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Martyr

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tical diocese he is married to his diocese. That is meant to be a lifelong thing," Father Cavanaugh remarked.

Cardinal Fisher's dedication was not lost on his contemporaries. In 1537, Cardinal Reginald Pole — who had left England to study in Italy before the firestorm of the Act of Succession swept over his homeland — wrote to King Henry declaring, "What other have you, or have you had for centuries, to compare with Rochester in holiness, in learning, in prudence and episcopal zeal? ... were you to search through all the nations of Christendom in our days, you would not easily find one who was such a model of episcopal virtues."

The future saint's rise to the episcopacy was rapid.

Born in 1469, the son of a merchant, the future Cardinal Fisher showed early signs of intellectual ability and he entered Cambridge at the age of 14. He earned a bachelor's degree in 1487 and a master's in 1491. He was also ordained in 1491, having received a papal dispensation to be ordained at age 22 — four years under the norm.

He received a fellowship at the university's Michael House in 1491, then in 1494 was elected a senior proctor. In 1501 he was elected vice-chancellor of the university, and in 1504, chancellor — a position he held until the end of his life.

The same year he was named chancellor, he also met Lady Margaret Beaufort, the mother of King Henry VII and grandmother of King Henry VIII. He became her personal confessor, and she provided monies to help found Christ's College (1505) and St. John's College (1509) at the university.

In 1504, at age 35, he was also named bishop of Rochester.

The currents of humanism were flowing across Europe during his rise to the chancellorship and the bishopric, and Cardinal Fisher was caught up in them.

"The whole purpose of humanism was religious reform, political reform, educational reform," Father Cavanaugh noted.

As chancellor at Cambridge, for exam-



ple, he helped to create the two new colleges and foster the study of Greek out of concern that priests be well-educated.

Cardinal Fisher's life might have continued in this pastoral and scholastic vein had it not been for King Henry's desire to have his marriage to Catherine annulled.

Henry had married Catherine, the widow of his older brother, Arthur, in 1509 after receiving dispensation from Rome to do so. Under church law at that time, marriage to the widow of a brother was not permitted due to the Mosaic law in Leviticus that forbade such unions.

Queen Catherine bore one daughter, the future Queen Mary I, and had a series of miscarriages. By 1527, Henry, desiring a male heir to the throne, declared that his conscience was troubled by the fact he had married his brother's widow. He sought to have the papal dispensation overturned and the marriage annulled.

Initial overtures to Pope Clement VII produced no results, and years of subsequent negotiations likewise failed. Henry even arranged for hearings in London in 1529 to decide the case. Then-Bishop Fisher had written a letter in defense of the marriage in 1527, and he appeared at the hearing on behalf of the queen, who after giving an initial address, refused to take part in the proceedings. Instead, she appealed to Rome. The court was adjourned later that year, its commission revoked by the pope in light of the appeal. The pope ultimately upheld the validity of the marriage in 1534.

From 1529 on, Henry began to seek greater control of the church in England.

Henry finally married his mistress, Anne Boleyn, in January 1533; their daughter, the future Queen Elizabeth I, was born in September. In March 1534, Parliament passed the Act of Succession, which declared the marriage of Henry and Catherine invalid, and that Elizabeth, not Mary, should inherit the throne.

Both More and Cardinal Fisher could accept this act, judging that Parliament could decide who was heir to the throne. But Parliament also attached to the act the Act of Supremacy. This later act acknowledged Henry as the head of the church in England, not the pope.

Neither Cardinal Fisher nor More could accept this, Father Cavanaugh noted.

"It wasn't the Act of Succession that was the sticking point, it was the Act of Supremacy," the priest said. "But they were tied together."

The tying of these two acts together was intentional, Father Cavanaugh ob-

served. Refusal to accept the joined acts became, in legal terms, not a religious issue, but rather, treason.

"It was Tudor Machiavellianism at its best," Father Cavanaugh said. "By tying the two parts together, they had a political handle to get rid of their opponents to the Act of Supremacy. They were smart enough to try not to make martyrs."

Ultimately, Cardinal Fisher refused to take the oath the acts required. He was arrested in 1534, and kept in the Tower of London for a year. He was tried in June 1535 — shortly after being raised to the rank of cardinal — found guilty of treason, and executed on June 22.

In his pamphlet about St. John Fisher, Father Cavanaugh explained that the word "martyr" means a "witness," suggesting that this title fit the saint.

"By his example of joining learning with holiness," he wrote, "by his service of God and his fellow man, by his loyalty to the Faith and conscience, John Fisher's life and death bore eloquent witness."

Diocese

Continued from page 1

diocesan pastoral center — and in the construction of St. John Fisher College.

And in the late 1930s, the Cross of St. Andrew was taken from the coat of arms of the English Rochester Diocese and incorporated into the New York Rochester Diocese's coat of arms.

Meanwhile, a new Catholic church was being built in Rochester, England. In 1952, Bishop Kearney raised \$30,000 to help pay for the effort.

Representatives of the New York Rochester Diocese attended the first Mass celebrated in that new church. The chalice used in the Mass was a gift from the students of St. John Fisher College.

As a special gift in return, Bishop Cyril Corderoy of the English Catholic Diocese of Southwark — of which Rochester, England, is now part — sent Bishop Kearney a first edition of St. John Fisher's 1525 critique of Martin Luther.

Father Robert F. McNamara, diocesan archivist, noted that Bishop Kearney had

attended St. John Fisher's canonization ceremonies in 1935. When he became bishop of the American Rochester Diocese in 1937, Bishop Kearney "would naturally turn to the saintly predecessor of the other Rochester," the archivist said.

Indeed, as early as 1941, Bishop Kearney obtained special permission from the Sacred Congregation of Rites to give liturgical honors to St. John Fisher alone on June 22; the rest of the church honors both the cardinal and St. Thomas More together on that date.

But Bishop Kearney was not alone in his admiration of the English martyr.

Father John S. Hayes, for example, wrote a history of the martyr in 1992 to mark the 30th anniversary of St. John of Rochester Parish.

"I've always been devoted to the man because of his contributions to the church during the Reformation," the priest said.

St. John Fisher was a heroic figure, Father Hayes acknowledged.

"Of all the bishops in England, he is the one who stood against Henry," Father Hayes observed. "All the others went with Henry."

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