and great anguish to see it deserted, and reduced to a solitude.

What was perhaps Las Casas' finest hour came in 1550, when he rose to answer the eminent humanist Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda (1490?-1572?), author of a treatise which sought to prove that wars against the Indians were just. The background of the great debate, held before a junta of theologians summoned by Charles V to decide the matter, was a general reaction in the Spanish court against Las Casas' liberal views, signalized by the partial repeal of the New Laws of 1542. All further conquests in the New World were ordered suspended while the great battle of words raged in Valladolid. Sepúlveda, a disciple of Aristotle, invoked his theory that some men are slaves by nature and thus made to serve others in order to show that the Indians must be made to serve the Spaniards for their own good as well as for that of their masters. Furthermore, the spread of the faith would be served by their subjugation. The highest point of Las Casas' argument was his eloquent affirmation of the equality of all races, the essential oneness of mankind. The outcome of the debate was inconclusive, with the judges finding themselves unable to reach agreement. The first\(^5\) of the following extracts is from Sepúlveda's treatise on the subject of Indian wars; the second\(^6\) is taken from Las Casas' Apologetical History of the Indies.

\[\text{Now compare these [Spanish] traits of prudence, intelligence, magnanimity, moderation, humanity, and religion with the qualities of these little men in whom you will scarcely find even vestiges of humanity; who not only are devoid of learning but do not even have a written language; who preserve no monuments of their history, aside from some vague and obscure reminiscense of past events, represented by means of certain paintings; and who have no written laws but only barbaric customs and institutions. And if we are to speak of virtues, what moderation or mildness can you expect of men who are given to all kinds of intemperance and wicked lusts, and who eat human flesh?}\]

\(^5\) Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, *Tratado sobre las justas causas de la guerra contra los indios*, México, 1941, pp. 105-113. (Excerpt translated by the editor.)

\(^6\) Las Casas, *Apológetica historia de las Indias*, Madrid, 1909, pp. 128-129. (Excerpt translated by the editor.)
And do not believe that before the coming of the Christians they lived in that peaceful reign of Saturn that the poets describe; on the contrary, they waged continuous and ferocious war against each other, with such fury that they considered a victory hardly worth while if they did not glut their monstrous hunger with the flesh of their enemies, a ferocity all the more repellent since it was not joined to the invincible valor of the Scythians, who also ate human flesh. For the rest, these Indians are so cowardly that they almost run at the sight of our soldiers, and frequently thousands of them have fled like women before a very few Spaniards, numbering less than a hundred.

Could one give more convincing proof of the superiority of some men to others in intelligence, spirit, and valor, and of the fact that such people are slaves by nature? For although some of them display a certain talent for craftsmanship this is not proof of human intelligence, for we know that animals, birds, and spiders do certain work that no human industry can completely imitate. And as regards the mode of life of the inhabitants of New Spain and the province of Mexico, I have already said that they are considered the most civilized of all. They themselves boast of their public institutions, for they have cities constructed in an orderly fashion, and kings, not hereditary but elected by popular vote; and they carry on commerce among themselves in the manner of civilized people.

But see how they deceive themselves, and how much I disagree with their opinion, for in these same institutions I see proof on the contrary of the rudeness, the barbarism, and the inherently slavish nature of these people. For the possession of habitations, of a fairly rational mode of life, and of a kind of commerce is something that natural necessity itself induces, and only serves to prove that they are not bears or monkeys and are not completely devoid of reason. But on the other hand, they have no private property in their state, and they cannot dispose of or bequeath to their heirs their houses or fields, since they are all in the power of their lords, whom they improperly call kings, at whose pleasure, rather than at their own, they live, attentive to their will and caprice rather than to their own freedom. And the fact that they do all this in a voluntary and spontaneous manner and are not constrained by force of arms is certain proof of the servile and abased spirit of these barbarians.

Such, in sum, are the disposition and customs of these little men—barbarous, uncivilized, and inhuman; and we know that they were like this before the coming of the Spaniards. We have not yet spoken of their impious religion and of the wicked sacrifices in which they worshiped the devil as their God, believing that they could offer no better tribute than human hearts. How can we doubt that these peoples, so uncivilized, so barbarous, contaminated with so many
infidelities and vices, have been justly conquered by such an excellent, pious, and just king as the late Ferdinand the Catholic, and the present Emperor Charles, and by a nation that is most humane and excels in every kind of virtue?

From these examples, both ancient and modern, it is clear that no nation exists, no matter how rude and uncivilized, barbarous, gross, savage or almost brutal it may be, that cannot be persuaded into a good way of life and made domestic, mild, and tractable — provided that diligence and skill are employed, and provided that the method that is proper and natural to men is used: namely, love and gentleness and kindness.

For all the peoples of the world are men, and the definition of all men, collectively and severally, is one: that they are rational beings. All possess understanding and volition, being formed in the image and likeness of God; all have the five exterior senses and the four interior senses, and are moved by the objects of these; all have the natural capacity or faculties to understand and master the knowledge that they do not have; and this is true not only of those that are inclined toward good but of those that by reason of their depraved customs are bad; all take pleasure in goodness and in happy and pleasant things; and all abhor evil and reject what offends or grieves them...

Thus all mankind is one, and all men are alike in what concerns their creation and all natural things, and no one is born enlightened. From this it follows that all of us must be guided and aided at first by those who were born before us. And the savage peoples of the earth may be compared to uncultivated soil that readily brings forth weeds and useless thorns, but has within itself such natural virtue that by labor and cultivation it may be made to yield sound and beneficial fruits.

6. INDIAN FORCED LABOR IN GUATEMALA

Las Casas died in 1566, at the great age of ninety-two, in a convent outside Madrid. Three Spanish kings had listened respectfully to his advice on Indian affairs, had sometimes acted upon that advice, and in their Indian legislation gave pious lip-service to the principles he advocated. But the realities of colonial existence overruled the voice of morality and religion. Legal slavery and personal service under the encomienda system had largely disappeared by 1700, but their place had been effectively taken by a system of labor conscription under which all adult male Indians were required to give a certain amount of