LAS CASAS, BARTOLOMÉ DE

by

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explore the Ohio region. His discovery of the Ohio River, however, is not accepted by modern historians.

La Salle found a kindred spirit in Comte de Frontenac, the "Fighting Governor" of New France (the French possessions in Canada) from 1672 to 1682. Together, they pursued a policy of extending French military power by establishing a fort on Lake Ontario (Fort-Frontenac), holding the Iroquois in check, and intercepting the fur trade between the Upper Lakes and the Dutch and English coastal settlements.

Their plans were strongly opposed by the Montreal merchants, who feared the loss of their trade, and by the missionaries (especially the Jesuits), who were afraid of losing their influence over the Indians of the interior. Nevertheless, Fort-Frontenac was built where Kingston now stands, and La Salle was installed there as seigneur in 1675 after a visit to the French court, as Frontenac's representative. The governor had recommended him as "a man of intelligence and ability, more capable than anybody else I know here to accomplish every kind of enterprise and discovery. . . ." Louis XIV was sufficiently impressed by him to grant him a title of nobility.

At Fort-Frontenac, La Salle had control of a large share of the fur trade, and his affairs prospered. But his restless ambition drove him to seek greater ends. On another visit to France in 1677 he obtained from the King authority to explore "the western parts of New France" and permission to build as many forts as he wished, as well as to hold a valuable monopoly of the trade in buffalo hides.

Since the project had to be carried out at his own expense, however, he borrowed large sums in both Paris and Montreal, and he began to be enmeshed in a tangle of debts that was to blight all of his later enterprises. La Salle's proposals also roused still further the enmity of the Jesuits, who resolutely opposed all his schemes.

Preparations for the expedition to the Mississippi

When he returned to Canada in 1678, La Salle was accompanied by an Italian soldier of fortune, Henri de Tonty, who became his most loyal friend and ally. Early in the following year, he built the "Griffon," the first commercial sailing vessel on Lake Erie, which he hoped would pay for an expedition into the interior as far as the Mississippi. From the Seneca Indians above the Niagara Falls he learned how to make long journeys overland, on foot in any season, subsisting on game and a small bag of corn. His trek from Niagara to Fort-Frontenac in the dead of winter won the admiration of a normally critical member of his expeditions, the friar Louis Hennepin.

La Salle's great scheme of carrying cargo in sailing vessels like the "Griffon" on the lakes and down the Mississippi was frustrated by the wreck of that ship and by the destruction and desertion of Fort-Crèvecoeur on the Illinois River, where a second ship was being built in 1680. Proud and unyielding by nature, La Salle tried to bend others to his will and often demanded too much of them, though he was no less hard on himself. After several disappointments, he at last reached the junction of the Illinois with the Mississippi and saw for the first time the river he had dreamed of for so long. But he had to deny himself the chance to explore it. Hearing that Tonty and his party were in danger, he turned back to aid them.

After many vicissitudes, La Salle and Tonty succeeded in canoeing down the Mississippi and reached the Gulf of Mexico. There, on April 9, 1682, the explorer proclaimed the whole Mississippi Basin for France and named it Louisiana. In name, at least, he acquired for France the most fertile half of the North American continent.

The following year La Salle built Fort-Saint-Louis at Starved Rock on the Illinois River (now a state park), and here he organized a colony of several thousand Indians. To maintain the new colony he sought help from Quebec; but Frontenac had been replaced by a governor hostile to La Salle's interests, and, instead of help, he received orders to surrender Fort-Saint-Louis. He refused to comply and left North America to appeal directly to the king. Welcomed in Paris, La Salle was given an audience with Louis XIV who favoured him by commanding the governor to make full restitution of La Salle's property.

The last phase of his extraordinary career centred on his proposal to fortify the mouth of the Mississippi and to invade and conquer part of the Spanish province of Mexico. He planned to accomplish all this with some 200 Frenchmen, aided by buccaneers and an army of 15,000 Indians—a venture that caused his detractors to question his sanity. But the king saw a chance to harass the Spaniards, with whom he was at war, and approved the project, giving La Salle men, ships, and money.

Expedition to Mexico

The expedition was doomed from the start. It had hardly left France when quarrels arose between La Salle and the naval commander. Vessels were lost by piracy and shipwreck, while sickness took a heavy toll of the colonists. Finally, a gross miscalculation brought the ships to Matagorda Bay in Texas, 500 miles west of their intended landfall. After several fruitless journeys in search of his lost Mississippi, La Salle met his death on March 19, 1687, at the hands of mutineers near the Brazos River. His vision of a French empire died with him.

La Salle provoked much controversy both in his own lifetime and later. Those who knew him best praised his ability unsparingly. He was considered "one of the greatest men of the age" by Tonty, who, like Frontenac, was among the very few who were able to understand the proud spirit of the dour Norman. Henri Joutel, who served under La Salle through the tragic days of the Texas colony until his death, wrote both of his fine qualities and of his insufferable arrogance toward his subordinates. In Joutel's view, this arrogance was the true cause of La Salle's death.

Undoubtedly, La Salle was hampered by faults of character and lacked the qualities of leadership. On the other hand, he possessed prodigious vision, tenacity, and courage. His claim of Louisiana for France, though but a vain boast at the time, pointed the way to the French colonial empire that was eventually built by other men.

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(D.C.G.S.)

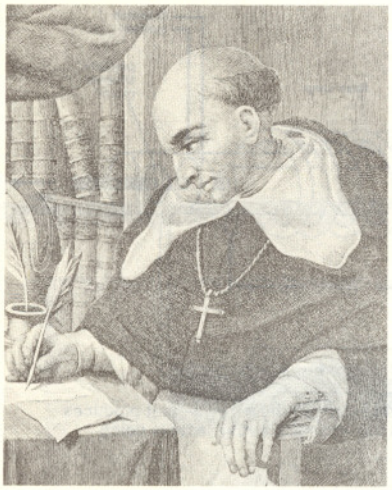
Las Casas, Bartolomé de

Bartolomé de las Casas, an early-16th-century Spanish theologian and missionary in the Americas, was the first to expose the oppression of the Indian by the European and to call for the abolition of Indian oppression. A prolific writer and in his later years an influential figure of the Spanish court, he yet failed to stay the progressive enslavement of the indigenous races of Latin America. The son of a small merchant, Las Casas was probably born in Seville in August 1474. He is believed to have gone to Granada as a soldier in 1497 and to have enrolled to study Latin in the academy at the cathedral in Seville.

In 1502 he left for Hispaniola, in the West Indies, with the governor, Nicolás de Ovando. As a reward for his participation in various expeditions, he was given an *encomienda* (a royal land grant including Indian inhabitants), and he soon began to evangelize the Indians, serving as *doctrinero*, or lay teacher of catechism. Perhaps the first person in America to receive holy orders, he was ordained priest in either 1512 or 1513. In 1513 he took part in the bloody conquest of Cuba and, as priest-*encomendero* (land grantee), received an allotment of Indian serfs.

Early years in America

Although during his first 12 years in America Las Casas was a willing participant in the conquest of the Caribbean, he did not indefinitely remain indifferent to the fate of the natives. In a famous sermon on August 15, 1514, he announced that he was returning his Indian serfs to the Governor. Realizing that it was useless to attempt to defend the Indians at long distance in America, he returned to Spain in 1515 to plead for their better treatment. The most influential person to take up his cause was Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros, the archbishop of



Las Casas, engraving by an unknown artist.
By courtesy of the Organization of American States

Toledo and future co-regent of Spain. With the help of the Archbishop, the *Plan para la Reformación de las Indias* was conceived, and Las Casas, named priest-procurator of the Indies, was appointed to a commission to investigate the status of the Indians. He sailed for America in November 1516.

Las Casas returned to Spain the next year. In addition to studying the juridical problems of the Indies, he began to work out a plan for their peaceful colonization by recruiting farmers as colonists. His stirring defense of the Indians before the Spanish Parliament in Barcelona in December 1519 persuaded King Charles V, who was in attendance, to accept Las Casas' project of founding "towns of free Indians"—*i.e.*, communities of both Spaniards and Indians who would jointly create a new civilization in America. The location selected for the new colony was on the Gulf of Paria in the northern part of present-day Venezuela. Las Casas and a group of farm labourers departed for America in December 1520. The failure to recruit a sufficient number of farmers, the opposition of the *encomenderos* of Santo Domingo, and, finally, an attack by the Indians themselves all were factors that brought disaster to the experiment in January 1522.

Upon his return to Santo Domingo, the unsuccessful priest and political reformer abandoned his reforming activities to take refuge in religious life; he joined the Dominican order in 1523. Four years later, while serving as prior of the convent of Puerto de Plata, a town in northern Santo Domingo, he began to write the *Historia Apologética*. One of his major works, the *Apologética* was to serve as the introduction to his masterpiece, the *Historia de las Indias*. The *Historia*, which by his request was not published until after his death, is an account of all that had happened in the Indies just as he had seen or heard of it. But, rather than a chronicle, it is a prophetic interpretation of events. The purpose of all the facts he sets forth is the exposure of the "sin" of domination, oppression, and injustice that the European was inflicting upon the newly discovered colonial peoples. It was Las Casas' intention to reveal to Spain the reason for the misfortune that would inevitably befall her when she became the object of God's punishment.

Historia de las Indias

He interrupted work on the book only to send to the Council of the Indies in Madrid three long letters (in 1531, 1534, and 1535), in which he accused persons and institutions of the sin of oppressing the Indian, particularly through the *encomienda* system. After various adventures in Central America, where his ideas on the treatment of the natives invariably brought him into conflict with the Spanish authorities, Las Casas wrote *De único modo* (1537; "Concerning the Only Way of Drawing All Peoples to the True Religion"), in which he set forth the doctrine of peaceful evangelization of the Indian. Together with the Dominicans, he then employed this new type of evangelization in a "land of war" (a territory of still-unconquered Indians)—Tuzutlan, near the Golfo Dulce (Sweet Gulf) in present-day Costa Rica. Encouraged by the favourable outcome of this experiment, Las Casas set out for Spain late in 1539, arriving there in 1540.

While awaiting an audience with Charles V, Las Casas conceived the idea of still another work, the *Brevísima relación de la Destrucción de las Indias* ("A Brief Report on the Destruction of the Indians"), which he wrote in 1542 and in which the historical events described are in themselves of less importance than their theological interpretation: "The reason why the Christians have killed and destroyed such an infinite number of souls is that they have been moved by their wish for gold and their desire to enrich themselves in a very short time." (*Destrucción*, Page 36).

Las Casas' work finally seemed to be crowned with success when King Charles signed the so-called New Laws (Leyes Nuevas). According to these laws, the *encomienda* was not to be considered a hereditary grant; instead, the owners had to set free their Indians after the span of a single generation. To ensure enforcement of the laws, Las Casas was named bishop of Chiapas in Guatemala, and in July 1544 he set sail for America, together with 44 Dominicans. Upon his arrival in January 1545, he immediately issued *Avisos y reglas para confesores de españoles* ("Admonitions and Regulations for the Confessors of Spaniards"), the famous *Confesionario*, in which he forbade absolution to be given to those who held Indians in *encomienda*. The rigorous enforcement of his regulations led to vehement opposition on the part of the Spanish faithful during Lent of 1545 and forced Las Casas to establish a council of bishops to assist him in his task. But soon his uncompromisingly pro-Indian position alienated his colleagues, and in 1547 he returned to Spain.

Las Casas and the New Laws

Las Casas then entered upon the most fruitful period of his life. He became an influential figure at court and at the Council of the Indies. In addition to writing numerous *memoriales* (petitions), he came into direct confrontation with the learned Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, an increasingly important figure at court by reason of his *Democrates II* ("Concerning the Just Cause of the War Against the Indians"), in which he maintained, theoretically in accordance with Aristotelian principles, that the Indians "are inferior to the Spaniards just as children are to adults, women to men, and, indeed, one might even say, as apes are to men." Las Casas finally confronted him in 1550 at the Council of Valladolid, which was presided over by famous theologians. The argument was continued in 1551, and its repercussions were enormous.

The servitude of the Indians nevertheless was already irreversibly established, and, despite the fact that Sepúlveda's teachings had not been officially approved, they were, in effect, those that were followed in the Indies. But Las Casas continued to write books, tracts, and petitions, testimony to his unwavering determination to leave in written form his principal arguments in defense of the American Indian.

During his final years Las Casas came to be the indispensable adviser to both the Council of the Indies and to the King on many of the problems relating to the Indies. In 1562 he had the final form of the *Prólogo* to the *Historia de las Indias* published, although in 1559 he had left written instructions that the work itself should be published only "after forty years have passed, so that, if God determines to destroy Spain, it may be seen that it is because of the destruction that we have wrought in the Indies and His just reason for it may be clearly evident." At the age of 90 Las Casas completed two more works on the Spanish conquest in the Americas. Two years later, on July 17, 1566, he died in the Dominican convent of Nuestra Señora de Atocha de Madrid, having continued to the end his defense of his beloved Indians, oppressed by the colonial system that Europe was organizing.

Assessment

At the suggestion of Francisco de Toledo, the viceroy of Peru, the King ordered all the works, both published and unpublished, of Las Casas to be collected. Although his influence with Spain and the Indies declined sharply, his name became well-known in other parts of Europe, thanks to the translations of the *Destrucción* that soon appeared in various countries. In the early 19th century,

the Latin American revolutionary Simón Bolívar himself was inspired by some of the letters of Las Casas in his struggle against Spain, as were some of the heroes of Mexican independence. His name has come into prominence again in the latter half of the 20th century, in connection with the so-called *Indigenistas* movements in Peru and Mexico. The modern significance of La Casas lies in the fact that he was the first European to perceive the economic, political, and cultural injustice of the colonial or neocolonial system maintained by the North Atlantic powers since the 15th century for the control of Latin America, Africa, and Asia.

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(E.Du.)

Laser and Maser

Lasers and masers are devices that produce a unique kind of radiation. Lasers produce an intense beam of light of a very pure single colour. Masers produce similar radiation, but in the microwave (radio) part of the electromagnetic spectrum. The names are acronyms derived from Microwave (or Molecular) Amplification by Stimulated Emission of Radiation (MASER) and Light Amplification by Stimulated Emission of Radiation (LASER). The difference between a maser and a laser is only that each operates in a different part of the spectrum, the maser in the radio spectrum and the laser in the light spectrum. Though the maser was invented first, the laser has proven much more useful.

Lasers represent the fulfillment of one of mankind's oldest dreams of technology, that of providing a light beam intense enough to vaporize the hardest and most heat-resistant materials. Lasers have been used to drill holes in diamonds for wire-drawing dies, to weld the retina of an eye to its supports to prevent detachment, and to perform microsurgery on parts of single cells.

Laser and maser principles. Atoms and molecules exist at low and high energy levels. Those at low levels can be excited to higher levels, usually by heat, and on reaching the higher levels they give off light when they return to a lower level. In ordinary light sources the many excited atoms or molecules emit light independently and in many different colours (wavelengths). If, however, during the brief instant that an atom is excited, light of a certain wavelength impinges on it, the atom can be stimulated to emit radiation that is in phase (that is, in step) with the wave that stimulated it. The new emission thus augments or amplifies the passing wave; if the phenomenon can be multiplied sufficiently, the resulting beam, made up of wholly coherent light (that is, light of a single frequency or colour in which all the components are in step with each other) will be tremendously powerful.

Einstein recognized the existence of stimulated emission in 1917, but not until the 1950s were ways found to use it in devices. U.S. physicist Charles H. Townes and colleagues built the first maser; shortly after, Townes and A.L. Schawlow showed that it was possible to construct a similar device using optical light; that is, a laser. Two Soviet physicists proposed related ideas independently. The first laser, constructed by the U.S. scientist T.H. Maiman in 1960, used a rod of ruby; since then many types of lasers have been built.

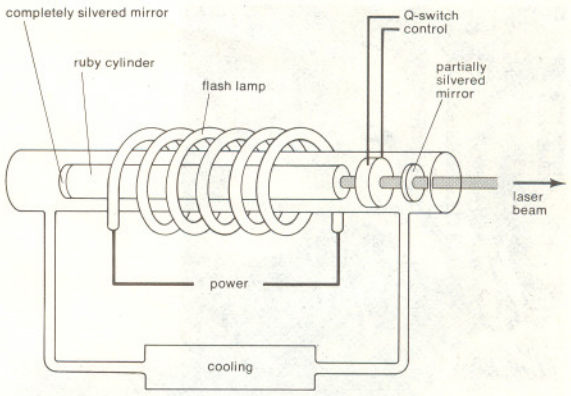

Figure 1: Q-switch, a special switching device that produces giant output pulse. In this example, a ruby laser is being used (see text).

TYPES OF LASERS

Of the several different types of lasers, produced by different means and useful for different purposes, the following are the most important.

Optically pumped solid lasers. One way to achieve the excitation of atoms to the higher energy level for laser action to take place is by illuminating the laser material with light of a frequency higher than that which the laser is to emit. This process is called optical pumping; the light pump must be of high intensity, as the process is usually rather inefficient.

An optically pumped laser consists of a rod of the material chosen, with the ends polished flat and parallel and coated with mirrors to reflect the laser light. The sides are left clear to admit the light from the pumping lamp, which may be a pulsed gas discharge, flashing on and off like a photographer's electronic flash bulb. It may be wound around the laser rod, positioned alongside, or focussed on it by a mirror (see Figure 1). The first operating laser utilized a rod of pink ruby, an artificial crystal of sapphire (aluminum oxide). Many other rare-earth elements have since been used, the most widely used being neodymium. Power outputs in the form of brilliant flashes of light of thousands of watts can be obtained.

Liquid lasers. Solid lasers have the disadvantage of occasional breakdown and damage at higher power levels because of the intense heat generated within the material and by the pumping lamp. The liquid laser is not susceptible to such damage; the crystalline or glassy rod is replaced by a transparent cell containing a suitable liquid, such as a solution of neodymium oxide or chloride in selenium oxychloride. Such cells can be made as large as desired to increase power output. Only a small number of inorganic liquids, however, will function as lasers.

Advantage of liquid lasers

Dye lasers. Certain organic dyes are capable of fluorescing; that is, re-radiating light of a different colour. Though the excited state of their atoms lasts only a small fraction of a second and the light emitted is not concentrated in a narrow band, many such dyes have been made to exhibit laser action, with the advantage that they can be tuned to a wide range of frequencies.

Dyes such as rhodamine 6G, which emits orange-yellow light, can be made to lase (provide laser action) by excitation by another laser. Rhodamine 6G was the first dye for which continuous, rather than pulsed, operation was achieved, making possible the production of a continuous beam of tunable laser light. Another dye, methylumbelliferone, with the addition of hydrochloric acid, can be made to lase at wavelengths varying across the light spectrum from ultraviolet to yellow, producing laser light of almost any desired frequency within this range.

Gas lasers. Atoms in a gas discharge can be excited to radiate and produce light, as in a neon sign. Occasionally, a particular energy level will cause an exceptionally high number of atoms to accumulate within it; if mirrors are positioned at the ends of the discharge tube, laser action results. Though the conditions are unusual and occur for only a few of the many wavelengths at which the discharge emits, most gases can be made to exhibit laser