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THE HOLOGRAPH OF MORE'S *EXPOSITIO PASSIONIS*
A BRIEF HISTORY

More's friends were startled and delighted when the heavily corrected and revised holograph of his *Expositio Passionis* was rediscovered at the Royal College of Corpus Christi in Valencia.⁽¹⁾ Having studied a microfilm of this manuscript for many months, I finally had the pleasure of spending many hours examining it during a recent visit to Valencia. Even apart from More's writing, the physical make-up of the manuscript provides some valuable information -- for example, that it was almost surely bound in or near Louvain. But here I wish to confine my remarks to the question: How did More's holograph come to be in Valencia?

San Juan de Ribera (1532-1611), Archbishop of Valencia and founder of the College of Corpus Christi, provided rare and welcome help in answering this question. He sketched the provenance of the holograph in a brief note, which is now attached to the inside of its front cover:

Thesaurus absconditus

este libro me Embio El conde de oropesa, diciendo me que era del Señor don fernando de toledo, al qual selo dio El padre frei pedro de Soto confessor del emperador rei i Señor carlos . V. porque era de thomas moro y escrito de su mano. (2)

But we have no concrete evidence by which to trace the owners of the autograph before it came into the possession of Fray Pedro de Soto. Since More's persecutors were desperately eager to trap him into stating a punishable opinion, they would probably not have neglected to examine any of his writings they could get their hands on. Certainly they were intensely interested in his letters to his fellow-prisoner St. John Fisher.⁽³⁾ And if they had discovered and examined the *Expositio*, it seems doubtful that they would have wished it to be published. More's discussion of martyrdom would hardly have helped them in their effort to proclaim him a traitor rather than a martyr. Hence it is not far-fetched to imagine that the individual gatherings, which seem designedly compact, were smuggled out of the Tower, either by More's servant John

a Wood or by one of his visitors.⁽⁴⁾

In any case, few would object to the assumption that the autograph came into the hands of Margaret Roper and (after her death in 1544) of her daughter Mary Clark Basset, who translated the *Expositio* for the *English Works* (1557). Yet one must also reckon with the fact that William Rastell and John Harris, both of whom died in Louvain, had collections of More's letters and papers.⁽⁵⁾ The best reason for believing that Mary Basset had the manuscript, rather than Rastell or Harris, is that she is much more likely to have come into contact with Fray Pedro de Soto. She was a lady in waiting, and her second husband, James Basset, was a gentleman of the chamber, at the court of King Philip and Queen Mary.⁽⁶⁾ Not only was James Basset in exile in the Low Countries during Edward's reign; in 1555 and again in 1558 Queen Mary sent him to Brussels as a messenger to Philip.⁽⁷⁾ Pedro de Soto, who was Confessor (1542-48) to the Emperor Charles V, was also closely connected with the English court of Philip and Mary.⁽⁸⁾ In 1553, while he was professor of theology at the University of Dillingen, de Soto became the trusted friend and emissary of Cardinal Pole, who sent him to Charles V in Brussels to discuss the best method of restoring the English Church to union with Rome.⁽⁹⁾ At Pole's invitation, de Soto was in England between May 1555 and September 1556, ⁽¹⁰⁾ assisting Pole at a synod, trying to get Cranmer and Ridley to recant, teaching and reforming the curriculum at Oxford, ⁽¹¹⁾ and writing his *Defensio Catholicae Confessionis*, which he had printed in Antwerp (1557) on his way back to Spain.

In his defense of papal supremacy in this work, de Soto cites both Fisher and More as glorious witnesses of his position. Of More he writes:

In quo loco non possum omittere verba, & testimonium omni acceptione dignum beati illius, & bonorum omnium memoria celebrandi Thomae Mori: cuius pietatis, & modestiae Christianae in tota vita, profectusque, & argumenti in his, quibus perpetuo quodam tenore in aula, in publicis muneribus, hisque summis, denique domi, & foris ita splenduit: ut inter caetera, quibus in Regno hoc Angliae, ubi nunc agimus Diuinae gratiae dono, & sanctorum exempla, quae in memoria multorum reperimus, tanquam recentia quaedam vestigia sanguinis Martyrum, vnice oblectati sumus, & excitati ad ardorem virtutis: beati huius exempla non minima fuerunt, inter quae cum in eos incidimus, qui illum familiariter nouerant, & ex memoria depromebant, & verba, & opera eius & scripta etiam quaedam offerebant sale quodam diuinae sapientiae condita, multo magis, quam in amoenissimis, quorum in hoc regno copia est, hortis suauissime versati, frequenter sumus, quasi inter flores, & rosas, illius enim reuera odor, atque fragrantia, sicut agri pleni, cui benedixit Dominus, excitat senescentes, & caligantes tepiditate praesentium temporum affectus, & sensus nostros: cuius vestigia vtinam digni essemus exosculari.

From this glowing testimonial of de Soto's admiration for More, it is clear that he discussed More's life and death, his words and deeds, with those who had known him personally. Even more important for our purposes, these friends of More had presented de Soto with certain writings of More, "seasoned, as it were, with the salt of divine wisdom." Presumably de Soto could have read only More's Latin, not his English, and of the Latin writings the *Responsio ad Lutherum* and the *Expositio* would have been most likely to interest de Soto. And at the very time de Soto was in England, Mary Basset's translation of the *Expositio* was being prepared for the 1557 edition of More's *Works*. Was de Soto himself one of the great scholars mentioned in the introduction to the translation: "This woorke in latine hath been by sondrye great clarkes read and wayed, and veary well lyked" (1350C)? According to de Soto, More also told one of his best friends of his desire to study the question of papal authority more thoroughly. When he returned to his friend about a month later, More was firmly convinced of the papal supremacy and considered it to be the foundation and basis of everything else in the Christian religion. (12)

Pole, who at one time thought that de Soto would be made a cardinal, held him in very high esteem. (13) On 2 September 1556 the Venetian ambassador in England reported that the Emperor had recalled to the Low Countries

his former confessor Father Soto, who was public lecturer in theology in the university of Oxford, his departure paining the Queen, by reason of the service she received from him there, and yet more the Cardinal, who loved him most dearly above all the other [Spaniards?] by reason of his goodness and many virtues. He received handsome presents from both one and the other, and Cardinal Pole at his own cost had him accompanied across the Channel beyond the English territory. (14)

Perhaps the Queen or Pole, who was a professed admirer of More, (15) was instrumental in procuring More's autograph of the *Expositio* for de Soto. Certainly it would have been a handsome gift for an eminent theologian (who had taken a vow of poverty) and a loyal servant of Charles V, the nephew of Katherine of Arragon. Although the Emperor originally intended for de Soto to return to Spain with him, he later allowed de Soto to stay behind in the Low Countries, (16) and there is reason to believe that he remained there for some months -- long enough, certainly, to have the manuscript bound. By March 1558 he was back in Spain. (17)

Probably before 1561, when he left Spain for the last time to journey to Rome and the Council of Trent, (18) de Soto gave the manuscript to Don Fernando de Toledo, the brother of the Count of Oropesa and one of the closest friends of San Juan de Ribera from the time of their university days at Salamanca. (19)

There were three Counts of Oropesa during the lifetime of San Juan: 1) Don Francisco Alvarez de Toledo (c.1484-1542), who became the third count in 1504 and whose marriage (1508-15) produced four (or perhaps only three) children; 2) his eldest son Don Fernando Alvarez de Toledo (c. 1510-1571), the fourth count, who had five children; 3) his eldest son Don Juan Garcia Alvarez de Toledo (1550-1619), who passed the title to the son of his daughter and heir, Doña Brites. (20) But the genealogical sources do not mention any Don Fernando de Toledo among the brothers of these three counts. The most likely supposition is that San Juan's friend Don Fernando was (like San Juan himself) illegitimate. His bastardy, combined with his life of devout obscurity and hidden charity, would explain why he has been overlooked by the historians and genealogists. Since he was more or less coeval with San Juan (who was at the University of Salamanca from 1544 to 1561) and since he was offered the cardinal's hat by Gregory XIII (1572-85), he must have been the son of the fourth count, (21) and the Count of Oropesa mentioned in San Juan's note was probably his brother, Don Juan, who became the fifth count in 1571.

The fourth Count and Countess of Oropesa were loyal friends and admirers of Pedro de Soto, (22) and it is natural to assume that the religious zeal of Fray Pedro and the count's natural son Don Fernando would also have drawn them together, in spite of the difference in their ages. Perhaps the manuscript went to the priest Don Fernando rather than to the count precisely because it was a gift especially suited to a clerical recipient. (23)

We know that Don Fernando received the manuscript before 1563 (when Gregory XIII became pope). It would be interesting to know when he died, for that might well have been the occasion when the manuscript came into the hands of Don Juan, the fifth Count of Oropesa, who presented it to Don Fernando's old friend, San Juan de Ribera. (24) At any rate, the manuscript was probably in the possession of Don Fernando (hidden away from the world like his own holiness) for over ten years, and we must reckon with the possibility that he may have been responsible for some of the marks and corrections added to it.

Though there is no evidence to show that San Juan was personally acquainted with Fray Pedro de Soto, San Juan did praise him in a letter he wrote to Philip III in 1608 concerning the duties of a confessor to the king, mentioning two incidents which illustrate de Soto's zeal and Charles V's high regard for him. (25) San Juan de Ribera himself was a likely recipient for such a splendid gift as the autograph manuscript of the martyred chancellor of

England, not only because he was a notable collector of fine books and manuscripts,(26) but also because he had a special interest in the English heresy and its possible effects on the subjects of Spain.(27) Moreover, the books owned by San Juan reveal his interest in the religious revolutions in England.(28)

Nevertheless, however much San Juan may have admired More and treasured his autograph, the manuscript itself was probably not placed in the great reliquary closet in the Chapel of the Relics until after More's canonization in 1935. More's autograph, which would not have been officially considered a relic any earlier than his beatification (1886), is not mentioned in three nineteenth-century lists of the relics at the College.(29) When it was mentioned again in 1904 (for the first time since San Juan's note), it was almost certainly being kept in the library of the Royal College, in a glass-topped case reserved for special treasures (such as the autograph sermons of San Juan himself).(30) But in 1947 it was included in a list of the relics.(31) When San Juan called More's autograph a "hidden treasure," he was referring to *Matt. 13 : 44*, but his designation was also a sort of prophecy, for the manuscript remained hidden and (for all practical purposes) unknown until Geoffrey Bullough, at the instigation of Professor Francisco Carreres of the University of Valencia, brought it to light in 1963.

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NOTES

1) - See Geoffrey Bullough, "More in Valencia: a Holograph Manuscript of the Latin 'Passion,'" *The Tablet* (Dec. 21, 1963), CCXVII, 1379-80, and Germain Marc'hadour, "Au Pays de J.L. Vivès: La Plus Noble Relique de Thomas More," *Moreana* 9, 93-6 and 10.

I am preparing an edition of the *Expositio* (or, to use More's own title, *De tristitia, tedio, pavore, et oratione Christi ante passionem eius*) for the Yale edition of the Complete Works of St. Thomas More. The material presented here has been gathered in the course of my work for the Yale Project. I wish to express my warmest thanks to Don Vincente Vilar and Don Antonio Villaplana of the Royal College for their gracious hospitality and assistance during my stay in Valencia.

2) - The note may be translated: "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 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." Two autograph volumes of sermons by San Juan, written after he became Archbishop of Valencia in 1569, are in the library of the Royal College (see Don Pascual Boronat y Barrachina, *El B. Juan de Ribera y el R. Colegio de Corpus Christi*, Valencia, 1904, pp. 241-2, and Ramon Robres Lluch, *San Juan de Ribera*, Barcelona, 1960, p. xxii, nrs. 222-3). A comparison of the handwriting of these volumes with that of the note in the More holograph makes it quite clear that San Juan wrote the note (except, perhaps, for the phrase "Thesaurus absconditus", which is in a different sort of script).

3) - Nicolas Harpsfield, *The Life and Death of Sir Thomas More*, ed. Elsie Hitchcock, Early English Text Society 186 (London, 1932), pp. 186-8.

4) - E.E. Reynolds, *Saint Thomas More* (London, 1953), pp. 325-7.

5) - See Richard Sylvester's introduction to his edition of *The History of Richard III* (Yale University Press, 1963), pp. xlviii-li.

6) - The fullest account of the Bassets is in the introduction to Philip Hallett's edition of Mary Basset's translation of the *Expositio* (*St. Thomas More's History of the Passion*, London, 1941, pp. xi-xviii). Hallett's account is based on Stapleton's *Tres Thomae*, R.W. Chambers and Elsie Hitchcock's edition of Harpsfield's *Life of More*, and various brief references in the State Papers.

7) - *Calendar of State Papers and Manuscripts, Relating to English Affairs Existing in the Archives and Collections of Venice*, ed. Rawdon Brown, VI (Part I, London, 1877), nr. 240, and VI (Part III, London, 1884), nr. 1146. Hereafter this work will be cited as *State Papers Venice*.

8) - The fullest account of de Soto is Venancio Carro's *El Maestro Fr. Pedro de Soto, O. P., y las Controversias Político-teológicas en el Siglo XVI*, 2 vols. (Salamanca, 1931-50). The same author gives a brief sketch of his life and a commentary on his works in *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique* (Paris, 1941), XIV (Part II), 2431-43.

9) - *State Papers Venice*, V, London, 1873, nrs. 832 and 855.

10) - Or perhaps June 1556. See *State Papers Venice*, VI (Part I), nrs. 513 and 564. There is also some other seemingly contradictory evidence about the dates of de Soto's departure from England and his arrival in Spain. The problem is discussed and resolved (as well as it can be) by Carro, I, 253-6.

11) - *State Papers Venice*, VI (Part I), nrs. 72, 394, 434.

12) - I have quoted from a partial reprint of de Soto's *Defensio* in Volume XVIII of *Bibliotheca Maxima Pontificia*, ed. Rocaberti, (Rome, 1968), pp. 70-71. Carro (II, 221) also quotes part of the passage (giving "augmenti" for "argumenti"), but both his version and Rocaberti's offer some syntactical difficulties and may be somewhat corrupt. Carro also makes de Soto say something about More's reliance on Fisher that I cannot find in Rocaberti's version. But I have not yet been able to lay my hands on the 1577 edition of de Soto's *Defensio*. The source of de Soto's report about how More studied and decided the question of papal supremacy -- de Soto says "quae a fide dignissimis accipi testibus" -- might well have been Pole or Antonio Bonvisi (see E.E. Reynolds, *Saint Thomas More*, London, 1953, pp. 160-61).

13) - *State Papers Venice*, VI (Part I), nr 317.

14) - *Ibid.*, nr. 594.

15) - See Martin Haile, *Life of Reginald Pole* (New York, 1910), pp. 13, 168, 343. In 1518 Pole sent More friendly advice against the plague and asked his mother, the Countess of Salisbury, to send More some medicine. In the early 1520's More showed Pole one of Margaret Roper's Latin letters - for which Pole expressed the highest admiration. See *The Correspondence of Sir Thomas More*, ed. Elizabeth F. Rogers (Princeton University Press, 1947), pp. 136, 301-1, and Soeur Noëlle-Marie's article on More and Pole in *Moreana*, n° 3, pp. 24, 35.

16) - *State Papers Venice*, VI (Part I), nrs 564 and 594.

17) - Carro, I, 253-4.

18) - *Ibid.*, I, 288. De Soto died at Trent on 20 April 1563.

19) - That San Juan's "Señor don fernando de toledo" probably does not refer to the third Duke of Alba (or to his illegitimate son, also don Fernando de Toledo) is clear from a passage in the first biography of San Juan by his confessor Fr. Escrivá: "Los dos más íntimos amigos que tuvo estudiando en Salamanca (como él mismo me lo dixo) siendo ambos hijos de grandes como él, eran tales [buenos], y fueron siempre de tan excelente virtud, que el uno aviéndole ofrecido el capelo de cardenal el Papa Gregorio XIII no se atrevió a aceptarlo, queriendo más ser un clérigo particular, y emplear, y acabar la vida como la acabó santamente, andado por los lugares, predicando, confesando, y visitando los enfermos pobres, y consolándolos, y remediándolos, sin cargo alguno de almas. Este fue don Fernando de Toledo, hermano del conde de Oropesa" (Robres, p. 26). Except for a brief notice in a manuscript in the archives of the Royal College of Corpus Christi ("Libro de noticias y curiosidades del real Colegio de Corpus Christi y de su illustre fundador don Juan de Ribera . . . escrito por el doctor Jose Ventura, Colegial perpetuo del mismo," section 9, p. 3), which adds nothing to Escrivá's account, I have not been able to find any more information about Don Fernando.

20) - A fairly complete account of the first six Counts of Oropesa including their marriages and children, can be obtained by combining the information in Roberto Levillier's *Don Francisco de Toledo, Supremo Organizador del Perú* (Buenos Aires, 1935), pp. 14-27, Antonio de Sousa's *História Genealógica da Casa Real Portuguesa*, rev. by M. Lopes de Almeida and Cesar Pegado (Coimbra, 1951), IX, 1-10, and Alberto García Carraffa's *Enciclopedia Heráldica y Genealógica Hispano - Americana* (Madrid, 1919-1963), lxxxiv, 204-6.

21) - The third count would presumably not have given two sons the same name, even if one was illegitimate.

22) - Carro, I, 97, 254.

23) - A book of autograph sermons written by Don Fernando and now in the library of the Royal College has a note inside the front cover in the handwriting of San Juan which testifies not only to his friendship with Don Fernando but also to his regard for autographs and his custom of identifying manuscripts: "Estos sermones estimo yo en mucho por ser del christianísimo don Hernando de Toledo, con quien tuve muy estrecha amistad: Y porque él me los embió de su mano escritos y el que los copió sabía poco, creo que deve aver en ellos yerros. Hasta agora no los he podido ver. El primero, 'de passione,' es del maestro fray Pedro de Puertocarrero" (Robres, p. 26).

24) - The wording of San Juan's note suggests that Don Fernando had the manuscript for some time and that the Count of Oropesa merely transmitted it to him.

25) - Carro, I, 98.

26) - Boronat, pp. 243-5.

27) - Robres, pp. 453-4.

28) - He owned books by Stapleton, Henry VIII, and St. John Fisher. See Robres, p. 7, note 11, and the list of San Juan's books in a manuscript at the Royal College entitled "Libro de noticias y curiosidades del real Colegio . . ." by Jose Ventura.

29) - "Reliquias que existen en la iglesia del Real Colegio de Corpus Christi de Valencia" (Valencia, 1859) and two other lists with the same title printed at Valencia in 1876 and 1896. Neither the authenticating documents in the reliquary closet, nor the documents in the archives of the Royal College concerning the relics contain anything about the More holograph.

30) - Boronat, p. 245.

31) - "Las Insignes Reliquias de la Capilla del Real Colegio de Corpus-Christi de Valencia" (Valencia, 1947). After mentioning that More's holograph is kept in a tortoise-shell box with the holograph sermons of San Vincente Ferrer, this notice quotes (with slight variations) San Juan's note, but gives More's work the erroneous title "de Dono Patientiae". In 1960 Robres (p. xxiii) again mentioned that More's holograph was kept in the Chapel of the Relics, giving the title (with question-marks) "De Domino Patiente."