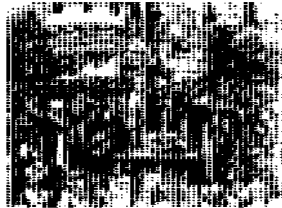


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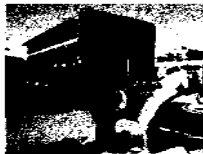
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More's Biblical Exegesis in *De tristitia Christi* : Original Interpretations and Applications¹

Clarence H. Miller

English department

St Louis University, St Louis, MO 63103

millerp2@slu.edu

In my edition of More's *De tristitia Christi* for the Yale Complete Works I attempted to find sources for all the biblical exegesis. When I could not find any source (or only remote resemblances) I was willing to suggest that More's interpretation was original, though I am aware of the difficulties of asserting a universal negative. But with that limitation we can see that More sometimes added brief new interpretations, sometimes made original applications to topical issues such as the new heresies or the duty of bishops and others to face up to them, sometimes followed Erasmian linguistic or contextual methods, and sometimes approached texts with an exactitude or analysis of probability derived from his legal skill.

Key words: *Scriptural exegesis, Heresy, Episcopal duty, Erasmian exegesis, Legal exegesis.*

Dans mon édition de De tristitia Christi de More, pour les Oeuvres Complètes de Yale, j'ai essayé de retrouver toutes les sources de l'exégèse biblique. Lorsque je n'ai reconnu aucune source (ou seulement une ressemblance lointaine) j'ai accepté de suggérer que l'interprétation de More était originale, même si je mesurais la difficulté d'affirmer un négatif universel. Cependant, tout en gardant ces limites à l'esprit, il est parfois possible de remarquer que More a ajouté de brèves et nouvelles interprétations, qu'il a parfois fourni des applications

¹ This essay is adapted from a talk given at the Thomas More Conference at the Center for Renaissance Studies at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, on August 16, 2007.

originales à des sujets cruciaux: tels que les nouvelles hérésies ou le devoir des évêques et des autres pour y répondre, ou bien qu'il a suivi la linguistique érasmienne ou ses méthodes contextuelles, et qu'il a quelquefois approché les textes avec une exactitude et une analyse des probabilités, qu'il tenait de ses talents de légiste.

Mots-clé: exégèse scripturaire, hérésie, devoir épiscopal, exégèse érasmienne, exégèse légale.

En mi edición de *De tristitia Christi* de More para los Yale Complete Works intenté localizar las fuentes de la exégesis bíblica. Cuando no podía localizar ninguna (ni siquiera alguna semejanza remota), sugería lleno de contento que aquella interpretación era original de Moro, si bien era (y soy) consciente de que me enfrentaría a una negativa universal. Aún con esa limitación, podemos ver que Moro en ocasiones añadía pequeñas interpretaciones; otras las aplicaba de forma novedosa a hechos de actualidad como las nuevas herejías o las obligaciones de los obispos y otros para enfrentarse a ellas; también en ocasiones seguía los métodos lingüísticos o contextuales de Erasmo; otras veces, por último, abordaba los textos con una exactitud o análisis de probabilidad derivados de sus habilidades legales.

Palabras Clave: Exégesis escriturística, herejía, deber episcopal, exégesis erasmiana, exégesis legal.

The second epistle of St. Peter refers to the following saying from the Book of Proverbs: "*sicut canis qui revertitur ad vomitum suum sic imprudens qui iterat stultitiam suam.*" "Like a dog returning to its vomit, an idiot repeats his folly." Today I do not intend to repeat anything about Folly but I do want to return (doggedly) to some perhaps trifling, though not unsavory, leavings from my work on More's *De tristitia Christi*- which now seems to have been long ago and far away. When after a decade or more I had done almost all the heavy lifting and seemingly endless grunt work on that book, I thought I had one section left to do: More's biblical exegesis, the sources for which I had identified pretty thoroughly in the commentary. But when I said this to Dick Sylvester, of blessed memory, he replied "no, you do not have to do that; let's run it as it is." The thump of the falling albatross must have been heard a block away.

But now after all these years I return to the exegetical leavings in *De tristitia*, the last (and in some ways the noblest) work of More's hand. More's exegesis in this work has naturally been discussed at some length by that Magister Moreanaus (alas not with us here), Germain Marc'hadour, in *Thomas More et la Bible*² though Germain was not primarily interested in More's exegetical sources. Almost certainly among the books More had in the Tower, the books taken away from him on June 12, 1535, was Gerson's *Monotessaron*, a biblical concordance or conflation upon which More explicitly based his meditation on the agony in the garden. He almost surely also had Gerson's *De oratione et eius valore*, which he closely paraphrases at one point (p. 1035-36).³ We know that the More family regularly discussed scriptural texts using Nicolas de Lyra's commentary. That work, together with the *Glossa ordinaria* and the *Catena aurea* could have provided most (but not all) of More's sources for his explication of *De tristitia*. But we also need to remember that the one excellence More was willing to assume for himself was his memory, which must have been extraordinary. I also found sources for his explanations in many other places, and I tried to cover the whole exegetical waterfront (as it were), so that when I found More propounding an interpretation or implication I couldn't find anywhere, I was willing to believe that he was offering something original with him. Naturally, I am aware of the difficulty of affirming a universal negative. (In those days, of course, we didn't have the wonderful searchable database of the *Patrologia Latina*, which can now make all of us look extraordinarily learned and proficient in patristic exegesis).

Let me begin with some places in which More adds fairly simple interpretations I could find nowhere else.

On the text "They went out to the Mount of Olives", More's interpretations of the olive branch as a sign of peace between God and man and of olive oil as a sign of the anointing of the apostles by the

² Paris, Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1969, p. 338-52, 447-55.

³ Nevertheless, in his Letter to Bugenhagen he objects mightily to Luther's wholesale importation of irony as an interpretation of biblical commands to do good works: they are allegedly commanded precisely to show us that we cannot do them. CW 7, 84/5-87/6

Holy Spirit are not traditional, though there are slight hints of them of the *Glossa ordinaria* and in Aquinas' *Commentary on Matthew and John* (11/4-8).

When Christ first told his apostles to watch and pray, and then went a short distance apart to pray alone, More goes beyond the suggestion of Cyril in the *Catena aurea* that Christ did not need the prayers of anyone else. Rather, More suggests, he told the apostles to pray in order to teach Christians to ask for the prayers of others in times of danger (109/6-7). Of course, More himself was in danger when he wrote this.

At the approach of Judas and the soldiers, Christ said to his apostles "Get up, let us go." More's basic understanding of the text is practical and original: "If you cannot stay awake to pray at least get up and go away quickly lest you be unable to escape." But he adds the usual interpretation: "Go forward with confidence to meet the enemy." (339/6-7)

Various reasons had been given why the priests added their own servants to the Roman cohort which came to seize Jesus. Aquinas, for example, suggested that the pharisees thought there might be less resistance to an arrest made by gentiles if respected Jews were part of the arresting force. But More gives three original and practical possibilities: 1) the pharisees did not have enough confidence in the Roman soldiers, 2) they thought extra numbers would prevent Christ from escaping in the confusion and darkness, 3) or they wanted to arrest all the apostles, without letting any of them escape. (363/6-365/2). There is only a hint of the first reason in a comment by Chrysostom in the *Catena aurea*.

After Judas identified Christ with a kiss, he directed the soldiers to "take him away carefully." More's indignant outburst is original with him:

Oh the lengths to which greed will go? you treacherous scoundrel, couldn't you be satisfied with betraying your Lord ... into the hands of impious men by the signal of a kiss ... [Did you have to] meddle in the duties of the soldiers ... as if the villainous magistrates who sent them had not given them adequate instruction, and there was a need for a circumspect

man like you to add your own gratuitous cautions and commands....

And More's Ciceronian sarcasm is even more orotund than the shortened quotation I have given here. (383/8--385/7).

Finally, considering the question why John goes out of his way to give the name of Malchus, the servant of the high priest whose right ear was sliced off by Peter, More departed from the ordinary interpretation (stemming from Chrysostom and others) that John did so to make his readers more certain of the event because of the historical detail. More is original in suggesting another reason for giving the name of the servant: namely, to show that Malchus was known to have standing with the high priest and was hence even more proud than his master, according to a saying of Juvenal that the servants of the proud are likely to be even more proud than their masters. More suggests that this overbearing man thrust himself forward and irritated Peter because of his aggression. That is, he shifts from the evidence of historicity to the psychological motivation of Peter's action. (473/8-10)

Now let us consider places in which More gives a new twist or application to a traditional interpretation.

Thus, for example, he extends the allegory of Malchus' ear to apply to heretics. Concerning the allegorical meaning of the cutting and restoration of Malchus' right ear, the traditional interpretation (derived from Augustine and Jerome) applied the meaning of Malchus' name, "king," to the Jewish people, who were once kingly but became servants to the letter of the Old Law (represented by the high priest). The advent of the gospel (preached by Peter and the other apostles) means that the Jews hear only the letter, with the left ear, until Christ restores them to true kingship by reattaching the right ear, the understanding of the spirit and the liberty of the new law. (509/1-10). More gives a different (and so far as I can tell, original) interpretation which applies to heresies like those he had fought against for so many years. The high priest and his followers stand for heresiarchs and their followers. Malchus, whose regal name makes him stand for reason, becomes a servant of heresy when he loses his right ear, the ear with which he ought to listen to the true faith, and follows heresy instead

with his left ear, until Christ restores his right ear. But More uses the episode to distinguish different kinds of heretics: some out of sudden impulse or misplaced zeal and some out of stubborn malice.

Some, [he says,] turn to heresies out of determined malice. Then the ear is not cut off by a swift stroke but rots slowly and gradually as the devil infuses his venom, until finally the prurulent parts harden and block the passages with a clot so that nothing good can penetrate within. Such persons, alas, are hardly ever restored to health.... But the ear cut off by a sudden stroke and sent whirling in one piece to the ground because of imprudent zeal, stands for those who turn from the truth to a false appearance of the truth because they are overcome by a sudden impulse; or it also represents those who are deceived by a well-meaning zeal, [like the apostle Paul]. ... But Christ often takes pity on the misery of such persons and with his own hand picks up from the earth the ear which has been cut off by a sudden impulse or by ill-considered zeal ... and makes it once more capable of listening to true doctrine. (511/5--515/2)

More is aware of his own originality in applying the event to heresy, for he goes on to say: "I know that the ancient fathers elicited various mysteries from this one passage, as each one, aided by the grace of the Holy spirit, made his own particular discovery. But it is no part of my plan to review them all here because to do so would make too long an interruption in the account of the historical events." (515/2-6) More's original interpretation here shows that he did make allowances for those who are impulsively misguided or overzealous in their false beliefs; the keynote of true heresy is stubborn malice.

More's struggles against heresy lead him to interpret some passages in a way that is not totally original but which adapts them specifically and in a new way to heresies current at the time. Strictly speaking, these are not so much new interpretations as new applications of Scripture to doctrinal matters of contemporary urgency. Thus when Christ prayed in the garden "My father, if this cup cannot pass away without my drinking it, let your will be done," More adds a short passage making

the connection with the "Our father" of the Lord's prayer. De Lyra had made the point that only Christ can say "My father" because he is truly and uniquely the Son of God, whereas we are only adoptive sons. When we say "Our father," according to More,

we acknowledge that we are all brothers who have one father in common. But if anyone is not content to be like other men but 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 a 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. (179/2-11)

Here More updates the usual interpretation by applying it to the reformers who claim private inspiration instead of sharing in the common inspiration of the church.

Eucharistic heresy in particular gives a new overtone to the interpretation of some events in the garden. More applies the text "The Son of Man will be betrayed into the hands of sinners" (*first*) to priests who hand over the eucharist to their parishioners insisting on both species, or (*second*) to those who assert the reality of the bread and wine together with the body of Christ (consubstantiation), or (*third*) those who preach the reality only of the bread and wine (the sacramentarian heresy). Concerning the sacramentarians More asks

how little difference is there, I ask you, between them and those who took Christ captive that night? How little difference between them and those troops of Pilate who in jest bent their knees before Christ as if they were honoring him while they insulted him and called him the king of the Jews, just as these people [the sacramentarians] kneel before the eucharist and call it the body of Christ--which according to their own profession they no more believe than the soldiers of Pilate believed Christ was a king. (357/7-14)

And later, when Judas called Christ "Rabbi," More finds a parallel in the treatment of the eucharist by the utraquists (who insist on reception under both species) and the sacramentarians:

And still, though they hotly insist that both species are necessary for the laity, most of them--both laymen and priests--eliminate the reality, that is the body and blood, from both species, keeping only the words "body and blood." In this respect, indeed, they are not unlike Pilate's guards, who mocked Christ by kneeling before him and saluting him as the king of the Jews. For these men likewise genuflect in veneration of the eucharist and call it the body and blood of Christ, though they no more believe it is the one or the other than the soldiers of Pilate believed Christ was a king." (393/6--395/6)

Another upheaval of More's time, the concurrence of the English bishops with Henry's seizure of the church in England, gave a new edge to More's very extended application of the apostles sleeping in the garden to emergent occasions in England, where only one of all the bishops, St. John Fisher, defied Henry by professing the truth as an apostolic teacher, knowing full well the price he would pay for doing so. More says some bishops are negligent in professing the truth out of sadness, grief for their flock, discouragement, what we would call depression. Others hold back out of fear for their own lives. Many people may be afraid, both laymen and bishops, but More makes an important distinction between the duty of laymen and that of prelates, the successors of the sleeping apostles. Fear for one's life cannot lead anyone to deny Christ. But according to More, though this rule applies to

everyone without exception when they have been seized and there is no way out, ... [Christ] attaches a separate charge over and above this to the high office of prelates: he does not allow them to be concerned only about their own souls or merely to take refuge in silence until they are dragged out and forced to choose between open profession or lying

dissimulation, but he also wished them to come forth if they see that the flock entrusted to them is in danger and to face the danger of their own accord for the good of their flock.

Here More is actually differentiating his case from that of John Fisher. Even worse than the bishop who remains silent out of fear is one whose fear drives him to forsake Christ openly and publicly. These are not merely like the sleeping apostles but rather like Peter when he denied Christ. Worst of all are bishops who openly preach heresy for sordid gain or out of corrupt ambition. They are like the betrayer Judas. But More also insists that for all such negligent or fearful or corrupt bishops the road to repentance is always open, as it was for Peter and even for Judas if he had followed his instinct to repent and had not despaired. (259/6--283/2) Surely this frank and extended analysis and exhortation to the bishops of Henry's England might well have been one reason for More's writing this treatise in Latin rather than in the English he directed to laymen, particularly if he knew ahead of time how he intended to interpret the message of the sleeping apostles as it applied to the bishops of England. And there is reason to believe that More knowingly smuggled the treatise out of the Tower (p. 717). He wrote it with a public audience in mind and with the clarity desirable for publication. He must have had at least a faint hope that it would be published.

Thus More makes new applications of Scriptural texts to heresy and to the duty of the English bishops of his time. But it is also useful to note how he employs secular learning in the exegesis of Scripture according to the theological program of the humanists.

This feature appears in a place where More sides with Erasmus against such mighty authorities as Origen, Chrysostom, Hilary, Jerome, and Augustine. When Jesus returned to his sleeping apostles for the third time he said: "Why are you sleeping? Sleep on now and take your rest. That is enough. ... Get up, let us go. Behold, the one who will betray me is at hand." The dominant patristic interpretation took "Sleep on now and take your rest" as a literal command with an allegorical meaning. Augustine took the command literally but also allowed for an extended pause after "Sleep on now and take your rest" imagining that,

after they had slept on for a while, Jesus commanded "Get up, let us go." More sides with Erasmus (and also Theophylactus and De Lyra) in taking the command "Sleep on and take your rest" as ironical. He found the literal interpretation, even with his beloved Augustine's ingenious twist, very improbable because of the context. According to More, Christ

had hardly said "Sleep" before he added "That is enough," as if to say: "Now there is no need for you to sleep any longer. It is enough that throughout the whole time you ought to have been staying awake, you have been sleeping---and that even against my direct orders. Now there is no time left to sleep, not even to sit down. You must get up immediately. ...Otherwise, so far as sleep is concerned, sleep on now and take your rest--you have my permission--that is if you can. But you will certainly not be able to. For there are people coming. ...

Christ had already rebuked them twice for sleeping. Here he does so again, and it is very unlikely that he meant to grant them time to sleep now when the danger was the greatest as the enemy approached. More noted that some pious men are shocked by such irony and fail to understand Scripture correctly because they are "not sufficiently versed in the figures of speech which sacred Scripture customarily takes over from common speech." And he goes on to point out two other places in Scripture which are obviously ironical. (289/11--291/11)⁴

But I find More's exegetical originality most interesting when he applies his extraordinary legal skill to the understanding of the biblical text. Once at least he does so in a straightforward way. When Christ rebukes Peter saying "For everyone who takes up the sword will perish by the sword," More goes beyond the usual *prima facie* interpretation that the violent will perish by violence. So far as I can tell, More is

⁴ Nevertheless, in his *Letter to Bubenhausen*, he objects mightily to Luther's wholesale importation of irony as an interpretation of biblical commands to do good works: they are allegedly commanded precisely to show us we cannot do them. *CW* 7, 84/5-87/6.

alone in interpreting Christ's words as alluding to a specific passage in the *Digesta* of the *Corpus iuris civilis*, "which" (More says) "also applied to the Jews at that time." (491/13--493/9). That law applied to those who struck to kill, even if they did not kill; and More finds it unlikely that Peter aimed for the ear and not the head. He anticipates the objection that "everyone has the right to use force in order to protect an innocent person from criminal assault" (which might apply to Peter) but notes that this objection "would require a longer discussion than I could introduce at this point." (493/10-13) And those who know More can imagine how detailed and persuasive such a discussion would probably have been.

On at least two other occasions, More approached the biblical narrative in the manner of a forensic, rhetorical advocate, analyzing the evidence in the most probable, persuasive way. One question usually considered was why it was necessary to have Judas identify Jesus. One reason sometimes given (for example, by Origen, Chrysostom, and De Lyra) was that Jesus had previously escaped the hands of those attempting to seize him. But since those cases occurred in daylight when he was easily recognized and since he escaped by his divine power, More claims that they are not comparable to this attempted capture. Another reason (given by De Lyra) was that James the Lesser (called the brother of Christ) looked very much like him so that they needed to have Christ distinguished precisely from his lookalike. But since they could easily have taken both and later distinguished one from the other, what need for a signal? More proceeds to present a more likely scenario:

The gospel makes it clear that the night was far advanced, and, although daybreak was drawing near, it was still nighttime and quite dark, as is evident from the torches and lanterns they carried, which gave enough light to make *them* visible from some distance but hardly enough for them to discern anyone *else* from afar. And, although on that night they perhaps had the advantage of some faint light from the full moon, it could only have been enough to make out the shapes of bodies in the distance, not to get a good view of facial features and distinguish one person from another.

Hence, if they went rushing in at random in the hope of capturing all of them at once, each man choosing his victim without knowing who he was, they were afraid, and rightly so, that out of so many some (by all odds) might perhaps get away and that one of the fugitives might well be the very man they had come for. For those who are in the greatest danger are likely to be the quickest to look out for themselves. Thus, whether they thought of this or whether Judas himself suggested it, they set their trap by having the betrayer go on ahead to single out the Lord by embracing and kissing him. In this way, when they had all fixed their eyes on him alone, each and every one of them could try to get his hands on him. After that, if any of the others got away, it would not be such a dangerous matter. (379/10--383/6)

More interprets here in the light of the full context and relevant evidence from elsewhere in the way advocated by Erasmus and other humanist exegetes.

Finally, one of the persistent questions in the interpretation of the passage about the capture of Jesus concerns the young man whose cloak was seized but who fled naked leaving it behind (Mark 14:51-52) (565-611). It is fascinating to watch More taking up the usual suspects, examining them carefully, and then offering a detailed hypothesis which accepts one of the three candidates. Erasmus had mentioned the three possibilities: James the brother of the Lord called the Just, John the evangelist, and a young servant of the family where Jesus and his apostles had celebrated the Passover. De Lyra had mentioned the same three. No one offered much support for James, but Gregory and especially Bede, had decided that John the evangelist was the most likely because of his young age, which had been confirmed by Jerome. Bede had proposed that after escaping naked, John went and got dressed before he went with Peter to the house of the high priest, where he obtained entrance for Peter, and then went on to stand beneath the crucified Christ. More finds this improbable:

Now there can be no doubt that at all these times and in all these places John was wearing clothes. For he was a disciple of Christ, not of the Cynic sect; and therefore, though he had enough sense not to avoid nakedness when circumstances required it or necessity demanded it, nevertheless I hardly think his virgin modesty would have allowed him to go out in public naked, for everyone to see, with no good reason at all. This difficulty they try to explain away by saying that he went somewhere else in the meantime and put on other clothes--a point I will not dispute, but it hardly seems likely to me, especially when I see in this passage that he continuously followed after Christ with Peter and that he entered the residence of Annas ... together with Jesus. (573/1-3)

Moreover, More points out that the language of the passage is against the attribution to John the apostle, for the text says that *all* the apostles fled and the one who fled naked was said to be "a certain" young man (Greek: *έτις τις*), that is, one not known (577/3-4). More goes on to create a scenario about the young servant, providing considerable psychological and narrative verisimilitude. He concludes that he has no doubt that this young man "even now lives with Christ in everlasting glory in heaven, where I hope and pray that we will one day live with him. Then he himself will tell us who he was, and we will get a most pleasant full account of many other details of what happened that night which are not contained in Scripture." (587/3-6)⁵

⁵ Even the vigorous exertions of the past two centuries of biblical scholarship have gone no further in finding out anything factual about the young man. The Anchor Bible on Mark 15:51-52 lets us know that we really don't know: "Assuming some historical ground for the story, there have been suggestions in plenty for the identity of the young man, from John, James the Lord's brother, to (in recent times) John Mark. ... There is certainly an air of eyewitness information about this section but the most we can say of vv. 51-52 is that they afford us a glimpse of a short oral narrative in the process of transmission." *The Anchor Bible: Mark, a New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, ed. C. S. Mann, vol. 27, New York, London, Toronto, Sidney, Doubleday, 1964, p. 599.

More also takes the young man's flight (and that of the apostles) as a framework to discuss a point he had already taken up at length: it is permissible, even desirable, to escape from persecution, perhaps out of fear of weakness, when this can be done without denying Christ, as the young man did. Here More is following Bede fairly closely. He sums up briefly his previous analysis of the duties of the eager and the reluctant martyrs. The flight of the apostles, on the other hand, was not without fault because, as with the English bishops, it was their duty to stand by Christ (589-91). He also takes up another traditional allegory explained by Bede and quoted in the *Glossa ordinaria*: the loose cloth which the young man let go stands for worldly possessions, which must be sacrificed and given up if religious duty requires it. But he gives a new and vivid twist to this traditional allegory. The young man wore only a simple linen garment, and even that was loosely fastened so that he could slip out of it easily. So too, "just as a pot-bellied man slowed down by his fat paunch, or a man who goes around wearing a heavy load of clothes is hardly in a condition to run fast, so too the man who is hemmed in by a belt full of money-bags is hardly able to escape when troubles suddenly descend on him and put him in a bind." The idea is traditional, though More makes it quite vivid, with some help from Juvenal and Horace. But More is original in going on to consider the case of the poor man who is so attached to his paltry goods that he refuses to let them go when religious duty requires it. "Neither will a man run very fast or very far if his clothing, however light it may be, is so tightly laced and knotted that he cannot breathe freely. ... A man who is wearing only a little but has it tied around his neck so tightly that he has to carry it with him wherever he runs" cannot escape from a religious crisis by giving up his goods. Some rich men, More points out, are not corrupted by their wealth.

One sees rich men--less often, it is true, than I would like--but still, thank God, one sometimes sees exceedingly rich men who would rather lose everything they have than keep anything at all by offending God through sin. These men have many clothes, but they are not tightly confined by them, so that when they need to run away from danger, they escape easily by throwing off their clothes.

But More makes the shrewd, original, and untraditional observation that a poor man may also fall into sin because, unlike the young man who slips easily out of his garment, the poor man may be too tightly bound to the little he has.

There are some, [More says,] and far more of them than I would wish--who happen to have only light garments and quite skimpy outfits and yet have so welded their affections to those poor riches of theirs that you could sooner strip skin from flesh than separate them from their goods. Such a person had better get going while there is still time. For once someone gets hold of his clothes, he will sooner die than leave his linen cloth behind. (601-05)

Finally, More goes on to consciously add a new interpretation:

Now anyone who is willing to devote a little more attention to this deed of the young man can see that it offers us another teaching, even more forceful than the first. For the body is, as it were, the garment of the soul.... Hence, just as the clothes are worth much less than the body, so too the body is far less precious than the soul ...Thus, the example of the young man warns us about what sort of clothing for our souls our bodies ought to be when we are faced with such trials; they should not be obese from debachery and flabby from dissolute living but thin like the linen cloth, with the fat worked off by fasting; and then we should not be so strongly attached to them that we cannot willingly cast them off when God's cause demands it." (610-11)

There are hints elsewhere in the New Testament of the analogy between the body and the soul as like the relation of a garment to the body, but no one before More seems to have applied it to the young man and his linen garment. And to tell the truth, it is not particularly striking. But More goes on to give a fairly lively presentation of the traditional analogy of the fleeing young man with Joseph fleeing from the advances of Potiphar's wife. More concludes his treatment of the young man with a striking simile of the wise serpent sloughing off its

old skin by the tribulation of rubbing it against thorns and thistles, and coming forth young and shining, just as the faithful Christian will pass through suffering to be quickly carried up to heaven, "shining and young and never more to feel the effects of old age." (617/3-5) More had precedents for his striking figure in such pagan writers as Statius and Martial; but he is closest to Augustine (commenting on another text, Matt. 10:16). But no one (so far as I know) had applied it to the young man slipping out of his garment. On the whole, what is most striking about More's treatment of the young man who fled naked is its multiple blending and enhancement of traditional interpretations, some of which he has elaborated in new and vivid ways.

Thus we see that More sometimes added brief new interpretations, sometimes made original applications to topical issues such as the new heresies or the duty of bishops and others to face up to them, sometimes followed Erasmian linguistic or contextual methods, and sometimes approached texts with an exactitude or analysis of probability derived from his legal skill.

We turn to *De tristitia* because of its profound resonance, both personal, historical, and universal. In its biblical exegesis, as in other ways, we experience a strong and lively mind, both wholesome and holy.



Endgame: The Genesis of More's *The Sadness of Christ*¹

Seymour Baker House

Mount Angel Seminary

seymour.house@mtangel.edu

This paper locates the genesis of More's *The Sadness of Christ* to his understanding that by late spring, 1535 he faced martyrdom. It tracks the striking shift in both genre and dominant metaphor from the *Dialogue of Comfort* to the *Tristitia*, and uses More's letters (and a return to the legal and political maneuvers of his case) to provide a helpful telemetry in accounting for those shifts. Additionally, it argues that because More chose to interpret his situation in terms of Christ's struggle in Gethsemane, he saw his martyrdom as part of the timeless Christian struggle to bear faithful witness. *The Sadness* becomes a dialogue between reason and fear as it traces the final working out of More's decision to suffer death for his conscience and his record of that process as his last gift to those who would follow.

Key words: *De tristitia Christi*, *Sadness of Christ*, martyrdom, Christic figure, conscience.

Cet article date la genèse de La Tristesse du Christ de More à la fin du printemps 1535, lorsqu'il comprit qu'il devait affronter le martyre. Il retrace le changement radical, à la fois dans le genre et la métaphore dominante, qui s'est opéré entre le Dialogue du Réconfort et De tristitia et explore les Lettres de More (ainsi que les nouvelles manœuvres judiciaires et politiques dont il fut l'objet) qui fournissent une télémétrie utile permettant d'expliquer ce changement. L'article montre, en outre, que c'est parce qu'il a choisi d'interpréter sa situation selon les termes de la lutte du Christ à Gethsémani, que More a compris son martyre comme

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