

1592—perhaps by two combined theater companies, and with unusual financial backing from some who wanted the truth of those Wars understood by Queen Elizabeth and her subjects. *Richard III* is the most famous exemplar of Shakespeare’s method of creating *true, universal history*—fundamentally, the history of ideas in dramatic form—from the bits and pieces of chronicled “fact” available to him.

This play became the definitive history of how the Wars were finally ended and England united as a nation, for centuries after it was composed and first performed. Shakespeare wrote it in “spiritual partnership” with his predecessor Thomas More. By taking More’s history as the basis for *Richard III*, Shakespeare gave an “eternal” authority to More’s devastating portrait of the revenge-killing cycles of the English oligarchical families of the Plantagenet era.

More also showed how such rule had to destroy itself, by insisting on noting the psychological disintegration of Richard III before the battle of Bosworth, which Shakespeare made into an unforgettable Fifth Act scene. In the final century of that Plantagenet era, the great families so exhausted themselves in these blood orgies, that by 1484, half the titled baronies of England were empty, because there was no surviving adult male in the family; the children had become wards of the king; the family holdings confiscated by the crown, or added to those of other, temporarily victor-families in this war of each against all. When Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond, crossed from France with

a small force of French, Welsh, and English soldiers, Richard III could muster only 8,000 knights and soldiers from all of England to defend his usurped throne. Henry ended the Wars of the Roses, and as King Henry VII, united and began to rebuild an exhausted and prostrate nation.

Thomas More became a teacher, and also the conscience—finally the tragic conscience—to Henry’s famous son, Henry VIII; as Pope John Paul II has recently declared St. Thomas More to be the conscience and patron saint of all statesmen and political leaders [SEE Box]. As we have seen, his *Utopia* of 1515 was a piece of this work accomplished by More. It was also part of a great effort by the English Erasmians who were Henry VIII’s friends, to pull him back from the brink of that 1516 Hapsburg Empire-allied invasion of France (involving his fantastic delusion that he was Henry V Plantagenet reincarnated!), which began his long downfall from his father’s level of governance and statecraft.

More’s *History of King Richard III* would have shown his king everything that he must not be, and must not do, if he were to “govern well his own ancient kingdom,” although it was not to be published in its English version until after both Thomas More and Henry VIII were dead. From Shakespeare’s revelation of it in 1592 until today, *Richard III* has been perhaps the most-often performed of all of the plays of Shakespeare, certainly the most famous of all “history plays.” *Richard III* is the authoritative *idea* of that evil quality of the English oli-

## Pope John Paul II on St. Thomas More

On Nov. 4, 2000, John Paul II declared Thomas More the Patron Saint of Statesmen and Politicians. The declaration constituted an extraordinary challenge to all political leaders in the world today. For, to declare Thomas More their Patron Saint, is to challenge them to become like the great humanist, to conceive and live politics as he did.

In his address, the Pope said: “Yours can well be deemed a true and genuine vocation to politics, which, in practice, means the governance of nations, the formulation of laws, and the administration of public affairs at every level.” The Pope proceeded to examine the nature and aims of politics, from a Christian standpoint. “Politics is the use of legitimate authority in order to attain the common good of society. . . . Political activity ought therefore to be carried out in a spirit of service.”

And the aim is to attain justice, “which is not content to apportion to each his own, but one which aims at creating conditions of equal opportunity among citizens, and therefore favouring those who, for reasons of social status or education or health, risk being left behind or relegated to the lowest places in society, without possibility of deliverance.”

“This is the scandal of the affluent society of today’s world, in which the rich grow ever richer, and the poor grow ever poorer, since poverty tends to additional poverty,” the Pope said. Especially through the process of globalization, he added, this polarization has become exacerbated. The problem with globalization, is that it has divorced economic policy from morality. What must be done, is to reassert this morality, “to conform the laws of the ‘unbridled’ market to the laws of justice and solidarity.”