

Human rights and the Law in More's Utopia and Duterte's Philippines

Antonio G. M. La Viña

Rodrigo Duterte decisively won the presidency in May 2016 with a clear vision of governance and society and the promise of strong leadership that will change the Philippines. Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law in September 21, 1972 although Proclamation 1081 was actually implemented two days later. His avowed mission was to defeat a rightist-leftist conspiracy and build a new society for the Philippines. Finally, President Benigno Aquino III was inaugurated President June 30, 2010 and governed for six years, purportedly following the straight path of governance, until 11 weeks ago when he yielded the presidency to the mayor from Mindanao. Yes, its only been that long and now it is a very different Philippines.

All these three presidents articulated the rationale of their presidency around moral crusades – whether it is the oligarchy for Marcos, corruption for Aquino, and illegal drugs for Duterte. All these presidents, in my view, justified violations of human rights of individuals in the pursuit of the big national goals they have appropriated. The scale of course is different. The numbers of the Marcos era human rights violations and numbers of casualties we are seeing now in the war against drugs cannot be compared to the corruption prosecutions launched during the Aquino administration. We know that the zeal with which President Aquino went after former President Gloria Macapag Arroyo did not end up with her assassination in the hospital or elsewhere and certainly, eventually, due process did work with Arroyo's acquittal. But tell that to the Arroyo family or for that matter to the family of Chief Justice Renato Corona whose impeachment was pursued mainly for political reasons.

Injustice is injustice, and whether it done to one or to many, one must ask why such things happen. I come from the tradition that does not allow for the derogation of any basic human right, and in particular procedural rights of due process. There may be a hierarchy of substantive rights, for example the right to life (which include right to human dignity, right to food, and right to a sound environment, among others) is superior over the right to property which may be limited by the former if necessary for public interest. But procedural due process, in my view, is absolutely essential and cannot be diminished for any person or group.

As for the argument that human rights are relative and culturally based, while I might agree that its particular manifestations are likely to be influenced by culture, the universality of due process cannot be denied. To quote the greatest lawyer this country has ever produced, Ka Pepe Diokno: "No cause is more worthy than the cause of human rights... they are what makes a man human. Deny them and you deny man's humanity."¹

¹ "Jose W. Diokno" Accessed October 4, 2016 <http://diokno.org/post/3612830697/quotes-by-jose-w-diokno>

Yet it happens: this utter disregard of due process. In the time of Marcos many times and under a veil of constitutional authoritarianism; in the time of Aquino, directed at specific individuals; and now in Duterte, at a whole class of people, drug pushers and users, mostly from poor neighborhoods, expendable in the view of the president and his supporters.

What is the thinking behind this? What justifies such disregard? How do we respond to its prevalence?

These are the questions I seek to answer in this lecture. I hope to use a 500 year old book written by a martyred saint of the Catholic Church to help answer these questions.

To be honest, I was very thrilled when Dr. Jonathan Chua, chairman of the Interdisciplinary Studies department, asked me to deliver this lecture. Thomas More is the patron saint of lawyers and public servants, to which communities I belong, and Utopia was a favorite book from way back when I was hoping to be a scholar of the writings of Karl Marx. That early intellectual interest eventually led me to utopian socialism and other similar thinking, all of which prodded me to go to the originator of the word and to the book that started it all.

But personal attachment aside, the questions about derogation of human rights, particularly due process, are urgent and need to be addressed. And so I wrote and deliver this lecture in that spirit.

More's Utopia and Duterte's Philippines

At the outset, I must say that I support a strong leader with formidable political will as that is required by many of our challenges. In this regard, I support many of President Duterte's initiatives, particularly the peace processes with the Moro and communist revolutionary organizations, constitutional change for federalism and a combined presidential-parliamentary system, the promise to address decisively the mobility crisis, the emerging social reform and justice agenda, and yes, the war against illegal drugs if pursued without human rights excesses

Unfortunately, central to Duterte's strategy in the war against illegal drugs is the idea that human rights must be subordinated to the exigencies of the war. In Duterte's Philippines, the burden of proof is reversed; it is the suspected drug lord or pusher who must prove innocence; due process is only for the courts and not a responsibility of the executive branch, meaning the prosecution and law enforcers.

Superficially speaking, Duterte's Philippines, at least in its treatment of human rights and the role of law, is not very far from Thomas More's Utopia. In More's world, lawyers are actually prohibited and citizens are assumed to know exactly what the law is, what right and wrong is, and are expected to comply with all the rules laid down by the state. In More's Utopia, punishment is a certainty for those who transgress the law. In More's imaginary world, the justice system is always fair and so human rights is not an issue. Its

respect is assumed. Unfortunately, both the assumptions of an educated citizenry and an excellent justice system does not hold for our country.

How do we respond to Duterte's Philippines? Unfortunately, the book Utopia does not give us good answers to this question. Sadly, utopian literature frequently justify human rights violations in the name of achieving a better, more perfect society. Therein lies the danger and the tragedy that is unfolding in Duterte's Philippines. It is not a perfect world; government makes mistakes, including terrible ones. A disregard for human rights, substantive and procedural, makes those mistakes permanent, irreversible through extrajudicial killings and the imposition of the death penalty. In the real, not utopian, world of Thomas More, this danger and tragedy also unfolded in the fate that befell him.

The Utopia of Thomas More

Thomas More's utopia envisioned a complex society where the inhabitants share a common culture and a way of life. He contrived a perfect way of life for his Utopians, defining systems of punishment, social hierarchy, agriculture and education, as well as customs for marriage, dress, and even death. He imagined the best existence possible for his ideal creation. Through the philosophical exchanges of the fictional characters - More, the servant of King Henry VIII of England, Peter Giles, and the philosopher and world traveler Raphael Hythloday and Cardinal John Morton - Thomas More creates a fictional society depicting an idealized system of religious, social and political customs.

In Utopia, More conceptualized the yearnings of humanity. Every human creature earnestly strives for the best possible state of existence; an existence where there is no crime, no pain, no suffering, no sickness. Societies strive in every way possible to achieve this ideal. Yet this is not achievable unless humanity comes up with a unified vision of how to live; a philosophical framework that guide humanity to realize heaven here on earth.

More's assumption is that no normal individual desires for self-destruction; on the contrary his every waking hour is to dream on how to lead a life the best way possible. This tendency is almost instinctual. Yet there are as many interpretations on how to come up with a perfect society as there are people and governments. Some resort to benevolence, altruism while others to violence or tyranny.

One must take note that there is a reason why Thomas More used the word Utopia, which literally (from the two Greek words joined by More to form one word) means "not a place", to describe his imaginary heaven. It stands to reason to propose that this is because he knew that such a place was never going to materialize. Certainly, More would be horrified at how Utopian visions later became the justification of many atrocities in world history.

The limits of Utopian thinking

Written 500 years ago, More's work has left a lasting impact on subsequent political thought and literature. It may be half a millennium old, but utopia's contemporaneity

cannot be denied. Tyrants, reformers, radicals, revolutionists often take their bearings on the utopian philosophy.

There are, for example, similarities between More's Utopia and the classless society promised by Karl Marx. Indeed, the Utopians "wear the same sort of clothes without any other distinction, except what is necessary to distinguish the two sexes, and the married and unmarried." (Of Their Trades, and Manner of Life, Utopia). They share their material possessions and work for the common good, it is more akin to the structure subsisting in a monastic life rather than the society designed by Marx which stems from a highly stratified economic environment.

More's Utopia, while similar to Marx's dictum: "To everyone according to his needs - from everyone according to his abilities," however departs from the Marxian concept insofar as concerns the driving forces behind the two ideas. More fantasized of a people untainted by malice; where people are selflessly devoted to preserving well-structured and orderly institutions. On the other hand, the Marxian communism is premised on an inherently dysfunctional society where two opposing forces, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, who are in perpetual contradiction against the other. As Friedrich Engels clarified: "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles."² And order is not possible unless the working class prevails over the capitalists or the bourgeoisie.

Thomas More's treatment of religion is also instructive. Utopian citizens, as envisioned by More, practice religious freedom. "They derive their belief in god by means of pure reason since they do not have access to revealed truths, yet they are in agreement that there is one God and that the soul is immortal. However, there is no compulsion in belief. Each one is free to choose who to believe in and how to express this belief. "The common sacrifices be so ordered, that they be no derogation nor prejudice to any of the private sacrifices and religions. Therefore, no image of any god is seen in the church, to the intent it may be free for every man to conceive God by their religion after what likeness and similitude they will. They call upon no peculiar name of God, but only Mithra, in the which word they all agree together in one nature of the divine majesty whatsoever it be." (The Second Book, Of the Religions in Utopia, Utopia)

In Duterte's Philippines, it is wise to take heed of Thomas More's admonition when he said: "The way to heaven out of all places is of length and distance." And his reminder that "If you do not find a remedy to these evils, it is a vain thing to boast of your severity in punishing theft (criminality in our case), which though it may have the appearance of justice, yet in itself is neither just nor convenient."

Fr. James Schall, in an essay entitled "The Right to Happiness", argues: "So we do not have a right to be happy. The assumption that we do lies behind the utopian turmoil of our times. The attempt to guarantee our right to be happy invariably leads to economic bankruptcy and societal coercion. By misunderstanding happiness and its gift-response condition, we impose on the political order a mission it cannot fulfill. We undermine that

² Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Manifesto of the Communist Party, (1848) Chapter 1

limited temporal happiness we might achieve if we are virtuous, prudent, and sensible in this finite world."³

Marcos' new society war against oligarchs and communists, Aquino's war against corruption, and Duterte's war against drugs may have the best of intentions but its excesses and disregard of procedural rights, for groups and/or individuals although different in scale, nullified/nullifies what they were/are supposed to achieve. The point is utopian thinking and self-righteousness can be the enemy of human rights when it is used to justify these excesses and disregard.

What was frightening for me during the Marcos, Aquino and now in the Duterte eras, is that there are people, true believers who actually believe that people should be hunted down, diminished, mocked, and in the case of Marcos and Duterte killed for the greater cause. What is sad is behind the veneer of wonderful or passionate slogans like "new society", 'daang matuwid", and "I hate drugs" is politics in the most ugly sense of the word. In similar ways, the attacks against Vice-President Binay and Senator Grace Poe, arguably pursued with mixed motivations of national interest and support for a specific candidate, fall under this category of no holds barred, scorched earth politics is also because of this. Never mind to the damage caused to the persons and their families, and in the case of Poe, never mind the collateral damage to foundlings and global Filipinos.

Our complicity in human rights violations

Let me now go to Duterte's Philippines? How does the ongoing war against illegal drugs measure up to the standards set by More's Utopia? Making good his campaign pledge to rid the country of criminality, corruption and drugs, Duterte has resorted to the most unorthodox and unconventional means which would have toppled a less popular and weaker executive. As the body count continues to rise, now nearing 3000 casualties, resulting from police buy-bust operations and suspected vigilantes, Duterte keeps on urging the police to double if not triple their efforts to crack down on drug personalities. To allay the fears of the drug enforcers, he promised to pardon police if they were charged with human rights violations for carrying out his merciless orders.

Duterte had vowed to keep this "shoot-to-kill" order "until the last day of his term, if he were still alive by then". Never before have we seen such graphic images of slaughter, not even during the darkest days of the Marcos dictatorship. Often bound hand and foot, shirts soaked in blood, their faces sometimes covered in duct tape, wearing crude signs hastily written on a piece of cardboard proclaiming their alleged crimes. Murdered in poorly lit street corners or in ramshackle, crowded rooms by unknown vigilantes or policemen who invariably say that they had to kill them in self-defense. Apart from protestations by the Commission on Human Rights, some human rights groups and a few politicians, the absence of outrage is deafening.

The conspicuous lack of moral indignation is an unmistakable indication of the people's approbation of Duterte's use of iron gloves. In spite of or because of this, Duterte

³ Father James V. Schall, S.J. : The 'Right' to Happiness (Crisis Magazine, 2009)

continues to keep his core support, and I suspect, in the next round of surveys, there will still be strong support for this approach.

I do not question on the president's sincerity and noble intentions. I acknowledge that there might already be tangible results but its definitely too early to declare this a success. But at what cost are we willing to pay to attain the kind of state that Duterte is forcing upon us? Are we ready to cast aside the rule of law, sacrifice our beliefs in due process and respect for human rights, set aside our moral moorings in exchange for security even thru retribution, violence, and impunity? Have we so desensitized our morals to a point where we have stopped being shocked?

For many years we have exerted all efforts to educate the security forces about human rights: to make them understand that human rights are not their enemy but a guidepost to proper behavior, especially in uncertain situations. We have gained much headway in these efforts. Many in the police and military have fully accepted human rights principles and their practical application. Now all of this is in danger of being erased, nay, reversed, by a presidential declaration practically guaranteeing impunity. How many years and generations will it take to undo the psychological damage that this war on drugs may cause to its purveyors? We will all pay the price for our moral failure to stand up against what is being done to alleged drug pushers and users.

Justice Leonen, on stereotypes and murder

Last August 20, 2016, Justice Marvic Leonen delivered a remarkable commencement speech to the graduates of the Ateneo School of Government. It would be a mistake to interpret Leonen speech as anti-Duterte. In fact, it is a systematic reflection on democracy, on the universality of human rights, on rejecting stereotypes as doing so kills people, on what the ultimate significance of politics is and the challenge to all of us to build a good society. If you cheered or liked it because you think he is only talking about Duterte, then you have not learned and profited from such a wonderful text from a great thinker.

In that speech, Justice Leonen asserts: "Successfully caricaturing a group leads to their dehumanization. Stereotyping another human being is itself an inhuman act."

Leonen gives concrete examples from our history: "We are familiar with these stereotypes: those who belong to non- Christian tribes are uncivilized and have a low level of intelligence. Muslims are terrorists who believe in a religion without ethics, always the legitimate subject of privacy violations and law enforcement. Communists are godless and, therefore, legitimate targets of fundamentalist religious crusades. A sexually active woman is a slut who could be publicly shamed and shunned. Drug pushers are dogs. Drug addicts are beyond redemption."

Leonen comments further about drug pushers and addicts: "If drug pushers are dogs then they can be killed at the slightest provocation. If drug addicts are beyond redemption, then it is acceptable to segregate, marginalize, and shun them from society. Thus, they

can be ferreted out through searches of homes and private spaces without warrants. If drug pushers are dogs and drug addicts are wasted homo sapiens, then those who coddle them are worse and, therefore, can be named and shamed without first assessing the testimony and the evidence of those who have provided their names in an impartial proceeding, which would afford them with the opportunity to be heard.”

Leonen warns that society unfortunately “will be blind to the fundamental human and constitutional rights of those who are dehumanized by stereotypes if those of us who can fail to critically assess these assertions.” This should motivate us to be vocal against acts of government based on these false ideas.”

I agree with Justice Leonen: “We are complicit when we are not critical. We are part of the conspiracy of the powerful if we remain silent.”

Justice Leonen is right: “Stereotypes are dangerous. Stereotypes should be stopped.”

I agree with Justice Leonen: “Intolerance grows on fertile ground when the public ceases to be sensitive to the humanity of others. An intolerant society is breeding ground for violent secular fundamentalists. Death squads—for whatever cause—are valorized and protected rather than condemned and arrested. Impunity legitimizes abuse. Fear, not good governance, will become the foundation of our government.”

Like Justice Leonen, “I also believe that government should direct its efforts to understanding the complexity of addiction: not simply the effects of drugs on our bodies, but the effect of marginalization, oppression, and poverty on the psyche of those who choose to be addicted.”

Justice Leonen is right, that: “to fully unleash the coercive, violent resources of the state without ensuring effective and efficient means to address the weaknesses of our law enforcement, prosecutorial, and judicial institutions is a recipe for disaster. Impunity for public officers at any level—from former Presidents, to prosecutors, to judges, to tax collectors, to police officers—will cause untold abuses when state violence is unleashed and encouraged.”

I agree with Justice Leonen: “Due process of law should be respected. The State cannot claim divine omniscience. Deliberate killing is a universal moral wrong. In our jurisdiction, it is a crime. One who deliberately takes the life of another without the required legitimate and legal provocation assumes an undeserved superiority over the victim. The perpetrator assumes that the acts of the victim define his or her whole humanity. Never mind the conditions under which he or she lived. Never mind if, in the soul of the victim, there still exists the possibility for rehabilitation. Never mind if he or she is capable of atonement. Never mind his or her role and relations with family, friends, and community. To those who kill deliberately, the grief of others is irrelevant. One who kills deliberately judges with irreversible finality. It is without appeal. It is the exercise of unsanctioned absolute power. It is my conviction that a policy of deliberately taking human lives—no matter what the justification—is not sanctioned by our laws.”

Justice Leonen is absolutely right: "Murder is murder."

The Marcos legacy

If we fail to rise up to this challenge and stop the killings, we will pay a high price as a society. Sadly, future generations will have to deal with it.

This is not the first time. We also failed, as a society, to be accountable to those who suffered under martial law. We have made progress for sure with the law allowing victims to claim compensation for what was done to them but all of that is being undermined now, not the least because of the decision by President Duterte to have Marcos buried in the Libingan ng Mga Bayani.

February 25, 1986 was a good day for Filipinos. It marked the end of the Marcos dictatorship which started with the proclamation of martial law by President Ferdinand Marcos on September 21, 1972.

Five years earlier, in 1981, Marcos had formally lifted martial law but it was cosmetic. Even as a small number of opposition members were elected in the 1984 parliamentary elections, Marcos retained legislative power under the 1973 Constitution through Amendment Number 6. Up to the end of his dictatorial regime, human rights were wantonly violated with people being arrested without warrants, enforced disappearances happening, and extrajudicial killing as well as massacres of protestors still occurring.

With the people power revolution, formal democracy was restored. Certainly, the pre-martial law Bill of Rights became the rule again. While initially governing under a revolutionary Freedom Constitution, President Corazon Aquino immediately convened a constitutional commission that then quickly drafted the 1987 Constitution that on February 2, 1987 was ratified by the people.

Things have changed indeed. But the long shadow on martial law lingered for decades. Even now, remnants of the legal architecture set up by Marcos remains, not the least of which are the provisions in the 1987 Constitution which perpetuates an imbalance in separation of powers, favoring a strong president that can suspend the privilege of writ of habeas corpus, be granted emergency powers under certain circumstances, and worst declare a state of martial law throughout the land.

Many Filipinos, particularly those belonging to the economic and social elite – initially supported martial rule. With the support of the military, cooperative media, a small cadre of social and economic elite, and a coopted legislature and Supreme Court, President Marcos established for himself a repressive regime, stifling all forms of dissent, perpetuating himself in power by manipulating the adaptation of the 1973 Constitution, made himself both Head of State as President and Head of Government as Prime Minister, rigged elections and installed himself as a dictator for life.

Marcos' designs were not at once apparent. He justified martial law as a way, among others, to dismantle the oligarchic structures and patronage system which contributed much to the suffering of the people, to infuse moral values sorely lacking among Filipinos like discipline, spirit of self-sacrifice for the national welfare. In other words, he wanted to establish a New Society, calling it as the Revolution from the Top. The objective was to emulate the economic progress and political stability of Taiwan and South Korea. And a wide majority of the local business community and foreign governments, particularly Washington, approved. Only a few brave souls dared to raise a cry of protest.

The first years of martial law saw increased economic gains due to bolstered business confidence and political stability. President Marcos tapped good technocrats from the academe and business sector. He encouraged foreign investments, projecting the country as an excellent choice for multinational investors because of low wages and industrial peace. The influx of foreign capital increased considerably. Land reform was instituted and new agricultural initiatives introduced. Amount of investments in infrastructure was at unprecedented levels, with the construction of new roads, highways, bridges, hospitals and other structures essential to nation building.

With a compliant legislature in the Batasang Pambansa and a subservient Supreme Court, Marcos successfully put in place the political and legal infrastructure which enabled him to exercise absolute power, in the process churning out innumerable presidential decrees which cemented the dictatorship. But with absolute power at its disposal, the Marcos regime not only created a new breed of oligarchs known as cronies whom the dictatorship granted monopolies which supplanted the traditional economic elite but also redefined the term corruption and profligacy, which then First Lady Imelda Marcos best exemplified.

The Marcos dictatorship resulted in innumerable cases of human rights violations, a wrecked economy, highly politicized military and weakened governmental institutions. In the end, the martial law experiment proved to be a national trauma which must not be repeated and never forgotten.

Today, forty-four years later, we are still feeling the ugly vestiges of martial. None of the architects and enforcers has been brought to justice. Moreover, with the presidential system that we have, there is always a possibility, and that's not even remote, of a repeat of 1972. As pointed out above, the president is given a lot of leeway when it comes to the exercise of his extraordinary powers. What level of conflict demarcates the choice between ordinary police action and resort to emergency rule? What degree of punitive State action is necessary to address the emergency without exposing civil liberties to unwarranted perils? Sadly, the answer to these questions depends largely on this wide presidential discretion. And that is why it would have been better that the 1987 Constitution completely did away with the martial law powers of the president.

The argument is that the country needs discipline and a strong leader. True. But a strong leader does not have to be a dictator. What we need is more, not less democracy. To stop corruption, we need complete transparency through a freedom of information law.

To make sure Mindanao fulfils its promise, we need an inclusive peace process that brings all stakeholders together to walk the path of peace. And to make that the problem of illegal drugs is defeated, we need law enforcement agencies that have the support and trust of citizens. All of these is antithetical to authoritarian rule.

Resort to martial law or any kind of authoritarian response to any national emergency, real or imagined, is always a slippery slope. Authoritarian regimes have proven that it is easier for a dictator to grab power than to exercise it with restraint and wisdom. Dictatorial power, untrammelled by legal and institutional strictures, is simply too alluring for the autocrat. Once emergency rule is declared, the constitutional bonds are loosened, and this could create a window of opportunity for unrestricted power. Unfortunately, the exercise of that power will have devastating, long term effects, a shadow that will linger on to the future as it does again today.

Accountability in Utopia and the Philippines

More's Utopians detest war "as a very brutal thing; and which, to the reproach of human nature, is more practiced by men than by any sort of beasts. They, in opposition to the sentiments of almost all other nations, think that there is nothing more inglorious than that glory that is gained by war. Yet they are not averse to a just war and will resort to violence when all else fail." (Of Their Military Discipline, Utopia)

Let's contrast the prevailing mood in our present-day society with the Utopians' attitude towards war. More's fictional characters would be both troubled and ashamed of a bloody victory over their enemies, and think it would be as foolish a purchase as to buy the most valuable goods at too high a rate. And in no victory do they glory so much as in that which is gained by dexterity and good conduct, without bloodshed.

History has taught us that repressive governments that commit the most horrendous and barbaric acts of violence against their fellow human beings are invariably founded on a warped and perverse notion of a utopia that their leaders conjure, imagine and forcibly impose upon their people. Either in the name of race, ethnicity, religion or some dubious theorems of equality, whether social or economic, these governments rabidly undertake radical and repressive measures against their own people and others who do not "belong" that, without exception, exceed the bounds of every norm of decency and standards of morality.

More than half a century ago, Adolf Hitler, an obscure Bavarian corporal in the German army fresh from a humiliating loss in the First World War, became the chancellor of a defeated Germany. He was catapulted to power by pandering to the frustrations and anger of the German people who were groaning under the weight of the Versailles Treaty imposed upon them by the victors. Hitler would not accept a subjugated German nation who he believed was a superior race. He had the crazy idea that the Aryan race, the pure German race or Herrenvolk, had the obligation to dominate the world. Thus, he launched a war of aggression that sparked a worldwide conflagration resulting in untold suffering by the tens of millions and the death of millions upon millions of combatants and non-

combatants alike, including six million Jews who died in the Holocaust. **It is lamentable, that President Duterte, wittingly or unwittingly, likened himself to this monster, thus sinking further the president's opprobrious rhetoric to new lows.**

In More's imaginary community, people do not have the ambition for territorial expansion. The utopians are pacifists by nature; hence, their territory does not need borders. But they are willing to fight if the need arises to protect their common interests although as much as possible they would rather outwit their enemies and avoid bloodshed.

Speaking through Hythloday and his two companions discussing and debating moral philosophy and other aspects of communal life, Thomas More made for perfect vision far detached from the realities of the present world. Yet, we can draw some important virtues from his imaginary world. Virtues that even us contemporary men aspire for. His humanism, nobility of spirit, selflessness, belief in non-violence, respect for fellow human beings, probity and justice are some moral lessons that we can learn from his masterpiece even as we engage in soul-searching and ponder on our own realities.

In More's opus, he decries in prose what ails his society and explains what changes could be made to redeem it. Ultimately, there is accountability in More's Utopia.

In Duterte's Philippines, and in the eras before this man from the South rose up to power, impunity has been a permanent feature. Until we address and correct that, we will be condemned to this repetition.

A man for all seasons

Five hundred years ago, in England, a lawyer and top government official had to stand up against his King. His name was Saint Thomas More, now recognized as patron saint of lawyers and government officials. More was not a perfect man; both his personal and public life were stained with personal flaws, including pride and being too harsh and judgmental on others. But at the most important moment of his life, More stood steadfast to his principles and conscience. That is why, Robert Bolt honors the saint with his play "A Man for All Season. In one of the most memorable scenes from the movie adaptation of Bolt's play, More tells his daughter: "When a man takes an oath, he's holding his own self in his own hands like water, and if he opens his fingers then, he needn't hope to find himself again."⁴

We do not honor Thomas More as the patron saint of lawyers and public servants because of his authorship of Utopia. We look up to More because he defied what is wrong and did what is right, even to the point of death. We must do the same today, hopefully without dying of course. In real life, More lived the life of his fictional characters when he defied the king by refusing to sign the Oath of Supremacy, which gave the king more power than the pope. And for this he paid for his life and was declared a saint by the Catholic Church. By his defiance to do what he perceived as an evil act, he was rewarded his utopia to be raised in the altar and be with his Father in heaven for all eternity.

⁴ "A Man for All Season Quotes: Accessed October 5, 2016 <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0060665/quotes>