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HOMILY FOR THE RED MASS 2001

*Delivered by His Eminence Edward Cardinal Clancy AC, KGCHS
Archbishop of Sydney and Patron of the St Thomas More Society
on 29 January, 2001 at St Mary's Cathedral, Sydney*

When Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, bade his listeners come to terms with their adversaries before approaching either the altar or the courts, he was touching the very nerve-centre of Gospel teaching. It relates directly to everything that he said on this and on other occasions about love of neighbour.

The word that this morning's Gospel reading readily brings to mind is "reconciliation". We should be reconciled with our adversary before devoting ourselves to prayer, because to offer prayer while alienated from a brother or sister would be a mockery; to contemplate litigation instead of reconciliation would be to invite disaster.

The word "reconciliation" in turn draws us to the writings of that faithful interpreter of Jesus' teaching, St Paul. St Paul alone in the New Testament actually uses the word "reconciliation", and he does so on a number of occasions. Jesus' mission on earth is one of reconciliation. But the reconciliation of people among themselves and the reconciliation of people with God are interdependent. Neither one is possible without the other. Jesus said, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with

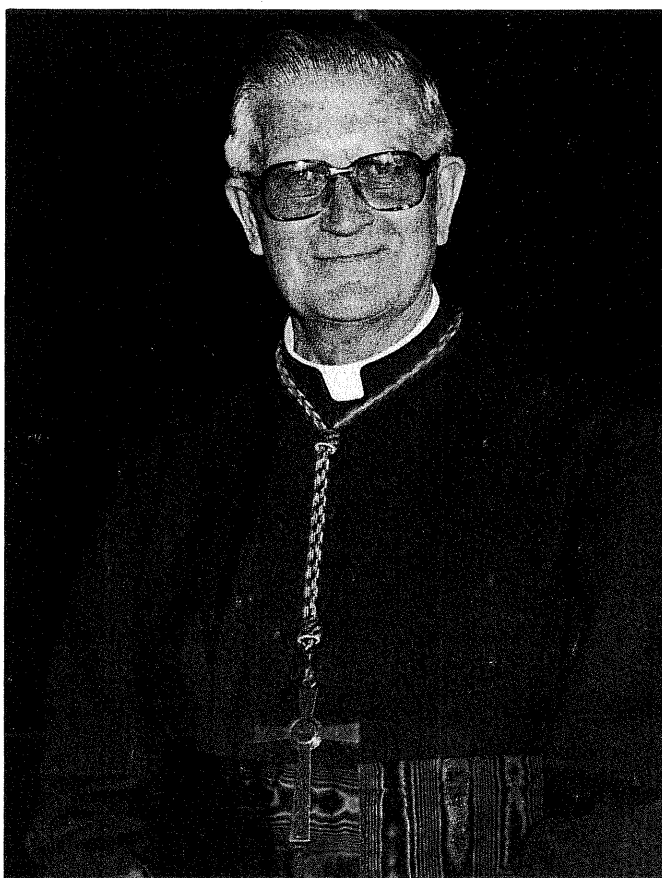
all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second resembles it: You must love you neighbour as yourself". (Mt 22, 37-39). The mission of the Apostles is to carry forward that work of reconciliation, and by implication it is the mission, too, of every follower of Christ, every Christian. Writing to the Corinthians,

Paul says: "It was God who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the work of handing on this reconciliation. In other words, God in Christ was reconciling the whole world to Himself not holding men's faults against them, and He has entrusted us to the news that we are reconciled. So we are ambassadors for Christ; it is as though God were appealing through us,

and the appeal that we make in Christ's name is ... be reconciled to God". (Cor. 5, 18-20) and, one must add, to one another. It is the same Paul who, in the context of his times, writes in his First Letter to the Corinthians: "How dare one of your members take up a complaint against another in the law courts of the unjust instead of before the saints? You should be ashamed: is there really no one reliable man among you to settle differences between brothers ...?" (6.1ff).

In the history of religion, the accent on reconciliation is a peculiarly, though not exclusively, Christian contribution.

"Reconciliation" is not an unfamiliar word. Indeed it is one of the most commonly occurring words in print and parlance today. We have all witnessed, and perhaps contributed to, its growth.



His Eminence Edward Cardinal Clancy

Almost without exception, however, it is now used only in reference to the relationship between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians. That is a pity, because it has gravely impoverished the word, and our culture has suffered as a consequence. There is no question but that reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians is of crucial importance, and we must all work purposefully and with a sense of urgency to bring it about; but the indigenous cause would itself benefit if addressed in a broader context and from a more universal perspective. It would go far to ensure that the cause is pursued, not merely out of a sense of political expediency, but out of a sense of moral duty.

History could be written in terms of on one hand, estrangement and hostility within and between people, and on the other, efforts, nearly always inadequate and mostly fruitless, to bring about reconciliation. The contemporary world mirrors the past, and almost anywhere we look on the global map today similar distressing situations manifest themselves. Old animosities and resentments, long since buried and forgotten, constantly re-emerge with devastating results, as we witnessed in the Balkans and in Rwanda and now in Indonesia. The history of religion is no exception, and by the very nature of things is more distressing, though one

notes with some comfort current efforts at ecumenical reconciliation among Christian communities and world religions.

However, we do not have to go to the big screen to find evidence of endemic estrangement and division among human beings. We do not have to go beyond our own nation, our own local communities, our own homes and our own personal relationships. We do not have to go beyond the daily news bulletin and our own daily experience. A prominent Federal politician was recently quoted as rejoicing that so many thousands had in such a short space of time taken advantage of the new Federal Magistracy established to speed-up the processing of divorce cases. While appreciating the perspective from which he spoke, one would have welcomed, at a deeper level, some expression of profound regret. Reconciliation just does not seem to be a real option these days in the resolution of marriage differences. The point is worth making, too, that tension and division in our own personal lives is in continuity with tension and division in the wider community, and in and between nations. The same holds true for reconciliation.

The role of law in the work of reconciliation is a somewhat ambiguous one. If everybody responded to the enjoinder of the Gospel and

spontaneously resolved differences rather than have recourse to the courts, this morning's congregation would be considerably smaller than it is. A decision of the courts can sometimes aggravate a disagreement; it can sometimes be the initial cause of disagreement. It can, of course, on occasions facilitate reconciliation. However, it must also be said that no reconciliation can hope to endure if not founded on truth and justice, and whosoever the law upholds truth and justice, it is playing its part in promoting reconciliation. Moreover we applaud the initiative of members of the legal profession who have, in more recent times, thrown their weight quite expressly behind the principle of reconciliation in the creation of alternate dispute resolution procedures.

What we must all do is develop a mentality, an instinct, for reconciliation. If the mentality is there, it will find its own way to achieve results. Most importantly of all must we bear in mind that reconciliation among people is a realistic goal only if there is reconciliation of people with God. In the neglect of that principle, I suggest, lies the reason why so many attempts at reconciliation come to nothing.

May our endeavours to heal the wounds of sin and division always be a work of God himself.

UPCOMING FUNCTION

THE BECKETT LECTURE SERIES

Address by the Chief Justice,
The Hon J J Spigelman AC

Beckett and Henry II: The Conflict

Monday, 20 August, 2001

at

6.00 p.m.

Common Room, NSW Bar Association

174 Phillip Street, Sydney

All Welcome

"THE SKY IS RED"

Address given to the St Thomas More Society, Sydney

Patronal Feast Day Meeting

Thursday, 6 July, 2000

by The Hon Sir Gerard Brennan AC KBE

The title of this paper is taken from that part of St Matthew's Gospel¹ where Christ, answering the Pharisees and Sadducees, said to them:

'When it is evening, you say, "It will be fair weather; for the sky is red." And in the morning, "It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening". You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times.'

Foretelling the weather from the appearance of the sky is a chancy business, but it has a purpose. Shepherds tending their flocks and farmers tending their fields need to know what weather is imminent. Human activity calls for a degree of prophecy as to the future. Those who can foresee the course of human events are wise; those who chart their course according to that foresight are prudent; those who order affairs with that foresight are effective and efficient – provided, of course, that what has been foreseen actually occurs. But in human affairs, the wisest and most prudent among us may prove to be wrong. And even those who prove to be right in human terms gain only a comparative and temporal advantage.

A certain foresight of an eternal future can occur only in the context of a transcendent faith. Men and women seek a transcendent reality, something beyond human experience to whom or to which they can relate, for that vision positions humankind, gives us our true dignity and enables us to glimpse an ultimate destiny. For the Christian, the

transcendent reality is the eternal and all-loving triune God, revealed through the mystery of the Incarnation. For those who admit the existence of that God and the salvation of humankind earned by the crucifixion and death of Christ, there are new points of reference for foretelling the future and deciding

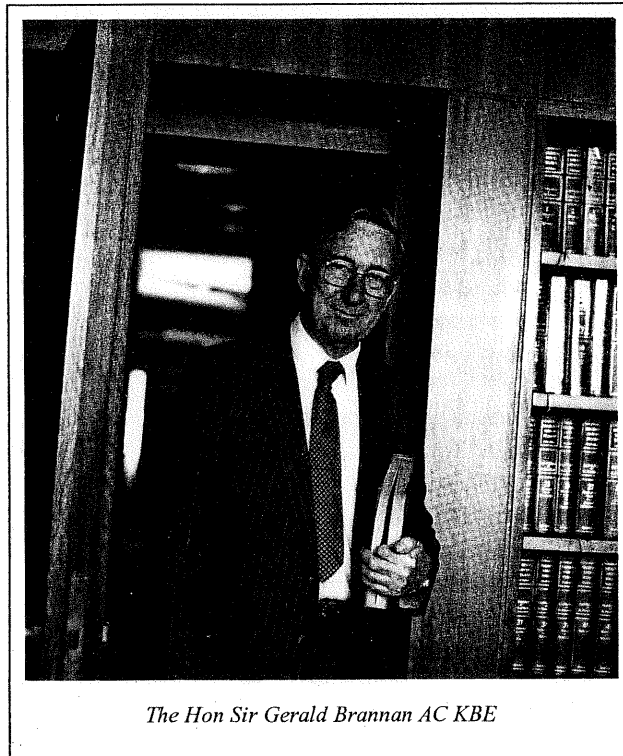
indicia of human affairs.

On my desk a small clear plastic photo frame sits, big enough for two postcards. Each postcard is a reproduction of a famous portrait. The sides are slightly angled, so that the copy portraits on either side gaze at each other continually. Just as the originals

do on either side of a fireplace in a room in the Frick Collection in New York. The originals were both painted by Hans Holbein the Younger. One is the portrait of Sir Thomas More; the other the portrait of Thomas Cromwell – contemporaries, one of whom could interpret accurately the signs of the times, the other a masterful reader of the sky in Tudor England. More discerned what was good and valid; Cromwell perceived what was expedient and humanly sensible.

Both More and Cromwell survived and profited from the fall of Cardinal Wolsey; both achieved high office under their beloved King Henry VIII; both made a great contribution to the administration of Tudor England; and both were executed by the King's

command. More lost the King's favour, having given the King his opinion on the annulment of his marriage to Catherine of Aragon. Cromwell, the architect of many of Henry's policies, organized the statutory annulment of his marriage to Catherine of Aragon, supported his marrying Anne Boleyn, then was instrumental in securing her trial and execution, continued in the King's favour when the King married Jane Seymour but slipped from favour when



The Hon Sir Gerald Brannan AC KBE

how to live in order to achieve it. But in our busy world of human affairs in which wealth, power and position seem so important, the eternal reference points are often disregarded. We do not interpret the signs of the times because we do not see or hear more than our senses tell us, nor do we have confidence in a future which cannot be foretold by human foresight alone. Instead, we look to see if the sky is red and chart our course by the uncertain

he, Cromwell, chose the unattractive Anne of Cleves as her successor. Cromwell secured his power in part by his administrative and political ability and in part by his facilitation of the King's serial nuptials. But in the end, he suffered the same fate as More. He was executed on Tower Green on 28 July 1540, ten days before the King married Catherine Howard, and a mere five years after More's execution.

These were turbulent and perilous times and it could not have been easy to discern what was good and valid as against what was expedient and sensible. We know from his public utterances what More discerned to be good and valid and why he rejected what was merely expedient and sensible. His fall from civil power came when Cromwell sought to strip the Convocation of Bishops of their power to enact ecclesiastical canons without royal approval. On 16 May 1532, on the authority of a rump of Convocation, three bishops and four abbots subscribed the Articles of Submission. When the Bishops agreed to subject the governance of the Church to Royal power, the relationship of Church and State was disordered. That afternoon More surrendered the great seal. The King was gracious to him then. More acknowledged that, "by the incomparable benefit of his most gentle prince", he had obtained his life's desire

"... that he might have some years of his life free, in which gradually withdrawing himself from the business of this life, he might continually remember the immortality of the life to come."

The ultimate crisis started with the passing by Parliament in 1534 of the Act of Succession. The Act not only pronounced the marriage of Henry and Catherine to be "void and annulled" but denied the authority of the Pope to sanction that marriage. Succession was to be through the children of Queen Anne. The Act required the taking of an oath in conformity with its provisions and More was summoned to appear before Lord Chancellor Audley, Cromwell and others in Lambeth Palace

accordingly. The summons was served on him on a Sunday.

He was not unprepared. He spent the Sunday night in prayer and attended Mass in the village church on the Monday morning. As he was being rowed down the Thames to Lambeth Palace, he said to William Roper: "Son Roper, I thank the Lord the field is won." He was not so unworldly or foolish as to think that the King or his interlocutors would recant their views; he must have been speaking of his own internal conquest which he would vindicate in what was to follow.

He was prepared to swear the succession but nothing more. Although he was assured that all the Lords and Commons had taken the oath, he refused, saying:

"My purpose is not to put any fault either in the Act or any man that made it, or in the oath or any man that swears it, nor to condemn the conscience of any other man. But as for myself, in good faith my conscience so moves me in the matter, that though I will not deny to swear to the succession, yet unto the oath that here is offered to me I cannot swear without the jeopardizing of my soul to perpetual damnation."

That was enough to have him taken to the Tower. Later, Cromwell came to the Tower and promised More the King's mercy in exchange for his compliance with the Act of Supremacy, but More maintained his silence.

That Act recognised the King as "the only Supreme Head in earth of the Church of England" and the form of oath under the provisions of the Act denied to the Pope any authority other than that of Bishop of Rome². Cromwell left, and the die was cast. Rich's perjury was used to secure More's condemnation though he, by his silence, had committed no offence.

After More was convicted, he addressed his judges – Lord Chancellor Audley, Cromwell, and others. He said:

"Now that I see you are determined to condemn me (God knows how) I will in discharge of my conscience speak my mind plainly and freely touching my Indictment and your Statute withall. Forasmuch as, my Lord, this Indictment is grounded upon an

Act of Parliament directly repugnant to the laws of God and his holy Church, the supreme government of which, or of any part whereof, may no temporal prince presume by any law to take upon him, as rightfully belonging to the See of Rome, a spiritual pre-eminence by the mouth of our Saviour himself, personally present upon the earth, only to St Peter and his successors, Bishops of the same See, by special prerogative granted; it is therefore in law amongst Christian men insufficient to charge any Christian man. This realm, being but one member and small part of the Church, might not make a particular law disagreeable with the general law of Christ's universal Catholic Church. No more than the city of London, being but one poor member in respect of the whole realm, might make a law against an Act of Parliament to bind the whole realm. No more might this realm of England refuse obedience to the See of Rome than might a child refuse obedience to his own natural father."

He was sentenced to be hung, drawn and quartered but the King graciously permitted his death to be by beheading. More expressing thanks that he had "convenient time and space to have remembrance of my end." 465 years ago, almost to the hour, More knelt before the block and prayed "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving kindness."

After nearly half a millennium, does More's life have any relevance to us today? Assuredly it does, for the signs of our times have to be interpreted and More's example teaches us how to interpret them. Our times are not the times of More. Heresy is not now a crime; burning at the stake is no longer a penalty; criminal punishment is not dispensed by executive fiat. Today we debate the topics of good and evil and, in our pluralistic and tolerant society, we embrace tolerance and assert the right to dissent from religious or political orthodoxy. More's denial of the Realm's right to "make a particular law disagreeable with the general law of Christ's universal Catholic Church" would not now be accepted. But the uncompromising integrity of Thomas More provides both an instruction and an example for our age.

The genius of More was his gift of discernment. While Popes and Abbots pursued temporal wealth and power, More respected their spiritual and pastoral authority. When Bishops tailored their words and actions to advance their own interests, he examined more deeply the New Testament and the traditions of the Church. Good servant of his master, the King, he advocated his cause as far as his conscience would permit. He kept a public silence which, in law, ought to have sufficed to save his life, while remaining faithful to his conscience. He rendered to Caesar what was Caesar's without denying anything to God.

The basic lesson that More teaches is that discernment is not achieved without prayer, study and reflection—assisted, in More's case, by the penance of the hair shirt. More lost his office, his assets and his life for the sake of his conscience—a conscience formed and informed by faith. Prayer entrenched his faith, study informed his mind and reflection led him to the conclusion that Henry, Cromwell and the Bishops were in error in asserting the King's authority over the governance of the Church in diminution of the authority of the Pope. It must have been difficult for More to reach this conclusion. In a letter to Cromwell, More wrote that—

"I was myself sometimes not of the mind that the primacy of that See should be begun by the institution of God, until I read in that matter those things that the King's Highness had written in his most famous book against the heresies of Martin Luther".

He told Cromwell that once he had considered the Papacy to be a historical evolution but had changed his mind through seven years of study—a period that he later amended to ten years.

In the years before 1534, the Papacy had not inspired confidence in its pastoral role. In his Lecture on *"More's Doubts regarding the Papacy"*, delivered to this Society in 1977, Father Durning SM observed that the 16th Century Papacy *"lost much of its prestige; the character of its personnel was anything but striking"*. Pope Leo X³ had added to the income of the

Vatican treasury by the sale of indulgences and offices and had depleted its resources by expenditure on lavish balls and other entertainments. The short reign of Hadrian VI⁴ had restored some stringency to Vatican administration but, after Clement VII⁵ became Pope in 1523, he engaged in opportunistic diplomacy between Emperor Charles V and the French King François I in order to protect the Papal States and their interests. He had vacillated over Henry's claim to annul his marriage to Catherine, aunt to Charles V, at a time when Henry was still adhering to Catholic practice. In a sense, the Popes themselves had forfeited the allegiance of the thinking faithful.

On the other hand, More had ample inducement to comply with the Royal will. His and his family's welfare depended on it, he had been favoured with land grants and with office; he had been a faithful servant of the King; he knew the machinations of princes and the sources of power; he respected and was respected by Henry. More was more than familiar with, and delighted by, the advantages of Royal favour. In the summer of 1532, after quitting as Lord Chancellor, he composed an epitaph in which he ran through his public offices:

"[he had been]...called into the court, and chosen one of the counsel, and made knight: then made first Under-Treasurer of England, after that Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, and last of all (with great favour of his Prince) Lord Chancellor of England. But in the mean season, he was chosen Speaker of the Parliament, and besides was at different times in different places the King's ambassador, and last of all at Cameray, when the leagues between the chief princes of Christendom were renewed again and peace, so long looked for, was restored to Christendom.

As Lord Chancellor, More had placed before the House of Commons learned opinions on the question of the validity of Henry's marriage to Catherine of Aragon, widow of Henry's late brother. He knew of Henry's reliance on Leviticus 20:21: *"If a man takes his brother's wife, it is impurity;*

he has uncovered his brother's nakedness, they shall be childless" and Henry's argument that the Pope had no power to dispense from this biblical injunction. In placing before the Commons academic opinions that the marriage to Catherine was invalid, More assured the House that *"the King hath not attempted this matter of will or pleasure, as some strangers report, but only for the discharge of his conscience and surety of the succession of his realm"*. More himself held the marriage to Catherine to be valid. He had told the King so privately. But it appeared that, John Fisher apart, the weight of English ecclesiastical opinion on the question of the King's marriage to Catherine of Aragon was with the King.

As the world knows, More died rather than deny his conscience. It was not a conscience that followed the *ipse dixit* of the Bishops of his Church. It was not a conscience that was born out of institutional loyalty. It was a conscience that grew over the years of prayer, study and reflection and the daily penance of the hair shirt. It was a conscience that sought to understand the Divine will and, having understood it, to be obedient to the truth he saw. The claims of the State he had served, of his friends or even of his family, could not prevail against More's obedience to his conscience.

The signs of the times are not always easy to interpret, but they can be interpreted only by the voice of conscience. And the voice of conscience is more imperious, more uncompromising, than any external command. St Thomas Aquinas says:

*"The binding force of conscience, even mistaken conscience, is the same thing as the binding force of the law of God. For one's conscience does not say that X is to be done or Y avoided unless one believes that Y is contrary to, or X accords with, the law of God."*⁶

Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of man or woman. There he or she is alone with God. To follow one's conscience, as More did, is to do what we believe God wants us to do—not what we would want to do if we left

responsibility to care for prisoners. The lawyers' responsibility has closed too often with the clanging of the steel doors. Yet there is no professional group who, having been aware of a prisoner's antecedents and of the circumstances of his offence, has or ought to have a better understanding of the dangers of the prison environment. Shortage of funds is often the reason given for the retention of subhuman conditions but Governments – even those of goodwill – cannot be expected fully to remedy the situation unless the public is alerted to the need. The absence of the alerting is arguably an indication of a failure of discernment on the part of our generation of lawyers.

Or take another question that might trouble a modern Christian as the attack on the authority of the Pope troubled More. I speak of the status of marriage and the family. Marriage, as the law knows it, is the voluntary union for life of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others⁸. The ceremony of marriage is a public declaration of the mutual rights and obligations of the spouses. The lifetime commitment of the spouses, their joint responsibility for the parenting of their children and the social stability – including the minimising of calls on the public purse – which the institution of marriage creates demand protection by laws affecting property, inheritance, maintenance, custody of infants and pensions. The principle which supports these protective laws is the social necessity to safeguard the interests of both spouses (particularly the more dependent spouse) and the children of the union. The same principle supports similar protective laws in the case of what were known as common law marriages, though in those cases there was no ceremony publicly declaring mutual rights and obligations. In modern times, however, the sexual revolution has diminished the significance of marriage as a central social institution. The

institution has been undermined by the option to divorce after twelve months separation and a more relaxed response to sexual infidelity. Common law marriages, of course, are more easily terminated. Some children are born in wedlock; an increasing proportion outside wedlock. Fortunate indeed is the child who is reared to adulthood by both natural parents. For children, irrespective of the relationship of which they are born, there must always be protective laws.

In recent times, there has been increasing pressure to equate sexual relationships with marriage and, presumably, to extend to them the benefit of the laws protective of spouses and children. Increasingly those of marriageable age do not marry but form relationships that last at the discretion of the parties. Most of the non-marital relationships are heterosexual, some homosexual. But if a person chooses to enter a sexual relationship of either kind, why should the mere entry into that relationship be taken legally to be the equivalent of marriage? If the principle which justifies the protective laws attaching to the institution of marriage has no application to particular relationships, there is no justification for attaching the protective laws to the relationship. To do so would alter the fundamental purpose and character of the law of personal relationships and would create a new principle, namely, that entry into a sexual relationship is sufficient to create rights and obligations comparable with those appropriate to marriage. And if A can confer rights on B simply by entering into a sexual relationship with him or her, should not X be entitled to confer similar rights on Y simply by agreement between the two without the need for a sexual association? Should any two-party association, whether sexual or not or, if sexual, whether heterosexual or homosexual, and whether children are involved or not, attract the same legal

consequences as entry into marriage?

These are but some of the issues that can evoke our consideration 465 years after the death of More. His life is an inspiration and a challenge. An inspiration, because in following his conscience, he found freedom in this life and salvation in the next. A challenge, because his life invites us to live a life in the world yet free from its attractions, a life in which we meet Christ in the depths of our conscience and follow Him as we perceive His will for us. Hans Kung, writing of More and his freedom in the world⁹, said this:

"Thomas More, in his secular dress, with his secular culture, in the midst of his family, his possessions, and his public life, was a saint. Not because he was without faults and sins; he had them, like every other human being, and he confessed them often before his death. But, with all his sinfulness, he was a saint, because he, as a sinful man, chosen out and embraced by God's grace in Christ made a radical choice of God, kept himself ready for God throughout his whole life in the world, and finally underwent the supreme test of that readiness in his death. Thus he knew the love of God in Christ, from which nothing can separate a man, neither life nor death:

All things are yours ..., whether the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come: for all are yours; and you are Christ's: and Christ is God's. [1 Cor.iii.22-23.]"

NOTES

¹ [Ch.16 verses 1-3].

² Holdsworth *History of English Law* vol 1 pp 591-592.

³ 1513-1522.

⁴ 1522-1523.

⁵ 1523-1534.

⁶ *Commentarium super epistolam ad Romanos*, c.14 cited by Dr Samuel Gregg in Lecture 3, Morality, Law and Public Policy.

⁷ Note A "Liberalism" to p 116 of Newman's *History of My Religious Opinions (To the year 1833)*

⁸ *Hyde v Hyde and Woodmansee* (1866) LR 1 P&D 130,133; *Family Law Act* 1975, s 43(a); *Calverley v Green* (1984) 155 CLR 242, 259-260.

⁹ *Freedom in the World: St Thomas More* (London, 1965) at 39-40.

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"POLITICS AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH – THE LIMITS OF ENGAGEMENT"

Outline of Address given to the St Thomas More Society, Sydney

2000 Annual General Meeting Wednesday, 25 October, 2000

by George Weigel

Senior Fellow, Ethics and Public Policy Centre: Washington, D.C., U.S.A.

Author, Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II

Mr President, Distinguished
Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Five years ago, in his address to the United Nations General Assembly, Pope John Paul II described the quest for freedom as "one of the great dynamics of human history". That quest, the Holy Father insisted, is "not limited to any one part of the world," nor is it "the expression of any single culture". Rather, the Pope reminded the General Assembly, "men and women throughout the world, even when threatened by violence, *have taken the risk of freedom*, asking to be given a place in social, political, and economic life which is commensurate with their dignity as free human beings." Deepening the analysis further, the Holy Father argued that the *global* character of this quest for freedom is a "key" to understanding its significance, for the worldwide reach of this movement confirms "that there are indeed universal human rights, rooted in the nature of the person, rights which reflect the objective and inviolable demands of a *universal moral law*."¹

How stands the cause of freedom, five years after the Holy Father identified and lifted up freedom's moral core before the leaders of the world of politics? And what does the current situation suggest about the discipleship and mission of the baptized in the world of domestic politics and in the international community?

The twentieth century proved beyond dispute that ideas have consequences, for good and for ill. My



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suggestion is that the *idea* of freedom in a society and in the international community has everything to do with whether freedom is lived in such a way that the result is genuine human flourishing. If the idea of freedom in a society or in the international community is defective, dehumanizing politics will inevitably follow. If the idea of freedom is sound, we may yet, as the Holy Father proposed in 1995, see a century of tears give birth to a "new springtime of the human spirit."²

Therefore, the primary mission of the laity in the world of politics and in the international community is to *promote the notion of freedom for excellence* – freedom tethered to truth

and ordered to goodness – and to *resist* the concept of freedom as a neutral faculty of choice that can attach itself legitimately to any object.

Put another way, the lay task in the political arena is to insist that freedom means doing things the *right* way, rather than doing things *my* way.

Put yet another way, the laity will advance the new evangelization in the world of politics and in the international community by bringing to those worlds the teaching of *Centesimus Annus*, read "through" the teaching of *Veritatis Splendor* and *Evangelium Vitae*. That is, the teaching of *Centesimus Annus* on the priority of culture in the formation of democratic politics and the free economy must be read "through" the teaching of *Veritatis Splendor* on the public meaning of exceptionless moral norms, and through *Evangelium Vitae*'s analysis of the linkage between the life issues and the basic social and political conditions for living freedom justly and nobly.

Democracy and the free economy are not machines that will run by themselves. The free society will only remain free if the virtues necessary for freedom are alive and well, in and among political communities. It takes a certain kind of people to make political freedom serve the ends of justice; it takes a certain kind of people to discipline and direct the remarkable energies set loose by the free economy. Absent the habits of mind and heart that link freedom to truth and goodness, the free economy will produce what

Zbigniew Brzezinski has called the “permissive cornucopia,” and democracy will decay into new forms of manipulation and oppression. That is why the primary mission of the laity in the world of politics and in the international community is to teach, witness to, and embody the truth that freedom is not a matter of doing what we like, but rather of having *the right to do what we ought*.

Ten years ago, in the aftermath of the Soviet collapse, it seemed as if the cause of freedom, often identified with the democratic project, was irresistible. As I look out into the first quarter of the twenty-first century, it seems to me that the democratic project itself is under internal assault, politically, philosophically, and technologically. A brief outline of each of these threats may help us identify more precisely some of the most pressing issues to be addressed by the distinctive lay mission of the baptized in the world of politics and in the international community.

The *political* threat to the democratic future involves the increasing role of unelected judges in settling basic issues of public policy. This practice diminishes and demeans democracy, and weakens a people’s democratic instincts. The judicial usurpation of politics on the life issues of abortion and euthanasia, and in the definition of marriage, is taking place on both the national and international planes, often in response to activist non-governmental organizations who cannot achieve their goals through legislation. Through this process, wrongs are being proclaimed as “rights”, and the tools of law are being deployed to do evil, to justify evil, and to compel cooperation with evil. Here is the clearest example to date of what John Paul II warned against in *Centesimus Annus*: democracies deteriorating into “thinly-disguised” totalitarian systems in which the external forms of democratic government are maintained even as those forms are turned into instruments of coercion.³

This political threat is closely linked to the *philosophical* threat to the

democratic project, which is the prevalence in the public life of western societies of a soft utilitarianism married to a concept of freedom as radical personal autonomy. Here is the “freedom of indifference” of which I spoke earlier in its most dangerous form. For freedom-as-personal-willfulness, coupled with radical skepticism about the possibility of our knowing the moral truth of things, is ultimately incompatible with democratic self-government. If there is only “my truth” and “your truth”, and neither of us recognizes a transcendent horizon of truth by which we agree to settle our differences when our “truths” are in conflict, then one of two things will happen: either I will impose my will on you, or you will impose your will on me. Press that method of settling differences far enough, and we find ourselves, rather abruptly, at the end of democracy. A careful survey of public life in the developed democracies suggests that we are already dangerously far down this path to democratic self-destruction.

The *political* threat to the democratic future and the *philosophical* threat often intersect in the many urgent questions posed for politics and the international community by the new biotechnologies. Within a very few years, the completion of the Human Genome Project will hold out the prospect of extending and enriching lives by early-detection techniques and precisely-designed vaccines, and ultimately correcting the genetic defects that lead to sickle-cell anemia, Huntington’s Disease, and various cancers. These are entirely welcome prospects. Yet the new genetic knowledge and the power of the new biotechnologies also carry within them the temptation to re-manufacture the human condition by re-manufacturing human beings. Unless that temptation is resisted – unless the lay mission in the world succeeds in teaching the world the truth about our freedom – the world will suffer the kind of dehumanization that was once imagined only by novelists. Crossing the threshold of the 21st century, it begins to appear that Aldous Huxley was right and George Orwell

wrong. The most profoundly threatening dystopia of the future is not the brutal totalitarianism sketched in Orwell’s novel *1984*, but the mindless, soulless authoritarianism depicted in Huxley’s *Brave New World*: a world of stunted humanity; a world of souls without longing, without passion, without striving, without suffering, without surprises or desire – in a word, a world without love.

In confronting the challenge that this brave new world poses for human freedom, the laity have a powerful model in St. Thomas More, recently proclaimed the patron of statesmen and politicians – and, by extension, the patron of all those engaged in public life. Contrary to the image created by the play and film, “A Man for All Seasons,” Thomas More was not a martyr for the primacy of conscience, if by conscience is meant freedom as radical personal autonomy. Thomas More was a martyr for Christian truth, the truth that “man cannot be sundered from God, [or] politics from morality.”⁴ Not all Christians are called to be “martyrs” in the strict sense of being called to suffer death for Christ and the Gospel. But all Christians are called by their baptism to be “martyrs” in the original Greek sense of μαρτυρ, “witness.” Thus Catholic politicians, statesmen, and citizens engaged in the public debates that are the lifeblood of democracy are called to be *witnesses to the truth* about the human person.

For Catholics, that truth has been definitively revealed in humanity’s encounter with Jesus Christ. As the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council put it, “Christ the Lord, Christ the new Adam, in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and of his love, fully reveals man to himself and brings to light his most high calling.”⁵ To enter more fully into our baptismal mission in the world is to take upon ourselves more completely the three-fold mission of the Christ into whom we were baptized: the Christ who is priest, prophet, and king. Thus we are to worship in truth, speak the truth, and serve in the truth.

Like every other aspect of the

creation, freedom is “groaning as in the pains of childbirth” as freedom awaits the fullness of its redemption (cf. *Romans* 8.22). In this particular moment of the “in-between” time that is the Church’s life between Easter and the Lord’s coming in glory, the baptismal mission of the laity in the world of politics is to witness to the truth of the human person, human community, human origins, and human destiny

revealed in the incarnate Son of God, who shows us both the face of the Father and the dignity of our human condition. In witnessing to that truth, in charity, we may hope to rebuild the moral foundations of the house of freedom—to persuade the political world of the 21st century that the future of freedom requires reclaiming and renewing the *idea* of freedom as a matter of having the right to do what we ought.

NOTES

¹ Pope John Paul II, *Address to the Fiftieth General Assembly of the United Nations Organization*, 5 October 1995, 2-3 (emphases in original).

² *Ibid.*, 18.

³ *Centesimus Annus*, 46.

⁴ John Paul II, *Apostolic Letter Proclaiming Saint Thomas More Patron of Statesmen and Politicians* [*L'Osservatore Romano, English Weekly Edition*, 8 November 2000, p. 3].

⁵ *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.

UPCOMING FUNCTION

2001 PATRONAL FEAST DAY DINNER

to be held at

The University & Schools Club
60 Phillip Street, Sydney

on

Thursday, 5 July, 2001

6.30 p.m. for 7.00 p.m.

Prior to the Dinner

Mass at 5.30 p.m.

will be offered for deceased members of the society

Most Rev. Edward Cardinal Clancy AC KGCHS

Will be the Society’s Guest of Honour

Guest Speaker will be

Professor James Hitchcock
of St Louis University

Invitations will be sent out in June

For further details contact 9231 1006