

Final Comments about Thomas More by Erasmus¹

1. *Erasmus' Dedicatory Preface to Ecclesiastes, August 1535, EE3036:*

“Of how many of my most faithful friends have I not been robbed in these stormy days! Long since by the death of William Warham, Archbishop of Canterbury; recently by that of William Mountjoy, of the Bishop of Rochester and of **Thomas More, who was the chief magistrate of his country, whose heart was whiter than snow, a genius such as England never had before, nor ever will have again, a country by no means lacking genius.**”

2. *Erasmus to Bartholomew Latomus (Latin professor, College de France), 24 August 1535, EE3048:*

“Some monks have suffered capital punishment, one of them a Bridgettine monk who was dragged on the hurdle, then hanged, and finally drawn and quartered. There is a persistent rumor here, probably true, that when the King discovered that the Bishop of Rochester [John Fisher] had been appointed to the college of cardinals by Paul III, he speedily had him led out of prison and beheaded. In this fashion did the King bestow upon him the red hat. It is all too true that Thomas More has been in a prison for some time, and his money confiscated and forfeited to the royal treasury. There has also been a rumor that he was put to death, but I have no certain information on that. **I wish he had never become involved in this perilous business and had left a theological question to theologians.** My other friends who occasionally used to honor me with letters and gifts now are too fearful to write or send anything; neither do they receive anything from anybody – as if under every stone lay a sleeping scorpion.”

3. *Erasmus to Peter Tomiczki (Bishop of Cracow), 31 August 1535, EE3049:*

“What happened in England to the Bishop of Rochester and to Thomas More, the holiest and best pair of men England ever had, you will find out from a section of the letter which I am forwarding to you.² **In More I feel as if I had died myself; there was but one soul between us, as Pythagoras says.** But such is the ebb and flow of human affairs.”

4. *Erasmus to Conrad Goclenius (Master & Chair of Latin, Louvain), 2 September 1535, EE3052:*
Erasmus describes **More's character as "imperiosus"**³ – not at all timid.

See also Erasmus' three letters describing Thomas More:

-23 July 1519, Erasmus to von Hutten (*Thomas More Source Book* 3-13)

-Sept 1521, Erasmus to Guillaume Budé (*TMSB* 221-26)

-Late 1532, Erasmus to John Faber [Austrian humanist; later, bishop of Vienna] (at):

“[S]uch is the kindness of his disposition, or rather, to say it better, such is his piety and wisdom, that whatever comes his way that cannot be corrected, he comes to love just as wholeheartedly as if nothing better could have happened to him. You could say that his house is another Platonic Academy. But I dishonor his home when I liken it to Plato's Academy, where they discussed numbers and geometric figures, and on occasion moral virtues; this home of More's you could more rightly call a school and gymnasium of the Christian religion. There is no man or woman there who does not have leisure to study the liberal arts and worthwhile reading, although the chief and primary concern is for piety. No quarrel or nagging word is to be heard there, no lazy person to be seen. But such good family discipline is not secured through scolding or arrogance, but with courtesy and benevolence. All are busy about their duty, but there is liveliness there and no lack of self-possessed cheer [*hilaritas*].”

See http://thomasmorestudies.org/docs/Erasmus_on_More_1532_to_Faber.pdf for the full text.

¹ Desiderius Erasmus, 27 October 1466-12 July 1536

² Conrad Goclenius of Louvain wrote August 10, giving Erasmus his first definite news about More's execution: “Thomas More was executed in Britain on 6 July showing himself no less steadfast in his trial and execution than did Socrates before his infamous Athenian prosecutors.”

³ Boethius uses the same term to describe Lady Philosophy (1.1 Prose,44-8, *Consolation of Philosophy*). Common definitions of *imperiosus* are “exercising authority, possessed of command, powerful, far-ruling, commanding.”