



Utopia

Sir Thomas More (1478 - 1535)

Read by:	Ruth Golding	Format:	MP3 CD in DVD case
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Sir Thomas More invented the word “utopia” by blending words from Greek meaning “no place” as a title for his fictional work of political philosophy. The mythical island of *Utopia* is located in the New World. Raphael, a voyager, describes the customs of Utopia he observed for five years. We learn that there are 54 cities each consisting of exactly 6,000 households arranged in groups of 30, each of which elects a representative, who then in turn elect a Prince, who serves for life. There is no private property. Dwellings are rotated. Meals are communal. Everyone wears the same simple clothes. Men and women are equals. Everyone works at agriculture and at a simple trade six hours a day. Each household has two slaves, who are either foreigners

or criminals. There are no lawyers. Health care is free and euthanasia is allowed. Multiple religions are tolerated; atheism is allowed, but disdained. Priests can marry, couples may divorce, but premarital sex is punished by life-long celibacy and adulterers are enslaved. Written in Latin and published in 1516 in Belgium, the book was not published in England until the translation by Ralph Robinson appeared in 1551, sixteen years after More’s death. Scholars are puzzled by More’s motives in writing *Utopia*, since many of the concepts put forth stand in direct opposition to his beliefs as a devout Catholic. Most see it as a satirical commentary on the evils of European society and as direct influence on later works such as Francis Bacon’s *New Atlantis* and *Candide* by Voltaire.

Sir Thomas More (February 7, 1478 – July 6, 1535) was an English lawyer, statesman, author and philosopher best remembered for his opposition to the Protestant Reformation as well as his portrait of an ideal nation portrayed in *Utopia*. He was the son of a successful London lawyer and judge and served John Morton, the Archbishop of Canterbury, as a household page during his youth, which led to studies at Oxford before returning to London to study law. His political influence grew steadily with his career progress through election to Parliament and subsequent appointments as undersheriff of London, Privy Councilor, undertreasurer of the Exchequer, Speaker of the House of Commons, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, and Lord High Chancellor of England. Most importantly, he was secretary and advisor to King Henry VIII, but broke with him over separation of the Church of England from the Catholic Church. He was convicted of treason and beheaded when he refused sign the King’s Oath of Supremacy. He was canonized as a martyr in 1935 by the Catholic Church for his steadfast faith and was name the heavenly Patron of Statesmen and Politicians” by Pope John Paul II. He is recognized as a Reformation martyr by the Church of England and was honored by the Soviet Union for communistic notions of property rights advanced in *Utopia*.