



# More News

*The Newsletter of the Thomas More Society of America*

*June 2000*

## HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 **“Utopia Before and After St. Thomas More” by Dr. Virgil Nemoianu of The Catholic University of America.**
- 3 **“The Word of God- The Heart of Prayer”: a Lenten Reflection by Rev. Sidney Griffith, S.T., of The Catholic University of America.**

## UPCOMING EVENTS:

All members and friends of The Thomas More Society are invited to a memorial mass for St. Thomas More and St. John Fisher to be held on the Feast of St. Thomas More, Thursday, June 22, 2000 at St. Joseph's Church on Capitol Hill at 12:10 P.M. Complimentary refreshments will follow the Mass, and a board meeting will conclude the events of the day. Please R.S.V.P. A.G. Harmon at 703-237-4978 before June 19, 2000 if you plan to attend.

**On February 29, 2000, The Thomas More Society of America was honored to have Dr. Virgil Nemoianu, William J. Byron Distinguished Professor of Literature and Ordinary Professor of Philosophy at The Catholic University of America, deliver a lecture on “Utopia: Before and After St. Thomas More. A transcript follows:**

"Utopia before and after St. Thomas More"

Précis of Lecture on February 29, 2000 by

VIRGIL NEMOIANU

William J. Byron Distinguished Professor of Literature and Ordinary Professor of Philosophy,  
Catholic University of America

While scholars frequently attribute the origin of Utopia to Plato's Republic, we find a significant turning point in the first Christian century. Many early followers of Christ expected his Second Coming to be imminent. When it did not soon occur, they took measures to hasten Christ's return by working for the justice and peace which would characterize the end time.

After the first Christian millennium, hopes and efforts to establish a just society intensified. During the centuries of Crusade (eleventh to thirteenth), armies dedicated to reclaiming the Holy Land were composed not only of knights but of the disarmed, the poor, even of children. The mendicant orders founded by Dominic and Francis in the thirteenth century renounced communal ownership of property and fostered a fraternal spirit among their members extending to lay associates. Great disparities between rich and poor continued to exist with periodic outbreaks, such as peasant rebellions in England (1381) and Germany (1524-25). In 1534-35, the Anabaptists tried to establish a new Jerusalem in Münster by a communism of property and wives.

Perhaps the most significant proponent of Utopian thought in the five hundred years before Thomas More was Joachim of Fiore (1145-1202). He claimed that the Old Testament was the Age of the Father, and that the period between Christ and his own era was the Age of the Son. He heralded an era of the Everlasting Gospel, which would be the Age of the Holy Spirit. Because he foretold the abolition of work, property, Empire, Church (even food!), Joachim has been called by some "the Marx of the Middle Ages."

In her finely-nuanced lecture, "Humanism in Utopia: Renaissance or Post Modern?," Anne Lake Prescott suggested that Thomas More offers a Utopian model of society with hesitancy and irony. In this ambivalence he differs from his seventeenth century disciples, the Dominican Thomasso Campanella with his City of the Sun (1623) and Sir Francis Bacon with his New Atlantis (c1624). Thomas More rather fears that utopia could turn into dystopia, as do many of his twentieth century followers. Responding to the oppressions of the Soviet system, the Russian authors Evgeny Zamyatin published We abroad (1920-21; English translation, 1924) and Vladimir Nabokov wrote Bend Sinister in the United States (1947). Zamyatin influenced George Orwell's nightmare image of the police state, 1984 (1948). The Wanting Seed (1976) by Anthony Burgess ought to be better known.

After the collapse of the Nazi and Soviet totalitarian systems, these dystopias may be less relevant to our needs than the fables of Aldous Huxley, Brave New World (1932) and Brave New World Revisited (1958). Huxley's prophecies of test-tube babies, the drug culture, and New Age spirituality have come true in the later twentieth century. These false pleasures may be opposed by the Christian Epicureanism of good health, a good conscience, the contemplation of truth, and the hope of heaven set forth in Book II of Thomas More's Utopia.

**On March 30, 2000, The Thomas More Society of America was honored to have Rev. Sidney Griffith, S.T., professor of Semitics, Department of Biblical Studies at The Catholic University of America, deliver a Lenten Reflection on "The World of God - The Heart of Prayer." A transcript follows:**

"The Word of God - the Heart of Prayer"

Précis of Lecture on March 30, 2000 by  
 SIDNEY GRIFFITH, S.T.  
 Professor of Semitics, Department of Biblical Studies  
 Catholic University of America

In this season of Lent, the Church challenges us to deepen our spiritual lives by prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Today, I want to focus of the topic of praying with Scripture as practised by St. Thomas More. I have been aided in preparing this talk by two works of the eminent priest-scholar Germain Marc'hadour: Thomas More et la Bible (Paris: Vrin, 1969) and The Bible in the Works of St. Thomas More, 5 vols. (Nieuwkoop: De Graaf, 1969-72).

I am also inspired by the words of Hans Urs von Balthasar in Prayer: (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986): "It is a dialogue not a human monologue. In this conversation God's Word has the initiative." Although we learned in the Baltimore Catechism that prayer is "the lifting up of the mind and heart to God," it is crucial for us to remember that God has first spoken to us through the Bible and through Christ. As von Balthasar observes, "In contemplating Scripture, we learn how to listen." Contemplation means learning how to see as God sees.

Thomas More followed the example of Augustine and Bede of salting his speech and writing with phrases and examples from Scripture. Catholics today know the Gospels, Epistles, and Psalms from hearing them read at Mass, but we don't habitually quote them in our prayer and speech. As post-Reformation Catholics, we perhaps are diffident about using the Bible, but we should return to the custom of the Church in the Patristic and Medieval eras.

St. Jerome made a new Latin translation of the Old Testament directly from the Hebrew. Jerome also corrected the Latin translation of the Gospels according to good Greek manuscripts, and a disciple revised the rest of the New Testament. From the late 4th century, Christians in the West, including Thomas More, read the Latin Vulgate. More never learned Hebrew, but he did learn Greek. After 1516, More could read the New Testament in its original language in the edition of his friend Erasmus.

From the 13th century onwards, the Vulgate was translated into many European vernaculars. In the 14c, followers of John Wyclif made two unauthorized translations into English. In 1526 William Tyndale made the first translation of the New Testament from the original Greek into English. He translated half the Old Testament from the original Hebrew (Genesis through 2 Chronicles) before he was executed for heresy in 1536. More believed that laypeople should read the Bible in their native tongue, but he insisted that they use an authorized translation. Based on the Vulgate, an English New Testament was published at Douai in 1582 and an Old Testament at Rheims in 1609. They were revised in the 18th and 20th centuries.

Before the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in 1947, the oldest Hebrew manuscripts dated from the 9th and 10th centuries A.D. Now we have manuscripts from 200 B.C. to 200 A.D., close to the time when the last books of the Hebrew Bible were recognized as canonical in the late 1st and early 2nd A.D. The earliest New Testament manuscripts date from the end of the 2nd century, only a hundred years after the New Testament was completed. None of the manuscripts agree completely with each other, but lawyers would be glad to have so much substantial agreement among their witnesses.

The concern for an authorized translation of Scripture continues today. Catholics hear the New American Bible read at Mass, and they may use the New Jerusalem Bible for private prayer. The Catholic version of the New Revised Standard Version has been approved for use in Canada. It has not yet been approved for liturgical use in the U.S.A. because of disagreement on how to deal with gendered language.

A good Lenten practice would be to resolve to pray with a bible in our hands so that the Scripture will permeate our thoughts, speech, and writing. Doubting Thomas acknowledged the Risen Lord with the words, *Ho Kurios mou kia ho theos mou* ("My Lord and my God") (John 20.28). Behind the Greek --- stands the Hebrew Adonai Eloainu, a phrase oft-repeated in the Pentateuch and translated as "The Lord God." Then we would follow the example of the Apostle Thomas in responding to the Lord with his own inspired words.