Las Casas and the Concept of Just War

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Introduction

Bartolomé de las Casas had a multifaceted relationship with war. He was, in the beginning, a participant in the Spanish conquest. Then, after his conscience was awakened to the horrors of the conquest as experienced by the native population, his outlook grew more critical. Trained as a priest and educated in the classical texts of the just war tradition, notably Cicero (106–43 BCE), Augustine of Hippo (354–430), Gratian (d. before 1159), and Thomas Aquinas (1224/25–1274), he became well-versed in the moral and juridical conceptions of just war that dominated the Christian Middle Ages and the arguments prevalent in sixteenth-century Spanish discourses about just war. He then attempted to harness these concepts to defend native populations from unjust conquest during nearly fifty years as Protector of the Indians, all the while struggling with their moral limitations and internal contradictions.1

Las Casas’s views on just war have largely been overlooked in the vast literature on his opus and actions. The focus, rather, has been on his arguments for indigenous rights, denunciation and repudiation of the conquistadors, arguments for tolerance, the limits of his understanding of the Indians, and his complicity in the imperial project.2 While his debt to ancient thinkers such as Cicero and medieval law have been explored, the extent to which his

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innovative views on just war influenced his work has been generally overlooked.³ Nowhere is this more explicit that in Gustavo Gutiérrez landmark work *Las Casas: In Search of the Poor of Jesus Christ*. Describing Las Casas’s arguments that the Indians had the right to wage war on the Spanish invaders, Gutiérrez remarks: “Here, then, Bartolomé is content to repeat the doctrine of the just war, applying it to the situation of the Indies—with sincere conviction, surely, but without deepening it or offering any novel contribution to it.”⁴ And yet, it is my intent to show that Las Casas did indeed offer a very novel take on the just war norms of his time.

Las Casas has been all but ignored by scholars of the just war tradition even though his reflections on just war cut across the three general categories of just war thinking—*jus ad bellum* (justice of war), *jus in bello* (justice in war), and *jus post bellum* (justice after war).⁵ He marshals these ideas to make political arguments across his career. Throughout the course of this chapter, I will turn to three key texts that span his life and capture his evolving just war philosophy across time: *De unico vocationis modo* (which espouses his philosophy on peaceful evangelization in 1537); the *Argumentum apologiae adversus Genesium Sepúlvedam theologum cordubensem* (which he composed for the Valladolid debates around 1550); and the *Doce dudas* (1564) about the unjust conquest of Peru.⁶ The *Doce dudas*, considered to be the codicil to Las Casas’s last will

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⁴ Gutiérrez, *In Search of the Poor of Jesus Christ*, 368.

⁵ As an illustrative example of the just war scholarship as a whole, Las Casas is not included in the now classic anthology of just war thinkers which has forty-seven historical chapters covering thinkers from before the twentieth century: Gregory M. Reichberg, Henrik Syse and Endre Begby, eds., *The Ethics of War: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006). Yet, if we view just war thinking as a body of knowledge, of sometimes competing ideas about the relationship between war and ethics, that thinkers turned to address contemporary problems, then Las Casas has an important place. See James Turner Johnson, *Just War Tradition and The Restraint of War: A Moral and Historical Inquiry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), x. Las Casas stands, like Vitoria, at a point of transition between the medieval and modern world of just war thinking, what Johnson describes as a shift between the religious and the secular; Johnson, *Just War Tradition*, 176.

⁶ For *De unico vocationis modo*, I use the following English translation: Bartolomé de las Casas, *The Only Way*, trans. Francis Patrick Sullivan, S.J (New York: Paulist Press, 1992). I also point the reader to the Spanish and Latin versions in Bartolomé de las Casas, *Del único modo de atraer a todos los pueblos a la verdadera religión*, ed. Augustín Millares Carlo (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1942); and *De único vocationis modo*, O.C., vol. 2. For the *Argumentum apologiae adversus Genesium Sepúlvedam theologum cordubensem*, I use the
and testament, represents Las Casas’s powerful culminating statement about
just war, as well as justice after unjust war.7 By examining these texts, I show
that Las Casas turned to classical medieval just war arguments—particularly
those found in Gratian—to decry the injustice of the conquest, but also that
he marshaled the same authorities to legitimize Indian resistance to the Span-
ish. I reveal how his stance on *jus in bello* shows both consistency with and a
departure from that of School of Salamanca, and I suggest how this view led to
a radical view of *jus post bellum* (justice after war) that required the restitution
of land, treasure, and sovereignty back to the Indians. To grasp the innovative
nature of this argument, one need only compare him to Francisco de Vitoria,
the most influential just war thinker of the day. Vitoria conceded that even
though the conquests were unjust, it was still better for the Indians to fall un-
der the dominion of the Spanish. As we shall see below, Las Casas viewed such
an argument as running completely counter to justice. The chapter concludes
with a discussion of how, albeit with five centuries of interval, Las Casas con-
tributes to the just war tradition today.

**Medieval Notions of Just War**

Despite criticizing the conquest, Las Casas was not a pacifist. Rather, he was
well-versed in the just war literature prevalent in his time. His exposure to au-
thoritative texts that articulated Christian conceptions of just war is evident
across his opus. Yet, in light of the New World controversies, his views on just
war were not quite in line with those espoused by the School of Salamanca—
e.g. Francisco de Vitoria (1492–1546), Domingo de Soto (1494–1560), and Fran-
cisco Suárez (1548–1617).8 In discussing just war, Las Casas cites Cicero’s *De
Officiis*, one of the first ethical treatises that incorporates just war into a broad-
er moral project. Augustine and Aquinas also feature prominently in his dis-
cussions about war.

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7 Casas, *Doce dudas*, p. 17; Gutiérrez, *In Search of the Poor of Jesus Christ*, 236.
8 Anthony Pagden, “Conquest and the Just War: The School of Salamanca’ and the ‘Affair of the
Indies,’” in *Empire and Modern Political Thought*, ed. Sankar Muthu (Cambridge: Cambridge
The most important source on just war was arguably Gratian, whose *Decretum* was considered the key text on many issues during the Middle Ages. The *Decretum* was a massive collection of canon law—the law of the Christian Church—with the treatment of just war falling in Part 2, *Causa* 23.\(^9\) Gratian, as one scholar puts it, devoted significant effort “in creating a legal and moral-theological approach to warfare that drew especially on Augustine’s moral theology of Christian violence.”\(^10\) Indeed, Augustine is cited more than most others in the section on just war; the passages derive from a broad diversity of Augustine’s works: apologetic (*Contra Faustum*), philosophical (*De Libero arbitrio*), exegetical (Augustine’s works on Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, the Pentateuch as a whole, the Gospel of Matthew and Christ’s Sermon on the Mount), sermons on various topics, some of his letters, and the *City of God*.\(^11\)

Gratian was an authoritative source for Las Casas, Sepúlveda, and other writers at the time. In Gratian, Las Casas found one of the most comprehensive and systematic statements of the idea of just war: “The widespread adoption of the *Decretum* as a legal textbook and reference work ensured that Gratian’s formulation of the just war established the direction, focus, and boundaries of future discussion.”\(^12\) Gratian examined whether and under what conditions Christians could wage a just war. *Causa* 23 begins thusly:

> At this stage we ask in the first place whether it is a sin to serve as a soldier. Second, what sort of war is just, and how the children of Israel fought just wars. Third, whether an injury inflicted upon our associates ought to be repelled with arms. Fourth, whether vengeance is permissible. Fifth, whether it is a sin for a judge or minister to execute a guilty

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\(^12\) Cox, “Gratian,” 42.
person. Sixth, whether the wicked may be forced to do good. Seventh, whether heretics ought to be despoiled of their property, and whether he who gains possession of property taken from heretics is to be considered as possessing things belonging to others. Eight, whether it is permitted to bishops, or any sort of cleric, to take up arms on the authority of the pope or by command of the emperor?13

War represented a stark challenge to the more peaceful elements of Christian thinking, including maxims that Las Casas would come to favor when arguing about the best way to evangelize. However, Gratian’s text offered authoritative answers to the questions most pertinent to Las Casas as he sought to defend the Indians—the first, second, sixth and seventh questions. Thus, regarding the first question, Gratian wrote: “When force is required to inflict punishment against enemies who have committed injury, in obedience to God or some lawful authority, good men undertake wars. … A righteous man, who happens to be serving even under a sacrilegious king, can rightfully engage in combat under his command if … it is certain that what he is ordered to do is not contrary to God’s law, or it is not certain whether it is.”14

The second: “That war is just is waged by an edict in order to regain what has been stolen or to repel the attack of enemies … just wars are usually defined as those which have for their end the avenging of injuries, when it is necessary by war to constrain a nation or a city which has either neglected to punish an evil action committed by its citizens, or to restore what has been taken unjustly.”15 The sixth: “it is useless to compel anybody to the good, since God disdains forced worship.16 And seventh: “it is licit to deprive heretics of their goods … these authorities plainly show that what the heretics possess unrightfully is rightfully taken away from them by Catholics, who therefore are not said to possess things belonging to others.”17 To discuss these questions, Gratian adopted the form of scholastic dialectical reasoning known in the Middle Ages as the sic et non [yes and no] method. This method comprised of posing a question, providing arguments for and against by turning to canonical authorities, and finally, providing a solution that attempted to reconcile these authorities. As Rory Cox observes, “It was in his critical analysis of the canons and the construction of these original syntheses that Gratian broke genuinely

13 Gratian, Decretum Causa 23, prologue, in Reichberg, et al., The Ethics of War, 109.
14 Gratian, Decretum, Causa 23, q. 1, in Reichberg et al., The Ethics of War, 112.
15 Gratian, Decretum, Causa 23, q. 2, in Reichberg et al., The Ethics of War, 113.
16 Gratian, Decretum, Causa 23, q. 6, in Reichberg et al., The Ethics of War, 122.
17 Gratian, Decretum, Causa 23, q.7, in Reichberg et al., The Ethics of War, 123.
new ground in canonical jurisprudence, distinguishing his *Decretum* from previous compilations of canon law by canonists such as Burchard of Worms (c. 960–1025), Anselm of Lucca (circa 1036–1086), and Ivo of Chartres (circa 1040–1115). Gratian created a just war doctrine that incorporated the right of self-defense as well as the obligation to defend others, punish material injuries, and punish moral injuries against justice, the Church, and the faith. For those who would turn to it, the *Decretum* was littered with sometimes contradictory canons (passages) from church authorities, but it also became a text of authority in and of itself. Consequently, the potential application of Gratian’s just war thinking was remarkably broad. For his own political purposes, Las Casas forged Gratian’s authority with his own experience of war, his vision for evangelization, and his erudite knowledge of other canonical works (especially Aristotle read through the lens of Aquinas).

**Wars for Conversion Contradict the Mission of Evangelization**

“One way, one way only, of teaching a living faith, to everyone, everywhere, always, was set by Divine Providence: the way that wins the mind with reasons, that wins the will with gentleness, with invitation. It has to fit all people on earth, no distinction made for sect, for error, even for evil.” So begins the surviving fragment of *De unico vocationis modo*, composed in about 1534. In this work, the fifty-year old cleric compares peaceful evangelization with wars to convert. The former he considered as the only way to bring the Indians into the fold; the latter, he rejected as unjust, referring to those who supported such views as “the satanic champions of war, wreckers of Christ’s Holy Church.” He would later confront directly one such thinker—Juan Gines de Sepúlveda (1494–1573)—at the legendary Valladolid debates in 1559.

It is important to note that Las Casas makes a distinction between just and unjust wars. His rejection of wars to convert as unjust does not make him a pacifist. Rather, he recognizes the validity of the arguments expressed in Gratian and others that Christians can take up arms under certain circumstances:

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19 Casas, *The Only Way*, 68.

20 Casas, *The Only Way*, 143.
No one should conclude from this that warfare is forbidden to Christian leaders when it is necessary for the defense of the nation. It is one thing to speak of the way to preach the law of Christ and thereby gather, settle, and secure a Christianity in which He rules spiritually. It is another to speak of saving the nation, of using sound judgment, which sometimes dictates waging a defensive war, or offensive war, against tyranny.\(^{21}\)

Echoing Gratian’s just war doctrine that incorporated the right of self-defense as well as the obligation to defend others and to punish moral injuries against justice, the Church and the faith, Las Casas sees many contexts in which war could be justified. But the wars in the New World did not fit these contexts. They were neither waged in self-defense nor, as we will see below, legitimate offensive wars to punish moral injuries against the faith.

While the Spanish had, in Las Casas’s mind, the right to evangelize in the New World thanks to the Papal Donation of 1492 (the Alexandrine Bull), this was a spiritual right, not a political right for conquest.\(^{22}\) While some Christian thinkers, including Sepúlveda, would argue that just war could be waged to clear the way to spreading the faith, Las Casas vehemently rejected this claim. His argument against wars to convert is multifold. First, Las Casas sees it as a “new idea” that “contradicts the method the holy patriarchs used from the dawn of time and in every age since, up to the coming of Christ.”\(^{23}\) The true model appeals to the mind and seeks to convince the pagans of the truth of the faith; however, using war first to subject them is “mindless, unnatural, inimical to human nature, without precedent, and therefore dubious.”\(^{24}\) Moreover, it “contradicts the way that Christ willed, the one He taught when He preached His gospel.”\(^{25}\) A second and related point is that war sends the opposite message of those preaching the Gospel: “The way of war provides a shortcut for demons to pour into people’s souls … the victims will surely hate, with an implacable hatred, those who wage war against them, hate them as enemies.”\(^{26}\) This destroys “respect” for Christians and the Christian religion and “breaks with the laws of kinship,” both of which are necessary to spread the faith.\(^{27}\)

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21 Casas, *The Only Way*, 100.
23 Casas, *The Only Way*, 123.
24 Casas, *The Only Way*, 123.
27 Casas, *The Only Way*, 164.
Las Casas no doubt saw this with his own eyes during his many years in the New World.

Another reason against wars to convert is that such wars are acts of mortal sin. While Gratian effectively argued that Christians (but not clergy) could wage just war without the weight of moral sin upon them, Las Casas argues that those who wage an unjust war are subject to divine punishment in the afterlife. By taking the goods of others and killing in unjust wars, they commit acts “classified under theft, adultery, homicide, or such.” In just war parlance, they commit “injury” against someone, which is an “injustice,” and which is a “mortal sin.” A final reason, found in a summary of the text written later (the original pages have been lost), is that the Indians are not the kinds of pagans against whom a just war can be waged. According to the summary that is preserved in Fray Antonio de Remesal’s Historia de la provincial de San Vincente de Chyapa y Guatemela de la Orden de nuestro glorioso padre Sancto Domingo (1619), Las Casas discussed four different kinds of infidels and the extent to which they could be compelled to do anything: those living in Spanish territories, those who seize Spanish lands unjustly (i.e., the Turks), heretics, and those who have never heard the faith (i.e., the Indians). The church can compel the first three kinds of infidels in some legitimate ways. The first, because they are subjects of the Crown. The second, by way of just war. The third, because they are subjects of the Church who, because of their heresy, effectively have no rightful ruler and are subject to punishment by the pope. The wars of the conquistadors against the fourth kind of infidel, however, are patently unjust because they have committed no wrongs and were not under Spanish or Church jurisdiction. While this section of the manuscript is lost, Las Casas revisits the theme at the Valladolid debates and again in the Doce dudas.

Applying the Just War Tradition at the Valladolid Debates

By 1550, the sixty-five-year-old friar found himself debating the justice of the conquest at a junta called for by the king—the legendary Valladolid debates. The context of the Valladolid debates is well-known, but what is important for my purposes is the extent to which it was framed in terms of just war. Las

28 Casas, The Only Way, 165.
29 Casas, The Only Way, 165.
31 On the Valladolid debates, see Hanke, All Mankind Is One. Parts of this section are based on arguments from: Daniel R. Brunstetter, “Las Casas,” in Brunstetter and O’Driscoll, eds., Just War Thinkers, 92–104.
Casas believed that war was “a pestilence and an atrocious calamity for the human race.” Yet, turning to past authority for support, he recognized that war could sometimes be just. He cites a passage from Augustine, who is quoted in Gratian: “War should be a matter of necessity, so that God may free from need and preserve in peace;” and then referring to Cicero’s view from *De Officiis*, he recognizes war is unjust unless “unavoidable necessity is so compelling that it cannot be avoided in any way.” But were the wars against the Indians just? To answer this question, Las Casas sets as his task the rejection of the four causes of just war enumerated by Juan Gines de Sepúlveda.

*Sepúlveda and the Just War*

Both Las Casas and Sepúlveda were well-versed in the authorities of just war. Sepúlveda turns to Augustine, Isidore of Seville (circa 560–636), and Innocent IV (circa 1195–1254) (all cited in Gratian) as his main authorities. He explicitly stipulates that there is a difference between waging war for “just causes” compared to waging war for the wrong reasons. Citing Augustine, he asserts war must be waged for the sake of peace. He also recognizes, again citing Augustine, that a just war must be waged with both “legitimate authority” and “right intention,” and then only if it is formally declared (here he cites Isidore). Among the recognized just causes, he includes the following: repelling force with force (citing Innocent IV), taking back goods wrongfully seized, and punishment for a wrong committed. Referring to the collective body of knowledge about just war, Sepúlveda concludes: “These, then, are the three just causes of war that Isidore enumerated in those few words of his that are recorded and which were passed into the *Decretum*.” The legacy of Gratian, as a source of authority, can be clearly seen.

However, Sepúlveda’s main argument regarding just war against the New World peoples hinges on four alternative just causes, which he called “less common,” but more directly applicable to the “barbarians” of the New World. Sepúlveda’s just causes are the natural slave argument drawn from Aristotle, the eradication of those customs that violate the natural law, to

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35 Sepúlveda, *Democrates Segundo*, 5.
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save the innocent from tyranny and to avenge injury to God,\textsuperscript{40} and to pave the way for the spread of Christianity by removing the barbarians’ leaders and instilling Christian rulers.\textsuperscript{41} What is interesting is how Sepúlveda recognized that the traditional just war arguments were not applicable and drew upon other sources of authority to justify the conquests. He thus used the standard language of just war, with which his audience would have been familiar, to frame his arguments, all the while pursuing alternative lines of argumentation aimed at showing the conquest could indeed be justified. Las Casas, on the other hand, would use the traditional just war arguments, clarifying them at times, to rebut Sepúlveda and make the case that Spanish wars in the New World were not just.

Las Casas’s Four Types of Barbarians

To make his argument, Las Casas draws from his previous work. We thus see many recurring themes that were prevalent in De unico vocationis modo. He begins by rejecting Sepúlveda’s first just cause, the view that the Indians were barbarians in the Aristotelian sense, that is, so-called natural slaves against whom a just war could be waged. The parallels with the lost passages from De unico vocationis modo are apparent. Building from canonical sources, notably Aquinas, Las Casas differentiates between four kinds of barbarians: the cruel, the uncultured, the irrational who fit the bill of Aristotle’s natural slave, and the nonbelievers. Whereas Sepúlveda had argued that the Indians were the barbarians discussed by Aristotle against whom a just war could be waged, Las Casas rejected this view. Rather, he demonstrated that they were rational beings with sovereignty, and identifying them as the fourth kind of barbarian who could eventually be converted.\textsuperscript{42}

Las Casas then rejects Sepúlveda’s second just cause, the claim that one can wage a just war to eradicate the Indians’ barbaric customs. Such an argument, he clarifies, is applicable only to those who are subject to Christian rulers. This encompassed pagans living in Christian lands and heretics, but not the Indians, who were viewed as in no way living under the jurisdiction of the Crown. The “Protector of the Indians” argues, “It is not the business of the Church to uproot

\textsuperscript{40} Sepúlveda, Democrates Segundo, 60–62.

\textsuperscript{41} Sepúlveda, Democrates Segundo, 63–64; for a discussion, see Daniel R. Brunstetter and Dana Zartner, “Just War Against Barbarians: Revisiting the Valladolid Debates Between Sepúlveda and Las Casas,” Political Studies 59 no.3 (2011): 733–75; Brunstetter and Zartner, 735–38.

\textsuperscript{42} Casas, In Defense of the Indians, 25–54; see the discussion in Brunstetter and Zartner, “Just War Against Barbarians,” 739–41.
idolatry by force or to punish idolaters, at least if they are not its subjects."⁴³ This part of Las Casas's point taps into emerging arguments about sovereignty, seen most prominently in Vitoria, who claimed that the Church did not have temporal dominium over the entire world, and thus had no power to impose rules and punish transgressors. Like Vitoria, Las Casas rejects medieval authors such as Hostienses (circa 1206–1271), who proclaimed the pope had temporal and spiritual power over nonbelievers.⁴⁴ But he also clarifies the implications of the Alexandrine Bull, which Sepúlveda had taken as a mandate to conquer the New World populations. Following Columbus's initial voyage in 1492, and amidst growing quarrels between Portugal and Spain, Pope Alexander vi issued the 1493 bull Inter Caetera, the so-called Alexandrine Bull, which divided the power to subdue pagans living in these lands between Spain and Portugal. Las Casas, seeking to clarify the ambiguities that had misled Sepúlveda, draws clear limits on the right of the Spanish to exercise jurisdiction over others: "No ruler, whether king or emperor, nor anyone else, can exercise jurisdiction beyond his borders, since borders or limits are so called because they limit, determine, or restrict the property, power, or jurisdiction of someone."⁴⁵ That being said, there are conditions under which one could punish others, even if they are outside one's borders. At this point in his argument, Las Casas explains his view of just war and uses it to further repudiate Sepúlveda's arguments.

**Las Casas and the Potential Just Causes of War for the Spanish**

At this point, Las Casas begins a long discussion of six possible just causes by which the Spanish could wage a just war against the Indians. He frames his discussion in the context of war as a form of punishment, drawing inspiration from the just causes enumerated in Gratian (self-defense, taking back goods/lands, and various forms of punishment in response to injury) and Vitoria (punishing those who hinder the spread of the faith and saving the innocent) to offer a counter just war narrative compared to that of Sepúlveda. The first just cause is to take back formerly Christian lands held by unbelievers. Because unbelievers "do continuous injury to us, the Church can actualize the jurisdiction it has over [the lands] in order to regain what belongs to it through force."⁴⁶ The second just cause is to punish pagans who practice idolatry in

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provinces formerly under Christian control, thus corrupting the region “with evil and hateful vices against nature.” Here, Las Casas clarifies the arguments of Hostiensens and Innocent IV, upon whom Sepúlveda built his claims; rather than referring to idolatry anywhere in the world, Las Casas argues for a more restricted view lest great “absurdities” follow. Because the Spanish did not have justified political jurisdiction over the New World, the Indians’ idolatry was not a cause for just war. This view restricts the Church’s power to punish by war. In the process, Las Casas clarifies Gratian and “other canonists” who,

because they speak generally and without distinctions, confuse matters and darken men’s understanding. Because they do not distinguish alien from alien and unbelievers from unbelievers, these men say, with the gloss, that “aliens are under Roman rule [or Empire].” I say that it is stupid to take this in such an absolute case. But since it is incredible that the gloss and those who make similar statements have fallen into this error, we must say that the gloss is to be interrupted as referring to aliens ... who live within the provinces of the Church or in the territories of Christian rulers or because they hold lands taken from Christians since those realms are included within the limits of Roman rule that do not go beyond the limits of the Christian people.

While Gratian implied it could be just that Christians could despoil heretics wherever they lived, Las Casas goes to great length to show that this aspect of just war thinking was not applicable to the New World because the Indians were the fourth kind of barbarians—not unbelievers with the right to sovereignty—not heretics.

A third just cause is to punish certain types of blasphemy: war can be waged against those who are “maliciously, knowingly, and insultingly blasphemous ... by speaking out of hatred and contempt for the Christian truth,” and thus do injury to God. Now, Las Casas was interested in converting the Indians. As we saw in De unico vocationis modo, he saw the work of peaceful priests as the best method of spreading the faith. In this context, we should not fail to overlook the deep connection between Las Casas’s just war arguments and Spain’s colonial project. As Daniel Castro remarks:

In the historical context of the time, [Las Casas's] role as a proponent of imperialism was tempered by his calls for reform in defense of the rights of the natives, at least on paper. Nevertheless, this defense seems to have ensued from the forms that domination assumed, rather than from a wholehearted opposition to the motives behind the practice ...50

And yet, this is only partially true. When we consider Las Casas's use of just war language as weapon to counter Sepúlveda's claims, and then his use of the same language later in his life, as I discuss below, to legitimize Indian just war against the Spanish and support his calls for the restitution of their goods and sovereignty, a more complex view of Las Casas emerges. Blasphemy is a case in point.

Las Casas recognizes that “the Church, to which belongs the care of peoples throughout the world as regards the preaching of the truth, can justly wage war upon those who prevent the Gospel from being preached within their jurisdiction,” but then he rejects this claim in the case of the Indians.51 The argument that just war could be waged in such a context follows, on the surface, the views of Vitoria who argued that the Spanish had a right to preach the Gospel anywhere, and could wage war to obtain this right if it was blocked.52 However, Las Casas adds important elements to clarify ambiguities that might arise. Following from the arguments in De unico vocationis modo, the truth must be preached in the right manner, i.e., in the absence of arms: “I could dare say that to wage war against Indian rulers could not be just at the very outset—rather, it would be unjust—if, from fear of losing their property, they refuse to receive preachers who are accompanied by fierce and barbarous men.”53 In addition, if the rulers and people do not want to listen because they remain devoted to their own religion, “then, under no circumstances, can they be forced by war to let [preachers] come in.”54 If the Indians were provoked, as certainly the conquistadors were doing based on Las Casas’s argument in De unico vocationis modo, their actions would not amount to blasphemy (i.e., injury to God). Thus Las Casas remarks emphatically: even if the Indians were to “kill two hundred thousand preachers, and even if they were to kill the Apostle Paul and all the

50 Castro, Another Face of Empire, 8.
other gospel-preaching followers of Christ," war would not be justified against them if they were provoked or waged a war in self-defense.\(^{55}\)

The crux of his claim is that if unbelievers "speak blasphemously about the Christian religion not out of contempt and hatred of religion but out of anger toward Christians by whom they have been maltreated and injured ... such persons are not blasphemous."\(^{56}\) Citing Vitoria, the bishop clarifies his rebuttal to Sepúlveda at the Valladolid debates, "Not all blasphemy [gives just cause] for war against infidels." Even though Jews and Moors who live under Spanish dominion commit blasphemy, the Church should not "punish" them with war but should "tolerate them because they are her subjects and she can easily do so." However, Las Casas argues the Church can punish, with war, the "infidel Turks and Moors for what they are purposefully doing, mocking, prohibiting and defaming the faith which impedes those who would receive the faith from doing so."\(^{57}\)

The mention of the Turks marks a clear case in which the Spanish do have a just cause for war. For Las Casas, the Turks “have a deep-seated wish that the whole religion of Christ had long ago been blotted out, and generally, in every locality and at all times, they do their utmost to perturb the lives of Christians.”\(^{58}\) The case of the Turks—i.e., the Ottoman Empire—is a stark contrast to the issue at hand for Las Casas in the New World. The Indians represent those he hopes to convert to Christianity, while the Turks had vehemently rejected Christianity and arguably threaten its very existence. In 1521, the Turks captured Belgrade, and in 1529 had laid siege to Vienna. Raiding parties frequently took Christian slaves on the fringes of the Hapsburg Empire while Ottoman ships tormented the Mediterranean Sea. Fear of the Turks invading the heartlands of Europe was real and pervasive. From Las Casas’s perspective, the Turks were a grave threat to Christianity.

The comparison between Turks and the indigenous people of the Americas offers an interesting lens through which to view Las Casas’s fourth just cause, which is to punish those who “hinder the spread of the faith deliberately and ... attack those who wish to embrace it or already have embraced it.”\(^{59}\) Referencing Gratian, Las Casas concludes that “this kind of evil cannot be met with any other remedy” except the recourse to war.\(^{60}\) Perhaps Las Casas has the Turks
in mind when he pens these thoughts since he concludes it is not applicable in the case of the New World. Nevertheless, this just cause also points to one of the main tensions of the evangelization method he outlined in *De unico vocatio- nis modo*, namely that if partially successful, some pagans might resist with force or attack those who do convert.61 What then? Would the Spanish have just cause to wage war against the resistant Indians in this circumstance? Las Casas does not explore these questions directly, but there are instances in his writings that suggest he grappled with the possibility.

Two points are paramount to consider here. First, the sharp tone the Spanish cleric uses to describe the Turks marks a distinct contrast to the common view of Las Casas as the great defender of the Indians and benevolent humanitarian. Gutiérrez, Nederman, Tierney, and other contemporary proponents of Las Casas overlook this layer of nuance to his arguments. According to Las Casas, the Turks, who have stubbornly refused the Truth, are subject to perpetual enmity. They are, in his words, the “the truly barbaric scum of the nations.”62 While the Indians are justified in resisting the conquistadors and defending their liberty because they were provoked, the Turks, however, “bear an age-old hatred of the name of Christ” and “break into our provinces or harass our shores with the accouterments of war.”63 Las Casas views their barbarism as irreconcilable, and subjects them to a political plight defined by perpetual just war: “And since, in the case of the Turks and Saracens, the Church has learned from very long experience to consider as a condition totally fulfilled the fact that they are always ready to attack the faith and unsettle the Christian people; therefore it rightly and always has the power to invade them, even if they should stop their attacks for a few years.”64

Second, the Indians are not yet in this category. The Turks, who were guilty of *injuria*, represent a relatively straightforward case in which Las Casas advocates for just war. Yet, in Las Casas’s mind, the Indians have not rejected the Christian faith outright. They are invincibly ignorant, and, as we saw in the *De unico vocatio- nis modo*, had initially been introduced to the faith in the wrong way. Thus, any resistance they show would be justified, and not, as others interpreted, blasphemous, or blocking the spread of the faith. Indeed, Las Casas’s dedicated attempts to evangelize warring Indians in Tuzulutlán—called the

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61 For a more complex discussion of Las Casas’s struggles with the relationship between war, ethics and identity than can be given here, see Brunstetter, *Tensions of Modernity*, 71–82.
Land of War at the time—demonstrate his commitment to the idea that the Indians who resisted were simply reacting to the violence of the Spanish.65

But Las Casas muses, in rare moments, about what might be justified if the Indians did reject the faith in earnest. The precedent set by his response to the Turks raises the question as to whether the Indians, too, could be subject to a similar just war. At what point do they cease to be in the category of the invincibly ignorant and become guilty of injuria? Las Casas offers a tentative answer, if certain conditions were met: “Where there is some great and probable danger to the faith if a pagan rules, for example, if he treats his subjects tyrannically and violently because they have accepted the faith, if he is blasphemous towards Christ, or if he does or says anything that would lessen Christ’s glory.”66 Las Casas’s arguments imply he would not accept a pagan ruler who promulgated intolerant laws that prohibited conversion to Christianity or persecuted converts. Such actions would be tantamount to a just cause for war:

So if, in a kingdom that was in the first stages of conversion, the ruler allowed temples to remain open and the worship of idols to be practiced publicly, not only the ruler but the people would have been in imminent danger of apostatizing the faith. For this reason it was most proper—rather, very necessary—that the Church and its prelates exhort Christian rulers to destroy idolatry and to strive with all their power to destroy temples.67

The plight of those who reject Christianity for unjust reasons seems therefore clear, even if it remained hypothetical in the New World.

In the Apologética historia sumaria, Las Casas labels the choice of rejecting the faith as “la barbarie contrarie” or enemy barbarism. Those who make this choice are “the enemies of the Christian faith whom one can most correctly label barbarian.” Their barbarism consists in their “opposition to the faith, that is to say, they reject the laws of the faith, refuse to receive it and resist its preaching... out of pure hatred for our faith and the name of Christ; and not only do they refuse to receive [the faith] or listen [to the Gospel], but they impugn and persecute it; and if they could, to elevate and expand their own sect, they would destroy it.” They are, in a word, “fundamental enemies of the faith.”68

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This kind of barbarian could be anyone, including the Indians, who rejects and violently resists the faith. As Walter Mignolo explains, this kind of barbarism “identified all those who ... worked to undermine Christianity. It was called ‘enemy barbarism’ because of the barbarians’ hatred of the Christian faith. It would apply to all those infidels who resisted and refused to accept the Gospel.” 69 But again, the Indians did not fit this case as they were not hindering the spread of the faith but defending themselves against the brutal conquistadors.

A fifth just cause is “natural defense.” Referencing Aquinas, Las Casas argues: “By the law of nature, the arms of all peoples throughout the world are raised against their public enemies. So, to crush the insolence of such enemies we take them captive, and by inflicting equal destruction we teach them to fear our men and to avoid injuring us so that they pay for the injuries they have inflicted on us.” 70 The notion of self-defense was an accepted element in just war thinking, Gratian explicitly stated. However, in extending this right to non-Christian Indians, as I will discuss below, Las Casas cuts against the grain of the inherited tradition at the time.

Rejecting Just War to Save the Innocent
The final just cause is a “new case, not heard of until our times”: the Church can wage just war against unbelievers “if they are found to oppress and injure any innocent persons or to kill them in order to sacrifice them to their gods or in order to commit cannibalism.” 71 Sepúlveda, like Vitoria before him, in his third just cause justified war to save the innocent, calling it “an obligation of the just and religious prince.” 72 For Sepúlveda (and Vitoria), saving the innocent was equivalent to removing their tyrannical regimes and installing morally good ones. Las Casas, even though he embraced the Christian ethic of love towards one’s neighbor, all but rejects this view. And in doing so, he makes a unique argument.

Las Casas recognizes the restraining intent of jus in bello found in the canonical texts—he cites Gratian as proof that the innocent should be spared (to the extent possible) from the engulfing violence of war. While accepting accidental killing of innocents (something defended as early as Aquinas), Las Casas makes a strong case against killing the innocent, even from non-Christian societies: “Christian warriors ... are held to presume, even in the course of conflict, that the persons whom they see bearing such signs [of being of the class

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70 Casas, In Defense of the Indians, 184.
71 Vitoria, Political Writings, 321.
72 Sepúlveda, Democrates Segundo, 62; Vitoria, Political Writings, 285–86, 316.
of non-combatants] are innocent rather than hostile," and thus should not be killed indiscriminately.\footnote{Casas, In Defense of the Indians, 201.} However, he nevertheless worries that war’s fury cannot fully be controlled because it is sometimes difficult to distinguish the innocent from oppressors. Thus, despite the potential benefits that might come from saving the innocent from tyrannical practices, i.e., when good and evil are intertwined, Las Casas argues it is best to avoid the evils of war despite the good it might produce. Where the hardships of the innocent persecuted by the regime “cannot be avoided by any remedy other than war, we are bound by the natural, human, and divine law to tolerate and overlook them lest a countless number perish.”\footnote{Casas, In Defense of the Indians, 213.}

What is interesting in this specific argument is that Las Casas uses the \textit{jus in bello} restrictions, which are implicit in Gratian and Aquinas and more fully developed in Vitoria—namely that the innocent should be spared from war—to argue against waging war to save those who suffer injustice from Indian practices of human sacrifice. This is a substantial and unique argument in the course of the just war tradition at the time, insofar as it emphasizes the ways in which \textit{jus in bello} considerations should restrain medieval notions of \textit{jus ad bellum}, and in the process, undermines a key \textit{jus ad bellum} argument put forth by the School of Salamanca.\footnote{Such an emphasis arguably emerges later in Grotius’s thought, though Grotius would still defend humanitarian intervention; Johnson, Just War Tradition and The Restraint of War; 178–79.} Recognizing the dangers of war and the difficulty of distinguishing innocent from guilty, the friar rejects the justice of war to save the innocent—what some might call today humanitarian intervention—that would find a place in the a subsequent line of just war thinkers including the later scholastics, Francisco Suárez (1548–1617), Alberico Gentili, (1552–1608), Hugo Grotius (1583–1645), and Samuel Pufendorf (1632–94).\footnote{Richard Tuck, “Grotius, Hobbes and Pufendorf on Humanitarian Intervention,” in \textit{Just and Unjust Military Intervention: European Thinkers for Vitoria to Mill}, ed. Stefano Recchia and Jennifer M. Welsh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 96–112.} In Las Casas’s own words:

In the din of wars the innocent ... cannot be distinguished from their oppressors because of (1) the large number of persons, (2) the fury and turbulent uproar in which son does not respect father nor father have mercy on son ... and (3) the confusion and fear of the invaders. Also, there are many who seem evil and are not evil, and in such a doubtful matter.
...it is more just that the unjust go free justly than the just or the innocent as such, perish unjustly.77

Returning again to themes from the 1537 *De unico vocationis modo*, Las Casas upholds that war will hinder the spreading of the moral good though Christianity which would, in the long run, bring an end to their oppressive customs and liberate the innocent who suffer. Rejecting Sepúlveda’s fourth just cause (war to pave the way for spreading the faith), Las Casas argues that “anything should be tolerated to avoid waging war, the sea of all evil ... for this is not helpful to the spread of the gospel.”78 Spreading universal values by war creates hatred for those wielding the power because of the death and destruction war inevitably produces. Here his argument rehashes much what he covered in *De unico vocationis modo*. Namely that spreading Christianity via war gives no sense of credibility to the values being spread but sends instead a message of hypocrisy. He concludes that the result of a war justified by this cause would be that “the Indians will never accept the truth of Christianity if they are hardened [against it].”79

In sum, Las Casas did not think the war against the Indians was justified. Having mustered various elements of classic just war thinking, which he applied according to his own interpretations to the New World context, he countered Sepúlveda’s just war claims. In his concluding statement—again with reference to just war authorities [Aquinas and Augustine quoted in Gratian (*Causa 23*)]—he asserts:

> Therefore, since war should not be waged unless there has first been a provocation by the person against whom warfare is being prepared toward the one who is waging the war, it follows that war against the Indians is unlawful. This conclusion has also been proved from many arguments that have been offered previously in this work. However, war against them could be just if they committed something found in the six cases we listed above.80

And of course, none of these cases applied to the Indians.

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The Indians’ Just War and Post Bellum Restitution

It is clear from Las Casas’s writing that, although the concept of just war has legitimacy, the Spanish cannot invoke it to wage war against the Indians in the New World. But could the Indians invoke it to wage wars against the Spanish? “Every nation,” writes Las Casas in the Defense, “no matter how barbaric, has the right to defend itself against a more civilized one that wants to conquer it and take away its freedom.”81 Las Casas is more explicit later in the text. When defending their practices of human sacrifice as rational, he writes: “They are bound, without doubt, to defend the worship of their gods and religion by going forth with their armies against all who attempt to take those things from them or injure them or prevent their sacrifices—to fight, kill, capture, and exercise all the rights consequent a just war according to the law of nations.”82 Conceding the right of just war to the Indians is a powerful statement, one that moves well beyond the views of even the most progressive thinkers of the time. Even Vitoria who boldly granted the Indians the right of sovereignty, never broached the subject explicitly.83 But the elderly Las Casas went further. In 1564, the octogenarian penned Doce dudas, in which he drew on Gratian to make the explicit argument that the Indians (in this context, the Incas of Peru) had four just causes to wage war against the Spanish.

Written just two years before his death, the Doce dudas is the finale of his tireless defense of the Indians, and the ultimate culmination of his just war thinking. Wagner refers to it (along with the De thesauris) as the “concluding summaries” of his “total doctrine.” Indeed, as Wagner notes, “his successive ideas are echoed here—extinction of the encomienda, illegitimacy of the conquests, Spanish title based on peaceful conversion and the consent of the governed, full restitution, restoration of native lords, all carried to their logical if extreme conclusion.”84 The importance of Las Casas’s use of the just war doctrine to buttress these claims should not be overlooked.

The Doce dudas begins with a familiar theme—that there are four types of infidels, with the Incas being of the fourth kind, that is, unbelievers over whom the Spanish have no temporal power. Las Casas then discusses that the only right the Spanish have to be there is to preach the faith, meaning the wars for

81 Las Casas, In Defense of the Indians, 47.
82 Las Casas, In Defense of the Indians, 244–45.
84 Wagner, Life and Writings, 232, 236. See Las Casas’s own references in the Doce dudas to his esteemed written work of the past; Casas, Doce dudas, 35, 87.
the sake of conversion are unjust—themes prevalent from the *De unico vocatio-

nis modo*. Following this, his understanding of just and unjust war buttress
his claims that the conquistadors were required to restitute all they had taken
during the conquests or else face the consequences of mortal sin. Las Casas
asserts that from the very beginning, the conquistadors did not come into the
New World *in good faith*, but rather, with rapacious and tyrannical intentions.
Still, while Las Casas clearly states that the king never authorized such unjust
wars, he recognizes that some soldiers might have thought this to be the case.
Thus, one could refer to a passage from Augustine inserted in Gratian’s *Causa
23*, to excuse the injustices of these conquistadors: “Those thus called and sent
by their Prince while not knowing the truth [of the justice of the war] even
though the wars are unjust and the stealing and killing they are sent to do are
against justice, are excused from sin, as well as restitution … because obedi-
ence to the Prince or King himself, as Augustine and the saints say: [Casusa
23, q.1].”85

But Gratian’s explanation has a caveat that Las Casas exploits, namely that
this does not hold if the war is contrary to God’s laws. To this Las Casas adds his
own clarification: individual soldiers should, in the case of doubt (and any war
that would require them to commit such violent acts should cause doubt), ask
the wise—presumably men like Las Casas—whether the war was just before
engaging in it. And if the answer were yes, then they would be “obliged not to
obey the mandate of the prince, even under the pain of death.”86 Of course for
Las Casas, the wars were unjust, meaning that all those who took part cannot
be excused for their actions.

The point of this argument is to remove any doubt that the conquistadors
could not be excused for their actions by explaining how they all committed
mortal sins. Thus, Las Casas’s understanding of the responsibilities of soldiers
he garnered from Gratian’s just war writings helped to underpin his *post bellum*
plan of restitution. Echoing arguments he made in the *Confessionario*, he as-
serts all of these individuals “are obliged to provide restitution to all those from
whom they stole and tyrannized.”87 The individual guilt of soldiers and neces-
sary restitution of the goods they stole, is, however, only one part of the broad-
er aftermath of the unjust conquest. Turning to Gratian, Las Casas mounts the
argument that the Indians are justified in waging an eternal just war against the
Spanish. This is a bold claim: “Since the moment [the conquistadors] arrived

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85 Casas, *Doce dudas*, 101.
86 Casas, *Doce dudas*, 101. Compare with Vitoria’s views on the moral responsibility of sol-
diers; Vitoria, *Political Writings*, 307–11.
87 Casas, *Doce dudas*, 120.
in that land ... [the Indians and future descendants] acquired the right to a
continued and just war against all the Spanish, as against public enemies, en-
emies of the human race.” This “right to wage a just war against all the Spanish
perpetually until judgment day” can only be interrupted in four ways: peace,
a truce, paying for the injuries caused, or total restitution of goods and lands
they stole.88 That the Indians have the right to wage a perpetual just war im-
plies that the only way to achieve true peace would be via restitution; other-
wise, the descendants would always have some previous wrong to avenge.

But where does this right to wage just war come from? Las Casas paraphr- 
eses in Latin passages from Gratian's Causa 23 that describe the justice of war in
the medieval tradition: for reasons of self-defense, to avenge injury, and to take
back goods wrongfully taken.89 His turn to Gratian establishes the legitima-
cy of just war based on an unquestioned authority and sets up his discussion
of the four just causes by which the Indians could wage just war against the
Spanish. While different on the surface compared to those he enumerated at
Valladolid—the Christian perspective of punishing blasphemy and stopping
the spread of the faith were left out—the core drawn from Gratian is the same.
First, “any person ... or kingdom for reasons of self-defense.” Second, as “resis-
tance against the evil and noxious men who want to cause injury ... to those
who never gave reason for offense ... which is almost the same as the cause of
natural defense. Here, let us mention the first chapter, 23, q.2 [of Gratian]: ‘jus-
tum est bellum propulsandurum causa’ [Just is the war for the reason of self-
preservation].” Third, “to recuperate that which has been unjustly robbed, or
to compensate for the evils and injuries received.” And fourth, “to punish and
castigate [the enemy] for the injuries and damages received.” Las Casas sup-
ports causes three and four with quotes in Latin, taken from Gratian, saying
essentially the same thing (C.23, q.2; C. 23, q.1).90

In the case of the Incas, Las Casas asserts “all four of these causes are pres-
et.”91 He then goes on to offer proof that this is the case. He uses phrases such
as “no one doubts,” and asks what he sees as rhetorical questions that begin
with “Who could negate ...,” to describe the justice of Indians' case for war.92
But it should be made clear that in explicitly making the case that the Indians
can wage just war, when no one else of repute was doing so, Las Casas both
deepens the meaning of just war and offers a novel contribution to prevalent

88 Casas, Doce dudas, 123.
89 Casas, Doce dudas, 124.
90 Casas, Doce dudas, 125.
91 Casas, Doce dudas, 125.
92 Casas, Doce dudas, 125–26.
understandings in the sixteenth century. In doing so, he extends the meaning of sovereignty in ways beyond those conceived by Vitoria and the School of Salamanca.

But Las Casas goes further, for he then blends his view of just war with much more precarious arguments related to overthrowing tyrants. The use of force to rebel against unjust leaders was generally prohibited in Christian thought. As argued in the text—*De Regimine Principum*—attributed to Aquinas during Las Casas’s lifetime and which Las Casas’s references as an authoritative source: “If there be not an excess of tyranny it is more expedient to tolerate for a while the milder tyranny than by acting against the tyrant, to be involved in many perils which are more grievous than the tyranny itself.” But then Aquinas allows for an exception. If the situation is very grave, then: “It seems ... that to proceed against the cruelty of tyrants is an action to be undertaken, not through private presumption of a few, but by public authority ... if to provide itself with a king belong to the right of any multitude, it is not unjust that the king set up by that multitude be destroyed ... if he tyrannically abuse the royal power.”

The case of Peru is slightly different as the conquistadors were not set up by the authority of the multitude, but even still, the “sons and descendants of the King Atahualpa” gained the right to “wage war against [the conquistadors].” What is more, departing from Aquinas, the tyranny of the conquistadors was so grave that any Indian, even individuals, could take up arms against the Spanish who were “true tyrants.” Las Casas thus writes, referencing the *De Regimine Principum*: “not only the kings and towns ... but each particular person has the same right according to the natural law ... each individual Indian can [kill and destroy the Spaniards without leaving a trace of them behind].” Now, Las Casas did not consider the Spanish king to be a tyrant, but only the conquistadors who usurped power in the New World. Even so, by extending the right to use force to overthrow a tyrant to individuals and blending it with the right to wage war, Las Casas departs from the traditional notion of just authority that dominate medieval Christian just war thinking.

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95 Casas, *Doce dudas*, 131.

96 Casas, *Doce dudas*, 132.
The right to wage war was, from Augustine through Gratian to Aquinas, reserved for a legitimate authority whose task was to wage war for the sake of peace and the common good; the common individual, on the other hand, had the right to self-defense. “The right of self-defense,” as one modern scholar notes, “did not extend to the recovery of things wrongly taken or punishment of the violator; this right belonged to the public authority, not to individuals.”

But Las Casas asserts that, absent their rightful king (Atahualpa had been killed) all Incans had the right to use punitive force “to recover what is possible from the injustices received and restitution for the evil and injuries received.”

By extending the right to punish to any Incan individual who suffered from the tyranny of the conquistadors, Las Casas incorporates into his just war analysis the exception seen in Aquinas regarding overthrowing domestic tyranny. Such an absolute right of resistance is reminiscent of passages from twentieth century anti-colonialist Franz Fanon (1925–61), who argued the colonized have absolute rights of resistance against those who occupy their lands.

Las Casas, for his part, did not envision that the Indians would ultimately reject the impulses of Christianity if the peaceful methods from De unico vocatio modo were followed. However, the success of the evangelization project depended in part on making a true peace with the Indians. While individual conquistadors giving full restitution was a necessary step, it was not sufficient. The Indians had the right to pursue war not simply for restitution but also to punish the Spanish and seek vengeance against their crimes. Because considerable treasure was sent back to Spain, this could set the context for a perpetual war. Thus, to ensure peace in the long run, Las Casas demands the Spanish king restore full sovereignty to the Incas.

This is a powerful statement about jus post bellum, and the responsibility of those who are ultimately accountable for unjust wars of aggression. It is also a statement on the interplay between colonialism and just war. While many have criticized the link between the development of just war principles and European expansion, Las Casas’s vindication of Indian rights to just war and sovereignty, coupled with his recognition that the colonizer holds the responsibility for creating the conditions of future peace by withdrawing, suggests
an alternative core for universalist just war principles that steps beyond, to an extent, the bellicose colonial dynamic.\textsuperscript{101}

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown that Las Casas was well-versed in just war thinking and that his understanding of, and sometimes innovative take on, just war, underpinned many of his other ideas. These include his views on how to preach the Gospel, the sovereignty of the Indians, and \textit{post bellum} restitution. While he relied on Gratian as an important source, Las Casas also put his own stamp on just war thinking, notably with regards to rejecting the argument to wage war to save the innocent (which challenged the School of Salamanca’s position) and by blurring the lines between just war and just rebellion against a tyrant.

In these concluding remarks, I want to suggest that there are three things to take away that have contemporary relevance. First, just war was at the heart of Las Casas’s most important endeavors and the arguments he put forth to buttress them. And understanding the importance of his deliberations about just war is paramount to understanding Las Casas’s legacy. Second, Las Casas should be remembered as someone who abhorred war but saw it as sometimes just. He harnessed just war thinking to criticize the Spanish wars in the New World but recognized that the Christian wars against the Turks were just and viewed the Indians’ resistance against the conquistadors as a just war. Lastly, at a time when the world struggles with the justice of humanitarian intervention, Las Casas’s rejection of this claim while others around him supported it, is a stark reminder of the unpredictable violence of war even for the best of reasons. Ultimately, despite believing in the necessity of spreading Christianity, which raises clear tensions with his view of sovereign rights of the Indians, his understanding of just war invites us to question the relationship between just war and the spread of moral values.