

*Under the Banner of Bartolomé De Las Casas*  
**Brazilian Dominicans and Social Justice**

CARLOS JOSAPHAT PINTO DE OLIVEIRA

In January 1998, the Brazilian Dominicans chose the name of Bartolomé de Las Casas for their province. The new province was an amalgam of three entities, each bearing age-old riches and known by the prestigious names of Thomas Aquinas, Catherine of Siena and Martin of Lima. Without in any way underestimating such great patron saints, the Brazilian Dominicans decided that their identity as sons of St Dominic was better exemplified today in the person and under the patronage of Las Casas. Recognising that for decades Las Casas was at the roots of their social and apostolic action, they based their future on this tireless champion of justice. This noble Spaniard became an American both out of love for the New World and because of his passion for human rights, which the discovery of these lands made all the more urgent at a universal level.<sup>1</sup>

*A Liberating Justice Confronts Resistant Colonisation*

The history of the Dominicans in Latin America is marked chiefly by the challenge of justice and of liberty, that is, by a justice that liberates, for the most radical form of injustice detected and denounced by them in the colonial system was the violation of liberty and of other fundamental rights. What initially struck their first community, animated and led by Pedro de Cordoba, was the enslavement of the indigenous population, together with attacks against their most elementary rights, that is, to own and live on their lands, to govern themselves and to organise their lives according to their own culture and traditions. On Christmas Eve 1511, through their spokesperson Antonio de Montesinos, the Dominicans of the Spanish Isle uttered the famous cry which has not ceased to reverberate throughout the world and across the centuries: 'Con que derecho?' 'What right' have colonials to occupy, conquer and subjugate peoples, impose on them new life models, new economic and political structures, new legal principles and most of all, a new religion? In fact, the Spanish brand of Christianity as a whole, and even as manifested in its most eminent religious leaders, showed itself completely ignorant of the concept of 'otherness'. Individuals, races, peoples