Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda: Concerning the Just Cause of the War Against the Indians (1547)

The Spanish have a perfect right to rule these barbarians of the New World and the adjacent islands, who in prudence, skill, virtues, and humanity are as inferior to the Spanish as children to adults, or women to men; for there exists between the two as great a difference as between savage and cruel races and the most merciful, between the most intemperate [lacking in self-control] and the moderate and temperate, and, I might even say, between apes and men.

Compare, then, these gifts of prudence, talent, magnanimity [generosity], temperance, humanity, and religion with those possessed by these half-men in whom you will barely find the vestiges [traces] of humanity, who not only do not possess any learning at all, but are not even literate or in possession of any monument to their history except for some obscure and vague reminiscences of several things put down in various paintings; nor do they have written laws, but barbarian institutions and customs. Well, then, if we are dealing with virtue, what temperance or mercy can you expect from men who are committed to all types of intemperance and base [morally low] frivolity [foolishness], and eat human flesh? And do not believe that before the arrival of the Christians they lived in the pacific [peaceful] kingdom of Saturn [ruler of the Golden Age in Classical mythology] which the poets have invented; for, on the contrary, they waged continual and ferocious war upon one another with such fierceness that they did not consider victory at all worthwhile unless they satisfied their monstrous hunger with the flesh of their perfect enemies.

Furthermore these Indians were otherwise so cowardly and timid that they could barely endure the presence of our soldiers, and many times thousands upon thousands of them scattered in flight like women before Spaniards so few that they did not even number one hundred. . . . Although some of them show a certain ingenuity [skill] for various works of artisanship [craftsmanship], this is no proof of human cleverness, for we can observe animals, birds, and spiders making certain structures which no human accomplishment can competently [adequately] imitate. . . .They have established their nation in such a way that no one possesses anything individually, neither a house nor a field, which he can leave to his heirs in his will, for everything belongs to their masters whom . . . they call kings (chiefs), and by whose whims they live, more than by their own, ready to do the bidding and desire of these rulers and possessing no liberty. And the fulfillment of all this, not under pressure of arms but in a voluntary and spontaneous way, is a definite sign of the servile [slavish] and base soul of these barbarians. . . .

They live as employees of the king, paying, thanks to him, exceedingly high taxes. . . . And if this type of servile and barbarous nation had not been to their liking and nature, it would have been easy for them, as it was not a hereditary [by right of birth] monarchy, to take advantage of the death of a king in order to obtain a freer state and one more favorable to their interests; by not doing so, they have stated quite clearly that they have been born to slavery and not to civic and liberal [free] life. Therefore, if you wish to [subdue] them . . . to a servitude a little less harsh, it will not be difficult for them to change their masters, and instead of the ones they had, who were barbarous and impious [wicked] and inhuman, to accept the Christians, cultivators of human virtues and the true faith.

(Sepulveda, Juan Gines de, "Democrates II, or Concerning the Just Causes of the War Against the Indians.")