

# Debunking Anti-Catholic Myths, Part 2



No other institution in the world has contributed as much as the Catholic Church to human rights, international law, education, social services and organized charity.

# Mainstream Media “History”

1. The Church supported the persecution of Jews since they were the ones who crucified Christ.
2. The Dark Ages were a time of ignorance and barbarism perpetuated by an oppressive Church.
3. The Church supported slavery.
4. Catholic missionaries in the New World forcibly converted the indigenous peoples and suppressed their culture.

# The Church and Slavery

John Francis Maxwell, *Slavery and the Catholic Church* (1975): “Since the sixth century and right up until the twentieth century it has been the common Catholic teaching that ... slavery is morally legitimate.”

The Church had already abolished slavery during the so-called Dark Ages. It tried to again when the New World was colonized. Before we deal with slavery specifically, let's examine Catholic charity and human rights in general.

# “Charity” in the Ancient World

- ▶ The Stoics “regarded mercy and pity as pathological emotions—defects of character to be avoided by all rational men. Since mercy involves providing unearned help or relief, it was contrary to justice.” (Rodney Stark, *The Triumph of Christianity*)
- ▶ Seneca, Roman philosopher, in *De Clementia*:  
“The sage will console those who weep, but without weeping with them...he will feel no pity. It is only diseased eyes that grow moist in beholding tears in other eyes.”

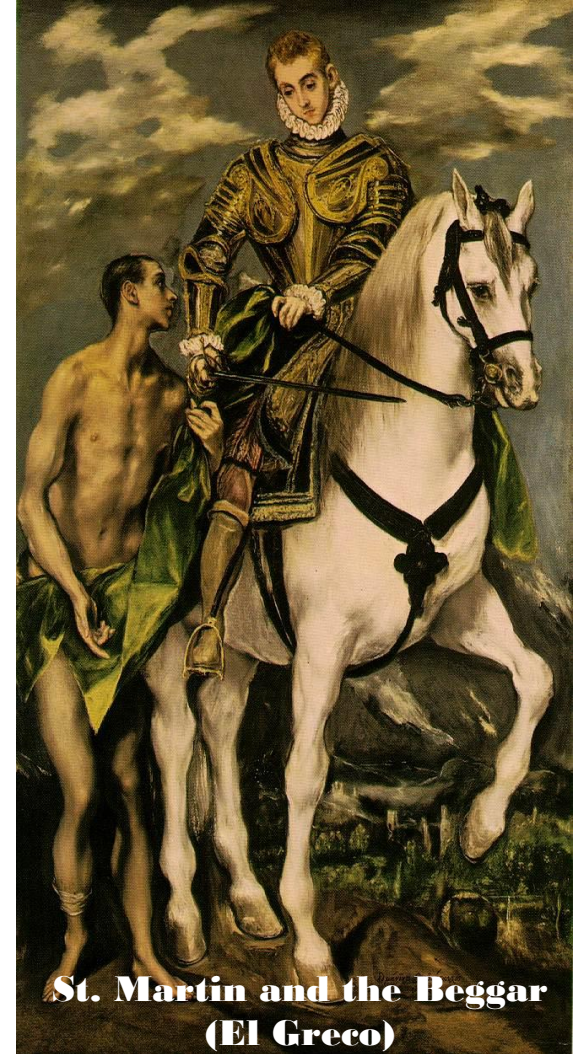
# The Revolution of Catholic Charity

“Love one another as I have loved you.”

The Church pioneered the systematic collection of donations for the poor, the establishment of hospitals and orphanages open to all, and the organization of relief efforts in the aftermath of plagues and natural disasters.

St. Augustine, St. John Chrysostom, St. Cyprian, St. Ephrem, and St. Basil the Great, besides being great Doctors of the Church, all founded hospitals and cared for the sick with their own hands.

Even the most anti-Catholic critics are forced to admit the historical facts:







- ▶ Voltaire: “Perhaps there is nothing greater on earth than the sacrifice of youth and beauty, often of high birth, made by the gentle sex in order to work in hospitals for the relief of human misery, the sight of which is so revolting to our delicacy. Peoples separated from the Roman religion have imitated but imperfectly so generous a charity.”

# Human Rights

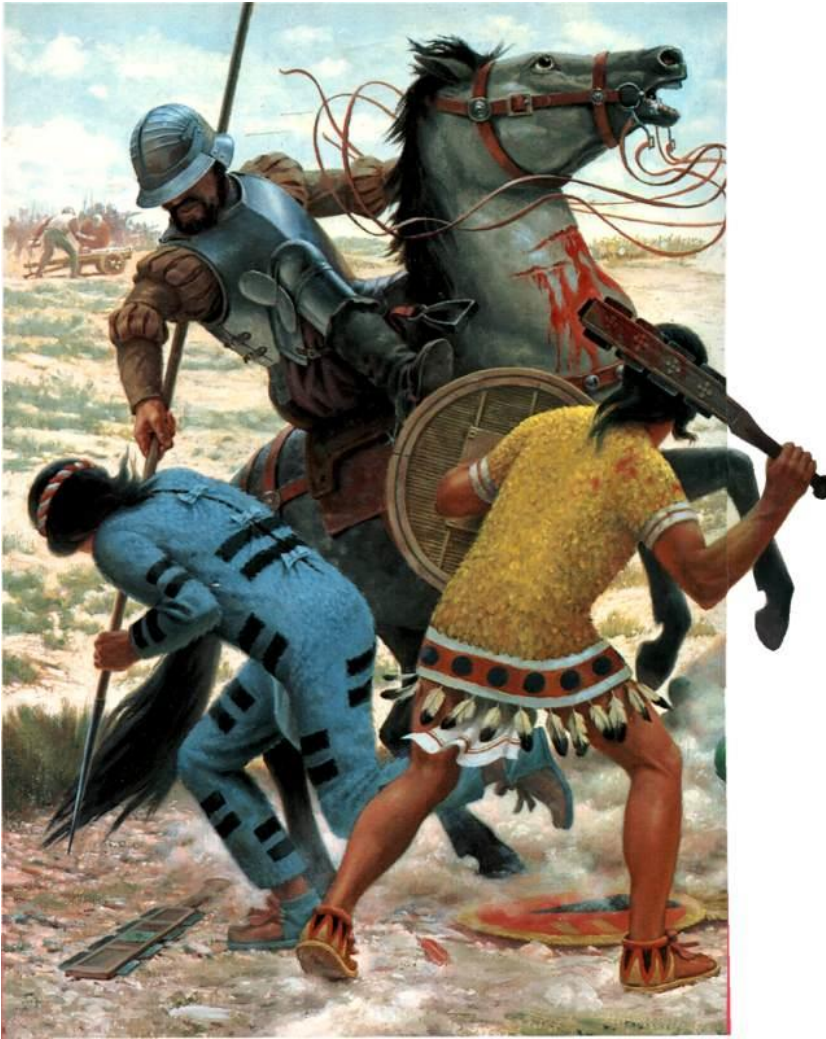
Beginning in the 12th century, Catholic jurists defined the rights of private property, self-defense, education, marriage, and due process as being rooted in man's nature (not in civil law nor religion). As such they were unalienable.

St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) taught that slavery was immoral because it treated human beings as means, not ends.

Pope Innocent IV (mid-13th cent.) was the first of many Popes to uphold this doctrine.



# The Defenders of Indigenous Peoples



- ▶ After the Spanish conquest of Mexico, many native populations were reduced to slavery.
- ▶ Some argued that they were “slaves by nature” because “they lacked reason.”
- ▶ Who defended their rights?
- ▶ The Popes: Innocent IV, Eugene IV, Pius II, Sixtus IV, Paul III, and Urban VIII.



► Pope Paul III (1534-1549): “Satan, the enemy of the human race, who always opposes all good men so that the race may perish, has thought up a way, unheard of before now, by which he might impede the saving word of God from being preached to the nations. He has stirred up some of his allies who, desiring to satisfy their own avarice, are presuming to assert far and wide that the Indians of the West and the South who have come to our notice in these times be reduced to our service like brute animals, under the pretext that they are lacking in Catholic faith. And they reduce them to slavery, treating them with afflictions they would scarcely use with brute animals.”

“Therefore we, noting that the Indians themselves indeed are true men, by our Apostolic Authority decree and declare by these present letters that the same Indians and all other peoples – even though they be outside the faith – should not be deprived of their liberty or their possessions and are not to be reduced to slavery, and that whatever happens to the contrary is to be considered null & void.”

- ▶ Pope Paul III also issued a bull imposing excommunication on anyone “who may in any way presume to reduce said Indians to slavery or despoil their goods.”
- ▶ Paul III and other Popes were ignored, so Church leaders in each country pushed for humane legislation to regulate slavery.
- ▶ In France, the *Code Noir* required owners to baptize and catechize slaves, allow them to marry, not sell family members separately, let them rest on Sundays and holy days, and provide minimums of food, clothing, and medical care.
- ▶ In Spain, the *Código Negro* required all of the above and also allowed some ownership of property and the purchase of freedom.
- ▶ Protestant England and Holland had no such protections for their slaves. As a result, slaves generally suffered worse conditions in English and Dutch colonies. To be fair, however, it must be recognized that Protestants (as well as Catholics) eventually helped to abolish slavery.

- ▶ Were there exceptions to Catholic opposition to slavery? Of course there were! Papal bulls were ignored by most, slavery regulations were disobeyed by some, and even some clergymen had slaves. But the Church as an institution worked tirelessly to oppose slavery and to make it more humane.

# Catholic Missionaries in the New World

The common accusations against these missionaries, particularly against Junipero Serra and other Spaniards who built missions, was that they forcibly converted the Native Americans and destroyed their way of life.

Let's talk first about St. Junipero Serra. He was canonized by Pope Francis in 2015 amid great controversy. Here's an excellent video in which Fr. (now Bishop) Robert Barron defends Serra's sainthood.



Barron video

The main point is this: Serra and other Spanish missionaries did the best they could, with great personal sacrifice, to help the Native Americans. The missionaries defended the Indians' rights and made sure they weren't oppressed. The mission system wasn't perfect, the Spanish government and military frequently abused their power, but the Spanish missionaries in the New World brought many indigenous peoples to Christ and taught them valuable skills for life, such as farming and cattle-raising. This gave them a more stable food supply, as well as the spiritual food of the Eucharist. St. Junipero Serra wasn't the only champion of human rights in the New World. There were also:

# Fr. Antonio de Montesinos (1475-1540)

- Objected to Spanish colonial policy in Haiti and the Dominican Republic, incurring the wrath of conquistadors.
- Inspired Bartolomé de las Casas and others to fight for the rights of indigenous peoples.
- Convinced King Ferdinand to approve the Laws of Burgos in 1512 and the Laws of Valladolid in 1513.
- He was murdered in Venezuela, where he had been appointed protector of the Indians.



# Theologians of Human Rights



**Fr. Francisco de Vitoria (1483-1546)**  
**Father of International Law**



**Fr. Bartolomé de las Casas (1484-1566)**  
**Defender of the Indians**



- ▶ *Francisco de Vitoria*: “The American Indians are not irrational, but they have the use of reason in their own way. This is clear because they have a certain order in their affairs, ordered cities, separate marriages, magistrates, rulers, laws...Also they do not err in things that are evident to others, which is evidence of the use of reason. God and nature do not fail for a great part of a species in what is necessary.”

- ▶ *Bartolomé de las Casas*: “In his goodness and mercy, God considered it right to choose me as his minister, though unworthy, to plead for all those peoples of the Indies, possessors of those kingdoms and lands, against wrongs and injuries never before heard of or seen, received from our Spaniards...and to restore them to the primitive liberty of which they were unjustly deprived...And I have labored in the court of the Kings of Castile going and coming many times from the Indies to Castile and from Castile to the Indies, for about fifty years...”

# Columbus, Conquest, and Conversion

Please read and take notes on the following article. I have also attached it in Google Classroom.

<https://www.crisismagazine.com/1992/columbus-forgotten-legacy-missionaries-in-the-new-world>