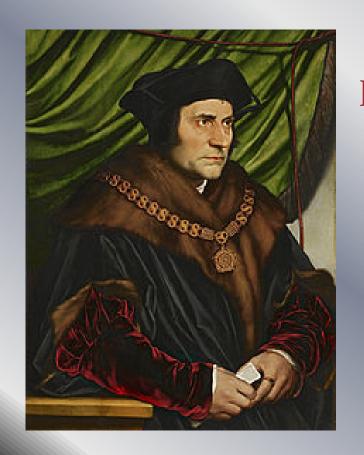
(London, 14th February 1478 – 6th July 1535)



Saint Thomas More was an English lawyer, social philosopher, writer, statesman and noted Renaissance humanist. He coined the word "utopia", a name he gave to the ideal, imaginary island whose political system he described in his masterpiece Utopia (1516).

- 1478: born in London, son of a prominent judge, in 1492-94 he studied Greek and Latin literature at Oxford University, and started writing comedies.
- 1499 he started a lifelong friendship with the Dutch humanist Erasmus of Rotterdam and in 1501 he became a barrister.
- **1504:** he entered Parliament and earned a reputation as an honest and effective public servant.
- **1512-19**: he worked on a *History of King Richard III*, never finished but greatly influential on W. Shakespeare's play *Richard III* in **1516** he finished and published *Utopia*.
- 1517: he entered the king's service as a counsellor and personal servant and in 1521 he was knighted.



• **1521**: More helped Henry VIII in writing his *Defence of the Seven Sacraments*, a repudiation of Luther's doctrine – Pope Leo X rewarded the king with the title *Fidei defensor*.

Martin Luther then attacked Henry VIII in print, calling him a "pig, dolt, and liar". More's rebuttal defended the supremacy of the papacy, the sacraments, and other church traditions in a virulent language branding Luther an "ape", a "drunkard", "lousy little friar" and a lot more!



- 1523: he was made Speaker of the House of Commons.
- **1527:** he refused to endorse the king's plan to divorce Queen Catherine of Aragon; nevertheless in **1529** he was the first layman to become Lord Chancellor.

- **1532:** disapproving Henry's stance toward the church he resigned, citing ill health.
- **1533:** he refused to attend the coronation of Anne Boleyn, a matter which did not escape the King's notice.
- 1534: after a series of false charges he was committed to the Tower of London because he refused to swear to the Act of Succession in 15 minutes he was found guilty of treason.
- 1535 (July 6th): he was beheaded his final words on the scaffold were "*The King's good servant, but* **God's First**".

More was **beatified in 1886** and **canonized** by the Catholic Church as a saint by Pope Pius XI **in 1935**.

The origin of the word "utopia".

• "Utopia" comes from the Greek words:

Oὐ = "not" +
$$τόπος$$
 = "place" + the suffix –ία

Οὐτοπία = "no-place-land".

In English, *Utopia* is pronounced exactly as *Eutopia* (i.e.
 Εὐτοπία in Greek meaning "good place") something that More himself addresses in an addendum to his book:

"Wherfore not Utopie, but rather rightely my name is Eutopie, a place of felicitie."



Utopia (1516)

- Thomas More is travelling in the Low Countries when he sees his friend, Peter Giles who introduces him to a well-travelled friend of his, Raphael Hythloday. Among the countries Raphael speaks about he tells them about a **Utopia**, which he thinks is ruled very well and is a **perfect country**.
- Utopian **towns** are all as identical as possible, with a max. of 6,000 families organized in groups of thirty headed by a magistrate called Philarch elected yearly. An Archphilarch overlooks every ten Philarchs.
- The Utopians' manner of life is unusual: **gold is of no value** thus everything is free they spend their lives in the city and in the suburbs, living in each place for two years at a time.

Utopia

- Laws dictate that they are not to travel without a 'passport', obtained from the Prince and stating where they can travel. There are no lawyers in Utopia: defense in court is personal.
- **Marriage**s are possible for women over eighteen, and men over twenty-two. Sexual encounters before marriage are prohibited as are polygamy and adultery.
- Military discipline involves everyone on a daily basis even though armies are preferably hired from outside: women are encouraged to join their husbands at war.
- As regards religion people are free but they <u>must</u> all <u>believe</u> <u>in one Divine Being</u> – it is forbidden to believe that the human soul dies with the body since

"degrading so noble a being as the soul, and reckoning it no better than a beast's is not fit for a human being". 7

Utopia: inexistent or ideal?

- Why did More write this work? Did he agree with the ideas he was propounding or was he making fun of his readers?
 - living a communal life, working for a public cause, searching for spiritual happiness, alternating work with leisure and study with games are **in line** with what we know about More's beliefs;
 - divorce, euthanasia, married priests, female priests, religious toleration seem to **jar** with what More stood and fought for.
- Utopia is thus primarily a story about a journey to an imaginary place told by an imaginary man with a strategically chosen name:

Raphael the archangel who guided Tobias
& "opened" his father's blind eyes

Hythlodaeus (from the Greek *hythlos*, "nonsense" and *daíein* "give, spread") means "dispenser of nonsense"!