

LAS CASAS AND HUMAN RIGHTS ¹

In October 1974, the *Institut d'Etudes politiques d'Aix* commemorated the five hundredth anniversary of the birth of Bartolomé de Las Casas (1474-1566) by organizing a three-day colloquium as a tribute to the remarkable Dominican monk whose name has gone down in history as the impassioned champion of the Indians (of the New World) and as a mediator for human rights second to none. Last year, a substantial volume containing the twenty-nine papers presented at the Las Casas colloquium was published by the *Institut*.

A vast quantity of papers, which had remained buried for centuries in various archives and which were only recently made public, have enabled many learned historians to move towards the discovery of a man whose complex personality has been for a long time the subject of controversy, and towards the knowledge of an immense body of work which is still being studied.

The essays in this volume, the fruits of the research made on Las Casas' work, are primarily of historical interest. What is considerably more interesting is that nowhere else as in the writings of Las Casas has the defence of human rights been presented and put into practice with so much concern for relating closely and intensely the constant efforts of the mind with those of speech, of writing and of action. This idea has led those who took part in the colloquium to study Las Casas in the perspective of present-day conflicts and to see whether he can be considered as a forerunner and a guide for the perfectly balanced creation and practical application of an economic system and of a policy directed towards the respect of the quality of life of nations.

It is in this respect that we find that the essays collected in this splendid book are of such particular interest.

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