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Lawrence A. Clayton and David M. Lantigua, Bartolomé de las Casas and the Defense of Amerindian Rights: A Brief History With Documents

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Lawrence A. Clayton and David M. Lantigua, eds. *Bartolomé de Las Casas and the Defense of Amerindian Rights: A Brief History with Documents*. Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2020. 141 pp. \$29.95 Paper. ISBN: 978-0-8173-5969-0.

Lawrence Clayton, a historian of Latin American and Christian church history, and David Lantigua, a moral theologian and ethicist, have collaborated to produce a comprehensive yet compact sourcebook of original documents by Bartolomé de las Casas that surveys Las Casas's life and thought.

The editors' excellent introductory essay unites the documents. It deftly melds Las Casas's historical context and life events and his theological, philosophical, and legal thought and arguments into a concise yet comprehensive overview. This essay is reinforced by the editors' paragraphs introducing each of the chapters that divide Las Casas's life, thought, work, and legacy into seven thematic parts and introduce each of the documents found therein.

Las Casas himself introduces the advent of Spanish exploration and conquest in part one. His transcription of Columbus's log of this first voyage is the closest thing we have to an account by his own hand. Important here is the surfacing by the editors of an underappreciated fact about the Spanish conquest of the Americas: it was the continuation of the Spanish *Reconquista*. Part two presents how England and the Netherlands used Las Casas's work to develop the Black Legend: Spain was portrayed by its Protestant rivals for empire in the Americas as a preternaturally backward and barbaric country. (A contemporary legacy of that is the prejudice against Latinos that exists in the United States to this day.) Part three illustrates Las Casas's major error of promoting the African slave trade as a source of substitute labor in the Americas, his repenting of that error, and his interpretation of the New Laws promulgated in Spain to protect Amerindian and African persons. These laws were roundly ignored and openly violated by the Spanish American colonists.

Part four shows Las Casas, as a Dominican priest and later as the bishop of Chiapas, presenting his argument of why the only way to evangelize the Amerindian is through persuasion. Parts five, six, and seven, respectively, present Las Casas's Aristotelian/Thomistic philosophy, political philosophy, and legal reasoning, all in defense of the essential humanity, liberty, right to life and property, and freedom of consent, of the Amerindian. These form the core of Las Casas's arguments, which he took directly to one of the most powerful monarchs in history, Emperor Charles V, persuading him to suspend the *Conquista* and change Spanish law to protect the Amerindian and to limit what the Spanish conquerors and settlers could legally do in Spain's American empire. Here is found Las Casas's legacy as an intellectual ancestor of Latin American nationalism, liberation theology, and Catholic social teaching and as a pioneer of human rights theory. Moreover, though Las Casas never met Luther or involved himself in the Protestant Reformation, the editors point out that his work was nevertheless part of an epoch of reform affecting Europe and its nascent empires. Las Casas's insistence that the Spanish Crown has no right to entrust Amerindians and their lands to Spanish rule without their uncoerced, free consent also makes him a direct ancestor of the 18th and 19th century revolutionary movements across the Western Hemisphere, including the American Revolution.

University professors and their students studying religion, theology, politics, philosophy, human rights, and Latin American history will find this book useful as a course textbook and a reference guide for research. The questions in Appendix B could expand the book's audience to include high school teachers and their students in advanced history, politics, philosophy, and religion classes.

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