

CHAPTER THREE

THE IMAGO DEI TRADITION IN HISPANIC/LATINA THEOLOGY

For the creator of every being has not so despised these peoples of the new world that he [*sic*] willed them to lack reason and made them like brute animals so that they should be called barbarians, savages, wild men, and brutes, as they [i.e. the *Sepulvedistas*] think or imagine. On the contrary, they are of such gentleness and decency that they are, more than the other nations of the entire world, supremely fitted and prepared to abandon the worship of idols and to accept, province by province and people by people, the word of God and the preaching of the truth – Bartolomé de las Casas on the Defense of the Indians (1550).¹

As the quotation by Friar Bartolomé de las Casas indicates the history of the Americas has often been characterized by distrust and mistreatment of the native, of the one who is perceived as different by the dominant culture. The history of the conquest of the Americas gives copious evidence to this cruel reality as well as to resistance by the oppressed.² In Latin America many Spaniards distrusted the spiritual and intellectual capacity of Native Americans³ and questioned their humanity and participation in the divine *Logos*.⁴ Friar

¹ Cited in Lewis Hanke, *All Mankind is One: A Study of the Disputation Between Bartolomé de las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepulveda on the Religious and Intellectual Capacity of the American Indians* (DeKalb, IL.: Northern Illinois University Press, 1974), 82.

² García, *Dignidad*, 151-2.

³ The term "Native American" will be used in lieu of "Indian" as this term more accurately reflects the self-understanding of the indigenous peoples of the Western Hemisphere. The term "Indian" is a historical misnomer attributed to the wrongful naming by Christopher Columbus of the new peoples he encountered on his historic voyage to the New World. According to Elizondo, this arrogant naming of the other was a mistake of colossal proportions. See Elizondo, *Galilean Journey*, 9.

⁴ González, *Mañana*, 104; Elsa Támez, *The Amnesty of Grace: Justification by Faith from a Latin America Perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 39-42.

Bartolomé de Las Casas argued against this view and defended the humanity and dignity of the Native Americans before the court of Spain.⁵

Hispanic/Latina theologians are currently involved in the same kind of justice praxis from their respective social locations in an effort to recover this trampled human dignity from the perspective of their interpretation of the *imago Dei*.⁶ They are helping to recover this theological notion employed by Friar Bartolomé de las Casas in his defense of the original inhabitants of these lands. They are applying this concept to defend the humanity and dignity of the Hispanic/Latina community. These theologians and social scientists are the descendants of the people of the conquest of México and the Southwest. They are the resulting mixture of Spanish and Indian people, groups known as the *mestizos*.⁷ They share a common history of oppression as well as of resistance and protest against any sociopolitical and religious ideology and practice that would diminish the humanity of the *mestizo* as a creation in the image and likeness of God.

In North America the mistreatment of the Native-Americans and other marginal groups such as the Hispanic/Latina community bears evidence to the

⁵ Hanke, *All Mankind Is One*; Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Las Casas: In Search of the Poor of Jesus Christ*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995); Luis N. Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism: The Political and Religious Conquest of the Americas* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1992).

⁶ García, *Dignidad*, 130-1; Ada-María Isasi-Díaz and Yolanda Tarango, C.C.V.I., *Hispanic Women, Prophetic Voice in the Church: Toward a Hispanic Women's Liberation Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 5-6.; Harold J. Recinos, *Who Comes in the Name of the Lord?* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 145-6.; Villafañe, *The Liberating Spirit*, 188-9.

⁷ Elizondo, *Galilean Journey*, 14-18.

same experience of the original forebears.⁸ These people were indigenous but became foreigners in their own lands as the result of conquest and genocide. They were treated as suspect and less than human because they were different from the dominant culture. The result was an unjust marginalization and a denial of their human dignity. Their humanity and dignity as a people created in the image and likeness of God was questioned from the moment of the first encounter.⁹ From the very beginning of this history Greek philosophical concepts were used by some of the clergy to define and construe the concept of the *imago Dei* to the advantage of those who conquered and to the diminishment of the humanity of the conquered inhabitants.¹⁰ The arguments of the Spanish theologians of the sixteenth century are evidence of the debate that occurred to question and disprove the humanity of the conquered and the dispossessed. The Aristotelian precept of the *Logos* was the basis for this historic debate and was used to justify the exclusion and domination of those considered lacking in humanity.¹¹

In this chapter we will examine how Old World European prejudice influenced and shaped the history of racism and ethnocentrism of the Americas. The perspective of racial preference and the divine right of conquest for the sake of evangelization allowed the Spanish Roman Catholic conquerors and various clergy to justify the conquest and the imposition of theological norms. It was a

⁸ Marty, *Righteous Empire*, 5-6.

⁹ Hanke, *All Mankind is One*, 4.

¹⁰ González, *Mañana*, 104; Támez, *The Amnesty of Grace*, 39-42.

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view based on the allegedly superior rational faculty of the conqueror.¹² This interpretation of the human also allowed the Protestant establishment of North America to view itself as the uniquely civilized and favored of God. The ideology of Manifest Destiny was imposed on the native peoples with this perspective in mind, and was used to conquer and subject them and their native lands to the dominant cosmovision¹³. The result was a loss and degradation of human dignity that continues to plague current human relations in both the church and society. The foreigner and immigrant very often experience the violation of their human dignity because they are perceived as different from the dominant culture and because they speak a different language.¹⁴ After a review of the arguments of the early Spanish theologians and their interpretation of the *imago Dei* we will examine the arguments of two Hispanic/Latino theologians who help to recapture and affirm the dignity of the Hispanic/Latino community as *imago Dei*.

The Doctrine of the *Logos* in Historical Perspective

¹² This defamatory opinion of the Native Americans was supported by the historian Fernández de Oviedo in his *Historia general y natural de las Indias* which was first published in 1535; the complete *Historia* (fifty books) did not appear until the nineteenth century when the Real Academia de la Historia published it in preference to the *Historia de las Indias* of Las Casas. It was the opinion of Oviedo that the Native Americans were a dirty, lying, cowardly people lacking in reason who should disappear from the face of the earth, a view that was refuted by Las Casas in his *Historia de las Indias*. For an exposition of their discordant views, see Hanke, *All Mankind is One*, 39-40.

¹³ Marty, *Righteous Empire*, 5-6.

¹⁴ Lily Wu, a Chinese Lutheran lay person, stated that "British accents are considered the most acceptable to Americans. But do I *wish* for the day when a Mexican accent would be accepted just as much!" This dissonance in acceptability based on the language of origin continues to be a shared experience among immigrant groups in this country. See Lily Wu, "The Chinese Caped Crusader and the Pneumatology of Function for Contemporary Pentecost at The Lutheran School of Theology" (2001 Commencement address at LSTC, June, 2001).

In order to understand what the Spanish theologians of the sixteenth century understood as *imago Dei*, one must first examine the history and understanding of this concept and its nexus with the doctrine of the *Logos*. The early Christian apologists -- Justin, Clement, Origen and others -- developed the doctrine of the *Logos* in an attempt to bridge the Christian faith with pagan philosophy.¹⁵ These early Christians were accused of being atheists and uncultured barbarians because they had no visible gods. In their defense they were forced to take up the issue of the relationship between their faith and pagan culture.¹⁶ They appealed to the doctrine of the *Logos* as the bridge between the two cultures and traditions.

To make their argument these early apologists appealed to the authority of the classical philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics. These taught the existence of a supreme being above the entire cosmos. Appealing to such respected authorities, these early Christian apologists argued that they also believed in the supreme being of the philosophers. This being was the God they knew. This argument proved to be very convincing but also very dangerous because the philosophers conceived of perfection as immutable, impassible, and fixed and many Christians came to the conclusion that such was the God of the Scriptures.¹⁷ Justin, like Plato before him, began with the notion that perfection

¹⁵ González, *The Story of Christianity*, 56-7; 159-60.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

requires immutability and thus agreed that the Supreme Being, God, must be immutable.¹⁸

The doctrine of the absolute immutability of God led necessarily to the question of how such a God can relate to a mutable world. Justin found his answer by drawing on the doctrine of the *logos*, which was of ancient lineage among Greek philosophers. *Logos* is a Greek word that means both "word" and "reason."¹⁹ According to a tradition of Greek philosophy, the human mind can understand reality because it shares in the *Logos* or universal reason that undergirds all reality.²⁰ Borrowing from this doctrine, Justin was able to formulate the argument that although it is true that the supreme being – the "Father" – is immutable, impassible, and so on, there is also a *Logos*, Word, or Reason of God, and this is personal, capable of direct relations with the world and with humans.²¹ Thus, according to Justin, when the Bible says that God spoke to Moses, what it means is that the *Logos* of God spoke to him.²² In the Fourth Gospel John the apostle declares that Jesus is the *Logos* or "Word" made flesh. For Justin the incarnation reveals that the underlying Reason of the universe, the *Logos* or Word of God, has come in the flesh.²³

¹⁸ González, *Mañana*, 103.

¹⁹ González, *The Story of Christianity*, 55.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid, 161.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 55-6.

According to the Fourth Gospel, this *Logos* is the true light that enlightens everyone. This means that, even before the incarnation, he is the source of all true knowledge. Paul had already stated in 1 Cor. 10:1-4 that the faith of the ancient Hebrews rested on none other than Christ, who had been revealed to them even before the incarnation. Now Justin added that there were also among the pagans those who knew the same *Logos*, however dimly.²⁴ It was his contention that whatever truth was found in the writings of Plato was due to the *Logos* of God who granted him this truth. This was the same *Logos* who was incarnate in Jesus. From this standpoint it was possible for Justin to argue that the great philosophers of antiquity such as Socrates and Plato "were Christian" because their wisdom came from Christ.²⁵ This did not mean, however, that the incarnation was not needed, for those philosophers knew the *Logos* "in part," whereas those who have seen Jesus in his incarnation have seen the "entire *Logos*."²⁶ This understanding, however, was not applied to the inhabitants of the New World who showed no signs of the *Logos*.²⁷ Their humanity was therefore suspect and subject to disputation.²⁸

²⁴ Ibid., 56.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 104; Justin, *I Apol.* 46. 3-4; *II Apol.* 7.3; 10.2-3.

²⁷ According to González, post-Constantinian Christianity seems to have had recourse to this doctrine only when those whom it was attempting to missionize could not be conquered by force of arms. He points out that the missionary methods of Ricci in China and de Nobili in India, on the one hand, and those followed in Africa and in Latin America by most missionaries, on the other, were dictated by the pragmatic reality that the colonial empires supporting such missions could conquer Africa or Latin America, but not China or India. The result was the notion that the Chinese, for instance, showed signs of having been instructed by the *Logos*, but that the same was not true of Africans or of American Indians. From this it was a short step to the declaration that the Chinese were human, for the universal *Logos* had spoken to them, but that the same was not true of the "savages" of Africa and the New World. These, showing no signs of the *Logos*,

On the Nature of the Indigenous Peoples of the New World

The historical accounts of the encounter with the native peoples of the New World reveal that the question of their humanity was the subject of protracted dispute and refutation. Some would argue that what was really at issue was the freedom and servitude of the Native Americans and the right to possess their lands. Whether they were rational beings or brute animals was the determining question.²⁹ The answer to the question would determine the evangelization of the native peoples and their self-governance as subjects of the crown.³⁰ The question of their nature became the basis for the first great philosophical and theological dispute about the New World.³¹

At the same time it is interesting to observe that some native peoples questioned the humanity or divinity of the Spaniards.³² The first aborigines found

were inferior beings, who did not truly own their land, and who could be legitimately dispossessed and enslaved. González, *Mañana*, 104.

²⁸ Hanke, *All Mankind is One*. This question of the humanity of the Native Americans and their capacity for the Christian religion and for European civilization was the basis for the disputation between Las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda at Valladolid, Spain in 1550. Using the Aristotelian theory of natural slavery Sepúlveda argued that the Native Americans should be considered as the natural slaves of the Spaniards. Las Casas refuted this argument in his famous treatise, *Defense Against the Persecutors and Slanders of the Peoples of the New World Discovered Across the Seas*.

²⁹ Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism*, 133-4. Rivera observes that this question started a tradition and that in general every encounter between Europeans and whites with persons of other races (and with less developed technology) leads to a questioning of the rationality of the latter. It is an ideological mechanism of domination.

³⁰ Ibid. See also Gutiérrez, *Las Casas*, 89-90.

³¹ Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism*, 133-4.

³² Ibid.; see also, Georg Friederici, *El carácter del descubrimiento y de la conquista de América: Introducción a la historia de la colonización de América por los pueblos del Viejo Mundo* (México, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1986), 1: 167-71.

by Columbus believed that he and his companions were celestial beings. According to the Admiral, they exclaimed: "Come and see the men who have come from heaven."³³ History records that Moctezuma, perplexed at the possibility of the divine origin of Cortés and his cohorts, was fatally indecisive. An account in Nahuatl (the primary native language of México) says that the Mexican chief "had the belief that they were gods, he took them to be gods."³⁴ That caused him anguish and terror, which led him to say, according to the same account: "My heart is wounded unto death! Like it [is] being submerged in chile [hot pepper], it suffers great anguish, it is burning..."³⁵ According to José Acosta, the Peruvian natives called the Spaniards *viracochas* [divine], "for they believed they were children of heaven."³⁶ It was not long before the inhabitants of the continent soon discovered the humanness of the Europeans, not only because of their mortality, but also because of their intense greed.³⁷

³³ Ibid.; see also, Consuelo Varela, ed., *Los cuatro viajes. Testamento*. (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1986), 65.

³⁴ Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism*, 133-4.

³⁵ Ibid., 299. According to the historian Bernal Díaz del Castillo, Cortés, during the first confrontation with the natives, would hide the dead, "so that the Indians would not see that we were mortals, but believe that we were *teules* [divine] as they would say." See also, Angel María Garibay, ed. *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España por Bernardino de Sahagún (1582)*, (México, D.F.: Editorial Porrúa, 1985), 12: 765-766.

³⁶ Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism*, 133-4. Vargas Machuca cited in Antonio M. Fabié, *Vida y escritos de don Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, Obispo de Chiapa*, 2 vols. (Madrid: Imprenta de Miguel Ginesta, 1879). [Reprinted in the *Colección de documentos inéditos para la historia de España* Vols. 70-71. Vaduz: Kraus Reprint, 1966], 71:225-226, generalizes this naïve deification: "As far as taking the Spaniards as children of the Sun ... generally it has happened at first sight in all the Indies, and it is the same today in the new conquests, from which you can easily tell that they are barbarians."

³⁷ Ibid., 134. According to Mendieta, the native inhabitants of Mexico thought the Spaniards were "gods, children, and brothers of Quetzalcoatl," until after they witnessed their insatiable greed and "experienced and saw their deeds, then they did not see them as celestial beings." See

In contrast the natives were labeled as subhuman, "barbarians," or "beasts from a European perspective."³⁸ Francisco de Vitoria, a Franciscan evangelizer in New Spain, directly refers to those who claimed that the legitimacy of Spanish hegemony over "the barbarians of the New World" was based on the anthropological inferiority of the latter, "who really do not seem to be far from brute beasts."³⁹ Las Casas refers to the judgment expressed by Gregorio, a scholar in the Castilian court in the 1520s, at the beginning of the debates over the nature of the natives, according to which "those Indians ... are like talking animals."⁴⁰ This assessment of the aborigines reveals that it was really a debate about the rationality of the natives, of their capacity to reflect the character of the universal *Logos*. According to Acosta, there were many Europeans who thought that the natives "were quadrupeds rather than rational men."⁴¹

Ginés de Sepúlveda, who debated Las Casas at the famous disputation of Valladolid in 1550, thought of the natives as *humunculos* ("little men in whom there is hardly any trace of humanness"; "hardly men").⁴² John L. Phelan

Gerónimo de Mendieta, *Historia eclesiástica indiana* [1596] (México, D.F.: Editorial Porrúa, 1980), 2:93. The same is found in Las Casas. See Baratólomé de las Casas, O.P., *Los indios de México y Nueva España* in *Antología de Apologética historia sumaria*, ed. Edmundo O'Gorman, 2 vols. (México, D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma, 1987), 3:54.

³⁸ Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism*, 134.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* See also, Lewis Hanke, ed., *Historia de las Indias* (México, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1986), 2:472.

⁴¹ Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism*, 134. José de Acosta, S.J., *De procuranda indorum salute* (*Predicación del evangelio en las Indias, 1588*), "Proemio," ed. Francisco Mateo, S.J. (Madrid: Colección España Misionera, 1952), 4:332.

⁴² Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism*, 134. Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, *Demócrates Segundo o de las Justas causas de la Guerra contra los indios*, ed. Angel Losada (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1951), 35, 63.

summarizes his precise posture: "The Indians lacked *humanitas* ... that quality of mind and spirit that makes a specific people competent to attain civilization."⁴³ Based on that evaluation, Sepúlveda justifies their loss of dominion over their lands, their forced servitude, and the imposition of Christianity upon them. Sepúlveda is an Aristotelian humanist scholar who uses the Aristotelian thesis on the difference between the nature of free humans and servants to justify the suitability of imposing a regime by masters on the natives of the continent. "The differing condition of men produces just forms of government and diverse types of just empires. In fact, men who are moral, human and intelligent are apt for a civil empire, which is proper for free persons, or royal power."⁴⁴

"Men who are moral, human, and intelligent" and "free persons" are, above all, the Spaniards (and in general Christian Western Europeans). Since they possess genuine *humanitas*, a civil government befits their rationality and liberty.⁴⁵ But there is another type of human being: "the barbarians ... who have little discretion."⁴⁶ Two possible reasons were given for this inferiority or lack of *humanitas*. "Either they are servants by nature, as they say exist in several regions of the world,⁴⁷ or because of their depraved customs ... they cannot fulfill

⁴³ Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism*, 134. John Leddy Phelan, "El imperio cristiano de Las Casas, el imperio español de Sepúlveda y el imperio milenarista de Mendieta," *Revista de Occidente* 141 (diciembre): 293.

⁴⁴ Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism*, 134.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 135.

⁴⁷ Ibid. See also, 299, footnote 6, wherein Rivera indicates that this geographic determinism became a masterpiece of imperialist ideology in attempting to give a pseudo-scientific explanation to the supposed natural servitude of some nations.

their duty in any other way."⁴⁸ According to Rivera, the natives of the Americas fit both descriptions: the natural-geographic and the socio-moral. "One and the other cause concur in the case of those barbarians."⁴⁹ They do not qualify, therefore, for a government similar to the one enjoyed by Iberian subjects, but for a regime that Ginés de Sepúlveda calls "dominio heril" [domination by masters] for a species in between free man and slave.⁵⁰

Sepúlveda would argue this point with Las Casas even as he tried to soften his opinion about the native inhabitants after Pope Paul III's bull *Sublimis Deus* (1537), which affirmed the full humanity of the natives.⁵¹ The central differences between the two men, however perdure since the latter (a) repudiates the concept of conquest, for it necessarily implies the violent usurpation of political sovereignty; (b) rejects the idea that conversion should be preceded or be conditioned by force of war; (c) censures the *encomienda* system of servitude, which Sepúlveda includes as part of his understanding of "domination by masters"; and (d) insists on the necessity of the Castilian empire being the object of a free autodetermination of the native communities, which for Sepúlveda would be absurd, because of the impossibility of obtaining a free and

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

rational decision from nations not made up of men who are moral, human, intelligent, and "free."⁵²

Because of some of the unusual customs of the native inhabitants, such as their eating habits, sexual practices, and cannibalism, even some of the clergy defended their enslavement.⁵³ It was not a far stretch, then, to declare the native inhabitants beasts to legitimize converting them into property as slaves. As Beatriz Pastor describes it: "It would become the metamorphosis of *man* into a *thing*, passing through a first metamorphosis of man into a beast ... which would climax in the transformation of man into a commodity."⁵⁴ A similar perception is reflected by Sebastián Ramírez de Fuenleal, bishop of Santo Domingo, when writing to Carlos V, on May 15, 1533, criticizing the opinion of Fray Domingo de Betanzos, who labeled the natives as beasts before the Council of the Indies. "Fr. Domingo de Betanzos ... agreed to affirm what these people who want to consider them as beasts say so that they can seize their property."⁵⁵

⁵² Ibid., 136.

⁵³ These included the Dominican friar Tomás Ortiz who became the first bishop of Santa Marta. In a report to the Council of the Indies he defended the enslavement of the natives because of their unusual customs. According to Rivera, accusations of sodomy and cannibalism usually went together. Both were joined to the idea that idolatry leads to extreme moral corruption. See Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism*, 136. Pagden points out that this negative vision has been common in the European perspective of "primitive societies." Thus, imperialism assumes a face of moral education. See Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 176.

⁵⁴ Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism*, 137. See Beatriz Pastor, *Discurso narrativo de la conquista de América*. Awarding-winning essay for Casa de las Américas historical contest in 1983 (La Habana: Casa de las Américas, 1984), 95, 101.

⁵⁵ Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism*, 137. See Mariano Cuevas, *Historia de la iglesia en México*, 5 vols. (México, D.F.: Editorial Patria, 1946), 1:256.

The same thesis is underscored by Julián Garcés, Dominican friar and first bishop of Tlaxcala, in an extensive letter sent to Pope Paul III shortly before he issued his famous bull *Sublimis Deus*. Garcés censures:

The false doctrine of those who instigated by the devil's suggestions affirm that the Indians [*sic*] are incapable of our religion (*incapaces religionis nostrae*). This voice, which is really from Satan ... is a voice coming from the avarice of Christians, who are so greedy that to quench their thirst they want to establish that rational creatures (*rationabiles creaturas*) made in the likeness of God are beasts and stupid ... with the only aim of using them in their service at will.... And hence some Spaniards.... have come to think that it is not sinful to devalue, destroy, or kill them.⁵⁶

For Garcés, on the contrary, the American natives "are entitled to be called rational, and have full sense and mind."⁵⁷ There were others who defended the native inhabitants against those Spaniards who would dehumanize them as *bruta animalia* (irrational animals).⁵⁸ Among them was Las Casas who fully realized the material interest behind that description, to utilize the natives as beasts of burden so as to enrich the colonists. For Las Casas the theoretical posture concerning the nature of the native inhabitants was really a badly concealed justification for the use of the natives as means of production. Together with this infamy there was another assertion that Las Casas

⁵⁶ Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism*, 137. See Ramón Xirau, *Idea y querella de la Nueva España* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1973), 90-2.

⁵⁷ Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism*, 138.

⁵⁸ These included Gerónimo de Mendieta, Fray Antonio De Remesal, Tomás López and José de Acosta. See Mendieta, *Historia eclesiástica indiana*, 1:28; Antonio de Remesal, *Historia general de las Indias Occidentales y particular de la gobernación de Chiapa y Guatemala* [1619] (Guatemala: Biblioteca "Goathemala," 1932), 1:206; Tomás López, in Hanke, *All Mankind is one*, 129-130; idem., "More Heat and Some Light on the Spanish Struggle for Justice in the Conquest of America," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 44, no. 3 (August): 293-340; José de Acosta, S.J., *Historia natural y moral de las Indias* [1590] (México, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1985), 6:280.

stigmatized as "bestial heresy" namely, "that they are incapable of Catholic faith."⁵⁹

The position taken in regard to the subhumanness of the American natives did not come, according to Las Casas, from a genuine philosophical analysis of their reasoning faculties. It arose, rather, from the heart of conquerors and *encomenderos*, among them Francisco de Garay, Juan Ponce de León, Pedro García de Carrión, and "other neighbors of the island [Española] ... who had many Indians [*sic*] in servitude."⁶⁰ It was this economic element that forced upon the natives disparaging images aimed at their exploitation and the expropriation of their possessions and goods.

According to some historians, the question was not centered on the nature or essence of the natives, whether they were human beings or irrational beasts, a position favored by Lewis Hanke. The question hinged on whether they had a right to their unconditional freedom, to control of their possessions and lands, and whether they could be compelled to work for the primary well-being of the Castilians.⁶¹ This position was held by Lino Gómez Canedo and according to Luis Rivera seems to bear the weight of the evidence.⁶² It appears that in spite of the sometimes extremely denigrating words of such persons as Tomás de Ortiz and others, very few people were ready to deny that the Indians were

⁵⁹ Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism*, 139. See also Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, 2:206-207; 3:167.

⁶⁰ Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism*, 139-40.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 140.

⁶² Lino Gómez Canedo, "Hombres o bestias? (Nuevo examen crítico de un Viejo tópico)." *Estudios de historia Novohispana*, vol. 1 (México): 29-51.

closer to the Europeans than to irrational beasts. The problem was whether they were endowed with an *inferior rationality* that would make it impossible for them to be fully instructed in the Christian faith and to govern themselves adequately as persons or as nations, a situation that would bring it the necessity for some sort of compulsory tutelage.⁶³

Spanish Arguments for the Full Humanity of the Natives

Upon recognizing the full humanity of the natives, Las Casas insisted that their full individual and collective liberty be respected. In doing so he faced not only a "dehumanizing concept" of the natives, but also its corollary: their utilization as mere instruments of enrichment. In his letter to Bartolomé Carranza de Miranda, August 1555, he reiterated his criticism "of the blindness and diabolical evil ... which the Spaniards themselves perpetrated: namely, to have defamed those Indians [sic] as beasts," an evaluation that is used to establish a supposedly despotic government whose true finality is "to rob them and oppress them and hold them in servitude" – then, with greater prophetic indignation, he adds, "to become rich through blood."⁶⁴

Las Casas believed that all the nations of the world are human.⁶⁵ He maintained the thesis that the natives are creatures "endowed with reason,"⁶⁶

⁶³ Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism*, 140.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 141. See also, Fabié, *Vida y escritos*, 71:414, 416.

⁶⁵ Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism*, 141.

⁶⁶ Lewis Hanke and Manuel Giménez Fernández, Prologue to *Tratados* 2 vols. (México, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1965), 1:239.

with "lively understanding," created like the Europeans in the image and likeness of God. He stresses the equal nature of Europeans and natives, since "there is only one ... species of rational creatures ... dispersed throughout the world".⁶⁷ As such it is fitting to recognize their full humanity as beings endowed with intellect, who also constitute *imago et similitudo Dei*.⁶⁸ Phelan has indicated that the identification of human nature in Las Casas has two roots: the ontological definition of the rational unity of the human species from classic Greco-Roman philosophy, and the medieval ideal of the universality of divine grace.⁶⁹ What Las Casas wants to stress is the profound ontological and religious unity between human beings on both sides of the ocean.⁷⁰

To a dehumanizing and mercantilist vision of the New World Las Casas juxtaposes the full humanity of the natives.⁷¹ When debating with his ideological rivals, he focuses the polemic on the destiny of the souls of the natives: they are perfectly capable of understanding and accepting the Christian faith. In his dispute of 1519 with the bishop of Darién, Juan de Quevedo, he asserts: "Those

⁶⁷ See Las Casas, *Del único modo de atraer a todos los pueblos a la verdadera religión* (México, D.F. Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1942), 13.

⁶⁸ Rivera points out that while Las Casas stresses the meekness and lack of bellicosity ("peaceful and tranquil ... meek sheep") of the natives as the principal indication of their humanity, Alonso de Ercilla sees that humanity, above all, in their valor and warring skills. See Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism*, 141, 300, n.14. See also, Isacio Pérez Fernández, O.P., Introduction and notes to *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de Africa: Preludio de la destrucción de Indias. Primera defensa de los guanches y negros contra su esclavización* (Salamanca-Lima: Editorial San Esteban-Instituto Bartolomé de las Casas, 1989), 15-7. See also, Alonso de Ercilla, *The Araucaniad*, trans. Charles Maxwell Lancaster and Paul Thomas Manchester (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1945), 1.

⁶⁹ Phelan, "El Imperio cristiano," 302.

⁷⁰ Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism*, 142.

⁷¹ Ibid.

people ... with which the New World is teeming and filled, are very capable of the Christian faith and of every virtue and good habit through reason and Christian doctrine, and of their very *natura* [nature] are free."⁷² Thus the accomplishment of a rational and pacific conversion of "those peoples" should be the regulatory norm of the Spanish Crown in the lands that Providence has granted it.⁷³

The idea that the natives have defects in their humanity – to consider them "beasts incapable of doctrine and virtue" who allegedly lack the "quality of human nature" – Las Casas considers "scandalous and false science and perverse conscience."⁷⁴ Such ideas imply an affront to the "dignity of the rational creature," and still worse, to God, who is responsible for "consenting to create ... [this] monstrous species ... lacking in understanding and without talent for governing human life."⁷⁵ For the Dominican friar, "all nations of the world are human and there is only one definition for each and all of them: they are all rational; all possess understanding and will and freedom, formed to the image and likeness of God."⁷⁶

To demonstrate this thesis Las Casas writes a monumental work: *Apologética historia sumaria*, which Rivera considers the most impressive effort on the part of a white and Christian European to demonstrate the rational

⁷² Ibid. Also, Hanke, *Historia de las Indias*, 3:343.

⁷³ Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism*, 142.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid. Also see Hanke, *Historia de las Indias*, 1:13-20.

⁷⁶ Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism*, 142. Also Hanke, *Historia de las Indias*, 2:396.

integrity and full humanity of non-European, non-white and non-Christian nations.⁷⁷ The whole purpose of this extraordinary work is to demonstrate in a multiplicity of ways his main argument, namely: "All nations of the world are human." This universal rationality and capacity for intelligent self-determination is denied in the case of the natives so as to exploit their work without scruples.⁷⁸ The Spaniards, who wanted to obtain the most wealth possible by means of "harsh slavery" and "heavy oppression" of "innumerable peoples," without any religious or ethical impediment, invented the false idea that the native Americans were "so far from the reason common to all men, that they were not capable of governing themselves ... they had no qualms in affirming that those men were beasts or almost beasts ... and that, therefore, they could use them at will."⁷⁹

Las Casas reaffirms that "these gentle people from our Indies are human nations" are "reasonable," endowed with reason, because "no nation in the world was excluded from this human and universal propensity by Divine Providence."⁸⁰ If some of its nations seem "primitive and barbaric,"⁸¹ so had in the past many

⁷⁷ Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism*, 142. Rivera indicates that the carefully written preliminary study by Edmund O'Gorman prefacing the Mexican version of the *Apologética* is marred by lack of attention to what Rivera has emphasized in his work. He believes that fundamentally, it is not, as the great Mexican researcher thinks, a question of anthropological philosophy – the levels of understanding historically achieved by the natives – but primarily a question of domination in the area of politics and labor; namely, the legitimacy of the abrogation of native sovereignty and their being compelled to work.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 143.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* See Las Casas, "Del único modo," 363.

⁸⁰ Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism*, 143.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* See Las Casas, *Apologética historia sumaria*, 2 vols., ed. Edmundo O'Gorman (México, D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma, 1967), 1:257-8; also, Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, 2:171. Rivera points out that Las Casas creates a taxonomy of the different meanings of the word "barbarian" in a section later added to his *Apologética* (see 264-7, 637-54). It is a type of postlude in cultural philosophy, written at the end of his combative existence. He distinguishes four

communities considered cultured and civilized today, such as Spain. It is a matter of educating them with persuasive arguments suited to their intelligence and pleasing to their will.⁸²

For Rivera, the idea that the American natives "are human nations" implies something more than the affirmation that they should not be enslaved, that they are individually free. It also implies collective and political freedom.⁸³ As a result, in his reply to Bishop Quevedo, Las Casas not only insisted that the natives are individually free and fit to receive the Christian faith, but he also defends "their right to lordship." By nature they are free and have their natural lords and kings who govern their realms."⁸⁴ It was in defense of this thesis that he dedicated the extensive juridical-political treatise *Los tesoros del Perú* (1563).⁸⁵

As José Maravall points out, Las Casas, while defending the full humanity of the natives, lays down the bases for a new cosmopolitanism, which he bases

variations in the concept. The first refers to the actions and attitudes of a human being generally reasonable but sometimes allowing himself to be possessed by great flares of passion and wildness, to the point of committing a "barbaric act." The second denotes those cultures that do not yet have a literature, or do not speak our language correctly, or have different political characteristics. The third implies rude and wild beings, beastly in conduct and customs, the only ones to whom the term can be applied without correctives. Finally, the term "barbarians" is applied to the infidels, and these can either be guilty and consider themselves enemies of Christianity, such as the Turks, or not guilty by reason of not having heard preaching about Christ. The natives of the New World fall in the second category and in the second subdivision of the fourth. As a result of both of these reasons they cannot be declared irrational, inept for self-government, or incapable of accepting and fully understanding the Christian faith.

⁸² Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism*, 143.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid. See Las Casas *Historia de las Indias*, 3:343.

⁸⁵ Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism*, 143. From this anthropological conception Las Casas developed his frustrated utopia, in which the Spanish Christian empire would sustain, not abolish, the original political structures of the native nations and respect their autonomy and self-determination.

partly on the revival of classic stoicism, and partly on the empirical proof of the similarity between the inhabitants of the old and new continents.⁸⁶ He maintains the medieval ideal of the *orbis christianus*, the preeminently theological and religious character of the unity of the human species. In the acute debate with Quevedo, he affirms the correlation between the unity of the human race and the universality of the Christian faith: "Our Christian religion is the same and can be adapted to all the nations of the world and from all it equally receives, and it does not take from any of them their lordships nor does it subjugate them."⁸⁷

In his long treatise on the injustice of all forms of slavery to which the natives have been subjected, Las Casas stresses, without neglecting the demand of the natural law and universal morality, the biblical and evangelical demands. For him the accent is not on the obvious fact that the "bodily differences between them (Spaniards and Indians [*sic*]) are few and do not alter the human figure, and that reproduction between individuals from the different sexes was possible",⁸⁸ but on the ontological similarity of a common rationality, and on the same capacity to respond effectively to saving divine grace. In this way Las Casas creates a peculiar and fertile convergence between stoic rational cosmopolitanism, the Christian conception of the unity of the human race, and the verification of the substantial similarity between Europeans and natives. All

⁸⁶ Ibid.; see José Antonio Maravall, "Utopia y primitivismo en Las Casas" *Revista de Occidente* 141 (diciembre): 311-88.

⁸⁷ Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism*, 144. See, Las Casas in Hanke, *Historia de las Indias*, 3:343.

⁸⁸ Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism*, 144. See Maravall, "Utopia", 324.

of that results in the categoric statement: "All the nations of the world are human."⁸⁹

For Las Casas, the native inhabitant is a human person who is first and foremost the evangelical neighbor.⁹⁰ These are the poor of Jesus Christ to whom the love of God is owed. In the afflicted and scourged inhabitants of these lands, Bartolomé was able to see the presence of Christ. According to Gutiérrez, for Bartolomé, "Christ is the Indian [sic]."⁹¹ With this reasoning, concluding his *Apología*, Las Casas asserts, with the firm conviction of someone conscious of driving home a point with a final argument: "The Indians are our siblings, and Christ has given his life for them. Why do we persecute them with such inhuman cruelty when they do not deserve such treatment?"⁹² In his *Memorial de remedios* (1516), he declares that these inhabitants are "free human beings, and ought to be treated as human beings and free."⁹³ One is obligated to love them as a brother or sister as one would love God. This is key for Las Casas for the "love of God," he maintains, "cannot exist without love of neighbor, love of neighbor without love of God. 'Love of God, love of neighbor, simultaneous

⁸⁹ Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism*, 144.

⁹⁰ Gutiérrez, Las Casas, 93. See Las Casas, *De único vocationis modo*, in *Obras completas*, vol. 2 (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1990), 167.

⁹¹ Gutiérrez, Las Casas, 96. Also see *Confesionario*, (1552) in *Obras escogidas*, ed. J. Pérez de Tudela, 5 vols. (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Españoles, 1957-8), 5:240a.

⁹² Gutiérrez, Las Casas, 93. See Las Casas, *Apología*, in *Obras completas*, vol. 9 (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1989), 252-253.

⁹³ Gutiérrez, Las Casas, 80. See Las Casas, *Obras escogidas*, 5:10a.

loves!' says Chrysostom."⁹⁴ This is the commandment, ever new, left us by the Lord and in the Indies, particularly urgent.⁹⁵

To proclaim God, then is not enough for Las Casas. Solidarity is required, especially with the very poorest and most helpless. "Just think," he declares, ...

how God was so concerned to have people love one another with a mutual charity that through Scripture He showed how the whole law was contained in loving one's neighbor, that alone. Even though there are two precepts, even though the one can be understood in the other, nonetheless the two are made into one compressed: 'Love your neighbor as yourself,' as in Galatians 5:14: 'The whole law is contained in one statement: Love your neighbor as yourself.'⁹⁶

The fullness of the law requires justice as well. This justice is a capital demand, according to Las Casas. Indeed, justice, which is an expression of love, is a Christian demand of the first importance. Gustavo Gutiérrez indicates that according to the Bible, to establish "justice and right" among the Hebrew people means prolonging, extending, the liberative act of God that withdrew that people from the oppression under which it suffered in Egypt.⁹⁷ The establishment of justice and right is fidelity to the Covenant struck by believers with God and must lead to fullness of life. From this perspective, the word "justice," while referring to the bonds established among persons living in society, denotes the nexus of human beings with God as well. According to Gutiérrez, the first meaning is not erased. It is only assumed into a connotation so important and rich, in Scripture, that it comes to be equivalent to salvation – that

⁹⁴ Gutiérrez, *Las Casas*, 93. See Las Casas, *De único vocationis modo*, 167.

⁹⁵ Gutiérrez, *Las Casas*, 93.

⁹⁶ Ibid. See Las Casas, *De Unico*, 168.

is, to total communion with God and others. St. Paul, for example, speaks of salvation as justification. For the same reason, the word "just," in the Bible, becomes a synonym for "holy."⁹⁸

When Las Casas links salvation and justice he is only responding to this biblical focus, which constitutes a permanent facet of Christian tradition. Precisely because he regards it as the proper characteristic of the follower of Jesus to proclaim and bear witness to the salvific will of God, to "establish justice and right" in the Indies becomes an imperative for him. It is a condition for attaining the face-to-face vision of God – to use the Pauline expression – that John of the Cross denotes as those "other, better Indies."⁹⁹ Las Casas sought to bring about something of those better Indies (fullness of love and friendship) that this fullness might become history and flesh (justice) in the Indies.¹⁰⁰

For Las Casas as a member of the church, that "rule and measure of our believing,"¹⁰¹ it is faith and the consequent task of evangelization that are the mainspring of his commitment. In his view the "better Indies" function as a utopia to move history and transform, radically, the reality of the Indies.¹⁰² This utopia is of love, justice and peace and remains in force even today.

⁹⁷ Gutiérrez, *Las Casas*, 10.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 11; see Las Casas, *Obras escogidas* 5:539b.

¹⁰² Gutiérrez, *Las Casas*, 11.

The proclamation of the gospel as such was for Las Casas the sole reason for which Europeans might legitimately find themselves in the Indies. He expresses this concern in the significance that he gave for learning the language of the native inhabitants. For him, this was important, if one desired to proclaim the gospel to them.¹⁰³ It was important in his Verapaz experiment,¹⁰⁴ and he insists on it in a very significant text, his petition to Pius V.¹⁰⁵ There he speaks of requiring bishops appointed for the Indies to learn the native languages "with all diligence."¹⁰⁶ This, according to Gutiérrez, is also a manifestation of his defense of life. "A language is an element of the culture of a people" and "culture is life, as the anthropologists like to say."¹⁰⁷

According to Gutiérrez, adopting the perspective of the natives of the Indies was one of great efforts of Bartolomé's life,¹⁰⁸ and the principal source of

¹⁰³ Ibid., 90.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 165. This was an experiment in peaceful evangelization in a region undergoing a meaningful change of character from a land of war to a land of Verapaz, or "True Peace." Here, in this "least corner of the Indies," the inhabitants had the time they required in order to accept the faith freely and the space needed to attain to an authentic knowledge of God, without fear and without dissimulation.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. See Las Casas, *Obras escogidas* 5:542a.

¹⁰⁷ Gutiérrez, *Las Casas*, 165, n. 44. Despite the fact that Las Casas himself mentions and explains—sometimes in detail—words from native languages, Gutiérrez points out that it is not known how extensive his knowledge was of the Indian tongues, as there is no definitive documentation on the point. What is known, however, is that Domingo de Santo Tomás, author of the first *Gramática o arte de la lengua general de los Indios de los reinos del Perú*, was an associate of his. See L.J. Cisneros, "La primera gramática de la lengua general del Perú," *Boletín del Instituto Riva Agüero* 1951-52 (Lima) 1 (1953): 197-264," and M. Mahn-Lot, "Transculturation et évangélisation dans le Pérou du XVI S.: Notes sur Domingo de Santo Tomas, disciple de Las Casas, méthodologie de l'histoire et sciences humaines." *Mélanges en l'honneur de F. Braudel*, 353-65. Paris: Privat, 1973.."

¹⁰⁸ Gutiérrez, *Las Casas*, 165, n. 45. This is what the natives understood, so that they entrusted him with the defense of their interests (see León Portilla, "Las Casas en la conciencia indígena del siglo XVI"). For example, Peruvian Indian chiefs assigned him, along with Domingo de Santo

his pastoral and theological creativity.¹⁰⁹ Therefore when he makes the viewpoint of the "Indian oppressed" his own, his reflections acquire a new, liberated tone, and he is able to see in the message of the gospel what was otherwise hidden from him and many of his contemporaries.¹¹⁰

For both Luis N. Rivera and Gustavo Gutiérrez, the evangelization and defense of the native inhabitants was of paramount importance in the life and mission of Las Casas. For Rivera, the "discovery" of the New World was not a mere historical fluke. It was understood by Las Casas as well as by his theoretical rivals, in the context of the universal history of salvation, as one of its most important episodes.¹¹¹ It is very well recognized that one Las Casas' work, *Del único modo de atraer a todos los pueblos a la verdadera religión*,¹¹² is nothing other than an extensive theological deliberation on the conditions for the fulfillment of the mission command of Jesus, his last instruction prior to what the New Testament calls his ascension: "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Go, then, to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples:

Tomás, the task of opposing the perpetuity of the *encomienda* (see Gutiérrez, *Las Casas*, 279-301).

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 165.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism*, 60.

¹¹² Ibid., 60, n.32; Las Casas, *Del único modo* (México, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1942); Only chapters six, seven and eight of this work have been found, but the thesis of Las Casas is repeatedly and clearly expressed in them.

baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:18-19).¹¹³

Las Casas helped to implement this commission with the fervor of a theologian who recognized the providential nature of the encounter between the Europeans and the native Americans. As pointed out by Gutiérrez, Las Casas could not sidestep this challenge once he had taken his stand on the side of freedom in religious matters.¹¹⁴ The question of how these two groups could respond to the salvific will of God led Las Casas to glimpse avenues that the theology of the age was not eager to traverse. His considerations are important and bold and fraught with consequences. They continue to influence theological and missionary understanding:

We know the universal salvific memory of God thanks to "Our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for those people."¹¹⁵ In behalf of these disdained, forgotten peoples, *Christ Our Savior* demands respect for their condition as human beings and as children of God in whom what the Fathers of the Church call "seeds of the Word" are present. The final destiny of Christians who fail to practice justice and love toward them will not be full communion with God. This attitude will be expressed by respecting them as equal in human dignity and by acknowledging them as culturally and religiously different.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism*, 60. According to Rivera, it is much less known that Francisco de Vitoria's theological treatise *De indis* begins with the exposition of the same biblical text, the evangelical command to universal preaching and its implications for missionary activity in respect to "those barbarians from the New World, commonly called Indians." Las Casas and Vitoria proceed from a similar premise: the conversion of the New World infidels, by fulfilling Christ's mission command, announces the approaching end of history.

¹¹⁴ Gutiérrez, *Las Casas*, 272.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. See also, Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, bk. 3, ch. 109 in *Obras escogidas*, 2:536a.

¹¹⁶ Gutiérrez, *Las Casas*, 272.

A Hispanic/Latino Interpretation of Human Dignity
as Implicit in the *Imago Dei*

Virgilio Elizondo and Justo González are two twentieth-century Hispanic/Latino theologians who recapture the sense of human dignity¹¹⁷ that is implicit in the concept of the *imago Dei*. This view of human dignity was present in the writings of Las Casas in his defense of the humanity and dignity of the Native Americans.¹¹⁸ Elizondo and González are representative of the Hispanic/Latino Roman Catholic and Protestant theological communities in the United States. In their own way they take up the banner of Las Casas in the defense of the human dignity of their respective communities. Through the crucible and lens of their own experience as members of an oppressed minority they help us to understand that to be created in the image and likeness of God means that human beings are endowed with an inalienable human dignity. This remains true for all human beings regardless of their historical origin or mode of linguistic and theological communion.¹¹⁹

For Virgilio Elizondo the human dignity of the Hispanic/Latina community is affirmed through the practice of popular religion. It is in the practice of their

¹¹⁷ The American Heritage Dictionary defines *dignity* as the quality or condition of being esteemed or honored. It also signifies inherent nobility and worth, poise and self-respect. It is this sense of *dignity* that the Hispanic/Latino community affirms as implicit in the creation of the human being as *imago Dei*.

¹¹⁸ Gutierrez, *Las Casas*, 272. See also, Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, bk. 2, ch. 109 in *Obras escogidas*, 2:536a.

¹¹⁹ See, for example, Isasi-Díaz and Tarango, *Hispanic Women, Prophetic Voice in the Church*, 5-6. These writers stress that Hispanic Women's Liberation Theology rejects the idea that women are not made in the image of God and that Hispanic Women as oppressed women are indeed *imago Dei* insofar as they struggle to become fully human. For these writers to be fully human does not depend on gender, race, or class, but on the willingness to be in relationship.

popular faith and communion with God that the people receive the affirmation of their self-worth as dignified human beings. This quality or condition of being esteemed or honored is particularly revealed in the practice of their devotion to the Virgin of Guadalupe.¹²⁰ It is the indigenous Virgin who as a *mestiza* represents the people's longing for self-acceptance and human worth. She is one of them in the sense that she represents and affirms the mixture of human cultures as these encountered each other in the New World. She is the half-breed who no longer belongs to either family of origin -- Spanish or Native American -- but instead represents a synthesis of the two.

Guadalupe represents a people who are a radically new creation as a result of the conquest. In her appearance to Juan Diego she affirms the dignity of the native inhabitants of the Americas.¹²¹ She reveals that those who look like her and speak like her now belong to the family of God. She brings acceptance to the people where there had only been rejection and disdain. She speaks their language -- Nahuatl -- as a sign that God hears their prayers and understands their oppression.¹²² She is a prototype of the new humanity of the Americas and a harbinger of glad tidings for she embodies the message of the new *mestizo* Christianity of the Americas.¹²³ She proclaims the message that those people

This requires commitment to vulnerability, justice, truth, and love for all relationships that contribute to the building up of the community.

¹²⁰ See Elizondo, *Guadalupe: Mother of the New Creation* (New York: Orbis, 1997).

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 52-3.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 3-4, 35-6.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 66-7.

whom the world rejects God accepts as God's very own.¹²⁴ She brings dignity to the people in the affirmation of their human worth. She affirms that the new *mestizo* people are sons and daughters of God who have been created in the image of God. They form a part of the salvific plan of the Creator.¹²⁵

There is popular devotion to the Virgin of Guadalupe and other saints such as San Martín de Porres¹²⁶ precisely because these historical figures and saints of the church provide a meaningful venue for the popular expression of the faith of the people. The *mestizo* people also find acceptance and affirmation in popular saints who look like them and who have experienced their kind of oppression. These heroes of the faith provide a sense of healing and wholeness to wounded souls who have been historically marginalized and depreciated in value and esteem. These are saints who travel with the people in their migratory treks and who sojourn with them in their daily lives. That is why their visibility in the homes of the people and in the church sanctuary is so significant and valued. They are the expression of the popular devotion and piety of a people whose faith has often been considered suspect and superstitious because it did not measure up to the standards of Western European orthodoxy.

Justo González is a Protestant historian and theologian who affirms the human dignity of the Hispanic/Latino community from the perspective of the crucible and lens of his experience as an oppressed minority within a dominant

¹²⁴ Elizondo, *The Galilean Journey*, 11-13.

¹²⁵ Ibid. See also idem, *Guadalupe*, 66-7.

¹²⁶ For an excellent historical exposition of the popular devotion to this saint, see García-Rivera, *St. Martín de Porres*.

culture and theological tradition.¹²⁷ One of his most significant contributions is his understanding of the significance of the Spanish language in the interpretation of Scripture. González argues for a reading of the Bible in Spanish because this reading in the vernacular brings a particular perspective that is often missing from the more normative and dominant perspective of the church which he refers to as a guilty innocence.¹²⁸ What González means by this reading is not so much a "reading of the Bible in Spanish," but a reading of the Bible that takes into account the non-innocent reading of history. By that he means that the Hispanic/Latino community can identify with the principal characters of the Scriptures and the political situations presented in the Biblical narratives in a way that takes into account their own history of violence and oppression. This reading offers a hermeneutical advantage over those whose history is still at the level of guilty innocence and who therefore must read Scripture in the same way in which they read their own history, that is, without awareness of the misdeeds of the heroes of the faith and of the history that has justified oppression under the guise of political expediency.¹²⁹

González points out that since the time of the Reformation there has been a great emphasis on making the Bible available in the vernacular so that the people could read the Scriptures for themselves. However, there is another dimension to this type of reading. González argues that when this happens it becomes the people's book, no longer under the control of those who control

¹²⁷ See González, *Mañana*, 22-26.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 75-6.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 77-8.

society. When the people read the Bible, and read it from their own perspective rather than from the perspective of the powerful, the Bible becomes a powerful political book. This is what he means by "reading the Bible in Spanish." This is a reading in the vernacular, not only in the cultural, linguistic sense but also in the sociopolitical sense.¹³⁰

There is a certain grammar to reading the Bible in Spanish. For González, to say that the Bible is a political book means that it deals with issues of power and powerlessness.¹³¹ This is the fundamental political question, and according to him this is one of the central issues in Scripture. To read the Bible "in Spanish" means to read it as exiles, as members of a powerless group, as those who are excluded from the "innocent" history of the dominant group. When this happens one begins to see that the Bible is indeed a political book. As such he recommends that when one approaches a text, one must first ask not the "spiritual" questions or the "doctrinal" questions, but the political questions, that is, Who in this text is in power? Who is powerless? What is the nature of their relationship? Whose side does God take?¹³²

Another facet of this grammar concerns the reading of scripture as a communal experience. He notes that only a small portion of Scripture was written originally with the intent that it be read *a solas*, or in private. Spanish, like Greek and Hebrew, distinguishes between the singular and plural forms of the

¹³⁰ Ibid., 84-5. He points out that in the high Andes, the equivalent of our reading in Spanish would be a reading in Quechua, and from the perspective of the Quechua-speaking peoples oppressed by the Spanish speaking.

¹³¹ Ibid., 85.

¹³² Ibid.

second person. The singular "you" as a form of address to the reader appears rarely in Scripture. English no longer makes a distinction between the two forms of "you." When one reads a biblical injunction addressed to "you," especially when reading the Bible in private, one tends to think of each one as an individual, and not all of us as a community. The problem then is that this form of reading leads to the privatization of the faith and its demands. In order to avoid this, González recommends that the "grammar" for a new reading of Scripture "in Spanish" must be aware that even when one reads Scripture in private, God is addressing everyone as a community of faith.¹³³

One must also remember that the core principle of scriptural "grammar" is its availability to children, to the simple, and to the poor. To read the Bible "in Spanish" means to give attention to what they find in it. It is important to find out what this is.

A final characteristic of this grammar is to read Scripture in the vocative. This allows the community to interpret their situation according to the Word of God. The purpose of this method is to allow one to understand oneself in light of this Word and to discover the obedience that is required in the pilgrimage of faith. This is particularly true of the Hispanic community for whom the vocative reading of the Bible is a reading of oneself and of the world.¹³⁴

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 85-6.

It is by this reading that one gains self-understanding as a child of God. By it one acquires the notion that to be human is to be-for-others.¹³⁵ The image of God is therefore the image of God's for-otherness that is exemplified in the life of the Christ. In their self-understanding as being-for-others, the Hispanic/Latino community reflects the image of God. The protest against the dehumanization of the community in the denial of their for-otherness by those in positions of power and privilege is an attempt to remind those in power of the inherent dignity of the Hispanic/Latina community as a people of God.

Conclusion

Hispanic/Latina theologians and historians share the experience and perspective of marginality. This shared experience compels them to defend the human dignity of their faith communities. Their work uncovers historical and theological precedence for this defense. They help us to understand that human dignity is indeed an ontological gift of creation and implicit in the *imago Dei*. They also help us to see that marginal faith communities defend their gift of human dignity through their own perspective, experience, and expression of the *imago Dei*. The Hispanic/Latina community interprets this experience primarily in the relational terms of community (*familia*) and in resistance to oppression that negates their creation in the *imago Dei*.

Hispanic/Latina theologians also recover the more inclusive notion of the *imago Dei* that was characteristic of the experience of the marginal community of the early church. Whereas many of the patristic theologians interpreted the

¹³⁵ Ibid, 137.

construct along a more individualistic and "rational-bearing" term, the people themselves – the slaves, women, children, etc. -- interpreted the construct from within their own experience of marginality and inclusion in the household of God. By their experience of equality and nobility within the household of God, they resisted the oppression of the dominant culture that subjected them to a marginal status in the social hierarchy. By their claim to human dignity as a divine gift, they offer a perspective of the *imago Dei* from below, a counter-notion that resisted the claims of imperial status conferred by imperialistic edict on a select few.

The Hispanic/Latina community in many ways shares the experience of the early church. The theologians of the community interpret the construct in terms that resonate with the early church experience of marginality and resistance. They remind us of three notions that are critical for self-understanding as a people of God. The first is the notion of inclusion in the *familia de Dios*. The second is the notion of resistance to oppression implicit in the *imago Dei*. The third is the notion of the struggle for justice that is derivative of the *imago Dei* as gift and responsibility. They also reveal the significance of popular religion for the interpretation of the construct within a dominant culture and tradition. They show that popular religion as an experience of the margins affirms the gift of human dignity and provides the venue for resistance to oppression. These theologians teach us that popular religious expression allows for a different reading of the construct and for a more subversive and affirming way to interpret oneself in light of the experience of marginality. They remind us that the struggle for justice is

the proper ethical response of the justified community. They instruct that the struggle for justice is also a direct corollary of the righteousness of God. This struggle is both gift and responsibility of the justified community. Chapter Four will explore this aspect of the justice of God from the perspective of the central doctrine of the church, the doctrine of justification by faith.

In Chapter Five we will explore the ethical implications that naturally arise from the notions of resistance to oppression and the struggle for justice that are implicit in the *imago Dei* construct. We will examine the works of two Hispanic/Latina ethicists who challenge the theological community and tradition by their proposals for a more inclusive notion of justice as an ethical response of the justified community.