



## Las Casas and the Struggle for Justice in the Indies

A focus upon the three “Gs” of conquest, God, Glory, and Gold, is a time-tested classroom strategy for fostering an understanding of the early colonial period of Latin America. The first of these “Gs,” God, the spiritual conquest of the natives by the Spaniards, serves as the unifying theme for this discussion. A conversation about the spiritual conquest requires inquiry into the religious mentality of the Spaniards, particularly those who undertook the task of converting native peoples. It is impossible, however, to speak of the spiritual conquest of the Indies without an examination of crown policy toward the native populations of those lands. Native policy and the effort to Christianize went hand-in-hand. Neither the elaboration of native policy nor the Christianization of natives developed without controversy. In most instances, neither crown policy nor official efforts at Christianization successfully dictated uniform standards of behavior. Colonists pursued their own objectives, usually those of Glory and Gold. Nor is it legitimate to examine the spiritual conquest without reference to the vision of the vanquished; that is, the reaction of native peoples to Spanish treatment, evangelical measures, and the utilization of Christianity for their own purposes.

Fortunately, all these themes can be explored by a consideration of Bartolomé de Las Casas as the “protector of the Indians” in the first three-score years of the sixteenth century. My intention is to explore the theme of Spanish treatment of native peoples through various lenses. These include: the primary features of Spanish native policy; the spiritual conquest of the natives as manifest in the writings of Las Casas and other pro-native clerics; the juxtaposition of Pedro de Alvarado and Las Casas as a means of examining major policy decisions regarding the treatment of native peoples; and the indigenous reaction to their treatment by Spaniards. These are all well-traveled paths of inquiry, defined most clearly by the historian Lewis Hanke, upon whose work all persons interested in Las Casas must reflect. As I began this paper with an example, let me warn you; it will end with a quiz. What do native peoples think of Las Casas and his attitudes toward natives? Why do they think this way? What does it reveal of the spiritual conquest?

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The task of winning souls to God constituted one of the stated objectives of all Spanish explorations. This goal must be understood in light of the long *reconquista*, but also within the context of papal and monarchical powers in Europe. As Ferdinand and Isabella joined the power of their kingdoms to undertake the final stage of the *reconquista*, the papacy lacked

the power to extend its control over the soon to be reconquered lands. The pope therefore assigned Ferdinand and Isabella the right "to possess and control the churches, monasteries, and other ecclesiastical benefices and occupied territories regained by them . . ."56 This edict laid the foundation for church/state policies toward natives in the Indies.

Columbus's return from the new-found lands forced the Castillian and Portuguese monarchs to appeal to the pope to resolve which kingdom had proper claim to the new lands. Pope Alexander VI, a Spaniard, issued a bull in 1493 which granted Castille control of the "very remote islands and even mainlands" found by Columbus. The pope ruled that

inasmuch as with eager zeal for the true faith you design to equip and despatch this expedition, your purpose also, as is your duty, is to lead the peoples dwelling in those islands and countries to embrace the Christian religion; nor at any time let dangers or hardships deter you therefrom . . .57

The Catholic crowns named several friars to accompany Columbus on his second voyage, thereby setting the precedent for monarchical control of church affairs in the Indies. As Spain, the papacy, and Europe came to realize the scope and importance of the lands encountered by Columbus, considerable legal wrangling sought to determine secular and religious jurisdictions. Finally, in 1508, Pope Julius II granted royal patronage (*patronato real*) to the Castilian crown over all church affairs in the Indies. The papal bull *Universalis Ecclesiae Regimini* authorized permanent monarchical control over the establishment of churches, the founding of sees, and the appointment of all clerical personnel in the Indies. The Spanish monarchical state, therefore, had sole authority to shape religious affairs in the Indies, which included policy toward native peoples.

The contract that Columbus signed with Isabella had clearly stipulated the importance of God to his enterprise. The Catholic sovereigns spelled out these provisos again in their instructions to Columbus in 1497, instructing him "to work diligently and peacefully to inspire and attract the natives of the said Indies to serve Us and live under Our lordship and rule, and above all, you should work for their conversion to Our Holy Catholic Faith . . ."58 Contact with Caribbean natives, however, resulted in few conversions, but many settlers used the Caribbean peoples as slaves in their agricultural activities and mines. There is little indication that Columbus himself shared the mentality of many of the colonists, but his lack of control mitigated any benevolent attitudes that he might have harbored.

The first manifestation of a policy for treatment of natives came in the *repartimiento*, or division of native peoples to the conquerors. This involved a grant of natives, people from whom a Spaniard could extract labor as a form of tribute to the Spanish monarch. In return, the tribute lord was supposed to teach Christian principles to the natives as a route to their conversion and

salvation, but such was seldom the case. Slavery became commonplace, a system of labor that slowly decimated the populations of the islands, leading Ferdinand and Isabella to flatly outlaw it in 1500. The governor of Hispaniola, Nicolás de Ovando, recognized the abolition of slavery, but complained “that because of the excessive liberty allowed the said Indians, they run away from the Christians and withdraw from any intercourse and communications with them.....” Governor Ovando therefore informed Queen Isabella that

[I] compel the Indians to have dealings with the Christian settlers on the said island, to work on their buildings, to mine and collect gold and other metals, and to work on their farms and crop fields ... ordering each cacique to be responsible for a certain number of the Indians in order to make them to go work where they are needed, and so that on holidays and other days you deem appropriate, they can assemble to hear and be taught the essentials of the faith in places appointed for this. ...<sup>59</sup>

Ferdinand formalized the system of *encomienda*, which is quite akin to repartimiento, in 1509, mandating the effort to save native souls. By then, however, the abuses of native laborers had become endemic in the islands.

These violations of religious responsibilities outraged many priests, notably some Dominicans on the island of Hispaniola. In 1511, Friar Antonio de Montesinos shocked local encomenderos by accusing them of “sins against the Indians.” Claiming to be “a voice crying in the wilderness,” Montesinos said that

you [the encomenderos] are in mortal sin, that you live and die in it, for the cruelty and tyranny you use in dealing with these innocent people. Tell me, by what right or just do you keep these Indians in such a cruel and horrible servitude? Why do you keep them so oppressed and weary, not giving them enough to eat nor taking care of them in their illness? ... And what care do you take that they should be instructed in religion? ... Are these not men? Have they not rational souls? Are you not bound to love them as you love yourselves? ... Be certain that, in such a state as this, you can no more be saved than the moors or Turks.<sup>60</sup>

The local inhabitants were shocked. They rushed to tell the Governor, Diego Columbus, and the local vicar of the outrage. Attempts to convince local church leaders to censor Montesinos came to naught. King Ferdinand soon heard of Montesinos's accusation and informed local administrators that

the Indians should be assigned to work for the Spaniards, and that this was in accord both with human and divine law. And since it is clear by logic that even laymen can comprehend how necessary it is for this business of the servitude of the Indians to the Spaniards to be handled as it is, I am even more amazed at those friars who refuse to absolve the settlers [in confession] ... until they free their Indians, when these Indians were given to them by My orders. ...<sup>61</sup>

Montesinos was prohibited from further sermons of this kind.

Here, however, are the seeds of what has been called the "great struggle for justice in the New World." Curiously, Las Casas, who would become the central figure in this struggle, had begun his career in the Indies as a conquistador. He came to Hispaniola in 1502 and shortly thereafter took part in the conquest of Cuba, earning an encomienda and numerous slaves. During this period he became a priest, yet he sided with the colonists against Montesinos. In 1514, while preparing a sermon, Las Casas experienced a radical change of heart, coming to believe the truth of Montesinos's message. Thereafter, Las Casas became the most visible defender of Indians in the Americas.

One byproduct of the Montesinos affair was an appeal to the King to resolve the question of encomienda. This resulted in the promulgation of the Laws of Burgos in December 1512. The seven-part law recognized the basic freedom of the Indians and their right to humane treatment, but stipulated that they must be kept close to Spaniards so that they could be properly converted. The Laws of Burgos enjoined encomenderos to fulfill their duty of conversion as well as enjoying the privilege of labor. Encomienda was sanctioned, but the moral responsibility of the institution was firmly stated.

**Therefore,** for these reasons and for many others that could be adduced, it was agreed that for the improvement and remedy of all the aforesaid, the said chiefs and Indians should forthwith be brought to dwell near the villages and communities of the Spaniards who inhabit that Island, so that they may be treated and taught and looked after as is right and as we have always desired....<sup>62</sup>

Encomienda natives were to be reduced to community life near Spanish communities so that Spaniards might fulfill their duty and enjoy their privileges. This sanctioned the establishment of legal native communities, with their own rights and internal leadership. These communities allowed considerable labor exploitation of natives and their devastation by disease in the short-run, but, over the long-run, proved to be the most resistant source of indigenous cultural survival.

The Laws of Burgos resolved the problem of encomienda only if colonists adhered to their principles, which they generally did not. At least part of the problem of the treatment of native peoples lay in their unclear character in Spanish eyes. Were they animals, in which case no restriction might hinder their exploitation, or were they humans? If they were humans, what was their religious status? Were they pagans, with no exposure to the word of Jesus? If so, they must be converted and incorporated into the Spanish realm. Or were they infidels, people who had rejected Christ, and thus subject to slavery and material expropriation?

The essential question was whether or not natives could live like Spaniards. As might be expected, opinions differed. Queen Isabella was convinced that the natives were rational and human. She thus demanded that the first settlers look after their spiritual needs and not enslave them save in instances of just

war. Conquistadors and early settlers were quick to deny that natives were in fact humans, a reasoning that naturally would have enhanced their exploitative powers. Throughout the Caribbean phase of conquest thousands of native peoples were enslaved and worked to death. Governor Ovando shared the perception that natives were animals, and did little to lessen their exploitation, a fact clearly seen in Montesinos's charges of 1511. Las Casas, of course, disagreed. In one passage that reflected his humanist and romantic orientations, he acknowledged that "God created these simple people without evil and without guile. They are most obedient and faithful to their natural lords and to the Christians whom they serve. Surely they would be the most blessed in the world if they only worship[ed] the True God."

Despite outward appearances, the crown was at least partially sympathetic to Las Casas and others like him. During the early conquest period, the crown sanctioned several experiments intended to ensure a just treatment for natives outside the institution of *encomienda*. In the end, all of the experiments were failures, not so much because they were misconceived, but more likely because they represented attempts to overcome fundamental conflicts with the objectives of the colonizers and because of seemingly irreconcilable cultural differences among Spaniards and indigenous peoples. The efforts, nonetheless, are telling.

The crown named Las Casas "Protector of the Indians" in 1517. Three Jeronymite friars were assigned to determine if natives could live free of direct Spanish supervision and still be Hispanicized. After exhaustive investigations, the Jeronymite team concluded that no such native people had been found; the task was impossible. Natives would, the Jeronymites feared, revert to their ways without the oversight of Spaniards. It would be better for them to be "serving men" than "free beasts." All natives on Hispaniola were thus concentrated into villages, where they could be supervised and taught, all the while working for Spaniards.

Las Casas convinced the new emperor, Charles V, to undertake a new investigation, which resulted in the dispatch of Rodrigo de Figueroa to Hispaniola. Figueroa freed three villages and charged them with producing the gold that they otherwise would have mined for the Spaniards. The program failed; natives had no interest in the gold, and promptly reverted to their agricultural ways. Another experiment at freeing natives was conducted in Cuba in 1525–26, with equally dismal consequences, at least in Spanish eyes.

It is worth noting that natives too had questions about the nature of the Spaniards, although accounts of their investigations are few. One investigation took place in Puerto Rico, where the locals wondered if the Spaniards were mortal if removed from their horses. One account notes that an unknowing Spaniard was invited to view a particularly idyllic spot on the island, whereupon the Spaniard was thrust under the water of a stream and held until he drowned. The native then waited for the Spaniard to spring back

to life. Some days later, as the body began to smell, it was concluded that the Spaniards were mortal and could be killed. The tribe then initiated war against the Spaniards on the island.

This account, while perhaps exaggerated, suggests an important facet of native policy. Certainly Spaniards sought to define that policy according to their own disparate interests. So too did natives. The indigenous reactions recounted so far suggest their own priorities. It is clear that native peoples sought physical separation from Spaniards so that they could live according to their own cultures. Native peoples desired self-government, with their own system of leadership. There is little evidence to suggest that given a free choice, native peoples would select Christianity as a mode of religious expression. Neither did native peoples wish to labor for Spaniards, preferring instead to pursue their own economic activities, largely agricultural in nature. Native preferences, therefore, favored independent living arrangements, autonomous political practices, traditional religion, accustomed economic activities, and a continuation of their own culture. In short, native peoples preferred a life recreating as nearly as possible that which had existed before contact.

This was, of course, impossible for most people. At best, accommodation could partially satisfy some of these objectives. As we consider the reaction to Spanish efforts to Christianize natives, we must bear in mind the limited choices available to native peoples. Especially when we think of the "positive" reaction to the "struggle for social justice" in the Indies, we must remember that men like Las Casas offered only the best of several negative options.

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The opportunities to illustrate the brutality of Spanish treatment of native peoples are all too frequent. Nowhere, perhaps, can the dichotomy between cruelty and compassion be more clearly illustrated than in the highlands of Guatemala, which were known during the early colonial period as *Tierra de Guerra*, the land of war. Highland Guatemala had been at the southern boundary of Mexica power, and was one of the core regions of the Maya culture. The Mexica had only a weak grip on the peoples of highland Guatemala, who tended to be dominated by distinct city-state polities that functioned under a system of shifting alliances. Lowland Guatemala, by contrast, although the core of earlier Maya civilizations, was sparsely populated at the time of contact, almost impenetrable geographically, and contained only weakly developed polities. The Spaniards learned of the peoples and polities of highland Guatemala during their conquest of Mexico. As Pedro de Alvarado brutally conquered the bulk of Guatemala, he instituted a reign of Spanish terror that some might argue has never ended. The Maya resisted and continue to resist Spanish domination, a resistance that gave the region its temporary name of "the land of war."

The conqueror of Guatemala, Pedro de Alvarado, had a checkered career in the conquest of Mexico. Alvarado was Cortés's right-hand man, but nearly thwarted the conquest by his hot-headedness. Alvarado was in many ways a typical conquistador. He came from the southern region of Estremadura, from a noble family, although one that lacked real wealth. Estremadura was on the front line of the reconquista, giving its inhabitants a familiarity with war and religious conquest. Alvarado accompanied one of the earliest voyages of exploration to the Yucatan peninsula. He returned to Mexico on the relief expedition to Cortés, the one that brought smallpox to the mainland. He quickly earned a reputation as a ferocious, blood-thirsty captain. Blessed with a head of deep red hair and a beard to match, he was referred to by the Mexica as *tunatiuh*, the sun. It was Alvarado who ordered the surprise attack on the Mexica lords while Cortés was away from Tenochtitlan, the attack that turned the city into a battleground and forced the Spaniards to flee. Cortés was furious at the move and its consequences; probably only the importance of Alvarado as a fighter kept him out of jail or from the gallows's noose.

Alvarado and his brothers were rewarded with large encomiendas for their part in the conquest, but the stationary life seemed not to have suited him. In late 1523, by Cortés's orders, he took off with 120 horsemen, 300 foot soldiers, and thousands of native slaves and warriors to conquer Guatemala. Smallpox preceded his advance, inflicting its usual devastation among the native peoples. Cortés charged Alvarado with the peaceful conquest of the region, an article to which few expected him to adhere. Alvarado did not. For two years he carried out an extraordinarily brutal campaign of conquest against the Maya. As no large empire united the Maya, repeated assaults were necessitated against the many autonomous city-states. He used a tactic of divide and conquer, a timely decision that enabled him to take advantage of the civil war between the Cakchiquel and Quiche tribes, forging a temporary alliance with the Cakchiquel to attack the Quiche, defeating them in early 1524. By 1526, all of Central America save the highland area of Guatemala had been turned into a brutalized land of war.

Maintaining control over the vast region proved an arduous task. Mayan polities rose in revolt in the aftermath of conquest as soon they realized the nature of the Spanish rule. The cacique of the Cakchiquel took advantage of Alvarado's absence from the region in 1529 to lead a major rebellion. Alvarado then undertook a long, brutal war of subjugation that was as much economic as military. Native lands were divided among the conquerors and tribute peoples assigned to work them. Economic domination was complete by the early 1540s, in all areas save the *tierra de guerra*.

The failure of Alvarado to subjugate the Maya by use of brutality opened the last great experiment to achieve social justice for native Americans. Las Casas had not been directly involved with many of the early crown experiments on native policy. Instead, he concentrated his energies in the 1520s on an attempt to establish an ideal agricultural colony of Spaniards and natives in the coastal



area of Venezuela. Spanish farmers were brought from the metropolis to live side by side with natives, in the hope of showing them by example the proper ways to live. The colonization attempt was a total failure, so much so that Las Casas entered the Dominican order and withdrew from public life for ten years.

When Las Casas returned to public life in the early 1530s, his dedication to social justice was even more complete. His principles are laid out in *The Only Method of Attracting All People to the True Faith*. To begin, Las Casas insisted upon the capacity of native peoples to receive faith in the Christian god as a "gift." He asserts that "the way to bring into the bosom of the Christian faith and religion men who are outside the church must be a method which persuades their understanding and which moves, exhorts, and gently attracts the will."<sup>63</sup> Miracles help, but peacefully preaching and genuine understanding of native cultures are the keys. Over a period of time, Las Casas argued, native peoples could be convinced of the goodness of the Christian god by the behavior of its servants, friars who led "exemplary lives" and manifested love. Armed conquest and mass baptisms would not, Las Casas explained, win true conversion; that could only come by "the sweetness of His doctrine, the sacraments of the church, and mercy [which] will bestow many benefits with graciousness, gentleness, charity, and peace."<sup>64</sup> Conversion, in short, would be a choice made by native people without force.

Las Casas used his pulpit in Guatemala City to announce his plans for the peaceful conversion of the highland Maya to the Spanish residents early in 1537. He met little opposition, as most creoles thought the friar's plan so foolhardy that it was doomed to failure. Las Casas proposed that he and his fellow Dominicans be allowed to convert the Maya without outside interference, without weapons, and without soldiers; using only the word of God and the teachings of the Gospel. He asked the governor for only two conditions, both of which were readily accepted: any natives peacefully converted would not be subject to encomienda division, and no other Spaniard would be allowed into the region for five years. Winning acceptance of the plan, Las Casas and the other friars composed some ballads depicting the lessons of the Bible in the local language. The group then contacted four Christianized Maya who traded in the region and taught them how to sing the ballads. Thus prepared, the native merchants were sent into the highlands.

The reception was more than the Dominicans might have hoped. After initial reluctance, the merchant singers were warmly received and for eight days asked to sing the ballads. Then, having explained that the Dominicans wanted only to talk to the Maya about the meaning of the ballads, not to seek tribute or gold, the chief asked for a visit. Friar Luis Cancer, who knew the language well, then visited the highlands, preaching to all natives that he could, and successfully converting the chief. With that victory, the rest of the Dominicans went to the highlands. Local Spaniards were shocked, and even more so when other Dominicans came to the highlands from Spain. The missionaries

continued their efforts for years, seemingly with great success. Las Casas became bishop of the region in 1544, in large part due to his actions in the land that became known as *verapaz* (true peace). As bishop, Las Casas fought bitterly with the Spaniards who wanted to subjugate the Maya, a struggle that led him to resign his office in 1550, at the age of 76. The priest returned to Spain, where he engaged in his noted debate with Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda over the proper treatment of the natives in the Indies.

It would be nice to finish this account with a "happy ending." Such was not the case. In the mid 1550s, amid reports that the Maya had begun to practice their own religion, which the Spaniards labeled idolatry (to them a repudiation of Christianity), the Maya rose in rebellion against the friars. More than 30 priests were killed, including one who was sacrificed in a newly built church according to Maya ritual. The isolated priests sought assistance from the local Spaniards, who refused to come to their aid. The rebellion confirmed what many Spaniards knew to be true; only a harsh hand and forced "civilization" could control the diabolical Maya. Alvarado's spirit returned to the land as the Spaniards brutally punished the Maya and again conquered the region. Its people were put to work in close proximity to the Spaniards, where their tribute to the crown might be paid in labor, where they might be civilized, and where they could be converted to the "true ways of faith." Highland Guatemala was forcefully brought into the Kingdom of Guatemala, a land in which terror has now reigned for hundreds of years.

Despite the failure of Verapaz, Las Casas never lost faith in the promise of his beliefs and, although age began to limit his active field work, it did not limit his scholarship. He dedicated much of the rest of his life to the completion of his opus *History of the Indies*. This work serves as a fundamental source of information on the early period for modern historians. One of Las Casas's other works can rightly be said to have had more contemporary influence. His *Very Brief Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, as noted in an earlier paper, was for many the origin of the Black Legend. Not until this century, with the emergence of Liberation Theology and its principles of social activism, has the near-veneration of Las Casas balanced the hatred which the *Destruction of the Indies* caused among many Spaniards toward the defender of the Indians.

Las Casas had another, more immediate impact. He had left Guatemala in 1540 to return to Spain where he helped shape the New Laws of 1542, which "tamed" the institution of *encomienda*. Emperor Charles and his court had grown increasingly mistrustful of the power of landed *encomenderos* in the Indies, fearing that their base of labor power could translate into a political potency which would work against the interests of the crown. Charles also harbored the ongoing monarchical concern for native subjects, a concern upon which Las Casas played. The New Laws forbade the granting of new *encomiendas*, removed them from people who could not produce a legal title, and declared that *encomiendas* could not be passed on to one's heirs. Colonial reactions to these stipulations were violent. They sparked a five-year civil war

in Peru, a rebellion in Nicaragua, and considerable unrest in New Spain. Although the crown softened the New Laws, the independent base of encomendero power was slowly reduced. There is little evidence, however, that native peoples fared better after the New Laws than before. Certainly the period of strong clerical pursuit of "social justice" had passed by mid-century; increasingly smaller numbers of clerics followed the path laid out by Las Casas and Montesinos. Not until the mid-twentieth century did significant numbers of churchmen and women seek to repeat the work of this first generation of Catholic clerics in the Indies.

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**M**iguel León-Portilla notes in one of his essays that the image of Las Casas is decidedly shaped by European thought. Recall that the crux of the question of social justice lay in the competition between the economic needs of the colonists and the state's identification of its need to convert newly conquered people into Christian subjects. This returns our attention to the purpose of the conquest. Did the desire to convert people to Christianity motivate the conquest? Should we place primacy upon the "G" of God? Did the Gold of conquest, the earthly reward of power and position, dominate Spanish motivations? To what degree did the culture of Glory push the Spaniards on to extreme sacrifices? Las Casas serves as the perfect foil to reveal the deep complexities of the conquering culture. It is simply wrong to ascribe to all Spaniards the venality of Alvarado; nor is it just to suggest that the example of Las Casas was common. My own reading, however, is that Glory and Gold, and less God, motivated most Spaniards who came to the Indies. Las Casas and others are notable by their exception, not by their normality. In any instance, Spanish motivations were complex and offer the observer sufficient examples to expound most points of view.

What we lack, perhaps, are the insights of native people. We know surprisingly little about what natives thought of Las Casas or other friars. This is even true in New Spain, where more is known about the spiritual conquest of indigenous populations than in any other region. Spanish friars accompanied Cortés and early expeditions, but these few individuals could hardly cope with the massive population of this region. Nor could they be expected to penetrate the dense religious culture of the Nahua with light or casual ministrations. Cortés recognized this, requesting that the crown organize special missions to Mexico. Independent of this request, the crown sent the "mission of the twelve" to New Spain in 1524, where they arrived in early May. This group of Franciscans established a framework for the Christianization of native peoples, which included extensive inquiries into indigenous cultures as a means to their evangelical ends, the founding of schools to teach native lords, and a sustained effort to peaceably convert the natives, which brought the principles pursued by Las Casas directly into the spiritual conquest of Mexico.

León-Portilla cites a document of 1556 as one indication of native attitudes toward Las Casas. In that year several prominent natives penned a letter to the Emperor Phillip II seeking a voice in Madrid that would be sympathetic to their needs. The authors of this text include the lord of Texcoco, at least three native governors, the grandson of one of the most noted Texcocan scholars, and several leaders of the Mexica. These men were among the most prestigious native lords, with linkages both to the preconquest period and to the benevolent evangelical movement in central Mexico. Some had been educated at the Franciscan college for natives. It appears that certain of these men may have met Las Casas on one of his three trips to Mexico City. It is certain that they knew of his debate with Sepúlveda and of the crown's retreat from its support of a benign native policy. In this context they wrote

we are very much in need of a person who would be our defender, who would reside continuously in that royal court, to whom we could go with ... [our necessities] ... we humbly beseech Your Majesty to appoint to us the bishop of Chiapas Don Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas to take this charge of being our defender ... [or] one of those principal persons of your royal court who is very Christian and of goodwill to whom we can appeal with the things that would come up ... because otherwise we will suffer daily so many needs and we are so aggrieved, that soon we will be ended, since every day we are more consumed and finished, because they expel us from our lands and deprive us of our goods, beyond the many other labors and personal tributes that daily are increased for us <sup>65</sup>

Here, finally, is your quiz. Why would these native lords address themselves in this language to the emperor of Spain? Do these words represent an acceptance of Christianity, or something else?

