Sir Thomas More: Humanist and Martyr

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Chapter 1: A Lost Holbein Painting

Even today, when skyscrapers sprout in London and Paris as much as in Manhattan, the English capital still holds many surprises—perhaps even more than our Paris. Following the turnings of a little road, though just a few steps from a noisy thoroughfare, without warning, one by chance comes upon a marvelous relic of the blessed era when the country sprang up right in the midst of the city. In times gone by, weren't cities simply enlarged villages, and large cities collections of villages? Indeed, the perimeters of Paris remained more unchanged than one might have believed until after the last war. Despite all, though, a certain suburb of London, Chelsea, still remains, in places, a checkerboard of gardens and parks, in which the houses seem to want to avoid notice altogether. Or perhaps it would be better to say that these houses have grown inseparable from the beautiful, centenarian trees and the impeccable lawns that surround them. How the flowers abound, from the first spring until the final days of autumn, and at their height twine leisurely in the grass and climb old walls of rosy brick, in beautiful faded hues, and ancient timbers.

But Chelsea, in this early autumn of 1528, was at yet nothing more than a particularly charming medieval hamlet, a clump of country flowers growing beside the waters of the slow, meandering Thames. And on the other side of the river, Battersea was little more than a clearing in the forest.

Nevertheless, they had already begun to build there. The wealthy

bourgeois Londoners fled the tumult and press of the city, so here these "cockneys"[1] knew too well what had attracted them to this rustic place to risk destroying it or spoiling its charm. Such was the case of an eminent lawyer, just a short while ago London's Under-treasurer and at the same time the Speaker of the House of Commons, captured by the Royal Authority, after having victoriously defended a merchant ship belonging to the Papal States against the King's customs officers[2] that had been confiscated due to certain obscure transport duties (it is likely that they did not wait for the existence of the *Pie Opere di Religione* in order to blame the Holy See), this bright, even brilliant lawyer, introduced into the Privy Council and knighted, soon made the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. To put it more simply, he was then entrusted with managing the Crown's most significant assets. It was rumored that from there he could not ascend further, for this exceptional *chat-fourré*,[3] far from promoting himself, had always separated himself as much as possible from promotions; yet he would see himself installed, *nolens volens*,[4] in the highest office of the British government, becoming the Lord Chancellor, the direct arm and mouthpiece of the king.

Nevertheless, bringing a large family here to this verdure, a family of which his sons-in-law constituted, with himself, the principal masculine element (this dignitary, having only one male child, never stopped teasing his trio of daughters by referring to them as his affliction, although they never had any doubt about the reality—or, more aptly, the unreality—of his misogyny), he seized this moment when he seemed bound for glory to retire to this suburban countryside. Better still, after having chosen to reside there rather than at his old residence of Bucklersbury, a house in the heart of the city, no less antique, and hidden at the end of a garden, he immediately had built for himself a quasi-monastic place of solitude. With a library and chapel, he could flee even his closest associates for retreats of study or devotion—or,

1. Bouyer's note: true Londoners, natives of the city
2. *gabelous:* specifically, enforcers of a "salt tax"
3. "furred cat," a teasing term for officials who wore fur or wigs ceremonially
4. Latin: willing or not

as was his habit, of both at once.

Gardens at this time, and particularly English gardens, had already learned the art of always being refined yet simultaneously evoking the wilderness. And if ever, it was certainly the case in his garden, where, on this beautiful September evening, a whole loving family was scattered, awaiting the return of the master of the manor. Though it was late autumn, vividly colored flowers still bloomed and mixed with plants of diverse fragrances, such as were still favored by doctors as well as cooks in this time borrowed from the Middle Ages. The vines climbed the walls of the ancient building undisturbed, walls dotted with many small-paned windows, and the vines were already reddening. But the trees, mostly elms, though with one of those mulberries that remain the favorites of the presbytery gardens beyond the English Channel, were as yet untouched by the colors of autumn. Still more colors abounded: two peacocks met, as serious as the sentinels at Windsor, and better adorned, on the little wall separating the garden from the towpath. Incidentally, the male is named Argus and the female Juno, the first indication of the intellectual proclivities of this family, also suggesting that these did not preclude a sense of humor.

Moreover, these brilliant fowls were certainly not the only animals animating the garden. Dogs were not lacking, nor were cats, and there were even perfectly domesticated rabbits—including something scarcely believable—a hare that Cecily had managed to tame by raising it herself.

Which brings us to the inhabitants, again, principally feminine, of this household, the head of which, it can certainly be believed, merrily described it as an aviary.[1] Cecily was the youngest of the daughters, having just reached her twenty-first year. Even so, she had already married one Giles Heron, a young, distinguished lawyer, at St. Michael's two years earlier, on the same day that Elizabeth, just one year older, was wedded to William Dauncey, a lawyer and heir of a noble family. Elizabeth awaited her first baby. Older than she appeared, eldest among

1. *described gladly as an aviary:* there is a lovely assonance here, "qualifait volontiers de volière."

the sisters and adored by them all, was Margaret (Meg, familiarly among the family), also the eldest born from her father's marriage with the fragile, timid Jane Colt, whose untimely death had already enabled Meg to live longer than she had, Meg having completed her twenty-fourth year. That being said, this daughter, cherished most dearly by her father and beloved by all, had been the first to take a spouse, marrying another attorney, at the time also a student of Sir Thomas. William Roper, to tell the truth, was too impulsive and changeable ever to have a career as brilliant as those of his brothers-in-law, never mind that of his father-in-law. But he was sure to atone for this inferiority, if it is one, in the years to come, by writing the first, and certainly the best biographical history of the great man, who is still absent on the evening in question.

We can say simply that Cecily was the most imaginative of the three, Elizabeth the most beautiful and Margaret the most mysterious; Margaret, so exceptionally brilliant that at twelve years old she wrote (in Latin, mind you!) to the great Erasmus himself. And not only did he respond to her at great length, but he was full of praises for her. Be reassured on this point, though, for she had no pedantic pretentions whatsoever. Her father's humor, and the teasing of her sisters, had been more than sufficient to alleviate this risk, if it had ever been a risk at all. I almost forgot, in lingering on these three graces, the sole boy, one quite handsome and refined, nineteen year old John, or rather John junior, for the name first belonged to an aged grandfather. To be more precise, a judge who frightened those who appeared before him in court with his appearance alone, but who, after a strict yet successful fatherhood strict, became a grandfather as tender as he was endearing. Young John, despite his age, was already engaged to a lovely young girl, clearly the darling of the whole family, Anne Cresacre, who, for her part, had only sixteen birthdays behind her. And if the family were not large enough, it was necessary to join to the band Margaret Giggs, an adopted orphan the same age as the other Margaret and her primary

study companion.

No one was lacking except the sweet young mother who brought the three girls punctually into the world, year by year, until young John sent her to her tomb in making his difficult entrance into this world, where he found three sisters, in recompense, to spoil, adore, and tease him. Their father, all too aware of his inability to raise this large brood by himself, promptly found and married Dame Alice so that she could help (if to say this here is not a euphemism); she was herself a widow seven years his senior and already graced with a little girl of twelve years. It seems clear that she was an energetic mistress, who knew how to lead with authority and did not allow herself to be mistreated. Yet the affection that these children devoted to her sufficiently refutes the supposition of too many historians that she must have been a shrew. And all of the burlesque talk about his spouse which tends in this direction proves nothing except their lack of humor, the lack of which, in them, is equal to its omnipresence in More.

There still remains one person, who surely wont escape notice, Henry Patterson, the master's jester; a jester, it must be said, who was hard put not to appear too much less funny than his employer, but who nevertheless did not fare too badly!

In this beautiful evening light, all were chatting, laughing, or singing, while one or another of the young ladies plucked her cittern; no one is bothered by the monotonous cries of the peacocks, and the male does not stop showing off his arc of plumes despite his inattentive audience.

But then there appears a little monkey tumbling from the mulberry tree where he has been stuffing himself with berries; immediately the dogs begin to bark and the cats mew. He pulls each of their tails on the way, but this does not stop him from making for the gate that opens directly onto the riverbank.

Margaret, her beautiful gown spread upon the shore, watches her family with an amusement less sisterly than maternal, does not mistake

this sign. Raising a voice more laughing than scolding, she puts an end to the discordant serenade saying, "Be quiet, be quiet you all! I am sure that father is coming."

And in fact, in the precariously restored silence, the beating of the rowers can already be heard, as they pull against the currant. The group gathers to see the long boat as it approaches the neighboring wharf, which flanked by two beautiful elms and around which the water eddies and flows.

Their joyous acclamations redouble when they realize that the chancellor, enveloped in his furs, with his collar sparkling with the Tudor rose joined with the portcullises of Lancaster, brings, seated at his right hand, the old gaffer (as he is called with no disrespect) wrapped in the red robe of a judge of the King's Bank. Evidently, the boat bringing his son from London Bridge, where the official buildings of the Duchy still stand today, picked up the older man on the way from Westminster.

The elderly man, despite his austere appearance, seems hardly less pleased with this tumultuous welcome than is the quinquagenarian whom he accompanies. A moment later, they are all gathered in the garden. Dame Alice appears at his side, adopting with evident good humor the cantankerous tone that she assumes deliberately, knowing full well that she is the only one in the household capable of doing so.

"Ah! Here you are, assembled at last!" she says, scarcely greeting her father-in-law or her husband. "Now that you are all finally together, poor Holbein will be able to move forward a bit with his picture. It is a fine thing to promise it to Erasmus for the coming Christmas, but he still needs to make progress, or otherwise our unhappy painter will have to keep waiting who knows how long!"

Talking and laughing more than ever around father and grandfather, the group enters the great room from which the windows open onto the garden. The monkey, satisfied for a moment by sugar from his master—the children for once having been a little too grand for it—is

taken firmly in hand by his mistress. Otherwise, no doubt, it will again disgrace itself by playing some other little prank during the brief group portrait sitting to follow.

In truth, Holbein needs little more; having at his leisure already done individual portraits of each one in turn, his only concern now is finally to arrange the group, which he does referring to a sketch he holds in his hand. At the request of the Lady More, who says she finds herself old enough as it is, he is in the process of correcting his first sketch, in which he had her placed alone kneeling on a *prie-dieu*, from which he now restores her to an upright position among the youthful members, seated in state behind Cecily and Margaret, who kneel familiarly on the ground. But he will make up for this concession by vividly sketching in the playful antics of the little monkey who now crumples the good lady's dress without her noticing.

The painter had already painted in the beautiful pendulum clock on the back wall, between the two doors whose massive *tambours*[1] prevent the chill from coming into the home, so comfortable and full of laughter. Observing the merry disorder of the evening, he adds an arrangement of flowers here, a lute and pipes over there, and takes care not to omit the books scattered throughout the scene.

He also takes his time painting in, in grand strokes, the drapes of the old judge's crimson robe, which contrast superbly with the somber velvets and furs of the younger magistrate. All the while, though, his gaze continually returns to the central figure of the picture, already captivated by the master's various fleeting expressions. Yet the grand, ceremonial portrait presents his expression set curiously between a faint smile, which barely curves his thin lips, and a knowing, sensitive clarity in his eyes. The painter remarks privately that he has never observed such expressions, in which frank gaiety and something that is not exactly sadness, but rather a compassion without illusions about the feebleness and mediocrity of humanity, play across his face. Sir

1. enclosures between two sets of doors meant to maintain warmth within

Thomas, though a man absolutely devoid of indirectness, is someone who even the most perceptive observer of the century could manage, without difficulty, to know completely!

A little later, once Holbein has released his models, they reassemble around the dinner table; the general conversation begins again, first with a chapter of Scriptures read aloud by Cecily in her particularly fresh voice. At first, the youthful generation respectfully listens while father and grandfather exchange opinions and witty remarks, in which those of the old judge are perhaps more sarcastic and those of his son more cleverly mischievous, but before long the good humor of their repartee sparks the response of the younger set. It certainly would not be excluded. Erasmus has already been recalled, he who was always a faithful correspondent of the family, though at this time he had not returned to the island that had left him with certain unhappy memories ten years prior. The family portrait, though, wouldn't it have tempted him when it was received?

Sir Thomas, with a wink directed particularly at his spouse, proffers an ambiguous remark questioning the warmth of hospitality that their guest knows full well to expect, provoking suppressed laughter. Lady More is not fooled and shoots back, half in jest, half in earnest, "I should think so! I take great pleasure in listening to you two laugh nonstop at Latin jokes that I don't understand a word of!"

"Oh, mother!" says Margaret, gently, "you can't tell me that you haven't heard this already in the *Praise of Folly* …" "Yes," concedes the faux-evil stepmother, good-natured to say the least, "from what you have translated for me, and no doubt glossed at the same time…"

"And," says Elizabeth, "if Erasmus had not gotten him started with his *Folly*, would papa have finished writing—or perhaps even started writing—his *Utopia*, even though in places it is much like bedtime stories he told us when we were young?"

"He didn't dedicate it to him for nothing!" finishes Cecily, as she

daintily enjoys the slice of lamb seasoned with mint she has just served herself.

Everyone laughs, including Lady More. Holbein, whose seriousness is a little grave, as befits a good Swiss man, and even more so one from Basel, concludes privately that these Englishmen could pass for French, considering how they chat and banter, talking all at once at the table—and even more so, how they pass in an instant not only from one subject to another,[1] but also from unbridled pleasantries to philosophical or religious observations of unexpected profundity, given their manner of coming up with them. Certainly, the father of the family has not placed such an excellent program of studies before them for nothing! But that which the studious Dutchman certainly cannot achieve is what this disconcerting yet very sympathetic Amphytrion,[2] whose smile rarely leaves his lips, can—as was observed to Holbein by one of the children, though he no longer remembers which—when he slips in the most hilarious comments precisely as his face assumes all the juridical gravity one could expect of him. On reflection, it is true that such spoken opinions could appear to arise from a certain bitterness if they were not surrounded by such buffooneries.

From his perspective, William Roper, the only one of More's sons-in-law who, when seen too often, occasionally gets on his nerves—but who, knowing well his honesty and profound candor, he does not hold any less in his affections, listens with somewhat flabbergasted admiration as Sir Thomas regales his audience with one of his rollicking stories, suited to the tastes of magistrates rather than doctors. What little puritan used to be in the good Will is no longer shocked, for he understood some time ago that if the father of his marvelous Meg had only one care, it would be that that his daughters should have no prudishness and that nothing should trouble their limpidity. But this apparent total lack of seriousness in a man whose greatness obscures it shows, in the end, his native simplicity to be the mark of his genius,

1. Bouyer uses a French idiom here, "*passer … du coq à l' âne,*" passing from the rooster to the donkey, meaning to pass between unrelated topics of conversation without transition or connection.
2. hospitable dinner host; a king from Greek mythology.

and perhaps of more than this.

As they leave the table, grace recited, Will finds himself at his father-in-law's right hand, and together they admire the view of the garden and river, over which the sunset extends its crimson veil; it is so vivid that he cannot help himself—he must express the subject of his contemplation. "Ah, sir," says Will, "I cannot watch the garden again in this beautiful evening light without recalling that other evening, no so long ago, when His Highness the King arrived unexpectedly and invited himself to dinner at the home of his favorite counselor. Afterward, he walked for a long time with you, his hand on your shoulder and arm around your back as a friend can only do to his dearest friend! Oh that you could still count on his good graces!"

To his renewed surprise, Sir Thomas only responds to this remark, offered in a tone close to adoration, with a burst of laughter. "My brave Will, be assured that if my head, in separating from my shoulders, could accomplish for the King my master the defeat of a single fortress in France, I would not avoid it."

Meanwhile, young John, after glancing at the clock, grabbed a bell and rang it. At this signal, all of the family, including the servants, gathers in the chapel, arranged with the two sexes carefully separated, and the communal evening concludes with several psalms and the Gregorian litany.

Who would have thought that Sir Thomas More, so close to the supreme magistrature, would be spared martyrdom only during his own brief time in office as Lord High Chancellor? He himself had certainly already envisioned the possibility, if not the probability, of an abrupt reversal of his career, so dazzling until this point. However, had anyone told him that by this path he would end up exchanging the woolsack[1] of Lord Chancellor of England for a place among the canonized saints of the Catholic Church, he doubtless would have thought his own pleasantries were nothing but sneezing powder beside

1. Bouyer's note: the "woolsack" by which the Chancellor takes his place at the foot of the throne, to reside in the name of the king over the Chamber of Lords

those of the Almighty!

It is certainly a shame, in any case, that the portrait that Holbein produced that evening has been so thoroughly lost by the heirs of Erasmus that it can no longer be found. We will see in what follows that simply to recover a true sense of More's personality, to say nothing of Erasmus, has not been an easy task heretofore.

Chapter 2: A Humanist Formation from the Carthusians to the Inns of Court

In the City itself, specifically on Milk Street, at Harpsfield, More's second biographer tells us Thomas More was born on the 6th or 7th of February 1477 or 78, son of John More, who at this time was already a prosperous man of the law, knighted, and furnished with a country house in Hertfordshire. He would be married not just twice like his son, but three times (and certain historians even say four!). Thomas, who beneath the simplest jokes displayed a keen sensitivity toward feminine affections, would twice experience grief in this respect, for after six years of marriage he lost the spouse of his youth, having already been deprived of his mother in infancy. It has been justly observed that only in paternal love was he able to find a perfect and lasting response to this profound tenderness, above all—it is self-evident—in his incomparable Meg!

Yet St. Anthony Grammar School (in Threadneedle Street) seems to have successfully cultivated in him a passion for his studies without in the least quenching his natural gaiety. Perceiving exceptional natural talent in his son, his father, equipped with good connections, found him a place among the pages of the future Cardinal Morton (whom Roper rightly described, in addition to being Very Reverend,[1] as wise and learned). Morton was the Primate of All England, by virtue of being the Archbishop of Canterbury, and at the same time the Lord Chancellor.

Roper assures us that he distinguished himself in Morton's home even by the way in which he arrived. It was Christmas time, and, on arriving, More hid himself among the actors of the Christmas plays and improvised, with a brilliance equal to his cheek, a role so successful that in it he eclipsed the professionals! The excellent prelate must also have recognized his excellent abilities, because we know that, on

1. *reverendissime:* official title or form of address

Morton's initiative, as soon as the teenage boy reached his fourteenth year, he was sent to Oxford. There is reason to believe that this was at Canterbury College, which would later be incorporated into Cardinal Wolsey's magnificent project, the glorious Cardinal College, and finally become Christ Church.

There, he completed his studies of rhetoric and enjoyed the opportunity, still rare at that time, both to perfect his Latin and to begin his studies of Greek, the teaching of which had been introduced there some forty years earlier by the Benedictine William Selling.

His father watched over his son carefully,[1] and, all too aware of his heir's already lively interest in literature, he was not going to let him languish from too much poetry of Isis and Cherwell. When Thomas was barely sixteen or seventeen years old, his father recalled him to London to pursue the most lucrative industry of the Inns of Court, the schools of law. Passing in turn through New Inn and then Lincoln's Inn, he quickly became, not only a barrister but also a bencher, a member the council of the Inn of Court, or Master of the Bench. At just twenty-four years old, he was a reader and professor of law.

Whatever the interest—which is not minimal—of More's literary works, from Odes and Epigrams, translations of the Palatine Anthology[2] and then of Lucien, from Greek into Latin, to controversial treatises (polemical works) in the vernacular, and finishing with spiritual writings, not to mention his copious correspondence, his father did not stifle, his son's genius by starting him down the path on which he himself had shone. There is no doubt that it was first in his study and teaching of law, and even more so in its practice at the bar and then in court, that his profound humanity, so practical, and characterized by tremendous good humor combined with great sincerity, must have been nourished. In this way, his humanity attained a warmth and character that neither study nor the classic great books could have elicited from him on their own—though undoubtedly these contributed to its character.

1. Bouyer uses the expression, *veiller au grain*, literally to keep careful watch over the grain, likely to be sure it is not damaged by an unexpected storm.
2. *Anthologie palatine*, (*Anthologia Graeca*) a manuscript of Greek poems, epigrams, etc.

Soon after, he served as a shrewd advisor and respected lawyer for the merchants, notably the drapers, of London, and was counted among the best friends of the middle class, who were themselves quite cultured and well-educated. His success in this realm is attested by his election to the House of Commons in 1504 and by his first diplomatic mission abroad, when he was sent to negotiate with Bruges concerning issues of commerce.

At the same time, his participation in two other communities also affirmed the depth and breadth of his interests. First of all, the humanists, re-discoverers of ancient literature and poetry—particularly of Greek, even more than Latin—which Oxford has revealed to him. Thomas perfected his Greek with William Lely, a friend from London ten years his senior, on Lely's return from Rhodes, where he had learned Greek from the Knights of St. John. He did not limit himself to Greek poets and philosophers, but, like the first humanists of Florence, he read equally the New Testament, when Erasmus made it available, and, even before this, the Greek Fathers, the first great Christian theologians. In this he certainly benefited from his friendship with a classmate from Oxford, William Grocyn, who, after becoming vicar of St. Lawrence Jewry, next to Guildhall (the city's Town Hall), at St. Paul's Cathedral gave lectures on Pseudo-Dionysius, the brilliant mediator between Neo-Platonist philosophy and early Christian mysticism. Incidentally, Grocyn was one of the first scholars to maintain that Dionysius, far from having been simply a contemporary disciple of St. Paul, was one of the greatest Greek Fathers of the Church. After Grocyn, Thomas Linacre, a priest and doctor who had recently returned from Florence, introduced Thomas More to texts in the original Greek with a reading of Aristotle's *Physics*.

In 1504, More collaborated with Lely to produce his Latin translation of selected epigrams from the Greek Anthology. But as early as 1499, More had met Erasmus during the latter's first visit to England, when

he stayed with the father of a student, Lord Mountjoy. From the first, there was such a close tie between them, that during Erasmus's second visit, in 1505, he would be More's guest at Bucklersbury, his new London residence. This is when, together, they would tackle the translation of the dialogues of Lucian, brilliant satires of all false pretenses. After Erasmus returned to the continent, this time of common life with More had impressed him so deeply that later, despite a dozen years having passed, he recalled that he had found More to be like a brother—even a twin brother. In fact, no less than the influence of Colet, the future dean of St. Paul's, whom Erasmus met at Oxford during his first sojourn in England, was the influence of More, for More would be decisive in orienting Erasmus's spirit; Erasmus was originally curious about everything, and therefore malleable, yet he pursued a renewal of Christianity that would later be called a "return to the sources." This term indicates a knowledge, on the one hand, of early Christian texts and the great, ancient theologians, and, on the other hand, of the Christian spiritualists who reinvigorated the judicious use of philology and critical history.

Paradoxically, Erasmus, a Canon Regular and priest, only came little by little to his profoundly religious and highly traditional spirit, which, more than innovator, or more aptly re-innovator, would color his entire body of work; yet More, a layman and destined always to remain so, even from the outset seems to have drawn inspiration for every aspect of his life from a monastic way of life, with an authenticity rare at his time. During the four years preceding his marriage, he began his education at Furnivall's Inn, and lived half as guest, half as postulant with the Carthusians of London. In the end he decided that he was made not for the monastic life but for marriage and fatherhood, as Erasmus quipped, preferring to be a chaste spouse rather than a lecherous priest. Yet, as we have seen, this would not preclude his reserving for himself, on the margins of his domain at Chelsea, a quasi-monastic "desert," where

every Friday he spent as much time as possible. Finally, in a letter to Margaret, he celebrated his confinement in the Tower as the fulfillment of a desire, unrealized until that time and seemingly unattainable, for solitude and detachment.

It has been said that his piety, in contrast to his humanism, remained a medieval one, particularly on the strength of his *Dialogue of the Last Things*, which was certainly drafted during his semi-monastic youth. It is true that this opponent of any break with living tradition, nourished moreover in the tradition that grew organically from England's Common Law, never tried to wipe the slate clean of anything,[1] which placed him in radical opposition to Protestant innovators. But it is no less true that his way of using the Bible was that of the Church Fathers, an approach recovered by the best of the Christian humanists. And because he was directly inspired by the first Florentine humanists, More was not only the best disciple of Erasmus, but also his inspiration, or in any case the one, above all, who encouraged him to continue without ceasing down this path, on which perhaps he would never have begun if he had not met young More so early on.

In this regard, More's translation, more or less paraphrased and glossed, of the *Life of Pico de la Mirandol*a by his nephew is revealing, More produced this work in 1504, on the eve of his marriage and of his collaboration with Erasmus.

It is not a coincidence that More began this work at the same time as arriving at the church of his friend Grocyn to lecture on Augustine's *City of God*; he gave a series of lectures of which we only have the title, yet this alone is quite expressive of his preoccupations of the moment. In More's shaping of the *Life of Pico*, one clearly notes his enthusiasm for the image of a Christian captivated by the attraction of universal knowledge, in which all things, like all the spirits of this world, find the secret of their reconciliation in a harmonious vision encompassing all created reality. Man, provided he remains faithful to the divine vision

1. Bouyer uses an idiom, "*faire table rase,*" suggesting that he never denied anything as it had been said or done.

in which he was created, or returns to being so, emerges as both the predestined location and the conscious agent of this reconciliation. For this, it is further necessary that in Christ, Word and Wisdom of God made man, man himself be reconciled with his maker in the adoring recognition of the infinite love which created and saved him, and who is the life itself of He who made him.

This being said, it is no less clear in reading More, that for him this pervasive or all-encompassing intellectualism, by which Pico had begun searching out the secret of universal reconciliation, is nothing but a lovely dream. When this dream crumbled through contact with reality, seized by the fervor of Savonarola, Pico could do nothing but renounce it, in a total reversal of the spirit—and all of his being. To read these reflections that More intermingled with his translation, it is clear that More, more immediately sensitive than Pico to the unavoidable necessity of the Cross, rejects both naïve optimism and discouraging pessimism.

For him, the knowledge that ought to recognize, save, and restore all things, beginning with man himself, is first of all the vital knowledge of man's situation in the world, where speculative intelligence cannot be substituted for lived intelligence. On this strong foundation, the knowledge of God in Jesus Christ will certainly gain possession of all that we call culture, though of a culture that encompasses the entire human being. This knowledge will simultaneously transfigure it, once man prepares himself in the school of Christ for the reshaping, both painful and supremely joyful, in which one's entire being, to the very depths, is reclaimed by God.

This vision is present throughout a reading of this *Life of Pico*, which More insightfully meditated on as he translated it. But one can say that it bursts forth in a double series of poems written around the same time. Here, divine love is symbolized by the most generous, and therefore the most pure, human love. Reciprocally, this human love

finds itself illuminated and elevated by the particular generosity of the love of God recognized in Jesus Christ.

Significantly, More produced the first of these two writings, the *Life of Pico*, at the outset of his temporary retreat with the Carthusians, and the second, these poems, shortly before his marriage.

This also clarifies what the biographers tell us of the circumstances of this marriage, disconcerting for more than one modern reader. More himself did not hide that at first it was the younger of the Colt daughters who had attracted him with her charm. But in the end he turned toward the older, he said, unable to abide the thought of affronting her by preferring her younger sister. Not the romantic, this Thomas More, one would say! Certainly not the easy romanticism that values, if not solely physical attraction, in any case nothing that goes beyond sentiment. On the contrary, I would say, More reveals a deeply Christian sensibility (naturally through jest, as is his style!) when he discovers in Jane's pain, and undoubtedly in her unexpressed pain, the delicacy of a loving heart which does not look for anything in return, and in his own heart, on this occasion, that even in terms of simple, human love there can be more happiness in giving than in receiving.

That in fact he loved her tenderly, if perhaps not romantically, she who he called his "*uxorcula*,"[1] his "little bit of a woman," is confirmed not only by their children, whom she gave to him and in whom we can see that he loved her unceasingly after she had passed away, but also by the simple, chaste tenderness with which he spoke of her.

All of this introduces quite well a possible comparison, not too superficial, of this humanity which exists equally in his humanism and in that of Erasmus, though they are not at all the same, and in which, it seemed to Erasmus, could be discerned More's influence on his eldest.

Erasmus knew quite well what he said in joking of himself and More as though they had truly been twins. Erasmus greatly resembled More, in this humanism that he nurtured more and more through his

1. Latin, "little wife"

studies and religious meditation; it never stopped developing, but he may not have been so deeply embedded in it had he not met More during these years which were the most formative for them both. Proof of this is that one can wonder whether Erasmus himself ever laid out these underlying strains as clearly and directly as More did in his letter to the theologian Dorp, a letter so lovely that it managed to dispel Dorp's prejudices against Erasmus, which even Erasmus himself had not previously been able to bring about.

To say all this in as few words as possible, in the end, what most brought them together, and united them forever despite their many differences, was not only their curiosity, but also their natural sympathy, their true love, for what is in Man; as in the Gospel when a person finds himself when he finds God, who is also truly and totally human. But Erasmus, even though he is a priest—and much more profoundly priestly than he seemed at first glance—remained fundamentally an intellectual. Not that his intelligence stops with pure intellectualism: he had encountered this in the works of the decadent scholastics and this intellectualism horrified him. But for him it is always through thought, or more precisely reflection, that he fulfills, in himself as well as in others, humanity itself. Without a doubt, nothing is more characteristic (and happily characteristic) of this dedicated worker than to know, as all the evidence demonstrates, that he was always ready to receive those who were unknown, to listen to them and to chat with them. It could also be said of him, and he would have had to say it of himself, that (like a certain Anglican priest described by Charles Morgan in one of his best passages) it is unknown whether priestly charity or simply an insatiable curiosity about human nature made him so welcoming to everyone. But, in fact, curiosity does not persevere if it is not aided by charity—particularly the charity that one rightly expects from a priest, which knows no exclusion.

The same was true for More, simple layman that he was, but with

this difference: however intelligent or intellectual he was, it was not first through ideas and discussion that he approached people; rather, he came to know them through his essential sympathy, which, far from banishing charity, supposes it, as charity is necessary for sympathy even to be possible. This was simply part of their lives, part of their interactions each day. And beyond this, there is the untiring availability of the judge who never allowed himself to stop listening and seeking to understand the accused, as much as the plaintiffs, brought before his court, as well as the complete loving attention, though no less critical, of a father for his children, and (not to be forgotten) his universal hospitality, which he extended to people who seemingly had nothing in common with him—from his jester to his executioner.

Certainly, despite—or to be more exact even by means of—his hearty vivacity, his sympathy for women, from one so thoroughly masculine, reveals not only his understanding, but also his humility, I would even say, toward them. He is, in effect, one of the very rare modern men for whom a humanity in which women, wives, mothers, or daughters do not have their rightful place, the proper and irreplaceable place which belongs to them, ceases to be human. Notable beyond this is the education that he will be one of the first to seek to give them (and if necessary require of them), not a copy of men's education, but one that is equal to theirs yet does no damage to their true femininity.

Is this not the discovery par excellence that Erasmus could not have made without him? This priest, a little outside the box, and a religious despite himself, but no less ecclesiastical for all this, great God!

We can go so far as to ask ourselves if it is not because he enabled him to make this discovery that More acquired so much influence over him. In any case, it is only after he lived not only with More but in his household that Erasmus seemed to be freed, not from his clerical role but from his clericalism. Thus these two figures emerge before us as they were at the moment when they entered the most important years

of their careers.

One cannot pass by More's formative years, in which he will reveal himself first as a statesman, but also as one who bears witness to the truth that transcends all that exists in the world, without saying something of the work which is perhaps the most unique of his youthful years: his *History of Richard III*, composed around 1513, when he was still nothing but an Undersheriff (the equivalent of one of our magistrates of the [French] correctional tribunal). It is surprising to observe so early, in the analysis of the events of the political world, a lucidity unsurpassed even by Machiavelli, but one with no less rectitude of judgment, both human and Christian. This Richard, who assures himself of gaining the throne simply by putting to death his brother Edward's children—of whom he had been named the "Protector"!—provides the ideal model for a study of the manner in which one becomes a tyrant. But it must be emphasized: duplicity, total absence of scruples, and passion for domination are just as vividly stigmatized in the person of the royal hunchback as are versatility, inconstancy, and the sheer recklessness of the multitude of those privileged within a regime like that of the masses of the people. This man, this magistrate with wide open eyes who wrote this history this early, was ready to play the role of the honest politician, generous but stripped of all illusions, preceding that of the martyr, as free from all affectation as of all illuminism[1] than, without a doubt, has ever been seen.

1. *illuminisme*; a sense of one's enlightenment; a sense that one has attained a state of holiness such that prayer, sacraments, etc., are unnecessary for one's salvation

Chapter 3: Utopia, Plan or Parable?

In their lives, as in their writings, both Erasmus and More crossed from the period of formative years to mature activity through a book, one that was successful yet remains an enigma: first, *The Praise of Folly*, second, *Utopia*. The two are intimately linked. Only by discovering what they have in common as well as what distinguishes them can one truly understand these works and at the same time hope to dissipate the still unresolved equivocations that surround the enduring mystery of these two personalities who are as celebrated as they are misunderstood.

The Praise of Folly is Erasmus's only work that can be said to have become popular, properly speaking, once it was translated into the vernacular from its original Latin. This work would earn for him the reputation of a skeptic, of a Voltaire *avant la lettre*.[1] This is a complete misinterpretation, but he had such a hard life that today it still influences knowledgeable studies of his life and works, like that of Augustin Renaudet.

Utopia, once it was translated into the vernacular, if possible even more completely mystified the majority of its readers. Do we not arrive at the heart of an attentive yet myopic reading when we find in this author a Karl Marx *avant la lettre*? Without going that far, isn't the unlimited openness of his Utopians frequently placed in opposition to the rejection of an anarchic Reformation, from which the Lord Chancellor will draw inspiration, and to the fidelity that will make him the martyr par excellence of a Catholic church disowned by everyone, beginning with its own bishops?

The misinterpretation of *The Praise of Folly*, the approach of which Erasmus could at least sense, would concern him. The second misinterpretation, if More had been able to foresee it, would certainly have incited laughter, but not without a hint of melancholy behind it. So as not to be led astray in turn regarding these works, we must

1. idiomatic expression, literally "before the letter," suggesting a precursor, or an anachronistic usage before a term was coined or, here, before a person lived

begin by being clear about the chronology first of their composition and then of their first printings.

It was during Erasmus's return to Italy in 1509, when he finally received his diploma of Doctor of Theology at Turin, that he composed *en route* a first draft of *The Praise of Folly*—of theologians in particular and of men of the Church in general, and in which the Romans are not forgotten. But he had More and his profound Christian wisdom in mind when he composed for him this *repoussoir*.[1] And it was alongside More that he would complete the rewriting of this work. Published for the first time in 1511, it was not until March 31, 1516, at Froben's press in Basel, that he released the edition that can be considered definitive, the edition that Holbein, that same year, would embellish with pen and ink drawings. Further, from Bruges, on the 21st of October, More addressed his letter to Dorp to clarify firsthand the true intentions of Erasmus, both in launching this incendiary text and in his most serious works.

Around the same time, More, who had long been preparing a response to Erasmus's work with a work of his own—a certain *Praise of Wisdom* written in his own style, was obliged to extend his stay in Flanders where he was occupied with political-economic negotiations on behalf of British industry and commerce (as has been demonstrated recently by the abbot André Prevost); during his stay, not only did he complete the description, prepared in longhand, of the country of *Nusquama* (Nowhere), which would remain the seed of the future Utopia,[2] but he also began to set it in a dialogue, in which he depicts himself with his interlocutor and Flemish friend, Peter Giles, and to frame and intersperse among their remarks the marvelous reports of the fabricated traveler whom he named Raphael Hythloday. In this blessed republic, which evidently can only be found in the absolutely ideal country of "nowhere," the most prickly problems of the city of man must be resolved through the good sense that Descartes would

1. a painting technique of using high contrast to highlight something, particularly by placing a vivid object in the foreground to make other objects appear farther away; by extension, something that reveals through contrast
2. Bouyer's note: of which the name, no longer Latin but in Greek, has the same meaning

soon say is the most widely shared thing in the world, but that has apparently rarely been properly put to use, except in this land of plenty. When More finally returned to London, in the beginning of 1516, he again hosted Erasmus in July and August for what would prove to be the last time.

But of course, finding on his return a great deal of urgent business left undone, he was not yet able to complete his response to the *Folly*, which Erasmus was, if possible, even more impatient than he to see sent to the press. Naturally, they conversed together unceasingly (which does not seem to have been particularly to the liking of Lady More!). At the end of the month of August, More made one last farewell visit to Erasmus at the home of Bishop Fisher at Rochester before his friend embarked for Calais. But it was not until the 3rd of September that he was able to send off his manuscript, finally complete. On October 3rd, Erasmus acknowledged its reception from Antwerp, and on the 17th he charged Peter Giles, the secretary of the municipality of Bruges who had played a part in the dialogue, with the task of completing this edition with a dedicatory letter addressed to an exemplary patron, who was to be Busleiden, a particularly respectable and respected churchman of Mechlin.[1] Giles was immediately enchanted with the text and reassured More, who seemed to him to be worried about how it would be received among their friends.

"I am happy," he wrote, on the 31st of that same month, "that our *Nusquama* pleased Giles, but what do Tunstal, Busleiden, etc., think of it?"

Tunstal was an expert in canon law and civil law and had been his colleague on this ambassadorial mission; a little later, having become the bishop of London, he would push More to engage in polemics against the Protestants. Upon learning that Giles had addressed his dedicatory preface to Busleiden specifically, More sent his text to him personally. Giles's letter was rushed to its addressee on November 1st, and as early

1. *Var.* Malines; a town in the region of Antwerp in Belgium

as the 9th, with Erasmus as intermediary, Busleiden responded to it in the warmest terms. December 4th, a letter from More to Erasmus thanked him for having brought about such a favorable reception from Tunstal. Another letter from More to Erasmus, dated the 15th of December, was written while awaiting its imminent publication.

This immediate success was such that in 1518, when Froben published a new edition, among the most luxurious, he added a preface in his turn, no longer worried about compromising More through a public intervention. It should be noted that what was effectively a second edition had appeared in the meantime, introduced by a figure as noteworthy as Guillaume Budé, a Parisian humanist.

All of this demonstrates the intertwining, reciprocal influence between Erasmus and More, which is the primary key to these two works. One can surmise that an encounter between a spirit as continental as that of Erasmus and a spirit as British as that of More is no small thing amid the mystifying ambiguity of these two works, which are so profoundly yet subtly related. We would willingly say that here one sees two almost unique examples of a mix of irony, Germanic as much as Latin, and Anglo-Saxon humor. Let us think, on one hand, here, of what the German romantics, nourished by Greek and Latin, must have thought about irony. And, on the other hand, we recall that one August-Wilhelm Schlegel, as taken as he was with humor, Shakespearian humor in particular, at the end of the day failed to explain it more to his Teuton compatriots or to Madame de Staël—she herself undertaking, with audacity capable of stunning even the great Goethe, to bring to light for the French both the spirit of the Anglo-Saxons and that of the Germans!

To simplify a little bit, one could say that the irony consists of explaining things which in the end are very serious under a comic form, and the humor of telling the most enormous jokes with implacable seriousness. The abbot André Prévost gave us an analysis of the sources

and of the stages of the composition and redaction of *Utopia* that it would be difficult to surpass. He himself is plainly aware of More's humor and appreciates it. One could only reproach him, having studied his body of work so seriously, with possibly having sometimes forgotten the wry smile with which More, in the end, offers this work to the reader.

For our part, we would say that the main difficulty in rightly understanding Erasmus's *The Praise of Folly* lies in a pervasive glaze of British humor over his Dutch irony, influenced by his companion from across the Channel, that pervades in a way that will be doubly disconcerting when he finishes his satire of the folly of men with an exaltation of the folly of the Cross. Conversely, the humor of More's description of Nusquama, the land of nowhere, in *Utopia*, completed under the eye of Erasmus, will be beautifully and thoroughly tinted by a very Erasmian irony. Once the shell of the false respectability of England's own purportedly Christian institutions is pierced in this way, the decidedly incorrigible humor of the future Lord Chancellor—and of the eventual martyr—has the last word by seemingly maintaining the farce of the reported permanent reforms, those of the disquieting Hythloday and others!

In the final analysis, it is necessary to recognize that this inseparable duo, Erasmus and More, thus resemble Lewis Carroll's twins, which is to say they are enantimorphic:[1] the same in every way, but entirely inverted. In the same way, each for his part has understood the other as much as the other has understood him, but for this very reason they have become equally incomprehensible for the average continental and for the typical Englishman; they have nothing in common except their symmetrical fidelity to the refrain of the *Pirates of Penzance:* "Never go to the sea!"

Erasmus, when he pushes the joke almost to sacrilege in *The Praise of Folly* is therefore desperately serious. In the same way, when More himself finally appears to take his Utopia as serious, he gives us

1. in both French and English, a term from chemistry and mathematics to describe substances or images that are mirror images of each other but cannot be superimposed upon each other and lack internal symmetry

nothing but a final mockery—as he will also do in his last words to his executioner.

To be brief, and simultaneously state the essential, Erasmus only shows that ineradicable folly parades under many forms of worldly wisdom in order to demonstrate, in the end, the one true Wisdom, that of God, which appears to be folly to the eyes of the world.

More, from his end, never wants to persuade us to raze all existing Christian society and reconstruct it *ab ovo* in a purely rational fashion. He counts on the evident absurdity of such a project to dissuade us. But for all this he will not deprive himself of using it to show us that a little more reason, far from harming the tradition that is justifiably dear to us, would only revive it by washing away the encrusted grime.

They are among the true (and very rare!) men of dialogue, something that unfortunately nobody (as is seen even more today than in the sixteenth century) bothers to listen to, even when everyone, as far as the eye can see, monologues over one another—about the dialogue! This assertion makes our closing comparison essential. Their style of double meanings, like a peaked roof but with both sides sloping toward each other,[1] is nonetheless already announced by Erasmus's title: *Encomium Moriae*, which can be translated, as he has already indicated for us, either as *The Praise of Folly* or equally as *Praise of More*—or to put it another way, praise of a man who does not have an air of being wise, but who nonetheless is this and more.

Sticking to More's *Utopia*, it is noteworthy that, like nearly all of his major works, it takes the form of a dialogue; it is a playful dialogue, like those of Lucian, yet no less serious than the dialogues of Plato. This presupposes that no statements by any character should be taken on their own, even those of More's depiction of himself, who does not explain his last word on these questions—because it is essential to political problems, which he sees like a discerning Christian, that at the level of worldly politics they do not have a solution that could be

1. an odd image, indicating that the style of double-meanings doesn't create contradictions but rather harmony, seemingly symbolized by the slopes of a roof inverted and thus running toward each other, to a center trough

considered final. He does not mean therefore to overturn the world and substitute a world that man himself makes anew, for of this More asserts man is incapable. But the whole question is to make sure that in this world where we are, which is transitional by nature, Christians at least do all they can so that final salvation, which can only be supernatural, will become or remain accessible to all people, as well as preparing for this salvation by preparing themselves as well as possible. The dialogue will aim for this by progressive approximations, by avoiding the political carelessness of an exhausted dog who abandons himself to the flow of the current, yet without literally claiming to realize a perfection that would only exist "nowhere;" but that does not prevent this, though it is only a dream, from being in any case a provocative dream. *Utopia*, even by this very designation, should not be read as a blueprint of a perfect society, which could not exist as far as actual history is concerned. But, in imagination—by opposing the mediocre *accomplishments* of Christians whose Christianity, if it is not purely a façade, is at least second-hand to what these "natural ones," who would not for all this be absolutely unreasonable, would be able to do through good sense—one tries to make out what improvements a society that wants to be Christian would be open to if it truly tried to be so.

It is in this, in sum, as in certain parables from the gospels, especially that of the unfaithful steward. It is important not to search here for an allegory corresponding detail for detail but for a form illustrated with images from *argumentum a fortiori*. If a well-advised use of doubtful resources, or truly deficient ones, can have good effects, what cannot arise from a more attentive application to the best resources! The Utopians, in effect, are nothing but people moving toward the truth, who know that they are far from having achieved it but who honestly try, if only by grasping, to draw on the best part of their imperfect knowledge. They are sketched out with so much wit and verve only to embarrass those who boast of possessing this truth but who in truth

do not pain themselves to apply it, or even to examine it too closely.

It is not hidden from us that the Utopians ignore grace, Christian forgiveness, and Christian charity. But their mere attention to the common good, rightly understood, brings them to a distribution of goods of consumption among them that is less shocking than that which is observed in our societies of thoughtless Christians. Even more importantly, they avoid engaging in combat with their neighbors, of whom a little evaluation suffices to show that, even supposing they should end up conquerors, they would reap no real advantage from it in the end. The Utopians and their world are not in any way exempt from what can be judged patent absurdities. But despite being absurd on certain points, they are not necessarily so on all. Is it too demanding for Christians at least to do likewise?

The unreality—but, once again, provocative unreality—of *Utopia* is otherwise balanced by the realism of the dialogue and all of the story-telling that surrounds it. Hythloday, the sea-faring globe-trotter, boastful but not foolish, conforms in all things to the contemporary model of the conquistador, who is no doubt too imaginative but at least does not appear withdrawn. Between the continental Peter Giles, who begins with the point of view of one from Bruges, an imperial perspective, and the insular Thomas More, representing the point of view of a Londonian and of the British nation, this outsider comes just at the right moment to inspire a possible mediation. In revealing that what is self-evident for one or the other is not necessarily self-evident for those who come from elsewhere, even should it be from "nowhere," an eloquent seaman (who is capable of boastfulness but also of righteous indignation, and as we certainly must not forget is more than a bit of a practical joker) might put two grand bourgeois men, two wise men of the world who come from different perspectives, on a path of understanding that is profitable for everyone.

Here and nowhere else lies the meaning of *Utopia*: it is not a plan, but

a parable, a parable that invites us not to oppose tradition to rationality, but no more, certainly, to oppose rationality to tradition, and certainly not to reduce Christian tradition to traditions more or less mixed with the Christian, which are tradition less by reflected conviction than by a more or less vague custom. When this has been understood, one is prepared to understand this Chancellor of England who will direct all of his policy, inspired by an ideal of the Renaissance and of authentic Christian and human reform, against already rampant heresy and schism that is more than threatening; one is prepared, too, to understand the martyr who will prefer, at the price of his life, to remain faithful to a single point of the faith, even should it be judged obscure, but who sees clearly that if this were relinquished

Chapter 4: Christian Chancellor of a Megalomaniac "Defender of the Faith"

Following a reading of *Utopia*, one is naïvely surprised that Sir Thomas More, when appointed Lord Chancellor, should not have implemented, or better yet proclaimed, even slightly original policies. First of all, this does not take into account all that we have just observed concerning the true meaning of the *Utopia*. But this also certainly confuses who a Chancellor of England was at the beginning of the 16th century, and what he could do, with what we can expect today from His Majesty's Prime Minister, who is called to his duties by the sovereign following an election. Today, by a singular exchange, when the sovereign, crown on head, solemnly delivers the Speech from the Throne[1] before the reunited Lords and Commons, this does nothing in reality except set forth the views of the party brought into power by universal suffrage. On the contrary, in More's time, the Chancellor, addressing the same Parliament, could do nothing but pass on to them the good pleasure of their common master.

With Henry VIII above all, England became an absolute monarchy, and it did not definitively stop being one until well after the failed Restoration[2] and the defeat of the Stuarts. This means that, far from resembling a modern Prime Minister administrating his policies or those of his party, which the sovereign can only temper, a Chancellor like More was nothing more, in the legislative plan, than the megaphone of the royal will. The incident in which More was obliged to communicate the King's intentions to Parliament in the affair of his still-pending divorce was typical. A member of More's Parliamentary audience asked him publicly what he thought about the affair. He could not and would not respond except to say that the King knew his thoughts, but that he was not permitted, without authorization, to reveal his personal opinion, whatever it may be, to anyone else.

1. also called the Queen's Speech or the King's Speech; delivered at the state opening of parliament, an event marking the start of a session of the Parliament of the United Kingdom
2. the period following the reign of Cromwell in which, under Charles II, the monarchy and English way of life was restored and a new political order established, with Parliament establishing limitations to monarchical authority

Simple administrator, therefore, of policies that were not within his powers to determine, it was, in fact, as England's highest judge that it would be possible for the Chancellor at the very most to interpret these policies according to the fundamental spirit of the Common Law. In fact, as early as his installation speech, which was justly severe toward his predecessor, Cardinal Wolsey, who without a doubt was much more worried about advancing his own affairs than those of the king or citizens, More wished to settle innumerable legal cases as quickly as the most attentive diligence would allow, notably including questions of public interest as much as humble, private ones, long left undecided.

Nevertheless, we must not forget that before his accession to this magistrature, supreme yet not at all sovereign, when he was still nothing but the simple Speaker of the Commons, More told Henry, in terms in which the requisite humility only served to underscore his dauntless frankness, that he believed that, in his position, the greatest service he could offer his master was not to hide from him any of the reactions, the desires as much as the revulsions expressed by his subjects through the mouth of their deputies. One can be sure, all the more so once he had become the King's primary councilor, even if he had to conform (so far as he could in conscience) to his decisions once they had been made, he would not hold back opinions beforehand.

And assuredly, he who had so coolly analyzed the character of Richard III, living daily in Henry's shadow, had taken stock of his master long before his final elevation. Roper's comments that we have cited, which are far from the only ones, show it too. First, it can be argued that the flattering Ode with which More lauded Henry's accession praised not so much the qualities he saw in him as those he would have wished to see there. At that time, everyone believed that Henry at least exhibited this potential, but it is very probable that More's highly perceptive spirit discerned in him at most a possibility to encourage before it was too late. Intelligent, certainly; brilliant; as attractive as

he wished to appear: such was the young prince. But we can be sure that this acute observer at his side was never much mistaken about the constancy that was possible from his master in matters other than self-satisfaction.

As early as the first years of his reign, when he claimed the dignity of Emperor of Germany (of the Holy Roman Empire, as it is called), Henry boasted of being the defender of the faith *par excellence*, in his kingdom and beyond, before Leo X, whose spirit was more witty than profound, praised him for it. At this time, he wrote his *Defense of the Seven Sacraments* against Luther. His councilor, already favored though not yet Chancellor, from this moment saw nothing so well as the instability of pride, second only to the vanity that blinded this autocrat. It was therefore More—O irony!—who warned the somewhat-improvised royal theologian not to exalt too highly, in his refutation of Luther, a pontifical authority whose powerful interests were not quite certain always to be in agreement with his declared principles.

Returning to More's legal activity, during his relatively brief time in the chancellery, he would draw out the logical consequences of his master's official position of faithful orthodoxy, not only because he reasonably suspected that the king began to be the first to be taken in, but also, one might imagine, in order to try, if there were still time, to make the monarch's official orthodoxy irrevocable. To this end, though he encouraged patience and humanity as much as possible toward preachers of the religious reform, which was inspired by German Lutheranism but already much more violent in its rupture with the Catholic tradition, when he was certain that arguments were insufficient, he did not hesitate to decide legal proceedings as required by the laws of the kingdom, of which he had been established primary guardian. There is no contradiction in this with the Utopians' great tolerance, which is explicitly linked to the search for and expectation of a revelation that is possible but has not yet been made known to them.

More thought—and how can we say he was wrong—that the case was entirely different for a state like England, in which all of the institutions were founded on the country's universal Catholic faith, beginning with that of the Crown. Its highest judge can in conscience add nothing.

But, uniquely in the history of his office, More never launched legal proceedings in his realm of responsibility without conversing as equals with the defendants before him, in order to help them reflect—not so much on the consequences of their situation as on the unstable, often contradictory, character of the positions that tend toward the ruin, pure and simple, of the traditional Christian faith which he strove, with all of his smiling good nature, to illuminate for them.

Nevertheless, once it was evident that the peaceful discussion was not leading anywhere, it was not within his authority not to apply the laws with vigor when the responsible party had been identified. At the same time, though, he perceived that the King wanted an obliging primate who could solve his matrimonial affairs, which Wolsey had not managed to settle even while he held the positions of legate of the Holy See and Chancellor of England concurrently. Cranmer's nomination to Canterbury despite, as neither Chancellor nor King could have been unaware, his living in concubinage and secretly favoring ideas much more extreme than those of Luther (his unavowed marriage with the daughter of Osiander, friend of the German reformer, is significant), already tended to undermine any legal effort to combat religious upheaval. The King, of course, after taking such a clear position, could not endorse it without making himself ridiculous. Moreover, deep within himself, the issue continued and would always continue to disgust him.

On the other hand, he needed a real archbishop; Rome would not submit to his conjugal fantasies, though they were covered by a dynastic pretext. The Queen, Catherine of Aragon, had only given him a daughter, but it was clear to everyone, as Shakespeare observed, that the

principal defect of the king's marriage was now that the Queen's maid of honor, Anne Boleyn, seemed more desirable to him. More saw very well that the legal barriers that he was still responsible for maintaining were caught in a trap, and in the years to come he committed himself more and more in parallel, as a private man, in the controversy.

It bears repeating: shortly after Tunstal, his old colleague, became bishop of London, he charged More in the name of the bishops with this task that no bishop, except Fisher of Rochester, felt capable of undertaking. The vigor of his attacks, and their personal character, in particular concerning Tyndale, the first English reformer who tended openly toward heresy in addition to schism, does not by any means suggest that he had repudiated the idea he had developed with Erasmus of a truly evangelical (in the real sense of the word) religious reform, which is to say reform through a return to the apostolic Church. This conveys well the disposition that he would encourage with Erasmus and even explicitly incite: nothing is more capable of ruining true reform in the Church than confusing reform with destruction of the traditional foundations, which are in fact purely apostolic and evangelical, of the Church herself.

In all this, one must recognize the exceptional, even unique combination in More's character, particularly among those in England at this time, of lucidity and courage, combined with prudence without weakness, and moderation devoid of incertitude.

Neither was there cowardice in him, like that of the masses, which was seen not only in politicians but also in churchmen and in nearly all of his compatriots and contemporaries, nor was there fanaticism, nor even confusion between religious politics and politics itself, of which the only courageous and faithful bishop, Rochester himself, the future Cardinal *in carcere*,[1] would not at this moment be totally exempt. In a church and state in parallel disarray, the incorruptible jurist, remained impossible to lure, and he was as inseparable from lucid Christianity

1. Fisher, bishop of Rochester, was named a Cardinal by Pope Paul III in May 1535, while he was in prison and awaiting trial.

in his vision as he was constant in his faith.

In this regard, his sovereign, as brilliant as he had seemed to everyone until this moment, had already shown he was not up to the task, and one cannot believe that the unhappy king did not feel it, even if confusedly. Henry did not become a Bluebeard overnight, despite being as ridiculous as he was odious in his final years. More was the first to be convinced that his scruples of conscience were not yet simply for show. His desire, sincere at least until a certain point, was to extract himself honorably from the inextricable contradictions in which his unbridled desire for power, his real dynastic worries, and his sensual passion, had thrown him; though these convictions served as cover for what was contrary to them, in the meantime, they had not stopped being more authentic than one might have thought. Hence, during the final days of More's official service, the sovereign undeniably entangled himself in no less a contradiction with regard to his Chancellor.

Without a doubt, from the moment the King installed him in the supreme magistrature, he had the idea of bending him to his ends through blackmail by confidence and generosity. But given that men are complex, and those who aspire only to super-humanity[1] more than others, we cannot therefore exclude the possibility that the king truly hoped to convince More of the purity of his deepest intentions, and thus to silence the scruples that had not yet been extinguished in himself.

One could say that More resigned when, from his point of view, he had become totally convinced of the inadmissible character, in equity and in law, of the royal divorce, and even more so of the religious consequences that would result for the country, particularly in the circumstances in which he was to bring it about. But it is also the case that he had realized he was incapable of showing the royal megalomaniac the internal contradictions into which he sank more and more deeply, or of helping him extricate himself from them.

1. in the sense of moral superiority

At this moment, one can no longer doubt that More would be weakened by the weight of responsibilities which he felt so much surpassed the capacities at his disposal, whether constitutional or psychological, in the face of the monarch, particularly amidst a public opinion so profoundly troubled. Therefore, his resignation for reasons of health was not a pretense, nor was his proclaimed hope, in dreaming of private life, of being able to work peacefully toward his own salvation and that of his loved ones, giving up his responsibility for the public safety once it was clear he no longer had the means to safeguard it.

As for the ruin of his career, and consequently the final blow to the worldly success of him and his family, one can be sure that these were the least of his worries. As he had forewarned his family, they might not all at this instant descend from their position of affluence to poverty, but now they must expect a decline which, even if it were not complete immediately, would certainly be irremediable.

The Sunday following his resignation, in place of his departed serving man, in the little church at Chelsea, he went himself to his wife's pew to tell her, "Madame, my Lord is gone!" Even while poking fun at his wife's chagrin, there is no doubt that, by his accounting, he was content finally to be free of a weight that had become unbearable. Nevertheless, he could not have many illusions about the chances of long being able to retreat with his personal *pursuits in otio cum dignitate*.[1] In fact, his first care would be to prepare his close ones, as he had prepared himself, for any eventuality, including the worst.

1. Latin: worthy leisure; a phrase Cicero used to describe his retirement from public life

Chapter 5: The Martyr

In March of 1532, More returned the seals he had received in October, 1529. Thus, he had only held them for a space of two and a half years. And undoubtedly, long before he divested himself of them, he foresaw the grave difficulties that would come. Another thought expressed to his son-in-law Roper, aside from that already quoted, shows clearly that the still-vague threats he had sensed so early on had quickly become more defined: "Now would to our Lord, son Roper, upon condition that three things were well established in Christendom, I were put into a sack, and here presently cast into the Thames! … The first is, that where the most part of Christian princes be at mortal war, they were all at a universal peace. The second, that where the Church of Christ is at this present sore afflicted with many errors and heresies, it were settled in a perfect uniformity of religion. The third, that where the King's matter of his marriage is now come in question, it were to the glory of God and quietness of all parties brought to a good conclusion."[1]

A short time later, he would be still clearer, anticipating all too well how the affair of the divorce and tendencies toward schism and heresy would intermingle and fatally congeal: "God give grace, Son, that these matters within a while be not with oaths."[2]

What More feared long in advance and saw gradually take form, he foresaw imminently when, on May 15, 1532, the Convocations (the provincial synods of Canterbury and York) recognized the king as the Supreme Head of the Church in England, though with the purely formal reservation, "so far as the law of Christ permits." The following day, which is certainly significant, though it was simply the conclusion of long negotiation, he rendered the seals to his sovereign, who, incidentally, on this occasion did not withhold his profession of gratitude and good will.

1. William Roper, *The Life of Sir Thomas More, from Essential Works of Thomas More*, eds. Gerard Wegemer and Stephen Smith (Yale University Press, 2020), 1396/78-81, 1396/88-1397/1, hereafter, referred to as *EW*.
   When quoting Roper, Bouyer gives all quotes in French. In this edition, we have cited these quotations directly from Roper. In a few cases, Bouyer includes his own words for transition or emphasis; these have been included in the quotation, to preserve integrity and continuity of thought, but enclosed in square brackets to distinguish from Roper's text.
2. *EW* 1405/1-3

But from then on, he did not simply limit the way of life of himself and his household, which the loss of his rank and accompanying income now made impossible, but he also applied himself to preparing them little by little for those trials whose grave future impact he was perhaps the only one already to see clearly.

In fact, all would be visibly set in motion a little less than two years later, when, on May 31, 1534, the Convocations repudiated all Papal authority within the kingdom.

Already, on the first of June, More's absence at the coronation of Anne Boleyn was noted. Just as, shortly before, he had refused a sumptuous gift presented in the clergy's name by his friend bishops for his written defense of Catholic principles, which he pursued with more energy than ever in the leisure of his retirement, he also evaded the solicitations of the same prelates who wanted him to avoid inciting the anger of the new queen by his absence. When they came to find him, he teased them by telling a story, in his way, that suggested they would accept being deflowered for fear of being decapitated; but he said that by his accounting he would prefer to lose his head than his virtue.[1]

His perspicacity was justified when they first tried, vainly, to compromise him in the affair of a nun from Kent, who was guilty of having prophesied the double infidelity of the king—to his faith as well as to his legitimate spouse.[2] But the final blow was dealt when, on the following 13th of April, having been summoned to Lambeth to preach a sermon on the act of succession which made the eventual children of the new royal marriage the legitimate heirs to the throne, he would refuse. He made it very clear before the commission that it was not the legitimacy of the succession that was the object of his refusal, but the manner in which the text tied it to the rejection of papal authority and to the recognition of the king as the only head of the Church in England.

One month earlier, in fact, Cranmer (the new archbishop of

1. *EW* 1405/24-52
2. *EW* 1405/74ff

Canterbury), Audley (who had succeeded More in the Chancellery) and Thomas Cromwell (who would be the principal executor of the measures against the monasteries, and who, after having copiously filled his pockets, would in his turn be condemned to decapitation) had interrogated him concerning the affair of the nun of Kent, and they themselves were easily convinced that it was useless to pursue this charge. Nevertheless, they had prolonged the interview to try to persuade him to publicly approve of all measures newly ratified by the clergy and Parliament.

"To this," says the excellent Roper, "Sir Thomas More mildly made answer, saying,

'No man living is there, my lords, that would with better will do the thing that would be acceptable to the King's Highness than I, which must needs confess his manifold goodness and bountiful benefits most benignly bestowed on me. Howbeit, I verily hoped that I should never have heard of this matter more, considering that I have, from time to time, always from the beginning so plainly and truly declared my mind unto his Grace, which his Highness to me ever seemed, like a most gracious prince, very well to accept, never minding, as he said, to molest me more therewith; since which time any further thing that was able to move me to any change could I never find, and if I could there is none in all the world that would have been gladder of it than I.' "[1]

They then passed to threats, accusing him of "unnaturally … provoking [the king] … to put a sword into the Pope's hands to fight against himself" (an evident allusion to his *Assertio septem sacramentorum adversus Martinum Lutherum*).[2]

This supreme clumsiness elicited a response of which one will appreciate the particular flavor:

"My lords," quoth he, "these terrors be arguments for children, and not for me. But to that therewith you do chiefly burden me, I believe the King's Highness of his honor will never lay that to my charge. For

1. *EW* 1407/20-37
2. *EW* 1407/48-53

none is there that can in that point say in my excuse more than his Highness himself, who right well knoweth that I never was produrer nor counselor of his Majesty thereunto. But after it was finished, by his Grace's appointment and consent of the makers of the same, only a sorter-out and placer of the principal matters therein contained. Wherein when I found the pope's authority highly advanced and with strong arguments mightily defended, I said unto his Grace, 'I must put your Highness in remembrance of one thing, and that is this. The pope, as your Grace knoweth, is a prince as you are, and in league with all other Christian princes. It may hereafter so fall out that your Grace and he may vary upon some points of the league, whereupon may grow breach of amity and war between you both. I think it best therefore that that place be amended and his authority more slenderly touched.'

" 'Nay,' quoth his Grace, 'this shall it not. We are so much bounden unto the See of Rome that we cannot do too much honor unto it.'

"Then did I further put him in remembrance of the Statue of the Praemunire, whereby a good part of the pope's pastoral cure here was pared away.

"To that answered his Highness, 'Whatsoever be to the contrary, we will set forth that authority to the uttermost. For we received from that See our crown imperial'—which, till his Grace with his own mouth told it me, I never heard of before. So that I trust, when his Grace shall be once truly informed of this, and call to his gracious remembrance my doing in that behalf, his Highness will never speak of it more, but clear me thoroughly therein himself."[1]

"[Over which,]" concludes the brave Roper, "displeasantly departed they."[2] One can believe it, beyond doubt!

But he adds, "Then took Sir Thomas More his boat toward his house in Chelsea, wherein by the way he was very merry, for that I was nothing sorry, hoping that he had got himself discharged out of the Parliament bill. When he was landed and come home, then we walked

1. *EW* 1407/55-93
2. *EW* 1407/94

twain alone in his garden together, where I, desirous to know how he had sped, said, 'I trust, sir, that all is well because you be so merry.'

'It is so indeed, son Roper, I thank God,' quoth he.

'Are you then put out of the Parliament bill?' said I.

'By my troth, son Roper,' quoth he, 'I never remembered it.'

'Never remembered it, sir?!' said I. 'a case that toucheth yourself so near, and us all for your sake?! I am sorry to hear it, for I verily trusted, when I saw you so merry, that all had been well.'

Then said he, 'Wilt thou know, son Roper, why I was so merry?'

'That would I gladly, sir,' quoth I.

'In good faith, I rejoiced, Son,' quoth he, 'that I had given the devil a foul fall, and that with those lords I had gone so far as without great same I could never go back again.' "[1]

In fact, the three partners had been impressed by the jurist's consummate skillfulness and intransigent honesty. They managed, not without trouble, to convince the king that a trial, in due form, charging More based on this affair of the nun could only result in the confusion of the judges—not to mention their master! But from then on—More was not mistaken—being able neither to circumvent nor to condemn him under a false pretext, all was done to bring him down using the opportunity furnished only too well by the oaths, just as he had foreseen.

This was decided on May 11th in another, fatal meeting of these same three executors of sinister royal intent. That day, all clergy from the City and Westminster were summoned again to Lambeth to take the oath mentioned above, which combined the cause of the succession and formal acceptance of the schism (already entailing heresy), and More was the only layman summoned with them.

After going to confession and assisting at morning mass, More forbade his wife and children from accompanying him to his boat, contrary to his normal habits, evidently fearing that he would be unable to overcome his emotions on leaving them. But once alone with Roper

1. *EW* 1408/1-25

and the rowers, after a brief silence he appeared calmer, and said to him, "Son Roper, I thank our Lord, the field is won!"[1]

Roper, not knowing what to think of this, responded vaguely, "Sir, I am thereof glad." But in narrating the events, he added, "as I conjectured afterwards, it was for that the love he had to God wrought in him so effectually that it conquered all his carnal affections utterly."[2]

When he arrived at Lambeth, Sir Thomas again found himself before the same three infernal judges from the previous month. They formally asked him to ascribe to the oath naming the king, in place of the Pope, as the only supreme head recognized by the Church in England. More, having read it composedly, declared that he could not agree to the oath thus composed. His judges requested that he retreat to another part of the palace for a period of consideration, during which they administered the oath to all those who were obliged to take it. From a window there, he could also contemplate a view of the crowd of London clergy competing in servility.

Hoping, wrongly, that this edifying spectacle would change his disposition, Minos, Aeacus, and Rhadamanthus[3] recalled him. Finding him still of the same opinion, they handed him over to the guard of Westminster Abbey and went to report to their master. Roper seems to have had good reason to believe that they advised that they only require More's acceptance of the succession, without his being obliged to sign the document to which he objected, provided that he make known his exemption, and that this was the King's first inclination.[4] But Anne Boleyn, who could not stomach the offence of his refusal to attend her coronation, set things in motion such that he could not act thus.[5]

It was decided, therefore, formally to arrest him, and he was conveyed to the Tower of London. As he entered, the porter, according to custom, asked him to surrender his upper garment as a duty. Joking in his usual way, Sir Thomas pretended to think he wanted his old hat and gave it to him, saying, "I am sorry it is no better…."[6] The good

1. *EW* 1409/13-14
2. *EW* 1409/16, 16-20
3. from Greek mythology, the three judges of the dead in Hades
4. *EW* 1409/28-31
5. *EW* 1409/32-36
6. *EW* 1409/51

fellow then had to insist on having his cloak, and undoubtedly with it the ex-chancellor gave him the gold chain he had refused to send home despite well-intentioned advice.

In fact, the beginning of his incarceration was relatively benign. The lieutenant of the Tower, certainly informed of what those in the highest places desired of him, permitted More to send for his servant, John Wood; the jurist, having forgotten nothing of his profession despite being stripped of his title, made his servant swear before him that, should the need arise, he would reveal everything to the lieutenant that More might say or write in his presence against the king, counsel, or kingdom.

Clearly, More's circumspection, as much as his firmness, put everyone in a quandary, and it was fervently hoped that a captivity as benign as possible would succeed, perhaps managing to bring about volens nolens what they desired from him more than from anyone else. Very likely toward this same end, the astute Cromwell, knowing how dear Meg was to her father, gave permission for her to visit after a month had passed. A slightly ambiguous letter that she had addressed to her father was carefully pass on to him after it had, naturally, been intercepted. Did it not show her profoundly troubled and give the impression that she disapproved of his conduct? He responded to her in these terms, surely even more enticing for his persecutors: "If I had not been, my dearly beloved daughter, at a firm and fast point (I trust in God's great mercy), this good great while before, your lamentable letter had not a little abashed me, surely far above all other things, of which I hear diverse times not a few terrible toward me."[1]

She was therefore hurried to her unhappy father, without showing any indication that this was exactly what she had expected, with her truly feminine cunning, from Cromwell, for whom—and not for More—her wily move, full of double meaning, was intended.

But when she was admitted into the cell, after they had begun by

1. Thomas More, "202. To Meg Roper," *EW* 1308/24-29

praying together as was their habit, he said to her, "I believe, Meg, that they that put me here, ween they have done me a high displeasure. But I assure thee, on my faith, my own good daughter, if it had not been for my wife and you that be my children, whom I account the chief part of my charge, I would not have failed long ere this to closed myself in as straight a room, and straighter too."[1]

Which is to say that once he was in his prison, he no longer viewed it as anything but a substitute, in providence, for the cloister he had given up, in order finally to prepare himself without distraction for those "last things" whose supreme importance his sojourn with the Carthusians appears to have imprinted so strongly upon him, from the beginning of his adulthood. We know that he had already written his dialogue on this theme in the form of a discussion with Margaret. And it is certainly not saying too much to suggest that from the moment of his precarious retreat from public life this perspective was renewed in him. *The Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation*, which would occupy his last leisure hours in the Tower, is clearly the fruit of many reflections from the intervening period, during which he never ceased to prepare himself, while preparing his loved ones, for what was to come.

One finds here, more clearly resonant than ever, the absolutely decisive trait of More's humanism. As in Boethius's *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, which he had evidently followed over a long period of time, he begins by showing how merely philosophical, entirely human, wisdom should bring us to see our present life entirely as a preparation for death. At the same time, the perspective of a Christian death opens the door of the only possible entrance to what St. Paul calls true life.

Here, it is appropriate to recall the circumstances of a visit that the Duke of Norfolk paid him while he was still at Chelsea, shortly before his arrest. To fully appreciate it, it is good to approach it from a previous visit from the same noble Lord. This first time, finding him at church in a surplice, among the choir singing praises to the Most High with

1. Roper, *EW* 1409/70-77

all his heart, so falsely did More sing, as it appeared to the Duke, that Norfolk exclaimed, " 'God's body! God's body! My Lord Chancellor, [look at you here—] a parish clerk, a parish clerk! You dishonor the King and his office!'

" 'Nay,' quoth Sir Thomas More, … 'your Grace may not think that the King, your master and mine, will with me, for serving of God his master, be offended, or thereby count his office dishonored.' "[1]

This first experience should have prepared the same Duke, who later said to him, "By the Mass, Master More, it is perilous striving with princes. And therefore I would wish you somewhat to incline to the King's pleasure, for, by God's body, *Master More, indignatio princips mors est!*"[2] To which More replied, "Is that all, my Lord?... Then in good faith is there no more difference between your Grace and me, but that I shall die today and you tomorrow."[3]

During a second visit from Meg, after having inquired about his family and household, he asked her about Queen Anne. " 'In faith, father,' quoth she, 'never better.'

" 'Never better! Meg,' quoth he, 'Alas!... It pitieth me to remember into what misery, poor soul, she shall shortly come.' "[4]

Thereupon, they were interrupted by the Lieutenant of the Tower coming to assure More, in the presence of his daughter, that he wished, for his part, to treat him much better than he was able to, but that he could not do so without incurring the wrath of the crown. To which More responded, "… assure yourself, Master Lieutenant, I do not mislike my cheer, but whensoever I do, thrust me out of your doors."[5]

It was arranged that another of poor Meg's visits should coincide with the departure of the Carthusian martyrs, who were not only imprisoned like Sir Thomas, and for the same reason, but also sent to more atrocious agonies, after having been terribly tortured. More knew it well, for his intrepid daughter-in-law, Anne Cresacre, had managed to visit and care for them during their imprisonment. Be it

1. *EW* 1403/58-65
2. *EW* 1408/68-72. indignatio… The indignation of the prince is death.
3. *EW* 1408/73-76
4. *EW* 1409/92-1410/3
5. *EW* 1410/16-18

well understood, they counted on this spectacle, and on acquainting Meg with it, to vanquish the resistance of the ex-Chancellor. In this they were subject to singular illusions, for all his view of the sinister procession inspired in Meg's father were these words: "Lo, dost thou not see, Meg, that these blessed fathers be now as cheerfully going to their deaths as bridegrooms to their marriage? Wherefore mayest thou see, mine own good daughter, what a great difference there is between such as have in effect spent all their days in a [righteous,] straight, hard, penitential, and painful life religiously, and such as have in the world, like worldly wretches, as thy poor father hath done, consumed all their time in pleasure and ease licentiously. For God, considering their long-continued life in most sore and grievous penitence, will no longer suffer them to remain here in this vale of misery and iniquity, but speedily hence taketh them to the fruition of his everlasting deity, whereas thy silly father, Meg, that like a most wicked caitiff hath passed forth the whole course of his miserable life most sinfully, God thinking him not worthy so soon to come to that eternal felicity, leaveth him here yet still in the world, further to be plunged and turmoiled with misery."[1]

These words are testimony, like many others from his correspondence and prayers in prison, to More's profound humility. We can say it clearly: this explains why he exhausted all legal means, not judging himself worthy to aspire to martyrdom, before publicly opening his conscience, as he would do so magnificently at the end of his trial—or of the farce that took the place of a trial.

After this, they saw clearly a resort to drastic measures would be necessary. Twice, the chancellor himself, Cromwell, and the Dukes of Norfolk and Suffolk, all visited him together, trying to obtain either a confession of the Royal Supremacy in ecclesiastical matters, which would allow his release, or conversely his formal denial, which would justify a condemnation in due form.

But their united efforts could obtain nothing: he refused to swear

1. *EW* 1410/82-1411/7. *Silly*: foolish; *caitiff*: wretch

against his conscience, but he maintained until the end his position that, on these points in contention, he had hidden nothing from the sovereign concerning what he thought and that, in this, he clung to the King's repeated assurances that he would always respect his conscience, provided that he kept his sentiments private from anyone else. We note that these final collective objurgations[1] followed two individual visits, of which the parallels would be highly comedic if they weren't sinister. Cromwell, steadfastly and unshakably convinced of the beneficial effects of a Scottish shower,[2] came, supposedly from the king himself, to assure More that his good and gracious lord was only waiting until he would no longer be troubled by any affair that might cause him a scruple of conscience. If Cromwell seriously imagined that after this Sir Thomas would open his heart to him, he could have spared himself the trouble. More let him leave with only the most courteous thanks. But no sooner was the door of the cell shut on the discomfited fox than More, with a bit of coal, wrote these lines, which seem his last:

"Fortune of sweet appearance, so beautiful you are
So pleasingly do you smile
As though you wanted to ruin me,
Do not believe you can lure me during my life.
I hope, with God's help, to enter soon
Into his celestial door, uniform and sure.
But I await always the storm after the calm."[3]

Cromwell then had one last fantastical idea: that which nothing yet had been able to achieve—perhaps a lovely vignette with a cantankerous spouse could obtain it? Chambers, an excellent modern historian of our hero, has justly emphasized that while it is impossible, after such a long time, that Roper should always cite verbatim the words he reported, in any case he had a singular talent for imitation. Unquestionably, in this case he surpassed himself with the act he prepared for his mother-

1. *Objurgations*: entreaties
2. *Scottish shower*: an intense cold shower or showers of quickly changing temperature, often used therapeutically; metaphorically, rapid changes of good and bad fortune
3. Bouyer's French translation corresponds to the poem in Roper's text, which follows:
Eye-flattering fortune, look thou never so fair,
Nor never so pleasantly begin to smile,
As though thou wouldst my ruin all repair,
During my life thou shalt not me beguile.
Trust I shall God, to enter in a while
His haven of heaven, sure and uniform;
Ever after thy calm, look I for a storm. (*EW* 1411/18-24)

in-law.

"[Hello], Master More.… I marvel that you, that have been always hitherto taken for so wise a man, will now so play the fool to lie here in this close, filthy prison, and be content thus to be shut up amongst mice and rats, when you might be abroad at your liberty, and with the favor and good will both of the King and his Council, if you would but do as all the bishops and best learned of the realm have done. And seeing you have at Chelsea a right fair house, your library, your books, your gallery, your garden, your orchard, and all other necessaries so handsome about you, where you might in the company of me your wife, your children, and household be merry, I muse what, a' God's name, you mean here still thus fondly to tarry."[1]

" 'After he had a while quietly heard her, with a cheerful countenance he said unto her, "I pray thee, good Mistress Alice, tell me one thing.'

" 'What is that?' quoth she.

" 'Is not this house,' quoth he, 'as nigh to heaven as my own?'

"To whom she, after her accustomed homely fashion, not liking such talk, answered, 'Tilly-vally, tilly-vally! [We've heard this tune before!]'

" 'How say you, Mistress Alice,' quoth he, 'is it not so?'

" '*Bone deus*, *bone deus*, man, will this gear never be left?' quoth she."[2]

All means exhausted, it was all too clear that he would never give it up. Not content with depriving him of all means of writing, of his books, and more generally of all that could have softened his captivity, three fellows were sent to him under the pretext of removing from his chamber anything that might fall into this category. Two of them, as it appeared to him, were at least honest men, even if they were not particularly courageous: Sir Richard Southwell, and a servant of Cromwell named Parker. But the third was what modern spy services call a mole: Master Rich, who had just been named (no doubt for this purpose) Attorney General.

1. *EW* 1411/30-45. *fondly*: foolishly
2. *EW*: 1411/46-58. *gear*: matter

This one, while packing up the books, entered into a fawning conversation with More:

" 'Forasmuch as it is well known, Master More, that you are a man both wise and well-learned as well in the laws of the realm as otherwise, I pray you therefore, sir, let me be so bold as of good will to put unto you this case. Admit there were, sir,' quoth he, 'an act of Parliament that all the realm should take me for king. Would not you, Master More, take me for king?'

" 'Yes, sir, [if it were done],' quoth Sir Thomas More, 'that would I.'

" 'I put case further,' quoth Master Rich, '[suppose] that there were an act of Parliament that all the realm should take me for pope. Would you then … take me for pope?'

" 'For answer, sir,' quoth Sir Thomas More, 'to your first case, the Parliament may well, Master Rich, meddle with the state of temporal princes. But to make answer to your other cause, I will put you [in my turn] this case: Suppose the Parliament would make a law that God should not be God. Would you then, Master Rich, say that God were not God?'

" 'No, sir,' quoth he, 'that would I not, since no Parliament can make any such law.'

" 'No more,' said Sir Thomas More, as Master Rich reported him, 'could the Parliament make the king supreme head of the Church.' "[1]

And Roper, to conclude: "Upon whose only report was Sir Thomas More indicted of [high] treason … [for having denied] the king to be supreme head of the Church. Into which [bill of] indictment were put these heinous words—'maliciously, traitorously, and diabolically.' "[2]

Brought to Westminster on the 1st of July, before the bar of the court of King's Bench presided over by Audley, he was therefore judged under this accusation. He pled not guilty. After Rich testified under oath, as was expected of him, Thomas More limited himself to declaring to the court, "If I were a man, my Lords, that did not

1. *EW*: 1411/88-1412/20
2. *EW*: 1412/21-26

regard an oath, I needed not, as it is well known … to stand here as an accused person. And if this oath of yours, Master Rich, be true, then pray I that I never see God in the face, which I would not say, were it otherwise, to win the whole world."[1]

Having established the exact terms of their interview and stated clearly that his supposed conclusion was purely Rich's invention, he turned towards the wretch and crushed him in these terms: "In good faith, Master Rich, I am sorrier for your perjury than for my own peril. And you shall understand that neither I, nor no man else to my knowledge, ever took you to be a man of such credit as in any matter of importance I, or any other, would at any time vouchsafe to communicate with you. And I, as you know, of no small while have been acquainted with you and your conversation, who have known you from your youth hitherto. For we have long dwelled both in one parish together, where, as you yourself could tell (I am sorry you compel me so to say) you were esteemed very light of your tongue, a great dicer, and of no commendable fame. And so in your house at the Temple, where hath been your chief bringing up, you were likewise accounted."[2]

"Can it therefore seem likely unto your honorable lordships," [he concluded his address to his judges,] "that I would, in so weighty a cause, so unadvisedly overshoot myself as to trust Master Rich, a man of me always reputed for one of so little truth, as your lordships have heard, so far above my Sovereign Lord the King, … that I would unto him utter the secrets of my conscience touching the King's supremacy, the special point and only mark at my hands so long sought for…? Can this in your judgments, my lords, seem likely to be true?"[3]

After this, Rich tried in vain to invoke the testimony of his two companions. Parker took his place to declare that he had been so deeply occupied by packing up Sir Thomas More's books that he had paid no attention to their words, and Sir Richard Southwell, in his turn, declared that having only been charged, by his reckoning, to oversee the transport

1. *EW*: 1412/46-52
2. *EW*: 1412/56-71
3. *EW*: 1412/72-81, 87-89

of the books, he had given no ear to the gentlemen's conversation.

Notwithstanding this evident lack of valid testimony, and without taking any account of More's defense, that even had he put confidence in Rich as they gratuitously attributed to him, this could not have constituted a malicious, treacherous, and diabolical offense against the statue, the jury, carefully selected and even terrorized by Cromwell and his henchmen, returned a verdict of guilty.

Audley was so evidently troubled that he resorted to his legal duty and immediately began to pronounce the sentence. But More, on the contrary, as calm and master of himself as though it had still been his job to preside over the proceedings, interrupted him with a mocking courtesy: "My lord, when I was… [magistrate], the manner in such case was to ask the prisoner before judgment, why judgment should not be given against him."[1]

Audley, who no longer knew what to do, could only cede him the floor. Therefore, now that all had been consummated, he freed himself from all that he had carried within in terms that not only Roper, many years later, would report, but to which a Frenchman present at the proceedings bore witness a few days later: "Forasmuch as, my lord, … this indictment is grounded upon an act of Parliament directly repugnant to the laws of God and his Holy Church, the supreme government of which, or of any part whereof, may no temporal prince presume by any law to take upon him, as rightfully belonging to the See of Rome, a spiritual preeminence by the mouth of our Savior himself, personally present upon the earth, only to Saint Peter and his successors, bishops of the same See, by special prerogative granted, it is therefore in law amongst Christian men insufficient to charge any Christian man."[2]

Audley attempted to respond that "[from the moment that] all the bishops, universities, and best learned of this realm had to this act agreed, it was much marveled that he alone against them all would so

1. *EW*: 1413/68-71
2. *EW*: 1413/76-88

stiffly stick thereat, and so vehemently argue thereagainst."[1]

To which More made this final response: "If the number of bishops and universities be so material as your lordship seemeth to take it, then see I little cause, my lord, why that thing in my conscience should make any change. For I nothing doubt but that, though not in this realm, yet in Christendom about, … they be not the fewer part that be of my mind therein. But if I should speak of those which already be dead, of whom many be now holy saints in heaven, I am very sure it is the far greater part of them that, all the while they lived, thought in this case that way that I think now. And therefore am I not bound, my lord, to conform my conscience to the Council of one realm against the General Council of Christendom."[2]

After this, understandably, Audely could not without doubt, as Roper says, bring himself to carry the whole burden of the judgment alone. So, in a loud voice, he asked the opinion of England's second magistrate, the Lord Chief Justice Fitz-James. This Raminagrobis[3] limited his response to an oracle that rivals Rabelais' *Dive Bouteille*[4] in clarity :" 'My Lords all, by Saint Julian,' (that was ever his oath), 'I must needs confess that if the act of Parliament be not unlawful, then is not the indictment in my conscience insufficient.' "[5] To which, the chancellor could only say, "Lo, my Lords, you hear what my Lord Chief Justice saith."[6] Finally, he rendered the sentence of condemnation, which could only be a traitor's death. After this More was offered a final opportunity to say a few words, one might think with the hope that he would say something to bring the king to reduce the sentence should he wish to, and this was his response, as beautiful in its serene charity as it was bravely divested of any ambiguity and by which he clearly rendered appeal of his judgment impossible: "More have I not to say, my lords, but that like the blessed apostle Saint Paul, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles, was present and consented to the death of Saint Stephen, and kept their clothes that stoned him to death, and

1. *EW:* 1414/28-33. Not a direct quote in Roper.
2. *EW:* 1414/34-49
3. A poet from Rabelais, whose name can be jokingly used for a cat, or pejoratively for a corpulent person
4. A poem, "The Divine Bottle" read as an unintelligible prophecy and printed inside the figure of a bottle.
5. Roper *EW:* 1414/59-63
6. *EW*: 1414/65-66

yet be they now both twain holy saints in heaven, and shall continue there friends forever, so I verily trust, and shall therefore right heartily pray, that though your lordships have now here in earth been judges to my condemnation, we may yet hereafter in heaven merrily all meet together, to our everlasting salvation."[1]

We must cite the excellent Roper again on More's subsequent return to prison: "When Sir Thomas More came from Westminster to the Towerward again, his daughter, my wife, desirous to see her father, whom she thought she should never see in this world after, and also to have his final blessing, gave attendance the Tower Wharf, where she knew that he would pass by, before he could enter into the Tower, there tarrying for his coming home. As soon as she saw him, after his blessing on her knees reverently received, she hastening toward him, and without consideration or care of herself, pressing in among the midst of the throng and company of the guard, that with halberds and bills went round about him, and there openly, in the sight of all, embraced him, took him about the neck, and kissed him. Who, well liking her most natural and dear daughterly affection toward him, gave her his fatherly blessing and many goodly words of comfort besides. From whom after she was departed, she, not satisfied with the former sight of him, and like one that had forgotten herself, being all ravished with the entire love of her dear father, having respect neither to herself, nor to the press of the people and multitude that were there about him, suddenly turned back again, ran to him as before, took him about the neck and diverse times together most lovingly kissed him, and at last, with a full heavy heart was fain to depart from him. The beholding whereof was to many of them that were present thereat so lamentable that it made them for very sorrow thereof to mourn and weep."[2]

Eight days still had to pass before the execution of the sentence. The day before, he wrote, with a bit of coal, this final letter to his daughter: "I cumber you, good Margaret, much, but I would be sorry if it should

1. *EW:* 1414/71-82
2. *EW:* 1415/18-48. *halberds and bills*: battle-axes and broadswords; *ravished*: carried away; *fain*: obliged

be any longer than tomorrow, for tomorrow is Saint Thomas's Even, and the Utas of Saint Peter. And therefore tomorrow long I to go to God; it were a day very meet and convenient for me, etc. I never liked your manner toward me better than when you kissed me last. For I like when daughterly love and dear charity have no leisure to look to worldly courtesy."[1]

One of his friends, Sir Thomas Pope, at daybreak on the 1st of July, was sent to tell him his sentence would be carried out that same morning, before nine o'clock. In the end, the king had ordained that More would be decapitated, in lieu of the torture inflicted on traitors of being hung, quartered, and disemboweled.

Sir Thomas More said to him, "Master Pope, … for your good tidings I most heartily thank you. I have been always much bounden to the King's Highness for the benefits and honors that he hath still from time to time most bountifully heaped upon me, and yet more bound am I to his Grace for putting me into this place, where I have had convenient time and space to have remembrance of my end. And so help me, God, most of all, Master Pope, am I bound to his Highness that it pleaseth him so shortly to rid me out of the miseries of this wretched world. And therefore will I not fail earnestly to pray for his Grace, both here and also in another world."[2]

Before departing for Tower Hill, More had a gold angel sent to his executioner. This man who had never stopped experiencing the human fear of weakening in his final moments, and who in consequence had used all his legal learning, all his lawyerly ability, to be ready, if possible, for the moment, surrendered himself to his death exactly as he had been in his best days. Climbing the wobbly scaffold supported by the arm of the Lieutenant of the Tower, More said to him, "I pray you, Master Lieutenant, see me safe up, and for my coming down, let me shift for myself!"[3] The king, afraid, wanted to prevent him from exhorting the crowd. But he contented himself with asking the assistants to pray for

1. *EW:* 1415/57-66. *cumber*: trouble; *Utas*: octave; *meet and convenient*: fit and appropriate
2. *EW:* 1415/77-89
3. *EW:* 1416/45-47

him and witness that he died for the Catholic faith.

Kissing the executioner, he finally said to him, according to Roper, "Pluck up thy spirits, man, and be not afraid to do thine office; my neck is very short; take heed therefore thou strike not awry, for saving of thine honesty."[1] According to Harpsfield, he added, "Do not cut my beard," (which had grown during his imprisonment) "for it, at least, has not betrayed the king!"[2]

He had composed an epitaph as soon as he retired, which can be read in the church at Chelsea, below a tomb that he was not able to join, but where his two successive wives are reunited, and in his text the paragraph concerning them is remarkable, evidently written (as the English say) tongue in cheek. The faithful Margaret managed to recuperate his head, which was exhibited on London Bridge, and had his body interred in the church of St. Dunstan, at Canterbury (Roper's parish). It rests there to this day.

The bishop John Fisher, imprisoned in the Tower at the same time as More was, would follow him in death shortly thereafter. As we have seen, the Carthusians and other religious had preceded them. For the moment, it might seem that these are all the martyrs that fidelity to the Catholic Church would find in England, apart from the poor nun mentioned above. Beginning with Elizabeth, though, the reaction would come, and well into the seventeenth century their successors would be numerous.

It is worthy of note that the miserable Rich, quickly made noble by his false witness, was moreover showered with wealth. One likes to think that he could not enjoy them without troubling his conscience. As for the queen, Anne Boleyn, like Cromwell, the most faithful executioner of the royal plans, she finished on the same scaffold as their victim, having in the interim ceased to please. To conclude with their master himself, as an English historian elegantly said, "This grand monarch's final years were unhappily darkened by a succession of conjugal bereavements." This is certainly the least that we can say!

1. *EW*: 1416/54-57
2. from Cresacre More's account; a paraphrase

Conclusion: The Legacy of a Humanist Martyr

As the more-or-less Shakespearian play, *Henry VIII*, attests, not only during England's brief return to Catholicism under Mary Tudor, but even in the time of Elizabeth and her successors, More would be recognized among Anglicans and Catholics alike as the exemplar of a lawyer of integrity, an incorruptible judge, and a royal councilor who combined, even under Henry VIII, absolute fidelity with uncompromising honesty.

However, seventeenth century Puritans, and notably Foxe in his *Book of Martyrs*, were the first to describe Chancellor More as a torturer of the most evangelical pioneers of Protestantism in England. Responses founded on this would continue from then on. They obliged Foxe himself, in the later editions of his book, first of all to remove facts that had been presented as certain. Nevertheless, in the nineteenth century, the great liberal historians, from unbelieving Froude to Catholic Lord Acton, would renew the accusation. Chambers' great biography seemed to have dissipated it by establishing the justice of Erasmus's affirmation that, in fact, no one in England suffered for their Protestant faith during More's time in the Chancellery.

Surrounding the canonization of More and Fisher, recent years appear to have successfully unified the English in their recognition of More, not only among Catholics as a saint, but also among Protestants themselves as a hero of conscience and faith and among lawyers and statesmen, whatever their belief or unbelief, as one of the greatest representatives of the political and judicial traditions of which England is justifiably proud. I need nothing more for evidence than a collected volume, edited by the Anglican vicar of the church in Chelsea that was More's parish, of this parishioner of a clearly exceptional stature. Better yet, very recently a writer, part of the Protestantism known as Non-Conformist, devoted a popular biography to him that was no

less laudatory. A recent work tried to denounce this consensus by elevating Wolsey as the man of state open to change necessitated by the times, and reducing More to the level of a simple fanatic intent on maintaining at all costs, by flattering the sovereign, an impossible survival of medieval Catholicism; More, not hesitating to engage in bloody persecution to accomplish this, by a just turn of events was in his turn the victim of a reaction of good sense by the prince in whom he had first aroused bloodthirsty politics.

Good critics, coming from the most diverse horizons, have already done justice to this indictment by showing the weaknesses of his argumentation. Nevertheless, even the critic of the *Downside Review* believed he had to concede effectively that "More's chancellery saw numerous heretics sent to the executioner." It is necessary therefore to begin by settling this question *de facto*.

The most recent research shows clearly that Chambers, like Erasmus, was still missing complete information and simplified things on this point. Not that there were in fact "numerous" executions during the two and a half years when More was Chancellor, but all in all we do know of four, those of Thomas Hitton, probably in February, 1530, and Thomas Bilney, Richard Bayfield, and John Tewkesbury at the end of 1531. One could say that this is still too many, and there is no denying that More many times, in his polemical works, declared without mincing words (as was his habit) that he approved in principle of this sort of execution when the offense was recurring, which is to say when heretics relapsed to the propagation of their ideas after having renounced them and seen themselves released.

It is also necessary, though, to consider all the contemporary facts of the problem. Before anything else, one cannot understand More's statements on this point if one makes an abstraction of his added assertion: that he would have no objection to the Turks themselves coming to preach their beliefs in England, contingent only on their

allowing Christian missionaries to come there, and as long as it were understood on both sides that these preachers must neither urge the forceful overthrow of the state constitution, Christian or otherwise, nor, in general, encourage any violence whatsoever.

This shows clearly that it is not heresy per se that can and should be an object of legal suppression, according to More, but the implications drawn out by the heretics themselves for the forced destruction simultaneously of the traditional Church and the Christian regime founded on its being recognized by all, sovereigns and subjects alike. In the face of this, one must not forget that his opponents themselves absolutely agreed with him concerning the persecution of heretics, with similar reservations, only for them it was the Catholics who were the heretics to be eradicated by any means necessary unless they consented to their own teaching. One must also add that More himself, in practice, always maintained that before even prosecuting heretics, never mind condemning them, one was obliged to discourse peacefully with them and try diligently to convince them to desist from imposing their own ideas upon others, by force if necessary. Testimonies abound showing that he was always faithful to what he advocated. Certainly, his polemics could be bitter when he saw the true evangelical reform he and Erasmus had promoted imperiled by a reform that he believed adulterated it. But, in the realm of his personal relations, whether it was with those whom his office, in the constitutional capacity in which he found himself, obliged him to prosecute, as has been said, he always applied the method he advocated. What is more, the number of executions under his Chancellery would not have been so small compared to what followed if he had excited even a little bit, rather than restrained, the zeal of his subordinates. Even more importantly, he was not free to refuse to apply the laws with vigor, and even less to change them should he wish to, when their implementation was required by the ecclesiastical tribunal, the only authority in the matter. As for those

who were judged and eventually condemned in these matters, as lay judge, he could neither meddle with them in any way nor therefore be held responsible.

All of this being considered, it is certain that one is in the presence of a false quarrel: one can neither present as martyrs for liberty of conscience the men who cared about it much less than he, nor suggest that he was responsible for a political-religious situation which his critics wished only to turn in their favor, and much less than he himself to amend.

On the other hand, on the question of the individual's conscience and inalienable liberty—which does not mean the unbridled ability to follow any whim but rather the capacity and the right to search out the truth in all things by the means at one's disposal, even if it entails being silent and retiring if one is not able, after this, to approve of the position taken by the authority one still judges to be legitimate—one could not possibly find in all of history a position more firm and clear than his. We know that Newman would not agree to drink a toast to the sovereign *par excellence*, and neither to conscience over the pope nor to the pope over conscience, but "to Conscience first, and to the Pope afterwards." Nothing better explains the foundation of More's own position. And for this he went to his death without weakening, even when it would have been sufficient for him to accept an ambiguous compromise, which everyone expected from him, in order to find himself again in his *otium cum dignitate*.

More profoundly, and to put things in right perspective, More remains above all the model, not of a more-or-less Christianized humanism, but of a Christianity which purported to be—and was—fully and totally humane. For him, this meant, above all, that accepting the cross one bears in following Christ was never solely the work of monks or "religious," but instead of all baptized, answering the need of every person to be delivered from evil in the spring of Christ Himself.

At the same time, it is no less essential to his view of existence, and to his entire life, to demonstrate, in his own development and above all in the last phase of his life, that the cross of Christ does not signify a human diminishment but rather is the only concrete possibility in the end, if one agrees to pay the necessary price, of attaining the true life of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, and of having this life to the full. In More, from this perspective, the professional lawyer, the statesman, the father of a family, the friend, the thinker, the contemplative, and finally the martyr, as well as the quotidian man and the man of heart, if ever there was one, with his insight, sensibility, generosity, and above all his humor which ordered all things while carefully but firmly removing all false pretense, were all one.

Finally, it is necessary to highlight that he offers us, in our post-Vatican II Church, as much as in his Church before Trent, the perfect example of a layman aware of his place in the Church and of his rights, inseparable from his duties, which this implies. Cardinal Gasquet was once asked about the position of the laypeople in the Catholic church of his time. He responded "Lay people? Their position? Ordinarily, they ought to kneel. But they can stand for the gospel. Otherwise they must always put their hands in their purses." More, on the contrary, exemplifies a laity well informed of its responsibilities and the duties that these imply. He did not receive his faith passively—as a Church that is purely "taught," without anything having to be assimilated personally, and therefore inevitably discussed, in one's heart of hearts and with competent people—by a teaching Church that would be for him like an automatically functioning oracle. It is necessary here again to invoke Newman and his distinction without separation, in the Christian tradition, of what he called the episcopal form and the prophetic form of this tradition. The Christian truth, he would tell us, which is the truth of life, only subsists by being lived, and personally lived, by all members of the Church, as much as the clergy, including bishops. The

grasp and possible formulation or application of all that follows from Christian revelation for the individual person and whole community of believers is, therefore, not reserved to the bishops alone. There is an effect on all faithful Christians, lay as well as clerics, of faithfully living, in all of one's being, by one's faith. What belongs to the episcopal authority is only the passing of final judgment, authorized by an office that follows from the apostolic office established by Christ Himself, of the validity or invalidity of the developments in question. But it can certainly happen, in this or that circumstance, that a simple layman, a simple faithful person, through this personal fidelity to the complete tradition of the truth of the whole body of the Church from which he will never be separated, can bear witness to truths that a number of bishops, in a specific time and place, will show themselves incapable of defending or even expressing. At the same time, sooner or later, with the assembly of the body of Christian faithful, in communion with the first of the bishops, the most sound part of the bishops (to say nothing of the assembly of the clergy) will be brought, when all is said and done, to recognize and canonize that which one layman, perhaps, abandoned, by all or nearly all of the shepherds of his country, will have confessed, and to canonize the confessor with his confession of faith. What happened in the case of Thomas More is not therefore an anomaly: it is the confirmation of St. Augustine's adage: *Veritas magna et praevalet*, "the truth is great and mighty above all things."