DE TRISTITIA TEDIO PAVORE ET ORATIONE CHRISTI ANTE CAPTIONEM EIUS: THE LAST WORK BY ST. THOMAS MORE

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Summary: I. *Biographical Introduction and some of the writings of St. Thomas More*. II. *The autograph manuscript of the* De tristitia tedio pavore et oratione Christi ante captionem eius. III. *Composition*. IV. *The background of More's last work*. 1. Context of More's writings within his own life, vocation, and sources available to him at the time. 2. The continental context. 3. Erasmus's Disputatiuncula de taedio, pavore, tristicia Iesu. V. De tristitia tedio pavore et oratione Christi ante captionem eius *immediate sources, title, content and commentary*. 1. The title of the book. 2. Content and commentary.

1. Biographical Introduction and some of the writings of St. Thomas More

Thomas More was born in the City of London on 7 February 1478, and he was beheaded on Tower Hill, just outside the Tower of London, on 6 July 1535. In January 1505 he married Joanna Colt; they had three daughters and one son. Joanna died in 1511 and within a month he married Alice Middleton. More was a successful lawyer and one of the most significant Christian humanists in England. He knew and corresponded with Erasmus and other European scholars. From his life and his writings, it can be said that he understood the vocation of the humanist as one of service to society.[1] As is well known he wrote *Utopia* in 1516. More was directly involved in the publication of the first four editions: Louvain, 1516; Paris, 1517; Basel, March 1518; and Basel, November 1518. The two editions of 1518 included in the one and same volume *Utopia*, More's *Epigramata*, and Erasmus's *Epigramata.* The volume was to be More's self-introduction to European humanists. His two works, *Utopia* and the *Epigramata*, showed his

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[1] See Chapter 1: *Called to the service of Christendom* in J. McConica, *Thomas More*, H.M. Stationery Office, London 1977; translated into Spanish by F. Mitjans, and published as *Tomás Moro*, Rialp, Madrid 2016.

knowledge of Greek and Latin languages and authors, as well as providing a critique of the society of the various kingdoms of Christendom at the time. Up to a point, they conveyed More's own political views.

In 1518 More entered the service of King Henry VIII, and during his first two years in office he wrote in Latin his celebrated Letters to Oxford (1518), to a Monk and to Lee (1519). The three of them were written in defence of humanism and displayed More's profound acquaintance with Theology, Sacred Scripture, and the Fathers of the Church. In January of that same year 1518, people began to take notice of Martin Luther's theses[2] and soon Lutheran books started arriving in England. In 1520 Luther was excommunicated and Henry VIII wrote a response to Luther's *De Captivitate Babiloniae*.[3] In 1528 the Bishop of London commissioned More to defend orthodoxy through writing. More published in English *A Dialogue of Sir Thomas More, Knight* (1529) in which he criticized the ideas of Luther and Tyndale. Tyndale produced his *Answer*, and More responded with the first part of *The Confutation of Tyndale's Answer* (March 1532) while he was Lord Chancellor of the Realm. In May 1532 Convocation agreed to the "Submission of the Clergy", paving the way for Parliament declaring two years later that the King was the Supreme Head of the Church in England. The following day, 16 May 1532, More resigned as Lord Chancellor, but he continued writing in defence of the Church, publishing in 1533 the second part of *The Confutation of Tyndale's Answer*; *The Apology of Sir Thomas More; The Debellation of Salem and Bizance*; and *The Answer to a Poisoned Book.*

From the beginning of 1534 More was under threat of being arrested and he ceased to publish against heresy. Instead he planned to write *A Treatise upon the Passion of Christ,* but this was left unfinished when on 13 April he was taken into custody. In the Tower of London he wrote *A Treatise to Receive the Blessed Body* and *A Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation.* More's last book is *De tristitia tedio pavore et oratione christi ante captionem eius* which he must have finished by 12 June 1535 when all his books and writing utensils were taken from him, less than a month before he was executed.

II. The autograph manuscript of the *De tristitia tedio pavore et oratione christi ante captionem eius*[4]

The autograph manuscript of *De tristitia tedio pavore et oratione christi ante captionem eius* is deposited in the *Real Colegio de Corpus Christi* in Valencia,

[2] Cfr. R. Rex, *The Making of Luther*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2017, 10–17.

[3] Henry VIII asked Thomas More to reply. More did so anonymously with his *Responsio ad Lutherun* (1523) under the name of William Ross.

[4] In this paper capitalization of the Latin and Spanish words in the manuscript is as appears in

Spain, where it is considered a relic of St. Thomas More and is kept together with other relics. The college was founded by St. Juan de Ribera (1532–1611), and on receiving the manuscript he wrote:

> *Thesaurus absconditus*
> este libro me Embio El conde de oropesa,
> diziendo me que era del Señor don fernando de
> toledo, al qual selo dio El padre frei pedro de
> Soto confessor del emperador rey i Señor carlos .V.
> porque era de thomas moro y escrito de su mano.[5]

The anglophone academic world, however, was not aware of the existence and location of the manuscript. In 1962 Andrés Vázquez de Prada published the first edition of his biography of More.[6] One of his readers pointed out to him that he had not mentioned the autograph kept in Valencia. Vázquez de Prada researched the manuscript and contacted Professor Geoffrey Bullough of King's College London and Germain Marc'hadour, editor of *Moreana*. Vázquez de Prada included an account of his "discovery" in Appendix IV in the Second, Third and Fourth editions of his book published in 1966, 1975, and 1985 respectively.[7] At the time the critical edition of *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More,* was being prepared by Yale University Press and Clarence H. Miller (1931–2019) was in charge of the edition of More's last work. He was notified of the discovery of the manuscript in Valencia and he used it for the critical edition of *De tristitia tedio pavore et oratione christi ante captionem eius*. This was published in 1976 as Volume 14 of the *Yale Edition of the Complete Works of St. Thomas More,* which has a total of 15 volumes.

Volume 14 has two parts. Part I (694 pages) is entitled the "Valencia Manuscript" and includes a complete facsimile of the manuscript folio by folio on even pages, and the transcription of the Latin text and the English translation on the pages

the transcription given by C.H. Miller, *The Yale Edition of The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London 1976, Volume 14, which from here onwards is referred as CW 14.

[5] Transcription as per CW 14, part II, 716, which could be translated as "A hidden treasure: This book was sent to me by the Count of Oropesa, who told me that it belonged to Señor Don Fernando de Toledo, to whom it had been given by the Rev Friar Fr. Pedro de Soto, Confessor to the Emperor, King and Lord Charles V, because it was by Thomas More and written with his own hand." The Dominican theologian Pedro de Soto taught in Oxford in Mary Tudor's reign.

[6] Cfr. A. Vázquez de Prada, *Sir Tomás Moro: Lord Canciller de Inglaterra*, Rialp, Madrid 1962, 395 pages.

[7] Cfr. Mitjans, *The 'Discovery' of the Autograph of Thomas More's* De Tristitia Christi *through Andrés Vázquez de Prada*, «Moreana» 58.1 no. 215 (2021), 112-124.

opposite. Part II (pages 695 to 1192) includes Introduction, Commentary, Appendices, and Index: a tremendous scholarly work for which we must be very grateful to Professor Miller.[8] Those almost 500 pages of Miller's exhaustive study are the best source for any further investigation, the most recent of which is the excellent piece by Katherine Gardiner Rodgers, "The Lessons of Gethsemane: *De Tristitia Christi*", published as chapter 11 of the *Cambridge Companion to Thomas More*, Cambridge, 2011, pages 239–262. What follows is based mainly on the reading of *De tristitia tedio pavore et oratione christi ante captionem eius* in Volume 14 of the *Complete Works*.[9]

The essential content of *De tristitia tedio pavore et oratione christi ante captionem eius,* however, was not unknown before the discovery in Valencia. Two versions of it were accessible: the translation into English done by Mary Basset (c.1523–1572), grand-daughter of Thomas More, which was printed in the *English Works* of Thomas More published in 1557; and a Latin version included in *Thomae Mori Opera Omnia,* Louvain, 1565. Mary Basset was a daughter of Margaret Roper, herself the eldest daughter of More. Her translation is quite accurate,[10] and she started her translation rendering into English the complete title found in More's autograph. It reads:

> Of the Sorrow, Weariness, Fear, and Prayer of Christ before
> his Taking, as it is written in the XXVI Chapter of St. Matthew,
> the XIII of St. Mark, the XXII of St. Luke,
> and the XVIII of St. John.

William Rastell, the editor of the *English Works,* however, addressed the reader by adding an introduction to Basset's translation. In that introduction he entitles the work as *An Exposition of a Part of the Passion.* And in the *Opera Omnia* it is also headed with the editor's title:

> Expositio Passionis Domini, ex contextu
> IV. Evangelistarum, usque ad comprehensum Christum:
> Autore Thoma Moro,
> dum in arce Londinensi in carcere agebat.

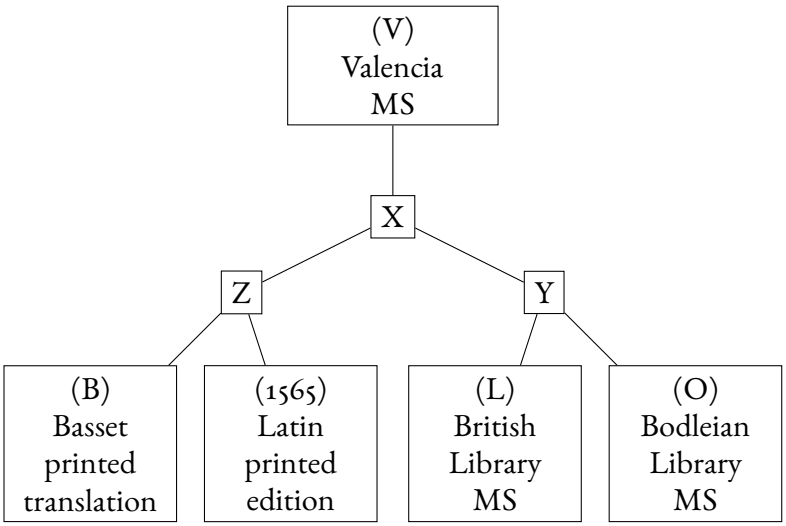
[8] See K. Rodgers, S. Merriam Foley, *In Memoriam: Clarence H. Miller (1931–2019)*, «Moreana» 57.1 no. 213 (2020) v-viii.

[9] Miller's translation into English is also included in G. B. Wegemer, S. W. Smith (eds.), *The Essential Works of Thomas More*, ed., Yale University Press, New Haven and London 2020; in G.E. Haupt (ed.), *St. Thomas More: The Tower Works*, , Yale University Press 1980; and in G.B. Wegemer (ed.), *The Sadness of Christ*, Scepter Publishers, Princeton 1993.

[10] Cfr. CW 14, 1077–1165.

Therefore, from the time of the publication of the *English Works* of 1557 and the *Opera Omnia* of 1565 up to the Yale critical edition of 1976, the work had been known as *An Exposition of the Passion.*

In his Introduction Miller mentions that there are other two Latin manuscripts of the work, one in the British Library and the other in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, which he calls L and O, and after a detailed study of the five extant versions he suggests that probably there were three hypothetical manuscripts which he calls X, Y, and Z, giving the following stemma:



He suggests that Basset's seems to be a translation of the hypothetical manuscript Z, and that the Latin printed edition is also based on that manuscript; that L and O are based on the hypothetical Y; and that B, 1565, L and O have a common source, the hypothetical X. "[But] since it is all but certain that More had no opportunity to revise [the text], the Valencia autograph (V) has full and absolute authority in establishing the text".[11] It is relevant to point out that the added title, *An Exposition of the Passion,* does not appear in the manuscripts (L) and (O).

The bound volume of the Valencia manuscript includes the text of *De tristitia tedio pavore et oratione christi ante captionem eius* on 155 folios numbered in the upper right-hand corner of each recto, followed by 7 blank folios, and 14 folios, numbered 156–169 in the lower right-hand corner, containing a series of scriptural pages written by More and some of his own brief reflections. These additional texts do not appear in the 1565 edition or in the Basset translation. Though closely related to some of the ideas expressed in the main text, they are independent from it. Miller suggests that they might have been assembled by

[11] Cfr. CW 14, *The Manuscripts and the 1565 Edition*, 724–737.

More before or during or after it.[12] References to *De tristitia* in this Study are given by the number of the original folios as they appear in CW 14 as well as in the Latin-Spanish edition published in Valencia in 1984;[13] this allows for a close following of the text.

III. Composition

The Valencia manuscript is, in fact, the only extant long autograph of Thomas More and its 155 folios give an insight into how he composed it. He wrote it in a hurry, sentence after sentence, correcting it as he went along, crossing out a word or full sentence here and there, adding another in places. Though it has a clear structure it branches in different directions: More followed a line of thought, and then expanded the same in another. It is very much a personal meditation but addressed to the reader whom he names every so often. It is a meditation exhorting the reader to pray. It is also very much an autobiographical text which he writes aware of his own circumstances, expecting to be executed at a moment's notice.

De tristitia tedio pavore et oratione christi ante captionem eius is like no other work by More. The letters to Dorp, to a Monk, to Lee, and to the Masters of Oxford University were written addressing specific individuals or groups. The settings of *Utopia,* the *Dialogue* of 1529, and the *Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation* were a mixture of fiction and non-fiction. *Utopia* is a conversation between *Morus* and the fictional traveler Raphael Hythloday, introduced one to the other by More's friend, Peter Giles, after Sunday Mass at the Church of St. Mary in Bruges, and continued in Giles's house, about a non-existent isle found nowhere. In the *Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation*, More, imprisoned in the Tower of London, portrayed himself as old bedridden Anthony who advised his young nephew Vincent confronted by an imminent invasion by the Turks which historically took place in 1529, though in fact the author is referring to the imminent threats truly present in England in 1534. In the *Dialogue* of 1529 against Tyndale and Luther the real More welcomes into his house in Chelsea the fictitious student confused by ideas he had heard; this gives More the freedom to confront what he considers to be the arguments of the reformers; while in all other writings in defence of orthodoxy he is tied up with answering specific written objections. More tried an apologetic history in two versions (*The History of King Richard III,* in English, and *Historia Ricardi Tertii,* in Latin) but he did not publish either. *A Treatise upon the Passion* was meant to be an academic treatise though More did not manage to finish it.

[12] Cfr. CW 14, 695–704.

[13] Cfr. T. Moro, *De Tristitia Christi*, edited and translated into Spanish by F. Calero, published by the Ayuntamiento de Valencia, Spain, 1984.

De tristitia is different. There is no fictional device, no academic treatment. In *De tristitia* More opens his heart and his mind, he prays, he meditates on the Gospel, he exhorts his readers to pray. The closest lines to the style of *De tristitia,* I would say, are the last lines of his early *Nine Pageants*: the first eight stanzas of the poem are in English, but the ninth is a 12-line stanza in Latin. The last 6 lines read:

Gaudia laus et honor celeri pede omnia cedunt,
Qui manet excepto semper amore dei.
Ergo homines, levibus iamiam diffidite rebus,
Nulla recessuro spes adhibenda bono.
Qui dabit eternam nobis pro munere vitam,
In permansuro ponite vota deo.[14]

The citing of these few Latin lines seems relevant to the question of how More as a layman put across his faith through his writings. In 1505 his ideas are conveyed by adding and omitting texts while translating the *Life of Pico*. More managed to publish *Utopia,* his *Epigramata,* and his *Translations of Lucian* through Erasmus. By the time he writes his letters to Oxford, Lee, and Brixius, he was already a renowned scholar and a knight. It seems likely that the letter to Oxford had the backing of the King's authority.[15] He prefaced his *Dialogue of 1529* with a declaration that he was "one of the council of our sovereign lord and king, and chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster". He continued writing in defence of orthodoxy as Lord Chancellor. In all the various circumstances he had to consider his medium and his authority. In the Tower, a few weeks before his execution, there is no need to use any device: he can play it straight. He had also expressed what was in his heart in that stanza in Latin in his early youth while joking in English through the previous stanzas.

IV. The background of More's last work

1. *The context of More's writings within his own life and vocation, and sources available to him at the time*

Before getting down to an analysis of the content of *De tristitia* it will be worth considering briefly Thomas More as a writer: his skills, and sources, as well as his spiritual formation within the context of the times he lived. In the very first

[14] CW 1, 6 and CW 3, II, Poem 272. The translation given by Miller (CW 3) reads: "Pleasures, praise, homage, all things quickly disappear—except the love of God, which endures forever. Therefore, mortals, put no confidence hereafter in trivialities, no hope in transitory advantage; offer your prayers to the everlasting God, who will grant us the gift of eternal life".
[15] Cfr. CW 15, xxx.

sentence of the 1532 epitaph for his tombstone and that of his two wives, he wanted to mention his dedication to writing, for he said:

> Thomas Morus urbe Londinensi familia non celebri sed honesta natus in literis utcunq versatus:
>
> (Thomas More was born in the City of London, of an honest though not famous family, and was always engaged in letters in one way or another).

On the same tombstone he added a Latin poem he wrote years earlier after the death of his first wife:

> Here lies Joanna, the beloved little wife of Thomas More.
> I intend that this same tomb shall be Alice's and mine, too.
> One, my wife in my youthful years,
> has made me father of a son and three daughters;
> the other has been as devoted to her stepchildren
> (a rare distinction in a stepmother)
> as very few mothers are to their own children.
> The one lived out her life with me, the other still lives with me:
> I cannot decide whether I did love the one or do love the other more.
> O, how happily we could have lived all three together
> if fate and religion had permitted.
> The grave will unite us however, and I pray that heaven will unite us too.
> Thus, death will give what life could not.

So, he saw himself as a writer and as a poet.

More was educated at St. Anthony's Grammar School in London where he learnt Latin. He continued his education in the household of Cardinal John Morton, Archbishop of Canterbury and Lord Chancellor of England, and then in Oxford. At the age of 18, in 1496, he was admitted to Lincoln's Inn for the study of Law. In 1499, he met Erasmus who had been invited to spend some time in England by one of his disciples, William Blount, Lord Mountjoy, a friend of Thomas More. Erasmus, aged 33, was very impressed by the erudition and manner of that brilliant student, young More, aged 21.

For some time then Erasmus had been "occupied with"[16] his first major work, the *Antibarbari*. In introducing her translation for the *Collected Works of Erasmus,* Margaret Mann Phillips suggests that the book must have been an "obsessive thought with Erasmus [and that] he went on tinkering with it for a long time."[17]

[16] McConica, *Erasmus*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1991, 31.

[17] *Collected Works of Erasmus* (from now on CWE), 23, University of Toronto Press, Toronto 1978, 3.

Mann Phillips considers that the *Antibarbari* was the passport which Erasmus showed to the leaders of thought in the circles he frequented in France and England. The *Antibarbari* (*Against the "barbarians"*: those ecclesiastics who taught theology without knowledge of the original texts) is mainly a defence of the classics and an appeal to return to the study of the Fathers of the Church and other ancient Christian authors. The central phrase that summarises it is the quotation from the Gospel of St. John 12:32 which—in his own spelling—Erasmus quotes and comments:

> "Qum, inquiens, exaltatus fuero a terra, Omnia traham ad me ipsum—when I am lifted up from the earth", he [Christ] says, "I will draw all unto me". Here it seems that he most aptly uses the word traho, "I draw", so that one may understand that all things, whether hostile or heathen or in any other way far removed from him, must be drawn, even if they do not follow, even against their will, to the service of Christ.[18]

The meaning of Erasmus is clear, namely that Christ drew all the knowledge of the pagans to himself: the wisdom of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Seneca, Virgil, and all the classics. And this, Erasmus said in the *Antibarbari,* was the opinion of St. Basil, St. Cyprian, St. John Chrysostom, St. Jerome, St. Ambrose, St. Augustine, and other Church Fathers. The *Antibarbari* defined Erasmus's project: the study of the Greek and Latin classics, and of the early Christian authors, for the edification of Christendom. Somehow Thomas More shared Erasmus project, and, evidently, he encouraged Erasmus in that pursuit; the two of them studied Greek and Latin authors, and the Fathers of the Church.

Years later Erasmus managed a major accomplishment of his project: his revised translation of the New Testament from Greek into Latin; and among his very extensive works, there are translations from St. John Chrysostom, St. Athanasius, Origen, and St. Basil, and editions of *Totus Hieronymus cum scholiis* (1526), *Cyprianus* (1529), *Hilarius* (1523), *Irenaeus* (1528), *Ambrosius* (1527), *Lactantius,* and *Augustinus* (1529).[19]

In that same 1499 More had the opportunity of studying the Greek text of St. John Chrysostom's *Homilies on the Gospel of St. Matthew*; later on, in 1506, he wrote that St. John Chrysostom was of all Christians (in his own opinion: *ut ego certe puto*) the most learned, and of the learned the most Christian.[20] Around 1501 he gave a number of lectures on the *City of God* of St. Augustine. In the first

[18] CWE 23, 59:22.

[19] This list of translations and editions comes from the *1530 Catalogue* of Erasmus's works written by himself. There, he gives the year of the editions but not that of the translations, cfr. CWE 24, 697–698.

[20] Cfr. Mitjans, *St. Thomas More and St. John Chrysostom*, «Moreana» 53.2 no. 206 (2016) 129–142.

of these two works, Chrysostom, addressing the citizens of Antioch, tells them that the teaching of Christ ought to be practised by all, young and old, wise and unlearned, married or single, by people of all professions: "the husbandman and the smith, the builder and the ship pilot"; specifically, he tells them that it should be practised in "the city and the market place" without the need to flee to the mountains. In a letter dated 1504 addressed to his spiritual director, More echoed those words of Chrysostom. At that time More translated the *Life of Pico,* in which the dilemma of the humanist is presented as being between the contemplative life of a scholar and the active life of service to the city, following the advice given by Cicero in *De Officis.* In summary, from the *Homilies on the Gospel of St. Matthew,* the study of the *City of God,* the letter of 1504, the edited translation of the *Life of Pico,* with his omissions and his addition of a poem on the love of God, and his early English Poems, it can be confidently concluded that by the time Thomas More married in January 1505, he had chosen the vocation of the active life of service to the city and the contemplative life of a Christian, and, in words of James McConica, that he "understood marriage as a vocation".[21]

In 1504 More was elected Member of Parliament; he continued with the practice of the law, his involvement in the government of the City of London, and his study of the classics and the Fathers of the Church. A decade later, in his letters to Martin Dorp (1515) and to Edward Lee (1519), Thomas More defended Erasmus's work and in particular Erasmus's freedom to translate the New Testament from the Greek text, and for this he cited St. Jerome, St. Ambrose, and St. Augustine. The defence of Erasmus's freedom, rather than the translation itself, moved More to write his long "Letter to A Monk" (1519) entitled by him, in the edition of 1520, "A learned epistle from a man of renown, Master Thomas More, in response to a certain monk's ignorant and virulent letter, senseless invective, belabouring, among other issues, Erasmus's translation, 'In the beginning was Speech, etc.'"—original: "*In principio erat sermo, etc.*"[22] In that letter he based his argumentation on St. Cyprian, St. Hilary, St. Gregory of Nazianzus, St. Ambrose, St. Augustine, and the translator of the Vulgate, St. Jerome; though More points out that he would have preferred to leave *logos* untranslated as the Church has done in her liturgy with words such as "Alleluia", "Amen", and "Osanna".[23]

In the same line, in his *Letter to Oxford* (1518) More emphasised the need to learn Hebrew, Greek, and Latin in order to be able to advance in the study of "theology, that venerable heavenly queen" which inhabits and dwells "in holy

[21] McConica, *Thomas More*, London 1977, 14. This 60-page biography is, in the opinion of the author of this article, the best introduction to St. Thomas More; in particular, its first two chapters: *Called to the service of Christendom* and *The European intellectual.*

[22] CW 15, 199.

[23] Cfr. CW 15, 237.

scripture as her proper home, from which she makes her pilgrimage through all the cells of the oldest and holiest fathers; that is, Augustine, Jerome, Ambrose, Cyprian, Chrysostom, Gregory, Basil, and other men like them."[24] The point was to tell those teaching at Oxford University to keep up the teaching of Greek, for "all the ancient doctors of the Latin Church, Jerome, Augustine, Bede, and many others besides, made strenuous effort to learn the Greek language".[25]

So, when in 1528 the Bishop of London asked More to write in defence of orthodoxy he was able, as did his peers in that task, to produce lists of Church Fathers in defence of specific issues.[26] While the reformers would pick out an incomplete statement of one of the Fathers in order to attack the practices of the Church, More emphasised the common *tradition* shown in the writings of, among others, St. Ignatius of Antioch, St. Polycarp, St. Justin Martyr, St. Irenaeus, Theophilact of Antioch, Origen, Tertullian, St. Cyprian, St. Cyril of Alexandria, St. Hilary, St. Sistus, St. Basil, St. Gregory of Nazianzus, St. John Chrysostom, St. Eusebius, St. Athanasius, St. Ambrose, St. Leo, St. Jerome, St. Augustine, Hesychius of Jerusalem, St. Gregory the Great, St. Bede, and St. John Damascene, as well as Boethius and doctors of the Church such as St. Anselm, St. Bernard, St. Bonaventure, and St. Thomas Aquinas. More had access to the writings of the ancient Christian writers or references to them from collections of old manuscripts and their copies, recently transcribed Greek manuscripts, and first printed editions; and these were available to More in the library of the London Charterhouse; the library of Syon Abbey (the humanist, friend of More, St. Richard Reynolds, a Bridgettine priest, executed on 4 May 1535, donated 94 volumes to Syon Abbey); the extensive collection of More's teacher William Grocyn; the *Catena aurea* of St. Thomas Aquinas, and so on. This list of ancient Christian writers is outlined here only to emphasise that Thomas More based his defence of Christian humanism (1515–1520) and his defence of orthodoxy (1529–1533) on Sacred Scripture and the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, rather than on scholastic argumentations of the day. It is not the purpose of this article to present a "theology" of St. Thomas More or "his views" about "theological studies", which in fact could be summarised in two points: first the centrality of the person of Jesus Christ,[27] and second exposition of the nature of the Church.[28]

[24] CW 15, 141.
[25] CW 15, 143.
[26] Cfr. G.P. Marc'hadour, *Fathers and Doctors of the Church*, in CW 6, 526–534.
[27] A. Prévost, *Thomas More et la Crise de la Pensée Européenne*, Mame, Tours 1969, 301–315.
[28] The nature of the Church is the constant topic in all the works of More in defence of orthodoxy; cfr. Prévost, *Thomas More*, 277–287; B. Gogan, *The Common Corps of Christendom: Ecclesiological Themes in the Writings of Sir Thomas More*, Brill, Leiden 1982; J. Paul, *Thomas More*, "The Common Corps of Christendom", Polity Press, Cambridge 2017, 83–115; E. Duffy,

There was clear continuity between More as a humanist and More as an apologist. There was a difference of purpose and of audience; and therefore, a difference of language. The humanistic works of More were written in Latin and addressed to scholars; the latter, in English and for the sake of the ordinary faithful, which More often mentioned directly. For example, the *Confutation of Tyndale's Answer* starts with a "Preface to the Christian reader";[29] and further on there are phrases such as "good Christian reader".[30] But of course, there was also a difference of issues. More's main argument in the period 1515–1519 was, against the scholasticism of the day, the need for theologians to study Sacred Scripture and the Fathers of the Church, as well as the original languages of Scripture and the works of the Latin and Greek authors. More argued in his *Letter to Dorp* that the Fathers studied Greek and at times Hebrew, they read pagan literature, they sought the purest texts in translating and interpreting Scripture, and they cultivated elegance and eloquence in their writing. At the start of the latter period he continued in the same vein, for instance in the *Dialogue of 1529,* More explicitly advised the "messenger", who was reporting and asking about the objections of the reformers, to cultivate secular learning and to consult the Fathers for a proper understanding of Scriptures;[31] soon, however, that was not the topic, but the defence of specific issues of doctrine or practice of the Church.

Criticism of the sixteenth-century scholastics did not apply, of course to Aquinas. In his *Answer* to More's *Dialogue,* Tyndale attacked "the Thomases, and a thousand like them"; and Thomas More replied praising "that holy doctor St. Thomas [Aquinas], a man of such learning that the great excellent wits and the most cunning men that the Church of Christ had had since his days, have esteemed and called him the very flower of theology".[32] Interestingly, for More's ultimate attitude toward Aquinas, the editor of volume 15 of *Complete Works of St. Thomas,*[33] remits the reader to José Morales,[34] among others. Aquinas was praised also by Erasmus in the *Antibarbari* as one of his supporters:

> That most noble writer Thomas Aquinas brought out commentaries on the pagan philosopher Aristotle, and even in his theological Questions, where he is reflecting

The comen knowen multitude of crysten, in G.M. Logan (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas More*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2011, 191–215; and so on.

[29] CW 8, 3:1.

[30] Cfr. CW 8, 43:31.

[31] Cfr. CW 6, 121–133.

[32] Cfr. CW 8, 713:24.

[33] CW 15, lxxviii, note 6.

[34] J. Morales, *La formación espiritual e intelectual de Tomás Moro y sus contactos con la doctrina y obras de Santo Tomás de Aquino*, «Scripta Theologica» 6 (1974) 439–489.

> about the first principle and about the Trinity, he offers evidence from Cicero and the poets.[35]

It is necessary, however, to complete this study of Thomas More's thinking in the context of the religious literature of his own time. In his *Confutation to Tyndale's Answer,* More wrote that, rather than reading his works or those of the reformers, people should

> occupy themselves besides their other businesses, in prayer, good meditation, and the reading of such English books as most may nourish and increase devotion. Of which kind is Bonaventure on the Life of Christ, Gerson on the Imitation of Christ, and the book of contemplative devotion, Scale of Perfection, with other similar ones.[36]

With regard the books mentioned in the above paragraph the following points might be made.

- It is assumed by the editors of the *Complete Works,*[37] that the "English book" that More was recommending under the title *Life of Christ,* is the abridged translation of *Meditationes vitae Christi,* often then attributed to St. Bonaventure. That English translation was by Nicholas Love and titled *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ,* also known as St. Bonaventure's *Speculum Vitae Christi.*

- The *Imitation of Christ* was attributed by More, and others, to Jean Gerson.[38] It was well known in England at the time, together with what is called *Devotio Moderna.*

- The *Scale of Perfection* was a work written by Walter Hilton (1340–96), and frequently printed in London. The first edition was by Caxton in 1486, and there were editions of 1490, 1494, 1507, 1519 and 1525. Most early editions and some of the manuscripts included *The Treatise of Mixed Life* also by Hilton.

The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries witnessed an extensive and consistent process of assimilation by the laity of techniques and materials for spiritual ad-

[35] CWE 23, 112:4–8.
[36] CW 8, 37:26–32.
[37] CW 8, 1474, comment to CW 8, 37:30.
[38] On the attribution of the authorship of the *Imitation of Christ* to J. Gerson, see: A. Gwynn, *New Light on the Imitation of Christ*, «Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review» 29 no.113 (1940) 92, www.jstor.org/stable/30097827 [Accessed 16 Feb. 2021].

vancement which had historically been virtually the preserve of religious orders.[39] There was a considerable development in the writings of spiritual works in English such as Richard Rolle (c. 1300–49) and Julian of Norwich (1342–1416), beside those already mentioned, Hilton and Love.

The three recommended by Thomas More, however are especially relevant to the spiritualty available to More. It is worth starting by noticing that St. Bonaventure was canonised in 1482, when Thomas was a child, and that André Prévost considers that the works of Bonaventure, or those attributed to him, were one of the sources of the permanent intimacy with Christ which is present all through the writings of More from the *Dialogue* of 1529 to his last works in the Tower.[40] The library of Grocyn, available to More, included also the *Opera* of Bonaventure printed in 1482.[41] Christ is the centre of the philosophical and theological doctrine of St. Bonaventure; He is the Exemplar of God and is at the centre of God.[42] Prévost, from this reference to Bonaventure, defines the philosophy of Thomas More as "ontological exemplarism", and a manifestation of it is the spiritual exemplarism which leads to identification of the Christian with the feelings and thoughts of Christ as shown in the last works of More, *De tristitia* and the *Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation*.

Focusing first therefore on the Latin original, the *Meditationes vitae Domini nostri Jesu Christi* survive in several versions in more than a hundred manuscripts. The long version includes one hundred short meditations on the life of Christ which were supposed to have been written by St. Bonaventure, but are no longer attributed to him; the author has often been referred to as the pseudo-Bonaventure, and it has been assumed that he was an Italian Franciscan friar living in Tuscany during the second half of the thirteenth century. More recently Mary Stalling-Taney has argued that the meditations were written by Iohannis de Caulibus in the fourteenth century.[43] The author of the *Meditationes* starts the prologue by saying that St. Cecilia, a Christian martyr married to St.

[39] Cfr. V. Gillespie, *Vernacular Books of Religion,* in J. Griffiths, D. Pearsall (eds.), *Book Production and Publishing in England, 1375–1475*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1989, 317.

[40] Cfr. Prévost, *Thomas More* (1969), 51–52, 77, 157, 232, and 353.

[41] Cfr. H. Burrows, *Collectanea II*, Oxford Historical Society, 16, Oxford 1890, 319–380. nos. 15, 51, and 60.

[42] For an introduction to St. Bonaventure see E. Gilson, *The Philosophy of St. Bonaventure*, London 1940, in particular *The Man and the Period*, 1–86, and *The Spirit of St. Bonaventure*, 470–496.

[43] For the study of the *Meditationes vitae Dom. nostri Jesu Christi,* therefore, there are several sources.

(1) Iohannes de Caulibus, *Meditaciones vitae Christi, olim S. Bonaventuro attributae,* ed. M. Stallings-Taney, published in 1997 in the *Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis,*

Valerian, "always carried the Gospel of Christ hidden in her bosom,"[44] which, he continues, means that she meditated on the life of Jesus, as shown in the Gospel, day and night with pure and undivided heart and single-minded and fervent intent, and thus, the author recommended the continuous contemplation of the life of Jesus Christ, and stated that this was the purpose of the meditations that followed, which, though based on the text of Scripture, at times were the fruit of his own or others' imagination and did not have to be taken as true stories, but—if not confirmed by the words of Scripture—could be put aside or used at will if they were found helpful. The example of St. Cecilia in contemplating the scenes of the Gospel is mentioned right through the book, and in the last chapter the author advises the reader to "Converse freely with the Lord Jesus and, in imitation of the Blessed Cecilia, strive to place His life, as she did the Gospel, inseparably in your heart."[45]

Little is known about the history of St. Cecilia though pious romances about her were widely disseminated and there is a rich pictorial tradition. Her feast, however, has been celebrated in the Roman Church since the fourth century, and her name appears in the Roman Canon of the Eucharistic Liturgy of the Mass from at least the end of the fifth century,[46] following which it was incorporated into the Canon of the Sarum Missal widely in use in England until 1549.[47]

The set of meditations concludes with the author giving some advice on how to meditate: "You ought to know that it is enough to meditate only on what the

no. 153, by the Medieval Academy of America: this is a critical edition of the text based on several of the extant manuscripts.

(2) Translations of the same or other manuscripts, such as *Meditations on the Life of Christ* by John of Caulibus, translated and edited by F.X. Taney, Sr., A. Miller, M. Stallings-Taney, Asheville 2000, or *Meditations on the Life of Christ,* translated and edited by I. Ragusa, Princeton University Press 1961, here cited as Ragusa (1961).

(3) Early printed versions such as those of 1468, 1487, 1490, and 1493 in the BL: it is likely that Thomas More read one of these in his youth.

(4) The English translation by N. Love, published under the title, *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ;* a critical edition based on Cambridge University Library Additional MSS. 6578 and 6686, has been edited by M.G. Sargent, University of Exeter Press, 2004.

(5) The Early printed versions of N. Love, *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ,* published by Caxton in 1484, 1486 and 1490, by Richard Pynson in 1494, and by Wynkyn de Worde in 1494, 1507, 1517, 1525 and 1530: it seems that these are the English versions recommended by Thomas More in 1532.

[44] Ragusa (1961), 1.

[45] Cfr. *ibidem*, 388.

[46] J.A. Jungmann, S.J., *The Mass of the Roman Rite: Its Origins and Development*, New York 1955, II, 253.

[47] Cfr. *Ordinary and Canon of the Mass According to the Use of the Church of Sarum*, translated by J.T. Dodd, 1872, 15.

Lord did or on what happened concerning Him or on what is told according to the Gospel stories, feeling yourself present in those places as if the things were done in your presence, as it comes directly to your soul in thinking of them".

When More recommended it in 1532, it was because he had practised it himself, as is evident in reading *De tristitia,* where indeed More places himself, and invites the reader to place himself in the scene. André Prevóst develops this theme in his chapter entitled "The Core of the Mind of More: The Person of Christ".[48]

In the *Canterbury Tales, Fragment VII* (1380s), Chaucer writes that one of the meanings of the name Cecilia is contemplation of heaven as well as the active life represented by Leah. The text was printed as the *Golden Legend* by William Caxton in 1483:

	Text printed by Caxton in 1483	Modern transcription
94	*Or elles Cecile, as I writen fynde,*	Or else Cecile, as I written find,
95	*Is joyned, by a manere conjoynynge*	Is joined, by a sort of combination
96	*Of "hevene" and "Lia"; and heere, in figurynge,*	Of "heaven" and "Leah"; and here, symbolically,
97	*The "hevene" is set for thoght of hoolynesse,*	The "heaven" is set for her holiness of thought,
98	*And "Lia" for hire lastynge bisynesse.*	And "Leah" for her constant business.

The author of the *Meditationes vitae Domini nostri Jesu Christi* recommends that the meditation on the life of Christ should be undertaken daily, and suggests distributing the main events of the life of Christ among the seven days of the week.[49] This method is followed by Nicholas Love, who rearranged his English abridged version—*Speculum Vitae Christi*—into sixty-four chapters in seven unequal parts corresponding to the days of the week, from Monday to Sunday.[50] The first part (Monday) starts with "A devout meditation of the great council in heaven for the restoration of man and his salvation." It is interesting to note that this coincides with one of the first themes considered by Thomas More in the Introduction of his *Treatise Upon the Passion* under the heading "The determination of the Trinity for the restoration on mankind"[51]. *Monday* includes also the "Incarnation of Jesus" and the "Feast of the Annunciation", as well as the journey of Mary "with her spouse Joseph" from Nazareth to visit her cousin Elizabeth (that St. Joseph accompanied Mary is asserted also by Jean Gerson in

[48] Cfr. Prévost, *Thomas More* (1969), 343–358.

[49] Cfr. Ragusa (1961), 387.

[50] See N. Love, *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, ed. Sargent, University of Exeter Press, Exeter 2004, Table of Contents, 3–6.

[51] *A Treatise Upon the Passion*, Introduction, The third point, CW 13, 25:8–9.

his Poem *Josephina*);[52] the meditation continues with the dream of St. Joseph, the Nativity of Jesus Christ, and the Epiphany; it ends with the "feast of the Purification that is called Candlemas".[53]

The consideration of the active and contemplative life of Martha and Mary, is dealt with in part fourth, chapter 33, which summarises what in the original *Meditationes vitae Domini nostri Jesu Christi* occupy fourteen meditations. Chapter 33 ends with the recommendation to read the work of Walter Hilton.[54]

The fifth, sixth, and seventh parts follow the traditional arrangement to consider the passion and death of Jesus (*Friday*), "what our Lady & others with her did on the Saturday" (a single chapter 49, for *Saturday*), and the Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus Christ, and "the sending and coming of the Holy Spirit" (*Sunday*). *Sunday* includes a last chapter (chapter 64) "On that excellent & most worthy sacrament of Christ's blessed body". Thus, Nicholas Love's work is very much a book written in response to the heretical eucharistic teachings of the Lollards. Thomas More was recommending it in his *Confutation of Tyndale's Answer* in 1532, because Tyndale objected to the traditional teaching of the Church in the same points that the Lollards had done a century earlier.

The last book recommended by More at the beginning of *The Confutation of Tyndale's Answer* is *The Scale of Perfection,* a work written by Walter Hilton (1340–96). One of the many British Library manuscripts of Hilton's *Scale of Perfection* belonged to the London Charterhouse. It seems that the Carthusians there were instrumental in getting the work into print for the first time. In the fifteenth century there were at least four printed editions: those of Caxton (1486, 1490), of Wynkyn de Worde (1494), and of Pynson (1494). In addition, before More's *Confutation of Tyndale's Answer,* there were other printed editions of the *Scale,* those of 1507, 1519 and 1525. The *Scale of Perfection* included two books: Books One and Two are considered two different works written at different times. A third writing by Hilton, *The Treatise of Mixed Life,* is found together with the two books of the *Scale* in several of the manuscripts, and in all the early printed editions (those of 1494, 1507, 1519 and 1525). Therefore, when Thomas More was recommending in 1532 "the book on devout contemplation of the *Scale of Perfection*", he undoubtedly knew that he was advising the reader to go through the two books of the *Scale* and *The Treatise of Mixed Life* in any of those printed editions. What it is more relevant to this study is that before his decision to get married the two books and *The Mixed Life* were available to Thomas More

[52] Cfr. Gerson, *Josephina*, text established by G.M. Roccati, LAMOP, University of Paris, Paris 2001, line 1163.
[53] Love, *The Mirror*, 50.
[54] Love, *The Mirror*, 122.

from the first printings as well as from manuscripts accessible at the London Charterhouse. The short Foreword of *The Treatise of Mixed Life* reads:

> This is the start of a little book written for a man of authority in the world, to teach him how in his position he should behave with well-ordered love towards God and his fellow Christians.[55]

As its title implies, it deals with the mixed life of action and contemplation. Since the time of Gregory the Great with his *Pastoral Rule,* this pattern of life, exemplified above all in the life of Christ, had been seen as the model for pastors. Hilton is innovative in applying the principles which Gregory set out for clergy to lay people with temporal responsibilities—including care for others—living in the world. The approach of *Mixed Life* is interesting to say the least. At times its reading is quite attractive to a layman:

> You must mix the tasks of active life with the spiritual labours of the contemplative life, and then you will do well. For at one time you must be busy with Martha, managing and directing your household, your children, your servants, your neighbours and your tenants: if they do well, support and help them in their work; if they do wrong, teach them to reform, and correct them. You must also find out and take careful heed that your possessions and worldly goods are properly kept by your servants, managed and distributed faithfully, so that you can the more liberally do acts of kindness for your fellow Christians. Another time you must with Mary leave the activities of the world and sit down at our Lord's feet in prayer and holy thoughts, contemplating him according to the grace he gives you. So you will pass from one to the other with profit, and fulfil both: and then you will keep the true order of charity.[56]

The author goes on to point out that this mixed life—as St. Gregory had said—"belongs especially to men of holy church such as bishops and other pastors: those who have the care and direction of others", and he adds:

> Moreover, this way of life is in general right for certain men with high temporal rank and large holdings of worldly assets, and a kind of authority too over others to direct and support them: as a father has over his children, a master over his servants, and a landed proprietor over his tenants, these men also have received grace of devotion by the gift of our Lord, and—in part—a taste for spiritual occupation. To them too this mixed life belongs, which is both active and contemplative.

Hilton is not emphasising a universal call to the contemplative life in the ordinary circumstances of the ordinary people. He is answering a specific enquirer: Section

[55] W. Hilton, *The Treatise of Mixed Life*, edited and introduced by D.L. Jeffrey, *Toward a Perfect Love*, Multnomah Press, Portland 1985, "On the Mixed Life", 1.
[56] Hilton, *Toward a Perfect Love*, 6.

7 is entitled, *The kind of life most suited to the man for whom this book was made,* and Hilton deals with it by saying:

> in my opinion, this mixed life is the most appropriate for you. For our Lord has deliberately set you in so great a position of power over others [...]; in addition you have through the mercy of our Lord received grace in order to have some knowledge of yourself, with spiritual longing and a joy in his love.[57]

It seems, therefore, that Hilton does not exclude the possibility that the fullness of the Christian life can be practised by "a father with children" and a man with responsibilities, and in Sections 12 to 28, he does offer useful advice for fostering the spiritual life in the midst of the ordinary duties of work. For instance, he points out that the desire for God can be present in all occupations throughout the day: "It may sometimes happen that the more troubled you have been outwardly with active work the more fervent your desire will be for God and the clearer your view of spiritual things" (Section 12); and later on he states that those practising a *mixed life* can be full of the love of God—"*Ignem veni mittere in terram, et qu*[*i*]*d* [*volo*] *nisi ut ardeat*"[58]—he adds for emphasis in Latin (Section 14), and that as "St. Augustine says [...] the life of every Christian is a continual desire for God"; etc.[59]

In fact, Hilton's *Mixed Life* was well known especially among London lawyers. It is assumed that Hilton himself obtained the degree of Bachelor of Civil Law at Cambridge before he embraced the religious life, and his letters reveal that he renounced a promising legal career. His writings reflect his clear legal mind and interest in moral theology, as well as his wide grasp of spiritual theology, in the tradition of St. Augustine and St. Gregory the Great.

The second book recommended by Thomas More was *The Imitation of Christ,* now generally ascribed to Thomas à Kempis (*c.* 1441). The book was the product of the Brothers of the Common Life whom Gerson defended at the Council of Constance and it was then commonly thought actually to be written by Gerson. The first English translation of *The Imitation of Christ* was made by William Akinson and Margaret Beaufort, mother of Henry VII and patron of Bishop John Fisher. It was printed in 1503 by Pynson and in 1528(?) by Wynkyn de Worde. Though meant for those embracing the religious state (see Book One, chapters 17, 18, 19, 20.3, etc.), from the beginning it was read by many laymen seeking to practise a spiritual life in their own circumstances. Rather than a rule

[57] Hilton, *Toward a Perfect Love*, 13.

[58] The book is written originally in English. "*Ignem veni mittere in terram...*" is the only phrase that appears in Latin, cfr. Hilton, *Mixed Life*, Lambeth Palace MS. 472, ed. S.J. Ogilvie-Thomson, 1986, line 458.

[59] Hilton, *Toward a Perfect Love*, 21.

for the monastic life, it is a series of short recommendations to grow in virtue, to contemplate the life of Christ, to practise humility, to seek friendship with Christ, to love the Cross of Jesus, to read Holy Scripture, to foster personal meditation, and so on. In Book One Chapter 17.2 it is stated that "Habit and tonsure change a man but little; it is the change of life, the complete mortification of passions that endow a true religious". That is why it was found useful for "The Interior Life"[60] of people both inside and outside the cloister.

His recommendation to read *The Imitation of Christ* suggests that Thomas More knew of Gerson and his works from early on. Later More cites him in several books written from 1532 to 1535. Jean Charlier de Gerson (1363–1429) was a priest from Gerson, a small town in France. He studied at the University of Paris and when he was 32 he was appointed Chancellor of Notre-Dame and one of the two Chancellors of the University, and as such he played a very active role in the Council of Constance (1414–18) which ended the Great Schism of the West (1378–1418).[61] From the beginning of his university career Gerson was concerned with promoting the unity of Christendom. In June 1392 he preached for a joint action of the Kings of France and England to achieve ecclesiastical reunion. In December that year he defended his mastership in theology on the topic *De jurisdictione spiritali* concerning the validity or otherwise of resignation of spiritual authority as a way of allowing for a new election of a single head. In 1395 he was appointed Chancellor and he kept giving sermons and addresses and writing tracts on the subject. Together with a determination to promote unity, Gerson showed a flexibility of approaches in particular with regard to Benedict XIII, the Avignon anti-pope, first with *De substractione obedientiae* or *De substractione schismatis,*[62] 1395, appearing as a moderating influence, and *De schismate, vel de papatu contendentibus,* 1397, favouring *via discussionis.* Then in the *Acta quedam de schismata tollendo,* 1406, he suggested several possible solutions including a council and a new election by the united cardinals. The Council of Pisa (1409), however, elected a third pope, Alexander V (1409–10); it was an attempt at a solution, but it did not solve the situation.

Following the failure of Pisa, the aim of the Council of Constance was again to return to the unity of the papacy and the reform of the Church. At the start of

[60] The four short books of the *Imitation of Christ* are entitled: I. Thoughts Helpful in the Life of the Soul; II. The Interior Life; III. Internal Consolation; and IV. An Invitation to Holy Communion.

[61] For Gerson and the papacy see, for instance, H. Jedin and J. Dolan (eds.), *History of the Church*, Burns & Oates, London, IV, 1980, 352–389, 401–472, and 573–579; and R.N. Swanson, *Universities, Academics and the Great Schism*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1979.

[62] Cfr. Swanson, *Universities, Academics and the Great Schism*, 97; B.P. McGuire, *Jean Gerson and the Last Medieval Reformation*, Pennsylvania State University 2005, 70.

the council there were simultaneously three reigning popes: John XXIII (elected at Bologna in 1410 to succeed Alexander V and deposed by the Council on 29 May 1415); Gregory XII (elected at Rome in 1406, resigned on 4 July 1415); and Benedict XIII (elected at Avignon in 1394 and deposed by the Council in 1417). The Council was attended, among others, by cardinals, archbishops and bishops, abbots and generals of religious orders, professors of theology and canon law, envoys of kings, princes, cities, and universities. When John XXIII fled on 20 March 1415, Gerson's sermon *Ambulate dum lucem habetis* was of crucial importance in the decision to continue with the assembly. Gregory XIII officially convoked the Council again through a delegate; and finally, the College of Cardinals elected Martin V (1417–31) as the sole pope. Gerson therefore was very instrumental to a return to the unity of Christendom.

More had great admiration for Gerson's loyal opposition to ecclesiastical corruption and emphasis on personal piety.[63] He was an eager contributor to the late medieval movement of spiritual and mystical literature into vernacular forms that could be read by lay Christians. He was a prolific writer and defended a simple contemplative life. He maintained that everyone was called to practise contemplation and he taught a type of contemplation rooted in piety and in practice of the human virtues. He wrote, for instance, that "there is no contemplative person who has no need for any labour. Thus, in one person it is always necessary that Martha be with Mary, and Mary with Martha."[64] Gerson's books were printed first at Cologne in 1483; by 1521 there were nine collected editions of his works. A printed copy of *Opera Johannis de Gereonno* was in the Catalogue of Grocyn's books.[65] They were, therefore, available to More.

In the *Treatise on the Passion* and in *De tristitia* More followed the texts of the four Gospels from Gerson's *Monotessaron*;[66] in the *Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation* he cited Gerson often; and again in *De tristitia,* he calls Gerson an outstanding scholar,[67] a most learned and virtuous man,[68] and lastly a remarkable man.[69]

At the beginning of this section mention has been made of More's determination to learn Greek. In a letter dated 1504 he mentions his two teachers of Greek, William Grocyn (1449–1519) and Thomas Linacre (1460–1524). Grocyn

[63] Cfr. CW1, p. lxxvii; CW 9, 338, Commentary to *The Apology*, 60:11.
[64] Gerson, *Early Works*, ed. B.P. McGuire, Paulist Press, New York and Mahwah 1998, 91.
[65] Cfr. H. Burrows, *Collectanea II*, Oxford Historical Society, 16, Oxford 1890, 321, no. 53.
[66] In the *Treatise upon the Passion,* More wrote, "I will rehearse the words of the evangelists [...] in Latin word by word after my copy as I find it in the work of that worshipful father, Master John Gerson, which work he entitled *Monotessaron,* that is to wit, 'one of all four'", cfr. CW 13, 50:6–10. For *De Tristitia,* see CW 14, 623.
[67] Cfr. CW 14, 315.
[68] Cfr. CW 14, 325.
[69] Cfr. CW 14, 623.

had studied Greek in Italy and taught it in Oxford. In 1496 he was appointed the Rector of St. Lawrence Jewry, London, the parish church of Thomas More, which was only 3 minutes' walk from More's parents' house in Milk Street, and 6 minutes from More's house after he married in 1505. Grocyn invited More to lecture on the *City of God* of St. Augustine in 1501; and it has been suggested that he introduced More to St. John Chrysostom through the Greek manuscript he had acquired in September 1499.[70] It is to be assumed, therefore, that More had access to Grocyn's books at least while the latter was at St. Lawrence. At his death Linacre, as executor of Grocyn's will, produced the catalogue of his books.[71] It contained 105 printed volumes and 17 manuscripts. The list included many of the books that have appeared in this section: *Augustinus de Civitate Dei cum commentario* and other works of St. Augustine,*Opera Ambrosii, Opera Anselmi, Epistole Cipriani*, and other Fathers of the Church; *Origenes*; *Opera Boetii*; *Opera Bone Venture, Thome Aquinatis secundus liber secunde partis* (cited by St. Thomas More); *Meditationes vitae Dom. nostri J. Cristi*, by *Bonaventura*; and *Opera Johannis de Gereonno* [sic.] (?*Gersono*), and so on. The catalogue was not exhaustive; Erasmus, for instance, used the book on Isaiah by St. Basil, on loan from Grocyn.

In conclusion, while considering Thomas More's knowledge of the spiritual and theological literature at the time it is necessary to take into account not only his study of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, but also the spiritual and devotional literature popular in England at the beginning of the sixteenth century, which included translations of Continental writers, but also English spiritual authors.

2. *The continental context*

Of course, for a wider context it would be necessary to include a full account of what now is called the Christian humanism of the European renaissance, in which More participated, and the writings of the reformers, to which he responded. This, however, is beyond the scope of this article which seeks only to give an analytic presentation of *De tristitia tedio pavore et oration christi ante captionem eius.* Nevertheless, as an example of More's involvement with the continental humanists, I would like to mention his friendship with some of them who were—as was his own case—laymen and married such as Frans Van Cranevelt, Juan Luis Vives, and Guillaume Budé.

Budé (1467/8–1540) had studied law and later literature, and had devoted himself to the serious learning of Latin and Greek, becoming the most distin-

[70] Corpus Christi College, Oxford, *MS.* 23.
[71] Cfr. Burrows, *Collectanea II*, 16, 319–380.

guished Greek scholar in Europe. He had seven sons and two daughters. In July 1517 he wrote a letter in praise of *Utopia* and its author, whom he had not yet had the opportunity to meet. The letter was included in the second edition of *Utopia*. From then on, the two humanists corresponded and grew in friendship just by letter until they first met in 1520 when More was in the entourage of Henry VIII at the Field of Cloth of Gold, and Budé in Francis I's. The first letter we have from Thomas More to Budé is dated c. August 1518 and it is especially interesting. It is written in Latin, but for emphasis he wrote the words λαικόν and λαόν in Greek. The letter ends:

> quod hic tam utilis labor in literis, omnes tibi mortales obstringit, vel quod tam incomparabilis eruditio, quae peculiaris olim cleri gloria fuerat, tibi faeliciter obtigit uxorato. Nam λαικὸν appellare non sustineo, tam multis, tam egregiis dotibus, tam alte subuectum supra λαόν.[72]

λαικὸν being the accusative of λαϊκός, laikós, layman, and λαόν the accusative of λᾱός, laós, people. To capture the emphasis given by More it would help to give the Greek words—as More did—and to translate λαόν as "ordinary people," thus:

> You have earned the gratitude of all men for your useful literary labours: though *a married man* you have happily acquired a degree of learning that was once the exclusive possession of the clergy. Indeed, I am hardly content to call you a layman λαικόν when by your splendid gifts you are so highly raised beyond the level of the ordinary people—λαόν.

It seems that the first extant text in which λαϊκός appears as a substantive is the Letter to the Corinthians from St. Clement of Rome dated between the years 96 and 98 meaning a person of the people of Israel who was not a priest or a Levite: "the layman is bound by the laws that pertain to laymen".[73] It was used by Clement of Alexandria (circa 150–215) to designate a Christian who was not a cleric.[74] And with the same meaning is found several times in the works of Origen (185–253),[75] an author cited repeatedly by More. Thomas More and Guillaume Budé used Greek words when the Latin equivalent was not common in classical Latin. The Latin "*laicus*" was used by Christian authors such as Tertullian (c.155–c.240) and St. Jerome (347–420), but it was not used by classical authors. In the letter to Budé, Thomas More makes a play on words: on the one hand it is praiseworthy

[72] *The Correspondence of Sir Thomas More* (henceforth cited as *Correspondence*), ed. E.F. Rogers, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1947, letter 65:18–22.

[73] 1 Clement 40:5.

[74] Cfr. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 3.12.90.1.

[75] Cfr. Origen, *Homilies on Jeremiah* 11:3; *Homilies on Exodus* 11:6; and *Homilies on Joshua* 17:3.

for a married layman to have acquired a degree of learning that was once exclusive to the clergy; on the other, it cannot be said that Budé was "unqualified". Had More used instead the Latin words "*laicus*" and "*populus*", he would have missed the relationship between λαϊκός and λαός. From the text it appears also that More used the word λαϊκός with a certain personal pride in belonging himself to the people.

In that first letter from Thomas More to Budé, Thomas almost identified himself with Budé: "whomsoever I love, you, by good fortune, love also: you possess so many excellent virtues: your temperament, as I judge, hardly differs from mine." Other letters, no longer extant, must have followed between the two humanists because in the second extant letter[76] from More to Budé, written probably from Calais circa June 1520, after they had just met for the first time, More refers to Budé's plan of publishing their correspondence, and suggests that he would like first to revise his "remarks upon peace and war, upon morality, marriage, the clergy, the people, etc." It would have been most interesting to read those remarks of Thomas More about *"moribus, de coniugatis, de sacerdotibus, de populo,*[77] *etc."*[78]

In a long letter from Canterbury addressed to Erasmus and dated 26 May 1520,[79] Thomas More mentioned that he had read several works by Vives and praised him highly saying that Vives had treated some themes in writing on almost the same lines as he—More—had thought out for himself before he had read anything by Vives; and even using the same words.[80] The letter gives the impression that they had not yet met because More wrote then that Vives was a stranger to him[81] but this empathy is relevant in considering what Vives wrote later on in his commentaries on the *De Civitate Dei.*

Erasmus introduced More to Juan Luis Vives and Francis Cranevelt, and the four of them stayed at the house of Cranevelt in Bruges from 25 to 29 July 1520.[82] From then on More, Vives, and Cranevelt corresponded and passed on news from

[76] Cfr. *Correspondence*, letter 96.

[77] More might have written "*de laicis*"; instead he chose "de populo", emphasising the common condition of belonging to the people which of course then referred to the people of Christendom or to the Christian people.

[78] *Correspondence*, letter 96:20.

[79] Cfr. CWE 7, Letter 1106.

[80] Cfr. CWE 7, Letter 1106: 70–85.

[81] Cfr. CWE 7, Letter 1106: 106. On the possibility of More having met Vives before, however, see CWE 4, 274, footnote to line 16. In fact, Jardine writes convincingly that More's letter to Erasmus employs the fiction that Vives was unknown to him, cfr. Jardine, *Erasmus, Man of Letters*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1993, 18.

[82] Cfr. Marc'hadour, *L'Universe,* 295.

one to another often.[83] Vives wrote to Erasmus from Bruges on 10 July 1521[84] telling him that he had written to More and he hoped to meet him soon. The rest of the letter deals with his work of finishing his extensively annotated critical edition of *De Civitate Dei*. On 14 August More arrived in Bruges and duly met Vives.[85]

On 1 April 1522 Vives wrote a long letter to Erasmus from Bruges telling him about progress with his *De Civitate Dei*; Vives mentioned that he had received a letter from More. Again Vives wrote to Erasmus, this time from Louvain, saying that he had received two letters from More, and that he was very well; in this letter dated 14 July 1522 Vives told Erasmus that he had finished working on the twenty-two books of *De Civitate Dei,* and had sent the last five to him by a messenger.[86] Four weeks later, Vives wrote to Cranevelt exultant at having Erasmus, Budé, and More as "godparents", and asking Cranevelt to pass on greeting on his behalf to More.[87] On 15 August Vives wrote to Erasmus anxious to know whether the rest of the *De Civitate Dei* had reached him;[88] in the same letter he said that he had sent off to England the letter of Erasmus to More. By the end of the month, the work was already being printed. This correspondence shows that Thomas More was aware of Vives' progress with his edition *De Civitate Dei,* and undoubtedly the two of them discussed the work by St. Augustine

In fact, in one of his commentaries on the text of *De Civitate Dei,* Vives wrote that he was quoting a "version of Lucian in the words of Thomas More, in preference to a translation of [his] own" and then he goes on to praise More in the printed edition:

> Who could speak, as they deserve, of the shrewdness of his wit, the strength of his judgement, the excellence of his learning, his eloquent flow of language, the suavity of his deportment, the probity of his manners, the judicious prudence, his rapidity in execution, his invariable integrity, his equity and faith; unless, in a word, one say, that they are completely perfect, absolute, and exact, in their full proportion! unless he calls them, as they are, each the highest of its sort, and all examples worthy the

[83] On the relationship between More and Vives, see—among others—T. Stapleton, *The Life of Sir Thomas More* [1588], Burns & Oates, London 1966, 30, 56, 92, 101; R.W. Chambers, *Thomas More*, Jonathan Cape, London 1976, 106, 177, 217, 259; R.P. Adams, *The Better Part of Valour: More, Erasmus, Colet, and Vives on Humanism, War, and Peace*, 1496–1535, University of Washington Press, Seattle 1962; G.M. Logan (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas More*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2011, 80, 88, 217.

[84] Cfr. CWE 8, Ep. 1222.

[85] Cfr. Marc'hadour, *L'Universe.*

[86] Cfr. CWE 9, Letter 1303.

[87] Cfr. H. de Vocht, *Literae Virorum Eruditorum ad Fr Craneveldium*, Louvain 1928, letter 13, 10 August 1522; also in J.L. Vives, *Epistolario*, ed. J. Jiménez Delgado, Editora Nacional, Madrid 1978.

[88] Cfr. CWE 9, Letter 1306.

> imitation of all men? I say a great deal of him, and they, who knew no More, will wonder at the extraordinary praise: but they will readily acknowledge the truth of my words, who knew him, who read his writings, who either witnessed his actions, or heard them related. But I will yet have an opportunity of spreading out, in this man's praise, as a ship's sail in an extensive sea, expanded by the prosperous winds, when I shall say of him as highly as my exertions can equal his merits; and that, too, with the full approbation of my readers.[89]

Vives's edition of *De Civitate Dei* was published in 1522[90] and he was invited to lecture at *Corpus Christi College* in Oxford starting in 1523. The college had been founded in 1517 by Bishop Richard Fox. It was a new kind of foundation with a humanistic curriculum which included lectures in Latin literature, Greek and Theology, the last appointed to teach Scripture and the Church Fathers rather than the medieval authorities; it had a trilingual library—containing texts in Latin, Greek and Hebrew.[91] It should be noted that Vives had lectured before at the *Collegium Trilingue* in Louvain; and that the library at *Corpus* received the books of William Grocyn, More's teacher of Greek. Thomas More mentioned Bishop Fox's approval of Erasmus's translation of the New Testament in his letter to Erasmus dated 15 December 1516,[92] in which he also writes of the work of Thomas Linacre. While in England Vives kept close contact with More and Linacre. In 1528 Vives opposed the intended annulment of the marriage of Henry VIII to Queen Katherine and was placed for a while under house arrest, before being allowed to leave England and move to Bruges. Thomas More was not only in contact with those involved in the College, but as a lawyer he intervened in the acquisition of the land for the College;[93] and of course, later on, he defended the curriculum of *Corpus* in his Letter to Oxford.

Frans Van Cranevelt (1485–1564), like More and Budé, belonged to the group of highly educated lawyer-humanists.[94] In 1510 he took his degree as *Doctor juris utriusque*. In 1515 he was appointed legal adviser to the magistrate of Bruges, More held a similar position as under-sheriff of the City of London.; later on, he was appointed to the Council of Burgundy. Cranevelt translated Greek into

[89] Translation and edition by A. Butler (ed.), *The City of God by St. Augustine Bishop, Confessor, and Doctor of the Church with the commentaries of J.L. Vives*, Dublin, 1822, 72–73.

[90] Cfr. St. Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, critical edition with commentaries of Vives, published by Johann Froben, Basle, 1522.

[91] Cfr. J. Watts (ed.), *Renaissance College: Corpus Christi College, Oxford in Context, 1450–1600*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2019, Introduction, 1.

[92] Cfr. CWE 4, Letter 502:21–27.

[93] Cfr. A.J. Kendell, *Thomas More, Richard Fox and the Manor of Temple Guyting in 1515*, «Moreana» 23 nos. 91–92 (1986), 5–10.

[94] Cfr. H.S. Herbrüggen (ed.), *More to Cranevelt*, «*Supplementa Humanistica Lovaniensia*» XI, Leuven University Press, Leuven 1997, 30–32.

Latin, for instance, three homilies of St. Basil; and taught himself Hebrew. He edited after Vives's death his *De veritate fidei christianae libri quinque*. His first wife bore him eleven children; she died in 1545 and he married again. In total, 386 letters of Cranevelt's correspondence survive. The letters from More to Cranevelt are a marvellous example of correspondence among friends. In those letters More often mentions Cranevelt's wife in terms that only a married man might address to another: "As for my lady your wife, or rather your lady my wife since I betrothed myself to her there long since—and seriously she is a woman of the highest dignity, complete adorned with the ornaments by giving birth and that your family has been increased by offspring"—but he corrects himself and returns to speaking of—"my lady, your wife"—and ends up asking his friend to give warmest regards to "your most charming wife" (9 April 1521).[95] He continues in the same vein: "Give my regards to our lady and wife." (12 November 1521); and continues jokingly, "farewell, together with the wife who is mine by day and yours by night; but the lady of us both" (6 June 1525). And, "Give best regards to your lady wife, and likewise mine" (22 February 1526). Ending the series of letters that have reached us, he again corrects himself: "Please give my regards to my lady, your wife (for I do not dare to reverse the order again)" (10 June 1528). On other occasion he greets him for a new child:

> I offer hearty congratulations that your family has been increased by new offspring, and indeed I do so not only for your sake but also on behalf of the commonwealth, to which it is very important which parents enlarge it with the most numerous progeny, for from you only the best can be born. Farewell, and greet your most excellent wife from me most diligently and obligingly. From the bottom of my heart I pray for her happy state of health and well-being. My wife and children also pray for your well being, for through my eulogies you are no less known to them than to me myself. Once more, farewell. At London, 10 August [1524].

In one of his letters Thomas More thanks Cranevelt for looking after a painting of the Blessed Virgin Mary that More had commissioned. He wrote:

> I thank you for taking care of my painting. The Virgin herself will thank you, since at your insistence she was finished with great care. [...] Farewell, my dearest Cranevelt, together with your wife, the best and most delightful of ladies. Regards from my wife and my whole family.

This correspondence is an example of the tradition of humanistic friendship, and specifically of More's character:

[95] Miller (ed.), «Moreana» 31 n. 117 (1994) 3–66, and Herbrüggen, *More to Cranevelt*, 130–172.

> [More] seems to be born and made for friendship; no one is more ready to making friends or more tenacious in keeping them... In a word, whoever looks for a model of true friendship, will find it nowhere better than in More.[96]

3. *Erasmus's* Disputatiuncula de taedio, pavore, tristicia Iesu

Finally, in considering the context of *De tristitia* it is necessary to acknowledge that Erasmus wrote years earlier *de taedio, pavore, tristicia Iesu*. The *Disputatiuncula* originated in a discussion at Oxford between Erasmus and John Colet in October 1499 during the first stay of Erasmus in England. In that same visit he met Thomas More for the first time. At that discussion Erasmus argued that Christ suffered during his agony in the garden because of his approaching death on the cross. Colet, on the contrary, affirmed that Christ could not be distressed by his coming physical death, but that when the text of the Gospel says that his soul was "sad unto death" it was to be understood that he suffered because of the rejection of the Jews and the desertion of the disciples, not because of any fear of death. Erasmus pointed out that the human nature of Christ suffered in body and soul, and that this was the common understanding of the traditional piety of the Christian people. That discussion originated then a correspondence between Erasmus to Colet. First Erasmus, from his lodgings in Oxford, at St. Mary's College, wrote two long letters to Colet;[97] Colet replied briefly, thanking him for his letters, but without agreeing to the conclusion;[98] and Erasmus sent him a longer letter describing their discussion.[99]

Four year later Erasmus published a further elaborated text, expanding the content of the letters and adding patristic references as well as making references to classical authors. The *Disputatiuncula,* which occupies 55 pages in the *Collected Works of Erasmus,*[100] starts as if it had been written immediately after the discussion—"In the course of our sparring match yesterday afternoon, Colet"—and ends as if written in the place of the discussion—"From Oxford: Farewell, excellent Colet, glory of this university and my joy". But Erasmus may have put it into its final form while working on the early Fathers at Courtbourne in 1501–1502.[101]

Erasmus's conclusion is doctrinally orthodox though the display of authors and the references to Homer, Socrates, Virgil, Livy and other classics seem just an

[96] *Letter from Erasmus to Ulrich bon Hutten*, 1519, in CWE 999:98,112; cited in Herbrüggen, *More to Cranevelt*, 33.
[97] Cfr. CWE 1, Letter 108 (136 lines in the CWE edition) and 109 (173 lines in the CWE edition).
[98] Cfr. CWE 1, Letter 110.
[99] Cfr. CWE 1, Letter 111 (265 lines in the CWE edition).
[100] Cfr. CWE 70, 13–67.
[101] Cfr. M.J. Heath (translator), *Introduction*, in CWE 70, 4.

exercise of erudition and showing off. He points out that the fear of death was accepted by the stoics such as Cicero as pertaining to human nature.

In the *Disputatiuncula* Erasmus generally sides with the scholastic theologians, such as St. Bede, St. Bernard, and St. Bonaventure, and against the early authors and Fathers like Origen, St. Jerome, St. Ambrose, St. Augustine, and St. Hilary, though in an exercise of rhetoric he shows that they had not really held a doctrine contrary to his position.

It is interesting to underline here that Erasmus followed St. Bonaventure. The translator of the work points out that the "self-abasement in [Christ's] human nature, echoed the *vita Christi* tradition in which Erasmus had been brought up". This coincides with the case of More as mentioned early on in this paper. More specifically Erasmus cites Bonaventure's commentary on Peter Lombard's *Liber sententiarum*:[102]

> Nor will you [Colet] deny something that Augustine and many others confirm, and that Bonaventure skilfully explains in his commentary on the Sentences, book three, distinction fifteen.

"*Bona Ventura super libros senten[tiarum]*" that was in the library of William Grocyn and therefore available to More,[103] as well as the *Vita Christi, meditationes [Meditationes vitae Dom. nostri J. Christi],* by Bonaventure.[104]

In order to show some common ground with Colet, Erasmus agrees with him that it was love that moved Christ, and he writes:

> For the moment, Colet, I shall merely say in self-defence, before counter-attacking, that it is not I who belittle Christ's charity; it was so great, I agree, that all the martyrs' charity put together cannot be compared to it; but I think that it must be judged by somewhat more reliable criteria than yours.
>
> Love can make people go eagerly to their death and ignore pain, but, equally, it may not have this effect, not only in Christ, but in us. For example, some modern commentators argue that all the love felt by the Virgin Mother of God, second only to Jesus' own love, could not alleviate the sword of sorrow which, we read, pierced her entire soul.[105]

Both the Introduction to the whole volume 70 of the *Collected Works of Erasmus* on *Spiritualia* and *Pastoralia,* and the Introduction to *De tedio,* mention *De tristitia* by More:

[102] CWE 70, 23, and footnote 47.
[103] Book 60 in the Catalogue given in Burrows, *Collectanea II*, 16, 321.
[104] Book 66 in the Catalogue given in Burrows, *Collectanea II*.
[105] CWE 70, 48.

> The most famous text dealing with Christ's agony in the garden was written some thirty years after Erasmus' "Debate" by his [...] friend, Thomas More; More wrote it in the Tower of London on the eve of his execution, a situation that gave it a poignancy and emotional force not present in Erasmus' more theoretical treatment.[106]
>
> [...] the most relevant—and poignant—contemporary commentary on Christ's agony was made by Thomas More, as he faced his own martyrdom in the Tower [...] More took much the same line as his old friend, maintaining that the episode provided an example and comfort for those who were not blessed with the holy zeal of the early martyrs.[107]

v. *De tristitia tedio pavore et oratione christi ante captionem eius*: immediate sources, title, content and commentary

In spite of the many titles mentioned so far, it should be recalled that More would not have had access to them in the Tower. For his last work he had to limit himself to John Gerson's *Monotessaron,* which he explicitly said he was following; the *Catena aurea* of St. Thomas Aquinas;[108] which in fact he had mentioned in his *Confutation to Tyndale's Answer,*[109] and his prayer book,[110] which contained a printed Latin Book of Hours and a liturgical Latin Psalter. For most of the texts of Sacred Scripture he would have relied on his own memory.

As I have said, *De tristitia* is an exhortation to pray and the only way to read it is to meditate upon it on one's own. The lack of headings and subheadings, together with the various digressions, however, may make it difficult to follow More's mind at times and this Study in *Annales Theologici* aims to emphasise the points he makes by providing relevant headings.

1. *The title of the book*

So far in this paper the final version of the title by the hand of Thomas More such as can be read clearly in the top line of the first folio of the autograph manuscript has been used, *De tristitia tedio pavore et oratione christi ante captionem eius.*

[106] J. W. O'Malley, editor, Introduction to CWE 70, xii.
[107] Heath, translator, Introduction to *Disputatiuncula de tedio, pavore, tristicia Iesu*, CWE 70, 6.
[108] Cfr. M. Thecla, S.C., *St. Thomas More and the Catena Aurea*, «Modern Language Notes» 61/8 (1946) 523–529: www.jstor.org/stable/2909110 [Accessed 7 February, 2021]; and T. Curtright, *From Thomas More's Workshop: De Tristitia Christi and the Catena aurea*, «Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture» 22 (2015), retrieved from "*The Free Library*" on 7 February 2021.
[109] CW 8, 685.
[110] Cfr. L.L. Martz, R.S. Sylvester (eds.), *Thomas More's Prayer Book: A Facsimile Reproduction of the Annotated Pages*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London 1969.

Looking at the manuscript it is evident, however, that that was *not* the original title given by More. It can be clearly seen that at some stage the title read:

De oratione ante captionem christi

More crossed that out, and added, between the header and the top edge of the folio what now appears as final title; and between the original header and the first paragraph he added the references to Matthew 26, Mark 14, Luke 22, and John 18. Thus, the transcription of the first lines of the first folio is

∧ tristitia tedio pavore et oratione christi ante captionem eius
De ∧ ~~oratione et passione christi~~
Mat 26 [Ma]R[ci] 14 L 22° Io 18°
'Hec quum dixisset Iesus hymno
dicto exierunt in montem oliveti'
Tot sancta verba quot habuerat
christus super cenam cum apostolis
hymno tamen quum digrederetur

That title, *De oratione ante captionem christi,* gives fully the period covered by the book: The prayer of Christ in the garden of Gethsemane until he was taken prisoner. "One hint that More's scope did not go beyond Christ's capture is that his work [...] coincides exactly with the subdivision entitled 'De oratione Iesu et sua captione' in Jean Gerson's *Monotessaron* [1420], the text More says he is following."[111] Moreover, More used the subtitle "De christi captione" on folio 154. Miller, however, helps us to see behind the various layers of crossings outs and additions the following metamorphosis of the title starting with

De oratione et passione Christi

in which "passione" refers to the suffering of Christ during his agony in the garden. Dissatisfied with the ambiguity of the word "passione" as it might be understood as referring to his suffering from the moment of his being taken prisoner up to his death on the cross, More wrote "ante" over "et" and added a line above the "e" of "passione," producing

De oratione ante passionem Christi

This, however, misses the suffering in the garden, so the next step—Miller continues to suggest—was to cancel "the passione christi" and have it as

De oratione ante captionem Christi

which conveys clearly the period covered, but misses the suffering during his

[111] Miller, CW 14, 789, first paragraph.

agony in the garden. Therefore he added "tristitia tedio pavore" before "oratione", resulting as his final title

De tristitia tedio pavore et oratione christi ante captionem eius[112]

The final title is exact in giving the period—Mt 26: 30–56, Mk 14: 26–52, Lk: 22: 39–53, and Jn: 18: 1–12—but misses Christ's capture which is covered by More, and by these four Gospel accounts. It seems that it would have been more accurate for More to have written: "*De oratione Christi et captione eius*", rather than "*ante captionem*". His title would then have followed more closely Gerson's, "De oratione Iesu et sua captione". However, he had to manage with the space he had on fol. 1 and with what he had written already in the various corrections.

In any case, the final text by the hand of More is *De tristitia tedio pavore et oratione christi ante captionem eius,* and it is risky to try to *reduce* it. Most of More's works have long titles as was common at the time. It has been pointed out above that the title by which the work was known, *An Exposition of the Passion,* was misleading. The contraction *De Tristitia Christi* seems to be misleading also. Although the agony in the garden is an important topic of the book, the constant element in the several steps of the metamorphosis of the title is the *oratione christi*. And it should be borne in mind that in a series of Latin terms—such as in *De tristitia tedio pavore et oratione*—the emphasis is usually on the last of them. It is common practice to call a document by its first two or three key words, and to choose them to convey its topic, but More gave a precise title and I would suggest that we ought not to tamper with it; though of course in order to avoid frequent repetitions of the long title there is no objection to using just the first words—*De tristitia*—as Miller himself does throughout his Introduction.[113]

The unfinished Treatise *upon the Passion* ends with the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper. *De tristitia,* though it is a different work and has a different character, starts where the other had left off: Jesus with his apostles left the upper room "and went out to the Mount of Olives" (fol. 1, line 5; Mt 26:30; Mk 14:26; Lk 22:39; Jn 18:1); and it ends when he is taken prisoner. This is the period of time covered by More in *De tristitia,* and in so doing—he writes—he follows the texts of Jean Gerson's *Monotessaron,* a work that merges all four Gospels into one account. *De tristitia* is a contemplation of the life, actions, feelings, sufferings, prayer, and exhortations of Christ during that period of time; a meditation in which More does his own personal prayer and helps the reader do likewise. The conclusion of this first point of the commentary, is that the reader really ought to receive the title as written by the hand of the author:

[112] For a full description of the metamorphosis suggested by Miller see CW 14, 789–790.
[113] Cfr. CW 14, 695–778.

De tristitia tedio pavore et oratione christi ante captionem eius

without modifying it in ways that might depart from the mind of Thomas More.

2. *Content and commentary*

a) Mind in heaven

From the start of *De tristitia* it is evident that More had his mind constantly focused on heaven. On fol. 1 he starts saying that Christ spoke of holiness (cf. fol. 1:6) and goes on to write that when we prepare ourselves to pray, we must lift up our minds from the bustling confusion of human concerns to the contemplation of heavenly things (fols. 2^{v}-3). In his first extant letter to John Colet dated 23 October 1504 More had spoken already of the need to overcome the din of the market place—*forenses strepitus*—in order to seek the things that are above; and he wrote to his children to raise their minds to heaven, lest the soul look downwards to the earth.[114] In the "Twelve Properties of a Lover" in 1505 he had written that the lover of God, should have his body on earth, his mind in heaven.[115] Erasmus in his biographical profile of More wrote that when More talked "with friends about the life after death, you recognize that he [was] speaking from conviction, and not without hope".[116] More's hope of heaven is evident right through *De tristitia,* from considering that the sufferings of this time are by no means worthy to be compared to the future glory[117] which will be revealed in those who loved God so dearly that they spent their very life's blood for his glory (fols. 27 and 61) to saying, by the end of the book, that he has not the slightest doubt that the young man who followed Christ that night and could not be torn away from Him until the last possible moment, after all the apostles had fled, lives with Christ in everlasting glory in heaven, and that he—More—hopes and prays that we—More and his readers—will one day live in heaven with the young man: "Then he himself will tell us who he was, and we will get a most pleasant and full account of many other details of what happened that night" (fols. 145^{v}-146).

Having our hope in heaven, however, does not take away the difficulties we encounter, and More saw in the toponyms given in the text from Gerson's *Monotessaron,* "*in montem Olivarum, trans torrentem Cedron in villam cui nomen Gethse-*

[114] Cfr. Letter 101 in *Correspondence*. English translation given in *St. Thomas More: Selected Letters*, ed. Rogers, Yale University Press, New Haven and London 1961, 146.
[115] Cfr. *Life of Pico*, in *Essential Works*, 90–91.
[116] CWE 7, Letter 999:300.
[117] St. Paul's words, 2 Cor 4:17, found on fol. 27, are similar to Rom 8:18 which is cited on fol. 61.

mani"[118] a reference to the need of going through the sufferings of this life before reaching the joys of heaven. He writes that the stream of Kedron lies between the city of Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives, where the orchard of Gethsemane is; that *cedron* means "sadness", and Gethsemane a "most fertile valley" or "valley of olives"; and therefore, that while we are exiled from the Lord we must surely cross over a valley of tears and a stream of sadness whose waves can wash away the blackness and filth of our sins before we come to the fruitful Mount of Olives and the pleasant estate of Gethsemane, an estate most fertile in every sort of joy. This, he writes, is the salutary lesson contained in these place-names (fols. 3–5^{v}). The parallel between going through Kedron to reach Gethsemane and through suffering to reach glory, is found it in the *Catena aurea* from Alcuin commenting on Jn 18:1.

b) My soul is sad unto death

More continues to point out that those place-names harmonize very well with the immediate context of Christ's passion for the prophet predicted that Christ would work out His glory by means of inglorious torment. "Then—More writes—the meaning of the stream He crossed, 'sad', was far from irrelevant as He Himself testified when He said, "My soul is sad unto death" (fols. 5^{v}-6^{v}).

The words of Jesus, "My soul is sad unto death", are found in Mt 26:38 and Mk 14:34, but not in John's Gospel where many of the events recorded in the synoptics are assumed as known to readers. The reference to Kedron—meaning sad—is hint enough of the agony of Christ in John's account, and lets him go on to describe Christ's control of the situation (Jn 18:4–11). Further on in the text (see fols. 102–115) Thomas More wrote about how Jesus confronted those who were seeking him; in the first folios, however, he focused on Jesus's prayer, and on how that of his disciples should be.

More writes of "Christ's holy custom of going together with his disciples to that place—Gethsemane—in order to pray" (fol. 7^{v}), that he had the habit of spending whole nights praying without sleep (fol. 8^{v}). On that occasion, "He began to feel sorrow and grief and fear and weariness", and "said to them, 'My soul is sad unto death. Stay here and keep watch with me'." "He suddenly felt such a

[118] Mt 26:30 reads in Latin, "Et hymno dicto, exierunt in montem Oliveti"; and Mt 26:36, "Tunc venit Jesus cum illis in villam quae dicitur Gethsemani"; Mk 14:26, "Et hymno dicto exierunt in montem Olivarum, and Mk 14:3232, Et veniunt in praedium, cui nomen Gethsemani"; Lk 22:39, "Et egressus ibat secundum consuetudinem in montem Olivarum"; Jn 18:1, "trans torrentem Cedron, ubi erat hortus". Gerson's *Monotessaron* brings together the "torrentem Cedron" mentioned by John and "Gethsemani / montem Olivarum" from the synoptic gospels, into a unified reading: "Haec cum dixisset Iesus, & hymno dicto, exierunt in montem Oliveti. Et egressus ibat secundum consuetudinem in monthem Olivarum, trans torrentem Cedron, in villam, cui nomen Gethsemani" (cfr. Gerson, *Monotessaron*, edition published in Cologne in 1546).

sharp and bitter attack of sadness, grief, fear, and weariness that He immediately uttered, even in their presence, those anguished words which gave expression to His overburdened feelings: 'My soul is sad unto death'." Christ, More, argued, suffered in Gethsemane because he had present in his human soul the physical suffering that he was going to undergo in his body from the blows, thorns, nails, and horrible tortures up to the crucifixion; he suffered from the treacherous betrayer and bitter enemies; but over and above these, by the abandonment of his disciples, the loss of the Jews, and finally—More wrote—by the "ineffable grief of His beloved mother".

He went on to explain that Christ, truly God and truly man, had as a man the ordinary human feelings; he experienced hunger, thirst, and sleep; and equally he had the capacity to suffer and "chose to experience sadness, dread, weariness, and fear of tortures and thus to show by these very real signs of human frailty that He was really a man. Moreover—More wrote—because He came into the world to earn joy for us by His own sorrow, and since that future joy of ours was to be fulfilled in our souls as well as our bodies, so, too, He chose to experience not only the pain of torture in His body but also the most bitter feelings of sadness, fear, and weariness in His mind—*in animo*—partly in order to bind us to Him all the more" (fol. 24^{v}). Fear is the suffering of the soul engendered by foreseen future events, and More emphasizes that Christ's soul suffered in Gethsemane for all the physical pain his body was to feel up to his death on the cross. St. John Henry Newman was later to emphasise that "the agony, a pain of the soul, not of the body, was the first act of His tremendous sacrifice".[119]

While Matthew and Mark report the words of Jesus, "My soul is sad unto death," and John gives just a hint of the agony, Luke amplifies the scene, and gives a further abundance of details; he is the only one who mentions that Jesus sweated blood (Lk 22:44). Luke's Gospel is more tender, and conveys especially the mercy of God. He is the one who relates the infancy of Jesus, the parables of the prodigal son and the good Samaritan, and the repentance of the good thief. More writes that Christ was overwhelmed by mental anguish more bitter than any other mortal has ever experienced from the thought of coming torments even to the point that a bloody sweat broke out all over his body and ran down in drops to the ground (fol. 58^{v}). And similarly, Newman preached three centuries later that Christ shed blood in Gethsemane; that His agonizing soul broke up His framework of flesh and poured it forth. "His passion [has] begun from within. That tormented Heart, the seat of tenderness and love, began at length to labour and to beat with vehemence"; "the foundations of the great deep were broken up; the red streams rushed forth so copious and fierce as to overflow the veins, and

[119] J.H. Newman, *Discourses to Mixed Congregations*, London 1892, Discourse 16, 325.

bursting through the pores, they stood in a thick dew over His whole skin; then forming into drops, they rolled down full and heavy, and drenched the ground."[120]

More goes on to write, however, that Christ's sadness, fear, and weariness did not prevent him from obeying his Father's command (fol. 21^{v}). He addressed him saying, "Abba, Father, to you all things are possible. Take this cup away from me", but continued, "yet not what I will, but what you will" (fol. 28).

c) Pray always

Focusing on the prayer of Christ in Gethsemane leads Thomas More to exhort Christians to pray, and this he does from the beginning of *De tristitia,* from the very first folio. In brief, More presents two different approaches. Firstly, he writes of the need to pray by dedicating certain times to prayer and by praying properly. Erasmus in his biographical profile of More wrote that he had fixed hours at which he said his prayers, and that they were not conventional but came from the heart.[121] More relates that Christ went to mount Olivet to pray with his disciples "as He customarily did" (fol. 2). He addresses the readers and encourages them to "follow after Christ and pray to the Father together with Him" (fol. 7). In contemplating the scene of Christ's agony, More points out that Jesus expected his disciples to watch with him (fol. 10). It is in prayer that the Christian accepts the will of the Father (fols. 28^{v}, 38^{r}). The follower of Christ "should take humility as his starting point, since it is the foundation, as it were, of all the virtues" (fol. 29), and More writes:

> Reader, let us pause for a little at this point and contemplate with a devout mind our commander lying on the ground in humble supplication ... so that we will see, recognize, deplore, and at long last correct, I will not say the negligence, sloth, or apathy, but rather the feeble-mindedness, the insanity, the downright block-headed stupidity with which most of us approach the all-powerful God, and instead of praying reverently address Him in a lazy and sleepy sort of way (fols. 29–30).

And he goes on forcefully to advise the need of praying intensely and avoiding distractions during the times of prayer (fols. 30–34), and the need of persevering in prayer (fol. 39^{v}). He quotes Jesus's words to his disciples, "Stay awake and pray, that you may not enter into temptation".

But More changes his tract, and writes that the precept of praying always is not to be taken metaphorically, but in a real way, and this requires a constant presence of God, "while walking or sitting or even lying down". "Indeed, I wish—he writes—that, whatever our bodies may be doing, we would at the same time

[120] Newman, Discourse 16, 340.
[121] Cfr. CWE, letter 999:297.

lift up our minds to God, which is the most acceptable form of prayer" (fols. 34^{v}-35^{r}). He then considers the example, given by Gerson in the short treatise titled *Prayer and its Value,* of the man who decides to go on a pilgrimage to a faraway shrine. He starts walking towards his destination with his aim very much in his mind; of course, at some stage he needs to stop and spend the night at an inn; at other times he eats or talks to a fellow-traveller, or even gets distracted; but on all those occasions he should not fail to be on pilgrimage, unless of course, he decides to change his course or desist from his plan. More explains that the whole act of going forward is "informed and imbued with a moral virtue because it is silently accompanied by the pious intention formed at the beginning, since all this motion follows from the first decision"; thus, he writes:

> And so, this pilgrimage is never truly interrupted in such a way that its merit does not continue and persist at least habitually, unless an opposite decision is made, either to give up the pilgrimage completely or at least to put it off until another time.

More continues saying that Gerson "draws the same conclusion about prayer, namely that once it has been begun attentively it can never afterwards be so interrupted that the virtue of the first intention does not remain and persist continuously—that is, actually or habitually—so long as it is not relinquished by making a decision to stop nor cut off by turning away to mortal sin"; concluding that "whoever lives well is always praying" (fols. 78^{v}-82).

d) A discussion on martyrdom

As a whole, and as has been commonly said, *De tristitia* deals throughout, almost from beginning to end, with three themes: the contemplation of Christ's agony in the garden; an exhortation addressed to all Christians to pray; and a discussion of martyrdom. This third theme starts with the consideration of Christ's suffering in his pre-passion, which More considered to be greater than it "has been to anyone else" (fol. 58), "more painful than the suffering of any of all martyrs, of whatever time or place, who underwent martyrdom for the faith" (fol. 57). Then, More speaks of two types of martyrs, those who embrace martyrdom eagerly, and those who do so reluctantly which was to be very much his own case. He went over and over again in his mind the different aspects of this matter, and what he wrote was clearly autobiographical. He did not consider himself to have the vocation of a martyr.

> ... the whole drift of the present discussion finally comes to this: we should admire both kinds of most holy martyrs, we should venerate both kinds, praise God for both,

> we should imitate both when the situation demands it, each according to his own capacity and according to the grace God gives to each (fol. 62^{v}).

And he concluded by saying:

> ... in our agony remembering His (with which no other can ever be compared) let us beg Him with all our strength that He may deign to comfort us in our anguish by an insight into His; and when we urgently beseech Him, because of our mental distress, to free us from danger, let us nevertheless follow His own most wholesome example by concluding our prayer with His own addition: "Yet not as I will but as you will" (fol. 63^{v}).

e) The Church, bishops, priests

More considered himself very much a member of the Church; the Church is made up of all the faithful, those on earth and those who have preceded us and are in heaven or undergo purification in purgatory. For More the laity are fully members of the Church. In *De tristitia* he calls the Church repeatedly the mystical body of Christ (fols. 25, 87, and 111^{v}) and Christ is the Head of the Church (fol. 111^{v}). In all his writings More had in mind that the Holy Spirit plays an essential role in the Church as Christ promised that the Holy Spirit will guide the Church into all truth (Jn 16:13); in *De tristitia* he writes that the Holy Spirit taught the apostles after the resurrection what they would not have been able to bear had it been told them a short time before (fol. 3).

More emphasizes that all fatherhood proceeds from God both in heaven and on earth (fol. 38) and that Christ taught us to call Him "*our* Father" rather than any individual addressing Him as "*my* Father", because that way of addressing belongs only to the Son, while all of us are brothers; he had in mind that the reformers claimed a direct relationship with God without the Church, and he wrote:

> He [Christ] teaches the rest of us to pray thus: "Our Father who art in heaven." By these words we acknowledge that we are all brothers who have one Father in common, whereas Christ Himself is the only one who can rightfully, because of His divinity, address the Father as He does here, "My father." But if anyone is not content to be like other men and is so proud as to imagine that he alone is governed by the secret spirit of God and that he has a different status from other men, it certainly seems to me that such person arrogates to himself the language of Christ and prays with the invocation "My Father" instead of "Our Father," since he claims for himself as a private individual the spirit which God shares with all men. In fact, such a person is not much different from Lucifer, since he arrogates to himself God's language, just as Lucifer claimed God's place (fol. 45^{v}).

More's awareness of his belonging to the Church leads him to pray for all the faithful. He quotes Terence,[122] "Since I am a man, I consider nothing human to be foreign to me"; likewise, More suggests that because we are Christian we need to be interested in all Christians and we must all pray for those in need. In the context of the sleeping disciples he writes: "how could it be anything but disgraceful for Christians to snore while other Christians are in danger?" (fol. 87^{v}).

In contemplating the sleep of the apostles in Gethsemane, More reflects on the attitude of many bishops:

> Why do not bishops contemplate in this scene their own somnolence? Since they have succeeded in the place of the apostles, would that they would reproduce their virtues just as eagerly as they embrace their authority and as faithfully as they display their sloth and sleepiness! For very many are sleepy and apathetic in sowing virtues among the people and maintaining the truth, while the enemies of Christ in order to sow vices and uproot the faith (that is, insofar as they can, to seize Christ and cruelly crucify Him once again) are wide awake—so much wiser (as Christ says) are the sons of darkness in their generation than the sons of light (fol. 65).

The above paragraph contrasts with More's apologetic writings in which he defended bishops and priests against the attacks of the reformers. In 1525, in his Letter to Bugenhagen, More wrote that the bishops of England were not going to be influenced by the doctrines of Luther.[123] Alas! The tables had been turned. Seven years later the bishops in Convocation[124] by their statute of the Submission of the Clergy of 15 May 1532, relinquished their authority and recognized Henry VIII's royal authority over all Church legislation, thereby opening the door to the Royal Supremacy and to breaking with Rome;[125] the following day, 16 May, More resigned as Lord Chancellor. In describing the attitude of the sleeping

[122] In *De tristitia* More calls him "the comic poet": Terence was a Roman playwright (c.186–c.159 BC). Miller mentions him a dozen times in commenting on More's Latin in *De tristitia,* cfr. CW 14, II.

[123] Cfr. CW 7, 27: 10–12.

[124] The Convocations of Canterbury and York were the synodical assemblies of the bishops and clergy of the two provinces of the Church in England. At the time they included the bishops and other members of the clergy.

[125] The declaration of the Royal Supremacy proceeded in stages. From the beginning of the session of Parliament which started in October 1529, the King attempted to control the Church but found clear opposition in Parliament. Parliament, which included Thomas More as Lord Chancellor and William Warham as Archbishop of Canterbury, refused to pass the Submission of the Clergy Act and Henry dismissed Parliament on 14 May 1532. The bishops in Convocation accepted the Submission of the Clergy on 15 May 1532. More resigned the following day, and the Archbishop of Canterbury died that summer. By the Submission of the Clergy, the bishops accepted that they would not make new canons without the King's licence and ratification, and that they would submit prior canons to a royal revision. This declaration was probably meant for putting pressure

bishops, he used words that he had written in his letter of 23 October 1504 addressed to John Colet. There, he wrote about the "stuff for the belly and the world and for the world's lord, the devil."[126] In *De tristitia* he writes that some of the sleeping bishops "*multo plures quam vellem*", far more of them than I would wish, "are numbed and buried in destructive desires; that is, drunk with the new wine of the devil, the flesh, and the world, they sleep like pigs sprawling in the mire" (fol. 65–65^{v}). And he uses the image he placed on the lips of the quasi-fictional *Morus* in replying to Raphael Hythloday, "You must not abandon the ship in a storm because you cannot control the winds".[127] In *De tristitia* he writes:

> If a bishop is so overcome by heavy-hearted sleep that he neglects to do what the duty of his office requires for the salvation of his flock—like a cowardly ship's captain who is so disheartened by the furious din of a storm that he deserts the helm, hides away cowering in some cranny, and abandons the ship to the waves—if a bishop does this, I would certainly not hesitate to juxtapose and compare his sadness with the sadness that leads to hell; indeed, I would consider it far worse, since such sadness in religious matters seems to spring from a mind which despairs of God's help (fol. 66).

Some authors have suggested that More used strong words in *De tristitia* because writing in Latin he was addressing a more erudite audience. This does not seem to be the case. The reality is that the bishops in England had abdicated their responsibility in the face of the King's oppression. *De tristitia* is addressed to them and the clergy, and to the common people who could read Latin; not just to a select few.

More goes on to speak of two other categories of bishops. "The next category, but a far worse one, consists of those" moved by ambition who "do not sleep like Peter" but "make his waking denial" (fol. 66–68). Here More seems to have had in mind the case of Cardinal Wolsey, who not only submitted to the king's desires, but out of his own ambition worked actively to achieve the divorce of Henry from Catherine. And finally, the third group is made up of "those that not merely neglect to profess the truth out of fear but preach false doctrine "whether for

on the Pope, rather than for a definitive break with Rome. (For a detailed account of More's resignation, see, for instance: J. Guy, *The Public Career of Sir Thomas More*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London 1980, "The Events of 1532", 175–203).

In March 1533, however, by the Act in Restraint of Appeals, Henry VIII was declared head of the Church. By the Act of Submission of the Clergy of March 1534, Parliament formalized the 1532 Convocation statute, and all appeals in Church law were to be addressed to the King's Court of Chancery. The Acts of Succession and Royal Supremacy followed. Thomas More and Bishop John Fisher refused the oath to the Act of Succession on 13 April 1534 and were taken to the Tower of London. The Act of Royal Supremacy was passed in November 1534 when the two of them were already in the Tower.

[126] *Correspondence*, Letter 3:26.

[127] *Utopia*, I, CW 4, 99:34–35.

sordid gain or out of a corrupt ambition, such a person does not sleep like Peter, does not make Peter's denial, but rather stays awake with wicked Judas and like Judas persecutes Christ" (fol. 68^{v}). This was the case of Thomas Cranmer who not only tried to please the King but, as Archbishop of Canterbury, granted the annulment, allowed the marriage to Anne Boleyn, conferred on her the crown, and introduced Lutheran doctrines in England.

More continues reflecting on the state of the clergy: "At this juncture another point occurs to us, that Christ is also betrayed into the hands of sinners when His most holy body in the sacrament is consecrated and handled by unchaste, dissolute, and sacrilegious priests" (fol. 88). Again, strong words from the pen of Thomas More, but he had already written of the marriage of Luther to a nun, and of that of other continental reformers earlier;[128] closer to home, everyone was aware of the illegitimate son of Cardinal Wolsey. Archbishop Cranmer also brought a wife from his stay in Germany though this was kept secret and it was perhaps not known by More.[129] On the following folio More speaks of those who deny the real presence of the Body of Christ in the sacrament though they call it by that name, *Corpus Christi* (fol. 89). In the *Treatise upon the Passion* which he left unfinished at Easter 1534 before he was taken prisoner he wrote a most extensive defence of the real presence citing in Latin and English from nineteen Latin and Greek Fathers of the Church, and other ancient Christian writers, from St. Ignatius of Antioch to Theophylact of Bulgaria;[130] and later on, probably soon after arriving at the Tower he wrote the brief *Treatise to Receive the Blessed Body of Our Lord, Sacramentally and Virtually Both*.[131] Those pages are evidence of the love and veneration More had for the Eucharist.

f) Psalm II

It is interesting to note that More cited Psalm II a couple of times: first with reference to the reformers who claimed to be able to interpret Scripture without the help of the old doctors or the tradition of the Church (fol. 110^{v}), and later when Jesus replied to his captors, "This is your hour and the power of darkness", Lk 22:53 (fol. 133^{v}). More places in the mouth of Christ that "this hour and this

[128] Cfr. *The Confutation of Tyndale's Answer*, CW 8, 41:31.

[129] Sometime between March and August 1532 Cranmer got married in Nuremberg. He left his wife in Germany while continuing his diplomatic mission in the Continent, but at the death of Warham he was recalled to be consecrated archbishop of Canterbury. The consecration took place in January 1533. Sometime later Cranmer's wife slipped into England. Although she bore a daughter, the marriage remained hidden through most of Henry's reign. It is not unlikely though that by 1534 More knew of the marriage.

[130] Cfr. *A Treatise Upon the Passion*, Chapter 4, Lecture 2, CW 13, 136–174.

[131] Cfr. CW 13, 191–202.

power of darkness are not only given to you now against me, but such an hour and such brief power of darkness will also be given to other governors and other caesars against other disciples of mine" (fol. 135). More see those words fulfilled in the case of Nero and others who persecuted Christ's disciples from the beginning of the Church and for centuries to come, including in this his own situation; and he paraphrases the words of the Psalm:

> Although the nations have raged and the people devised vain things, although the kings of the earth have risen up and the princes gathered together against the Lord and against His Christ, striving to break their chains and to cast off that most sweet yoke which a loving God, through His pastors, places upon their stubborn necks, then He who dwells in heaven will laugh at them and the Lord will deride them ... He will establish His Christ, the son whom He has today begotten, as king on His holy mountain of Sion... (fols. 136–138^{v}).

The picture described by More from folios 64 to 138 is really grim: bishops and clerics in England, and those in authority and illustrious men, had deserted Christ. But not all was lost. Bishop John Fisher kept the faith, and the Carthusians, and other religious: his friend, and fellow scholar Richard Reynolds, a Bridgettine priest, and three Carthusian priors, died martyrs on 4 May, and the rest of the London Charterhouse was resisting Thomas Cromwell's attempts to gain their submission (up to eighteen of them were to die martyrs; the others submitted and abandoned the house which was taken over).[132]

Another source of consolation for More was his friend Antonio Bonvisi to whom he wrote his last-but-one extant letter,[133] probably after finishing *De tristitia* because, though *De tristitia* was written in ink, traditionally it is assumed that the letter to Bonvisi was written with a coal.[134] He started it saying:

[132] Cfr. M. Chauncy, *The History of the Sufferings of Eighteen Carthusians in England*, written in Latin in 1539, it was published in English in 1890 by Burns and Oates, London.

[133] His last extant letter was addressed to his daughter Margaret on 5 July 1535, the day before his execution in Tower Hill.

[134] This would date the letter between 12 June 1535, when he was deprived of writing utensils, and 1 July, when he was sentenced to death. William Rastell, editor of the *English Works of Sir Thomas More,* 1557, placed the letter to Bonvisi and the letter of 5 July to Margaret last among the letters of Thomas More, *English Works* pages 1455 and 1457 respectively, and they are preceded by a paragraph in which the editor says that they were generally written "with a coal" because More did not have "pen or ink". From this grew a family tradition that More in the Tower had to write with a piece of coal. Rodgers considers this to be an exaggeration (cfr. *Cambridge Companion to Thomas More*, 240) and, in fact, the Valencia manuscript itself disproves it. The editor of the *English Works* mentions using a coal only for the last two letters, and charcoal pencils were, and are, a normal medium for drawing (used, for instance by Holbein in the sketch of Thomas More's

> Since my mind has a presentiment (perhaps a false one, but still a presentiment) that before very long I will be unable to write to you, I have decided, while I may, to show by this letter, at least, how much I am refreshed by the pleasantness of your friendship now that fortune has abandoned me.[135]

More goes on to write that the happiness of a friendship so faithful and constant against the contrary blast of fortune is a higher good arising from the loving-kindness of God.[136]

Faithful also were his adopted daughter, Margaret Giggs, and her husband, John Clement; and his secretary John Harris, who married Dorothy Colly, the maid of Margaret Roper, eldest daughter of Thomas More. Margaret Roper, Margaret Giggs, and Dorothy Colly brought More's headless body from Tower Hill to be buried in the Tower. Margaret Giggs succoured the imprisoned Carthusians. And faithful at the time were most common people, most of the religious, and most of the clergy. And More found consolation in the company of all the Church in Christendom and of the saints in heaven.

But, of course, his main comfort was God himself, and More finished his meditation on Psalm II with the following words which he placed on the lips of Christ:

> Thus, when they have taken up their cross to follow me, when they have conquered the prince of darkness, the devil, when they have trod underfoot the early minions of Satan, then finally, riding aloft on a triumphant chariot, the martyrs will enter into heaven in a magnificent and marvellous procession (fol. 137^{v}).

g) The flight of the apostles and the capture of Christ

At the end of folio 115v Thomas More lists three topics that he is going to develop in the rest of the text:

> *De amputate Malchi auricula*
> *Apostolorum fuga*
> *et captione Christi*
>
> The severing of Malchus' ear [fol. 116–138^{v}],

family) and not uncommon for writing. Rather than saying that he used a coal, perhaps it is more accurate to say that More used a *pencil* (a charcoal pencil) for those his last two letters.

[135] The letter was written in Latin, translated into English by E. McCutcheon, «Moreana» 18, 71–72 (1981), 55–56. Most collections of letters of Thomas More give the English translation published in the *English Works* of 1557, rather than a fresh modern translation from the Latin.

[136] For a recent appraisal of Buonvisi, see F.E. Smith, *A "fowde patrone and second father" of the Marian Church: Antonio Buonvisi, religious exile and mid-Tudor Catholicism,* «British Catholic History» 34/2 (2018), 222–246, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

the flight of the apostles [fol. 139–153],
and the capture of Christ [fol. 154–155^{v}]

These three final sections are the only ones that have been clearly given headings in More's own handwriting on the folios of the manuscript, as if, until then, More had been writing in haste, following his train of thought with everything he had in mind, and, in finishing folio 115, he had stopped and had wanted to ensure that he covered those three last topics. These three headings appear well centred at the top of each of the respective folios, 116, 139, and 154.

At the bottom right of folio 138^{v}, he wrote the heading of the following page; and it appears on top of folio 139: *De fuga discipulorum*.[137] The first lines of this section continue to be clearly autobiographical:

> "Then all the disciples abandoned him and fled." From this passage it is easy to see how difficult and arduous a virtue patience is. For many can bring themselves to face certain death bravely provided they can strike back at their assailants and give vent to their feelings ... But to suffer without any comfort from revenge, to meet death with a patience that not only refrains from striking back but also takes blows without returning so much as an angry word, that, *I assure you,* is such a lofty peak of heroic virtue that...

I would suggest that staying in the Tower from 17 April 1534 to 6 July 1535 keeping his calm was a real trial for Thomas More's *patience.*

The last heading, *De christi captione,* appears in the final title of the book, as well as in a previous attempt, *De oratione ante captionem christi*. There has been some discussion as to whether More intended to write further, but, from the list of those three topics, it is obvious, that, at least from the moment that he reached writing folio 115, the *De christi captione* was going to be the end of his narrative, which he finished with the few lines describing the capture of Christ, which took place, he writes, after Christ had twice addressed those who had come to apprehend him, and had announced to them that they then had permission to do what they had not been able to do before—to take him captive, that is, after all the apostles had escaped by running away, after the young man who had been seized but could not be held had saved himself by his active and eager acceptance of nakedness, only then, after all these events, did they lay hands on Jesus (fol. 155).

h) The gentleness of Thomas More

At this stage, it seems necessary to focus on what might be called the gentleness of Thomas More which is apparent throughout *De tristitia*. Early in the book

[137] On fol. 115^{v} he wrote *Apostolorum fuga*; but on fol. 138^{v} and on top of fol. 139, he wrote: *De fuga discipulorum,* in concordance with the following line of fol. 139: *Tunc discipuli relicto eo omnes fugerunt* (Mt 25:56).

More points out that Christ used to eat with sinners, calmly and kindly helping them to reform their lives (fol. 9). In discussing the words of Our Lord, "Are you sleeping and taking your rest? It is enough" (Mk 14: 41), More says that he was not unaware that there are various interpretations and states that everyone is free to choose, as he is not an arbitrator (fol. 76). Similarly, by the end of the work, More comments that he differs from the interpretation adopted not only by many celebrated doctors of the Church but also approved by that "remarkable man John Gerson" whom he had generally followed in his work (fol. 154^{v}-155). In these comments, More's freedom of mind in giving his own opinion comes through, but also his honesty in mentioning other interpretations and his gentleness in praising those who held opposite views.

After criticizing those prelates who had actively denied Christ out of fear he suggests that most of them will eventually repent (fol. 68); which was in fact the case under Mary Tudor. One of those who repented was Bishop Stephen Gardiner (c.1495–1555). Gardiner had served under Wolsey in the attempt to obtain the divorce of King Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon. Henry appointed him bishop of Winchester in 1531; though he opposed the King in 1532, he was among those who accepted the Royal Supremacy, and defended it in his book *De vera obedientia.* Under the following king, the young Edward VI, Gardiner sought the return of the kingdom to the Catholic Church and he was imprisoned in the Tower of London. He was released at the accession of Queen Mary in 1553, and appointed her Lord Chancellor. He backed her in her efforts for a Catholic restoration. It was reported that on his deathbed, listening to the gospel narrative of Peter's betrayal of Christ, the bishop, weeping bitterly, said *"Ego exivi sed non dum flevi amare"*—"I have gone out, but as yet I have not wept bitterly".[138]

With regard to those who had preached false doctrine, he points out that, since there is no limit to the mercy of God, Christians had to pray humbly and incessantly that with God's help they should return to their senses and rectify (fol. 70^{v}). More had also spoken about unfaithful priests, and went on to advise that people had to pray more earnestly for priests, for it will be much to the advantage of the people if bad priests improve (fol. 88^{v}).

It has been mentioned in the preceding section that More made reference to Psalm II, "He who dwells in the heaven laughs to scorn these wicked and vain

[138] Cited in the entry of Stephen Gardiner, in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* online version of 3 January 2008, accessed on 21 December 2020. The source of this quotation was Stapleton (July 1535–1598), biographer of St. Thomas More. He was educated at Winchester College and graduated from Oxford in 1556, the year after Gardiner's death. He was a Canon of Chichester under Mary, but was deprived of the prebend in the next reign on refusing the Oath of Supremacy in 1563. He emigrated to the Continent and was later a professor at the English College in Douay and at the University of Louvain.

attempts of [the bad theologians]"; but More goes on to write, "But I humbly pray that he may not so laugh them to scorn as to laugh also at their eternal ruination, but rather that he may inspire in them the health-giving grace of repentance" so that they "may retrace their steps to the bosom of mother church and so that all of us together, united in the true faith of Christ and joined in mutual charity as true members of Christ, may again attain to the glory of Christ our Head" (fol. 111^{v}).

All through the book Thomas More contemplated the passion of Christ who suffered as no other man had suffered, but he emphasized that Christ did so because he wanted to, and specifically, focusing in the account of John, that he went freely to meet those who sought to capture him (Jn 18: 4–8), and that he was in command of the situation (fol. 64 and 102), so much so that those who went to take him fell to the ground at his word (Jn 18: 6). This gave More a deep trust in Jesus Christ, and he ended his narrative full of confidence, calm, and joy.

The reader of *De tristitia* perceives that Thomas More's feelings come through when speaking of his loved ones or people he particularly appreciated. The first one undoubtedly was the Blessed Virgin Mary for in speaking of Jesus's agony, More writes that he suffered because of "the ineffable grief of his beloved mother" (fol. 12^{v}), whom More mentioned again as Jesus's "most loving mother" on fol. 39 and on fol. 48a^{v}.[139] More had also a soft spot for John, the young apostle; he praised him for his virginity (fol. 10^{v}) and mentioned that he followed Christ all the way to the place of the crucifixion and stood next to the cross with Christ's most beloved mother: "two pure virgins standing together—*virgo purus cum virgine purissima pariter*", and that when Christ commended her to him he accepted her as his own mother from that day on (fol. 142).

In this his last work More did not want to omit mentioning Mary Magdalen to whom Jesus appeared after his resurrection (fol. 105^{v}). He had written of her in 1529 in his first dialogue in defence of orthodoxy: Christ promised that Saint Mary Magdalen would be venerated through the world because she bestowed that precious ointment upon his blessed head;[140] from the example of that holy woman, More wrote, and from the words of our Saviour, we learn that God delights in seeing the fervent heat of the heart's devotion bubble out through the body and do him homage.[141] He wrote of her also in the *Treatise upon the Passion*[142] before being taken prisoner, and again, already in the Tower, in *A*

[139] More inserted two additional folios after fol. 48 which in the transcription given in CW 14 are called fol. 48a and 48b.
[140] Cfr. CW 6, 49:13.
[141] Cfr. CW 6, 49: 29–32.
[142] Cfr. CW 13, 76–77 and 157.

Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation;[143] in these two books he identifies Mary Magdalen with Martha's sister.[144]

Mary and Martha are also praised by More in his *Treatise on the Blessed Body,* where he encourages Christians to receive the Blessed Body of Our Lord sacramentally and virtually just as Mary and Martha received him in their house; as Saint Elizabeth received her cousin, the Blessed Virgin Mary, with the joy of Saint John the Baptist leaping in his mother's womb; as the two disciples going to Emmaus, who asked Christ to stay with them—*mane nobiscum Domine* (they, too, are mentioned by More in *De tristitia*); and as Zacchaeus received him.[145]

More's excitement is at its best, however, when speaking of the young man who followed Jesus when all the disciples had abandoned him and run away (fol. 143). More tells us how he would imagine the situation. He suggests that the young man had heard of Christ's fame and, as may have happened, he was serving at table during the Last Supper when he was touched by a secret breath of the spirit and felt the moving force of charity. Then, impelled to pursue a life of true devotion, he followed Christ when he left after dinner and continued to follow him. When all the apostles had escaped in terror, this young man, More suggests, dared to remain behind, with all the more confidence because he knew that none as yet was aware of the love he felt for Christ.

> But how hard it is to disguise the love we feel for someone! Although this young man had mingled with that crowd of people who hated Christ, still he betrayed himself by his gait and his bearing, making it clear to everyone that he pursued Christ, now deserted by the others, not as a persecutor but as a devoted follower (fol. 144^{v}).

Thomas More continued to consider the example of this young man. He managed to escape when they tried to catch him, but he did not abandon Christ out of fear, but escaped out of necessity when he was able to do so without betraying Christ; and—More writes—he avoided being caught because he was not attached to material things. Here More brings up the example of another young man, "the holy and innocent patriarch Joseph" (Gen 39:12), who left to posterity a notable example, teaching that one should flee from danger of falling into sin (fol. 152). More, almost at the end of his narrative, reveals once again his inner self:

[143] Cfr. CW 12, 146 and 185.

[144] The identification of the three Maries, Mary Magdalen, Mary the sister of Martha, and Mary who washed the feet of Jesus in Bethany, was common in the pictorial and liturgical tradition at the time, cfr. R. Rex, *The Theology of John Fisher*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1991, IV: "The Magdalene controversy", 65–77.

[145] Cfr. CW 13, 200–204.

> If we patiently endure the loss of the body for the love of God, then, just as the snake sloughs off its old skin (called, I think, its "senecta"[146]) by rubbing it against thorns and thistles, and leaving it behind in the thick hedges *comes forth young and shining,* so too those of us who follow Christ's advice and become wise as serpents will leave behind the thorns of tribulation suffered for the love of God, and will quickly be carried up to heaven, *shining and young* and never more to feel the effects of old age (fol. 153).

So, at the end of his life, awaiting his execution, Thomas More, *felt himself young,* with an ardent love for Christ like that of the young man who followed Jesus to Gethsemane, and, like him, without being hindered by earthly attractions; with the heat of Mary Magdalen's heart; with the solicitude of Martha; with the eagerness of Zacchaeus; with the purity and zeal of John, the beloved apostle.

Abstract

This study is an "analytic" introduction to *De tristitia tedio pavore et oratione christi ante captionem eius,* the last work of St. Thomas More, studying the autograph manuscript folio by folio. The discovery of the manuscript in 1963 highlighted the need to clarify the text and title of the translation and of the Latin versions of that work known until then. From then on that work of More has been called *De Trititia Christi,* but further clarification in this paper suggests keeping the original full title given by More; though, of course, as is common practice, the title may for convenience be abbreviated to its first words, *De tristitia*.

For the intended readership the study includes the context of such a work within the vocation, studies, and literary production of More as a humanist and in defence of orthodoxy. A description of such context, however, cannot be other than "synthetic": it involves necessarily the opinions of the author of the article. Obviously, the context of the last work of a writer is his whole life until then, and in the case of St. Thomas More, the context of *De tristitia* was not just his life until then, but up to his expected martyrdom and beyond.

[146] The simile is found in St. Augustine, *De doctrina christiana*, II, 16, 24.