

INPERSON

## Thomas More of California

BY Robert Kumpel

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Charles LiMandri was introduced to St. Thomas More's thought in an unexpected way as a young man.

Now he's in the thick of California's homosexual "marriage" battle, serving as general counsel for the National Organization for Marriage, one of the key groups supporting Proposition 8, a ballot initiative that would amend California's Constitution to define marriage as between a man and a woman. He recently spoke to correspondent Robert Kumpel.

*Are you involved in any unusual cases right now?*

I've been preparing for trial right now. There were four San Diego firefighters who were ordered to take part in the Gay Pride parade. It's a very interesting case, which raises some religious freedom issues. They are all Christians, and three of them were raised Catholic. For one thing, homosexuals have all the rights under the law, and we must tolerate them and let them exercise those rights. The second thing is that they get to openly promote and celebrate those rights. The third thing is: Can you make people participate who don't want to? They would have been disciplined if they didn't obey the order. One was up for battalion chief and another was up for captain, and they would have been taken off the promotion list and faced a suspension. So they're suing the city for sexual harassment. We want people to see how mean-spirited and committed to violating anyone's rights [they are] to promote their own radical agenda.

*How did you decide to study and practice law?*

I always wanted to be a lawyer. In kindergarten at 5 years old, I dressed up in a sport coat with a briefcase and went to career day as a lawyer. I knew that's what I wanted to do, and there was no doubt in my mind. We watched "Perry Mason" too. I was always gravitating towards the ideas and concepts and theories. I always excelled in literature, philosophy and history, always liked the idea of an orderly system of governance, which the laws are supposed to provide. Growing up, I always had to have everything in its right place, so it fit my personality.

*Obviously, your faith is an important part of your life and your work. Was there ever a time when that was not the case?*

Yes. I was a cradle Catholic and had the blessing of being trained and educated in Catholic orthodoxy even during the wishy-washy '70s. I wasn't exposed to anything I would consider overt heresy. I had several theology classes at USD [University of San Diego] with then Dr. [Ray] Ryland, who is now Father Ryland at the [Franciscan] University of Steubenville, and he was very solid and orthodox. Just like the law, theology always seemed very comfortable to my way of thinking. There was a natural attraction to want to know more about God.

But throughout most of high school and college, there was a bit of a disconnect between the intellectual idea and understanding of God and the practice of my faith, knowing God as a loving Father. I'm more aware now of God as a loving Father involved intricately in the details of our lives than just as a loving deity.

*What changed that for you?*

My marriage. Family prayer, Eucharistic devotion, the Rosary — all those things have changed my life. I make more frequent confessions and receive Communion more worthily than ever before. I don't tend to think of sin anymore as just between me and God. Those things have really grown throughout the course of my married life.

*Who have been some of the influential people in your life?*

When I was 11, a Monsignor came in to class and told us we should see this movie, *A Man for All Seasons*. I remember that I didn't get to see it. But I always remembered him saying it. When I graduated at USD in 1977, it was playing at the Ken [theater]. So I went and saw it and was absolutely enamored with Thomas More — who he was and what he stood for. He blended being a brilliant lawyer into being a Catholic saint — and how he was able to fully integrate his faith into his personality and all aspects of his life. As a matter of fact, the word "integrity" comes from Thomas More. He coined it. He was the model and standard that greatly influenced my thinking and ideals of what a layperson working as a lawyer should be.

Although I didn't plan it, I ended up going to Britain to study in USD's Oxford program after seeing it. By happenstance, I arrived in England in the fall of '77, and one of the first places I went was the National Portrait Gallery, and there was a big banner on the building that read "500th Anniversary of Thomas More's Birth." They had all the paintings, all the personal artifacts and writings — everything of his that they could find, accumulated together in one place for the first time in 500 years. There was a lecture series, but it was all sold out. I asked who was the foremost scholar on Thomas More and was told it was Professor J.J. Scarisbrick, who was giving one of the lectures. So I wrote him and told him that I was an American student who was studying for one year at Oxford and would love to attend one of his lectures. Providentially, he wrote back and said that he was on sabbatical and would take me on for private tutorials.

So here I am, going from Oxford to the University of Warwick by train every two weeks, in his private study in the shadow of a medieval castle, doing essays on Thomas More. I even did an internship at the Bodleian Library, where Thomas More himself studied 500 years earlier. What would be the chances of going to Oxford — which I didn't plan to do — seeing that movie which just happened to come out because the Ken would show old movies, arriving during a phenomenal exhibition, and then getting the top Thomas More scholar in England, who I didn't know yet was a devout Catholic, taking me on and doing tutorials? It was a miraculous intervention in my life that grounded me in what God wanted for me. I can still remember sitting in the Bodleian Library thinking, "How fortunate we are to live in a time when we can take our religious freedoms for granted and never have to worry about being persecuted for our faith." That was 30 years ago, and now I'm seeing the full-on frontal assault of Christianity in general and Catholicism in particular, which I don't think existed since Thomas More's day.

*And now you're involved with California's battle for marriage.*

And it was that very issue that Thomas More drew the line at. They were trying to determine who has the final say on what marriage is or what it should be. Is it the state or is it the Church? And that's where we're at now in California. Who could have known years ago that that's what God had in store? In 1935, when the Pope made Thomas More and John Fisher saints, it was so they would be role models for citizens on how to stand up to the face of tyranny, since that's what was happening in Germany at the time with Hitler.

Chesterton said at that time that Thomas More is more important now than any time since his death, but not nearly as important as he will be 100 years from now. That was prophetic.

*So what's your role in this?*

I'm the general counsel for the National Organization for Marriage, and they've been one of the key groups spearheading the battle for marriage in California, along with Protect Marriage. I'm with them because it's predominantly Catholic, and Protect Marriage is predominantly evangelical. They're all good people, and it's a pleasure to work with them, but I wanted to be aligned with well-recognized, respected Catholics because our outreach has been primarily to the Catholic community, which needs to be mobilized and invigorated in this fight, or we're not going to win it.

*What about Attorney General Jerry Brown changing the language on the ballot initiative?*

The liberal powers that be are doing everything they possibly can to undermine this effort. Brown changed the language to call it a "ban" because, typically, when you call something a "ban," you lose 10 percentage points at the polls. But when you call it "continuing marriage as it's always existed from the beginning of recorded history," people get it, and we're ahead. So by re-framing the issue, it does tend to hurt us. Now there have been legal challenges to that, but inasmuch as we have hostile courts, particularly at the Supreme Court level, there's no guarantee that we will win that fight. So we have to hope, pray and work hard that people understand what's really at stake — regardless of how they try to re-caption the issue. The ballot language is exactly the same as Proposition 22, which passed with 61% of the vote in 2000, which says only marriage between a man and woman is valid and recognized in California. That hasn't changed, even though they're trying to re-package the description of what it's going to accomplish.

*Robert Kumpel is based in Valdosta, Georgia.*

**INFORMATION** Contact Yes on 8 Coalition at 916-446-5031 or [protectmarriage.com](http://protectmarriage.com). The National Organization for Marriage can be contacted at 888-894-3604 or [nationalformarriage.org](http://nationalformarriage.org)

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