



More News

The Newsletter of the Thomas More Society of America

February 1997

On January 23, **Dr. Richard L. DeMolen**, of the Washington Theological Union, addressed members of the Society gathered to hear his lecture, "Family Values in Sir Thomas More's Household." Dr. DeMolen offered details on the close attention More paid to the education of his children and wards. More's own account of occupying himself by writing Latin poems to his children while riding horseback through mud and rain on the way to Calais, in particular, revealed the love and respect he had for his children. Such attention to his role as a caring father exhibits the very type of family values Pope John Paul II celebrated in his *Familiaris Consortio*, in which he testified to the importance of the support and guidance parents give their children and that, in turn, children learn to share with others in their communities. The complete text of Dr. DeMolen's address begins on page 3.

Sincere Thanks to Mr. George Georges

The Board of Directors of The Thomas More Society of America extends its appreciation to Mr. Georges for his dedicated service as the Society's Treasurer. The Board also welcomes Mr. Robert Nolting as the new Treasurer.

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*Proposed Amendment to the Bylaws of
the Thomas More Society*

IN MEMORIAM

In accordance with Sections 4.02 and 4.04 of the Bylaws of the Thomas More Society, the Board of Directors has called a special meeting of the members of the Society. Members will meet at the luncheon on February 20 and discuss the amendment, which is intended to simplify the present administration of the Society by permitting the elected President to function also as the Chairman of the Board of Directors. The proposed amendment to Section 6.01 follows: "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*" (proposal in italics).

The officers, directors and members of the Thomas More Society of America express their deep and profound sorrow upon learning of the death of their esteemed friend and honorary member, **William J. Kinsella**, formerly the president of the St. Thomas More Society in Ireland. Mr. Kinsella passed away Christmas day, 1996, at his home in Dublin. In his memory, the Board of Directors of The Thomas More Society of America is sending a letter of condolence to his widow, Teresa Kinsella, and to his family.



Upcoming Programs

Dr. Matthew DeCoursey, a Folger research fellow and a lecturer at Catholic University, will speak at the March 20 **luncheon**. His presentation is entitled, "Why Learn? Thomas More on Religious and Secular Education."

The annual **memorial mass** in honor of St. Thomas More and St. John Fisher will be held on Friday, June 20, at St. Joseph's on Capitol Hill. Reverend Charles Antonicelli, the Society's chaplain and a member of the Board, will be the celebrant at the mass.

Announcements

* Visit the **Thomas More Web Site**, sponsored by the University of Dallas, at <http://www.d-holliday.com/tmore/soci.htm>

* The **International Thomas More Conference** is inviting proposals for papers. The conference will be held at Maynooth College in Ireland, August 9-16, 1998. One-page abstracts addressing the theme, "Thomas More in his Time: Renaissance Humanism and Renaissance Law," should be sent to Thomas Finan, Department of Ancient Classics, Maynooth College, County Kildare, Ireland, by May 1, 1997. Fax (353)1-628-9373.

* Gerry Wegemer, of the University of Dallas, is beginning work on a proposed **Center for Thomas More Studies** at the University of Dallas. The proposed center would include a library collection appropriate to More studies and provide a home to More conferences in the United States.

* **Paul (Terry) Lamb**, a member of the Society, was ordained a priest of the Fall River, Massachusetts diocese on June 8 by most reverent Sean O'Malley, bishop of Fall River. Father Lamb was a lawyer with a degree from The Catholic University of America. After working for many years in the areas of real estate and securities, he began his study for the priesthood in 1992.

"Family Values in Sir Thomas More's Household" by **Richard L. DeMolen**

"For I assure you that, rather than allow my children to be idle and slothful, I would make a sacrifice of wealth, and bid adieu to other cares and business, to attend to my children and my family, amongst whom none is more dear to me than yourself, my beloved daughter."

Sir Thomas More wrote these words to his eldest daughter, Margaret, in 1518, while he served as a royal councillor to King Henry VIII. More's concern for his family's welfare is reinforced by his authorship of a meditational fragment for their consideration which he began about 1520, titled, "Treatise on the Four Last Things: Death, Judgement, Heaven, and Hell." More's declared willingness to divest himself of his wealth and position in government attests to the importance he placed on his role as *pater-familias*, even though such critics as Sir Geoffrey Elton and Professor Richard Marius have underscored More's politically ambitious nature. It was at Chelsea that Sir Thomas established a hermetically sealed cocoon in which to cultivate Christian virtues among his offspring and charges.

Thomas More chose as his first wife Jane Colt, whom Erasmus of Rotterdam, a close friend, described as "still very young" at the time of her marriage. Erasmus believed that More deliberately chose as his wife a young girl from the country who was still "quite inexperienced" in order "to mold her character to match his own." More married Jane about 1504 when she was seventeen years old and he was twenty-seven. After

their marriage, he arranged for her education so that she would be able to teach future generations on his estate. More confessed his intentions in his poem, titled "To Candidus: How to Choose a Wife," that "if she is well instructed herself, then some day she will teach your little grandson, at an early age to read." More wanted to transform his young wife into a malleable as well as literate member of his household.

After Sir Thomas' death in 1535, his son-in-law, William Roper, recalled the spiritual life that permeated his home. He described the nature of the private devotions in which More participated with his family:

As Sir Thomas More's custom was daily, if he were at home, besides his private prayers, with his children to say the Seven Psalms, Litany and Suffrages following, so was his guise nightly before he went to bed, with his wife, children, and household, to go to his Chapel and there upon his knees ordinarily to say certain psalms and collects with them.

In addition to leading his family in prayers, More would exhort them to "heavenly things" by offering them spiritual advice. In his biographical sketch, William Roper quotes his father-in-law as follows:

It is now no mastery [i.e., achievement] for you children to go to heaven, for everybody giveth you good example—you see virtue rewarded and vice punished. So that you are carried up to heaven, even by the chins. But if you live the time that no man will give you good example, when you shall see virtue punished and vice rewarded, if you will then stand fast and firmly stick to God, upon pain of my life, though you be but half good, God will allow you for whole good.

Sir Thomas, no doubt, wanted to prepare his children for the time when he would no longer be with them; when they would have to depend on their childhood education for strength and constancy in their faith. Fr. Brian Byron has maintained that "it is probable that he [More] wrote both *The Four Last Things* and the *Dialogue of Comfort* primarily for the spiritual welfare of his own family." Like Martin Luther, More believed that the "father serves as priest in family worship."

Sir Thomas More was the father of three girls and one boy. His eldest child, Margaret, was only about seven years old when her mother died in 1511. The other children at that time were Elizabeth, who was about six, Cecily, about four, and John, about two. According to John Bouge, the parish priest at St. Stephen's in Walbrook, More married the widow Alice within a month of the death of Jane. Erasmus suggested that More chose a second wife so quickly after the death of the first one for the sake of his motherless children and "more to have someone look after his household than for his own pleasure." But it may also have been a deliberate effort on Sir Thomas' part to avoid producing a second set of children. As Richard Marius has wryly observed, "Dame Alice may have already passed through menopause when More married her."

In order to arrange for the education of his children, More established a school in his home which consisted not only of his four children but also of his step-daughter, Alice Middleton; his foster daughter, Margaret Giggs, who was the same age as his daughter Margaret; his future daughter-in-law, Anne Cresacre, who became More's ward after the death of her father in 1512; his future son-in-law, William Roper, and Margaret à Barrow, a companion for his daughters. So noteworthy was this household school that Erasmus described it as follows in his book on the instruction of boys: "In England there is the illustrious Thomas More, who despite his commitments to the affairs of state did not hesitate to serve as a tutor to his wife, son, and daughters, beginning with their religious education and then advancing to their Greek and Latin studies." But More was not the only tutor

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to his children. There were at least four professional tutors in More's household during the childhood years of his offspring. One of them, John Clement, came to live with More's family about 1514 as a servant-pupil, and eventually was hired as a tutor. More taught the very tutor who would later teach his children and charges.

It was More's belief that a non-family member had the ability to mold the character of his children and to instill in them a desire for acquiring such virtues as modesty and wisdom. Learning itself, however, was clearly secondary to the attainment of virtue; and the pursuit of wealth and beauty had no place in the curriculum of More's household academy. More valued the virtue of wisdom because it could teach his children how to distinguish between "the inner knowledge of what is right" and "the [outer] task of man." To get the most out of education, a child must create a reservoir of inner knowledge which will enable him or her to expose the evil attractions of the external world and to strengthen his/her resolve to live justly. Here More was indebted to Quintilian's idea of self-esteem as a basis for morality. Once his children were strengthened by virtue, Sir Thomas believed that they would be able to reject "the empty praise of men" and the "evil tongues" of the outside world.

Having supervised the instruction of his three daughters and several other girls in the elements of knowledge, More firmly believed that all children, irrespective of their gender, were capable of attaining virtue and knowledge. Writing to William Gonnell, another of his household tutors, More noted:

Nor do I think that the harvest is much affected whether it is a man or a woman who does the sowing.

They both have the name of human being whose nature reason differentiates from that of beasts; both, I say are equally suited for the knowledge of learning by which reason is cultivated, and, like plowed land, germinates a crop when the seeds of good precepts have been sown.

In order to obtain true learning, More urged Gonnell to introduce his daughters to the works of St. Jerome and St. Augustine, because their ideas are clearly focused on "the testimony of God and a good conscience." The major obstacle to virtue that More singled out in his letter to Gonnell was pride, which he believed took root in the child soon after birth. He blamed its cultivation on the adults who cared for infants and young children. Sir Thomas observes:

But, dear Gonnell, the more do I see the difficulty of getting rid of this pest of pride, the more do I see the necessity of getting to work at it from childhood. For I find no other reason why this inescapable evil so clings to our hearts, than that almost as soon as we are born, it is sown in the tender minds of children by their nurses, it is cultivated by their teachers, it is nourished and brought to maturity by their parents.

More hated pride because it was contrary to the message of Jesus in Matthew 19:13, wherein Jesus exhorted adults to imitate the ways of children. Backed by virtue, learning was to advance by stages. Children should not be exposed to ideas which will confuse them or escape their comprehension.

In order to capture the imaginations of his children and wards and to involve them as much as possible in the learning process, More drew up imaginary plots and invited his children to comment on them. He sketched, for example, Quintilian's first declamation which recounted the story of a blind son who was accused by his stepmother of killing his father in order to inherit his father's fortune. More's children were asked to evaluate the evidence against the son and to decide whether it was he or his stepmother who was the likely murderer. Juan Luis Vives, the Spanish educator, summarized More's method of instruction in his treatise on the education of a Christian woman (1524). Vives writes:

More had told the story of Quintilian's first declamation to his little boy John and to his daughters Margaret, Elizabeth and Cecily, the worthy offspring of their father. He had discoursed in such a way as to lead them all by his eloquence. The more easily to the study of wisdom. He then begged me to

write an answer to the declamation which he had expounded, so that the art of writing might be disclosed more openly by contradiction, and, as it were, by conflict.

Sir Thomas wished to use the elements of mystery in order to arouse the problem-solving interests of his family. Since there was no right or wrong answer, each child was given the freedom to devise his/her own solution to the mystery and in the process to reveal his or her ingenuity.

More demonstrated his concern for his children not only through frequent correspondence, necessitated by long absence because of government business, but in his religious treatises as well. At the same time, More advised his readers in *The Treatise on the Passion* (1534) that parents should not love their children selfishly but should be prepared to offer them to God if they are taken in death prematurely or if they are called to the religious life. Sir Thomas clearly saw himself as the temporary custodian of his children, whom he believed were gifts of a providential God. Along with his concern for their moral upbringing, More displayed paternal affection toward his children by composing special poems for them. Writing about 1517, he sent them Latin verses in elegiac couplets, which he wrote down while traveling on horseback toward Calais. His chief motive was to give them pleasure. Sir Thomas writes:

... while I am making a journey, drenched by a soaking rain, and while my mount, too frequently is bogged down in the mud, I compose these verses for you in the hope that, although unpolished, they may give you pleasure. From these verses you may gather an indication of your father's feelings for you--how much more than his own eyes he loves you; for the mud, the miserable stormy weather, and having to urge a small horse through deep waters have not been able to distract his thoughts from you.

For instance, when--and it is often--his horse stumbles and threatens to fall, your father is not interrupted in the composition of his verses. Many people can hardly write poetry even when their hearts are at ease, but a father's love duly provides verses even when his is in distress.

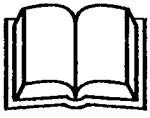
As a parent, More was mindful of his responsibility to be a disciplinarian and used corporal punishment in dealing with his offspring; but his gentle manner prevented him from exercising a heavy hand. He writes: "My whip was never anything but a peacock's tail. Even this I wielded hesitantly and gently so as not to mark your tender backsides with painful welts." Sir Thomas' irrepressible love for his family continued to grow and deepen as his children matured and developed into those virtuous images which he had envisioned from the beginning. In one of his poems, More also indicated that his love for his children would continue to increase as long as they progressed steadily in their learning; but he likewise warned them that the intensity of his love was tied to their performance. If they should fail to measure up to his expectations, we may assume that they would then fail to share in the growing richness of his affection. The reward for virtue and learning in More's household was his love. He observes: "Therefore, my dear little troop of children, continue to endear yourselves to your father and, by those same accomplishments which make me think that I had not loved you before, make me think hereafter (for you can do it) that I do *not* love you now."

Sir Thomas reinforced his own program of education by insisting that his children write to him frequently and keep him informed of their studies. He assured them that as long as they continued to progress in their education "this fully convinces me that you love me as you ought, since I observe you feel so much concern in my absence that you practice zealously what you know gives me pleasure when I am with you." More wanted his children to write letters to him which were honest reflections of their daily activities and a careful statement of their mastery of the Latin language--which was the measure in those days on one's academic attainment. Because he was aware of his own deep emotional attachment to his offspring, More deliberately chose tutors for his children who would mitigate his own indulgent relationship with them. At the same time, he valued a spirit of detachment in his tutors because he believed that it would prevent their fondness for his children from overshadowing their responsibility to teach them virtue and learning.

Family values function as the heart of More's household at Chelsea in the sixteenth century. His life as a father and husband have been extolled by countless admirers and biographers in the succeeding centuries. Though making no direct references to More's family, Pope John Paul II drew our attention to the centrality of the family in today's world shortly after his election. In 1981, the Holy Father published an apostolic exhortation on the family, *Familiaris Consortio*, in which he described the family as "the cell of society"--as the fundamental transmitter of human values that are at the core of human existence. Moreover, he stressed the importance of the parents as moral teachers in the education of children: "only by praying together with their children can a father and mother--exercising their royal priesthood--penetrate the innermost depths of their children's hearts" (#60). Moral values need to be cultivated by prayer and example. Earlier in his exhortation, John Paul II notes that "it becomes necessary, therefore, on the part of all to recover an awareness of the primacy of moral values, which are the values of the human person as such. The great task that has to be faced today for the renewal of society is that of recapturing the ultimate meaning of life and its fundamental values" (#8). He also reminded his readership that the twin enticements of extreme prosperity and consumerism in today's culture have deprived married couples of the generosity and courage that are needed for raising up new human life.

Moreover, the pontiff insists that every member of the family is given the grace and responsibility to build a communion of persons; to embrace and care for the elderly, the infirm, and the vulnerable. Through dialogue, reciprocal respect, shared responsibility and self-control, parents and children alike contribute to the construction of an authentically human and fully Christian family. Family unity can only be preserved and perfected through a spirit of sacrifice. It requires a ready and generous openness to understanding, to forbearance and to reconciliation. "There is no family," the Holy Father reminds us, "that does not know how selfishness, discord, tension and conflict violently attack and at times mortally would its own communion" (#21). He also points out that mutual love and support for all children should constitute a distinctive characteristic of Christians, proposing that "modern culture must be led to a more profoundly restored covenant with divine wisdom. Every human person is given a share of such wisdom through the creating action of God. And it is only in faithfulness to this covenant that the families of today will be in a position to influence positively the building of a more just and fraternal world" (#8). As Christians, we must not only preach the gospel to the world but we must commit ourselves to the service of humankind. Stories of battered wives, abused children, and addicted family members leap out at us in today's news media. May we have the grace and courage to reach out to "the poor and disadvantaged" in faith, hope and love--the kind of love that St. Thomas More displayed to his household family in sixteenth-century England: a believing and evangelizing community, a community in dialogue with God, and a community at the service of humankind.





Book Review

A. D. Cousins and Damian Grace, eds.
More's Utopia and the Utopian Inheritance. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1995, xxi + 136 pp., ISBN 0-8191-9915-X, \$37.50.

More's Utopia and the Utopian Inheritance provides a collection of brief and fundamental essays originally presented at a conference entitled "New Worlds and Utopias." Because of the introduction they provide to the *Utopia* and to its influence on the genre and their interdisciplinary scope, the collection would be most useful to students beginning their study of the work and to instructors looking for possible paper topics. As an introduction to More's work, Aleksander Pavkovic addresses the credibility of Utopian society, examining the paradoxical nature of the prosperous yet propertyless citizens. In a more rhetorical study, Damian Grace explores *Utopia's* relations to contemporary academic skepticism, comparing the anti-dogmatic ideals of the Utopians with the Ciceronian pursuit of probability, as opposed to certainty. For those students interested in More's legacy, essays by John C. Olin and Clare M. Murphy provide basic introductions to his influence on writers such as Montaigne, Voltaire and Arnold. Fred Stanley's explanation of the post-war period's dystopia, exemplified by Huxley and Orwell, offers a brief but thoughtful study of the importance of historical

context and the evolution of utopian myth into modern nightmare. Historicists will appreciate essays by Dominic Baker-Smith, Miguel Martínez López and James McCutcheon, respectively, as they offer insights on Utopia's resemblance to the Franciscans in habit, poverty and observance of natural law, on the possibility of More's modeling his community on the Essenes and on the secularization of the London Missionary Society's attempt to foster a Protestant utopia in Hawaii. Finally, for instructors seeking less traditional interdisciplinary topics, Elizabeth McCutcheon provides a comparison of More's work with E. Callenbach's *Ectopia* and Biosphere II, emphasizing the common ideals of cooperative living and moderation.

reviewed by Jennifer Bess



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