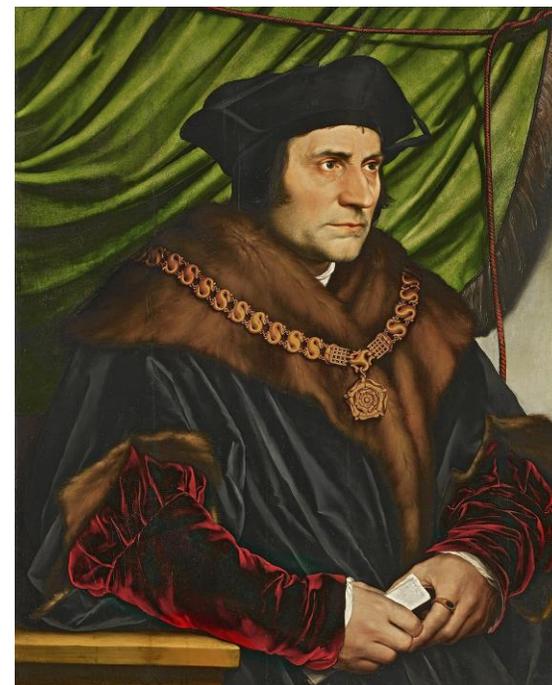


THOMAS MORE 1475-1535

Thomas More is one of the most universally admired personages of the English Renaissance. He is probably best known as the author of *Utopia* (1516) a witty description of a land where contemporary material values are reversed. More was a legal scholar, diplomat, government official and humanist author. In the circle of saints depicted in the chapel, he is the rare image of the Christian parent.

More's rise to fame and wealth was steady. His father was a member of the legal profession, and he arranged for Thomas to be appointed page in the household of Cardinal John Morton, Archbishop of Canterbury. Morton had been instrumental in the deposition of Richard III and the elevation of Henry VII, who subsequently rewarded him by appointing him Chancellor. Thus Thomas was early initiated into royal politics as well as exposed to some of the finest legal minds of his day. He began his formal education at Canterbury College, Oxford, but soon moved to legal studies in London. At this time he demonstrated what would be characteristic of his career and his life: a deep spirituality that led him to reside for four years with the Carthusian monks in London's Charterhouse. Monastic life would not be his life's role, however, and in 1504 he married Jane Colt, who bore him four children before her death seven years later. His marriage shortly afterward to the widow Alice Middleton provided his children with a much-needed step-mother. During these early years, More emerged as the leader of a group of humanists who would leave a profound mark on the world of letters and educational reform. Erasmus of Rotterdam was a close friend of More and composed his work *In Praise of Folly* at More's house in London. The book's Greek title *Morias Enkomion* is a friendly pun on More's name.

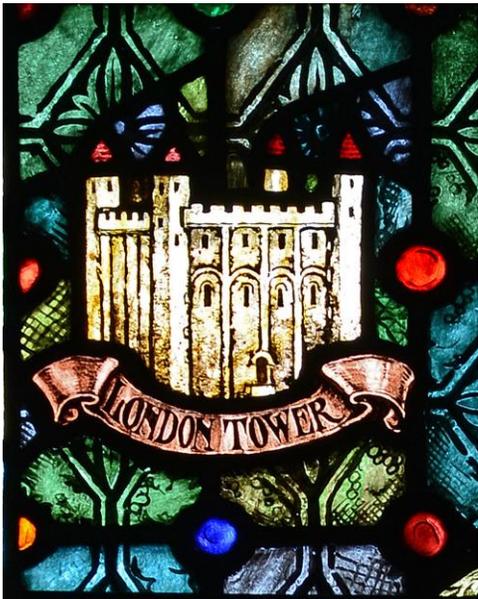
In 1515 More received from Henry VIII his first royal mission, an embassy to the Low Countries. Three years later he was named a royal counselor. His official posts accrued: knighthood, Speaker of the Parliament, High Steward of Oxford University, and, in 1529, Lord Chancellor. But the "Great Matter" of Henry



VIII's divorce from his queen, Catherine of Aragon, and subsequent marriage to Anne Boleyn would put a halt to More's rise. When the English clergy agreed to the legitimacy of the divorce and to Henry's authority in matters of faith, More resigned. He was unable, however, to avoid confrontation and was required to take the Act of Succession and the Oath of Supremacy (against which a century later Robert Bellarmine would argue with James I). More agreed to recognize the heirs of Henry's marriage but was steadfast in his refusal to accept the monarch as the head of the Church. Imprisonment in the tower did not weaken his resolve. Henry remained implacable, and More was condemned for treason, held in the Tower, and beheaded.



More wears the purple robes and golden chain of the Lord Chancellor of England. He holds in one hand a rolled parchment and in the other the mace of legislative office. The image is based on a 1527 portrait of More by Hans Holbein the Younger, now in New York's Frick Museum of Art. The Tower of London stands both named and depicted in the upper left. In the borders are symbols of More's life: his heraldic shield, the rose of the Tudor dynasty, the ax of More's beheading, the mace of office, an orb symbolic of kingship, and an open book inscribed *Utopia*. The narrative scene shows More, on the way to the scaffold, meeting his eldest daughter, Margaret. Margaret, whom



More educated in both Greek and Latin classics, married More's biographer William Roper. Exposed on London Bridge, More's head was later claimed by Margaret and now lies in St. Dunstan's Church, Canterbury. He is honored as the patron saint of Catholic lawyers, a vocation not unknown to graduates of Holy Cross.

