irreparably slandered them before the entire world? From the fact that the Indians are barbarians it does not necessarily follow that they are incapable of government and have to be ruled by others, except to be taught about the Catholic faith and to be admitted to the holy sacraments. They are not ignorant, inhuman, or bestial. Rather, long before they had heard the word Spaniard, they had properly organized states, wisely ordered by excellent laws, religion, and custom. They cultivated friendship and, bound together in common fellowship, lived in populous cities in which they wisely administered the affairs of both peace and war justly and equitably, truly governed by laws which at very many points surpass ours, and could have won the admiration of the sages of Athens, as I will show in the second part of this Defense.7

At various points Las Casas referred to the Spanish Apologia in such a way as to show that it was an integral part of his position as set forth in The Latin Defense. He commended the Indians' Christian faith, their honor of the holy sacraments, and, at the time of death, "the wonderful concern about their salvation and their soul. . . . I shall speak at greater length about this in the second part of this apology." Later on in the Defense, during the long passage against Oviedo, Las Casas stated: "Oviedo's assertion that the Indians are unteachable and incorrigible is false, as will be clear from the second part of this Defense."8

In his summation, made at the close of the Defense, Las Casas declared:

The Indians are our brothers, and Christ has given his life for them. Why, then, do we persecute them with such inhuman savagery when they do not deserve such treatment? . . . [They] will embrace the teaching of the gospel, as I well know, for they are not stupid or barbarous but have a native sincerity and are simple, moderate, and meek, and, finally, such that I do not know whether there is any people readier to receive the gospel. Once they have embraced it, it is marvelous with what piety, eagerness, faith, and charity they obey Christ's precepts and venerate the sacraments. For they are docile and clever, and in their diligence and gifts of nature, they excel most peoples of the known world.

The second part of this Defense, written in Spanish, will set all this before the eyes of everyone with very clear arguments and a true description of that world in order that the wicked plunderers who have defamed that very sincere, docile, moderate, and clever people by poisonous detractions and slanderous lies may be silenced.9

At this point one is led to wonder whether the Spanish Apologia described by Las Casas as the second part of his argument at Valladolid was not in fact an early version of the Apologética Historia, for the first paragraph of this latter work reads as follows:

The ultimate cause for writing this work was to gain knowledge of all the many nations of this vast new world. They had been defamed by persons who feared neither God nor the charge, so grievous before divine judgment, of defaming even a single man and causing him to lose his esteem and honor. From such slander can come great harm and terrible calamity, particularly when large numbers of men are concerned and, even more so, a whole new world. It has been written that these peoples of the Indies, lacking human governance and ordered nations, did not have the power of reason to govern themselves—which was inferred only from their having been found to be gentle, patient and humble. It has been implied that God became careless in creating so immense a number of rational souls and let human nature, which He so largely determined and provided for, go astray in the almost infinitesimal part of the human lineage which they comprise. From this it follows that they have all proven themselves unsocial and therefore monstrous, contrary to the natural bent of all peoples of the world.10

Las Casas assured his readers that the truth is the opposite:

Not only have [the Indians] shown themselves to be very wise peoples and possessed of lively and marked understanding, prudently governing and providing for their nations (as much as they can be nations, without faith in or knowledge of the true God) and making them prosper in justice; but they have equalled many diverse nations of the world, past and present, that have been praised for their governance, politics and customs, and exceed by no small measure the wisest of all these, such as the Greeks and Romans, in adherence to the rules of natural reason.11

Throughout both the Apologética Historia and the argument against Sepúlveda at Valladolid, Las Casas devoted many thousands of words to attempting to refute the idea that the Indians were such incapable people that the Spaniards could lawfully wage war against them, and that they fell into the classification of slaves by nature according to the Aristotelian doctrine. It seems reasonable to suppose, therefore, that both the Latin Defense and the Spanish Apologia can be considered essential parts of the immense armory of information about the New World and its inhabitants—together with the learned citations from the laws, ancient history, and Church fathers—that Las Casas had built up over the years in his campaign on behalf of the Indians. The following declaration, by which he explained the sixth reason for the composi-
tion of his more general work, History of the Indies, might well be taken as one of the main objectives of the last fifty years of his life:

To liberate my own Spanish nation from the error and very grave and very pernicious illusion in which it now lives and has always lived, of considering these people to lack the essential characteristics of men, judging them brute beasts incapable of virtue and religion, depreciating their good qualities and exaggerating the bad which is in them. These peoples have been hidden away and forgotten for many centuries, and [it has been my purpose] to stretch out our hands to them in some way, so that they would not remain oppressed as at present because of this very false opinion of them, and kept permanently down in the darkness.\(^{12}\)

If any doubt remains concerning the relationship of the various writings of Las Casas to each other, and specifically the connection between his arguments at Valladolid against Sepúlveda, chapters 142-151 of Book III of his Historia de las Indias provide convincing proof. At the end of this work Las Casas was describing the first important public dispute (in 1519 before King Charles and his Court in Barcelona) on the application of the Aristotelian doctrine of natural slavery to the Indians. Las Casas wrote these chapters after 1550,\(^{13}\) and they constitute a kind of summary of all his thoughts on this subject, as well as another detailed and scathing attack upon the credibility of the historian Oviedo. Las Casas there gave a blow-by-blow account of the encounter he had in Barcelona with the Bishop of Tierra Firme, Juan de Quevedo, in which he used essentially the same arguments and examples he later employed against Sepúlveda.\(^{14}\) He cited his Apologética Historia, which was written in Spanish, on the question of sacrifices and on the bravery of the Indians even in the face of death, a quality that Oviedo did not bother to mention but that Las Casas emphasized in his Apologética Historia and also in his De unico vocationis modo. One of the basic propositions Las Casas stated over and over again in his various treatises was the grave error of those who depreciated the Indians:

This charge is not true, but is on the contrary a great falsity and a very pernicious allegation that those who make who deprecate the Indians and charge them with a corrupt bestiality. We have disproved this in our Apologia and in other treatises, and all the world knows it.\(^{15}\)

Concluding his report on the battle in 1519 against Bishop

Quevedo in Barcelona, Las Casas remarked, referring particularly to Aristotle's definitions of natural slavery:

This is what the Philosopher says. But it does not apply to the Indians, because they are not stupid, nor without sufficient judgment to govern their households, as has been proved. On this subject we have already written in our Apología, written in Spanish, as well as in Latin in our work De Unico Vocationis Modo; and in another book in Spanish entitled Apologética Historia in which I describe in detail and at length the customs, life, religion, government, and good breeding which all these people have, some more than others as the bishop stated. Some few have not yet reached the perfection of an ordered government, as was the case with all peoples of the world in the beginning, but this does not mean that they lack the necessary reason to be easily brought to an orderly, domestic, and political life.\(^{16}\)

To those who have read the numerous writings of Las Casas on Indian affairs, and especially those writings composed after he left the monastery in Hispaniola in 1530 and went forth in the world to battle for his ideas, it will come as no surprise that his doctrine is all of one piece—even though some of his treatises may be couched in a largely theoretical tone, such as the De Unico Vocationis Modo or parts of the Apologética Historia, with relatively few specific references to events in America or to the battles in which they were used. To believe that the Apologética Historia was not an integral part of the corpus of Las Casas's fundamental doctrine but, instead, was drawn up as the result of his reaction to his alleged polemical failure at Valladolid, as one modern writer believes, seems to me a wrong reading of his opera. The abstraction or removal of his theories from the context of the sixteenth-century world in which he lived and fought on behalf of what he considered justice for the Indians seems to me an unhistorical approach, with little possibility of surviving the scrutiny of the years.\(^{17}\)

An Overview of the Argument

The main lines of the argument Las Casas developed at Valladolid in his presentation to the Council of the Fourteen in August 1550 have been known ever since 1552, when he published a résumé by Domingo de Soto of both his own views and those of Sepúlveda. Soto, the Dominican theologian who was a member of the Council appointed to hear the controversy, and who had been commissioned by his
colleagues to prepare a summary of both arguments, never mentioned the second part, the Spanish apologia. He remarked, however, that Las Casas had once said more than was necessary on a certain point and, at another time, had been "as copious and diffuse as the years of this business," especially in his response to Sepúlveda’s charge that the Indians were barbarians and therefore slaves by nature, "to which he did not respond in any one place, but in all his writings may be found his arguments on this topic which may be reduced to two or three main points" (an accurate and perceptive description of Las Casas’s writings). At another point Soto stated:

The bishop described at length the history of the Indians, showing that although some of their customs were not particularly civil, they were not however barbarians on this account but rather a settled people with great cities, laws, arts, and government who punished unnatural and other crimes with the death penalty. They definitely had sufficient civilization that they should not be warred against as barbarians.

As Las Casas stated to Prince Philip in the dedicatory letter of the Defense, he was responding point by point to the doctrine presented by Sepúlveda in his manuscript Apologia, which was a résumé of Democrates Alter. (It will be recalled that Las Casas complained that several copies of this manuscript were circulating in Spain in the years immediately preceding the Valladolid dispute.) He had to use a summary of this treatise because no copy of the complete text was available to him at the time he was marshaling his hundreds of citations for the Defense, which was written, he informed Philip, "at the cost of much sweat and sleepless nights." Las Casas’s purpose was a comprehensive demolition of Sepúlveda, "wrong both in law and in fact," and a demonstration of how he "has distorted the teachings of philosophers and theologians, falsified the words of Sacred Scripture, of divine and human laws, and how no less destructively he has quoted statements of Pope Alexander VI to favor the success of his wicked cause. Finally, the true title by which the Kings of Spain hold their rule over the New World will be shown."

Thus did Las Casas, at almost eighty years of age, and after half a century of experience in America, explain how he came to "unsheathe the sword [pen] for the defense of the truth" in one of his most significant writings on the history of Spain in America and on the nature of the Indians. Although the manuscript embodying Las Casas’s attack was already bulky, he requested Philip to command Sepúlveda to give him a copy of the complete Latin work so that he could refute his falsehoods even more thoroughly.

Before we enter into the story of this argument it may be useful to have a closer view of the complicated and controversial subject: Is war lawful as a means for spreading Christianity in America? This question has two aspects.

First, its legality: Is war against the Indians ever just, in itself, as a means of attracting them to the true religion? Sepúlveda had expounded his views on this theoretical issue in his Latin treatise Democrates Alter and in the summary of this treatise, which Las Casas had read. Las Casas presented his position in the Defense, whose text is the basis for this study.

Second, its factual basis: Are the Indians really in such a state of inferiority and barbarism in relation to the rest of the civilized people that this fact alone justifies such war, according to natural law, as a means of liberating them from such inferiority and barbarism? Sepúlveda invoked the testimony of the royal historian Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Váldes in his Historia general y natural de las Indias, which had rendered a very unfavorable opinion on Indian capacity and character. To prove the contrary, Las Casas devoted a large part of his Defense to expounding his very favorable view of the Indians and to attacking Oviedo tooth and nail. Moreover, he composed the second part of his Defense, in Spanish, to demonstrate the truth of his contention that the Indians are not "irrational or natural slaves or unfit for government."

Las Casas divided the Latin part of his argument, the Defense, into two well-defined sections. In the first he replied to the four reasons Sepúlveda adduced in favor of waging war against the Indians, and in the second he commented on the "authorities" Sepúlveda cited to substantiate his position.

The imposition of a scholastic organization of thought on the torrential prose of Las Casas does not give the reader a true understanding of the rare combination of passion and erudition that marks the Defense. Sarcasm, learning, indignation, and memorable phrases are to be found throughout this treatise, which probably presents a more comprehensive view of Las Casas’s thought than any