**Who was Francisco de Vitoria?**

Francisco de Vitoria was born in Burgos in 1485. At age 20 he entered the novitiate of the Order of Preachers (better known as the Dominican Order), where he began studying Humanities. The Dominican Order, founded by St. Dominic in the Thirteenth Century, has been famous in history for its work for the advancement of intellectual knowledge and the dissemination of truth. Among famous Dominicans are figures such as St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Albert the Great and Francisco de Vitoria.

In 1508, Fray Francisco joined the College of Santiago, one of the schools of the Sorbonne University of Paris. There he received the degrees of Bachelor and Doctor. In 1522, he moved to the College of San Gregorio of the University of Valladolid where, for three years, he taught the Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas. He received the highest grade given to teachers by the Dominican Order: the Master of Sacred Theology. In 1526 he was granted the position of Chair of Theology at the University of Salamanca, then one of the world’s most prestigious universities. There he continued to teach until his death.

In his classes, which were attended by both students and faculty, he presented topical issues. His teaching ability was extraordinary, his students admired him so much that he was called “master” and even government officials came to him for advice. He founded the famous School of Salamanca, whose members included influential jurists and theologians of the stature of Melchor Cano, Domingo Banez, Domingo de Soto and Francisco Suarez. **He is considered the father of modern international law and was a leading advocate of human rights of Native Americans**.

During the twenty years he spent in Salamanca, he faced the greatest intellectual challenges of his time, renovated intellectual methods and topics, and created a new current in legal-theological thought which had a profound impact. His work focuses on the concept of dignity and moral problems of the human condition. He was especially influential for his work on legal issues, but his studies on theology and moral aspects of the economy were also important . His teachings have been preserved in thirteen formal lessons called “relecciones”, dedicated, among other things, to murder, marriage, civil and ecclesiastical power, relations between the Council and the Pope, war and justice or conflicts over the discovery of America, the incorporation of new territories to the Spanish Crown and peace and respect in relations with the Native Americans. These “relecciones”, written and published by his disciples, have been preserved along with other writings.

As one of his best disciples once said, some were more learned than he but not even ten together could teach as well as he could. His thinking has had a great influence and today remains relevant. Following his example, the work of the UFV is summarized in research, teaching and service to society, and many of his qualities inspire our daily work: strength, scientific rigor, open-mindedness, respect for all living things and a great passion for the pursuit of truth and the rights of humans.

King Ferdinand asked a theologian, Francisco de Vitoria, a professor at the University of Salamanca, for his opinion on relationships with the indigenous peoples. Vitoria wrote his advice in 1532 on two opinions, ***De Indis*** and ***De Jure Belli***. His arguments as stated in the book **Native Rights in Canada** are found on page 14:

***Vitoria asserted that the Indians were true owners of the land, both from the public and private point of view. The Indians’ lack of belief in the Roman Catholic faith could not affect the question, as heretics in Europe were not denied property rights. He suggested that the Indians were no less intelligent than some Spanish peasants and therefore were equally fit to have legal rights. To the argument that the Pope had granted the New World to Spain, Vitoria replied that the Pope had no temporal power over Indian lands. Spain had no claim to the land through discovery, he said, because that notion only applied to unoccupied lands.***

King Ferdinand did not accept this opinion because it challenged his assertion and discovery which resulted in Spain’s Sovereignty. However, Vitoria did not stop. He was encouraged by Las Casas to visit Pope Paul III who issued a **Papal Bull Sublimis Deus on June 4, 1537** which said in part:

***that the Indians are truly men and that they are not only capable of understanding the catholic faith but, according to our information, they desire exceedingly to receive it… notwithstanding whatever may have been or may be said to the contrary, the said Indians and all other people who may later be discovered by Christians, are by no means to be deprived of their liberty or the possession of their property, even though they be outside the faith of Jesus Christ; and that they should, freely and legitimately, enjoy their liberty and the possession of their property; nor should they be in any way enslaved; should the contrary happen, it should be null and void and of no effect.***

Vitoria was recognized in 1939 as the ***father of international law***.

Saint Pope John Paul II’s visit in Canada in 1984 and reminded the people of Canada. He spoke to the Indigenous people gathered at Fort Simpson from the airport in Yellowknife on September 18, 1984 and told them:

***My presence in your midst today is intended to be another expression of the deep interest and solicitude which the Church wishes to show for the native peoples of the New World. In 1537, in a document entitled Pastorale Officium, my predecessor Paul III proclaimed the rights of the native peoples of those times. He affirmed their dignity, defended their freedom, asserted that they could not be enslaved or deprived of their goods or ownership.***

When he returned to Fort Simpson on September 20, 1987, he repeated that:

***Let me recall that, at the dawn of the Church’s presence in the New World, my predecessor Pope Paul III proclaimed in 1537 the rights of the native peoples of those times. He affirmed their dignity, defended their freedom and asserted that they could not be enslaved or deprived of their goods or ownership. That has always been the Church’s position (Cfr. Pauli III Pastorale Oficium, die 29 maii 1537: DENZ.-SCHÖNM. 1495). My presence among you today marks my reaffirmation and reassertion of that teaching.***