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David L. Gregory

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BOOK REVIEW

THOMAS MORE, BY RICHARD MARIUS†

David L. Gregory*

Thomas More was the former Lord Chancellor of England, beheaded by Henry VIII in 1535 at the age of 57 for refusing to acquiesce to the King's assertion of complete religious supremacy. The brilliant lawyer, shrewd politician, and mystic martyr of conscience, presents a timeless message with his life and death. Given the convergence of contemporary politics and religion, More's lessons have particular cogency today. Historian Richard Marius of Harvard College in *THOMAS MORE*¹ presents the definitive biography of this enigmatic, timeless man who died "the King's good servant, but God's first." *THOMAS MORE* thoughtfully examines the many fundamental paradoxes in the life of the ambitious lawyer who had reached, and then deliberately threw himself from, the heights of secular

† New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984; pp. 562.

* Associate Professor of Law, St. John's University School of Law; LL.M 1982, Yale University Law School; J.D. magna cum laude 1980, University of Detroit; M.B.A. 1977, Wayne State University; B.A. with honors 1973, Catholic University of America.

¹ R. MARIUS, *THOMAS MORE* (1984). There have been many prior biographies of More. About 1557, William Roper, More's devoted son-in-law, husband of More's eldest beloved daughter Margaret, wrote the first short biography, *THE LIFE OF SIR THOMAS MORE*. Marius says that Roper's biography "has been at the heart of every More biography written in English until now." R. MARIUS, *supra*, at XV. During the Renaissance, several other biographies followed. In 1935, Professor R.W. Chambers of the University of London wrote the "standard" biography, *THOMAS MORE*. See R. MARIUS, *supra*, at XX. The first modern More biography was written in 1891 by T.E. Bridgett, an English priest converted to Catholicism. For better or worse, most of these prior biographers wrote of the saint and not of the man. Marius, however, avoids this one-dimensionality and presents a thorough study of the whole person. Richard Marius has devoted most of his professional life to the study of Thomas More. He received his Ph.D. from Yale University in 1961, with his dissertation *Thomas More and the Heretics*. He has been involved with the editing of the multivolume *The Yale Edition of the Complete Works of St. Thomas More* from its inception in 1958. Marius' lifelong scholarship thus provides a rich understanding of Thomas More.

power.

More mirrored the Catholic theology of the Apostle Paul and of Augustine of Hippo ² that had exalted the celibate religious life. But for his human passions, he would probably have become a monk.³ With his choice of married life, he was driven to the public life.⁴ These deep tensions between the secular and the religious provide especially powerful manifestations of the very complex personality of Thomas More. He shunned the outward personal trappings of wealth and position. However, while seemingly self-effacing, More was shrewdly ambitious.⁵ His clothes were dignified but austere, without ostentatious finery. By this pronounced lack of pomp, he was immediately obvious at court and in any pageant.

More was a master of the broad view, and did not become ensnared by details. He lacked the administrative genius of his predecessor as Lord Chancellor, Thomas Wolsey. He avoided petty intrigue while rising to

² R. MARIUS, *supra* note 1, at 35-38. More was especially well versed in the works of Augustine, particularly his *CONFESSIONS* and *CITY OF GOD*. More had publicly lectured, with some notoriety, on the latter book. *Id.* at 50.

³ *Id.* at XXI.

He was gregarious, but he felt a contrary pull to solitude, loving isolation and serenity, and he never overcame his early longing for the unambitious, remote life of the cloistered monk he might have been, the monk he always thought he should have been.

....

For those who know More's life best, the most puzzling thing about him is that he did not become a priest or perhaps a monk, devoting all his days to the quest for salvation. . . . More considered a religious vocation and turned back. He gave it up because he wanted a wife.

Id. at XXI-XXII. Early biographers assert that More spent four years at the Carthusian monastery in London, from 1501 until his first marriage in 1504, at the age of 26. *See id.* at 34.

⁴ *Id.* at XXIII.

[F]ew have contemplated the deep inner conflict that More's decision cost him, the burden of guilt that a man of his own uncompromising temperament felt at bowing to the demands of the flesh. I believe it was the ruling drama of his life. More always thought he should have been a monk or a priest, and his character was formed by his decision to take a wife, which in turn inexorably drove him to assume a public career.

Id.

⁵ *Id.* at XXI.

He was ambitious, but he did not want people to know that he was. He loved the praise of the crowd and worked hard to create a public image of himself as a man who took no care for what people thought of him. Yet he hated criticism and responded furiously whenever attacked. . . . He worked hard to seem humble. But he always wanted to be somebody, and he always tried to make the public image that high position had been thrust upon him only because great and wise men insisted that his talents were too large to be hidden. Few people have enjoyed greater success in advertising their humility.

Id.

Lord Chancellor. But by then, ironically, he was largely a figurehead, and had lost concern for secular power. Thomas Cromwell was the real power behind the throne in England while More was Lord Chancellor. The King's estrangement from Rome became exacerbated, while religious reformers in England gained Henry VIII's increasingly open approval.

More was a voluminous writer and thinker. From his early twenties, he maintained a life long friendship and correspondence with the great Renaissance scholar, Erasmus of Rotterdam. More's important *History of King Richard III* became the basis for Shakespeare's immortal play. *Utopia* is More's classic enduring work, coupling the Platonic idealism of the *Republic* with More's own notions of socialism and utilitarianism. His lively wit and imagination, keen intelligence and fine education made him "the greatest English storyteller between Chaucer and Shakespeare."⁶ He blended his legal training with historical and theological scholarship. He was one of the most outspoken critics of Martin Luther and the Reformation.⁷ More was a relentless, merciless prosecutor of anyone threatening the absolute spiritual primacy of the Roman Catholic Church. His hatred of any suspected heresy manifested his deep melancholy and morbid concern with eternal damnation.⁸ Unyielding devotion to the Church ultimately brought More into inevitable conflict with King Henry VIII. Once More realized that the conflict with the King was inexorably joined, the urbane London lawyer cleverly engineered the high drama that led to his martyr's crown and subsequent canonization as the patron saint of lawyers by the Catholic Church.⁹

His death was the capstone of his life, and the grace of his death insured his immortality.¹⁰ Despite his office as Lord Chancellor, success as a London lawyer, and voluminous important writing, his death dominated any single achievement during his life. With the exception of *Utopia*, he

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ More and Luther were contemporaries. More published *UTOPIA* only a few months before Luther wrote his *Ninety Five Theses*. They both studied law, were attracted to the monastic life (Luther became an Augustinian monk), and were, according to Marius, intensely sexual. More had several children by his first wife, and remarried, but probably remained celibate, after her premature death. Luther married a nun, completing his break from Rome. *Id.* at 39-42, 308.

⁸ *Id.* at XXIII. "More could never be single-minded about governance and power. He was distracted by concern for his own soul and with a darkness that always threatened to consume him." *Id.*

⁹ *Id.* at XIX. More was beatified by Pope Leo XIII in 1886, perhaps fittingly enough by the same Pope who championed the poor and the working classes in his encyclicals. He was then canonized as a saint of the Roman Catholic Church by Pope Pius XI in 1935, four hundred years after his martyrdom. *Id.*

¹⁰ *Id.* at XXIII. "His glory has always been the outward serenity and courage with which he faced death. Had he not died so nobly, we would not remember him so well." *Id.*

left no earthly successes.¹¹ Martyrdom, rather than fleeting secular achievement, was his avenue to a place in history.

This comprehensive biography examines these many deep paradoxes in the life of Thomas More. He remains a highly complex, enigmatic personality; as his friend Erasmus said, More was indeed "a man for all seasons." The author centers Thomas More, the person, squarely within the context of his times. This significantly enhances our understanding of More and couples fine biography with rich historical study.

More was the quintessential Londoner, and London is vividly and colorfully described. England and Europe are satellites that revolve around London's sun, the center stage for the drama of Thomas More's life and death. More was born in 1478, the son of a prosperous and prominent London lawyer to whom More remained deeply devoted. More received his legal education at the New Inn and at Lincoln's Inn in London. All the major events of his professional life and martyr's death occurred within the London radius. More's family life is thoroughly discussed, with particular focus on his two marriages, his distant and probable celibate relationship with his older second wife, and his deep love for his children from his first marriage.

The main historical emphasis of the biography is upon elucidating the central political and religious events of England and of Europe. More's polemical attacks upon Martin Luther and other religious reformers are explored at length. His long friendship with Erasmus is effectively explained,¹² and his classic *Utopia* is also examined. The middle chapters constitute the bulk of the book and set the historical stage for Henry VIII's confrontation with Rome that ultimately led to More's martyrdom. The final chapters are a particularly fascinating analysis of the political intrigue surrounding the court of Henry VIII, the obsequious role of the Parliament, of Wolsey, a mentor to More,¹³ of Cromwell, and the King's most important advisors and ancillary political actors. Regrettably, Marius gives relatively little attention to Catherine or to Ann Boleyn, the

¹¹ *Id.*

In some remarkable ways he resembled his older contemporary Leonardo da Vinci - brooding, otherworldly, sensual, preoccupied with too many tasks and beset by his inability to finish great works, unable to make a clear distinction sometimes between ideal and fantasy, a man who made a much stronger impress on history by the power of his imagination and by the force of his character than by the strength of his practical accomplishments.

Id.

¹² *Id.* at 79. "It is a commonplace to say that their friendship was one of the jewels of the Renaissance . . ." *Id.*

¹³ *Id.* at 56. "Wolsey was essential to Thomas More's career, since had Wolsey disapproved of him, More could never have become a royal counselor. The two worked together for many years. Wolsey was always the superior and More the underling . . ." *Id.*

European continental courts, the Popes and Vatican politicians, or to Bishop John Fisher, More's fellow martyr. More's rise to prominence began when Henry VIII came to the throne in 1509. More succeeded Wolsey as Lord Chancellor when Wolsey abruptly fell from the King's favor and suddenly died. In 1523, More had become Speaker of the House of Commons in Parliament.

The most important chapters are the final chapters that closely examine the salient events that led to More's martyr's choice. More's opposition to Henry VIII was not exclusively religious. As a lawyer, More was thoroughly familiar with England's rich legal tradition, stemming from the Magna Carta, that limited the power of the crown¹⁴ and protected the rights of the people. *Utopia* had no king.¹⁵ More subscribed to the Socratic view that passive resistance to secular tyranny was the best course for persons of conscience. Tyranny would prove to be its own undoing, without any need for violent revolution or regicide,¹⁶ and More's *History of King Richard III* suggests the viability of the alternative course of passive resistance.

More was certainly not an uncritical Catholic. He shared Erasmus' contempt for corruption in the Church, such as the selling of indulgences; however, his personal admiration of and attraction for monasticism, a love not shared by the monk Erasmus, separated More from the rampant anti-clericalism of the English population.¹⁷ More did not oppose the King purely from some sense of inflexible devotion to an individual Pope. Rather, More's allegiance to the papal institution was part of his fundamental insistence on preserving order, stability, and consensus.¹⁸

More died in an attempt to preserve English allegiance to the universal Church. His devotion transcended belief in any particular set of political issues and was as grounded in his fear of theological and secular chaos in England if the King forced the nation to abandon the universal Church as in his brooding disquiet concerning his own personal salvation. More

¹⁴ *Id.* at 33. "[T]he most important thing that . . . the English law taught Thomas More was that Kings are limited in the power they may exercise justly. More was to have a remarkable record of opposition to the Kings of his own lifetime . . ." *Id.*

¹⁵ *Id.* at 163.

¹⁶ *Id.* at 118.

¹⁷ *Id.* at 125. "[A] fiery anticlericalism smoldered just under the surface of English society." *Id.*

More's description of the priests of Utopia reflects both dissatisfaction with the corruption of Christian priests and yet an utter dedication to priesthood itself. In this respect, he is again different from Erasmus, who praised priests only when he had to and spent his life, it seems, wishing he could cease being one.

Id. at 184.

¹⁸ *Id.* at 145, 171-75. More's loyalty to the Vatican went unrequited for 400 years; the Vatican's failure to canonize More in the immediate wake of his martyrdom is particularly pronounced, since Henry VIII had previously been excommunicated. *See id.* at XIX, 445.

augured the Hobbesian view of human nature, requiring ruthless discipline and unwavering devotion to be saved from both temporal and eternal destruction.¹⁹ The consensus, the universality of the Catholic Church, transcending boundaries of petty nationalism, had to be preserved at all costs.²⁰ Henry VIII's contumacy, particularly his discomfort over the refusal of Rome to endorse his volatile sexual appetites, made the need to preserve the categorical principles of the Church all the more obvious. The King threatened the collective good of all England and of all Christendom. The collective good was an enduring theme of More's.²¹ He trusted the wisdom of the group over that of the individual. Although virtually isolated in his martyrdom, while the cowardly religious and secular leadership of England supported the King's illegitimate usurpation of religious authority, More saw himself standing with the common people of England. He felt that the vast majority of the English people remained quietly loyal to the larger body of the Catholic Church. More's sharp sense of heavy irony applied even to this metaphysical counting of noses. He saw his solitary martyr's death proving the rule of the population's silent repudiation of the King's actions.

More was very much a man of his complex time, a period of transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, from religious medievalism to secular modernity. Of course, the two ages overlapped in many ways. The Renaissance continued many of the religious themes of medievalism, and attempted to harmonize and to integrate religious themes into an increasing, but not exclusive, secular fabric. More personified these tensions. He "shared also the special turmoil of the collision of medieval and Renaissance. A thesis of this biography is that until his imprisonment More suffered the severe inner conflict of a deeply divided soul. Perhaps the fundamental cause was that he struggled to combine medieval piety with the invincible temptations of Renaissance secularism."²² More's personal lifelong struggle of conscience and his ongoing attempt to strike a delicate balance between spiritual idealism and temporal pragmatism is a timeless, universal struggle. More raised and confronted the fundamental questions that must be faced by every person of conscience who participates in the arena of public affairs. As More so eloquently demonstrated in his martyr's death, harmonious balance cannot always be struck between the demands of personal conscience and of public life. Thus, More was the rich and worthy successor of the tradition of the victory of pri-

¹⁹ *Id.* at 154.

²⁰ *Id.* at 159. "More was always to make much of consensus More could retain his own confidence in the Catholic Church because he believed that the world beyond England's shores testified to a consensus that made the English schism petty and absurd." *Id.*

²¹ *Id.* at 162. "[T]he greatest good for the individual is to seek the good of all" *Id.*

²² *Id.* at 66.

vate conscience over contrary public demands. Antigone, Socrates, and Jesus were some of the prominent forbearers of this conscientious heritage; Bonhoeffer, Gandhi, and King were some of its successors. It is incumbent upon all public citizens, especially lawyers, to reflect upon their duties as heirs of this rich tradition of the primacy of private conscience. It is particularly imperative that lawyers, as special guardians of the public trust, most carefully examine their collective and individual roles when in the contemporary drama, private personal conscience is faced with perhaps irreconcilable public demands.

Thomas More is important for many reasons, and this fine biography has many audiences. It is an interesting historical study of a complex personality that offers insight into the transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance in England. The bitter theological divisions of the Reformation certainly will be of interest to both historians and theologians. Perhaps the most important lessons will be for lawyers, most necessarily involved in the debates of public life. More rightly is the patron of all lawyers. This transcends the theological fact of his canonization to sainthood by the Catholic Church because More's life and death offer continuing, timeless messages to all lawyers of conscience. It is usually possible to strike a harmonious and workable pragmatic balance between the demands of private conscience and public life. They are occasionally competing, but not necessarily irreconcilable interests. Often, there is no real conflict, and the potential dilemma never materializes. It is usually a problem reducible to allocation of finite resources in the most equitable and prudent fashion. For example, there is the perennial problem of insuring sufficient governmental domestic spending on social welfare programs for the destitute and poor, counterposed by the legitimate demands of necessary spending for adequate national defense and for foreign aid. This competition for scarce government funds was true in the England of Henry VIII and Thomas More, and in the United States of the Reagan Administration in 1985. Imperfect but adequate balances can be struck in these matters of important, but not fundamental, collective interests.

Lawyers of conscience can effectively integrate the demands of private conscience and public life. On occasion, however, it is impossible to strike a balance when the most fundamental issues of conscience are at stake. In this relativistic age that disavows moral absolutes and categorical imperatives, difficult choices must be made; harmonious balances cannot always be struck. The choices were perhaps more simple in More's day. The Reformation had not yet come to full fruition, Martin Luther was still *persona non grata* throughout most of Europe, and the many ramifications of Henry VIII's defiance of the papacy were yet to be realized. While the primacy of Rome was being undermined, the formalities of spiritual hegemony were still observed. Even Europe's intelligensia,

struggling with profound religious doubts,²³ did not openly question the Church's teachings regarding the ultimate realities of heaven and hell. These eternal verities made it much easier to draw bright lines between good and evil, truth and falsity, salvation and damnation. These eternal spiritual absolutes formed the penumbra for temporal choice. Absolutes were crystallized and earthly choices were easier, though the temporal consequences of those choices were perhaps more Draconian.

Today the choices are not so clearly drawn for a lawyer of conscience in the United States. The scenario is more complex and absolutes are often difficult to ascertain in any immediate fashion. Issues of life and death are more complicated. Ultimately, however, while the issues are different today, absolutes do exist; balances cannot always be struck, and difficult choices must be made. Today, while the individual issues are obviously different than those in More's England of 450 years ago, issues of religion and politics remain at the fore of public policy debates in the United States. The first amendment is proof that the Framers of the Constitution and Bill of Rights learned the hard bloody lessons that compelled separation of church and state. Yet, these are lessons now in danger of being forgotten. Today the issues are being deliberately obfuscated; secular powers are surrounded by sycophants, purporting to confer religious and spiritual legitimacy to the merger of church and state. There is an uncanny ominous parallel to the state religion established half a millennium ago, dangers from which the first amendment sought strong guarantees of protection. While no one risks death by challenging today's incipient, ominous church-state alliance, few have seriously questioned the ramifications of this contemporary development. More died for his virtually solitary resistance to the imposition of state religion. He would probably find himself almost as isolated concerning this creeping problem in contemporary America. The current threat of a more subtle form of state religion is not imposition by imperial fiat; rather, it is occurring by a far more insidious process that undermines the Constitution and gravely threatens fundamental religious liberties. Rather than stand in the rich heritage of More, servile flatterers rush uncritically headlong to please the secular authorities encouraging this bizarre and pernicious church-state

²³ *Id.* at 79, 74-78.

The deepest difficulty was the collapse of the Scholastic synthesis of faith and reason. In the two centuries since Thomas Aquinas' sophisticated theology and metaphysics of the *SUMMA THEOLOGICA*, reason had come to dominate faith by More's time. The frustration and doubts resulting from the inability to resynthesize reason and faith effectively was a contributing cause of the Reformation.

Id.

This intellectual uncertainty became a principal source for the doctrine of predestination. *Id.* at 120. (The extensive discussion of Martin Luther and his doctrines are particularly well informed, given Marius' earlier fine biography of Martin Luther.)

hybrid.

More was not an omniscient moral paragon. He did not face or resolve every moral issue of his age, let alone of ours. Indeed, some of his conduct was seemingly inflexible, cruel, and vindictive. He had no tolerance for religious diversity, and would have continued the subordination of the state to the Church. More was certainly fallible. He relentlessly pursued followers of Martin Luther. He was the creature of his age, encouraging the burning of heretics at the stake. There is no indication that More was troubled by these events; his written vituperation of the heretics often assumed a frenzied fever pitch.²⁴ This medieval process, by which religious heretics were condemned by the Church and then executed by the state, is perhaps the most pointed and perverse example of the dangers of church-state melding. There was no regard for Christian mercy or of biblical injunctions against taking of life. Capital punishment for secular and religious crimes was never questioned in More's England. Life and death were clearly etched.

King Henry's attempted legitimation of his union with Ann Boleyn was an international scandal and a contributing factor to More's refusal to yield to the King's usurpation of the Church's spiritual authority. Abortion was utterly beyond the pale. Today abortion and divorce are but two of the pressing moral issues in the public arena. Although uniformly condemned by the Catholic Church hierarchy, abortion poses a particularly nettlesome issue for many politicians.²⁵ As lawyers charged with

²⁴ *Id.* at XXIV.

His fury at the Protestant heretics . . . has a touch of hysteria about it . . . he cried for them to be burned alive, and he rejoiced when some of them went to the fire. This fury was not a bizarre lapse in an otherwise noble character; it was almost the essence of the man.

Id.

²⁵ Perhaps the most thoughtful recent address of the tensions posed by public issues contrary to the private conscience of the politician was the speech of New York Governor Mario Cuomo at the University of Notre Dame on September 13, 1984, "Religious Belief and Public Morality: A Catholic Governor's Perspective." See Oneskes, *Cuomo Bids Catholics Persuade By Example, Not Impose Views*, N.Y. Times, Sept. 14, 1984, at A1, 21, 22. "I speak here as a politician. And also as a Catholic . . . An old-fashioned Catholic who sins, regrets, struggles, worries, gets confused and most of the time feels better after confession." *Id.* at 21, col. 3. While stating that he personally believes abortion is wrong, Governor Cuomo strongly urged that the "pro-choice" *Roe v. Wade* decision not be changed, leaving the choice of whether to have an abortion is left to the individual woman, not the government. See *id.* at 22.

The Supreme Court has established a woman's constitutional right to abortion whether we like it or not. . . . Catholics, the statistics show, support the right to abortion in equal proportion to the rest of the population. Despite the teaching we've tried in our homes and our schools and our pulpits . . . collectively we Catholics apparently believe—and perhaps act—little differently from those who don't share our commitment.

upholding the law, including the decision of the Supreme Court in *Roe v. Wade*, which declares that a fetus is not a person and thus subject to legal abortion under some circumstances, the lawyer personally opposed to abortion, who embraces More's example, is faced with a difficult choice.

Some have uncomfortably tried to balance the public demands of the secular law with the contrary private demands of conscience. What does the public official do to reconcile the demands of public office, that, for example may sponsor legal abortion with public funding, with the competing demands of personal conscience? If some of the demands of public office would require violation of private conscience must the office be abandoned? Abortion is one prominent issue on a consciously broader spectrum that urges fuller appreciation of all life. Theft of a few cents is no longer punishable by hanging. Life seemingly meets with more respect, at least in the much narrower scope of capital crimes.²⁶ The eighth amendment is further proof that the Framers of the Constitution learned the lessons of the bloody history of England.

Upon more careful scrutiny, however, this contemporary greater respect for life evaporates as illusion. Today, just as the abortion controversy poses difficult questions at one end of the spectrum of life and death, so too does the question of capital punishment—another nonissue in More's England—haunt lawyers of conscience today. If life is protected only until birth, and then contemptuously relegated to the misery and despair of poverty, illiteracy, and urban decay by the lack of governmental funds and social resources, the spirit of More would stand in silent reproach. If the anti-abortion lawyer abandons public office because the duties of office require support of state sponsored abortion programs, who in the public realm will conscientiously work to amend the law? Who will work to protect and to further the lives of the historically disadvantaged by achieving more equitable allocation of governmental resources? If the lawyer of conscience abandons public office, who will close the flood gates of capital punishment that now threaten to open in a bloodbath of barbarity? ²⁷ But, if these broader life and death issues militate against resignation of office, will that not induce an untenable professional schizophrenia? The anti-abortion lawyer remaining in office and working to amend

Id. at 21, col. 6. *But see* Bergen, *Two Cardinals Join on Abortion Issue*, N.Y. Times, Oct. 2, 1985, at A12 (Cardinal O'Connor stated that former Democratic vice-presidential candidate Geraldine Ferraro "misrepresented Catholic teaching").

²⁶ For a discussion of how the range of capital offenses was gradually constricted in the United States, see R. BERGER, *DEATH PENALTIES* (1982); *see also* Gregory, Book Review, 32 *DE PAUL L. REV.* 211 (1982).

²⁷ For an excellent, comprehensive study of the history of capital punishment in the United States, see W. BOWERS, *LEGAL HOMICIDE* (1984); *see also* Gregory, Book Review, 61 *J. URB. L.* 675 (1984).

the law is imposing private morality on public life, and may be accused by some of sabotaging the secular sphere. However, public life divorced from morality is fundamentally impoverished. Moral choices necessarily permeate the political realm, and it is imperative that the right moral choices be implemented in political action.

In light of these very complex and potentially contrary issues in contemporary America, Thomas More may be envied the simple absolutes of his day. The choices were clearer; life was simpler, though temporal death swifter if the consequences of choice were adverse to the interests of the monarchical elite. Today the fundamental issues of life and death are far more complex; they span a broader, more fully explicated spectrum. It is not easy to abandon the public arena, since an entire panoply of other fundamental issues of conscience may be compromised by the default. The usurpation of religious authority by Henry VIII was not subject to amendment by act of Parliament in the context of the times; indeed, Parliament was fully compliant with and expedited the wishes of the monarch. Fortunately, laws today remain subject to principled amendment, another countervailing consideration to abandoning the public arena because of any single issue.

Thomas More never questioned the institution of capital punishment; indeed, he pursued heretics to their deaths. Divorce was outrageous; human sexuality was, at best, uncomfortably accommodated. Artificial insemination, laboratory fertilization and incubation processes, organ transplants, artificial prolongation of life, euthanasia, genocide, nuclear war, and continental famine are but a few of the many fundamental contemporary issues never faced by Thomas More. He is not an infallible guide on all questions, but he does reach us from his timeless scaffold on Tower Hill. Absolutes were never easy to ascertain. When balances and accommodations cannot be reached, however, absolutes must be thoughtfully chosen by all persons of conscience. This is the enduring message in the spirit of More. As lawyers, if our private and public lives are to have any ultimate meaning, we must, as More did, sometimes take difficult, irreversible positions. More was a staunch Roman Catholic, but his message transcends any particular faith. The atheist humanist can draw equal inspiration from the example of choosing to obey personal conscience rather than follow the popular passions.

Those who find the history, the law, and the theology of More's England and contemporary America in many ways parallel will certainly find much to reflect upon in this fine biography of the man for all seasons. History, biography, theology, and literature are effectively fused in a grand morality play. Thomas More is bound to eternity and to every age. His life and death illuminate, at least in part, the choices that lawyers in the public life of the United States must make today. Richard Marius has written an outstanding biography, with particular relevance for our troub-

led times. There are many difficult questions, but no easy answers, to fundamental public and private moral issues of conscience. The process of choice and decision must be searchingly rigorous and thoughtful, especially for the lawyer in the public sphere. The life and death of Thomas More remain beacons for our time.