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Brevissima Relacion

Bartolome de las Casas

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Early Visions of Florida

Poetry • Stories • Chronicles from an American Borderland

Bartolomé de las Casas, Brevisima Relación



- The full title appears as “Brevisima relación de la destrucción de las Indias, colegida por el obispo don fray Bartolomé de Las Casas o Casaus, de la orden de Santo Domingo, año 1552”

Bartolomé de Las Casas questioned the Spanish monarchy by condemning the actions of the conquistadors. Cleric and historian, he was perhaps most importantly an advocate for the American Indian, one who spent his life protecting and representing Native Americans during a time when Spanish and Indian relations were poor. Historian Lewis Hanke sees Las Casas as “a

fighter on behalf of justice for the Indians,” and conversely as “a promoter of conquering and Christianizing by peaceful means alone.” For Spanish Catholics, he played the role of conscience, reminding the crown of its Christian duty to seek peaceful conversions.

Las Casas believed that the actions and governance in New Spain and the Americas was not consistent with Church beliefs. In his *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de la Indias*, Las Casas describes abysmal treatment of the natives. It is apparent that Las Casas believes that those in command only wanted to “advance themselves to higher dignities and promotions than they could deserve...[with] the effusion of blood and destruction of these people.” He struggled with these issues throughout his political career, winning and losing support from the Spanish. The *Brevísima relación* has also had its own strange career, having being translated into English, and used to justify stubborn defenses of Anglo-American colonialism.

Edited by Alisa Roberts, University of South Florida St. Petersburg

Further Reading

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Vickery, Paul. *Bartolomé de Las Casas: Great Prophet of the Americas*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2006. Print.

Bartolomé de las Casas. “[Of the Provinces of Florida](#).” From *A Brief Account of the Destruction of the Indies*. London: R. Hewson, 1689.

Three tyrants at several times made their entrance into these Provinces since the Year 1510, or 1511, to act those Crimes which others, and two of these Three made it their sole business to do in other Regions, to the end, that they might advance themselves to higher Dignities and Promotions than they could deserve, by the Effusion of Blood and Destruction of these People; but at length they all were cut off by a violent Death, and the Houses which they formerly built and erected with the cement of Human Blood, (which I can sufficiently testifie of these three) perished with them, and their memory rotten, and as absolutely washed away from off the Face of the Earth, as if they had never had a being. These Men deserted these Regions, leaving them in great distraction and confusion, nor were they branded with less notes of infamy, by the certain Slaughters they perpetrated, though they were but few in number than the rest. For the Just God cut them off

before they did much Mischief, and reserv'd the Castigation and Revenge of those Evils which I know, and was an Eye-Witness of, to this very Time and Place. As to the Fourth Tyrant, who lately, that is, in the Year 1538, came hither well-furnished with Men and Ammunition, we have received no account these Three Years last past; but we are very confident, that he, at his first Arrival, acted like a bloody Tyrant, even to extasie and madness, if he be still alive with his Followers, and did injure, destroy, and consume a vast Number of Men (for he was branded with infamous Cruelty above all those who with their Assistants committed Crimes and Enormities of the first Magnitude in these Kingdoms and Provinces) I conceive, God hath punished him with the same Violent Death, as he did other Tyrants: But because my Pen is wearied with relating such Execrable and Sanguinary Deeds (not of Men but Beasts) I will trouble myself no longer with the dismal and fatal Consequences thereof.

These People were found by them to be Wise, Grave, and well dispos'd, though their usual Butcheries and Cruelties in oppressing them like Brutes, with heavy Burthens, did rack their minds with great Terror and Anguish. At their Entry into a certain Village, they were welcomed with great Joy and Exultation, replenished them with Victuals, till they were all satisfied, yielding up to them above Six Hundred Men to carry their Bag and Baggage, and like Grooms to look after their Horses: The *Spaniards* departing thence, a Captain related to the Superiour Tyrant returned thither to rob this (no ways diffident or mistrustful) People, and pierced their King through with a Lance, of which Wound he dyed upon the Spot, and committed several other Cruelties into the bargain. In another Neighboring Town, whose Inhabitants they thought, were more vigilant and watchful, having had the News of their horrid Acts and Deeds, they barbarously murdered them all with their Lances and Swords, destroying all, Young and Old, Great and Small, Lords and Subject without exception.

The Chief Tyrant caused many *Indians* (above Two Hundred as 'tis noised abroad) whom he summon'd to appear before him out of another town, or else, who came voluntarily to pay their Respects to him, to have their Noses and Lips to the very Beard, cut off; and thus in this grievous and wretched Condition, the Blood gushing out of their Wounds, return'd them back, to give an Infallible Testimony of the Works and Miracles wrought by these Preachers and Ministers baptized in the Catholick Faith.

Now let all Men judge what Affection and love they bear to Christianity; to what purpose, or upon what account they believe there is a God, whom they preach and boast of to be Good and Just, and that his Law which they profess (and indeed only profess) to be pure and immaculate. The Mischiefs acted by these profligate Wretches and Sons of Perdition were of the deepest die. At last this Captain devoted to Perdition dyed impenitent, nor do we in the least question, but that he is overwhelmed and buried in Darkness Infernal, unless God according to his Infinite Mercy and boundless Clemency, not his own Merits, (he being contaminated and poison'd with Execrable Deeds,) be pleas'd to compassionate and have Mercy upon him.