

## *William Tyndale: Father of the English Bible*

**O**pen the eyes of the king.” Those were the dying words of **William Tyndale** in **1536** just before he was strangled and burned to death. Do you want to guess what king he was praying for? It was Henry VIII. William Tyndale prayed that Henry VIII would open his eyes to the Word of God. Though William Tyndale didn’t live to see it, his prayer was answered to some degree. Let’s travel back to England today, back to the days when Henry VIII was still alive and wrestling with his faith. There we will find William Tyndale risking his life to translate the Bible into English.

William was born in England near the border of Wales. He went to school in Oxford, was ordained a priest, and later transferred to Cambridge. It was at Cambridge that William Tyndale was exposed to some of the best Greek scholars in Europe. These scholars had been trained in the Greek classics at the Platonic Academy started by Cosimo de’ Medici in Italy. Remember Cosimo? Though long dead, he was still influencing history.

Before I go on, stop and picture something with me. Picture in your mind a Renaissance man. Can you see him? Now picture in your mind a reformer. Do you see him? Generally speaking, each represents a completely different mind-set. The Renaissance man, if you pictured him correctly, is focused on the glory of man and his marvelous achievements. He is considered well-rounded, lives for the here and now, and appreciates art, literature, and the classics. The reformer, if you pictured him correctly, is focused on the glory of God and His Word rather than on things of this world. He lives for the kingdom of God yet to come and risks his earthly life for an eternal one.

But there was at least one common thread between the Renaissance man and the reformer. Can you guess what it was? It was the Greek language. Think about it. The masters of the Greek language were the ones who brought Greek thought and humanism to the Renaissance man. He was stimulated to dwell on the wisdom of the ancient Greek philosophers who lived before the days of Christ. But it was also the Greek language that was used to write most of the New Testament.<sup>1</sup> It was the renewed learning of Greek that brought clearer understanding of the Word of God to those who chose to study it. I find it fascinating that those of the Renaissance and the Reformation met at the crossroads of the Greek language.



William Tyndale used his extensive knowledge of the Greek language to study the original words of the New Testament.

## *Tyndale Translates the Bible*

Now let me take you back to William Tyndale. Do you remember what he was studying at Cambridge? It was Greek. He was instructed by the Italians. But Tyndale didn't follow the course of the Renaissance thinkers. He used his knowledge of Greek to deeply study the New Testament. It would affect many generations to come — even ours.

At this time in history, the Word of God was still not readily available to the English. Though John Wycliffe had translated most of the Bible into English in the 1300s, his version never made it to the printing press. It was still being hand-copied and distributed by the Lollards. These hand copies were expensive and hard to come by.

Besides that, Wycliffe's version wasn't as accurate as it could have been. Here's why. Jerome first translated Greek into Latin to make the Latin Vulgate. Then Wycliffe took the Latin Vulgate and translated it into English. That made it a "second-generation" translation. In translating three languages (Greek to Latin to English), Wycliffe lost some accuracy and the original meaning of some words.

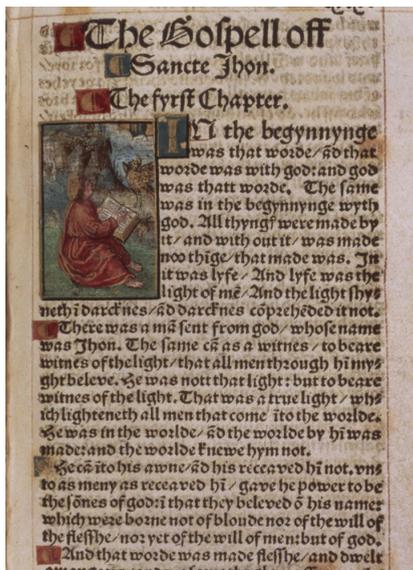
So William Tyndale, with his great knowledge of Greek, set out to fix this problem. He made it his goal to give the English-speaking world a Bible based on the *original* language of Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic. He said, "It was impossible to establish the lay people in any truth, except the Scripture were laid before their eyes in their mother tongue."<sup>2</sup> But this would be no small task.

William Tyndale first approached the bishop of London to sponsor his project. Though the bishop was fond of Greek, he wasn't so fond of the idea of the common man handling the Word of God. The bishop was of the mind-set of the Roman Church authorities at that time in history. They had no confidence in men or women reading the Word and properly understanding it. They wished instead that the Bible remain in the hands of priests to teach to commoners.

After being turned down by the bishop, William Tyndale realized that he was up against some serious conflict. England was a hotbed of controversy at that time as Henry VIII was making himself the supreme head of the Church of England and breaking away from Rome. It was safer for William to leave his homeland and work abroad. So he sailed to mainland Europe. He would never see England again.

## *An Escape to Europe*

While in Europe, William Tyndale probably had the chance to meet Martin Luther. He was a big fan of Luther's and used his notes to make comments throughout his translation work. William published his first New Testament in 1525 in the city of **Cologne** (Kuh LONE).



Pictured here is the first page of the Book of John from William Tyndale's English translation of the New Testament.

It was an exciting time but a dangerous one, too. A customer at the print shop caught wind of what was being printed there. This customer blew the whistle on Tyndale and sent for the authorities. Tyndale was given short notice about the raid. He quickly ran through the printing press gathering every precious page he could. He escaped to the town of Worms (Vermz).

Tyndale was a little safer in Worms. He managed to have 6,000 copies of the New Testament printed there. Only two still exist today. Do you know why so few can be found? The rest were smuggled into England. They were hidden in crates, barrels, sacks of flour, and bales of cloth. Because authorities were still in conflict over the Word, the Bible had to be smuggled in. Many would risk their lives in printing, packing, shipping, unloading, and distributing the dear Word of God.

One of those “authorities” against the printing of the Bible might surprise you. It was Sir Thomas More, who was still alive at this time. He sent Tyndale letters criticizing his work and pointing out errors in translation. If you remember, Thomas More was good with words and knew his Greek pretty well, too. He used his knowledge of Greek as a way to discredit William Tyndale.

Now, as you know, Thomas More was also a good man. So, it may be hard to understand why he didn't want the Bible distributed. Well, look at Thomas More this way — he and many others *did* view the Bible with great respect. They just didn't trust that common people could understand it. They deeply believed it was the role of the church to interpret it. They weren't haters of the Word of God. Rather, they saw themselves as protectors of it. Remember, this was one of the dividing issues between Protestants and Roman Catholics.

The bishop of London and the archbishop of Canterbury were of the same mind-set as Thomas More. They, like Thomas More, thought the Bible should be taught only in the Roman Church. They also thought that Tyndale made errors in his translation work. They convinced the cardinal of England to issue a decree for Tyndale's arrest and sought to stop all the smuggling of the New Testaments.

Now, something ironic happened. In order to prevent William Tyndale's New Testament from hitting the streets of England, the archbishop of Canterbury tried to buy them all himself so he could burn them. The ironic part of the story is that the buying of the Bibles put money into the hands of William Tyndale to print even *more* Bibles! I guess you could say that the plans of the archbishop backfired.

In time, William Tyndale moved to the city of Antwerp in the Netherlands.<sup>3</sup> There he began translating the Old Testament from Hebrew to English. For the most part, Antwerp was a city of safe refuge. Many Protestants were there. But over his seven-year stay in Europe, Tyndale had to hide most of the time because he was a “wanted” man. It was difficult to know who was friend or foe.



The Tyndale Monument, built in 1866, is located in North Nibley, Gloucestershire, England. A steep spiral staircase leads to the top of the tower and offers a view for miles around.

Unfortunately, in 1535, Tyndale was tricked. A man who claimed to be his friend and who was staying in his boardinghouse, turned out to be an enemy. This man was named **Henry Phillips**. Phillips eased his way into the private life of William Tyndale in order to “rat” on him. Henry Phillips drew William out into the streets of Antwerp one evening simply to have dinner. Once outside, Phillips pointed to authorities to arrest Tyndale. He was sent to prison in Brussels, another city of the Netherlands.

William Tyndale spent 16 to 18 months in the dark, cold dungeon of the castle of Vilvorde (Vill VORD). Ironically, it was during this time period that Thomas More was arrested and put to death back in England. I wonder how it made Tyndale feel to hear of Henry VIII turning his back on Thomas More. More and Tyndale had been enemies — now it appeared they would share the same fate.

While in prison, William Tyndale requested three things: a warm coat, the Hebrew Bible, and a candle to read by. He hoped by candlelight to finish translating the Old Testament. But his trial came before that could happen.

William Tyndale was written up for many offenses. Throughout the ordeal, he claimed to be “saved by faith alone” and would not relent of that faith. William was only in his early forties when the court in Brussels condemned him as a heretic. Like many other martyrs of the faith, he was to be strangled to death and his body burned.

Before his death on October 6, 1536, William uttered one last prayer, the one that opened this lesson. He prayed for the king of England to open his eyes. We know he was praying for Henry VIII. This is where the story gets really interesting.

Back in England, Henry VIII was surrounded by many reformers. Two of those were Thomas Cranmer and Thomas Cromwell. They approached Henry with the idea of printing the Bible in English. At the time, Henry had heard that William Tyndale was a heretic and would have nothing to do with Tyndale's Bible. So, Tyndale's Bible was disguised! Cranmer and Cromwell sent Henry a copy of the **Matthew's Bible** for review.<sup>4</sup> But you know what? The Matthew's Bible was primarily the work of William Tyndale! In fact, on the last page of the Old Testament, William Tyndale's initials were included in 2½-inch block letters. It was a secret tribute to Tyndale, who by then had been put to death. Henry VIII had no idea that this Bible was mainly the work of William Tyndale.

The Matthew's Bible was later improved upon by **Miles Coverdale**, another Bible translator and close friend of Tyndale's. It grew in size to be called the Great Bible. Finally, in 1539, Henry agreed that it was a good idea to circulate the Great Bible throughout his country. He stated, "In God's name let it go abroad among the people."<sup>5</sup> This full-sized English Bible was placed in every parish church with a chain on it to prevent its being stolen. Henry saw it as a way to promote the pride of the English who had recently broken from Rome.

We see it differently, don't we? I think it was an answer to William Tyndale's prayer and the culmination of his lifelong work. The English *were* going to get the Bible in their mother tongue. At least for a time, Henry's eyes *were* open to the Word of God.

Believe it or not, Tyndale's translation work was so excellent that years later, when King James authorized another translation of the Bible, 90 percent of it was the work of William Tyndale. Very little was changed. Seventy-five percent of Tyndale's words make up the Revised Standard Version of the Bible today. Though it cost him his life, William Tyndale's work was remarkable. Those of us who use English as our everyday language should be grateful for his sacrifice. Of this man, John Foxe wrote, "There is no grander life in the whole annals of the Reformation than that of William Tyndale — none which comes nearer in its beautiful self-forgetfulness to His who 'laid down His life for His sheep.'"<sup>6</sup>

## Nicolaus Copernicus

**F**inally. We have finally reached a lesson that isn't terribly depressing. This lesson, unlike so many others, does not contain violence. Nor does it contain greed, murder, envy, or conspiracy. I think you'll find this lesson refreshing. It's the straightforward story of **Nicolaus Copernicus** (Koh PUR nih kus). He was a Polish astronomer who dared to think differently about the heavens. He was the first astronomer to publish the idea that the earth revolved around the sun. And you know what? He was right.

Nicolaus Copernicus was born in **Poland**. We haven't talked much about Poland yet. It became an independent nation in 1025, but for 300 years, it suffered through wars and

invasions. In the 1300s, Poland finally experienced a time of peace, and the culture began to blossom. In 1364, the **University of Krakow** (CRACK koff) opened. That was a good thing for Nicolaus Copernicus. He was fortunate to attend the university in 1491. There he discovered a love for mathematics and astronomy that would last him a lifetime.

Also to last Copernicus through his lifetime was his employment with the Roman Church. (By the way, we've backed up in time here, so the Roman Church is not yet called the Roman Catholic Church.) Through his uncle, Nicolaus was appointed to be a canon in the cathedral of his hometown. (A canon is a high position in the church but not as high as a priest.) The church job continued to pay Nicolaus even when he took a three-year leave of absence to study in Italy. The cathedral was generous and so Nicolaus never turned his back on the Roman Church — even when his ideas disagreed with theirs.

### *Questioning the Movement of the Stars*

Early in his studies, Nicolaus questioned the way the stars appeared to move in the night sky. It was believed back then that the earth was the center of the universe and that all the heavenly bodies spun around it. A Greek astronomer named **Ptolemy** (TOL uh mee) had made this theory popular around A.D. 150 in his work titled *Almagest*. We call it the **geocentric theory**. (*Geo* stands for “the earth” and *centric* stands for “the center.”) Under this theory, the earth was believed to be stationary. The stars were thought to be lights splattered across a concave dome rotating around the world.

But Nicolaus Copernicus thought differently, as had a few other scientists before him. As far back as 300 years before Christ, some scientists wondered if the earth revolved around the sun. **Archimedes** (Ar kih MEE deez) thought so, as did **Seleucus** (Si LOO kuhs) of **Babylonia**. Even Leonardo da Vinci suspected that the sun stood still. But Copernicus was the first to officially propose what we call the **heliocentric theory** of the heavens. (*Helio* stands for “the sun.”) In this theory, the sun is the center of the solar system and all the planets spin around it.<sup>7</sup> He also theorized that the earth spins on its own axis every 24 hours, giving us different views of the sun and the stars.



In his work titled *Almagest*, Claudius Ptolemy mistakenly wrote that the earth was the center of the universe.

Now, all you students, young and old, should know that Nicolaus was right. The earth does revolve around the sun, as do the other planets. And the earth does spin on its axis every 24 hours. But it wasn't so obvious back then. Think about this: When you look at the stars at night, it could *appear* that they are moving around the earth. For thousands of years, people tracked the paths of the stars and gave names to the constellations, believing that they were circling the earth. Because the sun rises in the east and sets in the west, it would *appear*, too, that the sun is moving around the earth. But actually, *we* are the ones moving. (We move with the earth, so we don't feel it.) Nicolaus called this phenomenon “real motion” versus “apparent motion.”

One way to understand this is to think about sitting in a parked car and watching a train go by. You know in your mind that the train is whizzing by. But sometimes your eyes play tricks on you, and you get this funny feeling inside that *you* are moving, not the train. Have you ever felt that? I have. That is what we call “real motion” versus “apparent motion.” It’s an optical illusion between a moving object and a stationary one.

Now back to Nicolaus. It was 1522 when he first wrote a small pamphlet about his heliocentric theory. Think about the year 1522. This was just five years after Martin Luther posted his Ninety-five Theses. And as you know, this document triggered the Protestant Reformation and a lot of questions over the authority of the church. For this reason, Nicolaus was a little shy about making his theories widely known. He knew that the Roman Church would disapprove of his ideas. Let’s talk about that for a moment because this issue explains the rest of the story of Nicolaus Copernicus.

The Roman Church at this time was, as you know, very powerful. The church played the role of overseeing what was taught in all kinds of areas, including science. So when a scientist came up with a new idea, the church gave its opinion on the matter. When the Roman

Without the use of a telescope, Nicolaus Copernicus tracked the movement of Mars, his favorite planet to study.



Church disapproved of something, the Inquisition got involved as the ruling body to investigate. This means that when someone came along with a new idea that *challenged* the view of the church, that person could be arrested and questioned before the Inquisition. And you know what that meant! The Inquisition had a reputation for burning heretics at the stake along with their books and ideas.

Now, I don't know if Nicolaus was wise or a coward, but he did *not* have his ideas published right away because it would have put him in front of the Inquisition. And, more than likely, the inquisitors would have declared his ideas heresy. That might sound crazy to us in the twenty-first century, but that's the way things were back then. A radical new idea, like the earth circling the sun, would have been scorned for sure. Both Martin Luther and John Calvin thought that Copernicus was talking nonsense! Calvin quoted Psalm 93:1 to make his point. It says, "Surely the world is established, so that it cannot be moved." (Of course, the Bible is not wrong; Calvin simply misinterpreted the passage. The Scripture is not referring to the physical movement of the earth but rather, to the will of God, which nothing can move.)

To avoid the obvious conflict, Nicolaus Copernicus worked on other projects for awhile. He studied medicine, worked for his uncle, and improved the money system in Poland while continuing to serve as a canon in the church. But Copernicus never lost his love for studying astronomy. Whenever possible, he got away to observe the stars and planets. His favorite planet to follow was Mars. It provided him with a lot of information. But keep this in mind — Nicolaus was tracking the planets and the stars *before* telescopes were invented! It's impressive that he figured out as much as he did.

## Developing a New Theory

What Nicolaus Copernicus figured out was a major flaw in Ptolemy's theory. Ptolemy taught that the stars and planets were circling the earth in invisible bands following a cyclical pattern. (Ptolemy was right about the invisible bands. We call those orbits.) But Ptolemy was wrong about the number of them that existed and what they were circling. The math behind Ptolemy's theory wasn't adding up.

This puzzled Nicolaus Copernicus until he developed his heliocentric theory. In his theory, the orbits were renumbered and redirected around the sun. His calculations also made the universe much larger than it was thought to be. It would be years before some of these ideas were fully developed. For example, Nicolaus still thought the planets traveled in round orbits when in fact they are elliptical, or oval shaped. But at least his theory was heading in the right direction, literally.

Now, we may never have heard of Nicolaus Copernicus except for the fact that he had a very persistent friend. His friend was a bright professor at the University of Wittenberg. In 1542, the professor insisted



At the insistence of a friend, Nicolaus Copernicus agreed near the end of his life to publish his brilliant work on the heliocentric theory.

that Nicolaus publish his works. By then, Nicolaus was in his seventies. Having lived a full life, he was ready to risk his life if need be in front of the Inquisition. But he never had to. Legend says that Nicolaus Copernicus was on his deathbed when his book came out in 1543. Supposedly he was just able to leaf through the pages of his book before he drew his last breath.

The book by Nicolaus Copernicus was titled *Concerning the Revolutions of the Celestial Spheres*. It laid out the heliocentric theory as best as Copernicus understood it. And as feared, the theory did *not* go over well with the Inquisition. The Roman Church was mostly upset that the ideas were presented as fact rather than as theory. No matter what it was called, it was beyond their understanding, and eventually condemned as heresy. In 1615, the book by Copernicus was banned.

It would be decades before the theories of Copernicus were accepted. Other great scientists, such as Kepler, Galileo, and Newton, would expand on them and start what has been called the Scientific Revolution. This was just the beginning of a whole new age for mankind.

## Lesson 36

1550

### *Bartolomé de Las Casas*

**I**magine you are a 9-year-old boy. (I'm sure some of you are.) Pretend you are watching a parade go through your town. Streamers and banners cloud the sky, loud music is playing, and sweet smells of food fill the air. Everyone is celebrating. They are celebrating the return of Cristóbal Colón from the New World. While you watch him go by, you are in complete awe. But what really grabs your attention is not Cristóbal Colón but the seven Indians who are walking behind him like trophies on display. You're drawn to their long black hair and fierce-looking eyes. By your culture's standards, they are barely dressed. And their decorations of tiny shells and beads, as well as the beaten-gold ornaments they carry, also catch your eye.

As the crowd gawks and presses in, you wonder what the Indians are thinking and feeling. Are they scared and embarrassed? Or are they as proud and strong as they appear? You wish you could speak to them. Deep down inside, your spirit is touched and after that day, you're never quite the same.

If you can imagine that scene in your mind, then you're seeing **Bartolomé de Las Casas** (Bar toll oh MAY day Las CAH sahs). In 1493, when he was just a boy, he really *did* attend a parade for Cristóbal Colón held in Spain. And he really *did* see Indians who were put on display like spoils from a victory. As a result of this and many other experiences, Bartolomé de Las Casas would grow up to be one of the greatest humanitarians of the sixteenth century. He became known as the "Protector of the Indies" for fighting for the rights of the indigenous people of the Americas.

The word *indigenous* means “natural.” It refers to the people of the New World who were naturally living there *long* before Europeans began to immigrate. We might also use the words *natives*, *locals*, or *Indians* when speaking of the indigenous people of America. (Of course, the term *Indian* came from Cristóbal Colón.) No matter what you call these folks, they were people. And Bartolomé de Las Casas cared a great deal for them.

Bartolomé grew up in Spain in a family of farmers and merchants. He excelled in Latin and other academics. He was only 18 when he made his first trip to America. He traveled to Hispaniola in the West Indies with the governor. For his services, Bartolomé was granted an **encomienda** (en co mee IN duh). I doubt you know what that is, but it’s very important that you understand the term. So let me stop and explain.

### *The Encomienda System*

As the Spanish settled in the Americas, they patterned things after the ways of life in Spain. Spain in the fifteenth century was still under the influence of the old feudal system. Do you remember the feudal system from the Middle Ages? It’s a system in which wealthy landowners give portions of their land to the *less* wealthy in exchange for their services. This system gave protection to the poor and provided places to live and farm. Though the poor usually stayed poor, it was a decent system when practiced fairly.

Well, in the West Indies, the Spanish took the same idea of feudalism and applied it to the Indians. They renamed it the **encomienda system**. It was supposed to be a fair way to employ Indians in their own land and teach them the Christian faith. As wealthy Spaniards came to the West Indies and took large portions of land, they “hired” the Indians who lived on the land to work for them. The landowners, or *encomenderos* (en co men DARE ohs) provided protection and Christian training for services. Unfortunately, the Indians didn’t have much say in the matter and were usually overworked and poorly taught. It was practically slavery, though nobody wanted to call it that.

Now, let’s go back to Bartolomé de Las Casas. As I mentioned before, when he arrived in the West Indies, he was given an encomienda — which was a small tract of land with Indians who lived on it. According to the system, it was “his” to manage. But Bartolomé wasn’t like most wealthy Spanish landowners. He saw the Indians as people rather than as a source of cheap labor. He would spend the rest of his life trying to change the unfairness of the system.

Bartolomé had a spiritual experience that was one of his sources of inspiration. In 1511, he listened to the preaching of a Dominican priest who based his message on the Bible verse that reads, “I am “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: “Make straight the way of the Lord.”” (See John 1:23.) The Dominican priest believed he was speaking the voice of the Indians who were crying out in their despair. Bartolomé was moved in his heart and returned his encomienda to the governor!

A year later, in 1512, Bartolomé de Las Casas was ordained a priest in the Roman Church. He was the first to be ordained in the Americas. In 1513, Bartolomé took part in the conquest of Cuba. And do you want to know what he received for his services? Once again, he received an



Bartolomé de Las Casas, the first ordained priest in the Americas, devoted his life to fair treatment of Native Americans.

encomienda of land and Indians! The system was still alive and well in the West Indies despite the preaching of the Dominicans.

So, in 1515, Bartolomé decided to fight for the Indians. He went back to Spain to speak to King Ferdinand about the matter. The king listened and sent Las Casas back to the West Indies for a full investigation of the treatment of Indians. Las Casas provided that and came up with a better plan to employ and teach the natives.

Well, the next king of Spain, Charles I, was not as optimistic as King Ferdinand. He wanted Bartolomé to *prove* that his plan could work. He allowed Bartolomé to set up an experimental farming colony in Venezuela just the way he wanted it — with more freedom for Native Americans. Part of the experiment was proper teaching of the Gos-

pel to the natives. Bartolomé must have been excited to show others that there were better ways than slavery to settle a land.

I wish I could report that the “better way” of Bartolomé was successful. But unfortunately, not everyone in the colony cooperated. Oppressive neighbors made it almost impossible for the new colony to get established. The *encomenderos* were resistant to change. They liked the old system as it was because it allowed the colonists to work very little, yet get very rich!

### ***Bartolomé Joins the Dominicans***

Naturally, Bartolomé was discouraged at the failure of his colony, but he didn’t give up his fight for the American Indians. When he was 36, he joined the Dominicans and turned to the power of the pen. That means he directed his energy into writing books. His books would expose the terrible treatment of the Indians to all who could read. He wrote gruesome stories of natives being butchered and burned alive. He wrote of seeing thousands die from laboring in the gold mines. He wrote of thousands more who were being massacred by the Spanish. Bartolomé saw these crimes firsthand and believed they were ultimately a result of man’s sin and selfishness. Few could argue that.

By 1537, Bartolomé would gain the attention of the pope in the matter. The pope agreed with Bartolomé that the Christian faith ought *not* to be forced on the Indians in exchange for labor. He also recognized the humanity of the American Indians, declaring that they were “rational beings” who should be protected. As normal as that might sound to us in the twenty-first century, it was a new view back then.

Finally, in 1542, Bartolomé de Las Casas experienced some victory. He convinced Charles I to sign what were called the “New Laws.” They prohibited slavery of the American Indians and limited the *encomienda* system. In particular, the New Laws limited the employment of serfs to one generation. It was progress.

Two years later, Bartolomé was made a bishop in Guatemala. He was joined by 45 Dominican friars in a large-scale mission to evangelize the Indians. He was there also to oversee that the New Laws were followed. Unfortunately, they weren’t. Because of racism and greed, Native Americans were *still* being treated cruelly. Bartolomé got the cold shoulder from wealthy landowners and made enemies trying to set things straight. So many colonists broke the New Laws that they were impossible to enforce. Bartolomé resigned as bishop but pressed on in yet another way. (This man was amazingly persistent!)

In 1550, Bartolomé petitioned Charles I, the king of Spain, to host a debate. The king agreed. The debate over slavery was held at the **Council of Valladolid** (Val uh duh LID) in Spain. Bartolomé’s opponent was a persuasive man named **Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda** (Wahn Jih NESS deh Zee pull VEE duh). Though no official verdict was given, most would say that Bartolomé *won* the debate at Valladolid. His strong views were heard.

But you know what? When all was said and done, the *encomienda* system stayed in place! The views of Sepúlveda and the colonists won in the long run and were practiced in the Indies and Americas. Slavery was kept alive and fed by greed. The promise of gold found in Peru was especially damaging to the Incas — who were enslaved to collect it. (Remember Francisco Pizarro?) But Bartolomé kept writing. He believed that the treasure tombs of the Incas belonged to the Incas, not to the Spanish. Bartolomé continued to speak at councils and give his voice to the American Indians until he died in 1566. He was 82 years old.

Do you think the long fight of Bartolomé de Las Casas matters today? I think it does. Our world is not free of racism, slavery, or oppression. It exists in many forms. I’m glad that Bartolomé de Las Casas had the courage to address these difficult issues as far back as the fifteenth century. I believe we need voices like his today to speak out for those who can’t be heard.



Responding to a request by Bartolomé de Las Casas, Charles I of Spain agreed to host a debate over slavery at the Council of Valladolid.