from the HOUSETOPS

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Saint Benedict Center

The Slaves of the Immaculate Heart of Mary

To Our Readers:

Martyrs are never conformists—When Thomas More, the Chancellor of England was summoned before the Council to swear to the succession of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn's progeny, More said he would swear to succession but there were parts of the oath to which his conscience could not swear. He was referring to that part which made Henry VIII head of the Church in England. He was told: "You ought to think your conscience erroneous when you have against it the whole Council of the nation" and More replied, "I should if I had not before me a still greater Council of Christendom."

You are perhaps familiar with the story of Saint Thomas More for it has been written and produced hundreds of times. This time we are presenting it as almost a parallel with our own days—comparing his time and ours. History does indeed repeat itself in various ways.

Presented also is the true account of Saint Christopher, popular protector of travelers.

We are pleased too with an excellent article of "No Salvation Outside the Catholic Church" written in the 1800's by a famous convert Orestes Brownson. He himself had to abjure his former heresy by stating and signing the thrice defined dogma when he embraced the Catholic Faith.

And now we invite you to read all the articles in this issue in order to become better acquainted with the truths and traditions of our religion and pass them on to succeeding generations not hesitantly, reluctantly or with doubts but boldly, with certitude and as Our Lord wanted—loudly "from the housetops."

The Editors

Saint Thomas More

His Times and Ours

No layman of equal status from Medieval Times until this very day presents such an epitome of tradition and progress with such sanity and balance as the sixteenth century saint and martyr, Thomas More. Is this then to be another biographical essay on Thomas More? You may well ask!

Before answering that question let me assure our readers that it would be presumptuous, indeed, in view of the many excellent, and in many instances, scholarly lives of this fascinating figure to repeat in a magazine article what has been presented in hundreds of thousands of volumes. The biographical outline is well known. Every school boy from his history texts recognizes Sir Thomas More as Chancellor of England under Henry VIII. Many of us, too, have seen the play, *Man For All Seasons* and the movie. There are collegiate collections of his works, statewide forums, and national guilds and organizations devoted to research on this man who, says a Jesuit writer, Fr. Basset, would have been a saint even if he were not a martyr.

And on the other side of the fence, four hundred years after his execution a debunker or two have already gone off the deep end in trying to show that Thomas More was not a martyr at all but just a shrewd barrister and statesman, but who missed finding a technological flaw in the King's divorce case and who

wasn't shrewd enough to save his own neck. Nevertheless such endeavors do demonstrate quite clearly that saints cannot be fully understood by non-saints and not at all by those who are without the theological virtue of Faith.

The present writer makes no claims to a FULL understanding of the saint but since Rome has proclaimed him "martyr" in modern parlance, THAT is the bottom line. *Roma locuta est.*

And the wise chancellor, the astute attorney, the courageous martyr, witty to the last step, is like a magnet attracting all and sundry to plumb the depths of his magnetic personality, his clear vision, his deep Faith, his active yet prayerful life.

Theodore Maynard, a modern writer, now deceased, poses the question: "But one may wonder why it took exactly four hundred years for More and Fisher (the one bishop at the time who did not defect of the 72 who did) to be canonized?" Our answer must be another question: Do we not minimize the part of the Holy Spirit in His "breathing where (and when) He wills"? Nothing in God's plan is accidental and in His mercy and concern surely raises up to the status of canonized saints those figures who are most significant for the particular age.

There certainly is a crying need for such a layman today; so ideal, so disarming, so strong on all those issues so weakly and erroneously regarded in our age. This is, indeed, an age in which the layman in reality is abandoned (and the word is used advisedly) to his own decisions . . . in some instances by the silence of the magisterium and in others by the chaos and confusion caused by the "experts." Our Holy Father seems to stand alone in his insistence on traditional hard line morality while before his very eyes as well as behind his back are the innovators, the nationalists (some speak now of the American Catholic Church!) the rebels, and the computer fiends spewing off their heresies of numbers . . . as if the Catholic Church were a democracy depending for its authority from below instead of, like all authority, from Above —a divinely protected plan.

And the rebels today are evident in every walk of life. They come from our monasteries and convents; many leave, but some remain to stir up from within. These are the disloyal who rationalize in the breaking of their vows, both lay and monastic, including the unfaithful breakers of marriage vows on "psychological" grounds, interchangeably using two contradictory terms, "divorce" and "annulment" to appease an undisciplined and indifferent conscience. And as if that weren't a long enough list there are the *destructionists* of the family, the chief unit of society; secularizers of education; degenerators of the Liturgy but, most important, scorners of defined doctrine.

A Scholar and a Wit

More's life was not a long one. He was born February 7, 1478 and died July 6, 1535. He was fifty-seven years old. His family

was "honorable not illustrious." His father, John More, became an eminent judge. As a boy Thomas went to St. Anthony's School in London and then was taken to serve as a page in the household of the famous Cardinal Morton, then Archbishop of Canterbury and Lord High Chancellor of England; the statesman who advised the best measures of Henry VII, who began to reform the monasteries, who heavily taxed the rich and took care of the poor. In this household Thomas was known as a bright lad who would often "speak a piece" in Christmas skits or take part in the frequent plays put on for the guests' entertainment with a wit and sparkling readiness that made the Archbishop predict for Thomas a great career. But even he did not suspect that the young student would also eventually become the High Lord Chancellor of England. . . . The Archbishop suggested that the young More go to Oxford. Thomas studied at New Inn. And then at Lincoln's Inn, he studied law because his father was insistent, especially when More preferred less practical scholarly pursuits in another direction and intimated to his father that he would have preferred to be a university professor . . . for he was widely known in academic circles as a scholar and a wit.

Like so many Catholic youths when the Faith flourishes (both as cause and effect) Thomas thought of and prayed about a vocation. Was it to be a Religious in a Monastery, a secular priest or a husband and father of a family? To him each was a sacred vocation and required his studied thoughts and almost detached prayer. "Voluntate Dei". . . . . He spent much time at the Charterhouse, a monastery of Carthusians in London and actually lived there on a monk's schedule for several years while studying law during the day hours. But by 1504 when he was twenty-seven years old he decided on marriage. Some of his biographers make a point of mentioning that Thomas came to the Colt home to court the youngest daughter but that he felt it would be odious to seek the hand of the youngest when the eldest was still unmarried. This is ascribing a motive to Thomas that would be difficult to prove.

If need be it could well be "explained" by the simple fact that he was very much in love with Jane, the eldest—(and Thomas had a tremendous capacity for love). At any rate all agree that Thomas and Jane were very happily married for more than five years 'till her death in 1511, leaving four children: Margaret (Meg) born in 1505, Elizabeth (Beth) 1506, Cicily (Cecy) 1507, and John (Jack) in 1509.

Shortly after his first wife's death he married a still older woman, a widow, Alice Middleton, who brought to his household her daughter, Alice. One of More's better biographers, E. E. Reynolds remarks that a very deep affection developed between Thomas More and Alice Middleton and between More's children and herself who "at times spoke her mind brusquely," which