Moreana, no. 65-66 (Jun 1980): 41-56

MORE'S *DIALOGUE* AND THE DYNAMICS OF COMFORT.

It is not hard to understand why the form of Saint Thomas More's *Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation* has challenged and even confounded so many of its readers : the three parts of the treatise -- the first doctrinaire, the second merry, and the third ecstatic -- seem almost to preclude association within a unified structure. Even the *Dialogue*'s most recent commentators, Louis L. Martz and Frank Manley, succeed only in identifying a loose, three-part structure based on the theological virtues. They proceed to undercut even this form, however, by arguing that Books One and Two act as prelude and interlude preceding the final book, which Martz characterizes as a « treatise on the art of meditation » [1]. Observations such as these serve to identify some of the structuring principles of the *Dialogue*, but at the same time effectively deny its unity.

The purpose of this essay is to take issue with this perception of the *Dialogue*, to search for a form or tactic within which all of the parts of the work can be seen to operate, and specifically to examine the *Dialogue* as a reading experience. From this perspective, the *Dialogue* can be seen to possess a definite strategic unity, a sophisticated pattern of progress by misdirection that underlies all of the varieties of tone, manner, and subject matter.

To see this progress, we must first examine the part of the *Dialogue* that contributes least to Vincent's and the reader's comfort, Book One, for it is the rhetorical failure of this first discussion that creates by contrast the laughing *contemptus mundi* that becomes the solution to the problem of comfort against tribulation. Critics of the *Dialogue* agree that the Antony of Book One fails to impart comfort to his nephew Vincent, but they also agree that the *matter* of their first conversation is theologically sound and thoroughly relevant to the problem of comfort in tribulation (even if it is rather wooden and traditional) [2]. This must mean that the failure of Book One on the rhetorical level is due either to flawed exposition -- « Antony's fault » -- or to the impossibility of instilling active faith in a soul capable only of intellectual assent -- « Vincent's fault » [3]. In fact, Book One's failure to bring comfort is both men's fault, for both Antony's presentation and Vincent's reception are unequal to the human reality of tribulation.

The Antony we meet in Book One of the *Dialogue* is anything but a comfort in human terms ; his canned doctrine and seemingly unsympathetic response to tribulation are an immediate and intentional disappointment. He seems aloof as he mouths the standard Christian formulae :

> ... yf ye be part of his [God's] floke, & beleve his promyse : how can ye be comfortles in any trybulacion / when christ & his holy spryte, & with them their vnseparable father, yf you put full trust & confidens in them / be neuer one fynger brede of space, nor one mynute of tyme from you (I, Preface [p. 5]) [4].

The tone here is not simply dry and impatient but is actually nasty : for « how can you » be comfortless, read « how dare you ». The crotchety parenthesis, « yf you put full trust & confidens in them », is an outright attempt to shame Vincent into comfort by impugning his faith.

Vincent's response to this pronouncement is a masterpiece of deferential understatement. He first thanks his uncle for reminding him of this, the obvious, ultimate source of all comfort, and then he adds rather pathetically,

> And ouer that, like as our trybulacions shall in weight & nomber encrease / so shall we nede, not onely one such good word or twayne, but a greate hepe therof, to stable & strength the walles of our hartes, agaynst the great sourges of the tempestious see. (I, Preface [5])

This response shows Vincent's inability to accept the intellectualized consolation of Christian stoicism, the belief that God lovingly tests his servants, but never beyond their endurance and always for their improvement. Were Vincent (or More) a wooden medieval Christian, Antony's statement alone would be sufficient to effect comfort, could be the entire treatise. Indeed, Vincent admits that he *should* feel comforted by the implications of his faith, but he also announces with considerable implicit force that he is not. He begs his uncle for a « greate hepe » of such consolation -- perhaps hoping that quantity might offset quality -- and the comic, Old Testament Antony of Book One is only too happy to oblige him.

As the first book of the *Dialogue* continues, Antony enlarges on his themes of faith and resignation. A strangely silent Vincent learns that tribulation is sent us by God to prompt us to call on him for help (I, iv) ; hearing this, Vincent reasonably concludes that it is proper to call on God to ask him to remove the trouble. The reader is as surprised as Vincent to hear Antony correct him -- such selfish requests are presumptuous and betray a lack of faith in God (I, vi).

To justify this stoic resignation, Antony explains that tribulation is sent to prevent sin rather than to punish it. In a most suspect passage, highly unpleasant in its black humor, the uncle gives an example of such « preventive medicine ». He recalls the case of a young girl who was tempted to impurity because of her great beauty :

> But god lovyng her more tenderly / than to suffer her fall into such shamfull bestly synne, sendith her in season a goodly fair fervent fever, that maketh her bones to ratle, & wastith away her wanton flesh, & bewtifyeth her faire fell with the colour of the kites claw / & makith her loke so lovely, that her lovier wold haue litell lust to loke vppon her (I, ix [29]).

The sarcasm and grisly glee of the passage -- in which the fever « beautifies » the woman -- make it a suitable representative of Antony's discourse in Book One. We perceive with Vincent that this Antony is almost totally out of touch with the human realities of pain and adversity and that he has become steeled to human feeling and the « tempestious see » of this world like his hermit namesake [5]. In a significant omission, Vincent does not applaud the story of the fevered girl as he does for so many others ; with a certain hollow quality to his words, he simply moves on to the next subject for discussion.

After many similar arguments concerning comfort, culminating in the assertion that those not troubled on earth are destined for Hell (Chapter xiii), Vincent can take no more. In a show of exasperation, he finds himself saying :

> ... yf it were as you say good vncle / that perpetuall prosperitie were to the sowle so perilouse, & tribulacion therto so frutefull / than were as me semeth euery man bound of charitie, not onely to pray god send their neibours sorow / but also to help therto them selfe / & when folke are sike, not pray god send them helth / but when they come to comfort them they shuld say I am glad good gossep / that ye be so syk / I pray god kepe you long therin / and neyther shuld any man give any medicyne to other / nor take any medicyn hym selfe neyther / for by the mynyshyng of the tribulacion, he taketh away part of the profit from his sowle, which can by no bodely profit be sufficiently recumpensid. (I, xv[46-47])

This taunting extension of Antony's stern contempt of the world to its logical but absurd conclusions is one of the crucial dramatic moments in the *Dialogue*. The words are harsh and angry : Vincent has come to the end of his rope. His uncle has given him a thoroughly conventional *consolatio,* rooted deep in Boethius, Innocent, and Christian stoicism, but Vincent, with refreshing impertinence, declares that the old platitudes will not work for him.

A slightly ruffled Antony responds to this outburst in an equally realistic fashion :

> Eyther I said not Cosyn, orels ment I not to say, that for an vndoutid rule / worldly pleasure were alwey displesaunt to god/ or tribulacion euermore holsome to euery man (I, xvi[48]).

Antony's clipped, stilted phrases suggest shock, offense, and deflated dignity. Rebuffed by his nephew's outpouring of pent-up emotion, Antony descends to a level even lower than that of sardonic resignation ; he seems here to be trying to cut his losses by making quick distinctions which are wholly irrelevant to Vincent's appeal for comfort on the emotional level. The statement above signals the beginning of the near-monologue that is the remainder of Book One, in which Antony tries to regain rhetorically what he has lost affectively.

At the end of Book One, Vincent apologizes for arguing and then, in a strange sentence, excuses himself to return to his friends :

> I shall with this good counsaill that I haue hard of you, do them some comfort I trust in god / to whose kepyng I commyt you / (I, xx[77]).

The sentence is splendidly evocative in its jolting, tortured economy. Vincent first expresses the hope that Antony's hard-nosed *contemptus mundi* will help the community, do them « some » good. Then, turning the sentence like a stiff steering wheel on the phrase, « I trust in God » (the theme of Book One), Vincent exits with a decidedly hollow benediction. With this strained sense of unfinished business, Book One ends [6].

Book Two of the *Dialogue* is a conscious reaction to the dry, lifeless, and singularly uncomforting commonplaces of Book One. It begins as Antony, to the total surprise of Vincent and the reader, tells his nephew that, like all old men, he likes to run off at the mouth, likes « to

sit well & warm with a cuppe & a rostid crabbe & dryvill & drinke & talke » (II, Preface[78])). To illustrate this, he tells the story of the nun and her brother. The cloistered nun receives a visit from her brother, a virtuous student at the university. She proceeds to lecture him mercilessly on the wretchedness of the world and on his own moral deficiency, ending by wondering aloud why he has nothing to say for himself. The brother quietly responds that she has « said inough for vs bothe » (II, Preface[80]).

The aptness of this anecdote to Book One of the *Dialogue* is lost on neither man, and its sudden, unexplained appearance here assures both Vincent and the reader that they are not to know what has changed Antony so radically since Book One. In a way, the merry tale both obscures and explains Antony's change from the grim figure of Job-like resignation to what he shall become in this second book : his self-effacing confession that he enjoys hearing himself talk is not justly applicable to Book One (and so functions as non-explanation) yet, at the same time, his self-portrait here reminds us that he is a man and not an allegorical figure of authority. At any rate, Vincent, the ideal reader of the *Dialogue*, takes the change at face value and responds with an anecdote of his own about a loquacious wife and the two have a good laugh. Whatever the reasons, the tone of Book Two is set here by Antony's jest at his own expense and his stated wish to listen as well as talk [7]. A fitting emblem for Book Two is Antony's statement in Chapter One :

> ... I can no more saye / but he that can not long endure to hold vpp his hedd & here talkyng of hevyn except he be now & than betwene (as though hevyn were hevynes) refreshid with a folish mery tale / there is none other remedy, but you most let hym haue yt / better wold I wish it but I can not help it. (II, i[84])

This statement itself is the moral of Antony's « folish mery tale » of the preacher who spiced his sermons with jokes to awaken his sleeping congregation. Thus, to announce the tone of Book Two, Antony admits that merry tales are a regrettable necessity ; to illustrate that truth, he tells a merry tale.

The reader's immediate reaction to Book Two, coming as it does after the rather mutinous catechism lesson of Book One, is one of surprise and delight equal to Vincent's. Uncle and nephew turn playful in the extreme, and the section seems intended to make Vincent and Antony forget rather than face their approaching trials. Book Two has a timeless,

naive quality that mutely declares its unconcern with the impending moral and political disaster : the Turks are not even mentioned here except as distant bogeymen in Antony's « war story » of the jumpy watchman who mistook a row of hedge for their approaching column (II, xii[109-110]).

The stories and merriment of Book Two seem to have nothing whatever to do with tribulation -- certainly not the all-too-real disasters on the horizons of Vincent's Budapest and More's London -- but rather appear to serve only as escape and comic relief, a tone which has earned for them the designations « variegated interlude » and « leisurely prologue » [8]. A closer look at the tales and merriment of Book Two, however, reveals that the subjects under consideration are anything but frivolous. Presumption, scrupulousness, despair, suicide, and demonic possession are all considered by way of anecdote (and therefore neutralized as tribulations or temptations). The merry tales of Book Two all have very serious points : for example, a man who puts his faith in a plan of whispering « God forgive me » on his deathbed is a fool (II, v[92]). Book Two depicts despair, cowardice, and suicide as follies, not sins, and the book's anecdotal quality allows Vincent to look at them from a distance and laugh. When he finishes laughing, such temptations have little meaning for him.

The strange and grisly tale of the carver who wanted to be crucified (II, xvi[143-7]) operates in this way. St. Paul tells us that, if we are to rise with Christ, we must first be crucified with him (*Romans* 6:3-6). Like Tom Sawyer's Aunt Sally (who prayed in her bedroom closet), this fellow operates on a literal understanding of Paul's teaching ; unlike Twain's ridicule, this anecdote has a theological point : Christ's death for our sins is alone sufficient to redeem us if we but repent. To feel we must match the Savior's sacrifice is insanity (as well as heresy). The method of Book Two of the *Dialogue* is to retreat with great fanfare from the prescriptive doctrine and ethics of Book One and to present despair and vice as irrational and irrelevant to right-thinking men.

To achieve this appreciation of worldly vice requires that More revise the essentially Old Testament theology of the previous conversation for, without a notion of God and divine justice that allows for merriment, Book Two would be patently blasphemous. While the God of the *Book of Job,* the august dispenser of tribulation, is the deity of Book One, a warm, maternal presence presides over Book Two, a presence More calls up from the Compline Psalm (90 : 4-6) :

> *Scapulis suis obumbrabit tibi,*
> *Et sub pennis eius sperabis.*
> *Scuto circumdabit te veritas eius ;*
> *Non timebis a timore nocturno ;*
> *A sagitta volante in die,*
> *A negotio perambulante in tenebris,*
> *Ab incursu, et daemonio meridiano.* (4-6) [9]

The image of line 5, the *scutum* or long-shield (More's translation is « pauice ») as equivalent to God's truth, is the controlling figure of the remainder of the work and becomes almost a refrain unifying the topics of Book Three (*CW* 12, lxxvi). The other image, that of mankind under the wings of a « mother-hen God », clucking after her chicks and shielding them from birds of prey, is more emblematic of the perspective of Book Two in its total disregard for the small-minded dignity of earthly life. The laughter of Book Two is derisive, degrading, and, as such, powerfully theological, for it is laughter at human folly that necessarily deflates earthly existence to utter inconsequentiality. The tenor of Book Two suggests that we are, after all, as helpless and ridiculous as chicks and that the world, after all, has no more dignity or importance than a barnyard. While the feast that ends Book Two is appropriate, it is not so in that it ends a leisurely interlude [10]; Vincent and Antony may relax over lunch at this point because they have established a perspective that, in one form or another, will govern their discussion for the rest of the work.

The relaxation of Book Two seems only a memory when Vincent returns that same afternoon for his third and final discussion with his uncle. From the first sentence of Book Three, we may sense Vincent's new anxiety :

> Somwhat haue I taried the lenger vncle / partly for that I was loth to come ouer sone / lest my sone comyng might haue happid to haue made you wake to sone / but specially by reason that I was lettid with one that shewid me a lettre datid at Constantinople / by which lettre it apperith that the greate Turke preparith a mervelouse mighty army / And iet whether he will therwith / that can there yet no man tell (III, Preface[188]).

On the next page Vincent says that the very tribulations that he and Antony have been discussing will soon be upon them. With a note of regret for their truancy in Book Two, Vincent asks his uncle to turn quickly to consider persecution and martyrdom, the ultimate tribulations.

We tend to take these broad hints, the sudden urgency of the situation and the ostensible return to stern, Boethian *contemptus mundi,* as evidence that Book Three is fundamentally different in tone and strategy from Book Two, and in doing so we are half-right. The tone of Book Three does represent a return to that of Book One, but this must not obscure the final section's crucial tactical debt to the merry anecdotes that preceded it. A rhetorical examination of Book Three should illustrate its unique wedding of the matter of Book One with the manner of Book Two.

Early in the final section, Antony allows Vincent to hear the « laughter of the land », fought for and won by petty conquerors who believe themselves invincible :

> Oh Cosyn Vincent / yf the whole world were anymatid with a resonable soule, as plato had went it were / & that it had wit & vnderstondyng to marke & perceve all thing / lord god how the ground on which a prince bildeth his palice, wold lowd lawgh his lord to scorne, whan he saw hym prowd of his possession, & herd hym bost hym selfe, that he & his blowde are for euer the very lordes & owners of that land / for than wold the grownd thinke the while in hym selfe / ah thow sely pore soule, that wenest thow were halfe a god / & art a midd thy glory / but a man in a gay gowne / I that am the grownd here ouer whome thow art so prowde, haue had an hundred such owners of me as thow callest thy selfe / mo than euer thow hast hard the names of (III, vi[207-8]).

As Vincent applauds this insight on the transience of ownership, we suddenly realize that this is not the same impertinent, terrified young man of Book One. Vincent has changed : his nerves have been so calmed and his perspectives so liberated from earthly concerns that he can consider the very conquest of his homeland as ultimately meaningless.

And what has changed him is laughter. In Book Two, Vincent was asked to laugh at the folly of individuals ; in this third part, he will laugh at the folly of nations, races, planets. In the end, his laughter will be almost that Boethian, « disembodied » laugh at the end of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde.* All that might be used to distinguish between Troilus' and Vincent's laughs is their source or impetus : while Troilus reaches the eighth sphere through an ever-deepening intimacy with pain and suffering, Vincent ascends to « higher knowledge » through the good offices of his uncle, who begins with jokes and then skillfully widens the comic perspective to planetary proportions.

Two brief examples of the Christian comedy of Book Three must suffice to illustrate its tactical identity with Book Two. In the first chapter of Book Three, Antony and Vincent consider whether a man need even think of coming tribulations, since his worry and fear cannot change the inevitable. The Antony (and thus the *Dialogue)* of Book One would have answered this quite readily and coldly : one must think of coming tribulations, for such thoughts of God's loving gifts of earthly troubles should awaken in our hearts a new and deeper love for him. The Antony of Book Three gives us the same truth but does so by anecdote, by reducing the question to foolish triviality :

> ... to counsayle a man neuer to thinke on that case, is in my mynd as much reason / as the medicyne that I haue hard taught one for the toth ache, to go thrise about a chirchyard / & neuer thynke on a fox tayle / For yf the counsayle be not given them / yt can not serue them / and yf it be gyven them, it must put the poynt of the mater in their mynd / which by and by to reiect & thinke therin neyther one thyng nor other / is a thyng that may be sonner bidden than obeyid. (III, i[197])

Far from being a tactic aimed at clearing the mind for eschatological meditation, More's treatment of fear here is a simple reduction of the matter to a (silly) question of human nature ; trying not to think about coming troubles is the same folly as trying *not* to think about anything. The nature of man is such that questions like these are foolish even to consider since our only choice is not whether to think of such things but how. And even this choice is determined in Book Three as Antony reduces it to a matter of priorities :

> ... is it wisedome than, so mych to thinke vppon the Turkes, that we forgete the devill / What mad man is he, that whan a lion were about to devoure hym, wold vouchsafe to regarde the bytyng of a lytle fistyng curre (III, xxvii[318])

Like the fellow in the last book who thought the moonlit hedges were the advancing Turks, this man is a fool, not for fearing, but for fearing stupidly. Here in the last chapter of Book Three, Antony is still « telling jokes », still making man's folly and madness the butt of his ethical humor.

A second example of the Christian comedy of Book Three that developed naturally from Book Two is the pair's anecdotal treatment of flattery. The centerpiece of the chapter is, significantly, Vincent's story of a « greate man of the church » (who is clearly Cardinal Wolsey) [11]. After

giving what he thought was a splendid oration, this prelate asked his dinner guests what they thought of it (III, x[213]). Vincent places almost no emphasis on the man's inordinate pride and love of compliment (as one might expect he would in a moral treatise) ; the bulk of the story is the narration of the ingenious rhetorical contest among the dinner guests, who praise their host in increasingly hyperbolic terms. The final participant in the contest, having heard all of the elegant praise of the others and knowing he must best them, receives a sudden inspiration :

> ... whan he saw that he could find no wordes of prayse that wold passe all that had bene spoken before all redy / the wily fox wold speke neuer a word, but as he that were ravishid vnto havyn ward, with the wonder of the wisedome & eloquence that my lordes grace had vttrid in that oracion, he fet a long sigh with an oh fro the bottom of his brest, & held vpp both his handes, & lyft vpp his hed, & cast vpp his yien into the welkyn, and wept / (III, x[215-16).

Antony's response, « Forsoth Cosyn he playd his part very properly », suggests that both men need not even discuss the sin of pride or the error of priorities involved in seeking flattery. Their enjoyment of the contest winner's ridiculous posturing reduces the serious matter of the chapter -- care about one's reputation -- to the absurd. And if a matter's essence is ridiculous, then its accidents, we know, cannot be otherwise.

This tactic of reduction and ridicule allows Vincent to participate more fully in Book Three than in either of the others. His head bobs wildly in approval as Antony ridicules conquerors. He plays the part of a rich man clinging to his earthly possessions in a lively and conclusive mock debate. The nephew's unbounded energy and desire to know accelerate the pace of the *Dialogue* to breakneck speed : the vanity of kings and cardinals, wealth and power, fame and empire are all dispatched with lightning justice as Vincent and Antony race towards a final goal.

Then, with a fine sense of literary realism, More shows us that Antony has pushed Vincent too far too fast. After laying some groundwork on the definition of imprisonment, Antony delivers what he believes to be the *coup de grâce* : all men are prisoners on this earth, serving a life sentence with God as jailer (III, xix[262]).

The silence is suddenly deafening. Vincent seems stunned : he attempts to offer logical objections and then stops cold. In his next words, the crucial ones for Book Three, the nephew expresses this crisis in the *Dialogue* :

> ... vncle in good fayth though I can not fynd answeres convenient wher with to avoyd your argumentes / yet to be playne with you & tell you the very trewth / my mynd fyndeth not yt selfe satisfied in this poynt / but that euer me thinketh that these thinges wherwith you rather convince & conclude me than enduce a credence & perswade me / that euery man is in prison all redye / be but sophisticall fantasies / & that / except those that are comenly callid prisoners / other men are not in any prison at all / (III, xix[262]).

We need only recall Vincent's earlier objections to his uncle's exposition to see how far he has come. As he confesses that his uncle's arguments seem to be specious tricks to him, Vincent sounds frightened, pleading, and apologetic.

Antony's response to this plea shows the change in him as well :

> Well fare thyne hart good Cosyn Vincent / There was in good fayth no word that you spake syns we talkyd of these matters, that halfe so well liked me as this that you speke now / For yf you had assentid in wordes / & in your mynd departyd vnperswadid / than yf the thing be trew that I say / yet had you lost the frute / & yf it be peradventure false & my selfe decevid therin / than while I shuld wene that yt liked you to / you shuld haue confyrmyd me in my folye / (III, xix[262]).

The matter of the world as prison, Antony knows, is too vital for either man to settle for mere intellectual assent. He must present it to Vincent carefully and fairly, so that both of them will feel the power of its truth. Even at this crucial point in Book Three, however, error is presented as folly rather than as moral evil : Antony fears that Vincent's acquiescence will confirm him (Antony) in his folly. Both men need to know that this final perspective on earthly life is not like the reasonable plan of the two harts, discarded in cowardice at the first sign of the approaching hunting dogs (III, xxiv[294-96]). The assent which Vincent must be made to give here must not be the deference of nephew to uncle ; his conviction must be of the heart as well as of the mind.

To convince his nephew of this critical truth, Antony carefully retraces his steps, taking care that Vincent be convinced on each subordinate point. As his concluding argument, Antony offers an image of striking psychological power, which he uses to define earthly life in a final comic vision :

> And surely like as we wene our selfe out of prison now / so yf there were some folke born & brought vpp in a prison / that neuer cam on the wall / nor lokyd out at the dore / nor neuer herd of other world abrode / but saw some for their shrewed turnes done among them selfe, lokkid vpp in some strayter rome, & herd them onely callid prisoners that were so servid / & them selfe euer callid free folke at large / the like opynion wold they haue there of them selfe than, that we haue here of our selfe now / And whan we take our selfe for other than prisoners now / as verely be we now deceyvid, as those prisoners shuld there be than. (III, xx[275])

In response to this powerful image, Vincent quietly concedes that he is convinced.

This central passage in Book Three of the *Dialogue* is the best example of the wedding of the thematics of Book One with the tactics of Book Two to produce a peculiarly comforting *contemptus mundi* in the conclusion of the work. After all, what is exposed in the « parable of the prisoners » is not sin, evil, or degeneration but simply folly. To Vincent and the reader, with perspectives wider than that of a single building, the myopia of the prisoners is (at least technically) funny. The further widening of our perspectives by anecdote gives Vincent and the readers the *contemptus mundi* with which Antony began the *Dialogue*.

The tactic of the *Dialogue* as a whole is one of misdirection, a circular movement beginning with the *contemptus mundi* and returning to it by what at first appears a dramatic movement away. Book One presents a view of life analogous to that of the *Book of Job* : in Antony's question, « How can you believe and not be comforted », there is an eerie echo of the distant, inscrutable God of the Old Testament. God may send us troubles, Antony says in Book One, but we may not pray for relief.

The change from Book One to Book Two is profound. There is no feeling of impending doom in this timeless human dialogue. Like Jesus in his public ministry, Antony uses parables and homely examples to instruct Vincent in man's foolishness and God's maternal protection. The Word is, as it were, made flesh in this second part ; the warmth of humanism is infused into the cold and comfortless faith of the Old Testament.

The third section of the *Dialogue* returns to the themes of the first by using the strategies of the second. In an ever-widening comic vision, Vincent is brought to laugh at all of earthly life and then, after all else is made ridiculous to him, he turns in the only remaining direction, toward

the Four Last Things. In a final apocalyptic vision, Vincent is made to see Heaven and rests comforted in this final expectation.

The three parts of the *Dialogue* are thus analogous in mode to the Old Testament, the Gospels, and the Apocalypse respectively. They form a scheme that is a relatively late manifestation of the medieval notion of the « three advents of God », a conception that Professor Kolve sees at the heart of the Corpus Christi cycle dramas [12]. The cycle dramas depict the three stages of salvation history, the joyful record of God's direct dealings with the human race. The first stage (Creation) began with dramatic representations of the Creation and the fall of the angels and usually contained plays on Old Testament figures such as Noah and Abraham as well. The second and crucial stage of the cycles (Incarnation) generally depicted the events between the Annunciation and the Ascension, while the third stage was devoted to Doomsday and Judgment.

These « three advents » or manifestations of God are, like the three parts of the *Dialogue*, both historically progressive and psychologically (theologically ?) cyclic, since the final members of both cycles represent a return to the elemental, pre-institutional relationship between Creator and creature that existed at the beginning. The key element in the cycles, then, is the middle one, in which a mediator (Jesus / Antony) intervenes to re-educate man through an intense examination of humanity itself. Jean Gerson, one of More's favorite thinkers, makes this idea of the « mystic return » the center of his thought [13]. The « return » for Gerson (unlike traditional mystics) was attainable only when a creature followed the dictates of proper action for his own nature : *Sic soli tibi*, writes Gerson, *ad Deum regredi concessum est per cognitionem et amorem* [14]. The end point of this return, it is clear, is not an ontological union with God but that natural, elemental relationship between man and the Creator that existed in the Garden and shall exist in the Millenium (the termini of the cycle above).

For More, then, the road to God was less the road « up » and more the road « back ». Like Gerson, More sees man's path to God in distinctly human terms. The movement of the *Dialogue* is thus an evolution or « revolution » of the whole man away from the world and back again to God. It achieves this movement not by an heroic act of will but by a subtly directed education of perception : once the reader begins laughing with Antony and Vincent, More does not let him stop until he has reached a wistful and charming contempt of the world.

Georgia Institute of Technology **J. Stephen Russell**

NOTES

1. Louis L. Martz, « The Design of More's *Dialogue of Comfort* », *Moreana*, 16 (1967), p. 342. The essay is reprinted in *The Complete Works of Saint Thomas More*, Volume 12, *A Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation*, ed., Louis L. Martz and Frank Manley (New Haven : Yale University Press, 1976), pp. lxv-lxxix. Future references to this important essay on the *Dialogue* will be noted with page numbers for both locations (i.e., here, 342[lxxvii]). On the theological virtues as a structuring principle, see the Yale text introduction, p. lxxxix.

2. Martz, 334 (lxvii), calls the doctrines of Book One « familiar, traditional views » ; elsewhere in the introduction to the Yale text, the editors view Book One as « focused on faith » and claim that the book concludes with « a series of objections by which our perspective is adjusted to accept tribulation in the light of faith as a gift of God » (lxxxix). There is no doubt that it was Antony's intention to do this in Book One, but Vincent's recalcitrance and the existence of Book Two make it difficult to agree that Book One standing alone succeeds in adjusting perspectives to any great extent.

3. Both of these alternatives are represented in the introduction to the Yale text (if only implicitly) : see pp. lxvii-lxviii and lxxxix-xcv, respectively.

4. Quotations from the *Dialogue* are taken from Volume 12 of *The Complete Works* and will be cited in text.

5. St Antony, the founder of monasticism, lived most of his life as a hermit until, in relative old age, he took in a group of young followers ; see Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, tr., Granger Ryan and Helmut Ripperger (New York : Arno Press, 1969), pp. 99-103. Jacobus reports that Antony's name is derived from « *ana* » (high) and « *tenens* » (holding) and explains the etymology by noting Antony's spiritual hold onto the high truths of the next world and parallel scorn of earthly concerns (not unlike More's Antony).

Vincent's name suggests a saintly paradigm as well. The logical candidate from among many saints of that name is a young Spanish deacon to a bishop Valerius during the reign of Dacian. Like More's Vincent, this young man served as a transmitter of comfort to a Christian community during a time of tribulation : because the deacon's oratorical abilities far exceeded his bishop's, Valerius appointed Vincent diocesan preacher in his place (see *The Golden Legend*, 114-117).

6. Martz, lxviii : « An uneasy feeling persists [at the end of Book One] that the problems of human suffering cannot be adequately met by the delivery of traditional apothegms ».

7. Martz and Manley explain the change in tone as resulting from the book's central theme of hope (Yale text, xcv-civ) ; this is certainly correct but fails to address the strategic and rhetorical reasons for the manner of Book Two.

8. Martz, lxxv.

9. *Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam Clementinam*, ed., Alberto Colunga and Laurentio Turrado (Madrid : Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1977), p. 531.

10. Martz comments on the fitting end of Book Two at dinnertime (339), lxxiii.

11. On the identification of the anecdote, see the notes to the Yale text, p. 416.

12. *The Play Called Corpus Christi* (Stanford : Stanford University Press, 1966), esp. pp. 58-63.

13. More cites Gerson three times in the *Dialogue* : twice incorrectly (II, viii and II, xvi, on the common belief that Gerson wrote the *Imitation of Christ)* and once correctly (at II. xvi). On the notion of the mystic return in Gerson, see Frederick Coppleston, S.J., *A History of Philosophy*, II, pt. 1 (Garden City : Doubleday, 1963), p. 217.

14. Jean Gerson, *Selections from A Deo exivit, Contra curiositatem studentum and De mystica theologia speculativa*, ed., tr., Steven E. Ozment, *Textus Minores in Usum Academicum*, vol. 38 (Leiden : E.J. Brill, 1969), p. 18 (in *A Deo exivit*).

The Family of Sir Thomas More : Facsimiles of the drawings by Hans Holbein the Younger in the Royal Library, Windsor Castle. A portfolio. Johnson Reprint, 24-28 Oval Road, London NW1 7DX, and 111 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10003. May 1978, £ 35.00 or $ 65.00.

The 8 page introduction by Jane Roberts quotes More's letter to Erasmus (of December 1526) : « Your painter, dearest Erasmus, is a wonderful man. » The eight drawings have been printed in six colors by experts operating for Johnson at Windsor itself. They constitute the first release in a major project. In our Angers Moreanum, the superb set was displayed for a public occasion. The response to Holbein's artistry is of course enhanced by the previous attachment one feels for the More household, into which the German portrayer gives us incomparable glimpses. Out of the eight plates, seven persons come alive, from the septuagenarian Judge Sir John to his teenage grandson John and John's bride Anne Cresacre. Three other More women are Elizabeth Dauncy, Cecily Heron, and Margaret Giggs. Thomas More himself is featured by two successive crayons, the second being the one we used as cover for our own *Gazette*.

G.M.

THE HAMMOND ALMANAC 1979 encounters More at several turns. *Utopia* is the only event listed for 1516, and More's execution is the sole entry for 1535. The World Biography, which does not include Erasmus and Luther, has More as « English author » and « statesman », « celebrated as a Roman Catholic martyr ». More is listed again among the major writers, along with Erasmus, whose *Praise of Folly* duly appears under 1509.

★

In *THE HEYTHROP JOURNAL* of January 1979, reviewing Vol. 4 of *CWE*, Alistair Hamilton singles out the letters by which Wolfgang Capito and Thomas More urged Erasmus to moderate his criticism of the clergy, and to be more scrupulous in the publication of his Scriptural studies. He views *Utopia* as « one of the best expressions » of Erasmus's dream of a golden age.

★

In *THE CATHOLIC HISTORICAL REVIEW* LXV, 1 (Jan. 1979), John D. Krugler, à propos of Lord Baltimore, mentions (p. 68) More's descendant Fr Henry More, English provincial of the Jesuits. He quotes him p. 75.

In the next issue of the same journal (April 1979), Egmont Lee covers the years 1479-84 via « Iacopo Gherardi and the Court of Pope Sixtus IV ». Gherardi's diary relates how at Christmas 1481 the pope blessed « the hat and sword » destined for Edward IV, « ut ipse quoque, quamvis sit in ultimis terris, sancte Sedis honorem in aliquo degustaret » : one more instance of the sense of isolation felt by and about England, not unlike (it seems) the feeling experienced today by New Zealanders.

★

In *RENAISSANCE QUARTERLY* XXXII, 1 (Spring 1979), John B. Gleason reconsiders « The Birth of John Colet and Erasmus » (73-77) : legal documents drawn for the execution of Henry Colet's last will (d. 1505) show his son and heir John to have been born in January 1467. As Erasmus claims to have been Colet's senior by two or three months, his own birth may be dated 28 October 1466.

Reviewing tome IV, 2 of the North Holland *Opera Omnia Erasmi,* J.K. Sowards points out the editorial inconsistencies in the texts of the *Querela Pacis* and the Plutarch versions. Peter Milward's *Religious Controversies of the Elizabethan Age,* writes Leland Carlson, will prove « an accurate guide to the context and relevance of more than 600 works ». Margaret Loftus Ranald's review of Juliet Dusinberre's *Shakespeare and the Nature of Woman* evinces a fine grasp of the spirit in which More and Vives, Richard Hyrde and Margaret Roper advocated and demonstrated feminine education.