

takes place in many local communities and which mostly escapes the attention of the press. Such as the one which the Division of Justice and Reconciliation in the S.A.C.C. is out to provoke by bringing White people face-to-face with the actual conditions in which the country's underprivileged race-groups must live. Going a step further is the plan to step up the exchange of pulpits among preachers ministering to congregations of different colours, which has gained considerable momentum since the end of the 'Congress on Mission and Evangelism'.

The congress-theme was chosen from 2 Chron. 7, 14: 'If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land'. It has been stated above that the hour may not yet be too late for this promise to find its fulfilment in present-day South Africa. There is still hope that the small number of men will be found whose righteousness will save the land from Jahweh's wrath and the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Bartholomew de la Casas, Samuel Purchas and Colonialism

by Enrique Ruiz Maldonado, O.P.¹

Contradictions in a Controversy

Las Casas has always been surrounded by controversy. Not only did he play a highly important role in what is known as the 'Indian Controversy', but he himself has been the object of violent and protracted dispute. He has been regarded as the glory, and at the same time as the disgrace of Spain: as a fanatic, and a man of enlightenment. He has been used as an example for all kinds of people, for Christians as well as atheists, for Protestants and Catholics, for those on the left as well as those on the right; for people who love Spain, and those who hate the country.

This article does not seek to cast new light on that problem, which is sufficiently vast and complicated to inspire a book and much more. The present task is more modest; it is to look again at one or two important points in the interpretation of Las Casas, and to arrive

¹English translation by Paul Potts O.P.

at a picture which fits better with the man, his thoughts, and his deeply-held desires. I am sure that it is impossible to understand him if his life and work are separated from his basic motives; and this separation has been one of the main sources of the controversy surrounding him. It is also at the bottom of the paradoxical criticism and praise for him that spring out of the turning-point in history known as 'The Indian Controversy'.

Samuel Purchas (1575-7 to 1626) provides us with a very illuminating example of this contradiction, and his attitude to the Spanish conquest is a case in point. His *Relations of the World* was first published in 1613, that is 61 years after the first edition of Las Casas' best-known and most polemical work, the *Brevisima Historia de las Destruccion de Las Indias*. Now the gap between what Las Casas wrote and the motives of Purchas can be seen clearly expressed in the latter's writing, for his aims were quite different from those of Las Casas. Whereas Las Casas had in mind the interests of the Indians, and shouted with all his might to bring to public notice the injustices of which they were the victims. Purchas was looking in those same injustices for a stick to beat the 'Pseudo-Catholic Religion' of Spain.

No doubt there is a basis of truth common to both these works, namely the criticism of a religious theory which was unable to prevent injustice. But Las Casas is to be counted well above this theology, and with him many other Catholics of his time. Their action resulted in a colonialism less mediaeval and less inhuman than that of other countries such as Portugal, England and Germany. But more of that later.

The confusion I have been talking about arises equally in other areas, always in connexion with historical situations and current ideological conflicts. For example, in the Mexican newspaper *Excelsior* for 30.1.1920, can be found the following:

'Is it not extraordinary that revolutionaries and anti-clerics, as well as Catholic missionaries, should have Friar Bartholomew de Las Casas as their patron and model? Even the constitution of Queretaro . . . while forbidding the wearing of the religious habit and other religious symbols, allowed the fine statue of the friar Bartholomew to remain in a corner of the Place d'Armes in Mexico City. By order and agreement of the government, Las Casas alone was allowed to violate the strait-laced constitution of Queretaro.'

Here again the motives of the Mexican government, and of the anti-clerics and revolutionaries, coincide to some degree with those of Las Casas, but over a large area are quite different. For them, he provides an opportunity for edifying popular and nationalist demagoguery; but they show no concern to know why he did what he did, and what were the principles of his action—principles which were attacked in the constitution of Queretaro, but which were praised and revered in their results.

Purchas and his 'Pilgrimage'

As we have just said, Purchas' main source of inspiration is Las Casas' *Brevisima Historia*. Although he does not actually cite the title, he says 'He wrote this anno 1542'. Now we know that the first edition was printed in 1553, and also that Las Casas completed the manuscript on 8th December, 1542. In any case, the points and examples brought up by Purchas are to be found in that work.

Purchas' work went through four editions in the seventeenth century: 1613, 1614, 1617 and 1626. The edition I am using is the third. The following are the passages on which I want to comment:

Chap. XV. Of the Spanish cruelties in the West-Indes and their
perverse conversion of the Indians into Christianitie.

For as much as the Papists doe usually glory in the purchase of a new world unto their religion, and would have men beleieve, that since this scripture-heresie hath made new Rome to tremble now . . ., they have a new supply with much advantage in this Western World of America; and they make this their Indian conversion, one of the markes of the truenesse and catholicisme of their Church, which hath gained . . . an hundred times as much in the new world towards the west, south and east, by new converts, as it hath lost in the north parts by Heretikes . . . it shall not be amisse to observe the proceedings of the Spaniards in these parts. And herein wee will use the witness of men in their owne Romist Religion. . . . The Indians conceive an implacable hatred against the Faith, by the scandall of the Spaniards cruelties; and that they have baptized some by force. *Vega* accuseth them of baptizing without making them know the Faith, or taking knowledge of their life. And how could it otherwise be, when we finde it recorded of sundrie of their preachers, that baptized each one of them above an hundred thousand, and that in a few years? . . . Some of these were so good Christians, that they still continued . . . the sacrifices of humane flesh. *Oviedo* writeth, that they have but the name of Christians, and are baptized rather because they are of age, than for devotion to the Faith, and none, or very few of them are Christians willingly.

'Hee that will reede what they lately have done in Spaine with the remnants of the Moores may perhaps satisfy himself with the reasons of *Frier Fonseca* (Damiano Fonseca: "Del giusto sciaciamento Moreschi da Spagna"), in defence thereof. But for the poor Indians, *Bartholomeus de Las Cases*, a Dominike Frier . . ., and after a bishop in America, hath written a large and unanswerable treatise of the enormous cruelties, and unchristian Antichristian proceedings in the New World, the summe whereof is this, that the Indians were a simple harmless people, loyall to their lords, and such as gave no cause to the Spaniards of dislike, till they by extreme iniuries were provoked: they are also docible and pliant,

both in good doctrine and living. To these lambes, saith he, the Spaniards came as cruell and hungry Tygres, Beares and Lions, intending nothing those forty years (hee wrote this anno 1542), but bloud and slaughter, to satisfie their avarice and ambition. . . .’

Puchas goes on with a résumé of the violence and slaughter of the Spaniards in Cuba, ‘In the Island Hispaniola’ (Santo Domingo), ‘Sain John’ (Puerto Rico), ‘Jamaica’; ‘from Darien’ (Venezuela) ‘to Nicaragua’; ‘In New Spaine’ (Mexico), and so on. And he goes back to the question of the Catholics, following Las Casas closely:

‘They (the priests) teach them a few prayers in the Spanish tongue, which they understood not: and the which are more painefull, a Catechisme without explanation.

‘Their teaching is but a jest and a shadow to get money; they follow dicing, hunting, whooring; in so much that Baptisme is scorned, and the Indians are forced to it against their wills. . . . They are of the opinion (saith Casas) that the King of Spaine . . . is himselfe most cruell and lives on mans flesh; and that of all gods, the GOD (*sic*) of the Christians is the worst, which hath so bad servants; longing for their owne gods, of whom they never received such ill, as now by this of the Christians. . . .’

‘This is the preaching and Conversion the Romists boast of, and gull our European world with musters of their miracles, and thousands of their proselytes, which we rather pitie than envie.’ The Jesuits are not spared from a share in this violent critique, with evidence taken from Arnaldus’ work, *Against the Jesuits*. The Inquisition comes under critical scrutiny also; and to conclude the account from which we have seen some extracts, Purchas gives us his own motives:

‘. . . and in this subject, which is of the Spanish cruelties (not written in hatred of their nation, because they are Spaniards), but of their pseudo-Catholicke religion, under show where of, they there did, and heere would have executed those butcheries. . . .’

He came back to this idea later, in his *Hakluytus Posthumus* (ch. 18). Here again, where he gives his translations of Las Casas (this is the second English translation of the *Brevisima Historia*), Purchas insists that he is not trying to denigrate the Spanish nation. He asks the question that many subsequent historians have asked about Las Casas—by speaking out as he did, was he not in fact working *for* the reputation of his country, rather than bringing it into disgrace and ill-repute?

Colonialism and Christian Humanism in the sixteenth century

It is clear that it is not at colonialism that Purchas’ investigation is in the end directed; the affair of the Spanish colonies is for him simply an example to support the idea of the Church which was then in the process of formation in England; so to understand his discussion, we must have a brief look at the England of the sixteenth

century. We must not separate Purchas' assertions from the background of the Act of Supremacy signed by Parliament in 1533, which, by making the king the supreme head of the English Church, exercised an enormous influence on English culture. Purchas views Spain through the prism of the power struggle between the pope and the king of England, a struggle which brought forth, as at the beginnings of the Church, an avalanche of apologetic and defensive literature, whose objectivity is often questionable.

The important point here is that it was Las Casas whom Purchas used as his principal authority in his anti-Catholic (and not anti-Spanish, as he says) argument. Why was this? Clearly because Las Casas had formulated some very severe criticisms of the Catholic society to which he belonged. Purchas has simply made use of this as a generous garnish for his own apologetic. Certainly, as I have said, this criticism of injustice in the heart of a Catholic society provides a common basis of truth in both writers; but there is an enormous difference between them. It was Las Casas' object to change the mediaeval ideas and practices which were threatening the survival of the colonized Indians, in which he was joined by many others. But Purchas attacked the system in its entirety. Casas looked for reform, whereas Purchas, conscious of the way his own world has been reformed, was seeking to strengthen his own Church by a radical opposition to other similar institutions in their desire to perpetuate themselves, 'which we rather pity than envy'. Even though it is only mentioned in passing, this is on behalf of a system which felt itself capable of sustaining the attack, and of uprooting its own injustices.

We must now consider the way that the two ideologies reacted when confronted by the problem of colonialism.

The discovery of America was, through the controversy to which it gave rise, a decisive event in the evolution of thought on these matters. The first question it posed bore on the rights which the Catholic kings had over the newly discovered territories. And the fact that the lands in question were inhabited by others whose beliefs and way of life were not that of the European posed the second great question: do the Catholic kings have any rights over the peoples of these lands?

Two responses were to be evoked by these two questions; that which was in line with the theocratic and feudal culture of the Christian Middle Ages, and that of an equally Christian humanism still in the process of asserting itself. This cultural shift is the real source of the controversy. The former answered that the kings did have rights: the latter, after initial fumbling and hesitation, answered that they did not—the Christian kings had no rights of property or of government over the discovered peoples, even if they were not Christians. For the divine right does not override human rights, such as the right to possess lands or goods, the right to one's own leaders in law

and politics, and in fact the right to be free of slavery and exploitation, the state of dependence more or less accepted by a conquered people. . . .

Unhappily for the Indians, this controversy was not opened up until twenty years of savage exploitation had passed. Historians agree in placing the beginnings of the dispute at the end of 1511, the date of the historic sermon of Antonio de Montesinos. This is why the first positive results appeared only with the *Encomiendas* of New Spain, which treated the Indians with much more respect and gentleness than in Hispaniola and the other Caribbean colonies. It is true that the 'Laws of the Indians', especially those of Burgos and the 'Legas Nuevas', remained largely ineffective, and sometimes created real conflicts; but this effort on the part of the Spanish crown and of missionaries such as Montesinos, Pedro do Cordoba, Las Casas, Motolinia, Vasco de Quiroga, etc., prevented the total wiping out of the Indian population and allowed the development of a new mixed society.

Las Casas' struggle for reform had, then, only a qualified success, and from his own point of view, was a complete failure. Even so, thanks to him, something was saved. He still stands as an example and an inspiration for those who are seeking a better way of life for the millions of men living in situations of injustice in Latin America; situations brought about by the new forms of colonialism, political, cultural and social.

I have not yet dealt with parallel controversies in other colonialist countries. As we have seen, the important questions raised by the colonialists' claims were thrashed out between the spiritual and the temporal powers. In England, the formulation of such questions became impossible as soon as, in the one person of the king, both human and divine rights are found to coincide. The result was, that there was no external appeal which could challenge or even discuss his rights. And so reflection on human rights, brought in by humanist tendencies from the Middle Ages, which were of crucial importance in a colonial situation, underwent a serious set-back. Already in 1542, the Pope had been systematically denied the right of disposing of the power and property of infidels, even in order to evangelize them and bring them civilization. After 1533, a parallel move was impossible under the English system.

However, there was an enormous difference between Spain and England in the way that sixteenth-century humanism, whose principal representative was Erasmus, developed in the two countries. This can be seen, for example, in the remarkable spiritual energy of the Spanish missionaries, whose baptism of hundreds of thousands of Indians is brought up by Purchas. In the atmosphere of a new millenarianism (cf. Matthew 24, 14), they baptised whole towns, rather like the cities of Thomas More's *Utopia*. In 1514, More himself saw

colonization as a right for overpopulated nations (*Utopia*, pt. 2), an idea which became stronger and stronger in England, whereas in Spain it gradually lost ground. If we go back to the two critiques and the aims behind them, we can see that for Las Casas there were only very meagre practical results. For Purchas on the other hand, they were crowned with success. Yet in the old Spanish colonies, the Indians can be counted in millions. In the English colonies, they can be found not at all, except in the reservations.

In conclusion, I would like to quote from the article on Las Casas in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (13th Edit.), which is a typical example of the way that the colonial policies of England justified itself (later editions have been more cautious):

‘. . . Las Casas is still a figure of controversy: his colonisation attempt was a humiliating failure; his experiments to test the capacity of the natives found only a few capable of living alone as free subjects of the king; the attempt to introduce the Faith by peaceful means led to bloodshed in Guatemala and Florida; the radical decrees of the New Laws led to near revolt in Mexico, open rebellion in Peru and grave unrest throughout the empire. None of his plans succeeded. Yet by his monolithic stubbornness, Las Casas dramatized the plight of the Indian and made progress for their betterment possible for more reasonable men.’

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Cardinal Newman’s Social Philosophy

by David G. Hawkins

The most extreme advocates amongst those who favoured ‘sacerdotalism’ if not theocracy, John Henry Newman was ‘deeply introspective, constantly self-concerned, tirelessly self-recording’.¹ Subsequently he

¹Sean O’Faolain quoted by Giovanni Costigan, *Makers of Modern Britain* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), pp. x-xi.