



# More News

*The Newsletter of The Thomas More Society of America*

*August 1997*

On May 20, **Professor Gerard Wegemer** addressed Society members and scholarship recipients, **Kathleen DeLaney** and **Craig A. McCubbin** (both 1997 graduates of Paul VI High School), who were gathered at the University Club. His topic, "Thomas More: How He Achieved Greatness," illuminated More's human, intellectual and spiritual pursuit of perfection. Eschewing pride, our martyr strove to see his life in the context of a larger picture, to appreciate his humble part in the mystery of God's plan. With his eyes on eternity, More vigilantly practiced self-examination and cultivated his own gifts, vowing not to take them for granted. Wegemer told, for example, of a year when More learned that a fire had destroyed his family's stores of grain and those of their neighbors. Upon hearing this news from Alice, knowing that this loss could cost them their home, More meekly thanked God for adversity, resisting the all-too-human tendency toward anger. In retrospect, explained Wegemer, such humility and self-discipline prepared him for his own royal services and, of course, provide a model of personal integrity for us all.

We extend our congratulations to the winners and hope that our members will enjoy Professor Wegemer's address, which begins on page 8.

While in Washington in June for the opening of the Tyndale exhibit at The Library of Congress, **Professor David Daniell** addressed the Society on "Richard III in More and Shakespeare." In his lecture, he emphasized the drama and details of More's text. More, said Daniell, took English history, decorating it with classical oratory, and created a figure both "alluring and revolting," a figure Shakespeare then brought to life on the stage.

## HIGHLIGHTS

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## *Upcoming Events*

The **Annual Dinner** will take place on November 14, at the Congressional Country Club. **Justice Clarence Thomas** will speak to the Society at the dinner.

## *Elections*

Elections will take place at the annual meeting on September 17 at the Army Navy Club. At that time, **John Higgins**, will take office as President of the Society. The candidates for election to the other offices Board are listed below:

President-Elect: Dr. William D. Byrne

Treasurer: Mr. Robert L. Nolting, Jr.

Secretary: Dr. Jennifer Bess

Board Members: Brother Hilary Mettes S. T.  
Mr. Joseph A. DeGrandi  
Mr. Noel J. Augustyn  
Mr. Edward J. Grenier, Jr.

William Byrne is a member of the Board. Robert Nolting and Jennifer Bess would be returning to office, as would Hilary Mettes and Joseph DeGrandi. Noel Augustyn is a current member of the Society, and Edward Grenier is a new member. He is a partner at Sutherland, Asbill and Brennan in Washington, D.C.

### ***Bylaws Amendment Passed***

At the special members' meeting held after the Memorial Mass on June 10, 1997, the Amendment to Section 6.01 passed. The text now reads:

Not more than one office may be held by one person except that when the Board by resolution deems it appropriate or necessary, the same person may serve as both Chairman of the Board and President.

### ***Tyndale Exhibit***

"Let there be Light: William Tyndale and the Making of the English Bible" can be seen at the Jefferson Building of The Library of Congress through September 6. At the exhibit, you will not only see Tyndale's New Testament, but also the letter he wrote from his cell at Vilvorde, asking for warm clothes, candles and his Hebrew Bible. However, the highlight is reading the verses from Tyndale's Genesis (1530): "In the begynnynge God created heaven and erth."

Sixteenth-century editions of More's works are also on display, including his *Dialogue Concerning Heresies* and *Utopia*.

## **"Why Study? Thomas More on Education"**

**Dr. Matthew DeCoursey**

**March 20, 1997**

Today, I want to talk to you about two men. They were friends, and yet they were very different. The one, Erasmus, was a very determined scholar: he traveled from country to country and endured all kinds of hardship so he could edit St. Jerome, and do things like that. His friends were all learned men, and he conversed with them in Latin. The other, Thomas More, was a lawyer. His clients were not all wealthy, as we know from Erasmus. And as More rose in the legal hierarchy, he still remained close to these ordinary people.

As it happens, both came to be burdened with important responsibilities for shaping education in England, and they agreed on a lot of the issues. Yet they were very different men, who had very different experiences. They both wanted education to lead children to a virtuous life, but their visions of the process differed a great deal. Erasmus, the learned humanist, was optimistic for the poetical transformation of all Christian Europe, down to the ploughboy. More, though, dealt with all sorts of people in his work, and had a more realistic conception of what education might accomplish in England's immediate, practical future. His educational vision was pessimistic compared with Erasmus'. And yet it was also more compassionate, with a clearer vision of the situation of ordinary people.

Thomas More, as you have no doubt heard a dozen times already, grew up in London, the son of a successful lawyer who ultimately became a judge. More's childhood saw the Battle of Bosworth Field, and the consequent accession of Henry VII. It would have been after these events, at the age of seven or so, that

More began his education.<sup>1</sup> We don't know many of the details, but he would have gone first to song school, where he would have learned to sing hymns in Latin. At this stage, the boys likely did not know what the words meant.<sup>2</sup> At the same school or at another one, he would have been taught his ABC, reading and some writing in English, and the basics of Latin grammar.<sup>3</sup> At this level, the schools often used little books made of horn or wood. Possibly, there was a primary school attached to the grammar school he later attended, Saint Anthony's in Threadneedle Street, in what is now the heart of the London financial district.

We have no specific record of what went on at St. Anthony's, but we do know generally about the grammar schools of the time. After some fundamental grammar, they generally began with the Distichs of Cato.<sup>4</sup> These are little bits of moral advice in more or less simple Latin, like an example you see on your handout:

Succussus nolito indigni ferre moleste  
Indulget Fortuna malis, ut uincere possit.

Do not take the success of an unworthy person bitterly:

Fortune is indulgent to evil people, that she may overcome them.<sup>5</sup>

The teacher would go back and forth between the grammar book and these little sayings. An advantage they had was that they could be memorized, and used to keep Latin grammar straight.

After Cato, contemporary sources say, the most usual thing was the "Eclogue" of Theodulus.<sup>6</sup> This was a poem that dated back to about the year 1000 in Germany. There is an introduction that sets up the situation of a goatherd and a shepherdess minding their flocks. The goatherd is named Pseustis, a word which suggests "falsehood." The shepherdess is Alithia, which means "truth." The goatherd is a pagan, and the two agree that they will debate the relative merits of their religions. They do this in alternating four-line stanzas. Pseustis tells a compressed version of some story from Greek mythology, and Alithia responds with a corresponding story from the Bible. For example, Pseustis tells the story of Saturn's Golden Age, and Alithia responds with the Garden of Eden: both ages of prosperity and innocence before the world we know began. For some time, Alithia's stories are from the Old Testament, but once she mentions the Incarnation of Christ, the game is over, and Pseustis submits.

The poem was a very durable element of medieval school curricula. While other texts changed, this one remained constant over about five hundred years, from 1000 to about 1510 or 1520.<sup>7</sup> When that time came, the poem's fortunes dropped like a stone. The change took at least one scholar and one printer by surprise: a London printer produced an

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Marius, *Thomas More* (New York: Collins, 1984) 14-18.

<sup>2</sup> See Nicholas Orme, *English Schools in the Middle Ages* (London: Methuen, 1973) 63; Jo Ann Hoepfner Moran, *The Growth of English Schooling, 1340-1548: Learning, Literacy, and Laicization in Pre-Reformation York Diocese*, 53-62. Cf. Also William J. Courtenay, *Schools and Scholars in Fourteenth Century England* (Princeton UP, 1987) 15-17.

<sup>3</sup> Moran, 39-53.

<sup>4</sup> Wayland Johnson Chase, *The Distichs of Cato: A Famous Medieval Textbook* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1922).

<sup>5</sup> Book II, #23; Chase, 28. Translation mine.

<sup>6</sup> "Theoduli Ecloga," *Seven Versions of Carolingian Pastoral*, ed. R.P.H. Green (University of Reading, 1980) 26-35; notes 111-49. See also Green, "The Genesis of a Medieval Textbook: The Models and Sources of the Ecloga Theoduli" *Viator* 13 (1982): 49-106.

<sup>7</sup> Orme, 63.

edition of it with a new commentary in 1515.<sup>8</sup> It would be the last. That is why it is important in the history of English education: if we can understand what the poem did, and what the replacements did differently, we can see better how education changed.

Part of the reason why the poem was useful over so many centuries was that it offered condensed versions of some classical and biblical knowledge in a form that is easily memorized. For example, when Alithia comes to the Tower of Babel, she tells the story like this:

Posteritas Adae summa Babilonis in arce  
turrim construxit, quae caelum tangere possit  
excitat ira deum; confusio fit laborum;  
dispergentur ibi, nomen non excidit urbi. (ll. 89-92)

(The descendants of Adam built a tower in the high citadel of Babylon which could touch the sky. It provoked God in anger: Confusion of tongues came; they were dispersed from that place, though it retained the name.)<sup>9</sup>

What aids memorization is an internal rhyme. In the first line, "Adae" rhymes with "arce," and so following: "construxit" with "possit," "deum" with "laborum," "ibi" with "urbi." A lot of these rhymes are pretty forced: but that doesn't matter when the point is not so much artistry as memorizability. These things are so compressed that they require appreciable explaining, which is why there are a number of surviving commentaries on the poem to help schoolmasters explain it correctly.<sup>10</sup> When the information is in bite sizes like this, it would be possible to teach a class even when the only book in the room is the one in the teacher's hand. More's school, though, was a fairly prosperous one, and More's own family was well off; so we can take it that he had his own copy of Theodulus and of other books on the curriculum.

When humanist education came to England, Theodulus was out, and a classical Latin curriculum was in. That is to say: Virgil, Ovid, Cicero, Sallust and so on. Our information on the time is patchy, but we know that these authors were being studied at Magdalen College School in Oxford by 1498.<sup>11</sup> The big change, though, came with the influence of Erasmus a very few years later.<sup>12</sup> He and More got together initially in London in 1499, when More was still a law student at the Inns of Court.<sup>13</sup> More, Erasmus and John Colet, among others seem to have discussed education among themselves during this visit by Erasmus to England, and in subsequent ones. More and Colet developed ideas that they would each put into practice later.

Erasmus believed that the point of education as eloquence and inspiration. That is, not only should a schoolboy learn to speak well, but he should learn to be sensitive to good literature and be changed by it. What we call "appreciation of literature" was a very pale thing compared to Erasmus' conception. For him, reading a good poem was a not a casual and civilized pleasure, but a cataclysm. He thought that if you read something like Virgil really well, you would feel intense emotions that could form the very character of the person within into a new thing.<sup>14</sup> If we take, as an example,

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<sup>8</sup> There were four editions of Theodulus published in England or for English schools before 1510: STC 23940 (1503?); STC 29340.3 (1505); STC 29340a (1508); and STC 23941 (1509). The last was printed by Wynkyn de Worde in 1515 (STC 23943).

<sup>9</sup> "Ecloga" 28. Translation mine.

<sup>10</sup> All of the editions listed above have commentaries.

<sup>11</sup> A *Fifteenth Century Schoolbook*, ed. William Nelson (Oxford, Clarendon, 1956) 63-5.

<sup>12</sup> For Erasmus' understanding of the classical curriculum, see "On the Method of Study" ("De ratione studii") ed. & trans. Craig R. Thompson, *Collected Works of Erasmus* (Toronto: U of Toronto Press, 1978) 24: 666-691.

<sup>13</sup> Marius, 79-81.

<sup>14</sup> See Matthew DeCoursey, "Erasmus and Tyndale on Bible-Reading," *Reformation* 1 (1996): 157-64.

the famous storm scene in the first book of Virgil's *Aeneid*, Erasmus would want the student to feel the excitement and the danger of the storm, to see the ships being tossed on the waves and their heroic passengers enduring, working, resisting, and mourning their compatriots.<sup>15</sup> Erasmus thought that reading works like these could create a habit of virtue in readers. Erasmus recommended four readings of every text: the first two were to get the technicalities of the Latin down, the third was to notice the rhetorical qualities of the text, and the fourth was a moral reading, to be sure the lessons were learned.<sup>16</sup> Yet what was crucial was the living experience of reading the text, the emotion and the inspiration that pushes the student in the right direction. In later education, students would use the experience of inspiring literature to produce their own speeches and declamations: the virtue that they learned would then pass from them to the less educated.

The old approach, then, stressed information, to be remembered forever after. The new, humanist approach attempted to address the whole person, with the focus on emotion.

Not everybody was happy about the changes in the schools. Some ecclesiastical authorities worried about the impact of asking students to read pagan texts. Perhaps they would not be as Christian as they would be otherwise. I don't know if they took Erasmus' assertions on the power of poetry seriously. If they did, they might have been even more worried: how do we know that this greater power is pushing the student in the right direction? It was a little like the concerns today about exposing children to sex and violence. Erasmus was very optimistic about his authors and their effects: he was sure that they were virtuous men, and that their virtue could only be an effect of the Holy Spirit, even though the writers lacked the illumination of Christian revelation. It was not only conservative authorities who worried: Erasmus' friend John Colet founded St. Paul's School in London in 1510. His articles of founding praise the eloquence of Virgil, Ovid and Cicero, but list other writers in the curriculum. They are mostly Christians of the age of Constantine. Colet implies that they have the eloquence of the classical writers, but they are Christian, and therefore safer.<sup>17</sup>

You might think that what would be safest of all would be to teach students Latin out of the Vulgate Bible. But the church authorities were very nervous about heresy, and worried about readers drawing their own conclusions from scripture. For example, Erasmus found it necessary to point out that there was danger in reading the story of David and Bathsheba: someone might ignorantly use the story to justify adultery and murder. Even more, what if ambiguous words in the Bible were used to found new sects? It was generally felt, by Colet and More among others, that the Bible should be read only *after* the student has had a great deal of practice on other texts.<sup>18</sup>

When More's daughters were of an age to be taught their letters, More provided a tutor for them, for other children in the household, and possibly for some neighbors. It seems quite clear that his program was Erasmus' program, without the mitigations that Colet brought to it.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, More did not share Erasmus' great optimism about the potential of classical learning. More's pessimism about this reflected a certain pessimism about the possibility of virtue in human beings. For example, More had made the Utopians prescribe severe penalties for fornication, saying that no

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<sup>15</sup> I. 81-124. Many editions, the most accessible being Virgil *Aeneid I & II* (Loeb Classical Editions; Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP; London: Heinemann, 1940).

<sup>16</sup> Erasmus, *De conscribendis epistolis*, trans. J. Kelley Sowards in *The Collected Works of Erasmus* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1985) 25: 194.

<sup>17</sup> Colet says the authors should be "such as have the very Roman eloquence joined with wisdom specially Christian authors that wrote their wisdom with clean and chaste Latin, wither in verse or in prose." The authors he recommends are "lactantius, Prudentius, and Proba, and Juvenecus, and Baptista Mantuanus, and such others that shall be thought convenient." Joseph H. Lupton, *A Life of John Colet* (London: Bell, 1909), 279-80. Spelling modernized. These articles of founding are discussed in John B. Gleason, *John Colet* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1989) 217-34.

<sup>18</sup> Moran 32-3.

<sup>19</sup> This is convincingly demonstrated in Sowards, cited above.

one would get married if they could fornicate freely.<sup>20</sup>

We can see this in the way he wrote about education. In 1518, More wrote a letter to his children's tutor at the time, expressing a certain anxiety about them and their learning. More was concerned that his talented daughter Margaret should not get too proud of her learning. He wrote:

Though I prefer learning joined with virtue to all the treasures of kings, yet renown for learning, if you take away moral probity, brings nothing else but notorious and noteworthy infamy, especially in a woman.<sup>21</sup>

In this letter, More presents learning not as something inseparable from virtue, as Erasmus thought, but as something that magnifies virtue and vice that may be formed separately. He is a more practical man than Erasmus: he accepts that it is good to address the whole person, but he does not think that by doing this, all will be made well. Erasmus thought virtue could be encouraged positively, through enjoyment. More accepted this, but though vice was a great threat, and must be constrained. In the same letter, More showed a constructive attitude toward this same pessimism. On the question of women's education, he notes that many people deny that women should be educated, on the grounds that women didn't learn well. His answer was, all the more reason. He was pessimistic, but he was for working toward difficult goals. It is compassionate to believe in working the harder with poor human materials.

Related to the issue of classical learning was the issue of Bible-reading, because the same independent interpretation was in question. Erasmus' education required that the student should be trusted with what he regarded as the most powerful process in the world. Students must learn to read well, and to produce the movement toward virtue on their own. With the Bible, readers must be trusted all the more. Erasmus thought that if people learned to read well, they would see the same thing he saw himself in the Bible: the presence of Christ, whose image would inspire to virtue, in the fullest possible sense.<sup>22</sup> Erasmus knew that even the Bible could be misused; but he was overall optimistic about its prospects.

In the year of More's letter to Gonnell, 1518, Luther hammered his 95 theses to the door of the Wittenberg church. A storm blew up with incredible speed, and the enemies of Erasmus' educational program would soon feel themselves vindicated. Luther favored lay Bible-reading, and he would produce a translation into German, using Erasmus' version of the New Testament. Luther's program required, as did that of Erasmus, that the individual interpreter be trusted, even if the interpreter were completely unlearned.

For More, the contrast of Luther and Erasmus was a confirmation of two ideas he had expressed in the letter to Gonnell: one, that education may lead to virtue; and two, that pride may make the virtue of education into a magnified fault. He saw Luther as an example of an educated man gone wrong through pride. He saw Luther's followers either as opportunists, like the lords who used him as an excuse to seize church lands, or as uneducated people who could not be expected to make their own judgments in these matters. He had similar comments to make about the English Lutheran William Tyndale.

The uneducated people themselves, of course, were caught in the middle of this disagreement. More dramatized their situation in Book Eight of *A Confutation of Tyndale's Answer*.<sup>23</sup> There, he presented the Protestant preacher Robert Barnes in the midst of his flock of a visit to England. One of the flock is a literate woman, the innkeeper's wife, who wants to know where she can find someone to teach her when Barnes has gone. Barnes' ultimate answer is that she can trust a preacher who construes the Bible correctly. But how can she know *that*, she wonders. You must look at the text

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<sup>20</sup> More, *Utopia*, ed. Edward Surtz, S.J. and J. H. Hexter, *Complete works of St. Thomas More*, vol. 6 (New Haven: Yale UP, 1965) 186-7.

<sup>21</sup> St. Thomas More, *Selected Letters*, ed. Elizabeth Frances Rogers (New Haven, Conn. and London: Yale UP, 1961).

<sup>22</sup> "[T]hese [writings] bring you the living image of His holy mind and the speaking, healing, dying, rising Christ Himself, and thus they render Him so fully present that you would see less if you gazed upon Him with your very eyes." (Erasmus, *Christian Humanism and the Reformation: Selected Writings of Erasmus*, ed. & trans. John C. Olin, 3rd ed. [New York: Fordham UP, 1987] 108).

<sup>23</sup> Thomas More, *The Confutation of Tyndale's Answer, The Complete Works of Saint Thomas More* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1963-) 883-906.

yourself, he says. But if learned men who spend their lives at the problem cannot agree, then how shall I know, she asks. Then an illiterate woman enters the discussion, saying, how much worse is *her* situation? Barnes ends by telling them that they're stupid old women and they should just go away.

The point I want to make with this story is that More's pessimism about unlearned people was not mere elitism. He felt that it was unfair to present the people with dilemmas that they did not know how to solve, and there is some conviction in the notion that they did not wish to solve every theological problem from scratch, and risk damnation if they got it wrong. It is easy enough, as an educated person in the twentieth century, to see the belief of Erasmus and Tyndale in the judgment of the individual, and approve. It fits well with the kind of society we now have. Nevertheless, when I read this passage of More, it does strike me that the belief on Erasmus' and Tyndale's part in the reading capacity of ordinary people is indeed mere fantasy for the immediate future of England. Erasmus said, and Tyndale echoed him, that the ploughboy should learn to sing hymns at this work, and understand them, too. But it seems no service to the ploughboy to burden him with big questions and tell him that he will be damned if he gets the answer wrong. The vividness and detail of More's presentation shows a compassion for the situation of the unlearned that Erasmus and Tyndale lacked. Nor was the Protestant position on this matter very practical: people who work sixty hours a week don't seem very likely to make careful theological distinctions. Indeed, the English church did not long hold to Tyndale's position on this matter.

So what are we to make of all this? It is not my point that lawyers are better than scholars. Nor is it that Erasmus' view of education was wrong or misconceived. It affected schooling even into this century. But every human situation has advantages and disadvantages. As a humanist, More believed that learning should address the whole person, emotion, intellect and all, and he supported Erasmus in that enterprise. As a practical man with much experience of society, he had a more complex vision of moral nature than Erasmus had. He used that vision to reach out to his fellow beings with some subtlety.

*The lectures of both Dr. DeCoursey and Professor Wegemer focus on More's scrutiny of the relationship among education, pride and virtue.*

*The first, warns More, may lead to either of the latter, but virtue is nurtured by self-discipline.*

# "Thomas More: How He Achieved Greatness"

Professor Gerard Wegemer

May 20, 1997

It is a pleasure to speak with you at this important event in honor of the 1997 Thomas More Society Scholarship Awards.

Most of you know very well the famous events of More's life: by age 52, he was selected Lord Chancellor of England, the highest office of the land after the King; by 49 he was appointed to the royal council's subcommittee of four, which was responsible for the major concerns of the realm, except for matters of war. At 46 he was the Speaker of the House of Commons, and he used that position to make the first formal request for political free speech. And remember, More only entered royal politics at 41. How he achieved so much in such a short time we will soon see.

Despite the good More achieved in his own life, however, it may be that he exerts even greater influence today than in his own times--yet not as much as he will in years to come when you, the young, are the leaders of society. That was G. K. Chesterton's opinion in 1929 when he said that "Blessed Thomas More is more important at this moment than at any moment since his death, even perhaps the great moment of his dying; but he is not quite so important as he will be in a hundred years' time."

Pope Pius XI foresaw this when in 1935 he canonized Thomas More, as an example for a world under siege from tyrants such as Hitler. In light of such dangers, Pius XI put the full authority behind More's example, saying: "Here is someone worthy of imitation." "Here is someone who knew how to deal shrewdly with corruption, without being corrupted."

How much the example of such persons is needed *today!*--and *tomorrow*, when some of you will be up here giving such talks.

At this point it is important to recognize what important work the Thomas More Society of America does and has been doing for many years now. I attended their lectures and lunches and talks when I was a student many years ago, and they stimulated my own research and interest in More. May many of you go on to contribute to this Thomas More Society, and to other societies of its kind.

But let's turn directly to the issue at hand: How did Thomas More achieve greatness?

The most significant element of More's success was proper preparation: humanly, spiritually, intellectually, and professionally.

Humanly speaking, his was not an easy life. His mother died when he was young, and he had three subsequent step-mothers. His father loved and cared for his son, but theirs was not always an easy relationship. As Erasmus tells us, Judge John More nearly disinherited his son when young Thomas did not show enough interest in taking up John's lawyer trade. This seems to have occurred during More's early twenties, a time when More was not



sure what path he should take in life--a period of such uncertainty and difficulty, that More said that it brought him "almost to the gates of hell."

That More felt such anxiety should be an encouragement to us who also meet many uncertainties and trials in this life. As difficult as this youthful period was for More, it seems to have laid the foundation for the unshakable serenity and courage that marked the rest of his life.

This difficult stage of life led More to pay much greater attention to his spiritual life, which became the foundation for everything else. During these years, More sought out the best advice available and learned HOW to pray and HOW to use his many gifts in a constructive way--HOW, for example, to forge his sharp wit into a scalpel to heal rather than a sword to destroy. In other words, it was in the midst of his youthful trials that he learned HOW to achieve excellence and virtue.

It was also during these years of his youth that More wrote his first book, a book about spiritual warfare and self-mastery. This important book at first appears to be an ordinary biography of a then famous Christian scholar and civic promoter, Pico della Mirandola. But as you would expect from brilliant and witty Thomas More, this first book is not ordinary, but is deeply thought-provoking and quite puzzling.

At first glance, Pico would seem a likely candidate for any eager youth like More to imitate. A man of immense learning, Pico was a descendant of that great Emperor Charlemagne, and he was a person renowned for his good life.

What a surprise it is, therefore, that after presenting Pico's many spectacular accomplishments, *The Life of John Picus* concludes with the rather shocking revelation that, upon his death, Pico does not go to heaven.

Such an unusual ending forces the reader to reflect more deeply on this famous leader of reputed greatness. The ending is typical of Thomas More, whose quick and subtle wit found ingenious ways to pose issues, moving us to stop and wonder.

The story's surprise ending invites the reader to ask where Pico went wrong and to ask what comprises true greatness. After reviewing the story, one discovers three failings which explain why the book ends with Pico's crying from the fires of purgatory: he was negligent in his duties, he was ungrateful for the many gifts he had received, and he was slow in fulfilling God's will. More must have reflected a great deal on these failings, for he was never accused of them himself.

More's point in beginning his first book with this unusual biography is to help us to appreciate the difficulty of achieving real virtue, or real self-mastery. With this in mind, we can then turn with keen interest to the later sections of this book which deal with the basics of combat--combat with oneself.

As paradoxical as it may sound, the essence of this combat as presented in the rest of More's first book is to fight to love--that is, to fight vigorously to love greatly and faithfully.

One of the most original features of this spiritual guidebook is the section entitled "The Twelve Properties of a

Lover." This long poem is a thirteen-part love ballad. Each part has two sections. The first describes a quality of ardent youthful love, and the second applies that quality to the love of God.

The ardent lover, for example, not only bears willingly some trial or pain for the sake of the beloved, but actually longs to do so. In fact, he "thinks himself happy that he may take / Some misadventure for his lover's sake." Another quality of lovers is their desire to be with each other constantly: "The perfect lover longs to be / In the presence of his love both night and day." When this is not physically possible, the two nonetheless remain together "in mind and thought." In the same way, More goes on to say, lovers of God should also "be present with God and conversant always."

Throughout this poem, More shows an acute awareness of how much conscious attention must be paid to one's loves, and More takes the greatest human lovers as his model. This in itself is one of the ways More achieved greatness: he had a great love for life and, as a result, people loved to be with him.

But all great love takes attentive and painstaking cultivation. That's why More uses battle imagery throughout this first book, to emphasize what is obvious to any experienced lover: in this world as it is, one must be courageous enough and virtuous enough to defend what one loves.

As More points out at the end of that first book, the best way of defending that love is to have such a vivid recollection of it that it is ever present, both day and night. Maintaining this ardent love was the ultimate foundation of More's "success"--humanly with his family and friends, professionally in law and politics, and spiritually with his God.

One necessary part of keeping one's love alive is what More calls "right imagination and remembrance." And one part of "right imagination and remembrance" is the habit of not "murmuring." Murmuring or internal complaining, after all, is a result of the "fond fantasies" we all tend to create, fantasies that cloud our vision or eclipse our first loves. And realist that he was, More pointed out that murmuring can produce the greatest of harms. The example he uses repeatedly is King Saul, whom More seems to present as an archetypal figure that shows what can happen to any good person who does not control his imagination, and therefore, does not maintain his youthful loves.

Saul, as you know, loved God deeply and was specially chosen to be the first king of His Chosen People. Yet by the end of his life, Saul turned from God, looked to witches for advice, and ended up losing his kingship because of his infidelities. What happened? As More reflects upon this story, he points out that it all started with Saul's interior complaints about the difficulties and uncertainties of his own life. By allowing himself to indulge in these interior fantasies, Saul fell from interior complaint to outward negligence and finally to outright rebellion against God.

This fight against murmuring is another way of exercising our freedom. After all, human beings are free, and we often use this freedom to become attached to the most foolish things or

ideas instead of the people and projects entrusted to our care. More explains this in his fascinating analysis of how pride works. Pride begins with an image of the good that we come up with, a "fantasy" of our own creation. And because it is ours, we become quite fond of it. The image can be what we imagine a parent or a son or daughter should be like, or how dinner should be this evening, or what home should be like after school or work, or even what the Church should be in 1997. Now the complexity of reality will never match our simplified image of it. But it is the tension between our expectation and the reality that causes anger, anxiety, annoyance, and impatience. We often end up trying to impose our idea onto what actually is. And it doesn't work.

What is the answer? Well, there could be many different formulations of this answer, but STUDY is one. More had a genuine love for study. In fact, even during the busiest periods of his life, he set aside for study several hours every morning, quiet hours before the rest of the family got up.

But consider the nature and importance of study: it uses the highest powers we have been given. And GOOD study must have the elements of freedom, detachment, and initiative which permits a person to ask difficult and challenging questions: what is going on here? what is the truth of this matter? how should I respond? A life of study allows you to be completely immersed in the events of your life, but without being overwhelmed by them. Isn't this what most of us admire about Thomas More? The balance, the humor, the perspective he brought to his life and his times?

In his professional development, More learned early that study of law alone was not enough to make a great lawyer; it was, of course, absolutely essential, and More spent MANY years in mastering the vast body of common law and canon law. He remained active in the inns of court, and he continued his study of the law even while serving as lord chancellor.

But More saw clearly that, to be a great professional, he needed the philosopher's understanding of human nature, a diplomat's knowledge of his country's history and literature, a theologian's appreciation for the mystery of God's plan, and a media expert's command of language.

To prepare himself in just these areas, More studied so well that he wrote his own treatise on political philosophy, his own history of England, his own accounts of the spiritual warfare he waged; he also practiced his writing and speaking skills for over twenty years before joining the King's service.

More's habit of study and reflection also allowed him to look at his life as a whole, respecting the demands of each stage and of each dimension of his life. He saw his youth as an important time of preparation: humanly, spiritually, and professionally. As a young family man, he knew that he needed enough time for his wife and children, and he delayed entering the king's service until he was 41. That gave him the time not only to attend to his growing family, it also gave him the time to prepare and test himself for the real spiritual and political dangers that would face him. How does one work with dishonest

and power-hungry people in an effective and diplomatic manner? How does one gracefully change the conversation when inappropriate topics are being discussed? How does one deal with a leader who is willing to change a country's laws and customs to suit his own plans?

Finally, More's success was dependent on a life of very hard work. As a lawyer, More was known to be always the first one at court in the morning. As a judge, he made himself available to people. As a father, he closely followed the education of his children and fostered a personal friendship with each one. He also attended to household affairs as soon as possible. As counselor to the King, he courageously and ingeniously exerted continuous effort to find ways to guide Henry. And when, in his final years, he was asked to defend his country and his Church, he did so at the price of his health and his very life.

When we consider how hard More worked throughout his life, we cannot be surprised to read this last prayer that he wrote in the Tower: "The things, good Lord, that I pray for, give me the grace to labor for."

Notice again: no murmuring, no ingratitude, no negligence, no slowness to respond in using the many gifts he had been given.

Just how well More lived this ardent and wise love of the life he was given is revealed in an example that occurred just a few weeks before More became Lord Chancellor of England. More was away on business, and back at Chelsea they were harvesting the crops--the first good crop in three years. Famine had spread throughout England to such an extent that the state resorted to hanging people who stole grain in an effort to control theft.

The harvest was just completed, and one of More's men caused a fire that burned the barns, all the harvest, and the neighbors' barns. Lady Alice sent their son-in-law to More right away, informing him of the situation, and More wrote a response on the spot while "son Heron" waited.

Now let's put ourselves in his situation. He was deeply concerned about the famine; he had been feeding up to 100 people a day at Chelsea. This was an accident due to carelessness, and the financial loss was so great that More knew they might have to sell their land. What would our first reaction be? Here is More's first reaction at age 51:

My son Heron has informed me of the loss of our barns and our neighbors' also, with all the grain that was in them. Although (saving God's pleasure) it is a great pity that so much corn was lost, yet since it has pleased God to send us such a chance, we must and are bounden not only to be CONTENT but also to be GLAD of his visitation. He sent us all that we have lost and since he has by such a chance taken it away, again his pleasure be fulfilled; let us never begrudge [or murmur about] God's will, but take in good stead and heartily THANK him as well for adversity as for prosperity. Perhaps we have more cause to thank him for our loss than for our winning, for his wisdom better sees what is good for us than we ourselves. Therefore I pray you be of good cheer and take all the

household with you to church and there THANK God both for that he has given us and for that he has taken from us and for that he has left us, which if it please him he can increase when he will. And if it please him to leave us yet less, let it be at his pleasure.  
(emphasis added)

Now there is a person that has worked for many years to educate his mind, his imagination, and his whole being to achieve true success, not apparent success.

Here we arrive at the point that I would like to stress the most: More's many achievements, his many virtues, his good use of time, his humor, and his positive outlook on life were not simply temperamental--or simply because he was a talented man; they were rooted in the freely cultivated virtues. More's "success" came from preparation that took hard work and much study; his "success" depended upon a deep life of prayer and a constant effort to keep everything in perspective; it came from knowing that there was a plan beyond his own; and it came from a willingness NOT to APPEAR successful. As anyone knows who knows anything about Thomas More, the greatness of Thomas More lies in his willingness to give up everything to defend what he knew to be true and just.

To understand merry and successful Thomas More, one has to consider what a humanly attractive and effective figure he FOUGHT to be. The fight was an internal one: against moods, whims, fantasies of imagination; this fight required study, shrewdness, and hard work. But the external results were abundant: his bright and cheerful home, his life of integrity, his sought-after good judgment, his life as a civic leader who always had time for people. The result of that internal fight was a life of real virtue that was so attractive that he moved those around him and those after him to want to do the good.

My great wish for you who are this year's winners of the Thomas More Scholarship and for you who know and love Thomas More is that you may embody in your own lives all that More represents so that you may move those around you and those after you to seek true greatness and true success--even if it appears to be a failure in the eyes of the world.

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