

INTRODUCTION

Sir Thomas More, Controversialist

Thomas More (1477/8-1535) was the son of Sir John More, a London judge. He became a member of the household of Archbishop J. Morton about the age of thirteen while Morton was chancellor of England. More's early study of the classics held his lifelong interest. It was his father's wish that he study law and this he began in 1494, being called to the Bar about 1501. He lectured in law at Furnival's Inn and in 1504 entered parliament. About this time he had felt the call to religious life and lived for several years with the Carthusians in their London charterhouse. He finally decided that monasticism was not for him and married in 1505 but without giving up his strict manner of life. Because of his interest in the humanities, his house became a meeting place for scholars and humanists. He was on terms of close friendship with men such as John Colet, William Grocyn, and, of course, Erasmus of Rotterdam. More was also a favourite of Henry VIII. With his accession in 1509 to the throne of England, a new period in Thomas More's public career began. He was sent as an envoy to Flanders in 1515, became a privy councillor in 1518, was knighted three years later and elected Speaker of the House of Commons in 1523. He reached the highest point of his career when he was appointed Lord Chancellor of England in 1529, an office he held till 1532 when he was succeeded by Thomas Audley.

More's early intellectual interest in the classics was evidenced by his epigrams, the translations from Lucian, and in a derived sense his most famous work, *Utopia*, published in 1516 at Louvain.¹ However, it is with More the theologian that this study is concerned. More's theological writings fall into two broad categories: spiritual writings which began with his life of the Italian humanist Pico della Mirandola (a translation printed in London about 1510) and ended with the Tower works, notably the treatise on the Passion.² In spite of the interest of these compositions, it is

¹ Thomas More, *The Latin Epigrams of Thomas More*, (Basle, 1520), edited and translated by L. Bradner and C. A. Lynch, Chicago, 1953; idem, *Utopia*, (Louvain, 1516), edited and translated by Edward Surtz and J. H. Hexter, New Haven and London, 1965, *CW*, 4; idem, *Translations of Lucian*, (Paris, 1506), edited Craig R. Thompson, New Haven and London, 1974, *CW* 3.

² Thomas More, *Here is conteyned the lyfe of Johan Picus Erle of Myrandula*, London, (1510?); idem, *A dialoge of comfort against tribulacion*, London, 1553; edited by Leland Miles, Bloomington (Ind.) and London, 1965; edited by Louis L. Martz and Frank Manley, New Haven and London, 1977, *CW* 12; idem, *Treatise on the Passion; Treatise on the Blessed Body; Instructions and Prayers*, edited by Garry Haupt, New Haven and London, 1977, *CW* 13.

in his more formal theological writing that material relating to this enquiry can be found. Most of this was written as a direct response to the threat posed by Wittenberg and its English adherents.

Thomas More's support for Henry was not his first excursion into theology. As a younger man he had lectured on Augustine's *City of God* in the London Jewry and had written a number of essay-letters, some critics say of great originality, on theological method.³ But the *Responsio ad Lutherum* (1523) was his first major incursion into formal theology. Both as royal official and confidant of King Henry VIII, More had taken an active part in drafting the *Assertio Septem Sacramentorum*.⁴ Luther's subsequent replies as well as possible urging from his royal master stirred him to write this, his first major work of religious controversy.

Thomas More's reply to Martin Luther's *Contra Henricum regem angliae* (1522) first appeared under the title *Eruditissimi viri F. Baravelli opus elegans* in 1523 without any indication of the place of printing. A second augmented edition came off the presses under a new title *Eruditissimi viri G. Rossei opus elegans* later the same year (1523) in London.⁵ The main difference between these editions, apart from the change of pseudonym, was the expansion of chapter ten (H gathering) to deal with the Roman primacy in some detail. The change of plan was apparently motivated by another work of Martin Luther's of which he had become aware in the meantime, *Responsio ad Catharinum* (1521) in reply to a work composed by

³ See in particular André Prévost, *Thomas More, 1477-1535, et la crise de la pensée européenne*, Tours, 1969, 125-141. 'Ce fut la grandeur de More d'avoir pressenti le danger et d'avoir ouvert la route à la théologie moderne, la "Théologie Positive".' Prévost suggests that More was indeed the first to use the term 'positive theology' to describe a theological method based on induction from the sources rather than deduction from *a priori* principles according to the method of scholastic theology. Ibid., 140 and Thomas More to Martin Dorp, Bruges, 21 October (1515), Rogers, *Correspondence*, 45, 608/610: speaking of decadent scholasticism, More says of its exponents '...quaecunque sunt optima, piissima, maxime Christiana, verisque Theologis dignissima, ea, inquam omnia, quod sint (vt ipsi vocant) *positiva*, continentant...'

⁴ See Headley, *Responsio*, 715-731; 775-803. This matter will be dealt with at greater length below. See *Assertio Septem Sacramentorum* in Henry VIII, *Libello huic regio haec insunt*, London, 1521.

⁵ The Rosseus edition of the *Opus elegans* was reprinted in the collection of More's Latin works published at Louvain in 1565 by J. Bogard, and in another edition by T. Zangrius. Each of these was reprinted the following year, 1566, as well as in a later edition which appeared in Frankfurt am Main in 1689 under the Gensch imprint. An English translation of part 1 of this work was published some years ago in the U.S.A. by G. J. Donnelly, *A Translation of St. Thomas More's Responsio ad Lutherum*, with an introduction and notes, Washington D.C., 1962. A new edition with notes and translation has since appeared as part of the *Complete Works of St. Thomas More: Responsio ad Lutherum*, 2 Vols, ed. J. M. Headley, tr. Scholastica Mandeville, New Haven and London, 1969, *CW* 5.

Ambrosius Catharinus O. P., an Italian opponent of Luther's, *Apologia pro veritate catholicae et apostolicae fidei ac doctrinae*, printed in Florence in 1520.

In this tract More began to grapple seriously with some of the central problems posed by the Reformation. He identified these principally in terms of the understanding of revelation, the nature and role of the church. More's continued concern with the impact of Luther's innovations reveals itself in his correspondence. He gave it concrete form in his pamphlet against Bugenhagen, taking the Wittenberg publicist to task on a number of classical themes such as justification, ministry and celibacy.⁶

Lutheran influence was felt in Britain within a few years of the Wittenberg eruption. John Dorne records the sale at Oxford of a dozen books by Luther in 1520.⁷ At Cambridge interest was more intense. Theology students from a number of colleges 'flocked together in open sight, both in the schools, and at open sermons...' to hear the new doctrines discussed. The White Horse tavern was centre of this ferment. Among early adherents were men later to be reckoned among the founding fathers of English Protestantism such as Tyndale, Coverdale, Joye, Cranmer, Latimer, Barnes.⁸ Official opposition could do little to hold back this new growth.

Under pressure from home as well as attraction from abroad many of these men found their way overseas to centres of evangelical reform. The government campaign to forbid entry to Luther's publications was to prove equally ineffectual against the flow of vernacular works which sprang from England's Protestant exiles.⁹

The key work in this publicity campaign was Tyndale's translation of the new testament completed in Worms in 1526. This was followed by a series of other works such as Jeremy Barlowe's *The Burial of the Mass* (Strasbourg, 1528), Tyndale's *Introduction to the Romans* (Worms, 1526),

⁶ *Epistola, in qua...respondet literis Ioannis Pomerani*, was composed about 1526. It was first published in Louvain, 1568; subsequently in Rogers, *Correspondence*, 323-365. Bugenhagen (1485-1558) was Luther's confessor at Wittenberg, and a supporter of Melancthon. The letter was written in reply to Bugenhagen's *Epistola ad Anglos* (1525) published initially in German and Latin, which reproached the English for their ignorance of the true gospel. See E. F. Rogers, *Sir Thomas More's Letter to Bugenhagen* in *The Modern Churchman* 35 (1946) 350-360.

⁷ See F. Madan, *The Day-Book of John Dorne, 1520* in *Collectanea*, I, First Series, ed. C. R. L. Fletcher, Oxford, 1885, 73-117.

⁸ See H. Maynard Smith, *Pre-Reformation England*, London, 1938, 497-498.

⁹ For an up-to-date list of these works see Anthea Hume, *English Protestant Books Printed Abroad, 1525-1535: An Annotated Bibliography*, in *Confutation* II, 1065-1091; Carl S. Meyer, *Henry VIII Burns Luther's Books 12 May 1521*, *JEH* 9 (1968) 173-187; for the later fortunes of the subversive book-trade see Louis A. Schuster, *Thomas More's Polemical Career, 1523-1533*, in *Confutation* III, 1155-1252.

Roye's *A Brief Dialogue* (Strasbourg, 1527), Tyndale's *Parable of the Wicked Mammon* and *The Obedience of a Christian Man* both of which appeared in 1528 from an Antwerp press. These works coupled a vigorous criticism of accepted practice in established ecclesiastical circles, often justified, with an appeal to a radical evangelical doctrine on the lines of that advocated by Martin Luther. Publications from abroad were matched by an increasing amount of quiet proselytism at home which touched even More's own household.¹⁰ It is against this background that Cuthbert Tunstal's invitation to Sir Thomas More makes sense. Reasoning, popular appeal, ready wit, and a command of written English, it was hoped, might prove a better counter-balance to subversion than legal threat or even cruel punishment.

In 1528 Sir Thomas More, then Speaker of the House of Commons, was drawn into direct intellectual conflict with the Lutheran movement in England. On 7 March 1527/8 Cuthbert Tunstal, bishop of London, sent him a special commission. In this he asked More to take up the public defence of traditional orthodoxy in the vernacular. He wrote: 'Now you can play the Demosthenes both in English and in Latin, and at every assembly you are the keenest defender of the truth. You can spend your leisure hours in no better way, if any you have, than in writing in English to open the eyes of uneducated people to the crafty deceits of these heretics and so put them on the alert against those who seek to destroy the church. In so doing you will but follow the example of our illustrious king... That you may carry out this mission most effectively I hereby license you to keep and read the works of heresy.'¹¹ Thus More was commissioned to enter the lists on behalf of orthodoxy.

Why should More, a layman, a non-professional theologian, have been selected for this task? He was marked out for it on several scores—by his political prominence in parliament and friendship with the king, his popularity with the common people achieved in his days as under-sheriff of London, his range of learning established by the widespread acclaim accorded his *Utopia*, his reputation as lecturer in law as well as his theological

¹⁰ Nicholas Harpsfield, *The life and death of Sr Thomas Moore knight*. ed. E. V. Hitchcock, London, 1932, 84-89. Harpsfield was a friend of William Roper, More's son-in-law. Roper went through a prolonged flirtation with Lutheranism about 1526. More stopped arguing and turned to prayer instead. This seemingly proved more succesful in winning his favourite daughter's husband back to orthodoxy.

¹¹ Cuthbert Tunstal to Thomas More, (London), 7 March 1527/8, Rogers, *Correspondence*, 387/19-388/45. On More's polemical career see Rainer Pineas, *Thomas More and Tudor Polemics*, Bloomington (Ind.), 1968, a collection of articles previously published; idem, *George Joye's Controversy with Thomas More*, *Moreana* 38 (1973) 27-35; Schuster, *More's Polemical Career*, in *Confutation III*, 1137-1268.

learning and honesty of life. Most decisive of all, perhaps, was his mastery of English as a written language in an age when Latin was the *lingua franca* of cultured society and Europeans generally were only beginning to domesticate the barbarisms of their spoken tongues.¹²

Given this mandate from his bishop, More set to and produced a series of works of controversy in English, the centre-piece of which are his two works directed against William Tyndale. *The Dialogue Concerning Heresies* (1529)¹³ brought More directly into conflict with English Lutherans. The *Dialogue* evinced a speedy reply from 'The Masker' as More termed his principal adversary. William Tyndale's response, *An answer vnto Sir Thomas Mores dialoge*, was published probably in Antwerp in 1530. This in turn provoked More's major work of ecclesiological interest, *The Confutation of Tyndale's Answer*.¹⁴ The first part was published in London in the year he resigned as Lord Chancellor, 1532, and the rest the following year, 1533. When we examine these works in detail we discover that while they range over almost all disputed areas, one theme constantly recurs. More repeatedly returned to the authority of the church as bearer and interpreter of revelation. His conviction on this score was something arrived at in the process of argument rather than assumed as an *a priori* position. As already noted, it had arisen first of all in his work against Luther, the *Responsio* (1523). Luther based his case on justification, his rejection of sacraments, the hierarchical church, monastic life and so forth on scrip-

¹² See R. W. Chambers, *The Continuity of English Prose from Alfred to More and His School*, in Harpsfield, *Life of Sir Thomas Moore*, ed. E. V. Hitchcock, cxli-cxlvii.

¹³ *A dialoge of syr Thomas More knyghte*, was printed in London under the imprint of John Rastell, 1529. It was reprinted in the following year 1530-31 by the same firm. It appeared some thirty years later in *The workes of Sir Thomas More Knyght*, London, 1557, pp. 103-288. This later version was printed in facsimile with a version in modern English spelling in Thomas More, *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies* ed. W. E. Campbell, with introduction and notes by A. W. Reed, London, 1927. A new edition was completed in 1981 as part of the Yale project, with Dr Thomas Lawler of Holy Cross College, Worcester, Massachusetts as chief editor. I am indebted to Dr Lawler for a progress report on this edition and reassurance concerning the almost complete identity of the 1529 and 1531 editions of the *Dialogue*. For some interesting detective work on the text of the *Dialogue* from the clues provided in the printed sheets see E. J. Devereux, *Thomas More's Textual Changes in the 'Dialogue Concerning Heresies', Library* (September 1972) 233-235. (I am indebted to Dr Lawler for this reference.) More seems to have treated his printer as a modern newspaper editor treats his printers. Not surprisingly John Rastell passed on the work in mid-stream to a colleague Peter Treveris, better able, presumably, to put up with frequent changes of text.

¹⁴ *The cōfutation of Tyndales answere made by syr Thomas More knyght*, (pt. I) London, 1532, (pt. 2) 1533 appeared under the imprint of Wyllyam Rastell and was reprinted in his compilation, *The workes of Sir Thomas More knyght*, London, 1557, pp. 339-832. It has appeared in the Yale edition of More's works, *The Confutation of Tyndale's Answer*, edited by Louis A. Schuster, Richard C. Marius, James P. Lusardi and Richard Schoeck, New Haven and London, 3 vols, 1973, CW 8.

ture. More found that in order to substantiate his own position he had to turn to traditional interpretations of scripture, the church's theological tradition and established doctrine for support. This in turn led to an examination of church authority together with the nature and origin of the church whose authority he quoted. Finally he came to define the characteristics by which this church can be known. All of this argument is contained in the *Responsio* (1523). It is repeated in whole, in part, or in more developed form in the later works, notably *The Dialogue Concerning Heresies* (1529-31) and *The Confutation of Tyndale's Answer*, (1532-33).

While More directed his attention to other evangelicals besides Tyndale, in 1533 he was obliged to open up a second front, as it were, with critics of the extended powers of the church in English society. In particular Christopher St German (+ 1540), an expert in common law, attracted his attention. St German had published seven treatises attacking ecclesiastical jurisdiction. In 1532 he released an anonymous tract entitled *A Treatise concernynge the diuision betwene the spirytualtie and temporalitie*. In this he blamed the clergy for tensions existing in English society between clergy and laity. In 1533 Sir Thomas More took St German to task in *The Apologie of syr Thomas More knyght* published in London by his nephew William Rastell in 1533. St German's reply, *Salem and Bizance (A dialogue betwexte two Englysshe men)*, came off the presses in the same year. With customary persistence More answered with a further thrust within the year 1533, in *The debellacyon of Salem and Bizance*.¹⁵ It was not without reason that the name of the eastern empire was used in this debate. It was truly Byzantine in its detailed examination of the complications inherent in the interlocking jurisdictions of church and state as well as some outstanding instances in which conflict had arisen.

Sources

This brief review of Sir Thomas More's career as controversialist has already identified the main sources this study will draw on and the order in which they will be discussed.¹⁶ In order of appearance these are the *Respon-*

¹⁵ Thomas More, *The Apologie of syr Thomas More knyght*, London, 1533, ed. Arthur Irving Taft, London, 1930; idem, *The debellacyon of Salem and Bizance*, London, 1533, repr. *EW*, 1557. Christopher St German, *A Treatise concernynge the diuision betwene the spirytualtie and temporalitie*, London, 1532; idem, *Salem and Bizance (A dialogue betwexte two Englysshe men)*, London, 1533.

¹⁶ More detailed bibliographical information can be found in Frank and Majie Padberg Sullivan, *Moreana. Materials for the Study of Saint Thomas More*, Los Angeles, Ca, 1964-71, a comprehensive bibliography that has appeared in separate fascicules over the years; R. W. Gibson, and J. Max Patrick, *St. Thomas More: A Preliminary Bibliography of his Works and of Moreana to the Year 1750*, New Haven and London, 1961; the review devoted exclusively to Thomas More studies, *Moreana*, Angers, 1964-, and of course the magnificent critical edition

sio ad Lutherum (1523), *The Dialogue Concerning Heresies* (1529-31) and *The Confutation of Tyndale's Answer* (1532-33).¹⁷ For a variety of reasons I have omitted detailed consideration of *The Apology of Sir Thomas More Knight* (1533) and *The Debellation of Salem and Bizance* (1533) even though these shed light on such topics as More's conception of Christendom, church-state relations and his attitudes towards heresy and heretics. I have made this, admittedly regrettable, omission for two reasons. Firstly, the complex nature of the issues discussed: it would be difficult to do them justice within the limits of this already somewhat extended study. Secondly, the editors of the Yale edition of More's works have not yet completed their researches on these treatises.¹⁸ It would seem an unnecessary duplication of effort to get too involved with these tracts while their editors are still at work. However, this should not hide the fact that at a future date the ecclesiological content of the St German controversies will have to be worked into our over-all picture of More's understanding of the church.

One further collection of sources bearing on More's attitudes during the trial proceedings is of importance. These consist mainly of letters, to be found for the most part in Elizabeth Rogers, *The Correspondence of Sir Thomas More*, Princeton, 1947;¹⁹ contemporary accounts of his trial, notably *The Paris Newsletter*, printed as an appendix to Nicholas Harpsfield's, *The life and death of Sr Thomas Moore*, first published in London, 1932;²⁰ and contemporary biographies, especially those of William Roper and Nicholas Harpsfield.²¹

of More's works: *The Yale Edition of the Complete Works of St Thomas More*, Yale University Press, now well advanced. Each volume contains detailed references and bibliographies.

¹⁷ See above notes 5, 13 and 14 for bibliographical details.

¹⁸ The Yale edition of the first of these tracts has appeared since my work was completed: Sir Thomas More, *The Apology*, edited by J. B. Trapp, New Haven and London, 1979, *CW*9.

¹⁹ The correspondence which developed during More's imprisonment prior to his execution especially with his daughter Margaret and with Thomas Cromwell is important as revealing his thought in regard to the key-issues of royal supremacy and papal primacy. Many of these letters are available in printed sources such as the *The works of Syr Thomas More knyght* (1557), but are most easily accessible in E. F. Rogers, *The Correspondence of Sir Thomas More*, Princeton, 1947. This resource is complemented by *Erasmi epistolae*, (Oxford, 12 vols, 1906-58) edited by P. S. and H. M. Allen as Rogers does not print letters published by the Allens, as well as Hubertus Schulte-Herbrüggen, *Sir Thomas More. Neue Briefe*, Münster, 1966.

²⁰ The principal sources for More's trial are the following: *The Paris Newsletter*, reprinted as an appendix to Nicholas Harpsfield, *The life and death of Sr Thomas Moore, knight*, edited by E. V. Hitchcock and R. W. Chambers, London, 1932, 254-266; *Expositio fidelis de morte Di Thomae Mori*, Basle, 1535, ed. Allen, *Erasmi epistolae*, 11, 368-378; H. de Vocht, *Acta Thomae Mori*, Louvain, 1947; J. Gairdner, *The Calendar of Letters and State Papers, Foreign and Domestic of the reign of Henry VIII*, Vol. VIII, No. 974, pp. 384-386. The official documents relating to the trial are extant in the *Baga de Secretis*, pouch 7, bundle 3, M.7 at the Public Record Office,

Any explorer in reformation history owes an enormous debt to those who have provided increasingly brilliant beacons by which to navigate his course. The studies of G. R. Elton in revising many received interpretations of late medieval and early Tudor constitutional history, his perceptive and sympathetic treatment of Secretary Cromwell's *Realpolitik*, as well as his comprehensive treatment of the implementation of royal supremacy—which received the support of many humanists—shed a great deal of light on the issues which confronted Sir Thomas More.²² While A. G. Dickens has done a great deal to bring the complex history of the English Reformation on to a more human scale,²³ the magisterial treatment of the history of the Council of Trent by Hubert Jedin, together with his other researches, provide us not merely with a multitude of insights into the twisted course of internal Catholic reform, but also manage to illuminate many hidden corners of sixteenth century ecclesiastical history.²⁴ The history of the Reformation itself continues to be the subject of almost countless studies among which it is difficult to single out star performers.²⁵ More specifically in relation to the subject matter of this study, the history of ecclesiology, one must point to the brilliant monograph by Yves Con-

London. The more important of these have been reprinted as an appendix to Nicholas Harpsfield, *The life of Sir Thomas Moore*, 267-276 in a critical edition which takes account of other extant mss.

²¹ William Roper, *The Lyfe of Sir Thomas Moore, knyghte*, ed. E. V. Hitchcock, London, 1935, the work of More's son-in-law, Margaret More's husband. Nicholas Harpsfield, *The life and death of Sr Thomas Moore, knight sometymes Lord high Chancellor of England*, ed. E. V. Hitchcock, London, 1932. Harpsfield, like his colleague Roper, a lawyer, was present at More's trial, and later had contact with other members of the More family circle. See also Thomas Stapleton, *Tres Thomae*, Douai, 1588, translated by Phillip Hallett, London, 1928. Stapleton was an exile of Elizabethan vintage, a scholar who spent most of his life at Douai. Cresacre More, *The Life and Death of Sir Thomas More*, (probably Paris) 1631; London 1828. Cresacre was a great grandson of Sir Thomas. Having studied at Douai, he returned to the family property at Gobions, Hertfordshire. RO: BA, *The Lyfe of Syr Thomas More Sometime Lord Chancellor of England*, ed. E. V. Hitchcock and P. E. Hallett, London, 1950.

²² See in particular, on constitutional and related political issues, G. R. Elton, *The Tudor Constitution: Documents and Commentary*, Cambridge, 1960; idem, *The Tudor Revolution in Government: Administrative Changes in the reign of Henry VIII*, Cambridge, 1953. See also the essays collected in idem, *Studies in Tudor and Stuart Politics and Government. Papers and Reviews 1946-1972*, 2 Vols, Cambridge, 1974; on Cromwell and the implementation of royal supremacy, idem, *Policy and Police. The Enforcement of the Reformation in the Age of Thomas Cromwell*, Cambridge, 1972; idem, *Reform and Renewal. Thomas Cromwell and the Commonweal*, Cambridge, 1973; idem, *Reform and Reformation, England 1509-1558*, London, 1977.

²³ See in particular Arthur Godfrey Dickens, *Lollards and Protestants in the Diocese of York, 1509-1558*, London, 1959; idem, *The English Reformation*, London, 1967.

²⁴ See in particular Hubert Jedin, *Geschichte des Konzils von Trient*, 4 Vols, Freiburg im Br., 1949-75, tr. E. Graf, *A History of the Council of Trent*, 3 vols, London, 1957-.

²⁵ *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* (Gütersloh, 1910-) provides a reliable guide to literature on the Reformation.

gar, a work whose arches span the broad reaches between Augustine and the second Vatican Council without apparent strain.²⁶ While Congar is particularly effective in providing a vantage point from which to view the many turbulent currents of late medieval ecclesiology, Heiko Oberman has focused attention on the key issues of revelation, scripture, tradition and church.²⁷ Finally anyone coming to grips with Sir Thomas More must acknowledge his debt to the editors of *The Complete Works of Sir Thomas More*, an edition whose introductions, commentaries and indices provide so many keys to turn, one feels that, given willing hands, the hidden treasure it contains will very rapidly be made available to the public at large.²⁸

Historiography

If these are the principal sources on which a study of More's theological ideas can be based, the question naturally arises as to what effort so far has been made to determine the nature and scope of his thought on the church. Not without good reason the French Renaissance scholar Marie Delcourt pointed to two distinct streams of interpretation of Sir Thomas More's thought, the continental European which emphasised the More of *Utopia*, Erasmus's humanist confidant.²⁹ The English recusant tradition on the other hand turned More into an ikon of God-fearing resistance to unwarranted intervention by secular power in the activity and governance of Christ's church. In this century, however, despite the flurry of hagiographical writing surrounding the canonisation proceedings in the 1930s, the predominant scholarly cult of More in Britain epitomised in the work of R. W. Chambers tended to take up the humanist dimension in his writing. In this case, however, with a renewed stress on the liberal elements in More's thought the tendency was to underline his contribution as *littérateur* and early pioneer of English prose. While *Utopia* still proved a

²⁶ Yves Congar, *L'Église de saint Augustin à l'époque moderne*, Paris, 1970.

²⁷ Heiko Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology. Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism*, Cambridge (Mass.), 1963. Oberman has carried his researches a stage further in idem, *Werden und Wertung der Reformation, Vom Wegestreit zum Glaubenskampf*, Tübingen, 1977.

²⁸ *The Yale Edition of the Complete Works of St. Thomas More* published by the St. Thomas More Project, Yale University. Further material less directly related to the subject in hand can be found in other works of More's. These are listed in the bibliography in the end pages of this work.

²⁹ See Marie Delcourt, *L'Amitié d'Érasme et de Thomas More entre 1520 et 1535*, in *Bulletin de l'Association Guillaume Budé* 50 (1936) 7-29; idem, *Recherches sur Thomas More, la tradition continentale et la tradition anglaise*, in *Humanisme et Renaissance* 3 (1936) 22-42; Delcourt's findings were re-examined and to a large extent confirmed by James K. McConica, *The Recusant Reputation of Thomas More in Essential Articles for the Study of Thomas More*, edited by R. S. Sylvester and G. P. Marc'Hadour, Hamden (Conn.), 1977, 136-149.

fertile hunting ground for students in search of a thesis, the content of More's theological writings remained largely unexplored.

One of the earliest writers in this century to point to the significance of his theological contribution was the American Charles Kernan in an article published in *Thought* in 1942.³⁰ The gist of what Kernan had to say could be found in some of the early biographies as well as, for example, Campbell's introduction to his reprint of the 1557 edition of the *Dialogue*.³¹ Nonetheless in subsequent years there has been an increasing focus of attention on More's theological interests and a recognition that theological and spiritual concerns dominated his writing from 1520 onwards. Martin Luther killed off the More of *Utopia*. The dream of perfection gave way to a prolonged struggle for the simple preservation of the structural framework of western Christendom.

Not surprisingly the doctrine of the church loomed large in this concern. It has taken some time for historians to identify the centrality of this theme. Willis J. Egan in his 1952 doctoral thesis pointed the way.³² In his analysis of More's concept of the rule of faith, Egan clearly showed the main elements in More's position. Arguing against Tyndale's simple *scriptura sola* formula, More saw the role of the church both in authenticating scripture and interpreting it. Divine revelation is broader than scripture. Unwritten tradition in a variety of forms subsists in the church of Christ identified by More with the common known Catholic Church. Helpful as a first exploration of the ground, Egan did not fully perceive the primarily pneumatic concept of tradition held by More and tended to read back anachronistically into More a certain degree of ultramontane papalism unsupported by the evidence.³³

Paul Huber, a Swiss historian, less concerned with deepening the analysis of More's theological ideas than with testing out the interpretations of the pre-World War II school of More scholarship in Britain, found himself focusing on the concept of tradition predominant in More's thought.³⁴ He saw More as a man deeply rooted in the socio-cultural and

³⁰ Charles Kernan, *Thomas More Theologian*, *Thought* 17 (1942) 281-302.

³¹ Thomas More, *Dialogue Concerning Tyndale*, ed. W. E. Campbell, London, 1931, (63-108).

³² Willis J. Egan, *The Rule of Faith in St. Thomas More's Controversy with William Tyndale 1528-1533*, published in Los Angeles, 1960. I am indebted to Fr Egan for the use of his microfilm of *The Workes*, 1557.

³³ See Egan, *Rule of Faith*, 73: 'Thomas More is quite aware, and on more than one occasion he acknowledges, that inerrancy of belief belongs primarily to the *magisterium*, and especially to the successors of St Peter...'

³⁴ Paul Huber, *Traditionsfestigkeit und Traditionskritik bei Thomas Morus*, Basel, 1953.

religious tradition of late medieval England, one who wished to advance towards a better world using the mainspring of living tradition rather than promoting its radical destruction, a constitutional reformer in the legal sense of constitution; definitely not a revolutionary.

Huber wrote within the perspective of a historian of culture and society rather than of ideas, still less theological ideas. Nonetheless his analysis as far as it went cast a great deal of light on such themes as More's concept of Christendom as a political entity with a spiritual core and the relation between spiritual and temporal powers, where he adverted to More's stress on the role of laity in the church. Similarly in his interpretation of More's concept of tradition, Huber pointed out that in More's view the bearer of ecclesiastical tradition is not exclusively the clergy. The entire body of believers play a key role. This 'populist' approach to religious faith finds both a political and ecclesiastical counterpart in his theory of consensus. It is characteristic of Huber's method that he presents this stance of More's in terms mainly of popular 'political' consensus rather than one based in spiritual experience and belief. Nonetheless, Huber clearly observed the dominant role of More's doctrine on consensus as a principle of verification: 'nisi rationi consensus accedat...qui consensus aut coalescens usu, aut expressus literis, publica lex est.' Sir Thomas More, Huber recognised, was no counter-reformation papalist but a moderate constitutional thinker in a late medieval mould, one whose political and legal intuitions found a ready parallel in the patristic theology of consensus and communion as well as echoing many voices from the schools of late medieval conciliarism.

The first systematic analysis of More's ecclesiology came in two articles from the Dutch scholar E. Flesseman-Van Leer published consecutively in 1959 and 1960.³⁵ Concentrating on the More-Tyndale controversy, Flesseman-Van Leer first analysed their respective notions of the transmission of revelation in scripture and tradition. Flesseman-Van Leer's exposition of the controversy revolved around the four classical issues of the Reform. These were:

1. The sufficiency of scripture; 2. the necessity of scripture; 3. the self-authentication of scripture; 4. the transparency of scripture. Exploring these issues Flesseman-Van Leer quickly came up against the doctrine of the church underlying More's antithetical attitudes. Scripture is not suffi-

³⁵ E. Flesseman-Van Leer, *The Controversy about Scripture and Tradition between Thomas More and William Tyndale*, *Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis* Nieuwe Serie 43 (1959) 143-165; idem, *The Controversy about Ecclesiology between Thomas More and William Tyndale*, *Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis* Nieuwe Serie 44 (1960) 65-86.

cient. It is complemented by church tradition which is in a certain sense prior to holy writ. While recognising the value of scripture, More admitted the possibility of Christian faith in one who had never read the scriptures through adherence to God's word proclaimed in the preaching of the church. Similarly More affirmed that scripture does not vindicate its own divine origin but is handed on by a church which establishes its credibility through the authority of its own witness and the testimony of miracles.

Not surprisingly More rejected the self-evidence of many scripture passages, insisting that the aid of the church was needed for their interpretation. In disputed readings credence should be given to articles of faith taught by the church rather than to the apparent sense of scripture.

Almost inevitably Flesseman-Van Leer moved on to an examination of the protagonists' opposed views on the nature of the church. For More revelation was not something given once and for all and recorded in writing. It was an ongoing reality—essentially the divine presence in the church, revealing itself to believers of each age, helping them to identify the true scriptures, guiding them in their interpretation as well as leading them into a deeper perception of divine truth either by further revelation or the discovery of new facets to doctrines already made known.

Given the centrality of the church in the appropriation of revelation, More attached a high degree of importance to identifying the true church of Christ. This he saw as the common corps of Christendom, the well known body of believers, not the hidden group of elect whom Tyndale conceived of as the church of Christ. Through its consensus of faith as well as its common voice expressed in council, this church of Christ can determine the meaning of disputed passages in scripture and give authoritative testimony to the broader meaning of any aspect of divine revelation whether made known through scripture or tradition. The church is an organised community with worship and the proclamation of the gospel as its principal activities. Flesseman-Van Leer notes More's nuanced position on papal primacy. While More himself affirmed the divine right of the papacy he did not consider it fully *de fide*. 'He died for the unity of the church, for the upholding of which the primacy was instituted.' Her final word is that the underlying difference between the two writers in their views on the church may be traced back to two different conceptions of what constitutes the substance of Christian faith. More stressed intellectual content, Tyndale the experience of God's loving mercy in trusting to his promise. Whether this analysis is correct remains to be seen. In any event the appearance of these two studies marked a major step forward in a critical examination of More's thought.

In the introduction to the Yale edition of the *Responsio* John M. Headley presented a picture of its ecclesiology which is a model of both scholarly expertise and intelligent brevity. Disentangling the two versions of the *Responsio*, the earlier Baravellus (late spring 1523) from the later Rosseus edition, produced probably in autumn of the same year, Headley traces the evolution of More's thought within the crucial years 1521-1523.³⁶ He points out that while the overt question in dispute in the *Responsio* is that of the seven sacraments, the real underlying question was quickly identified by More in terms of the authority of ecclesiastical tradition. This led him subsequently to examine the credentials of the community which claims to bear and interpret this divine tradition.

More devoted the first book of his treatise to the question of tradition, going beyond Henry in formulating a theory of unwritten transmission of revelation. In the *Responsio* this was conceived principally in terms of an inspirational, pneumatic theory: what the Spirit inscribes on man's heart through the divine indwelling. This indwelling Spirit of God guides the church in recognising and interpreting divine revelation whether given in the form of scripture or unwritten tradition.

Inevitably this led to the question of the church. In the earlier edition's second book More went on to discuss the question of church authority in doctrinal matters. He identified this in the main with the consensus of believing Christians. Headley more accurately than Huber sees the doctrine of consensus principally rooted not in English constitutional practice nor Roman law theory but in the spiritual conception of a community uninterruptedly under divine influence, an influence whose aim it is to bring about communion of mind and heart in common submission to divine truth.

Only in the H gathering, the addition made to the first edition due probably to the influence of the German Franciscan Thomas Murner and More's perusal of Luther's attack on Ambrosius Catharinus Politi, (an Italian Dominican opponent of Luther's), did More fully perceive the nature of a further issue of crucial significance, the nature of the church of

³⁶ See Thomas More, *Responsio ad Lutherum*, Part II, ed., John M. Headley, New Haven and London, 1969, 732-77. Some of Headley's positions were anticipated in earlier publications and filled out in later ones, mainly the following: idem, *Luther's View of Church History*, New Haven and London, 1963; idem, *Thomas Murner, Thomas More, and the First Expression of More's Ecclesiology*, *Studies in the Renaissance* 14 (1967) 73-92; idem, *More Against Luther: On Laws and the Magistrate*, *Moreana* 15 (1967) 211-223; idem, *Thomas More and Luther's Revolt*, *ARG* 60 (1969) 145-160; idem, *Thomas More and the Papacy*, *Moreana* 41 (1974) 5-10. See also Denis Hay, *A Note on More and the General Council*, in *Moreana* 15 (1967) 249-251. Hay suggests that More adopted an extreme conciliarist standpoint, a thesis which is not borne out by a detailed examination of the evidence.

Christ.³⁷ Both he and Luther had cited Ps 67, 7,—the Spirit of God makes men of one mind to dwell in God's house. Unanimity in faith is the product of the work of the Spirit. But unanimity among whom and in which church? Luther said the hidden church of the elect. What of More?

More identified his church with the common known multitude of believers, what we now call the institutional church, organised hierarchically, which celebrates the sacraments and preaches the gospel of Christ under the presidency of the pope. It is the consensus of this body that More looked on as normative of faith, not that of any 'number of secret and unknown assemblies...who disagree both with the rest of the church and also among themselves about the faith of Christ...'³⁸

Headley disagrees with Huber who had argued that More came to recognise the divine origin of papal primacy only about 1528. The former points to the unequivocal nature of his affirmations concerning Christ's wish that Peter and his successors preside over his followers in a ministry springing from an authority not of power but of love. Headley argues convincingly that More's conviction on this matter crystallised in the period between the production of the two editions of his reply to Luther. Thus in terms of the full Rosseus edition Headley is prepared to state that for More the twin focal points of his thought on the church are the institution of papal primacy on the one hand and the authority of ecclesial consensus on the other. Apart from a serious lapse of observation in neglecting the full significance ascribed to conciliar authority in the *Responsio*, this essay of Headley's was the most satisfactory account of More's ecclesiology at its time of publication.

The Abbé André Prévost published in 1969 the first full length survey of More's theological positions extending from his concept of God to practical spirituality. Within this broad ranging synthesis Prévost found time to analyse at length the content of More's ecclesiology.³⁹ Like his predecessors he began with the rule of faith. The eternal unwritten word of God immanent in tradition as well as scripture is More's yardstick. It is to this divine word mediated through the church that submission is made in the act of faith. The mediation of revelation by the church is an essential

³⁷ On Murner and More, see Headley, *First Expression of More's Ecclesiology*, 73-92; idem, *Responsio*, 786-788. See also Ambrosius Catharinus Politi, *Apologia pro veritate catholicae et fidei ac doctrinae adversus impia ac valde pestifera Martini dogmata*, (1520) ed. J. Schweizer and A. Franzen, *Corpus Catholicorum* 27, Münster Westf., 1956 and Luther's reply: *Ad librum eximii magistri nostri Ambrosii Catharini...responsio*, (1521), *WA* 7, 705-778.

³⁸ More, *Responsio*, 202/28-33, tr. 203/33-39.

³⁹ André Prévost, *Thomas More, 1477-1535, et la crise de la pensée européenne*, Tours, 1969, 233-287.

part of its function in the world. Prévost like Headley emphasised the inspirational, pneumatic concept of tradition found in More, based on his profound conception of the abiding presence of the divine Spirit within the Christian community.

Because of this divine guidance the church can exercise its ministry in respect of God's word in authenticating, transmitting and interpreting the divine message. This it does through three main organs: the common faith of the visible church; the writings and other commentaries of the fathers; conciliar definition. Prévost recognised More's affirmation of a divinely based papal authority but saw this exercised more in the sphere of discipline and church order than in teaching with special authority. Hence, little is heard of either the 'ordinary' or 'extraordinary magisterium', of the Roman pontiff. In this he was more acute than Headley who failed to see all the nuances possible within a broad affirmation of papal primacy.

According to Prévost the church for More was primarily a social body with ends and means, hierarchically organised with its own discipline and administration. He also adverted to the mystical and communitarian dimensions but these were overlaid by an emphasis on its social characteristics. Nonetheless, he recognised the special significance attached by More to the divine presence which enables the church to outlive the near-fatal effects of the sinful life of so many of its members and office-holders. Prévost's work is invaluable providing as it does a unique synthesis of More's theological outlook. At the same time it lacks a full, historical dimension in that this outlook is presented as a static rather than an evolving picture, one whose lines are drawn in the course of a lifetime, rather than given at birth. Moreover he failed to appreciate fully the profoundly spiritual view of the church underlying More's aggressive polemic.

Richard Marius in his introduction to the Yale edition of the *Confutation* also presents a synthetic view of More's thought, though confined in scope to the work in question.⁴⁰ His exposition is systematic rather than genetic in character. Hence one does not have the opportunity to follow the argument as it develops in the course of the book. On the other hand the canvas on which he works is a good deal broader than Headley's though Marius lacks Headley's talent for combining compression with insight.

Marius spells out the context of More's ecclesiology in terms of an awareness of the absoluteness of God, a doctrine of predestination, man's

⁴⁰ See Richard Marius, *Thomas More's View of the Church in Confutation III*, 1271-1363.

sinfulness or God's gracefulness towards man. Marius traverses now familiar territory in describing More's attitudes towards the church, revelation and its transmission. He strikes a nice balance in his presentation of More's view of the church as being at once charismatic and institutionalised, spiritual and terrestrial, sinful and yet inwardly sanctified and sanctifying.

What is a little new in this treatment is the firmer emphasis on conciliar authority in terms of legislation, definition of doctrine, and a certain degree of supervision of the papacy by the council. Marius's treatment of More's attitude to the latter institution is perhaps the most nuanced to date. He notes the dual base of papal authority in divine authority and ecclesial institution. More gave unqualified assent to the second of these affirmations concerning the validity of papal authority. He himself thought the papal office to be of divine institution but did not look on it as a matter beyond the bounds of theological disputation and justifiable dissent.

A number of other shorter studies have appeared on various aspects of More's ecclesiology, some of them an elaboration of positions spelled out in the works referred to above, others derivative from the latter.⁴¹ What then remains to be done? In the first instance only one complete study of More's ecclesiology exists, that of Prévost. This occurs in a larger study covering the whole range of More's theological preoccupations. Moreover valuable as Prévost's study is, it fails to adopt a fully historical perspective in terms of the inner development of More's thought and its relationship to its historical context both as regards medieval background as well as contemporary developments in Britain and the European mainland. The other studies excellent as they are, tend to limit themselves to one or other of the main sources, *Responsio*, *Confutation*, or in the case of Flesseman-Van Leer, the Tyndale controversy taken as a whole.⁴²

Hence there is both room for and need of a study of More's ecclesiology which will examine its development through its various stages of growth as well as in relation to its antecedents in medieval times and parallels in contemporary thought. This makes it possible to identify to some degree the interaction between the various phases of Sir Thomas More's career and thought, to delineate the turning points in the evolution of his positions, to

⁴¹ See for example James Hitchcock, *Thomas More and the Sensus Fidelium*, *Theological Studies* 36 (1975) 145-154, and the later articles by Headley noted above.

⁴² Presumably the Yale editors of the *Dialogue Concerning Heresies* will deal with its ecclesiological content.

take stock of his relationships with thinkers of former times as well as his own. In this way it becomes easier to pinpoint his position in the map of an evolving conception of the church and to define in some degree the elements of originality which were his.

Plan of the study

The scope of the subsequent study is worked out within the following framework. The first step is to examine the background of medieval ecclesiology. I then look at some of the principal sources used by More and outline his own approach to theological method. Subsequently I study the development of his thought in four main sources taken in chronological order: the *Responsio ad Lutherum* (1523), *The Dialogue Concerning Heresies* (1530-31), *The Confutation of Tyndale's Answer* (1532-33), and a fourth group of sources, mainly letters, some of which antedate the *Confutation* but most of which were composed during the treason-trial period (1534-35). Finally a synthetic presentation is made from the conclusions of these four chapters showing the development, if any, of More's main positions. These conclusions are reviewed once more in the final chapter, this time against the background of late medieval and reformation ecclesiology.⁴³

⁴³ As regards methodology I have followed the American author Clemens J. Fuerst, *Normae scriptis edendis in disciplinis ecclesiasticis*, Rome, 1961, as a basic guide, but modified by T. W. Moody, *Rules for Contributors to 'Irish Historical Studies'*, a reprint from *Irish Historical Studies*, Dublin, 1968; *The Victoria History of the Counties of England, Handbook for Editors and Authors*, edited by C. R. Elrington, London, 1970, and R. H. Shevenell, *Recherches et thèses: Research and Theses*, Ottawa, 1963. Normally the full title and author of a work is cited when it first appears in the footnotes; the author with short title is given in subsequent references. A list of abbreviations used is given in the front pages of this work. I have for ready reference inserted biblical references into many of the quotations. These are placed outside the full stop to indicate an interpolation to the text.