HONOR AND CARITAS:
BARTOLOMÉ DE LAS CASAS, SOLDIERS OF FORTUNE,
AND THE CONQUEST OF THE AMERICAS

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HONOR AND CARITAS: BARTOLOMÉ DE LAS CASAS, SOLDIERS OF FORTUNE, AND THE CONQUEST OF THE AMERICAS

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This dissertation - a postcolonial re-examination of Bartolomé de las Casas, the 16th century Spanish priest often called “The Protector of the Indians” - is a conversation between three primary components: a biography of Las Casas, an interdisciplinary history of the conquest of the Americas and early Latin America, and an analysis of the Spanish debate over the morality of Spanish colonialism. The work adds two new theses to the scholarship of Las Casas: a reassessment of the process of Spanish expansion and the nature of Las Casas’s opposition to it.

The first thesis challenges the dominant paradigm of 16th century Spanish colonialism, which tends to explain conquest as the result of perceived religious and racial difference; that is, Spanish conquistadors turned to military force as a means of imposing Spanish civilization and Christianity on heathen Indians. In contrast, this work emphasizes the continuity of the conquest of the Americas with longstanding internal conflict over limited Iberian resources, particularly the century and a half crisis preceding
1492. Iberian warriors fought each other and the crown for control over feudal offices, tribute paying peasants, and prestigious titles. This civil conflict spilled over into the Americas as de-centralized entrepreneurial groups of Spaniards exercised similar military techniques for the same goals – economic and social power – with rather limited religious concerns. Theological rational and crusading zeal did not drive the conquest; rather, they are better seen as a gradual accretion to an already occurring process. Theological support for the conquest, exemplified by Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, developed in response to the opposition of Las Casas and the Dominicans.

The second thesis pertains to the opposition of Las Casas and the Dominicans. Traditionally, most commentators see opposition as a stage in intellectual history foreshadowing the coming modern idea of toleration, a perspective that is not entirely incorrect. This dissertation, however, argues that opposition should be seen primarily as an innovative reformulation of traditional Catholic theology. The Dominicans, a reformed order with an intense ascetical and liturgical life, opposed conquest on theological grounds – based on the supernatural virtue of *caritas* – and enforced it with ecclesial discipline. The thought and practices of Las Casas and the Dominicans stemmed from old world precedents of ecclesial opposition to internal aristocratic violence, exemplified by the Peace of God movement of the 11th century and St. Ignatius of Loyola of the 16th. Thus, opposition is best seen as an extension of traditional mendicant life and theological ferment into unprecedented terrain.

In the end, this work has two intended conclusions. On the one hand, the conquest – often seen as an act of irrational barbarism – becomes more intelligible. The conquistadors, much like foreign predators released into an environment unaccustomed to
their techniques of predation, devastate natives through what is their natural behavior.

On the other, Las Casas and the Dominicans become more radical in their denial of what is a rather natural, if exceptionally tragic process of expansion. It is their quixotic faith that helped birth our ambivalence to conquest and servitude.
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INTRODUCTION

One of the most fascinating and tragic events of history is what is often called the “Conquest of the Americas.” It began in 1492 when Christopher Columbus arrived in the Caribbean. After devastating the island of Hispaniola, reducing its as many as three million inhabitants to a remnant numbering in the thousands, conquistadors spread throughout the Caribbean basin like ripples from a large stone dropped into the sea. Mexico fell in 1521, Peru in 1533, Chile beginning in 1541…the lists goes on as Spanish war parties reverberated throughout the Americas. In less than a century, tens of millions of Indians were dead and the rest served their new Spanish overlords or lived in marginal areas. African slaves worked early sugar plantations, foreshadowing the millions more to be brought across the Atlantic. Armadas laden with gold returned to Spain while an imperial web of Spanish language, culture, and Catholicism blanketed the Americas.

For a long time this story was told with a certain European triumphalism. Some circles emphasized the religious difference. European Christians, with the help of God, defeated the pagan Indians and gave them the priceless gift of faith. Others focused on the supposed racial difference. Europeans, as the peak of the human evolutionary tree, brought civilization to culturally and racially inferior peoples. Whether providential, evolutionarily necessary, or a combination of both, the moral of the story was simple: Europeans were good and Indians were bad.
I, thankfully, am young enough not have learned that version of the story. I was in high school in 1992, the quincentennial of Columbus’s arrival in the Americas, and was taught that intolerance - in this case a medieval Catholic form - caused the conquest. Crusading Spanish knights, fresh from the killing fields of the Reconquista and torture chambers of the Inquisition, unleashed European military technology and disease on the peoples of the Americas. Indians, though nobly and uniformly united in defense of their holistic cultures and ancestral lands, succumbed to the unrelenting Spanish war machine. In essence, the triumphant story was flipped on its head and made tragic: now Indians were good and Europeans bad.

A number of years later in college I encountered the subject again. The narrative of conquest was largely the same – Indians good and Europeans bad - but to my surprise I discovered that a number of Spaniards opposed the conquest. Two decades after Columbus’s initial journey to the Caribbean, a group of Dominican friars publicly issued their opposition to what they called “cruel and horrible servitude” and “unprovoked war.”

I studied the work of the most famous critics, Bartolomé de Las Casas. Initially a young secular priest integrally involved in the conquest, he renounced his grant of Indian laborers and joined the Dominican campaign. Las Casas spent over fifty years leading the fight against what he called the “damnable, rotten, infamous deeds done so unjustly, so tyrannically, so barbarously to these people.”

This was certainly a better story. It now had another set of characters and an additional level of conflict. But where, amidst this sea of fanaticism and brutality, did the

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critics of conquest come from? I am now not sure if I was taught or merely assumed the answer. Such strange characters must be, I thought, an early manifestation of the coming age of Enlightenment foreshadowing the development of modern toleration and multiculturalism. Such unexpected cultural sensitivity seemed relevant to contemporary issues of religion and politics, so when I found myself in graduate school I decided to revisit the conquest of the Americas and tell the story with an emphasis on the critics of conquest. The task seemed simple enough: the characters and conflict were already clearly defined, I merely needed to add some detail; namely, how Las Casas and his Dominican allies, despite coming from an intolerant Spain, managed to be ahead of their time.

The first few months of preliminary research confirmed my expectations. Spain, after all, was a land of intense religious ferment and conflict. Conquistadors did appeal to the culture of holy war and found aspects of Indian culture revolting. Some Spaniards attempted to convert the Indians and eradicate what they considered to be idolatrous customs. Indian societies lost many beautiful and good things as a result of the conquest. There was, without a doubt, more than enough tragedy and horror in the conquest. And there is something intensely modern, even contemporary sounding about the opposition of Las Casas and his allies.

Yet as preliminary research turned into detailed study, the clarity I had inherited and now depended on for a simple dissertation, like anything subjected to close scrutiny, began to evaporate. None of the groups – Indians, Spaniards, and critics – matched my stereotypes.
The image of the un-ambiguously good Indian was the first to fade. Long before contact with Europeans, Indian societies engaged in conquest and slavery, to say nothing of human sacrifice. Indians often fought each other during the conquest, some embracing Spanish warriors as new allies against ancient oppressors. The greatest violence of the conquest, the complete destruction of the Aztec capital Tenotchtitlan, was in large part the act of vengeful Indians warriors. Overall, Indians perpetrated most of the vile acts of the conquistadors long before the Europeans arrived.

It took longer time and more resistance on my part to relinquish the figure of the unambiguously bad Spaniard. In many ways, conquistadors were surprisingly tolerant of Indian cultures and peoples. Conquistadors self-consciously modeled themselves on the Indian lords they replaced, assuming pre-established tribute arrangements and adopting native cultural practices. Spaniards often displayed sincere affection for their Indian allies, their Indian mates, and their mestizo children. More often than not conquistadors were unconcerned with religious scruples, lukewarm at best about converting Indians, and many openly blasphemous. For the Spanish population, the deadliest and longest lasting battles were fought not against Indians but among themselves. I was surprised to learn that they did not want Indians, their new source of labor, to die arbitrarily. The Spaniards of the conquest, I reluctantly concluded, were brutal but not in the predictably “intolerant” manner I had learned.

The final - and most difficult - re-assessment concerned the character of Las Casas and his fellow critics of the conquest. They, unexpectedly, often behaved more like intolerant zealots than the conquistadors, spewing fire and brimstone from the pulpits of the Americas, threatening their opponents with eternal damnation for conquest and
their lack of zeal for converting the Indians. They gave no free pass to the Indians, who without the grace of baptism faced the very real possibility of an eternity in hell. The Dominicans practiced an almost fanatical asceticism, praying for hours a day and fasting for months at a time. I found no conclusive evidence of abstract toleration; in fact, Las Casas, called “The Universal Protector of the Indians,” once casually referred to Muslims as “the truly barbaric scum of the nations.” At the same time, he condemned conquistadors and those who held Indians in servitude to be worse than Muslim infidels. The Dominicans, I realized, arguably inhabited the most distinctive and exclusive culture in the lands of the conquest, very far from the ideal of a modern multicultural citizen.

I was forced to conclude that the conquest of the Americas was much more complicated than good Indians, bad conquistadors, and tolerant critics. The Spanish/Indian dichotomy of both the triumphant and tragic narratives – which explains much – increasingly failed to explain the anomalies listed above. Why did Indians ally with Spaniards? Why did Spaniards spend so much time fighting each other? Why did critics argue that conquistadors were worse than Muslim infidels and heathen Indians? The basic answer must be that cultural distinction was only secondary to a deeper, more fundamental power struggle.

This growing intuition, however, seemed in opposition to the history of Spain immediately preceding the Conquest of the Americas. 1492 was a significant year, not only because of the discovery of the Americas, but because it marked the definitive end to what some scholars refer to as convivencia – the relatively peaceful and fruitful coexistence of Jews, Christians, and Muslims in medieval Iberia. In 1492 Castile

conquered Granada, the last Muslim kingdom in Iberia, and thus re-unified the peninsula under Christian rulers. The famous edict of expulsion was also enacted in 1492, ordering all of Castile’s Jews to either convert to Catholicism or leave the kingdom. Many who examine the conquest of the Americas thus understandably focus on the troubled history between Castilians and the “other,” seeing cultural division as the principle source of conflict in Spain.

Yet the deeper I dug into Castilian history – from the Visigoth kingdom, to the Muslim conquest of the 8th century, to the long medieval centuries of the Reconquest - I noticed that Spanish knights had a much bigger enemy, one they spent considerably more time and energy fighting: rival Spanish warriors. Civil wars, family feuds, internecine murders occurred and reoccurred over the millennium of Spain’s formation, particularly in the century and a half preceding 1492.

Indeed, what most of us refer to as “Spain” was not a stable political entity united against a common external enemy or resident minority. Rather, the Christian population of the Iberian Peninsula was a composite of multiple ethnic and language groups loosely organized in numerous kingdoms. These kingdoms, in turn, were an amalgam of constantly shifting family clans, alternately forming alliances and splitting into feuds, their power waxing and waning over time. The clans, furthermore, were composed of ambitious warrior upstarts, who rose in status through the exercise of arms. These warriors were as likely to break the demands of ethnic, religious, and even family bonds as keep them if it served to further their position. Medieval Spain, to put into visual

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4 The political and cultural nature of the peninsula leads to a problem of naming the people of the places in this story. The concepts of “Spain” and “Spanish” did not exist in the form that we now use the terms. People used the names of the kingdoms which made up the peninsula to describe where they were from and who they were; for example, Castile and Castilian or Aragon and Aragonese. When referring to the peninsula as a whole I will generally use the term Iberia.
analogy, is not best seen as a tightly-knit pyramid defined by its outer expansion. The Iberian political landscape was more like the flux of a lava lamp, continually re-shaped by the internal struggle for political and socioeconomic power, where religious and cultural difference played an important – yet secondary – role.

As I studied Castile’s turbulent political history, I began to take note of a simultaneous, deep-seated internal conflict over the very warrior culture which fueled the civil strife. The Reconquest, for example, took centuries to develop an overtly religious culture and when it did, it was as much a response to internal civil conflict as religious fervor against Islam or a practical response to the threat posed by Muslim expansion. Clergy, in addition to threatening excommunication for depredations against unarmed peasants and clerics, hoped to channel noble violence toward acceptable, external targets. Such flare-ups against civil conflict in turn reflected the long-term internal tension within Castile over the values and practices of the warrior culture. The pursuit of earthly glory and fame was a religious problem and thus the target of ongoing ecclesial critique.

I eventually concluded that the ongoing internal conflict within Castile – both the noble violence and opposition to it - was the missing key for interpreting the conquest of the Americas. The conquest, in other words, was not best understood as a particularly troubled Castilian relationship with the “other,” but the centuries-long inter-Castilian conflict which expanded into the radically different American settings.

My argument will consist of a twofold thesis. The first part, historical in nature, re-describes the conquest with a particular focus on the small, rival groups of Castilian warriors which drove the process of expansion. I will provide an in depth analysis of their culture, which was based on the loyalty of feudal bonds and the maintenance of their
central value - honor. I will argue that the conflict – both between warrior bands and the Indian polities that they encountered - was fundamentally temporal in nature: over control of economic resources, political and social status, and public recognition of their deeds.

The historical component of my thesis leads to the second, more important theological component of my argument. I will argue that internal opposition to conquest stemmed from small groups of clergy, at once similar to warrior bands in their feudal-type culture yet opposed to the conquest for largely spiritual goals. Their primary value, the supernatural virtue of *caritas*, was much like an other-worldly, inverse honor with its rejection of earthly glory in favor of eternal salvation. Because of their alternative honor and ecclesial bonds they attempted to tame the chaotic violence of the warrior bands and end the conquest.

I will argue my simultaneous two-fold thesis – the decentralized, temporal conquest and its spiritual opposition - in three major components. The first component pertains to the process of the conquest of the Americas and is the primary subject of the first section (Chapters 1-3). The first chapter details what could be classified as the internal conquest of Castile’s resources, exemplified by Don Pedro Girón, a noble who through the use of arms almost rose to the crown. Chapter 2 will tell the story of early Hispaniola and the rebellion of Francisco Roldán, who used military power to overcome the royal monopoly of American trade and establish a hybrid feudal regime, a precedent which characterized the subsequent conquest of the Americas. In chapter 3 I will explain the systematic form that the conquest took, whereby entrepreneurial groups repeated Roldán’s rebellion throughout the Americas.
The second component of the dissertation regards the development of theological opposition to the conquest. Part of chapter 2 and chapters 4-6 will detail Dominican mendicant culture and the theological character of their opposition. It will focus primarily on the work of Las Casas, his attempt to use the spiritual power of the sacraments to halt the process of conquest, and his alternative social vision, what I will call the “politics of charity.” This component will also examine the theological support for the conquest which developed in response to the work of critics, exemplified by Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda.

The third and final component of this work details the process of consolidation of empire. The feudal and entrepreneurial aspects of the conquest made it essentially centrifugal in nature. I will examine how the crown, both in Castile before 1492 and in the Americas afterwards, consolidated the nobility and constructed a relatively unified polity. Theological opposition to the conquest, perhaps counter intuitively, played an important role in the creation of empire.

Thus, I will argue that a basic three-fold pattern – de-centralized conquest driven by noble expectations, theological conflict stemming from a mendicant culture, and the pragmatic royal consolidation and creation of empire – made up the formation of Latin America. The actual argument, of course, is more complex and as a result, a more detailed introduction will precede each of the work’s three sections.

I should note that this work is only half of the story. I here analyze the Castilian expansion into the Americas and, as a result, only examine various groups of Indians and Africans from the “outside” – to the degree they interact with the preceding Castilian groups. I had hoped to simultaneously analyze Indians and Africans from the “inside.”
This goal, however, proved to be too great a task. While I consider the second conquest to be in many ways more interesting than the first, I must content myself with the glimpses seen in this work – complex cultural negotiation, alliances, and rebellions – as well as the thought that a forthcoming second part will one day continue this story.
PART I: CONQUESTS, OF NEW WORLDS AND OLD

“...we must live by our swords and lances. Otherwise, in this lean land we could not
survive and, in my opinion, we must move on.”

_Cantar de Mío Cid_

“to take a look at the great Montezuma – in fact to earn our livelihood and make our
fortunes.”

_Bernal Díaz del Castillo_

The first part, chapters 1-3, is the story of conquest. The character, in all settings,
was the Castilian warrior who used arms to gain and strengthen the multifaceted status of
the lord based on material tribute from those that served, whether the peasants of Castile
or Indians of the Americas. Their culture was that of intense loyalty bonds, dramatic
display of violence, limited spiritual concerns, desire for glory and fame, and
maintenance of their primary virtue – honor. We will see individuals rise and fall in
status, factions form and split in competition, and families form veritable empires. The
main characters – Pedro Girón in chapter 1, Francisco Roldán in chapter 2, and Hernán
Cortés in chapter 3 – undertake the same quest for noble status.

The characters, then, do not change in essence; rather, their settings do. Each
chapter describes the outworking of the Castilian warrior culture in three different

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5 From Angus MacKay, _Spain in the Middle Ages: From Frontier to Empire, 1000-1500_ (London:

6 Bernal Díaz del Castillo, _The Conquest of New Spain_, translated with an introduction by J.M.
locations - Iberia, the island of Hispaniola in the Caribbean, and Latin America as a whole – in three successive crises and rebellions. In chapter 1, we examine the late medieval Castilian crisis (1350 -1500) - largely based on conflict over control of falling tribute resources – and the rebellion of Don Pedro Girón, a Castilian noble who through civil conflict almost seized the crown. The second chapter deals with the crisis caused by the failure of the Castilian royal trading system in Hispaniola. Francisco Roldán, a disgruntled employee, rebelled against royal authority and established himself and his followers as lords over Indian tribute payers. Chapter 3 explains the systematic form that the crisis and rebellion took throughout Latin America. De-centralized entrepreneurial groups – or companies – invaded Indian polities for plunder and noble status in the encomienda.

We will also see in this first section seeds of the following two sections. In chapter 2 we encounter the birth of Dominican opposition to conquest, based on a long theological tradition of tension with the warrior culture of Castile. Likewise, we shall see the various royal campaigns to domesticate the centrifugal noble violence and consolidate the power of the crown, from Queen Isabel in Castile in chapter 1, to her royal official Nicolás de Ovando in Hispaniola in chapter 2, to subsequent efforts throughout Latin America in chapter 3.
CHAPTER 1: TO 1491

“that wretched Spain where no amount of work can wipe out misery....”

1. From Peasants to Lords

In the dusty summer heat of the Castilian plains, King Ferdinand of Aragon, husband of Queen Isabel of Castile, lifted the siege of the town of Zamora. More than a week had accomplished nothing. King Afonso of Portugal would not leave the fortified city to meet Ferdinand in single combat and despite an impressive force – 30,000 footsoldiers, 4,000 lances, and 8,000 cavalry – Ferdinand had no siege weapons to breach the walls of Zamora. Moreover, there were rumors that Ferdinand’s Castilian nobles had no desire to see his power increase with victory in battle. The army dissolved in its retreat from the battle of Toro and moved to easier targets. “Without glory, without plunder,” Nancy Rubin explains, “the men freed from Ferdinand’s command wreaked their frustration on innocent Castilian communities, leaving terrible devastation in their wake. They pillaged villages, robbed citizens, raped their daughters and wives, picked farms clean of crops.”

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The violence that the troops inflicted on the Castilian peasants was not, unfortunately, uncommon in Castile. Teofilo Ruiz, historian of the era, warns that those of us who enjoy the relative security of modern western society “may find it hard to understand the brutality that governed the everyday life of medieval and early modern men and women.”  

Social order rested on the threat violence, often actualized in dramatic public displays, such as the mercenaries of Catalonian nobles who on Palm Sunday 1588 marked a ball field with the heads of executed villagers. In Castile, war meant battle between opposing military forces but also included depredations against the dependent peasants of one’s enemy, such as “robbing their animals and goods, burning their properties, raping their women, conscripting their sons or holding them for ransom.”

Such dramatic acts of violence, typified by the aftermath of the Battle of Toro, merely punctuated the average Spaniard’s ongoing struggle to survive. On most days, the Castilian plain was home not to dramatic battles or overt violence, but the slow daily struggle to coax nourishment out of the rocky earth. Most of the peasants worked the stark Iberian interior with its high altitude, sparse rainfall, and thin soil. The general shortage of work animals, agricultural tools, and firewood in the deforested land compounded the difficult labor and with few exceptions, peasants lived on the edge of hunger, one lean harvest away from famine.

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9 Teofilo Ruiz, *Spanish Society, 1400-1600* (Harlow, England: Pearson Education Limited, 2001), 163. There is no way to do justice to Ruiz’s great analysis of the multiple levels of violence that permeated all levels of early modern Spain, from more personal and familial interactions, between groups, and civil strife. See chapters 7 and 8.

10 Ibid., 176.

11 Ibid., 168.

Overall, the Iberian demographic picture resembled something like the stereotype of a modern third world country. In the early fifteenth century, the 80% of the approximately five million people who sprinkled the peninsula were peasants. They were by definition servus, those born to serve others. Some were slaves, but most were vasallos naturales – vassals by nature - who worked the land and paid tribute. Probably less than half owned their own land and over 50% were day laborers. Overall, the life of a peasant meant “a lifetime of hard economic choices and grueling toil with little or no reward.”

But there were other ways to earn material rewards in Castile. All peasants, even the financially successful, had lords of some kind to whom they gave political allegiance and material tribute. Lords were diverse – seigniorial or ecclesiastical, “distant and benign, or close-by and horrible” – but all were special. For most of Castilian history the high lords were simply known as “los ricos hombres,” the rich men. Lower lords were generally called “hidalgos,” a name which one theory attributes to the phrase “hijo de algo,” the son of something. Both names point to economic power, but in the Castilian mind to be a lord was more than just material superiority. To be a lord was to be a different class of human being, elite by virtue of the universal order, “a person of

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13 Ruiz, Spanish Society, 42, 39, 51.
15 Ruiz, Spanish Society, 41.
16 Ibid. 49. Peasants, even the financially successful, “were never released from their obligations, rental dues, and debts of allegiance to the lord of their lands.”
17 Also known as infanzones or caballeros. Over time, hidalgia became hereditary and by the late Middle Ages would be further formalized with the French hierarchical system: Duke, Marquis, Count, Viscount. Angus MacKay, Spain in the Middle Ages: From Frontier to Empire, 1000-1500 (London: Macmillan Press, LTD, 1977) 47. John Edwards, Christian Córdoba: The City and its Region in the Late Middle Ages (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 133.
inherently superior capacity, wisdom, virtue, and goodness." In Castilian legal thought, they were called señor natural, a lord ordained to rule by nature itself. Most lords were the children of nobility or lucky enough to be placed in the house of a powerful lord as a child. Under a lord’s patronage, the young noble learned martial arts, statecraft and diplomacy. There, in his lord’s house, “a young man accustomed his body to armor and physical hardships and learned to handle arms, to hunt, to speak persuasively, to arbitrate disputes, to supervise the building of fortifications, to serve at table, and to sing,” Helen Nader explains, “….by practicing and by following the example of his patron.” When he finished his training, the young lord probably underwent a knighting ceremony, marking his passage to adulthood and entry into noble pursuit of wealth and glory.

While the highborn and well-placed had the distinct advantage, in Spain, with its long tradition of social mobility, the sons of peasants need not die as peasants. Through military service, even peasants could become lords, provided they could somehow obtain the tools of a knight. To be sure, they were expensive. The horse, the most important

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19 The señor natural was a political category of medieval and renaissance Castilian thought, employed in codes, laws, decrees, administrative documents, legal treatises, and various other historical and political documents. This concept of senor natural was a fusion of many sources: Castilian political philosophy, a hybrid of Greek and Roman thought, Roman and Germanic law, biblical texts, patristic writings, canon law, scholastic thought, “and influenced by feudal theory and practice.” “Relatively frequent appearance of the term in the Siete Partidas of Alfonso el Sabio indicates that by the mid-thirteenth century the concept was fully formed and generally comprehended.” Chamberlain defines the term as “one who by his own nature and in his own right is foreordained to hold dominion, and it is in accord with the divine will, nature, reason, justice and natural law that he should hold sway over his fellows.” It was applied to a diverse spectrum of elites who held temporal authority, primarily the king but also the various levels of nobility. Ibid., 130, 132.
component of the knight’s military technology, might cost as much as what an average
day laborer earned in a decade or the value of a good property, such as Pelayo Froilaz
who in 1114 received an estate in return for a horse and an ox.23 According to Theresa
Vann, weapons “could cost as much as a horse,” to say nothing of saddles, armor, a spare
horse or mule to ride to battle and a page or two to maintain one’s equipment.24

Overall, knighthood required economic resources far beyond the reach of the
average Spaniard and no knight was content with the bare minimum, exemplified by the
description of one high medieval chronicler. “And first he himself [the knight] put on his
cuirass; nobody has ever seen better; then his sharp sword, inlaid with gold by an expert
hand….He carried his shield on his left arm; it was all inlaid with gold; and on it a fierce
painted dragon shone out.” The chronicler continued: “He covered his head with a
shining helmet that a smith had decorated with sheets of silver and fitted round with a
band of electrum. He mounted his horse which a Moor had brought from overseas, and
which he had bought for a thousand gold pieces, which runs faster than the wind and
jumps higher than a hart.” Such ostentation was not merely a reflection of ego but also a
public display of power, designed to inspire fear and command respect. “Arrayed with
such armour and such a horse,” the chronicler explained, “Paris and Hector were not
better than him in the war of Troy, nor is anyone now.”25

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24 Theresa M. Vann, “A New Look at the Foundation of the Order of Calatrava,” in *On the Social
Origins of Medieval Institutions: essays in honor of Joseph F. O’Callaghan*, edited by Donald Joseph
Kagay, Joseph F. O’Callaghan, Theresa M. Vann (Boston: Brill, 1998), 110.
25 Barton, *The Aristocracy in Twelfth-Century Leon and Castile*, 162. The symbolic importance of
a horse in the Castilian mind is indicated by Ignatius of Loyala’s brother, who was ashamed that Ignatius
Loyola, with Related Documents*, with introduction and notes by John C. Olin (New York: Fordham
University Press, 1992), 84.
It was with just such a vision of knightly glory that many sons of peasants rode south to the ongoing Reconquista – or Reconquest - determined to win what they did not have at home. There on the long, slow-moving frontier with Islam they hoped to earn glory on the battlefield and a living from the spoils of conquest. Monarchs encouraged the frontier social mobility, creating a class of non-noble knights, caballeros villanos, who served the dual purpose of bolstering military strength on the border and countering the power of more established nobles. Thus, in the frontier society, “a society organised for warfare,” upstart commoners rose to quasi-noble status through the exercise of arms and after two or three generations, “were easily assimilated into the ranks of the hidalgos.”

While the frontier provided unprecedented social mobility, both combined to transform the concept of lordship in Castilian popular imagination. According to the eminent historian John Huxtable Elliott, the ideal of the perfect hidalgo – “a man that lived for war, who could do the impossible through sheer physical courage and a constant effort of the will, who conducted his relations with others according to a strictly regulated code of honour, and who reserved his respect for the man who had won his riches by force of arms rather than by the sweat of manual labour” – was not merely for the high

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26 In the early eight century the outer shock wave of the Muslim explosion of 630 finally hit the unstable Iberian political terrain, conquering most of the peninsula in less than a decade. The Muslim blitzkrieg ground to a halt on the Northern plains where the environment would not support Mediterranean agriculture and the mountains provided refuge to the Visigoth remnants. To the south, the small Muslim elite composed of Arab and Berber elements gradually absorbed the much larger native Iberian population. From about 700-1000, the Umayyad Caliphate of Córdoba kept the surviving Visigothic kingdoms penned in the mountains as war parties ventured north every summer across the barren plains. Christians settled the virtually uninhabited frontier zone between the north and the south, the area which became Leon and Old Castile. It was not until the eleventh century that the balance of power shifted. The attacks of the united Caliphate ceased as it fractured into rival Taifa states. Christian rulers saw their opportunity, encouraging conflict between the Taifas and extracting tribute in what was known as parias, revenue which became an essential part of royal income. Mackay, Spain in the Middle Ages, 17. Joseph F. O’Callaghan, Reconquest and Crusade in Medieval Spain (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 165.

27 Mackay, Spain in the Middle Ages, 47, 48. See also Elena Lourie, “A Society Organized for War: Medieval Spain,” Past and Present, No. 35 (December 1966): 54-76.
born. Frontier conflict and social mobility “conspired to diffuse it throughout Castilian society….and thus imbued the populace with ideals similar to those of the aristocracy.”

Over time, Spain developed the highest percentage of nobles of any region in Europe, many of whom were impoverished and looking to actualize their claims.

On the frontier, the caballeros villanos primarily fought the knights of the Muslim kingdoms, but for ambitious upstarts, frontier conflict was not primarily ideological. Christian mercenary service to Muslims may have begun as early as the beginning of the ninth century. It continued despite the growth of the crusading ideal and the threat of papal excommunication and according to Simon Barton, “more often then not, we are given the impression that the initiative came from the Christians themselves.” Overall, by the end of the 13th century there were probably several thousand Christian warriors serving in the Muslim kingdoms of Southern Spain and Northern Africa, which Barton calls “a veritable gold mine.”

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Nor were Christians categorically opposed Muslim military service. Christian nobles, including the crown, used Muslim military forces to buttress their power. In some areas, a Muslim aristocracy kept their lands and castles by giving homage to Christian leaders, such as the military governor (qā‘id) of Jávita, described by a contemporary as having a force of 400 horsemen and appearing as ‘a noble, for he came riding upon a splendid horse and his saddle and breast leather were inlaid with foil of gold.’” James I
Christian military service to Muslims should not be surprising. The Reconquest, although profoundly shaped by the crusading ideal, was not started or controlled by it. It began as Christians settled the Duero River valley, long a no man’s land of passing raiding parties. The small scale frontier raiding and migration became thought of as a Reconquest in the late 9th century as chroniclers began to use Visigoth lineage, real or imagined, as support for monarchic ambitions to “reconquer Visigothic territory and restore the Visigothic monarchy.”

It was perhaps inevitable that religious difference would become the dominant theme of the Reconquest, but it was internal conflict which catalyzed its formation. From 1100-1117 civil war raged in the unconquered Christian kingdoms of the north, Leon and Castile, between rival claimants to the throne. In Galicia, the northwestern corner of the peninsula, rival noble factions waged private wars in the power vacuum, carrying off serfs and cattle, attacking merchants and pilgrims, even targeting the church of Compostela. But the Shrine to Santiago in Compostela also drew pilgrims and merchants from beyond the Pyrenees, who brought in the influence of various ecclesial reform movements, including the Peace of God.

The Peace of God movement developed over a century earlier in almost identical chaotic conditions. Similar noble violence had been endemic to Europe during the early Middle Ages, increasing with the gradual disintegration of the Carolingian Empire and exacerbated by partially assimilated invaders. “Throughout the kingdom,” Richard Landes explains, “Carolingian institutions collapsed at a local level as independent

of Aragon regarded the lord of Javita as a vassal “who should ‘protect and defend me and my interests’ and ‘take justice at my hands.’” MacKay, Spain in the Middle Ages, 64, 63.

O’Callaghan, Reconquest and Crusade in Medieval Spain, 7.

warlords (castellans) and their bands of retainers (milites) established their rule.”33

Feuding factions marauded through the land, often targeting churches and unarmed peasants.

Beginning at the end of the 10th century, bishops and clergy gathered saints’ relics and called councils to confront offenders, threatening excommunication to those who attacked clergy, unarmed peasants, and church property. Often the warriors were required to swear oaths on the relics before the presence of large crowds and miracles allegedly accompanied the gatherings. The movement spread and according to Landes, “Once established in tradition, Peace Councils became a model for responses to anarchy and violence all over Western Europe.”34

Back in Galicia, the Church invoked the Peace of God in 1124 in an effort to remake the aristocracy. The Church required lords to keep the peace and abstain from warfare during certain time periods. At the same time, the Church promoted the recently conceived crusades, whereby warriors were given spiritual incentives – such as the absolution of sins - to fight non-Christians and heretics. Over the centuries, an elaborate liturgical culture sanctified the Reconquest along with extensive ecclesial financial


34 Landes, “Peace and Truce of God,” 1104. When a new Muslim threat appeared on the Byzantine door in the form of the Seljik Turks the Emperor Alexius I appealed to the papacy for assistance in 1095 and Pope Urban II responded. The crusading movement grew in part out of the chaotic social conditions and on the heels of the Peace of God movement. In front of a large crowd of French nobles and clergy at the Council of Clermont he preached against noble violence and urged Christian warriors to use arms to serve God, a chronicler recorded “Now will those who were robbers become Christi Milites; those who once fought brothers and relatives will justly fight barbarians; those who once were mercenaries for a few farthings will now obtain eternal reward.” The Pope got a huge response, probably more than he expected. Richard W. Kaeuper, Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 75.
support. Thus, the Peace of God tamed the rebellious nobility at home while the crusading ideal focused noble military power against the Muslim kingdoms of Southern Spain. The two movements had the desired effect as in only decades lords were portrayed by chroniclers in favorable terms, now burning mosques instead of pillaging churches and robbing priests.\(^35\)

But despite the massive infusion of propaganda and resources, it seems that worldly motivations remained the dominant concern for most agents involved in frontier warfare. Juan Manuel, the nephew of King Alfonso X, stated that there will be war until the Christians have recovered their stolen land, but “[t]here would not be war between them on account of religion or sect, because Jesus Christ never ordered that anyone should be killed or forced to accept his religion.”\(^36\) According to Barton, the crusading influence did not so much create noble violence as channel it to more acceptable targets, concluding that “most nobles were doubtless quite happy to go along with the prevailing view that a willingness to wage war on the enemies of Christendom and the perennial quest for wealth and glory were far from incompatible.”\(^37\)

The Spanish folk hero Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar, better known as El Cid, exemplified the opportunities which both sides of the border offered. Born around 1040,

\(^35\) Barton, “From Tyrants to Soldiers of Christ,” 11.

\(^36\) O’Callaghan, *Reconquest and Crusade in Medieval Spain*, 211. This would be in continuity with the secular character of aristocratic dynastic concerns noted by Nader, who argued that Mendoza history has no universal standard of morality or theory of monarchy, only the higher obligation of deudo – the bond of family, friendship, and vassalage – which dictates the higher matter of family survival. Nader argues that the aristocracy viewed the Reconquest through a largely secular lens, whose chroniclers portrayed it as “a secular war of territorial conquest fought in the pursuit of honor, property, and liberty by the king and his fellow knights.” She continues: “Valera referred to the Muslims not only as enemies of the faith but also as believers in God and as admirable knights, noting that Muslims were ‘willing to die in order to defend their honor and property and liberty’ and exhorting the Christian soldiers to do the same.” Nader, *The Mendoza Family*, 29, 69, 71.

the low born knight was sent by the king of Castile to collect tribute from the Muslim ruler of Seville. Dispute with the king led to exile from Castile, and El Cid set off into the frontier regions with his entourage of loyal knights to seek his fortune. Masterfully playing the contested political field, he struck alliances with Muslim leaders as often as with Christian rulers, earning the name El Cid, derived from the Arabic *síd*, meaning ‘lord.’

While El Cid is remembered for happily killing countless Muslims – so much so that the blood drenched his forearm and ran down his elbow – crusading fervor plays only a secondary role in this drama. More fundamentally, El Cid pursued wealth and noble status, urging his men to keep moving, “for we must live by our swords and lances. Otherwise, in this lean land we could not survive…”

While opportunities lay on both sides of the frontier, service to the Crown gave the most stable and coveted rewards. In return for unswerving loyalty and military service on the frontier or in the Castilian homeland, knights received exemption from taxes, ordinary labor, torture and other legal punishments. More significantly, the Crown gave knights grants of its property, often referred to as *mercedes.* Such grants were formalized in a ceremony which bound the two parties in a new relationship of rights and obligations, enacted as the knight kissed his lord’s hand, declaring, “Sir, I kiss your hand

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38 He later became the independent ruler of Muslim Valencia (1094-1099). Mackay, *Spain in the Middle Ages*, 18.
40 “…and, in my opinion, we must move on.” From Mackay, *Spain in the Middle Ages*, 18. El Cid exacted *parias* as ‘protector’ of Muslim Zaragoza and booty from numerous conquests, dividing it according to Muslim custom: 1/5 for the leader and a double share for the mounted warriors. El Cid’s *mesnada* grew to 7000 according to most chroniclers. John H. Beeler, *Warfare in Feudal Europe, 730-1200* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971), 173.
and I am your vassal." The vassal knight became in effect a vicar of the crown in the properties of the merced, which could include land, villages, churches, and mills. In general, the lord assumed the administrative duties and financial benefits of the Crown, such as the right to judicial authority over the inhabitants, to collect taxes, fines and dues, and demand military service. The lord was to protect his vassals who in return gave tribute (kind and money) and services (agriculture and public works).

Finally, then, the son of a peasant was now a lord over his own peasants, and earned his living from their tribute. But maintenance and expansion of this new status required significant political dexterity. Lords sought to establish a permanent presence in the royal court to influence the crown and seek further mercedes. They made alliances with other lords and noble families, often through strategic marriages. Lords also maintained an extensive network of retainers who ran holdings, collected revenue, and supported their political agenda. Despite being illegal, lords often took city officials as

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42 In France and Catalonia, the knight knelt with his hands in those of the king and swore fealty. Joseph F. O’Callaghan, A History of Medieval Spain (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), 262-3. The grant was made formal through official documents. Chamberlain, “The Concept of the Senor Natural,” 40. See this page for the details of system of the rights and obligations between sovereign and grantees.


44 And immunity from royal officials as they were forbidden to enter. There many different types differentiated by varying levels of political authority and length of possession, ranging from temporary administration to de facto sovereignty. In general, grants for the life of the recipient until the 13th century, when hereditary lordship grew. Chamberlain, “The Concept of the Senor Natural,” 46; Barton, The Aristocracy in Twelfth-Century León and Castile, 92, 108.

45 Usually given on Christmas, day of St. John’s, St. Martin. Ibid., 43-4. The details varied widely but the relationship between lord and peasant was regulated by fueros which outlined the mutual obligations. In 1147 one count received 10 loaves of bread, a half sheep, a quantity of barley and unfermented grape juice from each inhabitant. Others required payment of between one and five solidi. Usual labor service was between 12 and 24 days a year, with the lord providing at least some of the food. Peasants often had residency requirements. The lord also required the right to yantar or hospitality at the peasants’ expense. Some more extreme rights, called “malos usos,” included the lord’s right to land without an heir, tax on inheritance, and a marriage tax, but these died out by the twelfth century. Barton, The Aristocracy in Twelfth-Century León and Castile, 97-8.

46 Ibid., 87.
retainers to buttress their political power. The nobility also searched for new sources of income, turning to the growing late medieval commerce which they usually controlled from above, “liv[ing] off the profits of economic activities in which they seldom became directly involved.”

In this political game the church was also an important channel of power. Nobles sought appointments to influential positions, especially for younger or illegitimate children who would not receive the family inheritance. Church offices, especially bishoprics, offered stable and often significant streams of revenue as well as a potential political channel to influence the crown. Such influence was not without cost, however, as what John Edwards calls the “mercenary values” of aristocratic culture bled into the fabric of ecclesiastical life leading to numerous warrior bishops over the centuries.

For the majority of Castilian lords, however, ecclesiastical and theological purity was a secondary concern to the status of one’s family. The Castilian nobility consisted of

47 See John Edwards, Christian Córdoba: The City and Its Region in the Late Middle Ages (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 147-8. “Control over the office-holding system was a crucial part of the nobles’ dominance of important towns in this and other regions.” John Edwards, The Spain of the Catholic Monarchs, 1474-1520 (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 60. Took control of city governments and the hermandades of towns tended to fall under control of magnates during medieval era. Elliot, Imperial Spain, 87.

48 MacKay, Spain in the Middle Ages, 179. The growing money and commercial economy allowed some to buy titles of nobility. Yet royal privileges and revenues remained the most important component of noble power and attention. I had hoped to spend more time on the expanding late medieval economy and the simultaneous cultural change. See Teófilo F. Ruiz, From Heaven to Earth: the Reordering of Castilian Society, 1150-1350 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

49 Edwards, Christian Córdoba, 173. An excellent example of the ongoing shaping power that Castilian warrior culture exerted on Iberian Catholicism was the cult of St. James, or Santiago. It came to be believed that the body of St. James was buried in the northwestern corner of Iberia in the town of Compostela. Over the long conflict with the Moors, St. James returned to Spain to bring vengeance to the Moors, appearing as a heavenly sword-wielding rider in the sky during their battles.” The innovation was so novel and strange to story that a Greek pilgrim wondered how St. James could have been turned into Santiago Matamoros. According to Américo Castro, Santiago pre-dates Christian history, his roots sinking into the Roman cult of twin divinities Castor and Pollux, sons of Jupiter. One ascended to heaven and the other stayed on earth as protector of men. Like St. James, one descended from heaven on white horses to fight for the army they favored. Over the centuries, “Santiago” became the favored war cry of Spanish riders as they flew into battle in search of fame, riches, and salvation. Yet despite his official role as killer of Moors, Castilian warriors just as easily invoked his assistance in their internal conflicts. From Américo Castro, The Spaniards; an Introduction to Their History. Translated by Willard F. King and Selma Margaretten (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 411, 415, 382.
a fluid and constantly shifting hierarchy, a hierarchy that lords sought to ascend.
Through skillful utilization of military power, royal favor, diplomacy with other lords, control of church offices, and acquisition of property, noble lords and their clans formed veritable empires.50 Around 1491, 2-3% of Castile’s population owned 97% of land, over half of which belonged to “a handful of great families.”51

One such great family was the Mendoza. Originally a Basque family, the Mendoza moved to Castile in 1332 to escape escalating clan warfare. But in Castile they embraced the endemic warfare, serving as military entrepreneurs and rising quickly through their uncanny ability to choose the winning side in internal conflicts of the royal family. Over time, through court influence and influential marriages, the Mendoza transformed themselves from a peripheral military family to “an aristocratic dynasty” of national importance.52

The center of the Mendoza dynasty was Guadalajara and as the only noble family, their “impact on the society and politics of the city was overwhelming.”53 Although a royal town, the Mendoza had long controlled the city’s income and government. Their building projects and real estate purchases dominated the city to the degree that Helen Nader calls Guadalajara the “city of Mendoza palaces.”54 The Mendoza mayorazgo contained a minimum of 76 properties, including 21 towns and 48 villages.55 From these holdings the Mendoza collected seignorial taxes and rents as well as their own

50 The Trastamara revitalized the mayorazgos, the amalgamation of holdings into a primogeniture estate, a practice which led to the formation of “private empires.” Edwards, Christian Córdoba, 136.
51 Elliot, Imperial Spain, 113. In kingdom of Córdoba, secular lords held 1/3 of land and ½ of the population. “There can have been no citizen of Córdoba who did not in some way feel the influence of the aristocracy in his or her personal life.” Edwards, Christian Córdoba, 190.
53 Ibid., 116.
54 Ibid., 115.
55 Ibid., 113-4.
agricultural products and lumber.\footnote{In addition, they had a virtual monopoly on the processing of products in “wine and olive presses, hemp mills, bakeries, forges, tanneries and tallow works, grain mills, salt mines, quarries, wine cellars – even the collection and marketing of herbs used as medicine, spices, and dyes.” They also obtained the royal concession to collect the sales tax of a little over 3% at market fairs along towns in the sheepwalks and major routes in the Tajo Basin. Nader, \textit{The Mendoza Family}, 114.} They were frequently conceded the \textit{tercias} (Church taxes collected by the Crown) as a \textit{merced} and the wealthy bishopric of Sigüenza “became almost hereditary”.\footnote{Ibid., 114.} The Mendoza military force was among the most powerful in Castile, as one member of the clan, a future Duke of Infantado, was able to raise 1,400 cavalry in a dispute with the count of Benavente in 1473.\footnote{725 were from his own forces and 675 from his cousins, the counts of Treviño and Castañeda. Forty were regular members of his household cavalry, 160 hired on salary, and the rest troops of twenty commanders loyal to him, all but five being brothers, sons, nephews, and in-laws. Ibid., 106.}

Mendoza military power brings us to perhaps the most important component of lordly power and ambition. Lords had a \textit{mesnada}, a warrior band, formed of family members and paid retainers, who in turn often had their own vassals and small armies.\footnote{Edwards says lesser magnates could provide 20-50. Edwards, \textit{Christian Córdoba}, 146. One chronicler gives the example of a smaller lord with who had 2000 vassals and 100 men-at-arms. Fernan Pérez de Guzmán, \textit{Pen portraits of illustrious Castilians}, translated with introduction and notes, by Marie Gillette and Loretta Zehngut (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 32. Muslim knights could found among the \textit{mesnadas}, such as that of Henry IV. MacKay, “Religion, Culture, and Ideology,” 218.} The \textit{mesnadas} of the more important lords had a minimum of about 100 knights, and some were able to keep 200-300.\footnote{O’Callaghan, \textit{Reconquest and Crusade in Medieval Spain}, 127.} The \textit{mesnada} was called upon to follow its lord in royal campaigns and often made up a significant portion of the Crown’s cavalry, as was the case at the Battle of Toros described in the beginning of the chapter.

But although noble \textit{mesnadas} often found themselves in service to the Crown, that was not their ultimate end. First and foremost a \textit{mesnada} served its lord and his political agenda. Lords often waged what one author called “private wars,” either against
rival lords, the crown, or even against family members in disputes over inheritance.\textsuperscript{61} Many areas of Iberia were split between rival factions, or bandos, made up of “complex and amorphous alliances, which partook of the characteristics of clan groups, feudal retinues and political parties.”\textsuperscript{62} As a result, internal warfare – although waxing and waning over time – was an endemic part of medieval Castilian life.

While based on competition for economic and political power, the endemic Castilian violence was also fueled by the culture of honor. The highest value of the warrior culture of Spain, honor demanded that the warrior gain prestige through valorous military service to one’s senor natural, country, and faith. Warriors were driven, in the words of Laura Vivanco, by “the hope of glory and of achieving for themselves the ‘vida de la fama’ which the great warriors of the past had already achieved.”\textsuperscript{63} The warrior class eagerly pursued a “good death,” one “that results from violence and the pursuit of earthly, not spiritual, glory,”\textsuperscript{64} for “death was to be feared less than dishonour.”\textsuperscript{65}

Honor, like much we have examined here, was dominated by temporal concerns. The conception of honor was fused in the middle ages, beginning as a “positive value” in the words of historian Bartolomé Bennassar, “an individual and collective heroism.” It was greatly influenced by the courtly romances which emerged in the twelfth century, but as time went on, honor became increasingly separated from its moorings in the code of chivalry, “defined as a code independent of all morality, a code to which social prejudice

\textsuperscript{62} Edwards, \textit{The Spain of the Catholic Monarchs}, 60.
\textsuperscript{63} Laura Vivanco, \textit{Death in Fifteenth-century Castile: Ideologies of the Elites} (Woodbridge: \textit{Tamasis}, 2004), 57.
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 57.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 55.
and pride or even vanity has the only key." Insults to one’s lineage, family, the sexual purity of one’s female relatives, financial status, or bravery required retribution, leading to duels, murders, honor killings, and feuds. Emphasis on honor grew through late medieval and early modern Castile, becoming the “dominant literary theme” and diffused throughout society, leading Bennassar to claim that if "there was one passion capable of defining the conduct of the Spanish people, it was the passion of honor." Contemporary foreigners noted the Spanish obsession with honor and its consequences. The Florentine Francesco Guicciardini noted that the men of Spain “value honor so greatly that most will choose death rather than tarnish it” while another Italian chronicler described Spanish troops in the Italian wars: “These crazy Spaniards have more regard for a bit of honor than for a thousand lives….”

Thus, for a young man born in Iberia, violence and extreme class difference was merely part of the fabric of life. For the long medieval centuries - from the fall of the Roman Empire to the discovery of the Americas - internal feudal conflict characterized Castilian violence. While this conflict was at times profoundly shaped by ideological concerns, its base was fundamentally temporal: the power lords exercised over peasants, military conflict between noble rivals over limited resources, and the exercise of arms to make the transition from commoner to elite status. Thus, for most of the agents involved, we must concur with Simon Barton’s assessment of Christian mercenaries: “when all was said and done, the search for wealth, status and power, the chief motors of aristocratic behaviour down the ages, was always likely to take precedence over religious or

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69 Both quotations from ibid., 214.
ideological considerations.”  

And for the century and a half before 1491, a crisis of violence plunged the decentralized feudal landscape into chaos, only further clarifying the temporal nature of Castilian conflict.

2. Crisis 1350-1500

The century and a half crisis began with civil war over the control of the Kingdom of Castile. The King of Castile, Alfonso, died in 1350, a victim of the Black Plague which decimated his army during the siege of Gibraltar. His one legitimate son, Pedro, inherited the throne but his father also left seven children by his mistress Leonor de Guzmán. One year later, Alonso’s widow orchestrated the murder of Leonor, which began a twenty year struggle between Pedro and the illegitimate branch of his family, led by his half-brother Enrique. Pedro executed anyone he suspected of allying with Enrique, more than sixty vassals of the king. The supporters of Enrique spent much of that time in exile in France or Aragon, especially after the murder of Enrique’s twin. War raged for two decades, as both gathered allies from among the nobles of Castile and among the combatants of the Hundred Years War.

The final battle in the twenty year war occurred March 14, 1369 at the small provincial town of Montiel. Pedro had the aid of 1,500 Muslim horsemen, 3,000 lancers, and troops provided by numerous towns. But Enrique, with only 3,000 lancers and 600 French allies, defeated his scattered troops after a surprise night march. Pedro, now trapped in a fortress with few supplies, attempted to bribe Enrique’s French ally

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70 Barton, “Traitors to the Faith?,” 38.  
Monsieur Bertrand with 200,000 gold pieces and the lordship of various towns. Enrique matched the offer and Bertrand lured Pedro into his tent, where Enrique lay in ambush. At first he did not recognize Pedro, but then dispatched him with repeated dagger thrusts to the face. Pedro’s body was left unburied and Enrique de Trastámara, the great-great-grandfather of Isabel and “illegitimate in every sense of the word,” established a new royal dynasty.

The violence surrounding the rise of the Trastamara was merely the dramatic opening scene in a century and a half of similar conflict. The conflict was in part over land as the 15th and 16th century “witnessed numerous violent attempts by lords, cities and rich farmers to seize land form the village community and to privatize communal lands.” But more fundamentally, the conflict was over a much more limited and precious Castilian resource: people. The Black Death, which tore through Europe in 1350, killed not only King Alfonso but as much as 2.5 of Spain’s estimated 6 million inhabitants. As a result, the supply of tribute payers and the income of lordships fell by the same rate.

In a similar fashion, the reduction in tribute payers was compounded by a monetary problem. Tribute, which was often paid in labor and kind in earlier centuries, was now almost exclusively paid in money. But while tribute dues were set at fixed rates, the value of money was not. Throughout the era of crisis, the Crown repeatedly

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73 In the words of Helen Nader, “The Trastamara monarchy began as a revolutionary government with a regicidal king who ruled with the consent of powerful interest groups, many of whom were as powerful as he.” Helen Nader, *The Mendoza Family*, 15, 19.
debased the currency to cover low revenues and soaring war costs, which encouraged inflation and reduced the value of fixed dues.\textsuperscript{76}

The long and short of the dual process was that lords had fewer tribute paying vassals who paid dues that constantly decreased in value. To a noble with drastically falling revenue, the solution was obvious: acquire more royal grants with more people.\textsuperscript{77} But the overall number of grants remained stable and increased competition - compounded by weak royal authority - led to accelerating violence as lords ramped up extraction of their remaining vassals and gang-like factions plundered the countryside.

Perhaps counter-intuitively, the crisis would be worst not in the lands of the Reconquest but in the oldest parts of the Christian kingdoms. Along with the crisis of tribute described above, the small northwestern region of Galicia had the additional problems that came with the lack of a frontier. The Reconquest drew the majority of economic development southward and without the new lands of an expanding border, the passing of generations left peasant holdings “fragmented beyond reason.”\textsuperscript{78} The population recovered and expanded in the 15\textsuperscript{th} century further increasing the need for


\textsuperscript{77} As a result, the importance of land diminished and “the later medieval emphasis was on lordship over people.” Nobles pursued “the acquisition of further lordships and the attached multiplicity of small dues paid by the seigneurial population” from royal grants. Another practice was the increased usurpation of land from towns and monasteries. “Monastic wealth was particularly susceptible to usurpations which were given theoretical justification by \textit{encomiendas} – that is, agreements whereby a noble ‘protected’ a monastery in return for a share in monastic income. In the 1380s a royal commission discovered that almost all Castilian monasteries were suffering from the imposition of \textit{encomiendas}.” Ibid., 175-6.

\textsuperscript{78} Ruiz, \textit{Spanish Society}, 190. Worst in Catalonia, Basque provinces, and Galicia. Generally, worst of noble depredations were in areas lacking in alternative sources of income, where the monarchy was weakest, and where lesser nobility was denser and size of lordships were smaller.
new land. Even the maritime economy had fallen behind other, more enterprising regions. And according to Ruiz, lordship was the only sector to have expanded.\textsuperscript{79}

In an effort to increase revenue, lords exercised what Ruiz calls “a relentless and predatory lordship.”\textsuperscript{80} “What they could not get by legal means,” Ruiz explains, “they extorted by force. Strong houses, castles, and other noble lairs became the refuge for gangs of noble retinues.”\textsuperscript{81} According to Ruiz, “the targets of noble excesses, raids, looting, rapes and murders ranged across a broad social spectrum.” There were a number of assaults on middling sorts, such as fishermen, clergy, and merchants but peasants were “the favourite prey. Attacks against peasants consisted of the habitual theft of cows and oxens, illegal imprisonment, the ransoming of captured peasants, torture, and the illegal collection of tribute.” Sexual violence compounded the plight of women. “The rape of lower-class women by upper-class men or their minions in Galicia followed a pattern of sexual abuse that prevailed in other regions of Spain and the world. In times of political anarchy and open violence, women became convenient targets for lordly greed and desire.”\textsuperscript{82}

Overall, in Galicia – where the Peace of God was invoked three centuries ago to control the predatory aristocracy – “the tensions between those below and those above reached a boiling point.”\textsuperscript{83} The chaos culminated in the “second war of the Irmandiños,” a broad rebellion which Ruiz described as a “motley alliance of peasants, artisans,

\textsuperscript{79} “Galicia was the paradigmatic land of lords (ecclesiastical and seigneurial), and their tenacious grip extended throughout the region.” Ruiz, \textit{Spanish Society}, 190.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 190.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 190-1.
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., 192-3.
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., 191.
shopkeepers, clergymen and lower nobility.”

They drove the noble elite out of the land, executed those that resisted, destroying 100 noble strongholds with the cry “Long live the king and death to the caballeros!” The revolt lasted for two years, 1467-9, before the nobles regrouped and re-established their rule.

The intensity of the crisis in the north should not hide its universal manifestation. Even the south - with its greater resources, economic development, and spoils left to be won in the Reconquest - was plagued by violence. The conflict between the great noble clans of Guzman and Ponce de Leon split the land around Seville, divided the Reconquista and even spilled into the Atlantic. According to Ruiz, the violence of the crisis was captured in literature of the era. One example comes from Fray Inigo de Mendoza, who in the poem Coplas de Mingo Revulgo described fifteenth-century Castile “as a place torn by civil war, famine, and pestilence.” Two sheep herders portray the nobility as wolves, persecuting the people who as sheep were unprotected by a weak king. “I see the wolves coming in,” Fray Inigo wrote, “and the flocks bleeding.” The poem ends with “apocalyptic images of a war that ‘does not allow mothers and their children to lie quietly in their homes’.” Overall, the poem described civil war which, in the words of Ruiz, “finds its way into the most hidden of places, bringing endless disturbances to the land.”

No one better embodied the endless disturbances of the late medieval Castilian crisis than Don Pedro Girón. Born around 1423, he was the younger of two sons of the powerful Pacheco clan. Girón began his dramatic political ascent with a placement in the

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84 Ruiz, Spanish Society, 191. Hermandades, brotherhoods organized to maintain social order, had risen up in the 1420s and 30s.
85 MacKay, Spain in the Middle Ages, 176.
86 Ruiz, Spanish Society, 174.
87 Ibid., 175.
house of the prince who would become King of Castile, Enrique IV. He first served as a page, but in this center of royal power, Girón quickly moved up the chain of political offices. His greatest opportunity arrived in 1443, when it became apparent that the Master of the Order of Calatrava would soon die.\textsuperscript{88}

Originally a military order organized under monastic guidance to fortify the frontier, the Order of Calatrava had drifted to the more worldly ends of the Reconquest over the centuries since its founding in 1157. The overall consequence was that the knights of Calatrava amassed “a considerable fortune in lands, rents, herds, and the like, making the order a formidable force within Castile.”\textsuperscript{89} By the 14th century, the order of Calatrava had “extended its seigniorial control over vast areas” and grown to include nineteen separate temporal holdings, or encomiendas, the largest being an estate of 400 square miles.\textsuperscript{90} At the height of their prosperity, the order had 56 commanderies, lordship over 64 villages with a total population of 200,000, and was able to bring 1,200 to 2,000 knights to the field.\textsuperscript{91}


\textsuperscript{89} Ibid., 275. These extensive temporal holdings of were divided into units called encomiendas headed by commendadores who were appointed by the master of the order. An encomienda could include lands, towns, fortresses, mills, and mines. Land was worked directly by the order’s laborers or rented out to small farmers. For example, in the encomienda of Zorita residents were expected to contribute “115 field hands to plant and harvest grain in the Campo de Calatrava for a sixty-day period every year.” In San Silvestre, “the order expected owners of oxen and wheat farmers to contribute their labor three times a year, planting, cultivating, and harvesting.” Ibid., 277, n51.

\textsuperscript{90} The original grant of 1228 which formed Martos included three villages and twenty yugadas of land. Over the years “they annexed Locubin, Susana, Alcaudete, Carmona, Guadaira, Zambra, Sabiote, and Alcalá de Albenzaide, considered ‘the richest and most productive lands of the region.’” To this they added smaller holdings, including vineyards, real estate in city of Jaen, the fortress of Cabra. Ibid., 281, 276, 284.

\textsuperscript{91} Catholic Encyclopedia. http://www.newadvent.org. The order of Santiago was even greater, holding 86 commanderies, 2 cities, 178 boroughs and villages. Their possessions found in Portugal, France, Italy, Hungary and Palestine. Alcantara had 37 commanderies with 53 castles or villages. According to Eliot, the three orders of Calatrava, Santiago, and Alcantara combined had 183 members with
Not surprisingly, control of Calatrava’s lucrative economy and powerful military force was much coveted, and the news of the master’s imminent death drew numerous rivals. They broke into open conflict when the *comendador mayor* (grand commander) of Calatrava moved to claim the main convent with 300 horse. A rival’s larger force of 580 horse defeated the commendador mayor, only to see King Enrique’s 800 horse besiege the convent. The complicated details of the multi-year conflict are less important than the outcome: somehow, in the aftermath, Girón obtained the mastership of Calatrava.⁹²

Don Pedro Girón, now one of the powerful lords in Castile, did not rest on his laurels. The next two decades of his life consisted of a dizzying array of conflicts, acquisitions, and repeated switched allegiances between King Enrique and de Luna, the king’s former chief supporter. In 1450 Girón engaged in a military showdown with a supporter of de Luna over the control of Calatrava and in the process, sacked Torrijos and Orgaz for supporting Alfonso. After initially supporting rebellious nobles against Enrique, Girón reconciled with the king for more *mercedes*, including the towns of Fuenteovejuna,⁹³ Belmez, and Morón, an *encomienda* belonging the Order of Alcantara.
Girón launched a couple of minor campaigns against Granada during these years, but was not too busy to bully Francisco de Guzman and his family, looting their possessions - including horses, mules, beds, and curtains - on the road to campo de Calatrava.94

To add to the confusion, by 1465, Girón again turned against King Enrique. He battled rivals in Andalusia and gathered support for the rebel cause while a large faction of Castilian nobles burned Enrique in effigy and proclaimed the twelve year old Prince Alfonso king. By spring, Alfonso had gained the support of almost all of Andalusia. The only remaining supporter of King Enrique held the town of Jaen, which Girón attacked with 3000 horse and 5000-6000 foot soldiers. Lope de Vega, a famous Spanish playwright, captured the fervor of a similar siege by Girón’s son Rodrigo with language reminiscent of that used to describe El Cid’s battles with the Muslims: “Draw that white blade, which you shall dye in battle as deep a crimson as the cross you wear. Right Master of the Cross of Calatrava, both must be the color of blood! And then, Rodrigo Téllez Girón, your youth and valor will truly crown the fame of your immortal ancestors.” Rodrigo, in words that could have just as easily been uttered by his father in his attack on Jaen, replied that he “shall strike its city walls like a bolt from heaven.”95

Girón devastated the countryside but Jaen held out, preventing him from aiding the attack on Enrique IV. Sensing that the moment was lost, Girón entered into negotiations with the King. Girón offered 3000 lances and 70,000 doblas to help crush the rebellion on the condition that two of his political rivals be ousted from the court and he be married to Enrique’s sister, Isabel, a possible heir of the Trastamara dynasty.

1513. This particular holding had 485 heads of household, and produced 80,700 mrs annually, or 166.4 per head. O’Callaghan, “Don Pedro Girón, 38 n167.
94 In 1464. Ibid., 50 n225. He had allegedly attempted to rape Queen Isabel, the widow of Juan II.
Enrique consented and Girón began the journey, while the desperate Isabel prayed for deliverance and her lady-in-waiting “swore that she would kill Girón with her own hands.”

This marriage was perhaps the final piece to the successful construction of a new dynasty. According to one chronicler, that is exactly what Girón had in mind; he allegedly planned to kill Enrique after the wedding.

But for Girón, it would not be. On the way to meet Isabel, he saw a sign of multiple noisy cranes, and died. Officially, he died of an abscess of the throat but according to Peggy K. Liss, it is possible that he was poisoned by another rival with something to gain, perhaps a member of the Mendoza clan. Girón left his oldest son the greatest inheritance of the age and according to O’Callaghan, “perhaps none was more audacious in the quest for power.”

“The quest for power;” a good assessment of Girón’s life but, as we have seen in the previous section, nothing new. The lordly ideal - the life of arms based on tribute from subjects; the culture of honor, a code independent of morality and focused on earthly glory; the pursuit of riches and private empires - and the uniquely Spanish opportunities for social mobility had long structured Iberian society. The changing social environment – disease and the resulting decline in the tribute paying population, economic crisis, and weak royal authority – allowed and even encouraged greater completion within the warrior class, demonstrated by Girón’s relentless pursuit of riches and migration up the political hierarchy, what we will see in later Iberian transplants to the America’s. Ecclesial power tended to both tame this conflict internally as well as

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96 O’Callaghan, “Don Pedro Girón,” 47.  
98 Liss, Isabel, 63.  
focus it outward into conquest but could never control it and the century and a half preceding the Spanish arrival in the Americas was an age of violence and crisis that prefigured the crisis that would occur in the New World. “Who could possibly relate or write about all of the injustices that ensued?” asked one Castilian chronicler in language that foreshadowed Las Casas’ hyperbolic prose before providing an inventory: “Insults, factions, imprisonment, banishment, confiscation of property, deaths, general destruction of the land, usurpation of positions, disturbances of the peace, injustices, robberies, and wars against the Moors.” Depredations plagued Castile for so long, he guessed “that for thirty years the evil and harmful deeds never ceased.”

3. Monarchy

That the 150 years of crisis and 30 years of chaos would be largely quelled by 1492 could not have been predicted in December 1474. Much less could the focal point of the chaos’s subjugation have been identified. It was Isabel, Don Pedro Girón’s desired bride and the great-great granddaughter of Enrique of Trastamara, who rose out of the Iberian chaos and remade Iberia, foreshadowing the Crown’s agenda in the America’s in the coming century: domesticating a predatory warrior class that contemporary critics characterized as wolves.

First, though, Isabel had to gain the throne. After avoiding a marriage with Girón, she orchestrated her own marriage in secret. She chose Ferdinand, the heir to the crown of Aragon and of the other branch of the Trastamara and journeyed in secret under the protection of troops. Ferdinand, who had no such protection, traveled disguised as a

servant. In the ceremony Isabel united the two most powerful kingdoms of Spain and the Trastamara dynasty and stood poised to inherit the throne.101

King Enrique IV revoked her status as chosen heir for the secret marriage. But Enrique soon died and Isabel, after attending a mass and rites for his death, quickly moved to claim the throne in the royal city of Segovia. Adorned with gold and precious stones and greeted with “the roll of kettledrums and to clarinets and resounding trumpets,” Isabel mounted a platform in the portal of the church.102 She publicly swore to obey the commandments of the Church, protect the common good of the realm and the crown and guard the privileges of the hidalgos. In turn, the various elite – clergy, knights, nobles - representing themselves and the kingdoms, “took an oath to her as their Queen and the proprietary Señora Natural of the kingdoms and to the King Don Fernando.”103

Her standard was raised to music and Isabel entered the church to pray before the main altar, offering the royal banner suspended on a lance to God. Outside she processed on horseback, surrounded by nobles on foot and followed by a throng of people. Perhaps the throng was like the one in her hometown of Avila a week later: canons singing Te Deum laudamus, Muslims performing momos and sword dances, and Jews with two torahs. Back in Segovia, one noble rode on horseback ahead of her. In his hand and pointing to the sky, an unsheathed sword symbolized the royal authority to punish the guilty. With it the mounted noble led Isabel to her palace, “the grandest of royal residences in northern Castile.”104

101 Liss, Isabel, 96.
102 Ibid.
103 Ibid., 97.
104 Ibid.
Her husband Ferdinand, away during her hasty coronation, was surprised at Isabel’s unprecedented use of the sword. “It was a rite of kings; he knew of no queen who would have usurped that male attribute.” Nevertheless, Ferdinand was confident he would reign as king, for in Aragon a woman could not inherit the Crown and no women had reigned in Castile for hundreds of years. “So he traversed Castile in high spirits,” in the words of Liss, “banners flying and trumpets proclaiming the presence of royal majesty ‘so that vassals might know it was their king who was in the land.’”

But Ferdinand would be disappointed. Isabel met him inside the gates, explaining that as she descended from the direct line of the Trastamara, she would reign as queen. Ferdinand’s entourage argued, but the formal accord of January 15 gave Ferdinand only indirect rights as husband; Castile was Isabel’s alone.

Isabel had succeeded in positioning her husband; now she had an invading army to deal with. A large faction of the Castilian nobility, led by the clans of Pacheco and Girón, urged the king of Portugal Afonso to invade. He sought the help of France in return for the Basque provinces. Isabel and Ferdinand were weak and sought support by promising mercedes of captured Portuguese land. They also established a treaty with Granada for help against a potential Portuguese invasion in the Cordoba area. To supplement her meager funds, Isabel tapped the wealth of the Church, which lent half its plate, worth 30 million mrs (80,000 ducats).

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105 Liss, Isabel, 103.
106 Ibid., 104.
107 Although he signed the agreement, his anger remained, and he almost left. Some minor terms were adjusted, and he stayed. Ibid., 107.
108 Rubin, Isabella of Castile, 142.
109 “In 1475 the only remaining repository of wealth in Castile was the church. Initially Isabel shrank from using ecclesiastical funds – the idea was unprecedented, perhaps even uncanonical. But Cardinal Mendoza and other prelates supported the idea, even cited scriptural arguments in its defense.” Ibid., 143.
Isabel gathered her forces to meet Afonso’s invading army and his growing number of Castilian allies. On the morning of July 15, 1575, Isabel went among the men preparing for battle, “‘with heartening words and cheerful face.’” She ascended a mount to see them off, a image vividly painted by Liss: “the grandes on horseback at the head of their hundreds-strong mesnadas of cavalry and infantry; Pedro de Manrique, Count of Treviño, leading thousands of Asturian foot and Biscayan archers; then the recruits come in from the cities; and her own guards, bearing her banner embroidered with her bundled arrows…. ” Liss continues: “Watching those thousands wend their way alongside the Duero river and disappear over the horizon, ‘the Queen saw herself señora of this powerful fighting force.’ She had been dissuaded only through much effort on the part of the King and the grandes from riding with them.”

Less than two weeks later, Ferdinand returned from the Battle of Toro disheveled and without victory, his army dispersed and raiding the countryside. Isabel, far from impressed, greeted Ferdinand with “‘words more like those of a forceful man than a timid woman [and] accused Ferdinand and his army of cowardice.” But the coming year would be different. On March 1, 1476, Ferdinand’s forces overtook Afonso at a wide plain near the town of Peleagonzalo. The Duero River, the ancient barrier between Castile and the infidel kingdoms of the south, was high with snow melt. The Portuguese had greater numbers and the Castilians were tired from journey. They had no artillery, it was late in the day, supplies were low and the men poorly protected from the winter cold.

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110 Liss, Isabel, 115-6.
111 Rubin, Isabella of Castile, 147.
But although outnumbered, Ferdinand was confident in Isabel’s right to rule and in the help of Santiago, the patron saint of Spain. They drew up battle formation and “[w]ith the rising beat of war drums, the blare of clarines, the spirited shouts of ‘St. James and St. Lazarus,’ Ferdinand’s right wing charged the Portuguese, who promptly discharged their cannons and arquebuses.” The discharge shattered the right wing, but the left wing, led by Cardinal Mendoza, fought bravely. Rubin continues the story:

An icy rain began to fall. In the deepening twilight the outcome of the battle remained undecided. The Portuguese flag was ripped apart as its courageous bearer, losing one arm and then the other, clenched the banner in his teeth until finally he was cut down. Hundreds of wounded Portuguese fell or leapt into the Duero and were washed downstream. In the darkness a spirited and bloodied Ferdinand continued to shout, ‘Charge forward, my Castilian knights, I am your king!’

In three hours of battle, more than twelve hundred Portuguese soldiers perished. Afonso had disappeared, but Ferdinand remained on the battlefield until midnight, convinced ‘that night that Our Lord had given him all of Castile.’ In the tradition of the victorious, the Castilian soldiers ‘took prisoners, gold, silver, clothes and many other things’ from the dead Portuguese and their horses.

Alfonso was defeated and over the next few years Isabel subjugated the remaining noble rebels. Through 1477-1478 they established authority over Andalusia and peace with France. After signing a peace treaty on September 4, 1479 Isabel’s claim to the crown was firmly established. Isabel was now monarch of Castile, “senor natural” over all its subjects, and thus “enjoyed a direct bond with all of them that superseded any other bonds of vassalage they might be subject to.”

Despite Isabel’s claims, they meant little in the decentralized feudal terrain of Castile, particularly in the rubble of the 15th century. Nobles often had significant independent power and little interest in recognizing temporal superiors. Royal Mercedes

112 From Liss, Isabel, 127.
113 Rubin, Isabella of Castile, 146.
114 Ibid., 146-7.
115 See Chapter 1 of Edwards, The Spain of the Catholic Monarchs.
were often confirmed what magnate muscle had already determined. Nobles were exempt from taxation, a major factor in Castilian weakness. Over 60% of royal expenditure went to the nobility, not counting the indirect channels of appointment to the Church, towns, and military orders.

So it was that Isabel, with the help of her supportive husband, embarked on a process of asserting their claims to dominion over the centrifugal feudal power. Like other lords, the crown relied on the cooperative support of lesser lords to establish its authority. The monarchs and their entourage had to frequently travel to address problems and demonstrate its authority. Given the fragility of crown authority, new monarchs had to act swiftly and definitively to establish their authority among the flux of multiple rival noble factions. Overall, Isabel and Ferdinand renewed old institutions of military power, government administration, and ecclesial infrastructure and “laid the foundations of a new state…”

Isabel and Ferdinand took calculated steps to extend their control over government administration. They turned the Cortes of Castile - a legislative body which had already been decreasing in authority - into a rarely summoned, purely advisory board. They reformed old sources of taxation and found new ones, almost tripling revenue between 1474 and 1504, allowing them to disregard the Cortes for long periods

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118 Edwards, *Christian Córdoba*, 89.
119 MacKay, *Spain in the Middle Ages*, 180. When King Joao II inherited the crown of Portugal so much was in the control of nobles that he declared that “All my father left me are the highways of Portugal.” The Duke of Braganza controlled over a third of Portugal, with “fifty towns and castles, and was able to muster ten thousand foot soldiers and three thousand cavalry.” James Reston, Jr., *Dogs of God: Columbus, the Inquisition, and the defeat of the Moors* (New York: Doubleday, 2005), 137.
121 “Elliot, *Imperial Spain*, 86.
122 Ibid., 93.
of time. The major part of their reform was the royal official, the *corregidor*. The *corregidor* was appointed to local governments and was to be entirely devoted to royal interests and not family or local interests of the area in which he served. Legal bureaucrats trained in the new universities, or *letrados*, fueled the growing centralization, who a later Mendoza chronicler called “middling people between the great and the small without offense to one nor the other, living honest lives with less tendency for corruption and greater loyalty to the Crown’s agenda.”

But the long tumultuous history of Castile had shown that government control amounted to nothing without sufficient military power to enforce justice. Even before the end of the War of Succession, the Catholics Monarchs revived the institution of the *hermandad* to combat the lawlessness of their kingdoms. It was a type of national police force which covered the patchwork of royal and seigniorial jurisdictions. Opposed to the slow process of the legal system, the *Santa Hermandad* dispatched justice quickly and violently: those convicted of stealing over 500 mrs. were to have a foot cut off, those of murder to be executed by arrows in open countryside. Each 100 households were to maintain 1 cavalry and each 150 one man-at-arms. According to Edwards, criminal justice also served as a pretext for the establishment of “what was effectively a national Castilian army” consisting of 2,000 troops commanded by Ferdinand’s brother.

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123 The 1480 Act of Resumption of the Cortes of Toledo reclaimed half of alienated revenues to the nobility since 1464. Elliot, *Imperial Spain*, 92, 89.
124 They were not allowed to engage in any personal economic activity within his jurisdiction and his officials were not to be natives of the area. In particular, he was “curbing the activities of seigneurial retinues” and protect royal privileges from “encroachment of both seigneurial and ecclesiastical jurisdictions.” Edwards, *The Spain of the Catholic Monarchs*, 58.
127 Elliot, *Imperial Spain*, 87. This army would become a crucial component of the war in Granada and also as an important source of revenue. See Edwards, *The Spain of the Catholic Monarchs*, 42-46.
Traditionally, administration of justice and war against the Muslims were the two main responsibilities of the Castilian monarchy. The Catholic Monarchs pursued both as it looked South and North to consolidate its rule. They renewed the war with Granada in 1482 to re-direct local noble power to an external outlet. In the midst of the war, they turned their attention to the chaos in Galicia, where the Conde of Lemos had seized a royal town, outmatched counter efforts by a hermandad force and two different commanders, and inspired further disobedience. The monarchs went north, forced Lemos to surrender the town and his castles, and sent him into exile. The show of force inspired repentant Galician nobles to offer their service to the traveling court. The Monarchs removed the most rebellious and ordered over 20 castles to be demolished.

Along with military power, Isabel made church reform an important priority. Both coalesced in the chilling specter of the Spanish Inquisition. The long tumultuous relationship between Christians and Jews in Iberia was somewhat paradoxical, with periodic eruptions of anti-Semitic violence and the simultaneous absorption of Jewish converts to Christianity into Castilian society, particularly the nobility. Most of the nobility had some Jewish ancestry, including Isabel and Ferdinand. Accusations that some of the more recent converts, called conversos, secretly practiced Judaism had further complicated noble conflict. In response, Isabel applied to Rome for permission to implement the Inquisition, which applied secular torture and punishment to the question of heresy.

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129 Elliot, *Imperial Spain*, 46.
She received permission on November 1, 1478, but it was not until two years later that the Inquisition was implemented in Seville. Upon promulgation of the edict, thousands of *conversos* fled to the seigniorial towns of the great Andalusian lords, such as Guzman and Ponce de Leon. There was allegedly a military plot to resist the Inquisition that was discovered, and in 1481 the first public burnings occurred. Ferdinand implemented the Inquisition in Aragon, where it was largely – and unsuccessfully - resisted as an imposition of undue royal power. Despite the assassination of the head inquisitor in a cathedral and a steady stream of *converso* appeals to the pope - who wrote chastising the Crown for the excesses of the Inquisition - it became an established part of their rule.\(^{131}\) Much could be said about the long debated Inquisition, but its effect as the only political body which spanned the much fragmented Spain was clear. “There is no question that for Isabel,” Liss explains, “the Inquisition was a means to fuse political, religious, and economic ends, to extending, heightening, and maintaining monarchical authority and to building a broadly Spanish consensus based upon religious orthodoxy and the social superiority of longtime Christians.”\(^{132}\)

By 1491, Isabel was at the height of her power; “stronger than a strong man…,” according to Peter Martyr d'Anghiera, an Italian chronicler living in the Castilian court, “[n]ature has made no other woman like her.”\(^{133}\) The coming year loomed large as a symbolic culmination of her refashioning of Iberia. Granada, the old vassal state and ally of Castile, was poised to surrender to her forces, and thus complete the Reconquest of Iberia. For Elliot, it was “the achievement of Spain’s territorial integrity” which “in turn forged a new emotional bond between the peoples of Spain, who shared a common sense

\(^{131}\) See Edwards, *The Spain of the Catholic Monarchs*, 84-90.  
\(^{132}\) Liss, *Isabel*, 177.  
\(^{133}\) Martir from ibid., 3.
of triumph at the downfall of the infidel.”\textsuperscript{134} Despite her personal tolerance of Jews and her own Jewish ancestry, she decided once and for all to eliminate Judaism from her realm, signing an order requiring all Jews to convert or be expelled from Castile. Combined, the expulsion of the Jews and conquest of Granada was in effect a religious unification of Spain, which according to Elliot “laid the foundations of a unitary state in the only sense in which that was possible in the circumstances of the late fifteenth century.”\textsuperscript{135}

There is certainly much more to be said about the details of Isabel’s rule, but overall, it effectively ended the thirty years of chaos. Lords were still occasionally willing to use military force for economic and political ends.\textsuperscript{136} Yet despite examples of noble violence, the Crown generally standardized and domesticated the nobility politically, allowing them to keep their socioeconomic power.\textsuperscript{137} Isabel had taken up the sword against all that had celebrated her coronation and the royal court, in the words of John Edwards, “was now explicitly the main, if not the only source of political legitimacy.”\textsuperscript{138}

4. Conclusion – 1492

Almost imperceptibly, an age was ending in Castile. For centuries, mounted knights had battled both infidel and Christian for glory, honor, and wealth, using warfare

\begin{itemize}
  \item[\textsuperscript{134}] Elliot, \textit{Imperial Spain}, 109.
  \item[\textsuperscript{135}] “At least in the minds of Ferdinand and Isabella, they helped impose a unity which transcended administrative, linguistic, and cultural barriers, bringing together Spaniards of all races in common furtherance of a holy mission.” Ibid., 110.
  \item[\textsuperscript{136}] See Edwards, \textit{Christian Córdoba}, 162.
  \item[\textsuperscript{137}] Nader attributes greater agency to the nobility, arguing that the nobility turned from national politics to consolidate local power, exemplified once again by the Mendoza. Nader, \textit{The Mendoza Family}, 103.
  \item[\textsuperscript{138}] Edwards, \textit{The Spain of the Catholic Monarchs}, 50.
\end{itemize}
as a means of social mobility. Numerous lords like Pedro Girón exploited periods of weak royal control to secure their share of limited Iberian resources.

But the age of mounted knights and lordly power waned as the 15th century ended. No longer would cavalry and individual valor decide military conflicts. The Battle of Peleagonzalo, which secured the throne for Isabel, was also “the last major contest in Castile to be decided by light cavalry and the individual valor of nobles and kings.”139 The young men of Castile would now fight elsewhere, some against the expanding Turkish Empire, but mostly in the increasingly bloody European conflicts of the sixteenth and seventeenth century. Neither would the noble conflict which defined Castile’s long, tumultuous history break the new order again. “It was certainly a thing most marvelous,” recorded Peter Martyr, “that what many men and great lords did not manage to do in many years, a single woman did in a short time through work and governance.”140

139 Liss, Isabel, 127.
140 Fernando de Pulgar, from Liss, Isabel, title page.
CHAPTER 2: HISPANIOLAN REBELLIONS

“Heaven help me! What’s this I see?
Heaven help me! What do I behold?
I marvel at it with little fear,
but I believe it only with great doubt.
I in a luxurious palace?
I amid fabrics and brocade?
I surrounded by such well-dressed, energetic servants?

Segismundo,
La vida es un sueño (Life is a Dream).
Pedro Calderón de la Barca, 1636.\textsuperscript{141}

1. Migration to the Caribbean

1497 was a perfect storm of hunger, disease, economic failure, weak royal authority, and open conflict. Newly fortified with horses, arms, and freshly slaughtered livestock looted from the royal garrison, the rebel faction of 70 mounted hidalgos descended on Fort Concepción. The fort, which was the central link between the royal forces in the south and the royal garrison in the north, was surrounded by a sea of discontented peasants. Their lesser lords had been urging revolt, which the rebel faction only encouraged, promising military assistance and liberty from tribute. The small fort could not hold all its defenders and according to Samuel Wilson, a determined attack could destroy Concepción. With a numerical advantage of over 10 to 1 and supplemented with mounted allies, the peasants would expel their lords. The Castilian

\textsuperscript{141} Pedro Calderón de la Barca, Life is a Dream, edited and translated by Stanley Appelbaum. (Mineola, NY: Dover Books, 2002), 71.
crisis, once quelled by Isabel, was reborn. But this was not Castile. This revolt against royal authority by potential lords and the societal turmoil which was its seedbed occurred halfway across the globe.\footnote{Samuel M. Wilson, “Columbus, My Enemy,” in \textit{Natural History} (December 1990), 44-49.}

It was most likely impossible for Isabel to have known the full consequences of the decision she made five years earlier. As Isabel made her royal entrance into newly conquered Granada, Christopher Columbus arrived to make one last effort to sell his proposal for a new royal campaign, not into the rebellious north or the Muslim south; this time, into the West and the waters of the Atlantic. Ferdinand’s household accountant finally convinced her that it was in fact a relatively cheap gamble with potentially great rewards. For his part, Columbus struck a good bargain: a percentage of the returns, noble status, and the right to govern any new lands that he discovered. The Crown found 2,500 ducats by shifting funds from various accounts, and on August 3, 1492, Columbus, a crew of ninety men, and three ships sailed west into the “green sea of darkness” and the unknown.

Though risky, the venture was not as unprecedented as contemporary readers may assume. For over a century - from 1340 to 1470 - small scale commercial ventures, “privately funded though royally sponsored”, drove a growing swath of European expansion in the Atlantic.\footnote{John Kelly Thornton, \textit{Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 35.} European navigators absorbed more of the African coastline and a growing number of Atlantic islands into their commercial orbit, in part an extension of the southward moving Reconquest but also encouraged by rising Islamic power in the
Mediterranean. European expeditions raided the weaker and traded with the stronger, rarely going further than necessary to ensure a profitable return.

Although dominated by the Portuguese, the Atlantic commercial expansion was an “international exercise” driven by small, entrepreneurial groups, which John K. Thornton describes as “the cautious advance of a new frontier, using or slightly modifying existing technology and relying on relatively small amounts of private capital.” For decades, smaller groups pushed the limits of navigation, while more politically and economically powerful agents consolidated gains made by those who took greater risks. This included the Iberian crowns, which were the quickest to claim sovereignty and “make the effort necessary to enforce these claims, usually after the economic benefits were clearly revealed by an international group of pioneers.”

The Atlantic was not just a commercial opportunity but had long been a theatre of Portuguese-Castilian competition and open conflict. They had jockeyed for control over the Canary Islands since the early 1400s. In 1453 the Portuguese intercepted a fleet of Castilian ships sent to trade in Guinea and captured a caravel, leading to “a flurry of claims and counterclaims over who had the right to trade in this region.” Support for Portuguese sovereignty in Guinea by the pope and the king of Castile did little to deter the attempts of Castilian agents to gain a piece of the African action, trading with

\[144\] Expanding Turkish naval power made the Mediterranean increasingly dangerous for European ships. The Turkish conquest of Constantinople in 1453 confirmed the changing balance of power, making the conflict free Atlantic more attractive to investment. Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World*, 35.
\[145\] Ibid.
\[146\] Ibid., 35-6.
\[147\] Ibid., 27-8.
Africans and raiding Portuguese ships for cargo. The Portuguese were not afraid to retaliate, illustrated by the Andalusian burned in Portugal in 1460 for selling arms in Africa. Isabel, for her part, had only heightened the conflict as she made the Atlantic another front in the War of Succession, asserting that Visigoth kings had once held the Atlantic lands and offering incentives for military action against Portuguese shipping.

The status of the Canaries and Africa was finally settled in the Treaty of Alcocovas of 1479 which also settled the more pressing dynastic dispute between the warring crowns examined in chapter 1. Castile renounced all rights to Portuguese claims in Guinea, of lands already found and yet to be discovered, in return for sole sovereignty over the Canaries. A line was established at Cape Bojador, just south of the Canaries and north of the Tropic of Cancer, making all that lies to the south under Portuguese jurisdiction. All Castilians and any other foreigners were forbidden to enter Guinea, a later clause adding that violators were to be thrown into the sea.

At first it seemed that the treaty only blocked Castile from the Guinea trade. This was bad enough, as Africa was a lucrative and much sought after trade destination. For centuries textiles, ivory, slaves, and most importantly, gold, had wound up the Saharan trade routes to the markets of Iberia, and now Portugal had direct access to the sources of

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151 The war pitted the Portuguese against the Castilian Crown and split the Castilian nobility. In 1476 she ordered a fleet of 30 caravels and 3 Basque vessels to raid Portuguese settlements at the Cape Verde islands. The expedition lost its political focus in freedom of the high seas, raiding Portuguese, African, and even Castilian interests. Having missed a Portuguese treasure fleet they took two ships with 500 Africans owned by Castilian Marqués of Cádiz. Liss, *Isabel the Queen*, 144 (140-51).
152 The Canaries, like the New World, was site of conquest and ensuing conflict over the form of conquest. While arguably an important bridge between the Old World and the New, I have chosen not deal with this in the body of the work. See Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *The Canary Islands After the Conquest: the Making of a Colonial Society in the Early Sixteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982) for details.
the goods. African peoples consistently beat back European incursions, so in general, the Portuguese settled on the establishment of fortified trading compounds called factorías.\textsuperscript{154} “The factorías were isolated trading communities established by individuals who were backed by private capital, without any presumption of political control of the territories in which they were established,” explains Kathleen Deagen and José Maria Cruxent. “They were, however, licensed by the Crown of Portugal, to which they owed one-fifth of any profits. Artisans, craftsmen, and laborers – predominately European – were employed in the factories and received wages.”\textsuperscript{155} This point deserves to be emphasized: the factoría was based on an entirely different relationship with native peoples than the lordly control and tribute. In fact, Europeans paid tribute to African rulers for the privilege of trade, a point examined in Chapter 8.

By early 1500s, 700 kilograms of gold passed from Africa to Portugal annually, a lot when the whole of European production was at most four tons a year and Portugal’s was zero.\textsuperscript{156} But as promising as African trade was for Portugal, it was not the greatest source of nautical concern for the Castilian Crown. In 1468 a Portuguese expedition reached the dramatic eastward turn of the African coast and an even greater prize – Asia – seemed within reach. Asia was the purported home of the legendary Prestor John, a Christian king of incredible power, with whom European rulers hoped to ally in order to surround the various Islamic kingdoms. Even more importantly, Asia was the home of spices, a valuable luxury good in high demand with European consumers. The Portuguese crown funded its first expedition in 1482 and five years later, Bartholomeu

\textsuperscript{154} Thornton, \textit{Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World}, 38.
\textsuperscript{155} Kathleen Deagan and Jose Maria Cruxent, \textit{Columbus’s Outpost Among the Tainos: Spain and America at La Isabela, 1493-1498} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 8-9.
Dias rounded South Africa. Despite being forced to turn around by a mutinous crew, the voyage made it clear that it was only a matter of time before the Portuguese made it to Asia.\(^{157}\)

Isabel, having been squeezed out of a potential water route to Asia a decade ago, used Columbus to ride the wave of commercial expansion west instead of east. As is well known, Columbus found land and people that seemed to be Asian, leaving a group behind to start a *factoría* while he brought news to his royal sponsors.\(^{158}\) Isabel moved quickly to follow up on Columbus’s discovery, using Ferdinand’s connection to the pope to obtain a papal bull to legitimate their claims and counter Portuguese outrage at the violation of the treaty. She assembled a virtual armada - 17 ships, 1,200-1,500 men including 20 knights of the *Santa Hermandad* with their horses, artisans, tradesmen, and twelve Franciscan priests – and quickly dispatched it to solidify Spanish interests in the Indies.\(^{159}\)

But despite the size of the expedition, Isabel did not send it for conquest but to replicate the Portuguese *factoría* model of peaceful trade for Indian commodities. In this particular case, the Castilian Crown control was even greater than for the Portuguese, as the Crown provided the initial investments. Profit would come from the royal trade of Spanish manufactured goods for the expected spices, gold, and other Asian products. Of the 1,200-1,500 Europeans that accompanied the expedition, all but 200 were salaried

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\(^{157}\) Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World*, 57, 32. It was also the first venture explicitly geopolitical in ambition, designed to surround Islam and find a direct link to the largest economy on earth.  
\(^{158}\) Deagan and Cruxent, *Columbus’s Outpost Among the Tainos*, 11-12, 15.  
\(^{159}\) Ibid., 18-19.
and expected to perform menial labor, indicating that the Crown had not yet envisioned native labor.\textsuperscript{160}

In addition to trade, Isabel also emphasized evangelization. The highest ranking priest was instructed to begin – along with monitoring Columbus and ministering to Spaniards – evangelization of the Indians.\textsuperscript{161} She directed Columbus to “strive by all means to win over the inhabitants of the said islands and mainland to our Holy Catholic Faith” and described only peaceful methods. Isabel ordered all that go to the Indies to “treat the said Indians very well and lovingly, and to abstain from doing them any harm, arranging that both peoples hold much conversation and intimacy, each serving the others to the best of their ability.”\textsuperscript{162} She also stated that “if any person or persons should maltreat the said Indians in any matter whatsoever, the said Admiral, as Viceroy and Governor of Their Highness, is to punish them severely by virtue of the authority vested in him by Their Majesties for this purpose.”\textsuperscript{163}

Besting the Portuguese, trade, evangelization - such were Isabel’s ambitions. But unbeknownst to Isabel, the men recruited to staff the venture had little interest in the crown’s plan. According to chroniclers and commentators, the majority joined for the same reason Castilians fought each other back at home: for wealth, honor, and fame.\textsuperscript{164}

\textsuperscript{160} Deagan and Cruxent, \textit{Columbus’s Outpost Among the Tainos}, 18-19.
\textsuperscript{161} Ibid., 16. The first of eighteen terms in Columbus’s instructions declared that the presence of a great many people “apt for conversion to our Holy Catholic Faith” gave great pleasure to the Crown since “Their principal concern be for the service of God, Our Lord, and the enhancement of the Holy Catholic Faith.”
\textsuperscript{162} Ibid., 16.
\textsuperscript{163} Ibid., 16-7. Such lofty religious language should not, however, allow the cautious reader to lose sight of the main purpose of the venture. It was first and foremost an economic investment predicated on large returns, an attempt to link European demand for the most valuable early modern commodity with its supply, which lay on the other side of the globe. The mission to convert the natives was to be conducted by the approximately dozen priests who joined the expedition. Thus, 1% of the expeditions’ personnel were to devote at most 1/3 of their time to the religious end of the project, hardly the resources one would expect from one’s primary goal.
\textsuperscript{164} Ibid., 55.
“Many of them were of the potential hidalgo class….,” writes Troy S. Floyd, “[and] since their ambitions were blocked in Spain, they looked to new opportunities overseas for which gold was but a means to achieving hidalgo status and to enjoying seigniorial life.”

Isabel wanted stable factoría-style trade and ordered evangelization of the natives; the shipload of young ambitious men culled from conflict ridden Spain would do neither.

Likewise, Isabel could not have known that their destination would compound their ambition. Columbus’s factoría was not on the periphery of the largest economy on earth, Asia, but a much smaller and less developed economy. Hispaniola had a population of perhaps one million, which most agree was divided into at least five larger hierarchical chiefdoms with chiefs, nobles, commoners and perhaps a servant/slave class. They subsisted primarily on an agricultural system, supplemented their diet with hunting and gathering, had no large domesticated animals, and utilized stone-age technology. Most significantly, the Taino had much lower military technology, no resistance to European diseases, and no spices.

Stepping back to take a broad perspective, then, Hispaniola sat on the edge of a steep precipice. In the previous chapter, we saw how conflict within the warrior class in the context of falling tribute paying populations and weak royal authority plunged Castile into multifaceted civil war. Now, no less than 1,200 potential Giróns sat poised on the littoral of one million technologically weaker, tribute paying vassals. Isabel’s Atlantic

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166 Ibid., 31. Another population began advancing up the Antilles in the eleventh century. The Caribs had occupied the Lesser Antilles and by 1492 were encroaching on Puerto Rico and Hispaniola with superior weaponry and ritualized cannibalism. It is possible that the Taino had absorbed some Carib and were on the verge of forming a confederation in defense of their lands.
campaign unwittingly transplanted predators long known as wolves in Castile among a prey with fewer natural defenses. The Castilian crisis would be given new life in a foreign land and the Queen, focused on more pressing issues in Spain, would have no way of predicting or controlling the trajectory of de-centralization and violence that would occur.

2. Hispaniolan Crisis

The Crown’s commercial enterprise began to fail before Columbus and the armada returned to the Caribbean. The expedition found not a thriving factoría but both the fort and the adjacent Indian town burnt to the ground and those left behind gone. Many of the higher-ranking men, including the head priest, urged Columbus to retaliate against the local Indians, but to his credit he instead moved the factoría to a more favorable location. Yet traveling against the once favorable wind proved to be unexpectedly difficult; it took 25 days to travel 160 km and according to the expedition’s physician, was more work than traveling all the way from Castile.

The new settlement, named La Isabela after the Queen, was immediately beset by problems related to the new environment. The food supplies, already depleted from the long Atlantic journey, began to spoil. European crops did little to alleviate the growing crisis as they failed to adapt to the tropical conditions. While Indians foodstuffs exchanged for Spanish trade goods kept the Spanish population alive, there was little gold

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167 Deagan and Cruxent, *Columbus’s Outpost Among the Tainos*, 11-12, 15.
168 According to the local Indians, some died from disease, others in fights among themselves over gold and women, and the rest by a hostile cacique from the south named Caonabó. Ibid., 47.
and no spices to fuel the factoría economy. Instead, local diseases brought death to some men and sickened most of the rest.\footnote{169} Personnel problems and weak central authority compounded the colony’s struggle to survive. Columbus ordered short rations and a mandatory work schedule, which angered many of the more privileged men. “Everyone had to pitch in, hidalgos and courtiers alike,” Las Casas recorded, “…people for whom having to work with their hands was equivalent to death, especially on an empty stomach.”\footnote{170} Columbus strictly enforced the royal monopoly on trade, allegedly splitting the ears and noses of those who concealed gold, which further exacerbated the rift.\footnote{171} After only a month, rebellion led by the royal accountant split the small colony. Columbus quickly regained control, but the bodies that hung from the makeshift scaffolding portended the future violence.

The lack of valuable commodities on the Indian periphery was certainly a main cause of the discontent and in mid January, Columbus sent out a party to search for signs of wealth. It returned with news of plentiful gold and the first hope of the voyage, one man remembering that all “made merry, not caring any longer about any sort of spicery, but only of this blessed gold.”\footnote{172} On March 12, 1494 Columbus and a group of 500 left for the interior “with colours flying, in rank and file, drums beating and trumpets sounding.”\footnote{173} From the pass ominously named “Puerto de los Hidalgos” they could see

\footnote{169} David Watts, \textit{The West Indies: Patterns of Development, Culture, and Environmental Change Since 1492} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 91. The most probable diseases were enteric dysentery and syphilis. \\
\footnote{170} Deagan and Cruxent, \textit{Columbus’s Outpost Among the Tainos}, 55. \\
\footnote{171} Floyd, \textit{The Columbus Dynasty in the Caribbean}, 25 \\
\footnote{172} From Deagan and Cruxent, \textit{Columbus’s Outpost Among the Tainos}, 55. \\
\footnote{173} From ibid., 56.}
the whole valley, “so green, so unspoiled, so colorful, all so full of beauty, that it appeared to them that they had reached part of heaven.”

The Spaniards established their presence in the Indian interior with the construction of a fort, the first of what would become a string of fortifications up the central Cibao valley. After marching all but fifty men back to La Isabel, Columbus received rumors of an Indian attack on the fort, and promptly sent 400 troops back. He ordered them to patrol the valley in squadrons of 50 men, hoping to impress Spanish power on the Indians and address the colony’s increasing hunger by spreading the men among a greater number of Indians. But as Floyd dryly observed, “There was something bizarre, however, about expecting men to consider themselves on regular salary in the wilderness, to roam about the Vega and be content with cassava and yams for payment.” Whatever brought the men to Hispaniola, it was certainly not Indian foodstuffs, which they consumed only as a last result.

Meanwhile, the centrifugal forces continued unabated. As the virtually unsupervised Spanish patrols marched through the interior, Columbus resumed his nautical search for Asia, leaving a council headed by his brother Diego to control the colony during his five month absence. At the same time, many of the elites returned to Spain to complain about Columbus, because they disapproved of the violent measures, or just escape the chaos of Hispaniola. Evangelization proved to be almost non-existent.

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177 Pedro Margarite, an Aragonese nobleman and “confidant of King Ferdinand,” did not carry out the punitive expedition or trick Caonabo into capture, and according to Oviedo “neither did nor consented to violence or offense to the Indians.” From Carl Ortwin Sauer, *The Early Spanish Main* (Berkeley:
Before leaving, the senior cleric wrote to the Crown and stated that nothing could be done to evangelize the Indians without interpreters. The men of the squads “scattered by twos and threes into Indian communities” hoping to find food and intent on - however unrealistically - “establishing a personal fortune of gold.”

While the particular actions of small bands of Spaniards are murky, Deagan and Cruxent assert that “abuses against the Taino must have been common.” According to Martyr, most of the expedition members were “unscrupulous vagabonds, who only employed their ingenuity in gratifying their appetites.” Many seemed to have preyed on Indian communities, extorting goods and women, not surprising given the Iberian precedents examined in the previous chapter. At the same time, the Taino were more than passive victims, as in “many places when our men were surprised by the natives, the latter strangled them, and offered them as sacrifices to their gods.”

Spanish desperation and aggression, Taino indignation, and general cultural misunderstandings finally culminated in open conflict between Spaniards and Indians. A Taino revolt killed 10 Spaniards and apparently burned 40 sick alive in the winter of 1495. The Spaniards retaliated and Columbus, now convinced that slaves would be the most profitable commodity available in the colony, enslaved 1,500 of the defeated Indians and sent 550 to Spain. The Spaniards - with 200 men, 20 horses, 20 wardogs,

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178 Only one priest, maybe two, actually evangelized Indians, learning the language and much about their culture while making some converts. Floyd, The Columbus Dynasty in the Caribbean, 38, 39.
179 Sauer, The Early Spanish Main, 85; Wilson, Hispaniola: Caribbean Chiefdoms in the Age of Columbus, 93. Despite the arrival of a relief fleet in the winter 1495, only 630 Spaniards were left, most of them sick.
180 Deagan and Cruxent, Columbus’s Outpost Among the Tainos, 45.
181 From ibid., 59.
182 Martyr from ibid., 59.
183 Ibid., 60; Floyd, The Columbus Dynasty in the Caribbean, 28.
and the assistance of one of the more powerful caciques (roughly “chiefs”) - put down the Taino coalition and definitively pacified the Western Valley.\(^{184}\)

Columbus took advantage of the conflict and attempted to adapt his failing system to the rapidly changing field. He turned away from barter and imposed a tribute system of gold, cotton, and labor, organized through caciques. In theory, the Spanish economy would extend further into the island and funnel goods to the factoría with greater efficiency by utilizing the Taino social structure.\(^{185}\) Columbus also pursued further territorial expansion, starting an important gold mine of San Cristóbal on south coast in July 1496 and establishing a tributary relationship with the western kingdom of Xaragua, the most developed on the island.

The tributary shift, however, did little to solve the factoría’s economic problems or the growing crisis among the Taino. A widespread famine compounded Indian population loss from European diseases and brutality. While climatic conditions may have been a factor, many chroniclers attributed the famine to a Taino attempt to starve out the Spaniards by refusing to plant. But “[w]hatever their origins,” Deagan and Cruxent conclude, “the famine and epidemics precipitated dramatically steep decline in Taino population in 1495 and 1496.”\(^{186}\) And by 1497, the Taino were on the verge of another rebellion.

Despite the Taino population decline and growing hostility, the Spaniards remained almost completely dependent on Indian food from the broken tribute system. Some Spaniards had been executed, more killed by Tainos in battle, and hundreds had

\(^{184}\) Wilson, Hispaniola: Caribbean Chiefdoms in the Age of Columbus, 90; Floyd, The Columbus Dynasty in the Caribbean, 27-8. 200 die on the voyage.

\(^{185}\) Wilson, Hispaniola: Caribbean Chiefdoms in the Age of Columbus, 89; Floyd, The Columbus Dynasty in the Caribbean, 29.

\(^{186}\) Deagan and Cruxent, Columbus’s Outpost Among the Tainos, 62.
died from disease. Hundreds more had returned to Spain, complaining about Columbus and what they called the “lands of vanity and deceit, which are the tomb and misery of the Castilians.” Even Columbus was gone from 1496-8, defending himself at the royal court. The 300 or so Spaniards scattered on the island were left with the oath “as God would take me to Castile” and nothing – either materially or morally – to lose.

By 1497, only a few short years since the arrival of the Spaniards, the island devolved into a multifaceted crises of hunger, disease, economic failure, weak royal authority, and open conflict with the Indians. The economy had collapsed and the Indian population and the tribute it provided was the only, and increasingly scarce, economic resource on the island. Various factions exercised predatory lordship among on the Indian population – particularly on women - with accompanying Indian resistance. Royal authority was weak and tensions between various competing groups had reached a boiling point.

Taken as a whole, the conditions Hispaniola mirrored those of the crisis in Galicia examined in chapter 1, where noble factions battled over limited resources. Back in Castile, political change had always emerged out of crisis, from the Trastamara dynasty of the early crisis and Girón’s meteoric rise in its worst years, from the rise of the Mendoza empire to Isabel’s new Spain. Hispaniola would be no different.

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188 Las Casas from Deagan and Cruxent, *Columbus’s Outpost Among the Tainos*, 63. Earlier, King Ferdinand had offered to commute the sentences of criminals who served a few years in the Indies.
3. Revolt

One of the men left at La Isabella with nothing to lose was the shadowy figure of Francisco Roldán. He came from a town outside of Toledo and despite Columbus’s mistrust of him, Roldán gained the office of *alcalde mayor* (mayor who acts as justice of the peace). He, like the rest of the men in Isabella, shared in the general antipathy towards Columbus. Rumors that the group in San Cristóbal gathering tribute and mining gold were striking it rich only sharpened their dislike. Overall, the details are difficult to sort out; what is certain is that Roldán took advantage of his office, the men’s anger, and the chaotic conditions to further his own ambitions, catalyzing an open revolt against the Columbus administration.

Roldán’s rebellion began in early 1497 when concubinage ties brought news of a brewing Indian revolt in the central valley. Under the pretext of subduing the revolt, Roldán marched a group of men into the valley where he established ties with the disaffected Indians and cultivated an alliance. He had designs of taking the Fort Concepción but returned to La Isabela where a tribute ship from Xaragua had recently arrived. Shortly after 70 men, including some *hidalgos*, sacked La Isabela, breaking into the royal storehouse and looting food, arms, and ammunition with the cry “Viva el Rey.” They proceeded to slaughter the king’s cows (presumably for food) and stole numerous horses before heading back into the central valley. The group swelled in numbers in response to Roldán’s call, who according to Martyr promised the Spaniards

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189 Deagan and Cruxent, *Columbus’s Outpost Among the Tainos*, 68. Roldán may have also been exorcised by the punishment of a close friend for the rape of an important cacique’s wife.
190 Ibid., 69.
“instead of grasping a hoe, to hold the breasts of a maiden; instead of work, pleasure; in place of hunger, abundance; and in place of weariness and watchful nights, leisure.”

Roldán’s original plan seemed to have been to take Fort Concepción, the lynchpin in the tribute system, which would give him control over the food supply and divide the Columbus faction. According to Floyd, he had been cultivating an alliance with the strongest cacique, Guarionex, promising to end the tributary system to gain Indian allies. So with his newly mounted followers and Indian allies, Roldán descended on Fort Concepción, and a cataclysmic battle of rival Spanish factions combined with a widespread Indian revolt seemed imminent.

But the impending battle, described in the beginning of the chapter, did not immediately occur. Over the next months, neither Roldan nor the Columbus faction was willing to take the risk of facing rival Spanish military power. Prudently abandoning the prospects of taking the Central Valley, Roldán and his group – perhaps 100 Spaniards now supplemented with several hundred central valley Indians - headed west, a Hispianolan El Cid determined to make his living on the frontier. They migrated to Xaragua, from where the tribute ship had recently arrived. It was the most developed Indian polity on Hispaniola and at this point, still the least affected by the problems brought by the Spanish colonial presence.

At Xaragua Roldán’s faction infiltrated the Indian hierarchy, adapting their hidalgo ambition to the Xaraguan aristocratic lifestyle, embracing polygamy and Indian

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191 From Peter Martyr D’Anghiera, ibid. Roldán claimed 400-500, but Columbus’s estimate of 120 from a year later was probably closer to reality.
192 Floyd, *The Columbus Dynasty in the Caribbean*, 37, 42, 39.
The combination of Indian agriculture and Spanish imports apparently solved their food insecurity as by the end of 1498 “the rebel Roldán alone owned 120 large and 230 small hogs.” Xaragua also benefited from the alliance, as they ended their tribute payments to the Columbus government and helped address the military imbalance with the colonial government.

The significance of the outcome of Roldán’s rebellion should not be lost in the quick pace of the plot. In his rebellion Roldán overturned the factoría crown control trade and implemented a feudal political economy. In effect, his faction established “a separate European polity in Hispaniola” with Roldán as its de facto sovereign.

Neither should the reader miss the rather worldly reasons for the occurrence and success of the rebellion. The unwillingness to work as salaried employees, hidalgo ambitions imported from Iberia, and most importantly, hunger, drove the rebels’ actions. The military parity which contained European presence in Africa and the high value commodities which fueled the factoría economic system were both absent in the Caribbean. The hierarchical social system of the Taino allowed for the easy division of labor and at least some Indians actively encouraged the feudal turn, perhaps as the “least-worst” option as it balanced the military inequality and individual lords were easier to support than a hierarchical tribute system. The Roldanistas were certainly not angels in

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193 Floyd, *The Columbus Dynasty in the Caribbean*, 39. A market for native women developed. “A woman was worth a hundred castellanos, reported Columbus, as much as a farm, and even girls of nine and ten had their price. There was a market for women of every age, he added, and many merchants were doing a profitable business in trafficking in them.” Lesley Byrd Simpson, *The Encomienda in New Spain: Forced Native Labor in the Spanish Colonies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 10.

194 Watts, *The West Indies*, 104.

195 Deagan and Cruxent, *Columbus’s Outpost Among the Tainos*, 69.

196 For Deagan and Cruxent, it involved a dual dynamic. On the one hand, it rejected old Iberian class distinctions and the centralizing authority of the crown as “even the basest-born Spaniards to claim land and Indian labor in the manner of hidalgos” “lived as a separate polity in Indian communities with Indian allies.” On the other hand, it involved significant accommodation to Indian cultural precedents, including wives and mestizo children, “At minimum, the roldanistas established a lifestyle that emphasized accommodation and incorporation of new American elements and circumstances…. ” Ibid. 201-2.
Xaragua, but in general, it was not in their interest to indiscriminately destroy their new vassals. They probably employed enough violence to maintain control, the rest probably stemmed from feuds between Spaniards.

In contrast, ideological concerns played little or no role in the rebellion. Roldán does not give any evidence that racial or cultural hatred is the source of his actions. From the perspective of the rebels, their primary conflict was with the Columbus administration. At the same time, Roldán’s faction adapted to numerous Indian cultural practices and demonstrated sincere affection for their allies and vassals. He viewed the central valley Indians which accompanied him to Xaragua as “his people” and later demanded that Columbus free 500 Indians he had taken as slaves. There is no evidence that the Roldanistas had any spiritual motives; if anything, they ruined the only evangelization that occurred by encouraging rebellion among a group which included some converts. Likewise, the rebels escaped Catholic moral requirements with their flight to Xaragua and adoption of polygamy.

Despite adoption Taino cultural practices, Roldán’s rebellion depended on Iberian precedents. Roldán and his followers did not create new roles, merely revived a pattern that had governed Iberia centuries. His ambition, to amass feudal power, looks much like that of Pedro Girón in Chapter 1, only unfettered in a new environment unaccustomed to iron, horses, and new diseases. The result was the heightening of the status of the lords and the demands placed on their vassals. The image used earlier bears repeating: predators long known as wolves in Castile were transplanted among a prey with fewer

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197 Floyd, The Columbus Dynasty in the Caribbean, 37.
198 Ibid., 37,42.
199 Ibid., 39.
natural defenses. The outcome of the transplant was the renewal of the Castilian crisis and this time, Isabel would not succeed in subduing it.

4. Crown Adaptation

When Columbus finally returned to Hispaniola in the summer of 1498, he found a completely new - and more dangerous – political situation. Spanish forces, once united against a militarily inferior opponent, were now split into competing factions over limited Taino resources. Roldán controlled the balance of power with all but 70 Spaniards in his camp and Columbus, recognizing his vulnerability, decided that compromise was his only option. He pardoned the rebels, paid them two years of wages, made Roldán alcade mayor of the island, and even executed rebels to Roldán’s authority. Most importantly, Columbus acceded to their demands for Indian vassals, granting Indian labor and lands from the already pacified central regions, “in most cases, a mere legal confirmation of what they already had.” Compromise with the rebels also meant appeasing his own supporters, who demanded the same privileges.

In effect, Columbus re-united the Spaniards at the cost of turning salaried employees into a landed aristocracy by bestowing mercedes without Crown approval. Back in Spain, Queen Isabel heard of Columbus’s deal and allegedly demanded “[w]hat right does my Admiral have to give away my Vassals to anyone?” The Crown had spent decades subduing the rebellious Castilian nobility and had no desire to see a new

200 Floyd, The Columbus Dynasty in the Caribbean, 43. This might have included a man arrested for wanting to marry one of Roldán’s concubines.
201 Ibid., 43.
202 Deagan and Cruxent, Columbus’s Outpost Among the Tainos, 203.
one form in the Indies. She had already concluded that Columbus had no right to take her vassals as slaves, ordering them to be rounded up and returned to Hispaniola, and she sent two consecutive officials to re-assert royal control and roll back the feudal shift.

The first official, Francisco de Bobadilla, arrived in Santo Domingo to see more Spanish bodies hanging from the gallows. He promptly arrested Columbus and sent him back to Spain in chains to the general satisfaction of the colony, one Franciscan writing that “the Island has been liberated from King Pharaoh.” But Bobadilla’s initial rash fervor cooled and despite the Queen’s orders, he ended up supporting the Roldanistas, who still occupied Xaragua “like feudal lords, controlling thousands of Indians.”

“Enrich yourselves as much as you can,” Bobadilla reportedly often told them, “you know not how long the time for it will last.”

The second official, Nicolás de Ovando, was directed to establish order where conditions were “something like absolute chaos.” He was instructed that the Indians were free vassals deserving of a just wage and good treatment. Furthermore, bureaucratic control had not kept pace with the increasing gold production and Ovando was directed to consolidate the mining industry in order to bring in the Crown’s share of the mining

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203 After initially accepting the first shipment of Indians to Spain, the crown suspended the slave trade a few days later pending the outcome of a commission called to examine the justification for the enslavement of Indians. A few years later, the commission determined that it is illicit, and the queen gathered the Indians that were still traceable and returned them to the Indies. They also tell a pardoned Columbus that he is forbidden to traffic in slaves on his fourth voyage. Deagan and Cruxent, Columbus’s Outpost Among the Tainos, 202.
204 From Floyd, The Columbus dynasty in the Caribbean, 46.
205 Ibid.
207 Simpson, The Encomienda in New Spain, 7.
boom. Ovando arrived in Santo Domingo April 15, 1502 and despite the multiple challenges, succeeded in constructing a new colonial order.\textsuperscript{208}

Realizing the impossibility of imposing the royal economic vision, Ovando successfully lobbied the Crown to adopt Roldán’s shift and legalize a system which will later be called the \textit{encomienda}.\textsuperscript{209} Indian \textit{caciques} and their vassals were partitioned to individual Spaniards, who in return for protection and religious instruction received labor and tribute. Indians gave roughly 2/3 of their time to the \textit{encomienda} and 1/3 for the cultivation of their crops; in effect, reviving the early medieval emphasis on tribute in the form of service.\textsuperscript{210} Grants were typically small in the relatively unstratified Taino society, usually around 100 Indians. Despite the notoriety that the \textit{encomienda} would later gain, it was a system that Lesley Byrd Simpson described as “in theory no more oppressive than the European serfdom”\textsuperscript{211} - at least from the Crown’s distant perspective.

Having resolved the fundamental economic problem, Ovando set about pacifying both the Spanish and Indian populations. He reorganized the allotment of \textit{encomiendas} while creating a new loyal nobility to counter the continuing power of the former rebels. After brutally subjugating the eastern kingdom of Higuey in 1503, Ovando and an army of 300 Spaniards and Indian allies of perhaps the same amount turned westward against the still powerful kingdom of Xaragua. According to Floyd, Xaragua was a “somewhat

\textsuperscript{208} Floyd, \textit{The Columbus Dynasty in the Caribbean}, 55-6. Up to this point it was profitless for Ferdinand, who was a major investor. New gold strikes and reports of gold smuggling gave Ferdinand new impetus to consolidate the Indies. The Casa de Contratación was established to control the Spanish end of the trade.


\textsuperscript{210} Simpson, \textit{The Encomienda in New Spain}, 178 n. 15.

\textsuperscript{211} Ibid., 14.
separatist community of both Spaniards and Taíno,” still housing at least one hundred Spaniards, many of which were fugitives from justice.²¹²

What followed Ovando’s arrival is unclear; Las Casas reported a massacre with 80 caciques burned alive by deceit. Fifty Spaniards were killed in the battle, prompting Floyd to describe it as “a preemptive strike against a planned uprising, the aftermath being an open battle between Ovando’s forces and the Spanish-Xaraguan alliance.” From this perspective, the battle that Roldán deferred at Fort Concepción in 1497 finally occurred seven years later, where rebel Spaniards “could only be separated from their Indian allies by surgery of violence.”²¹³

Whatever the details, the vicious campaigns and the structural reorganization produced a politically humbled population of both Spaniards and Indians organized into the more manageable configuration of 15 towns.²¹⁴ There were no significant independent Indian polities or Spanish rebels and for the time being, the new Spanish lords had enough Indian vassals to go around.²¹⁵ The food supply had stabilized and there was no need to import horses, cattle, or pigs as the livestock population had exploded. A gold rush fueled the economy for a decade, reaching its peak by 1508 with 450,000 gold pesos produced.²¹⁶ Crown income was now derived from taxation of private economic practices, taking a share of the gold and a 7.5% on goods. And the colony was relatively connected to the Old World as forty five ships a year now visited the port.

²¹³ Floyd, *The Columbus Dynasty in the Caribbean*, 40.
²¹⁴ By 1514 there were a total of 5000 Spaniards in the towns. Deagan and Cruxent, *Columbus’s Outpost among the Tainos*, 208.
²¹⁵ Floyd, *The Columbus Dynasty in the Caribbean*, 61.
²¹⁶ Deagan and Cruxent, *Columbus’s Outpost Among the Tainos*, 208.
But in many ways 1508 would be the zenith of Ovando’s consolidation. Gold production steadily declined thereafter and the Indian population, on which the colony depended for its labor, was in the midst of an ominous crash. Critics of the era attributed this primarily to Spanish brutality, but modern scholars cite disease and starvation as the greatest factors in the population collapse.\textsuperscript{217} By 1508 only 50,000-60,000 Indians remained of an original population of over a million leaving the colony in need of a new labor supply.

The colony turned to slavery, something strictly forbidden by Isabel. Spaniards raided neighboring islands for slaves, bringing some 40,000 Indians to Hispaniola between 1508-1513. The Lucayos, or islands of modern day Bahamas, provided the most Indians and perhaps the best reflection of the colonists’ popular religion. Governor Ovando argued that the lack of gold justified the slaving expeditions of the “useless islands” for without gold, no Spaniards would go there and the Indians would not receive Christianity.

But despite Ovando’s argument, there was little evidence that evangelization was a significant concern for anyone in Hispaniola. Some Franciscans that came with Bobadilla converted a few thousand Indians with mass baptisms,\textsuperscript{218} but in general, the Franciscans seemed content to stay in their convents and teach only the sons of caciques.\textsuperscript{219} The Franciscans did not keep up with the rapid fragmentation of the Spanish population, let alone adapt to the Indian context. No cathedrals were built and the parish

\textsuperscript{217} Wilson, \textit{Hispaniola: Caribbean Chiefdoms in the Age of Columbus}, 94.  
\textsuperscript{218} Floyd, \textit{The Columbus Dynasty in the Caribbean}, 84.  
\textsuperscript{219} Ibid., 47, 86.
system was not fully implemented, prompting one scholar to label it an “orphan church.”

Neither was there much of a popular religious movement from the ground up. Those who held *encomiendas* had done little more to evangelize Indians or promote Church growth than the Roldanistas in Xaragua. Las Casas’s later admission - that although he treated his vassal Indians well he directed little time and effort to evangelization - probably characterized the more well-intentioned *encomenderos*. Overall, the *encomendero* class inhibited church growth and the battle cry of Santiago was perhaps the most sincere and extensive religious expression among the average colonist.

By 1508, the entire island was pacified and the basic contours of the Spanish colonial presence were in place. To summarize, Roldán led a socioeconomic and political feudal turn. Isabel, so good at shoring up power in Iberia, only succeeded in re-establishing her authority in the Indies when she capitulated with the local innovations, regaining a semblance of royal control at the cost of sanctioning Roldán’s rebellion and granting lordship over Indian vassals. The Crown’s reluctant adaptation had all the marks of pragmatic, and not ideological, decisions. In effect, the crown made peace with a type of predatory lordship that it had largely tamed in Castile, which had spilled out into Hispaniola and remade the island. As the years passed, the process now expanded into the neighboring islands.

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220 Ovando had encouraged church expansion but did not receive adequate Crown support. While Ferdinand supported the orders, he had little interest in building institutional structures until he obtained full royal patronage, something that did not occur until 1511. The church essentially consisted of five thatched monasteries. Floyd, *The Columbus Dynasty in the Caribbean*, 88, 156.

221 Fidel Fita, from ibid., 88.

222 Ibid.
But despite Isabel’s compromise with the feudal turn, her conscience remained uneasy. Isabel had died in 1504, but not before re-iterating her feelings about the Indians. Her last will and testament, signed October 12, added a codicil on November 23 three days before her death. In it, Isabel recognized that the purpose of the papal bull to the Indies was to convert the Indians, and asked Ferdinand and Juana to make this their principal end. In addition, she commanded them to do the Indians or their goods no harm and treat them justly and well, and “if they were receiving any harm, to remedy it, so that it did not exceed the apostolic letter of concession.”

Almost exactly seven years after her death, a new rebellion based on the moral question inherent in Isabel’s will turned Hispaniola upside down.

5. De Córdoba’s Rebellion

The year was 1510, and a lone figure journeyed to Concepción de la Vega, unaware of the rebellion he would bring to the young colony. The young Dominican friar, Pedro de Córdoba, had only arrived in Santo Domingo a few days earlier. Upon hearing that Admiral Diego Colón was in La Vega, he set out on foot to present himself in person to the leader of the small colony. Although of noble birth, de Córdoba walked the thirty leagues, eating roots and drinking water directly from the small streams that spider-webbed through the green hills of Hispaniola. Privation was nothing new for the young Dominican, for as a university student he suffered from severe headaches caused by extreme penitential practices. As he lay under the Caribbean night sky with nothing but a cloak for bedding, he must have contemplated the long Atlantic crossing and what

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223 Liss, Isabel, 349.
await him in this new land. Certainly it must have seemed to be a great adventure for the idealistic friar.

And Dominicans were nothing if not idealistic. St. Dominic, the order’s founder, was born in 1170 in Old Castile and as a young man tried not once but twice to sell himself into slavery in order to ransom Christian slaves. His rule was approved in 1216, which maintained a strict schedule of silence, liturgy of the hours, begging, study, and preaching. The Order of Preachers coincided with the rise of other mendicant orders, who attempted to address the new urban population and the issues of the growing money economy. They became city monks who lived on alms and their charism of academic study and sound preaching, designed to counter the Albigensian heresy by persuasion. Their popular name “Domini canes,” dogs of the Lord, derived from Dominic’s mother, who according to legend had a vision of a dog leaping from her womb, carrying flaming torch in its mouth to set the entire earth on fire.

De Córdoba arrived in La Vega, where almost fifteen years earlier Roldán’s forces descended on Fort Concepción. Admiral Colón and his wife received him with great favor, bowing in respect to the young friar. The next day was a Sunday during the Octave of All Saints, so de Córdoba said Mass for the Spaniards and preached an energetic sermon “on the glories in paradise God prepared for His elect.”224 He then did something unusual, having the Spaniards gather all the Indians before him. With a cross in hand and the help of a translator, de Córdoba told the Indians of “the creation of the world, narrating its history up to the point where Christ was put on the cross.”225

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225 Ibid.
Indians had never seen anything like this man or heard such a message, the hyperbole prone Las Casas recorded, for it was the first time anyone had ever preached to them.

De Córdoba returned to Santo Domingo where he and two other friars started a small monastery on the edge of a friendly colonist’s property. Soon some twelve more Dominicans arrived from Spain. They were all from St. Stephen in Salamanca, an important center of the Dominican order’s internal reform to the sources of Dominican life, emphasizing contemplation and poverty.226 According to Las Casas, they volunteered to go to the Indies knowing “for certain they would bear great burdens on the island.”227 The Dominicans responded to the spiritual laxity of the frontier – which was even greater than the general laxity of early modern Europe – by voluntarily heightening their asceticism. They unanimously added additional rules in Hispaniola to live more austerely and witness to the rather indifferent colonists. They lived in small thatched huts with beds that “were nothing but boards covered with mats of rushes and reeds.”228 The Dominicans fasted for seven months a year and unless sick ate only native foods, primarily the staple casaba, which a later Dominican remembered as “a ruinous food that makes one swell, and gives very little sustenance.”229 In the words of Las Casas, through the strict discipline “the pristine period of St. Dominic was brought to life again.”230

Most moderns associate such Castilian religious zeal with the Reconquest and the Inquisition, and are not wrong. One thrust of the clergy’s approach to the endemic violence of Iberia was to channel it outward in the crusading ideal. The intensity of the

227 Las Casas, Indian Freedom, 136.
228 Tomás de la Torre, “Traveling in 1544 from Salamanca, Spain, to Ciudad Real, Chiapas, Mexico; The Travels and Trials of Bishop Bartolomé de las Casas and His Dominican Fathers,” edited and translated by Frans Blom, Sewanee Review, 81 (1972), 489.
229 La Torre, “Traveling in 1544,” 487.
230 Las Casas, Indian Freedom, 136.
Dominican order was also tapped by the Crown to play a prominent role in the Inquisition. But such intense religious devotion was also in significant tension with the ideal of *hidalguía* and the predatory lordship that plagued Castile. Castile was, in fact, a land of two conflicting yet co-existing visions of the warrior ethos. The theology of churchmen – or *oradores*, according to Laura Vivanco, with its emphasis on heavenly glory, sin and judgment, the virtues of faith, hope, humility, and charity, long opposed the warrior emphasis on earthly glory, honor, and fame. The ongoing tension often overlapped - such as in the military orders and culture of the Reconquest – but just as often boiled over into conflict over cultural norms such as the Peace of God.\(^{231}\)

Although not a Dominican, the tension over warrior culture is perhaps best demonstrated by St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556). Ignatius was a Basque noble who fought in the service of the Crown, in his own words “a man given over to the vanities of the world.” He dreamed of winning fame and “delighted especially in the exercise of arms.”\(^{232}\) Ignatius was so dedicated to the image of the knight that after breaking his leg in combat, he had it re-broken in order not to lose his noble bearing.

While Ignatius recovered from his wound in his family’s castle, he began to read spiritual books. He meditated on the lives of the saints, torn between “the worldly deeds he wished to achieve” and “the deeds of God.” Their great deeds continued to inspire Ignatius, who began to think that “St. Dominic did this, therefore, I have to do it,” until his spiritual crisis culminated in the rejection of the trappings of nobility.\(^{233}\) Disgust for his womanizing and obsession of worldly honor continued to haunt him after his

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\(^{233}\) Ibid., 24.
conversion, until the Lord “awaken[ed] him as if from a dream.” Ignatius - who called himself “the new Soldier of Christ” - took vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, and cast his voluntary asceticism in the image of a noble warrior; in effect, creating the ideal of spiritual hidalgía.

Ignatius’s ongoing conversion caused him to wake from the dream of hidalgía; for the equally zealous Dominicans of Hispaniola their ascetical life caused them to question the hidalgía of their new colonial surroundings. Little by little the friars began to observe the behavior of the Spanish lords and the condition of their Taino vassals. “Weren’t these people human beings?” the Dominicans asked. “Wasn’t justice and charity owed them? Had they no right to their own territory, their own kingdoms? Have they offended us? Aren’t we under obligation to preach to them the Christian religion and work diligently for their conversion?”

The Dominican’s questions were not merely a response to the current colonial society but also informed by the historical details of Roldán’s rebellion and Ovando’s consolidation examined earlier in this chapter. Soon after the friars arrival in Hispaniola, a former conquistador appeared at their door. Juan Garcés had lived as a fugitive in the mountains for the last three or four years, having fled after beating to death his Indian wife who he suspected of adultery. Now repentant, Garcés begged the Dominicans to admit him as a lay brother. They finally accepted Garcés and over time he related the events of the conquest. The Dominicans were struck “to the heart” by “deeds so completely foreign to humanity, to Christian ideals.” They prayed, fasted, and kept vigils

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235 Ibid., 24.
so that they would take the correct course of action and “would make no mistakes in such a crucial matter.”\footnote{237} The Dominicans knew the scandal it would create, “waking up people from the abyss of a dream they dreamt unawares.”\footnote{238} Ignatius’s brother had begged him to re-consider his rejection of the noble life and was ashamed of his refusal to ride a horse; the Dominicans’ opposition to the hidalgo lifestyle of others was bound to be worse.

After a period of discernment, the Dominicans finally decided to exercise their charism of preaching. The most learned of the group composed the sermon and they all signed it. They chose the best preacher, Fray Antón Montesino, who “had the gift,”\footnote{239} Las Casas remembered: “he was fierce in his attack on vice, and was very effective in his passionate choice of words and phrases.”\footnote{239} The friars recruited the colonists from their houses, spreading the word that they were going to preach on a matter of grave importance.

So it was that the Dominicans, led by Pedro de Córdoba, celebrated Mass on November 30, 1511. Most of the colonial elite were in attendance, including Admiral Colón, the royal officials, and the jurist of Santo Domingo. Appropriately enough, in the Gospel reading John the Baptist declared to the Pharisees “I am the voice of one crying out in the desert.”\footnote{240} Montesino began his homily with a brief discussion of Advent and then moved to “the barren desert of conscience in the Spaniards of the island and the blindness with which they lived.” Like the mission preachers that swept early modern

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{237} Las Casas, \textit{Indian Freedom}, 140.  
\textsuperscript{238} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{239} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{240} Ibid., 140-1.}
Europe,\textsuperscript{241} he painted the danger of sin, heightening emotion with words “aggressive and fierce, the kind that made their flesh crawl and made them think there were already at the last judgment.”\textsuperscript{242} They were, after all, “running a real risk of damnation.”

Such references to damnation and final judgment, even for the more casual early modern Catholics, were not without effect. Mortality and judgment loomed over all Iberians, regardless of status. In many ways, Iberians lived to prepare for death, praying for a slow death in order to have the opportunity to prepare the soul for judgment. Queen Isabel’s will, written as she slowly died over the course of a number of months, asked her patron Saint John the Evangelist to advocate for her “in that very terrible judgment and stringent examination, most terrible against the powerful, when my soul will be presented before the seat and royal throne of the Sovereign Judge.”\textsuperscript{243}

Death was so important in Castile precisely because hell was so vividly real. The Castilian Doctor of the Church, St. Teresa de Avila, recorded its terror. “The entrance it seems to me was similar to a very long and narrow alleyway, like an oven, low and dark and confined…. All earthly sufferings were "nothing in comparison with the ones I experienced there….they would go on without end and without ever ceasing.” Bodily suffering was only minor compared to that of the soul, which Teresa described as “a constriction, a suffocation, an affliction so keenly felt and with such a despairing and tormenting unhappiness that I don't know how to word it strongly enough.” She continued, “To say the experience is as though the soul were continually being wrested

\textsuperscript{242} Las Casas, \textit{Indian Freedom}, 141.
\textsuperscript{243} Liss, \textit{Isabel}, 344.
from the body would be insufficient, for it would make you think somebody else is taking away the life, whereas here it is the soul itself that tears itself in pieces.”

Passionate sermons on the last judgment and hell were novel for Hispaniola, but probably not unfamiliar or unexpected to those who sat in the church. Fire and brimstone sermons were common in Castile, especially in preparation of high feasts such as Christmas and Easter. But then the unexpected happened; Montesino turned to the colonial economy and excoriated the colonists for the events of the last two decades. He declared as the voice of Christ in the desert of the Indies that the Spaniards who held Indians in *encomienda* were in mortal sin. “Tell me, by what right do you hold these Indians in such cruel and horrible servitude? By what authority did you make unprovoked war on these people…?” Montesino asked the stunned congregation. “What care do you take to have them taught to know their God and Maker, to be baptized, to hear Mass and keep their Sundays and their holy days?” “Are they not men? Have they no soul, no reason? Are you not required to love them as you love yourselves?”

A certain caution needs to be exercised in analyzing Las Casas’s version of the sermon, as it seems remarkably close in content to his later theological work. But at minimum, one may draw two conclusions. First, a stunning reversal occurred in the small colonial church. Roldán’s rebellion and Ovando’s consolidation, up to now seen as royally approved vassalage, was now described as unprovoked war and cruel servitude. Spaniards, as Christians, were required to love the fully human Indians as themselves.

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Overall, the Dominicans orchestrated a type of public revolt against the colonial economy through their Advent homily.

The context of the revolt points to the second conclusion, the spiritual roots of the Dominican opposition. It was no accident that the small pocket of religious ferment birthed the critique of the colonial economy. Like Ignatius’s self-critique of the noble ethos, the strict Dominican rule produced opposition to the colonial *hidalgía*. The Advent Mass bears an even greater resemblance to the Peace of God movement discussed in Chapter 1. Like the Peace of God, the Dominicans used the spiritual power of the church in an attempt to control noble violence. In early medieval Europe, clergy used relics and crowds around outdoor fires; in Hispaniola they utilized the Mass with threats of the final judgment and hell. But for all intents and purposes the critique was the same, noble factions unjustly violated the peace, particularly against unarmed peasants.

In one sudden move, the Dominicans simultaneously dispelled two decades of religious indifference and little or no local opposition to the feudal shift. For their part, Montesinos’ audience clearly understood the challenge issued to colonial economic system. The colonial officials gathered and decided to “reprehend and frighten the preacher and his companions, to punish him as a scandalmaker and originator of a new doctrine that condemned them against the King’s authority.” They told the Dominicans that if they did not change, the friars could pack their things and be sent back to Spain, to which the Vicar dryly replied, “It will take no work at all to do that.” The colonists also demanded a public retraction next Sunday. Undeterred, the Dominicans responded with a similar sermon, this time threatening to refuse sacramental absolution to

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247 Las Casas, *Indian Freedom*, 144.
those that did not repent. As a result, the colonial government appealed to the crown, reporting that the Dominican “preaching amounted to nothing less than robbing His Highness of sovereignty and revenue.”

6. Ferdinand’s Response

Ferdinand, the current manager of the Crown, was consumed with his sovereignty and revenue. When Isabel died in 1504, Ferdinand was not legally the King of Castile. But after three years of unstable rule in which the nobility took advantage of the power vacuum and re-asserted its power, Castile was ready to call him back, with Martir writing to Ferdinand’s secretary, asking him to “come save us from the wolves.”

After a year of uncertainty, Ferdinand eventually became regent for his grandson Charles in 1507.

Ferdinand’s turned to re-establishing royal authority over the rebellious nobility and warring bandos, exemplified by a 1508 conflict with the Marquis of Priego. The Marquis abused some royal officials and in response, Ferdinand took a punitive force consisting of 1000 cavalry and 2500-3000 infantry. The Marquis was permanently banished from Córdoba and Andalusia, deprived of his royal offices, his castles confiscated, thirteen of his supporters were condemned to death, their goods confiscated, and their houses demolished.

In contrast to the instability in Castile, Ferdinand inherited a very different political situation in the Indies. Since Ovando’s consolidation, the Crown’s sovereignty

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248 Las Casas quoted from Parry and Keith, eds., *The Caribbean*, 312.
249 Liss, *Isabel*, 354. The crown passed to the unstable Juana the Mad and her husband Philip. Philip died in 1506 and with Juana unfit for rule, Cardinal Cisneros became regent.
250 John Edwards, *The Spain of the Catholic Monarchs, 1474-1520* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 289. John Edwards, *Christian Córdoba: The City and its Region in the Late Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 159-60, 161. There were also three sentenced to lose limbs, several others sentenced to imprisonment, and the marquis condemned to pay the cost of the expedition and trials, estimated at 20 million mrs. It is not known if the sentences were carried out.
and revenue remained relatively stable under royal control. The Crown received revenue indirectly through taxation and had also entered into mining directly, reserving the best mines and grants of Indians for itself, holding 10-15% of the Indians on the four largest islands.  

Ferdinand also distributed grants of Indian laborers to absentee holders in Castile, paying off political debts accumulated during his return to power with the added benefit of not disturbing the “seigniorial status quo in Castile.”

Where Isabel had resisted Roldán’s rebellion and Ovando’s consolidation, Ferdinand actively harnessed the feudal shift. According to Floyd, Ferdinand began promoting Caribbean expansion with “an intensity hitherto unsuspected….No monarch’s hand would ever guide events so closely.” According to Floyd “he had great faith in the potential wealth of America” which Simpson described as the establishment of “a simple formula: get money, by fair means if possible, but get it!” Ferdinand was not beyond questions of morality, commenting that the high mortality rate of the Indians

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251 Floyd, *The Columbus Dynasty in the Caribbean*, 126-7. Floyd gives the figures of 1,000 for Hispaniola, 500 in Puerto Rico, 2,000 in Jamaica, and an unknown number in Cuba. “He turned with characteristic Aragonese business acumen and energy to organize the overseas enterprise into a mining industry profitable to alike to himself and the hidalgo-bureaucratic class on which his power chiefly rested. These were the years of his unlimited ambitions – dreams of a Spanish-dominated Mediterranean, of a Jerusalem liberated from the infidel in realization of that boyhood vision of himself as the great paladin of Christendom. But he had great ambitions and small income; Castile could not be insistently pressed for subsidies lest he erode his precarious popularity. Like other Iberian monarchs later, he must make the most of America where his power was unlikely to be challenged, as it might be in Castile, by a major revolt. The ambitious Ferdinand was consequently to be the prime mover of Caribbean expansion, with the potential hidalgos as his agents” (126).

252 Ibid., 92. According the 1514 census, the King received 1430 Indians and the rest of the court 3,720 for a total of 5,250 out of 29,000 surviving Taino. Bishop Juan de Fonseca, head of the Council of the Indies, had an *encomienda* of 244 and Lope de Conchillos, secretary of Ferdinand, held 264. Simpson, *The Encomienda in New Spain*, 179-80.

253 Floyd, *The Columbus Dynasty in the Caribbean*, 128.

254 Ibid., 126; Lesley Byrd Simpson, *The Encomienda in New Spain*, 16.
enslaved from the “useless” non-gold bearing Lucayos islands “is somewhat burdensome to our conscience” but was also “not very profitable for business.”

But overall, when news of the Dominican disturbance in the Indies arrived colonial business was good for the crown and on the verge of improving. Ferdinand had recently heard of that there were certain caciques in the area modern day Panama with “gold that grows like maize in their huts.” He renamed the colony “Castilla de Oro” and began planning a new expedition, the first financed by the crown since 1493. Instructions were prepared on August 2, 1513 and less than a year later 2,000 hidalgos and veterans of Italy in 23 ships set sail on Holy Tuesday, an armada that cost the Crown 20.75 million mrs.

Ferdinand hoped for a big return on his investment as he tended “to regard the New World as of interest only for the resources which it might provide for more important enterprises elsewhere, such as Italy.” The Crown of Aragon held indirect control of Naples for a half century and in 1503 Ferdinand sent troops to bolster his claim. He continued his Italian imperial program through an alliance with the ambitious warrior pope Julius II and from 1508-1513 Spanish forces campaigned in Italy. The conflict culminated in the Sack of Prato where Spanish troops massacred over 4,000 people, taking prisoners, extorting ransoms, raping and pillaging while committing sacrileges in the process. Ferdinand orchestrated the rather questionable conquest of the

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255 In a latter communication he stated that “all the good of those parts lies in there being a number of Indians to work in the mines and plantations.” June 22, 1511. From Floyd, *The Columbus Dynasty in the Caribbean*, 27.
258 Ibid., 330, 336, 337, 338.
259 The Trastamara had indirect control of the Kingdom of Naples for fifty years. Ferdinand sent Gonzalo de Córdoba to Sicily with a large fleet, 300 men-at-arms, 300 cavalry, and 4,000 infantry in Naples. Ibid., 259.
kingdom of Navarre in 1512, accusing the leader of Navarre of entering into a secret alliance with France as a pretext to seize power, sending the Duke of Alba into Navarre with 17,000 troops. He also entertained the fantasy of reconquering Jerusalem and becoming the greatest prince in Christendom.

Broadly speaking, then, the Caribbean was no different than Ferdinand’s other realms; he held legitimate sovereignty and deserved its revenue. Yet at the same time, the Indies offered certain strategic advantages: it currently presented the least resistance to royal authority, was the easiest theatre for expansion, and provided revenue for more difficult campaigns. Moreover, the immediate context of the report of Dominican revolt was massive royal investment - ten times that of Columbus’s second voyage - and hopes of even greater financial return. It is not surprising, then, that Ferdinand responded quickly and categorically. He would not tolerate a threat from the Marquis of Priego in Castile, much less from some over-scrupulous priests the Indies.

Ferdinand sent a royal order to Colón on March 20, 1512, citing the Crown’s rights and “the solid theological and canonical foundation of the servitude that the Indians perform for Christians.” He forbade the Dominicans to speak of the matter anymore, whether in public or private, and ordered any Dominicans to be sent back to Castile if they persist in their actions. Their error, judged by their provincial and reported by the king, “had been due to excessive charity.”

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261 He invoked the donation of Pope Alexander VI and the right to enact even harsher servitude. Gutiérrez, *Las Casas* 33, 34.
262 Parry and Keith, eds., *The Caribbean*, 313. The Dominican provincial and future president of the Council of the Indies Alonso de Loaysa supported the king in three letters with arguments that would become staples of colonial apologists. He stated that if the Dominican teachings were followed no Christian would remain in the Indies. All the Indies are at the point of rebellion and he will allow no more Dominicans to go to Indies until they repent. The islands obtained in just war. It is what the Crown and his
With this response, we have arrived at the theological key for the ensuing conflict. We have seen that the Dominicans, if Las Casas can be trusted, based their critique on the duty of the Christian Spaniards to love their Indian neighbors as themselves. We will not see their full articulation of the relevance of charity to the colonial question until chapters four and five. But according to the Crown, their stance was incorrect because of excessive charity, the chief Catholic theological virtue.

Over the next two years, the debate continued as the Dominicans refused to let the issue drop and even journeyed to the royal court. Ferdinand called a junta (council) to examine the issue which eventually produced the Burgos Laws, legislation designed to improve the condition of Indian vassals. The Royal response culminated in the composition of the infamous requerimiento, a document to be read publicly to newly encountered Indians, which stated that they are royal vassals who must give fealty to the Crown’s representatives or face war and slavery.263

While important as elaborations of imperial theology, the junta and the documents it produced had no significant effect on conquered Indian populations or Spanish expansion. The conquests continued, from the Caribbean into Central America and the northern coast of South America. In practice, religion continued to matter little for colonial expansion. Bernadino de Manzanedo reported for the Jeronymite Fathers in 1518 that there were few priests and “Up to that time he had seen little evidence of their effort to convert the Indians.”264 Indian populations continued to decline, and according to a 1518 report of one colonial official “of a million one hundred thirty thousand at the
council teaches and “All must agree, and say what is most pacific and profitable to all.” Gutiérrez, Las Casas, 37.


264 Simpson, The Encomienda in New Spain, 51.
beginning there were then remaining eleven thousand and that in three or four years more there would be none.”

The cause was no mystery for more disinterested European observers: “Let us be strictly truthful and add,” the ever present Peter Martyr wrote, “that the craze for gold was the cause of their [the islands’] destruction.”

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, then, I must highlight the stunning reversal that occurred in this chapter. In chapter 1, 1492 marked the end of an era. Decentralized feudal conflict that had characterized Castile for centuries – with its ambitious upstarts who employed arms for social mobility – had been largely subdued by the rise of Isabel. But in chapter 2, 1492 marked the beginning of a new era. Castilian adventurers – with the same dreams of wealth and glory – found themselves far from royal authority and among militarily weaker peoples. Led by Roldán, they reinvigorated feudal relationships. The distant Crown, unsuccessful in its attempts to prevent the decentralization, reluctantly sanctioned Roldán’s rebellion. Ovando established a certain degree of royal authority and the more important collection of revenue.

But the largely secular hybrid American feudalism was not without opponents. Colonial expansion met its first significant local opposition in the form of a reformed religious community. It also drew on Old World precedents, in effect renewing the Peace of God movement to challenge the conduct of the new nobility. The two movements – the broad decentralized colonial expansion and the minority religious opposition – developed into develop two simultaneous and opposing trajectories. Chapter 3 will

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examine the first, chapter 4 will examine the second, and both will meet in chapter 5. It is to the legacy of Roldán and Ovando - the decentralized colonial expansion - that we now turn.
CHAPTER 3: COLONIAL EXPANSION

“Everybody says there is not a man who would not bring his wife and children to this country so as to take them away from the want and poverty of Spain, because a single bad day here is worth more than any good day in Castile.”

Alonso Herojo, from New Granada, 1583.

“Don’t be deceived, don’t listen to what they say about America, would to God I did not live where I live, God knows how things are.”

Colonist from New Spain, 1593. 267

The burden of the previous chapter was to explain the feudal turn in Spanish colonial expansion. Contrary to royal expectations, Francisco Roldán and his followers broke with the royal factoría economic model and utilized Spanish military superiority to infiltrate Indian societies. There they imposed a feudal-type rule which was later sanctioned and codified by Nicolas de Ovando and became the basis of the colonial economy. This chapter will explain the systematic form that Roldán’s rebellion and Ovando’s consolidation took in Spanish expansion into the Americas.

1. Companies and Entradas

After the initial waves of expansion through Hispaniola and into the Caribbean basin, a third wave – out of the Caribbean into the Central and South American mainland - swept through the Americas. It would last for decades, be driven by economic

concerns, and take the form of decentralized, fluid, entrepreneurial ventures. Roldán’s model became the basis of Spanish colonialism, systematized yet decentralized, the form of which John E. Kicza details in his article “Patterns in Spanish Overseas Expansion.”

The primary engine of the ongoing conquest was the *companía* (company): a private, profit-driven entrepreneurial group consisting of would be conquistadors designed to penetrate unconquered areas of Latin America. A typical group consisted of 250-300 men, with about twenty horses. They were usually initiated by prominent citizen with experience in the Indies. Companies sometimes formed in Iberia, but most developed in already established colonial centers, such as Cuba, Mexico, or Peru. Local governors frequently authorized the companies and colonial governments often saw new expeditions as a way of siphoning off restless Spaniards. Despite royal attempts to regulate companies, the crown had little direct control over the process which was “sporadic even at its height and quite negligible” during the peak of Spanish colonial expansion.”

Leaders and members made enormous investments in weapons, supplies, and transportation, all of which were expensive in the underdeveloped early colonial economy. Horses were scarce and commanded high prices, such as 400 pesos for Cortés, 3000 for one of Pizarro’s company. Weapons were also costly, 50 or 60 pesos for a

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269 Ibid., 250. While generally encouraging expansion, the crown did not have the resources or structures to control or finance the *entradas*. Its involvement was limited to offering incentives and confirming the leaders of successful *entradas* as the first governor of the new territory. Bureaucratic structures were slow to evolve both back in Spain and in the new colonies and as a result early colonists had substantial autonomy. Treasury officials were the first to arrive and political officials arrived later. Successful *entradas* culminated in reproducing a Spanish colony in the newly conquered region as leaders usually declared independence from the colony from which the *entrada* originated, founded a town and council, and began the process of dealing directly with the crown. It may be the first time the crown heard of the *entrada*, and the crown had little choice but confirm the successful leader and require compensation for the governor.
sword or crossbow. Leaders spent tens of thousands of pesos on average, some exceeding one hundred thousand. In order to generate the necessary capital to finance the expedition a leader usually sold or mortgaged his holdings, which resulted in most leaders being deeply in debt. The same can be said of other members, who usually supplied their own weapons, equipments, and supplies. As a result, most members in the company – in which they received no salary or wage – began with significant debt.270

The economic reward for which they had crossed the Atlantic and joined a *compania* was solely based on the wealth that they hoped to find in unconquered areas of the Americas.

The character of the men who made up the expeditions reflected not only the high levels of danger, investment, and risk of failure that they encountered in the New World, but also the changing opportunities in the Old. As we have seen, the feudal outlets had virtually closed off in Spain. Young men could do battle in the expanding international conflict of Europe for three ducats a month, but the era of mounted knights and individual valor had also largely ended. There were no more El Cids or Giróns in Spain; there would be many in the cavalry dependent battles of Latin America. Thus, younger and illegitimate sons without inheritance, impoverished nobility, and other ambitious upstarts found passage to the opportunities of the New World.

Yet crossing the Atlantic was long, dangerous, uncomfortable, and expensive; the equivalent of six to twelve months salary for the average daily laborer.271 Other than transportation, passengers received relatively little for such a high cost. A typical ship of

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270 Kicza, “Patterns in Early Spanish Overseas Expansion,” 250. Often more established citizens supplied members for a return of the profits, the owner of a horse getting a share equal to a member on foot.

106 tons had 150-180 square meters and 100-120 people, leaving about 1.5 square meters of communal floor space per person. In addition, ships usually carried pigs and chickens for food, sometimes transporting horses and cattle. Rats, roaches, and lice multiplied freely among the human and animal population. A Dominican missionary who we will encounter in chapter 5, Tomas de la Torre, summarized the weeks of discomfort endured in his 1545 crossing:

The feeling of being crushed, and of suffocation and heat, is intense; bed is usually the floor, some bring pillows, ours were poor, small and hard, stuffed with dog’s hair, and we had miserable goat’s hair blankets. There is a lot of vomit in the ship, and great deal of bad temper, which makes many people lose control completely, some for a longer time than others, and some increasingly. The thirst you suffer is unbelievable, made worse by the food, which is biscuit and salted things. The drink is a litre of water a day, you have wine only if you bring it. There is an endless number of fleas that eat you alive, and clothes cannot be washed. The smell is awful, especially in the hold, though it is insufferable everywhere in the ship…. 

For sailors the suffering was normal, “but we [passengers] feel them particularly badly because it is not what we are used to.” Overall, “The ship is a narrow, tight, prison from which nobody can escape even though there are no bars or chains,” de la Torre wrote, “and so merciless that it makes no distinction between its prisoners.” Yet if the ship was a prison with fair winds and a calm sea, “imagine,” as one passenger later wrote, “what it must be like to experience contrary winds, encounters with pirates, mountainous seas and howling gales.” Even as the seas became familiar and shipping routes stabilized, ships had a death rate of 12.3%, at least three times higher than on land.

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273 Fr. Tomas de la Torre from Kamen, *Empire*, 131-2.
275 From the period of 1573-1593, these voyages did not have any epidemics, which were fairly common and added to the death rate. Pérez-Mallaina Bueno, *Spain's Men of the Sea*, 186.
Overall, to go to sea was a “desperate and fearsome business”\footnote{Pérez-Mallaina Bueno, \textit{Spain's Men of the Sea}, 23.} and not a decision that was made lightly. It was the last place most people turn to in order to make a living, only utilized when they could not survive on land.\footnote{Ibid.} It was what one contemporary called “a mine where many became rich” but “a cemetery where infinite numbers lie interred.”\footnote{Ibid.} Economic opportunity, not abstract ideological concerns, drew the vast majority to run the Atlantic gauntlet, and those that did developed the reputation for lawlessness and deceit, here summarized by Friar Antonio de Guevara who stated that the “sea is the cloak of sinners and the refuge of malefactors.”\footnote{Ibid.} Taken as a whole, the crossing was the first formative experience of the Americas, a crucible of imperial dreams.

The ambitious upstarts who survived the Atlantic crossing made up much of the newly formed companies. Most were of middling sorts, neither the high nobility nor lower classes, and joined for “quick wealth, land, and laborers.”\footnote{Ibid., 217.} Many were not professional soldiers. Veterans of the Indies also joined companies but were usually the less successful members of the colonies, as those with resources were hesitant to risk them in unsure ventures. Companies were supplemented by sailors, as many joined merely to gain passage to the Americas, deserting in the New World despite it being a capital offence. Overall, the character of the men and the high stakes game meant that the would-be conquistadors “were ruthless in assailing those – native peoples and
sometimes other Spaniards – who stood in their way.”

According to a veteran of many companies, “They are the sort of men who have no intention of converting the Indians [to Christianity] or of settling and remaining in this land. They come only until they get some gold or wealth in whatever form they can obtain it. They subordinate honour, morality and honesty to this end, and apply themselves to any fraud or homicide and commit innumerable crimes.”

The companies conducted *entradas* – or “entrances” – into the virgin territory that was thought most likely to have gold and Indian polities that would have already processed it for them, one scholar likening them to “packs of hounds, roaming the interior to pick up a scent of gold.” But if gold was the ultimate goal, food was the most immediate concern. The expeditions could only subsist for a limited time on their rations. They could supplement their stores with hunting, fishing and gathering, but this only added sand to the caloric hourglass. Within a relatively short time, expeditions required Indian foodstuffs or faced hunger and starvation. When Indians would not trade or provide gifts, conquistadores turned to raiding and theft, illustrating Napoleon’s dictum that “an army marches on its stomach.”

Needless to say, Spanish brutality was often incredible, but it was usually not irrational. Dramatic displays of power were valuable tools in gaining Indian submission and did not always require bloodshed. Hernán Cortés, for example, utilized numerous ploys in the conquest of Mexico, such as the parading of horses and firing his guns to astonished Indian emissaries. The general strategy was to capture Indian leaders and rule

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283 Ibid., 51.
through them. Massacres such as Cajamarca were intentionally designed to decapitate Indian polities and avoid full scale direct confrontation.

From the first conflicts back in Hispaniola, Spanish forces usually relied on substantial Indian auxiliaries, who provided intelligence, common labor, translation services, supplies, and military power. *Entradas* did not always introduce violence but were often catalysts for shifts in long-standing Indian conflicts. Indian allies bent on inflicting vengeance on age old oppressors were sometimes more destructive than the Spanish newcomers, who generally preferred intact, productive Indian societies. Africans, both slave and free, contributed valuable military power, especially against Indians and other Africans, earning the name “Black Conquistadors.”

In certain ways, internal Spanish conflict was as common as conquest. The less successful an *entrada*, the greater potential for internal division, splinter groups, and even mutiny or civil war. Leaders sought to insulate themselves from internal conflict by recruiting family members or members from the same region of Spain. Spaniards were often executed for the same reasons as Indians: rebellion, desertion, or merely in the attempt to extort wealth. Both the manager of Cortés’s estate and the last Aztec emperor had their feet burned by Spanish rivals in search of wealth before being executed. After conquests, Spaniards regularly fractured into factions and waged civil conflicts over the limited spoils.

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284 Restall calls this well-documented but often underemphasized aspect of the conquest one of the seven myths. See Matthew Restall, *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), Chapter 3: Invisible Warriors: The Myth of the White Conquistador in Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest, 44-63. African auxiliaries will be looked at in greater detail in chapter 8.

Despite their massive investments and high expectations, company members rarely tasted lasting success. They endured incredible suffering through hunger, lack of sleep, wounds, and disease. They were killed in shipwrecks, epidemics, the ongoing battles and revolts of the Indian populations, or in conflicts with other Europeans. I know of no comprehensive figures, but my own impression is that the death rate for company members must have been significantly higher than that of the Atlantic passage.

For those that survived the rewards of conquest were often frustratingly small. The spoils of conquest were first pooled and the Crown claimed the royal fifth, or 20% of total. Leaders took larger shares and were often accused of cheating. Horseman took a double share, foot soldiers one share. After paying debts, profit for members was often small. A failed entrada could ruin the fortune of investors and members. This, combined with cheating and theft, often resulted in conflict over the division. Like for Roldán in Chapter 2, Indians were usually the only remaining resource, which will be examined in the next section.

After the division of spoils the company disbanded and members became free agents that could join new companies. Almost immediately, the process repeated itself, with entradas radiating out of the new colonies like ripples from stone thrown into a pond.

Overall, the systematic form that Roldán’s rebellion took – decentralized companies and entradas - was relatively uniform. The results of the expansion, however, were not. During the sixteenth century entradas saturated all corners of the Americas, most failing. According to Alan Knight, the more centralized Indian states succumbed more easily to Spanish advances, and “yielded the most numerous, docile and profitable
subjects; conversely, a cephalic, scattered societies – atomized in bands, tribes or chieftains – resisted with greatest success.”286 The next three examples – Central Mexico, the Yucatan, and the Southeast United States – give a flavor of the range of geographic fields and resulting outcomes.

The first example, Central Mexico, is of a successful entrada. It was originally organized and sent in 1519 by the governor of Cuba Diego Velasquez to trade and explore along the Yucatan and Mexican coast. However, Hernán Cortés – the commander of the company - changed plans when he met emissaries of the enormous Aztec empire. Upon learning of the discontent among conquered vassal peoples, Cortés rebelled against Velasquez and established an independent colony. He then instigated a rebellion among vassal tribes, overcame a mutinous Spanish faction, and began a long march to the imperial capital Tenochtitlan, its population perhaps as high as 300,000.

Over the next months, Cortés and his group of 450 Spaniards masterfully navigated the simmering Indian divisions through diplomacy and a few unfortunate, yet strategic battles; unfortunate because they weakened the company’s future allies and strategic because they ensured what would become permanent loyalty. Aztec emissaries offered to become tribute paying vassals if the Spaniards would halt their journey to Tenochtitlan, but Cortes pursued his prize, following the trail of Indian foodstuffs and supported by thousands of Indian allies.

The company arrived in an uneasy Tenochtitlan without a single direct battle with the imperial forces, housed as royal guests of the emperor Moctezuma. Cortés began the process of ruling the empire from within and for a brief six months; Cortes was the de facto emperor through the puppet Moctezuma, who publicly pledged fealty to Charles V

and Spanish sovereignty. Material reward appeared to the great as Moctezuma gave Cortés about 700,000 pesos worth of gold and began the process of passing over the Aztec tributary system.

Control eventually unraveled as the ruling elite grew restless and an invasion force sent by Governor Velasquez arrived on the coast, offering to assist Moctezuma. Cortés left a contingent in Tenochtitlan and went to battle Velasquez’s superior forces, who he defeated with bribes, stories of Aztec wealth, and a daring night attack. Cortés absorbed most of Velasquez’s forces and returned to the capital to find it in rebellion. In Cortés’ absence, the remaining Spanish forces launched what they claimed was a preemptive strike against a planned uprising. After a prolonged Aztec siege, Cortés, his Spanish forces, and Indian allies attempted to escape by night only to suffer catastrophic losses of most of their forces and gold.

Unfortunately for the Aztecs, the bloody expulsion of Cortés was only a pyrrhic victory. Afterword, a smallpox epidemic decimated the city’s population. Indian allies supported Cortés at his most vulnerable point, allowing him to regroup his forces and return to Tenochtitlan with perhaps more than 100,000 Indian troops, prompting David Carrasco to call the conquest “more of a massive rebellion of other Indian communities than a conquest by Spanish soldiers.” Tenochtitlan would not surrender and the rebels surrounded the city and laid siege, systematically destroying the prize that he had hoped to capture and rule intact. After eighty days the city was taken, not a house left standing. Indian allies meted out the worst violence, both in revenge for years of colonial subjugation and the traditional looting and human sacrifices that followed victory.

About 55% of Cortés’ group died in the Conquest of Mexico, 1,000 of 1,800. There was none of the 700,000 pesos that the expedition had gathered during its initial occupation of Tenochtitlan. Much of it was lost with those killed on the retreat. The company tortured the emperor and other important lords to find out what they had done with the remaining loot, only to find out that they had thrown it into the lake. All together the company collected between 185,000 and 200,000 pesos. The Crown’s Fifth was 37,000 pesos and Cortes took 29,600 as his share. That left about 120,000 to be divided among approximately 750 surviving Spaniards. Some senior officials received between 1,500 and 6,000 pesos, captains 400 pesos, horsemen 80, crossbowmen and arquebusiers 50 to 60, and less for the rest. Incredibly, after a two year campaign, many Spaniards were left with what they may have paid for a sword. Undaunted, many members of the group, including Cortés and other leaders, soon went out in all direction from the new Mexico City, looking to repeat their performance.

One of the more successful of the post-Mexico entradas was in the Yucatan, our example of middling results: a sufficient Indian population to make colonization a possibility but geography that gave Indians the distinct advantage. The leader, Francisco de Montejo, had been part of the Cortés company but spent most of his time lobbying in the Spanish court. He obtained a relatively large share of the Aztec loot, 6,000 pesos. Hoping that the Yucatan would be another Mexico he consolidated all his resources – lands, loans, and his fiancé’s wealth – and invested 28,000 castellanos in four ships, supplies, and 250 men with merchant support.

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288 Thomas, Conquest, 529.
289 For example, Cortes was accused of stealing much more than he took publicly and officers may have taken more. See Ibid., 546-8.
290 Ibid., 547.
The next two decades followed a similar pattern. The Indian population was not centralized as in Central Mexico but divided into medium size groups of comparable power. The company sought sufficient Indian numbers to provide adequate food supplies. Some Indian groups gave their fealty, some declined, but always for temporary expediency. Spanish demands often overtaxed Indian production, which led to refusal to pay tribute or their withdrawal. Robert Stoner Chamberlain judged this passive resistance to be “[a]n exceedingly potent weapon in the hands of the Maya, one they employed with great skill and discernment.” With this technique the Maya “could readily and at little cost to themselves make the position of the Spaniards difficult, even insupportable, for, with the exception of textiles, tribute in Yucatan were largely foodstuff.”

Spanish colonists responded to the Indian inability or refusal to pay tribute by looting, which only exacerbated the problem. Disease and hunger were recurrent problems, so bad in one settlement that colonists were forced to do the unthinkable - plant crops. The geographical advantage for the Maya was so great that one Spaniard wrote to the crown that the Maya “held the question of peace and war in their own hands.” Simmering Mayan discontent and many smaller eventually culminated in the Great Maya Revolt of 1546-7.

Overall, permanent occupation of the Yucatan was barely sustainable, let along profitable. No gold was found and slave raiding hurt the productivity of the *encomiendas*. News of the more lucrative conquest of Peru drew many colonists away. The challenges to settlement were not lost on the colonial authorities. In 1534 one town

292 From ibid., 171.
council lamented that Spaniards have little desire to stay in the Yucatan as “that there is no gold or silver nor anything else from which to obtain reward.” In 1534 Governor Montejo claimed that he was 50,000 castellanos in debt. Even when the colony became stable, crown revenue was so small that it had a hard time paying administrative costs.

If Mexico offered limited rewards, and the Spanish barely survived in the Yucatan, there were many areas of low Indian population that offered only failure or death. Dozens of failed entradas, too numerous to describe in detail, saturated the Americas. One such expedition of 600 men, five ships, and 80 horses left Spain in 1527 to conquer Florida. Almost a decade later, four survivors completed an overland trek from what is now the U.S Gulf Coast to northern Mexico, having endured disease, hunger, Indian attacks and slavery. They were the only survivors of the expedition.

The preceding examples illustrate the degree to which temporal motivation drove the conquests and success depended largely on geography and Indian population. What role did spiritual concerns have in this process? By the third wave, some institutional religious form had been given to Spanish expansion. Companies usually included one or two clergy who served primarily as chaplains to members and later as trusted representatives of the crown. However, evangelization was a rather low priority for companies as chaplains were not intended to be missionaries to the newly encountered Indian populations. Most efforts to convert Indians probably mirrored what a member of

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294 Ibid., 165, 335. Montejo was convicted in 1544 of insufficient effort in evangelizing and protection the Indians as governor of Honduras-Higueras and given six year suspension of office in the Indies. Ibid., 309.

the De Soto expedition (1539-40) to what is now the Southeastern U.S. observed. The Spaniards took women for service and “their lewdness and lust”, baptizing them “more for their carnal intercourse than to instruct them in the faith.” Generally, evangelization followed conquest, conducted by a different type of people with different priorities, which will be examined in the last section of this chapter. By and large, the conversion of Indians was at most a secondary concern for conquistadors.

Perhaps it would be useful to take a small detour back to the entrada where religion appeared to play the greatest role, the conquest of Mexico. The company accepted the popular Catholic horizon in which they lived: frequently celebrating mass, saying communal prayers when wine was not available, and seeking sacramental absolution when they feared imminent death. They were hostile to Aztec religion and were particularly revolted by human sacrifice. Cortés regularly made conversion speeches to newly encountered Indians, seeking to eliminate Aztec religion and replace it with at least a veneer of Catholicism.

Yet Cortés’ successful conquest was in a large part due to his subordination of religious considerations to the goal of the company. While Cortés demanded obedience to Castilian authority and fought those that resisted, acceptance of Catholicism was at least initially optional. The times that Cortés overextended his religious demands were precisely the actions that put the company’s precarious standing most at risk. A priest even repeatedly restrained Cortés from pushing acceptance of Catholicism; persuasion and time was needed, he said, and establishing sovereignty was the most pressing

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Continuing participation in Indian religion - even human sacrifice - was tolerated, even among such staunch allies as the Tlaxcala. In fact, the only religious demand that Cortés enforced with consistency was the conversion of Indian women given publicly as gifts before use as concubines.

To be sure, the Spanish conquerors themselves often imagined, at least in hindsight, that they were leading a just rebellion and spreading the true faith. But their primary motivation to join the company and seize control of the Aztec empire was summed up by one member’s memory of the long journey to Tenochtitlan. The company went “to take a look at the great Montezuma – in fact to earn our livelihood and make our fortunes” – almost exactly the sentiments attributed to El Cid when he led his men into the Castilian frontier. The moderate approach advocated by the resident religious specialist and the ease with which the expedition subordinated religious concerns to strategic and temporal priorities indicates that Cortés’s crusading zeal was more the product of the expedition’s warrior ethos than its causal force. They used spiritual energy as an important resource for conquest but seldom, if ever, allowed spiritual scruples to interfere with the probability of success.

It must be remembered that Cortés was one of the more spiritually minded conquistadors. We saw in the previous chapter that the first conquistador, Roldán, had no interest in spreading or even practicing Catholicism. Many companies and members shared a similarly apathetic perspective, exemplified by the conqueror of Peru, Francisco Pizarro, who when challenged by a Dominican friar flatly stated that he had not come to

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convert the Indians but take their gold. Kicza’s claim that the “zeal to convert did not drive Spain’s expansion across the Atlantic” is best understood as spiritual concerns being ancillary to the motivation of the particular agents and clearly external to the company’s primary end: profit.

What, in final assessment, did drive Spain’s expansion across the Atlantic? The overwhelming destruction of the conquest and the cultural gap between the agents involved and our own present-day context make it difficult to see the big picture, but there is no question at this point that it was primarily the pursuit of wealth. Virtually everyone, even Las Casas, went to the Americas for economic opportunity and everything else was secondary, including honor. This is repeated again and again by those very agents and only becomes clearer examining the form of the process: multiple gauntlets that required significant investment, physical pain, and a very high chance of death.

The unprecedented consequences of the conquest, much like on the microbial level, had less to do with the agents involved than the tragic imbalance set up by the accidents of geography. Viruses and bacteria, long blocked by the sea, survived the difficult passage and found virgin populations. The spectacular death rates of Indian populations were not produced because the microbial agents did anything new, but because their hosts had no inherent immunity to their attack. As a result, millennia of disease were packed into a few decades. In the same manner, Europeans, arriving in the Americas and facing a failing economic system, resorted to cultural practices that had long governed their homeland and imaginations as well as fit their new environment.

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300 Kicza, “Patterns in Early Spanish Overseas Expansion,” 250.
The military techniques and noble ambitions had long existed and evolved back in Europe. Transplanted to the New World, they encountered hosts that did not have the immunity that had built up in the Old World over millennia. The process became standardized in the entrada and saturated the Americas, the lethal combination of military superiority and allied pathogens tearing through Indian populations with almost predictable destruction. Like the diseases, entradas threw themselves at every possible environment in fluid decentralized manner, always following the frontier towards new hosts and away from traditional forms of authority and societal control. And they could only succeed in the right hosts: those with high population densities and highly stratified socioeconomic systems.

There was, of course, an inherent problem for the European viruses. Spaniards could only survive where there were Indian hosts. After the brief flash of initial plunder, which was never even enough to satisfy the expectations of the members of the companies, they needed to stabilize Indian societies and establish an ongoing parasitic relationship. The next section will document how the viral companies – like Roldán before them - transformed themselves into permanent occupiers via the encomienda: a broader feudal package that in addition to wealth included social status, political power, and glory.

2. “Obedezco Pero No Cumpló” – The Encomienda

In the previous chapter we saw how the encomienda – the hybrid feudal practice whereby Spaniards utilized Indian labor and tribute - developed in the aftermath of Roldán’s Rebellion. At the beginning of the third wave of Spanish expansion the
encomienda was out of favor with many Spanish elites. In a letter from cabildo of Vera Cruz to King, July 10, 1519, Cortés had resolved not to introduce the encomienda in Mexico, which he like many others blamed for the depopulation of the Caribbean.\footnote{Lesley Byrd Simpson, The Encomienda in New Spain: Forced Native Labor in the Spanish Colonies (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1929), 56-7.}

But the reality of surviving in a foreign land and constructing a new colony changed Cortés. A year after the conquest, Cortés repeated his concern but brought up a new issue, that without the encomienda, “the conquerors and settlers of these parts could not support themselves.”\footnote{The Indians were “of such understanding and intelligence as would make them moderately capable, and for that reason I thought it a grave matter to compel them to serve the Spaniards as they did in the other islands.” After reminding Charles of the impracticality of using royal revenue to compensate the conquistadors, “in view also of the great length of time we have been at war and the necessities and debts that we have all incurred because of it….it was necessary for me to deposit the chiefs and natives of these parts with the Spaniards.” Hernán Cortés, May 15, 1522, from Ibid., 57-8.}

After the initial windfall of mineral wealth, Cortés and companies faced the dual problem of economic viability and survival in an unfamiliar environment. They turned to the only immediate available resource – Indians organized in the encomienda – to address both problems. Tribute included food, other agricultural products, native products, metals and later money as well as labor for encomendero agricultural projects, mines, construction activities, and public works.\footnote{Robert S. Chamberlain, “Castilian Backgrounds of the Repartimiento-Encomienda,” in Contributions to American Anthropology and History, no 25: 23-60? (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1939), 26. In the beginning, the levels were determined by the encomendero.}

By 1520, the agenda of the Crown and theological critics were beginning to converge and the now king of Castile and Holy Roman Emperor Charles V wrote back to Cortes, prohibiting the encomienda for numerous reasons. The king argued that the encomienda had reduced the Indians of the Caribbean and had actually worked against the conversion of the Indians. Charles could not give the Indians in clear conscience as theologians and other court officials had ruled that God had made the Indians free. “You
are to allow them to live in liberty, as our vassals in Castile live,” Charles instructed Cortés, and if you have already given them, you shall remove them. Indians should be evangelized, especially the priests, but should not be pushed too hard. Spaniards were to treat Indians fairly and any abuse would be punished. Overall, Indians were to pay the services and dues that royal vassals paid back in Spain.304

Thus, the Crown firmly opposed the extension of the encomienda. But when the letter arrived in Mexico, Cortés had already finished the division of the Indian population into encomienda. In the words of Lesley Simpson, Cortés invoked “the magic of the ancient feudal formula of obedezco pero no cumplo (“I obey but I do not fulfill”) and composed a reply (Oct 15, 1524) justifying the imposition of the encomienda.”305 As much as the encomienda was against the royal agenda and moral scruples, Charles depended on the services the conquistadores provided. There would be, of course, no expansion of the empire or even maintenance of its colonies without their military service. Like his grandmother Isabel before him, the emperor made peace with the encomienda for the time being, depending on the institution for four important services: to reward conquistadors and their descendents for their service, insure permanent colonization, provide internal and external military support, and - at least in theory - to protect, evangelize, and acculturate the Indian population.306

304 Simpson, The Encomienda in New Spain, 59. War was only permitted if the Indians refused to render fealty. The defeated should be made slaves, “But you are to bear in mind one thing, and that is that all the Christians will be greatly desirous of keeping the Indians warlike and not peaceful, so that they may be given in encomienda.” Ibid., 60.
305 A summary of Cortes’s rational: 1, Spaniards have no other means of support and would leave the country, the emperor losing his empire and the Indians their souls. 2, the Indians would be returned to the worse slavery that the Spaniards had released them from. 3, Cortes would prevent the abuses of the Caribbean, such as gold-mining and plantations. 4, Indians could not pay tribute since they had only goods, not money. 5, without encomenderos the emperor would need a standing army to hold lands. 6, he did not give encomiendas to the judiciary. Ibid., 60-2.
As a result, the *encomienda* survived and reproduced throughout much of Latin America as the main institution of Spanish colonial rule. The *encomienda*, even in its earliest stages of Hispaniola, depended on pre-existing hierarchical social arrangements in Indian polities. Upon conquest a survey of the population was made, often relying on Indian precedents and record keeping. A royal official then divided up Indian elites — usually called by the Taino term *cacique* — along with their vassals who were parceled out to the new *encomenderos*.307 In any given place the Indian elite made up to about 10% of the Indian population and became what Alan Knight calls “vital cogs in the imperial machinery” as the link between *encomenderos* and the classes of Indian commoners.308 Caciques were expected to direct the pre-existing tribute to the new lords and mediate any new labor or tributary demands. As Indian polities grew, so did the size of *encomiendas*.

In many ways, what the conquistador desired and what the *encomienda* grant required were one and the same, to play the role of a knight. The *encomendero* was required to maintain arms and at least one horse for defense against rebels and Indians, a law that the notoriously lax government actually enforced.309 Indians often granted fealty and submitted to the *encomienda* when Spanish power was present, but constantly renegotiated it, withholding or rejecting it when they sensed weakness. Thus, the system required the constant threat and employment of violence for its continuation.

*Encomenderos* at times made dramatic displays of their military power over violations,
such as an encomendero that “put a lord on a cross with three nails, like Christ, because he was not given all the gold he had demanded.”

Not surprisingly, abuse of Indians in the early encomienda system was widespread. One government official gave the flavor of the entitlement felt by the early Spanish population in a report to the Council of the Indies in 1531. “You cannot imagine the avarice, disorder, and laziness of the Spaniards in this country. Those who have encomiendas think only of making the greatest possible profit out of them, without bothering the least bit in the world about the welfare or religious instruction of the Indians.”

Yet the reputation of encomenderos and their often brutal tactics should not obscure the more subtle techniques which they employed to maintain control. Much like Roldán, the more sophisticated encomenderos relied on soft power to encourage willing compliance, a point emphasized by Steven J. Stern. Some sought government favors in the form of grants of good land for their native elite. Encomenderos also gave gifts to their encomienda Indians, including one who gave his elite a black slave, mules, horses, livestock, and high quality Inca and Spanish cloth. They sought to develop relationships and smooth interaction based on native practices, realizing that mutual dependency was better than unmitigated plunder. Overall, Stern characterizes

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310 From Simpson, The Encomienda in New Spain, 222.
311 Juan de Salmerón, August 13. Ibid., 95.
312 Steve J. Stern, Peru’s Indian Peoples and the Challenge of Spanish Conquest: Huamanga to 1640 (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), 31.
313 “Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala wrote a scathing indictment of European colonials around 1600; but, significantly, this bitter Indian critic from Huamanga praised the first generation of encomenderos.” Ibid., 35.
**encomendero** society in the Andes as an “uneasy mixture of force, negotiation, and alliance.”

Not surprisingly, **encomenderos** reproduced many of the Iberian cultural precedents, such as the **casa poblada**, “the largest single element in the dream of a lordly life which all Spaniards shared.” James Lockhart explains that the **casa poblada** “implied a large house, a Spanish wife if possible, a table where many guests were maintained, black slaves, a staff of Spanish and Indian servant-employees, and a stable of horses.”

The house included agricultural land, livestock, and served as a refuge during time of rebellion. The **casa poblada** often developed something like a small royal court, with a large retinue of ambitious men looking for favors and opportunity, which also served to increase the **encomendero**’s political power.

A large percentage of the Spanish population lived in **encomendero** houses or on their land, each **encomendero** supporting a whole block of population whose only source of income was the **encomienda**.

The large grants did not run themselves and whole pyramid structure developed to administer the **encomienda**. The **encomendero** usually hired a **mayordomo** to manage the day to day operations of the **encomienda**. **Estancieros** were employees of lower rank who managed herds of livestock and lands gathered on the side. In addition, **encomenderos** usually employed a miner to develop mineral resources. Staff could add

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314 Stern, *Peru’s Indian Peoples*, 34
316 In 1553 one large **encomendero** was feeding forty people a day at his table. Ibid.
317 Ibid., *Spanish Peru*, 18.
318 In the beginning earned from 1/6 to ¼ of the profit and came to receive a fixed salary, from 200-300 pesos a year for smaller grants up to 2,000 pesos for the larger grants. They were also allowed to use their position to earn more on the side, one with a salary of 2,000 earning 12,000 in three years. Ibid., 25.
319 They were usually paid 100 – 200 pesos. Ibid., 27.
up quickly; the Pizarros alone seem to have had at least 400 major and 400 minor
officials to manage their extensive holdings.320

Officially, evangelization was the justification for the Spanish colonial presence
and an important function of the encomienda. The encomendero was required by law to
maintain a doctrinero, a priest who resided on the encomienda and evangelized the
Indians. It was a difficult position to fill as in general, priests preferred ministering to
Spaniards or secular work. They changed positions often, preferring to live in urban
areas and the more comfortable work in chaplaincies or administration. In contrast, the
position of the doctrinero implied “low status, low pay, and isolation from the Spanish
communities” in often country-sized holdings.321 Most doctrineros probably could agree
with an aging cleric in Potosí who wrote to his sister of his desire to return to Spain or
buy an estate in Peru “to retire and rest, and not go about instructing Indians, which is
sure a great travail.”322

Overall, a colony grew around the military and economic power of the
encomienda. In 1555 Spanish Peru, Lockhart estimates that there were 500
encomenderos out of approximately 8,000 Spaniards, who “provided the framework for
all Spanish social and economic activity.”323 They supported at least 1000
mayordomos/employees, and the economic life of the 350 clergy, 350 merchants, 300

320 Rafael Varon Gabai, Francisco Pizarro and His Brothers: The Illusion of Power in Sixteenth-
Century Peru, translated by Javier Flores Espinoza (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997),
137-8.

321 Lockhart, Spanish Peru, 58. Average salary in Peru about 300 pesos (less in Mexico, 150)
sometimes higher, in early 1550’s Cuzco, one encomendero unable to find a priest for 500 pesos plus food
(59). Many doctrineros developed into “priest-entrepreneurs” using their position to obtain wealth,
sometimes doubling as mayordomos (62). Despite official definition of the doctrinero, their service was
ordered to needs of encomendero, like a chaplain. During wars, clergy drawn away from work to work as
chaplains and negotiators (61). Encomenderos occasionally used lay instructors to little success.
322 Written in 1577. From James Lockhart and Enrique Otte, translators and editors, Letters and
323 Lockhart, Spanish Peru, 23.
notaries, 150 doctors and lawyers, 500 artisans, and 750 – 1000 women.\textsuperscript{324} The high-spending \textit{encomendero} class, eager to display its wealth and power, was “the life’s blood of Spanish artisans and merchants,” allowing profits of as much as 50-100\%.\textsuperscript{325}

\textit{Encomendero} Indian labor fueled public works, agriculture, and mining. The Church also grew up around and depended on the \textit{encomendero} economy. A Dominican from Peru describes the trickle-down dynamic of the colonial economy:

\begin{quote}
Nearly all the gold and silver in Peru derives from these encomenderos. The merchant gets two bars from them for his cottons and silks; the lawyer gets one bar for legal services; the scribe for writing; the doctor for healing; the tailor a hundred pesos for making clothes; the servants five hundred pesos in salary; religious two hundred pesos for saying masses, plus other stipends.\textsuperscript{326}
\end{quote}

\textit{Encomiendas} were judged by the size of their tribute levels, with anything lower than 1,000 pesos a year considered small. Large \textit{encomiendas} were between 5,000-10,000 pesos, great ones around 15,000 pesos, reaching 50,000 a year in high yield mining districts.\textsuperscript{327} In peripheral areas of Latin America the size of \textit{encomiendas} was generally much smaller, such as in Central America where Las Casas gives the richest \textit{encomiendas} ranging from 1,500 to 4,000 pesos.\textsuperscript{328} Tribute was only a part of the \textit{encomienda} grant as \textit{encomenderos} grafted other economic ventures onto the \textit{encomienda}.

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{324} There were also 200-400 sailors, and 2-4000 transients looking for opportunity. Lockhart, \textit{Spanish Peru}, 154.
\textsuperscript{325} Ibid., 23, 92.
\textsuperscript{326} From a moral inquiry entitled “Twelve Problems of Conscience” (1564), from Bartolomé de Las Casas, \textit{Indian Freedom: the Cause of Bartolomé de las Casas, 1484-1566: a Reader}, translations and notes by Francis Patrick Sullivan (Kansas City, MO: Sheed & Ward, 1995), 337. Overall, Himmerich y Valencia explains that “the wealth generated by the \textit{encomiendas} served as the engine that drove society….” and “nearly all the wealth in New Spain during the first generation of Spanish domination originated in one way or another with the natives, it follows that those controlling the Indians in reality dominated all aspects of society.” Robert Himmerich y Valencia, \textit{The Encomenderos of New Spain, 1521-1555} (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991), 3.
\textsuperscript{328} Murdo J. MacLeod, \textit{Spanish Central America: A Socioeconomic History, 1520-1720} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 117.
\end{footnotes}
grant. They started agricultural projects on land appropriated near encomiendas, owned urban plots, and invested in merchant enterprises.

*Encomenderos* were not merely economic agents; in many ways they aspired to and were successful in becoming smaller versions of the Spanish Crown. If not already a hidalgo, conquistadors achieved the status with the conquest. In the early years, there was no royal administrative oversight and the Crown’s attempts to implement it were successfully co-opted by *encomenderos*. Cortés used his position as governor to appoint allies to town councils and impose his own jurisdiction on the colony.329 He cited royal rights in Spanish and Indian traditions to justify the beginning of seigniorial rule, the very type that the Crown domesticated in Iberia.330 Even in 1550, there was no royal jurisdiction outside of Mexico City and Pizarro was able to act autonomously in Peru until about 1540.331

As a result, some *encomenderos* amassed enormous economic and political power. Hernán Cortés’s obtained the hereditary noble title of Marquis del Valle del Oaxaca and at one time was the richest man in the Spanish world.332 His grant of perpetuity was the “envy, admiration, and goal of all *encomenderos*.333 It included “the lands, and vassals, the woods and pastures, all waters, both running and standing, and complete civil and criminal jurisdiction – all the rights, in short which belonged to the Crown itself in the aforesaid lands.”334 “In later enquiries against him,” the historian Hugh Thomas writes, “it was persistently said that he had allocated himself ‘a million

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330 Ibid., 49.
331 Gabai, *Francisco Pizarro and His Brothers*, 44.
334 Quoted from ibid.
souls’: even ‘a million and a half.’”

According to Simpson, the revenue of the Marquesado in 1569 from tribute alone was 86,000 pesos. Hernán Cortés dressed in black silk and preferred a large entourage of “attendants, stewards, secretaries, valets, ushers, chaplains, treasurers, and all such as usually accompany a great sovereign.” Four Indian lords accompany him on horseback, government officials and soldiers precede him and “[a]s he passes by, everyone prostrates themselves, according to an old custom.”

Encomenderos and their encomiendas were the pillar of the new empire; but as noted before, the Indian elite was a crucial lynchpin in their operation. According to Charles Gibson, the pragmatic administrative need for an Indian elite was balanced by a positive theoretical view stemming from theological and juridical arguments for the rationality of Indians and their inclusion in jus gentium. Indians were “to be maintained in all ways compatible to with Christianity and civilization: Indian properties were to be preserved; Indians were not to be reduced to slavery; existing Indian rulers were to be respected as ‘natural lords’, (señores naturales).”

The Indian elite, despite subordination to Spanish encomenderos, priests, and government officials, retained significant local power and skillfully engaged the new political reality. In Mexico, they sought audiences with Cortes and journeyed to the Castilian court, emphasizing service to the crown, in search of royal confirmation of their holdings or further advantages “either for themselves or for their communities.”

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335 Thomas, Conquest, 578.
336 Even after decades of declining population and enforced regulation of tribute levels, the tribute given to the Marquis was 36,862 in 1560 and 75,623 in 1567. Simpson, The Encomienda in New Spain, 167. Abstract financial figures do not adequately convey the amount of tribute and the probable burden placed on Indian communities. For details see ibid., 106-7.
337 Cristobal Perez to Peter Martyr, from Thomas, Conquest, 585-6.
Gibson argues that the crown “took seriously its obligations to the ‘natural lords’ of Mexico” granting similar trappings of nobility such as coats of arms and Spanish clothing, but only to the degree that claims did not “interfere with the ambitions of Spaniards in the colony.” The status of Indian elites was so significant that Europeans often attempted to improve their socioeconomic standing with strategic marriages with the Indian nobility in the post-conquest era.

The Indian elite also deftly negotiated the Spanish style administration which now overlay Indian communities. Their various elected offices became targets of the Indian nobility as a way of increasing political and economic power. The position of the governor was responsible for the collection of royal or encomienda tribute and “provided them [elites] with opportunities for coercion, extortion, embezzlement, and other illegal methods for enriching themselves.” In the process caciques sometimes intensified their use of traditional vassals. Like their Spanish counterparts, some commoners migrated up the political hierarchy to noble status and some Indians even rose to the level of encomendero. Pizarro gave the puppet Inca, Paullu, a repartimiento with an annual income of 12,000 pesos and three Indians received encomiendas in Mexico, including two daughters of Moctezuma.

Hispanicization was a key element in the power of the Indian nobility, something which they often actively sought, being “both a symptom of authority and a method of

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340 Gibson, “The Aztec Aristocracy in Colonial Mexico,” 177. Up to 1550. The greatest example was the creation of the Condes de Moctezuma, who held lands and noble privileges in Spain.
342 Gibson, “The Aztec Aristocracy in Colonial Mexico,” 178. “In the mid-sixteenth century a community paying 1000 pesos in tribute to the king might be paying up to 4000 pesos to its own Indian upper class” (182).
343 Ibid., 183.
344 Gabai, Francisco Pizarro and His Brothers, 181; Himmerich y Valencia, The Encomenderos of New Spain, 27.
maintaining authority."\textsuperscript{345} Elites “adopted Spanish forms of dress, carried arms, and rode through the cities and towns with equipages and retinues of Indian servants.”\textsuperscript{346} Like the Spanish nobility, Indian nobles employed similar marriage strategies to maintain and increase power.\textsuperscript{347}

A good example of the new Indian elite was Don Juan de Guzmán Itztollinqui. He spoke Spanish and according to the viceroy was “always treated as a Spaniard.”\textsuperscript{348} He used crown channels to receive a coat of arms and have his properties confirmed against abuses. The viceroy granted him the right to wear a sword. He married the niece of the Don Carlos, the cacique of Texcoco, building a large estate with tribute that probably rivaled orbettered many encomenderos.\textsuperscript{349} Such success was not out of the ordinary as Charles Gibson classifies Don Juan as “a typical mid-sixteenth century cacique.”\textsuperscript{350}

Figures such as Don Juan illustrate the complex hybrid nature of the encomienda, which drew on parallel European and Indian precedents. Conquistadors fused Iberian lordship and Indian tribute practices to provide the means for their survival, material reward for military service, and the economic bedrock of the new colonies. The Crown harnessed the encomienda - if somewhat reluctantly - to ensure the stability of the colonies and further territorial expansion. Indians played active roles in the process, even if limited by a social and political ceiling. From a certain perspective, the agenda and culture of the encomendero class and the Indian nobility converged in form, and sometimes in intent.

\textsuperscript{345} Gibson, “The Aztec Aristocracy in Colonial Mexico,” 181.
\textsuperscript{346} Ibid. They also retained Indian displays of power such as a headdress to supplement Spanish dress.
\textsuperscript{347} Ibid., 182.
\textsuperscript{348} from ibid., 186.
\textsuperscript{349} Ibid., 186-7.
\textsuperscript{350} Ibid., 186.
Stepping back, then, we are now able to see the basic process of Spanish colonial expansion. In the first place, we saw how Europeans spread. Profit-driven companies composed of agents eager for wealth saturated the Americas like viruses, succeeding in the proper environments. In the second place, we saw how the Spanish newcomers maintained their presence. Through the *encomienda*, they imposed tribute demands based on their expectations of Iberian lordship and previous Indian tribute practices accomplishing numerous ends: creating a system of food security that allowed permanent European occupation, affording conquistadors the means to reproduce the Iberian culture of honor, providing the military force necessary to maintain security, and becoming the initial engine of the colonial economy on which an increasingly complex European society grafted on and grew, including, to a limited degree, the Church. Thus, one can imagine the *encomienda* as a franchise-like package of socioeconomic, political, military, and cultural power, through which Spanish viruses became parasitic lords.

Yet there are obvious weaknesses to this society, many due to the very factors which made Spanish expansion so rapid. The new colonies depended on a fickle and self-indulgent warrior class that both tended to over-exploit their vassals and devolve into open conflict. The new Spanish lords, in turn, relied on the Indian elite to mediate their control over a large, culturally different Indian peasant class, both of whom waited for a chance to “renegotiate” the colonial relationship when they sensed weakness. Overall, the parasitic relationship was an unstable situation that could and often did devolve into chaos and needed further transformation into something resembling a symbiotic relationship for long term stability. It would come from a component of Iberian life that what was still missing. Catholicism, despite royal legislation, still played only a minor
role in the *encomienda* and the societies based upon them. At best, evangelization made up a nominal, half-hearted component of the *encomienda*. In the next section we will see how mendicant clergy shaped the hybrid American feudalism and added another important ingredient to the cultural and political stew of Central Mexico. The work of the mendicants and the passing of time transformed the uneasy *encomienda* collaboration between Europeans and Indians into a single polity.

3. **Franciscans in Mexico**

Up to now, we have explored the systematic, decentralized form that Roldán’s rebellion took in Latin America. With the arrival of Franciscan missionaries in Mexico, we find something new. The first three Franciscans arrived in Mexico in 1523 and a group of twelve arrived a year later. Cortés, never one to miss an opportunity for dramatic political display, “assembled the highest Spanish and Indian dignitaries to welcome the first group of Spanish Franciscans, then indicated the threadbare friars’ prestige by kneeling and kissing their hands” – in effect, pledging fealty to the strange new arrivals.\(^{351}\) Like the Dominicans of Hispaniola from Chapter 2, the Franciscans came out of a reforming branch of their order. But unlike the Dominicans and any other clergy in the three decades of Spanish colonial presence, the Franciscans journeyed to the New World to evangelize Indians.\(^{352}\)

Indian missions were the Franciscans’ highest priority. They came to free Indians from idolatry and like most Spaniards, had a rather low vision of many Indian religious practices, such as human sacrifice. Despite the Franciscans condemnation of Indian

\(^{351}\) Liss, *Mexico Under Spain*, 70.
\(^{352}\) Ibid., 73.
religion, in many ways they had a higher opinion of Indians than Spaniards. The latter were seen to be lazy and corrupt, only out for material gain and full of vices which threatened Indian society. Indians were seen as having a purity and innocence that if only correctly tapped would lead to reviving the purity of early Christianity.\footnote{Liss, \textit{Mexico Under Spain}, 89, 91.}

The Franciscans generally baptized Indians that showed any desire, conducting mass baptisms, sometimes thousands at a time.\footnote{Motolinía claimed to have baptized 300,000 Indians. Ibid., 74.} In order to foster evangelization the missionaries embraced the study of Indian languages, and produced dictionaries and grammars. Popular formation occurred in preaching in native languages, the performance of religious autos (public plays), and publication of translated religious texts.\footnote{Ibid., 123, 75. Leon-Portilla, \textit{Bernadino de Sahagun, First Anthropologist}, 105.} Missionary schools taught religion, music, European arts and crafts, domestic arts for girls.\footnote{Liss, \textit{Mexico Under Spain}, 71.} They established cofradías (religious societies) for converts, provided basic social services such as medical care, and initially recommended the ordination of Indians to the priesthood.\footnote{The Junta Apostólica of 1539 approved the ordination of Indians and castas to the four minor orders of porter, lector, exorcist, and acolyte. They were steps to ordination to priesthood but were not permanent. They went on to state that Indian clergy was a possibility: “His Holiness and His Majesty should be consulted about this in order that they may approve and consider it praiseworthy and good, because these are Christians and the sacraments should be entrusted to them since baptism, which is not less than priesthood, is entrusted to them.” From Stafford Poole, “Church Law on the Ordination of Indians and Castas in New Spain” in \textit{The Hispanic American Historical Review}, Vol. 61, No. 4. (Nov., 1981), 640.} Overall, mendicant clergy would be the Indians greatest allies, and Indians sometimes violently opposed their removal.\footnote{Knight, \textit{Mexico: The Colonial Era}, 49.}

The Franciscans targeted the Indian nobility for their mission work which included education of noble youths at the College of Santa Cruz.\footnote{In Tlatelolco north of Mexico City was founded in 1536 for selected talented youth and the sons of Indian nobility. Existed at San Francisco Monastery since 1533. There the most educated friars who were fluent in the native languages taught subjects such as Latin, grammar, history, religion, scripture,}
Gibson explains, “the native nobility came to consist in large part of young men trained
by the friars to Christianity and Hispanic ways and ready to take an active, if subordinate,
part in colonial life.” Conversion, however, often required sacrifices that not all Indian
nobles were ready to embrace. They resisted the same missionary critiques of the noble
ethos and royal decrees that Spanish elites did, such as caciques and principales in
Atitlán who complained that their fields were ruined after the confiscation of their
slaves. The Church’s desire to protect women with marriage and stable domestic life
from what the first archbishop called “the accursed lechery of the caciques” was not
always met with enthusiasm.

One such example of the Indian nobility’s resistance to mendicant critique came
in 1539. Poor crops and fear of Indian insurrection led to the trial of Don Carlos
Chichimecatecuhtle (Ometochtzin), cacique of Texoco. Although educated at the
philosophy, and aspects of native culture. After the first generation of students passed through the school
there were enough to form a native academic staff. Leon-Portilla, Bernadino de Sahagun, First
Anthropologist, 113. The ambiguous potential of educating Indians was not lost on Spanish colonists. One
former conquistador wrote to the crown in 1545 of the danger of education: “In placing the Indians in the
culture of the Latin language, having them read science, wherein they have come to know all about the
beginnings of our lives through the books they have read, from whence we come, and how we too were
subjugated by the Romans and converted to the Faith from being gentiles, and all the rest that is written
about that, which causes them to say that we too arose from gentiles and were subjects and conquered and
subjugated and were subject to the Romans, and we rose up and rebelled and were converted to baptism so
long ago, and yet we are not good Christians; the Indians thus trained are many. The friars in Mexico City
and the hinterlands get it into their heads to preach; they say and preach whatever occurs to them about
these and other things.” The potentially subversive tendency of missionary work was perhaps a reason why
Guzman accused the Franciscans of plotting to lead an Indian rebellion in 1528 (98-9).

360 Gibson, “The Aztec Aristocracy in Colonial Mexico,” 174. “Whereas a macegual of the mid or late
sixteenth century would normally have received only a rudimentary ecclesiastical instruction, a well-appointed cacique would have received training at one of the several colegios established for the Indian
upper class, such as the Franciscan Colegio de Santa Cruz in Tlatelolco or the Jesuit school at Tepozotlan.
He would have learned to read and write, to study grammar and rhetoric, and to speak Spanish and possibly
Latin. . . . Literacy and Hispanization in general meant that caciques and principales, like Spanish colonists,
could express their complaints in writing to the monarch, as they frequently did in Spanish and occasionally
in Latin” (181).

361 William L. Sherman, Forced Native Labor in Sixteenth-Century Central America (Lincoln:
University of Nebraska Press, 1979), 275. Cedulas of 1536 and 1538 forbid caciques to hold slaves. In
addition, Mayan elites in the Yucatan were upset with missionary critiques of slavery. Chamberlain, The
Conquest and Colonization of Yucatan, 316.

362 From Liss, Mexico Under Spain, 78.
Franciscan college he was accused of idolatry and promoting concubinage. Don Carlos’s indignation over the charge was heightened by a perceived double standard. “Don’t the Christians have many women and get drunk without the religious fathers being able to impede them?” he asked. “So, what is this that the fathers do to us [Indians]?”  He also spread a rebellious message, declaring that “[t]his is our land and our treasure, our jewel and our possession, and dominion belongs to us.” Don Carlos was tried by the Franciscan archbishop of New Spain Zumarraga and found guilty, approved by Viceroy Mendoza, and burned in the public plaza.  

The close collaboration between Zumarraga and Viceroy Mendoza in the trial of Don Carlos brings us to the important political role played by clergy in general and the Franciscans in particular. In the early colonial period clergy served as the most trusted government officials and were an important factor in the establishment of royal control of the rebellious colonies. Peggy K. Liss’s judgment that the first archbishop “strove to protect the Indians up to the point where royal authority and Spanish settlement were not endangered” probably characterized the Franciscan’s political view as a whole.  

Overall, they aided in the creation of a hybrid political unit, “retaining much Indian social and political coherence while including the natives within an extended, essentially Spanish, political system.”  

An important component of the Franciscan role in promoting royal authority was their engagement with internal Spanish violence. In the 1520s rival Spanish factions split Mexico in competition over limited resources, especially during Cortés’ prolonged  

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364 Liss, *Mexico Under Spain*, 82.  
365 Ibid., 79.  
366 Ibid., 94.
absence in a failed entrada into Central America. The president of the first audiencia, Nuño Beltrán de Guzmán, conquistador of Panuco and a “natural gangster” in the words of one historian, used his position to displace Cortes and his supporters.\textsuperscript{367} The Franciscans found themselves caught in the middle of escalating factional violence and almost abandoned the mission in 1526.\textsuperscript{368} One Franciscan described “the dissension and factions among the Spaniards” as the 10\textsuperscript{th} plague afflicting the Indians and “the cause of the trials of many Spaniards, some condemned to death, others confronted and exiled…” In the chaos, the missionary boasted, “there was no one but the friars to impose peace…”\textsuperscript{369} As supporters of Cortés and defenders of the Indians, they suffered depredations and helped oust Guzman, in part through reports smuggled to Spain in a barrel of olive oil.\textsuperscript{370}

The details of the Spanish civil conflict are not as important for us as its outcome. In the end, the Crown supported a new government which in the long run stabilized the Spanish population. The Franciscan role in taming the civil conflict points to the important role spiritual concerns played in the formation of post-conquest society.\textsuperscript{371} In the process of their missionary work, the Franciscans tended to reconcile the competing encomendero, Indian, and royal interests. For the Indians, they were more or less a peaceful vehicle of Hispanicization.\textsuperscript{372} They helped control the unstable encomendero class. The Franciscans also cultivated Crown administration and popular support of its

\textsuperscript{368} Liss, Mexico Under Spain, 70.
\textsuperscript{369} From Leon-Portilla, Bernardino de Sahagun, First Anthropologist, 77-8.
\textsuperscript{370} Ibid., 86.
\textsuperscript{371} This idea was summarized by one royal official in a letter to the Crown in 1525: the Franciscans pacify the Spaniards and convert the Indians. In Simpson, The Encomienda in New Spain, 205.
\textsuperscript{372} Liss, Mexico Under Spain, 94.
sovereignty. Overall, Franciscan religious energy was a major ingredient, perhaps the main catalyst, in the fusion of a new, relatively integrated colony.

The Franciscans, then, provided the missing religious component of the conquest. In the process, they helped consolidate the unstable society that was the result of colonial expansion. In addition, the Franciscans provided colonial society a third service: they justified the process of colonial expansion itself: the conquest and *encomienda*.

At least some Franciscans initially opposed the encomienda as evidenced by a 1528 letter written by Franciscans in Mexico. Support of the *encomienda* by the *encomendero* class, they bluntly stated, “is nothing else but the using of religion as a pretext to enable them to continue their tyranny.” Conversion and humane treatment of the Indians was not a priority for *encomenderos*. Indeed, only “[b]y a special providence of God they have not succeeded, even with all the means they have used, in destroying the Mexicans.” “It were a lesser evil if not a single inhabitant of the New World were ever converted to our Holy Faith, and that the King’s sovereignty should be lost forever,” the friars declared, “than that these people should be brought to the one or the other by slavery.”

The strife in Mexico and “clamor of theologians” provoked another junta in Barcelona in 1529 led by Tavera, the Cardinal Archbishop of Toledo and highest ranking ecclesiastical official in Spain. It concluded that Indians which accepted Castilian

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373 Interestingly, they use the same concept as Las Casas attributed to his initial rejection of the *encomienda*: “To wish to make slaves of the natives of the New World in order to subject them to the Faith and the King’s obedience, is undoubtedly iniquitous, and God has forbidden men all abominations, even though the greatest good should result from them. Sacrifice is never acceptable if offered with unclean hands.” In Francis Augustus MacNutt, *Letters of Cortes: The Five Letters of Relation from Fernando Cortes to the Emperor Charles V*, Vol. II (New York, NY: The Knickerbocker Press, 1908), 224.
sovereignty were free, not to be given in *encomienda* and “not obligated to perform personal services beyond those demanded of other subjects of the Crown….”

But despite the initial dissent and the junta’s decision, the Franciscans gradually accepted the reality of the *encomienda* system. In the same year Archbishop Zumarraga suggested that the *encomienda* be given in perpetuity. Permanent grants would give *encomenderos* the incentive to promote stability, in the eyes of Zumarraga, rather than immediate profit at all costs and the resulting chaos. Franciscan writers would continue this trajectory, supporting the *encomienda* system and mythologizing Cortes and his achievements.

Other factors certainly influenced the Franciscan support for the *encomienda*. Cortés’s public deference to the Franciscans and the speed of the Catholic transformation of Central Mexico probably played significant roles. It also seems likely that the legacy of the Reconquest contributed to the Franciscans’ perspective. What is important for us here is that Franciscan support of the *encomienda* did not emerge out of theological inquiry. Rather, it served as a practical response to the chaos of the 1520s. Because of the Franciscan shift, the decentralized economic expansion – driven by the desire for survival, economic gain, and social status – now gained its final component: theological support for the conquest and *encomienda* from a community dedicated to the integrity of Catholic tradition. And theological support of the Franciscans and their ongoing work in Mexico was the glue for turning the parasitic *encomienda* system into a mutually symbiotic socio-economic system. Evangelization was the primary engine for the

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374 It continues later: “Until the Indians should be instructed in the Holy Catholic Faith and should adopt Spanish customs and learn to live in an orderly manner (*en policía*), the King might not legally give them to anyone, either temporarily or permanently, ‘for experience has shown that the laws made in their favor have been observed by no one.’” Simpson, *The Encomienda in New Spain*, 80.

375 Ibid., 226.
cultural transformation of the host population. Franciscans simultaneously provided ideological support for the viral agents on whom the colony depended for its ongoing existence while working to control them and connect them to the evolving imperial system. What started as a viral invasion, turned into a parasitic relationship, was now becoming a single living organism.

4. Conclusion

It has been a long sprint through the details of Spanish colonial expansion. To conclude, I wish to draw out three main themes. The first point concerns the character of colonial expansion. As we have seen, expansion was driven primarily by the temporal goals of economic reward, expectations of increased social status, and immediate survival. Agents acted in continuity with Iberian feudal expectations and adapted them to local conditions as a means of survival. In the process, the *encomienda* became the foundation of the new colonies’ socioeconomic, military and political power.

Secondly, other groups adapted to the actions of conquistadors and subsequent *encomenderos*. Indians negotiated the new military power, often forming alliances and collaborating when they sensed it to be in their best interests. The Crown, after unsuccessfully opposing various colonial developments, acceded to demands and learned to harness the feudal shift. The Church largely followed in the expansion’s wake and harnessed the opportunities offered by the conquistadors and *encomenderos*.

Third, spiritual concerns first played a prominent role in the post-conquest arrival of the Franciscan friars in Mexico. They contributed to the unity and stability of the new colony as well as the maintenance of a hierarchical society. They also provided
important ideological support for the prior conquest and continuing *encomienda* system. Mendicant orders would play roles in other parts of Latin America, but never as pervasively.

Before proceeding to the next chapter, it would be helpful to run through a map of Latin America. By 1540, the basic contours of the Spanish colonial presence in the Americas were in place. Central Mexico was the most populous and stable colony. Peru followed as the second colonial center, but was less stable. Its Spanish population remained divided and its Indian population was less integrated into colonial life. The Caribbean increasingly became a backwater as the Indian populations continued to fall, the economies stagnated, and the Spanish population migrated to colonial centers or virgin territory. Small colonial centers dotted Central America, the northern Pacific coast and Caribbean coast of South America, but by and large, Spaniards maintained a largely peripheral presence in these areas and many interior Indian polities remained independent of Spanish political control. By 1540, the colonial centers began the shift to Spanish controlled production and market economies while peripheral areas remained in earlier stages, depending more heavily or even exclusively on *encomienda* tribute.

Such was legacy of Roldán and Ovando. But the Dominican opposition examined in Chapter 2 had not ended. In the next part, an obscure priest and former *encomendero* embraced the Dominican call to arms against the conquistador tsunami engulfing the Americas.
PART II: THE CLAMOR OF THEOLOGIANS

If it’s a dream, if it’s vainglory,
who, in exchange for human vainglory,
would lose a divine glory?
What bygone happiness isn’t a dream?
Who that has ever had heroic good fortune
hasn’t said to himself, when
his memory reverted to it:
“Without a doubt, everything I saw
was a dream”? Well, if this is a cause for
my becoming disillusioned, if I know
that pleasure is a lovely flame
that is turned to ashes
by any wind that blows,
let us look to eternity,
which is everlasting fame
where good fortune does not sleep
and grandeur does not take repose!

Pedro Calderón de la Barca. 376

The second part, chapters 4-6, is the story of opposition to conquest. Chapter 4 begins with the religious conversion of Bartolomé de las Casas from conquest – the entrada/encomienda cycle fueled by honor, wealth, and glory – and his intense Dominican formation. Like the well-born sons of Castilian nobles, Las Casas underwent a lengthy apprenticeship in the house of a lord. In his case, he abided by the loyalty of a feudal bond, severe discipline, and exhausting training in the virtue of caritas; in essence, an alternative form of honor. The feudal bond and caritas, Las Casas argued, required

the rejection of armed conquest and the recognition of the political autonomy of Indian polities, leading him to oppose the conquest described in the previous part.

Chapter 5 and 6 explain the form of the Las Casas-led Dominican rebellion. In chapter 5 Las Casas’s thomistic theology received the support of the Renaissance papacy. In chapter 6, Las Casas further articulated his theology – a feudal code of honor – in the sacramental economy to counter resistance from the crown and colonists. Those that violated the Christian demands of *caritas* must repent, receive sacramental absolution in the sacrament of reconciliation, and make full restitution or be banned from participation in the Church. Las Casas, in effect, renewed the ongoing theological opposition to feudal violence in a new setting.

Throughout this section we will see the resistance of “conquerors” to the opposition of the Dominicans. It is, not surprisingly, largely temporal in nature: the conquest and *encomienda* are the only practical ways to establish and hold the colonies and thus secure revenue for the crown. This resistance is formally articulated in the work of Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda in chapter 6, who argues rather extrinsically that the conquest is both in continuity with Old World feudal patterns and temporally necessary. At the same time, the crown continued its consolidation of the colonies by modifying the Dominican opposition to its needs.
CHAPTER 4: BARTOLOMÉ DE LAS CASAS

“Let charity to one another burst forth in them, and let zeal for humanity burn in them, so they will stand out as a clear sign that you are the one true God, and that you love mankind with infinite love....”

Solemn blessing and consecration of the newly professed Dominican Friar. 377

1. Awaking From a Dream

Back in Hispaniola, probably in the early part of 1512, another impending battle loomed on the valley plains of Concepción de la Vega. Only fifteen years ago rival Spanish factions had almost clashed in Roldán’s rebellion. Now a young, recently ordained secular priest prepared himself for what Catholic tradition calls an anticipation of the Last Judgment.378 Never one to take the sacraments lightly, Bartolomé de las Casas had meticulously examined his conscience. As he knelt before the Dominican friar he confessed his sins in detail and then paused, waiting for counsel and absolution. But instead, the friar asked the young priest if he held Indians in encomienda.

Perhaps the question surprised the priest. Up to that point, Las Casas’s life was as deeply interwined with Castilian expansion as any one in the New World. He was born in 1484 to a father from the Canary Islands. Las Casas grew up in the southern port of

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377 Rite of Reception and Rite of Profession of the Friars: Provisional Translation for Study and Comment (Adelaide, South Australia) http://www.op.org.au/texts/prof_friars.doc, 64.
378 Catechism of the Catholic Church, Rev. ed. (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1999), 1470.
Seville and as a young boy witnessed Columbus’ triumphant return to Castile after his first voyage. In the ensuing excitement, his father and uncles returned with Columbus in 1493, leaving Bartolomé to study at the cathedral chapter. His father returned in 1498 with an Indian, who became Bartolomé’s attendant until 1500. Las Casas journeyed to the New World in 1502. Other than a three year hiatus in Europe to study canon law, he lived a rather uneventful life working in the family business in Hispaniola, now managing their estate in Concepción.\footnote{For details of his canon law studies see chapter 3 of David Thomas Orique, “The Unheard Voice of Law in BARTOLOMÉ DE LAS CASAS’S BREVISIMA RELACIÓN DE LA DESTRUICIÓN DE LAS INDIAS” (Ph.D. diss., University of Oregon, 2011). https://scholarsbank.uoregon.edu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/1794/11616/Orique_David_Thomas_phd2011sp.pdf?sequence=1}

Despite his probable surprise, it was not the first time that Las Casas had heard of the Dominican critique of the *encomienda*. Hispaniola was a small place, and he witnessed the aftermath of Montesino’s Advent sermon. Even relatively conscientious *encomenderos* had not believed the Dominicans’ argument that holding Indians was the equivalent to mortal sin, and Las Casas was no different. “Yes,” he must have told the Dominican, “I hold Indians, but that is not a sin.” He tried to reason with the friar, in his own words “giving frivolous arguments and vain solutions that had a semblance of truth.” Perhaps he explained that he and his family treated the Indians kindly, or that the *encomienda* was no different than the lords of Spain who held vassals. The friar, far from convinced, interrupted Las Casas. “Enough, Father,” the Dominican said, “truth has many disguises but so do lies,” and dismissed Las Casas without absolving his sins.\footnote{Bartolomé de Las Casas, *History of the Indies*, translated and edited by Andrée Collard (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 208.}

So Las Casas went away, carrying the burden he had hoped to leave in the confessional. He did not give up his *encomienda* and continued his work in the family
business. Sometime in 1512, Las Casas received the commission of chaplaincy to the Pánfilo de Narváez entrada into Cuba. For almost two years he helped smooth the pacification, sending a messenger ahead with instructions to provide food and service for the Spanish newcomers, resulting in a largely bloodless campaign. Only once was there serious conflict, where at the village of Caonao the Spaniards killed over 100 Indians. Las Casas unsuccessfully tried to stop the violence, then turned to baptize the dying. He remembered the event as an unprovoked massacre and his subsequent outrage, allegedly commending Narváez and his men to the devil.381

But Las Casas was not so outraged that he did not accept an encomienda for his services, a large grant on the gold rich Ariamo River. His partner was more concerned with prayer and solitude, so Las Casas conducted the business of administering the Indians in growing crops and panning for gold. Although he directed little time or effort to evangelization, he was hopeful that Cuba would be different than Hispaniola, that here Spaniards and Indians could live together in mutually beneficial peace.382

The Indian population, however, quickly collapsed. According to Las Casas, it happened even more quickly than in Hispaniola. Disease surely played the largest role, but in Cuba there was more gold and greater need for Indian labor. Colonists had a greater desire to make their fortune and return home. The numerous absentee encomiendas given by Ferdinand to his political supporters back in Castile were more likely to overwork their Indians. Encomienda labor disrupted the agricultural system, and soon the single cry of “hambre” filled the mostly empty Indian villages.

381 Bartolomé de Las Casas, Bartolomé de Las Casas; a Selection of his Writings, translated and edited by George Sanderlin (New York: Knopf, 1971), 65.
The events certainly wore on Las Casas’s conscience, but the sacraments of the Church became the catalyst for what had all the characteristics of an intense religious conversion. Pentecost of 1514 approached, and as one of only two priests on the island, Las Casas prepared to say Mass at the governor’s settlement. It was an important feast, for according to Helen Rand Parish, Pentecost was one of the four times a year that the colonists confessed their sins and received the Eucharist.\textsuperscript{383} Las Casas studied his past sermons and Scripture, particularly Ecclesiastes 34.

\begin{quote}
Tainted his gifts who offers in sacrifice ill-gotten goods!
Mock presents from the lawless win not God’s favor.
The Most High approves not the gifts of the godless.
[Nor for their many sacrifices does he forgive their sins.]
Like the man who slays a son in his father’s presence
is he who offers sacrifice from the possessions of the poor.
The bread of charity is life itself for the needy,
he who withholds it is a person of blood.
He slays his neighbor who deprives him of his living;
he sheds blood who denies the laborer his wages.\textsuperscript{384}
\end{quote}

Reflecting on the passage from Ecclesiastes, he remembered the Dominican confessor’s refusal to grant him absolution. There was no visible change in Las Casas during the two years since the incident, but the memory continued to accuse his conscience, for according to Las Casas, it “helped him understand his own ignorance and the danger of his soul.”\textsuperscript{385} Like Ignatius in his castle, Las Casas wrestled with worldly deeds and the deeds of God. He finally arrived at a verdict; namely, his soul was in danger for the dual reasons of holding an \textit{encomienda} and confessing \textit{encomenderos}.

Thus, Las Casas woke from the dream he dreamt unawares, deciding to reject the \textit{encomienda} and liquidate his allotment of Indians. He told his decision to Governor Velasquez, that no one who held Indians could be saved and how he furthermore

\textsuperscript{383} Parish, Introduction to \textit{The Only Way}, 20.
“intended to preach this to escape the danger, and to do what his priesthood required.” Velasquez, for his part, was amazed. How could a secular priest, “who was free to own things in the world,” be of the same opinion of the mendicant Dominicans? Why would someone with a “great aptitude for getting rich quickly” give it up? “Padre, think of what you are doing,” governor Velasquez told Las Casas. “No need for scruples! It is God who wants you to be rich and prosperous. For that reason I do not allow you the surrender you make of your Indians.”

But Las Casas stood firm. He made the necessary arrangements and on the Feast of the Assumption Bartolomé de Las Casas took the pulpit during Mass. Like the Dominicans, he divulged his conversion and pointed out the *encomenderos’* obligation “to act charitably to their Indians whom they exploited cruelly.”

“The congregation was stupefied,” Las Casas remembered, “even fearful of what he said to them. Some felt compunction, others thought it a bad dream, hearing bizarre statements such as: No one could hold Indians in servitude without sinning. As if to say that they could not make use of beasts of the fields. Unbelievable!”

It was, in short, a remarkable change. From his youth Las Casas followed the wave of colonial expansion, participating in all its facets - from *encomienda* life to *entrada* conquest – for over a decade. He now stood in opposition to colonial society, a shift which reflected a more fundamental theological change. He once saw the Indies as a place to become “rich and prosperous.” The sacraments and the example of the Dominicans pushed Las Casas to a higher calling, to see the full extent of the Christian call, the obligation “to act charitably.” With this statement, Las Casas crossed the great

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387 Ibid., 211.
388 Ibid.
theological divide encountered in Chapter 2. The Dominicans, in the context of great religious intensity, concluded that Christian charity, the duty to love one’s neighbor as oneself, required the rejection of conquest and the *encomienda*. King Ferdinand countered that the Dominican position was incorrect due to “excessive charity.” For Ferdinand, Indian submission to Spanish political authority would be received with charity. Las Casas had once received Indian vassals with charity; he now realized that charity required the rejection of lordship and vassalage.

Crossing the theological divide, however, left Las Casas in uncharted territory. Over the coming years, Las Casas painfully discovered that pious religious sentiments of Christian charity was one thing; the daunting challenge of embodying an alternative to the powerful conquest and *encomienda* cycle was quite another. Some Dominicans arrived in Cuba to help him preach, but to no avail. So Las Casas returned to Spain to lobby the Crown for reform, gaining appointment to the royal position of “Protector of the Indians,” which paid 100 gold pesos a year. His agitations inspired a top down reform of the existing colonies with a commission led by Hieronymite friars, intending to turn Indians into tribute paying free royal vassals. Colonist resistance, the smallpox epidemic of 1517 which devastated the Indian population, and the friars’ realization of the limitations of royal power in the Indies led to rather minimal results. He also

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389 They ended up taking a type of middle road, removing Indians from absentee officials in Spain, conducted an investigation, and tried to see that they Indians were treated well. In the end they free one Indian. There may have had some intention of setting up the towns, but an epidemic rips through the island all but exterminating the Indian population in 1517. From early on the commission wants to leave the undesirable position, and finally does. While he is waiting for him to arrive he meets Montesino’s brother also a Dominican. He had become interested in the “Indian question,” when he “was told one day by an old-time Indies councilor that the American natives were incapable of receiving the faith; Fray Reginaldo challenged this, and wrote to consult the celebrated Fray Juan Hurtado, then prior of San Esteban in Salamanca.” It ends up getting debated by a group of thirteen University theologians, arriving at “four or five authorized conclusions, the last of which was that those who maintained such an opinion should be
attempted to ease the need for Indian labor by promoting subsidized peasant emigration to the Indies. The second plan also fell through, which Las Casas attributed in part to complaints of Castilian lords angered at the potential disruption to the feudal economy.\textsuperscript{390}

With the colonies resistant to reform and emigration unfeasible, Las Casas turned to unconquered Indian populations.\textsuperscript{391} Perhaps he could get to the Indians before the companies and \textit{encomiendas}, evangelizing them while insulating them from Spanish violence. But in order to receive a royal land grant that excluded other Spaniards, Las Casas realized, it must produce revenue. He resurrected the Portuguese \textit{factoría} model envisioned by Columbus, whereby ten fortresses would be constructed along the northern coast of South America. Spanish employees would trade with free tribute paying Indian vassals. It would be costly - approximately 15,000 ducats – but potentially rewarding, he argued, perhaps a 30,000 \textit{castellanos} return on 500 ducats worth of goods.\textsuperscript{392}

Evangelization would accompany trade through the activity of the friars and the example of the Spanish employees.\textsuperscript{393}

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\textsuperscript{390} Even so as many as 200 peasants travel to the Indies with Berrio, some dying, other ill and destitute. Abandoned in 1519. Wagner with Parish, \textit{The Life and Writings of Bartolome de las Casas} (Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 1967), 36.

\textsuperscript{391} De Córdoba, the Dominican prior discussed in chapter 2, sent him a letter asking to for a land grant on the northern coast of South America which barred Spanish activity. De Córdoba hoped that the land would serve as a haven for Indians from the nearby slave raiding and for missionary work. When Las Casas showed the letter the Council of the Indies, the Bishop of Burgos laughed at the idea of granting land that would return no profit for the Crown. This point should not be missed; there was no land in the Americas that was not an economic resource, thus every Spanish activity should be ordered to that end. Ibid., 45.

\textsuperscript{392} Colonists would receive tax breaks and exemptions from monopolies, invested with a new type of \textit{hidalgo} status, a newly created knighthood, and perhaps even absolution in the case of death, something like a peaceful crusade. Crown paid no expenses, only incentives in the form of tax breaks on projected earnings. Ibid., 47.

\textsuperscript{393} Las Casas obtained a significantly reduced grant; instead of 1,000 leagues, 260 without the main gold producing areas. It took a year long fight. Enemies of the plan asked for the same grant, promising double the return. They also bring up 30 charges against Las Casas, who is forced to defend himself. Ibid., 48.
Unfortunately for Las Casas, the *factoría*-mission met the same end as Columbus’ earlier attempt. Spanish depredations and slave raiding along the coast embittered the Indian population, which retreated inland and eventually attacked the monastery. Despite Las Casas’ opposition, colonial authorities organized a punitive expedition and many of the would-be *factoría* employees joined other Spanish expeditions before even reaching the Venezuelan coast. In the end, Indians destroyed the settlement, killing numerous Spaniards in the process, including Juan Garces, the repentant conquistador turned Dominican lay brother.394

Las Casas had left the mission shortly before the final attack, sailing for Santo Domingo to seek the help of the *audiencia*. His boat overshot Santo Domingo and unfavorable currents prevented it from sailing back. Las Casas disembarked on the west end of Hispaniola and walked back to the capital. On the way, he received news of the tragedy from some travelers. Las Casas had many lonely miles to reflect on the embarrassing failure of his company and Cumana “*entrada*.” It was, in effect, the culmination of seven years of zealous yet painful anti-colonial floundering since his 1514 conversion.

Las Casas had realized the need for an alternative for the decentralized colonial expansion, but up to this point, the obstacles to bucking the slash and burn Spanish system were too great. Royal agents, like those of Isabel in Chapter 2, lacked both the authority and the will to reform the existing colonies. Spanish lords resisted the loss of their rent paying vassals. Even those Spanish peasants that did journey to the New World had no desire to work as they did back in Iberia, exemplified by the complaint of Hernán Cortés, who allegedly stated that “‘I came here to get rich, not to till the soil like a

394 Wagner with Parish, *The Life and Writings of Bartolome de las Casas*, 60.
The factoría failed due to the same lack of valuable commodities but also because of its lack of military deterrence.

But the power of colonial expansion was not the only aspect of his failure. What did it mean “to act charitably” among a completely foreign people? Las Casas knew that it was not the encomienda. But reform of the colonies, colonization, profit-based trade? All had prioritized Spanish economic interest and all had failed. He concluded that his fate was divine punishment for the worldly nature of his project and his survival due only to God’s mercy for his good intentions. But good intentions were no substitute for charity.

Overall, his two insights – the religious rejection of the encomienda and the need to develop a viable economic alternative - were incomplete in their development. The Indies would not change so easily; Las Casas would.

2. The Path of Perfect Charity: Dominican Formation in Caritas

Only the light of the candles filled the silence of the small chapel. Las Casas lay prostrate on the ground, his hands extended in the form of a cross. After some time, the prior asked, “what do you seek?” to which Las Casas responded, “God’s mercy and yours.” Later, like a medieval knight pledging fealty to his new lord, Las Casas knelt before the seated prior with the Book of the Constitution of the Order placed on top of their clasped hands. In front of the community he promised obedience to God, blessed Mary, blessed Dominic, the prior, the rule of Augustine, and the Constitution of the Order.

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Friars. It was, in effect, a feudal vow to the highest lord and unlike the vow of a knight, the obedience Las Casas pledged bound him “until death.” When the ceremony ended, his new Dominican brothers greeted him, singing the antiphon “Ecce quam bonum et quam iucundum habitare fratres in unum.”

It was now 1523, over a year since the destruction of the factoría-mission. It took further reflection, but the defeated Las Casas decided to abandon reform work and seek the salvation of his soul, joining the Dominican community, his only remaining allies in the Indies. Before the small community, Las Casas donned the armor of Dominican knighthood – the humble brown cloak – and took the simple vows which in many ways summarize the means and ends of Dominican life, “to enter upon the path of perfect charity according to the form of apostolic life outlined by Saint Dominic.” Friars lived the apostolic life in community, seeking union with God and efficacious acts of the Divine virtue of charity through the chief means: “the vows, choral recitation of the Office, the common life with its monastic observances, and the assiduous study of sacred truth.”

During the novitiate, the year long trial period, Las Casas tested the rigors of Dominican life. He studied Dominican history, the theology of the vows, and lived the communal life of the friary. He had already been used to chastity as a faithful secular priest. Perhaps the vow of poverty required some adjustment for someone known for his entrepreneurial skill. In place of his previous life of frequent travel Las Casas now

397 Rite of Reception, 29-33. Admittedly, this section needs further research to clarify the exact nature of the ceremony during Las Casas’s time. According to Marin Wallace, O.P., the prostration and the formula of the profession go back to the 13th century. Email message to the author, May 21, 2013.
398 Rite of Reception, 22.
399 Wagner with Parish, The Life and Writings of Bartolome de las Casas, 70.
400 Rite of Reception, 22.
401 Ibid., 29-33.
followed a structured schedule of prayer, work, and study. He observed the rules of silence, said grace before and after meals, made prostrations and *venias*, all within the walls of the Dominican friary. Certainly the seven months of fasting required perseverance. Even feast days were austere, as Las Casas remembered an Easter meal that consisted of cabbage without oil and only salt and native peppers for seasoning.\textsuperscript{402}

The year quickly passed and after taking his solemn vows Las Casas was a full member of the community. He now entered the next step of the quest: four years of intensive study of scripture, patristics, and theology organized around the work of the greatest Dominican son, St. Thomas Aquinas. Little by little, Las Casas gradually penetrated what was in effect a great romance and code of chivalry of the Highest Lord, very different from the culture and economy which drove colonial life. This “Divine economy” had its source beyond time in the One God which had existed for all eternity. The One God, “totally complete self-communicating goodness,” contemporary Dominican theologian Aidan Nichols explains, is in fact Three persons expressed “through the interplay of three subsistent relationships.”\textsuperscript{403} God is complete, pure being, pure act, unchanging, and eternal. Yet God is ultimately incomprehensible to the finite human mind, a sacred mystery open to contemplation but closed to full explanation.

In the great Thomistic vision, all of life is a great epic of *exitus-reitus*, emergence and return from God. In the beginning of time began the *exitus* when God issued forth all of creation, both the unseen spirit world and the seen natural world. Divine Wisdom ordered all aspects of creation so that it resembled God in its structure. The worlds’ diversity was not accidental; rather, “God has elected to originate a

\textsuperscript{402} Las Casas, *The Only Way*, 199.
differentiated, radically plural world.”

Yet by nature created being is finite, depending on God for continued existence and seeking the *reditus* - to return to God - in the perfection every diverse activity seeks. Thus, rational beings were ordered to God by their tendency to seek consciously an end beyond themselves and their capabilities.

Yet while all created being is related to God by its very nature and groans for the *reditus* in its natural activity, it is limited by its finite nature and marred by the effects of sin. The healing of the mystery of sin and the elevation of finite nature to eternal perfection are outside the potential of created being so Being itself, the Word through which all was created and ordered in Divine Wisdom, became human while retaining divine nature. Through the incarnation, life, death and resurrection Christ brought “together the origin and the goal” of creation, healing humanity of sin and raising it to perfection. Thus, Christ became the *iter ad Deum* - the pathway to God – completing the quest of all created being and the key to the great drama of *exitus-reditus*.

Through *lumen naturale*, the understanding from natural senses, the human person rises to some knowledge of God through the order of Creation. More importantly, God descends to humanity in the mode of revelation, through *lumen fidei*, to bring us knowledge of and means to the *reditus*, the *iter ad Deum*, which is “the power of a new love which unites us with God and with each other.” Yet like the colonial economy, the Divine economy is de-centralized in that the cosmic victory of Christ requires the

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404 Nichols, *Discovering Aquinas*, 58.
405 Ibid., 49.
406 Ibid., 10.
407 Ibid., 11.
408 “The totality of the divine work finds its completion in that man, the last created creature, returns to his source by a kind of circle, when by the work of the Incarnation he finds himself united to the very source of [all] things.” From ibid., 12.
409 Ibid., 10-11.
personal response of each human being. The human person’s role in the great drama is to enter the new love of the Pathway to God, who has risen to heaven but remains on earth in the Church and the sacraments. The Christian cooperates in one’s role in this return, through the free gift of God’s grace mediated through the sacraments of the church, ascetical practices, liturgical worship, and ordered and charitable relationships with the community.

Where honor is the chief noble virtue, the chief virtue of the drama is charity, for at the center of Being, permeating and uniting all, is caritas. Through human consent God makes us not merely passive recipients or channels but active mediators of this love. “[I]n charity we love our friend’s world because we love him [God],” explains Nichols, “and that means loving ourselves and our fellows as ourselves and not only as we love ourselves but as he does.”410 To love in the reditus, as the iter ad Deum, “is to let the primary action of God spread out in us the divine being, the divine life”, which generates joy, peace, mercy, and beneficence.411 Thus, the goal of Dominican life is to learn to love as God loves.

So day after day, Las Casas studied Sacred Truth - the drama of the exitus-reditus – absorbing its chief virtue, caritas, into his being just as the sons of Spain soaked up the chivalry of the great romances of the age. Just as young knights practiced their martial skill and learned the ways of the noble court, Dominican study was more than merely intellectual. It joined the other chief means – vows and the practices of communal life - to form one seamless Dominican life, which culminates in the fourth chief means, the choral recitation of the Office and the liturgy of the Eucharist. Seven times a day the

410 Nichols, Discovering Aquinas, 109.
411 Ibid., 107.
community gathers in what could be called the “court” of the Dominican world, leaving the silence of study and work to enter into communal chant of the ancient prayers of Israel, the psalms. Unlike most people in an age without recorded sound, Dominicans lived in a world of eternal song. The music of the chant coupled with periods of silence repeated throughout the day and fluctuated through the liturgical year, just as creation moves through the seasons. The friars sit and stand, kneel and prostrate, call and respond with the daily rhythm of the sun and darkness on the journey to perfect Caritas.

And once a day the highest prayer and the path of perfect Caritas is celebrated in the Mass. There the Dominicans offer back to God the gifts He bestowed on them in bread and wine and Jesus Christ - Charity Itself – is revealed. There they see the Highest Lord, what words of the Dominican rite calls hōstiam puram, hōstiam sanctam, hōstiam immaculātam. 412 The eternal victim made real in the Mass was not merely a vision to be admired but a model to be imitated. All of Dominican life – the vows, monastic communal life, study, and choral recitation – plays an important role in its end, the immolation of the friar as a holocaust, “a victim to Almighty God.”

Months turned into years and Las Casas completed the required study. In 1526 the superior sent Las Casas to found a new house in Puerto Plata, only a short distance from La Isabella, the first town in the Indies. Las Casas took a dressed stone from the church of the abandoned outpost, now believed to be the home of headless caballero apparitions, and made it the cornerstone of the new Dominican house. 413

413 Parish, Introduction to The Only Way, 30. Kathleen Deagan and Jose Maria Cruxent, Columbus’s Outpost among the Tainos: Spain and America at La Isabela, 1493-1498 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 118, 72.
As the battles initiated by Roldán spread through the Indies, Las Casas entered into the heart of eternal romance in the little friary with its small garden. In the initial theatre of Spanish colonialism, now the vacant backwater of Indies, there was no where for Las Casas to hide from his failings, the sweat of the habit on hot summer days, from the annoyances of his companions, or the pursuing hound of God. The smallest acts gradually became dramatic events in the great *reditus*. Incense of the liturgical year mingled with the floral island smells Las Casas described so vividly. The chants of the liturgical hours joined the rhythm of the surf, and the glow of candles joined the stars and moon above in proclaiming the Glory of God. As he followed the rhythms of Augustine’s rule, the basis of Dominican life, he sought what Augustine pursued with such passion, giving his entire being as a burnt offering to God:

> Whisper words of truth in my heart, for you alone speak truth, and I will leave these unbelievers outside to fan the earth with their breath, stirring up the dust into their own eyes, while I withdraw to my secret cell and sing you hymns of love, groaning with grief that I cannot express as I journey on my pilgrimage. Yet I shall remember the heavenly Jerusalem and my heart shall be lifted up towards that holy place, Jerusalem my country, Jerusalem my mother. And I shall remember you her ruler, you who give her light… I shall not turn aside until I come to that abode of peace, Jerusalem my beloved mother where my spiritual harvest is laid, the fountainhead of all that I know for certain on this earth.

It has been too easy to dismiss these years as wasted, leaving even sympathetic commentators to see this as a “great mistake,” presumably in opposition to the questions of the Indies. But the reality was much more complex. In one sense, Las Casas’s entrance into Dominican life entailed a complete rejection of the “world” of the noble ethos which permeated the frontier and royal court, a culture which celebrated violence, pride, vanity, and sensuality. In another sense, Las Casas entered what Talal Asad and

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415 Wagner with Parish, *The Life and Writings of Bartolomé de Las Casas*, 70.
his commentators describe as an alternative world bent on transforming the human person through spiritual engagement. Slowly, the silence and song of the rich Dominican liturgical culture seduces the friar into a world that bridges heaven and earth, and constructs a new memory, the “memory of heaven”. The multifaceted techniques of the liturgy and monasticism renewed desire into the likeness of God, the true self, so that “desire could flow charitably.”

So while Las Casas remembered that to all outward appearances he slept, his Dominican years can just as easily be seen as advanced anti-colonial study in caritas, as every aspect of its formation – caritas, immolation, obedience, poverty, nonviolence - was opposite to the culture of honor and economic motivation of the decentralized expansion. Dominican life had already taken Juan Garces, the fugitive conquistador from Chapter 2, and turned him into a mission-field martyr on the northern coast of South America. Likewise, Las Casas’s monastic journey was the undoing of any remnants of the culture of honor that permeated Iberian culture and especially the American frontier, replacing it with the “memory of heaven” - the caritas that is God and the caritas that according to King Ferdinand was the source of the original Dominican resistance to the colonial system.

It should come as no surprise, then, that as the years passed, Las Casas increasingly returned to the conquest/encomienda cycle described in Chapter 2. He began to write letters to the Crown in the late 1520s and preached against colonists.

416 Overall, the Dominican formation parallels the 12th Century Cistercian formation described by Talal Asad in Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).
417 Daniel M. Bell, Liberation Theology After the End of History: The Refusal to Cease Suffering (New York: Routledge, 2001), 96 (93-6).
418 In 1527 he started his Historia de las Indias. Parish credits him with initiating the 1529 junta discussed in the previous chapter with memorials brought to court by two Dominicans. In 1531 he wrote a
leaving for the conquest of Peru. In 1533 the Audiencia accused Las Casas of withholding deathbed viaticum from an encomendero. He was ordered back to the Dominican mother house in Santo Domingo to be silenced from preaching for two years. Unbeknownst to the colonial officials and Las Casas alike, the events occurring in Santo Domingo would hone his perception of political and economic alternatives to the colonial expansion.

3. “War with Indians Educated and Raised Among Us:” Enrique’s Revolt

In 1533 Santo Domingo was a shrinking colonial outpost. The conquests of Mexico and the declining economy left the island with only 4,000 Spaniards, all but 1,000 in Santo Domingo. News of Peru most likely further reduced this number. The Indian population numbered in the mere thousands while the growing African population had reached an estimated 20,000.

Many rebel groups had taken advantage of the growing power vacuum. The Indian Ciguayo, with only ten or twelve supporters, had terrorized the island from his mountain base on the northeastern coast. A mestizo lead 20 Indians on la punta del Tiberon and the cacique Tamayo operated a brazen offensive campaign in the northern

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letter to the Council detailing the devastated condition of the Indians, still pushing a Cumana-style colonization, and replacement of Indian servitude with African slaves. His stated motives were the suffering of the Indians and “the charity of Jesus Christ, which knows no measure nor seeks any rest while on this pilgrimage.” Parish, Introduction to The Only Way, 30; from Gutiérrez, Las Casas, 55.


He was eventually found by a Spanish war party, charging to his death after a serious lance wound at the hands of two Spaniards. Las Casas, History of the Indies, 253.

Altman, “The Revolt of Enriquillo,” 609 n.61.
mountains of modern day Haiti. Africans also exploited Spanish vulnerability, such as
the twenty Wolof slaves who formed a militia and besieged Azua in 1522. But the
biggest threat to the fragmented colony was an almost fifteen year rebellion which cost
the colony tens of thousands of pesos, headed by a leader that one chronicler compared to
Alexander the Great.

Enrique was born around 1500 into the Taino nobility from the area of Xaragua,
the grand-nephew of the Xaraguan Queen Anacaona. He was educated at the
Franciscan monastery in the Spanish town of Vera Paz which grew up on its old capital.
As a result Enrique spoke Spanish well, was literate, and a devout Christian. His
baptismal name also proclaimed high status as Enrique was “closely associated with
Spanish nobility.” After finishing his education he returned to his home village of
Baoruco and was married in the church to his cousin, also of noble descent. He
apparently owned a mare, which Ida Altman judges to indicate “considerable prestige and
favor.” The 1514 redistribution of encomiendas assigned Enrique and his people, now
less than 100, to a Spaniard in San Juan de la Maguana.

In 1519, as the smallpox epidemic devastated the remaining Indians and Cortes
began his rebellion in Mexico, Enrique and 30-40 Indians fled servitude. According to
Las Casas, encomendero abuse provoked the flight. The encomendero first took his mare
and then raped his wife. Enrique protested through the proper legal channels, only to

424 80 to 100 thousand castellanos according to Las Casas, 24-29 thousand pesos de oro by another
estimate. Bartolomé de las Casas, Indian Freedom: the Cause of Bartolomé de las Casas, 1484-1566: a
Reader, translations and notes by Francis Patrick Sullivan (Kansas City, MO: Sheed & Ward, 1995), 194;
Altman, “The Revolt of Enriquillo,” 599 n. 34; Parish, Introduction to The Only Way, 33.
426 Ibid., 590.
427 Ibid., 595 n.19.
428 Ibid., 595.
429 To the central valley where Anacaona had lived as wife to the Cacique Caonoba. Ibid., 594.
earn a beating and imprisonment. Fed up, he and his followers made their escape during a rotation in the labor shifts, repulsing the armed group sent to retrieve them with only rocks, bows and arrows, and other quickly improvised weapons, killing two or three Spaniards.\footnote{Las Casas, \textit{History of the Indies}, 248.}

The group of Indian rebels lived semi-nomadically in the remote mountains of Bahoruco, surviving off the land, eating spiders, crayfish, snakes, fish, and roots.\footnote{Las Casas, \textit{Indian Freedom}, 194, 599.} Eventually they cultivated agricultural plots strewn throughout the mountains. Spanish imports to the island became a main source of sustenance as the rebels raised chickens, cutting their tongues out to silence their calls. They used hunting dogs to hunt the wild pigs that had taken over the island, perhaps poaching from the now vast cattle herds.\footnote{A Spaniard commenting on African rebels in 1543 summarized the ecological terrain available to the rebels: “The island is large and full of cows, wild hogs and other staples” those in revolt “have security and food.” In July 1543 Melchor de Castro, notary for the mine, From Altman, “The Revolt of Enriquillo,” 611.}

They moved between scattered villages of grass huts. A later visitor described Enrique’s pueblo as “so rugged and hidden” that “it was almost impossible to find and that near it there are huge basins, something like caves, for him and his people to hide if they are found.”\footnote{From ibid., 606.}

The rebellion lasted for four years and became war in 1523. As Las Casas took his solemn vows, Enrique’s people interrupted the flow of Spanish bullion. Some of Enrique’s followers reportedly attacked a shipment from the mainland, killing four men and seizing the gold. The town of Vera Paz organized an expedition and authorized the participants to enslave the captives and keep a percentage of any gold they recovered.
Once again Enrique’s forces prevailed, killing the captain and eight other men, scattering the rest.\footnote{434 Altman, “The Revolt of Enriquillo,” 598. This battle may be the same as one recorded by Las Casas. Enrique’s band planned to burn out seventy-two fleeing Spaniards that had taken refuge in a cave. Enrique disarmed the Spaniards and let them go, gaining many swords and other weapons. One of the survivors entered the Dominican monastery to fulfill a vow he made if he escaped from dire situation and told Las Casas of the event. Las Casas, \textit{History of the Indies}, 250.}

Enrique’s success should not come as a surprise as Spanish patrols labored under a number of disadvantages. They had to carry virtually all their supplies, including water, during the weeks and even months spent searching. Furthermore, the \textit{audiencia} believed that Enrique received intelligence from contacts in the city and countryside.\footnote{435 Altman, “The Revolt of Enriquillo,” 609.} Neither could the campaign harness the energy of a religious campaign. Despite rejecting Castilian sovereignty, Enrique remained a practicing Catholic, reportedly saying the rosary as he guarded his camp at night. If anything, Enrique faith and monastic education aided the rebellion, something recognized by President Funleal, who wrote in 1529 that the war was not like in New Spain or Cuba, “because here it is war with Indians educated and raised among us, and they know our forces and customs and further use armor and have swords and lances.”\footnote{436 From ibid., 601.}

Over time, Enrique’s fame drew other Indian and even African runaways and mestizos. Perhaps some of the thousands of Indians sent to Hispaniola as slaves over the last decades - Lucayos, Mexicans, and Central Americans – found their way into Enrique’s group. Enrique sent an ambassador to the north side of the island and persuaded the rebel Tamayo to join forces and over the years, his forces of 100 grew to
about 300 men.\textsuperscript{437} The \textit{audiencia} feared that continued success could create a domino effect and lead to the takeover the island.\textsuperscript{438}

In 1533, while Las Casas traveled back to Santo Domingo for his punishment, an expedition finally tracked Enrique down in 1533 after two and a half months wandering the empty mountains. With the help of an Indian who was said to have fled from Enrique’s camp, they gained an audience with Enrique and his retinue of eighty heavily armed Indians. The Spaniards offered him the title of don, full pardon, and peace for the return of any new Indians or Africans that showed up to his camp. Another group was sent with gifts worth 120 pesos, including a bell and religious images which Enrique had requested for the rebels’ church. Negotiations continued for months as the authorities attempted to gain Enrique’s trust, prohibiting unauthorized visits under the pain of execution.\textsuperscript{439}

In circumstances that are far from clear, Las Casas heard of the rebellion during his punishment and decided to find Enrique. Las Casas and another Dominican journeyed to Bahoruco, unarmed and unknown to the authorities. “I was with him a month,” Las Casas recounted, “and confessed him and his wife and all his captains, and relieved them of all their very just fears.”\textsuperscript{440} Las Casas assured Enrique that the colonial government acted in good faith and “confirmed him in the service of the Emperor.” The diplomatic expedition also turned into a type of mission and he baptized babies, married couples, and said mass.\textsuperscript{441}

\textsuperscript{437} Altman, “The Revolt of Enriquillo,” 597-8.
\textsuperscript{438} Ibid., 604.
\textsuperscript{439} With four shirts for an African. Ibid., 604-7.
\textsuperscript{440} Wagner with Parish, \textit{The Life and Writings of Bartolome de las Casas}, 77. This was not the first time a Spaniard had entered his village. Romero had gone for nine days to deliver more gifts and continue the Barrionuevo negotiations. See Altman, “The Revolt of Enriquillo,” 606.
\textsuperscript{441} Parish, Introduction to \textit{The Only Way}, 33.
Enrique’s band returned in June 1534, settling as a free and independent community, assisted with livestock and agricultural equipment.\textsuperscript{442} Las Casas made a second trip to see Enrique and brought him and an entourage of 20 men to Santo Domingo for three weeks. Enrique was honored with a public celebration in the same place that three decades ago his great-aunt Anacaono was hanged as a rebel to the Crown.\textsuperscript{443}

After the celebration, Las Casas returned to the Dominican house in Santo Domingo, where he no doubt had time to reflect on the last decade since his failure in Cumana. He had taken a feudal vow to serve the highest Lord and his perfect caritas. Scholastic formation revealed the mysteries of the universe and the immolation of Dominican life made him a new person. Silence and song, asceticism and liturgical discipline burned the vision of caritas into his very being, until there was nothing else but the vow to the one Lord and His one love.

Enrique’s rebellion unexpectedly interrupted Las Casas’s cloistered life and from the Dominican house in Puerto Plata, Las Casas retraced the journey of Roldán to the area of Xaragua. In the small mountain village, he brought the vision of caritas - the sacrifice of the Mass - to the Indian refugees. Perhaps in the firelight they told stories of the old days before conquests and encomiendas to the young children and Dominican friar. For fleeting moments the tragedies of the last 40 years disappeared. The month

\textsuperscript{442} Altman, “The Revolt of Enriquillo,” 602.
\textsuperscript{443} Back in the negotiations Enrique had offered to “travel all the sierras of the island and collect Indians and blacks in rebellion and would send them to the pueblos to which they belonged.” Ibid., 606. He reiterated the offer after settlement, offering two captains as aguaciles against his former captain Tamayo (608). But it would not be. The next year he confessed and received the sacraments for the last time, and died in his new village. Parish, Introduction from The Only Way, 34. According to Oviedo, the audiencia was upset with Las Casas for going without permission, but happy about the results.
must have burned into Las Casas’s being just as his Dominican formation. It must have felt like redemption for his failure in Cumana.

As Las Casas returned to the rhythm of Dominican life, the two worlds of the last decade – the Dominican house and Enrique’s village – merged into one answer to the question that he carried from the wreckage of Cumana: the obligation to act charitably to the Indians. In the candle glow of the Hispaniolan night, he sat down at his desk and began to write.

4. “Full of the Taste of Charity:” *The Only Way*

The result of Las Casas’s labor was, according to Helen Rand Parish, the first draft of what was perhaps his most important theological work. The topic of the work is plainly stated in the title: *The Only Way to Draw All People to a Living Faith.*

The argument inhabits the rich Thomistic theological vision of the *exitus-reditus.* For Las Casas, “in creation, there is a certain circularity: goodness going out, goodness coming back.” Citing Wisdom 8:1, Divine Wisdom “reaches the whole of creation with its power” ordering everything with a certain perfection: ascribing each creature with proper ends, leading them to fulfill their natural purposes, and giving them the inner potentialities to act themselves. Thus, creation has an inner tendency towards the good, like “the way gravity affects a stone.” Divine Wisdom is reflected in creatures: “It is the goodness in God from which all natures flow…so every creature has in it a power to want goodness due to the imprint of its Creator upon it.” Thus “we call something good

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444 I use Helen Rand Parish’s reconstructed text.
445 All the quotations in this paragraph are taken from Las Casas, *The Only Way,* 69.
and virtuous when it acts harmoniously with itself, and thus with the goal set for it by God, in God’s own way.” For the human person, the ultimate good is the return to God.

By definition, for Las Casas, all of creation shares in the Wisdom of God by nature. If all of created being – in all its obvious diversity – shares in a unitary nature, the same holds for the diversity of peoples. The ultimate good is the return to God and thus no nation or race is not touched by the “free gift of grace”; some, whether few or many, will be taken to the heavenly Jerusalem. “It was due to the will and work of Christ, the head of the Church,” Las Casas explained, “that God’s chosen should be called, should be culled from every race, every tribe, every language, every corner of the world.” As a result, “[w]e must hold this to be true also of our Indian nations. [They are called as we.]....” The consequence, implicit in The Only Way, is that Indians are called to share in the sacramental economy of grace. The sacraments bind the human person to the “pathway to God,” elevated and repaired to live the higher supernatural life of caritas on its pilgrimage to the heavenly Jerusalem.

Thus, the exitus-reeditus determined what Indians are: fully human and called to the grace of Christ on the pilgrimage to the Heavenly Jerusalem. At the same time, Indians’ participation in nature entails certain “rights.” Las Casas began by arguing that Indians, as “faraway non-hostile pagans,” have legitimate dominion:

It is clear as clear can be that the nations of our Indies fall into [a special category of infidels]. They have and hold their realms, their lands, by natural law and by the law of nations. They owe allegiance to no one higher than themselves, outside themselves, neither de jure nor de facto. We find them in possession of their countries, with plenty of princes over plenty of principalities having great numbers of people, people who serve and obey their lords and masters, while the latter exercise full authority over their people without hindrance....

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446 Las Casas, *The Only Way*, 63.
448 Las Casas, *The Only Way*, 66.
The crucial point is that Indian polities have legitimate political dominion, integral to the nature of created being and irregardless of faith. Consequently, “no one would have the legitimate right to seize their power, or their realms.” Furthermore, no one “in their right mind” relinquishes dominion without coercion. In order for Spain to obtain dominion over Indian polities “[t]here would have to be a war.”

Then what of the wars of conquest in the Indies? Las Casas argued that they are not licit, citing Cajetan’s commentary on the *Summa*, written in 1517-8, which Gustavo Gutiérrez suggests may have been written in response to the Indian question. “I know of no law abrogating their temporal possessions. No king, no emperor, not the Roman Church itself, can make war on them for the purpose of occupying their territory or subjecting them to temporal rule. There is not,” Cajetan declared unequivocally, “just cause for such a war.”

Looking at the Indies from the perspective of the friary, then, Las Casas sees fully human Indians called to conversion inhabiting legitimate polities. Spaniards may not legitimately wage wars of conquest in the Indies. What, then, are they called to do? For Las Casas, the Spaniards must abide by the unique demand of Christian faith. It is “necessary to obey the law of Christ completely.” Do good - not just avoid evil – in the form of Christ which is “full of the taste of charity.” Las Casas’s emphasis on the higher duty of Christian faith will be more fully articulated with feudal imagery in a later work. “[T]he baptized person is considered to be somewhat like a feudal subject and

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450 Ibid., 117.
451 From ibid., 67.  “The reason: Jesus Christ, the King of Kings (to whom all power is given in heaven and on earth) did not send armed soldiery to take possession of the earth but holy men, preachers, sent sheep among wolves.” Gutiérrez, *Las Casas*, 516 n. 10.
452 Las Casas, *The Only Way*, 90.
453 Quotation from ibid., first part of sentence 138.
vassal of Christ because of the vow and the promise he makes in baptism…” Like a feudal lord, Christ “acquires a new right of dominion over” the baptized, who is required to following a higher code of conduct.\textsuperscript{454} Thus, morality is not merely inherited through nature, but transformed by the free gift of grace, ordered to the higher calling of charity.

Once again, the principle is based on the \textit{exitus-reditus}. The means of conversion, like every harmonious action of created being, must be in continuity with its end and the character of the human person. The end of conversion is ultimately \textit{caritas}. By nature the human person is a rational creature and the human mind the root of freedom; consequently, the missionary must appeal to its inner action.\textsuperscript{455} Christ, who overflowed with charity, established that rational persuasion to win the mind and gentleness to win the will be the one method to bring people into the faith.\textsuperscript{456} “Christ knew the human condition. So He fashioned a way of attracting people to Himself [and] to a moral life,” Las Casas explained, a way that “was respectful, attractive, altruistic, germane to human kind.”\textsuperscript{457}

Las Casas cited Christ instruction’s to the Apostles as the practical demonstration of His method. He sent the apostles to preach repentance and the Kingdom of Heaven to Israel. The apostles had to explain and give reasons how this is possible, in essence giving a map and directions to arrive at the destination.\textsuperscript{458} As the mind is won with persuasion, the will must be won simultaneously by gentleness. Christ commanded the

\textsuperscript{454} Bartolomé de las Casas, \textit{In Defense of the Indians}, translated and edited by Stafford Poole, C.M. (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois Press, 1992), 57
\textsuperscript{455} Las Casas, \textit{The Only Way}, 120.
\textsuperscript{456} Ibid., 69.
\textsuperscript{457} Quote continues: “He ordered that this be the way people should come under His gentle rule of their free will.” Ibid., 96. 94, 95.
\textsuperscript{458} Ibid., 73.
apostles to greet with “peace to this house!” and give the gifts of healing freely. 459 If rejected, the apostles were not to answer with fire from heaven but merely depart, reserving judgment for Christ himself. 460

After his resurrection, Christ re-iterated the form and sent the apostles into the whole world. 461 According to Las Casas, the apostles kept the form and conquered the world, which the Church Fathers confirmed and continued. 462 Las Casas used St. John Chrysostom to explain that the Apostles were stripped of the world, cloaked with Christ, and “walked the broad world as sheep through a wolf-pack….They were not savaged by those beasts. The wolves were made over, meek as lambs.” 463

Because of the form fashioned by Christ and passed on through apostolic witness, Las Casas argued that a missionary must have certain essential characteristics. Non-Christians must see that preachers want no power over them or desire their wealth. Preachers should be modest and respectful, ordered to charity, and live blameless, virtuous lives. 464 Religious who use torture are guilty of grave wrong and above all, missionaries cannot use war as it is the exact opposite of the method decreed by Christ to spread the Faith. 465 Moreover, “[m]indless war is forbidden by the natural law,” the ever

459 “All greetings are prayers for blessings, but more are enveloped in this particular one because peace is the tranquility of order, as Augustine says…Where the tranquility of order prevails, everyone is happy since nothing upsets the order…Peace is a supreme good….Peace is pure salvation.” Las Casas, The Only Way, 74.
460 Ibid., 77-8.
461 With a triple duty: to preach the faith, to nourish with the sacraments, and to teach believers to live a moral life. Ibid., 82.
462 Ibid., 84.
463 From ibid., 90-1. Fishermen who went to the chaos of the world and “gave it order, not by rattling shields, by bending bows, by letting arrows fly, by passing bribes, not by rhetoric.”
464 Ibid., 103-7.
465 Ibid., 151.
faithful Thomist explained, “because it contradicts the very way Divine Wisdom deals with all creation.”

Thus, for Las Casas, the dominion of Christ established over the Christian in the vow of baptism led to two simultaneous requirements. On the one hand, political dominion of the Indians was legitimate and irrevocable. On the other, Spanish presence in the Indies must be only of a nonviolent, persuasive, missionary nature. As a result, the Christian must enter the non-Christian Indian polity and infuse it with the Christian message, not replace it. Overall, the two themes of theological vision of the *The Only Way* – a high Christology and the high demands of the feudal bond of baptism – parallel and counter the noble ethos of old and new world feudal culture which drove the decentralized expansion.

At some point in 1534, Las Casas put down his pen and blew out his desk candle. Only the glow of the Caribbean moon lit the room. Outside the night insects of Hispaniola hummed in chorus with the breeze-stirred foliage as Las Casas contemplated what he had written. *The Only Way* was still a work in progress and he had not yet honed the implications of his emerging theology with the scholastic precision that he would later find. But he had the long-sought answer to his question: go to the Indians with the nonviolent *caritas* of Christ.

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466 Las Casas, *The Only Way*, 158.
467 They can also be seen as an elaboration of the vow Las Casas took in 1522 “to enter upon the path of perfect charity according to the form of apostolic life outlined by Saint Dominic, as gospel men who follow the footsteps of the Saviour.” *Rite of Reception*, 22. These themes flow from the biblical, patristic, and Thomistic sources, the very areas of study that made up Las Casas’s Dominican formation.
5. Into the Frontier

Like a knight emerging from a decade long vigil before the altar, Las Casas was ready return to the battles of the world. It was not a rejection of his cloistered life but the natural course of the Dominican charism, exemplified by their motto *Contemplata aliis Tradere*, “[t]o hand on to others the fruits of our contemplation.” In 1534 he and a group of Dominicans left for the missions, drawn away by the golden dreams of Peru that had already siphoned off much of the Hispaniolan population.

But the seas would not cooperate. Having crossed the isthmus of Panama, the winds died in the Pacific leaving the voyage becalmed. The ship bobbed in the sweltering heat as the sun rose and set with no change. Only after fifty days the winds returned, bringing the Dominicans to Nicaragua after two and a half months at sea. Las Casas made it back to Mexico City where he was named vicar of the Dominican province of Guatemala. He returned to Nicaragua where he began mission work, only to find Central America riddled with slaving expeditions. He confronted the colonists and governor over the raiding, only to be pulled off the pulpit while preaching.

An ecclesial junta was called so once again Las Casas made the difficult journey to Mexico City in 1536. The junta took up many questions of Church administration including the question of slavery. According to Parish, looming behind much of the conference is the influence of Las Casas.\(^468\) The junta concluded with three *actas*: proper instruction for Indian baptism, the condemnation of Indian slavery, and on the true

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missionary method based on Las Casas’s *The Only Way*. The junta entrusted the *actas* to the Dominican Bernardino de Minaya, who began the long journey to Rome.  

After the junta in Mexico City, Las Casas and his Dominican followers attempted to implement *The Only Way* on a local level. They hoped to start a mission among unconquered Indian peoples. The Indian hierarchy would retain its pre-contact status and missionaries would preach the gospel with no political or military support. Conversion would also entail moderate recognition of Castilian sovereignty through the payment of tribute. Indians would also be gathered in larger towns called reductions to facilitate religious life and private Spaniards would be barred from any economic or political involvement. At the same time, the culture of the mission would be based on the retention of *cacique* status and Christianized native law.

The only remaining unconquered Indians were on the lawless periphery of the Spanish empire. Las Casas and the Dominicans journeyed back to Central America, the dense Indian population of central Mexico receding and with it Spanish production and control. *Encomiendas* became smaller and less valuable and Spanish towns smaller and farther apart, until they arrived in the small Spanish outpost Santiago de Guatemala in the summer of 1536. From Santiago, they looked to the Mayan peoples of Tuzulutlán, the Land of War.

The rugged mountain territory of Tuzulutlán was aptly named. Aztec conquests had floundered long before they reached the Mayan highlands and the Spaniards faired

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470 This approach was not entirely new as a group of Franciscans lead by Testera attempted a similar experiment in the Yucatan from 1534. Benno M. Biermann, “Bartolomé de Las Casas and Verapaz,” in *Bartolomé de Las Casas in History: Toward an Understanding of the Man and his Work*, edited by Juan Friede and Benjamin Keen (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1971), 459.
471 Ibid., 474.
only slightly better. Three attempts to conquer Tuzulutlán had all failed. As a result, pockets of independent Mayan groups sprinkled the mountains, a census from twenty five years later listing 7,000 families in 15 different villages. But although the Spaniards could not conquer Tuzulutlán, they still harvested it, making the highlands prime slaving lands. It was there, in the heart of the slaving territory, that Las Casas and his Dominican contingent started their mission. Like El Cid and Roldán before him, Las Casas took his rebellion to the edge of Spanish control. But unlike the Spanish rebels, we will see in the next chapter how Las Casas’s rebellion migrated to the heart of Christendom.

**Conclusion**

We are now in a position to look back at the developments in this chapter as a whole and compare it to Chapter three. Overall, this chapter has demonstrated a reverse movement from Chapter three. Where in the previous chapter the entrada/encomienda cycle evolved and the Franciscans adapted to its formation, Las Casas migrated from the entrada/encomienda cycle to an alternative. Where the Franciscans made a rather practical concession to the encomienda, religious conversion was the catalyst for Las Casas’s shift. At the same time, his conversion prompted a journey much like Roldán: away from official Spanish activity to unsubjugated Indian polities. In the next chapters, we will see ensuing struggle between the two rebellions: Roldán and the colonial system it spawned, and Las Casas’s nonviolent mission.

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CHAPTER 5: CONTEMPLATA ALIIS TRADERE

“My father it is not thus we must act against this generation of pride. The enemies of the truth must be convinced by the example of humility and patience rather than by pomp and grandeur of worldly show. Let us arm ourselves with prayer and humility, and so let us go barefooted against these goliaths.”

St. Dominic Guzman.\(^{473}\)

1. To Reach “the Inaccessible and Invisible Supreme Good:”
   Pope Paul III and the Indies

Bernadino de Minaya finally arrived in Rome in early 1537. The young Dominican joined the thousands of pilgrims and travelers that arrived in the heart of Christendom every year, seeking spiritual rewards, the patronage of the Papal court, or the more base pleasures of its pagan legacy. In the days before Lent, crowds pulsed in the Roman streets, reveling in the many spectacles of the carnival: horse races, risqué pageants, bull fights, even processions made up of “elaborate floats laden with scenes from classical mythology, so massive they had to be drawn by teams of buffalo.”\(^{474}\) The carnival grew in extravagance every year but was probably not too different from one that Las Casas remembered from his visit in 1507: "Young men, their private parts covered only by skins, pinched everyone they encountered,” Las Casas recorded. “The lupercalia [the name of the Roman festival] priests, carrying belts and lashes made from the goats


they sacrificed, went running naked through the city, lashing and wounding all the women they encountered, and the very same women boldly sought the priests, hoping the lashes would help get them pregnant.”

Minaya had completed the long journey to Rome from Mexico City, the former capital of the old Aztec empire. Ironically, Spanish war parties had destroyed both; Spanish conquistadors and their Indian allies destroyed the Aztec city in 1521 and only six years later, the forces of the Charles V - Holy Roman Emperor and king of Castile - sacked Rome. His army of Germans and Spanish soldiers defeated France further up the Italian peninsula, but Charles had no money to pay them. Hungry and unpaid, they headed to Rome. The Spanish troops, some of whom had been in the New World, led the attack and were the first to breach the walls. Once inside Rome, mass chaos ensued.

“Everywhere there was the most ruthless devastation, everywhere rapine and murder,” wrote the famous historian Ludwig Von Pastor. “The air re-echoed to the wailings of women, the plaintive cries of children, the barking of dogs, the neighing of chargers, the clash of arms, and the crash of timber from burning houses.”

The Germans initially amused themselves with desecrating churches but quickly learned from their more efficient Spanish counterparts, who took hostages which they tortured for high ransoms. “Many were suspended by their arms for hours at a time; others were led around by ropes tied to their testicles…,” the Italian chronicler Luigi Guicciardini testified. “A very cruel and effective torture was to pull out their back teeth. Some were made to eat their own ears, or nose, or testicles roasted….” Some details were

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476 Ludwig Von Pastor, History of the Popes: From the Close of the Middle Ages, Volume 9 (J. Hodges, 1910), 399, G xiii.
so horrible, according to Guicciardini, that they “affect me too strongly even to think of them, let alone to describe them in detail.”

For eight days the troops raged through the streets of Rome. Troops raped women indiscriminately and turned churches and holy places into brothels and stables. Ethnicity meant nothing; not even the Spanish and German were treated better. Even Pope Clement VII fell victim to the raiders and paid 400,000 ducats in ransom. Only the banks were respected as they paid out the ransoms. In the end, over 4,000 people were killed and the population was cut in half: Artists fled the devastated city and building ceased.

Only now, in 1537, was the Eternal City returning to normal. Perhaps Minaya contemplated the recent parallels between Tenochtitlan and Rome as he made his way through the dramatic Renaissance projects. It is more likely, though, that he focused his attention on his mission. The Mexican ecclesial junta had sent him to Rome to find papal support for their three conclusions: proper instruction for Indian baptism, the condemnation of Indian slavery, and on the true missionary method described by Las Casas in *The Only Way*.

It is difficult to know what Minaya expected from the pope. The man that he sought, Pope Paul III (1534-1549), was a renaissance man with all the ingredients for a corrupt papacy. A Roman nobleman and a “product of old corruption,” Paul initially followed the example of his sister’s lover, the infamous Pope Alexander VI. As a cardinal Paul kept a mistress, had four children, and kept one of the grandest palaces in

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479 Ibid., 161.
Rome. Later as pope, he gave parts of the Papal States to his sons, cardinalates to two
grandsons and nephews, and even revived the Roman carnival, dormant since the sack of
1527.  

But despite Paul’s noble indulgences, he also moved to reform. He took the Fifth
Lateran Council seriously, ended his relationship with his mistress in 1513, and in 1519
“took the highly unusual step of seeking ordination to the priesthood.” Upon election
to the papal throne Paul promoted reform minded people to the cardinalate, the most
important being Gasparo Contarini. The “devout Venetian layman” had experienced a
Luther-type conversion in 1510 and played a significant role in the Italian humanist
world. Contarini guided Paul to draw a circle of reformers to Rome, which eventually
became a Reform Commission.

Contarini’s Commission issued a report to the Pope on the roots of church
problems in March 1537. In it, Contarini pulled no punches. Eamon Duffy, a prominent
historian of the papacy, describes the report in detail: “In the bluntest of terms, it laid the
blame for the ills of the Church, including the outbreak of the Protestant Reformation,
squarely on the papacy, cardinals and hierarchy.” Furthermore, Duffy continues, the
report “listed the evils of the Church, from papal sales of spiritual privileges, curial
stockpiling of benefices, heretical or pagan teaching in universities, down to such matters
as the ignorance of country curates or the poor spiritual direction in convents of
women.”

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481 Ibid., 163.
482 Ibid., 164. *Consilium de Emendenda Ecclesia*. Contarini’s support of Ignatius of Loyola, who
arrived in Rome in 1538, helped smooth the way for the founding of the Jesuit order in 1540. Joseph F.
Not only did Paul cultivate a climate of reform, he matched it with an apparent openness to the questions of a rapidly expanding world. Three Ethiopian monks arrived in Rome about the same time as Minaya. They joined a group of Ethiopian monks who had lived in Rome since the 1480s at the chapel of St. Stephen. In 1539 Paul obtained a hostel behind St. Peter’s for the Ethiopian community. The Colegio Ethiops was born and under Paul’s patronage their leader, Tasfa Seyon, went on to print a Ge’ez New Testament in 1548.  

When Minaya finally obtained an audience with Paul, the pope responded to the tales of corruption in the Indies in the same fashion as he had to church corruption in Europe. Paul established a commission consisting of Cardinal Contarini and three other theologians to examine the request of the Mexican junta. Minaya could not have hoped for a better leader. In addition to being a dedicated reformer, Contarini was also well-versed in the events of the Indies, having served as the Venetian ambassador to the crown of Castile. In 1525 wrote a report to the senate of Venice summarizing the history of the Indies. Hispaniola was very populated when it was discovered by Columbus, Contarini stated, “a million souls and more.”

The poor humans who were not accustomed to such work are forced to excavate gold, so many have died from despair that it gave mothers reason to kill their poor children. Almost all have disappeared that way that there perhaps only seven thousand left in Hispaniola. Now they buy slaves from Africa and send them to the mines, many of

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484 Helen-Rand Parish and Harold E. Weidman, Las Casas en México: historia y obra desconocidas (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1992), 16. In 1529 he witnessed Cortes’s mission to Rome. Even more significant, he had served as the Venetian ambassador to Charles V, witnessing the arrival of the Cortes treasure, including a Mexican Indian’s demonstration of combat, capture of the enemy, and techniques of human sacrifice. Hugh Thomas, Conquest: Montezuma, Cortés, and the Fall of Old Mexico (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 575.
485 He described the land, Tenochtitlan, Cortes’s campaign, and how “después de muchas guerras y muchas falsas lisonjas, se hizo señor”. Translation: after much war and false flattery, Cortes made himself lord [of Mexico]. Parish and Weidman, Las Casas en México: historia y obra desconocidas, 293-4.
which, shortly after I left the court, had joined with some natives and fled to the mountains.  

Thus, Minaya and the Mexican junta he represented found a receptive audience: a leader with extensive knowledge of the Indies, zeal for reform, and the backing of a conscientious pope. Contarini’s commission examined Minaya’s documents and recommended reform for the church in the Indies, just as he had three months earlier for the church in Europe. In response, Paul issued a papal bull and two implementing briefs.  

The bull, *Sublimis Deus*, concerned the proper missionary method. It began with the same sweeping Thomistic vision as Las Casas’s *The Only Way*. Humanity was created “not only sharer in good as are other creatures” but with the potential to “reach and see face to face the inaccessible and invisible Supreme Good.” The Supreme Good – an end to which all humans are called - is only attainable through faith in Jesus Christ. 

Despite the universality of the call, *Sublimis Deus* explained, the enemy has found a new way, “unheard of before now,” to oppose the preaching of the word of God to all nations. The devil stirred up “some of his who, desiring to satisfy their own avarice” assert that Indians be reduced to servitude “like brute animals”. As vicar of Christ who seeks to bring all into the same flock, it is proclaimed that “the Indians are true men” and “have not been deprived or should not be deprived of their liberty or possessions. Rather,” the bull continued, “they are to be able to use and enjoy this liberty and this ownership of property freely and licitly, and are not to be reduced to slavery.” The bull

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486 The source of his information seems to have been fellow Italian Peter Martyr. Parish and Weidman, *Las Casas en México: historia y obra desconocidas*, 292.  
487 Ibid., 37.
concluded that “[t]hese same Indians and other peoples are to be invited to the said faith in Christ by preaching and the example of a good life.”

The parallels between *Sublimis Deus* and *The Only Way* are not difficult to see. Both conceptualize the world in terms of *exitus-reditus*, proclaim the full humanity of the Indians, their legitimate political dominion, and a nonviolent missionary method. In effect, the papacy approved Las Casas’s anti-colonial theology. Certainly, the immediate context in Rome – Paul’s openness to reform along with Contarini’s reforming zeal and knowledge of the Indies – influenced the reception of Las Casas’s theology. But it would be a mistake to see Paul’s approval as merely an outcome of accidental political conditions. Thomism was the language of the Church and the goals of the bulls were internal to that language. Paul, in other words, supported the conclusions of the Mexican junta because the humanity of the Indians and their conversion reflect the purpose of the Church. The ecclesial nature of criticism of conquest can be seen in one of the briefs, *Altitudo Divini Consilii*, which proclaimed that Indians must receive adequate instruction before baptism, the same practice that occurred in the Old World.

The Vatican’s more surprising action was the other brief, *Pastorale officium*, addressed to the most powerful prelate in Spain, the Archbishop of Toledo. It repeated the main point of *Sublimis deus* - Indians “are not to be given into servitude” but invited to eternal life by preaching and good example - while adding an ecclesial penalty. Those that reduce Indians to servitude incur “the penalty of excommunication *latae sententiae*, incurred *ipso facto* . . . .” Excommunication, of course, bars a Catholic from full participation in the sacraments for threatening the integrity of the Church, thus imperiling one’s eternal salvation. In this case it is automatic, occurring at the moment of the act.

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For Helen Rand Parish, the implication was obvious: the excommunication affected not only the slavers and *encomenderos*, but also “denied the King’s authority to grant encomiendas and slaves!”

If Parish is correct, then, the Vatican directed ecclesial penalty against slavery and the *encomienda*, the very foundation of the American colonies, the Crown’s empire, and its revenue. This is certainly a remarkable action, especially to modern readers conditioned by the image of a corrupt and theologically bankrupt Renaissance papacy. It is even more remarkable considering that earlier in the decade King Henry VIII of England broke with the papacy and nationalized the English Church over the Vatican’s refusal to grant a desired annulment. Surely opposing the basis of empire could provoke an equally disastrous result. Pope Paul III, whether he knew it or not, was on a collision course with the Crown of Castile. In the next section, we will see the outcome of their confrontation.

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489 “negaba la autoridad misma del Rey para otorgar [to grant] encomiendas y esclavos.” (*servitute delendos*) Parish and Weidman, *Las Casas en México: historia y obra desconocidas*, 39. The Crown had wavered on the question of Indian slavery just as it had with the *encomienda*. To review, the distinction between slavery and the *encomienda* is best seen in light of the location of the subjugated Indians and not intensity of labor. In the *encomienda* Indian polities and their production were retained with tribute – either goods or labor - given to a particular Spaniard. In slavery, particular Indians became part of a Spaniard’s household, usually performing domestic service or unskilled labor in plantations and mines. The Crown had prohibited Indian slavery in 1530 in response to ecclesiastical pressure. This had been reversed in February 1534 due to pressure by Cardinal Garcia de Loaysa, a Dominican, advisor to King Charles, and the sometimes head of the Council of the Indies. Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Las Casas: in Search of the Poor of Jesus Christ*, translated by Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 305. The bull alluded to Charles’ prohibition of slavery and incorrectly assumed that it was in force. Did the bull also address the *encomienda* system? Parish judges that it covered both slavery and the *encomienda*. One reason the bull was revoked was that the ambiguous term “servitudinem” masked the intention to cover the *encomienda* as well as slavery. While this may not have been the Pope’s intention, it seems likely that Las Casas would have interpreted the bull in this manner and used it as the wedge he needed to attack the *encomienda* system, given his equation of the *encomienda* with de facto slavery and subsequent developments. In his 1555 letter to Carranza he called the *encomienda* “this hellish slavery that is the parceling-out of human beings as if they were beasts, which the tyrants beautify with the name of *encomienda*”, “entails bitter enslavement, tyrannical oppression.” From ibid., 233.
2. “The Petitions of the Same Emperor and King Charles:”
Revocation and the New Laws

Confrontation, it turned out, was much too strong of a word. Pope Paul III, for his part, had many closer, seemingly larger issues to address: continuing Church reform, the advancing Reformation, and internal European conflict. But living on the coast of the long Italian peninsula, the most threatening problem was the advancing Ottoman Turks. The Turks were now ruled by Suleyman I (1520-66) and under his leadership undertook their greatest phase of expansion. On land they advanced to the doorstep of Vienna in 1532. By sea the ruled the Eastern Mediterranean and continually pressed westward. The feared Khayr al-Din Barbossa harried the seas from numerous ports in North Africa, attacking Mediterranean islands and raiding and burning the Italian coast seemingly at will.\footnote{Henry Kamen, \textit{Empire: How Spain Became a World Power, 1492-1763} (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 70-4.}

Pope Paul III hoped to unite Christendom against the Turkish threat, but as usual, European princes were more consumed with fighting each other than more distant infidels. For the last three years Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor and King of Castile, had been at war with his brother-in-law Francis I of France over the vacant Duchy of Milan in the latest installment of the Italian Wars.\footnote{This round began with of the death of the Duke of Milan. Both sovereigns coveted the Duchy for their sons and turned to arms to enforce their claims. France invaded, successfully taking neighboring Turin but not Milan. In response, Charles assembled the largest army he had ever gathered and launched a rather unsatisfying invasion of Provence. James D. Tracy, \textit{Emperor Charles V, Impresario of War: Campaign Strategy, International Finance, and Domestic Policy} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 177.} Paul III convinced Charles and Francis to negotiate and in 1538 the warring brothers-in-law met at the Mediterranean
city of Nice. But they would not meet in the same room, leaving the papal court to broker the talks.492

Although Charles agreed to negotiations over a possible alliance against the Turks, he had his own complicated agenda as Holy Roman Emperor. Several important members of his entourage inflated that image, encouraging “the idea that their sovereign was marked out by God to be imperator mundi, emperor of the whole world.” Charles’s personal device, the Pillars of Hercules of the Straights of Gibraltar, also implied imperial ambition. The famous symbol and its usual motto Non Plus Ultra (“No Farther”) long marked not only the limits of nautical travel but also symbolized the boundary of human pride. However, the motto of Charles’ emblem read Plus Ultra (“Farther”). Perhaps this only referred to the new Spanish lands of the Indies. But maybe it proclaimed much more, that Charles “was a prince who brooked no limits”, an idea not uncommon in Europe. “To many politically conscious Europeans, including some of his own subjects,” explains historian James D. Tracy, “Charles seemed in fact the very incarnation of an overweening thirst for domination, an Alexander redivivus, not to be satisfied until he had brought the whole earth under his rule.”493

Scholars debate to what degree Charles embraced the idea of universal monarchy. He had denied it in front of the papal court in 1536, along with responsibility for the conflict over Milan and the broken peace within Christendom.494 But there is no doubt that Charles, called by one historian the “first and last great emperor of Europe,” sought to protect his dynastic inheritance and strategically expand it when given the

493 Tracy, Emperor Charles V, Impresario of War, 26-7.
494 Ibid., 159.
opportunity. The most important commodity for doing both was “honor and reputation.” In 1530 a Castilian advisor urged Charles to take Florence despite its probable great cost, beseeching Charles “not to desist even if the siege takes another four months, for victory will satisfy the demands of your estate, your honor, and your authority; and failure would mean a flood of problems.” Subjects complained about taxation, but according to Tracy, they “complained even more about a ruler who suffered his territory to be invaded with impunity. ‘Honor and reputation’ was thus a precious asset for the ruler and his lands, not a mere chivalric fantasy. It was, in effect, the keystone in a conceptual arch forming the grand strategy that guided Charles and his advisors.”

The question of the vacant duchy of Milan was one of land and revenue but was ultimately a challenge to his honor that had required an immediate response. However, a ruler with enemies and rivals on all sides – rebellious German princes, expanding Turkish power on land and sea, dissenting subjects in the Low Countries and Naples, and a frustratingly neutral papacy – could not declare war rashly. War required navigating the “conjuncture” of an “ephemeral constellation of circumstances” of his various realms, such as available funds, public opinion, status of national security, and the needs domestic administration. Most basically, conflict with one enemy required peace with the rest. He also had to gather resources from his multiple realms in order to fund military campaigns. This often meant spending a territory’s resources on a project with

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495 Tracy, Emperor Charles V, Impresario of War, 36, 305, from Anna Lanyon, The New World of Martin Cortes (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2004), 82.
496 Tracy, Emperor Charles V, Impresario of War, 36.
497 From ibid., 123.
498 Ibid., 38.
499 From ibid., 29.
little local relevance, often not an easy task. “Politically conscious subjects of all of Europe’s principalities were united in their detestation of seeing local revenues squandered on foreign escapades” something they could not always prevent but resisted as something against the interest of their realm.\textsuperscript{500}

Unfortunately for Castile, its resources were the easiest for Charles to apply to other lands. In 1534 the Low Countries could not provide for their own military needs. In response, Charles remitted 120,000 ducats from Castile in 1535 and 250,000 in 1537; a trend that would increase dramatically in 1540s and 50s.\textsuperscript{501} But even Castile, his wealthiest kingdom, was perpetually in the red as it “routinely had shortfalls of more than half a million ducats even in years of peace.”\textsuperscript{502} In response, Charles increasingly borrowed against future revenue.

In this dismal fiscal context, the growing wealth of the Indies provided much needed cash. His Tunis campaign of 1535 cost approximately 1,076,652 ducats and was only possible because of the wealth generated by the Peruvian conquistador Francisco Pizarro. The royal fifth was about 400,000 ducats and Charles sequestered more cash in return for \textit{juros}, and probably spent it all.\textsuperscript{503} The wealth of the Indies was fast becoming an addiction that Charles could not risk losing.

Nor did Charles want to lose Milan. The negotiations in Nice lasted for weeks as Cardinal Ghinucci, a member of the Contarini’s Indies commission, shuttled between the two warring princes.\textsuperscript{504} The effort paid off, and on the eve of Corpus Christi Charles V

\textsuperscript{500} Tracy, \textit{Emperor Charles V, Impresario of War}, 105.
\textsuperscript{501} Ibid., 53-4.
\textsuperscript{502} A budget projection from 1534 has 979,300 ducats of projected expenses and a deficit of 435,118 ducats. Ibid., 19.
\textsuperscript{503} Ibid., 202.
\textsuperscript{504} Parish and Weidman, \textit{Las Casas en México: historia y obra desconocidas}, 38.
and Francis I agreed to a ten year truce. Eleanor, the wife of Francis and sister of Charles, helped facilitate the final details. Milan would be settled in a joint wedding between the families of the two monarchs. Pope Paul III got his desire for peace in Christendom and a united front against the forces of Islam. Together, Charles and Francis would go against Suleyman I and his ambitions to be “senor universal.”

In the process, a small matter of the Indies was settled. Word had come from Spain that Minaya had arrived with potentially dangerous papal documents. It seems that Charles informed Paul of his opposition to the papal position on the Indies during the negotiations for the same day or the day after the truce, Paul III issued *Non indecens videtur*. The new bull revoked *Pastorale officium* and the penalty of excommunication for those that enslave Indians because it disturbed the prosperous state of the Indies and “gravely injured His Majesty and his subjects.” The new bull also stated that pope had been inclined to act “through the petitions of the same Emperor and King Charles.”

*Pastorale officium* was a threat to the prosperity of the empire and Charles, dependent on its revenue, petitioned Paul to revoke the bull. Paul, dependent on Charles to go against the Turks, acceded. In other words, geopolitical conditions settled the impending confrontation between the power brokers of early modern church and state.

The revocation of the brief, however, was not a complete rejection of Las Casas’s theology. Gustavo Gutiérrez has persuasively argued that the revocation only applied to

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506 Full text of bull of revocation in Parish and Weidman, *Las Casas en México: historia y obra desconocidas*, 314-5. According to Minaya the revocation was brokered by Loaysa, the man who earlier had urged Charles to protect his honor and reputation. Loaysa also imprisoned Minaya on his return to Spain and wrote to the Castilian ambassador in Rome, to ensure that no one raised questions about the Indies without the consent of the Council of the Indies (38-9). The King had all copies of the bull confiscated. On November 10, 1538 the emperor wrote to the prior of San Esteban in Salamanca ordering him to gather and submit all past *relectios* and prohibited Vitoria and anyone else from further discussing the Indies (41). See also Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 106-7.
the brief *Pastorale officium* and not the bull *Sublimis deus*. Paul, in effect, removed the ecclesial penalty but not the declaration of the Indians’ humanity, their legitimate political dominion, or the proper nonviolent missionary method.

In a similar manner, Charles’s political and economic interests elided with many of the reformers’ platform. He even seems to have been sincerely concerned with the moral issues that came with dominion over the Indies. Las Casas, who had recently returned to Spain in order to recruit missionaries for his mission in Vera Paz, protested the revocation and Charles quickly responded. He launched an investigation of the Council of the Indies and convoked another reform junta. The result was the New Laws of 1542, which in effect attempted to legislate the general, if more moderate, spirit of Las Casas’s theology. From henceforth conquest would be only for the establishment of Castilian sovereignty, just tribute (meaning lower than under previous Indian leaders), and trade. Most significantly, the New Laws proclaimed that *encomiendas* reverted to the Crown after two generations.

Stepping back, then, Las Casas’s theological victory in Rome, run through the sausage grinder of early modern war and statecraft, lost its ecclesial teeth. Domesticated into legislative form, the New Laws served a dual purpose for the Crown. Despite Charles’ worldly priorities, it can not be denied that the New Laws represented an effort to implement – at least on paper - some type of justice in the Americas. More practically, the New Laws would wean the empire of its dependence on the *encomienda* and

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507 Las Casas had returned to court in Spain in 1540, going above the Council of the Indies achieving what Parish described as a tactical success that would in the following years restore the effect of the three papal bulls. Helen Rand Parish, *Las Casas as a Bishop: a New Interpretation Based on his Holograph Petition in the Hans P. Kraus Collection of Hispanic American Manuscripts* (Washington: Library of Congress, 1980), xii.

consolidate the administration and revenue of the Americas, making the king into what one scholar called the only encomendero.\textsuperscript{509} In essence, the Crown packaged reformist concerns into policy that was palatable to its honor and reputation as well as useful to its agenda.

3. “Who would not weep?” Return to the Indies\textsuperscript{510}

Las Casas, for his part, adapted to the shift from ecclesial to legislative reform. The emperor assembled an administration team of four secular officials to implement the laws in the various regions of the Indies.\textsuperscript{511} Bishops were also needed to enforce the New Laws, so Las Casas accepted the bishopric of Chiapa, a small bishopric of Southern Mexico and Guatemala, near the mission of Vera Paz.\textsuperscript{512} There, on the periphery of the empire, Las Casas would be a missionary of the Church and Crown to the unruly Spanish colonists.

Las Casas took advantage of his new ecclesial role to reinforce the Dominican mission in Vera Paz to the Indians. He obtained the transfer of Vera Paz lands to the jurisdiction of his bishopric.\textsuperscript{513} Las Casas also spent the second half of 1543 recruiting missionaries throughout Castile. A portion of his Dominican recruits were from San Esteban, the Dominican house in Salamanca and the home of the original missionary, Pedro de Cordoba. One of the group, a lecturer in philosophy name Tomás de la Torre,

\textsuperscript{509} Simpson, \textit{The Encomienda in New Spain}, 129.
\textsuperscript{510} Tomás de la Torre, "Traveling in 1544 from Salamanca, Spain, to Ciudad Real, Chiapas, Mexico; The Travels and Trials of Bishop Bartolomé de las Casas and His Dominican Fathers," ed. and trans. Frans Blom in \textit{Sewanee Review}, 81 (1972), 461.
\textsuperscript{511} Simpson, \textit{The Encomienda in New Spain}, 133.
\textsuperscript{512} Parish, \textit{Las Casas as Bishop}, xiv.
\textsuperscript{513} According to Parish, he had three goals: the peaceful conversion and reduction of unconquered Indians, protected by a strengthened ecclesiastical arm, culminating in a new kind of colonization. Ibid., xvi.
was appointed official chronicler of the journey to the Indies. He produced the first
detailed narrative of the Atlantic crossing and through his eyes and pen, we see the
dreams which drove early missionaries, the suffering they endured, and the difficulty of
bringing the New Laws to the Indies.

The day the Dominican missionaries departed San Esteban, January 12, 1544, was
much like a funeral. A solemn Mass was sung in the House of Novices and all who were
not priests received the Holy Eucharist. The prelate gave general absolution and after a
big meal in the refectory, the group of sixteen friars began their good-byes. “There was
not one Religious, both those who were departing and those who remained,” de la Torre
wrote, “who did not shed many tears.” The friars began the long journey to Seville on
foot and did not get far the first day, only about five miles. They were sad and frequently
stopped “to look back toward our house and the town in which we spent the best part of
our lives, not expecting ever to see it again.”

For the next month, the Dominicans traveled the rough terrain of mountainous
Castile, through winter rain and over swollen rivers that sometimes would not let them
pass. They stayed with friends and in inns along the way. At one place the other guests
had never heard the services of the church, so around the fire they sang the psalm in exitu
and remembered the tears of their departure.

Sadness, however, was not the rule for the group. “[W]e walked along so happy
and content that we began to discuss if anything would be left for us in Heaven,” de la
Torre remembered, “as the Lord gave us so much pleasure and consolation here.” On
the way they met some secular clerics from the Indies who gave them some advice on

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514 Torre, “Traveling in 1544,” 432.
515 It was the first detailed account of a trans-Atlantic crossing. Ibid., 435.
516 Ibid., 437.
how to evangelize the Indians. Do not tell the Indians of Jesus’s death, the clerics explained, but portray him as strong and valiant, a giver of many temporal goods, “and other similar stupidities contrary to Christian piety.” In another place, rats ruined some valuable books. But the Dominicans took a broad perspective; they were, after all, going to the Indies and “would arrive rich if we got there with our hides intact.”

The Dominicans finally reached Seville in mid February, where they met Las Casas and the rest of the new missionaries. After a lengthy sojourn in Seville, the group – now numbering 46 - finally set sail July 9, six months after leaving Salamanca. Those who had never seen the ocean before were frightened and all prepared themselves for death, as it was the time of year when ships were frequently becalmed. As the ships followed the wind, they watch the shore disappear, expecting never to return to the land of their birth. On the open seas, the Dominicans suffered from seasickness, incredible heat, the fear of French attack, and abuse from the crew. But they survived the crossing and their first sight of land was a glimpse of heaven. “If I had been the discoverer of this island,” de la Torre marveled, “I would without any doubt have thought that it was paradise on earth, because of its beauty.”

Overjoyed, the friars arrived in Santo Domingo on September 9 and processed to the Dominican house singing Te deum laudamus. Their brothers welcomed them “with great charity” despite the surrounding hostility; the colonists had ceased supporting the monastery because of Las Casas and the New Laws. A few friars were even beaten and stoned, for “the Spaniards could not stand the sight of the Bishop [Las Casas] any better

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517 Torre, "Traveling in 1544,” 454.
518 Ibid., 459.
519 Ibid., 464.
520 43 days after leaving the Canaries. Ibid., 483.
than that of the Devil.” 521 But the Lord sent a free African to aid them, who “practically supported us” and “appeared to conquer all with her faith.” 522 News of the Dominican preaching on slavery surprised one rich widow, who commented “that she had never thought that it was a sin.” In response, she went to confession, freed her slaves, and gave the Dominicans provisions. 523

The group’s progress stalled again as it waited for passage to the mainland and in the meantime, many friars had second thoughts; some returned home to Spain, others stayed in Hispaniola. Finally, after three months, Las Casas obtained a ship and went deep into debt as a consequence. 524 They left Hispaniola only to be assaulted by a great storm. 525 Fearful for their lives, the Dominicans took shelter in the small cabin, praying to God for deliverance. “There was no light whatsoever,” de la Torre recorded. “At times we said the Credo and then the Quicumque vult at the top of our voices, and screaming we called the names of Jesus Christ and Our Lady, saying the Ave Maria. But in spite of all this the waves increased, and collided so violently with the ship that we thought each blow would be the last.” 526

Despite the Dominican’s prayers, the storm raged on, growing so bad that even the crew found devotion. They confessed and made vows, such as one Portuguese who swore never to go to sea again if God saved him from the tempest. The wind broke the foremast, and “[w]e thought that our last hour had struck.” 527 Finally, Las Casas stood up and “exorcised the sea, ordering it in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to abate and be

521 Torre, “Traveling in 1544,” 489.
522 Ibid., 490,491.
523 Ibid., 491.
524 Las Casas spent 1,262 castellanos, the king gave him 300, the rest “kept him in debt through many years.” Ibid., 492.
525 Ibid., 496.
526 Ibid., 497.
527 Ibid., 498.
silent. He called out to the people telling them to keep silent and to be without fear, for God was with us and we would not now perish.”

While the friars were singing, a sailor called out the storm had ceased. “I am no friend of calling things a miracle when there can be some natural reason, and I have told what happened;” de la Torre dispassionately observed, “ascribe it to whatever cause you will.”

After spending Christmas at sea, the ship-weary Dominicans made it to Campeche in Southern Mexico. Unfortunately, the trouble was not over. The group split up to make the last ocean voyage. The first group journeyed in an old and overloaded boat, and on January 20 thirty two passengers, including nine friars, drowned in another storm. It was not until eight days later that the news reached the surviving group. They were keeping vigil in church for their own upcoming journey. When they heard of the death of their brothers, the remaining friars threw themselves on floor in front of the altar and wept. “[W]ho would not weep,” asked de la Torre, “even if they had a heart of iron, a loss so great, a wound so incurable?”

We saw our families and parents whom we had left, our houses and monasteries, our spiritual fathers and brothers whom we had traded for these companions. Now we thought of the anguish which awaited us in this land, judging from what we already had tasted, the needs of the Indians, what the Spaniards had been saying, all this came to our minds.

There in the church, “our hearts were seized with poison, and our bodies were frozen so that we could not move,” yet there was no rest from the journey. A few days later they set sail on the last sea voyage of their journey to Vera Paz. Their suffering was not over as, in the words of de la Torre, “seasickness fell upon our sadness.” He continued: “We

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528 Torre, “Traveling in 1544,” 498.
529 Ibid., 499.
530 Much later, we found vigor in singing a litany, more for ourselves than for others, as we did not doubt the glory of the deceased, but we had no certainty about the living.....” They also lost goods worth more than 5,000 ducats. Ibid., 521.
lay covered by our capes and stretched out on the deck all that night and the next day. If anybody moved, it was to rush to the railing to vomit and then immediately to return to lie down. We neither ate nor said a word."\(^{531}\) On the way, they found some debris from the shipwreck, but no bodies.

So there, on the deserted Mexican coast, they marked the death of their brothers in the same manner they began their journey - with a Mass. A year after their departure from San Esteban they still had not arrived at their destination. They had already encountered violent opposition to the New Laws in Santo Domingo. Attrition had taken its toll on the group: some left for Spain, some stayed in Santo Domingo, and nine died. Their difficulty underscores the missionaries’ incredible strength, whether based on self sacrifice or delusion. It also underscores the limits of royal power in the Americas, which the arrival of the New Laws to the colonies will further highlight.

4. Rebellion Against the New Laws

Finally, the beleaguered travelers arrived in Tabasco. The Spanish residents, in the words of de la Torre, “came with many lights to receive him, pretending a joy which they did not feel.”\(^{532}\) Their only option was to hope that Las Casas moved on, which he shortly did, leaving the Dominicans and beginning the overland journey to Ciudad Real, the seat of his bishopric. Ciudad Real was a small regional center of only about 60 Spanish households, situated in the middle of the Central American frontier region of small encomiendas and an open slave trade.\(^{533}\) Resistance to the New Laws began even

\(^{531}\) Torre, "Traveling in 1544,” 522.  
\(^{532}\) Ibid., 525.  
\(^{533}\) Henry Raup Wagner with Helen Rand Parish, The Life and Writings of Bartolomé de las Casas (Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 1967), 135.
before Las Casas’s arrival as news of the laws and his appointment filtered into the region.\textsuperscript{534} The cabildo of Santiago voiced its outrage at Las Casas, stating “[w]e are disturbed as if [the public executioner] had been sent to cut off our heads.”\textsuperscript{535}

Las Casas traveled through the mission of Verapaz on his way to audiencia. “It was his last triumph,” Benno M. Biermann explains in recounting the details of Las Casas’s journey. “Don Juan, son of the cacique of Coban, went to meet him at Chiapas with a stately band of warriors. As a result, an order issued in Santiago to stop Las Casas’s progress could not be carried out. Biermann continues: In all the towns and villages he was jubilantly received by the Indians, with flowers and garlands, with speeches and presents….In Coban, fifteen caciques received Las Casas with presents. A solemn procession of the Blessed Sacrament, with singing and music, filed from the lovely, newly built church, whose great pillars and splendid dome would have aroused admiration even in Spain, though it was constructed of timber and roofed with straw.”\textsuperscript{536}

Las Casas’s triumphant journey through Mayan lands could not have provided a greater contrast to the coming events in his diocese. He arrived in Chiapas in March 1545, just before Easter. A near riot broke out at his attempted implementation of the New Laws and withholding of confession.\textsuperscript{537} Over the next year, Las Casas proceeded to

\textsuperscript{534} It is perhaps related to the visit of 12 or 24 Franciscans from Mexico under the leadership of Motolinia in summer of 1543. They may have reported the Mexican reaction to the New Laws and changed the minds of the previously supportive President Maldonado and Bishop Marroquin. Benno M. Biermann, “Bartolomé de Las Casas and Verapaz,” in Bartolomé de las Casas in History: Toward an Understanding of the Man and his Work, edited by Juan Friede and Benjamin Keen (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1971), 469.

\textsuperscript{535} From Ibid., 468.

\textsuperscript{536} Ibid., 471.

\textsuperscript{537} Wagner with Helen Rand Parish, The Life and Writings of Bartolomé de las Casas, 148. He made two visits to the missions and a three month stay in the central but tiny Gracias a Dios in Honduras for the consecration of his fellow Dominican Valdevioso of Nicaragua. He demanded that President Alonso de Maldonado support the implementations of the New Laws and his ecclesial authority with the secular arm. The previously supportive Maldonado refused, despite the threat of excommunication.
alienate virtually every Spaniard in Central America with his effort to enforce the New Laws, including the previously supportive president of the audiencia and bishop of Guatemala. By the end of 1545, Las Casas was in a hopeless situation. He was deep in debt and his only allies were his fellow Dominicans and the mission Indians. There were rumors of a death threat - not insignificant as disgruntled colonists would assassinate the Bishop of Honduras in less than a decade.

Tension came to a head when another riot broke out. He met with the townspeople, who presented a paper, “demanding that he treat the citizens as their quality required and help them to preserve their property, in which case they would receive him as bishop.” At one point Las Casas found himself surrounded by drawn swords. Fortunately for Las Casas, two Mercedian priests and some other friars helped disperse the crowd. A royal judge sent to reassess tribute levels bluntly told him to leave for the new ecclesial junta called in Mexico City, stating “I would be pleased if you would hasten your departure, for while Your Reverence is present, I can do nothing.”

Las Casas packed his things and left for Mexico City. He could not have known that the rest of the Indies had erupted into chaos as well. In Peru, the first viceroy, Blasco Núñez Vela, brought the New Laws to the highly unstable colony. One chronicler described the reaction: “Some were saddened, fearful of their application, others cursed, Wagner and Parish attribute his change to his marriage with Montejo’s daughter, which formed a united clan controlling more than 60,000 Indians.

539 200 pesos for trip to Honduras and 50 for horseshoes and Mexican officials want to withhold his 500,000 mrs. salary for being away from his diocese. Wagner with Helen Rand Parish, The Life and Writings of Bartolomé de las Casas, 152.
541 Wagner with Helen Rand Parish, The Life and Writings of Bartolomé de las Casas, 155.
542 From ibid., 158.
and everyone damned Bartolomé de Las Casas, who had instigated them. Men lost their appetite, women and children cried, the Indians grew haughtier, and this brought fear.”

The laws were the catalyst which transformed the multifaceted factional feuds into rebellion, as the brother of the now dead Francisco Pizarro, Gonzalo, organized a motley army to oppose Vela. His chief henchman, Francisco de Carvajal, was a forty year veteran of the Italian Wars. He helped sack Rome in 1527 and used the over 1,000 ducats he extorted to get to the Indies. Pizarro was also aided by the Indian Don Martín, who in previous service to the Pizarros obtained an *encomienda*, became a founder and *vecino* of Lima, and married a Spanish woman. Pizarro’s army defeated and executed Vela in 1546, winning the so-called War of Quito. Pizarro’s rule turned into what historian Peter J. Bakewell calls “a reign of terror” as Carvajal brutally executed hundreds of suspected rivals.

Las Casas’s destination, Mexico, also opposed the New Laws, but unlike Peru, with no violence. Much of the difference derived from a “second conquest” that had occurred over the last two decades. Part, as we have seen, was due to the work of the Franciscans. Part was due to the Crown who, even as Cortes revived the *encomienda* system, began extending its administrative control over the colony. A steady stream of *corregidores*, royal officials who played a pivotal role in Isabel’s consolidation of Iberia,

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543 Francisco López de Gómar from Castro, *Another Face of Empire* 168.
546 Rafael Varon Gabai, *Francisco Pizarro and His Brothers: The Illusion of Power in Sixteenth-Century Peru*, translated by Javier Flores Espinoza (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 170. See chapter 7 about Indian allies. He was one of the few who remained loyal to Gonzalo and enlarged his *encomienda* in the civil conflicts. He participated in Gonzalo’s rebellion, found guilty, appealed sentence in Seville where he died.
set up shop in Mexico. According to Liss, the bureaucrats saw regulation of the *encomienda* and Indian labor as the keys to controlling both the Indian and Spanish population, leading to “a steady erosion by juridical and administrative action of the freedom of Spaniards to compel Indian labor.”\(^{548}\) As the colonial bureaucracy chipped away at *encomendero* power, economic growth was high, particularly in mining and Spanish agriculture, increasing royal income six times. Indians were incorporated into colonial system by superimposing Spanish techniques over compatible Indian tradition. Overall, in the decades from 1530 to 1550, the colonial government “successfully adapted Charles’ priorities to the Mexican situation.”\(^{549}\)

To a limited degree, then, the Crown consolidated Mexico much as Isabel had extended her control over Iberia.\(^{550}\) And just as the Reconquest provided a unifying identity and an external outlet for unstable noble power, so did the Mixton War in Mexico. In 1540, the Cascan people of northern New Galicia, who had never been subjugated by the more powerful Tarascans or Aztecs, began a religiously inspired revolt. They killed *encomenderos* and friars and defeated three subsequent punitive expeditions. It took 450 Spaniards and thousands of Indian auxiliaries led by Indian nobles on horseback to put down the two year long rebellion.\(^{551}\) In addition to subjugating New

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549 Ibid., 52. The first viceroy, Antonio de Mendoza (1535-1550) of the famous Mendoza family, played the most important role. He maintained a court, thirty to forty gentlemen bodyguards, sixty Indians as a staff, and employed many more. He never left without an escort of cavalry. Overall, he mediated Crown policy with the conditions of New Spain, while increasingly engaged in promoting his own interests (56-7). Parish, *Las Casas en Mexico*, 52.


Galicia and reinforcing Spanish colonial unity, the Mixton War practically demonstrated the Crown’s reliance on the military service of the encomendero class.

It was into this rather stable colonial environment that Francisco Tello de Sandoval, the bureaucrat expected to implement the reform, arrived Feb 12, 1544. He encountered a united front against the New Laws and the abolition of the encomienda. Viceroy Mendoza and Archbishop Zumarraga convinced Sandoval to suspend the laws so they could submit an appeal. Moreover, Sandoval circulated a questionnaire soliciting opinions on the necessity of the encomienda. Numerous parties responded and their reasoning again illustrated the temporal priorities of the colonial agents and their church supporters.\(^{552}\) Not surprisingly, the Franciscans are supportive of resistance to the legislation.

But unexpectedly, the previously anti-encomienda Dominicans are as well.\(^{553}\) They do cite religious reasons for their new support of the encomienda, arguing that despite “some negligence” in the matter of evangelization, Indians would never retain the faith without the coercion of the encomienda. But even the Dominicans based their argument on economic and military needs of the colony. “There could be no permanence in the land without encomiendas, because all industry was carried on with Indian labor,” the Dominicans wrote. “Moreover,” the Dominicans argued, “it was necessary to have rich men for defense against enemies and for protection of the poor, as was true in Spain

\(^{552}\) Simpson, The Encomienda in New Spain, 133.

\(^{553}\) Perhaps the most basic reason was mere survival. Even in the two decades since the conquest, the Spanish population was still dependent on Indian agriculture for survival. According to Bishop Zárate of Oaxaca, the Indians are so well-treated “that no Spaniard now dares to harm an Indian. On the contrary, the natives are so favored that they dare to mistreat the Spaniards, not giving them anything to eat except for money and at high prices, and only when they wish and not when the Spaniards request and need it.” Indians own their estates and many are rich, better off than their ancestors, “because they own all the provisions and sell them at such high prices that no one can live in this country.” If enforced, the laws will lead to the abandonment of New Spain. From ibid., 138-9.
and in every other well-regulated republic."\(^{554}\) Besides, honor and reputation was at stake, for if the *encomenderos* did not provide military support, the poorer Spaniards would only be able to live in the country as servants of the Indians, “which would be a great insult to the Christians and to the Spanish nation.”\(^{555}\)

Mexico was united in opposition to the New Laws and Peru would be soon in rebellion. In Guatemala, where Las Casas attempted to implement the New Laws, the Spaniards drove him from the colony. Overall, Las Casas’ and the Crown’s attempt to legislate the extinction of *encomienda*, the most important technique for establishing Spanish colonial presence, was met with rebellion, threat of violence, or flat refusal.\(^{556}\)

As for Las Casas, he slowly retreated down the Guatemalan highlands to Central Mexico, the colonial center of Latin America. He probably ascended the southern pass into the Valley of Mexico, the same pass used by Cortés’s first entrance into the Aztec city. It was there that Spaniards first saw the glory of Tenochtitlan, ringed with snow capped mountains. One of Cortés’s soldiers, Bernal Diaz, memorialized that vision in his later account of the conquest. “[W]hen we saw those cities and villages built in the water, and other great towns on dry land, and that straight and level causeway leading to Mexico, we were astounded. These great towns and *cues* and buildings rising from the water, all made of stone, seemed like an enchanted vision from the tale of Amadis.

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\(^{554}\) Simpson’s words, *The Encomienda in New Spain*, 134.

\(^{555}\) Ibid., 135.

\(^{556}\) A delegation from Mexico went to Spain representing the *encomenderos*, Franciscans, Dominicans, and Augustinians on June 17, 1544. A year later they presented their argument which continued their theme: the New Laws driving Spaniards from the Indies. The argument for slavery followed similar logic. Petitioners fight the prohibition of slavery arguing that mining could not be conducted without it. Ibid., 141.
Indeed,” Diaz marveled, “some of our soldiers asked whether or not it was all a dream….”

The first Spaniards, mouth agape from their first vision of the imperial city, would have seen the great temple of Huitzlootchli. There the blood of the thousands of sacrificed victims ensured the survival of the universe and the unsurpassable might of the empire, which taunted the nations with its might in verse:

Proud of itself  
is the city of Mexico-Tenochtitlan.  
Here no one fears to die in war.  
This is our glory.  
This is Your command,  
oh Giver of Life!  
Have this in mind, oh princes,  
do not forget it.  
Who could conquer Tenochtitlan?  
Who could shake the found of heaven?  

In only a year the Spanish invaders and their Indian hordes did just that, reducing the enchanted vision to smoking rubble. The night that the conquest ended, a dramatic thunderstorm opened up over the once proud valley, the lightening perhaps announcing the departure of the gods that had watched over the city for so long.

The temple to Huitzlootchli was now gone, torn down by the Spaniards. Up to 400,000 workers reportedly reconstructed the devastated city. They used the temple stones to build a small church over the holy site. The surviving Aztecs understood the symbolism; the Aztec pictograph for conquest was a burning temple.

Looking over the city, Las Casas might have been able to pick out the church from the growing city. What he certainly saw were the towers of the great conquistadors

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557 “It was all so wonderful that I do not know how to describe this first glimpse of things never heard of, seen or dreamed of before.” Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *The Conquest of New Spain*, translated with an introduction by J.M. Cohen (New York: Penguin, 1963), 214.

Cortés and Alvarado. Such towers were illegal in Castile. But when Cortes built his mansion over Moctezuma’s old palace, there was no one to prevent his public declaration of military power and lordly ambition, just as there was no one to stop his expansion of the *encomienda*. 559

Outcast and on muleback, Las Casas descended into the valley.

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6: “THE CLAMOR OF THEOLOGIANS”

“Habiendo, pues, dos caminos que pueden llevar a la conversion de los indios: uno difícil, largo y entorpecido por muchos peligros y penalidades, que consiste solamente en la advertencia, doctrina y predicación, y otro fácil, breve, expedito y muy ventajoso para los indios, que consiste en su consentimiento, no es de hombre prudente dudar cuál de estos caminos se deba seguir....”\(^{560}\)

Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda

Therefore, although the Philosopher, who was ignorant of Christian truth and love, writes that the wise may hunt down barbarians in the same way as they would wild animals, let no one conclude from this that barbarians are to be killed or loaded like beasts of burden.... Good-by Aristotle! From Christ, the eternal truth, we have the command 'You must love your neighbor as yourself'....\(^{561}\)

Bartolomé de las Casas

1. “A Feudal Subject and Vassal of Christ:” The Confesionario

Only the candles lit the chapel of the Dominican friary Santo Domingo de México. It was close to midnight and one by one the friars filtered in for matins, until all 56 had taken their places. It was November 1546 and among them was Bartolomé de Las Casas.

After having been run out of his bishopric, Las Casas arrived on mule back to an uneasy Mexico City in June 1546. He was greeted with news that Charles had revoked the New Laws which pertained to the encomienda. He then found himself embroiled in a


prolonged conflict with Viceroy Mendoza and the audiencia. After another ecclesiastical junta, Las Casas retreated to the Dominican House where he remained for a number of weeks.

Matins ended and Las Casas lingered in the chapel, praying before the tabernacle. The high altitude chill of Central Mexico was a welcome change from the sweltering humidity of Central America. No less invigorating was the liturgical routine and fraternity of his Dominican brothers. It was much like 1522, when seven years of reform work had ended in disaster and Las Casas entered the Dominican order.

Much had happened since that decision. The decade of cloistered formation and month long mission to Enrique’s rebel community transformed Las Casas. Inspired, he wrote The Only Way and returned to reform work. For twelve years the single minded friar battled the colonial system. Las Casas crossed the Atlantic four times and taken innumerable journeys through the Central American mountains. He negotiated two ecclesiastical juntas and pleaded with royal bureaucrats. He was threatened by angry colonists, even pulled from the pulpit. But in spite of all his struggle, the colonial system ground on and in his low points, Las Casas must have wondered if the only thing he had gained was the universal hatred of the Spanish colonists.

Now the New Laws had failed and once again Las Casas was back in the friary. As he kept vigil before the tabernacle, his mind drifted between the battles of the Indies and the struggles of faith, both of which were cast in the code of feudal honor that had so long marked the culture of Castile. Faith for Castilians, after all, was a literal battle, illustrated by Ignatius of Loyola’s meditations in his Spiritual Exercises. Christ was a

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noble warrior - “supreme Captain and Lord” - who leads his troops on the battlefield of Jerusalem and sends his vassals on missions, “charging them that they should seek to help men.” Like the ambitious knights of Castile eager to serve powerful lords in return for mercedes, St. Ignatius sought the Lord’s favor and prayed to Our Lady that she “obtain for me from her Son and Lord the grace that I may be received under His standard.”

Honor and loyalty were an integral part of the Catholic faith of Castile and this was not lost on Las Casas. Baptism, for Las Casas, formalized the new vassal’s reception under Christ’s standard, binding both parties with mutual responsibilities. Christ gave new life while the baptized person - “somewhat like a feudal subject and vassal of Christ because of the vow” – promised unswerving loyalty while binding himself to a new code of conduct and honor. For Las Casas, “[Christ] acquires a new right of dominion over him….”

There, as Las Casas lingered in the royal court of the Lord, he gathered strength, for battles - spiritual or otherwise - are not without enemies. Lucifer, “the mortal enemy of our human nature,” fights for the dominion of human souls. In St. Ignatius’s vision “[T]he evil chieftain of all the enemy is seated in the center of the vast plain of Babylon, on a great throne of fire and smoke – a horrible and terrible sight to behold….” He won the first great battle in the fall of Adam and Eve, gaining dominion over the human race. The Devil captured Adam and Eve “just as if they had been conquered, and he made them his slaves,” Las Casas’s mentor Pedro de Córdoba explained in his Indian

564 Las Casas, In Defense of the Indians, 57.
565 St. Ignatius of Loyola, The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, 75.
566 Ibid., 76.
Catechism, “just as those you would conquer in war would become your slaves.”

Thus, in the victory the Devil and his minions enslaved those created to be vassals of God.

The war, of course, continued. Christ, in his victory on the cross, opened the door for humanity’s return to loyal service to its rightful Lord. Yet the Devil and his army continue their campaign against the vassals of Christ. The Devil “calls together countless demons” and scatters them “throughout the whole world, missing no province, no place, no state of life, nor even any single person,” St. Ignatius imagines. “[L]isten to the harangue which he delivers them, how he spurs them on to enslave men and to bind them in chains.” First and foremost, the demons tempt men with the trappings of nobility and what drew people to the Indies: “the lust of riches,” “the empty honor of the world,” and “unbounded pride.”

Thus, as Las Casas sat before the tabernacle in the Mexican night, a terrible war raged throughout the world and the highest stakes, ironically, were for the baptized. Those baptized that willingly succumb to temptation became members of the Devil’s forces, serving under his standard. In the process, they break their vow to Christ and fall into mortal sin, a condition worse than those that never swore fealty to Christ. It is, in fact, rebellion against their rightful Lord. In feudal Spain and colonial Latin America, rebellion and treason against one’s rightful lord was the worst possible crime. The Crown pursued rebels with total war and punished them with horrendous public executions. Rebels were drawn and quartered, mangled body parts displayed, corpses

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568 St. Ignatius of Loyola, The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, 76.
569 “From this we infer that if a Christian and a pagan commit the same crime, the Christian sins more seriously….” Las Casas, In Defense of the Indians, 57.
burned. The same was true for the Catholic drama; those who break their vow to Christ and die in rebellion suffer eternal damnation.

Even in Castile, though, rebels to the Crown who willingly surrendered could be reconciled and returned to loyal service. Royal sovereigns – from Alfonso XI to Enrique de Trastamara, even Isabel – often pardoned powerful adversaries in their campaigns against rebellious nobility.\textsuperscript{570} Returned to royal service, they became important allies and integral to the success of the Crown. Likewise, any rebel to Christ who approached him in the sacrament of reconciliation and made restitution was forgiven and returned to service. Many former rebels became great servants, such as St. Ignatius or Juan Garcés, the repentant conquistador turned martyr seen briefly in chapters two and four.

Rebellion and forgiveness, those were the keys to the conflict of in the Indies, for the conflict was merely a part of this greater battle of salvation history. Las Casas rose and left the chapel. Even though it was well past midnight, he went to the library. Back in 1534 his Dominican formation and mission to Enrique prompted Las Casas to explain the theology of the Christian call to evangelize the Indians. His Dominican life and mission to the Indianos – the Castilian name for Spanish colonists – now inspired him to articulate the other half of his theology: the consequences of rebellion against the feudal vow to Christ and the means to return to loyal service to one’s Lord.

Over the coming weeks, Las Casas composed “Twelve Rules for Confessors,” a guide for priests who reconciled the rebellious Indiano vassals of Christ. Las Casas stated that the Dominicans asked him “to state some rules to guide them in the forum of

conscience” out of “the desire to aid the souls of the Spaniards of the Indies.”

According to Las Casas, conquistadors must, in a certain sense, publicly and privately surrender before receiving the sacrament. With the help of a royal notary, the penitent is first required to make a public act declaring that “as a faithful Christian he desires to leave this life without offending God and to unburden his conscience, in order to appear before the divine judge in a secure state.” The penitent then surrenders complete control of his estate to the confessor, so that he does whatever is necessary for his salvation, up to the full restitution of his entire estate.

After surrendering his person and estate – effectively placing himself in divine custody - the penitent makes his confession, consisting of three classes of sin. The first class of sin includes any type of violence perpetrated against the Indians, which Las Casas lists as “unsettling, robbing, killing and depriving them of their liberties, of their seigniory [dominion, command, lordship] of their wives, of their children…., and of their other wealth, and for defaming them as beasts.”

The next two classes of sin are the spiritual consequences of the penitent’s American rebellion. Like in feudal Spain, the honor and reputation of the Lord were precious commodities and when the conquistador sins, he causes “vileness and abomination” to the name of Christ.

The penitent is also responsible for damage to the souls of Indians, such as “the damnation of the Indian souls that today are burning in

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572 Ibid., 3-4.
573 The penitent confesses his war acts, admit that he brought nothing from Castile, asks the Indians for pardon for the injuries committed, makes full restitution of all goods obtained in the Indies to the communities attacked if it possible, and revokes any other wills he may have made, renounces any laws that may help him contest the agreement. In essence, it is a requerimiento issued against the self. Ibid., 6.
574 Ibid.
575 Ibid.
the flames of eternal punishments.” By killing them “before their time”, conquistadors rob them of “the time and space for their own penance and conversion” – in effect, the opportunity for Indians to offer fealty to Christ.\(^{576}\) According to “The Twelve Rules,” conquistadors were not the only rebels as their initial rebellion extended throughout the Indies in the resulting system of tribute. For Las Casas, all tribute and services are unjust - even that assessed by public officials - for two reasons. First, no matter how well regulated, the initial *entrada* was illicit, and consequently no one may “take justly from the Indians one single *maravedí* of tribute.”\(^{577}\) Secondly, evangelization of the Indians was the final cause of the *encomienda*. The *encomenderos* never completed or even adequately provided for evangelization, “not even in their dreams.” They even, Las Casas argued, hindered the final cause “as if they were infidels.”\(^{578}\) As a result, the whole tributary system was unjust, including *encomenderos* that did not participate in conquests, miners, ranchers, and merchants who sold arms to conquistadors.\(^{579}\)

After confessing his sins, the penitent is then required to make amends for the damage caused by his rebellion. The confessor is to find the Indian communities injured by the penitent and make restitution if possible. If the Indians have disappeared, restitution can be made in other ways, such as alms to poor Spaniards.\(^{580}\) All slaves are to be freed and given restitution with a public act before a notary, since “there is not nor has there been a single Indian justly enslaved.” Penitents are required to buy the freedom

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\(^{576}\) Las Casas, *Confesionario*, 7.

\(^{577}\) Ibid.

\(^{578}\) Ibid.

\(^{579}\) Ibid., 18.

\(^{580}\) The confessors are given agency to apply casuistry for unique cases. For example, the conquistador that arrived in the Indies with previous wealth must turn in that wealth, which the confessor gives as restitution after allowing for a “living wage” of “modest sustenance.” Ibid., 12, 13.
of the slaves they sold, even if they must make themselves slaves.\textsuperscript{581} In addition, the penitent promises to participate in no more conquests or go to Peru, which is in rebellion. Las Casas ends the \textit{Confesionario} with an allusion to the \textit{merced} of eternal life granted in the vow of baptism: \textquote{This saying is hard; who can accept it? – The one who will wish to enter the narrow and difficult way, that leads to life.}\textsuperscript{582}

As Advent approached, the days grew short and the nights colder. Las Casas finished \textquote{The Twelve Rules}, what was in effect a surrender ceremony for rebel vassals. He then added an addendum explaining the precedents for the rules, such as the required public declaration. Within it is an interesting explanation on how the sacrament, by its very nature, promotes what we now call \textquote{social justice.} As the events of the Indies have well shown, justice, according to Las Casas, is often perverted in the public forum for numerous reasons. First, there is often a lack of consensus in what constitutes justice, particularly among \textquote{the unskilled and those individuals lacking authority.}\textsuperscript{583} Second, permissiveness, hypocrisy or blindness can plague those in authority. Third, concern that exercise of justice in a particular matter will harm \textquote{the good or temporal utility of the republic} can prevent authorities from acting and thus lead to injustice. In any of these cases, secular authorities do not provide justice for the \textquote{wronged or dispossessed.}\textsuperscript{584}

What Las Casas described here is related to the thomistic principle of the limitations of human law, whereby not all that is just can be mandated and not all that is unjust can prohibited.\textsuperscript{585} Yet for Aquinas, the final moral authority is not human law but

\textsuperscript{581} At the end, the penitent promises to participate in no more conquests or go to Peru, which is in rebellion. Las Casas, \textit{Confesionario}, 18-9.
\textsuperscript{582} Jn 6:11 (NAB Jn 6:60b), Mt 7:14. Ibid., 22.
\textsuperscript{583} Ibid., 28.
\textsuperscript{584} Ibid., 28-9.
\textsuperscript{585} See St. Thomas Aquinas, \textit{Treatise on Law (Summa Theologica, Questions 90-97)}, translated with an introduction by Stanley Parry (South Bend, IN: Regnery/Gateway, Inc.).
divine law, a point that Las Casas emphasized: “in accordance with the law of God, in the forum of conscience, [the perversion of temporal justice] is not tolerable or permissible.”

It is the confessor, and not a secular official, who in caring for the soul of the penitent upholds the final standards of justice inherent in divine law.

The confessor, as a spiritual judge, Las Casas explained, was “a public and official person of the universal Church in all things that should concern souls and spiritual service.” As a public judge - obligated “to exercise justice” with a “preference for what favors the public good and aids the defenseless” – the confessor “is placed by God as an official of the universal Church between the penitent and the despoiled or wronged.” In this forum, the confessor guides the penitent to repent and make restitution; in other words, supplying what the penitent “lacks against justice.”

As a result, numerous goods ensue: “the conscience of the penitent will be assured, the wronged and the despoiled will receive justice, and the confessor will fulfill his duty as a good public judge, even if he exercises [his office] at great personal risk.”

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586 Las Casas, Confesionario, 33.
587 Ibid., 29.
588 Ibid., 26, 25.
589 Ibid., 28-9.
590 The quote continues: “And what he [the confessor] is unable to free through the exterior form of justice, he can oblige the penitent to acquire by right and action [in favor of] the creditor by asking him [during confession] for a pledge so that the end of confession can be achieved. [The end] is that the penitent may depart from a sinful state and that justice may be done to the dispossessed. [In order that the penitent] follows through with the aforementioned cases, the confessor is obliged to constrain him by refusing him absolution. As a necessary thing, the said pledge is added in order that restitution may be effected.” Ibid.
591 Ibid., 31-2. Confessors who do not complete this do three harms: to penitents, Indians, and themselves: “the confessor aggrieves and does a great injustice to the dispossessed, robbed, afflicted and deserving Indians, because he is judge between them and the penitent, placed there by God as a remedy and for the illumination of souls in the Church. So that [when the confessor] does not provide the [appropriate] sentence during the act of confession, where he has all authority for the sake of the desired effect, the aggrieved party has less of what pertains to him and is made unequal and receives less justice. [This also results in] the robber and the aggravator possessing more and, [since] he is not allowed to make restitution, he has more to possess and to carry with him to hell” (36-7).
The long and short of Las Casas’s argument, then, is that human law only imperfectly instantiates justice, something he knew all too well from experience. The New Laws, ordered to implementing greater justice in the Indies, failed because of the self-interest of the governed and the inability of temporal authority to enforce them. In the _Confesionario_, Las Casas circumvented the limitations of civil law by harnessing the legal code and discipline inherit in the sacramental system, a move which offered distinct advantages. Unlike legislative power, there was no escape from the sacraments. The sacraments are omnipresent in that they move and even more significantly, it is the penitent who seeks them out. Perhaps most importantly, the sacrament ties the question of justice to the self-interest of the human person; if one wanted the _merced_ of eternal life, one must reform one’s conduct. In other words, the sacraments have incredible potential – given their unlimited extension and direct connection to the human person - to promote “social justice.”

The public extension of what is in reality a higher “legal” code was bound to create conflict, something of which Las Casas was well aware. He wrote two other documents at the monastery, the first which appointed a vicar general with the power to place the diocese under interdict if the colonists rebelled against the use the _Confesionario_. The second document was a letter to Prince Philip. In “an almost violent language” Las Casas argued the primacy of spiritual power over temporal, citing among many examples the case of Bishop Ambrose and his humbling of Emperor Theodosius. He even threatened Prince Philip with triple death: corporal, spiritual, and eternal.
Overall, Las Casas proclaimed, in the words of Parish, that “the bishops’ duty was to correct kings and princes and not vice versa.”

After completing his work, Las Casas readied himself to leave Mexico and the Indies for the royal court. There were many miles of mountain passes and Atlantic squalls left to travel. As the ship set sail, did he watch the coastline disappear? Did he know that he would never return to the Indies? Given what we know of Las Casas – impatient, always thinking of tomorrow - there was probably not much time for nostalgia. He was probably in the bow, looking out ahead across the Atlantic, preparing for his next battles.


Back across the Atlantic in Spain, another adversary was waiting for Las Casas. Up until this point, it has been noted, there had been rather little theological defense of the conquest. What had been produced was in response to the Dominican criticism and largely consisted of political lobbying from interested parties. In 1544, the year Las Casas and his Dominican missionaries left for the Indies with the New Laws, the head of the Council of the Indies sought to change that. A delegation from Mexico arrived in court to lobby for the colony’s encomenderos and religious orders. They met with Cardinal Loaysa who commissioned a humanist scholar and part time royal bureaucrat named Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda to write an apology of the conquests in the Americas.
Sepúlveda was uniquely suited for the task. He received a doctorate in theology and arts from the Spanish College at Bologna and acquired an impressive list of powerful patrons, including the Giuliano de Medici, the future Clement VII. After decades of study and work in Italy - where he experienced the numerous wars first hand - Sepúlveda succeeded in attaching himself to the royal court and returned to Spain. There Sepúlveda split his time; in the summer royal service took him to Madrid and other locations in Spain and during the winter he lived as a señor, pursuing private scholarship and managing his estate in the hills outside Córdoba. Despite his clerical status, Sepúlveda had his own noble ambitions, engaging in what J. A. Fernández-Santamaria called a “relentless accumulation of wealth.”

In addition to political connections, humanist training, and noble ambitions Sepúlveda had two other advantages to offer. In the first place, he romanticized the

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595 The Medici patronage, what Machiavelli had yearned for, began in 1519, and Sepúlveda dedicated two of his translations of Aristotelian works to Giuliano. Paid 200 ducats by Medici for his work on the commentary of Alexander. Alejandro Coroleu, “The Fortuna of Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda’s Translation of Aristotle and of Alexander of Ahrodistas,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 59. (1996), 327. From 1523 and 1526 he was employed as official translator and commentator of Aristotle, work which “undoubtedly had an impact on the early modern philosophical scene.” Ibid., 328. His Latin translation of the *Politics* still has a good reputation among classicists. “By the 1540s Sepúlveda had established an impressive reputation, particularly among his own countrymen, for his knowledge of Greek.” Ibid., 326, 331

596 He took refuge with the Prince of Carpi at the Castle Sant’Angelo during the Sack of Rome in 1527. Cardinal Orsini threw him into the streets for being a Spaniard. He also witnessed the siege of Naples in 1528. Aubrey F. G. Bell, *Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda* (England: Oxford University Press, 1925) 7, 8. He was in the service of the Cardinal of Santa Cruz, “an aristocratic prelate who had been sent Rome by Charles V to effect a *rapprochement* between Emperor and Pope” in 1529 and was present at his crowning as emperor. Jose A., Fernandez-Santamaria, *The State, War and Peace: Spanish Political Thought in the Renaissance, 1516-1559* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 164. In 1529 he composed a tract urging Charles to make war against the Turks. In 1534 Clement VII died and two years later, Charles took Sepúlveda into his service as imperial chronicler. Bell judges him to be a half-hearted historian. Bell, *Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda*, 50.

military culture that characterized Spain and the American expansion, exemplified by a dialogue which examined the compatibility of military glory and Christian morality. He cast the main figure not as a conquistador of the Indies, but the Castilian conqueror of Italy, Gonzalo de Córdoba. Through de Córdoba Sepúlveda argued that there is no contradiction between Christian morality and military glory, because both realize the cultivation of virtue. At the same time, unlike many humanists and political realists, he was committed to Catholic orthodoxy. He seems to have been faithful to his vows as a secular priest and in 1541 urged Cardinal Gaspar Contarini to reform the lamentable state of the priesthood. Overall, Anthony Pagden judges him to be typical of those who supported the general thrust of the Council of Trent.

Sepúlveda’s interest in military glory and Catholic orthodoxy had already converged in another dialogue, *Democrates primus*, written in 1531 to counter the influence of Erasmian pacifism that he had encountered among the Spanish students at his alma mater. Sepúlveda’s innovative method, not the details of the dialogue, is most relevant for our purposes. For Fernández-Santamaria, Sepúlveda makes an important, underappreciated step towards modern thought, as there is “something new,” “[s]omething less ‘medieval’” in Sepúlveda’s method. On the one hand, Sepúlveda made use of Aristotle in a manner unlike the Spanish Thomists, not limited by theological

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598 The dialogue takes place in 1507-8 Córdoba, when el Gran Capitán returns to his hometown, victorious, where he and family members debate “si la gloria se ha de anteponer a la vida y los demás bienes terrenales.” His sobrino, the senor de Aguilar and marquis of Priego, Pedro says the desire for glory contradicts Christian morality. Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, *Gonzalo, Diálogo sobre la apetencia de gloria*, edited with introduction by J.J. Valverde Abril, in *Obras Completas Vol. VI* EXCMO. (Ayuntamiento de Pozoblanco, 2001), cxci.
599 Ibid., cxci, cxcii.
600 Bell, *Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda*, 25.
603 Ibid., 175-6.
principles. On the other, “at no time does he feel compelled to reject any vital part of his own orthodoxy for the sake of the Aristotelian, Stoic, and civic humanist baggage with which he is burdened.” His unique ability, according to Fernández-Santamaría, is to simultaneously “remain a theologian while retaining his humanist outlook, and vice versa” even as he aimed to “reconcile[e] ethical behavior with the demands of utilitarian politics.”

Where Machiavelli said war is just when it is necessary, Sepúlveda stated “contemplative wisdom is intrinsically better but active wisdom often more necessary.”

Sepúlveda’s rather extrinsic marriage of natural law and utilitarian politics – so different from Las Casas’s Dominican theological holism - became the groundwork of his examination of the New World. At the request of Cardinal Loaysa, Sepúlveda turned to the question of the Indies in yet another dialogue, entitled Democrates secundos, framed as a continuation of Democrates primus. The antagonist, Leopolodo, has relapsed into his old Erasmian doubt that just wars are very rare, or even non-existent, especially for Christians. His new Lascasian doubt derived from a vision of Hernán Cortés, which gave him great pride but also the uneasy feeling that the wars of the Indies could never be defensive campaigns. During the ensuing debate Leopoldo voices Las Casas’s arguments.

The protagonist and voice of Sepúlveda, Demócrates, happily summarizes his previous, rather conventional position on just war. Military engagement must be defense against unjust aggression, the last resort, and sanctioned by legitimate authority. At the

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604 Fernandez-Santamaría, The State, War and Peace, 185; 187.
605 Ibid., 184
606 Ibid., 188. Pagden, The Fall of Natural Man, 109.
same time, agents must have the right intention and right manner of executing war, which must be for the overall well being of the people. Demócrates also makes clear from the start that expansion of empire, even if deemed a political necessity, is not a legitimate reason for war. Thus, traditional justifications for war do not apply to the American campaigns.

The inapplicability of traditional just war thought to the wars in the Indies does not, however, mean that they are unjust. Demócrates introduces three additional justifications for war, and although they are “less clear and less frequent,” they are no less just. This first is “to subdue with arms, if another manner is not possible, those that by nature ought to obey others and refuse their rule,” citing the authority of “the greatest philosophers.” All the various types of hierarchical relationships of society – whether a father over children or a lord over servants - reduce to one principle: that the perfect should rule the imperfect. Some “by nature are lords, other by nature are servants,” which is supported by Proverbs 11. Those that reject this rule of natural law can be justly warred against to restore it, which according to Aristotle originates in the art of hunting. This just cause, according to Augustine in The City of God and Aquinas in De Regimine Principum, gave the Romans the right to conquer and establish their dominion over many nations.

For Demócrates, there is no better example of the señor-servus dynamic than the conquest of Mexico. Moctezuma, although in a city similar to Venice but three times

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608 Sepúlveda, Tratado sobre las Justas causas de la Guerra contra los indios, 69-73, 75.
609 Ibid., 129-131.
610 Ibid., 81-3.
611 Ibid., 83.
612 Ibid., 85.
613 Ibid., 85, 101.
larger, was unable to prevent Cortes and his small contingent from entering. Thousands of Mexicans “were scattered fleeing like women before very few Spaniards.” Cortes occupied the city and “compelled by means of terror the king and princes subject to him to receive the yoke and lordship of the rulers of Spain.” After imprisoning Montezuma for plotting against the Spaniards the entire population could do nothing against less than 300 Spaniards and a few Indian auxiliaries. “Can one give greater or more irrefutable testimony,” asks Demócrates, “of how much that some men excel others in ingenuity, strength courage and valor, and other peoples are servants by nature?”

Unconvinced, Leopoldo turns to another line of argumentation, pointing out that there are numerous theologians who prohibit war against pagans for the purpose of submitting them to Christian dominion. In reply, Demócrates distinguishes between religious belief and natural law. When “the pagans are no more than pagans” and follow natural law, there is no just reason to attack them. However, the war to make pagans obey the natural law and cease unlawful practices such as cannibalism and idol worship is very rational and licit. An examination of the Old Testament reveals that there is not one war in the Old Testament for unbelief, only for crimes against nature such as idolatry.

Leopoldo, once again humbled, turns to Las Casas’s arguments for nonviolent, persuasive evangelism based on Christ’s form, the Apostolic witness, and subsequent Church history. Despite his claim that religious conversion is not a licit end for war in the Indies, Demócrates counters with a third innovation, the secular arm as a positive resource for evangelization. According to Demócrates, the contemporary Church is not

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615 Ibid., 109.
616 Ibid., 117.
617 Ibid., 119.
bound by what the early Church did not do. When the Church became established and acquired secular authority, it acquired the power “not only to invite, but also to compel the good.”

This should not be surprising as even Christ used force in order to make Paul believe. Demócrates turns to Luke 14 and the parable of the wedding feast, arguing that there are two periods of evangelization, “that of its origin and that of its growth whereby one can employ force in order to compel the infidels to enter.”

Overall, “that what St. Augustine says about the heretics, we, with the same truth, can affirm about the barbarians.”

We now have Sepúlveda’s three new justifications for the wars in the Indies: the weak should be made to obey the strong, Indians should be made to obey natural law, and secular power is a positive resource for evangelization. At this point, it may be helpful to pause and analyze the theological content of Sepúlveda’s work. Christ appears only briefly as a conqueror of Paul and a military councilor shrouded in parable, leading Fernández-Santamaria to observe that the New Testament and Christ virtually disappear in Sepúlveda’s work. Sepúlveda makes extensive work of the Old Testament to justify war, something which Patricia Seed points out Christian theologians outside of Iberia did not do. Augustine only appears to approve the expansion of the Roman Empire and casually equate heretics under Christian rule to non-Christians outside of Christian

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618 Sepúlveda, Tratado sobre las Justas causas de la Guerra contra los indios, 143.
619 Ibid.
620 Ibid., 145.
621 Ibid., 147.
dominion. Anthony Pagden concludes that if *Democrates secundus* is read as theology, its judgments are unsound.\(^{624}\)

From a strictly theological perspective, then, we are dealing with something very different from the rich theological texture of Las Casas’s work. For Pagden, Sepúlveda’s dialogue should be read as a rhetorical, literary work intended to persuade rather than explain.\(^{625}\) Despite Sepúlveda’s occasional reference to Catholic tradition, the issue is not a religious question for him, but strictly a question of natural law depending primarily on Aristotle.\(^{626}\) Overall, his argument on what the philosophers teach reduces to power, illustrated by his conclusion that “he who defeats exceeds the defeated in some virtue.”\(^{627}\) Virtue, in other words, was known by the outcome of conflict, not the character of the human person.

Sepúlveda attempted to deflect the question of his dependence on Aristotle in the dialogue itself. Leopoldo objects to the emphasis on “pagan philosophers” to which Demócrates responds that one can not look only to Christians and the Gospel authors, but to philosophers who studied nature, especially Aristotle.\(^{628}\) Aristotle and the Old Testament, not Christ, are the hinges on which Sepúlveda’s work turn, leaving Fernández-Santamaria to call Sepúlveda “a strict spokesman for natural law, the cold judge” of the Old Testament rule an eye for an eye.\(^{629}\)

Stepping back, *Democrates secundus* may be reduced to two main points. First, superior military force should be used to establish political rule. Second, evangelization

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\(^{624}\) Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man*, 114, 112.
\(^{625}\) Ibid.
\(^{627}\) Sepúlveda, *Tratado sobre las Justas causas de la Guerra contra los indios*, 163.
\(^{628}\) Ibid., 67-9.
– of natural law or Catholic faith – is a permissible by-product of the exercise of such force. Theologically speaking, then, we are left with Machiavellian utilitarian politics shrouded in rather thin theological garb, a point that that the rest of the dialogue will only further illustrate.

Up until now, Sepúlveda has argued that the wars in the Indies are permissible. As the dialogue continues, Sepúlveda will go further and portray the wars as necessary. For Democrates, Las Casas’s method of nonviolent persuasion is nothing more than a naïve fantasy. Unlike in the early church miracles no longer accompany preaching.\textsuperscript{630} There is already a shortage of priests and those willing to do the dangerous work of evangelizing Indians have no desire to do so without armed protection. Even Spanish colonial power does not guarantee safety as many missionaries have been killed.\textsuperscript{631} If missionaries are killed within the empire, Demócrates asks, what would happen without it?

Sepúlveda will push the necessity of armed missions even further in a later work, stating that even if sufficient preachers are found to try Las Casas’s method and they are not killed in the process, “not in a hundred years will their preaching have the effect it has in two weeks once [the Indians] are subjugated.”\textsuperscript{632} To not use arms is to tempt God, which is against the natural law, thus leading to the conclusion that conquest was - in striking contrast to Las Casas - “the only way” to evangelize.\textsuperscript{633}

While Sepúlveda argued that conquest is more effective for evangelization, he readily admitted that temporal ambition drove the conquest. \textit{Democrates secundus} ends

\textsuperscript{630} Sepúlveda, \textit{Tratado sobre las Justas causas de la Guerra contra los indios}, 139.
\textsuperscript{631} Ibid., 145.
\textsuperscript{632} From Sepúlveda’s Twelfth Objection 1552 in Las Casas’s \textit{Obras Escogidas}, quoted from Gutiérrez, \textit{Las Casas}, 436.
\textsuperscript{633} Sepúlveda, \textit{Tratado sobre las Justas causas de la Guerra contra los indios}, 139.
with a defense of the *encomienda*, arguing that Spanish conquest should follow the precedent of the Israelites in Deuteronomy 20. Spanish war parties should first give the Indians the opportunity to surrender. If the Indians resist and make war, it is licit to conquer and subject the survivors to slavery and confiscation of their goods. If the Indians submit to Spanish sovereignty, the Spanish may keep them as *encomienda* tributaries.\(^{634}\) Moreover, in a later work Sepúlveda argued that the salary of the *encomienda* is absolutely necessary for the colonial system to function, for even if the crown put forward the money “no one would be found willing to travel so far, not for thirty ducats a month.” Although religion may benefit, no one journeys to the New World for spiritual ends. “They place themselves at such great risk and go to all this trouble,” Sepúlveda wrote unapologetically, “for the sake of profit they expect from gold and silver mines and from the help of the Indians these have been subjugated.”\(^{635}\)

Thus evangelization is an ancillary by-product of more worldly ambitions, and with that frank admission, we arrive back at the beginning of this section. It was, of course, a political task for which the Council of the Indies recruited Sepúlveda. His political work also benefited from contact with the most successful conquistador and *encomendero* of the age, Hernán Cortés, who Sepúlveda encountered through his work with the royal court. It is also seems likely that he visited the Cortes house in Madrid, which served as a center of intellectual activity.\(^{636}\) Sepúlveda’s defense of the *encomienda* received the stamp of approval from the *cabildo* of Mexico City, which voted to send Sepúlveda valuable jewels to “animate him against their common

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\(^{634}\) Sepúlveda, *Tratado sobre las Justas causas de la Guerra contra los indios*, 167.

\(^{635}\) From Sepúlveda’s Twelfth Objection 1552 in Las Casas’s *Obras Escogidas*, quoted from Gutiérrez, *Las Casas*, 436.

enemy.” Overall, it was the *encomendero* class that was the source and intended beneficiary of Sepúlveda’s work.

Yet there is a certain irony to Sepúlveda’s argument that should not be missed. While the *encomendero* elite was a special class of people, “lords by nature,” Sepúlveda is not speaking of all Spaniards but only the Spanish elite. Indeed, the European peasantry is also barbarous and worthy to serve by nature, a social perception covered in Chapter One. Europe had its fair share, in the words of Sepúlveda, of “wicked men who must be controlled with an iron rod and kept away from mischief.” The crucial difference, though, is that *servus a natura* are found “much more often in Asia.” Thus, Sepúlveda’s innovation consisted not in creating a lower class of human being, but extending a pre-existing category to whole nations.

There is much more to be said about Sepúlveda, but we have found our relevant points. His work was clearly politically motivated and not traditional theology but a Renaissance utilitarianism based on a feudal social vision. Sepúlveda, in effect, used a

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637 From Lewis Hanke, review of *Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda: Tratado sobre las justas causas de la guerra contra los indios*, *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (Nov., 1941), 635.


639 From Ibid., 218-9. There has been a long debate over what Sepúlveda intended for Indians under Spanish rule. Many works translate *servus a natura* as slaves by nature and commentators in general have assumed he meant slavery. Fernandez-Santamaria argues that the Indians are the same as Europeans in the Spain’s possessions, such as Galicians or Sicilians, only Indians do not have an elite worthy to exercise rule. “The inferiority of the Indians is exactly the same as that of the Galicians or Sicilians, who are subordinated to the magistrates set above them by natural law for their governance, in all but one important respect: it is obvious that in the Old World provinces there exist aristocracies of service and talent fully capable of measuring up to the Ciceronian standards of public responsibility; not so, however, in the American ‘province.’” The Indian elite, and it should be clear by now that it is precisely this ruling class which Sepúlveda set out to judge and has found wanting, has proven its unfitness to rule. Whereas, then, in the Old World royal officials could cooperate on a parity basis with local notables….in the New World nothing stands between the Indians, now ‘democratized’ by the crushing canons of natural law, and the representatives of the Crown.” Ibid., 233. According to Pagden, “this analogy between Indians and the European peasantry was widely used….the view of the American tribes as an entire ‘nation of peasants.’” Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man*, 161.
European precedent to fuse a hybrid feudal theology, and thus gave the *encomienda* the ideological support it lacked.

### 3. Las Casas’s Response

Las Casas arrived in Spain in the middle of 1547, unknowingly on a collision course with Sepúlveda, who denounced him to the Inquisition.\(^{640}\) Las Casas survived, bombarded the council with texts, and re-invigorated the pro-Indian movement. In 1549 the Council of the Indies recommended to King Charles that the problem be studied by yet another junta. He subsequently ordered that all conquests cease pending the junta, which culminated in a refereed debate between Sepúlveda and Las Casas in 1551-2. On day one of the debate, Sepúlveda summarized *Democrates secundus*. Next, Las Casas took the stage. Never one for moderation, he read his manuscript for five days. According to Sepúlveda, the judges wearied of hearing Las Casas and requested a summary.

For the next session, Sepúlveda composed twelve objections to Las Casas and in turn Las Casas wrote twelve replies.\(^{641}\) The details of Las Casas’s rebuttal to Sepúlveda’s justifications for the wars of conquest have been rehearsed numerous times. In general, Sepúlveda and Las Casas talked past each other, not quite meeting as their departure points were so divergent. In addition to arguing his three innovative justifications for war examined in the previous section - the weak should be made to obey the strong, Indians should be made to obey natural law, and secular power should be used as a positive resource for evangelization – Sepúlveda emphasized a traditional justification: the


\(^{641}\) Lupher, *Romans in a New World*, 133-4.
defense of the innocent. Ending human sacrifice alone more than sanctioned Spanish campaigns in the Indies.642

Las Casas, for his part, stayed true to character. He openly scoffed Sepúlveda’s principle of the servus a natura. Any nation, even the Turks and Moors - “the truly barbaric scum of the nations” he stated with great rhetorical flourish - could make war using Sepúlveda’s argument.643 In response to the question of the defense of the innocent, Las Casas mounted a rather incredible natural law defense of human sacrifice. Not surprisingly, the arguments of Las Casas’s debate performance could fill an entire book. The details need not concern us here. What is important is the essence of Las Casas’s position, which boils down the Thomistic vision of the world of monastery. Like in The Only Way, Las Casas made a dual theological move.

On the one hand, there is an order to creation that reflects the divine intellect. According to Las Casas, the general thrust of Sepúlveda’s characterization of the Indians was incorrect because the works of nature usually or always tend towards the perfect and the good, as they are the work of the Supreme Intellect of God.644 Who, “except one who is irreverent toward God and contemptuous of nature,” asks Las Casas, “has dared to write that countless numbers of natives across the ocean are barbarous, savage, uncivilized, and slow witted when, if they are evaluated by an accurate judgment, they completely outnumber all other men?”645 Barbarians, if they exist, must be exceedingly rare, for “if we believe that such a huge part of mankind is barbaric, it would follow that God’s design has for the most part been ineffective….And so there would be a great

642 Sepúlveda, Apologia, 202.
643 Las Casas, In Defense of the Indians, 47.
644 Ibid., 34.
645 Ibid., 35.
reduction in the perfection of the entire universe – something that is unacceptable and unthinkable for any Christian.”

On the other hand, Las Casas argued that the nature of the Indians was irrelevant to the question of the justice of Spanish conquests because of the Christian vocation of caritas. Charity does not pertain to optional mercy that conquistadors may exercise on defeated Indians. Rather, charity is at the heart of God’s nature and should condition all aspects of the life of a Christian vassal. Las Casas’s words deserve to be quoted at length:

Again, if we want to be sons of Christ and followers of the truth of the gospel, we should consider that, even though these peoples may be completely barbaric, they are nevertheless created in God’s image….They are our brothers, redeemed by Christ’s most precious blood, no less than the wisest and most learned men in the whole world….Consequently, to these men who are wild and ignorant in their barbarism we owe the right which is theirs, that is, brotherly kindness and Christian love….Christ wanted love to be called his single commandment. This we owe to all men. Nobody is excepted. ‘There is no room for distinction between Greek and Jew, between the circumcised and the uncircumcised, or between barbarian and Scythian, slave and free man. There is only Christ: he is everything and he is in everything.’

Las Casas continued:

Therefore, although the Philosopher, who was ignorant of Christian truth and love, writes that the wise may hunt down barbarians in the same way as they would wild animals, let no one conclude from this that barbarians are to be killed or loaded like beasts of burden with excessive, cruel, hard, and harsh labor and that, for this purpose, they can be hunted and captured by wiser men. Good-by Aristotle! From Christ, the eternal truth, we have the command ‘You must love your neighbor as yourself.’….He who wants a large part of mankind to be such that, following Aristotle’s teachings, he may act like a ferocious executioner toward them, press them into slavery, and through them grow rich, is a despotistic master, not a Christian; a son of Satan, not of God.…

From a theological perspective, the difference between Sepúlveda’s and Las Casas’s position boils down to relatively simple categories. On the one side, conflict is natural

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640 Las Casas, In Defense of the Indians, 36. This Thomistic assumption of the unity of humanity led Las Casas to begin what Pagden argued was the first complete ethnographic work in a European language. Las Casas saw the essence of humanity and described the cultural accidentals. They have a high culture, in some ways better than European cultures. He contextualized the problematic areas such as human sacrifice with the historical memory of Catholic tradition, arguing that they were no different from Europeans practices before the coming of Christianity. Pagden, The Fall of Natural Man, 63, 122.

and evangelization should follow the noble ambition, military glory, and economic reward that fueled the decentralized expansion. On the other, charity is the call of Christians and the primary hermeneutic of all activity, including interaction with previously unknown foreign peoples. Where Las Casas saw natural law as something in which Indians already participate and the basis of their humanity, Sepúlveda viewed natural law as something to be enforced, thus justifying conquest. For Las Casas nature reflected God, while for Sepúlveda religion reflected nature in conflict.

In the end, the Universities of Salamanca and Alcala approved Las Casas’s text and condemned Sepúlveda’s work. Sepúlveda later claimed that Las Casas orchestrated the condemnation behind the scenes, but we have no way of confirming his accusation.648 Practically speaking, though, the matter was not an abstract theological question. Ultimately, the Crown would judge the debate and its implications for imperial policy as it had so many times before.

648 According to Pagden, his principal opponents were theologians, whose opposition may have stemmed at least in part for their desire to protect the integrity of their discipline. Pagden, The Fall of Natural Man, 110-1, 113.
PART III: CONSOLIDATION

“I undertake this journey against my will, for the sake of honor and reputation [honra y reputacion], for if our vassals will not serve us, one cannot sustain the burden of governing.... The voyage is full of danger for my honor and reputation, for my life and for my house; and may it please God it is not dangerous also for my soul, as I trust it is not, for I undertake it with good intention, to provide a remedy for preserving what has been given me, and not to leave you, my son, poor and robbed of authority....Believe that what I do has been upon me to preserve my honor, for without out it my ability to govern and your inheritance will be diminished.”

Charles V to his son Philip II, 1543

Part III, chapters 7-9, deals primarily with the royal consolidation of empire. We have already seen much of this trajectory: Isabel in Iberian in chapter 1, Ferdinand in chapter 2, and Charles V’s “middle road” exemplified by his transformation of papal decrees into royal legislation in the New Laws.

In the following book we will see the culture and needs of the royal court. On the one hand, it strove to maintain its “honor and reputation,” much like the nobles of Iberia and conquistadors of the New World. On the other, the crown did give evidence of a commitment to the concept of justice in its realms and conscience. Overall, Charles and his son Philip seemed to have desired just imperial expansion and control, in which a state-controlled church was an important, even necessary, component.

We will also see the last of the Lascasian and Sepulvedan trajectories. Las Casas, in chapter 7, proposes the culmination of his thought – what I will call the “Politics of

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Charity” – the free consent of Indian polities to a moderate royal overlordship. The Sepulvedan trajectory, in response, will develop two important works. *The History of the Incas* will argue that the ruling Indian elite was, in fact, more unjust than the Spaniards who replace them. In chapter 9, *The Yucay Opinion* will argue that the gold of the Indies was divinely predestined to enable the evangelization of the Indies and thus complete the argument of this work: the spiritual depends on the temporal.

Thus, de-centralized conquest driven by noble expectations, conflict stemming from a mendicant culture, and the pragmatic consolidation and creation of empire was the basic pattern of the formation of Latin America. Chapter 8, which deals exclusively with the early trans-Atlantic slave trade, is in many ways a microcosm of that process. Before 1492, slavery existed in Europe and Africa in comparatively limited form. Spaniards, in the context of the collapsing Indian labor population and gold production, created a new economic system based on sugar production and Africa plantation slave labor. In the unfettered context of the New World, Old World practices intensified, changing a largely domestic practice into the full blown industrial slavery of the colonial Americas. In this particular case, theological opposition was rather limited.

By Chapter 9, the Crown, despite the multiple challenges, managed to negotiate a fusion of the competing groups. It held together the territorial expansion and permanent occupation of new colonies provided by the conquistadors, the mendicant’s spiritual campaign against the conquistadors, and the labor and tribute provided - often reluctantly - by the Indians. The competing groups were now synthesized into new polities.
CHAPTER 7: A QUESTION OF NOBILITIES

The king dreams he’s a king, and lives
in that deception, giving orders,
making decisions, and ruling;
and that acclaim, which he receives
as a loan, is written on the wind
and changed into ashes
by death (a great misfortune!):
to think that there are people who try to reign
knowing that they must awaken
in the sleep of death!

Pedro Calderón de la Barca. 650

1. “In Vain:” Charles V and the Cost of Honor and Reputation

Not much had changed for the Crown since the revocation of the papal bull in 1538. Honor and reputation, not theological integrity, still drove Crown priorities, something that Charles explained to Philip in a secret 1543 letter before embarking on a military campaign. “I undertake this journey against my will, for the sake of honor and reputation [honra y reputacion],” Charles declared, “for if our vassals will not serve us, one cannot sustain the burden of governing…. ” He went on to recognize the danger that the coming campaign posed for his honor and reputation, his life, and his house. Yet he hoped that “it is not dangerous also for my soul, as I trust it is not, for I undertake it with

good intention, to provide a remedy for preserving what has been given me, and not to leave you, my son, poor and robbed of authority.”

With such a high priority on honor and reputation it is not surprising that Charles’s alliance with Francis against the Turks quickly dissolved. In fact, Francis turned to Turkish power in his ongoing feud with Charles. “The most conspicuous display of their collaboration came in 1543,” explains James D. Tracy, “when 110 Turkish galleys, with a French ambassador on board, raided along the coasts of Sicily and Naples en route to a warm reception in Marseilles.” The French city of Toulon served “as a base by Ottoman galleys for further raids against the Spanish coast.” A Franco-Ottoman fleet then conquered pro-imperial Nice, the same place that the Pope had brokered the ten year truce between Charles and Francis only five years earlier.

Charles, for his part, had no scruples against conflict with Francis. Despite the Protestant Reformation and expanding Ottoman power, Tracy states that “an examination of the emperor’s campaigns makes it clear that he concentrated his energy and treasure on the struggle against the Most Christian King of France.” Honor and reputation drove Charles to risk his own person, personally leading nine military campaigns between 1529-1552. The campaigns increased in cost, from 1.25 million ducats in Italy in 1529 to the 3,276,473 ducats he spent on the Second Schmalkaldic War, 1551-3. This particular engagement ended as a great victory for France and Charles’s worst defeat; “the largest of all his armies had achieved nothing.”

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651 From Tracy, Emperor Charles V, 37.
652 Ibid., 307.
653 Ibid., 311.
654 Ibid., 108.
655 Ibid., 242.
656 This was the last of nine military campaigns. Ibid.
As the cost of war exploded, Charles depended increasingly on debt to finance the campaigns and in many ways used Castile as a “treasury of last resort.” This was made possible by the fact that the Flemish born Charles made himself a “natural prince” by residing in Castile and learning its language and customs. But he proved to be less natural than Castilians had hoped as he left the kingdom in 1543 and would not return until after his abdication in 1556. Before he left Castilian bureaucrats had held his spending somewhat in check, but after leaving became less mindful to warnings from Castile, even those of his son Philip. 1529-1541 long term debt against the treasury of Castile paid for a quarter of war costs; it would grow to one half 1543-1552. In 1552 alone contracts for 3,669,449 in loans were charged to the treasury of Castile, the largest for any year of Charles’ reign. By 1554 debt had grown to over 14 million ducats, more than 14x the income from *rentas ordinaria* not taken by traditional fixed income. Overall, “the cost of honor and reputation,” Tracy concluded, “had been to bring one of Europe’s richest kingdoms to the very brink of bankruptcy.”

In this gloomy fiscal context the arrival of treasure from the Indies “was always a cause for great joy at court.” The average king’s share had risen from 39,000 ducats in the 1520s to 282,000 in the 1540s. In addition, the king could sequester silver in return for *juros*. Good news arrived from the Indies shortly before the debate between Sepulveda and Las Casas. Starting in 1550 Peruvian silver shipments - which had been halted by Pizarro’s Rebellion to the New Laws – resumed, bringing approximately 2

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658 Ibid., 248.
659 Ibid., 247, 244.
660 Ibid., 247.
661 Ibid., 104.
662 Ibid.
663 Ibid., 242.
million ducats to Spain, 400,000 for the Crown. But American wealth was not a long

term solution. “By December 1551 Charles had managed to expend 1,891,846 ducats, all

but about 100,000 of La Gasca’s treasure,” most of which was recycled into long-term
debt.

In the end, the Crown took the middle road between Sepulveda and Las Casas as

both were dangerous for royal interests, Sepulveda for his over-enthusiastic support for

the *encomendero* agenda and Las Casas for his complete dismissal of the role played by

the *encomendero* class in the imperial system. Towards the end of 1548, shortly after Las

Casas’s departure to Spain, a royal cedula ordered Mendoza to collect all copies of the

*Confesionario*, which he publicly burned for containing “seditious passages.” Thus, to
the end of his rule, American gold funded Charles’s war interests and fiscal concerns
drove his decisions on questions of policy and morality.

What were the benefits of wars for his Castilian subjects? Unclear. The benefits

for Charles are equally ambiguous. His son Philip, raised a Spaniard, was unable to

inherit the Holy Roman Empire. Charles maintained his other lands and passed them on,

some with simmering problems that would erupt under Philip. In the end, Charles retired
to a monastery, spent and waiting to die, maintaining that he never fought a war that he

unjustly started. “The balance sheet which Charles might have drawn up on his death

bed, recording his thoughts and examination of conscience,” Karl Burckhar reflected,


665 Ibid., 242.


667 Handed over Low Countries to Philip 1555; Castile, Aragon, Sicily, and Indies in 1556. In

1557 he retired to a Hieronymite monastery in Yuste, west of Toledo. He died September 21, 1558, his last

words being Jesus. Otto von Habsburg, *Charles V*, translated from the French by Michael Ross (New

“must surely have been summed up in the words: *in vain*. Each time his enemies had been defeated, they became stronger….”

As Charles slowly expired, the theological fingers of Las Casas’ reform were once again caught in the closing door of international political intrigue. And the lands beyond Gibraltar would continue to fund the cost of honor and reputation.

2. Las Casas’s Final Years: The Politics of Charity

Bartolomé de Las Casas, like Charles V, passed the rest of his days in a monastic seclusion, at the Dominican Colegio San Gregorio in the town of Valladolid. But unlike Charles he remained active, splitting his time between recording the history of the Indies and his work as legal advocate of the Indians in the royal court.\(^669\) No doubt, he had desired to return to court for a long time; he stated in a letter to the council in 1534 that it would be “the fulfillment of my wishes before I die.”\(^670\) At the same time, the royal court offered a hidden luxury, for as Daniel Castro points out, Las Casas “no longer had to fear for his life.”\(^671\)

The now semi-cloistered Las Casas continued to churn out arguments against the conquests. His years of study and writing, however, had paid off as the canon of his later work arrived at a level of precision not seen in his earlier, somewhat scattershot


\(^{669}\) For example, see the letter of Nahua nobles written to King Philip in 1556 requesting Las Casas as their legal representative, or in the event of his sickness or death another “principal persons of your royal court of good will and very Christian.” Miguel Leon-Portilla, ed. *The Broken Spears: The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico*, with a forward by J. Jorge Klor de Alva (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992 updated and expanded version), 152-4.


campaigns. Where the younger priest once railed against the totality of Spanish brutality and pitched what turned out to be unrealistic schemes, his now rather focused theological arguments culminated in a practical attempt to change the course of the American political situation.

Las Casas began, once again, with the question at the heart of the whole “Indian question,” namely, what was the source of the Castilian Crown’s dominion in the Indies? It stemmed not from discovery or conquest but from “the apostolic mission granted by the Holy Apostolic See” in the papal bull *Inter caetera*. The end of the grant was the conversion of the Indians and conversion entails choice, thus “a liberty of choice” must be afforded to the Indians.

Having established the liberty of conversion, Las Casas moved into new conceptual ground, arguing that religious liberty extended into political liberty, which Las Casas called “the highest, the most precious gift of the temporal goods of the earth.” In his characteristic Thomistic style Las Casas argued that liberty “is cherished early by all creatures from the least to the most aware, above all by rational beings.” Laws jealously guard liberty, even to the point of bias, as “they oblige us to judge for liberty in doubtful cases, not against it.” Only death itself, the aging friar pointed out, is worse than the usurpation of liberty.

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673 Ibid., 243. The means must be in accord to the final state of faith (243).
674 “The same is true in the [canon] laws of the Church.” Ibid., 243.
675 Ibid.
Indians – who Las Casas called “free peoples by the power of nature itself” - possessed this liberty and thus had the right to determine their governance. As a result, the only just title that the Crown may possess in the Indies must be based on the free consent of the governed; a concept, once again, borrowed directly from Aquinas. In theory, Las Casas claimed, the sovereignty conferred by free consent is of a very limited nature, not taking away but only increasing the freedom of the governed by the repair of any defects in previous governance. What this move did practically, it should be noted, was to put the Crown’s sovereignty in the Indies on par with the form of its sovereignty in Castile and its other European lands. In the first place, the relationship must be regulated through a contract and “solemn oath,” explained Las Casas, “as princes usually swear to free peoples and kingdoms when they accept some new ruler over them.”

Secondly, and more significant for Las Casas’s argument, proper consent of the governed placed them under royal jurisdiction. People consider royal jurisdiction to be the highest form of political rule and alienation to private lords to be a deprivation of liberty and cause for revolt. According to Castilian law, “the king cannot cede or alienate cities or towns or districts or fortresses or villages, boundaries or jurisdictions from the crown.” For Las Casas, the feudal system described in chapter 1 was unjust even back

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676 Las Casas, Indian Freedom, 247. The wars of conquest were not just, thus they provide no just title. In a later work he will argue that “Up until now, our King has only the right to receive the title, not actually have it, i.e., he has the potentiality for being lord over those realms, but he does not have the right to actual rule over them because consent on the part of the kings and the people out there is lacking him. And the tyrannical invasion and occupation by the Spaniards blocks [that consent].” Doce Dudas, from Sullivan, Indian Freedom, 351.
678 Las Casas, Indian Freedom, 241.
679 Ibid., 247.
680 Ibid., 244.
in Spain, where vassals of private lords tended to be overworked and a “good third of all complaints in chancery occur between lords and vassals.” In addition, there are many more abuses which people are afraid to report and overall, “they never succeed in halting the grievances people endure.”

The Castilian legal precedence of free consent for royal rule regulated by public oath provided Las Casas the practical basis to argue against the *encomienda*. “If tenant farmers and serfs, according to Your Majesty’s laws, cannot be transferred to the control of other masters, to make sure that their state in life is not worsened and their living made more bitter,” Las Casas reasoned, “much less should it be allowed to transfer totally free people to other masters who are not the king, from whom they could receive any threat great or small to their freedom, any harsh and terrible treatment.”

Given that the *encomienda* destroys the Indians “like some lethal, contagious disease loose inside the whole area,” to alienate rule from the Crown to private Spaniards is against right reason, natural law and justice, and “contrary to charity.”

Las Casas’s “politics of charity” – the free consent of the Indians, just royal rule ordered to greater freedom, and no alienation through the *encomienda* – found a practical outlet in the early years of the new king’s rule. In 1555 Philip inherited his father’s financially strapped kingdoms and began a desperate search for revenue. The Peruvian *encomenderos* seized upon the dismal fiscal situation and proposed to buy perpetual jurisdiction of their *encomiendas*. Las Casas heard of the bid and gained power of attorney for the Inca elites through the Dominican provincial of Peru. According to Las Casas, the Indians heard of the offer and saw “their own perpetual captivity, their

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682 Ibid., 243-4.
683 Ibid., 246, 245.
reduction from being free villages and people to the state of slavery. They saw their
doom, their total loss of self.”684 Through Las Casas they made a counter offer of equal
value plus 100,000 ducats to, in effect, buy a limited type of self rule.685 Under the deal
the Crown would essentially extend noble privileges to Indian rulers; in the words of Las
Casas, “the way knights and gentlemen are here in Spain.”686

Overall, Las Casas’s final position consisted of intact Indian polities with a
Castilian overlord present only to the degree to which it increased Indian freedom. At
this point the most significant - and perhaps weakest - component of Las Casas’s final
work becomes clear: the character of the Indian aristocracy. In Las Casas’s vision, the
Indian elite were to willingly consent to Castilian overlordship and conversion, as
Enrique had back in Hispaniola, and govern more justly than the encomenderos. To
support his political argument Las Casas portrayed Indians in his historical work to be
morally superior to the new Spanish elite. There is no better illustration of Las Casas’s
historiography than his Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies, a narrative account
of the first half century of Spanish presence in the Americas. Originally published in

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684 Las Casas, Indian Freedom, 328.
685 According to Daniel Castro, if there was no specific offer from the Peruvian encomenderos, the
Inca would pay two million ducats over four years. Castro, Another Face of Empire, 142.
686 Las Casas, Indian Freedom, 331. The following deal will be made with the appropriate legal
procedure with the following conditions: no more feudal arrangements of any kind after the death of the
current encomenderos with the Indians under the immediate jurisdiction of the Crown, prohibition of
Spaniards and Africans from entering Indian villages, the tribute of current crown villages reduced by half,
reasonable tribute for villages currently under encomenderos, restoration of the old Inca order, the
establishment of a representative body – “a process that used to occur in the time of the Inca kings, and
used to occur with the Cortes here in Spain” (331), and no more usurpation of public lands. This will
increase the Crown’s subjects, revenues, ability to exercise justice, decrease rebellion, give more resources
for distribution to more Spaniards and establish a garrison, allow good government and evangelization. In
addition, 1/3 of hidden treasure will be given to the crown (323).
1552, the work was dedicated to the then Prince Philip and portrayed unmitigated Spanish brutality with uncomplicated characters.  

On the one hand, the Taino of Hispaniola - who became the archetypal Indian - “are neither ambitious nor greedy, and are totally uninterested in worldly power.” Las Casas described the Taino as ideal subjects and converts: “innocent and pure in mind” and “particularly receptive to learning and understanding the truths of our Catholic faith and to being instructed in virtue.” “[I]ndeed,” Las Casas boasted, “God has invested them with fewer impediments in this regard than any other people on earth.”  

The people of Higuey, a sub-group of the Taino which he may have know from personal experience, “behaved as honourably as might the inmates of a well-run monastery.”  

In contrast to the monastic Indians, Las Casas categorically portrayed the Spaniards as “tyrannical murderers.” They destroyed the Indians with “a diet of robbery, murder, violence, and all other manner of trials and tribulations” solely for ambition and greed, to such a degree that many “ceased to be men in any meaningful sense of the term.”  

From their arrival in the Indies, the Spaniards “fell like ravening wolves upon the fold, or like tigers and savage lions who have not eaten meat for days. The pattern established at the outset has remained unchanged to this day,” lamented Las Casas, “and

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687 Published in Seville in 1552 with seven other tracts without license and translated into numerous European languages by the turn of the century. For an in depth legal analysis of the work see David Thomas Orique, “The Unheard Voice of Law in BARTOLOMÉ DE LAS CASAS’S BREVÍSIMA RELACIÓN DE LA DESTRUICIÓN DE LAS INDIAS” (Ph.D. diss., University of Oregon, 2011). https://scholarsbank.uoregon.edu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/1794/11616/Orique_David_Thomas_phd2011sp.pdf?sequence=1

689 Ibid., 23.
690 Ibid., 3, 13.
the Spaniards still do nothing save tear the natives to shreds, murder them and inflict upon them untold misery, suffering and distress….”

While there is certainly plenty of evidence to support Las Casas’s portrayal of the early Spanish colonists, it need not be examined here. Even ardent defenders of the Empire, such as Sepúlveda, were prepared to acknowledge unjust actions in the conquest. Instead, their new attack focused on Las Casas’s rather uncomplicated vision of Indian societies. His portrayal of Indians, which provided the untainted victim and heightened the moral outrage necessary for his political efforts, was a chink in his theological armor and now became the next front in the debate over the legitimacy of Spanish rule in the Indies.

True to character, Las Casas went out fighting, even to the end. In 1566 Las Casas sent a letter to his fellow Dominican Pope Pius V asking him to condemn conquest as a means of conversion. That same year in July, Las Casas died at the Dominican convent of Nuestra Señora de Atocha in Madrid at the age of 82. Preparing for death, he wrote his Last Will and Testament, “knowing that every Christian must lay bare his soul at the time he comes to die.” In it he declared that his work for the Indians was “for the sake of God alone, out of compassion at seeing the death of so many human beings.” “As God is my witness,” Las Casas wrote, “I had no other motive.”

3. 1568 Junta Magna and Historiography

In a certain sense, the death of Las Casas marked the end of an era. So many of the key figures in the early empire had died, from the sovereigns Queen Isabel and King

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Ferdinand to the conquerors Francisco Roldán and Hernán Cortés. Las Casas’s life spanned early Hispaniola to the post-conquest colonies and his energy was the major force behind reform. With his death, there was no clear heir apparent.

Of course, not all Spaniards lamented his death. There was a strong sense that the definitive termination of Las Casas’s influence was one of many steps necessary to stabilize the rickety empire. The year after his death, a visita (general inspection) detailed numerous problems in the Council of the Indies but, according to Geoffrey Parker, found two areas of in need of immediate reform. In the first case, members of the council “possessed little knowledge of the Americas and so did not understand their problems.” Secondly, “neither the council nor its ministers in America showed sufficient familiarity with the legislation in force.”

At the same time, rumors filtered into Spain that the Vatican was awakening to the American situation. The Jesuit General, Francis Borgia, was preparing to send the first Jesuit mission to Peru and asked Pope Pius V to issue directives. Remembering Las Casas’s letter, Pius gathered four cardinals and formed a commission, gave them Las Casas’s final two works, and told them to consult with Borgia. “The result,” Parish explained, “was a set of papal exhortations on good treatment of the Indians, drafted by Borgia, that read as if they had been written by Las Casas.” Perhaps, it seemed from Spain, the pope might revoke the royal privileges of church patronage and establish a direct link to the American church.

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Equally disturbing as developments in Europe was the condition of Peru. Pizarro’s rebellion against the New Laws was finally put down by a new royal official, Pedro de La Gasca. Fortified with the revocation of the New Laws, pardon for rebels, and the largest force ever yet assembled in Peru, La Gasca defeated Pizarro’s army on April 9, 1548. Nevertheless, rebellions continued: the Spaniards Don Sebastián de Castilla and Francisco Hernández Girón rebelled in 1553 and 1553-4 respectively, a pan-Inca religious nationalist movement Taki Onkoy (Dancing Sickness) rocked Peru in the 1560s, and the neo-Inca state continued its existence in exile. At the same time, in 1562 the Dominican friar Domingo Santo Tomas railed against the encomienda system in a series of public debates in the Andean highlands, displaying in the words of Stern “political instability, elite divisions, and receptivity to the idea that the encomendero elite was dispensable to Crown and native alike!” Overall, the encomenderos blamed clergy for growing Indian opposition to the colonial system and the economy lacked the development and diversification which characterized the more stable Mexico.

The papal initiative, general administrative chaos, and disorder in Peru prompted Philip to call a junta in 1568 for the purpose of examining Indian affairs with the hope of, in the words of Parker, overhauling “the entire administration of Spain’s overseas colonies.” One of the junta’s main areas of concern, according to Gustavo Gutiérrez, was the continuing effect of the Las Casas trajectory on the church in the Indies. The newly appointed viceroy of Peru, Francisco de Toledo, was instructed to discipline friars

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696 During the conquest of Peru the ruling Inca escaped to Vilcabamba and remained an alternative state from 1539-1572. Ibid., 4-6.
697 Steve J. Stern, Peru’s Indian Peoples and the Challenge of Spanish Conquest: Huamanga to 1640 (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), 49.
who questioned Castilian sovereignty in the Indies and apparently considered using the recently installed Tribunal of the Inquisition. Such means must have seemed necessary to the viceroy, who wrote that “until this Chiapa business is torn up by the roots it will always be able to sprinkle its seed somewhere or other, and there will always be someone found to poison the soil therewith.”

Toledo’s political campaign will be examined in its totality later in the chapter; for now it is sufficient to note its important ideological component designed to counter Las Casas’s favorable view of the Indian elite. Toledo recruited the highly educated Pedro Sarmiento de Gamboa, a sea captain and royal cosmographer for the viceroyalty, to research the history of the Inca. He joined Toledo’s entourage and traveled throughout Peru during the massive inspection of the viceroyalty (1570-75). Sarmiento was able to interview curacas (the Inca word for “lord” used by Spaniards to mean the same as cacique), members of the Inca royal family, and surviving conquistadors.

In the end, Sarmiento produced History of the Incas, Inca and Spanish colonial history packaged in a sweeping theological vision of history explicitly revealed in his introduction. In the eyes of Sarmiento, the Spanish discovery and possession of the Americas was not due to human agency; rather, “God was the true pilot who made the

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699 Gutiérrez, Las Casas, 406. A history of the Spanish Inquisition from the archives from the early 19th century stated that in one book Las Casas “tries to prove that the kings had no power to dispose of the persons and liberty of their subjects, the make the vassals of another lord, by way of fiefs, encomienda or in any other way. This work and its author were denounced to the Council of the Inquisition as contrary to the doctrine of Saint Peter and Saint Paul about the subjection of serfs and vassals to their lords and kings.” Quoted from Henry Raup Wagner with Helen Rand Parish, The Life and Writings of Bartolomé de las Casas (Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 1967), 187.

700 Quoted from Gutiérrez, Las Casas, 408.

crossing of the dark and frightening Atlantic Ocean easy.” Spain’s intentions,
according to Sarmiento, were pure; a holy mission to spread the Gospel. Rival princes
interested in the Indies’ material wealth acted not on their own behalf but were stirred up
by the devil to interfere with Spain’s desire to spread the Gospel. Pope Alexander VI, to
prevent interference, gave the Isabel and Ferdinand dominion of half the globe.

But the devil, Sarmiento explained, was not so easily deterred. Seeing his secular
doorway closed, he found a theological one. He seduced preachers - “the very soldiers
who were fighting against him” - to do what rival princes could not: “question the right
and title that the kings of Castile had over these lands.” Charles V, zealous for his
conscience, sought advice from scholars who, according to Sarmiento, misinformed him
that the Incas were “true and legitimate kings of these lands.” All of this occurred
because of the writings of Bartolomé de las Casas, who though moved by understandable
zeal, depended on incorrect evidence and judicial proofs.

Gamboa believed that his History of the Incas, in contrast, gave the correct
evidence and judicial proofs. He detailed the history of the Inca with special emphasis on
their conquests and apparent atrocities. Through interviews conducted with “diligence”
and ratified as “witnesses,” he found “the terrible, deep-seated, and horrendous tyranny
of the Incas, who were tyrants in this kingdom of Peru.” His argument deserves to be
quoted in detail:

I can truly testify to the terrible and most inhumane tyranny of these Incas and of their
curacas, who are not, and never were, true lords of this place. Instead, they were
appointed by Topa Inca Yupanqui, the greatest, most horrendous, and most damaging

703 Ibid., 39.
704 Ibid., 39.
705 Ibid.
706 Ibid., 39-40.
707 Ibid., 42.
tyrant of them all…..They perpetrated their tyranny even though they were foreigners in Cuzco. They imposed violence on all the natives of the Cuzco Valley and all the others from Quito to Chile through the use of weapons. Then, without the consent or election of the natives, they proclaimed themselves to be Incas.708

On the surface, Sarmiento’s rather shrill testimony seems to be another straightforward attack on the Indians’ humanity. Read canonically with Las Casas, however, we see a parallel method to Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies, with only the plaintiff and defendant reversed.709 Gamboa, in effect, delivered a defense of the conquistadors while issuing a counter-suit. He vindicates the conquistadors who defended the unjustly oppressed and enforced the natural law, driven by the command to love thy neighbor.710 The Inca were guilty of war crimes and did not have legitimate dominion of Peru when the Spaniards arrived. Overall, Sarmiento assured King Philip that his testimony will “give a secure and quiet harbor to the Your Royal conscience against the tempests [generated by] your native vassals, theologians, and other learned [individuals] who are misinformed about the events here.”711

4. Contemporary Historiography of Indian Aristocracy

To summarize, Sarmiento categorized the Inca as violent, imperial tyrants, much worse than their Spanish replacements. Las Casas, in contrast, maintained that Indians and by extension the Inca were relatively innocent in comparison to their Spanish conquerors. Using modern scholarship, we can briefly compare Inca history to that of the Spanish expansion. As we have seen, Spanish colonial expansion was largely conducted

708 Gamboa, History of the Incas, 42.
710 According to Gutiérrez, Gamboa uses Vitoria and argues that natural law alone gives title to not only Peru, but all of the Indies. Gutiérrez, Las Casas, 411-2.
by decentralized private groups in search of economic rewards, both mineral loot and tribute from noble status in the *encomienda*. Despite the largely temporal motivations, Spanish presence imposed religious change and developed spiritual justification in response to criticism.

The Inca, like the conquistadors of Castile, emerged from endemic warfare in the early 15th century. A more powerful rival kingdom, the Chanca, invaded their Cuzco valley homeland, forcing the reigning king and his heir to flee. According to legend, the creator god Viracocha appeared to another son, Yupanqui, promising victory over the invading Chancas and many other nations if he “kept to the true religion.”  

The Incas, along with aid from allies, defeated the Chancas and Yupanqui was crowned ruler in place of his father and brother, taking the name Pachakuti, “Cataclysm,” or “He Who Remakes the World.” He incorporated the defeated Chancas into the Incan army and initiated a series of imperial conquests which over the next century created the largest political entity that South America had ever seen, stretching 4,000 km over the Andes and encompassing 12 million people from diverse ethnic groups.

Subject populations provided multi-faceted service to their Inca overlords. As under the later Spanish arrivals the conquered population worked the land. Roughly 2/3 of the production was taken as tribute and the remainder, along with various other goods and services, was redistributed back to leaders of communities and conquered groups to encourage loyalty. In addition to working the land, the Inca administration also require every male to perform a set number of days of labor each year in a practice called the

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712 Geoffey W. Conrad and Arthur A. Demarest, *Religion and Empire: The Dynamics of Aztec and Inca Imperialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 111. Unless otherwise noted, all information in this section is from this book.

713 Ibid.

714 Ibid., 84.
m’ita. The army quickly became composed of conquered peoples as a compulsory draft of all men from 25-50 was drawn from the peasant class and the populations of subdued peoples.

In general, Inca imperial administration attempted to establish a firm control of subjugated populations while minimizing the interference on the structures of the local populations. Like the Spaniards, they absorbed local political systems into the imperial administration. The Inca divided the empire into an efficient imperial grid of four quarters subdivided into provinces of about 20,000 households, usually by ethnicity. The Inca further separated the provinces into progressively smaller units - at the level of 10,000; 5,000; 1,000; 500, and 100 – with each unit led by a curacas, the mostly native leaders of smaller ethnic populations who mediated the needs of the local populations and the requirements of the imperial system. As imperial bureaucrats they learned the Quechua language, permitted their sons to be taken to Cuzco as political hostages to be educated in Inca culture and politics, and their daughters to marry into the Inca hierarchy.

Inca social control over conquered peoples was extensive. Subject populations were required by law to wear their native dress which made for easy identification. Marriage needed state approval and was sometimes vetoed. Among less differentiated populations labor became transformed into the more hardened Inca practices and conceptions. An extensive and severe legal code backed up Inca rule, requiring corporal punishment, torture, and execution for noncompliance with imperial laws.

In addition, two servant classes developed that served Inca nobility and state. The yananas were servants from conquered populations that served the nobility, selected for their promise as children or through heredity. There was also a class of servant women
called aclyaconas, or Chosen Women. Selected at the age of ten from both conquered peoples and nobles for their attractiveness, they were sent to schools to learn domestic activities. The best were sacrificed to the Inca gods, were given to serve the gods in temples, married to elites or foreign leaders, or taught in the school.715

The Inca also made more dramatic changes in the Andean populations foreshadowing the coming Spanish colonial practices. Often whole groups of people were moved from their homeland and resettled in different locations (mitimae) for two reasons. One was to facilitate the more efficient agriculture. The mitimae was also used as a means of pacifying a rebellious region or ethnic group. Away from the advantage of familiar terrain and the help of local huacas (objects or landmarks of spiritual power), obstinate peoples were less likely to rebel successfully. Likewise, rebellious groups were often placed alongside more loyal populations, whose armed forces, economic and social incentives, and desire to please tipped the strategic edge in favor of the empire. Overall, the mitamae was so important for imperial administration that one scholar judged that without it, “it is unlikely that the Incas could have achieved a measure of unity and control over such a vast and distant territory containing such a variety of different ethnic groups so far from the imperial heartland.”716

Inca ideology, like Spanish notions of race and nobility, justified their higher social position. All Inca were considered nobility by definition, called orejones by the Spanish for their practice of piercing their ears. Non-nobles who served with distinction or earned favor could transcend their ethnicity by obtaining the status of “Inca by privilege.” Religion reinforced the distinction. The afterworld was a place of reward and

716 Often the new group earned the status of “Inca-by-privilege.” Davies, The Incas, 26.
punishment for earthly behavior, except for nobles, who all went to heaven. Inca, unlike commoners, could not be sacrificed. The Inca dismissed Amazon peoples, who they were unsuccessful in subjugating, as “stupid, naked savages, creatures so subhuman that they mated with animals.”

Religion also served as a means of buttressing the empire as religious renewal and transformation accompanied expansion. The new liturgy and rebuilt Temple of Coricancha “became the symbol of a new imperial cult of the Incas” which centered on the Inca monarchy. The supreme Inca, Sapa, was man and god, being the son of Inti and head of the Inca state. The Inca exported religion in a modified form of imperialism, perhaps more benign but not entirely dissimilar from the more liberal wing of Spanish missionary presence. They allowed subject populations to keep their religious traditions with two modifications. First, indigenous sacred objects were taken to Cuzco to be housed in an imperial shrine in the hope of promoting the gods into the Inca imperial administration and in a sense also holding them hostage. Second, subject populations were required to acknowledge the superiority of Inca gods exported as part of the imperial expansion.

Viewed as a whole, modern historical work portrays the Inca Empire as a dynamic polity filled with cultural and technological complexity. Yet the modern reader need not vilify the Inca like Sarmiento to recognize that the imperial system described above dispels Las Casas’s vision of the noble pre-contact Indian. Most components of the Spanish expansion - incredible violence, noble status, tribute, and enforced religious

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717 Conrad and Demarest, Religion and Empire, 128.
719 Ibid., 18.
and cultural transformation - were present in the Inca expansion. It is impossible to be exhaustive, but an examination of any Indian society reveals similar levels of ambiguity. Central America was composed of less stratified but still ambiguous societies built on conquest, tribute, and slavery. The Aztec of Central Mexico present an arguably more oppressive imperial system heightened by the high level of human sacrifice.

As a result, Sarmiento’s reduction of the question of conquest to a strictly historical perspective left Las Casas’s position with a significant problem. Las Casas’s vision of pre-contact Indians simply did not support the reality. The question of historiography, however, was not the only thrust of his argument. Of equal, arguably greater importance was how to interpret history. The theological question, after all, was not who was the greater tyrant but whether tyranny was acceptable for Christians; in the words of Las Casas “we do not excuse our tyranny by alleging his.”

A Jesuit missionary in Peru, José de Acosta (1539-1600), would later elaborate on Las Casas point. “[O]bviously,” he wrote, “one may not despoil robbers of the plunder they have taken from others and appropriate it oneself.”

While Las Casas’s interpretive point was theoretically valid, Sarmiento’s historical argument was probably the more effective for average Spaniards. Whether or not Sarmiento exaggerated Inca brutality was largely beside the point; his work and the work of the Toledan campaign undercut much of the energy of the Las Casian movement. At the very least, conquistadors and Inca lords end up looking much the same: ambitious warrior aristocracies willing to employ incredible violence to establish their privileged

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720 Doce Dudas from Gutiérrez, Las Casas, 417.
721 from Ibid.

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positions. If it was a matter of choosing one tyrant over another, why not choose the one closer to one’s personal interest?

5. Royal Consolidation

In the end, that seems to be the position of the Franciscans in Mexico. Motolonia, the famous Franciscan missionary, wrote a letter in 1555 which exemplified popular opposition to Las Casas. Las Casas’s newly printed tracts - which included his Confesionario, the same work he had gathered up to be burned five or six years ago – had recently arrived.\footnote{Wagner with Helen Rand Parish, The Life and Writings of Bartolome de las Casas, 190.} Las Casas never learned the good, only the evil, complained Motolinia, “upset[ing] and destroy[ing] the government and state here.”\footnote{Lesley Byrd Simpson, The Encomienda in New Spain: The Beginning of Spanish Mexico (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 238.} For all Las Casas’s defense of the Indians, he had no qualms against utilizing numerous Indian porters to carry his traveling library. Neither did Las Casas spend time on the difficult task of evangelization, not bothering to “humble himself to teach” the Indians.\footnote{Ibid., 238, 239.} Hernán Cortés did far more to further the faith, Motolinia argued, praising Cortés through whom “God opened the door for us to preach His Holy Gospel,” forcing the Aztec “to have reverence for the holy sacraments and for the ministers of the Holy Church.”\footnote{From ibid., 243.} It seems that from Motolinia’s perspective, the rapid cultural transformation that occurred in Central Mexico could not have occurred without political rule. For how would the head of a massive imperial system built on conquest and human sacrifice, Motolinia might have well asked, receive the admonitions of a few unarmed preachers?
Seen from the increasingly stable Central Mexico, much of Las Casas’s campaign had faded to irrelevancy as the 16th century waned. By the 1570s the Crown had won its victory over the *encomenderos*. A vast bureaucracy had eliminated personal service from the *encomienda* and replaced it with tribute alone, generally limiting Spaniards to one *encomienda* of no greater than 2,000 pesos.\(^{726}\) Despite the staggering collapse of the Indian population\(^{727}\) the economy had managed to adapt, depending on Indian labor drawn from a rotating draft of Indians congregated in towns. Spanish private landholding grew in the form of the *hacienda*, agricultural estates worked with Indian wage earners.\(^{728}\) The discovery of silver in Northern Mexico at Zacatecas (1548) pulled Spanish settlement and control north through the sparsely populated “Chichimec” areas that had previously evaded Spanish and earlier Aztec control.\(^{729}\) Cattle ranching spread through the northern plains as a *transhumance* (seasonal migration of cattle) similar to that in Spain developed. Overall, the economic diversification, the generally peaceful relations between Indians and Spaniards, the work of the Church, and the passing of time produced a sense of legitimate Spanish dominion along with a new colonial identity.

Stability encouraged legitimacy in Mexico, and the new viceroy of Peru, Don Francisco de Toledo, re-organized all facets of Peru during his viceregency (1569-1581) with the purpose of constructing an integrated state. He joined the interests of the rebellious *encomendero* class to those of the Crown through the institutions of a

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\(^{727}\) The Valley of Mexico’s tributary population had fallen from 1.5 million in 1519 to 350,000. See full details Alan Knight, *Mexico: The Colonial Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 20-21.

\(^{728}\) Knight, *Mexico*, 22.

centralized state and a huge corpus of legislation.\textsuperscript{730} Like the Catholic Monarchs in Spain a century before, he domesticated the nobility’s military power and allowed the growth of their social and economic power.\textsuperscript{731} He encouraged a prosperous mining system. Labor for the mining industry was drawn from the newly re-organized Indian population, resettled to Hispanic style towns and organized in the revived Inca \textit{mita} labor system, which drafted peasant laborers for small wages on a rotating basis. The system also served to acculturate the Indians, important for Toledo, for in order to become Christians he believed that “they must first know how to be human beings and introduced to governance and a political and rational lifestyle.”\textsuperscript{732} He gathered up works of Las Casas and overall, Toledo’s project achieved a type of Mexican synthesis of Church, state, and elite in Peru.\textsuperscript{733}

Dramatic public symbolism had always been an important part of Castilian political life, which Toledo used to inaugurate the definite end of the old Incan order. He had Sarmiento’s \textit{The History of the Incas} read publicly to representatives of the twelve Inca subgroups, or \textit{ayllus}, with translators and public notary, who affirmed its validity.\textsuperscript{734} At the same time, he purged the Indian nobility in Cuzco, exiling them to other cities for rebellion, two of whom had aided Sarmiento.\textsuperscript{735} Toledo invaded the neo-Inca state of Vilcabamba and fittingly, Sarmiento planted the royal standard and took formal possession of the city. To punctuate the new colonial order, Toledo had the last Inca,

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{730} For example, Toledo issued a four peso tax on carrying a sword. Arthur Franklin Zimmerman, \textit{Francisco de Toledo, Fifth Viceroy of Peru: 1569-1581} (Caldwell, ID: Caxton Printers, Ltd, 1938), 307.
\textsuperscript{731} Gutiérrez, \textit{Las Casas}, 609 n. 66.
\textsuperscript{732} From ibid., 418.
\textsuperscript{733} Ibid., 406-7.
\textsuperscript{734} Bauer and Decoster, introduction to \textit{History of the Incas}, 1.
\textsuperscript{735} Ibid., 24.
\end{footnotesize}
Tupac Amaru, executed in the plaza of Cuzco on September 24, 1572, proudly displaying the illegitimacy of Inca rule.\footnote{Bauer and Decoster, introduction to History of the Incas, 25.}

For all intents and purposes, Indian status in the colonies was now decided. They made up a second social tier; even elites were below the Spanish encomendero nobility. The majority were servants by nature, either in the remnants of the encomienda or the mita/repartimiento system. With Las Casas dead and Peru - the second great colonial center - sufficiently stabilized, there seemed to be no turning back for the Spanish colonial society. How the empire played the game was now decided; it would play as the Inca did before them, something Tupac’s dead body proclaimed to all residents of the Andes.

Yet to end with Tupac’s execution would leave the chapter incomplete. Since the arrival of Europeans in the Americas, the major battle for the crown was not with Indians, but Spaniards. The crown waged decades of conflict with the encomendero class, bureaucratic and military, and the new American nobility remained its greatest threat. Less than a decade before Toledo’s Peruvian campaign, the specter of revolt appeared in the heart of the largest and seemingly most stable colony, resulting in the public execution of Spaniards.

It began in March 1566 when “one of the most splendid knights in Mexico City,” Alonso de Avila, organized a public masquerade for the Marquis del Valle, Martin Cortés, in honor of the birth of his twins.\footnote{Anna Lanyon, The New World of Martin Cortes (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2004), 162.} The masquerade reenacted the Conquest of Mexico, complete with a procession dressed as Aztecs, who wound through the plaza to

\footnote{Martin along with his brother, had inherited their father’s encomienda worth 7,430 pesos. Simpson, The Encomienda in New Spain, 132.}
the Cortés mansion bearing gifts of bouquets and crowns of flowers. It was also rich with monarchical symbolism, including a floral crown and the message “No temas la caída pues es para mayor subida” – “do not fear the fall as it is for greater ascent.”

That night and the next day the Viceroy’s authorities arrested twenty people involved in the pageant, including the sons the conqueror of Mexico. They were accused of conspiring to rebel against the Crown and establishing the Marquis as the new king of Mexico, complete with an encomendero nobility and loyal Indian caciques.

Investigations through three different judicial bodies lasted for the next couple of years. In one lull the Marquis was allowed to appeal directly to the Crown and left with his family and one brother, his lands sequestered in the process. Another son of Cortes, Mexico’s first mestizo, was imprisoned for over a year and subject to gruesome rope and water torture, ending with a fine of 1,000 pesos and perpetual exile from the Indies.

Others were tortured as well and from the beginning, the process culminated in executions. Only a week after the arrest, the Avila brothers were sentenced to death. On the night of October 3, 1566, armed horseman cleared a path from the royal houses to the scaffold that had been set up in the center of the main plaza. Thousands watched as the town crier, playing his trumpet, led a procession of the Avila brothers mounted on mules. Several Dominicans walked beside them followed by the executioner. In the torchlight and in sight of their family mansion, the first brother received absolution and waited silently as his head was severed. The second brother lost his nerve and cried out in fear.

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739 Simpson thinks they could have succeeded with the unwavering support of the Marques. Lesley Byrd Simpson, *Many Mexicos* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1966), 132.
before being comforted by one of the priests. He laid his head on the block, and the crowd gasped as it took three blows to finish the job.

The execution of the Avila brothers was not the end of their punishment. Their house was torn down, the empty lot sown with salt, and a plaque commemorating the execution of royal justice displayed. Worst of all, their severed heads were set on pikes and left to rot, all at the western side of the Great Aztec Temple, where so many died by obsidian knife. A witness wrote that they lost everything, “life, honor and property, vida, honra y hacienda.” When the terror finally ended, accused and accusers ended up among the executed, “the headman’s axe dripped with the bluest blood of New Spain,” and no one was able to determine whether the plot was actually real. But the message was clear, even the suspicion of treason – by either Indian or Spaniard - would be purged by any means necessary.

Latent in the consolidation and legitimization of Spanish dominion in the Indies, then, there is an often overlooked irony. Indians, while forcibly made subjects of the Crown, were not the only ones “disciplined” by royal violence or even the biggest threats. King Philip was allegedly angered at Toledo for executing Tupac, for even though he was in rebellion, he – like Philip - was still royalty, and was so by divine right. The encomenderos of Mexico were not and if Philip and his officials had their way, would never be. In the end, no person, regardless of position or ethnicity, could cross the crown’s honor and reputation or take away from what it “ha[d] been given.”

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741 From Lanyon, The New World of Martin Cortes, 182.
742 Simpson, Many Mexicos, 134.
744 From Tracy, Emperor Charles V, Impresario of War, 37.
CHAPTER 8: A QUESTION OF SLAVERY

“[A]nyone who takes it upon himself to examine this question of Portuguese trading (contratación) will find no lack of things to criticize. The usual remedy is for those who have a part in it is to close their eyes and follow the crowd, without striving officiously to ask questions.”

Francisco de Vitoria, O.P.745

Up to this point, this work has examined the Indian question. In chapter 2 we saw two rebellions, that of Roldán and that of the Dominicans, which launched the conflict over the Indies. Over the next five chapters, we examined the struggle between the two. Conquest and encomiendas swept through the Americas and Las Casas, despite a lifetime struggle, was unable to end the cycle. It was now 1572; Las Casas was dead and the Indian question was settled; Indians were to be a permanent servant class. But back in Hispaniola, the site of the two revolts, the Indians and the gold that had fueled the conquests and encomiendas were now largely gone. No Indians meant no encomiendas, the foundation of colonial economies and societies, posing a dire threat to the self-interest of Spanish colonists, the viabilities of colonies, and the empire as a whole.

745 Francisco de Vitoria, Political Writings, edited by Anthony Pagden and Jeremy Lawrance (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991). This chapter is based on recent work on the trans Atlantic slave trade and some readers may consider it revisionist. According to a leading scholar of the slave trade, Herbert S. Klein, “Even today, despite a quarter century of sophisticated multinational studies, the gap between popular understanding and scholarly knowledge remains as profound as when the trade was first under discussion in literate European circles in the eighteenth century.” Herbert S. Klein, The Atlantic Slave Trade (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), xvii.
However, even as Spaniards spread throughout the Americas and the debate continued over the Indians, another revolution occurred in its wake. In the verdant fields of Hispaniola, Spanish lords tended new vassals brought from Africa. Depending on the season, you could see the vassals clearing the land or planting the young shoots by hand, some 5,000 to 8,000 per acre. At harvest, they cut the tall stalks - 25-100 tons per acre – and brought them to the mills to be pressed into juice. The slaves fed blazing fires under boiling cauldrons, reducing the juice to crystal. They pressed the crystals into cakes to be dried in the hot Caribbean sun. Lastly, the new vassals loaded the finished sugar – or white gold – into ships for the luxury markets of Europe. For the new vassals, the work was unending, the punishments were brutal, and the nutrition poor. Unlike for Indians, there were no villages for African slaves to return to after their labor as they were merely another piece of plantation property. African plantation slavery was born and would soon sweep through the Americas.

It is often easy to assume, especially for those unfamiliar with the history of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, that its development was the automatic outcome of European understandings of race and slavery. This chapter will analyze the development of African slavery in the Americas and argue that the opposite is true in three two-part sections. The first section, Precedents, will show the rather limited nature of Iberian slavery and the early social mobility of Africans in the New World. The second section, Crisis and Transformation, will explain the economic crisis in Hispaniola which prompted the turn to African slavery and sugar production. I will argue that, like colonial expansion in chapter 3, spiritual concerns played a minor role. Finally, the last section, Expansion and Intensification, will show how Portuguese military action in Angola fueled early growth.
in the trade. At the same time, the components of the new system – the Atlantic passage, American vassalage and labor, and its justification – intensified the nature of unfree servitude; in effect, African slavery became the third stop on the colonial trajectory beginning with Iberian serfdom and continuing with the American *encomienda*.

Overall, the birth of African plantation slavery was the final major transformation in our examination of the early Spanish Empire and in many ways a microcosm of the processes examined up to this point. Like Roldán’s rebellion, it occurred in response to Hispaniolan crisis. This time, agents synthesized developments from as far away as Africa and Asia to build new feudal power and wealth. Once again, religion played a rather small role. And Las Casas, despite his anti-colonial zeal, unwittingly contributed to its growth.

I. Precedents

1. Old World

It is unlikely that Las Casas or anyone else from the 16th century could have predicted the transformation of Hispaniola and the new American slavery. Slavery in late medieval Europe was nothing like the opening scene. Indeed, the dominant trend over the long medieval centuries was away from slave labor. Slavery had been a major component of the Roman Empire, but the dissolution of the empire into smaller polities and the loss of large scale international trade made slave labor inefficient.\(^{746}\) Along with political and economic conditions, the Church also contributed to a gradual decline in

\(^{746}\) According to Klein the Roman Empire was the only society to develop industrial slavery, having a well developed market economy on the local and international level, a significant share of agriculture from non-peasant labor, and slave labor a major factor in production. Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, 2.
European slavery. According to John Noonan, the Church successfully established a
certain level of indirect control over the master-slave relationship through the law of
marriage. Unlike under Roman law, slaves had the right to marry and to other Catholic
sacraments and thus some level of “rights.”  As a result of theological concerns and
more worldly conditions, the medieval centuries saw a gradual drift from slavery to
serfdom. After the eighth century, warfare created the remaining slaves who were
generally limited to small scale domestic service.

Slavery in Iberia was not too different from the general European trend: at best a
minor subplot in the crisis of 1350-1500 described in chapter 1. To be sure, the
Reconquest gave Iberian slavery an added importance as the ongoing frontier warfare
produced numerous captives. As a result, most slaves in medieval Iberia were of Islamic
descent and known as “white slaves.” But as in the rest of Europe, masters typically
owned only a few slaves who usually worked within the domestic sphere of their owners:
preparing food, doing laundry, attending children and horses, or as personal assistants.
Slaves who worked outside the homes of their masters did so usually in the urban
economy - such as the service sector or as artisans - and rarely in agriculture.
Punishments resembling torture were not uncommon, and the unruly were sometimes
branded, often in the face. In drastic cases, masters sold rebellious slaves overseas to the
colonies. Nevertheless, slaves were generally treated much like free servants, and

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747 Christianity originally inherited Roman law’s definition as “an institution of ius gentium
whereby on is, against nature, made subject to ownership of another.” Church fathers accept the Roman
understanding of slavery, some criticizing it but generally defining slavery as not a natural condition but a
Moral Teaching (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 40.
according to Ruth Pike there “is even some evidence that in Spain slaves received better treatment.”

In addition to slaves of Islamic origin, other groups were represented in the slave class, such as Eastern Europeans and Africans. According to chroniclers, the trans-Saharan slave trade had brought many African slaves to Seville by the end of the fourteenth century and over time they made up an increasing percentage of the enslaved population. Their cultural distinctiveness was in some ways attractive to prospective owners as African slaves were sometimes purchased to entertain with music, particularly the popular dances with African roots, such as the Guineo or Zumbé. There does not seem to have been any significant resistance to Africans in the life of the Church as they were considered full members and able to receive all the sacraments. African slaves and free blacks had their own cofradías, or religious brotherhoods, which gathered on certain feast days to perform their own music and dance. Furthermore, there were black candidates for the priesthood studying in Portugal during 15th century.

While Iberians tended to associate Africans with slavery, they were not considered slaves by definition as in subsequent New World slave societies. A significant free African population quickly developed as owners made charitable acts of manumission and slaves found ways to purchase their freedom. Free Africans participated in all realms of Iberian life with a certain degree of political autonomy.

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749 Ibid., 345.
751 Klein, The Atlantic Slave Trade, 17. According to Pike, “[e]ventually it became customary for one of them to be named by the city officials as mayoral (steward) over the rest, with authority to protect them against their masters, defend them before the court of law, and settle their quarrels.” In 1475
They generally remained in the lower classes but despite structural inequalities, Ruth Pike emphasizes that Africans and Spaniards generally interacted freely and without conflict, resulting in many mixed marriages.\(^{752}\)

Whatever Europeans thought of African culture and people in general, European elites seemed to have dealt with their African counterparts as they did with Indian elites, respecting them as *señores naturales* even if not required to by the circumstances, such as the Wolof king and his subjects brought to Castile as slaves and freed by Isabel in 1476.\(^{753}\) African elites were also potential allies for dynastic concerns, illustrated by Portuguese and Aragonese overtures for alliance marriages with Ethiopia.\(^{754}\) Neither was African descent an insurmountable obstacle for elite status in Europe, as Giulio de Medici, the son of an African servant, became the Duke of Penna and Florence and married the daughter of Charles V.\(^{755}\)

There is certainly much more to be said about slavery and Africans in the Old World. For our purposes it is enough to highlight the relatively limited character of Iberian slavery and the ambiguous status of Africans. Slavery would never be economically significant as the incentives for large scale slave labor did not exist. Rather, Pike explains that slaves were more a luxury item, “part of the conspicuous

\(^{752}\) For example, there was often competition between white and black workers, and guilds never allowed slaves to enter. Ibid., 357.

\(^{753}\) Peggy Liss recounts the story of an unauthorized Castilian slaving expedition which took a Wolof king captive through deceit. According to Liss, the king wanted to know “[w]ho had so cruelly deceived him? Told they belonged to Spaniards, he asked if they obeyed any king and when answered yes, a most noble one, he expressed confidence that his fellow-monarch would soon free him.” Arriving in Palos, the Wolof king demanded a mount for the journey to Seville, where Isabel ordered him and his people to be turned over and freed. Peggy K. Liss, “Isabel the Queen: Life and Times (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) 145.


\(^{755}\) Anna Lanyon, *The New World of Martin Cortes* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2004), 65-6. Some claimed that Giulio was the illegitimate son of Pope Clement VII.
consumption of the period that called for long entourages of servants and for coaches, costly wearing apparel, and ornate home decorations.”\textsuperscript{756}

Likewise, Africans inhabited an ambiguous social location. Most slaves were African by 1492, but a significant number were still Moorish or European. Africans were not slaves by definition and utilized numerous opportunities to obtain free status and socioeconomic advancement. Thus, as Europe entered the New World, African slavery was socially acceptable in Iberia but not in the way that would characterize American slavery, an idea perhaps best summarized by Herbert Klein, who concluded that unlike in later centuries there “was nothing special about Africans and slavery in the European mind at the end of the fifteenth century.”\textsuperscript{757}

\textbf{2. Initial New World}

The status of Africans and slavery in the Spain of 1492 was, as we have seen, very different from the African plantation slavery of the coming centuries. Turning to the initial wave of colonial expansion in the Americas, an observer would see another counter-intuitive trend: the New World initially offered Africans increased socioeconomic opportunities, just as it had for Europeans.

Africans arrived in the Americas as a continuation of Iberian patterns and were only an ancillary component of Spanish colonial expansion. Individuals or small groups journeyed with their masters on the same ships as Europeans or were even sent alone as business agents. African slaves continued to serve as status symbols, an essential

\textsuperscript{756} Pike, “Sevillian Society,” 350. 
\textsuperscript{757} Klein, \textit{The Atlantic Slave Trade}, 17.
component of the noble lifestyle. They also served as a trustworthy component of one’s retinue, often gaining the trust only given to blood relatives. They were perhaps less “other” in the context of large Indian populations as Africans were generally inculturated into Spanish culture and tended to have hostile relations with Indian societies.

As in Iberia, African slaves in the Americas lived primarily in urban settings and continued to perform domestic service, including small-scale agriculture and artisanry, such tasks that required some level of acculturation to Spanish culture. They filled much of the growing service gap in the quickly expanding Spanish presence, working in trades important for colonial infrastructure as blacksmiths, swordsmiths, carpenters, tailors, bakers, and muleteers. As time passed bozales - African born slaves - made up an increasing number of the new arrivals, a trend to which entrepreneurs quickly adapted. The Caribbean became a type of service training ground as one colonial official reported to the king that many Spaniards in Hispaniola “made a living by buying Africans [bozales], teaching them some trade [alguna industria] and then selling them at a profit on the mainland.”

Black slaves were never cheap, a fact that contributed to their relatively high initial status in Latin America. In Peru, prices grew from 100-250 pesos in the 1530s to 250-500 pesos by the 1550s. Skilled slaves, such as tailors, blacksmiths, and carpenters

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758 The noble ideal included house, land, horse, arms, livestock, and a large retinue of family and servants. While most Spaniards were unable to fulfill all the requirements of the noble ambition, Lockhart explains that “they aimed at least for two essentials, a house (which could be rented) and blacks.” James Lockhart, Spanish Peru, 1532-1560: a Social History (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994), 205, 213.
760 Ibid., 191.
were worth an additional 50%-100%.\textsuperscript{761} Ironically, their economic value made them of higher worth than European laborers and Indians, illustrated by the fact that slaves were allegedly a higher priority on sinking ships than mariners.\textsuperscript{762}

The high cost of African slaves was certainly related to the added military role that Africans played in the New World. Blacks served as individuals and as auxiliary divisions, such as the 200 Spanish speaking blacks sent from Hispaniola to relieve Cuzco in 1536 who according to colonial officials “were very good at fighting.”\textsuperscript{763} They appeared in virtually all expeditions and “[o]ne of the most important yardsticks for a Spaniard’s contribution to any of the various war efforts,” James Lockhart explains, “was the number of black servants he brought to the battle with him.”\textsuperscript{764} Blacks also enforced colonial discipline as intermediaries between Europeans and Indians, with whom they often had tense relationships. According to Lockhart “a small band of [Africans] could terrorize a whole indigenous community; a single black could dominate an Indian settlement.”\textsuperscript{765}

Not surprisingly, Africans often turned their formidable military skills against Spanish colonial authority. Already in 1503 Governor Ovando requested that blacks from Iberia not be sent to Hispaniola because of their proclivity for rebellion.\textsuperscript{766} In Chapter 2 we noted an African presence in Enrique’s rebel community and the Wolof

\textsuperscript{761} Lockhart, \textit{Spanish Peru}, 202-3.
\textsuperscript{764} Lockhart, \textit{Spanish Peru}, 205. Almagro allegedly had two times as many Blacks as Spaniards with him and Gonzalo Pizarro had 400 Blacks in his rebellion. Henry Kamen, \textit{Empire: How Spain Became a World Power, 1492-1763} (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 139.
\textsuperscript{765} Ibid., 194.
\textsuperscript{766} Matthew Restall, \textit{Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 56.
revolt of 1521. Hispanized blacks would have been familiar with Spanish military techniques, but even bozales brought skills forged in the iron and cavalry driven conflicts of Africa, such as the Wolof horsemen portrayed by the 16th century Spanish poet Juan Castellanos. “The Wolof are skillful and very warlike,” he wrote, “[w]ith vain presumptions to be knights.” Only a decade after Enrique’s capitulation with Spanish authorities, an African named Lemba led a rebel community in the same mountains, and African rebels remained a problem as long as slavery existed in the Spanish empire.

Revolt, although the most romantic option available to slaves, was only exercised by a small percentage of Africans. Most negotiated the colonial system and as in Spain, black agents used socioeconomic and religious channels to obtain freedom and middling status, utilizing the added social mobility of the frontier to climb the societal chain just as Europeans did. Many were freed by acts of charity or earned enough to buy their freedom despite exorbitant prices, such as one Peruvian couple who paid 1,800 pesos for their freedom in 1538. According to Matthew Restall, most slaves who participated in conquests were granted their freedom. Several free blacks earned cuts of conquest booty, including two at Cajamarca, one who took his footman’s share back to Spain where he lived to be an old man. Five men of color received encomiendas in Chile, grants which eluded the large Spanish transient population of the colonies. The added social mobility of frontier society allowed some to rise up to minor lords in their own right, the most

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769 Freedman often went to the Indies. Pike, “Sevillian Society,” 358.
770 Lockhart, Spanish Peru, 215.
dramatic example being Juan Beltrán, a mulatto and member of the expedition to Chile.

Vásquez de Espinosa chronicled his exploits:

The valiant captain Juan Beltrán, a mulatto, son of a black man and an Indian woman, is worthy of eternal memory for his great deeds among those savages. He was very deferential towards Spaniards, and very obedient and loyal to them. With the Indians he was fearless; they stood in awe of him and respected him, to such a degree that the mere mention of his name was often enough to intimidate the Indians and put their forces to flight…. With his 500 Indians he built his fort two leagues from Villarica, and they were very obedient to them. He made himself respected and feared in all the neighboring provinces, into which he made long malocas or raids, bringing in great prizes. So long as he lived, Villarica was well defended and could rely on his aid and protection…His loss was the end of the Spaniards….

Beltran became a legend; indeed, “[m]erely to write his victories and heroic deeds,” Espinosa marveled, “…would require an entire volume.”

While Beltran was one of the most dramatic examples, African social mobility on the frontier was an important reality. Military service, shrewd economic activity, and charitable acts produced a large free African class in colonial Latin America. By 1600 10-15% of the African population in Peru was free and by 1700 reached 50%, a feature not reproduced by later colonial enterprises. But despite the high percentage of free Africans, a ceiling to African social status remained. Higher social and political positions were almost categorically denied to people of African descent and freedom was not entirely dissimilar to slave status. Race would remain a defining social barrier that would only grow due to changing colonial economies.

Yet overall, the dynamics of colonial expansion actually improved African status in some ways. The initial wave of colonial expansion offered increased socioeconomic opportunities, especially in the trades. Even more unprecedented was the growth of military opportunities and their corresponding rewards. At the same time, royal import controls, high prices, and the limited demand of the domestic sphere kept the African

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772 From Restall, “Black Conquistadors,” 194.
population relatively small. While African status remained limited in Latin America, without too much imagination, one could envision Africans gradually blending into the colonial elite if the frontier trend continued.

Such improvements in African standing, however, depended on Indians. The disappearance of Indian populations and the economic crisis which followed in the wake of the initial wave of colonial expansion quickly counterbalanced and overwhelmed the initial social mobility of the frontier. Once again, Hispaniola was the center of the crisis. In 1517 the Indian population was only about eleven thousand, a mere fraction of the probable million that inhabited the island in 1492.\textsuperscript{774} Decline in the Indian labor population combined with increasingly spent gold deposits cut into the once thriving mining industry. In 1517 gold revenue dropped to 125,000 pesos a year, only $\frac{1}{4}$ of the earlier average of 500,000. The European population began its exodus to the more profitable mainland areas of Mexico and Peru, leaving those that remained in search of a new economy.\textsuperscript{775} Hispaniola needed wealth producing practices and labor to fuel them. The solutions – labor and a high value commodity – came from across the globe and transformed slavery in the Americas.\textsuperscript{776}


\textsuperscript{775} The Jeronymite mission sent to deal with the Indian question also had to face the growing poverty of the island: “So little were the gold mines producing by now that their owners were sinking deeper into debt.” Mervyn Ratekin, “The Early Sugar Industry in Espanola,” \textit{Hispanic American Historical Review}, XXXIV (1954), 9.

\textsuperscript{776} “Without question American labor market conditions most influenced the growth of the Atlantic slave trade.” Klein, \textit{The Atlantic Slave Trade}, 18.
II. Crisis and Transformation

3. Hispaniola, Africa, and Sugar

The solution to the first problem of the Hispaniolan crisis - labor - was contingent on events occurring on the other side of the Atlantic. As we saw in chapter 2, the African coast was a theatre of European colonial ambition long before 1492. But unlike in the Americas, conquest was not a viable policy. After a few small successful raids around 1444, Africans regularly turned back the would-be raiders.777 Other than the Portuguese colony of Angola which will be examined below, expeditions to seize control of gold resources or plans to imitate American style colonies always failed, including a 1,000 man expedition up the Zambezi River in 1569.778 Efforts at settlement continued but the combination of European vulnerability to tropical diseases, African resistance to European diseases, and African military technology frustrated European attempts to establish direct sovereignty over African peoples until the late 19th century.779 African responses to European depredations of free Africans were “swift and effective” and overall, David Eltis explains, Europeans simply “did not have the power to move into West Africa.”780

Unable to penetrate the African continent and forced to accept the sovereignty of African polities, Europeans maintained a rather peripheral presence in Africa. They built the previously described factorías (fortified trading compounds), generally after paying

777 In 1446 ship that landed in Senegambian region “was attacked by African vessels, and the Africans succeeded in killing nearly all the raiders. Likewise, in 1447 Valarte, a Danish sailor in Portuguese service, was killed along with most of his crew when local craft attacked him near the island of Gorée.” Thornton, Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 37.
778 Klein, The Atlantic Slave Trade, 54.
780 Ibid., 155, 146.
tribute to the local leaders and often constructed on islands to afford more protection.\textsuperscript{781} 

*Factorías* exerted little control over native populations and are better seen as claims over rival Europeans.\textsuperscript{782} Europeans were at risk outside the boundaries of the *factoria*, reflected by the observation of one Dutch trader who in 1702 stated that “no European nation can feel safe on this Coast unless the surrounding Natives are on its side.”\textsuperscript{783}

Occasional newcomers sometimes resorted to raiding, but only achieved minimal returns and spoiled future trading in the given area.\textsuperscript{784} According to Eltis, “even small polities….could lay siege to the largest forts, and “at any time a concerted effort on their (African peoples’) part could have driven the Europeans into the sea.”\textsuperscript{785}

Thus, on the thin border between the dangers of the Atlantic wilderness and African terrestrial sea, European agents settle on trade. They traded for numerous goods: primarily gold, also ivory, malagetta pepper, and slaves. Slavery had existed in Africa for centuries, generally employed in domestic activities and peasant agriculture. As in Europe, warfare resulted in slavery for the defeated and raids were sometimes executed for the sole purpose of gathering slaves. African societies, like their European counterparts, viewed slaves as something like “permanent children.”\textsuperscript{786}

\textsuperscript{781} “All European activity on any part of the West African littoral was a result of negotiation with local African authorities.” Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas*, 147.

\textsuperscript{782} Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, 77. The peripheral European presence along the African coast produced an independent mixed population. Portuguese speaking, Catholic, and familiar with the local African peoples, they often served as an economic and cultural bridge between the two groups, much like the Metis of North America. “They would act as translators, advisors, and traders in their own right, penetrating regions too remote for the agents of the chartered companies. In the 1600s and 1670s, the RAC did more business in the Gambia with this community than with Africans.” Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas*, 138-9.

\textsuperscript{783} A British trader in 1707 at Wydah explained that the local king protected the traders. It was impossible to control theft by local populations from agricultural attempts. In 1852, 1/10 of active duty British naval ships could not bring Wydah, five miles from shore, under control. Ibid., 147-9.

\textsuperscript{784} Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World*, 39.


Despite the numerous parallels between slavery in Africa and Europe, there was an important difference between the two. According to John Thornton, “[s]lavery was widespread in Atlantic Africa because slaves were the only form of private, revenue-producing property recognized by African law.”

Where Europeans tended to buy land with acquired wealth, Africans tended to buy people who served as “preeminent form of private investment and manifestation of private wealth.” Consequently, slavery made up an important component of local African economies and slaves circulated throughout the trade routes and markets of the African continent.

European traders tapped the pre-existing market “just as any African did,” building on the long precedent of external outlets to the internal African trade. Slaves remained secondary for European traders up until 1700, as other goods exceeded the value of slaves, demand never exceeded the supply, and prices remained stable. By the 1480s and 1490s, the Portuguese imported 2,000 African slaves a year. They also resold a good portion to traders, often Muslim, for gold in other parts of Africa, a practice that

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787 African ownership of land was generally communal, not private. They owned the products and thus increase revenue through the control of more labor. Thus, “private ownership of labor therefore provided the African entrepreneur with secure and reproducing wealth.” Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World*, 74, 85.

788 Slaves were also used to secure a loyal political power, to build larger polities, a form of tribute to local rulers, or as a way of gaining nobility. Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, 118.

789 The arrival of camels in about 300 A.D. transformed the trans-Saharan trade and the large and complex international markets of the Islamic world connected the Mediterranean world with Sub-Saharan Africa, bringing gold and slaves north and trade goods south, such as horses. Between 800-1600, 5 to 10 thousand slaves a year traveled north. An international slave trade also developed in East Africa, even developing plantations in Malinda, Mombasa and Madagascar. Overall, traders exported between 3.5 and 10 million African slaves out of Africa before Atlantic slave trade, reaching from Iberia to China. Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World*, 95. Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, 7.8-9. The Islamic world also pulled slaves from the north through the endemic warfare. Egyptian rulers imported 10,000 Christian males a year between late 13th and early 14th centuries and as Spaniards expanded into the Americas during the 1500s, the Christian slave trade continued, with an estimated 8,500 European Christians brought into the Barbary Coast. Ibid., 6-7. Robert C. Davis, *Christian Slaves, Muslim Masters: White Slavery in the Mediterranean, the Barbary Coast, and Italy, 1500-1800* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 23.

the King of Portugal unsuccessfully outlawed.\textsuperscript{791} The arrival of the Europeans shifted the contours of the African slave trade as those once at the end of trans-Saharan trade routes now found themselves with a new market. Europeans adapted to local practices as African rulers generally set the terms for trading and taxed traders such as 17\textsuperscript{th} century Wydah coast traders who paid 37-38 slaves for each ship solely for the right to trade.\textsuperscript{792} Trade goods brought by Europeans were generally high quality from diverse sources (various European and Asian nations) and included textiles, guns, iron, horses.\textsuperscript{793}

Although clearly a joint effort between Europeans and Africans, the latter shaped many aspects of the trade. African traders could withhold slaves until prices rose and also used European competition to play one group off against another.\textsuperscript{794} They generally sold off the undesirables of society, such as criminals, and kept a higher percentage of female captives.\textsuperscript{795} Overall, from the perspective of contemporary scholarship Africans and Europeans interacted in a context of relative parity with similar outlooks shaped primarily by market conditions.\textsuperscript{796}

\textsuperscript{791} Klein, \textit{The Atlantic Slave Trade}, 10.
\textsuperscript{792} Ibid., 104.
\textsuperscript{793} Cargo was the biggest expense of trade 55\%-65\%. Klein, \textit{The Atlantic Slave Trade}, 86. In 1450s traders reportedly received 10-15 slaves for a horse. Foreign competition caused inflation as a Portuguese official commented that the price dropped from 12 slaves to 6 per horse. Good if compared to Salic Law that established the price of a slave equal to a horse. Thomas, \textit{Slave Trade}, 66. In 17\textsuperscript{th} century 50\% of imports into Africa were textiles, alcohol 12\%, guns and gunpowder 7-9\%, tobacco 2-8\%, and bar iron 2-5\%. Ibid., 87-8.
\textsuperscript{795} Klein, \textit{The Atlantic Slave Trade}, 163, 165.
\textsuperscript{796} A point aptly summarized by Eltis: “Thus, the decision to enslave and ship was taken and executed jointly by Africans and Europeans, albeit with some specialization of function. But what is most striking is the shared assumption that underlay the decision. Initial African enslavers and European slave traders had identical attitudes toward the people they enslaved and shipped. Despite the use of the terms Africa and Africans here, modern conceptions of Africa and Africans did not exist in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The vast majority of African slaves were originally members of a society almost as alien to the individual who carried out the act of enslavement as Africans as a whole were to Europeans. The only difference between Africans and Europeans lay in the relative size and definition of the group that was defined as outsider and was thus eligible for slave status.” Eltis, \textit{The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas}, 150.
Thus, by the early 16th century, European colonial aspirations in Africa had taken the form that would last until the 19th century. Interestingly, the form was almost an exact photographic negative of the Americas, where Europeans used their military advantages and biological immunities to establish themselves as feudal lords over Indian vassals, a system which proved to be unsustainable. In contrast, unable to penetrate the African interior and establish political control, Europeans remained on the periphery in Africa. There they tapped the pre-existing slave market, in effect, buying individual vassals. And unfortunately, the system proved to be very sustainable.

Once purchased, slaves were transported to the New World like any other commodity via the growing trans-Atlantic shipping industry. With sufficient capital, Spanish lords were now able to piece together their vanished Indian fiefdoms one African vassal at a time. As a result, the Spaniards who remained in Hispaniola had a solution to the first Caribbean problem, the crisis of labor. The second problem, a profitable economic activity, found its solution in the arrival of a valuable Asian crop: sugarcane.

Sugar cultivation had been moving gradually west from its homeland in Southeast Asia over the centuries reaching Islamic Spain’s Mediterranean coast around 1300. Slavery was involved in its production and, according to Klein, “the identification of slavery with sugar was well established long before the conquest of America.” The Portuguese and then the Spanish transplanted the already perfected sugar plantation system to the various Atlantic islands, turning to the nearby African slave market after native Canary Islanders proved to be an insufficient labor force, establishing a link

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between sugar and African slavery. Thus, by 1491, a fairly simple, transplantable economic package existed; all that was needed was the proper environment, a few technicians, and numerous unskilled laborers.

Yet while sugar was ideal for the Hispaniolan environment, entering the industry was not cheap. A new mill usually required over 15,000 ducats to construct, which according to Mervyn Ratekin was “a sum far beyond the means of most small landowners of the time.” The crisis of the 1510s, however, began to change the sugar mill’s relative cost. A group of capitalists, worried by falling gold revenues and perhaps motivated by rising sugar prices in Europe, brought sugar masters and mill technicians from the Canary Islands to Hispaniola. Shortly after, the Jeronymite Commission helped midwife the nascent sugar industry into maturity, reporting in January 1517 that there were very few Spanish and Indians but that “the land, according to all reports, is very good and fruitful….” Under pressure from local officials and planters and without support from the interim government, they began steps to support the sugar industry, such as small loans of 500 pesos to planters, encouragement of partnerships, and requests for greater assistance from the crown. The royal judge who replaced the Jeronymites in 1519 expanded the program under orders from Charles V with increased loans, tax exemption, and recruitment of specialists. By the 1520s six mills were operational and forty more

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799 Klein, The Atlantic Slave Trade, 15.
800 “What transformed the history of African slavery was the story of sugar.” Walvin, Atlas of Slavery, 32.
801 Ratekin, “The Early Sugar Industry in Espanola,” 6. Cattle ranching had already begun to provide that role as livestock reproduced rapidly without assistance in an ecosystem with no predators or competition. All that was needed was labor to slaughter and cure the hides.
802 Ibid., 9.
were in construction. Successful mills generated capital to expand cultivation and soon sugar production spread throughout the island.\textsuperscript{803}

Expansion of African slavery, at the same time, went hand in hand with support of the sugar industry. In 1518 Judge Alonso Zuazo wrote to Charles V that the land was exceptional, advocated the construction of large sugar mills, and urged him to “import negros, ideal people for work here.” The Jeronymite commission agreed, writing “all the citizens of Hispaniola demand your majesty to give them a license to be able to import blacks, because the Indians are insufficient to sustain them in the island.”\textsuperscript{804} The Crown complied and through the resulting licenses and trade, the African population reached 20,000 in only fifteen years.

Africans provided the necessary labor for the sugar plantation, a hybrid estate which combined agriculture and industrial processing into one package. A good estate had 200 acres, half of the acreage for cultivation and the other half left forested for fuel. Only a small portion, perhaps 25-30 acres, was dedicated to sugar cane, the rest was diversified for domestic food consumption. Sugar plantations also had subsidiary industries such as flour or sawmills, and lands for grazing cattle, perhaps one to two thousand head. Plantation populations ranged from 50 or 60 to 500 people. The average plantation produced 125 tons of sugar annually which required 200 workers: 150 African slaves, a foreman, craftsmen, and sugar technicians who were often Italian or Portuguese. Like the \textit{encomienda} system, the sugar plantation also had a small chapel and maintained a chaplain.

\textsuperscript{803} Ratekin, “The Early Sugar Industry in Espanola,” 11.
\textsuperscript{804} From Thomas, \textit{Slave Trade}, 97.
The mill was not only an estate and processing plant; it was also in the words of Ratekin a “private town.” As the encomienda centers declined in Hispaniola mill towns became the most populous on the island, creating “rich and populous villages in a colony where poverty and decentralization were becoming the rule.” According to Ratekin, plantations “grew up largely outside the colony’s original administrative framework” leading to similar political jockeying that had characterized the development of the encomienda. The Crown attempted to extend its jurisdiction within the estates several times but was largely unsuccessful as the planter class assumed many characteristics of colonial nobility. “The mill owner,” Ratekin explained, “was well-named the señor de ingenio or ‘lord of the plantation’ for he was in fact nearly absolute master of his own land;” and, needless to say, absolute master of his slaves.

Like the encomenderos, the plantation lords exercised de facto political power despite the rejection of their request for official recognition. Their political status was probably related to the colonies’ dependence on their military service as in times of rebellion they were required to furnish “one Spanish cavalryman and a Negro hunter during the entire campaign.” Large planters also exerted considerable control over the numerous smaller planters orbiting around the mill, who usually paid grinding fees of half their crop. Large planters, like the encomenderos before them, gained significant official political power as they penetrated administrative structures and ordered policy to their needs. Their power extended into the religious sphere as they exercised the right of patronage over their chapels and chaplains, a dynamic opposed by local church

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806 Ibid., 16.
807 Ibid.
808 Ibid.
809 Their mill buildings and organized population served as defense. Ibid., 17.
administration. Overall, the plantation elite profoundly shaped colonial culture, summarized by Ratekin: “the ownership of sugar mills and plantation lands conferred a select group in the colony both great local power and a commanding voice in the affairs of the whole colony,” culminating in the formation of a “slave-owning aristocracy.”

Stepping back, then, we may now speak of a new rebellion in Hispaniola, not a single dramatic event orchestrated by a clear leader as in chapter 2, but multiple agents synthesizing disparate practices into a new whole. Military parity between African and Europeans, European and African precedents of slavery, the pre-existing slave market, and relatively stable trans-Atlantic travel provided the link between the American labor demand and African labor supply. Sugar production perfected over the centuries proved to be ideal for the Hispaniolan climate. Economic agents and government officials, encouraged by the collapse of the Indian/gold cycle, facilitated the large scale importation of African slaves and the difficult economic shift to sugar cultivation. Both converged in the new cell of colonial expansion, the plantation, which addressed the economic crisis of Hispaniola: by the 1580’s the island produced 562,000 pesos a year from sugar, roughly equivalent to gold production at its height. Overall, the plantation became the encomienda of the burned over area of the Spanish empire and in the process, effectively reversed the limited nature of Iberian slavery and social mobility offered to Africans on the frontier.

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809 “They exercised the right of patronage over their ingenio chapels, to the scandal of the local cathedral chapter. They paid tithes not to the church but to the support of their priests and services.” Ratekin, “The Early Sugar Industry in Espanola,” 16-7.
810 Ibid., 19.
4. Theology

Thus, in a little over a half century, Spanish presence transformed Hispaniola twice. Las Casas saw conquests turn Indian kingdoms into *encomiendas*, and their subsequent collapse. He must have witnessed the shift to sugar production and African slavery, at least in his peripheral vision, for the year after Las Casas left the island for the last time, 1548, the colonist turned chronicler Gonzalo Fernández Oviedo y Valdez called Hispaniola a “New Guinea.” Yet up to that point, Las Casas had few moral scruples against the trade. In fact, Las Casas had advocated the introduction of slaves into Hispaniola during the crisis of the 1510s, hoping that slaves, either black or white, would replace dependence on Indian labor and aid his campaign.

Las Casas recorded his involvement in his *Historia de las Indias*. In the time “[b]efore sugar mills were invented,” some colonists who the Dominicans would not absolve contacted him and said they would free their Indians if he would obtain royal licenses for each to import a dozen black slaves from Castile. At the time there were only about a dozen blacks on the island that had been sent by the king to build a fortress. Las Casas used his royal favor to lobby for the colonists’ request and the council decided to allow the importation of 4,000 black slaves to the major islands. The policy recommendation followed the economic momentum of all things of the Indies, as bureaucratic opportunism quickly transformed the program into what Las Casas called “a profit making scheme.”

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813 “As the sugar mills increased daily in number, the need to put blacks to work in them also increased”, spinning out of control until there were 30,000 brought into Hispaniola and 100,000 into the Indies. Bartolomé de las Casas, *History of the Indies*, translated and edited by Andrée Collard (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 203.
Undeniably, then, Las Casas played a role in the shift to African slavery. He continued to advocate the use of African slaves in other reforms - such as his failed Cumana experiment - and made use of Africans as a bishop in Chiapas. Yet his involvement was far from unique. He was one in a chorus of Hispaniolans requesting the importation of slaves, from the Jeronymites and sugar investors, to the Franciscans and the Dominicans, the latter who saw slaves as “temporary compensation” for the loss of the Indian vassals. For defenders of Las Casas, here typified by Gustavo Gutiérrez, Las Casas was much like everyone else. “At no time…does Bartolomé consider the legitimacy of slavery; nor does he argue in favor of it,” Gutiérrez explains. “The truth is that he simply does not pose the problem. He merely adopts the mentality of his age.”

Profit and to a lesser extent colonial reform dominated the Spanish view of African slavery as the trade slowly expanded in the first half of the 16th century, without apparent spiritual scruples or theological analysis.

It was not until 1546 - almost three decades after the Jeronymite commission - that a strictly theological analysis of the trade appeared. The Spanish Dominican Francisco de Vitoria, who many call the “father of international law,” addressed the morality of the expanding African slave trade in a letter to a fellow friar. On the one hand, Vitoria concluded that the particular actions of moral agents involved in the trade appeared to be just. Though he believed that raiding Africa for slaves was unjust, Vitoria found the rumor that the Portuguese used trinkets to lure Africans to trade and then

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815 Gutiérrez, Las Casas, 325.
816 Francisco de Vitoria, Political Writings, edited by Anthony Pagden and Jeremy Lawrance (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991). Fray Bernadino de Vique, OP, wrote to his fellow Dominican Vitoria in about 1546 asking four questions about the morality of the expanding slave trade.
unjustly seized them highly improbable. Participation in the African slave market was just as traders are not required “to discover the justice of wars between barbarians.” 817 Those enslaved through African customs, such as enslavement as an alternative to capital punishment, validly remained slaves for Christian masters. Overall, Vitoria conceded that “without further information, I see no reason why the gentlemen who purchased slaves here in Spain should have any scruples. It is sufficient that they should be prepared to fulfill their obligations should it prove to them that these goings-on [unjust raiding] are commonplace.” 818 Perhaps counter intuitively, it was Vitoria’s acknowledgement of African military power, moral agency, and cultural precedents that made the acts of the slave trade licit.

On the other hand, taken as a whole, the expanding slave trade made Vitoria uneasy. “[A]nyone who takes it upon himself to examine this question of Portuguese trading (contratación) will find no lack of things to criticize. The usual remedy is for those who have a part in it,” observed Vitoria, “is to close their eyes and follow the crowd, without striving officiously to ask questions.” If many good people affirmed widespread injustice, “I should dare not wholly to cling to the excuse that ‘the king and his council know and approve of it’. Kings often think from hand to mouth, and the members of their councils even more so.” Vitoria is not specific about areas of concern, but it seems to this commentator that the growing size of the slave trade and unprecedented systematic form of slavery were probably the source of his unease.

As a result, Vitoria was left with unease over the slave trade but without an unambiguously unjust practice to condemn. While modern readers may be

817 Vitoria, Political Writings, 335.
818 Ibid., 334-5.
understandably uncomfortable with Vitoria’s conclusions, his analysis of the slave trade points to the limitations of 16th century observers and the complexity of the moral agency involved. From his vantage point, only the components of the whole slave trade were clearly visible and not morally problematic for Catholic theology or any other cultures engaged in the trade. It was very difficult to see the system as it was developing or predict the incredible expansion that would later occur, especially for a largely cloistered friar far from even Seville, the center of slavery in Spain. Yet even behind the walls of the Castilian friary, Vitoria’s uneasiness points to glimpses of the new emerging whole.

It is remarkable, then, given the limitations of the 16th century perspective, that Las Casas reached a tipping point in 1547. On his way back to Castile, Las Casas stopped in Lisbon. There he came across Portuguese chronicles and their accounts of the early African slave trade. He added eleven chapters to his *History of the Indies* recording what he found and his new perspective on the African slave trade. He recounted the Portuguese voyage of 1444 in the same manner as his descriptions of Spanish conquests. Portuguese elite from Lagos obtained a license from the Crown and funded an armed expedition to Africa. They raided peaceful island natives and returned to Lagos with 216 slaves, many of which were auctioned. He quoted Gomes Eannes de Zurara to describe unloading of captives on the hot August summer morning:

Some among them were nearly white, handsome, slim; others were darker, seemed like mulattos; others black, like Ethiopians, gross in face and body – it appeared to people that they saw a reverse image of the world. What heart, hard as it might be, would not feel pity stir at the sight of such a group? Some had their faces down, wet with tears; some looked at the others and were groaning with grief; some looked to high heaven, fixing their look on it, shouting aloud up to it, as if asking the Father of Nature for help; others beat their cheeks with their palms, or threw themselves flat on the ground; others made lamentation in a song-like manner after the custom of their homeland. And though the words of their language could not be understood by us, their sorrow was understood indeed.  

The expedition offered two of the best slaves to different churches, an act which horrified Las Casas. “The raiders wanted to give God his share after the bloodshed, the unjust and wicked enslavement of those innocent people,” Las Casas wrote, “as if God were some wicked, malevolent tyrant.” He continued: “Those awful men did not know the scriptural passage: ‘God does not approve those who harm their neighbors sinfully, then offer God a sacrifice from their ill-gotten goods. Such a sacrifice is instead like honoring and serving a father by hacking his son to pieces as he looks on….’” 820 This scriptural passage, as Gutiérrez points out, was the same that Las Casas used to frame his conversion to the Dominican critique of the *encomienda*. In effect, Las Casas reassessed his early advocacy of African slavery and could not forgive himself for his mistake:

> The cleric, many years later, regretted the advice he gave the king on this matter – he judged himself culpable through inadvertence – when he saw proven that the enslavement of blacks was every bit as unjust as that of the Indians. It was not, in any case, a good solution he had proposed, that blacks be brought in so Indians could be freed. And this even though he thought that the blacks had been justly enslaved. He was not certain that his ignorance and his good intentions would excuse him before the judgment of God. 821

After Las Casas found out the truth, “he would not have proposed it for all the world, because blacks were enslaved unjustly, tyrannically, right from the start, exactly as the Indians had been.” 822 Africans, seeing the Portuguese demand, expanded unjust warfare and raiding to increase their supply. Thus, “we are the cause,” Las Casas lamented, “of all the sins the one and the other commit, in addition to what we commit in buying them.” 823

Las Casas now saw African slavery in continuity to his opposition to Indian servitude. Yet there is a certain ambiguity to Las Casas’ condemnation of African slave

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821 Ibid., 203.
822 Ibid., 202.
823 Ibid., 204.
trade. His perspective depended on conceiving African slaves as seized directly by European raiders or African raiders controlled primarily by European demand for slaves. From the perspective of contemporary scholarship, this view is not quite accurate. But perhaps it would not be too generous to understand Las Casas’s reaction to the shocking island raid as the catalyst for re-assessing the new emerging whole that the trans-Atlantic slave trade was becoming.

Regardless of the reasons for Las Casas’s shift, it is not hard to imagine why the rash Las Casas took so long to address African slavery. African slavery, as opposed to the conquests of the Americas, was largely an abstract problem for Las Casas, living in Hispaniola largely before the sugar revolution. Cartegena, the main port of entry for slaves in the Spanish empire, saw an estimated 15,445 slaves pass through between 1550 and 1600 for an average of just under 309 Africans a year. But having changed and given his work on liberty examined in the previous chapter, it would not be that big of a step for Las Casas to extend opposition of Indian slavery to a categorical denial of slavery in his political campaign. Archbishop Alonso de Montufar of Mexico began such a move, writing to the crown in 1560 that all the arguments against enslaving Indians appeared equally valid for Africans. But theoretical arguments had less reason for temporal support from the Crown as Africans, unlike Indians, were not potential tribute paying royal vassals before their enslavement.

In any event, Las Casas, in a manner of speaking, “closed his eyes” to the issue of the trans-Atlantic slave trade as his condemnation remained unpublished for three centuries. Opposition to the African slave trade, theological or otherwise, remained

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824 Population of 2,000 Spaniards. Alida C. Metcalf, Go-betweens And the Colonization of Brazil: 1500-1600 (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2005), 172-3.
825 Boxer, The Church Militant and Iberian expansion, 32.
minimal as none of the questions raised gathered much momentum. They remained isolated blips against a powerful and growing current, both the growth of the slave economy and it’s rather matter a fact defense. Without the pressure from a critic like Las Casas, there was no immediate need to mount a systematic defense. Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, the Spaniard who provided the most systematic defense of the Spanish encomenderos, seems to have spent little time thinking about the African slave trade, but provided the simplest and most consistent defense nonetheless: servitude applied to Africans just as it did to European peasants and Indians.  

At the same time, those with doubts about the trade came to matter of fact and profoundly un-theological conclusions. Charles II of Spain (1661-1700) and Pedro II of Portugal (1648-1706) both had misgivings of the slave trade but were convinced by ministers and perhaps confessors that abolishing the trade would destroy their empires. The Portuguese Jesuit Antonio Vieira (1608-97) is perhaps the best example of the economic rational that drove the European understanding of the slave trade. A holy man, defender of Indians, with some African ancestry, he argued that very few slaves from Angola were legitimately enslaved, “but that their blood, sweat and tears nourished and sustained Brazil, which could not dispense with their forced labor under any pretext.”

In general, such economic motives became masked with an overlay of religious intentions, epitomized by the same chronicler quoted by Las Casas. Despite the evidence presented earlier in the chapter to the short term economic goals of such agents, the

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827 Boxer, *The Church Militant and Iberian expansion*, 35  
828 According to C. R. Boxer, this argument “was repeated *ad nauseam* by British apologists for the slave trade during the eighteenth century, one of who characterized the Negro slaves as ‘the strength and sinew of this Western world.’” Ibid., 35.
chronicler portrayed the Portuguese Infante as giving away his portion of the slave raid, 46 slaves in all, “like a man who does not want to be rich himself.” Rather, the Infante’s “principal wealth was in good conscience, and the salvation of those souls pleased him mightily, [as] they would otherwise be lost.” Like the Reconquest and the American conquests, such quests for wealth and glory produced greater results in the eyes of the chronicler:

His judgment was not an empty one, for, as we said already, soon as the slaves learned the language, they readily became Christian. And I who write the history in this volume saw, in the city of Lagos, lads and lasses, the children, the grandchildren of those slaves, born here – and they such good and true Christians, it’s as if they were Christians forever back, the offspring of those who were the first baptized. And though the grief of those being split up was indeed great at the moment…Later, after it all, everything would change to joy and happiness, for they received the Christian faith, they gave birth to Christian children, and many later got back their freedom. 

The frankest and most accurate assessment of such spiritual claims came from the enigmatic Padre Fernando Oliveira, a Portuguese Dominican who wrote a denunciation of the slave trade in his 1555 *Art of Naval Warfare*. After offering a Lascasian condemnation of the African slave trade, he scorned portrayals of crusading zeal, pointing out that slave holders rarely taught their slaves the faith and did not even permit them to go to mass or observe Sundays or holy days. It was not evangelical fervor that drove the slave trade, Oliveira argued, for “if material interest were removed, they [slave traders] would not go there [to Africa].”

Stepping back to see the whole picture, a pattern similar to Roldán’s revolution emerges. Crisis produced by a failing economic system spurred innovation as agents synthesized available precedents into a new system. In chapter two, Roldán turned to lordship over Indian vassals for the gold industry; here we see his heirs shift to African

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831 From Alida C. Metcalf, *Go-betweens and the Colonization of Brazil: 1500-1600*, 172.
vassals for labor in sugar production. In both cases, the evidence points to largely temporal motivation behind the shifts while spiritual justification developed as the systems expanded. In chapter 2, Dominicans launched a spiritual movement in opposition to Roldán’s rebellion. In contrast, only some theological criticism appeared in response to the growth of African plantation slavery and did not fundamentally alter the system. Nothing – theological opposition or otherwise – would stop the expanding trans-Atlantic slave trade.

III. Expansion and Intensification

5. Angola and Expansion of the Slave Trade

From the perspective of the Indies, then, it is tragically fitting that the slave trade received a large boost towards the end of the 16th century as the Portuguese applied the same dynamics of Spanish colonial expansion in the Americas – decentralized military force, economic opportunism, native allies, and manipulation of theological categories – in Central Africa. In 1571 King Sebastião of Portugal granted Dias de Novais a charter “to subjugate and to conquer the Kingdom of Angola,” the first time that the Portuguese had thought to do so in Central Africa. Novais finally arrived in 1575 to make war against his unsuspecting allies. In the years of conflict that followed, his small contingent of 700 Portuguese troops depended heavily on KongoLose allies (as much as perhaps 60,000 troops in one case) and the often rebellious private Portuguese colonists. Like the Spanish in Peru, the Portuguese exploited an internal conflict over succession and found allies in the rival kingdom of Benguela. Despite the similarities, however, the results

were very different from the Americas. In 1591, even after more than a decade of war, ramshackle Portuguese Angola was a piecemeal configuration of Central African vassals that amounted, in the words of Linda Heywood and John Thornton, to “hardly a colony.”

The political and military terrain of Central Africa changed radically in the early 17th century with the eastern arrival of the mysterious hybrid band, the Imbangala. The Imbangala practiced ritual cannibalism and obtained new recruits through the capture of young adolescents. They trained captives with “alcohol and brainwashing, especially the practice of forcing the captive children to wear a collar until they killed an enemy,” a practice which Heywood and Thornton describe as “perhaps the earliest documented use of child soldiers in Africa.” Ruthless and mobile, the Imbangala lived off of a particularly destructive form of slash and burn raiding, destroying the agricultural practices which produced the food and alcohol they coveted. “Their relentless pillaging,” explains Heywood and Thornton, “resulted in the deliberate destruction of large areas, the removal of captives, and the flight of refugees whose subsistence base was destroyed and who also feared the Imbangala aggressors.”

The Portuguese of Angola initially helped the Kingdom of Kongo resist the invaders, but quickly learned to take advantage of Imbangala tactics and success. They followed in the wake of Imbangala destruction, mopping up captives through trade to fill asiento quotas (contracts to sell slaves in the Spanish empire). Demand had risen as Philip II of Castile had obtained the Portuguese Crown in 1580, linking the Spanish empire’s demand for slaves to the Portuguese trade in Africa. Traders still obtained

833 Heywood and Thornton, Central Africans, 90.
834 Ibid., 93.
835 Ibid., 94.
slaves through commerce, but the more lucrative source was war, and captives fed the growing trans-Atlantic trade. The colonial government cemented an alliance with the Imbangala and bucked royal intentions by encouraging rather specious wars for their production of slaves. And according to Heywood and Thornton, the Imbangala alliance “proved to be the key to the sudden and dramatic success of Portuguese arms against formerly difficult opponents.”

The overall result of Portuguese and Imbangala campaigns was that some areas of Central Africa experienced a state of near constant war throughout the first half of the 1700s. According to Heywood and Thornton, the wars that reverberated throughout West Central Africa were “not wars of ethnic hatred” as they overlapped ethnic boundaries and were driven by Portuguese desire to fill their *asiento* contracts. Neither was religion a major factor as numerous of the enslaved were Christians. The colonial government even turned the combined Portuguese-Imbangala force against the Christian Kingdom of Kongo, prompting the king, Pedro, to protest to Pope Gregory XV and Philip IV of Spain. According to Pedro, the Portuguese-Imbagala army - which included 200,000 “barbarous heathens who sustain themselves on human flesh” - destroyed numerous provinces of “infinite Christians.” The bishop of Kongo observed that although the governor of Portuguese Angola viewed military alliance with the Imbangala as “a great

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837 Ibid., 114.
838 Ibid., 109.
840 From Heywood and Thornton, *Central Africans*, 139.
sin” he used them anyway “since he did not wish to lose in profiting from it.”  

In the process, Portuguese settlers often depicted Kongo as less than fully Christian in order to obtain a certification by clergy to make sure their military operations into Kongo met the requirements of a ‘just war.’

The half century of near continual conflict sent shock waves out into the Atlantic through the heightened export of slaves. Slave exports from Central Africa to Brazil and the Spanish Indies in the late 16th century was about 5,000, doubling to 9,000-12,000 during the years of 1609-1660. In twenty years the export of Central Africans, which had once made up 30% of slave exports from Africa, increased to 75% in 1595. Overall, by the 1620s Angolan slaves made up about 90% of slaves funneled into the Spanish Indies.

At the same time, the heightened importation of African slaves fueled sugar expansion. Sugar production spread to Cuba in 1590. By the end of the 16th century there were thirty mills in Mexico and production equaled Hispaniola, which produced 1,000 tons of sugar in 1570. It was Brazil that launched the industry, transplanting sugar in 1540s and producing 2,500 tons annually within twenty years. By 1600 and now under the Castilian Crown, Brazil produced 16,000 tons and 20,000 tons by 1630. According to Thornton, “it is reasonable to argue that the take off of the Brazilian sugar revolution was supplied very largely by this Angolan wave of slaves.”

841 Manuel Bautista Soares, bishop of Kongo, 1619, from Heywood and Thornton, Central Africans, 118.
843 Heywood and Thornton, Central Africans, 159.
844 Walvin, Atlas of Slavery, 3.
845 Ibid., 35.
6. Intensification of the Components

All the pieces were in place: fertile land, labor demand and supply, international shipping, a valuable cash crop, and a socioeconomic unit which neatly combined its production and processing. Seen together, the pieces appear much as separate gears in a complete, interlocking system. As the system gathered steam, each gear intensified, much like the Iberian feudal practices which formed the basis of Roldán’s rebellion had intensified in the new American field. The Atlantic crossing is perhaps the most concrete example and easiest place to start.

The unique brutality of the trans-Atlantic slave trade heightened the suffering of what was already a perilous and uncomfortable journey. Slaves had less space than the 1.5 meters granted the typical European traveler as they were brought below deck - “locked from the outside, where they saw neither sun nor moon” - and chained in long rows. It was in the economic interest of investors to pack as many as possible into the ship, reducing space for food and water as well as increasing chance of sailing problems. The food was worse than the usual ocean going fare as slaves were fed perhaps once a day with gruel and small jar of water. Less space and freedom of movement worsened hygiene from the increased amounts of vomit, human waste, and the occasional outbreak of infectious disease. Olaudah Equiano, a former slave who penned an autobiography in 1789, described the “absolutely pestilential” condition of the ship in graphic terms:

The closeness of the place, and the heat of the climate, added to the number in the ship, which was so crowded that each had scarcely room to turn himself, almost suffocated us. This produced copious perspirations, so that the air soon became unfit for respiration, from a variety of loathsome smells, and brought on a sickness among the slaves, of which many died, thus falling victims to the improvident avarice, as I may call it, of their purchasers. This wretched situation was again aggravated by the galling of the chains,

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848 Ibid., 155-6.
now become insupportable; and the filth of the necessary tubs [latrines], into which the children often fell, and were almost suffocated. The shrieks of the women, and the groans of the dying, rendered the whole a scene of horror almost inconceivable.\textsuperscript{849}

The average voyage from West Africa to the Indies lasted two to three months in the early 16\textsuperscript{th} century but distances increased as the slave trade expanded, culminating in journeys from as far away as Mozambique. The danger of violence increased as slaves had nothing to lose, far from familial bonds with an ever decreasing chance of returning home, compounded by wild rumors of witchcraft and the gruesome fates that awaited them in the Americas.\textsuperscript{850} Slave traders complemented the heavy arms of ships which traded in Africa with a much larger crew, 60\% in the 18\textsuperscript{th} century. Lack of vigilance led to revolt and a successful revolt meant certain death for most of the crew.\textsuperscript{851} All these factors increased the estimated 10\% mortality rate of regular Atlantic crossings to an estimated 15\% to 20\% mortality rate between Senegambia and Spanish Indies in late 16\textsuperscript{th} century. Those that survived the crossing were, in the words of the Jesuit missionary Alonso de Sandoval (1576-1652), “reduced to skeletons.”\textsuperscript{852} Overall, the floating jail described by the Dominican friar de la Torre in chapter 3 transformed into a veritable hell for African captives.

Like the Atlantic crossing, colonial servitude in the plantations intensified for the African laborers in comparison to the \textit{encomienda}. To summarize, the \textit{encomienda} functioned by drawing labor from intact Indian communities. Tribute and labor were based on native precedents and drawn through the Indian elite. Because the \textit{encomienda}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[850] Thornton, \textit{Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World}, 161.
\item[852] 10\%-15\% from Cartegena to Lima. Thornton, \textit{Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World}, 159, 160. Both routes are relatively short compared to later routes. 583 Kongolese captives died during the Middle Passage and another 68 shortly after of 1,211 in 1622. Heywood and Thornton, \textit{Central Africans}, 137.
\end{footnotes}
utilized intact communities, it allowed for a general cultural continuity, despite evangelization and other forms of European cultural influence. To be sure, the early *encomienda* in Hispaniola resembled slavery in practice. However, the general trajectory of the *encomienda*, spurred by ecclesiastical reformers and royal bureaucrats, was toward mitigation of labor demands and the coercive power of the *encomenderos*.

In contrast, the passing of time intensified the labor demands, the power of the owners over slaves, and the overall brutality of the plantation slave system. In the first place, the plantation was a hybrid community as it imported individual slaves into a foreign environment. The Spanish generally preferred to group slaves of similar backgrounds, but even this required a certain level of cultural reconstitution. Labor requirements were higher on the plantation, six days a week throughout the year. In theory, the slave master had absolute political and economic control over the slave with which even the crown could not interfere, for as Ratekin observed, “[n]o judges sat [in the plantation villages], no councils ruled local matters or corresponded with the audiencia or the king.”

As we have seen, plantation owners became a new type of lord, great *senores naturales* over large *encomiendas*, completing the colonial turn. “‘[O]nly blacks till the soil’, the city of Santo Domingo stated in 1556,” aptly summarizing the new American *hidalgia*.

In the coming centuries, the industrialization of African slavery which started in Hispaniola would increase as it spread. Other cash crops – tobacco, rice, and cotton – would imitate the sugar system and the new economic and environmental plantations cells multiplied throughout the Americas like cancer, consuming the land and human

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lives. Other European nations would build whole colonies on cash crops in the Lesser Antilles, with the highest slave to master ratios in the Americas. Colonial discipline and sexual exploitation became increasingly brutal. Race became the ultimate explanatory system to legitimate dominion as a señor natural. This servus a natura was absolute beast, subhuman, with no possibility of freedom, living complete “social death.” Over the centuries, the whirring gears of the new, terrible machine of colonial expansion would grind up millions of human lives.

7. Conclusion

The full development of plantation slavery is beyond the scope of this chapter. What is important for our purposes is that African slavery was the final development in the early Spanish empire. To summarize, slavery played a limited role in pre-contact Iberia, having gradually declined over the medieval period. Furthermore, the initial expansion into the Americas offered Africans increased socioeconomic opportunities, even occasional noble-like status. The shift to large scale African slavery occurred because of an economic crisis in Hispaniola, the sight of Roldán’s initial colonial rebellion. Agents synthesized numerous available parts - European weakness in Africa, pre-existing African slave markets, international shipping, the sugar market, plantation unit – to solve the economic crisis and give slavery a new importance in the Spanish Empire. At the same time, the new whole intensified the various components which it drew on, including trans-Atlantic travel and colonial labor. Overall, the new whole reversed the democratic

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855 Spaniards began to turn to African slaves to satisfy the need for mass labor, even in areas of high Indian population density. Activities that required greater skills in European technology or in climates deemed unsuitable for Indians now utilized African labor. Gangs of 10 – 15 slaves worked gold mines in the tropical lowlands of Peru and small plantations in coastal valleys of about 40 slaves. Klein, The Atlantic Slave Trade, 23.
trend and social mobility of the American frontier. Blacks and sugar began to rival Indians and gold in the Spanish Empire.

Theological dissent, unfortunately, was almost non-existent. Even Las Casas, who came to view the slave trade with the same contempt he held for conquest and the *encomienda*, merely recorded his rather limited opposition. Churchmen were more likely to profit from the trade, such as the Society of Jesus, which became the largest slaveholders in the Americas by their expulsion in 1767. That spiritual voices were the few to question the nascent slave trade was probably little consolation for Las Casas. “He was not certain,” Las Casas grieved after decades of support for African slavery, “that his ignorance and his good intentions would excuse him before the judgment of God.”

In the end, though, it was not the judgment of God but the actions of men who made the Americas. Conquistadors conquered Indian empires and states, which they then sliced up into *encomiendas*. When they disappeared, they constructed new *encomiendas*, depending on conquests in Africa, most which depended on Africans who conquered other Africans one at a time. In the Americas the conquests spread like viruses. In Africa, the conquests spread like a vast tributary system, spider-webbing into the continent and feeding a growing river into the Atlantic and the Indies. Las Casas was powerless to stop both the viral invader and raging torrent and, like any one agent of the era, left with the option to close one’s eyes or lament the gore of human history.

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9. EMPIRE

All men merely dream what they are,  
though no one realizes it.  
I’m dreaming that I’m here,  
laden with these shackles;  
and I dreamt that I found myself  
in another, more flattering condition.  
What is life? A frenzy.  
What is life? An illusion,  
a shadow, a fiction,  
and our greatest good is but small;  
for, all of life is a dream,  
and even dreams are dreams.

Pedro de la Barca Calderón. 857

1. Empire

By the early 1570s, the long story of the birth of the Spanish empire – from long  
medieval Castilian centuries to Atlantic expansion; conquests and encomiendas;  
Dominican opposition, theological defense of expansion, and the royal middle road – was  
coming to an end. With the growth of slavery, the two walls of the Spanish imperial  
social pyramid were in place. On the one side, decentralized conquests divided up Indian  
polities among Spanish lords, creating a permanent Indian servant class. On the alternate  
side, decentralized conquests in Africa funneled slaves into the new world. African

857 Pedro Calderón de la Barca, Life is a Dream, edited and translated by Stanley Appelbaum  
slaves filled the urban areas and the areas where the Indian population had declined or
disappeared to such an extent that Africans outnumbered Spaniards in the empire.\textsuperscript{858}

The new Spanish nobility, consisting of the domesticated \textit{encomendero} elite and
the growing plantation slaveholder class, occupied the apex of the social pyramid. Yet
only a small minority of the Spanish population depended on the direct control of Indian
and African labor; the 1573 census found only 4,000 \textit{encomenderos} out of the 160,000
Spaniards in the New World.\textsuperscript{859} The revenue generated by \textit{encomenderos} and “lords of
the plantation” helped to support a large Spanish population, a large majority of whom
practiced trades, agriculture, maritime activities, or made up the clergy. There was a
significant class of transient riff-raff, drawn to the Indies by the promise of quick riches,
only to be broken by the high-stakes reality of the New World.

After more than eighty years, there was still no shortage of ambition, even among
the successful. The golden vision “El Dorado” – the legendary city of gold - continued
for decades, producing \textit{entradas} launched into South and North America whose dreams
were only matched by their futility. In 1569 Jiménez de Quesada, a successful colonist of
New Granada, invested 150,000 ducats in an expedition into what is now Southern
Columbia. 300 Spaniards, 1,100 horses, 600 cows, 800 pigs, 1,500 Indian and African
porters proudly marched into the unknown in search of glory and riches. After two and a
half years of fruitless wandering the company staggered home with 50 Spaniards, 30
porters, 30 or 40 horses, having accomplished nothing.\textsuperscript{860}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[858] Henry Kamen, \textit{Empire: How Spain Became a World Power, 1492-1763} (New York:
HarperCollins, 2003), 137.
\item[859] Lewis Hanke, \textit{The Spanish Struggle for Justice in the Conquest of America} (Philadelphia:
University of Pennsylvania Press, 1949), 104.
\end{footnotes}
Despite being sought for many more decades, El Dorado was never found intact; instead, the Spaniards constructed it. In 1545 massive silver deposits were found 13,000 feet up in the Bolivian Andes. Regardless of the extreme altitude, Spanish population and their laborers followed new economic resource, just as they had throughout the history of the empire. The population of Potosi grew from 14,000 in 1547 to 160,000 in 1650, making it the largest city in the empire.\(^{861}\) Silver production exploded, expanding sevenfold from 1572 to 1585, never falling below 7.6 million pesos a year between the years of 1580-1650. Potosi’s reserves made the fortunes of many a Spaniard. “‘There are many men I know who three years ago possessed not a penny and were three and four thousand pesos in debt,’” wrote one Spanish witness, “‘now with the new invention of mercury some of them have forty and fifty thousand pesos.’”\(^{862}\) “‘I now live rich and honoured,’” wrote another in 1590, “‘who would make me go back to Spain and live poor?’”\(^{863}\)

Potosi, along with its Mexican counterpart Zacatecas, produced wealth of such magnitude that it is hard to overestimate its importance for the empire or affect on the world economy. Mexico and South America produced 80% of the world’s silver and 70% of its gold between 1550 and 1800. Between the years of 1540 and 1700 50,000 tons of silver were shipped to Europe, doubling its stock.\(^{864}\)

Silver and gold became the lifeblood of the empire, something that Las Casas had understood. He railed against the Spanish lust for precious metals and urged the Indians to hide their knowledge of mineral deposits. Not surprisingly, Las Casas was

\(^{862}\) From ibid, 287.
\(^{863}\) From ibid.
\(^{864}\) Ibid., 286-7.
unsuccessful in stopping the growth in mining but his protest was another hurdle for
defenders of conquest to jump. The response to this challenge was, in effect, the final
chapter to the Sepulveda trajectory.

The so-called *Yucay Opinion* (1571) was a theological work commissioned by
Viceroy Toledo. The exact identity of the author was unknown but thought to be the
Dominican García de Toledo, a cousin of the Viceroy. He claimed, in his own words,
that he was “one of those who most believed” Las Casas; that is, until he arrived in Peru
where the reality of colonial life dispelled his naivety. Initially, the *Yucay Opinion*
followed the argument of Sarmiento and recounted the sins of the Inca - cannibalism,
human sacrifice, and idolatry – and concluded that they were “one of the greatest and
newest tyrants of the world.” Indeed, the Inca “had no more legitimate dominion over
this land than over Spain,” the *Yucay* declared, while reassuring King Philip that “of no
realm is His Majesty more the legitimate and absolute lord than of these.”

After repeating Sarmiento, the *Yucay Opinion* moved on to something new, to
show how the mining of mineral wealth is good and not from the devil. It did so with a
parable of the history of the evangelization of the world. In it, two daughters represent
two different groups of people. The first, who is beautiful and very desirable, represents
Europe. Her quick marriage symbolizes the comparatively rapid evangelization of
Europe, where missionaries selflessly endure great hardship, even martyrdom, to bring
Europe into the flock of the Church.

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865 From Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Las Casas: in Search of the Poor of Jesus Christ*, translated by Robert
866 From ibid., 401. “The cause of this enormous deception of the Emperor’s Majesty and his
Council and his viceroys and governors and Audiencias and of theologians and holders of great university
chairs and preachers and, finally, of all of Christendom, indeed all of the faithful, has been one person who
was wrong. That was a friar of St. Dominic called Friar Bartolomé de las Casas” (from 398).
867 Ibid., 420.
The other daughter, in contrast, represented the Indians of the New World and is homely and not pursued by suitors. God, in his loving mercy, did not forget his unmarried daughter and gave her a large dowry to attract suitors for her eternal marriage. “And so he gave them veritable mountains of gold and silver, fertile lands and fair,” the Yucay Opinion explained, “since, in this sweet odor there would be people who, for God, would be willing to go preach the gospel to them and baptize them, and these souls would become spouses of Jesus Christ.” The mineral wealth of the New World, in other words, drew Spaniards to do what they would not do otherwise: evangelize Indians.

As a result, the Yucay Opinion argued that mines are “morally necessary” for without them, “the gospel would not survive.” The author went on to make even greater claims: “Holy and good, then, are they [the mines], and for anyone to deny it would be great blindness, and the wickedness of the devil.” Gold is an “effective means of the gospel being in these regions.” The Yucay Opinion unabashedly concluded “[t]hus I say of these Indians that one of the means of their predestination and salvation has been these mines, treasure-troves, and wealth, since we clearly see that wherever these are the gospel spreads by leaps and bounds.” Conversely, “[t]he land where this dowry of Gold and silver does not exist, there neither solder nor captain wishes to go, nor any minister of the gospel either.”

The reality of the connection between gold and evangelization, according to the Yucay Opinion, exposed Las Casas’s fundamental error. In lamenting the mines and

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868 Gutiérrez, Las Casas, 424.
869 From ibid., 425.
870 From ibid., 431.
871 From ibid., 430.
872 From ibid., 426.
urging the Indians to conceal them from the Spaniards, Las Casas allied himself against God’s plan. “[T]he devil knows full well that these [the mines] are an effective means of the gospel being in these regions” and uses “Las Casas to conceal these mines and treasures and cast human beings into hell.” Consequently, there is no other possible conclusion; Las Casas “has been infected by the Evil One.”

Interpreting the *Yucay Opinion*, like Sarmiento’s history, reveals a certain tension. Bracketing theological conclusions for a moment, it must be admitted that the *Yucay Opinion* is accurate in describing the process of change in the Andes in particular and the broader New World context in general. The Spanish population and the accompanying religious change followed economic opportunity as it had with the *encomienda*. Its theological claims are, however, are extremely problematic. The *Yucay Opinion*’s blunt argument arrives at the conclusion that grace depended on nature, grafting on to the real, often bloody processes of history, concluding that “in these realms more than in others, the spiritual depends on the temporal.” Yet the *Yucay Opinion* does not merely admit that Spanish agents are out for material gain, it approves and praises their work, leading Gutiérrez to call its theology “a kind of reverse Christology.”

The *Yucay Opinion*’s subordination of evangelization to more base economic opportunism may be exceptional in its crass triumphalism but not in its basic assessment of colonial expansion. Once again, the Jesuit missionary Jose de Acosta agreed. “The day gold and silver run out or disappear from circulation, all human cooperation, all ambition for voyaging, all efforts in the civil or ecclesiastical field, would immediately

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874 From ibid., 430.
875 From ibid., 431.
876 Ibid., 432.
877 Ibid., 426.
vanish.” Acosta recognized the inherent theological contradiction, observing that “I ought to complain of the calamity of our times and such a great cooling of charity. There were no such complaints from the *Yucay Opinion*; as the final stop of the Sepulveda trajectory, it transformed the great cooling of charity into a righteous crusade.

The *Yucay Opinion* also argued that gold and silver are the means by which the King’s sovereignty arrived and was established in the Indies, a point that was equally historically accurate and ideologically problematic. The Crown was not fully comfortable with its dependence on colonist violence and privilege, both for practical reasons and, it must be admitted, occasional moral scruple. Two years after the *Yucay Opinion*, the final theological chapter of the royal trajectory appeared, smoothing the rough edges of the Sepulveda trajectory. The president of the Council of the Indies, Juan de Ovando, took Las Casas’s work from storage in the monastery at Valladolid. He had served in the Inquisition and also been in the general inspection of the Council of the Indies and thus knew its problems. Ovando began the monumental process of codifying the administration of the Indies, everything from the layout of city streets to legal codes. He had Las Casas’s work used to draft a new code, *Ordinances for New Discoveries*, promulgated in 1573.

According the *Ordinances*, new *entradas* were to be strictly regulated by the imperial bureaucracy, with the death penalty for those who went without authorization. Above all, companies “are not to engage in any form of war or conquest, nor support one

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879 Ibid., 428.
group of Indians against another, nor become involved in contention with the local
people, nor do them any harm, nor take any of their property, unless it be in the way of
barter.” Those in charge should be good Christians, “men of peace, dedicated to the
conversion of the natives;” important, since the Crown now acknowledged that
evangelization was “the chief object of all settlements authorized by Us.”

The Crown sought to distance itself from past brutality, proclaiming that “[t]he term ‘conquest’ is not
to be used to describe exploring expeditions. These expeditions are to be made in a spirit
of peace and love, and we do not wish them to be described by a word that might be
thought to authorize the use of force against Indians.”

The Crown hoped, at least on paper, to control the worst of colonial violence thus
eliminate the basis of theological opposition and unnecessary damage to its dominion. At
the same time, the Crown attempted to position the often dangerously autonomous
mendicant wings of the Latin American Church. As we saw in earlier chapters,
mendicants were the front lines of the Church in much of the New World. They held
significant ecclesial power as they had been granted the authority, if farther than two days
journey from a diocesan seat, to “perform many acts which normally required the office
of a bishop.”

“In effect,” Robert C. Padden explains, “every friar was virtually a
bishop in his own right.”

This, along with the “historic relationship between the friars and the Papacy stood between Philip II and absolute domination of the colonial
Church.”

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883 Ibid., 368. See also Kamen, *Empire*, 255-7.
884 Padden, “The Ordenanza del Patronazgo, 377.
885 Ibid., 337.
886 Ibid., 347.
The recent growth in the secular clergy compounded the Crown’s problem with mendicant power. By the 1550s secular clerics were firmly established in Mexico and the rivalry over jurisdiction and church income resulted in growing violence between what appeared to be rival factions. Two Franciscans led an army of 1,600 Indians against a secular church, in the words of Padden “razing the structure and burning the remains.” Not to be outdone, “a band of seculars from Michoacán invaded Nueva Galicia territory, sacked and pillaged a church, and put the friars to flight.”

Clearly, from the perspective of the Crown, the Church needed stabilization. It promulgated the Ordenanza del Patronazgo on June 1, 1574, which according to Padden “was a frontal assault on Mendicant privilege:” all clergy, secular as well as mendicant, “were to be subordinated in every respect to the ecclesiastical authority of the crown and its viceroys.” Most significantly for us, “[b]efore removing a friar from his position, or placing him in one, the provincials were to clear the matter with the secular prelate and governor.” Practically speaking, the Crown now had full control over the community responsible for opposition to the colonial system, which despite its general sympathy for royal control, had often defied imperial policy to further its own agenda. The royal action, in the eyes of Padden, was equivalent to the gradual tightening of a fist; despite increasing restrictions the Mendicants never withdrew from the Indies while “[t]he secular Church, basking in the sun of royal favor, grew enormously.”

Overall, Juan de Ovando, like his namesake in early Hispaniola, conducted a multi-faceted campaign – down to its very streets – to put the empire in order. For our

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887 Padden, “The Ordenanza del Patronazgo, 339.
888 Ibid., 352. The Crown asked the pope to establish a Patriarchate in the Indies, which he denied.
889 Ibid., 353.
890 Ibid.
purposes, the domestication of the conquests and Church are its most important aspects. *The Ordinances of Discovery* put into final verbal form the ongoing domestication of the colonial nobility and general order promoted by the various wings of the Church. The *Ordenanza del Patronazgo*, for all intents and purposes, made the colonial Church a department of state.\(^891\) The synthesis of empire - never fully uniform or complete as it appeared in Ovando’s work – took general form. Catholicism, in its dominant Latin American manifestation, served the interest of Spanish colonists and the maintenance of empire, and in the end the imperial social pyramid remained the basis of Latin American society.

### 2. Weakness

The collision of continents and subsequent upheaval had finally reached a resting point. And as the century waned, only further glory seemed in store for the Spanish Empire. Spain and her allies soundly defeated the Turkish navy in the apocalyptic battle of Lepanto in 1571.\(^892\) When the Portuguese King Sebastián died in 1578 in an ill-advised and unsuccessful conquest of Morocco, Philip II moved immediately to stake his claim on his mother’s kingdom. He employed leading jurists throughout Europe in defense of his claim and had his representatives lobby in Portugal for support, including bribes. In June 1580, 47,000 troops crossed the Extremadura frontier into Portugal.

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\(^891\) An interesting illustration of the imperial Church and the Crown’s desired expansion was the mendicant missions that subsequently developed, such as the Franciscan missions in New Mexico and California, where mendicant zeal combined with imperial discipline to become the front lines of the Empire’s expanding borders. See Kamen, *Empire*, 266-70. In general, the conquest of the Philippines seemed to follow the Crown’s “middle path.” See John Leddy Phelan, “Some Ideological Aspects of the Conquest of the Philippines” *The Americas*, Vol. 13, No. 3. (Jan., 1957): 221-239.

\(^892\) Kamen, *Empire*, 184.
Despite “stiff street-by-street resistance,” Lisbon surrendered in August.\textsuperscript{893} The kingdom of Portugal was Philip’s and “[F]or the first time since the days of the Romans, the peninsula was united under a single ruler.”\textsuperscript{894} Philip entered Lisbon in 1581, passing under arches, one which proclaimed “Now will be fulfilled the prophecies of the wise, that you will be sole king and sole shepherd on the earth.”\textsuperscript{895} It was, in the words of Kamen, “in every sense the high tide of Spain’s power.”\textsuperscript{896} Along with the Low Countries, half of Italy, the Americas, and the Philippines, Philip now controlled Brazil, Portuguese Africa, and operations in India, Indonesia, and China. An awestruck French noble, Pierre de Bourdeille, summed up Spain’s impressive achievements. “They have conquered the Indies, East and West, a whole New World.”

They have beaten us and chased us out of Naples and Milan,” he recorded in 1600. “They have passed to Flanders and to France itself, taken our towns and beaten us in battle. They have beaten the Germans, which no Roman emperor could do since Julius Caesar. They have crossed the seas and taken Africa. Through little groups of men in citadels, rocks and castles,” Bourdeille marveled, “they have given laws to the rulers of Italy and the estates of Flanders.”\textsuperscript{897} And, he might have added, taken the gold of the Indies.

The Spanish empire was now the largest that the world had ever seen, recognized by one contemporaneous Castilian writer, Pedro Salazar de Mendoza: “the monarchy

\textsuperscript{893} Kamen, Empire, 303.
\textsuperscript{894} Ibid., 304.
\textsuperscript{895} From ibid.
\textsuperscript{896} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{897} From ibid., 487.
covers one third of the globe... over twenty times greater than that of Rome was.”

Its significance, Kamen argues, was more than territorial as the empire was “the first
globalized economy.” “For the first time in history, an international empire integrated
the markets of the world,” he explains, “as vessels from the St Lawrence, the Río de la
Plata, from Nagasaki, Macao, Manila, Acapulco, Callao, Veracruz, Havana, Antwerp,
Genoa and Seville criss-crossed in an interminable commercial chain that exchanged
commodities and profits, enriched merchants, and globalized civilization. African slaves
went to Mexico, Mexican silver to China, Chinese silks to Madrid.”

Such power, such glory was that of Spain and its empire. “Empire;” a word so
imposing, so indestructible, yet under closer scrutiny it was in many ways an illusion.
Missionaries and government officials alike had long urged Philip to conquer what would
make the greatest prize of all, China. In 1584 the governor of Manilla told Philip that
“the enterprise of China is the greatest and most profitable and most noble ever offered to
any prince in the world, and also the easiest.” A petition to the Council of the Indies
signed by all Spanish officials in Manila from 1586 extolled China, a civilization
“superior to us in everything except salvation of the faith.” It outlined an invasion
composed of twelve thousand Spaniards, six thousand Japanese, and six thousand
Filipinos. Victory in China would make Philip, in the words of the Bishop of Malacca,
“the greatest lord that ever was in the world.”

898 Kamen, Empire, 305.
899 Ibid., 287, 296.
900 Ibid., 225.
901 From ibid., 225.
902 From ibid.
903 Geoffrey Parker, The Grand Strategy of Philip II (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press,
1998), 8.
The coming invasion of China, however, came not from the sea but from its real frontier, the great plains that extended endlessly to the North and West. The hybrid Manchu people, taking advantage of the chaos of the fading Ming dynasty, invaded the capital and ended almost three centuries of rule. There, from the Temple of Heaven, the Manchu began a ruthless campaign of military expansion throughout China. One city, the prosperous port of Zhangzhou served as example for those that resisted Manchu sovereignty. After its fall, the Manchu sacked the city for ten days, massacring more than 80,000.\textsuperscript{904}

How different it was for Spain. Long ago Ferdinand Magellan, perhaps expecting to repeat American conquests, lost a battle and his life to a small Filipino tribe on a remote Pacific beach. For all their bluster, Spaniards – along with all Europeans – maintained a peripheral and often precarious foothold in Asia without the advantages of disease and technology.

Philip instead focused on a closer, seemingly easier conquest. Buoyed by the ease of his seizure of Portugal, he turned to England. In 1588 an armada of as many as 140 ships set sail, only to be torn apart by the more agile English ships and brutal Atlantic storms. 70 ships were lost along with 15,000 men. “It was one of the most notable and unhappy disasters ever to have happened in Spain and one to weep over all one’s life,” recorded one Spanish monk, “…For many months there was nothing but tears and laments through Spain.”\textsuperscript{905}

Naval trouble was nothing new as European rivals increasingly preyed upon the lands and ships of the Spanish Empire. The French began raiding the Caribbean in 1536,

\textsuperscript{905} From Kamen, \textit{Empire}, 308. 293
Santiago de Cuba was captured and destroyed in 1554, Havanna razed and prisoners massacred the next year. That same year a government official reported in Santo Domingo that “Along the whole coast of this island there is not a single village that has not been looted by the French.” After 1560, in the era of the religious wars, piracy took an ideological turn not unlike the Spanish conquests examined in this work. “Non-Spaniards, whose primary motive was clearly trade or settlement,” Kamen explains, “began to cite ideological reasons for their actions.” Spain, in turn, “adopted the same tactic and pinned the label heretic on all the foreign traders in the areas that it claimed to control.” The English took a systematic approach, forming “companies” for illegal trade - the volume so great that “sugar is cheaper in London than in Lisbon or the Indies” – and raiding. Francis Drake raided the Pacific Coast of South America with “total impunity,” capturing a shipment of Potosi silver worth 450,000 pesos in 1578. Nine years later Thomas Cavendish seized a ship loaded with Chinese luxury goods, pearls, jewels, and 600,000 pesos in gold. Overall, about 200 privateering expeditions came to the Caribbean from England between 1585 and 1603.

Despite the rising cost of piracy, most of the wealth of the Indies made it to Spain. Yet there the weak Spanish economy held on to the American bullion like a sieve held water. Control of “all the essential arteries” of the economy by non-Spaniards combined with “systematic fraud” funneled riches into the rest of Europe. Foreign nations, ironically, came to see it in their interest to preserve the Spanish imperial structure, such

906 Kamen, Empire, 259.  
907 Ibid., 258.  
908 From ibid., 309.  
909 Ibid., 229-30.  
910 Ibid., 261.  
911 Ibid., 296, 297.
as an eighteenth century British prime minister. “The preservation of the Spanish
monarchy in America entire and undiminished has, for almost an age past, seemed to be
the general inclination of all the powers in Europe….It is true all that treasure is brought
home in Spanish names,” he conceded, “but Spain herself is no more than the canal
through which all these treasures are conveyed all over the rest of Europe.”

Futility in China, failure in England, piracy, economic incompetency…..
everywhere stress fractures and weakness riddled the empire, even, under closer scrutiny,
in the Americas. As Kamen explains, “the so-called ‘conquest’ of the Americas was
never completed. The encomenderos were at no time in a position to subjugate the native
populations systematically or occupy more than a fragment of the lands into which they
had intruded. They were too few in number and their efforts too dispersed.” Even after
two hundred years of conquest, “and long after cartographers had drawn up maps in
which the virtual totality of America was depicted as being ‘Spanish’, Spaniards in reality
controlled only a tiny part of the continent, mainly the fertile coastal areas of the
Caribbean and the Pacific….” Overall, the empire was “a fragile enterprise” “that
Spaniards by no means succeeded in controlling entirely.”

What had Castile gained out of all this? Glory and fame, no doubt, many would
answer. But just as many would argue poverty and hatred. American riches only
encouraged hidalgo aversion to work. “‘Our Spain’, González de Cellorigo wrote in
1600, ‘has looked so much to the Indies trade that its inhabitants have neglected the
affairs of these realms, wherefore Spain from its great wealth has attained great

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912 From Kamen, Empire, 474.
913 Ibid., 99.
poverty.” And imperial ambitions cultivated universal animosity. Marcos de Isaba, a soldier from the 1580s, wrote that “our nation is hated and detested by everybody.”

“The greatness of our king and the blessed name of Spaniard have few friends. In the past Spaniards were well loved by all peoples, but for the last ninety years we are hated and detested and all because of the wars,” Isaba lamented. “Envy is a worm that does not rest, it is the cause of the resentment and hatred shown to us by Turks, Arabs, Jews, French, Italians, Germans, Czechs, English and Scots, who are all enemies of Spaniards. Even in the New World there is hatred and detestation for the valorous arms of this nation.”

Overall, a modern day interpreter, peering back through the centuries at the Spanish empire, is left with a paradoxical – even mystifying – combination of weakness and strength, success and failure. Perhaps there is no better way to end than with the deaths of the three conquistadors that played such pivotal roles in this story. Pedro Girón died – or was perhaps poisoned – as he traveled to claim his unwilling bride. Francisco Roldán died in 1502, drowned in a hurricane on his way back to Spain.

The greatest conquistador of all, Hernán Cortés, returned to the Old World for the last time in 1540. He had invested incredible sums on new expeditions – offering to go as far as China to make them serve the emperor as their señor natural – in the hopes of repeating his conquest of Mexico. There were no more Mexicos, though, and now Cortés was back to seek an audience with the emperor, to counter the innumerable lawsuits issued against him and to complain of his unfair treatment.

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914 Kamen, Empire, 371.
915 From ibid., 509.
916 William Hickling Prescott, Mexico and the Life of the Conqueror, Hernando Cortés, Volume 2 (Mexico: Peter Fenelon Collier, 1900), 369.
Unable to gain imperial favor, Cortés nevertheless managed to join the naval assault on Algiers. A storm wrecked much of the fleet on the North African coast and it ended in retreat. Cortés, after swimming to safety with two of his sons, offered to take Algiers with the survivors. The aging conquistador’s request was ignored.

Cortes, at any rate, made it back to Spain and continued in vain to secure an audience with Charles. Bitter and ignored, he wrote a letter to Charles in 1544. It was his last and in it, he poured out his growing desperation. “For forty years he had passed his life with little sleep, bad food, and with his arms constantly by his side. He had freely exposed his person to peril, and spent his substance in exploring distant and unknown regions, that he might spread abroad the name of his sovereign, and bring under his sceptre many great and powerful nations. All this he had done,” Cortés boasted indignantly, “not only without assistance from home, but in the face of obstacles thrown in his way by rivals and by enemies who thirsted like leeches for his blood. He was now old, infirm, and embarrassed with debt.”

Voltaire, in a most likely apocryphal story, claims that Cortes finally caught up to the emperor’s royal carriage in a crowded street. Pushing his through the crowd, Cortes climbed the steps and the indignant emperor asked, “Who is this?” “One,” Cortes replied, “who has given you more kingdoms than you had towns before.” Frustrated, Cortes headed to Seville reconciled to passing his remaining years in Mexico. On his way, he contracted dysentery and lay dying for a month. He summoned a notary and made the standard declarations: money for his children and allotments for various church causes.

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917 From Prescott, Mexico and the Life of the Conqueror, 362.
918 Ibid., 363.
The dying conquistador also, perhaps with the words of Las Casas whispering in his ear, prepared himself for the final judgment. He had taken great pain to determine the tribute paid by his Indian vassals to their former Indian lords, Cortés claimed, and if it was found they paid him more, they would be given restitution from his estate. Likewise, he ordered that an inquiry should be made to the personal service given him by his vassals so that they be justly compensated. Finally, “It has long been a question whether one can conscientiously hold property in Indian slaves. Since this point has not yet been determined, I enjoin it on my son Martin and his heirs, that they spare no pains to come to an exact knowledge of the truth.” It was a matter of eternal import; it “deeply concerns the conscience of each of them,” he declared, “no less than mine.”

Hernán Cortés died shortly afterwards, on December 2. I am not the first to point out that was the year Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, the author of Don Quijote, was born.

3. “The First Man in Our Times…”

Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra was born in a university town east of Madrid, on September 29, 1547. He was one of seven children born to an hidalgo of “modest means.” After wounding a man in a duel he left for Rome in 1570. There he enlisted in the military and fought in the battle of Lepanto. Cervantes was shot in the arm during hand-to-hand combat and maimed for life.

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919 Prescott, Mexico and the Life of the Conqueror, 364.
920 Ibid., 365.
Injury was not, however, the end to Cervantes’s misfortune. While on his way home in 1575 he was seized by pirates and held hostage in Algiers, one of the estimated 8,500 Christian slaves brought into the Barbary coast each year.\textsuperscript{922} He made three escape attempts, each unsuccessful, and lived as a slave until ransomed in 1580.

Upon returning to Spain the injured veteran turned from arms to letters. Cervantes attempted to make a living as a playwright but earned only modest success. He became a tax collector near Seville, but even then financial stability remained elusive. He was imprisoned several times over accounts and even excommunicated once. Like Cortés, he repeatedly requested royal reward for his service to the Crown, but to no avail.

It was here that the fifty-seven year old maimed hidalg\textsuperscript{o}, former slave, and part time bureaucrat gave birth to what he called his step son, Don Quixote de la Mancha.

“[T]o what can my barren and ill-cultivated mind give birth,” Cervantes asked in his prologue, “except the history of a dry, shriveled child, whimsical and full of extravagant fancies that nobody else has ever imagined – a child born, after all, in prison….”\textsuperscript{923} Don Quixote, an aging hidalg\textsuperscript{o} of the northern Castilian plains, was “the light and mirror of all knight-errantry” and his literary exploits became what the Nobel Institute named the best book of all time, \textit{The Ingenious Hidalgo Don Quixote de la Mancha} (1604).\textsuperscript{924}

Don Quixote, like many Spaniards of the era, imbibed chivalric romances. The incredible tales so enraptured Don Quixote that he neglected his estate and even sold arable land to buy more books. “[O]ur hidalg\textsuperscript{o} was soon so absorbed in these books,”

\textsuperscript{922} This estimate is from the period between 1580 to 1680. Robert C. Davis, \textit{Christian Slaves, Muslim Masters: White Slavery in the Mediterranean, the Barbary Coast, and Italy, 1500-1800} (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 23.


\textsuperscript{924} Ibid., 13.
Cervantes explained, “that his nights were spent reading from dusk till dawn, and his
days from dawn till dusk, until the lack of sleep and the excess of reading withered his
brain, and he went mad. Everything he read in his books,” Cervantes continued, “took
possession of his imagination: enchantments, fights, battles, challenges, wounds, sweet
nothings, love affairs, storms and impossible absurdities.” The stories became so real
that “no history in the world was truer for him.”

As a result of his reading, Don Quixote “conceived the strangest notion that ever
took shape in a madman’s head.” He decided, “both for the increase of his honour and
for the common good, to become a knight errant,” traveling the world “redressing all
kinds of grievances, and exposing himself to perils.” He would overcome those dangers
“through the might of his arm” and “thus gain eternal fame and renown.”

So Don Quixote donned his antique armor, constructed a makeshift visor for his
helmet, and mounted his poor horse, setting out into the world “wishing to imitate in
every way he believed he could the passages of arms he’d read about in his books.”
He convinced a simple farmer, Sancho Panza, to be his squire with the promise of
bestowing upon him the rule of conquered kingdoms. Together they fought windmills
thought to be giants, survived the spells of priests thought to be wizards, and pursued the
love of Don Quixote’s imaginary lady Dulcinea del Toboso to the wonder and ridicule of
all they encountered.

Over the centuries it became commonplace to see the character of Don Quixote as
the model of the conquistadors, their visions of glory and righteous conquest called

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925 Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, 26-7.
926 Ibid., 27.
927 Ibid., 45.
928 Ibid., 62.
“quixotic.” There is some truth to this idea as a romance of the conquest evolved. Fantastic stories of the New World filtered back to Spain - Amazonian tribeswomen, the mythical city of El Dorado, savage cannibals, and of course the fabulous wealth – filling the plazas and halls of Castile. Travelers read the same chivalric romances consumed by Don Quixote on their long Atlantic journey, no doubt interspersed with their own stories of the glory and fame soon to be won in the Indies. And the chivalric tales fused with memories of the conquest, the conquerors of Mexico equating the unbelievable vision of Tenochtitlan with something out of the best-selling Amadis of Gaul.

Like Don Quixote the conquistadors willingly embraced incredible risks, hurtling themselves at the seemingly endless waves of Indian warriors. The pageantry and eloquence of Cortés paralleled the long public declarations of Don Quixote. Like Quixote, the conquistadors displayed an almost disdainful disregard for hunger and wounds. There are many examples of quixotic defiance to reality, such as Columbus’s unwillingness to believe that he was not in Asia or the unending search for the mythical El Dorado. And like Don Quixote, they made jealous, even fanatical, defense of their honor.

Yes, many Spaniards fell under the romantic spell of the Indies. Yet the dominant Spanish vision of the New World, under closer scrutiny, was less idealistic than the chivalric romances which took possession of Don Quixote’s imagination. The conquistador dream was born not as an idealistic crusade or chivalric quest but as a pragmatic response to a desperate situation. Roldán and his followers, faced with starvation, rebelled against a centralized economic system in order to both survive and serve rather base human needs: “instead of grasping a hoe, to hold the breasts of a
maiden; instead of work, pleasure; in place of hunger, abundance; and in place of weariness and watchful nights, leisure.”

As time went on, Roldán’s rebellion developed a systematic yet highly adaptable form based on investment capital, hierarchical order, fluid alliances, and significant risk. The conquistadors’ ruthless vengeance and dramatic displays of violence were at times the product of quixotic delusion, but just as often the cold, efficient pursuit of a rather practical goal: the seizure and maintenance of lordship. The conquistador dream was the dream of nearly the entire colonial population, hardly the lone absurdity that was Don Quixote.

Thus, books and tales encouraged but did not make the conquistadors; noble expectations forged over centuries and the brutal reality of surviving in a foreign environment gave birth to their vision. In contrast, the fantastic vision of Don Quixote – “the first man of our times” in the words of Cervantes - arose from books. He read day and night, night and day, until he went mad and “everything he read took possession of his imagination.” Such complete possession, such total transformation by books and stories finds a parallel not in the conquistadors but in the life of Bartolomé de las Casas.

Like Don Quixote, Las Casas studied fantastic tales – in this case the stories of a great Lord and his virtue of caritas - for years, immolating himself as a burnt offering through intense ascetical practices. Over time he recovered the memory of heaven and learned that la vida es sueño. His imagination, possessed by ancient stories, led him to the bizarre and unheard of conclusion that conquest and servitude was a dragon to be hunted down and slain. Emerging from his vigil, Las Casas charged into the Indies –

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929 Peter Martyr D’Anghiera, from Kathleen Deagan and Jose Maria Cruxent, *Columbus’s Outpost among the Tainos: Spain and America at La Isabela, 1493-1498* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 69.
which Cervantes famously called the “church of the lawless” — not intent on replacing the Indian aristocracy but Christianizing it. Armed not with swords and horses but sacraments, the wrath of God, and hellfire he marched into the “barren desert of conscience” imitating what he had read: calming storms, confronting warriors and princes, even facing death.

And the results of Las Casas’s quest were not unlike Don Quixote’s. Holding back the wave of conquest — rapid and decentralized, with its disease, military advantages, and universal support — was like trying to hold back the surf. Las Casas always chased the elusive, ever-moving frontier. His occasional allies were halfhearted and largely ineffective. The crown was unable to enforce its agenda the New World. The papacy was positioned by the Castilian Crown and more concerned with issues closer to home. It is likely the excommunication in the brief *Pastorale officium* would have been about as effective as the papacy’s later ban on bullfighting.

If the quest of the “most hated man in the Indies” was quixotic in its futility it must also be admitted that his vision of Indians was as well. For the purposes of his campaign he defended practices of conquest found among Indian polities. At the same time, Las Casas never really entered a polity not already positioned by Spanish violence. He always had the luxury of being the more benign side of empire. But the Indian elite seemed no more eager to accept criticism of slavery and concubinage than their Spanish counterparts. Las Casas defiantly rode into a rebellious Mexico City in 1546. Would he have had the same courage to ride into Tenochtitlan? I tend to think he would, but would

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he have survived the encounter? There is no way of knowing, but Las Casas’s mission in Guatemala, Vera Paz, failed. While significantly hurt by Spanish depredations, it was disgruntled Mayan priests allied with rival Mayan bands who invaded the mission and ended its viability.  

Who was Las Casas in final measure? The anti-colonial radical he is most often portrayed as? There is certainly much evidence to support that conclusion yet it is not hard to find inconsistencies in his thought and errors in judgment. Does that make him a short-sighted colonial agent in disguise, what one scholar recently called “Another Face of Empire?” Or does either portrayal of Las Casas – the anti-colonial radical or another face of empire – give him too much credit? One can make the case that Las Casas had little impact on the broad trajectory of Latin America. From the perspective of the thrashing, ramshackle empire and the brutality of the wider global picture Las Casas looks small, even broken, much like the dying Don Quixote.

Yet it is precisely Don Quixote’s child-like faith in his idealistic vision, regardless of failure or ridicule, which captured the hearts of the world. And it is Las Casas’s undying faith in his vision that arouses the passion of his admirers and detractors alike. Las Casas, “the first man in our times,” helped birth a deep ambivalence towards conquest which has migrated into the consciousness of the modern world. It is his quixotic vision that continues to haunt our consciences today.

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933 Cervantes, Don Quixote, 74.
“let’s go in for being saints, and then we’ll get the good reputation we’re after much sooner….it’s better to be a humble little friar of any order than a brave knight errant, and as far as God’s concerned a couple of dozen strokes of the lash are worth more than a couple of thousand thrusts of the lance, whether given to giants, monsters or dragons.”

Sancho Panza, Don Quijote.\(^9\)

\(^9\) Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, 538.
Conclusion

A Klee painting named ‘Angelus Novus’ shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing in from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such a violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward.

Walter Benjamin

1. Conquest

When we read the history of the Conquest of the Americas, it is difficult not to have the perspective of the Angelus Novus. Our benefit of historical distance, the relation of the conquest to contemporary political issues, the cultural differences, and centuries of grand narratives – the Black Legend, Crusading Triumph, or Genocidal Holocaust – make seeing the conquest’s chain of events virtually impossible. But examining the data with the cool detachment of the experimental scientist reveals three chains of events: de-centralized conquest, theological conflict, and royal consolidation.

The first chain of events, de-centralized conquest, began with Francisco Roldán, a relatively obscure employee of the Crown-controlled factoría. In the context of food insecurity, economic failure, disease, and a falling tribute population Roldán and his followers rebelled. They seized food, horses, and weapons, and established lordship over
the Indian population. The change solved their most important problem, food security, as well as gave them noble status and potential wealth.

Roldán’s expectations, the island context, and his decision to rebel – the first Hispaniolan event – was built on analogous events back in Iberia. The crisis of 1350-1500 – with its social mobility through arms, the conflict of numerous factions over limited resources, and a falling tribute population – was not unlike the crisis preceding Roldán’s revolt. In a manner similar to Roldán, Pedro Girón repeatedly rebelled against and negotiated with the Crown on his way to greater feudal power. The continuity between Iberian and American events is perhaps best summarized by Peggy Liss: the young men of Iberia arrived in the New World “to recreate overseas the ambience of their turbulent youth.”

The Hispaniolan event, in turn, spawned numerous other events of conquest. The process took systematic form in the entrepreneurial companies, decentralized self-funded groups of 200-300 conquistadors, who conducted *entradas* into all corners of the Americas. The conquistadors had relatively straightforward goals. The need for food security, as for Roldán, shaped the conquistadors’ actions. Most explicitly, the potential wealth of the Indies - plunder and *encomiendas* - drove the conquistadors, who in their most candid moments claimed as much.

The conquistadors’ motivations, however, were not strictly material. The riches that they sought and the battles that they fought gave another commodity, more intangible yet equally valuable: glory and fame. Hernán Cortés claimed that such status was his highest priority, writing to his father in 1526 that “I had rather be rich in fame than in

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wealth. Conquistadors also pointed to national pride, but the limited effect of patriotism was demonstrated by the ease with which conquistadors fought each other or rebelled against the crown. Some, such as Cortés, also had more spiritual goals, such as the establishment of the Church and conversion of the Indians. Yet those that did subordinated their spiritual goals to practical concerns of successful military tactics and the attainment of wealth, glory, and lordship. Evangelization, in other words, was at best a secondary goal.

The final link in the colonial chain – Girón, Roldán, the companies and their entradas – was the turn to the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Moral judgment aside, this second Hispaniolan event demonstrates a similar “traditional innovation” in response to socioeconomic crisis. In this case, the Hispaniolan elite, in search of the traditional goals of economic success and noble status, faced the dual crisis of a falling labor population and declining gold production. In response, they utilized two innovations. The failure of conquest in Africa combined with a willing slave market and trans-Atlantic shipping allowed lords to recreate their labor population with the purchase of individual vassals. At the same time, they shifted to sugar production. The end result was the new encomienda-like plantation.

Put all together, a contemporary observer can draw a rather straight line from the Castilian estate to the Indian encomienda and then the slave plantation. All systems were based on some type of lordly status and unfree servitude, but each was progressively more severe in its labor demands, ideological portrayal of the laborer, and more lax in their judicial constraint of the lord. In Iberia, competition often reached a relative resting

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point. When disturbed by crisis, military parity limited the scale of conquest and rewards. Armed with guns, germs, and steel and far from ecclesial and royal fetters, Iberian warriors swept through the Americas and seized huge estates and incredible wealth. Without military and biological advantages, the same conquistador wave was broken against the African shore. Yet the slave-trade transported individual vassals out of their home environment and into the unregulated private domain of the lord, allowing for the highest labor demands and most extreme ideological degradation of the labor.

Differing human geography allowed for the progressive magnification of conquest in Iberia, the Americas, and Africa. But at its core, a multi-faceted culture based on economic gain, lordly status, glory and fame, family and feudal loyalty, and some religious and patriotic energy – what I have called honor – drove the conquest. The conquest, in other words, was the outworking of honor in new geographic terrain.

2. Conflict

If the first stage was the act of conquest, the second was composed of two interrelated yet opposing strands of the development of ideological interpretation of the conquest. The oppositional chain of events began with the public opposition of the Dominicans in 1511. The opposition was not spontaneous but emerged gradually from their caritas centered mendicant culture evidenced by 1. their theological rational: unprovoked war and horrible servitude are mortal sin because Christians are required to love their neighbor as themselves; 2. the liturgical context: their opposition was issued during a high mass during an important holy season; and 3. its ecclesial punishment: the denial of sacramental absolution.
Thus, Dominican *caritas* produced an alternative view of the process of conquest, the first link in the process of opposition. This event was innovative as it addressed the humanity of the non-Christian Indians and the responsibility of the Christian towards them. At the same time, Dominican opposition to conquest and unfree labor stemmed from a traditional Christian ambivalence with the culture of honor. Most basically, the Dominican action harkened back to a general theological critique of the values the culture of honor, exemplified by but not limited to St. Ignatius of Loyola. This ambivalence occasionally flared in times of instability and/or church renewal, such as in the Peace of God movement, whereby clerics used the spiritual power of the Church to oppose the decentralized noble violence of early medieval Europe.

The first event, the Dominican opposition, was a direct ancestor of the second link in the chain, the conversion of Bartolomé de las Casas. It occurred years into his participation in the colonial expansion as an *encomendero* and *entrada* chaplain. The Dominican position first confronted Las Casas in the confessional when a friar denied Las Casas absolution for holding Indians. The incident provoked bewilderment but not repentance. Yet it was the moral seed planted by the Dominican and an encounter with Scripture that won Las Casas to the Dominican movement. Initial failure brought him to the friary and a decade of formation in the very culture in which opposition caught fire.

The third link in the oppositional chain was catalyzed by Las Casas’s encounter with the Catholic Taino rebel Enrique. Las Casas concluded that nonviolent evangelization was the only justifiable activity for Spaniards in the Indies and that a Christianized Indian elite should retain its status with its recognition of the Castilian Crown. At this point the Dominicans, with their intense loyalty bonds to each other and
their “lord,” formulated rival companies. Like the conquistador companies, the Dominicans reproduced and spread through the Americas repeating the confrontation with other factions. Their political campaign reached the papacy as well as the crown.

Las Casas’s response to the trans-Atlantic slave trade was the final and weakest link in the oppositional chain. He initially accepted the slave trade as everyone else did, particularly to support his campaign against the *encomienda*. Las Casas later repented, citing the same biblical passage used to describe his conversion to the Dominican position. He did not, however, make the trans-Atlantic slave trade a part of their political campaign.

Linking the chain together, one can draw a line – though more circuitous than the chain of conquest – from the Peace of God, to the Dominican opposition to conquest, to Las Casas’s final position on the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The clerics of the Peace of God had the advantage of not having to address a perceived racial or religious difference in the population they sought to protect. In addition, they had royal support and did not have to confront a moving frontier. In the Americas, the Dominicans and Las Casas extended church protection for raids against European peasants to whole societies of only potentially Christian non-Europeans. At the same time, they could not keep up with rapidly expanding frontier and dealt with weaker royal and ecclesial support. Las Casas came to reject the trans-Atlantic slave trade, but did not foresee its incredible expansion, and thus remained exclusively focused on the conquest of the Americas.

I have argued that the primary value of the Dominican trajectory was charity, the highest theological virtue and unifying principle of Dominican life and thought. It formed the basis of Montesino’s inaugural sermon and was opposed by Ferdinand as
excessive. It was alluded to in Las Casas’s conversion and was the basis of his Dominican formation and subsequent campaign. Caritas was not strictly an abstract idea; it was embodied in communal relationships and a complicated material culture. It was not merely against violence but a host of values: greed, honor, and lust. It may have also been paternalistic and possessive, in a sense claiming ownership of Indians from their new conquistador lords. Overall, the Dominican chain was the imperfect outworking of the queen of theological virtues in diverse settings.

Opposition to conquest, as we have seen, was not an automatic outcome of mendicant culture. Not all Dominicans agreed with Las Casas and Franciscans as a whole ended up supporting the conquest. Neither was caritas the only potential reason to oppose the brutality of the conquest. But the only systematic critique of the conquest came out of a caritas-ordered culture and was theological in nature.

The theological ferment which gave birth to opposition stands in stark contrast to much of the theological defense of conquest. In general, theological defense of conquest developed in response to the Dominican campaign. Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, a humanist scholar with an interest in promoting military honor and glory, exemplified the development of a theological defense. He was recruited by an opponent of Las Casas and the New Laws to defend the wars of conquest.

Sepúlveda defended the conquest by arguing it was natural for the strong to rule the weak, illustrated by the universal presence of conquest, lordship and tribute. Secondly, he argued that Spanish rule was better than its Indian precedents, arguing that ending human sacrifice alone more than justified the conquests. In addition, the Spanish

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system, despite the conquistadors’ material goal, had an important spiritual effect. Catholicism spread quickly through conquest.

All of Sepúlveda’s arguments depended on a rather thin, arguably innovative, theological method. He defended violence to impose lordship due to Indian ontological status as servus a natura. Sepúlveda transferred the force that Augustine permitted against heretics to evangelization of non-Christians. He promoted the emphasis of hidalgia on honor and glory as a means of virtue. Overall, his work was a theological defense of a pre-existing honor culture and its outworking. Honor, for Sepúlveda, was the engine of history and the church.

Later defenses of the conquest pushed Sepúlveda’s conclusions. Pedro Sarmiento de Gamboa composed an entire historical work demonizing the Incan imperial system, and thus countered Las Casas’s historical propaganda. The Yucay Opinion built a theological defense of conquistador greed with the parable of the two sisters. Conquistador greed did not merely have what Sepúlveda described as a secondary affect; God ordained the Spanish pursuit of mineral wealth as the means of spreading the Gospel. The spiritual did not merely build on the temporal, the spiritual depended on the temporal.

These examples – Sepúlveda, Gamboa, and the author of the Yucay Opinion – were more concerned with the reality of the empire than theological integrity. But some supporters of the conquest came from more integral theological sources. The Franciscans in Mexico, perhaps drinking deeply from the culture of the Reconquest, did not oppose the conquest and even came to mythologize it and its religious consequences. After some initial opposition, they also accepted the encomienda as a practical means of controlling
colonial violence. This is not an insignificant difference from other defenders of the conquest; despite support for the conquest and *encomienda* the Franciscans played an important role in pacifying conquistador factions and assisting Indian transition to the new colonial reality.

In general, we can speak of an accretion of ideological meaning to the events of the conquest. Opposition, flowing from the virtue of *caritas*, emerged almost two decades after the discovery. Theological support for the conquest generally developed in response to opposition and broadly supported the honor driven culture of the conquest. As time went on, ideological support aided the conquest but cannot be said to have driven it, at least in the initial stages.

### 3. Consolidation

So far, we have seen three consecutive movements. Conquest began as an innovative local movement built on Iberian precedents. Opposition later emerged from a theological source and theological defense was composed in response. In the last chain of events, the Crown utilized all three movements – local conquest, theological opposition, and the theological defense - to construct an empire.

It did not seem that way at first. Initially, Isabel attempted to control expansion with the *factoría* system. Despite the system’s failure, she resisted local innovations – Columbus’s slave raiding and Roldán’s feudal turn - as unjust usurpation of royal jurisdiction. Only after repeated failed attempts to turn back Hispaniolan developments did she accepted Roldán’s rebellion out of necessity.
As we saw in chapter 1, there was a long precedent of rebellion at the Crown’s expense in Iberia. The crisis of 1350-1500 exhibited similar political and economic fragmentation of the Crown’s interests. Isabel’s rise to power was a type of conquest – both military and bureaucratic – of the fragmented Iberian terrain and her royal claims. Isabel transferred the process to Hispaniola, regulating the feudal turn with the encomienda system while beginning the long process of building bureaucratic infrastructure: the first event in the imperial chain. But despite the compromise, she remained morally uncomfortable with the situation – at least when facing death.

After Isabel’s death Ferdinand inherited the nascent imperial system which he operated with a different emphasis. He encouraged expansion and became directly involved in mining activity. The Indies were a dependable source of revenue for other campaigns and he greeted a new rebellion – the Dominican’s moral objection to the conquest and encomienda cycle – as a threat, describing it as problematic for “excessive charity.” He initiated the second link in the imperial chain, sponsoring the composition of the Requirement thus help contain ecclesial opposition to the imperial system.

Thus, the evolving imperial system prompted different yet complimentary responses from the Crown. For Isabel, conquest and the encomienda emerged as a necessary, if morally problematic, compromise. Ferdinand harnessed the opposition and contained what he considered to be over scrupulosity. It was their grandson, Charles, who struck the royal middle ground. On the one hand, he pressured Pope Paul III to rescind the brief authorizing the excommunication of slavers and encomenderos. On the other, he quickly responded to Las Casas’s protestation with royal legislation of the New Laws. In this apparent vacillation Charles attempted to strike a moderate charity which
reflected the Crown’s moral sensibility but also reigned in the unruly colonies without risking the royal revenue – the third link in the imperial chain.

Charles’s moderate position was inherent in the role of the Crown and its multiple fronts. Charles had to simultaneously enforce his claims in Castile, conduct war in Italy, contain France, control princes in Germany, placate the papacy, and, above all, address the Turkish threat. As one scholar noted, the “confrontation between Latin Christendom and Ottoman Islam….was the decisive political and cultural reality of the era, the one conditioning all others.”938 As one front in a multifaceted, ongoing war, the Indies served primarily as a coffer for other, more costly ventures, especially as the Crown’s fiscal situation progressively worsened over the decades. The less heard about the Indies, other than treasure ships, the better.

The imperial chain, from a broad perspective, began in Iberia with Isabel’s unification of Iberia, which required the domestication of a rebellious noble class. She continued this process in Hispaniola over a similar noble rebellion. Ferdinand contained a threat from the nascent ecclesial branch of colonial society. Charles, in turn, harnessed both the noble class and ecclesial opposition to it in order to stabilize the imperial system. And his son, Philip, completed the imperial chain with the consolidation of Peru and the pacification of Las Casas’s influence.

Overall, the crown was a hybrid of honor and justice, somewhat of a middle road between conquistadors and clerical opponents, bent on stability. The crown came to terms with the conquistadors and encomenderos out of inevitability, waging a war of attrition. In this battle the ecclesial tentacles that Las Casas attempted to use for anti-colonial work were pruned for imperial management. At the same time, defense of the conquest

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938 From Liss, Isabel, 6.
checked Las Casas’s dangerous challenge to royal legitimacy. Overall, the crown negotiated all its fronts, overcame the incredible distances, and managed to construct one great encomienda.

4. Final Thoughts: Angelus Novus

Such were the chain of events. Yet the chain of events cannot remain on the level of analysis. The scale of violence, suffering, death, cultural loss, and ecological change requires some kind of horror and as a result we cannot see it all without looking through the eyes of the Angelus Novus. The story of the Conquest of the Americas is and will remain a catastrophe with few rivals.

But it is not the only story. There is another, the Conquest of the Conquest, a long story of the beauty that grew out of the ashes and rubble of the New World. It is a story of survival and life, a story that requires at least a whole other work but can be seen in the faces that live on in Latin America.


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