

TRUE REFORMERS

SAINTS OF THE CATHOLIC REFORMATION

SAMPLE

STUDY GUIDE

Presented by
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SESSION 1

SAINT THOMAS MORE

The Age of the Author



SESSION 1

SAINT THOMAS MORE

OPENING PRAYER

Lord, grant me a holy heart that sees always
what is fine and pure and is not frightened
at the sight of sin but creates order wherever it goes.
Grant me a heart that knows nothing of boredom, weeping, or sighing.
Let me not be too concerned with the bothersome thing I call myself.
Lord, give me a sense of humor,
and I will find happiness in life and profit for others.

—Saint Thomas More

Connect

1. It's a common saying that the end justifies the means.
What is the problem with this way of thinking and acting?

2. The Church teaches that each of us has a responsibility to
contribute to the common good of society. How can we as
individuals contribute to the public good of society?

*“To believe in Jesus is to accept what he says, even when it runs contrary to
what others are saying. It means rejecting the lure of sin, however attractive
it may be, in order to set out on the difficult path of the Gospel virtues.”*

—Pope Saint John Paul II

Introduction

The Renaissance was an age of discovery and innovation during which many lost their way amidst bold new visions of secular happiness. Thomas More was one of the greatest humanists of his age but also a man devoted to the spiritual life. His lifetime of learning, charity, and service to the public good of England enabled him to stand a patient and holy witness—and one of the greatest of modern martyrs—against the tyranny of Henry VIII. In this session, we will look into the ideas and example of Saint Thomas More and learn how faith and virtue impact man's relation to politics, society, and God.

Video

The following is a brief outline of the topics covered in this 45-minute video teaching.

I. Saint Thomas More's Early Life

- A. Grew up in the "age of the laity"
- B. Well-educated as a youth and served as page of Cardinal Morton
- C. Went on to study at Oxford and was influenced by the humanists
- D. Spent four years with the Carthusians
- E. Enjoyed a vigorous legal career
 - 1. Quickly rose in importance in this field
 - 2. 1529 named Lord Chancellor of England

II. More's Self-Portrait: *Utopia*

- A. Shows his wit and seriousness
- B. Subtly addressing the court
- C. Proclaims the truth and a new philosophy
- D. Commentary on the impracticality of socialism
 - 1. Utopians devoid of courage and chivalry
 - 2. Lack of respect for the dignity of human life
- E. Main purpose: ask questions critical to men and women
 - 1. What is truly good?
 - 2. What kind of life should be lived?

III. The Corruption of Christian Ethics

- A. Niccolo Machiavelli—focused on means, not end
- B. Martin Luther
 - 1. Invented new theology: we are saved by grace alone
 - 2. There is nothing to be done in order to become virtuous
- C. More's Response
 - 1. What directs our will: virtue is where our happiness lies
 - 2. Goods of the soul outweigh external goods

IV. The Noble Deed of St. Thomas

- A. Divorce of Henry VIII—knowledgeable king acting against his conscience
- B. More resigned his position as Lord Chancellor
- C. Henry VII attempts to change More's mind
- D. St. Thomas sent to Tower of London
- E. Dying words: "I die the King's good servant, but God's first"
 - 1. Served the king by serving the law, common good, and truth
 - 2. Witness of truth—devotion to God above all

Discuss

1. Saint Thomas More was a man of integrity. He refused to take the Oath of Supremacy by which he would have sworn allegiance to the King of England as the supreme governor of the Church. Consequently, he was convicted of treason and beheaded. Saint Thomas More would not compromise his Catholic Faith.

How would you respond to someone who says that the Church will become more relevant in society if it de-emphasizes, or even changes, those teachings that conflict with secular progressive values?

2. The saints are great models for us! Their lives demonstrate what is possible when one's will more fully cooperates with the grace God freely offers. In addition to their example, Dr. Blum says the saints can also be great friends to us.

How could you help an Evangelical Protestant understand the role of the saints in our lives when they believe that the Bible strictly forbids any form of communication with the dead?

3. Dr. Blum says that "the human soul is where God spends all of his efforts." In other words, we are the crown of his creation and our sanctification and final glorification is the intended purpose of our existence. Bottom line, God wants us to be saints. The only obstacle to his efforts is our own unwillingness to become saints. Saint Thomas More addresses this drama in *Utopia*, as the Utopians are not necessarily living with the end in mind. Truth, goodness, and courage are the necessary ideals for living with the end in mind.

If you were to develop a personal mission statement aimed at becoming the person God desires you to be, what would be your goals and your plan to reach them?

4. Martin Luther believed that human beings are not truly free. In his work *Bondage of the Will*, Luther argued that our will is either controlled by God or by the devil. It is for this reason that he taught that salvation is obtained by grace alone and faith alone. Saint Thomas More wrote this about Martin Luther's theology: "That everything depends only upon destiny, and that the liberty of the human will serves absolutely no purpose, nor do people's deeds, good or bad, make any difference before God ... [is] the very worst and most harmful heresy that ever was thought up; and, on top of that, the most insane" [Saint Thomas More, *Dialogue Concerning Heresies* (New York: Scepter Press, 2006), §11, p. 453].

Why would St. Thomas More consider Luther's teaching on human freedom and salvation "the very worst and most harmful heresy that was ever thought up"?

5. In the fictional work *Utopia*, the character Hythloday tries to convince Thomas More that Utopia is the most perfect of societies. He says, "In Utopia, where there is no private property, everyone is seriously concerned with pursuing the public welfare." As such, the moral education of the young in Utopia is aimed at their eventual contribution to the public welfare of the state. Hythloday's cynical view of the human person, who he considers to be prideful and greedy, thinks him incapable of private ownership and the building of a just society. However, Thomas More is not convinced.

With the Catholic Church's commitment to justice and the common good, why does the Church oppose those forms of socialism that seek to abolish the private ownership of property?

6. Saint Thomas More's family was always his first concern. Their home was full of love and security. He was personally invested in developing the minds and faith of his children. His close friend Erasmus, who made lengthy visits to the More residence, said: "I should rather call his house a School of Christianity for while there is no one in it who does not study the liberal sciences, the special care of all is piety and virtue. No quarreling or ill-tempered words are even heard and idleness is never seen."

A host of reputable studies demonstrate that a father is essential to the healthy development and total well-being of his children. And yet, from pop culture to the media, it would seem our nation places little value on the role of fathers. Why do you think this is the case, and what can be done to empower fathers?

Commit

In the words of Erasmus, Saint Thomas More's house was a "School of Christianity." Our commitment this week is to study the Faith with our families. One suggestion is to watch an episode from a video study on formed.org and have a discussion. Even if your children are raised and out of the home, invite them to watch the same episode and have a conversation to follow up.

"Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

—Luke 20:25

"In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

—Romans 8:37–38



St. Thomas More by H. Holbein © Restored Traditions

Closing Prayer

O Lord,
give us a mind that is humble, quiet, peaceable,
patient and charitable, and a taste of your Holy Spirit
in all our thoughts, words, and deeds.

O Lord,
give us a lively faith, a firm hope,
a fervent charity, a love of you.

Take from us all lukewarmness in meditation
and all dullness in prayer.
Give us fervor and delight in thinking of you,
your grace, and your tender compassion
toward us.

Give us, good Lord,
the grace to work for the things we pray for.
Amen.

—Saint Thomas More
Saint Thomas More, pray for us.

FOR FURTHER STUDY:

NOTES

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