

## **Marriage & Public Life**

**Kevin & Margaret Andrews**

*The St Thomas More Forum, Campbell, ACT, 17 August 2005*

### **I. Introduction**

We are delighted to be here tonight to participate in this series of presentations organised by the St Thomas More Forum. Our contribution amounts to our individual musings on our experience of marriage and the calling to public life with reference to the life and example of St Thomas More. A theme throughout is that of paradox, by which we mean the seemingly contradictory positions that nonetheless express a truth.

### **II. St. Thomas More**

Marriage was a recurring theme in the life – and death – of Thomas More.

As the facts of his early life are less well known than his later years, they are worth retelling briefly.

Born in February 1478, Thomas was one of six children of Agnes Graunger, the first wife of John More. She died when More was in his youth or young manhood, his father having three other wives subsequently.

More was raised in a prosperous and comfortable household, his father progressing from trade to the law, eventually serving as a judge on the Court of King's Bench. Little is known of the family life in which the young Thomas was raised.

At the age of 12, More left St Anthony's school to become a page in the household of John Morton, Archbishop of Canterbury and Lord Chancellor of England. It was more than a journey across the Thames from the City to Lambeth Palace; it was a journey to another world in which More would live and move for the rest of his life.

Morton subsequently sent the young More to Oxford, but the student never completed his degree, returning to the Bar in London where he progressed rapidly.

Erasmus, his great friend, describes how, as a young man, More was not immune to the charms of young women. More himself, was caught between the attractions of the monastery and marriage. Influenced no doubt by his mentors from Oxford, William Grocyn and Thomas Linacre, both of whom held rectorships at various times, More was attracted to the priesthood.

For a number of years, More joined the spiritual exercises of the Charterhouse monks, but he eventually abandoned his hopes of becoming a priest or religious. According to Erasmus: "The one thing that prevented him from giving himself to that kind of life was that he could not shake off the desire of the married state. He chose, therefore, to be a chaste husband rather than an impure priest."

More subsequently threw himself into his work at the Bar. In 1501, at the age of 23, he was first elected to Parliament. Four years later, he married Jane Colt, then 16 years of age.

More's marriage to Jane reflected a recurring theme in his life: that of the natural inclination being overridden by a sense of duty. As William Roper, More's son-in-law records: "albeit his mind most served him to the second daughter, for that he thought her the fairest and best favoured, yet when he considered that it would be great grief and some shame also to the eldest to see her younger sister preferred before her in marriage, he then, of a certain pity, framed his fancy towards" the eldest of the three sisters.

Nonetheless, More appears to have been not only a loving husband, but a tutor and mentor to his young wife. Erasmus recalled "as a rule, in talking to women, even with his own wife, he is full of jokes and banter." Yet their time together was short. Six years and four children later, Jane Colt, aged 22, died. Modern accounts suggest that she died in child-birth, together with the new-born child.

Ever the practical man, More remarried within a month after Jane's death in 1511. While this apparent haste may offend modern sensitivities, it should be recalled that it was not an age of romantic love, and More had a young family and household to maintain.

His second wife, Alice Middleton, was eight years his senior. She was the relatively wealthy widow of a London silk merchant, whom More had known for many years.

Some have postulated that More's views of marriage were entirely pragmatic, based partly on his most famous book, *Utopia* (1515). In it, the subject of the story, Raphael Hythlodæus, recounts life on the mythical island of Utopia. He describes various aspects of the islanders' culture, including their attitude to marriage:

"In choosing their wives they use a method that would appear to us very absurd and ridiculous, but is constantly observed amongst them, and is accounted perfectly consistent with wisdom. Before marriage some grave matron presents the bride naked, whether she is a virgin or a widow, to the bridegroom; and after that some grave man presents the bridegroom naked to the bride. We indeed both laughed at this, and condemned it as very indecent."

More's character in the book goes on to compare this practice with the caution with which a person purchases a horse, suggesting that equal caution be taken in the choice of a spouse.

Care needs to be taken with interpreting More. He was at once serious and satirical; idealistic and ironical. Parts of the work have been interpreted as both a representation and a rejection of his own beliefs. It reflects the paradox in the life of More.

In any event, the marriage to Alice seems to have been pleasant, although their characters and personalities differed greatly. Erasmus, who knew them well, wrote:

“There is no man living so affectionately as he loveth his old wife as if she were a girl of sixteen.”

Marriage, of course, came to signify another issue in Tudor England. The King’s “great matter” was to dominate English life, lead to the declaration of Henry VIII as supreme head of the church in that country, and, ultimately, the death of Thomas More.

This aspect of More’s life is well-known. For recent generations, it was popularised by Robert Bolt’s 1960 play *A man for all seasons*.

Let me reflect on just one aspect of the matter. It would appear that More and Alice remained faithful to each other throughout the trials and tribulations that ended outside the Tower of London on the 6<sup>th</sup> July 1535.

Bolt’s play records a conversation between them in which Alice demands a statement from her husband about his position on the King’s matter. Alice says: “And if I’m to lose my rank and fall to housekeeping I want to know the reason; so make a statement now.”

To which More replies: “No – Alice it’s a point of law! Accept it from me Alice, that in silence is my safety, but my silence must be absolute, it must extend to you.”

More, of course, was ever the lawyer. His defence of silence would have sufficed had not Richard Rich perjured himself, and the court not accepted his evidence over More and two other conveniently absent witnesses to that fateful conversation in the Tower.

More’s life and death was a contrast. More was a social man – part of the ‘A’ list of the English renaissance. He was a loving and loved husband and father, a man of sweet and gentle nature, perhaps the most well-known man in England, yet one, who in the end, chose a principle over popularity, and a solitary end. Ultimately, he chose to live and die by those precepts which had ordered his life: the law, and faith in God.

### **III. Reflections**

[Marg] I want to recount some events that may provide insights into our individual faith and values.

While I was aware I had married an intelligent and ambitious man, I never dreamt that I would spend over 14 years married to a politician. I knew Kevin had an interest in politics, but he wasn’t obsessive about it. We didn’t even have a TV in the house for the first ten years of our marriage, so we certainly didn’t have politics beamed into our lounge room each night.

In 1990, life was busy and full – Kevin was establishing his career as a barrister and I was caring for our four young children aged between nine and four. Just before Christmas Kevin announced that he would like to attend a forthcoming Liberal Party information session, with the view of running for pre-selection for a future Federal election. The application had to be in by close of business on Christmas eve.

I can still see Kevin slipping the late application under the door of the Victorian Liberal Party headquarters as we headed off for our annual holiday, with me privately hoping that it wouldn't be accepted because it was late.

Of course it was accepted, and Kevin attended the first of three seminars in Ballarat. The same weekend as the second seminar in February 1991, Neil Brown, MP for the Federal seat of Menzies announced his surprise resignation after 23 years. There was discussion and consultation about whether Kevin should 'throw his hat into the ring' with the other 23 candidates vying for the blue ribbon seat. Advice varied from 'it shows your interest and you begin to build a profile' to 'standing and not winning can disadvantage your future prospects'. I was indignant at the presumption by some that Kevin couldn't possibly win pre-selection for Menzies, and together we decided he should have a go.

I was however, quite ignorant about the nature and demands of politics. When I ventured to ask what Federal politics might mean for myself and our children, Kevin reassured me that (and these were his exact words) 'Parliament hardly ever sits'. In any event, I was pretty sure that this brief flirtation with politics would soon pass and we could get back to life as we knew it.

So it was with surprise and delight that I received the phone call from Kevin following the pre-selection meeting, to tell me that I was talking to the next Member for Menzies. I saw the hand of Providence in the number of unlikely co-incidences that led to our change of direction in life.

I was to make this observation again, about five years later when the euthanasia issue arose. It was about three months after the 1996 election, and Kevin had not been appointed to a front bench position. However, he seemed to be in the right place at the right time to sponsor a Private Member's Bill, something he could not have done if he were a member of the Government.

I had just finished the nightly family ritual and everyone was tucked into bed when I received a phone-call from Kevin who was in Canberra for Parliamentary sittings. The conversation got around to whether he should sponsor a Private Members Bill to overturn the NT Euthanasia legislation. If he was hoping to get any kind of discussion - at any level - about the pros and cons of such an action, he wasn't going to get it from me. My response was as naïve as it was direct - "If you are not going to do that, you might as well come home and be a decent husband and father"

It was a challenging nine months of the Bill's passage into law, and in a reflective moment during the maelstrom, I said to Kevin that if I had had any idea of what he was taking on, I would have been much more circumspect. He confided that it was just as well he hadn't thought too long and hard about it himself.

It seemed poignant that the same nine months was the time of gestation of our now eight year old son. I was just pregnant when Kevin put up his hand to sponsor the Bill, and Benjamin was three weeks old when the Private Member's Bill finally passed the Senate by two votes.

These are a few snap-shots of the many private and public challenges we have faced together over the past 14 years.

#### **IV. Public life**

[Kevin] Marriage and family had become the personal and vocational interest of Margie and me from our mid-twenties. Not only did we have our first four children within seven years of our wedding, we became involved in supporting others deciding to marry.

Together with a small group of other couples, we founded the Marriage Education Programme in Melbourne, which, within a few years, was providing pre-marriage education to some 500 couples a year.

Our interest led to an involvement at the national level, with Margie becoming editor of the national marriage education magazine, *Threshold*, and myself serving on the executives of the two national bodies. This led to an increased awareness of public policy and its impact on marriage and family.

My work at the Bar also led me to a greater consideration of policy. Almost by accident, I had developed a niche practice in the area of bioethics and health law. Increasingly I spent more time in hospitals than in courtrooms as I helped draft IVF and Refusal of Medical Treatment legislation and participated in the public debates of the time.

Supporting a young family and the need to build a practice at the Bar kept any thoughts of a political career on the backburner. However, the seeds had been planted many years earlier. My father had fostered conversation at the dinner table about current affairs, often taking the devil's advocate role in order to stimulate debate. This, and the example of my mother's simple accepting approach to life and a good Catholic education, led to an interest in service to the community in late secondary school.

I joined the Liberal Party in 1985, but did little other than hand out how-to-vote cards at various elections until late 1990, when I became involved in the circumstances that Margie has described. As a consequence, I had little practical understanding of the day-to-day demands of political life.

Margie and I have often reflected on the tension between family and politics. Ordinary families are not fully represented in the political process unless some of their number participate. Yet there are enormous pressures on one's own family once elected to Parliament.

I have seen far too many of my colleagues' marriages end in separation and divorce over the past 14 years. Only our strong commitment to marriage, our faith, and to each other, imperfectly lived out at times, has kept us from the same fate.

My early years in Parliament enabled me to pursue some of the things that first motivated me: more funding for marriage and family services, opposition to euthanasia, and consideration of the issues of human cloning and stem cell research, as well as other issues, such as independence for East Timor.

Men and women enter Parliament for all sorts of reasons. Rarely is there a discrete reason, rather it is a combination of experiences, aspirations and opportunities that shape the decision.

Whatever the initial motivating factors for an individual's entry into Parliament, they are only one part of the rich tapestry of government. Appointment to the ministry enables a person to be part of not only the legislature, but the government of the day. Indeed, I note that the principle issues confronting Thomas More as Lord Chancellor were unemployment and inflation.

History doesn't concern itself much with Thomas More's consideration of these issues. What it does record is his response to a fundamental issue of faith and morals, of principle and meaning. It was not a decision about which were the best administrative arrangements to make as Lord Chancellor about unemployment, inflation or the enclosure proposals of the day.

One usually brings to a ministry a broad set of skills and an approach to issues rather than expert prior knowledge of an area of government. As a minister, I seek to apply my mind, as objectively as I can, to the portfolio responsibilities with which I have been entrusted.

However, media articles about industrial relations, or welfare reform, for example, often include the extra information that I am a 'devout' or 'practising' Catholic. While I am happy for this to be known about me, what it adds to the debate is uncertain. The inference is that I am compelled to blindly follow a course of action without applying any rational judgement. I adhere to the Burkean approach to the role of a Parliamentarian. In the words of Edmund Burke: "Your representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgement, and he betrays instead of serving you, if he sacrifices it to your opinion."

During the euthanasia and stem cell debates for example, I argued issues – not on religious grounds – but what I considered to be good public policy.

What I bring to my responsibilities is a set of values, and an ethical framework. It is not a rigid adherence to a dogma, whether political or religious, but an exercise of judgment about various matters.

While formal conscience or free votes are few in the life of Parliament, we apply our conscience to many issues. Each of us brings to the decisions we take a set of values, shaped throughout our lives by various influences. What is important is that we acknowledge and debate the issues in a measured and respectful way.

As Lord Rawlinson said in his Oration to mark the 1978 Quincentenary of the birth of More:

“For sometime, somewhere, in matters far less grave than those which More had to face, every public man may have to make a similar choice. He may on some occasion have to make a decision when interest will conflict with principle. The consequences to history and to his own life (at least in the civilised world) will be far less great than the consequences for Thomas More. The alternative will not be the scaffold and the Tower or their equivalent. The public man will probably never have been a First Minister, with a name honoured throughout the world, but the decision the public man may have to face may well be the same in principle if not in degree. It may present for that man the difference between the world and the spirit.”

## V. Paradoxes

[Marg] I was impressed by an article I read recently by the Lutheran pastor and Professor Emeritus at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, Herbert Anderson. Under the heading of ‘The paradoxical spirituality of family living’, Anderson made the following observation which struck a chord with me:

“The spirituality that embraces paradox is particularly necessary for modern family living. By paradox, I mean a contradiction that does not seem to be true, but nonetheless is true. The Cross is the ultimate paradox for the Christian. If we live the way of the Cross, we will live the contradictions that only God can resolve. The last are first, the meek inherit the earth and in order to live, we have to die. Paradox is not only the Christian way: it is inherent in human nature, in human community and particularly in the family. Marriage is sustained by holding in vital, paradoxical tension the fundamental human need for intimacy and the equally fundamental human need for autonomy”.

I have often struggled with the tension between the legitimate call to serve the ‘public’ family, through our marriage education commitments and particularly Kevin’s public life, which seem at times to be pitted against our own ‘private’ family. For a range of reasons - including that I am a female, that I have the primary caring role of the family and that I am more gregarious - I have on several occasions over the past 14 years, felt the scales weigh against the ‘private’ family. One instance of this was when one of our daughters, at the vulnerable age of 16 was diagnosed with depression. Parents are quick with self-reproach: Where have we gone wrong? Have we been sufficiently accepting, loving and affirming? Have we given her enough time and attention? It’s the added questions that are more confronting and difficult to answer. Would this have happened if we were not so busy and pre-occupied, or if her father was home more often? These questions - and many like them - have occurred frequently throughout our marriage, particularly in relation to the demands on time, energy and priority that a career in public life entails.

It can be disconcerting to spend time espousing to other couples the importance of making time to be together, prioritising your relationship and nurturing intimacy, yet realise that we do so inadequately ourselves.

Differences in our personalities and how we individually cope with public life impinges on our relationship. I believe Kevin has somewhat of an atypical personality for a politician. He is reserved and enjoys solitude.

I suspect he would be more distressed at having his books denied to him than being in solitary confinement, as I am sure was the case with St Thomas More. Kevin is single-minded, task-orientated and mostly unaffected by the day-to-day ups and downs of public or home life. In contrast I feel keenly the emotional ups and downs. In fact, I dislike hearing criticism of Kevin as I consider that to be my prerogative! I thrive on the companionship of marriage and find the obligatory time apart difficult and the divergent lifestyle it entails, alienating.

I look for ways to alleviate this, so, at the time of the last election, I said to Kevin that if he couldn't be with me, I was going to put more effort into being with him. I'm sure I saw him gulp hard and turn just a little pale! But he was quick to assure me that it was a good idea.

It's not that other couples and families don't share similar experiences. I believe we are essentially ordinary – we do the same every-day things that most couples and families do. I'm sure we have the same petty arguments that others have. However, the demands of public life does mean there is an overlay of unpredictability, media attention and stress. When you add time apart to the mix, it can be difficult.

According to a news-clipping in January this year, a Trade Union newsletter stated the prediction for 2005 that "Mrs Andrews would die of boredom." I think I could live quite happily with a bit more boredom!!

## **VI. Conclusion**

[Kevin] So what do we draw from all of this?

Despite his fame, public life was a solemn duty for More. In *Utopia*, he argued that it was a person's duty to enter public life despite the evil necessarily entailed, saying, "that which you cannot turn to good, so to order it that it be not very bad." His task, as he saw it, was to make the law as moral as possible. But one also suspects that he was relieved to be spared the burden of office when he handed the Lord Chancellor's chain back to Henry.

Our view of public life, in its various manifestations, is more optimistic. For us, both marriage and politics are noble callings. The challenge for all in our position is to continue to balance the tensions that these two callings inevitably present.  
Ends.

### **Select bibliography**

Herbert Anderson (2005) 'Faithful becoming: Forming families in the art of paradoxical living in a fragmented and pluralist world' *New Theological Review* (February)

Peter Ackroyd, (1998) *The life of Thomas More*

Robert Bolt (1960) *A man for all seasons*

Robert H Bork (1999) 'Thomas More for our season' *First Things* 94: 17-21

Thomas More, *Utopia* (1515)

Lord Rawlinson of Ewell (1979) 'Public duty and personal faith – the example of Sir Thomas More' *53 Australian Law Journal* 9