

University of North Carolina at Asheville

Sir Thomas More:
A Manifold Man who Persecuted Reformists, Composed Humanist Literature
and Became a Martyr in the Catholic Church.

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By
Laura Beth Payne

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I. Introduction

In 1534, a young servant named Dick Purser attempted to share the reformist teachings of Martin Luther with a fellow servant. While this act seemed innocent enough, young Purser had forgotten whom the master of the household was. Poor young Purser was flogged and then dismissed for his innocent discussion. Purser worked under the roof of one of the most devout Catholics in England. He served a man who had publicly lashed out against Luther and the Reformation. Curiously, Purser also worked for a master that was known as a humanist author, who had written about freedom of religion and rights for women. Purser did not have two masters. Rather, he worked for the dichotic, Sir Thomas More.¹

Such a curious man was described much differently by his son-in law. "For as much as Sir Thomas More, knight, sometime Lord Chancellor of England, a man of singular virtue and of a clear unspotted conscience, as witnesseth Erasmus, more pure and white than the whitest snow."² This is the description of Sir Thomas More by his first biographer and son-in-law, William Roper. Sir Thomas More is also described by playwright, Robert Bolt, as "a man for all seasons."³ More was a brilliant lawyer, renowned scholar, author, chancellor to King Henry VIII, and devoted family man. Canonized as a Saint in the Catholic Church, More garnered respect for refusing to endorse Henry VIII's petition to be named head of the new Church of England. More's devotion to the Catholic Church is undeniable as he openly opposed the Protestant Reformation and Martin Luther. But it is More's devotion that creates a fascinating

¹ John Guy, *Thomas More*, (London: Arnold, 2000), 108.

² William Roper and Nicholas Harpsfield. *Lives of Saint Thomas More* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1963), 3. ³R. Bolt. *A Man For All Seasons*, (London, 1935).

dichotomy in his famous character. More's opposition to the Reformation contradicts his writing on religious freedom in his most famous work, *Utopia*. Opposing the Reformation in action while favoring a humanistic society in writing and thought, makes More an interesting contradiction. Sir Thomas More served as a prominent and influential opponent of the Reformation in Tudor England. His public actions and writings contradicted his private writings in favor of a religiously free society in *Utopia*. II. Historiography and Historical Background of More

Thomas More, as agreed upon by most historians, was born February 6, 1478 in the city of London.⁴ Very little is known about More's childhood and all of his biographies seem to pick up again with More as a page in the household of Cardinal Morton, Lord Chancellor of England. More received his education at Oxford University in 1492 and then entered as a law student at the New Inn in 1494. He then pursued a career as a lawyer.⁵ More's political career quickly accelerated as he was elected to the House of Commons in 1503 and then appointed undersheriff of London in 1510. In 1516, More completed *Utopia*, the humanistic work for which he is most famous, but he was the author of many other works as well. On October 25, 1529, More was appointed Lord Chancellor to King Henry VIII, where he would serve until his resignation in May of 1532. It was in this position that he developed a friendship with Henry and a reputation of virtue and reason. More refused the oath of succession, an act that recognized any child of

⁴Peter Ackroyd, *The Life of Thomas More* (New York: Nan A. Talese, 1998) 6; R.W Chambers, *Thomas More*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1938) 49; John Guy, *Thomas More*, (London: Arnold, 2000), 226; Richard Marius, *Thomas More*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), 3; Two sources listed More's date of birth as being the 7th of February and in the year 1477. This confusion is due to the lack of information on More's early life. February 6, 1478 has been determined to be the actual birth date based on the memoirs of John More, Thomas More's father.

⁵John Guy, *Thomas More*, (London: Arnold, 2000), 226.

King Henry VIII's second wife, Ann Boleyn as the rightful successor to the throne, in April of 1534 and was swiftly sent to the Tower of London where he remained until his execution on July 6, 1535.⁶

More is often classified as a humanist. Author John Guy more accurately describes More as a Renaissance Christian Humanist.⁷ To understand More, one must have a basic grasp of humanism, as it is an essential characteristic in More's writings. Humanism, in its simplest form refers to a school of thought rooted in Greek philosophy. This philosophy places emphasis on the worth and dignity of human life as well as reason. Humanism states that one cannot have faith or belief without reason.⁸ More began to develop his ideas on humanism during his time studying at the Lincoln's Inn. An introduction to Erasmus of Rotterdam, who was known as the "rising star of northern European humanism," in 1497, further encouraged More in humanistic thought.⁹ More developed a passion for Latin and Greek literature, which was latent with humanist ideas that influenced his own writings. Humanism in its truest form, however, does not generally support the idea of dependence on the supernatural or texts of divine origin.¹⁰ It is for this reason that More is described more specifically as a Christian humanist or a humanist author.

William Roper's *Life of Saint Thomas More* serves as the first and perhaps most valuable biography of Thomas More. Roper's account is exclusively classified as a primary source. Born sometime between 1493 and 1498, Roper was the son-in-law of Sir Thomas More. Following

⁶Ibid, 226-233. Guy, *Thomas More*, 50 ⁸Ibid, 24. ⁹Ibid, 26. ¹⁰Ibid, 27.

More's execution, Roper recorded his personal interactions and experiences with More. Roper gave these memoirs to Nicholas Harpsfield, instructing Harpsfield to compose an account of Thomas More's life. Harpsfield was asked to supplement Roper's personal accounts with details of More's public life to construct a full picture of who Thomas More was. Harpsfield had no personal interaction with More which makes his work the first secondary source of Thomas More. The result of this joint venture was the earliest first hand account of Thomas More in the form of *Lives of Saint Thomas More*.^{*1} Roper's accounts must be used with caution as he admired his father-in-law and sought in his memoirs to praise More for his personal convictions. This gave Roper a certain level of bias. Beyond the bias in Roper's intentions, are the flaws of human memory. Roper was recording details of his interactions with More after More's execution in July of 1535. Even so, Roper's work has since been cited by all of More's biographers and is considered the original source on More.

Historians and authors such as J.H. Hexter, Peter Ackroyd, R.W. Chambers, Richard Marius, and Anthony Kenny, seek to examine the life of Sir Thomas More.¹² Each does so with their own personal flair and style creating a wide array of biographies with unique takes on More. Perhaps the most useful and most recent source for Thomas More is the work of author John Guy. Simply titled *Thomas More*, Guy's work is very much inclusive and easy to read. Guy seeks to give the most accurate depiction of Thomas More by using and critiquing centuries of

* * William Roper and Nicholas Harpsfield. *Lives of Saint Thomas More* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1963), v.
¹²Peter Ackroyd, *The Life of Thomas More* (New York: Nan A. Talese, 1998); R.W Chambers, *Thomas More*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1938); J.H. Hexter, *More's Utopia: The Biography of an Idea*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1952); Anthony Kenny, *Thomas More*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983); Richard Marius, *Thomas More*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985).

sources. Guy writes, "This book seeks to reconsider key themes in More's life in conjunction with the divergent portrayals that have arisen to explain or condemn or exculpate."¹³ Using empirical methodology, Guy seeks to separate the painted image of Thomas More from the actual person of Thomas More. Each of these sources provides a slightly different perspective on who Thomas More was and how he impacted history.

Secondary research on Sir Thomas More is extensive. But most of the work on More spans More's entire life, or focuses on his work, *Utopia*. Little effort is given to exploring the dichotomy of Thomas More by placing his Utopian writings on religion in juxtaposition to his writings and actions against the Protestant Reformation in England. By examining specific elements of the humanistic ideals in *Utopia* and comparing those ideas to later expressions and actions, an interesting picture arises of what appears to be a conflicted man. With further examination, however, one can see ways in which More's opinions were not in full contradiction but simply evolve with changes in his life. III. More and His *Utopia*

Utopia was More's most famous work, establishing More as a humanistic author. "We shall then find, I think, that few books have been more misunderstood than *Utopia*" muses author R.W. Chambers in his biography, *Thomas More*.¹⁴ In Paul Turner's introduction to *Utopia*, he compares the work to the baby in the Judgment of Solomon. "One school of thought claims it as a Catholic tract [...] another claims it as a political manifesto."¹⁵ Sir Thomas More's

¹³John Guy. *Thomas More* (London: Arnold, 2000), x. ¹⁴R.W. Chambers, *Thomas More* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1938), 125.
¹⁵Thomas More, *Utopia* (London: Penguin Books, 1965), 7.

Utopia is a humanistic piece that describes the politics, economy, and social organization of an ideal society. As a work, *Utopia's* Book I gives valuable insight into what More believed about the structure of Tudor England, reform, and religious freedom. It is a social commentary that addresses capital punishment, nobility, private property, and divorce. Due to the breadth of issues discussed in *Utopia*, it has become, as J.H. Hexter describes, "a grab-bag of ideas." "This enables each writer to pull out the ideas that best suit his own taste, to exalt those ideas above the othersf...]"¹⁶ Indeed, *Utopia* has become a source for humanists, socialists, and conservatives alike. Perhaps *Utopia's* most valuable use is not to give insight into what More's work says about society, but rather what More's work says about himself. Sir Thomas More's description of religious practices in a Utopian society, as expressed in *Utopia*, gives perspective on the author's personal beliefs, and allows for stark contrast in his public career. *Utopia* was composed fairly early in More's career and was just one of many writings he produced, yet it continues to be one of his most famous.

Utopia was published in 1516, but is believed to have been composed a year earlier. At the time, More was serving on an embassy to Bruges and Antwerp, in what would become Belgium, for commercial treaties.¹⁷ More's intentions for writing *Utopia* are unclear but More's own correspondence perhaps sheds some light on its purpose. According to a letter More sent to his friend, Peter Giles, Chief Secretary of Antwerp and book editor whose work included Aesop's fables, he did not intend for *Utopia* to be a lengthy venture.¹⁸ "I feel almost ashamed to

¹⁶ J.H. Hexter, *More's Utopia: The Biography of an Idea*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1952), 13.

¹⁷ Gerard B. Wegemer and Stephen W. Smith, ed, *A Thomas More Source Book* (Washington, D.C: The Catholic University of American Press, 2004), 362. ¹ ^Thomas More, *Utopia*, Edited by Edward Surtz, S. J. and J.H. Hexter (New Haven: Yale University Press,

send you this little book about the Utopian Republic, for I've kept you waiting for nearly a year, and you doubtless expected to get it within six weeks."¹⁹ More goes on to list his reasons for the delay before mentioning that he is not sure if he will even publish the book at all.²⁰ "For men's tastes are so various, the tempers of some are so severe [...] that there seems no point in publishing something, even if it's intended for their advantage, that they will receive only with contempt and ingratitude."²¹

According to Marxist author Karl Kautsky, More's frustrations with the reader as expressed in his letter were evident in More's intentions for *Utopia*. It was no simple "scholastic exercise;" More sought to reform the destiny of England with his writing. "Its humanist character is again revealed in the fact that it was not written in the vulgar tongue, but in a language which only a fraction of the nation understood- Latin."²² At this point in More's career, he had some exposure to the corruption of the Catholic Church in England and English governance, serving in parliament and as undersheriff of London.²³ Harpsfield asserts that Cardinal Wolsey, whom More encountered during his service in Parliament, did not "heartily love Sir Thomas More" and was of "outrageous aspiring, ambitious nature, and so fed with vainglory."²⁴ Harpsfield went on to describe Wolsey as "thirsting" for praise, whether it was justified or not. It would stand to reason then, that More had hope for change and reform. By

1965)109.

¹⁹Ibid, 109.

²⁰Ibid, 111.

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¹ Thomas More, *Utopia*, Edited by Edward Surtz, S.J. and J.H. Hexter (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965) 111.

²²Karl Kautsky, *Thomas More and His Utopia* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1959), 98.

²³Gerard B. Wegener and Stephen W. Smith, ed, 361. ²⁴Harpsfield, 73.

composing his work, both in tone and language, in a way that would appeal to nobles, leaders, and scholars, More believed them to be the beginnings of change.

Change was desperately needed in England if *Utopia* is viewed as an ideal society. More's Utopian society involved a humanistic approach to the thieves and criminals of society, with no death penalty for theft.²⁵ Utopians would not enter war unless war was unavoidable for one's own land was quite enough to tend to without acquiring more.²⁶ More also condemns the use of private property and condones divorce by mutual consent. The condoning of divorce by mutual consent is interesting. "Occasionally, though, divorce by mutual consent is allowed on grounds of incompatibility."²⁷ What makes this provision worth noting is More's later response to King Henry VIII's petition for divorce, a petition More refused to endorse. The issues of economic, political, and diplomatic reform were undoubtedly aimed at English nobles and the monarchy. It is More's humanistic view of religion, however, in his Utopian society that draws significant interest due to his well-known devotion to the Catholic Church.

Utopia is a heathen society but the people do draw on religious principles for their own purposes. To condone their pursuit of pleasure, the Utopians support the idea of a loving God who intended humans to pursue happiness. "The first principle is that every soul is immortal, and was created by a kind God, Who [sic] meant it to be happy. The second is that we shall be rewarded or punished in the next world for our good or bad behavior in this one."²⁸ More goes on to write that while these are religious ideas that the Utopians subscribe to, they accept them on

Thomas More, *Utopia* (London: Penguin Books, 1965), 44.
²⁶Ibid, 59. ²⁷Ibid,104. ²⁸Ibid, 91.

"rational grounds." More valued rationality highly in his public and personal life. More preferred Greek authors and was well read in the classics. He mentioned Plato's writings on several occasions in *Utopia* itself, as Plato was his favorite author by far.²⁹ What is fascinating is More's marriage between the religious and the rational. More mentions religion being accepted on rational terms, a humanistic ideal, rather than simply by faith, supports religion rather than opposing it. As a humanist author, More sought not to simply have faith, but rather to have faith by exploring the rationality behind it. But this is not the only mention of religion in *Utopia*. The latter part of Book Two paints a more complete picture of religion in Utopia.

Several different religions are present on the island of Utopia. The majority of Utopians, however, subscribe to the belief that there is one supreme god called "The Parent." This single divine power is given credit for everything, including the creation of the universe and its management.³⁰ The religious freedom on the island of Utopia dates back to its founder, Utopos. Constant quarrels about religion and conquest in the name of religion led Utopos to declare that everyone was free to practice the religion of their choice.³¹ The purpose of this freedom was to keep the peace and to preserve the many facets of religion. "Apparently he [Utopos] considered it possible that God made different people believe different things, because He wanted to be worshipped in many different ways."³² Atheism, however, was prohibited. It was believed that if Utopians did not believe in eternal consequences, then they would be more likely to commit harmful and selfish acts. "For it stands to reason, if you're not afraid of anything but prosecution

²⁹Karl Kautsky, 97.

³⁰Thomas More, *Utopia* (London: Penguin Books, 1965), 117.

³¹Ibid, 119.

³²Ibid.

[...] you'll always be trying to evade or break the laws of your country."³³ Thus, atheists were prohibited from holding any sort of public office, for they would be more likely to abuse their power for personal gain. Even so, atheists could not be persecuted for that is hypocritical, a trait abhorred by Utopians.³⁴

Though Utopians were allowed to believe as they chose, More includes a passage that suggest that they were highly susceptible to accepting Christianity as their religion. When Christ was shared with the Utopians, many were easily converted.³⁵ The easy conversion of Utopians to Christianity suggests More's belief in the power and influence of Christianity compared to the religious beliefs previously accepted by members of the society. Pressuring conversion is a practice prohibited strictly in Utopia. More includes a story about one of the new converts and his overzealous sharing. "Eventually he got so worked up that, not content with asserting the superiority of our religion, he went so far as to condemn all others."³⁶ For his disturbance of the peace and lack of toleration, the man was exiled. Seeking converts was not forbidden if it was done in a way that is polite, quiet, and rational.

Oddly enough, though religious freedom is tolerated and protected, there is a religious structure in place that includes a priesthood. The priesthood in Utopia, however, does not at all resemble that of England in the 16th century. Priests are elected by the whole community, rather than appointed by religious leaders, or inherited by family position.³⁷ Education of the youth

³³Ibid, 120.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵Ibid, 118.

³⁶Thomas More, *Utopia* (London: Penguin Books, 1965), 119.

³⁷Ibid, 123.

falls under the responsibility of the priesthood. Perhaps the most radical difference between Utopian priests and priests in the Catholic church, was that Utopian priests were allowed to take a spouse. "Male priests are allowed to marry- for there's nothing to stop a woman from becoming a priest."³⁸ The Catholic Church had long prohibited clerical marriage and women as clergy. What is particularly interesting about More's allowance of married priests in *Utopia* is that More himself demonstrated a desire to become a priest or a monk before his pursuit of the law, but did not take the clerical oath that would establish him as a clergyman. This decision is believed to have been the result of his inability to tame his desire for sex. For this "failure" More is thought to have spent the rest of his life seeking to redeem himself through physical punishment and devoting himself to a life of religious piety.³⁹ Whatever the case may have been in More's personal life, his inclusion of married priests in *Utopia* challenged the structure of the Catholic Church.

By examining excerpts from *Utopia* in relation to religion it is apparent that Sir Thomas More wrote about a religious structure that was radically different from the structure in place in England during the time. Later in life, More's personal actions and expressed public opinions would also be radically different from the views expressed in *Utopia*, The contrast becomes clear by looking at More's response to the Protestant Reformation in England. IV. More's Response to the Protestant Reformation

While More's writings in *Utopia* portray him as an advocate of religious freedom and humanism, his public actions and attitudes towards the Protestant Reformation in England

³⁸Ibid. 124.

³⁹John Guy, *Thomas More*, 29-31.

display a less tolerant More. More strongly opposed Martin Luther and demonstrated unwavering devotion to the Catholic Church. More aided King Henry VIII in perfecting his written response to Luther, and his work, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church.*, which addressed the seven sacraments of Catholicism in the context of the Bible.^{4**} With the same unwavering devotion More refused to condone the petition of divorce for the King and refused to take the Oath in support of the Act of Succession. Death would be the ultimate result of such passion. How then, can More's expression of religious freedom and toleration in *Utopia* be explained? Sir Thomas More's public devotion to the Catholic Church and opposition to the Protestant Reformation express a more politically focused and settled side of More. More was a devoted husband and father by the time of the reformation. His youthful ideas seemed to have given way to a sense of duty. By examining the specific ways in which More's actions contradict his Utopian writings, More's contrasting layers make themselves known. More's persecution of Reformists as heretics is the most bold of these contrasts.

More expressed his feelings openly towards the Reformists teachings and "heretics." Roper and Harpsfield both give accounts of More's expression of disdain towards Luther and Luther's followers. Roper recounts More as having said, "And yet wish I, for all that, upon condition that all heresies were suppressed, that all my books were burned and my labour utterly lost."⁴¹ Harpsfield, includes a more pointed rant by More towards Luther:

Then shall Luther's Gospel come in, [...] then shall false heresies be preached, then shall the Sacraments be set at naught, then all fasting and prayer be neglected, [...] then shall Almighty God be displeased, [...] then shall all vice reign and run forth unbridled, [...]

⁴⁰ John Guy, *The Public Career of Sir Thomas More*, (Great Britain: The Harvest Press Limited, 1980), 16.

⁴¹ Roper, 24.

then shall whores and thieves, beggars and bawds increase, [...] then shall laws be laughed to scorn [...]. Then will rise up rifling and robbery, murder and mischief and plain insurrection, whereof what would be the end, or when you should sense it, only God knoweth.⁴²

More expresses in this passage that not only is Luther's Gospel heretical, but that it would surely lead to the downfall of not only religion, but morality and humanity as a whole. More's most blazing diatribes are included in his work devoted entirely to the criticism of Luther, *Responsio adLutherum*.⁴³

Luther's treatise, the *Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, had shaken the Catholic church, challenging its basic doctrine and tradition, *Responsio adLutherum* was More's rebuttal.⁴⁴ The basis of Luther's quarrel with the Catholic church was that nothing but the holy scriptures were valid, thus refuting the relevance of any practices that had little or no scriptural backing.⁴⁵ Sacraments, such as communion, were among the major practices that Luther attacked in the *Babylonian Captivity*, published in 1520.⁴⁶ More had already aided King Henry VIII in writing a response to Luther, *Defense of the Seven Sacraments*.⁴⁷ More sought to further disprove Luther's assertions as well as Luther's intellectual capacity in his own work. His lengthy response picks apart every argument put forth by Luther. Early on More established Luther's falsehood to the reader. "These very words of Luther, reader, on which he so excessively plumes himself, not only are absolutely false but contain almost as many errors as

⁴²Harfsfield, 93.

Thomas More, *Responsio adLutherum*, Edited by John M. Headley, English Translation by Sister Scholastica Manderville, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969).

More, *Responsio adLutherum*, 732.

More, *Responsio adLutherum*, 123.

⁴⁶Ibid, 732. ⁴⁷Ibid

there are words."⁴⁸ More goes on to state exactly what he intends to prove to the reader, that Luther is not only completely against the Catholic church, but the very teachings of God.

"Besides this, I will show not only that the scoundrel does away with all the traditions of men, even those which he ought to obey, but also that he does away with the traditions of God."⁴⁹ Such a bold statement asserts Luther as a heretic for he is at odds with God himself.

Beyond working to prove Luther false, More included attacks on Luther's character. More pokes fun at Luther with sarcastic comments, "Ha! Ha! Ha! Clever, neat, smart, Luther, incomparable! [...] Everyone who hears this will die laughing."⁵⁰ More attacks Luther's pride, comparing him to Lucifer who fell from heaven because of his pride. "He so proudly exults in this and insults everyone that no one can doubt how completely he breaths out upon earth the hellish spirit of him whom a similar pride cast down from heaven to hell."⁵¹ If comparing Luther to Satan himself was not enough of an insult, More goes on to compare Luther to a babbling drunk. "Have you heard these words before, Luther? Or have you become so drowsy from drinking that you do not hear them shouted in your ears?"⁵² When More began to feel that the reader had been adequately informed of Luther's falsehood, he included a confident statement further legitimizing the holy men of the Catholic church. More felt that Luther had been backed into a corner with solid, irrefutable evidence. Luther's attempt to refute such evidence, did nothing more than prove that he had lost. "You see then reader, the supreme impiety of the man

⁴⁸Ibid, 53.

⁴⁹Ibid. ⁵⁰Ibid,

131. ⁵¹Ibid, 41.

⁵²Ibid, 107.

who, when he knows that his heresies have clearly been condemned by the testimony of all holy men, does nothing else but abolish in turn the authority of all holy men."⁵³ What the sum total of More's comments prove, is the utter disdain More had for Luther and his teachings. It also demonstrates More's total confidence in the Catholic church and its teachings. Such an attitude seems to be in juxtaposition with the author of *Utopia*. With such passion against the teachings of the Reformation, it is understandable why More would so severely persecute Reformists.

More's opposition to the Protestant reformation and Luther's teachings, contradicts his support of religious freedom as expressed in *Utopia*. History has portrayed More as an inquisitor of sorts, questioning and torturing suspected heretics during the Reformation. This portrayal is not entirely incorrect as evident by More's treatment of heretics. More said that he, "took no pleasure in the prosecution of heresy, but regarded the work as necessary and well done."⁵⁴ In the original epitaph he composed, More said that he had indeed been "grievous" to "heretics." While chancellor, More questioned as many as three of the accused heretics that were burned at the stake for heresy.⁵⁵ According to Marius, More's position as chancellor granted him power which he used to "wage unrelenting war against the enemies of the faith."⁵⁶ While his position gave him the necessary means to obtain and try heretics, More illegally tortured several suspected heretics in his own home. More flogged three suspects in his garden in Chelsea, and tortured one suspect with ropes until "the blood started out of his eyes."⁵⁷

⁵³Ibid, 239.

⁵⁴John Guy. *Thomas More* (London: Arnold, 2000), 106.

⁵⁵Ibid, 107.

⁵⁶Richard Marius, *Thomas More*, (New York: Alfred A. Knope, 1985), 386.

⁵⁷Guy, *Thomas More*, 108

Even before he served as chancellor, More was known to question heretics in his home.⁵⁸ William Roper, More's own son-in-law, engaged More in heated discussions as he proclaimed to be a follower of the Reformation. Nicholas Harpsfield described his friend and associate, William Roper as "a marvelous zealous Protestant."⁵⁹ The persecution of "heretics" is especially puzzling when reflecting on the ideal in *Utopia* that even atheists were not to be persecuted. "They're not punished in anyway, though, for no one is held responsible for what he believes."⁶⁰ More undeniably held citizens of England responsible for what they believed and some paid the price.

Utopians, however, might argue in More's favor for his actions towards heretics. While *Utopia* does express religious freedom for all, it also places restrictions on the expression of faith. There was a man mentioned in *Utopia* who became consumed with passion and shared his Christian faith with force and condemnation. This could not be tolerated for while one has the right in *Utopia* to share and discuss one's religious beliefs, they must do so rationally and quietly.⁶¹ From More's view point, heretics who shared their faith without reason or tact could be subject to punishment. Even so, Utopian doctrine involves exile for the overzealous, not burning at the stake. Such an argument is difficult to swallow. Author Richard Marius refutes this argument, "Heretics were enemies of God [...] More believed that they should be

⁵⁸Marius, 395.

⁵⁹William Roper and Nicholas Harpsfield. *Lives of Saint Thomas More* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1963), vi.

⁶⁰Thomas More, *Utopia* (London: Penguin Books, 1965), 124.

⁶¹*Ibid*, 119.

exterminated, and while he was in office, he did everything in his power to bring that extermination to pass."⁶²

The persecution of reformists and condemnation of doctrines contradicted the Utopian vision More had conveyed. There were those who worshipped the sun or moon, and planets in Utopia. However, More's response to Luther's doctrine in *Responsio Ad Lutherum*, was anything but accepting. "Therefore, in every way your doctrines are condemned. [...] For he has found that the right of judging doctrines does not belong to pontiff, not to the priests."⁶³ Under the responsibilities of priests listed in *Utopia*, priests were expected to be responsible for conducting services and supervising morals.⁶⁴ Luther believed in eliminating the reliance of church members on priests for prayer and confession. More condemned this practice emphatically and thus condemned Luther's doctrine as false and heretical.

One of the revolutionary provisions in *Utopia* was the allowance of clergy to marry, which More later criticized Luther for. Book Two of *Utopia* included the provision that priests were allowed to marry.⁶⁵ More then opposed this idea in his work *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies*. More writes, "So that chastity was thought both to God and man a thing meet and convenient for priests, among them which most magnified carnal generation."⁶⁶ More himself, was unable to join the priesthood due to his inability to remain chaste and thus, entered into marriage. Roper shares accounts from his wife, Margaret, of More and his self-punishment.

⁶²Richard Marius, *Thomas More*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), 406.

⁶³More, *Utopia*. 123. ⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵Thomas More, *Utopia* (London: Penguin Books, 1965), 124.

⁶⁶Thomas More, *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, Edited by Thomas Lawler, Germain Marchadour and Richard C. Marius, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981) 232.

Roper also noted that More wore a hairshirt which was a plain undergarment, meant to be rough and uncomfortable against the skin.⁶⁷ It was meant to serve as a sort of penitence. "He used also sometimes to punish his body with whips, the cords knotted."⁶⁸ According to Guy, this sort of penitence is believed to have been related to his guilt at being unable to suppress his lusts and enter the priesthood.⁶⁹ Not only did More condone celibacy for priests, he attacked Martin Luther for having a wife. In *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, More called Luther an, "open incestuous lecher" for his marriage as a self proclaimed "priest."⁷⁰ This contradicts his support of pious women as priests through marriage as well. Such a blatant contradiction is interesting. Perhaps his opposition of married priests in England stems from his bitterness that he was unable to take the oath of clergy due to his need to satisfy his sexual desires through marriage, a choice for which he carried great guilt through out his life.⁷¹

More's religious fervor and devotion are undeniable. More led his household in daily prayers and often spent time in the solitude of his "New Building," a small private chapel on his Chelsea estate, in prayer and study. Roper recalled a statement often made by More towards his children that asserted More's religious devotion and gives insight to More's character, "if you will then stand fast and firmly stick to God, upon pain of life, though you be but half good, God will allow you for the whole."⁷² But his inability to fully commit to his Utopian beliefs of religious freedom would ultimately cost him his life, as foreshadowed in his own statement.

⁶⁷Roper, 25.

⁶⁸Ibid.

⁶⁹Guy, *Thomas More*, 29.

⁷⁰Ibid, 145.

⁷¹ John Guy. *Thomas More* (London: Arnold, 2000), 30.

⁷²Roper, 16.

In May of 1533, King Henry VIII's annulment from Catherine of Aragon was approved and on June 1, Anne Boleyn was crowned as Queen of England. More refused to attend her coronation. Shortly after, Henry had a bill of attainder drawn up against More and several others he accused as having committed treason. More was dismissed from this bill of attainder but was summoned in April of 1534 to swear an oath to the new Act of Succession. The Act of Succession of 1534, or 1533 when it was written, made Henry's first marriage to Catherine null. It also recognized Princess Elizabeth, the daughter of King Henry VIII's second wife, Anne Boleyn, next in line to inherit the throne. This act changed the status of the King's first daughter, Mary, to that of a bastard. Within the act there was also a general recognizing of King Henry VIII's supremacy. More had advised the King against divorce on several occasions.⁷³ Henry required that citizens take an oath that, "they would bear faithful obedience to Henry's heirs by his 'most dear and entirely beloved lawful wife Queen Anne.'"⁷⁴ Those who took the oath also agreed to accept Henry as the Supreme Head of the church in England. More refused the oath on religious grounds and was sent to the Tower of London. In a letter written to his daughter Margaret Roper from his imprisonment in the Tower of London, More discussed his refusal of the Oath. "I showed them that my purpose was not to find fault, either in the Act or any man that made it, or in the Oath or any man that swore it [...]." More continued, "But as for myself, in good faith [...] I could not swear without the jeopardizing of my soul to perpetual damnation."⁷⁵

⁷³Harfsfield, 149.

⁷⁴Marius, 459.

⁷⁵Thomas More, *The Utopia of Sir Thomas More: including Roper's Life of More, and letters of More and his daughter Margaret*, (New York: W.J. Black, 1947) 285.

In July, More was executed for refusing the Oath, and thus committing treason. In one of his last letters to his daughter, More expresses his unwavering religious devotion:

I have not been a man of such holy living as I might be bold to offer myself to death, lest God for my presumption might suffer me to fall, and therefore I put not myself forward but to draw back. Howbeit, if God draw me into it Himself, then I trust in His great mercy that he shall not fail to give me grace and strength.⁷⁶

More displays this same resolve in his final moments. Roper recalls that on the day of More's execution, 6 July, 1535, More turned towards the executioner and cheerfully exclaimed, "Pluck up thy spirits, man, and be not afraid to do thine office; my neck is very short; take heed therefore thou strike not awry, for saving of thine honesty."⁷⁷ V. Conclusion

Sir Thomas More was a man of great passion. His passion towards religion is expressed both in *Utopia*, as well as in his other writings and actions. Passion led More to write bold literature, live a life of religious piety, and die for what he considered a noble and worthy cause. With two opposing images of the historical Thomas More, one could easily be unsure of which image is a true depiction. J.H. Hexter suggests that they are both an accurate depiction of More, just at different stages in his life. "More saw all things precisely as he saw them in the moments of acute perception which took possession of him when he wrote *Utopia*"⁷⁸ * With a growing family, the spouting of ideals and fantastic societies with philosopher friends is no longer

⁷⁶Ibid, 309.

⁷⁷Roper, 50. ⁷⁸J.H. Hexter, *The Vision of Politics on the Eve of the Reformation: More, Machiavelli, and Seyssel*. (New York: Basic Books [1973]) 26.

practical, nor useful. Rather the advancement of one's career becomes more important. Thus Thomas More laid down *Utopia* for a more realistic world view. Perhaps it is an evolution of More's thinking, or a distinction between the ideal and reality.

During the Protestant Reformation in Tudor England, Sir Thomas More served as a sure and vocal advocate of the Catholic Church. Ironically, More was also a humanist author, famous for his piece *Utopia* which advocated religious freedom. This contradiction has puzzled historians and left the unanswered question of what did Sir Thomas More truly believe? Sir Thomas More was a visible anti-Reformist in Tudor England as evident by his actions and writings; contradicting his private writings of a religiously free society in *Utopia*. More was undoubtedly influential in both roles and demonstrated how public duty can override personal belief. More is an icon, a hero, or a legend, but he is above all, a man for all seasons.

PRIMARY DOCUMENTS

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—. *Responsio ad Lutherwn*. Edited by John M. Headley. English Translation by Sister Scholastica Manderville. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969.

For the purpose of examining More's role in the opposition of the Reformation, I use More's written response in this work to Luther and Luther's beliefs.

—. *The Utopia of Sir Thomas More: including Roper's Life of More, and letters of More and his daughter Margaret*. New York: WJ. Black, 1947.

This particular work is being used for the letters between More and his daughter Margaret. Margaret was his most beloved daughter and most trusted. In his letters to her, one can gain greater insight into his personal thoughts, rather than the more polished profession thoughts expressed in his published works.

—. *Utopia*. Edited by Edward Surtz, SJ. and J.H. Hexter. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965.

This version of *Utopia* was valuable for its introduction and commentary, given by Hexter.

—. *Utopia*. London: Penguin Books, 1965.

Utopia is a critical source for understanding More, the humanist. It was by far his most humanistic piece, as well as his most famous.

Roper, William, and Nicholas Harpsfield. *Lives of Saint Thomas More*. London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1963.

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—. *The Vision of Politics on the Eve of the Reformation: More, Machiabelli, and Seyssel*. New York: Basic Books [1973].

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Kautsky, Karl. *Thomas More and His Utopia*. New York: Russell & Russell, 1959.

Kautsky provides a unique perspective on More and *Utopians* he approaches it from a Marxist, Socialist perspective.

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Marius, Richard. *Thomas More*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985.

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Wegemer, Gerard, and Smith, have compiled excerpts from More's work to create a great, quick source.