

For Leaders In Time Of Crisis: The Example of St. Thomas More

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

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On Nov. 4, Pope John Paul II declared St. Thomas More the Patron of Statesmen and Politicians. The declaration constitutes an extraordinary challenge to the totality of political leaders in the world today; for, to declare Thomas More their Patron Saint, is to challenge them to become like the great humanist, to conceive and live politics as he did.

What is politics? For Pope John Paul II, "Politics is the use of legitimate authority in order to attain the common good of society. . . . Political activity ought therefore to be carried out in a spirit of service."

. . . Thomas More, undoubtedly the greatest statesman of Tudor England, embodied the ideal and worldview of the responsible Christian fulfilling civic duty, in the interests of the common good. Ironically, it was not More's intention to become a politician at all, but to enter the church. It was only after years of internal struggle, that he decided to accept the responsibilities of political leadership, which he proceeded to fulfill in the service of God. When the demands of public office came into conflict with his conscience, he sacrificed his life.

A Statesman Like Socrates

More's extraordinarily strong character was shaped by a special educational process, which started in his family, and continued with study of Classical culture, mediated through the Italian Renaissance into Tudor England.

The driving force which shaped More's character in his

family relations, and in his political career, was love. Born in 1477 or 1478, he was raised by his loving father, the lawyer John More, and his mother, Agnes Granger. Thomas was to reciprocate their love, by giving his own family—wife and children—the same quality of love, most emphatically, by uplifting their minds, and educating them. For Thomas, education was a form of loving, of developing in the other, those God-given potentials for creative thinking, which each child has. His home, as Erasmus reported, was like Plato's Academy.

His father sent him to the humanist St. Anthony's school, then to the house of John Morton, who was Lord Chancellor, Archbishop of Canterbury and later Cardinal. Morton had been the leading counsellor to the great king Henry VII of England.

Morton later sent Thomas to Oxford, to study Greek and Latin, as well as theology and sciences, and, three years later, he returned to London to study law. At the same time, he started giving lectures on St. Augustine's *De Civitate Dei (The City of God)* in London. London at this period, the 1490s, was indeed the center of the leading humanists who had brought back the seeds of the Golden Renaissance from Italy, and planted them in Tudor English soil. Under Henry VII, Italian humanists began to stream into England, and more important, Englishmen went to Italy, to bring the new learning of the Renaissance back to England. Leading among those, were William Grocyn, William Lily, John Colet, and Thomas Linacre. The most important member of this intellectual circle, for More's own development, was Erasmus of Rotterdam, his "soul-mate."

What these churchmen brought back was knowledge of the Greek language, the texts of Classical Greek, including



Sir Thomas More, painting by Hans Holbein. Pope John Paul II's decision to name More as the Patron Saint of Politicians, is a bold and polemical challenge to leaders in the world today, to rise to the level of humanism that More represented.

scientific works, and also the works of the Italians, from Dante, through Petrarca, Boccaccio, and including Lorenzo, Poliziano, Pico della Mirandola, and especially Nicolaus of Cusa. They set about spreading the new learning, not only personally, but by establishing institutions of learning, like St. Paul's school, the Royal College of Physicians, and so on. This was More's intellectual circle.

Once Thomas More had decided to enter public life, he made progress rapidly, assuming posts of responsibility. In 1504 he became a Member of Parliament under Henry VII; in 1510, under Henry VIII, and was named Under Sheriff. In 1517, member of the King's Council. In 1521, knighted, and named Subchancellor. In 1523, speaker of the lower house of Parliament; in 1524, High Steward of Oxford University; in 1526, named Judge of the Star Chamber.

In 1529, after the ouster of Cardinal Wolsey, More was named Lord Chancellor in his place. It was with this promotion, that the crisis in More's relationship with the Crown became manifest.

Kings and Natural Law

More's entire political outlook was shaped by his study of Plato, Augustine, and the Italian Renaissance thinkers, especially Cusa; it was based on the Renaissance idea of Man, as the highest product of divine Creation. If Man were created in the image and likeness of God, . . . Man alone has the capacity for creative thinking, and the ability to apply his cognitive powers to make fundamental discoveries, embody them in new technologies, and thereby, greatly enhance the productive powers of labor. If Man is such, then it is the moral duty of government, to establish institutions and policies, which contribute to developing these God-given creative capacities, so that each individual may fully contribute to the continuing progress of society. This is Natural Law.

For More, it was the king who was invested with the power and duty to order society in moral coherence with the divine order, with natural law, such that government would serve the common good. Thus, the *personal character of the king* was of paramount importance.

In his epigrams, More wrote of the difference between the good and the bad king: "Who is the good king? He is the shepherd dog, the protector of the flock. With his barking, he holds the wolves far from the sheep. Who is the bad king? He is the wolf."

More's early studies in statecraft, examined the ways in which a good or an evil king could determine the prosperity or the ruin of his kingdom, by his character. The earliest work in this context, was his study of King Richard III, who, for More, was the case *par excellence* of what the king should *not*

be. Richard III was pure evil, a bloody tyrant, whose character determined every catastrophe that befell the kingdom under his reign. More's study of Richard III, was the model for Shakespeare's masterpiece.

More and Henry VII

More presented his conception of the virtuous king, in his *Utopia: The Best State Of A Commonwealth*. . . . Here, the good King Utopos, is he who organizes society according to reason, to serve the common good. More also had the model of the good king, Henry VII.

With the end of the War of the Roses, Henry VII acceded to the throne in 1485, and proceeded to build on English soil, a modern nation-state. Henry's right to the throne had been won on the battlefield at Bosworth Field, where he defeated the tyrant Richard III, and his claim to have overcome the bloody rift between the Yorks and Lancasters, was supported by his marriage to Elizabeth of York. But, more than his marriage, it was his economic, social, and political policies

which reorganized the nation, and unified it in reality.

To establish a modern nation, committed to the common good, Henry had to break the power of the heteronomic feudal nobility, and shift social support for the Crown, from this degenerate layer, to the rising middle class engaged in manufacture and trade. This meant defining a new economic and trade policy, and creating new political institutions for the task.

Henry VII reorganized the King's Council, choosing his councillors on the sole criteria of loyalty and ability—not wealth, or land, or family. The core group of about 20, out of over 200 councillors, met regularly, with him, and after deliberation, Henry would make decisions. The most important of the councillors was the same John Morton who educated the young Thomas More in statecraft.

With very few exceptions, Henry's close councillors were men who had been with him in exile prior to Bosworth, most of them having been active in the Buckingham conspiracy against Richard III. Furthermore, they were all extremely well educated men, many of whom had studied at Oxford, the center of the new learning. . . .

Henry VII explained that the laws must be implemented to ensure the common good, for the “[politique wele peace], and gode rule and for the profit, surety and restful living of his subjects.” He wrote, “nothing is more joyous than to know his subjects live peaceably under his laws and increase in wealth and prosperity.” When Henry VII died on April 21, 1509, he earned the name of “the second Solomon.” He had been a pious Christian, who left behind the largest estate in Christendom, a sovereign nation-state, with a national economy that was flourishing, and an 18-year-old son, as his successor.

The Tragedy of King Henry VIII

More and Erasmus were not alone in celebrating the coronation of Henry VIII, in whom they placed great hopes. Here was a man, albeit very young, the son of the best King England had known; he had had all the benefits of a humanist education, given him personally by his doting father. When he ascended the throne at age 18, Henry VIII had mastered English, French, Latin, and Italian; he was educated in history, science, and theology; he had all the attributes of a nobleman, could ride, and fence. He was an accomplished musician, and a composer. And he had the best advisers.

Thomas More was not only a leading political figure in Henry VIII's administration, serving as a member of the inner circle in the King's Council, and elevated to knighthood, but he was also a preferred interlocutor of the King. As Roper, More's son-in-law, was to record later, More was Henry's favorite for 20 years; “the King upon holy-days,” would “send for him,” and they would discuss “matters of astronomy, geometry, divinity and such other faculties, and sometimes of his worldly affairs.” At night, the King would often call More,

and sit up with him, “to consider with him the diversities, courses, motions and operations of the stars and the planets.”

The problem with Henry VIII, was his weakness of character. He was not, like his father, someone who had fought against tyranny, and struggled to build a nation; rather, he was handed the state and royal power on a platter. Unlike his father, he did not rule over his administration, but allowed himself to be ruled by his advisers. And among his advisers were Venetian agents as well; primary among them, was Cardinal Wolsey, the key person in the drama of Henry VIII and Thomas More.

Wolsey entered the service of Henry VII as a chaplain, and rose rapidly. As a member of the Council under Henry VIII, Wolsey became the liaison between the Council and the King. As Wolsey's biographer Cavendish relates, he profiled the King, manipulated him; knowing that the King “was young and lusty, disposed all to mirth and pleasure and to follow his desire and appetite, nothing minding to travail in the [ro]bust affairs of this realm,” Wolsey persuaded Henry to follow his worldly appetites, and leave the boring business of governing to him, Wolsey. Wolsey so usurped the royal power, that he spoke *for* the King. As the Venetian Ambassador Sebastiano Giustiniano reported back to the Doge of Venice, Wolsey at first used to say, “His Majesty will do this or that,” and later, forgetting himself, would say, “We will do this or that,” until presently (1519), he had become accustomed to saying, “I will do this or that.” It was notorious, that it was Wolsey, not Henry VIII, who ruled. . . .

‘Good and Bad Angels’

With his Venetian methods of manipulation, Wolsey made a meteoric rise to power, parallel to More's:

In 1514, Wolsey became Bishop; then, Primate of England, and Cardinal. In 1518 he became legate and then, Lord Chancellor. Wolsey had ambitions to become Pope, and when this failed, he sought to concentrate power in his person, and to establish the Church of England as a national church.

More and Wolsey appear like the good and bad angels in the old medieval drama, each vying for the soul of the King. Wolsey as a person, was everything More was not: ambitious, unscrupulous, power-hungry, deceitful, fickle, arrogant, vain, a vile sycophant, a snake. More was committed to ensure the unity of the Christian princes, for peace; Wolsey worked to bring about the break of England with Rome, which inaugurated the Reformation, and the epoch of religious wars that devastated Europe.

This was Venetian geopolitical strategy: After the defeat of the League of Cambrai against Venice, in 1510, England (which had not been invited to join the League), France, Spain, and the Papacy, were pitted against one another, in a Venetian “balance of power” game. Venice wanted to break England's relations with its historic ally, Spain, and induce it to ally instead with France, then to play all against each other.

Venice wanted to get Henry VIII to divorce his wife — Catherine of Aragon, who was the aunt of Hapsburg Emperor Charles V — and to marry Anne Boleyn, a lady at Catherine's court and the granddaughter of one Thomas Howard, second Duke of Norfolk, who led the pro-French faction in the royal counsels.

Wolsey first suggested to Henry, legal grounds for a divorce; it was Wolsey, having Henry's psychological profile and knowing his weakness for women, who arranged the encounter with Anne, at his house, during a masked ball. It was Wolsey who convoked a gathering of scholars and prelates to study the legal question of divorce; and it was Wolsey, who manipulated the papal envoy Cardinal Campeggio. All the while, Wolsey was *ostensibly* pursuing the annulment or divorce; but he was playing two games at once. If the annulment were to succeed, he planned to have Henry marry not Anne, but the French King's sister.

Anyone who doubts the crucial role played by Wolsey, should re-read Shakespeare's play, *Henry VIII*. The central character in the play is Wolsey, pitted against both Catherine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn. It is through his interaction with them, both portrayed as virtuous, honest, and devoted to Henry, that he emerges as the evil, intriguing snake that he was.

More's Conscience vs. The King

After Wolsey was ousted as Lord Chancellor, whom did Henry name? None other than Sir Thomas More. Henry believed that More, the most respected intellectual in England, and a fervent Christian, either would have the ability to succeed in his suit with Rome (to annul his marriage with Catherine), or to provide credibility for the King, for whatever recourse he might have, including a break with Rome. In either case, More would have to support the King's pursuit — something Henry must have known he would not do, as a matter of conscience.

In 1532 came the decisive step: Henry had Parliament issue the Supremacy Act, which named him Head of the Church of England. Everyone was forced to swear an oath to the act. The clergy, almost without exception, capitulated on May 15, 1532. The very next day, More resigned as Lord Chancellor. Henry replaced More as Chancellor with Thomas Cromwell, Wolsey's chief officer, also a Venetian agent, committed to forcing through the break with Rome; Cromwell had two other Venetian agents at his side, Francesco Zorzi and Marco Raphael.

Events moved fast: On Jan. 25, 1533, Henry married Anne Boleyn. His previous marriage was swiftly annulled, not by Rome, but by his Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Cranmer, on May 23, 1533. On June 1, Henry's wife was crowned Queen Anne, in an ostentatious ceremony which More refused to attend. More was first put under pressure to recognize Henry as head of the Church, or be denounced as a

traitor. Then, he was pressured to accept the Act of Succession of March 1534, guaranteeing power to Henry's offspring with Anne, again — on pain of being named a traitor. On April 13, a royal commission went to More to demand his allegiance personally, which he refused. Just days later, he was taken to the Tower, where he was to remain, under continuing pressures to capitulate, until his execution on July 6, 1535.

More held resolute, that it was a matter of obeying the laws of God, over those of any temporal authority. That was the issue, not the divorce or marriage per se. It was a higher issue that was at stake: that man could not decree laws in violation of God's law. More knew, that regardless what might befall him personally, were he to sacrifice truth for convenience, it would not only deal a deathly blow to the Church, but it would violate divine, natural law.

More's letters from prison document his internal struggle to defend truth, in all its agony and glory. One of the most telling episodes of his prison tribulations, was his discussion with his beloved daughter Margaret, when she visited him in the Tower. Margaret reported on the visit afterwards. Margaret tried to convince her father to capitulate, arguing that many learned men had assured her, it would be all right; and that, if not, "it would both be a great blot in your worship in every wise man's opinion and as myself have heard some say (such as yourself have always taken for well-earned and good) a peril unto your soul also."

More responded, "Daughter Margaret, we two have talked of this thing oftener than twice or thrice, and that same tale in effect, that you tell me now therein, and the same fear too, have you twice told me before, and I have twice answered you too, that in this matter if it were possible for me to do the thing that might content the king's Grace, and God therewith not offended, there hath no man taken this oath already more gladly than I would do: as he that reckoneth himself more deeply bounden unto the king's Highness for his most singular bounty, many ways shewed and declared, than any of them all beside. But sith standing my conscience, I can in nowise do it."

Margaret repeated her appeals, that he swear the Supremacy Oath, arguing that it was an act of Parliament, and that others had done so, even against their conscience. More replied, "Mary Margaret, for the part that you play, you play it not much amiss. But Margaret, first, as for the law of the land, though every man being born and inhabiting therein, is bounden to the keeping in every case upon some temporal pain, and in many cases upon pain of God's displeasure too, yet is there no man bounden to swear that every law is well made, not bounden upon the pain of God's displeasure, to perform any such point of the law, as were indeed unlawful."

Laws Of Parliament vs. Natural Law

More reported to Margaret on June 3, 1535, of the proceedings of his last interrogation in prison, by the Commis-

sion sent by the King. The message they communicated at the outset from the King, was “that the king’s Highness was nothing content nor satisfied with mine answer, but thought that by my demeanor I had been occasion of much grudge and harm in the realm, and that I had an obstinate mind and an evil toward him and that my duty was, being his subject; and so he had sent them now in his name upon my allegiance to command me to make a plain and terminate answer whether I thought the statute lawful or not and that I should either acknowledge and confess it lawful that his Highness should be Supreme Head of the Church of England, or else to utter plainly my malignity.”

More wrote, that it hurt him to hear that the King had such a view of him, which was not true, but that he was sure, “that I know very well that the time shall come, when God shall declare my truth toward his Grace before him and all the world. And whereas it might happily seem to be but small cause of comfort because I might take harm here first in the meanwhile, I thanked God that my case was such in this matter through the clearness of mine own conscience that though I might have pain I could not have harm, for a man may in such case lose his head and have no harm. . . .”

On July 1, 1535, More was formally tried for treason in Westminster Hall. On his insistence that he be allowed to speak out, to explain why he should not be found guilty, he was allowed to issue his defense:

“Seeing that I see ye are determined to condemn me (God knoweth how) I will now in discharge of my conscience speak my mind plainly and freely touching my Indictment and your Statute withal.

“And foreasmuch as 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 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 pre-eminence by the mouth of our Saviour himself, personally present upon 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.”

When told that the authorities in the Church and universities disagreed with his view, More answered, declaring his loyalty to a higher authority, the court of history: “If there were no more but myself upon my side, and the whole Parliament upon the other, I would be sore afraid to lean to mine own mind only against so many. But if the number of Bishops and Universities be so material as your Lordships 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, of those well learned bishops and virtuous men that are yet alive, they be not the fewer part that are of my mind therein. But if I should speak of those that are already 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 bounden, my Lord, to conform my conscience to the Council of one Realm against the General Council of Christendom. . . .”

More was judged guilty of treason, for refusing to swear the oath, and was condemned to die on July 6, 1535.

The Death of More

When More met his death, he did so with the characteristic self-consciousness, and humor, which he had displayed his life long.

His good friend Sir Thomas Pope was sent to his cell in the Tower, to inform him, he would be executed the next day. Roper reports the scene:

“ ‘Master Pope,’ quoth he [More], ‘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.’ ”

. . . When taken out of the Tower and led to the execution block by the Master Lieutenant, More was about to fall, from weakness. Then, “he said merrily to Master Lieutenant, ‘I pray you, Master Lieutenant, see me safe up, and for my coming down, let me shift for myself.’ ”

“Then desired he all the people thereabout to pray for him, and to bear witness to him that he should now suffer death in and for the faith of the Holy Catholic Church. His last words were: ‘I die as the King’s true servant, but as God’s servant first.’ . . .” More was beheaded, and his head was exhibited on a stake in London, for weeks, until, re-united with his body, it was buried.

Henry’s Great Matter was one of the great tragedies of English history. Although he prevailed through power, . . . Henry was the tragic figure, who *could* have, and *should* have been the great King that More and Erasmus hoped he would be. Instead he allowed himself, like Shakespeare’s Othello, to be manipulated by Venetian methods, and was turned into a beast.

It was Sir Thomas More, elevated in 1935 (the 400th anniversary of his death) to St. Thomas More, who was the victor, who secured for future humanity the victory of truth. More is in the tradition of those precious few individuals in history—like Socrates (to whom he has been often compared), Christ, and Jeanne d’Arc—who in making what is considered the ultimate sacrifice, actually gave new life to humanity, by demonstrating in exemplary deeds, what the power of the love of truth, is. More is the sublime figure,

who in every word and action, rose above the petty world of political intrigue and personal interest, to lead the struggle for the common good, for a society founded on the commitment to love and truth.

The decision on the part of Pope John Paul II to name More as the Patron Saint of Politicians, is the boldest challenge which could be thrown out today. Were political leaders to rise to the challenge, as Lyndon LaRouche has done, there would be not only hope, but the optimistic confidence, that the world can indeed be brought into coherence with the law of God.

'Politics Is To Attain The Common Good'

This "Address of His Holiness Pope John Paul II, to the Jubilee of Government Leaders, Members of Parliament and Politicians," was given in Rome on Nov. 4, 2000.

1. I am most happy to welcome you, distinguished Government Leaders, Members of Parliament and men and women responsible for public life who have come to Rome for the Jubilee. I greet you and I thank Senator Nicola Mancino for the kind words he has spoken on your behalf. My grateful thoughts turn to Senator Francesco Cossiga, who has actively promoted the proclamation of Saint Thomas More as Patron of Statesmen and Politicians. My greeting also goes to the other distinguished leaders, including Mr. Mikhail Gorbachov, who have spoken in this assembly. I offer a special word of welcome to the Heads of State present.

Our meeting gives me the opportunity to reflect together with you, in the light of the motions just presented, on the nature of the mission which God, in his Providence, has entrusted to you, and on the responsibilities inherent in that mission. Yours can well be deemed a true and genuine vocation to politics, which in practice means the governance of nations, the formulation of laws and the administration of public affairs at every level. We ought then to inquire as to the nature, the demands, and the aims of politics, in order to act as Christians and as persons conscious of the excellence and, at the same time, the difficulties and risks which politics entails.

2. Politics is the use of legitimate authority in order to attain the common good of society: a common good which, as the Second Vatican Council declares, embraces "the sum of those conditions of social life by which individuals, families and groups can achieve complete and efficacious fulfillment" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 74). Political activity ought therefore to be carried out in a spirit of service. My predecessor Pope Paul VI rightly affirmed that "politics is a demanding

way of living the Christian commitment to serve others" (*Octogesima Adveniens*, 46).

Hence, Christians who engage in politics — and who wish to do so as Christians — must act selflessly, not seeking their own advantage, or that of their group or party, but the good of one and all, and consequently, in the first place, that of the less fortunate members of society. In the struggles of life, which can at times be merciless and cruel, not a few are "crushed" and are inevitably cast aside. Among these I cannot fail to mention those who are imprisoned. . . .

Justice must indeed be the fundamental concern of political leaders: a justice which is not content to apportion to each his own, but one which aims at creating conditions of equal opportunity among citizens, and therefore favoring those who, for reasons of social status or education or health, risk being left behind or relegated to the lowest places in society, without possibility of deliverance.

This is the scandal of the affluent society of today's world, in which the rich grow ever richer, since wealth produces wealth, and the poor grow ever poorer, since poverty tends to additional poverty. Not only is this scandal found within individual nations, but it also has aspects which extend well beyond their borders. Today, especially, with the phenomenon of the globalization of markets, the rich and developed nations tend to improve their economic status further, while the poor countries — with the exception of some in the process of a promising development — tend to sink into ever more grievous forms of poverty.

3. I think with profound distress of those areas of the world afflicted by endless wars and hostilities, by endemic hunger and by terrible diseases. Many of you share my concern for this state of affairs which, from a Christian and a human point of view, represents the most serious sin of injustice found in the modern world. It must therefore deeply disturb the conscience of Christians today, especially those who, since they guide the political, economic and financial mechanisms of the world, are in a position to determine — for better or for worse — the destiny of peoples.

Truly, there needs to be a greater spirit of solidarity in the world, as a means of overcoming the selfishness of individuals and nations. Only in this way will it be possible to curb the pursuit of political power and economic wealth with no reference to other values. In a now globalized world, in which the market, which of itself has a positive influence on human freedom and creativity in the economic sector (cf. *Centesimus Annus*, 42), nonetheless tends to be severed from all moral considerations, and to take as its sole norm the law of maximum profit, those Christians who feel themselves called by God to political life, have the duty — quite difficult, yet very necessary — to conform the laws of the "unbridled" market to the laws of justice and solidarity. Only in this way can we ensure a peaceful future for our world and remove the root causes of conflicts and wars: *peace is the fruit of justice. . . .*