

PETITION SENT TO JOHN PAUL II FOR THE PROCLAMATION OF SAINT THOMAS MORE AS PATRON OF STATESMEN

Holy Father,

For centuries now, Saint Thomas More, martyr, has inspired the sincere veneration of the Christian people. He is also one of the saints whose life and works receive most attention in the worlds of culture and politics, an attention reflected in numerous scholarly studies and an ever-increasing interest both in academia and in the world of affairs. The scholarly bibliography is constantly growing and has a number of remarkable characteristics; above all, it includes authors from different churches and Christian communities (Sir Thomas More is placed in the liturgical calendar of the Anglican Church in England as a "martyr"), different religious faiths and even authors who are agnostic. This is a sign of truly universal appeal. It reflects, moreover, an admiration which transcends the specific contributions that Saint Thomas More made in the various fields in which he worked — as humanist, apologist, judge, legislator, diplomat and statesman — and focuses on the man himself: the idea that holiness is the fulness of humanity appears, in this case, quite tangibly true.

Your Holiness's predecessor in the Chair of Peter, Pope Pius XI, in the Bull of Canonization, presented Saint Thomas More as a model of proven moral integrity for all Christians and defined him as *laicorum hominum decus et ornamentum*. Precisely among the laity, the growing appeal of this extraordinary man speaks to us of one whose presence becomes, with the passing of time, ever more vivid, more striking, and more permanently timely.

He shines forth as an example of that unity of life which Your Holiness has called a characteristic of lay holiness: "*The laity's unity of life is enormously important: for, indeed, they must sanctify themselves in their ordinary professional and social life. In order to be able to respond to their calling, then, the laity should look upon the activity of daily life as an opportunity for union with God and the fulfillment of His will and for service of their fellow man.*" (*Christifideles laici*, n. 17). In Saint Thomas More, there was no sign of that split between faith and culture, between timeless principles and daily life, which the Second Vatican Council laments as "*among of the gravest errors of our time*" (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 43).

In the humanistic activity which found him roaming from English to Latin and to Greek, and from political philosophy to theology, he united study with piety, culture with ascetical life, and the thirst for truth with the quest for virtue through a strict but joyful interior struggle. As a lawyer and judge, he established the interpretation and formulation of laws (he is rightly considered one of the founders of the study of the English *common law*) which safeguard true social justice and build peace between individuals and nations. More eager to eliminate the causes of injustice than to repress it, he did not separate his passionate but prudent advocacy of the common good from the constant practice of charity: his fellow citizens called him the "*patron of the poor.*" An unconditional and benevolent dedication to justice with regard to the human person and liberty was the guiding rule of his conduct as a magistrate. While serving all men, Saint Thomas More knew well how to serve his king, that is the state, but wanted above all to serve God.

This turning toward God permeated all his actions. His family, in which he took care to provide the highest level of moral education, was defined by contemporaries as a "*Christian academy.*" As a public figure, he showed himself an implacable enemy of favoritism and of the privileges of power, exercising an exemplary detachment from honors and offices, but living out, with simplicity and humility, his official position as the highest servant of the king.

Absolutely faithful to his civic duties, he exposed himself to extreme risks for the service of his own nation. He managed to become a perfect servant of the state, because he struggled to be a perfect Christian. "*Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, but unto God the things that are God's.*"

(*Matt. 22,21*): he understood that these words of Christ, while affirming the relative autonomy of the temporal from the spiritual sphere, call upon the Christian conscience to bring the values of the Gospel to the civil sphere, rejecting any compromise, even if this means martyrdom faced with profound humility.

His martyrdom, even given the imperfect historical judgment available to men, seems the supreme proof of this unity of values — the fruit of a relentless search for the truth and a no-less— tenacious interior struggle — with which Saint Thomas More managed to stamp his whole existence. His extraordinary good humor, perennial serenity, consideration of opposing views, and sincere forgiveness toward those who condemned him demonstrate that his personal convictions were wedded to a profound respect for the freedom of others.

The timeliness of this convergence of political commitment and moral conviction, this harmony between the supernatural and the human, and this seamless unity of life have caused many public servants from various countries to join the Committee for the Proclamation of Sir Thomas More, Saint and Martyr, as Patron of Politicians. Among the signatories of this petition are numbered Catholics and non-Catholics: statesmen who work in the fields of both politics and culture, different among themselves, but all captivated by the richness of Saint Thomas More's example — an example not only of the art of governing, but also of the virtues indispensable for good government.

Politics was not, for him, a matter of personal advantage, but rather an often difficult form of service, for which he had prepared himself not only through the study of the history, laws and culture of his own country, but also and especially through the examination of human nature, its grandeur and weaknesses, and of the ever-imperfect conditions of social life. For him, politics was the overflow of a tremendous effort of comprehension. As a consequence, he was able to show the proper hierarchy of ends to be pursued by government, in the light of the primacy of Truth over power and Goodness over utility. He always acted from the perspective of final ends, those which the shifting sands of historical circumstance can never nullify.

Hence the strength which sustained him in the face of martyrdom. He was a martyr of freedom in the most modern sense of the word, for he opposed the attempt of power to command the conscience: a perennial temptation — one to which the history of the 20th century bears tragic witness — of political regimes that do not recognize anything superior to themselves. Faithful to the institutions of his nation — the *Magna Charta* reads: *Ecclesia anglicana libera sit* — and a careful student of history, which showed him that the Primacy of Peter constitutes a guarantee of freedom for the particular Churches, Saint Thomas More gave his life to defend the Church's freedom from the State. But in this way, he also defended the freedom and the primacy of the citizen's conscience before the power of the state.

A martyr for freedom, then, precisely because he was a martyr for the primacy of conscience which, firmly grounded in the search for the truth, renders us responsible for our decisions, that is to say, masters of ourselves and thus free from all bonds except that bond — proper to a creature — which binds us to God. Your Holiness has reminded us that the moral conscience rightly understood is a "*witness of God Himself, whose voice and whose judgment penetrate the intimacy of man down to the roots of his soul*" (*Veritatis Splendor*, n. 58). This — it seems to us — is the fundamental lesson Saint Thomas More offers all statesmen: the lesson of flight from success and easy compromises in the name of fidelity to irrevocable principles, upon which depend the dignity of man and the justice of civil society — a lesson truly inspiring for all who, on the threshold of the new Millennium, feel themselves called to expose and eradicate the snares laid by new and hidden tyrannies.

Therefore, certain that we act for the good of future society and trusting that our petition will find a benevolent welcome with Your Holiness, we ask that Sir Thomas More, Saint and Martyr, faithful servant of the King, but God's first, be proclaimed "Patron of Statesmen."

--Petition sent to John Paul II for the proclamation of Saint Thomas More as Patron of Statesmen