

THE LIFE
AND WRITINGS OF
BARTOLOMÉ de las CASAS



by Henry Raup Wagner with
the collaboration of
Helen Rand
Parish

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ALBUQUERQUE

Spain a complaint that Casas, while Dominican prior in that town, had preached sermons against the encomienda and engaged in other activities harmful to the royal service and the welfare of the residents. As a result, the King sent a cedula reprimanding him.⁹ To clear himself, Casas wrote a letter to the Council on April 30, 1534, which gives us more details on the matter.

Fray Bartolomé begins by citing his past services to the Crown: his five years at court, working for the welfare of the Indians, and the previous years he had spent pacifying Cuba and subjecting it to royal authority. He further recalls the communication he had sent from Puerto de Plata, about the unspeakable crimes perpetrated against the natives, contrary to all law, human or divine. Then he takes up the audiencia complaints, point by point. One charge was that he had interfered in a death-bed confession, and forced a dying man to make the will he dictated. In rebuttal, Casas points out he has been preaching and confessing twenty-eight years and would do no such thing; furthermore, the property never came into his hands but into those of the town officials. Another difficulty, he says, had arisen because the civil authorities seized from the monastery a man who had taken sanctuary there, just as if it were a mosque and not a Christian church. As for his "opinions," he was merely affirming that the offenses against God in these lands—the destruction of so many native souls and bodies—offend no one more than the Emperor himself, destroying his vassals and wealth and putting his conscience in danger.¹⁰

Certainly in this letter, as in the long memorial that preceded it, we can see the old Bartolomé de las Casas stirring again even in the cloister.

THE ENRIQUILLO STORY

One dramatic episode does stand out near the close of Casas' monastery years: his part in the "pacification" of the famous Indian rebel Enriquillo. The story of this chief is most interesting. Some facts come from the *Historia*, others from official documents, and we shall review them here before establishing Fray Bartolomé's own role.¹¹

9. The judges to the King, June 7, 1533—Fabié, app. V. We know of the cedula from the opening of Casas' own letter cited in the following note.

10. Casas to the Council of the Indies, Santo Domingo, April 30, 1534. *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum*, IV, 197-202. See Catalogue, no. 13, for a description of this document.

11. In *Hist.*, lib. III, caps. 125-127, Casas tells the Enriquillo story clear to the San Miguel truce, ca. 1528.

As a youth, Enriquillo had been brought up in the Franciscan monastery of Verapaz; he was a devout Christian, spoke Spanish very well, and could read and write. When of age, he returned to his people in the province of Baoruco, where he was married in the church to a young Indian woman of good lineage named Lucía. With his Indians, he served a certain Spaniard, who first took his mare from him and then raped his wife. When Enriquillo protested to this Spaniard, he was given a beating; next, the chief complained to a magistrate in the Spanish town, and was thrown in jail. After his release he betook himself and his complaints to the audiencia, but the authorities merely sent him back to the same official who had mistreated him; and his master showered him with threats and further punishment.

Enriquillo dissimulated for a while, then fled to the mountains with a few followers. This made him a rebel, and the Spaniard came with eleven soldiers to bring him back. But the Indians were armed; and after an altercation, with the encomendero calling the chieftain "dog" and attacking him, there was a skirmish in which two Spaniards were killed and the rest routed.¹² The audiencia now sent seventy or eighty soldiers to subjugate the Indian, but these too were driven off, with some dead and wounded.

As the news of these exploits spread throughout Española, many Indians escaped to join Chief Enriquillo, until his forces numbered some three hundred. This guerrilla band he ruled with great skill. He instructed his men to kill no Spaniards save in self-defense, but always to take their arms and release them. (A few of his band, however, killed some Spaniards who had come from Tierra Firme, and seized their gold.) In this fashion he seems to have accumulated a supply of weapons that made him a formidable foe; and he also took remarkable precautions for the safety of his people. All the old folks, children, and sick persons were hidden away in a secret place in the mountains where he raised crops; with them he kept about fifty warriors as a guard, leaving the rest of his force under a captain to mount a lookout for Spaniards. When a few men were sent out hunting or fishing, he at once moved to another place, so that even if these individuals were captured and tortured they could not reveal his hiding place. Above all, he maintained great mobility, repeatedly exhausting the numerous Spanish expeditions sent against him.

The first serious attempt to recapture Enriquillo took place in 1525, when a formal expedition was sent out under Licentiate Badillo and Jacomé

12. Casas gives Enriquillo's exact words: "Be glad I did not kill you; go away and come no more!" Oviedo (I, 140) says that this happened in 1519.

de Castellón. Over eight thousand pesos were spent with no result. Again, in late 1527 or early 1528, another effort was made by Captain Fernando de San Miguel and eighty soldiers. A Franciscan named Fray Remigio, one of the early missionaries and probably, Casas thought, a former teacher of Enriquillo's, offered to go along with the party as an emissary. This friar was put ashore near where the rebel was supposed to be, and was shortly discovered by some of Enriquillo's scouts, who took him for a spy. Fray Remigio stated his peaceful and conciliatory errand; whereupon the scouts spared his life, but stripped off his garments except his underclothes, and departed with his message. Enriquillo came at once, apologized to the friar for their conduct, but declined Fray Remigio's invitation to establish friendship with the Spaniards. They had killed his father and grandfather and all the lords of Xaragua province, and greatly affronted him, and he wished to see none of them. Finally, however, the two sides did encounter each other and Enriquillo and San Miguel talked across a deep barranca—the Captain offering to conclude an official peace and Enriquillo to give back the gold he had captured. They agreed to meet at an appointed place on the coast, with eight men each. The chief did have a shelter erected and the gold placed therein, but he became suspicious because the Spaniards were arriving in force; so he disappeared in the forest and did not keep the rendezvous, though his men duly delivered the gold. The expedition, according to the official account, cost ten thousand pesos and recovered only fifteen hundred pesos in gold.¹³ Chagrined at the outcome, San Miguel returned to Santo Domingo; but anyway, says Casas, this truce lasted four or five years.

Finally, the government decided to conclude the matter. Dissatisfied with the state of affairs on Española, the Council of the Indies organized an armada of two hundred men to go to America and capture or kill or make peace with Enriquillo. Francisco de Barrionuevo was named commander under an order dated July 4, 1532; the following February he appeared in Santo Domingo and presented his credentials and instructions. At once the audiencia held a strategy meeting, and after long consideration decided that his soldiers were not fitted for a guerrilla campaign and he should take a smaller and more experienced force. Accordingly, on May 8, 1533, Barrionuevo left port in a small caravel with thirty-two men and some Indians.

After two months' search, Barrionuevo at last succeeded in meeting with Enriquillo and concluding a peace. He gave the chief a provision

13. The judges to the King, March 30, 1528, with an appended March 31 statement of costs and special taxes—*DII*, XXXVII, 389-396, 397-400. The taxes kept ships away from Española; cf. Herrera, *Historia general*, dec. IV, lib. IV, cap. 11.

from the Emperor, a full pardon, and no doubt also the title of "don," which the Indian bore thereafter. For his part, Don Enrique agreed to come in, though he remained somewhat mistrustful of the Spaniards. So he sent back an Indian with Barrionuevo, probably as a spy. Then in August, the chief himself came down with some of his men to within two leagues of Azúa, where a number of the inhabitants had gathered to meet him, in all some twenty-five or thirty horsemen and forty or fifty foot soldiers. But his envoy had not yet returned from Santo Domingo, and though he and the Spaniards celebrated the new peace, he was still suspicious in the presence of so many armed men, and finally returned to his mountain fastness.¹⁴

It was at this point, with the peace still precarious, that Fray Bartholomé in person took a hand. There has been confusion about his role for a long time, ever since Remesal mistakenly attributed to him both the earlier truce brought about by Captain San Miguel and the final peace officially negotiated by Barrionuevo.¹⁵ But Casas himself, in his 1534 letter to the Council, tells us what really happened:

"I went—with only the grace of God and a companion friar, whom the Order furnished me—I went to Baóruco, and reassured Don Enrique and confirmed him in the service of the Emperor, our lord. I was with him a month, and confessed him and his wife and all his captains, and relieved them of all their very just fears. I would not come away from there, till I took him with me to the town of Azúa, where he was embraced by the citizenry and made merry [with them]; and I left him with the course agreed that he was to follow, [namely] to go and be entertained at the other Spanish towns, and to bring to the service of His Majesty certain captains and people in rebellion, and particularly to establish his town seven leagues from Azúa; and he is to provide all that region with bread and other supplies. All of this he is actually fulfilling gladly. And in truth, noble sirs, had the Dominican Order not sent me, to serve God and His Majesty, and had I not gone there, it might be a hundred years before Don Enrique would be

14. *DII*, I, 481-505. Oviedo, primera parte, lib. V, cap. 9, gives details on the Azúa visit.

15. See *Rem.*, I, 147-155, and 161-163. Remesal (I, 468) says he did not have access to lib. III of Casas' history; he must therefore have taken his very similar narrative of the events to the truce from Herrera's version, which is lifted whole from Casas. In the truce story, Remesal gives Fray Remigio a secondary role, and in the final pacification he does not mention Barrionuevo at all.

Why did Remesal erroneously insert Casas into these events? I believe he misunderstood some papers of Licentiate Cerrato, which he says he found in the Guatemalan archives and which doubtless referred to Casas' subsequent visit to the chief.

seen outside the impregnable peaks and highlands where he was born and possesses his patrimony. Because even though Francisco de Barrionuevo went there and commenced the peace, and it is not right he should be defrauded of what he did, yet he was there only one night and part of a midday, and then he came back; and this was not sufficient in a situation where such a capital and justly undertaken war had gone on for so many years previous. Since I saw the great harm and destruction of this island, and the inestimable good that would accrue to all the land from security and peace with Don Enrique, and the long experience that I have in these matters, I persuaded the Superior to send me; and it was necessary to keep my going a secret from the royal judges, on account of the hostile attitude which I knew they had towards me. So I went, and I reassured him; and I left him firmer in the service of His Majesty than the peak of Martos, and may it please God that they know how to keep him thus."¹⁶ Parenthetically, little more is known of Don Enrique, save that the peace was kept and he died in about a year.

This is the Enriquillo story as we have it from Casas himself and audiencia reports. Oviedo, in his account, follows the same general lines and also gives us the reaction of the authorities to Casas' exploit. Telling of some religious and other customs of Enriquillo's followers, he adds: "Who told this was Fray Bartolomé, as they informed me; and he also told many other things in praise of this cacique, saying that he was far advanced in the faith and a good Christian. The judges of the audiencia were very angry about his visit to these Indians and to Don Enrique without their knowledge and license, fearing that the natives might be stirred up on account of the newness of the recent peace. Since, however, his visit had been so productive, as I have said, they were pleased at his success and thanked him for his labors."¹⁷

ALLEGED JOURNEYS

Hitherto we have covered the known and documented events of Casas' first decade as a friar. We turn now to dubious ground—two journeys he is

16. Casas to the Council, April 30, 1534, *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum*, IV, 199-200. Martos was in Jaén, Andalusia.

17. Oviedo, I, 158. His account was gathered in Santo Domingo, and he departed for Spain about January 1534. The "recent peace" he mentions was Barrionuevo's whose August 1553 meeting with Enriquillo he has previously narrated in great detail. So we can fix Casas' visit to the chieftain between these two dates—i.e., in the latter part of 1533 or at the very beginning of 1534. Oviedo's version of the Enriquillo story (*primera parte*, lib. V, caps. 5-11) contains no mention of either San Miguel or Fray Remigio.