The Road to Nowhere?

A Critique and a Re-imagining of Religion in Europe in Sir Thomas More's *Utopia*

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> A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and seeing a better country, sets sail. Progress is the realisation of Utopias.[1]

Thomas More's *Utopia*,[2] a work grounded in the political and religious life of early 16th-century Europe has greatly influenced a host of literature in the 506 years since its publication. My contribution to this project on discourses on religion in Europe as they occur in different media across time focuses, in the first instance, on three maps of Utopia produced in the course of the 16th century. I will argue in a first section that these maps of Utopia are not so much an accurate cartographic representation of the island of Utopia as described in More's second book of *Utopia*, as an entry point into its ambiguous, elusive and ludic intellectual landscape. The second section will

1 The quote is taken from Oscar Wilde's 1891 essay *The Soul of Man under Socialism* (1911, 28–29) and expresses two ideas: one, that the pursuit of a better world is an enduring human aspiration and two, that the notion of what that world should look like is forever evolving.

2 More's Latin title was *Nusquama*, in English »Nowhere«. The full title of the first Latin edition is *Libellus vere aureus nec minus salutaris quam festivus de optimo reip. statu, deq; nova insula Utopia authore clarissimo viro Thoma Moro inclytae civitatis Londinensis cive et vicecomite cura M. Petri Aegidii Antverpiensis, et arte Theodorici Martini Alustensis, Typographi almae Lovaniensium Academiae nunc primum accuratissime editus. Cum gratis et privilegio*. The title *Utopia* was used in November 1516 in a letter to Erasmus announcing its publication in Louvain (Baker-Smith 2012, xvi).

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explore the religious landscape of More's *Utopia*, while a third section will examine how this landscape was shifting through the process of translations of the work in a number of European countries.

As is well-known, More coined the term »utopia« in 1516 and made it famous as a book title. The etymology of the word comes from the Greek *ou-topos* meaning »no place«, a pun on *eu-topos*, »good place«, introducing an ambiguity at the outset: was More proposing a blueprint of an ideal society or was he satirising the self-interest, greed and military exploits of the hereditary monarchies of his time? Is it a serious treatise or is it a joke? Can it be both, as some scholars have suggested?[3] This »slippery text«[4] makes it nearly impossible to determine its authorial intent with any degree of certainty. Indeed, More's persona was also paradoxical and has given rise to many unresolved questions: was he a »medieval nationalist« or a »modern reformist«?[5] In other words, was *Utopia* a text addressed to fellow Catholics in a call to reform? Furthermore, what are we to make of his commitment to the humanism flourishing in Europe in the early 16th century and of his statement on religious tolerance when we know of his zeal in persecuting Protestants?

So it is with great caution that we approach this most »mischievous« of books, as the Victorian critic John Ruskin so aptly said.[6] While More's depiction of a perfect society defined by the equality between its citizens, the abolition of property, its lack of money and what appears at first to be a form of communism has fired the imagination of social and political writers for centuries, it is More's depiction of a society based on religious tolerance which is going to be our focus in this article. In fact, More himself is a Christian humanist and it can be safely said that the idea of a Christian Europe, and whether it is ever possible to achieve it, lies at the heart of *Utopia*.[7]

I will approach More's ideas of religion in Europe in *Utopia* through theory of space, drawing on the three categories delineated by Soja's analysis of space as a physical, conceptual and experienced entity.[8] Therefore, the con-

3 See Baker-Smith 2012, xv, following Marin 1993, 411–417.

4 Baker-Smith 2012, xix.

5 Baker-Smith 2012, xviii.

6 Ruskin 1909, 12.

7 Solz 1957, is to my knowledge the only extended commentary on the religion of the Utopians. See also Fenlon 1975, 125, and Kessler 2002.

8 Soja (1996, 11) speaks of a trialectics of spatiality. The three spaces he distinguishes and analyses are spatiality, historicality and sociality.

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cept of first (physical) space is used to approach selected maps which have accompanied the text of *Utopia*. The concept of second (conceptual) space leads the examination of *Utopia* in its classical and humanist contexts and debates on religious toleration in More's own time. Finally, the concept of third (experienced) space is applied to understand the symbolic significance of *Utopia* through its transmission in a number of translations throughout Europe.

1. First space: The physical space of the maps of *Utopia*

Since Utopia is an imagined island, its maps can be considered as a first space: they are the physical representations of Utopia. They give details about the dimensions of the island, the position of the cities and the harbour, and the general accessibility (or non-accessibility) of the island of Utopia.

Utopia's second book opens with a description of the physical features of the island:

> At the central point where it is widest the island of the Utopians extends out for two hundred miles, and nowhere does it get much narrower except where it tapers at the two ends. These ends, as if they enclosed a circle five hundred miles in circumference, give to the island the appearance of a crescent moon, the horns of which are some eleven miles apart. The sea flows between these into a huge bay protected from the wind by the encircling land, which is mostly not rough but calm, like a huge lake.[9]

More's readers would have recognised some elements of the description of the island of Utopia as a thin disguise for Henry VIII's England, when England and Wales comprised 53 counties plus London, making it 54 city-states. Furthermore, Utopia's fifteen-mile channel is suggestive of the English Channel.[10] However, other features, for instance the crescent shape of the island, have no direct correspondence to England's territory. It has also been argued that the description might refer to European cities.[11]

9 More 2012, 57.

10 For a full description of the maps and a detailed analysis see Bishop 2005; Goodey 1970, 18–23.

11 According to Surtz 1952, 165, the map of the island both represents England (54 cities) and European cities. See also Yoran 2010, 165; Goodey 1970.

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There have been many attempts to map out the island of Utopia, starting with the anonymous map which accompanies More's first publication of *Utopia* in 1516, but I will confine myself to three maps produced in the course of the 16th century: the anonymous map of the first edition from 1516, the map by Ambrosius Holbein from the edition of 1518 published by Froben in Basel, and the *Map of Utopia*, a copper engraving by Abraham Ortelius (1595).

Maps can be considered »parergon«, or »paratext«,[12] a term which includes further aspects of a book beside the main, original text. Here, they function as a »threshold«, an entry point into the world evoked by More's *Utopia*.

The first map of the island of Utopia published in 1516 is a simple anonymous woodcut which is entitled *VTOPIAE INSULAE FIGURA* and corresponds only schematically with the text (fig. 1). A few features may be noted: it has no indication of orientation nor scale and neither the lands beyond the island nor the body of water are named. It is also clear that there are very few landmarks, falling short of the textual account of Utopia's 54 cities. For our discussion it is significant that the monuments marked on the map have spires but none bear a Christian symbol.

The placement of a map at the beginning of More's first edition of *Utopia* plays an important role in that it suggests to his readers that it is a »real« place, especially when read in conjunction with Hythloday's claim to have accompanied Amerigo Vespucci on three of his journeys to America.[13] According to Marina Leslie, maps were quite rare at the time of the publication of More's *Utopia*, and had close antecedents in the tradition of *mappa mundi* and Italian navigation maps.[14] However, the closest inspiration may come from the sketches and plans used in judicial disputes over property and land which More had seen and used in the course of his work as a lawyer.[15]

In the third edition of Utopia from 1518, a new map was printed, designed by Ambrosius Holbein with the title: *VTOPIAE INSULAE TABULA*.[16] Close examination shows that it is a mirror image of the map of 1516 but with some significant differences (fig. 2).[17] In the foreground are three men, Hythloday

12 The term »paratext« as »threshold« is coined by the literary critic Genette 1997.

13 More 2012, 25.

14 Leslie 1998, 33.

15 Leslie 1998, 37.

16 This print by Johann Froben was published in Basel alongside some of Erasmus's and More's works in 1518.

17 Bishop 2005, see also Leslie 1998, 41.

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speaking with (probably) More in the left-hand corner and the figure of a soldier (Gilles?) in the right-hand corner, thus continuing to mix the real and the unreal. The ships sail away from the island and converge towards the two characters in the bottom left corner. While Holbein retains the captions from the first map, the buildings are now Germanic in character and close examination shows a tiny cross on top of two buildings.[18]

It is worthy of comment that Holbein's 1518 map includes a number of labels. The traveller, »Hythloday« (»purveyor of nonsense«), speaks to More (»the fool«) of a river, »Anyder« (»waterless«), running through the island of »Utopia« (»nowhere« or »the good place«), whose main city is called »Amaurot« (»spectral« city or »shadowy« city or »dim« city).[19] The latter city holds a central position in Holbein's map despite More's comment that all cities are alike. Two further captions refer to the source and the mouth of the river Anyder reversing their connection to the picture.[20] The choice of the names adopted by More to describe his interlocutor and the island with its features further deepens the sense of an unattainable world. Also striking are two garlands hanging from the top corners,[21] perhaps, as Leslie suggests, to emphasise the distance between Europe and Utopia and to introduce a sense of »dislocation«: Utopia is both close and distant, real and unreal.[22]

A final remark will highlight the slippery character of the two maps we have discussed. The broad shape of the first map (fig. 1) shows the outline of a human skull; this was refined by Holbein in 1518 to rework the island's shape more clearly as a skull with the ship representing the teeth (fig. 2). The departure from a realistic depiction of the island may point the way to metaphorical meanings. If this is the case, it is possible to identify the map as a »visual pun«, a *memento mori* (»remember death« or, in this context,»remember More«[23]), possibly suggesting that Utopia is the product of man's

18 Leslie 1998, 55, suggests that the island drawn by Holbein has already been »christianised«.

19 Goodey 1970, 25–28.

20 Leslie 1998, 40.

21 The garlands might also indicate the horned shape of the crescent moon, evoking the island's textual description. With thanks to my colleague Sean Ryan for this suggestion.

22 Leslie 1998, 45.

23 *Mori* means both »death« and »More«. More and Erasmus were known for their puns as Erasmus's previously published *Encomium moriae* (»In Praise of Folly« or »In Praise of More«) demonstrates. For a critical edition in English see e. g. Screech 1988.

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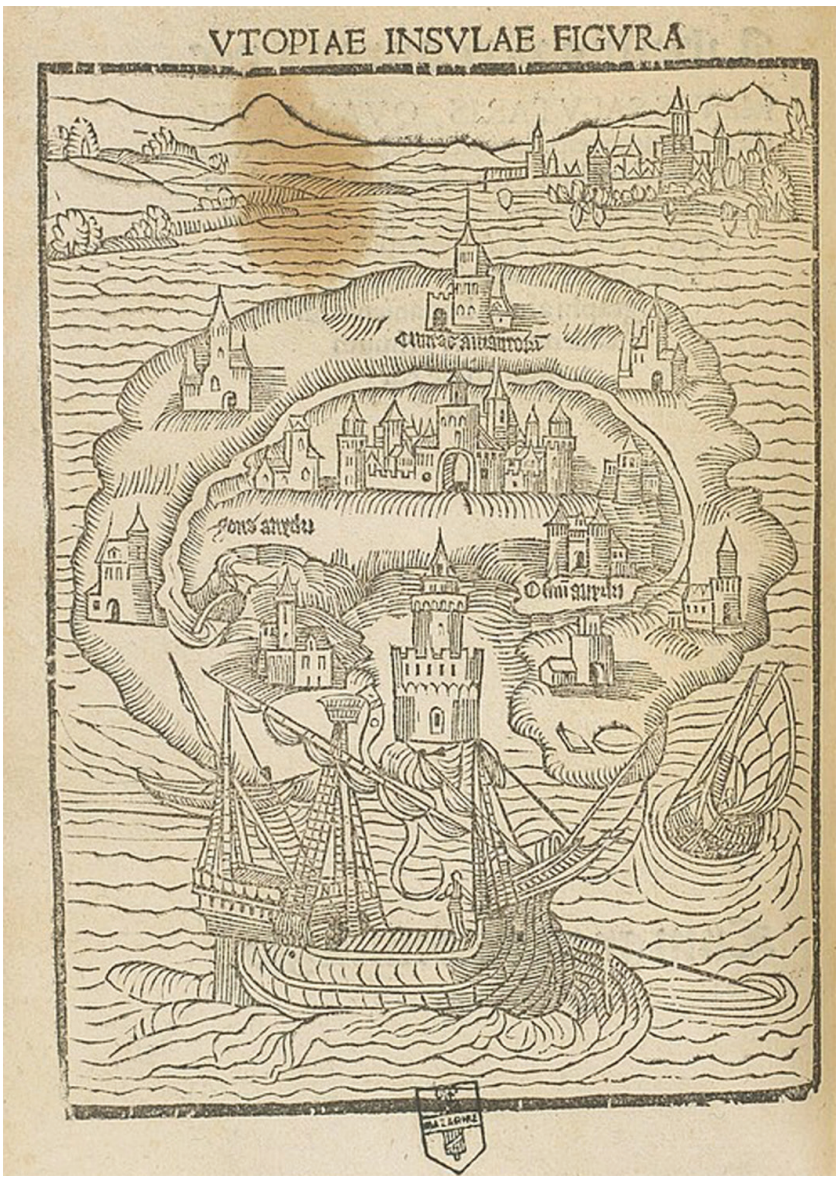

Fig. 1: Anonymous map of the 1516 edition of Thomas More's *Utopia*.[24]

24 Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/ed/Thomas_More_Utopia_1516_VTOPIAE_INSVLAE_FIGVRA_%28Biblioth%C3%A8que_Mazarine%29.jpg (accessed June 16, 2022).

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Fig. 2: Map of Utopia by Ambrosius Holbein in the edition of 1518 by Froben in Basel. It is printed on page 16 of the book entitled *De optimo reip. statu deque nova insula Utopia libellus vere aureus, nec minus salutaris quam festivus, clarissimi disertissimique viri Thomae Mori inclytae civitatis Londinensis civis & vicecomitis. Epigrammata clarissimi disertissimique viri Thomae Mori, pleraque e Graecis versa*. Epigrammata/Des. Erasmi Roterodami.[25]

25 Source: https://www.e-rara.ch/bau_1/content/zoom/9931536 (accessed June 16, 2022).

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mortal mind and not of God's eternal mind. The idea of the map as *memento mori* could also be a hint that the book contains ideas which could lead to persecution and death.[26]

The third map (fig. 3), designed by Abraham Ortelius in the latter part of the 16th century, introduces a radically different shape as well as a number of new features, omitting the crescent shape of the island but including the 54 cities described by More. His humorous design adds his own whimsical names for the towns not titled by More.

To sum up, it is striking that none of the three maps from 1516, 1518 and 1595 illustrates all the details set out in Hythloday's description of the island: in the words of Goodey, »Utopia was not written as geography«,[27] it is a »›Nowhere‹ that cannot be mapped.«[28] Both the physical description of the island of Utopia and the drawing-up of the maps highlight inherent tensions and contradictions undermining the reality of the island: representations of the island of Utopia through maps constitute a threshold and can function as a rhetorical device to examine the conceptual world of religion which lies behind it.

2. Second space: The conceptual world behind the maps of Utopia

Second space is a concept that encompasses the mental dimensions of space. The conceptual world behind More's *Utopia* is complex, and whether one sees it as contradictory or dialectical, it remains true that it is a multi-layered book which does not easily lend itself to reductionism. In this section, I focus on the conceptual world of the religious ideas expressed in the second book of *Utopia* and on the debates on the place of religion in society in the humanist context within which More's *Utopia* historically belongs. While More's *Utopia* reflects the general social and political situation that he experienced in England and in particular in London, his interest in religion specifically is paramount. As a Christian humanist one of the key questions for

26 It was banned by the Catholic Church. See below the section on the transmission of the book in Spain.

27 Goodey 1970, 18.

28 Goodey 1970, 21.

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Fig. 3: Abraham Ortelius, *Map of Utopia*, copper engraving, 380 × 475 mm, 1595, Plantin-Moretus-Museum, Antwerp. The map follows contemporary geographical conventions.[29]

him is whether a political state can be Christian and to what extent Christian virtues can be exercised in the world of politics. More's commitment to a *res publica christiana*, a Christian state, is crucial and underlies his political discourse.

As many scholars have noted, there are various intellectual influences behind More's religious world in *Utopia*, from Plato's *Republic*, Aristotle's *Politics*, Augustine's *On the Happy Life* and *City of God*, to Thomas Aquinas's *Commentary on Aristotle's Politics*.[30] Another important influence are the works of Lucian of Samosata which More and Erasmus had translated which showed how the playful use of satire, irony, puns as well as the evo-

29 Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kaart_van_Utopia_(1595-96_koper gravure)_Abraham_Ortelius_KBS_Brafa_2019.jpg (accessed June 16, 2022).

30 See Fenlon 1975, 119. Plato 2007; Aristotle 2000; Augustine 1939 and 2003; Thomas Aquinas 2007.

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cation of imaginary worlds could be used in pursuit of civic and religious critique.[31] In adopting the ancient genre of »paradoxography«,[32] which dates back to the age of Homer and early Hellenistic writers, More conveys a sense that not all is what it seems, which may function as a key to reading *Utopia*'s second book and the section on the religion of the Utopians in particular.

While Locke's *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689) constitutes a landmark in the history of religious toleration,[33] More is in fact the first thinker in the western world to offer a defence of religious freedom on both political and religious grounds. Many of the ideas regarding the exercise of religion in the fictional setting of *Utopia* have their roots in the Christian humanism of More's time, and in particular in his relationship with Erasmus: More's friendship and collaboration with Erasmus is well documented.[34] Indeed, Erasmus's P*raise to Folly* is dedicated to More and formulates questions about the political order as well as a reconsideration of the status of Christianity.[35] In *Utopia*, More continues to engage with Erasmus's ideas about the reforming and upholding of a European Christian society, »the Humanist Republic of Letters«.[36] In some way it can be said that *Utopia* embodies and supplements the Erasmian reformist religious programme.[37] Even though Utopian society is not Christian by the time Hythloday arrives there, this does not mean that it does not model Erasmian humanistic values: in Utopia, religion is a »social institution«[38] contributing to maintaining equality among people while promoting the good and happiness of the many. More endorsed Erasmus's belief that salvation depends on virtuous conduct rather than beliefs in overly complex theological systems.[39]

Features of the religion of the Utopians as described by Hythloday in his conversation with More, include plurality of religions and the right for every-

31 Baker-Smith 2012, xii–xiii.

32 Paradoxographies are stories about faraway, isolated places, most often islands, where authors envision contained environments within which they can construct exemplary societies, both good and bad. The history of this genre is firmly intertwined with that of the genre of utopian literature.

33 For a critical edition in English see Walters 2013.

34 See Kessler 2002; Yoran 2010 and Solz 1957.

35 See above footnote 25.

36 Yoran 2010, 1.

37 Yoran 2010, 13.

38 Yoran 2010, 98.

39 Kessler 2002, 216. This humanist view is a reaction against medieval scholasticism.

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one to hold their faith while respecting each other's beliefs.[40] The rationale for this is the state in which their King Utopus had found Abraxas, the original name of the island: the constant squabbling of the people made them politically vulnerable and enabled Utopus to take control. As a result, he established religious toleration as a means to uphold social order: the new statutes respected »the rights of conscience« and »prohibited coercion in matters of faith.«[41] Hythloday shows how religious freedom promotes civic peace. »Pride« is the main obstacle to peace: it produces theological certainty, and leads to zealotry, intolerance and violence. The only tenets of faith held by everyone are the belief in a supreme being,[42] the immortality of the soul and belief in the afterlife, including the belief in rewards and punishment since these promote a virtuous life.[43] The priesthood holds a position of great power, but they are few in number.[44] Their main responsibility is to oversee the education of the people.

Hythloday introduces Christianity among the Utopians: he mentions biblical passages citing Christ as promoting communal life and the sharing of goods. Interesting is the inclusion of an example of a Utopian, converted to Christianity, who then turns into a zealot and disrupts the civil order. Despite this example of disruptive religion, the commonwealth depicted by Hythloday possesses Christian characteristics: the opportunity for a contemplative or active life in service to others, the communal bond, and the strong discouragement of personal vice all reflect aspects of the monastic life that More embraced prior to his marriage. In addition, the contempt for gold and jewels, respect for humility, meekness, patience and dignity in labour can all be classified as ideal Christian concepts. While at first glance this looks like an ideal society, radical uniformity and the lack of individuality is disturbing. The static, totalitarian social order is governed by total control and supervision of every aspect of life with no room for dialectical engagement.[45] What started as a humanist venture ends in an »anti-humanist« society.

40 Kessler 2002, 207.

41 More 2012, 121.

42 Solz 1957, 49. The name of the deity is Mithras (More 2012, 107) although the Utopians may disagree as to his identity. They also believe in providence.

43 More 2012, 109–111. Immortality of the soul is a tenet of faith re-affirmed by the Lateran Council in 1513.

44 More 2012, 114; both men and women can become priests.

45 For a review of the »dark side« of *Utopia* and the main interpretative positions held by recent scholarship and a proposal see Yoran 2010, 166–168 and 171–185.

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All these features of religion in Utopia may be seen through the lens of the humanist response to the corruption of religious leaders and to the rise of secularism with its emphasis on material prosperity and capitalism.[46] The emphasis on learning, asceticism and action (as opposed to dogma) also reflects the humanistic values of the time. The question as to whether More designed Utopian religious freedom as a model for Christians in Europe has been much debated. Within *Utopia* his position was ambiguous: at the end of the chapter on the religion of the Utopians, Hythloday declares that »not a few of the practices which arose from Utopian laws and customs were patently absurd.«[47] More's position on religious toleration[48] was challenged by the events leading to the Reformation as witnessed by his public persecution of the nascent Protestant faith and his eventual demise under Henry VIII in 1535.

3. Third space: The social space of *Utopia* in European translations

Through the lens of third space as experience, I focus now on the lived experience of the religious conceptual world of More's *Utopia* expressed through its various translations in Europe. From the outset *Utopia* was a markedly cosmopolitan text, and one could think of it as »England's best-seller in Renaissance Europe.«[49] The multiplicity of translations of More's *Utopia* by humanists in a range of vernacular European languages including English, Italian, French, German, Dutch and Spanish is a testimony to its enduring appeal. A number of humanists like Ralph Robinson, Guillaume Budé, Francesco Sansovino, Hieronymus van Busleyden all embraced *Utopia* and

46 Kessler 2002, 213.

47 More 2012, 122.

48 It is important to note here that 16th-century ideas of religious toleration are markedly different from a 21st-century context; see Pepperney 2009, ii; see More's statement: »the clergy doth no wrong in leuing heretykes to the seculer hand […] that prynces be bounded to punyshe heretykes, and that the burnynge of heretykes […] yt is well done« (cited in Pepperney 2009, 48). More limits toleration to those he considers to be »heretykes« and associates them with fanatics.

49 Fenlon 1975, 115.

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promoted its ideas, albeit in a continuing work of re-contextualisation and re-conceptualisation.[50]

The history of the translations of More's *Utopia* has been widely discussed, so I will only comment here on how the translations have impacted the perception of religious toleration in the respective European contexts of each translation. Most vernacular translations of More's *Utopia* – which was originally published in Latin – in Europe comprise the second book only, which includes the chapter *Of the Religions of the Utopians*. Leaving out the first book allows for a de-contextualisation from the English context and a re-actualisation and a re-contextualisation in a diversity of European political, social and religious situations without any ludic overtones; it also allows the various audiences to concentrate on practical advice pertinent to their context.

I shall focus here on three trends illustrated in the translations of *Utopia* in various European countries to demonstrate that the ambiguity and instability of More's text have been marshalled through the translations to clearly support political and religious factions in their respective contexts. Firstly, *Utopia*'s translations have been used in support of the Catholic Church by introducing strategic revisions of the text. In England, for instance, Ralph Robinson's second translation of *Utopia* in 1556 alters the two marginal notes in the original Latin text of the chapter *Of the Religions in Utopia* relating to the excessive number of priests to one single sentence: »the majestie and preeminence of priestes«.[51] In doing so he repurposes his earlier translation to fit in with the religious landscape of the Catholic Queen Mary in 1556.[52] In Italy, Francesco Sansovino's paraphrase of *Utopia* from 1561 opens with the praise of More's martyrdom and offers support for the Counter-Reformation.[53] The French translation of the second book by Gabriel Chappuys,[54]

50 Surtz 1952, 165.

51 Cave 2008, 97.

52 The subsequent change to the Protestant Elizabethan regime after the death of Queen Mary sees More's demonisation and it is not until the end of Elizabeth I's reign that Robinson's translation is reprinted. There will be yet another reprint under the Stuarts in 1598, thus exemplifying its enduring power. See Cave 2008, 96.

53 Sansovino's paraphrasis of *Utopia*'s second book in 1561 was reprinted in 1567, 1578 and 1607. It re-contextualises *Utopia* by placing it in his treatise on different forms of government, *Del governo de regni et delle republiche antiche et moderne*. In such a context *Utopia* can be read as an ideal but fictional model for best governance where theological debates have outlived their usefulness.

54 Chappuys 1585.

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published in Paris in 1585, also adapts and reinvents *Utopia*'s message to fit its religious agenda to the polemics of the political and religious context of his day in order to present Henry III as a defender of the Catholic faith against heretical innovations.[55] Chappuys's version cuts down the chapter on the religions of the Utopians by 20 lines thus reducing the plurality of religions described in More's Utopia to one only.[56] Another example of this first strategy, of support for the Catholic Church, can be found in the Spanish translation of 1637 by Geronimo Antonio de Medinilla i Porres, a government official from Córdoba.[57] He takes away the paradoxical elements of the text to present Utopia as a perfect model of governance and »normalises« (and censures) More's account of the variety of religions in Utopia by modifying the relevant passage to include the variety of practices and monastic orders within the Catholic Church.[58]

Secondly, *Utopia*'s translations have been used to support a reformist agenda: Robinson's first translation of 1551 for instance was dedicated to William Cecil, one of the secretaries to the Protestant King Edward VI.[59] The first Italian translation of 1548 by Ortensio Lando, published by Anton Francesco Doni, also advocates and supports a »reformist« agenda.[60] It expresses the »genuine evangelical spirit where the radical foolishness of Christ outdoes ciceronian stoicism.«[61]

However, the most developed support of a reformist agenda arises from the emergence of *Utopia* in the translation of 1630 in the Calvinist Northern United Provinces of the Low Countries. The addition of a short title, *To the Christian Reader Who Is Eager for Knowledge*, heading a new preface illus-

55 The book was entitled *De la republique d'Utopie* and was part of the book *L'estat, description et gouvernement des royaumes et republiques du monde*. For more details on this translation into French see Hosington 1984, 118, 131–133.

56 See Sellevold 2008, 80.

57 Medinilla y Porres 1637.

58 Davenport/Cabanillas Cárdenas 2008, 119.

59 Robinson 1551.

60 More's Utopia generated a lot of interest in Italy. The translation by Lando of 1548 was printed in Venice, the European capital of printing in early modern times, without the names of the publisher and translator, and with the title *La republica nuovamente ritrovata, del governo dell'isola Eutopia, nella qual si vede de nuovi modi di governare Stati, reggier Popoli, dar leggi a i senatori, con molta profondita di sapienza, storia non meno utile che necessaria. Opera di Thomaso Moro cittadino di Londra*. See Grendler 1965, 491.

61 Gjerpe 2008, 55.

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trates this re-contextualisation.[62] The content and style of the preface, with its quotations of Old Testament texts, its biblical phrasing, its admonishment to subject oneself to the service of God and its dire warnings of apocalyptic retribution on those nations who do not follow such guidelines, culminating in a call to prayer, all firmly direct the reader towards a Christian reformist reading. Religious toleration was affirmed here as other Protestant groups were permitted freedom of worship and Catholics were tolerated.[63]

Thirdly, some translations support a moderate agenda, as the German translation of 1524[64] and the English translation of 1685 show.[65] The former is authored by Claude Chansonette and published in Basel. Its new dedication to the town councillors of Basel is written in support of the moderate party: by highlighting the »fridsamme einhelligkeit burgerlicher bywonung«, which stands for »the peaceful unity among the citizens living together«,[66] it clearly functions as a »warning«[67] in the face of confessional strife.[68] Further comparisons between the government of Basel and that of Utopia highlight the moderate values of both models of governance and »their distaste for extreme reform.«[69]

To sum up, through its multiple translations, »*Utopia* becomes a package of transportable goods«[70] whose meaning depends on the vehicles by which they are transported, and the situation into which they are transferred. *Utopia*'s popularity in Europe and its translations into vernacular languages shows a great dynamism: it is »a text constantly rewinding its spring, renewing its forces as it passes from one cultural moment to the next.«[71] The adaptability of More's *Utopia* to changing political and religious fortunes enabled politicians to seek new solutions and new models to the complex question of good governance and, not least, the role of religion in such projects of government.

62 Beeck 1630, 1.
63 Spaans/Cave 2008, 106. It may be noted here that despite affirming religious toleration only Calvinists could obtain positions of power.
64 Chansonette 1524.
65 Burnet 1685.
66 Kruke Salberg 2008, 35.
67 Kruke Salberg 2008, 36.
68 Kruke Salberg 2008, 35.
69 Kruke Salberg 2008, 37. According to Kruke Salberg, the prefatory letter refers to the Predigtmandat of 1523 which admonishes preachers to »follow the Gospel«.
70 Boutcher 2008, 131.
71 Cave 2008, 13.

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4. Concluding thoughts

More's *Utopia* heralded centuries of dynamic re-interpretation and re-shaping, and most importantly re-contextualisation and re-appropriation, thus giving rise to a rich literary tradition of utopian, dystopian and counter-utopian works. As Carla Danani has pointed out, More's *Utopia* allows us an external glance on our reality.[72] The 16th century was a time of profound social, political and religious changes, a time when the normativity of the feudal system was called into question. In such times it may be that *Utopia*'s main task, in response to these shifting multiple contexts, was to deconstruct itself and in so doing, to offer a horizon to imagine the good place which is not there, yet performs reality.[73]

Today, living in a post-modern world where the grand narrative of western religion is called into question, we need Thomas More's *Utopia* more than ever. Some of the most impressive fictional narratives of the 20th century referencing *Utopia* might be Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia*, a novel which disrupts the utopian future, and Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, which imagines a post-apocalyptic, genetically engineered new race, pacifist and tolerant, a perfect mirror to the inhabitants of Thomas More's *Utopia*.[74] If *Utopia*'s ontological disclosure functions as interference, it allows new possibilities and continues to inspire, half a millennium after More shared it with the world. Now disengaged from its original context, the principle outlined in the chapter on the religions of the Utopians that »no one should suffer for religion« has become a hallmark of free societies in Europe and elsewhere.[75]

72 Danani 2022, 2.
73 Danani 2022.
74 Le Guin 1974; Atwood 2003.
75 More 2012, 109.

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