

MORE AS AUTHOR :
THE VIRTUES OF DIGRESSION

I should like to dwell for a while on More's *Confutation of Tyndale's Answer*, the most neglected of all More's major works, for I believe it to be a great work ; at least we may agree that it is the greatest unread work of More. Complaints against its great length and « tediousness » are of long standing, arising from the earliest readers (or non-readers), as More testifies in the opening chapters of his *Apology*. For the « brethern, » the followers of Luther and Tyndale, More says, « fynde fyrste for a great fawte, that my wrytyng is ouer longe, and therefore to tedyouse to rede. For whyche cause they say they will neuer ons vouchsaufe to loke theron. »¹ Nevertheless, they have somehow managed to find great faults in the details of his work. But then, More says, « euery way semeth long to hym that is wery ere he begynne. » (p. 8)

I would like to provide some reasons to prevent such weariness from arising when our potential readers face the three thick volumes in our new edition of the *Confutation*.² For More goes on to explain that the great length is in part due to his awareness that many of his readers « wold peradventure waxe wery to rede ouer a long boke / and therefore haue I taken the more payne vppon euery chapyter, to thentent that they shal not nede to rede ouer any chapyter but one, & that yt shall not force greatly whych one thorow out all the boke. » (pp. 9-10) More is explaining that of course he never expected all his readers to read all of his book. It is addressed to the unlearned who, he feels, have been seduced by certain arguments of Tyndale and his sect, arguments that they have heard in sermons or in private discussions, or which they have read in the many short treatises circulated by the brethren. More's aim is to take each argument separately, show its fallacy, and at the same time, make it representative of the whole fallacious drift of the movement :

Now he that wyll therfore rede any one chapyter, eyther at aduenture, or ellys some chosen pyece in whyche hym selfe had went that hys euangelycall father Tyndale had sayed wonderfull well, or els frere Barns eyther / when he shall in that one chapyter as I am sure he shall, fynde his holy prophete playnely proued a fole, he maye be soone eased of any ferther laboure. For than hath he good cause to caste hym quyte of, and neuer medle more wyth hym / & than shall he neuer nede to rede more of my booke neyther, and so shall he make it shorte inough. (p. 10)

Such a reading of any one chapter is made all the more effective by the method of argument that More has described a page or so earlier :

And I somtyme take the payne to reherse some one thyng in dyuerse fasshyons in mo places than one, bycause I wolde that the reder sholde in euery place where he fortuneth to fall in redynge, haue at hys hand wythout remytynge ouer ellys where, or labour of ferther sekyng for it, as mych as shall seme requysyte for y^t mater that he there hath in hande. And therin the labour of all that lengthe ys myne owne, for ease & shortenynge of the readers payne. (p. 8)

In other words, More has composed here a compendium of essays in confutation, with each essay having a certain completeness of its own. Thus any person, or parson, or head of a family, or friend who is worried about the tendencies in himself or other people to accept the arguments of these new men may use each chapter to confute any given point that may arise at any time in any group or in any solitary meditation. Meanwhile all the essays are linked together by the central purpose indicated by the repetition of identical arguments and identical phrases, clauses, and sentences, which tend to run like a litany throughout the work. Such a view of the whole work will help to explain the continual repetition of certain set themes, as, for example, the repetition of the theme that Tyndale's heresy encourages and defends the marriage of a monk and a nun -- More's constant jibe, often given in the most virulent language :

For he [God] hath suffred them of hys hygh goodnes to shewe them selfe at laste, & to falle in to such open bestely fawtes, frerys & nunnes crepyng to bedde to gyther, and then to preche & teche theyr shameles lechery boldely about for good & lafull matrymony, that they haue therby now set out theyr gere so syghtely, that euery man maye well & playnty se suche open rybawdry wyth hys owne eyes, and well and easely iudge the thyng for synne and bestely bychery, and the defence therof for a shamefull shameles heresye, and the prechers therof for more then monstrouse heretykes.³

This theme should not be taken as evidence of some puritanical obsession on More's part. It is only one of dozens of similar repetitions of theme that run throughout the book, but it is especially prominent because it is especially important to More's aim. Dissolute living among the clergy is one of the most effective charges that the reformers were bringing against the church. More himself denounced such abuses in other works, but one could hardly expect him to do so here. Instead, he adopts the strategy of pointing out that this breaking of vows in the Lutheran sect is not an occasional or intermittent lapse, but is in fact an openly avowed principle : that it is *right* for a monk to wed a nun, that it is *right* to break monastic vows. Now which would you prefer, he asks by

implication, would you prefer these admitted, occasional, undefended, and frequently denounced lapses among the present clergy, or would you prefer the practice of this new sect that raises these lapses, this breaking of vows, to the level of a basic principle of life ?

For thys open heresye of frerys fylthy matrymony gyueth vs so playne and open warnynge of theyr worldly flesshly deuylysshe spyryte, so playne agaynste all holy scrypture and all good honest men : that we neuer coude haue excuse afore god, yf we wolde gyue suche prechers so bolde in suche rybawdry, eyther fayth or credence of faorable herynge : namely syth there was neuer in all crystendome syth the fayth fyrst began any holy doctour, nor doctour good or bad before Luthers dayes that any thyng hath wryten / but he hath abhorred and detested it to the deuyll of hell, that euer any person eyther man or woman, that hath vowed them selfe monke, frere, or nunne / sholde afterward ronne out of theyr relygyon, caste theyr vowe at theyr bakke, and fall to fleshe and wedde. (pp. 140-41).

More of course is not here attacking matrimony ; he is attacking what he calls « contempt of theyr holy vowys made before to god. » « All good honest people of crystendome thys .xv. hundreth yere haue had such bestely weddyng in grete abomynacyon. » (p. 141) There is another of More's repeated themes and phrases : these new men are flying in the face of the practice and belief « of crystendome thys .xv. hundreth yere. »

Such repetitions, then, have a threefold function : (1) They insure that the reader who reads only one section will find there all the main points of More's *Confutation* ; (2) the repetitions, blow after blow, will reinforce each single point for those who read at greater length ; (3) the repetitions will gradually bind all these essays in confutation into a unity.

It will be a unity of the kind that one finds in Augustine's *De Trinitate*, or in his *Ten Sermons on the First Epistle of St. John*. For these are not so much treatises as they are groups of essays or homilies on a set theme, growing toward a unity of meaning by repetition, recapitulation, association, even by digression. One thinks again of the great *Pensée* of Pascal (no. 283), in which Jacques Maritain has seen the essential difference between the writings of Augustine and Aquinas :

The heart has its own order ; the intellect has its own, which is by principle and demonstration. The heart has another. We do not prove that we ought to be loved by enumerating in order the causes of love ; that would be ridiculous. Jesus Christ and Saint Paul employ the rule of love, not of intellect ; for they would warm, not instruct. It is the same with Saint Augustine. This order consists chiefly in digressions on each point to indicate the end, and keep it always in sight.⁴

« Cet ordre consiste principalement à la digression sur chaque point qu'on rapporte à la fin, pour la montrer toujours ». One thinks of More's digression on the proper use of *no* and *nay*, where he apologises at the outset for considering such a « tryfle » and says he would « not here note by the way » such an error, except that it shows how a man who can make such a mistake in the use of « two so playne englyshe wordes » is hardly a suitable person to translate the Bible into English. More, always the purist, then explains the proper use of these two words in answering a question :

Nay answereth the questyon framede by the affyrmatyue. As for ensample, yf a man sholde aske Tyndale hym selfe : is an heretyke mete to translate holy scripture into englyshe. Lo to this questyon yf he wyll answere trew englyshe, he muste answere nay and not no. But and yf the questyon be asked hym thus lo : Is not an heretyque mete to translate holy scripture into englysh. To this questyon lo yf he wyll answere trew englyshe, he muste answere no & not nay. And a lyke dyfference is there bytwene these two aduerbis ye, and yes. For yf the questyon be framed vnto Tyndale by thafyrmatyue in this fashyon. If an heretyke falsely translate the new testament in to englysh, to make his false heresyse seme the word of god, be his bokes wurthy to be burned ? To this questyon asked in this wyse, yf he wyll answere trew englyshe he muste answere ye and not yes. But now yf the questyon be asked hym thus lo by the negatiue : If an heretyque falsely translate the new testament in to englysh, to make his false heresyse seme ye worde of god / be not his bokes well worthy to be burned ? To this questyon in thys fashyon framed yf he wyll answere trew englyshe, he maye not answere ye, but he muste answere yes, and saye yes mary be they, both the translacyon and the translatur, and all that wyll holde wyth them.

And thys thyng lo though yt be no greate mater / yet I haue thought good to gyue Tyndale warnyng of, bycause I wolde haue hym wryte trewe one waye or other / that though I can not make hym by no meane to wryte trewe mater, I wolde haue hym yet at the leste wyse wryte trew englyshe.

But now to the mater selfe. (pp. 231-32)

I think we can agree that More has here not forgotten the ultimate end of his confutation. Similarly he keeps his eye on the end in what is perhaps the most extravagant example of his repetitive technique, his digression on « Erasmus my darling » :

Then he asketh me why I haue not contended with Erasmus whom he calleth my derlyng, of all thys longe whyle for translatyng of thys worde *ecclesia* in to thys worde *congregatio*. And then he cometh forth wyth hys fete proper taunte, that I fauour hym of lykelyhed for makynge of hys boke

of Moria in my howse. There had he hyt me lo saue for lakke of a lytell salte. I haue not contended wyth Erasmus my derlyng, bycause I found no suche malycouse entent wyth Erasmus my derlyng, as I fynde wyth Tyndale. For had I fownde wyth Erasmus my derlyng the shrewde entent and purpose that I fynde in Tyndale : Erasmus my derlyng sholde be no more my derlyng. But I fynde in Erasmus my derlyng that he detesteth and abhorreth the errors and heresyse that Tyndale playnely techeth and abydeh by / and therefore Erasmus my derlyng shall be my dere derlyng styll. And surely yf Tyndale had eyther neuer taughte them, or yet had the grace to reuoke them : then sholde Tyndale be my dere derlyng to. But whyle he holdeth such heresyse styll / I can not take for my derlyng hym that the deuyll taketh for hys derlyng. (p. 177)

From the very beginning of this series of adroit repetitions, More has never lost sight of the end : that Tyndale is indeed the devil's darling.

Throughout the *Confutation* one can see and hear this Augustinian way of working, a way that More must have learned from a deep saturation in Augustine's writings very early in his life. We remember that, at the age of 23, he was lecturing in London on Augustine's *City of God*, with Grocyn in the audience. This analogy in method with Augustine's writings is reinforced by the way in which Augustine is called up as a witness in the *Confutation* twenty times more often and at much greater length than any other father of the church. This is especially evident in the conclusion to More's first volume, that is, the ending of the third book of the *Confutation*, where More defends the unwritten traditions of the church by calling upon ten of the « old holy doctours » (another of his constant refrains) ; chief among them is Augustine, whose words occupy three out of the six pages devoted to these testimonies, including a long translation from the *Confessions*.

This method, both in Augustine and in More, derives from a deep-seated conviction (or perhaps we should call it an instinct) about the ways in which truth may be found. It is a principle based upon Augustine's view of the workings of the will, which in his psychology takes priority over the intellect. On the other hand, Tyndale believes that the intellect is predominant and that once the intellect has seen the truth, the will always follows. This is a vast difference which creates the vast difference in the styles of More and Tyndale. For More, following Augustine, believes that truth will not be found through the relentless logic of Tyndale, which, proceeding from the doctrine of justification by faith, rides with brilliant wit and vehement persuasive power over all obstacles that deny or defy the logic proceeding from this premise. More's repetitive, digressive

essays therefore interrupt the onward striding of this logic, breaking its step, knocking it off stride, by bringing forward in an Augustinian manner an Augustinian view of life and religion -- a view that sees, not a church of « elects » who cannot fall to damnation, however they may slip, but a church of fallen people, any one of whom has yet available the hope of his redemption. This is the heart of More's objection to Tyndale : that his doctrine diminishes hope and changes that gracious word *charity* to a dubious, highly fallible word *love* -- a word that, as More sees it, can as well turn to lechery as to the love of God.

Can we not, perhaps, without at all equating the views of Aquinas and Tyndale, see something of Pascal's contrast between the order of the heart and the order of the intellect as we read the *Confutation of Tyndale's Answer* ? More's practice of quoting Tyndale at length, and accurately, is, as he says in the *Apology*,⁵ an effort to avoid the method of tendencious summary that Tyndale has used in answering More. More himself is determined to set forth his opponent's views exactly, and so he increases the length of his work by long and exact quotations from Tyndale. The effect of this method is dramatic, for it sets up a constant dialogue between Tyndale and More -- a dialogue in which the voice of More's opponent emerges in all its immense persuasive power.

More is well aware that Tyndale is a formidable opponent in this literary combat, for he warns at the outset against Tyndale's « hepe of hyghe vehement wordes » : « Let not therefore Tyndall (good reder) wyth his gay gloryouse wordes carye you so fast & so far away, but that ye remembre to pull hym bakke / by the sleue a lytle. » (p. 48) What More must show is that, however plausible, persuasive, and convincing the voice of this literary artist may be, his words are lies because his doctrine is false. Yet dialogue is perhaps not quite the right word for this contest, since the two voices are not exactly speaking to each other : each speaker, while acutely aware of his opponent's presence, is speaking directly to us, using every device known to the world of homily and oratory. Let us see how it works in one self-contained section, the part dealing with satisfaction for sins -- a section that occurs within a 35-page discussion of the sacraments that More himself calls a « longe dygressyon » ! (p. 120)

More well knows that here is the heart of Tyndale's attack on the ancient practices of the church, and so he introduces the problem with a brief prologue that makes clear the direction of Tyndale's theme :

He wyll that we shall for oure synnes nomore but onely repente. For as for goynge about to punyssh our selfe any thyng for oure owne synnys, by penauns doynge, wyth fastynge, prayour, almeise dede, or any bodyly

afflyccyon that god maye haue the more mercyē vppon vs, whyche thyng all good chrysten people haue euer vsed to do, and whyche the chyrche calleth satisfaccyon : thys thyng Tyndale calleth as ye shall here. (pp. 89-90)

Then the debate begins, with the names « Tyndale » and « More » set off in the middle of the page, to mark the dramatic speaker. Tyndale opens thus : « Synne we thorow fragilyte neuer so ofte, yet as sone as we repent and come in to the ryght waye agayne, and vnto the testament whych god hath made in Crystes blood : our synnes vanysh awaye as smoke in the wynde, and as darkenes at the commynge of lyght, or as thou cast a lytle blood or melke into the mayne see. » (p. 90) Note the eloquence of that series of lengthening, parallel comparisons : « our synnes vanysh awaye as smoke in the wynde, and as darkenes at the commynge of lyght, or as thou cast a lytle blood or melke into the mayne see. » Thus the power of Christ's blood is fully established. Now what is the logical consequence of such power ? It is this, says Tyndale in the next sentence : « In so mych that who euer goeth aboute to make satisfaccyon for his synnes to god warde, sayeng in his herte, thus mych haue I synned, thus mych wyll I do agayne [in return], or this wyse wyll I lyue to make amendes wyth all, or this wyll I do to gete heuen wyth all : the same is an infidele, faythlesse, and damned in his dede doynge, and hath lost his parte in Crystes blood, bycause he is disobedyent vnto goddes testament, and setteth vp a nother of his owne imaginacyon, vnto which he wyll compell god to obey. » Such a one is « damned in his dede doynge » because the doing of such deeds has no merit toward salvation. But what then about good deeds, we may ask, should we not do them ? The answer follows logically in Tyndale's next sentence : « If we loue god : we haue a commaundement to loue our neyghbour also, as sayth Iohan in his pystle. And yf we haue offended hym [our neighbor] to make him amendes / or yf we haue not wherewith, to aske hym forgyuenesse, and to do and to suffer all thynges for his sake to wynne hym to god and to norish peace and vnyte : but to godwarde Cryste is an euerlastynge satisfaccyon and euer suffycient. » Notice the resounding eloquence of the balanced phrasing and sound effects of that conclusion : « euerlastynge satisfaccyon and euer suffycient. »

Formidable logic, vehement words, glorious words. « The begynnyng of these wordes seme very godly, » says More, « for y^e magnifyeng of the great mercy of god. » But consider closely the consequences of such an easy doctrine of forgiveness : « Neyther purgatory nede to be fered when we go hens, nor penauns nede to be done whyle we be here /

but synne and be sory and syt and make mery, and then synne agayne and then repent a lytell and ronne to ye ale & wasshe away the synne, thynke ones on goddys promyse and then do what we lyst. For hopynge sure in that, kyll we .x. men on a daye we cast but a lytell blood in to the mayne see. » (pp. 90-91) So More begins to demolish the effect of the grand rhetorical comparisons in Tyndale's first sentence. More then goes on to analyse the falsity of the doctrinal charge here implied by Tyndale, saying that Tyndale « is not so folysshe but that he knoweth well inowgh that all christen men byleue that no penauns is of it selfe suffycient for the leste synne, but the passyon and payne of Cryste maketh our penaunce auaylable. » Thus More's doctrinal position is established in the exact middle of his reply. Then More turns sharply to consider this new doctrine of salvation by « no more but fayth ». And he asks Tyndale what he means by this word « repenting » : « a lytell short sorow, or a great sorow and a longe ? » If he means « a great feruent sorow wyth grefe and trouble of mynde, » then, says More, this heresy is nothing much to be worried about :

For no dowte is it but that Tyndals tale to suche a man shall seme god wote full fond. For he that hath such repentaunce, wyll to shryfte I warraunt you, and take penaunce of the preste, & do mych more there to what so euer Tindale tell hym. And he that is cristened & careth for no shryfte : repenteth neuer a dele / but they that repente not at all be Tyndals repentaunt synners. (p. 91)

Now More is ready for his finale. He concludes with a crushing piece of bitter and indecent wit that plays once again upon the eloquent ending of Tyndale's first sentence :

Wyll ye se that it is so ? Go me to Martyn Luther the fyrst mayster of Tyndale in thys mater, though now hys scoler passeth hym. Whyle that frere lyeth with his nonne, & woteth well he doth nought [evil], and sayth stylle he doth well : let Tyndale tell me what repentyng is that. He repenteth euery mornynge, and to bedde agayne euery nyghte / thynketh on goddys promyse fyrste, and then go synne agayne vppon truste of goddys testament / and then he calleth it castynge of a lytell mylk in to the mayne see. (pp. 91-92)

With that closing innuendo More uses his characteristic repetition of theme to destroy the power of Tyndale's rhetoric. His manner of proceeding here, by repetition and digression, may be found throughout his literary career, whether in short passages or in long works. Thus the *Dialogue of Comfort* opens with the powerful threat of persecution, but the

imminence of that threat gradually recedes throughout the short opening book. In the second book, twice as long, the theme of persecution disappears, as More goes on to deal with every other conceivable form of tribulation. Then at the outset of Book Three, the threat of persecution returns with redoubled force and joins with the repeated text of Psalm 90 to knit the whole work together in an Augustinian way.

So, too, the English treatise on the Passion begins as though it were going to be just another of the many meditations on the life of Christ that have come down from the Middle Ages. But gradually it becomes clear that this is another kind of *Answer to the Poisoned Book* -- a sequel to More's last work of controversy, in which More has answered the denial of the « virtual », the effectual presence of Christ in the Sacrament -- a denial found in this poisoned book written by someone whose identity More cannot discover. Whoever he is, More names him « Master Masker » and subjects him to the same sort of line by line dissection that he has used in confuting Tyndale, so far as the first part of this poisoned book is concerned. More promises a second part of his answer, dealing with the institution of the Last Supper as a sacrament. Now, as Germain Marc'hadour has said, it looks as though the English treatise on the Passion is his answer ⁶. But if so, why is its form so utterly different from More's answer to the first part, which followed the manner of the *Confutation*, whereas this treatise follows the ancient three-fold way of meditation on the life of Christ : quotation of scripture, analysis, and prayer ?

More has clearly decided to try another way of dealing with heresy : the translation of scripture and interpretation based directly upon that scripture. Thus in his own way, More is doing what Tyndale challenged the church in England to do : make the Gospel available to all in their own tongue. As Louis Schuster has said, ⁷ we can now see that the only effective response to Tyndale's translation of the Bible, with its controversial glosses, lay in an authorized translation with authorized glosses. Has More begun to realize that his controversial weapons, however skillfully wielded, are not having their desired effect ? One feels in the *Apology*, as in the *Answer to the Poisoned Book*, a sense of weariness, a sad realization that the flood of heretical books is sweeping on, despite his careful, lengthy, brilliantly argued confutations. In the end, More, like Tyndale, turns to the Word, and lets it speak, in the form of his terse and simple translations from Gerson's harmony of the four Gospels.

Although the texts upon which More comments here are quite other than the texts of Tyndale's controversial works, still, More's commentary in his English treatise on the Passion also takes the form of a series of

well-rounded essays, or « lectures », as More calls his commentaries here, « lectures » in the old sense of exploratory readings into the meaning of a given text. These lectures grow together on the theme developed near the close of the very first lecture, in words that recall the central theme of his *Answer to the First Part of the Poisoned Book*. More says that Christ « wyl that we shall receyue the holye Paschall Lambe hys owne blessed bodye, both bodelye in the blessed sacrament, and spirituallly with fayth, hope, and charitye receiue it worthely, and in suche wyse also virtuallye, when we receiue it not sacramentally. »⁸ That is to say, we receive it « virtually » when we are in devout attendance at the Mass. Then, giving an allegorical interpretation to the details of the Old Testament ritual, More gives directions for the proper reception of the sacrament. All this prepares the way for the final lecture in this English treatise, which tells «in what maner wyse we ought to vse our self in the receiuinge,» and then ends, as I have argued elsewhere,⁹ with the little treatise that Rastell printed separately, the treatise « To receaue the blessed body of our lorde, sacramentally and virtually bothe. »

I do not mean to argue that More, at the outset, planned to end his essays on the Passion at this point. The evidence says otherwise, for Rastell prints a long title, which seems certainly authentic, in which More plans to extend this commentary on through the burial in the sepulchre. But in the actual course of his writing More has come, it seems, by the Augustinian way of exploration, to discover his ending sooner than he thought. He therefore seems to have discarded this long title and the proposed preface, of which Rastell prints a fragment. These materials do not exist in any known manuscript, though Rastell undoubtedly found them among More's papers. If we read the English treatise on the Passion without these materials at the head, as the work appears in both manuscripts, always followed by the short treatise on receiving the sacrament, then the work has a beautiful completeness. It is an *Answer to the Poisoned Book* more temperate, more carefully devised, more effectually conceived and performed than the answer to the first part. This English treatise on the Passion was, we now know, a work in large part, and perhaps entirely, written before More entered the Tower of London;¹⁰ and with this work More's public duty as author is completed.

What remains is primarily for himself, for his family, and for the diminishing few who may share his views. One need not doubt that More hoped that a larger audience might sometime come to read what seem to be his last two major works: his *Dialogue of Comfort* and his *De Tristitia*. Yet both these works, under the guise of a public voice, speak prima-

rily to the inner man. In both the basic theme is the problem of enduring persecution to the death: the subject that begins and ends the *Dialogue of Comfort*, despite its long *excursus* into other matters during the middle book. Perhaps this middle book, with all its merry tales and varied anecdotes, is a way of masking the deeper, inner theme.

Just so, in the *De Tristitia*, the basic problem, the problem of the cautious, fearful kind of martyr, is introduced very early in the work, on the eleventh leaf of the Valencia manuscript, near the beginning of More's meditation on the text, «Tristis est anima mea usque ad mortem.»

He suddenly felt such a 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. »... He knew that His ordeal was now imminent and just about to overtake Him: the treacherous betrayer, the bitter enemies, binding ropes, false accusations, slanders, blows, thorns, nails, the cross, and horrible tortures stretched out over many hours.¹¹

All this mental suffering of Christ in the Garden, More says, was endured in order to provide the fearful with an example: « Therefore, since He foresaw that there would be many people of such a delicate constitution that they would be convulsed with terror at any danger of being tortured, He chose to enhearten them by the example of His own sorrow, His own sadness, His own weariness and unequalled fear » (p. 101) And so, for seventeen leaves in the Valencia manuscript, leaves heavily revised, deeply reconsidered, More ponders this problem of the fearful martyr until, at the close of this section, the meditating mind hears the inward speaking of Christ to the fearful soul, saying, « O faint of heart, take courage and do not despair. » (pp. 101-3)

But then as More turns to deal with the next biblical passage, he moves abruptly away from any such problem; he turns from the inward self, back to the outer world, saying, « 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. » (p. 113) And then, for sixteen leaves, he proceeds to give an objective discourse on the proper ways of prayer, couched in very familiar address to the reader. « And then our actions too, in how many ways do they betray that our minds are wandering miles away? We scratch our heads, clean our fingernails with a pocketknife, pick our noses with our fingers, meanwhile making the wrong responses. Having no idea what we have already said and what we have not said, we make a wild guess as to what remains to be said. » (p. 127) Imagine yourself standing before « some mortal prince or other who has your life in his hands, » pleading for pardon for some crime:

Now, when you have been brought into the presence of the prince, go ahead and speak to him carelessly, casually, without the least concern. While he stays in one place and listens attentively, stroll around here and there as you run through your plea. Then, when you have had enough of walking up and down, sit down on a chair...Then yawn, stretch, sneeze, spit without giving it a thought, and belch up the fumes of your gluttony... Tell me now, what success could you hope for from such a plea as this ? (pp. 131-33)

How could such a witty, teasing tone concur with a man worrying about his own imminent torture and death ? Perhaps we have misunderstood the preceding section on the fearful martyr ; perhaps this treatise, just like the *Dialogue of Comfort*, is objective, addressed to Hungarians, has little to do with the individual state of More, whose prayers surely never were performed in such a fashion. The next section continues this objectivity while considering the theological problem of how Christ speaks here both as God and as man. Here again, More uses the familiar manner of address : « But perhaps some meticulous fussy dissector of the divine plan might say... 'Since He was God, could He not at one and the same time speak the command and insure its execution ?' Doubtless He could have, my good man, » says More, « since He was God, Who carried out whatever He wished, Who created all things with a word. » (p. 197) But for His own reasons God did not choose to proceed in this way.

From here More moves briefly into the mode of controversy, denouncing the « pernicious nonsense » of those « shameless men » who « contend that it is futile for anyone to seek the intercession of any angel or departed saint. » (pp. 223-25) But shortly after this, when he turns to meditate upon Christ's bloody sweat, More returns with redoubled attention to the problems of the fearful martyr for five of the most heavily revised leaves in the entire manuscript (folios 59-63) -- leaves which show again the acute attention that More is giving to this issue.

Then, in the next section, the meditation moves again toward the outer world, as More uses the sleeping of the disciples as an occasion for a denunciation of negligent bishops who are asleep in the face of dangers to their flock, or worse : « Rather they 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. » (p. 263) After this More moves into a long, witty, Erasmian discussion of the uses of irony in Christ's words, « Why are you sleeping. Sleep on now and take your rest. » (p. 287) Other objective matters follow, culminating in the long passage of controversy arising from the scene of the betrayal of Christ by the kiss of Judas :

I think we would not be far wrong if we were to fear that the time approaches when the son of man, Christ, will be betrayed into the hands of sinners, as often as we see an imminent danger that the mystical body of Christ, the church of Christ, namely the Christian people, will be brought to ruin at the hands of wicked men. And this, alas, for some centuries now we have not failed to see happening somewhere, now in one place, now in another, while the cruel Turks invade some parts of the Christian dominion and other parts are torn asunder by the internal strife of manifold heretical sects.

Whenever we see such things or hear they are beginning to happen, however far away, let us think that this is no time for us to sit and sleep but rather to get up immediately and bring relief to the danger of others in whatever way we can, by our prayers at least if in no other way. Nor is such danger to be taken lightly because it happens at some distance from us...For we have reason to fear that the destructive force will make its way from them to us... (pp. 345-49)

Above all, More goes on to say, « Christ is betrayed into the hands of sinners in a special way among those of a certain sect... [who] altogether deny that the real body of Christ [corpus Christi] is contained in the sacrament, though they call it by that name. » (p. 355) This sort of contagion, More warns in conclusion,

spreads gradually and imperceptibly while those persons who despise it at first, afterwards can stand to hear it and respond to it with less than full scorn, then come to tolerate wicked discussions, and afterwards are carried away into error, until like a cancer (as the apostle says) the creeping disease finally takes over the whole country ... But so much for my digression into these mysteries ; let us now return to the historical events. (pp. 359-61)

Digression indeed : this passage gives the central motive for Thomas More's situation in the Tower and the central motive for his meditation on the agony of Christ.

This treatise ends with puzzling abruptness with two brief leaves under the final heading, « De Christi Captione », « On the Capture of Christ ». This unexpected ending might lead one to think that the treatise is unfinished, as William Rastell thought when he wrote after the final words : « Syr Thomas More wrote no more of this woorke : for when he had written this farre, he was in prison kepte so streyght, that all his bokes and penne and ynke and paper was taken from hym, and sone after was he putte to death. »¹² We have no reason to doubt that this was so. On the other hand, the matter-of-fact nature of the contents may be More's way of reasserting his mask of complete objectivity, for these

final pages constitute what might be called a long footnote :

Exactly when they first laid hands on Jesus is a point on which the experts disagree ... For Matthew and Mark relate the events in such an order as to allow the conjecture that they laid hands on Jesus immediately after Judas' kiss. And this is the opinion adopted not only by many celebrated doctors of the church but also approved by that remarkable man John Gerson, who follows it in presenting the sequence of events in his work entitled *Monotessaron* (the work which I have generally followed in enumerating the events of the Passion in this discussion). But in this one place I have departed from him... (pp. 619-23)

More has transferred to this place the words « Tunc accesserunt et manus iniecerunt in Iesum » (« Then they came up and laid hands on Jesus ») from a place that in Gerson's treatise occurs fifty-five leaves earlier in the relative position that it would have occupied in More's work.¹³ Why? It seems possible that More was quite deliberately creating this abrupt dramatic ending, for he moves out of his objective scholarly tone toward a grand crescendo, with a great sweep of the best Renaissance Latin, a conclusion in which, while allegedly only fixing the time when the capture of Christ occurred, he makes three indispensable points. First, he stresses the physical power of Christ, by which he could have prevented all this from happening. Secondly, he stresses the power of Christ to save his apostles and the young man whom More has earlier declared to be an image of the Christian soul escaping from earth to heaven. And finally, he shows that Christ has willingly allowed his final suffering, for our good. I will quote this concluding passage in the old translation by Mary Basset, where we may almost hear the voice of More speaking in the language of his day :

Neuertheles in this one thing varying from his oppinion, I haue demed it better to be of theyr mind, which are right notable writers to, that vpon veye probable reasons gathered of the wordes of sainte Luke and sainte Iohn the Euangelistes, do suppose that after Iudas had kissed our lorde and was returned backe to the souldiers & y^e Iewes agayn, and after they wer al w^l thonely wordes of Christ stricken down flat to the grounde, and after the chief priestes seruants eare was cut of & made hole by Christ a fresh, and after he had rebuked Peter for his fyghtyng, and stayed the rest of y^e apostles for [?from] making any resystance, and after he had once more spoken to thofficers of the Iewes that were than present with him, and shewed them y^t they might now at their pleasure take him, which erst they coulede neuer haue done, and after all the apostles were fledde awaye, and finallye after the yonge manne whom they wer not able to kepe (as sure holde as they had

of hym) was scaped stoutly (naked as he was) from them, that then after al this, dyd they fyrst lay handes vpon Iesus.¹⁴

More's exploratory Augustinian way of working seems to have led him toward a conclusion that no amount of planning could have bettered. At this point, More might well have said, « It is finished ».

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NOTES

1. *The Apology: Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, vol. 9, ed. J.B. Trapp (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1979), p. 3 (referred to hereafter as *CW*).
2. *The Confutation of Tyndale's Answer: CW*, vol. 8, parts 1, 2, 3, ed. Louis A. Schuster, Richard C. Marius, James P. Lusardi, and Richard J. Schoeck (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1973).
3. *CW* 8, 140.
4. Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, ed. M. Léon Brunschvicg, 5th edn. (Paris, Hachette, 1909); trans. W.F. Trotter (New York, Dutton, 1958). See Jacques Maritain, « St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas, » in *A Monument to Saint Augustine* (London, Sheed and Ward, 1930).
5. See *Apology*, chapter 2.
6. See Marc'hadour, *Thomas More et la Bible* (Paris 1969), pp. 311-12.
7. See *CW* 8, 1165.
8. *Treatise on the Passion: CW*, vol. 13, ed. Garry E. Haupt (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1976), p. 64.
9. See introduction to the *Dialogue of Comfort: CW*, vol. 12, ed. Louis L. Martz and Frank Manley (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1976), pp. lxxix-lxxxiii.
10. See *CW* 13, xxxix.
11. *De Tristitia Christi: CW*, vol. 14, parts 1, 2, ed. and trans. Clarence H. Miller (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1976), pp. 43-47.
12. *CW* 14, 1165.
13. See *CW* 14, 1060, note on 619/1.
14. *CW* 14, 1165.