolithic and that some of its most severe criticisms arose from within its own categories of legitimation.

The Dominican's historical significance lies finally in having transformed this contradiction into writing, argument, and political action. His legacy does not depend upon presenting him as a figure without limitations or judging him exclusively through contemporary categories. It depends upon understanding the historical structure of his intervention: a religious educated within Hispanic Christendom who, confronted with the American experience, used the intellectual resources of that tradition to deny that domination, violence, and greed could simply be conflated with a Christian mission. This operation explains why his thought remains indispensable for studying not only evangelization and conquest, but also the relationships among power, norm, language, and legitimacy in the formation of the American colonial world.

APPENDIX. THE COMPILED RULE: CRITERIA, NOTATION, AND CASES

The methodological note opening this volume defines the compiled rule as a normative formulation whose efficacy depends upon the restrictions it imposes on subsequent actions, while Sections 3.3, 4.3, 6.4, and 7.3 apply it to the historical material. Until this point, its use has been descriptive: the reader can follow the reasoning but lacks criteria for applying it to a different text or verifying whether a particular reading complies with the procedure. This appendix remedies that deficiency. Its purpose is not interpretive, but instrumental: to establish when a statement counts as a compiled rule, the notation through which it may be described, and the manner in which the result may be tested.

The procedure must satisfy two requirements. It must be sufficiently precise to exclude statements that do not qualify, since otherwise it would describe every normative text and say nothing, and sufficiently general to apply beyond the corpus of the Indies. The two cases in the final section test both conditions.

A.1. Identification Criteria

A statement constitutes a compiled rule if it satisfies the following four criteria.

Agency criterion. The statement designates a subject authorized or obligated to act. The designation may be nominal, a governor or a particular bishop, or functional, those who receive Indians in encomienda or religious personnel who travel to the Indies. A statement that imposes a state of affairs without identifying who must produce it does not satisfy this criterion.

Operation criterion. The statement applies to a specified action at least one of the deontic forms recorded in Chapter VIII, *mandar* (to command), *deber* (must/ought), *poder* (may/can), *procurar* (to endeavor), *inducir* (to induce), *reducir* (to reduce), *consentir* (to permit), *obligar* (to obligate), *prohibir* (to prohibit), *requerir* (to require), *haber de plus infinitive* (to be required to), or *ser necesario* (to be necessary), or an equivalent imperatival future. The action must be identifiable: send, settle, instruct in doctrine, assess, or restore. Declarations of purpose without an associated operation are excluded.

Dependency criterion. The statement invokes or presupposes a previous text from which its authority derives. This dependency may be explicit, through quotation or reference, or implicit, when the authority exercised is intelligible only through a prior grant. This criterion distinguishes the compiled rule from the singular order: one who commands through original authority of his own compiles nothing.

Projection criterion. The effects of the statement fall upon future actions rather than upon the description or classification of completed facts. A denunciation of past events, however severe, does not project restrictions; a provision governing how action is to proceed in the future does.

The four criteria are conjunctive, and failure to satisfy them produces distinct categories, not merely negative cases. A statement satisfying agency, operation, and projection but not dependency is an original command. One satisfying agency, operation, and dependency but not projection is a normative finding: it verifies past compliance with another rule. One satisfying dependency and projection without designating a subject or operation is a declaration of principle. This discrimination makes the instrument usable: if every normative statement were a compiled rule, the concept would be merely ornamental.

A.2. Notation

Once the criteria have been verified, the statement is described through a five-tuple recording its operational components. The notation does not aspire to logical formalization: it is a recording format that requires each element to be made explicit and renders visible what is absent.

Symbol	Component	Recorded Information
S	Authorized Subject	Who is authorized or

Symbol	Component	Recorded Information
		obligated, nominally or functionally
O	Operation	The imposed or authorized action, together with its deontic form
F	Declared Purpose	The end invoked by the statement itself as justification
V	Verification	The prescribed control mechanism; $\emptyset$ if none exists
D	Dependency	The preceding text from which authority derives

The scope for noncompliance is not recorded as a component because it is not a datum of the statement, but a result of the analysis: it derives from the relationship between V and S. When V is null and the interest of the authorized subject diverges from the declared purpose, the scope is maximal; when V exists and resides in an authority distinct from S, the scope is reduced. This derivation is the step that transforms description into explanation, and it is also the point at which the analyst must justify the reading, because the subject's interest is not inscribed in the text and requires external evidence.

For chains of texts, the symbol $\supset$ is used to indicate that the statement on its right rests upon the one on its left. The sequence examined in Chapter I is therefore written: Alcáçovas 1479 $\supset$ *Inter caetera* 1493 $\supset$ Tordesillas 1494 $\supset$ **Instruction** to Ovando 1501. Notating the chain reveals a property that continuous reading tends

to conceal: each link inherits the purpose of its predecessor and adds operations the former did not contemplate. The distance between the purpose declared at the origin and the operations authorized at the end therefore increases with the length of the chain.

A.3. Positive Case: The Instruction to Ovando (1501)

The document issued to Nicolás de Ovando before his departure for Hispaniola satisfies all four criteria. It designates a nominal subject, the governor, and derived functional subjects, the colonists who receive Indians; applies deontic forms to specified operations, to endeavor to convert, induce the native population, reduce them into settlements, instruct them in doctrine, and permit no harm; derives its authority from the bulls of 1493, which it invokes as the foundation of the Castilian presence; and projects its effects upon the island's future government. Recorded in the proposed notation:

S: the governor and, by delegation, the encomenderos. O: endeavor, induce, reduce, instruct in doctrine, permit no harm. F: conversion of the native people and their treatment as free persons. V: $\emptyset$, the document establishes no deadline, measure of results, or control authority distinct from the governor himself. D: *Inter caetera* and *Piis fidelium*, 1493.

The scope follows immediately. Verification is null, and the subject upon whom the obligation to instruct falls, the

encomendero, obtains his economic benefit from the labor of the very persons he must instruct. The scope is therefore maximal, and its magnitude depends not upon the agents' will, but upon the structure of the statement. This is the result sustained in prose by Section 3.3; the notation makes it verifiable and, above all, falsifiable. It would be sufficient to identify a verification mechanism prescribed by the document to invalidate the analysis.

A.4. Negative Case: The Sermon of Montesinos (1511)

The sermon of the fourth Sunday of Advent in 1511 is the text possessing the greatest obligational force in the entire corpus examined, yet it does not constitute a compiled rule. The distinction matters because it demonstrates that the criteria discriminate.

The sermon satisfies the agency criterion: it is addressed to identifiable subjects, the encomenderos and island authorities gathered in the church. It satisfies the operation criterion, and does so forcefully: the questions structuring it refer to unfulfilled duties, to provide food, tend the sick, instruct in doctrine, and refrain from killing, and culminate in a declaration of the impossibility of salvation. It also satisfies the dependency criterion because it invokes Christian law and the obligation derived from baptism as the foundation of the reproach.

It fails, however, to satisfy the projection criterion, and does so for a structural reason. The sermon classifies completed acts; it neither provides how action must proceed in the future nor alters anyone's powers. Its force is that of a normative finding: it verifies noncompliance with other rules and declares it publicly. Its historical effect was consequently immense, but its normative effect was null: it changed no authorized operation, and the response it provoked consisted in asking the Crown to correct the Dominicans, not in revising the encomienda regime.

The contrast with the *Confessional*, examined in Section 6.4, is illuminating. The latter does project: it establishes a condition, restitution, that the confessor must apply in future acts, and it therefore provoked hostility of a different kind. A sermon may be more eloquent than a form and less effective than it at the level of the rule. The distinction between denunciation and normative reformulation, presented by Chapter VI as an interpretive finding, is here derived from the criteria rather than the reader's impression.

A.5. Scope, Conditions of Application, and Falsification

The procedure is not limited to the corpus of the Indies. Its four criteria contain no reference to any particular historical content: they may be applied to any documentary series in which successive texts derive authority from one another and distribute powers among agents other than their drafters. The condition of applicability is the

existence of such a chain; where only one text exists, or where drafter and executor coincide, the instrument yields nothing.

Three conditions must be satisfied for the analysis to be legitimate. The first is documentary: every recorded component must be attributable to a locatable passage, and the notation $\emptyset$ must mean verified absence from the text, not absence of a search. The second is externality: deriving the scope requires evidence concerning the interest of the authorized subject that the statement does not provide, and this evidence must be presented separately, not inferred from the analysis itself. The third is interpretive contemporaneity: the criteria describe how texts function; they do not attribute to their drafters an intention to produce that functioning.

Finally, it is useful to indicate what observation would refute the instrument. If an extensive documentary series systematically showed that statements with null verification produced the same execution outcomes as statements with established verification, the relationship between scope and textual structure would be disproved, and the procedure would lose its explanatory value, retaining at most a classificatory use. Such a test requires comparable series and is, together with the extension of the lexical count proposed in Chapter VIII, the natural continuation of this work.

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