

# Utopianism and Islamic Ideals

Utopian tradition leads to false hopes of perfect states of existence and is contradictory to the Qur'anic dynamism. *Gulzar Haider* reviews the history of Western utopias and invites Muslims to an idealism whose aim is to absorb reality through purposeful action and moral struggle

MAN is simultaneously biological, emotional, self reflexive and capable of awe-inspiring thought that challenges and questions the very purpose of its own creation. He exhibits a strong sense of time in that he is fascinated by the past, is in a continuous battle with the present and is alternately hopeful and anxious about the future. He is characteristically aware of his needs and spends much energy and time seeking to fulfill them. Much more fascinating, however, is his ability to wish, fancy and dream about conditions even beyond the realm of "possibility". This characteristic, combined with an innate desire to know the true nature of his being and place within the broader scheme of things, makes him perpetually struggle to make his future different, if not necessarily better, than his past. And in this sense, there is no individual, nor any society, that is free of the concept of an 'ideal state of existence', some 'dreams-come-true' wishes and an agenda for the future as if all things kept happening favourably.

Great philosophers, anticipatory thinkers and visionaries, especially of the western world, feel compelled to pose themselves the question of the nature of an Ideal Society. They have left a literary legacy that could be collectively labelled as Utopian thought. Etymologically, the word utopia is derived from the Greek words *ou-no* and *topos* - where that is a place so perfect that it is "nowhere". Thomas More (1515-16) presented his moral and ethical vision for the society by writing about the ideal but nonexistent state of *Utopia*. He was thus able to sharply criticize his times without inviting the direct confrontation of his contemporaries. Taking cover behind his "nowhere" land he was able to point out England's ills and put forward the principles of tolerance, pacifism, value of the common good over

the pursuit of individual wealth, power or status, and the use of reason and intelligence over emotion and irrational behaviour. The credit thus goes to More's distinctive work for the word Utopia becoming a general term for all imaginary, ideal societies. Often the titles "utopia" or "utopian" are used in a cynical or derogatory manner because they are "mere fantasies" and lack the essential characteristics of "feasibility" in an epoch that takes pride in science, predictability, and definitive planning. Utopia is usually dismissed as an ambitious but predictably hopeless and thus unfortunate diversion.

Thomas More, however, was definitely not the first to think on these utopian lines. The lure of the perfect blissful states of life is old and man has forever been trying to devise maps for it. The earliest literary utopias can be seen in the Old Testament. The "Messianic" state promised and predicted by the divinely inspired prophets, as recorded in the Bible, has characteristics of visionary literature. Though Islamic dynamism and commitment to life here and now, as the arena of moral action, would not accept actionless anticipation for an ideal future of deliverance from all evil and thus question the authenticity of many sections of these 'man-tampered' scriptures, they still retain for us the value as records of what man wished his ideal future to be. From Amos to Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, we inherit powerful and earnest images of a society that is just under the commandments of God, where fair play among fellow-men is the ultimate value, where service and not the ceremonial is the ideal, a kingdom under God where a new era of social justice would be inaugurated. "Let justice flow like a river, and righteousness like a perennial stream". (Amos 5:24). Hosea calls a broken, troubled, corruption-ridden society



The ideal cities: view of the Castle of Milan, from the *Vitruvius Teutsch* of 1548 (right); and frontispiece from More's *Utopia*

back to its religious loyalty as the only hope of political and social salvation. He uses utopian fragments to build for his people the picture of a rehabilitated, purified society, under the Covenant. When there will be a new betrothal between man and God, when right and justice, grace and piety, love and faith will be the blessings. The bow and the sword shall be broken. The earth shall bring forth its wealth of products. It will be a righteous and peaceful people living in harmony with Jehovah and enjoying physical abundance. Isaiah, the "nobleman, councillor, city-dweller and statesman" prophet of the Judeo-Christian scriptures is eloquent in his critique of the social and moral decadence of his times:

*"How is the faithful city become an harlot;*

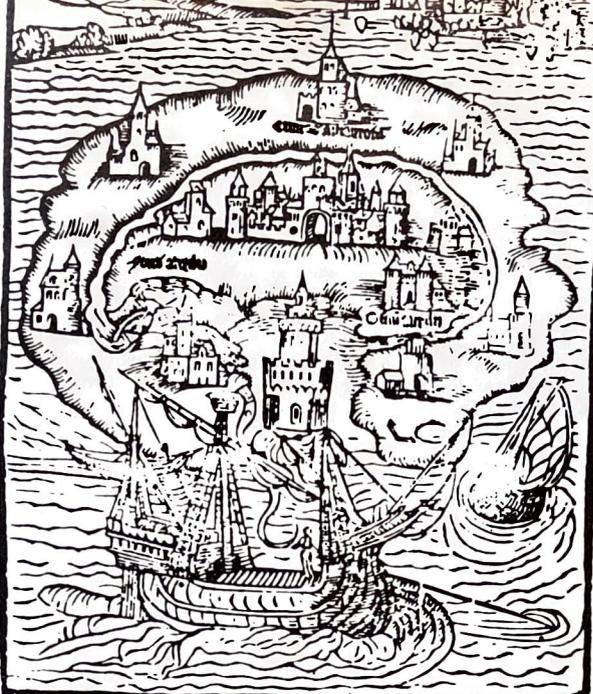
*It was full of justice;*  
*Righteousness lodged in it;*  
*But now murderers.*

*Thy silver is become dross, thy wine mixed with water*

*Thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves*

*Everyone loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards*

*They judge not the fatherless*



Neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them" (Isaiah: 21-23)

This divinely inspired man also realized in anticipation the noble characteristics of a single-hearted statesman sketched four centuries afterwards by the Athenian patriot, Demosthenes: "To discern events in their beginnings, to be beforehand in the detection of movements and tendencies, and to forewarn his countrymen accordingly; to fight against the political vices from which no state is free, of procrastination, supineness, ignorance and part jealousy; to impress upon all the paramount importance of unity and friendly feeling and the duty of providing promptly for their country's needs.

The tone of the biblical scriptures, the apocalyptists notwithstanding, creates the impression that these inspired men quite ahead of their times, looking forward instead of backward, hopeful warners rather than despondent mystics were all committed to preparing the people for residence in the ideal future state conceived in ethical and social terms. Of course, in the hands and minds of those who did not grasp or were consciously avoiding the direct reformative message, it slowly became a literature of anticipation for a Messianic miracle, or turned into negative utopias of apocalypse before redemption. The purposeful and positively motivated casualty among the deeds and their consequences, among the nature of the acts of

man and the pleasure or displeasure of God got transformed, through a spirit of hopelessness and overemphasis on the awaited Messiah, into a belief that the 'Kingdom of God' is not possible on the earth; and if at all it will be after some catastrophic, redemptive destruction. The pure and hope-giving message of Christ, if seen in the untarnished state, invited man to the commandments of love, faith, obedience to God, humility, freedom from hypocrisy and deceit, service to fellowman, individual responsibility, social cosmopolitanism and a forgiving spirit. It was a doctrine of hope and optimism. But in a short time it transformed into a mythology of trinity, separation of here and hereafter, an oppressive and burdensome church intervened between man and God and piety receded from the marketplace to the remote monasteries. Church became an empire whose pomposity and ritualism stifled the message of Christ.

By the 4th century CE Christianity had become a victim of its imperial hypocrisy epitomized by the Roman Empire. Its passion was cooling and it was being eaten away by invading neighbours and "a thousand philosophical cults with their fanatical adherents, who were sacrificing depth and philosophical outlook for polish and sophistry". All was turmoil and discord. This was St. Augustine's period of agony and ultimately "Confessions". In 410 CE Rome was plundered by Alaric the Goth. This dreadful destruction of the "eternal" city set in

motion many doubts and questions. Christians, by multitude, began to lose faith and awaited the end of the world. Pagans saw the cause of the fall in the long neglect of the Roman gods. Everywhere Christianity was under attack and thoughtful men saw the Christian principles as incompatible with statecraft, politics and defence. Augustine, the God-intoxicated mind, the brilliant intellect, the Christian soldier of God, rose to the defence of his Church and produced (413-426 CE) a treatise of twenty-two books known in history as *The City of God*. This work has had such profound influences on its own as well as the subsequent times that it has been called "the encyclopedia of the fifth century". It is perhaps the most brilliant apology for Christianity. Its primary stance is that Christianity, if duly carried out, would secure for the best and most inviolable state. And as Augustine pondered over the vanished glory of Rome, the "eternal" earthly city, there seemed to appear over the ruins his splendid vision of the City of God, "coming down out of heaven, adorned as a bride for her husband". He set the "City of God" in contrast to the "City of Men", showing that they represent diametrically opposite principles. The one consists of those who wish to live after the spirit and is founded upon the love of God and contempt of self; the other is made up of those who wish to live after the flesh, is based upon the love of self and contempt of God, and is the embodiment of evil. The individual then is the inhabitant of the one or the other of these cities as he lives according to man, or according to God. Augustine's utopianism centres about life according to God. It consists in the first place of freedom from the baser passions and lusts and the practice of Christian ethics. The bond of agreement in the divine city of the love of God as is shown when he defines a state as: "An assemblage of reasonable beings bound together by a common agreement as to the objects of their love". And in the very last section of this beatific vision, Augustine describes this blessed community: "How great will be that felicity, which shall be tainted with no evil, which shall lack no good, and which shall afford leisure for the praises of God, who shall be all in all... All the members and organs of the incorruptible body, which now we see to be suited to various necessary uses, shall contribute to the praises of God, for in that life necessity shall have no place, but full, certain, secure, ever-

lasting felicity... True peace shall there be, where no one shall suffer opposition either from himself or any other... and in that blessed city there shall be this great blessing, that no inferior shall envy a superior, as now the arch-angels are not envied by the angels, because no one will wish to be what he has not received, though bound in strictest concord with him who has received; as in the body the finger does not seek to be the eye, though both members are harmoniously included in the complete structure of the body. And thus, along with his gift, greater or less, each shall receive this further gift of contentment to desire no more than he has".

This functional-organic order that Augustine saw in the ideal, which to him was attainable only in the hereafter, was echoed for this earthly life by Thomas Aquinas. Human society, Aquinas repeatedly stressed, is to be seen as after the model of the human organism, with the same functional coordination of parts, the same kind of hierarchy of functions and members ranging from the simplest all the way up through the divinely created mind and soul to God, and the same subordination of each single part to the organic whole.

And these utopian ideas formed the foundations of life in the European middle ages. The essence of social order was hierarchy and the ideas of individual equality, freedom and rights were scarce. Individual was consumed in the community and in this Augustinian-Thomist ideal the religious (Christian) view of existence ruled supreme. Augustine's City of God was to be the historic visible church on earth.

Fra Girolamo Savonarola, almost a thousand years after Augustine, made an ill-fated attempt to transform Florence, the city of the Medicis, their art, culture and commerce, into a Christian theocracy. His dream was that of a perfect Christian city-state in which immorality should be suppressed, in which social and civic life should be ruled by Divine precepts, in which charity and righteousness, equality and liberty should reign supreme, in which private interests should be sacrificed to the common good, and in the hearts of those citizens, God should reign.

Savonarola, in a miraculously short period (1495-97) brought about a total transformation in the life of Florence:

"Finery and jewellery were cast aside; women dressed plainly on the streets; money which had before been spent for ornament and display was

now given to the poor; theatres and taverns were empty; cards and dice disappeared; the churches were crowded; alm-boxes were well filled; tradesmen and bankers restored their ill-gotten gains; purity, sobriety and justice prevailed in the city, and the Prior of San Marco (Savonarola) was everywhere hailed as the greatest benefactor".

But a Christian utopia imposed on the hearts and the minds that were ill-prepared to stand the full impact of a Christian life was bound to fail. The austerity and severity imposed on a socio-economic structure that thrived on the entrepreneurial genius of Florentine patron families was too abrupt a change. It is ironic, but quite understandable, that the corrupt papacy of Alexander VI rose to crush Savonarola's dream. But perhaps there is a more basic observation to be made that this "hero-priest" of history represented the monastic view of Christianity that had become too remote from the human nature that is innately good but cannot be pressed into goodness, it reveres piety but does not respond kindly, or for long, to legislated piety.

The stage was set for a Luther and a Calvin. Religio-ethical utopianism of Christianity was forever to be internalized. All the great reformers of Protestantism held a profound conviction that to externalize religion is to run the high risk of degrading or corrupting it. In John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) its hero is the isolated, self-sufficient individual, devoted, pious and in pursuit of grace. He journeys from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City and in the process overcomes all obstacles and temptations as an individual. The community of Augustine is invisible. The Christian is now an individual.

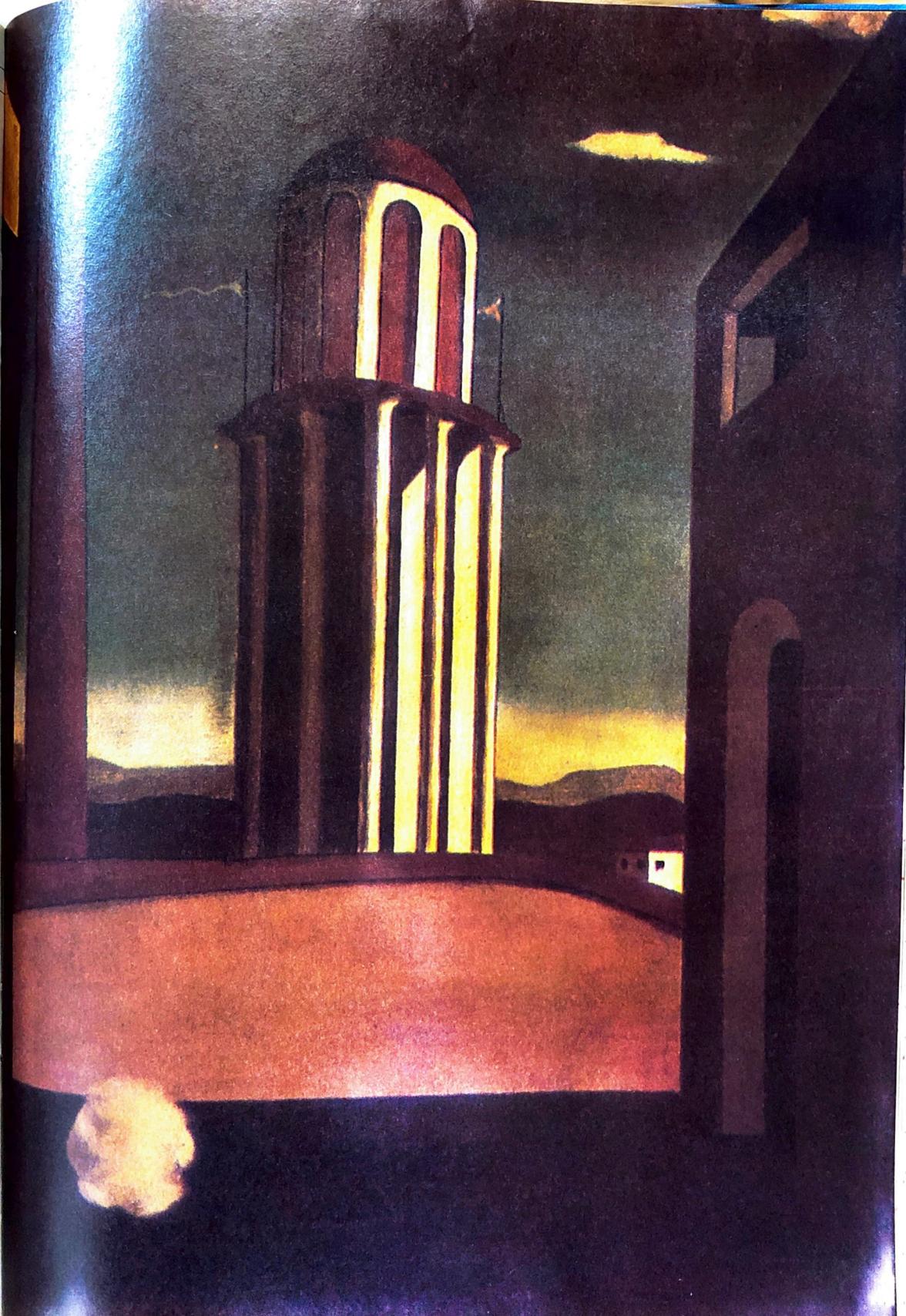
As we turn to the non-religio-ethical utopias, Lycurgus's *Sparta* and Plato's *Republic* stand out as historically significant. Sparta fascinated many later utopians for its basic, simple and austere life, its communism; its destruction of the family, its reduction of class to only that of Spartans and slaves, its rural rather than urban character and its dedication to the collective rather than the individual. Sparta has a kind of negatively motivated value because it nourishes the dreams of a perfect, healthy, self-reliant, highly organized, perfection oriented, militarily strong, hard-working, hard-living society. For all those who are angered and repulsed by the excesses of culture and diseases of opulence are naturally attracted to

the Spartan utopianism. Plato's *Republic*, however, is much more of a socio-political utopia aimed at the cognition of the Idea of Good. But in contrast with the religio-ethical utopianism, it depends heavily on eugenics, class structures of guardians, the rest and the slaves; selective education of the philosopher-kings, physical planning controls and ultimate exaltation of idealism, philosophic pursuits and establishment of civil justice. Through his vision of Er (or Erus), Plato stresses the doctrine of freedom of will and individual responsibility. Society to him is a self-conscious thing, capable of directing and controlling its own destiny by its own deliberate action. Philosophy, he puts forth as an instrument not merely for the interpretation but for the reshaping of the affairs of man. In this, and not in the specifics of the Republic, lies Plato's most valuable contribution.

Following Augustine's *City of God*, for about a thousand years, there was no serious utopian writing in the Western world. Renaissance, the reawakening of the western man, heavily indebted to the Islamic civilization that had flourished at the borders of Europe, rekindled the desire for reform. Society that had intellectually been dormant under centuries of Church domination could breathe once more. The humanist, individualist, freedom oriented activity that eventually led to the Reformation was greatly aided by those who dared the hypocrisies of the Church, the late fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were the richest in speculative treatises of utopian nature. It was during this period that Thomas More (1515) offered his *Utopia*. He was well aware of both Plato and Augustine. Francis Bacon wrote his *New Atlantis* in 1623, the same year Thomas Campanella, in Italy, wrote his *City of the Sun*. More, though himself a devout Christian, epitomized the humanistic period of the renaissance with emphasis on pantheism and recognition of equal social rights for all reasonable men. Bacon represented the belief that man's ultimate regenerations and perfectibility depended primarily not on reform of laws of property or on social revolution, but on the progress of science and the regulation of human life by the scientific spirit. With almost romantic enthusiasm he claimed that scientific method alone was the ladder

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The Return of the Poet by Giorgio de Chirico, painted 1911



by which man was to ascend to perfect living. Campanella, the monk, philosopher, university professor, and revolutionary is reported to have said, "I was born to combat three great evils: Tyranny, Sophistry and Hypocrisy". His *City of the Sun* has many resemblances with *Republic* and *Utopia* and shows how certain visions transcend time and culture. It is a city-state with one supreme ruler Metaphysicus who is head of all temporal and spiritual matters. He is the most enlightened leader and his wisdom is all pervasive. He is assisted by three princes of equal stature: Power, Wisdom and Love, which have their respective domains and administrative duties. All affairs are discharged by the four together but in "whatever Metaphysicus inclines the rest are sure to agree". In the manner of More, Bacon and Campanella there are at least a dozen more treatises on ideal societies and their systems including such well known works as Valenti's "*Christiopolis*" (1620), Godwin's "*The Man in the Moon*" (1638), Harrington's "*Oceana*" (1656) and Sadler's "*Olbia, the New Island*" (1660).

The factors and forces that generated the French Revolution can also be considered as the stimulants for a whole chain of writings that may be called the socialist utopias. The key figures in this group are Rousseau (b.1712), Abbe Morelley (b.1720), Francois Babeauf (b.1764), Saint-Simon (b.1760), Charles Fourier (b.1772), Etienne Cabet (b.1788), Louis Blanc (b.1813) and Robert Owen (b.1771). While their utopian images are different from each other they were all unmistakably dedicated to the establishment of a kingdom of reason and eternal justice; they wanted to free humanity from tyranny of disparity propped up by institutions and traditions. Private property ownership was seen by all as evil and cause of much misery. They all wanted to universalize wealth, remove hunger, bring health and vitality, unify work and pleasure and banish arrogance from the "fortunate". Environment and education were key variables for them and they believed that these could become instruments of change in human condition. Their utopias were finished ideal states rather than processes leading to an idea.

It is of great interest to note that all through the history of utopianism the city has been repeatedly used as a metaphor and as a real physical place. From Thomas More's Utopian capital city *Amaurotum* (dream town) that exists only in the literary and concep-

tual realm, the *Arcosantil* an "arcology" of Paolo Soleri that is presently being built, we have a profuse legacy of city ideas, all spurred by a dissatisfaction with the present and wish for a better, if not a perfect, future. The Renaissance produced many physical images of the Heavenly City. Leone Battista Alberti and Leonardo da Vinci produced in words and drawing the ideal city forms. Alberti's disciple, Antonio Filarte (1457-64), actually proposed the eight vertex ideal city plan, named it *Sforzinda* and planned many buildings for it. Vasari (1550), Lovini (1592) and Scamozzi (1615) produced ordered, proportional, geometricized urban diagrams. Eighteenth century architects like Boullée and Ledoux produced a phenomenal quantity of idealized buildings in city and in rural settings. Boullée's "City of the Dead set in an ideal landscape" and Ledoux's "Ideal Town of Chaux" (1790) are noteworthy. Nineteenth century socialist utopians represented by Owens and Fourier also influenced, if not directly authored, plans for ideal communities, the title page of "*CRISIS: or the Change From Error and Misery, To Truth and Happiness*" (1832) edited by Robert Owen contained the parallelogram design for his ideal settlement. Charles Fourier's "*Phalanstere*" had all its parts connected so that daily life could continue regardless of weather. At the turn of the twentieth century Ebenezer Howard (1850-1928) offered his *Garden City* that was an impassioned plea for land-use such that it discourages speculation and is kind to nature. In his utopia were hidden some of the attitudes of John Ruskin and of William Morris's "*News From Nowhere*". There is little doubt that the "*Garden City*" and the "*News From Nowhere!*" resulted much later in the *ecological consciousness, or at least guilt, in urban planning circles. Tony Garnier (1869-1948), about the same time as Howard, proposed "la Cite Industrielle" and soon after Sant Elia (1914) came waving his flag of Futurism and his drawings of "la Citta Nuova". This rather scary dream of a city is best described in his own words, "We must invent and rebuild the modern city, like an immense and tumultuous shipyard active, mobile, and everywhere dynamic... Elevators must no longer hide away like solitary worms in stairwells... but swarm up the facades like serpents of glass and iron. The house... rich only in the beauty of its lines, brutish in its mechanical simplicity, as big as need dictates, and not as zoning rules*

permit, must soar up from the brink of a tumultuous abyss; the street will no longer lie like a doormat at the thresholds, but will plunge stories deep into the earth... connected to metal catwalks and high speed conveyor belts... the fundamental characteristics of Futurist architecture will be its impermanence and transience. Things will endure less than us. Every generation must build its own city". Le Corbusier's "Une Ville Contemporaine", "La Ville Radieuse" and "Obus Plans for Algiers" were all examples of an architectural mind that never tired of proposing a new future. While claiming to be both an atheist or agnostic and apolitical, he was the author of the stirring rhetorical aphorism, "Architecture or Revolution". Le Corbusier was definitely well-intentioned in his rhetoric, "My duty, my research is to try to remove today's man from misery and disaster, and to set him in happiness, daily joy and harmony. For this it will be necessary in particular to re-establish, or to establish harmony between man and his environment". His proposals, however, in the hands of architects of lesser imagination are to blame for the curse of modernism in the cities of today. Since, and along with, Le Corbusier we have had Buckminster Fuller's Tetrahedra City and Domed Manhattan Island, Kenzo's Tange's Floating City in Tokyo Harbor, Freidman's Elevated Grid City and Roger Ferri's Pedestrian City and Garden Skyscraper. We have survived Archigram, an assortment of Plug-in Metabolists. Paolo Soleri and his arcologies are still going on. There has been a period of romance with the concepts of "Global-village" and the "Wire-City", a kind of non-physical dream of dispersed density achieved by electronic connectedness. And there have been very serious proposals for space colonization by the adherents of L-5 Society led by Dr O'Neill who made detailed proposals for human settlements contained in large enough space stations to have artificially generated, deliberately random climate. For the avant garde practice and architectural academia literature like Italo Calvino's Invisible Cities and Jorge Luis Borges' stories and project drawings of Scolarci evoke the questions of ephemerality and permanence, clarity and ambiguity and successive unfoldings in the memories of the city. To the Italian architect-theoretician Aldo-Rossi cities are abstracted, independent, autonomous form typologies with their source in the collective memories of a society. To Leon Krier, city is ver-

nacular building plus monumental architecture.

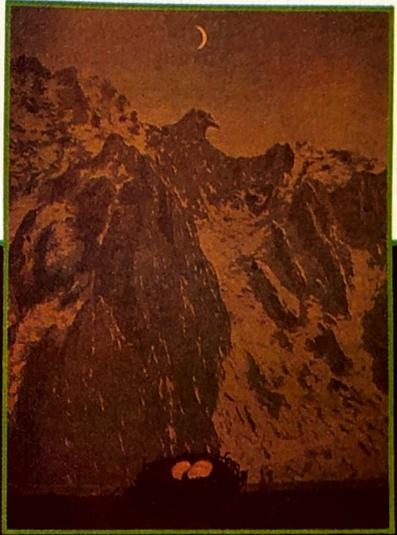
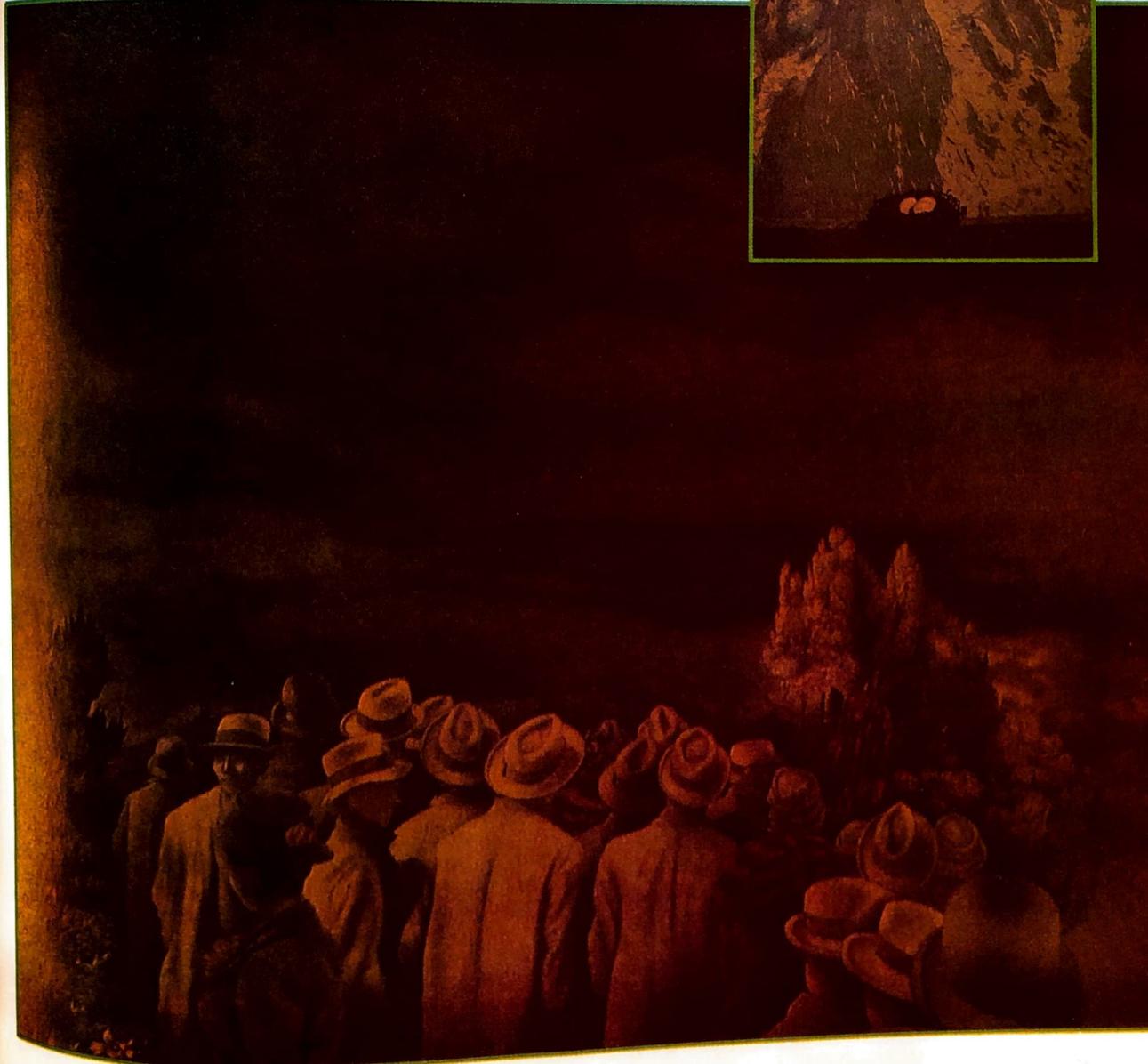
City as literary fantasy or ideological polemic is conducive to heightened sensitivities about the present problem and may also help in clarification of urban values. City literature, especially the utopian kind, as potentially realizable physical proposals, however, remains a difficult problem. As source of ideals, and even ideas, it is very reliable; as blueprint for solutions to built-environmental problems it has failed us much more often than it has helped us.

A dispassionate view of utopianism leads us to accept that this peculiar preoccupation of the concerned philosopher, the committed reformer and the sensitive artist is primarily aimed

at making this world into a better place. Firstly, utopia has been employed as a mask for a shriek of agony at the present misery, as a dream to calm down the anguish of life as it is, and ultimately as a framework and even an instrument of moral, sociopolitical and environmental criticism. Secondly, utopianism has always yielded, within the limitations of the belief structure and the world-view of its authors, a picture of the "ideal individual" and attributes that distinguish a ruler of the ideal state. In this sense, utopias have been repeatedly searching and clarifying the dimensions of perfection in human beings and societies. Thirdly, we find that many utopians see great hope in education and deliberate and willful

bringing-up of a better generation of citizens. Though the philosophies and methodologies of education differ greatly, there is little doubt that the primary raw material in constructing their utopias remains the educated, socially conscious, morally pure, physically strong and law-abiding citizen. And fourthly, as we have discussed earlier, utopians have put great emphasis on the environment, both natural and man-made, and its relationship with the human condition. The notions of civilizational ideals and the ideal

Utopian visions often lead to dead ends: expectations by Richard Oelze, painted 1935; and The Domain of Arnheim by Rene Magritte, painted 1962 (inset)



cities are inseparable in this literature. Land, water, gardens, walls, gateways, and spiritual edifices are frequently employed and their relative importance expressed through their location, unity of purpose manifest through a perfect order, health and ultimately peace and happiness.

The utopian legacy has many blemishes which have become the reason for unkind treatment it receives as an exercise in futility, trips or fancy and mere daydreaming in philosophical or artistic garb. Firstly, it is the pervasive unreality and almost other-worldliness that can fatally hurt the very intentions of a utopia. What may begin as a message of hope and a prescription for perfect bliss turns out to be non-existent and unattainable at least in this world and this life. To a sick society the eloquent talk of an ideal state is at best good bed-side manner of a physician with no real cures and at the worst it is false advertising. Utopia is thus reduced to a realm of ephemeral hope where only the fools, romantics and fanatics dwell, all for their own reasons. Secondly, there has always been an air of finality about utopias. The picture painted is final and perfect. The order is flawless and perpetual. Any deviation is dealt with promptly and severely. There is little indication or recognition of the processes of growth, change, maturation and transformation. This inherent, though perhaps quite unintended, inflexibility in utopian thought has been the major cause of miserable failures in the past and the reason for eventual scepticism about it all. It is ironic that what sets out to promise an ideal state of the society ultimately emerges as inflexible, unforgiving and autocratic. Thirdly, many classical utopias quite clearly prescribe eugenics and thus reinforce the bases for racial and class supremacy. Utopias vacillate among elitist imagery of wise, brave, philosophical and flawless 'guardians' of the state and the blissfully happy, universally motivated, classless communities of industrial workers marching hand-in-hand to the factories. Utopianism is preoccupied with either creating classes or destroying them and in both cases the individual faces an annihilation of selfhood and identity. And fourthly, utopian thought usually remains stretched between history, on which it looks romantically and a futurism about which it is unrealistically wishful. The simultaneous romantic classicism and maverick frontierism cannot coexist. Ultimately there is a break that results in excessive bias. There is either a longing for the good



old times (when all was perfect) or a drive towards creating a brave new world, even beyond the earth, where bliss is a push-button away.

It is striking that the Muslim civilization that has left such a rich legacy of literature has produced no utopias. Al-Farabi's *Madinat-al-Fadilah*, *Fusul-al-madani* and *Siyasat-al-madaniyya* where the influence of Plato's *Republic* and *Laws* is unmistakable perhaps becomes closest to Islamic vision of ideal polity. But when such literature is compared with other writings as those of Ibn Miskawaih, Al-Ghazali, Ibn Khaldun and Ibn Taymiyya, we realize that it is more at home as the literature that is primarily aimed at elucidation of Qur'an, Sunnah and Shariah in the language of socio-political morality. In the esoteric tradition of Islam one does find allegorical literature like Ibn Tuffail's *Hayy bin Yaqzan* (Alive, son of the Awake) which through a philosophical romance presents the position that nothing but an *a priori* inner light is the instrument of the Knowledge of God. Sufis have used metaphorical, idyllic settings to explain the mystic quest and Truth as a state of mind rather than an intellectual realization. Suhrawardi's *Nakujaabad* (a place nowhere), Attar's "Conference of the Birds" and Ibn Arabi's *Comic Mountain with the Tree of Knowledge* are not utopian settings but pure images. The perfectly round *Madinat-al-Salam*, Al-Mansur's Baghdad (8th century A.D.), was planned and built not as an "ideal city" and was thus quite unlike the utopian cities of the Renaissance. The limiting, arbitrary round form started crumbling before the forces of expansion and change in less than a century.

What could explain this absence of utopianism in Islam? Qur'an lays out the socio-ethical nature of human purpose so clearly and points out the transitory but essential journey of life

leading to the eternal hereafter so emphatically that it weakens any motivation for Muslims to dream of perfect city-states on this earth. The entire focus is on the process of Islamic life, its moral disciplines that keep reminding the forgetful man of his relationship to his creator, its social contracts that help create and maintain a community of believers and its focus on knowledge within a moral paradigm that provides the way for *Irfan*, the gnosis of God and His Purpose. Islam replaces intellectual anticipation with continuous struggle against forces of both introspective decay and externally imposed tyranny, disharmony and injustice. Knowing and being what one knows become inseparable in the personality of the Perfect Man: Prophet Muhammad. He is neither mythical nor a literary-philosophical construct. His example is the one with "Highest-Good" and he is eternally alive as a real man in the conscience of Muslims through his Sunnah. Having been granted the highest ascension to Heaven, as Iqbal points out, "He returns to insert himself into the sweep of time with a view to control the forces of history, and thereby to create a fresh world of ideals". And these ideals are not otherworldly nor nihilistic, neither dreamlike as in so much of utopianism. The Islamic ideals are forever nourished by the Qur'an as Muslims turn to it in every age and the timeless Shariah as encapsulation of Islamic social purpose as well as the methodology of discovering specific solutions, will forever keep them alive. "It is the mysterious touch of these ideals that animate and sustain the real. With Islam the ideal and the real are not two opposing forces which cannot be reconciled. The life of the ideal consists, not in a total breach with the real which would tend to shatter the organic wholeness of life into painful oppositions, but in the perpetual endeavour of the ideal to appropriate the real with a view eventually to absorb it, to convert it into itself and to illuminate its whole being".

Muslims need to re-establish their Qur'anic ideals that might have become blurred in their pursuit of secularistic vision of Europe and the West. They will be well advised to listen to Iqbal who had the audacity to talk of the "Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam" in our own epoch. They do not heed utopias that create false hopes, nor can they wait for miraculous rejuvenation engineered by their God. They need ideals, ideas and the will to act. ■