

GEORGE JOYE'S CONTROVERSY WITH THOMAS MORE *

Among the advocates of radical Protestantism who crossed pens with Thomas More was George Joye¹ and since their controversy has, to date, received scant attention,² it is the purpose of this paper to examine their exchange, focusing specifically on Joye's polemical technique.

In order to see the works they wrote against each other in their proper setting, it is necessary briefly to indicate More's part generally in the campaign against the Reformers. The first fruit of Bishop Cuthbert Tunstal's 1528 commission to More to combat heresy was More's *Dialogue Concerning Heresies* (1529), directed chiefly against Luther and Tyndale. Tyndale replied in 1531 by publishing *An Answer unto Sir Thomas More's Dialogue*, which More sought to rebut in *The Confutation of Tyndale's Answer*, published in two parts in 1532 and 1533. Meanwhile a friend of Tyndale's, John Frith, in 1532 wrote *A Christian Sentence and True Judgement of the Most Honorable Sacrament of Christ's Body & Blood*. This was not printed until about 1545, but More saw it in manuscript, and answered in a letter signed 7 December, 1532, which Joye attacked anonymously in *The Supper of the Lord* in 1533. In December, 1533, William Rastell published More's *The Answer to the First Part of ... The Supper of the Lord*. Joye responded with *The Subversion of More's False Foundation* in 1534.

The dispute in these works concerns essentially two matters : the nature of authority in the Church, and the nature of the Eucharist. The Reformers held that the ultimate authority on all matters of Christian doctrine and conduct was the Scriptures, while More's side contended that ultimate authority rested in the teachings of a divinely guided Church. Secondly, More defended the doctrine of the Real Presence, while many of his opponents challenged that doctrine, Joye believing the Eucharist to be purely symbolic.

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The most common method of disputation during the early Tudor period was to cite a passage from one's opponent – not always accurately – and then to attack the cited passage in appended commentary. While Joye usually favors this tactic, he did not adopt it in either of his two works against More. The *Supper* takes the form of biblical exposition concerning the Eucharist, accompanied by attacks on More's views, which are usually presented in paraphrase. The *Subversion* is a more direct rebuttal to the Catholic apologist – chiefly to his views about the inerrancy of the Church, a subject Joye also touched on in the *Supper* – and again Joye paraphrases rather than quotes his opponent. Neither of Joye's two works is noteworthy for its form – as were, for example, More's *Dialogue* and his *Supplication of Souls*³ – except that by not committing himself to direct quotation, Joye could determine the order of argument, keep his work at a reasonable length, and therefore be less in danger of wearying his readers. Of course, his method also makes it easier to misrepresent an opponent's views.

The specific polemical techniques Joye employed against More consist mainly of various rhetorical devices, some interesting accusations, and a use of contemporary politics.

By far his favorite device is what might be called "ironic refrain" or ironic echoing of his opponent's expressions. For instance, it is with a dig at a passage in More's *Confutation* that Joye leaves his opponent with a question to answer: More having undertaken to teach Tyndale the distinctions between "no" and "nay", as well as "yes" and "yea,"⁴ Joye comments on the question he has put to More that "If he say no, or nay: the Scripture is playne agaynst him. If ye say yea, or yes...", then More will get into even greater difficulty.⁵

Again, in his letter against Frith, More had adopted what could be interpreted as a patronizing attitude toward his opponent, based on Frith's youth, referring to "thys yonge man" and "thys yonge brother" who thinks he can "se forther with his yonge syghte, than I can see wyth myn olde eyen and my spectacles..."⁶ More's main point is that through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Church cannot err in any matter vital to the faith,⁷ and it is this contention which Joye attempts to ridicule in the *Supper* by means of ironic refrain. He refers to what he pictures as More's advanced years (*Ww*, p. 460), and plays a number of variations on the theme of More's age: "Lo here may

ye see what a feruent fayth this old man hath" (*Ibid.*, p. 462), and several lines later, More having made a statement concerning the power of God, Joye comments that "This man with his old eyen & spectacles seeth farre in Gods sight..." (*Ibid.*), and again, referring to Frith, "the young man here causing him to put on his spectacles and poore better and more wisely with his old eyen vpon S. Iohns Gospel..." (*Ibid.*, p. 463). Once more pretending solicitude for his opponent's age and eyesight, Joye begins another statement with: "...then do I lay before your old eyen and spectacles to..." (*Ibid.*, p. 466).

More teaches us, Joye writes, that Christ is only half a Savior, that to be saved we must have the pope's faith, that we must have some good works of our own and some merits of the saints, must go on pilgrimages, and we must believe More. "And why? because More & his chirche so teche vs/ and Moris chirche cannot erre" (*Subv.*, sigs. A2^v-A3). And if More teaches us that to call on God only is not enough, but that we must also pray to saints' images, "if (I saye) More teche vs this idolatry/ yet we must beleue it: for Moris chirche cannot erre" (sig. A3). And if More says God alone through Christ's merits is not the source of our salvation, but that we must also receive salvation and grace through the saints – "must we beleue... for Moris chirche cannot erre" (sig. A3). And if More teaches that the Scriptures are not sufficient to lead us to our salvation, but that we also need the teachings of the Church – "certayn vnwritten verities of More his owne fayning," we must believe him, "for Moris chirche cannot erre" (sigs. A3-A3^v).

More's contention that certain "vnwritten verities" are necessary for salvation⁸ is also derided by constant ironic repetition. Sometimes Joye combines repetition with wordplay, a rhetorical device of which he seems extremely fond. Charging More with inconsistency, Joye claims that while More now alleges the perpetual virginity of Mary as an "vnwritten veritie," More had previously claimed he could prove the truth of that belief from Scripture, "whiche now written vnwritten veritie hee numbereth a litle before among his vnwritten vanities... verities I should say" (*Ww*, p. 463). Here Joye adds the "slip-of-tongue" device, a kind of compressed *praeteritio*, to his wordplay.

Most of Joye's attempts to use rhetorical devices polemically – unlike the efforts of his more gifted brethren such as Tyndale and Bale – are of the obvious type just noted. It is

therefore not surprising that on the title page of his *Subversion* he indulges in the tired joke on More's name, by telling his readers that "Moros in Greke is stultus in Latyn/ a fool in Englysshe," although, as we shall see, he does make quite effective use of the concept of More the poet-fool-jester who wrote *Utopia*.

Another device of Joye's might be called "polemical *exemplum*,"⁹ that is, an illustration provided ostensibly to clarify the point being discussed but which itself attacks one's opponent. Thus in the *Supper*, to illustrate More's ostensibly faulty reasoning about the Real Presence, Joye complains that More argues that "Christ may make his body in many, or in all places at once, *Ergo*, it is in many or in all places at once..." How false that reasoning is, he comments, everyone can see :

A like argument, God may shew More the truth and call him to repentaunce, as he did Paul for persecutyng his Church : *Ergo*, More is conuerted to God. Or, God may let him run of an indurate hart with Pharao, and at last take an open and soden vengeaunce vppon him for persecutyng hys worde, and burnyng his poore members : *Ergo*, it is done already.¹⁰

Sometimes Joye manages to combine polemical *exemplum* with wordplay, as he does in an attempt to destroy another of More's arguments supporting the Real Presence. With his customary care to report opposing arguments to make them sound foolish, Joye informs his readers that More argues that because one face can yield many reflections in a broken mirror, therefore one body can be in many places at the same time.¹¹ "But," says Joye, "I aske *More*, when hee seeth hys owne face in so many glasses... wherewith he faceth vs out the truth," whether that is a reflected image or substance he sees (*Ww*, p. 463).

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Accusation is the cliché of controversy, but the specifics of accusation often constitute one of the more interesting aspects of polemics, as they do in Joye's diatribes against More.

A standard accusation among Tudor polemicists — standard because so effective — was that the opposition really knew it was wrong but refused to admit its error ; and one could supply a host of reasons for an opponent's intransigence, ranging from the domination of the devil to affection for the devil's servant,

Mammon. While Joye probably believed in the former possibility, he chose to publicize the latter, namely, More's alleged venality. He accused More of having undertaken his defence of the Catholic Church "ether for money or for the honour of his lorde the Cardinal..." (*Sub.*, sig. A2). Such an accusation, meant to impugn the faith being defended and the good faith of the defender, was lent credibility in More's case because it was known that his apologies had been commissioned and that he had been offered payment for his efforts. What Joye either did not know or chose to ignore was that More had refused the money.¹² Joye repeats the charge that even More does not believe in the cause he is defending, informing his readers that "More belyke mistrusteth his parte and defendeth it w^t a naughty conscience" (*Sub.*, sig. D7v).

If accusation was the standard ingredient of polemics, the charge of misquotation was the commonplace of accusation, but in his attack on More, Joye for once went beyond the standard and accused his opponent not only of misquotation, but also of wholesale forgery. The work in question is William Barlowe's *A Dialogue Describing the Original Ground of These Lutheran Factions* (1531), and Joye probably was skeptical concerning its purported authorship because Barlowe had been a Lutheran. Possibly Joye had not heard of Barlowe's reconversion to Catholicism, and therefore considered him incapable of attacking Lutherans. Further evidence in support of Joye's fathering the work on More, as did others, was the fact that it was printed by William Rastell, More's nephew and printer of his polemics.

Joye therefore concludes his commentary in the *Supper* on Christ's words of institution with a startling claim :

Now haue ye the very pure sense of these Christs wordes, this is my body, that is to say, this signifieth or representeth my body takyng *Est*, for *significat*. As *M. More* hym selfe vttered it in his Dialogue putt forth in *William Barlowes* name, recityng the opinions of *Oecolampadius* and *Zwinglius* : saying, this is my body, is as much to say as this signifieth my body...¹³

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By far the most interesting accusations Joye makes against More are those which involve the Utopia and which

picture its author as a "poet" and a jester. In a period during which the line between "fiction" and "lie" in many minds faded from thin to invisible,¹⁴ it must have been irresistible for Joye to use More's authorship of the book about the imaginary commonwealth to indicate that the Champion of the Church was a "poet" who habitually dealt in fiction rather than fact. After all, the author of *Utopia* had brazenly introduced "poetry" into doctrinal debate, what with his fictional setting of the *Dialogue* and the speeches of the suffering souls in his *Supplication*. Often the charge that More was a "poet" was accompanied by the accusation that he was a "jester", with the implicit or explicit point that in neither role was he worthy of credence. One suspects that the attacks on More for using humor in religious controversy¹⁵ originated not only from his opponents' realization of how potent a weapon humor was as used by him, but also from their genuine puzzlement at someone who saw nothing wrong with leavening weighty doctrinal debate with "merry tales".

More always perverts God's Word, complains Joye — "this Poete" calls black, white (*Ww.*, p. 460), and if "ye will beleue what so euer More can fayne... can this Poete faine you an other church then Christes..." (*Ww.*, p. 461). Joye claims that everything More "imagineth & fayneth" is not true (*Ibid.*), calls More a "pontificall Poet" (*Ibid.*, p. 463), and concludes that with an apologist such as More, the Church needs no detractors, so that had More not written in defence of purgatory,

had he not come beggyng for the Clergy from Purgatory, with his supplication of soules... Purgatory peradventure had serued them yet another yeare : neither had it so soone haue bene quenched, nor the poore soule and Proctour there bene... so farre coniuered into hys owne *Vtopia*... (*Ibid.*, p. 476).

The implication is, of course, that purgatory is as real as Utopia.

The proto-Puritan attitude to "poetry" and jesting can be seen in Joye's attempt to disqualify More's judgment on purgatory, not only because More "invented" it poetically, but also because he played the buffoon on so serious a doctrinal question. If any man wants light, writes Joye, let him search the Scriptures —

and go not/ in thingis concerninge lyfe/ vnto dede spritis faynyng themselues to come frome hell or purgatory/ as

did More of late... faynyng to haue come fro thence with his boke... (*Sub.*, sig. E4^v).

This is one of Joye's more effective polemical manipulations of prose : there is the godly anger, but there are also overtones of dark and suspect intercourse with demonic powers, and the rather clever turning of More's dramatization of the souls against him, yielding the image of More ascending to earth with his hellish tablets dictated by Satan, like some anti-Mosaic and certainly anti-Christian prophet.

And so More "trifleth out the truth" (*Ww.*, p. 464), and the ungodly ceremonies of Rome are defended "with such other vnwritten vanities, as *M. More* lysteth to iest and tryful out the truth" (*Ibid.*, p. 473), comments Joye indignantly, a little later declaring that to use "sophisticall sophismes, and to tryfull out the truth with tauntes and mockes, as *M. More* doth, is no Christen maner" (*Ibid.*, p. 475), adding that More "doth but mocke it [the truth] out when he cannot soyle it" (*Ibid.*, p. 478).

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Finally to be considered is the use Joye makes against More of what might broadly be called "contemporary politics."

The one incident Joye uses against More so frequently that it almost becomes an irrelevant "clincher" to every argument — as More had used Luther's marriage as rebuttal to every Protestant argument¹⁶ — is the case of Elizabeth Barton. The Nun of Kent claimed to know by divine revelation that Henry VIII would lose his throne and die within six months if he put away Catherine of Aragon and remarried. She and some accomplices eventually confessed to being impostors, and early in 1534 a bill of attainder was introduced into the House of Lords, which included the names of Fisher and More; however, More's name was eventually removed.¹⁷ Actually, More had never encouraged the woman, and it is clear that he was much too shrewd either to have been taken in by her or to allow his enemies to use this case to entrap him.¹⁸

However, Joye was writing his diatribe in the latter months of 1533 and must have published the *Subversion* early in 1534,¹⁹ probably while More's name still stood in the bill on a charge of failing to reveal treason. More's delicate political position must have appeared to Joye as "heaven-sent" proof of the Protestant theory of history, first enunciated in England by

Tyndale, that Roman religion and treason against England's crown have historically gone hand in hand.²⁰

Politics aside, the fact that some in the Church had professed to credit the Nun's prophecies, and that subsequently she had confessed her imposture, gave Joye much ammunition against More's claim that one of the signs the Catholic Church was the Church of Christ were the many miracles God had wrought on her behalf, while the Reformers could show none.²¹ Therefore, Joye comments gleefully on this latest "miracle". More tells us, writes Joye, that there are many "vnwritten verites (as he calleth them)," which must be believed on pain of damnation, which the Apostles handed down, "vntil thei came to Moris chirche... and euen at laste vnto the holy mayde of kent Moris miracle maker/ which now hauinge the holy goste (as More saith) assistent/ cannot erre" (*Sub.*, A2^v). More, of course, had never claimed that either Elizabeth Barton or any one individual was incapable of error, as Joye's phraseology implies. Again, discussing the characteristics of the true Church, Joye comments that these are to be found in the Scriptures and that they are

not glittering glory/ tyranny & power/ delusion of ye devil/ euen Moris holy maydens miracles of ypswych & kent whiche nowe thanked be God/ be come to lyght...²²

Unlike More's church, Joye's true church does not persecute preachers and burn the Scriptures. Even when this mayde ... was espied ... to be a seducer wt hir perniciousse counsellors & supporters auerting ye people from goddis worship vnto delusions/ lyes/ & idolatrye worthy all dethe by goddis lawes/

that church did not thirst after her blood but only sought to restore her to the true faith (sig. A8^v). How he thought the treatment accorded Elizabeth Barton, who was executed for treason by the state, differed from that of Reformers handed over to the state by the Church, Joye does not elaborate. Again, during a discussion of a certain text, Joye opines that perhaps More understands matters with a special knowledge – "perhaps More had some reuelacion/ withe his holy mayde of kente" (sig. D7^v).

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It is an interesting footnote to Joye's controversy with More that after More's execution, Joye used More's name as a

weapon against other opponents. In a work published in 1544 against what he considered to be relics of Rome in the Church of England, *A Present Consolation for the Sufferers of Persecution for Righteousness*, Joye capitalizes on More's execution by implying that More is an example of the fact that allegiance to Roman dogma and ritual connotes treason. Our bishops compel men to adhere to their views, claiming that "where the head & gouerner professeth Chryst, there can be no persecution," but we know that these same bishops persecuted the gospel in the past.

What thinge... was it, that in the Cardynall Thomas wolsaye, his days, and in that traytor syr Thomas More his tyme, beynghe chanceler... you persecuted... (sigs. A6-A6^v)

More's alleged treason is again pressed into service somewhat later in the same work when Joye considers that if the gospel still flourished in England, it is despite all the bishops' efforts to suppress it :

Where is nowe your wyse man ? Where be nowe your writers for your pope and his religion ? ... Thei hyerd... syr Thomas More... to wryte ageynst vs... lyeinge & fonde bokis full of threatis mockis tauntis & reuylings (sig. F4).

And again, toward the end of his book, Joye asks rhetorically : But where be now the enimies of Chryst... ? Where is decius... ? Where is Dioclesiane... Thomas wolsaye... Syr Thomas More... ? (sigs. F8^v-G1)

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NOTES

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1 Joye was born about 1490 and was educated at Christ's College, Cambridge. He was ordained in 1515. In late 1527 he was summoned to London to be examined for Lutheran opinions, but he fled to the Continent, where he wrote several works of religious controversy and engaged in translating various portions of the Old Testament into English, as well as publishing a revision of Tyndale's 1526 New Testament. He returned to England in 1535 but fled for a second time to the Continent in 1540. In 1548 he returned and died in 1553. See Charles C. Butterworth and Allan G. Chester, *George Joye* (Philadelphia, 1962), and William A. Clebsch, *England's Earliest Protestants* (New Haven, 1964), pp. 205-228.

2 Butterworth and Chester deal with Joye primarily as a translator of the Bible, while Clebsch's emphasis is also on Joye's translations and on his theology. My

own study, *Thomas More and Tudor Polemics* (Bloomington, Ind., 1968), omitted a consideration of Joye, confining itself to those polemicists whose works More answered directly, and at the time of writing I considered *The Supper of the Lord* to be by Tyndale, but I am now satisfied that it is Joye's. On this question of authorship, see J. F. Mozley, "Tyndale's 'Supper of the Lord,'" *Notes and Queries*, CLXXXIII (November, 1942), 305-306, and "The Supper of the Lord, 1533," *Moreana*, X (May, 1966), 11-16; W. D. J. Cargill Thompson, "Who Wrote 'The Supper of the Lord?'" *Harvard Theological Review*, 53 (1960), 77-91; and W. A. Clebsch, "More Evidence that George Joye Wrote *The Souper of the Lorde*," *Harvard Theological Review*, 55 (1962), 63-66.

³ For a discussion of the form of these works, see my book on More, pp. 80-92, 158-161.

⁴ See *The Workes of Sir Thomas More Knyght... in the Englysh tonge* (London, 1557), p. 448.

⁵ *The Supper of the Lord in The Whole workes of W. Tyndall, John Frith, and Doct. Barnes* (London, 1573), p. 460. Hereafter cited as *Ww*.

⁶ *The Correspondence of Sir Thomas More*, ed. Elizabeth F. Rogers (Princeton, 1947), pp. 444, 450.

⁷ "We say that sith our sauour hath hymselfe promised in the ghospell, that hymselfe & his holy spirite shalbe with his churche all dayes vnto the ende of the worlde : it foloweth... that his church shal neuer fayle... And... that his holy spirit euer abiding with his churche... that he wil not suffer his church fal into y^e erroneous belief of anie damnable vntrouthe..." More, *Workes*, p. 461.

⁸ See More, *Workes*, pp. 459-522.

⁹ See my note, "Polemical *Exemphum* in Sixteenth-Century Religious Controversy," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme & Renaissance*, XXVIII (1966), 393-396.

¹⁰ *Ww*, p. 461. For the legal limitations under which More dealt with heresy, see Clebsch, p. 277 ff.

¹¹ But see More, *Correspondence*, p. 454.

¹² There is no evidence that More benefited in any material way from his defense of Catholicism. See More, *Workes*, p. 867.

¹³ *Ww*, p. 473. The portion of the *Dialogue* referred to is on sigs F4^v-G1. Another explanation circulating among the Reformers was that Barlowe had been coerced into writing the work; see William Turner, *A New Book of Spiritual Physyk* (Basel?, 1555), sig. F8^v.

¹⁴ See, for instance, Tyndale, *Ww*, pp. 318 and 330, as well as the attacks on poetry rebutted by Sidney later in the century.

¹⁵ More answers these attacks in his *Apology*; see *The Apologie of Syr Thomas More, Knyght*, ed. Taft (London, 1930), p. 194.

¹⁶ See More, *Workes*, pp. 168, 247-248, and 262, for examples.

¹⁷ See J.D. Mackie, *The Earlier Tudors, 1485-1558* (Oxford, 1952), pp. 361-362.

¹⁸ See R.W. Chambers, *Thomas More* (London, 1935), pp. 294-296.

¹⁹ Butterworth and Chester, p. 109.

²⁰ See *Thomas More and Tudor Polemics*, pp. 53-69.

²¹ See, for instance, More, *Workes*, pp. 130-132, 145, 445.

²² Sig. A7^v. In his 1529 *Dialogue*, as proof that miracles do happen, More had devoted a chapter to a case with which he was personally familiar, the miraculous cure of Margaret Wentworth by Our Lady of Ipswich. See M.J. Tucker, "Thomas More and the Wentworths," *Moreana*, 34 (Summer, 1972), 57-60.