

Spain and Portugal: Roman Catholic Empires in the Old and New Worlds

~ PART II ~





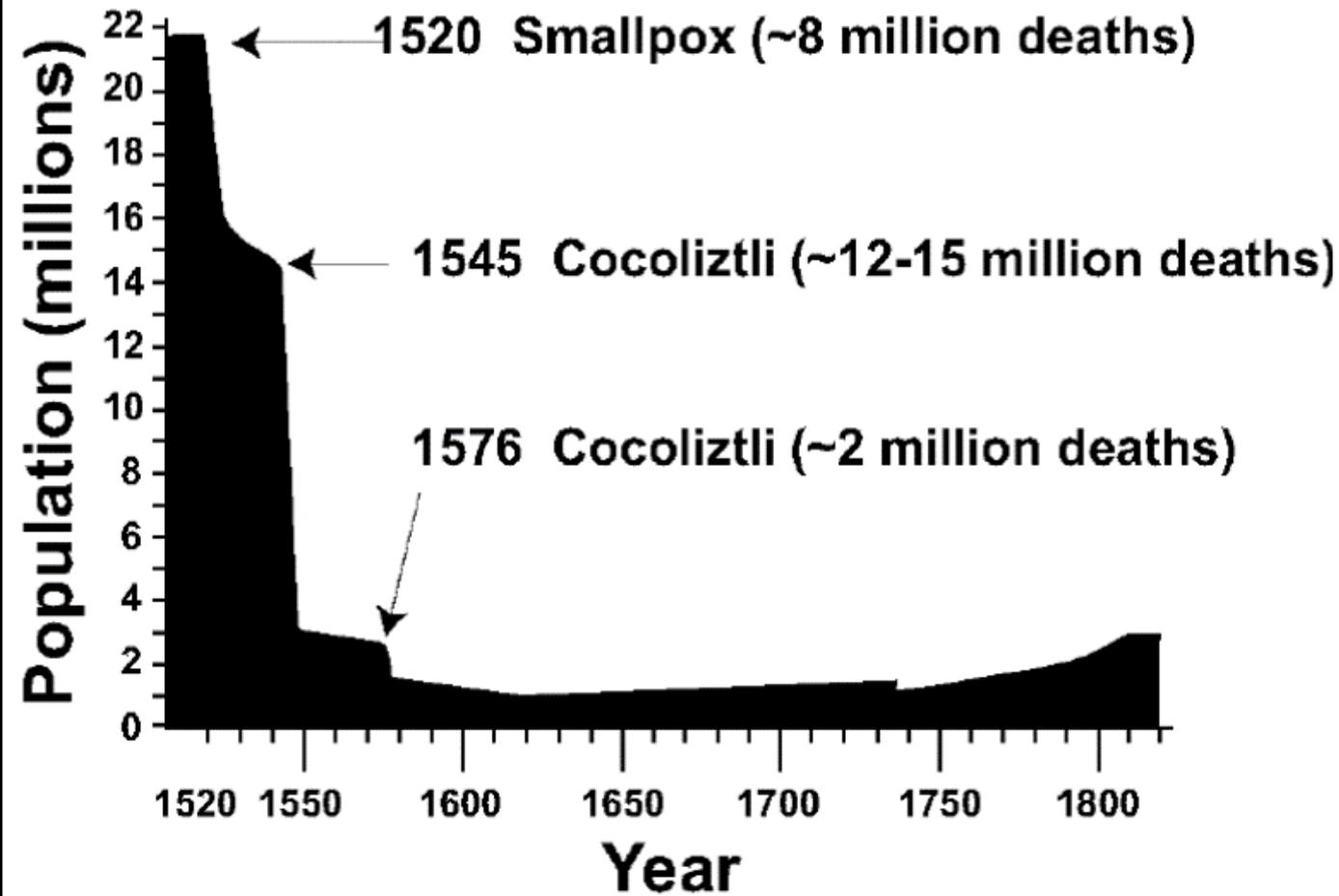
King Ferdinand II of Aragon married Queen Isabella I of Castile in 1469, uniting Spain and finishing the *Reconquista*.

- Christopher Columbus was commissioned by Ferdinand and Isabella to find a westward trade route to the East Indies in Asia in 1492.
- Columbus's first voyage crossed the Atlantic and reached the Caribbean Islands, also known as the West Indies.

- Thus began the European exploration and conquest of the Americas, although Columbus remained convinced that he had reached the Far East.
- Financed initially by the Crown of Castile and spearheaded by the Spanish conquistadors, the Americas were invaded and incorporated into the Spanish Empire.
- With the exception of Brazil, British America, and some small regions in South America and the Caribbean, the Crown created civil and religious structures to administer this vast territory.
- The main motivations for colonial expansion were profit through resource extraction and the spread of Catholicism through indigenous conversions.

- By contrast, the indigenous population plummeted by an estimated 80% in the first century and a half following Columbus's voyages.
- The decline in native populations was caused primarily by the spread of disease, forced labor and slavery for resource extraction, acculturation and *Missionization*.
- The goal of the Spanish in the New World could be summarized as the search for "gold, glory, and God."
- The *conquistadors*, or soldiers, were looking for gold and glory in battle. The Roman Catholic missionaries, mainly Jesuits, were seeking to convert the pagan natives.

Population Collapse in Mexico



The Native American population in Mexico declined by an estimated 90% (reduced to 1–2.5 million people) from the beginnings of Spanish colonization to the early 17th century. Main cause: disease. Mexico was also plagued by droughts.

“Megadrought and Megadeath in 16th Century Mexico,” Emerging Infectious Diseases, CDC – authors Acuna-Soto, et. al.

- The relationship between the Spanish colonization and the Catholicization of the Americas is inextricable.
- The missions created by members of Catholic orders were located anywhere the missionaries found local population.
- Missions facilitated the expansion of the Spanish empire through the religious conversions of the indigenous peoples occupying those areas.
- The Spanish missions permitted assimilation between Spaniards and the native population producing a new blended culture in Latin America.

- The letters and reports sent to the Spanish Crown by the priests that accompanied the first Spanish expeditions spoke of the "good and innocent Indians."
- This deeply touched the heart of Queen Isabel of Castile, who instructed the missionary priests to convert and baptize the indigenous population.
- Isabel was against slavery and proclaimed that all peoples that were under the subject of the Castilian Crown could not be enslaved in most situations.
- Many clergy ventured to the Americas to preach what they felt was a purer form of Christianity, and to redeem the souls of the indigenous peoples.

- Although the Spanish did not want (generally) to enslave the indigenous populations, they needed workers for agriculture and mining.
- Spain had a precedent for slavery as an institution since it had existed in Spain itself since the times of the Roman Empire.
- Slavery also existed among Native Americans of both Meso-America and South America.
- With the rise of sugar cultivation as an export product in the Caribbean, Spaniards increasingly utilized enslaved African people for labor on commercial plantations.

THE TREATY OF TORDESILLAS

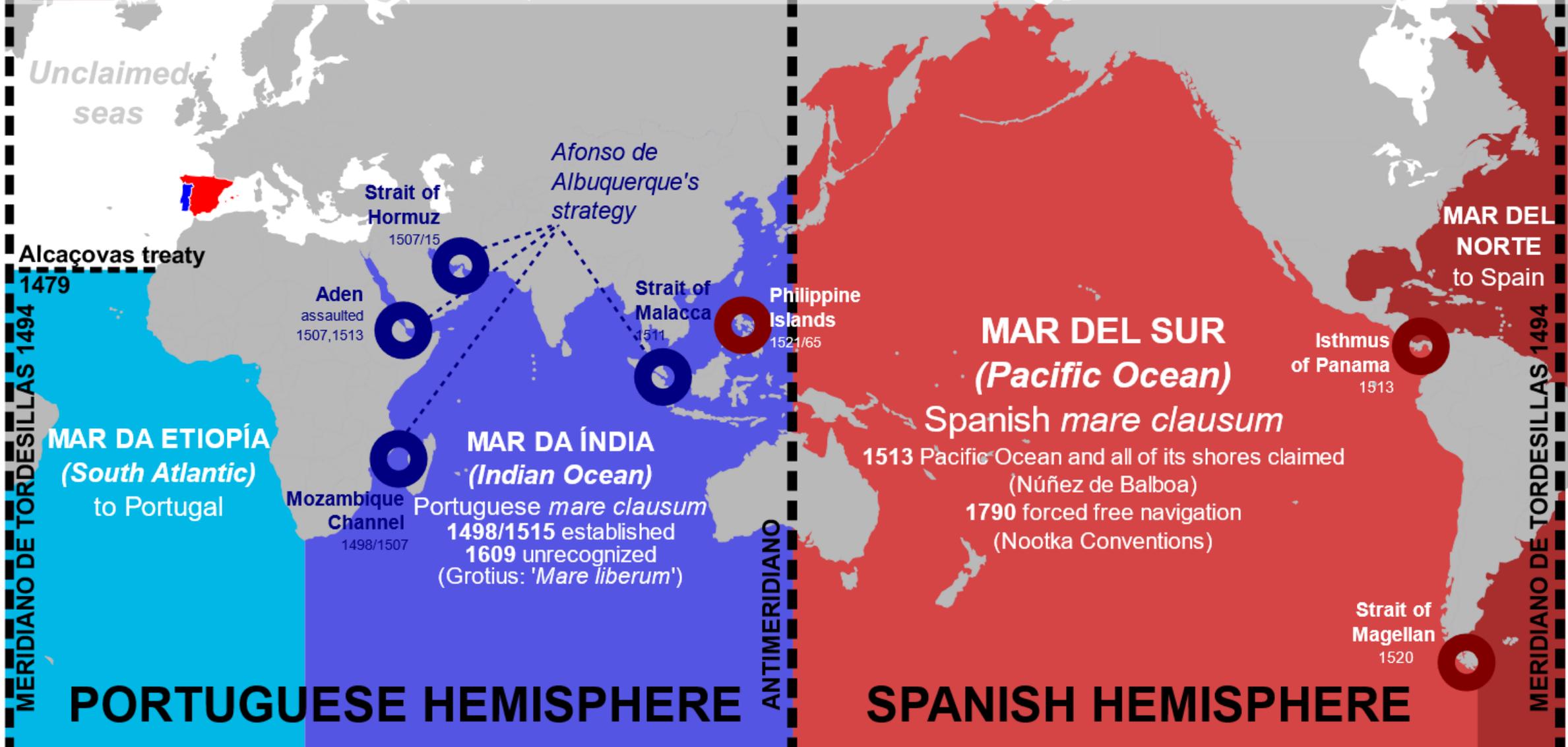
- The Treaty of Tordesillas was signed at Tordesillas in Spain on June 7, 1494, and authenticated at Setúbal, Portugal.
- It divided the newly-discovered lands outside Europe between the Portuguese Empire and the Spanish Empire (Crown of Castile), along a meridian 370 leagues (approx. 1,110 miles) west of the Cape Verde Islands, off the west coast of Africa.
- That line of demarcation was about halfway between the Cape Verde Islands and the islands entered by Christopher Columbus on his first voyage named in the treaty as Cipangu (Cuba) and Antilia (Hispaniola).

Iberian *mare clausum* claims

**mare clausum:*

a sea under the jurisdiction of a single nation and not open to all others
(Collins Dictionary)

- Portugal
- Castile/Spain



- Portugal and Spain largely respected the treaty.
- The other European powers did not sign the treaty and generally ignored it, particularly those that became Protestant after the Reformation.
- Indigenous (non-European, largely non-Christian) nations did not acknowledge the treaty.
- It became the source of the *Discovery Doctrine*, and has been a source of ongoing tension regarding land ownership into modern times, cited as recently as the 2005 United States Supreme Court case *Sherrill v. Oneida Nation*.

- On June 2, 1537, Pope Paul III issued the bull *Sublimis Deus* condemning and forbidding the slavery of the indigenous peoples of the Americas.
- The bull also proclaimed that the Native Americans were fully rational human beings who have rights to freedom and private property.
- The papal ecclesiastical letter *Pastorale officium* provided that anyone who enslaved or stole from Native Americans would be excommunicated.
- Jesuit leaders condemned the right of conquerors to despoil the conquered of their property and freedom.

- Despite the seeming good intentions of the Spanish toward the indigenous peoples, the fact remained that the Spain was there to function as the Roman Empire had in the Old World.
- Just as the Roman Catholic Church had grown atop the pagan empire it replaced, the Roman Catholic Church in the Americas became one of the most dominant features of colonialization.
- The Patronato Real, or Royal Patronage, was a series of papal bills constructed in the 15th and early 16th Century that set the secular relationship between the Spanish Crown and the Catholic Church.

The *Patronato Real* clarified the Crown's responsibilities:

- to promote the conversion of the indigenous Americans to Catholicism
- the sending and selection of missionaries to America (Bull *Inter caetera*, 1493)
- the collection of the tithe (Bull *Eximiae devotionis*, 1501)
- the power to fix and modify the boundaries of the dioceses in America (Bull *Ullius fulcite praesidio*, 1504)
- the power to veto the election of archbishoprics or bishoprics, and the right of presentation (Bull *Universalis ecclesiae*, 1508)

- The *Patronato Real* determined the founding of churches, convents, hospitals, and schools, as well as the appointment and payment of secular clergy.
- Just as the religious and political establishments of medieval and early modern Europe were inextricably intertwined, so too the Roman Catholic Church and the Spanish political structures were fused together in the Americas.
- Spanish political systems also incorporated indigenous political structures, much as the Romans had allowed puppet kings to rule in their conquered lands.

THE FRANCISCANS

Franciscan missionaries were the first to arrive in New Spain in 1523, following the Cortes expeditions in Mexico, and soon after began establishing missions across the continents. Founded in the early 13th century by St. Francis of Assisi, the Franciscan order has been active in evangelization throughout its history.

Fray Pedro de Gante, Franciscan missionary
“First Teacher of the New World” →



- The Franciscan missionary groups were split up and sent throughout present-day Mexico.
- In addition to their primary goal of spreading Christianity, the missionaries studied the native languages, taught children to read and write, and taught adults trades such as carpentry and ceramics.
- There was a clear goal of changing and shaping the indigenous communities to conform to European standards of life and work.
- Some Franciscan groups were not successful due to the emphasis on monastic practices like contemplation.

THE JESUITS

- The Jesuits had a wide-spread impact between their arrival in the New World about 1570 until their expulsion in 1767.
- In the southeastern part of South America the Jesuits followed a widespread Spanish practice of creating settlements called "*reductions*" to concentrate the widespread native populations.
- The Jesuit *Reductions* were protected societies in which each family had a house and field, and individuals were clothed and fed in return for work. There were also schools, churches, and hospitals. No Spanish settlers were allowed to live in them, only natives.



Father Eusebio Francisco Kino, S.J., born Aug. 10, 1645 in Austria, came to what is today Arizona, U.S. and Sonora State, MX in 1687. He was a missionary, geographer, map-maker and astronomer. By the time of his death in 1711, he had established twenty-four missions and *visitas* (country chapels or visiting stations) throughout the southwestern territory. He also established cattle ranches and farms for the indigenous people of this area.

- Over time, the Jesuits resisted crown control, refusing to pay the tithe on their estates that supported the ecclesiastical hierarchy and came into conflict with bishops.
- The most prominent example is in Puebla, Mexico, where the bishop was driven out by the Jesuits in 1647.
- The bishop challenged the Jesuits' continuing to hold Indian parishes and function as priests without the required royal licenses.
- The crown expelled the Jesuits from Spain and the New World in 1767 during the Bourbon Reforms.

THE DOMINICANS

- The Dominicans were centralized in the Caribbean and Mexico and, despite a much smaller representation in the Americas, had one of the most notable histories of native rights activism.
- The Order of Preachers, whose members are known as Dominicans, (Latin: *Ordo Praedicatorum*, or OP) is a *mendicant* order (professing and practicing a vow of poverty) of the Catholic Church founded in Toulouse, FR by the Spanish priest Saint Dominic in 1216.
- Nickname: *Domini canes* – “hounds of the Lord.”

- Bartolomé de Las Casas was a Spanish nobleman who arrived in the West Indies in 1502.
- He became a land- and slave owner.
- He participated in slave raids and military expeditions against the native Taíno of Hispaniola.
- He gradually came to see the wrongs of European colonization.

Bartolomé de Las Casas (c. 1484 - 1566) →



- In September 1510, a group of Dominican friars arrived in Santo Domingo led by Pedro de Córdoba.
- Appalled by the injustices they saw committed by the slaveowners against the Indians, they decided to deny slave owners the right to confession.
- Las Casas was among those denied confession for this reason.
- Despite his conduct as a land- and slave-owner, Las Casas was ordained as a Roman Catholic priest in 1510, the first in the New World.
- The Dominicans continued their protest against injustice.

In December 1511, a Dominican preacher, Fray Antonio de Montesinos preached this fiery sermon in Santo Domingo:

"Tell me by what right of justice do you hold these Indians in such a cruel and horrible servitude? On what authority have you waged such detestable wars against these people who dealt quietly and peacefully on their own lands? Wars in which you have destroyed such an infinite number of them by homicides and slaughters never heard of before. Why do you keep them so oppressed and exhausted, without giving them enough to eat or curing them of the sicknesses they incur from the excessive labor you give them, and they die, or rather you kill them, in order to extract and acquire gold every day."

- Las Casas continued to work as a priest and chaplain for the Spanish armies, and witnessed the conquest of Cuba.
- He witnessed many atrocities committed by Spaniards against the native Ciboney and Guanahatabey peoples.
- He later wrote: "I saw here cruelty on a scale no living being has ever seen or expects to see."
- In 1514, Las Casas was studying a passage in the book *Ecclesiasticus (Sirach)* 34:18–22 for a Pentecost sermon and pondering its meaning.
- It was at this point that he came to see that everything that the Spanish had done in the New World was illegal and a great injustice.

“¹⁸ To whom doth he look, and who in his strength?

¹⁹ The eyes of the Lord are upon them that fear him, he is their powerful protector, and strong stay, a defence from the heat, and a cover from the sun at noon,

²⁰ A preservation from stumbling, and a help from falling; he raiseth up the soul, and enlighteneth the eyes, and giveth health, and life, and blessing.

²¹ The offering of him that sacrificeth of a thing wrongfully gotten, is stained, and the mockeries of the unjust are not acceptable.

²² The Lord is only for them that wait upon him in the way of truth and justice.”

Sirach 34:18-22

- Las Casas made up his mind to give up his slaves and *encomienda* (plantation), and started to preach that other colonists should do the same.
- When his preaching met with resistance, he realized that he would have to go to Spain to fight there against the enslavement and abuse of the native people.
- In the winter of 1515 he arrived in Spain, hoping to meet with King Ferdinand.
- Ferdinand died in Jan. 1516 and Las Casas was not successful in persuading the Castilian crown hierarchy of the need for reforms in the New World.

- In 1516 Las Casas wrote an account of the situation in the Indies and his proposed remedies titled "*Memorial de Remedios para Las Indias.*"
- In this early work, Las Casas advocated importing black slaves from Africa to relieve the suffering Indians.
- He later retracted this idea, becoming an advocate for the *manumission* and *emancipation* of African slaves in the colonies as well.
- Initially, Las Casas's first concern was not to end slavery as an institution, but to end the physical abuse and suffering of the Indians.

- In keeping with the legal and moral doctrine of the time Las Casas believed that slavery could be justified if it was the result of Just War.
- Internationally, this was at a time when many nations believed that enemy combatants captured in war could justifiably be kept as slaves.
- At this time Las Casas assumed that the enslavement of Africans was justified.
- Las Casas had limited success in convincing the Spanish crown and the Hapsburg emperor Charles V of the need for thorough reform of Spanish New World government.

- In 1522, he tried to launch a new kind of peaceful colonialism on the coast of Venezuela, but this venture failed.
- He sought to bring Spanish peasants to the New World where they would introduce small-scale farming and agriculture, a kind of colonization that didn't rely on resource depletion and Indian labor.
- These ventures were similar to the British system of creating private companies supported by private investors, that would establish settlements in the Spanish territories not dependent on slaves.

- Las Casas's ventures were not successful, and were repeatedly undermined by both the Spanish aristocracy and by powerful Roman Catholic churchmen.
- By 1522, Las Casas gave up attempting reforms.
- He entered the Dominican monastery of Santa Cruz in Santo Domingo as a novice, and then took holy vows as a Dominican friar in 1523.
- Although he was cloistered for much of the time, he oversaw the construction of a monastery in Puerto Plata on the north coast of Hispaniola, subsequently serving as prior of the convent.

- In 1536 Las Casas went to Guatemala in hopes of continuing to evangelize the Aztecs.
- Also in that year, Las Casas went to Mexico, to participate in a series of discussions and debates among the hierarchy of the Dominican and Franciscan orders.
- The two orders had very different approaches to the conversion of the Indians.
- The Franciscans used a method of mass conversion, sometimes baptizing many thousands of Indians in a day.
- This method was championed by prominent Franciscans such as Toribio de Benavente, known as "Motolinia."

- Las Casas wrote a treatise called "*De unico vocationis modo*" ("On the Only Way of Conversion") based on the missionary principles he had used in Guatemala in 1536.
- Las Casas made many enemies among the Franciscans for arguing that conversions made without adequate understanding were invalid.
- As a direct result of the debates between the Dominicans and Franciscans and spurred on by Las Casas's treatise, Pope Paul III issued the Bull "*Sublimis Deus*," which stated that the Indians were rational beings and should be brought peacefully to the faith as such.

Las Casas returned to Guatemala in 1537 wanting to employ his new method of conversion based on two principles:

- 1) to preach the Gospel to all men and treat them as equals, and
 - 2) to assert that conversion must be voluntary and based on knowledge and understanding of the faith.
- It was important for Las Casas that this method be tested without meddling from secular colonists.
 - He chose a territory in the heart of Guatemala away from any previous colonies.

- Las Casas also wanted to evangelize an indigenous people who had little to no contact with the Spanish, and who were considered fierce and bellicose.
- Las Casas's group of friars established a Dominican presence in Rabinal, Sacapulas, and Cobán, Guatemala.
- Through the efforts of Las Casas's missionaries the so-called "Land of War" came to be called "*Verapaz*", "True Peace".
- Las Casas's strategy was to teach Christian songs to merchant Indian Christians who then ventured into the area.
- In this way he was successful in converting several native chiefs and in building several churches in the territory named *Alta Verapaz*, now a state in present-day Guatemala.

- Las Casas later became a bishop in Mexico, but he never stopped working for humane treatment of the native Americans and reforms of Spanish rule in the New World.
- His work earned him many enemies, both in Europe and in Central and South America.
- His last act as Bishop of Chiapas, Mexico was writing a *confesionario*, a manual for the administration of the sacrament of confession in his diocese.
- Las Casas still refused absolution to unrepentant and exploitative plantation owners.

- His enemies saw his writings as in essence a denial of the legitimacy of Spanish rule of its colonies, and hence a form of treason.
- The legacy of Las Casas, and that of the Roman Catholic priests, Franciscans, Dominicans and other members of other Catholic religious orders in the New World show the tension and difficulties inherent within evangelism into non-Christian, non-European territories, and among people who have very different cultures and religions.
- Can the Christian gospel be proclaimed without cultural and political imperialism and colonization behind it?