

Heaven on Earth.

Utopia and Religion: Interaction and Reciprocal Influences

Francesco ALICINO

Abstract. *Utopia, as a paradigm of the perfect community, features the tension between an idea and reality but like a versatile mould, it enables reality and imagination to merge. The same tension, though, characterizes the relationship between society and religion, which may act as the transcendental dimension of the utopian dream. Reason and science alone cannot justify new ideas, which demand support from tradition and religion. Utopia may lead religion to reconsider some precepts, sustaining both the promise of Paradise and the creation of a heaven on earth, restoring the unity of humanity and the original perfection, in fact enabling redemption.*

Keywords: *Religion, Tradition, Utopia, Law, State.*

Introduction

For some thinkers, while the disappearance of ideology would affect only particular communities or groups, the eclipse of utopia would be a true disaster.¹ It is possible to be more or less in agreement with this statement. In any case, since the imagination of the ideal society has been called a fundamental human trait, there is no doubt that utopia has been central to history, starting from the line of thought related to Western constitutionalism. At the same time, though, we do not exactly know its full implications. This is mainly due to its challenging relationship with the real world, which implies the

correlation between utopia and *time-memory*.²

The construction of imaginary worlds, free from the problems and complications that beset us in reality, takes place in one form or another in utopian texts: these texts and the relative ideas exist because of the real world. However, one of the most important characteristics of these texts is that their contents do not exist in concrete or empirical reality. This is because their existence would mean the end of utopia: a utopian idea collapses when realised. Nonetheless, or maybe precisely for this reason, utopia becomes a powerful instrument to change or reshape the real world.

This is particularly true for those utopian texts that are normally embedded in origin and destination myths, where the good life is not available to us in this world: it is confined to either a lost golden age or a world beyond death. Perhaps, it is not by chance that this image is also very helpful for illustrating the potential of utopian ideas (never realised, but endlessly fascinating) contained in ancient religious texts, whose precepts continue to inspire and impact existing cultures.³

Utopia has in effect an affinity with religion in having an element of wishful thinking: there is no scientific proof of their existence, but both utopia and religion(s) exist mainly because they are directed at persons who do not normally find satisfaction in the present reality. In this manner, the real world influences the content of utopian texts, as the current interpretations of religious (ancient sacred) books are often influenced by analysis and diagnosis of the existing reality. The mingling relation between utopia and religious beliefs is also reinforced by the fact that religion can be seen as an important resource of utopian material and a space in which this material may be created and shaped.⁴

The starting point of this article is the role of religion in the 1516 famous book of Thomas More, who first coined the term “utopia” giving to it the basic conceptual structure, in the modern sense of the expression. The evolution of the relationship between religion and utopia will be

then investigated with the reference of some utopian authors in the development of Western thought.

In this manner, I will try to demonstrate that this relationship was the basis of the spiritual dimension of utopia that, under the influence of the of the Enlightenment thinkers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, was translated into the belief in human action, supporting a vision of ‘ideal paradise’ without God; which was later placed at the service of the contemporary Leviathan State and its mortal Gods (nation, demos, race, political party, etc.). Thus, during and after the great tragedies of the twentieth century, utopia itself began to be questioned by an opposite genre called “dystopia”, which still enjoys a great success today. At the same time, however, in some parts of the world utopia is now experiencing an unexpected revival that, once again, is supported by some religious doctrines, such as those referring to Islam.

The Role of Religion in Thomas More’s *Nova Insula*

There have been countless attempts to define utopia, whether as a literary genre or as an important concept of Western thought. There is in any case a tendency to think of utopia as being the “no place”, which means the good-perfect place. This connection is evident in Thomas More’s famous book, where the ideal State of *Utopia* is a result of a word pun referring to Greek words *ou* (no

or not) and *topos* (place). From here stemmed the name for the new island (nova insula) in the book titled *Libellus vere aureus, nec minus salutaris quam festivus, de optimo rei publicae statu deque nova insula Utopia*, which was first published in 1516 and where a range of temporal glances are visible.

In this book the “no place” is presented as a reality distinct from Tudor England. Nevertheless, a backward look is also possible, for the narrator drew upon the memory of his visit to *nova insula* to construct his account. More’s personal view-memory of the utopian people (Utopians) was then used to explain the extraordinary characteristics of *no-place*. There is controversy on how far the Author was advocating the utopian life as a model for a future England. In succeeding centuries, however, the concept of utopia became increasingly associated with a gaze into the future and, as such, it would be destined to remain a paradigm: a prototype of the perfect community that, for this very reason, is unrealizable. Furthermore, its existence and its intellectual fortune are based on the impossibility of implementing it in practice.

Since then, utopia has in effect constituted a particularly versatile *typus*, giving rise to a constant interplay between reality and fiction, promise and illusion, the utopian commonwealth and the shape that its aspirations take. In doing so, Utopia drew sustenance from the Author’s immersion in the writings of classical

antiquity and the practices of Medieval Christianity, which also explains the ambiguous role played by religion in the new island.

In particular, Thomas More described the utopian God as *a single divinity, unknown, eternal, infinite, inexplicable, beyond the grasp of the human mind, and diffused throughout the universe, not physically, but in influence. Him they [utopian people] call their parent, and to him alone they attribute the origin, increase, progress, changes and ends of all things; they do not offer divine honours to any other.*⁵

This official religion was clearly distinguished from superstition. It was a religion based on the worship of nature. It seems that More derived his idea of religion from the real world, where he had been experiencing the involuntary nature of religious beliefs. So, even though Utopia recognised an official religion, the State’s authority cannot force the inhabitants of the island to believe in that creed. The instinctive nature of religious beliefs led More to make utopian people as religiously tolerant. While in the island there was an official religion, whose priests are part of the governance, superstition was tolerated. At the same time, and for the same reason, *Utopia* suggested that variety in religion was, in itself, a good thing. Hence, the inhabitants of the island were free to worship as each saw fit.

This is an attractive feature of More’s Book, especially when related to rational idea of liberal and

secularized constitutionalism. But, in the light of the secular concept of religious freedom, this is also in contradiction with the section of the book where the Author described the only exception to utopian religious tolerance:

*[t]he only exception was a solemn and strict law against anyone who should sink so far below the dignity of human nature as to think that the soul perishes with the body, or that the universe is ruled by blind chance, not divine providence.*⁶

Is it possible to determine the reason for this limitation? The answer to the question tells us much about the role of religion in *Utopia*.

The most important characteristic of the island is pleasure. Although More tells us that the pleasure is ordered according to virtue, the contents of this virtue are never spelled out in the book. What is spelled out on several occasions is the role of fear in keeping utopian people from the pursuit of pleasure. And the principal source of fear is the punishment after death at the hands of a divine judge; what, not by accident, “is the greatest and almost the only incitement to virtue”.⁷ Therefore, those who deny the immortality of the soul and assert no order to the universe are danger not only to divine truth, but also (and above all) to the welfare of the island.

The official religion of *Utopia* maintains the doctrines, which are knowable by reason and based on immortality and divine providence. But it is not because these doctrines

are true, but because the social order depends upon them. In other terms, religion in the Island is ordered to the good of the commonwealth. And in this More’s book may be considered a product of its time.

From this point of view, the Author himself is part of the British current of liberal thought culminating in the 1689 Glorious Revolution, whose political and philosophical premises remain strongly influenced by the Christian tradition. It is not surprising, then, that relatively shortly after the publication of *de optimo rei publicae statu deque nova insula Utopia*, More’s idea about the role of religion would find a promising development in John Locke, the champion of the 1689 Revolution, a key source of inspiration in the advance of modern constitutionalism.⁸

An important characteristic of Locke, descended from him to the British liberal movement, is the lack of dogmatism or the presence of few convictions: god, our own existence and mathematics. The truth is hard to ascertain, which means that rational man will keep his opinions with some measure of doubt. These are the basic ideas from which Locke derives his religious tolerance. Despite his deep religiosity, Locke has always accepted divine revelation as real source of knowledge, he nevertheless hedges round his faith with rational safeguards: even revelation must be judged by reason, which nevertheless remains supreme.⁹ This is because “reason is easier to be understood,

than the fancies and intricate contrivances of men, following contrary and hidden interests put into words".¹⁰ Like Thomas More, Locke thus realizes that religious diversity is unavoidable and religious difference would prove intractable. Furthermore, because "it is only light and evidence that can work a change in men's opinion; and that light can in no manner proceed from corporal suffering, or any other outward penalties",¹¹ the State could not enforce religious uniformity.

Yet these considerations do not prevent Locke from affirming the use of the State's force against certain doctrines, such as atheism that, by its very nature, constitutes a threat to the welfare of the commonwealth:

*[t]hose are not at all to be tolerated who deny the being of God. Promises, covenants, and oaths, which are the bound of human society, can have no hold upon atheist. The taking away of god, though but even in thought, dissolves everything.*¹²

As we have seen in the case of *Utopia*, the religious tolerance is thus limited by the need to preserve the social orders which, according to both More and Locke, is threatened by those who believe that the world and the universe are not ruled by divine providence, but by blind chance.

In logical term, it must have been clear to Locke that intolerance against those who did not believe in any God was incompatible with his affirmation about the involuntary

nature of religious creed. But, here again, this was due to the fact that, like More's ideas, Locke's notion of religious tolerance was deeply influenced by Christian cultural framework. Hence, their definition of *Utopia* (More) and *commonwealth* (Locke) was "shaped and dominated by a picture of the earthly setting of human life as a created order, an order designed and controlled by an omnipotent, omniscient and also, mercifully, benevolent deity: the God of Christian".¹³ For this very reason, both freedom of religion and religious tolerance became subjected to the contingencies of politics directed toward public good, as intensely influenced by the Christian tradition and its dominant position in the political, social and cultural fields.¹⁴

All this also is able to explain why the biblical Promised Land, the theological Garden of Eden, the holy new Jerusalem, the sacred Kingdom of God are ideas that can be linked to the concept of utopia,¹⁵ as defined in More's book: they are imaginative depictions of places or states of being in which society is fundamentally different from the society in which the texts are read.

Utopia and Religious Pluralism

Until now we have discussed the role of religion in More's *Utopia* and its probable successors: in this sense, we have pointed out one aspect of the Locke's thought about religious freedom and tolerance. But

it is also important to focus the attention on its direct predecessor, like Plato's *The Laws*, *Republic* and the idea of Atlantis mentioned in the dialogues *Timaeus* and *Critias* as well as St. Augustine's *On the City of God*, in respect of which More was indeed a student, having publically lectured on it early in his career.¹⁶ Under this point of view, More's idea about utopia may be considered a variant in the line of Christian thought. This also means that in this context, like his predecessors, More interprets the Christian tradition having in mind the concrete (political, social and economic) problems of the existing society (what we call the real world). Which is even more evident in comparison with St. Augustine's *On the City of God*.

In this great work of Christian antiquity, St. Augustine undertakes to defend Christianity against other (false) religions, starting from the pagans who pursue their own vision of divinity: indeed, in the 4th century A.C. early Christian community used the Latin term *paganus* in reference to people of the Roman world who "badly" worshipped religions other than Christianity.¹⁷ Among St. Augustine's many concerns are (1) what the purpose of religion is and (2) the subordination of religion to the good of the Roman Empire. In both cases the answer of Augustine is very clear. Christianity is about happiness, specifically the happiness that is eternal life in union with God in love. This, as Augustine

argues, is the city of God, which exists invisibly among men in history and is defined by its love of God. In this love all people find true and abiding happiness. When persons have any other ultimate object of love they will inevitable experience unhappiness. It is precisely a disordered love that characterizes the city of man, in which people seek their pleasure without God. For this reason, all (including the State's power) should be ordered to God, which also implies the fact that, according to St. Augustine's ideal city, one love (that of the God of the Christians) should be honoured and pursued.¹⁸

In *Utopia* too the official religion plays a very important role for the pleasure of its citizens. But More is aware that forcing people to follow only one religion may be counter-productive to the effort to preserve the welfare of the commonwealth; what may also explain the role of Christianity in itself in the *nova insula*.

As we know from *Utopia*, the traveller Raphael Hythlodæus (whose tale Thomas More supposedly transcribes) and his companions brought Christianity with them. Unfortunately, a new convert was over zealous. Hythlodæus then reported:

[a]s soon as he was baptized, he took upon himself to preach the Christian religion publicly, with more zeal than discretion. We warned him not to do so, but he began to work himself up to a pitch

where he not only set our religion above the rest, but roundly condemned all others as profane, leading their impious and sacrilegious followers to the hell-fires they richly deserved. After he had been preaching in this style for a long time, they arrested him. He was tried on a charge, not of despising their religion, but of creating a public disorder, convicted, and sentenced to exile.¹⁹

The convert was therefore punished, because “one of their [utopian people] oldest rules [is] that no one should suffer for his religion”.²⁰ And the inhabitants of *Utopia* were suffering at by the over-zealous preaching of the new convert. In order to restore right order, he was thus sent into exile: for the utopian people he did not suffer for his religion, but his religious behaviour was disturbing the peace of the *nova insula*.

Now, it should be noted that the most important claim of the overzealous Christian is that his creed is the (only) true religion. The utopian people reply that they wish they had only one truest religion, but are in any case open to another.²¹ As if they want to say: we utopian people (and we may add Thomas More) know that there is only a religion; but, taking into account the fact that at the moment there are different way of experiencing faith, we would better tolerate other creeds rather than oppressing them; this is for the good of *Utopia*, that is to say for the need to ensure the

maintenance of its (idyllic model of) social order.

For the same reason, the only and explicit limitation to utopian religious tolerance is atheism, the idea that the law of chaos, without any Gods, rules the universe. This is unacceptable, because the absence of divine providence would deprive utopian people of the greatest and almost the only incitement to virtue; that is the fear of the divine judgment and God’s punishment after death.²² Thus, concerning the role of religion(s) in *Utopia*, the important thing is that general consensus redirects the wide variety of forms of worship towards veneration of the divine power of nature, what More calls *numen* and *maiestas naturae*.²³

Utopia and Natural Religion

It should be noted that, after Hythloday’s arrival, the citizens of the *nova insula* took a particular interest in Christianity. In fact, many of them converted to this “new” faith, whether because of the secret inspiration of God or because utopian people considered it closest to nature and reason. Here the concept of religion is clearly influenced by the Christian tradition, in respect of which More outlined a “natural” and “reasonable” dimension. For the English thinker religion is, in other words, an essential part of reason and, as such, an intrinsic characteristic of human beings.

Some explain this reasoning as a variation of a *prisca theologia*, through which the form of pre-Christian thought concerning religion as well as the spiritual destiny of mankind have been assimilated to Christianity.²⁴ This is due to the fact that human reason spontaneously tends towards the God of the Christians, not only through an institutionalized church, but also through an evangelical itinerary, within which the inhabitants of *Utopia* are included. They identify divine law with natural law, because living according to reason means living in harmony with nature; that is to say in accordance with the law and will of God. In this context – More seems to be saying – people naturally tend toward that monotheistic belief because this religion meets human reason.

Likewise, few decades later the publication of *Utopia* (and precisely in 1553) Francesco Patrizi in his *Città felice*²⁵ claimed that, although only some persons can teach the divine laws on earth, religion is a natural component of human reason.²⁶

Even in the 1602 Tommaso Campanella's *Città del sole*, another key book of early utopianism, religion is described as *religione naturale* (natural religion).²⁷ Organized along strict communist lines, social and political life is here subject to divine law. The *City of the sun* is therefore the first example of religious utopia, in the strict sense of the expression; in this context the political, cultural and social structure

of the community is based on one religious order. God is seen as a principle and universal virtue. But, like utopian people in More's book, the inhabitants of Campanella's *City* honour but do not worship (*onorano, non adorano*) the sun and the stars. This is because they consider them to be living representatives and signs of God, as the temples and living altars (*siccome cose viventi, statue e templii di Dio ed altari animati del cielo*).²⁸ However, their worship completely rejects idolatrous practices (*culto di Latria*) and the sun, in reality, is the mean by which they worship God. The inhabitants of the *City* contemplate His image through the sun, and this is the reason why they call it the sign of God: His face and living image, by means of which light, heat, life, and the making of all things good and bad proceed. Therefore they have built an altar like to the sun in shape (*nel sole contemplano l'immagine di Dio, e lo nominano eccelso volto dell'Onnipotente, statua viva, fonte di ogni luce, calore, vita e felicità d'ogni cosa*).²⁹

In these texts, while prioritizing natural religion, the utopian authors try to institute worship in the form of an amalgam of pagan and Christian motifs. In any case, or maybe for this very reason, they are forced to take into serious account the question of religious pluralism, which implies the manifestation of religion in the public sphere. Although in the line of Christian tradition, those texts reflect thus the tension between the universal need to ensure the welfare of the

commonwealth and the cultural-religious autonomy of specific groups.

After all, we must remember that, in the real world and along with the publication of these utopian texts, both Christian tradition and political powers had to face issues raised by the Protestant Reformation; what in fact led to both changes in the religious geography of Europe and the age of religious wars.

The Spiritual Dimension of Utopia

As already outlined in Plato's *Republic*, since the modern age and especially after Thomas More's famous book, the concept of utopia shares the desire for a perfect world, maintaining at the same time the search for salvation of souls. In this sense, utopia constitutes an un-real space where the city of God (heaven) and the city of men (earth) may converge. In this way, it provides reasons to convert chaos (from Greek *χάος*, a state of non-being prior to creation)³⁰ into cosmos (where the world and the universe are regarded as a complex and orderly system).³¹ In other terms, utopia unveils the tension between the displeasures of the existing-present reality and the promise of an ideal-future world. Hence, it exposes the dialectic (inter) relation between the realism of the *here* and *now* and the gaze focused on the *temporal* and *spatial* horizon.

In this context, religion represents the point of departure for exploring

the essence of utopia as a fictional genre that, in away or another, has made a significant contribution to the development of Western thought and (through its interaction with the stream of history made by the real world) the relative model of constitutional democracy.

Under this aspect, it is important to note that the political and religious disruption of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries impacted the concept of utopia, which was quite heterogeneous, especially in its spiritual dimension.³² Indeed, this dimension revealed significant differences amid utopian authors. For example, those who sustained Reformation tended to imagine an ideal country where religion was placed at the service of the purity of the Gospel. On the other hand, those who fought against Reformation promoted a version of utopia where strict and institutionalised religious values governed social and political life of the imaginary State; this is, for example, the case of Ludovico Agostini's *Repubblica immaginaria* (1575-1580)³³ that, not by chance, was a mouthpiece for counter-Reformation or, at least, for the most orthodox Roman Catholicism.³⁴

Despite big and noteworthy differences, there are in any case some common characteristics that can be extrapolated from the utopian genre of the early modern age. One of them is the conviction that it is impossible to build an ideal State on purely secular values. As clearly stated in More's book, only the fear of God

(his judgment during life on earth and his punishment after death) could guarantee the virtue in the ideal country. In this cultural milieu, religion becomes the driving forces behind utopian nations, which are unimaginable without some reference to the divine order. In brief, religion becomes one of the most powerful machines of the utopian creativity. This explains why in many utopian texts the social hierarchy draws inspiration from contemporary religious models, such as those referring to monastic life.³⁵

Another common element is given by the fact that, generally, during this period utopian authors refuse a passive attitude. Instead of waiting passively for salvation, they want to influence both individuals' existence and the spatial-temporal organization of community. But this means neither renouncing the sacred order nor affirming the absence of a religious dimension in the ideal State. On the contrary, the role of religion in utopia is twofold: it gives shape to the promise of divine paradise, while foreshadowing a new prophecy, the creation of a human paradise on earth. Hence, nourished by the idea of social and political renewal, the discourse of utopia also refers to the restoration of unity and original perfection. In utopian writings the renovation and the re-organization of society take on religious attributes and becomes a space of redemption.

Under this perspective, over the years utopian authors began nonetheless to show hostility towards the

religious institutions, including ecclesiastical ones. By this way, and by the revolutionary process of enlightenment, from the eighteenth century onwards, utopia began to openly question the validity of religion itself. In particular, during this period utopian thought was used in order to discuss matters pertaining to the best form of government, which inevitably led to criticise some dogmas.

As a matter of fact, these dogmas started to be subject to the censure of enlightened and reasoned thinking, which was against the exercise of political despotisms, often justified by references to religious precepts (whether Catholic or Protestant).

A "Secular" Form of Utopia

In spite of that, the concept of utopia continued to be based on transcendental elements and, as such, it was constantly looking for an eschatological meaning, an infallible order, and a supreme law. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the spiritual dimension of utopia was translated into the belief in human action, supporting a vision of universe without God: "[r]eligion was to be dethroned through intellectual demolition and social privatisation, leading to the modern mutually parasitic dualism of the secular and the religious".³⁶ Furthermore, the theory and practice of life in society and the State's political power were elevated to a religion, as demonstrated by Jan Jean-Jacques Rousseau's

utopian ideas³⁷ of *the general will* and *the Sovereign*, within which persons would “be forced to be free”.³⁸ And, perhaps, it is not by chance that these ideas drew their “being wholly from the sanctity of the [social] contract”³⁹ and the *civil religion*, whose dogmas “ought to be few, simple, and exactly worded, without explanation or commentary”:

*[t]he existence of a mighty, intelligent and beneficent Divinity, possessed of foresight and providence, the life to come, the happiness of the just, the punishment of the wicked, the sanctity of the social contract and the laws: these are its positive dogmas.*⁴⁰

Without renouncing the habit of metaphysical and mystic abstractions, it seems that Rousseau wanted to introduce a secular version in the line of thought of utopia,⁴¹ which was later placed at the service of the contemporary leviathan State and its collective divinities⁴² (nation, demos, race, political party, leader, etc.).⁴³

Hence, during and after the great human tragedies of the twentieth century, utopia itself and its tradition began to be questioned, repudiated and overturned by an opposite genre called “dystopia”. Examples of that are the 1921 Yevgeny Zamyatin’s novel *We* (which sketches the image of a society in which life is governed by strict reason and in which emotional impulses are prohibited), the 1932 Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (depicting a world state with strict control over reproduction and consumption) the 1949 George

Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (which envisions a totalitarian regime with total surveillance), the 1971 Ursula K. Le Guin’s *The Lathe of Heaven* (addressing the tragic paradoxes of the realized utopia) and the 1985 Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* (which describe a imaginary State where all women are exploited by the pseudo-religious regime). Whereas utopian authors frequently describe a homogeneous society, which is so harmonious that there is simply no need for dissent, dystopian writings regularly contain a theme of rebellion and a search for an alternative system. In this sense, dystopia points out the variety and unpredictability of human nature, its extraordinary capabilities, but also its manifest limitations. For these very reasons, no one should aspire to coerce men, not even into happiness.

Along with these form of fictional narrative, from the second half of the last century some authors pointed at the negative effects of utopianism through analyses based on rigorous empirical observation. This is the case, for examples, of Karl Popper who demonstrated how the attempt to make heaven on earth might often produce real hell.⁴⁴

Conclusion. Religion and Utopia at the Present Time

At the present time, however, in some part of the world utopia is experiencing an unexpected success that, once again, is particularly sup-

ported by some religious doctrines, such as those referring to Islam.

Especially in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region and in the so-called Arab world, for many Muslims the utopian paradise is now at the centre of their life. As such, this element is able to strongly influence the public discourse, the collective imagination of numerous young people and, of course, religious sermons. It has thus become a goal for several individuals and groups, replacing their dreams of social welfare, political stability and economic development; what, since post-war decolonization, have been constantly promised by the Arab elites.⁴⁵ Described as a place of pleasures, this contemporary version of utopia appears, in other words, the exact opposite of the living condition of the left-behind Muslims, whose real-life experiences are often dominated by wars, bloody regimes and economic failures.

In this context, the original source for the imaginary heaven is the Holy *Quran* and some *Hadiths*,⁴⁶ as copiously portrayed and developed in Islamic literature for centuries. Yet in recent times this ideal place is defined in detail by preachers, imams and in religious writings. Hence, it has become the (no)place dreamed of by the poor people, the excluded and the unemployed. Thanks also to some religious elites, who has promoted it as a mean of recruitment, it has also stimulated the imagination of the terrorists, the suicide bombers and the misogynists.⁴⁷ From here stems

the double facets of this paradise, which is often supported by the vision of middle-rich class life in the Western world, what is at once desired and hatred.

Many Muslims dream of going to the West. Among them, however, there are those (the vast majority) who do so in order to build a better life for and those (the extreme but also very dangerous minority) who want to subjugate the Western civilization and, if this is not possible, destroy it from outside and within. In both cases, the principal motivation is often the sense of isolation and despair these people have been experiencing in the last decades. Which, as regards the latter category of “utopian believers”, is sometimes relived by the prospect of earning a place in Islamic paradise.⁴⁸

From this point of view, it should be noted that the western-based Islamic terrorists normally are not militant vanguard of Muslim community; “they are lost generation, unmoored form traditional societies and cultures, frustrated by a Western society that does not meet their expectation”. Hence, they “find their cause in the utopia of a universal *ummah*, in an abstract an pure Islam”.⁴⁹ The fact remains that, in order to get to heaven, they first has to die and kill other persons. Besides, in doing so they do not really bring any tangible benefits to Islam, nor do they bring any real changes in the life of many Muslims in the Arab world and elsewhere.

All this shows once again that, even in the light of other traditions and different geo-political contexts, utopia and religion maintain their permanent and challenging features, like those that have been emerging in the Western thought since Thomas More's famous book (if not beforehand): they may be powerful tools in promoting and shaping a better world; but, their attempt to

make heaven on earth may also lead to hell, whose road, as is well known, is often paved with good, respectable, honourable intentions.

From here stems the main reason why, like any other potent and effective idea, utopia and religion must be handled with great caution, without losing contact with the concrete facts of experience and the multiple facets of reality.

Notes

- ¹ K. Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, Harcourt, Brace & Co., New York, 1936, pp. 262-263. See also D.A. Nielsen, "Religion, Utopia, and Ideology: Reflections on the Problems of Spiritual Renaissance and Social Reconstruction in the Sociology of Karl Mannheim", in *Journal of the sociology of self-knowledge*, 2, 2002, pp. 101-108.
- ² V. Geoghegan, "Utopia, Religion and Memory", in *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 12, 2007, pp. 255-67.
- ³ R. Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, Philip Allan, London, 1990, p. 2.
- ⁴ E. Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1986, p. 1193.
- ⁵ T. More, *Utopia*, revised edition, (ed. by G.M. Logan and R.M. Adams), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002, p. 93.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 95.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 102.
- ⁸ J. Dunn, *The Political Thought of John Locke*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1969, p. x; L. Ward, *John Locke and Modern Life*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2010, p. 1.
- ⁹ J. Tully, *Toleration, Skepticism and Rights: John Locke on Religious Toleration*, in E.J. Furcha (ed.), *1990 Symposium on Truth and Tolerance*, McGill University Press, Montreal, 1990, p. 13. See also D. Augenstein, *A European Culture of Religious Tolerance*, 4 *EUI Working Papers, Law*, 28, p. 1.
- ¹⁰ J. Locke, *Two treatises of Government*, Book II, *The second Treatise of Civil Government*, (ed. by C.B. MacPherson), Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis and Cambridge, chap. II, sec. 12, 1980, p. 10.
- ¹¹ J. Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, in J. Horton, S. Mendus (eds.), Routledge, London, 1991, p. 19 (English translation from Latin by W. Popple).
- ¹² *Ibid.*, p. 54.
- ¹³ J. Dunn, *What is living and What is Dead in the Political Theory of John Locke?*, *Interpretation Political Responsibility*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1990, p. 11.

- ¹⁴ I tried to demonstrate that in F. Alicino, “Constitutionalism as a Peaceful “Site” of Religious Struggles”, in *Global Jurist*, 10, 2010, pp. 11-13.
- ¹⁵ F. Uhlenbruch, *The Nowhere Bible. Utopia, Dystopia, Science Fiction*, Walter de Gruyter GmbH, Berlin, Munich, Boston, 2015, pp. 27-44.
- ¹⁶ J. Boyle, “Theological Designs: Religion in Utopia”, in *Thomas More Studies*, 1, 2006, pp. 68-71.
- ¹⁷ Paganism is in fact a term that derives from the word *paganus* that, in classical Latin, referred to a “nonparticipant, one excluded from a more professional or more distinguished group. It could mean no more than ‘private’ as against ‘public’ or ‘official’” (P. Brown, “Pagan”, in G. Warren Bowersock, P. Brown, O. Grabar, *Late Antiquity. A Guide to the Postclassical World*, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.), 1999, p. 625). See P. Orosius, *Adversus paganos historiarum libri septem*, first published in 417 A.C., see the 1857 edition available at <https://archive.org/details/adversuspaganosh00oros> (last accessed 25 March 2017).
- ¹⁸ J. Boyle, *Theological Designs: Religion in Utopia*, cit., p. 70.
- ¹⁹ T. More, *Utopia*, cit., p. 94.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 97.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 103.
- ²² *Ibid.*, pp. 95-96, 102.
- ²³ See what More originally wrote in *De optimo statu reipublicae deque nova insula Utopia* (Liber Secundus, *Raphaelis Sermo Pomeridianus*, 11. *De religionibus Utopiensium*): “[q]uin ceteris quoque omnibus, quamquam diversa credentibus, hoc tamen cum istis convenit quod esse quidem unum censent summum, cui et universitatis opificium, et providentia debeatur, eumque communiter omnes patrialingua Mythram appellant, sed eo dissentium, quod idem alius apud alios habetur. Autumante quoque quicquid id sit, quod ipse summum ducit, eadem illam illam prorsus esse naturam, cuius unius numini ac maiestati, rerum omnium summa, omnium consensu gentium tribuitur tribuitur”.
- ²⁴ K. Von Stuckrad, *Locations of Knowledge in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Esoteric Discourse and Western Identities*, Brill, Leiden-Boston, 2010, pp. 27-35.
- ²⁵ F. Il Patrizi, *La città felice*, in Id., *La città felice...dialogo dell'honore, il Barignano...Discorso della diversità de furori poetici. Lettura sopra il Sonetto del Petrarca*, Giov. Griffio, Venetia, 1553.
- ²⁶ I. Nakládalová, *Religion in Early Modern Utopia*, in Ead. (ed.), *Religion in Utopia. From More to the Enlightenment*, Academia Verlag, Sankt Augustin, 2013, p. 16.
- ²⁷ T. Campanella, *La Città del sole*, G. Ruggia e C., Lugano, 1836: “[g]li abitanti solari s'erigono difensori del diritto naturale e della Religione” (p. 39); “[i]n verità siccome questa gente che conosce soltanto la legge naturale s'accosta tanto al Cristianesimo, il quale non aggiunge alle leggi della natura che i Sacramenti (conferenti forza a seguire fedelmente quelle), così io deduco un gran argomento a favore della Religione Cristiana, come quella ch'è l'unica vera che, tolti gli abusi, dovrà dominare tutto

- l'universo, come insegnano e sperano i più distinti teologi" (p. 70).
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 63.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 64.
- ³⁰ *Χάος* refers to "emptiness, vast void, abyss", and it derives from the verb *χαίνω* meaning "gape, be wide open". It may also mean "space", "the expanse of air" and "infinite darkness".
- ³¹ According to the Holy Bible, *Genesis* 1-8, "[i]n the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless wasteland, and darkness covered the abyss, while a mighty wind swept over the waters. Then God said, 'let there be light', and there was light. God saw how good the light was. God then separated [which also means de-fine] the light from the darkness. God called [i.e. de-fine] the light 'day', and the darkness he called 'night'. Thus evening came, and morning followed – the first day. Then God said, 'let there be a dome in the middle of the waters, to separate [i.e. de-fine] one body of water from the other'. And so it happened: God made the dome, and it separated the water above the dome from the water below it. God called the dome 'the sky'. Evening came, and morning followed". See S. Facioni, *La cattura dell'origine: verità e narrazione nella tradizione ebraica*, Jaca Book, Milano, 2005, p. 36 ss.; U. Galimberti, *Psiche e techne. L'uomo nell'età della tecnica*, Feltrinelli, Milano, 2005, p. 279; S. Quinzio, *La Croce e il nulla*, Adelphi, Milano, 1984, p. 22 ss.
- ³² I. Nakládalová, *Religion in Early Modern Utopia*, cit., p. 12.
- ³³ See L. Agostini, *La Repubblica immaginaria*, ed. by L. Firpo, Ramella, Torino, 1957. In reality, this text represents the last part of Agostini's *Dialoghi dell'infinito*.
- ³⁴ R. Trousson, *Religions d'utopie*, Ousia, Bruxelles, 2001, p. 63.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 64.
- ³⁶ V. Geoghegan, *Utopia, Religion and Memory*, cit., p. 261.
- ³⁷ See I. Berlin: *Freedom and Its Betrayal. Six Enemies of Human Liberty*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2003, pp. 27-49; Id., *Political Ideas in the Romantic Age*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2006; Id., *Two Concepts of Liberty*, in Id., *Four Essays on Liberty*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1969, pp. 118-72.
- ³⁸ J.-J. Rousseau, *The Social Contract or Principles of Political Right* (first published in 1762), Book I, Chapter VII: *The Sovereign*, Bartleby, New York, 2010, p. 8.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.
- ⁴⁰ J.-J. Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, cit., Book IV, Chapter VIII: *Civil Religion*, p. 15.
- ⁴¹ H. de Vries, *Introduction: Before, around, and beyond the theologopolitical*, in H. de Vries and L.E. Sullivan (eds.), *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-Secular World*, Fordham University Press, New York, 2006, pp. 1-88; V. Geoghegan, *Religious Narrative, Post-Secularism and Utopia*, in "Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy", 3, 2000, pp. 205-24.
- ⁴² M. Gauchet, *Le désenchantement du monde. Une histoire politique de la religion*, Gallimard, Paris, 1985, p. 35.
- ⁴³ In this sense, it is very interesting what Bertrand Russell wrote in his *History of Western Philosophy*, first

published in 1945, Simon and Schuster, New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, 2008, p. 684: “Jean-Jacques Rousseau...though a philosophe in the eighteenth-century French sense, was not what would now be called a ‘philosopher’. Nevertheless he had a powerful influence on philosophy, as on literature and taste and manners and politics...He is the father of the romantic movement, the initiator of systems of thought which infer non-human facts from human emotions, and the inventor of the political philosophy of pseudo-democratic dictatorships as opposed to traditional absolute monarchies”. See also p. 700: “[t]he *Social Contract* became the Bible of most of the leaders in the French Revolution, but no doubt, as is the fate of Bibles, it was not carefully read and was still less understood by many of its disciples. It reintroduced the habit of metaphysical abstractions among the theorist of democracy, and by its doctrine of the general will it made possible the mystic identification of a leader with his people, which has no need of confirmation by so mundane an apparatus as the ballot-box”.

⁴⁴ See K.R. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, first published in 1945, Routledge, London, 2012. See, for example, Volume II, *The High Tide of Prophecy*, where Popper wrote that “the attempt to impose our scale of ‘higher’ values upon others, in order to make them realize what seems to us of greatest importance for their happiness...leads to Utopianism and Romanticism. We all certain that everybody would be happy in the

beautiful, the perfect community of our dreams. And no doubt, there would be heaven on earth if we could love one another. But...the attempt to make heaven on earth invariably produces hell. It leads to intolerance. It leads to religious wars, and to the saving of souls through the inquisition”. (p. 442)

⁴⁵ K. Daoud, *Paradise, the New Muslim Utopia*, The New York Times, 2 August 2016.

⁴⁶ See The Noble *Quran* 18:31: “[t]hose will have gardens of perpetual residence; beneath them rivers will flow. They will be adorned therein with bracelets of gold and will wear green garments of fine silk and brocade, reclining therein on adorned couches. Excellent is the reward, and good is the resting place”. See also 18:107: “[i]ndeed, those who have believed and done righteous deeds - they will have the Gardens of Paradise as a lodging”; 23:11: “[w]ho will inherit *al-Firdaus*. They will abide therein eternally”. It should be noted the term *Jannah* refers to the Islamic concept of Paradise, while the highest level of Paradise is defined as *Firdaus*.

⁴⁷ A. Anees, “Suicide Bombing Cannot Bring Salvation”, in *New Perspectives Quarterly*, 23, 2006, pp. 37-43; D. Gupta & K. Mundra, “Suicide Bombing as a Strategic Weapon: An Empirical Investigation of Hamas and Islamic Jihad”, in *Terrorism & Political Violence*, 17, 2005, pp. 573-98.

⁴⁸ A. Acharya, *Age of Fear. Power Versus Principle in the War on Terror*, Routledge, London, 2014, pp. 39-41; I. Strenski, “Sacrifice, Gift and the Social Logic of Muslim

“Human Bombers”, in *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 15, 2004, pp. 1-34.

- ⁴⁹ O. Roy, *Why Do They Hate Us? Not Because of Iraq*, *The New York Time*, 22 July 2005; A. Agron, *Jihad and Terrorism Threat Monitor*

(*JTTM*) *Weekend Summary*, 15 may 2015, available at [https:// www. memri. org /reports/ jihad-and- terrorism- threat-monitor-jttm-weekend-summary-143](https://www.memri.org/reports/jihad-and-terrorism-threat-monitor-jttm-weekend-summary-143) (last accessed 28 March 2017).

Bibliography

- ACHARYA A., *Age of Fear. Power Versus Principle in the War on Terror*, Routledge, London, 2014.
- AGOSTINI L., *La Repubblica immaginaria*, ed. by L. Firpo, Ramella, Torino, 1957.
- AGRON A., *Jihad and Terrorism Threat Monitor (JTTM) Weekend Summary*, 15 may 2015, available at [https:// www. memri. org /reports/ jihad-and- terrorism- threat-monitor-jttm-weekend-summary-143](https://www.memri.org/reports/jihad-and-terrorism-threat-monitor-jttm-weekend-summary-143) (last accessed 28 March 2017).
- ALICINO F., “Constitutionalism as a Peaceful “Site” of Religious Struggles”, in *Global Jurist*, 10, 2010, pp. 1-34.
- ANES A., “Suicide Bombing Cannot Bring Salvation”, in *New Perspectives Quarterly*, 23, 2006, pp. 37-43.
- ATWOOD M., *The Handmaid’s Tale*, Infobase Publishing, Philadelphia, 2009.
- AUGENSTEIN D., *A European Culture of Religious Tolerance*, 4 *EUI Working Papers, Law*, 28.
- BERLIN I., *Freedom and Its Betrayal. Six Enemies of Human Liberty*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2003.
- IDEM, *Political Ideas in the Romantic Age*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2006.
- IDEM, *Two Concept of Liberty*, in *Four Essays on Liberty*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1969.
- BLOCH E., *The Principle of Hope*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1986.
- BOWERSOCK G.W., BROWN P., GRABAR O., *Late Antiquity. A Guide to the Postclassical World*, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.), 1999.
- BOYLE J., “Theological Designs: Religion in Utopia”, in *Thomas More Studies*, 1, 2006, pp. 68-71.
- CAMPANELLA T., *La Città del sole*, G. Ruggia e C., Lugano, 1836.
- DAOUD K., *Paradise, the New Muslim Utopia*, *The New York Time*, 2 August 2016.
- DE VRIES H., SULLIVAN L.E. (eds.), *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-Secular World*, Fordham University Press, New York, 2006.
- DUNN J., *The Political Thought of John Locke*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1969.
- IDEM, *What is living and What is Dead in the Political Theory of John Locke?*, *Interpretation Political Responsibility*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1990.
- ELIOTT R.C., *The Shape of Utopia*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1970.

- FACIONI S., *La cattura dell'origine: verità e narrazione nella tradizione ebraica*, Jaca Book, Milano, 2005.
- GALIMBERTI U., *Psiche e techne. L'uomo nell'età della tecnica*, Feltrinelli, Milano, 2005; S. Quinzio, *La Croce e il nulla*, Adelphi, Milano, 1984.
- GAUCHET M., *Le désenchantement du monde. Une histoire politique de la religion*, Gallimard, Paris, 1985.
- GEOGHEGAN V., "Religious Narrative, Post-Secularism and Utopia", in *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, 3, 2000, pp. 205-24.
- IDEM, "Utopia, Religion and Memory", in *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 12, 2007, pp. 255-67.
- GUPTA D., MUNDRA K., "Suicide Bombing as a Strategic Weapon: An Empirical Investigation of Hamas and Islamic Jihad", in *Terrorism & Political Violence*, 17, 2005, pp. 573-98.
- HUXLEY A., *Brave New World*, Vintage Book, London, 2008.
- LE GUIN U.K., *The Lathe of Heaven*, Scribner, New York, 2008.
- LEVIN H., *The Myth of the Golden Age in the Renaissance*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1969.
- LEVITAS R., *The Concept of Utopia*, Philip Allan, London, 1990.
- LOCKE J., *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, (ed. by J. Horton, S. Mendus), Routledge, London, 1991 (English translation from Latin by W. Popple).
- LOCKE J., *Two treatises of Government, Book II, The second Treatise of Civil Government* (ed. by C.B. MacPherson), Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis and Cambridge, 1980.
- MANNHEIM K., *Ideology and Utopia*, Harcourt, Brace & Co., New York, 1936.
- MORE T., *Utopia*, revised edition (ed. by G.M. Logan and R.M. Adams), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002.
- NAKLÁDALOVÁ I. (ed.), *Religion in Utopia. From More to the Enlightenment*, Academia Verlag, Sankt Augustin, 2013.
- NIELSEN D.A., "Religion, Utopia, and Ideology: Reflections on the Problems of Spiritual Renaissance and Social Reconstruction in the Sociology of Karl Mannheim", in *Journal of the sociology of self-knowledge*, 2, 2002, pp. 101-108.
- OROSIUS P., *Adversus paganos historiarum libri septem*, first published in 417 A.C., see the 1857 edition available at <https://archive.org/details/adversuspaganosh00oros> (last accessed 25 March 2017).
- ORWELL G., *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Penguin, London, 2004.
- PATRIZI II F., *La città felice*, in *Idem, La città felice...dialogo dell'honore, il Barignano ...Discorso della diversità de furori poetici. Lettura sopra il Sonetto del Petrarca*, Giov. Griffio, Venetia, 1553.
- POPPER K.R., *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, first published in 1945, Routledge, London, 2012.
- ROUSSEAU J.-J., *The Social Contract or Principles of Political Right* (first published in 1762), Book I, Chapter VII: The Sovereign, Bartleby, New York, 2010.
- ROY O., *Why Do They Hate Us? Not Because of Iraq*, *The New York Times*, 22 July 2005.
- RUSSELL B., *History of Western Philosophy*, Simon and Schuster,

- New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, 2008.
- STRENSKI I., "Sacrifice, Gift and the Social Logic of Muslim "Human Bombers", in *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 15, 2004, pp. 1-34.
- STUCKRAD VON K., *Locations of Knowledge in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Esoteric Discourse and Western Identities*, Brill, Leiden-Boston, 2010.
- TROUSSON R., *Religions d'utopie*, Ousia, Bruxelles, 2001.
- TULLY J., *Toleration, Skepticism and Rights: John Locke on Religious Toleration*, in E.J. Furcha (ed.), *1990 Symposium on Truth and Tolerance*, McGill University Press, Montreal, 1990.
- UHLENBRUCH F., *The Nowhere Bible. Utopia, Dystopia, Science Fiction*, Walter de Gruyter GmbH, Berlin, Munich, Boston, 2015.
- WARD L., *John Locke and Modern Life*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2010.
- ZAMYATIN Y., *We*, Penguin, New York, 1921.