

Introduction

The Methodist Church has a complicated history of engagement with the indigenous peoples of the world. As recently as the 2012 General Conference, the United Methodist Church conducted an Act of Repentance for sins committed by United Methodists institutions, members or their predecessors against indigenous peoples of the world. The liturgical celebration which solemnized the Act of Repentance elicited a mix of responses from its participants. Charges of superficiality and banality were common along with accusations of relativism and syncretism. Ultimately, the responses raised questions regarding the relationship between God, ethnicity and history. In his conclusion to a study guide for teaching Native American history in the church, Thom White Wolf Fassett, former General Secretary of the United Methodist General Board of Church and Society, posed the questions thus: “Does not the history of our people teach us of the power of the Holy Spirit?”¹

The question that I want to consider is the following: how is God at work in the particular ethnic histories of humanity? Of course, without an outpouring of the gift of prophecy, answering this question lies beyond the competence of the theologian.² Instead, I propose to examine the various theological lenses used by Wesley in considering the history of the natives of the Americas. In order to accomplish this task, I enlist the assistance of the Dominican bishop, Fray Bartolomé de las Casas (1486-1566). A disclaimer is order. I am not aware of any explicit references to Las Casas among Wesley's published writings. Wesley does state that he read Abbé Raynal's *History of the Settlements and Trade of the Europeans in the Indies* and Jean François Marmontel's *Les Incas, ou la Description de L'empire de Peru*.³ This last one has extensive discussions of Las Casas's doings in the Americas,⁴ but Wesley thought little of either of these works, in part because of the positive description that these authors offered of the natives. I believe that the challenges confronting contemporary Methodist reflection on history would benefit from building bridges connecting Aldersgate to Salamanca, where the classic theology of Thomas Aquinas was creatively deployed in the sixteenth century by people like Las Casas on behalf of the defense of the indigenous.

Wesley's view of the Indigenous

Wesley encountered indigenous peoples in the flesh during his brief missionary journey in Georgia and on paper through his reading of the accounts of historians and explorers. This encounter was mediated through a set of theological lenses which brought into focus (and at times distorted) the reality which Wesley surveyed. I draw attention to four theological lenses: providence, primitive Christianity, original sin, and preventient grace.

John Wesley was a strong believer in God's providential care for all creatures. “A “threefold circle of divine providence” enfolds humanity, the visible church, and the invisible church.⁵ On the “outermost circle” which includes “heathens, Mahometans, Jews, and Christians,”⁶ God lavishes the blessings of creation: rain, bountiful harvests, and the like. Over the nominal Christians of the inner circle, God shows greater care and extends his protection more consistently so “that the spirits of darkness do not reign over them as they do over the heathen world.”⁷ Whereas the real Christians of the innermost circle are the apple of God's eye.⁸ The lens of providence helped Wesley to see that the God of the Christian is also the God of the Cherokee and the Creek while marking the different ways in which God relates to each of these.

The restoration of “primitive Christianity” was the North Star guiding Wesley's missionary journeys in the Americas.⁹ Wesley, like many other missionaries to the Americas

before him, saw a contextual parallel between the way of life of the indigenous people and that of the earliest Christians. Freed from fissiparous denominationalism, philosophical theology, accommodating commentaries, and sensuous lifestyles, the indigenous are “fit to receive the Gospel in its simplicity. They are as little children, humble, willing to learn, and eager to do the will of God; and, consequently, they shall know of every doctrine I preach, whether it be of God.”¹⁰ The mission was short lived, but the dream of establishing primitive Christianity did not perish in Georgia, it returned to England to blossom in the scriptural Christianity of the early Methodists.¹¹ The lens of “primitive Christianity” helped Wesley to see a people who were living “out of time” in a state of innocence that made them ready for the gospel.

Original sin is one of the doctrinal pillars of Methodist theology. This doctrine is the “first, grand, distinguishing, point between heathenism and Christianity.”¹² As a lens through which to survey the human predicament, the doctrine of original sin highlights the necessity and gratuity of grace. As a lens through which to consider the indigenous it offers a very negative view of their culture and history. Among the natives of the southern colonies, “everyone does what he sees good. And if it appears wrong to his neighbor, he usually comes upon him unawares and shoots or scalps him alive.”¹³ Turning this lens to the African population, Wesley sees people who though human are not fully rational.¹⁴ To be fair, in no way does Wesley exempt England from the withering, leveling critique of this doctrine.¹⁵ Nevertheless, a monocular view of human history through this lens offers a flattened view of humanity that filters out the grace of God which is at work in all.¹⁶

The final doctrinal lens which I wish to examine is that of prevenient grace. Prevenient grace prepares humanity for the reception of the gospel by restoring a measure of the free will and conscience that was lost as a consequence of original sin.¹⁷ Its soteriological orientation distinguishes the operation of prevenient grace from that of providence¹⁸ and also from “common grace.”¹⁹ The application of this lens made possible Wesley’s commendation of the faith of Chicali who longed for the revelation of the Word among his people.²⁰ The doctrine of prevenient grace empowers a positive judgment of non-Christian cultures and opens the possibility for its critical inculturation.²¹

The use of this cluster of doctrinal lenses allowed Wesley deeper insight into the dynamics of the history of salvation than any single lens alone. The lens of providence helped him to see the rule of God over all ethnic histories. The lens of “primitive Christianity” empowered his discernment (and projection) of virtue to whatever objects fell within its admittedly historicist gaze, and the binocular vision of the lenses of doctrines of original sin and prevenient grace corrected each other while allowing for a field of view of God’s works in history that escaped the focal range of the previous two lenses. What needs further clarification is the object of these lenses, the nature whose shadowy history is illumined by the light of Christ in preparation for the gospel of Christ. For this task, I turn our attention to Las Casas.

Las Casas’s view of the Indigenous

Bartolomé de las Casas was one of the conquistadors that sailed from Spain to the “new world” in search of fortune. In brief, he owned Indian slaves, but after hearing a now famous sermon by the Dominican friar Antonio de Montesinos in 1511²² and being confronted by the word of God as Las Casas himself prepared to preach on Pentecost Sunday in 1514,²³ Don Bartolomé freed his slaves, joined the Order of Preachers and became the indefatigable defender of the Indian until his death in 1566.²⁴ Since many of the justifications for the exploitation of the

indigenous were argued on historical grounds, Las Casas marched onto that battlefield with his own narration of indigenous history in the *Apologética Historia Sumaria*. The key to Las Casas’s understanding of history in this work is expressed in the conviction that “*todas las naciones del mundo son hombres*” (all the nations of the world are human),²⁵ or in a different formulation: “*todo linaje de los hombres es uno*” (all human races are one)²⁶. A few features of Las Casas’ theological ethnography bear singling out.

First, humanity is ontologically one. “All nations of the world have understanding, will, and the freedom that proceeds from these two capacities. And thus, all nations possess virtue and the capacity or ability, along with the natural inclination, to be taught, persuaded, and drawn to order, reason, laws, virtues, and all goodness.”²⁷ Not even the extreme and exceptional cases of “feeble minded humans” or “wild men” can shake Fray Bartolomé’s belief in the unity and parity of humanity.²⁸

Second, humanity is historically one. “All human beings are alike with respect to their creation and nature, and none is born educated. Hence, all have need at the beginning of being guided and helped by those who were born before.”²⁹ The history of the Indies is but one particular instantiation of the universal history of humanity, an instantiation that differs in modality from other particular histories, but not in degree. Created by the same God for the same final goal of eternal communion with him, all the histories of the world share a common origin and goal. Even those people who have for long been strangers to each other (as the Indians and the Spaniards) are brothers and sisters both synchronically and diachronically.³⁰

The ontological and historical parity of humanity must not be misunderstood. Las Casas is not saying that all histories are really the same such that the details of a people’s social and cultural location are irrelevant. After establishing the rationality of the Indian upon Thomistic grounds, Las Casas continues to write hundreds of pages describing the particular, historical manifestations of the Indian’s rationality without glossing over the darker sides of the story.³¹ In spite of all the particularities of the history of the Indians (admirable and disturbing) their history is fundamentally human history.³²

Third, God guides human history in accordance with his wisdom. For Las Casas, the universe is a dynamic movement, where all things come from God and return to God, and this circular movement is guided by God’s wisdom incarnate in Jesus Christ.³³ God’s wisdom spans all creaturely needs and provides for their sustenance and fulfillment. Not only does God’s wisdom direct what God gives to his creatures, but also how. God’s might is seen precisely in this that he disposes all things delicately, gently, sweetly, *suaviter*.³⁴ God has provided all creatures with the abilities that they need in order to attain their natural end. How much more will God grant all humans the graces that they need in order to attain their supernatural end? Created by the same God, all the histories of the world share a common origin and *telos*—eternal communion with God by knowledge and love.

The theological ethnography of the *Apologética Historia* is unabashedly teleological. Admittedly, teleology can be a dangerous historical category, but this danger is most imminent when the teleology is immanent.³⁵ If the *telos* of history can be achieved in history, or worse, if this *telos* can be known by the historian and manipulated by the politician, then the study of history becomes the handmaid of empire. But if the teleology is transcendent, if it finds its ground not in any idea or concrete historical form but in an eschatological goal of which we only have a mysterious revelation (cf. 1 John 3:2), then far from being a homogenizing concept, teleology can become the source of hope and apologetic against all earthly empires.

Nature, sin and grace in Indigenous history

By this point, those following the argument may be wondering, what has Aldersgate to do with Salamanca? And it is to a comparison of their representatives that I turn. The claim that I make is that the way in which Las Casas deployed the Thomistic concept of nature to the situation in the Indies can sharpen the focus of the lenses through which Wesley regarded the humanity and history of the indigenous. Admittedly, my appropriation of Las Casas is more corrective of Wesley than critical of the Dominican friar. The reasons for this unilateral critique are prudential. Given the brevity of this piece, its Wesleyan audience, and its ecumenical intent, I focus on what Wesleyans could learn from Lascasians rather than the reverse.

With regard to the lens of providence, Las Casas helps us see that God looks after a human nature that unfolds in many Indian histories. Las Casas shares Wesley's understanding of “circles of providence.” God cares for all human beings albeit in a differentiated way.³⁶ For Las Casas, one of the clearest signs of God's providential care for the human being is the stability of human nature throughout history. Although individuals are born with cognitive impairments, physical disabilities, and social dysfunctions, these impediments do not vitiate the fundamental dignity of the human being, and moreover, it is impossible to imagine that God's providence would permit that “there could be a whole nation of such incapacity, such barbarous judgment, and dim and low reason that it is not able to govern itself.”³⁷ All ethnic histories are human.

With regard to the lens of “primitive Christianity,” Las Casas draws our attention to Christ's wisdom as the center of history. The times *post Christum* are not an inherently negative process of alienation that needs to be resisted by a return to a “golden age.” A desire for the restoration of “real Christianity” stirred the heart of many missionaries particularly the Franciscans among whom the legacy of Joachim of Fiore's teachings lent a millenarian impulse to their evangelistic endeavors. Las Casas' relation to Joachim of Fiore is admittedly complex and contested.³⁸ Las Casas can speak as idealistically as the early Wesley regarding the virtues of the indigenous, but the basis for this interpretation lies not in the innocence of these peoples but in Christ's identification with them. As Las Casas states against his detractors: “*Indi fratres nostri sunt, pro quibus Christus impendit animam suam.*”³⁹ When Las Casas looks at the indigenous he does not see a noble savage but the suffering servant who declares that as you have done it unto the least of these, you have done it unto me.

With regard to the lens of original sin, Las Casas focuses our gaze on the nature that has survived the fall. Sin mars human nature and makes it impossible to know and love God without grace. Indeed, for Las Casas, at the heart of the tragedy of the Indies lies the fact that not only are the Spanish condemning the Indians to misery by depriving them of their lands, livelihood and lives, but they are condemning them to hell by depriving them of the opportunity of responding to the gospel. Both Wesley and Las Casas look at the situation in the Indies through the lens of original sin. However, where Wesley sees *corrupt* nature, Las Casas sees corrupt *nature*. In the fallen state, human beings can still do a great deal of good things; they can organize themselves; they can build houses; they can compose poems. “Heathen virtue,” the virtues of the Cherokee, the Taíno, and the Incas, are real virtues and not splendid vices.

With regard to the lens of preventient grace, Las Casas challenges us to understand that grace presupposes nature. Las Casas shares Wesley's conviction that in any chain of events, God is the first one to act. In order to preserve the excellence of the order which his wisdom has disposed and in order to defend the dignity of human nature, God moves humans to their

“All the peoples of the world are human.” The Indigenous Question, Wesley, and Las Casas
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supernatural end in a way that is similar to the way in which he moves other creatures to their natural end. And although the human’s true end is supernatural, the way in which God moves humans to this end is not unnatural. Grace does not destroy nature but perfects it, and it perfects it in a way that is appropriate to human nature.

Conclusion

I invited us to travel to Salamanca for help in understanding how the concept of nature was deployed in the context of the sixteenth century defense of the humanity of the indigenous for the purpose of deepening Wesleyan reflection on the relation between God, ethnicity, and history. In other words, I turned to Fray Bartolomé in order to help answer Thom White Wolf Fassett’s question “Does not the history of our people teach us of the power of the Holy Spirit?” Fassett’s own answer is an emphatic, yes! He states that “The sacred instructions given to our people by God to revere and preserve in ancient times have been renewed and revitalized in Jesus and the New Covenant.”⁴⁰ The answer that an engagement with Las Casas and Wesley offer is more complicated. The particular history of a people, even before the reception of the gospel of Christ, is not void of theological significance. This history has its own proper dignity and integrity and cannot be regarded as so much raw material to be exploited by the Christian (*spoliatio Egyptorum*) nor as only a prologue to Church history (*preparatio evangelica*). The incarnation of the Word and the sending of the Spirit heal history within history. In the words of John Paul II, “The Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ speaks all languages. It esteems and embraces all cultures. It supports them in everything human and, when necessary, it purifies them. Always and everywhere the Gospel uplifts and enriches cultures with the revealed message of a loving and merciful God.”⁴¹ Christianity is not a foreign, Western religion. It satisfies the deepest desires of all peoples so that the more a particular people convert to Christ the more authentically ethnic, they become.⁴² The Thomistic axiom “grace does not destroy nature, but perfects it”⁴³ applies equally well to the transmission of the gospel; the coming of the gospel to the natives of the Americas does not erase their history but heals it from its defects and sets it free for its unique fulfillment—in Christ.⁴⁴

Bartolomé de las Casas has much to teach the heirs of John Wesley about the power of the Holy Spirit to transform history. The vine of Christ is not an invasive species that spreads by choking the life of the native plants, but a seed that can only bear fruit that lasts when it is buried deep in the soil of a people, absorb the nutrients of the native soil. The heirs of John Wesley like most Christian groups have forgotten the resiliency of the seed of the gospel to flourish in all kinds of terrains or doubted the capacity of the native soil to receive this seed without corrupting it. For this reason, the gospel has too often been transmitted as a potted plant.⁴⁵ Las Casas invites Wesley’s heirs to trust the wisdom of the sower. And so I close with a poem by Pedro Casaldáliga celebrating the abiding power of this witness.⁴⁶

*Los Pobres te han jugado la partida
de una Iglesia mayor, de un Dios más cierto:
contra el bautismo sobre el indio muerto
el bautismo primero de la vida.*

*Encomendero de la Buena Nueva,
la Corte y Salamanca has emplazado.*

*Y ese tu corazón apasionado
quinientos años de testigo lleva.*

*Quinientos años van a ser, vidente,
y hoy más que nunca ruge el Continente
como un volcán de heridas y de brasas.*

*¡Vuelve a enseñarnos a evangelizar,
libre de carabelas todo el mar,
santo padre de América, las Casas!*

¹ Thom White Wolf Fassett, *Giving Our Hearts Away: Native American Survival* (New York: General Board of Global Ministries, 2008), 126.

² As Wesley makes abundantly clear in his sermon “The Imperfection of Human Knowledge,” ignorance of the ways of providence, to say nothing of the ways of grace is a mystery that escapes human understanding. For although the “desire of knowledge is an universal principle in man, fixed in his inmost nature” (*The Works of John Wesley, The Bicentennial Edition*, Volume 2:568; henceforth referred to as WJW), the satisfaction of this desire is only in part because our knowledge is only in part.

³ WJW 23:83.

⁴ “Cet apôtre de l’Inde, ce vertueux prélat, ce témoin qu’a rendu célèbre sa sincérité courageuse, compare les Indiens à des agneaux, et les Espagnols à des tigres, à des loups dévorants, à des lions pressés d’une longue faim.” Jean-François Marmontel, *Œuvres complètes de Marmontel*. v. 8., 7.

⁵ WJW 3:94.

⁶ WJW 3:94.

⁷ WJW 2:543.

⁸ WJW 3:94.

⁹ In a letter to John Burton, the very person who recruited Wesley for the Georgia mission, the would-be missionary expresses that he hoped to learn “the true sense of the Gospel of Christ by preaching it to the heathen.” (WJW 25:439)

¹⁰ WJW 25:439

¹¹ Geordan Hammond, “John Wesley’s Mindset at the Commencement of his Georgia Sojourn: Suffering and the Introduction of Primitive Christianity to the Indians” *Methodist History*, 47:1 (October 2008): 16-25. Burton was the one who recruited Wesley for the mission in Georgia. “Wesley’s correspondence with Burton illustrates that prior to embarking for Georgia, he was intellectually and spiritually driven by his determination to create the primitive church anew amongst the Indians in the pristine Georgia wilderness. Despite his best intentions Wesley was not able to put this goal into practice, nonetheless, he did not question the propriety of restoring the doctrine and practice of the primitive church, he merely shifted his vision to his parishioners in Savannah. His lack of opportunity to serve as a missionary to the Indians did not squelch his life-long endeavor to raise up a people who would embody the holiness of the primitive Christians.” (25) Ted Campbell considers the vision of primitive Christianity as the only viable alternative framework for guiding a Christian movement of renewal after the failure of apocalyptic visions espoused by Thomas Münzer and the Peasant’s Revolt to achieve any real transformation [Cf. Ted Campbell, *John Wesley and Christian Antiquity: Religious Vision and Cultural Change* (Nashville, Tennessee: Kingswood Books, 1991), 119].

¹² WJW 2:183. The former presents humanity in its present state as “infected with many vices, and even born with a proneness to them; but supposes withal that in some the natural good much overbalances the evil.” (*Ibid.*) The latter proclaims that humanity tends toward evil “every year, every day, every hour, every moment.” (WJW 2:176)

¹³ WJW 12:180. The refrain of “everyone does what he sees good” is an allusion to Judges 17:6 “every man did that which was right in his own eyes” which Wesley like the author of Judges associates with life without social structures when “there was no king in Israel.” See also WJW 12:178, WJW 2:580, and WJW 18:202.

¹⁴ WJW 2:579.

¹⁵ WJW 12:195-206.

¹⁶ Wesley states that by nature, humans beings have no knowledge of God, no fear of God, and are rank idolaters. But he states this of “man in his natural state, unassisted by the grace of God” (WJW 2:176). However, for Wesley, no human is in such a state of deprivation except by rejecting the grace which God has poured out into the world through Christ.

¹⁷ *Works of John Wesley, Jackson Edition*, Volume 10:229-230 henceforth referred to as WW; WJW 2:156-157.

¹⁸ Notice the contrast that Wesley draws between the working of providence and grace in his sermon on “The Imperfection of Human Knowledge” (WJW 2:582ff.).

¹⁹ J. Gregory Crofford, *Streams of Mercy: Prevenient Grace in the Theology of John and Charles Wesley* (Lexington, Kentucky: Emeth Press, 2010), 193-94.

²⁰ “No more therefore will be expected of them, than the living up to the light they had. But many of them, especially in the civilized nations, we have great reason to hope, although they lived among heathens, yet were quite of another spirit; being taught of God, by his inward voice, all the essentials of true religion.” (WJW 3:494.)

²¹ As Randy Maddox states: “If God is already graciously at work in a beginning sense in one's existing cultural setting, then conversion to Christianity need not require a comprehensive rejection of this culture.” [“Wesley and the Question of Truth or Salvation Through Other Religions”, 19.]

²² The first stirrings of Las Casas’ conscience occurred in Santo Domingo in 1511 while listening to a sermon by Fray Antonio de Montesinos on John 1:23— “I am the voice crying the wilderness” (*Ego vox clamantis in deserto*). The Word of God preached questioned Las Casas: “Are these not human beings? Do they not have rational souls? Are you not required to love them as you love yourself? Do you not understand? Do you not feel? How is it that you are so soundly asleep?” [Bartolomé de las Casas, *Obras Completas, Vol. 1-13* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1990), vol. 5:1761f. Henceforth referred to as OC.]

²³ Ecclesiasticus 34: 21-27 “If one sacrifices ill-gotten goods, the offering is blemished; the gifts of the lawless are not acceptable. The Most High is not pleased with the offerings of the ungodly, nor for a multitude of sacrifices does he forgive sin. Like one who kills a son before his father’s eyes is the person who offers a sacrifice from the property of the poor. The bread of the needy is the life of the poor; whoever deprives them of it is a murderer. To take away a neighbor’s living is to commit murder; to deprive an employee of wages is to shed blood.”

²⁴ I will use the term “Indians” to name the native inhabitants of the lands encountered by their Spaniards in their search for a route to India. Of course, the term is problematic on many grounds, but the alternatives (Amerindian, Native American, indigenous) fare no better. In any case, “indios” or Indians was what Las Casas called the peoples to whose defense he dedicated his life, and it is in that spirit that I use the term.

²⁵ *Apologética Historia Sumaria*, Tomos 1 y 2, Ed. Edmundo O’Gorman, (México: Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1967), 257. Henceforth referred to as AH.

²⁶ AH 1:258.

²⁷ AH 1:258.

²⁸ “Sería gran monstruosidad en el linaje humano errando la naturaleza en que todos los hombres de una nación fuesen furiosos y fantochados, mentececaptos o ciegos de pasión,...que cerca de los hombres no puede la naturaleza por la mayor parte errar” (AH 2:653). “It would be a monstrous stain on the human race that nature would err in that all the people of a certain nation were born as lunatics, scoundrels, fools, or blinded by passion...for in the greater part of humans, nature cannot stray.”

²⁹ AH 1:258.

³⁰ O’Gorman, “Estudio preliminar” in AH 1:lxx.

³¹ Even practices like human sacrifice and cannibalism—to name two of the most startling aspects of Indian life— need to be seen as historical accidents (in the Aristotelian-Thomistic sense) that leave unchanged the human essence. Cf. Alberto Mario Salas, “El Padre Las Casas, su concepción del ser humano y del cambio cultural”, *Estudios sobre Fray Bartolomé de las Casas*, (Sevilla: Universidad de Sevilla, 1974). Salas is correct in stating that “El rasgo cultural, el hecho etnográfico, como hecho de una segunda naturaleza humana es algo que está arraigado en el hombre y como incorporado a su naturaleza” (268). Thus, “en algunas circunstancias los pueblos o naciones pueden ser más o menos intelectivos” (269). “Antropológicamente hablando no admite, en cambio, que ninguna incapacidad alcance a la totalidad o generalidad de ninguna parcialidad humana, porque ello sería sacrilegio, puesto que equivale suponer que Dios y la naturaleza ha cometido error en la tarea de creación” (269).

³² Las Casas has been accused of being naïve for thinking that Spanish colonists could be bearer of good news to the indigenous. He has been variously credited as being another face of empire, the father of racial ideology, the defender of “othercide.” [See Daniel Castro, *Another Face of Empire: Bartolome de Las Casas, Indigenous Rights*,

and Ecclesiastical Imperialism (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); Diego A. Von Vacano, *Color of Citizenship : Race, Modernity and Latin American/Hispanic Political Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Daniel R. R. Brunstetter, *Tensions of Modernity: Las Casas and His Legacy in the French Enlightenment*. (Florence, KY, USA: Taylor and Francis, 2012).] In the judgment of Hardt and Negri, “Las Casas cannot see beyond the Eurocentric view of the Americas, in which the highest generosity and charity would be bringing Amerindians under the control and tutelage of the true religion and its culture. The natives are the underdeveloped potential Europeans”. Michael Hardt’s and Antonio Negri’s in *Empire* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000), 116.] The charges are not without merit but they miss the Christological dimension of Las Casas thinking. What they descry and decry in Las Casas is not a globalizing universal but the scandal of particularity.

³³ All created things “conforme a la tendencia recibida del creador, se inclinan a apetecer el bien, es decir, a su perfección, pues la actividad propia de cada ser es su finalidad, ya que es su segunda perfección. Por eso se llama virtuoso y bueno a lo que está bien inclinado por su propia actividad, y así a la finalidad que Dios le ha prefijado, según su manera de ser. De forma que en las cosas se descubre cierto proceso circular, pues saliendo del bien, al bien tienden.” (OC 2:19)

³⁴ Cf. Wisdom 8:1, “Attingit ergo a fine usque ad finem fortiter, et disponit omnia suaviter.”

³⁵ Las Casas’ contemporary Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo’ view of history fell into this “immanentist” trap. In O’Gorman’s words in *Crisis y porvenir de la ciencia histórica*: “La Providencia Divina no es ya el fundamento de la historia, sino que la historia es la base de los designios providenciales, inversión imanentista que culminará tres siglos después en el sistema histórico-teológico de Hegel. Oviedo, sin darse cuenta, interpreta ya a la Providencia según los sucesos históricos, y no, como antes, en que se comprendían éstos en trascendente referencia a aquélla. Fué así como la vieja y piadosa máxima medieval en encarnó el fervoroso espíritu de las Cruzadas, “*Gesta Dei per Francos*” pudo convertirse en las habilísimas manos de un príncipe de la Iglesia, el Cardenal Richelieu, en la fórmula utilitaria y nacionalista “*Gesta Francorum, gesta Dei*”. Desde que, hablando con propiedad, hay una historiografía moderna, Dios va a ser invocado, traído y llevado para patrocinar todo lo habido y por haber, desde una guerra de agresión imperialista hasta un adulterio principesco” (30f.).

³⁶ AH 1:259.

³⁷ AH 1:260.

³⁸ For instance, Santa Arias [*Historia y Polémica: Bartolomé de las Casas y la tradición intelectual renacentista* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2001)] asserts that, “Las Casas se inscribe ideológicamente en el esfuerzo de reconciliación religiosa para propagar el cristianismo y cumplir con el plan mesiánico según lo explicaba Fiore” (68). “La diferencia entre la visión utópica de Las Casas en comparación a la de sus antecesores y contemporáneos, radica en que él ofrece su visión del ideal utópico textualmente y propone una perspectiva en la práctica política con las ideas renovadoras y la experiencia de las fundaciones experimentales en el Darién (1518), Cumaná (1520-1521) y la Vera Paz (1537-1544)” (64). Santa Arias is not completely off the mark but overstates her case and glosses over the differences between the Franciscan Spiritualist heirs of Joachim and Las Casas own Dominican (i.e. Thomist) theology of history. For this reason Alain Milhou’s judgment in this matter seems to me more accurate. Acknowledging the pervasiveness of millenarian and apocalyptic expectations in 16th century Spain, Milhou remarks: “Comment se situait Las Casas par rapport à ces rêves? Disons d’abord qu’il était conscient de l’accélération qu’avait connue l’histoire du salut à cause de la Découverte. Mais surtout que cette conscience ne l’empêcha pas d’insister fréquemment sur le temps nécessaire à la conquête et à la colonisation pacifiques, à l’extirpation progressive et volontaire de l’idolâtrie et des coutumes païennes incompatibles avec le christianisme. D’où son opposition radicale aux théories de ceux des missionnaires franciscains du Mexique qui pensaient que la conquête armée, l’évangélisation rapide et les baptêmes en masse hâtaient l’avènement du règne de Dieu sur terre”. [“Las Casas: Prophétisme et millénarisme” in *Études* (March, 1992, 393-404), 398f.]

³⁹ OC 9:664. “The Indians are our brothers and Christ gave his life for them.”

⁴⁰ Thom White Wolf Fassett, *Giving Our Hearts Away: Native American Survival*, 126.

⁴¹ “Address of John Paul II to the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders in ‘Blatherskite Park’”, November 29, 1986, para.12.

⁴² In the same address mentioned before John Paul II avers that “That Gospel now invites you to become, through and through, Aboriginal Christians. It meets your deepest desires. You do not have to be a people divided into two parts, as though an Aboriginal had to borrow the faith and life of Christianity, like a hat or a pair of shoes, from

someone else who owns them. Jesus calls you to accept his words and his values into your own culture. To develop in this way will make you more than ever truly Aboriginal.” (Ibid.)

⁴³ “*Gratia non tollit naturam sed perficit*”. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 1.1.8.ad2.

⁴⁴ A wonderful example of this kind of theological ethnography is the *Historia de la Nación Chichimeca*, by the sixteenth century historian, Don Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxóchitl. His historiography seeks to interpret a recent event (the trauma of the conquest) in light of the past (the glorious history of Texcoco) in order to give value to the present (his life as a meztizo Christian).

⁴⁵ In the words of D.T. Niles, “The gospel came to us as a potted plant. We have to break the pot and set the plant in our own soil.” Cited by C. Michael Hawn, “The Fiesta of the Faithful: Pablo Sosa and the Contextualization of Latin American Hymnody”, *The Hymn*, 50 (1999):32.

⁴⁶ “A Bartolomé de las Casas” by Pedro Casaldáliga, *Todavía estas palabras*.

<http://www.servicioskoinonia.org/Casaldaliga/poesia/todaviae.htm>. Translation: The Poor have made the choice for you/Of a greater Church, a truer God:/Against the baptism of the dead Indian/The baptism first of life./ “Encomendero” of the Good News,/You have brought the court and Salamanca together/And your impassioned heart/five hundred years of witness bears./ Five hundred years have passed, o seer,/and today more than ever the continent roars/like a volcano of wounds and flames./Come back and teach us to evangelize, in a sea free from tallships,/Holy father of the Americas, Las Casas.