

EDITORIAL

In 1516, Sir Thomas More published his seminal book of social reform entitled *Utopia*. He described this Utopia as an imaginary island, separated from other civilizations, where an ideal commonwealth would allow people to exist under perfect conditions. Here would be found the perfect place or the ideal state of things; with a perfect social and political system.

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Utopia, Ian Todd and Michael Wheeler

Man is in a continual search for perfection. He is constantly looking for a better, more comfortable way of living; a life of happiness, free of social problems, evil, and with the hope of eternal life and prosperity. This idea stems back to man's expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Since then he has always sought a means of returning to this Garden, and is continually trying to find or create an equivalent "earthly paradise."

The idea of an "earthly paradise" has influenced people, architecture and different utopian movements. To some it is simply a comforting idea, to some it is a place in the distant future, and to others it is a place of perfection, to be found at the end of a grand voyage to the far edges of the world. When Christopher Columbus discovered North America, he believed that he had stumbled upon the earthly paradise. He thought that the fresh water currents that he encountered in the Gulf of Paria originated in the four rivers of the Garden of Eden. In addressing Prince John he stated, "God made me

the messenger of the new heaven and the new earth;...and He showed me the spot where to find it." Therefore, the so-called "New World" was considered as more than just a new geographic discovery.

People viewed this new land as a present from heaven; a long awaited discovery of a genuine "earthly paradise;" a land that is the result of messianic hopes and promises, and one that puts faith in youth and in simplicity of the mind and soul. New communities were built by people who flocked to this new continent in the hope of ridding themselves of troubles and hard times that they had in their old country. They left their homeland with the promise and goal of a new beginning, a fresh start, a re-birth that would recall the creation of man.

The nature of utopian movements has changed drastically during the ages depending on the social events of the times. In times of greater social unrest, utopian ideals are particularly cultivated. Social history is reflected in the range of utopias from Plato's philosophical Republic to the architectural projects of visionaries such as Boullée and Ledoux.

An unfortunate problem of many utopian visions is that the ideals and social concerns of the place or state are considered more important than those of the individual habitants. Utopias in the past have arisen not from a better living condition, but from a destruction of an existing living condition. In other words, an *order* was replaced by another with its own set of problems. It is of great importance that ideals evolve from what has happened before and what presently exists. When one tries something totally new it creates new problems which can be worse than those that were present in the first place.

Man is continually evolving through time; always in a quest for *more* and *better* of what he has. This quest is not just for improved living conditions, but also for material goods, wealth, prosperity, and happiness. When new things occur, such as construction, industry, etc., people refer to this as "progress." When a tree gets cut down, or a forest with its streams and wildlife, gets plowed over by bulldozers, we call this "progress," but is it? Is it instead a continual undermining of a natural utopia now hidden by all of man's thwarted efforts to rediscover it? Can utopian movements ever survive or be realized? Examples of the past demonstrate that utopian movements always end in failure. If and when a society based on utopian ideas is "successfully" developed, is it any longer a utopia? How much is utopia a man-made thing? Can there ever be a true architectural form for utopia or an earthly equivalent of the Garden of Eden?

There will always be imaginative and creative people who will constantly search for new ways to solve problems. Sometimes they will be scorned and ridiculed, and at other times they will be praised and honoured. As a cultural expression, architecture is always an attempt to put into built form the continuing experience of man. Hopefully, as long as man's perception of the world continues to develop as a reaction to current events, this expression will continue to evolve.

— Stephen Silverman