“The saddest aspect of life right now is that science gathers knowledge faster than society gathers wisdom.”—Isaac Asimov.

“It was long ago in my life as a simple reporter that I decided that facts must never get in the way of truth.”—Brit journalist James Cameron.

“All the noisy tempestuous scenes of politics witnessed in this country—all the excitement and strife, even—are GOOD to behold.”—W. H. Whitman.

“Keep your eyes on the prize and hold on.”—African-American hymn cited by Juan Williams in his “Eyes on the Prize”; JW = DvJM photo-subject.

“Cover, write, and present every story with the care I would want if the story were about me.”—One guideline to MacNeil/Lehrer journalism.

“That’s a product of what Wisconsin is. A guy who’s worked so hard every day to do whatever he can to help the team.”—UW Linebacker TJ Edwards re: Safety Evan Bondoc 2018.

“The more corrupt the republic, the more numerous the laws.”—Publius Cornelius Tacitus.

“If ever there is a tomorrow/when we’re not together.../there is something you must remember./You are braver than you believe,/stronger than you seem,/and smarter than you think./But the most important thing is/,/even if we’re apart.../I’ll always be with you.”—A. A. Milne’s Winnie the Pooh via Tammie B. Collins on Facebook.

With 168 books so far plus all his other word & photo creations, David Joseph Marcou is Wisconsin’s most prolific author.
It is an accepted fact of British historical life that during the reign of King Henry VIII “the English spirit of independence burned low in the socket, and love of freedom grew cold.”(1) This essay deals with that epoch's voice of freedom, Sir Thomas More, a man who refused to let that flame be extinguished. Here was a man who saw his duty to God and King and chose not to let that King impede the path of conscience. The hat of civil liberties must certainly be taken off to, the civil disobedient.

Whether the historian considers this More civil disobedient, visionary realist, or simply, saint though, there remains the epitaph of Robert Whittington that no person should deny him, “man for all seasons”(2, the phrase is the title of Robert Bolt's play, which became the Academy Award winning 1966 film starring Paul Scofield, which your author viewed as a student at Aquinas HS, ca. 1967). For from the early days of his career, he possessed a keen sense of the burdensome tension that worldly matters versus spiritual ideals would produce and alleviated it when he could. In those fresh, wonderful days of one's youth, which most people recall for their lack of troubles and responsibility, Thomas More was accustomed to spending a large share of his time in contemplation concerning the monk's calling. Eventually, however, he would decide that worldly temptations could not be wholly restrained – he married at the age of 27. His first wife, Jane Colt, died after giving birth to his four children and within a month, mainly for reasons of childcare, More married a woman seven years his senior, Alice Middleton. She was to be the burre under his shirt, spurring him on to civil glory. In his “Dialogue of Comfort”, two characters suspiciously resembling himself and Alice were to point up the role a wife can play for a husband: “When her husband had no list to grow greatly upward in the world, nor neither would labour for office of authority, and over that forsook a right worshipful room when it was offered him, she fell in hand with him and… all to rated him, and asked him: 'What will you do, that you list not to put forth yourself as other folk do?' 'Why wife,' quoth her husband, 'what would you do?' 'What? By God, go forward with the best. For as my mother was wont to say, God have mercy on her soul, it is ever better to rule than be ruled, and therefore by God, I would not, I warrant you, be so foolish as to be ruled, when I might rule.' [To which he replied], 'By my troth, wife, in this I dare say you say truth. For I never found you willing to be ruled yet.'”(3) Symbolically and practically, then, Alice constituted a moving force that would not be ruled, a motive known as the call to worldly involvement. Such was the dilemma a goodly number of dedicated monks never would resolve, for they lacked such an Alice, in themselves or otherwise.

Upon conclusion of a disillusioning series of royal embassy services in 1517, More had second thoughts about his political career. At this point, the impetus to continue came not from the practical-minded Alice, but from a more substantial source, the King himself. Henry wished More's services to be made available to the Council, for although More had scarcely begun his rise, he was widely known and well-liked for his probity and wisdom. Fearing any commitment for royal favors gained, Thomas shied from the King's offer. But he was only deferring what he knew was to come – the office must be accepted. Master More would never again dwell upon retirement seriously until that day in 1532 when he would give up the Chancellorship on account of sickness. Perhaps the occasion freshened the memory of his Raphael Hythloday in More's “Utopia”…. yet you must not on that account abandon the ship of state and desert it in a storm because you cannot control the winds,… but you must with a crafty wile and a subtle train study and endeavor yourself, as much as in you lieth, to handle the matter wittingly and handsomely for the purpose, and that which you cannot turn to good, so to order that it be not very bad.”(4) His gift for visionary realism was shining through.

Henry had not approached Sir Thomas on the basis of reputation alone. The two had been friends for some time and the oncoming decade was to reveal a closer friendship than the King had ever known. In the midst of even royal friendship, however, More retained that unalterably objective view of reality. Upon Henry's most singular visit to Chelsea (More's home) one day, William Roper, More's son-in-law, beamed with pride. Afterward he spoke with More, praising him highly. Roper relates in his biography “Sir Thomas More”: “As soon as his Grace was gone, I, greatly rejoicing thereat, told Sir Thomas More how happy he was, whom the King had so familiarly entertained, as I never saw him do to any other except Cardinal Wolsey, whom I saw his Grace once walk with arm in arm. ‘I thank our Lord, son,’ quoth he, ‘I find his Grace my very good lord indeed, and I believe he doth as singularly favour me as any subject within this realm. Howbeit, son Roper, I may tell thee that I have no cause to be proud thereof, for if my head could win him a castle in France (for then there was war between us) it should not fail to go.”(5) That friend wasparted from his noble head in10years.

If such a man was the closest friend our capricious monarch was to ever enjoy, why did More's head roll? The answer is a bit involved, but suffice it to begin that in 1521 Henry requested More's assistance in the editing of “Assertion of the Seven Sacraments”. Sir Thomas viewed the King's defense of the Papacy as an over-extension of Henry's true feelings and rightly foresaw a day when, if need be, the King would readily throw off such an authority because he had become too closely attached to it. Roper furnishes us with Sir Thomas's reflection on that incident during questioning in 1534: “Nay,’ quoth his Grace, ‘it shall not. We are so much bound unto the See that we cannot do too much honor to it. Then did I further put him in remembrance of the Statute of Praemunire, whereby a good part of the Pope's pastoral authority here was taken away. To that answered his Highness, ‘Whatsoever impediment there be to the contrary, we will proclaim the authority to the uttermost. For we received from that See our Crown Imperial: which till his Grace with his own mouth told me I never heard of before.”(6)

By 1527 and probably earlier King Henry was to regret his “Assertion” fervently. Across Europe he was regarded as “defender of the faith”, while in England his Chancellor, Cardinal Wolsey, through the guise of Legatus a Latere (Ambassador from the Side) had usurped many Papal prerogatives. The English Church was bound to drift with the politically ambitious Wolsey as its practical head. But an important subsidiary factor, the Bishop's fear of Wolsey and praemunire charges, rose up and was not diminished by his fall in 5129. By 1531 a spineless Convocation was ready to proclaim Henry Supreme Head of the Church of England.

Sir Thomas's role for a time seemed unimportant. In May of 1527, while walking with Henry at Hampton Court, he had been confronted with biblical references substantiating the King's annulment argument. (The King was seeking an annulment with Katherine of Aragon on grounds he had no right to marry his brother's wife. Feeding the fire was Henry's lust for Anne Boleyn and the absence of a male heir.) But the King had respectfully declined any imposition of royal will when More proclaimed ignorance in matters of divinity. The question was to be put
to More continually, but he repeated his prior response. He sincerely hoped the King's request could be granted by Pope Clement VII and in studying the problem read books and articles favoring Henry's viewpoint only.

Of course, Henry desperately hoped for the assent to annulment of such a loyal servant as Master More. After all, the Pope would be hard-pressed to allow it if such a staunch Catholic as More favored it; also, the English people respected the saintly More and such an image would hold up brilliantly against onslaughts by disloyal subjects and European monarchs. Such was the state of affairs on that day in 1529 King Henry opted to request Sir Thomas as his Lord Chancellor. More, sensing the King's dependence on him, felt he could not refuse. Henry would never have a more loyal servant, if, that is, loyalty be defined as a subject doing everything he thinks best for his King and country. More first reminded Henry, however, of the words he spoke to Sir Thomas upon taking office in 1518: "that his Highness spake unto him, the most virtuous lesson that ever Prince taught his servant, willing first to look unto God, and after God to him." To this Roper continues, the King made the kindly answer 'that if he could not therein with his conscience serve him, he was content to accept his service otherwise;' and using the advice of his learned Council, whose consciences would well enough agree therewith, would nevertheless continue his gracious favour towards him, and never with that matter molest his conscience more.' It was therefore with the distinct understanding that he was not to be asked to promote the annulment proceedings, that More consented to take the fallen Wolsey's place."(7) This was precipitous ground indeed, but Sir Thomas advanced faithfully.

Thomas served his term with honesty and tact, although his patience was growing thin. Unfortunately, so was his physical constitution. He now considered retirement and when a chest disorder lingered, he obtained permission to be relieved of his duties as Lord Chancellor of England. Idleness was not a characteristic trait of his, however; for the next several months he caught up on some writing he had been postponing due to a full schedule. Nowhere in his writing was there any thoroughgoing discussion of the Papal issue. Instead, he devoted most of his working time to points of religion which Henry prided himself for being orthodox. Every action, every word of Thomas More's was carefully ruminated upon and enacted so as not to cause Henry's displeasure. Yet, once prior to his arrest in the spring of 1534 was he forced to cause the King and new Queen great perturbation or lose the battle of conscience.

On June 1, 1533 Anne Boleyn was to be crowned Queen of England at Westminster (Cranmer had annulled the previous marriage as of May 23.) Thomas's friends, Stephan Gardiner and the Bishops of Bath and Durham (Clerk and Tunstall), fearing he wouldn't appear, sent him 20 pounds to buy a new gown for it. Instead of buying a gown, More remained at home that day and kept the money ("I took you for no beggars, and myself I knew to be a poor man.")(8). The new Queen must have been furious, for she had no great love for More; the absence of a former Lord Chancellor from ceremony must have given her fits. Thomas later explained his failure to attend in this way: "So though your Lordships have in the matter of the matrimony kept yourselves pure virgins, yet take heed, my Lords, that you keep your virginity still. For some there be that of procuring your Lordships first at the coronation to be present, and next to preach for the setting forth of it, and finally to write books to all the world in defense thereof, are desirous to deflower you, then they will not fail to devour you... Now my Lords, it lieth not within my power but that they may devour me; but God being my good Lord, I will provide that they shall deflower me."(9) Through a gradual progress of attrition the King was to indeed "deflower" those men and others in the government. In November 1534 he saw his wishes become law in the Act of Supremacy. No longer were there technical reservations and qualifications as had been the case since 1531. Parliament's words were direct and conclusive now, "as far as the law of Christ allows" was omitted. No ruler, temporal or spiritual, would ever direct Henry again.

Meanwhile, the King's henchmen were feverishly at work trying to incriminate Sir Thomas and his good friend Bishop Fisher, these two being the only major figures seemingly opposed to the divorce. More was questioned in connection with judicial misconduct in past years, collusion with the "Nun of Kent," the circulation of an anti-divorce pamphlet, and criminal action in the editing of the "Assertion of the Seven Sacraments." He allegedly was at fault in his editing for inducing the King "to put a sword into the Pope's hands to fight against himself."(10) Thomas responded that it had been Henry himself who had pressed for alignment to such a degree. More's reply, of course, to the King's fool-hardiness was that "till his Grace with his own mouth told me I never heard of before." In regard to the "Nun of Kent", Sir Thomas's name was placed on a Bill of Attainder along with Fisher's.

On that early February day, Sir Thomas, riding the waves back to Chelsea after meeting with a Commission, seemed happy that Roper inquired as to whether his name had been removed from that bill (for it as yet had not): "I trust, sir that all is well because you are so merry." to which More answered, 'It is so indeed, son Roper, I thank God.' 'Are you then out of the parliament bill?' 'The astonishing answer came, 'By my troth, son Roper, I never remembered it.' 'Never remembered it.' Report exclaimed, 'A case that toucheth yourself so near, and us all for your sake.' Then More asked, 'Wilt thou know, son Roper, why I was so merry?' 'That would I gladly, sir.'... 'In good faith, I rejoiced, son, that I had given the devil a foul fall, and that with these lords I had gone so far, as without shame I could never go back.'"(11) More's truthful replies to the Commission on this occasion had burned almost all his bridges; but on Feb. 21, 1534, his name was dropped from that particular document, because some evidence still weighed in his favor. Fisher was not to gain the same reprieve – Sir Thomas's destiny awaited.

In March 1534, the confirmation with oath which More had feared was enacted; the Act of Succession had been passed. On April 12, 1534, while attending Mass at St. Paul's the summons was presented to him. The next morning, he heard Mass again, received Communion, and confessed his sins to a priest – a morning like any other at Chelsea. Upon his arrival at Lambeth, he was directed to the Cranmer-led Commission to swear to the oath. Although Sir Thomas assented to the new rule of succession in his mind, he could not mouth any oath that included mention of the King's spiritual authority. As he refused the swearing, Cranmer revealed to the former Lord Chancellor a list of persons who had sworn on it already. Nearly all his close friends of rank had sworn to it, and in the future he would hear of even the good Tunstall's vow (Cuthbert Tunstall was one of the few people More would ever confide in; they had carried on discussions over the marriage proceedings in 1529). Some months later, as Tunstall was on the verge of taking that oath, More would say: "If he do not, no force (matter), for if he live he may do more good than die with us."(12)
demn his friends for doing so. Cranmer snapped at that opening and retorted: “But [since you say your conscience is uncertain], you know for a certainty, and a thing without doubt, that you are bound to obey your sovereign Lord, your King. And therefore are you bound to leave off the doubts of your unsure conscience, in refusing the oath, and take the sure way in obeying your Prince, and swear it.”(13) More hesitated a moment, somewhat stunned that an Archbishop of Canterbury would strike with such an argument, but struck back concisely, to the heart of the matter: “For in whatsoever matter the doctors stand in great doubt, the King’s commandment, given upon whither side he list, solveth all the doubt.”(14) Such concession would mean the end of academic, religious, and moral freedom. When the Archbishop had fallen back somewhat himself, he maneuvered back into position quickly. He queried why the great More was so sure of himself if the whole Council of the realm stood against him. Sir Thomas rejoined with the comment that he had no reason to fear that, if the general Council of Christendom also stood upon his side. This day’s meeting ended at this point and Thomas was taken into custody and delivered to Westminster, where he was detained until arrangements were made for his stay in the Tower.

Cranmer now approached Henry in an attempt to reach some sort of compromise. Fisher and More would be agreeable to an oath recognizing the succession of Princess Elizabeth to the throne upon Henry’s death. They would in no way swallow the rest. Henry would not have the compromise though, for such an oath was tantamount to reprobation of the second marriage. Henry maintained that not only did the line of succession of illegitimate children have to be observed, but also the belief in the offspring’s legitimacy. There was no easy exiting now and More seemed glad of it. Of all the letters sent to his faithful daughter Margaret, one especially deserves attention here: “I believe, Meg, that they that have put me here ween they have done me a high displeasure. But I assure thee on my faith, my own good daughter, if it had not been for my wife and you that be my children, whom I account the chief part of my charge, I would not have failed long ere this to have closed myself in as straight a room, and straighter too… Me thinketh God maketh me a wanton, and setteth me on his lap and dandleth me.”(15)

It seems, here, as if More’s urge for isolation was making progress once again. Sir Thomas had no reason to regret, however, his denial of the monastic calling in his boyish youth. He still held within himself a certain boyish element, but of the kind that a man never relinquishes fully, even though he develops into maturity through the world. Thomas had trekked to this point with the world. He had taken, what some might call, the route of the visionary realist. And now that world, that government, that King he had served, along with his God, could never more be served in full, if matters ran their seemingly inevitable course. Now, in the Tower, was the time for total contemplation, reflection upon how his involvement had affected humanity and where he would stand as Mistress Death overtook him. Thomas was indeed not a man reverting to those days of immature reverie. The task had been seen through and he, at this moment of destiny, could look, it’s hoped, to future glory, without hint of stain.

During his time in the Tower, More took upon himself to compose his “Dialogue of Comfort” and “Treatise on the Passion”. In these works he glories in the victory of the individual soul. Allegories and parables were two of the tools he utilized to expose what human justice and individual liberty should really be. His attack upon Henry himself is most subtle, yet pungent. “There is no king so great but is very sure that he must die: And therefore, but if he be a fool, he can never be without fear, that either on the morrow, or on the selfsame day, the grisly, cruel hangman, Death, which, from his first coming in, hath ever hoved aloof, and looked toward him, and ever lain in await on him, shall amid his royalty, and all his main strength, neither kneel before him, nor make him any reverence, nor with any good manner desire him to come forth; but rigorously and forcibly gripe him by the very breast, and make all his bones rattle, and so by long and divers sore torments, strike him stark dead, and then cause his body to be cast into the ground in a foul pit, there to rot and be eaten with the wretched worms of the earth, sending yet his soul out farther unto a more fearful judgment, whereof at his temporal death his success is uncertain.”(16) Later he speaks of the pains any man must endure to be free: “Who can for very shame desire to enter into the kingdom of Christ with ease, when himself entered not into his own without pain?”(17)

In Nov.-Dec. term of the 1534 Parliament, the Act of Treasons was passed, which made malicious literature or speech intending to deprive the King of his dignity, title, or name of his royal estate a crime of High Treason. Soon Acts of Attainder were legislated against More and Fisher for denial of the opportunity to take the oath. The Parliament, however, was not a rubber-stamp in its passage. There was especial controversy over the term “Maliciously” in the Act of Treasons. It was strongly agreed upon that not all speech against the Supremacy was to be considered malicious. In future years, though, the King’s Commissioners would have the say as to whether a defendant’s language was malicious or not. But in some cases they would determine that any words spoken against Supremacy at all were necessarily malicious. On June 22, Bishop Fisher was executed. Sir Thomas’s turn would come soon.

But first that ugly formality, the trial. On July 1, in Westminster Hall, Thomas More stood before the court charged with four counts. The first was failing to accept the King’s oath from Cromwell and others on May 7th. More had said simply: “I will not meddle with such matters, for I am fully determined to serve God, and to think upon his passion and my passage out of this world.” More added that treason was to be considered malicious or not. But in some cases they would determine that any words spoken against Supremacy at all were necessarily malicious. On June 22, Bishop Fisher was executed. Sir Thomas’s turn would come soon.

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Sir Thomas More died for what he believed to be an inevitable cause from the first day he took office as Lord Chancellor. He had envisioned the fatal sickness that was to result from the major sore spot in the English state. That sore spot happened to be its only-semi-whimsically, very much unevenly-balanced Henry VIII. Many civil disobedients may recognize a true evil in society and move to eliminate it. Some choose violent means (many moving beyond the parameters of civil disobedience); others opt to utilize the minds and hearts of the people to evoke change. Their disobedience is to be an example. Sir Thomas, as others, witnessed the enactment of an immoral statute in 1534. He also saw the direct confrontation with conscience that statute must lead to. His humble reply to the ramifications of that statute was silence, pure and simple. He would seem to accept the dictates of the legislative body quietly, even if that legislative body's dictates might not be up to the standards of his own conscience. Thomas accepted the unjust legal fate held against him as any courageous civil disobedient would. Acceptance of punishment for his disobedience of English law was all he could hope for in that era's world. The root essence of a free political system is the freedom of conscience any member may and should exercise. If it differs from authority's own, the individual may have to pay consequences. Much of sixteenth century English society chose not to function on the desires of the singular More. That is not to say later generations should not gain from the knowledge/wisdom in this tragic incident. True, a country's laws must generally be obeyed (unless under a tyrant). And if an individual's conscience cannot see fit to obey, we can only hope, if that individual be morally right, that society will awaken before ultimate punishment is enacted, or failing that, after that punishment has been enacted, so similar ultimate punishments will not be enacted again.

This man More (later canonized by Catholic Church) was moved by more than mere political influences. Most would think him a religious martyr also. To be a martyr generally is to be a person who gives up his or her physical life for a spiritual or moral ideal. Is it truthful, then, to name Sir Thomas More martyr? Yes. Though we can hardly place such beings on a moral richter scale, it's plausible Sir Thomas stands a notch above most of the rest. Is this to say that most lacked courage and faith in the face of oftentimes brutal death? Scarcely. But we should begin to appreciate the singular type of martyrdom St. Thomas More underwent. Many who have died a similar death were overwhelmingly caught up in a martyr's passion, a largely emotional sensation. For them death seems an irresistible joy, a happy culmination to some heroic action. For others, death probably seems a grim fact that must be accepted if the moral principle behind resistance to the law is not to be dealt a death-blow. Few could be as intellectually resolute and truly joyful as More. Sir Thomas More's death was not the death of an itinerant zealot, who knew he might be here today and gone tomorrow for his beliefs; nor was it the death of a grim insurgent, struggling for an abstract ideal with no realism but little redemptive humor either.

More--the rational, deliberate Christian humanist--would have found great difficulty in rushing haphazardly into a croquet match, much less his own death. For him, as for St. Augustine, Proud Death was a power to be contemplated throughout one's life. The Crown gave Thomas fifteen months of the world's sometimes seemingly innumerable moments and he utilized them to the utmost. How many people could have sat down at the writing table and philosophized right into the teeth of death? His purpose? – to give others comfort against tribulation; and that solace is "the desire and longing to be by God comforted, " because "surely the greatest comfort that any man may have in his tribulations is to hide his heart in heaven. "(21) If any creature's heart be hidden in heaven, I'd venture a guess to say Thomas's is. And St. Thomas More's most famous line? "I die the king's faithful servant, but God's first. "

“Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.”

The Saturday Evening POST
November 5, 1960

The 1960’s
From Camelot to Cultural Conventian
1960: John Kennedy wins Presidency
1961: Peace Corps & Proposed Moon Program
1962: National Guard Deploys to Cities
1963: March on Washington
1964: Civil Rights Act
1965: Voting Rights Act
1966: Civil Rights Movement

In Memoriam
A2

The New President
The Saturday Evening POST November 5, 1960
IN MEMORIAM

This is the site of the Sterling Hall bombing, which occurred at 3:40 AM on August 24, 1970. An outstanding research scientist, Dr. Robert Flammacht, was killed in the bombing while working during the night in his laboratory on a physics experiment studying a basic mechanism for superconductivity in metals. Three others were injured. Dr. Flammacht was 33 years old, married, and had three young children.