

**RELIGION AND UTOPIAN THINKING
AMONG THE MUSLIMS OF
SOUTHEAST ASIA**

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According to Karl Mannheim, the thinking of human groups falls basically under two categories, namely *ideology* and *utopia*. The concept of *ideology* 'reflects the one discovery which emerged from political conflict, namely, that ruling groups can in their thinking become so intensively interest-bound to a situation that they are simply no longer able to see certain facts which would undermine their sense of domination'. There is implicit in the word *ideology* the insight that 'in certain situations the collective unconscious of certain groups obscures the real condition of society both to itself and to others and thereby stabilizes it.'¹

The concept of *utopian thinking* on the other hand reflects the insight that in political struggle 'certain oppressed groups are intellectually so strongly interested in the destruction and transformation of a given condition of society that they unwittingly see only those elements in the situation which tend to negate it. Their thinking is incapable of correctly diagnosing an existing condition of society. They are not at all concerned with what really exists; rather in their thinking they already seek to change the situation that exists. Their thought is never a diagnosis of the situation; it can be used only as a direction for action.' In the utopian mentality 'the collective unconscious, guided by wishful representation and the will to action, hides certain aspects of reality. It turns its

¹ See Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1976, p. 36.

back on everything which would shake its belief or paralyse its desire to change things.’²

This paper attempts to portray *utopian thinking* among Muslims of Southeast Asia. Such thinking is reflected among Muslims who are basically critical of the existing social order and disapprove of it, though more often than not they are not clear as to what they are objecting to or disapprove of. This thinking may be reflected among isolated individuals or in the outlook of organised social groups and can be said to be one of the integral aspects of the religious orientation of Muslims in Southeast Asia. It can be said that it is *utopian thinking* which lends a millenarian, populist, eschatological and orthodox character to the religious life of many Muslims in Southeast Asia and beyond. It is the thinking which underlies the demands for the establishment of the Islamic states and the implementation of Islamic laws. It is influential enough to influence governments to establish the so-called ‘Islamic’ institutions offering ‘Islamic banking’, ‘Islamic insurance’ or ‘Islamic education’ or at least to appear as accommodating and appeasing in its pronouncements and formulation of policies and programmes.

We have to justify our classification of the style of thought being studied as *utopian thinking* as defined in the above. We have classified it as such based on its following observable features: a) the single minded rejection and denial of the existing order, b) the posing of a radically different alternative to the existing order, c) the manner in which it obscures the understanding of certain aspects of

² Ibid, p.36

the present realities which challenge their ideas or undermine their demands for change and d) its formulation of ideas is more for the purpose of mobilisation and action towards the change they desire, and not for the objective diagnosis or understanding of present realities and e) it is populist rather than intellectual in character in terms of ideas and style of thought, although it may have intellectual trappings and external features.

There are various recurring ideas in the utopian type of religious thinking among the Muslims of Southeast Asia. These include the following: a) *Islam as Ad-Din* or *The Religion*, b) the threat of secularism, c) the image of the West in crisis, d) the limitation of man, e) the hierarchy of knowledge, f) the perfectibility of the past, f) the pursuit of the new millennium, and g) the denial of the reality of social dimension. Between these elements, we can identify a rather systematised and organised mode or style of thought attributable to particular social groups in Malay society.

This kind of utopian thinking is to be distinguished from the traditionalistic religious consciousness of the past where the interpretation of Islam and related issues is still very much part of a theology dominated or monopolised by the religious elite. Such religious consciousness pertained to daily religious practices and observances in daily lives. By and large it was more preoccupied with personal ethical guidance and ritualistic propriety where the concern is to live a proper and blessed life in accordance with the requirements of the religion of Islam.

Utopian thinking of the religious kind however is markedly different in the sense it is by no means confined to or monopolised by the theologians and religious elite but is much more broad-based, with the supports of people from all walks of life, be it factory workers, labourers, literatis, artists, undergraduates, polytechnic students, academics, school teachers, civil servants, businessmen, petty traders, professionals, politicians or housewives. Another distinguishing trait of the Islamic type of utopian thinking is that it is social and political in character, and shows elements characteristics of social movements. Another major difference between traditionalistic religious thought and utopian thinking is that the later reflects more conscious intellectual and political formulation. In other words utopian thinking is much more systematised and clearly formed as a distinctive style of thought.

Perhaps the most central and potent motif in utopian thinking in terms of representing its group situation is the idea that *Islam is Ad-Din, The Religion*. Utopians maintain that Islam is not to be likened to any other religion in the world. It is perfect and absolute, all embracing and total in its guidance for mankind. The characteristic formulation of this motif runs as follows: 'Islam is not a religion in the common, distorted meaning of the word, confining itself to the private life of man. It is a complete way of life, catering for all the fields of human existence. Islam provides guidance for all walks of life-individual and social, material and moral, economic and political, legal and cultural, national and international'. It is the fundamental position of utopians that Islam is not merely a religion but much more: 'a total and unified way of life, both religious and secular; it is a set of belief and a way of worship; it is a vast and integrated system

of law; it is a culture and a civilization; it is an economic system and a way of doing business; it is a *polity* and a method of *governance*; it is a special sort of society and a way of running a family; it prescribes for inheritance and divorce, dress and etiquette, food and personal hygiene. It is a spiritual and human totality, *this-worldly* and *other-worldly*'.³

The potency of the idea of *Islam as Ad-Din* in its utopian function lies exactly in its absoluteness or the totality of its claim. In claiming perfectibility and comprehensiveness for its own theoretical and intellectual position, utopians are in a position to exclude all other ideas which are not compatible with its own ideas and interests. When a system is perceived to be all-inclusive and all embracing, there could be no room for anything else. This is particularly so when that totality and completeness are accompanied by a sense of holiness or sacredness as in the case of system of ideas resting on religious symbolism. The process of rejecting, discrediting and negating other rival ideas which threaten the intellectual and social position of the group concerned become imbued with the vehemence, intolerance and authoritarianism often observed in extremist religious groups.

The above explains many of the responses of utopian Muslims to contemporary development and issues. For instance utopians are indifferent to the ideological debate taking place in modern history, say between capitalism, socialism, totalitarianism, democracy and various other economic, social and political systems. A typical response of utopian thinking would be to brush aside the whole dialogue and intellectual discourse taking place by merely declaring

³ See Jansen, GH, *Militant Islam*, Pan Books Ltd, London, 1979, p.17.

that 'Islam is not capitalism, socialism, democracy, humanism or for that matter any other *isms*; Islam is Islam and *Ad-Din*'. Thus through a single argument and a convenient negating device, utopians could ensure the integrity of their own system of thought and secure it against the encroachment of rival or competing ideas. Under the sanctity of religion, the claim of totality and completeness of one's own thought- model can easily become the justification for intellectual and philosophical self-sufficiency and self-atrophy.

While it is true that the teachings of Islam cover all aspects of life in terms of broad principles and guidelines, and that in its history Islam had evolved a very complex and comprehensive civilization, the claim of totality and absoluteness by utopian thinking is of another category altogether. It does not refer or relate to an objective evaluation of the content of the civilisation in a formal or intellectual way, but is merely an intellectual tool and a political weapon for undermining the credibility of rival social groups and their competing styles of thought. Indeed to a great extent, utopian thinking of the religious type in Southeast Asia arrives at many of its major theoretical positions not through the intellectual process but more through emotional identification and a sense of loyalty to the symbols of the religion of Islam. Hence the belief in the perfectibility of *Islam as Ad-Din* is not so much the product of objective assessment of Islamic civilisation or intellectual culture, mistaken or otherwise, but more in the nature of group faith and the rallying call of the creed. It can be justifiably said to function as the group's *myth* or *credo*.

There are many grounds why we consider the idea of *Islam as Ad-Din* as formulated by utopian thinking in Southeast Asia more as an idea which is socially, politically and existentially determined (through group dynamics and interests) rather than an objective intellectual position. Firstly the advocates and the supporters of the idea are not of the intellectual type. Both advocates and supporters alike do not champion or uphold the idea on rational or intellectual ground. In fact very often utopians scorned upon intellectual scrutiny of *Islam as Ad-Din*. Many of them are not sufficiently knowledgeable about Islamic history, intellectual culture and civilisation to be in a position to defend their position intellectually if they want to.

Secondly, the social, political and existential nature of their position, rather than intellectual, is reflected in their attitudes towards intellectual culture itself. Utopians scorn upon intellectual inquiry of their position and do not aspire to an intellectual defence of their ideas not because they lack intellectual capacity. It is not the case that utopians feel a sense of inadequacy on the intellectual plane, forcing them to be defensive in the face of intellectual challenge. Muslim utopians do not miss or lament the lack of intellectual strength for in fact they do not even value it. To them intellectuality is the preoccupation of the wayward and misguided humanity and the utopians adjudge it such from the higher ground of religious sanctity and spirituality. In other words, utopian thinking does not avail itself of intellectual culture to promote or defend its position, does not submit itself to the intellectual scrutiny of its ideas by opponents, and in fact rejects the intellect and intellectual value itself, pronouncing it as inferior. Its typical rebuttal of intellectual challenge to their ideas is often not in terms of an intellectual

response but in moral or religious judgement - that their ideational opponents are *unislamic* or shades of this category. Utopian thinking does not enter into intellectual competition with rival ideas advocated by rivals. It simply withdraws moral and spiritual legitimacy, of which it deems itself to be the fountain and conferring authority.

Thirdly, the social and political nature of the motif *Islam as Ad-Din* within utopian thinking is evidenced by the excesses of its claim to the totality, perfectibility and the completeness of Islamic civilisation. Utopian thinking does not appreciate the difference between basic values or ideals and the historical and social expression of them. For instance it does not recognise or appreciate the distinction between the value of justice and the social expression of it. While Islam advocates the value of justice, man and society would have to grapple with the task of giving a living expression to it in the context of his life and historical reality. To utopians, it is not necessary, or even wrong to contextualise, realise, institutionalise, or effect various synthesis of the value of justice on the ground that *Islam is Ad-Din* and hence 'complete'. The same can be said of other basic values such as the brotherhood of man, the idea of Good, Compassion, Mercy, as well as others which must of necessity be expressed or realized in historical and social reality.

The excessiveness of the utopian claim to the perfectibility and completeness of Islam lies in their denouncement and denial of the necessity and legitimacy of human experience and its historicity. In this respect, utopian thinking does not understand nor is it interested to understand the reality and

necessity of the human conditions in the concrete texture of reality in all its complexities. Thus in every sense of the word utopian thinking alienates man from his own humanity and life in general. Basically man is told not to understand himself and his life or to grapple with his realities and conditions for the reason that everything had been resolved in a neat and complete package in the form of the Golden Key of Islam. In this manner, utopians seek to dominate the interpretation of life and reality. Firstly it denies rival ideas of religious legitimacy by declaring them as falling outside Islam, thereby discrediting them. Secondly utopian thinking seeks to monopolise the interpretation of life and reality by installing itself as the sole and legitimate interpreter of 'Islam'. In other words, ideas which compete with those of utopians are pronounced irrelevant and illegitimate on the authority of the Golden Key, the use of which is open only to the utopian as the sole custodian.

Another recurring element in the utopian thinking of Muslims in Southeast Asia is *the scare of secularism*. An examination of the utterances of utopians evolving around this element shows the basic motif of denying the reality of the human conditions in history. Putting it in different words, utopian thinking rejects the reality of historical context which created the need and the right of man to understand and manage the conditions of his lives. Utopian thought is hostile and contemptuous towards the idea of man confronting his life and adapting to it. Utopian thinking is opposed to contextual ideas and discredits them. The notion of man living and struggling in a specific and real world is alien to it. It is basic to its thought that man's action and struggle in a specific context is wrong and the world

in which he acts and struggles is either to be denied or denounced. As a motif the crisis or threat of secularism is a potent device for achieving this end.

To discredit the idea of man acting and struggling in a specific historical context, utopian thinking opposed the idea to religion. Drawing from its own interpretation of Western history, utopian thinking identifies self-determinism and human action with secularism or secularization of anti-religion character. Reason, empiricism, science and technology in association with human action for self-determinism is portrayed as working towards the overthrow of religion or replacing it, thus conferring the whole movement with a blasphemous or irreligious character.

Even religion-based humanistic philosophies are discredited as either being misguided or being apologetic to secularism of the irreligious kind. Contextual interpretation and application of religion which must necessarily change with changing context and conditions is dismissed as being 'relativistic', almost suggesting a sort of fickle-mindedness. The distinction between the process of adapting, synthesising, interpreting basic principles and the process of compromising and diluting the basic principles themselves are never drawn. A characteristic critique levelled by utopian thinking towards more progressive religious movement would be: 'The theologians and intellectuals referred to... are not only preparing ground for a new secularised version of Christianity, but they also tragically know and accept as a matter of historical fact that the very ground itself will be ever-shifting, for they have come to realize, by the very relativistic nature of their new interpretation, that the new version itself-like all new versions

to come - will ultimately again be replaced by another and another and so on, each giving way to the other as future social changes demand.'⁴ Such criticism rests on the assumption of a theology which is final, complete and stationary. Such a theology can remain stagnant and motionless only because it is alienated and insulated from all the changes in the human conditions. In other words it is a theology which is irrelevant to the lives of man, in relegation of its purpose of guiding humans.

What utopian thinking radically opposes is man's rootedness in his life and his existential consciousness. Implicitly or in a latent manner, utopian thinking advocates a philosophy of life reminiscent of mediaeval theology, in which man is supposed to be indifferent to the world, to be other-worldly; the world itself is to be considered of lesser importance to the spiritual world or the world-hereafter. This is reflected in a characteristic remarks taken from an important document representing utopian thinking. The remarks show us how the objection of utopian thinking towards secularism or secularization is precisely directed to the development of existential consciousness in man, in other words to man's growing awareness of his world:

The term *secular*, is from the Latin *saeculum*, conveys a meaning with a marked dual connotation of *time* and *location*; the time referring to the 'now' or 'present' sense of it, and the location to the 'world' or 'worldly' sense of it. Thus *saeculum* means 'this age' or 'the present time', and this age or the present time refers to events in this world, and it also means 'contemporary events'. The

⁴ See Syed Muhammad Naguib Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, Kuala Lumpur, 1978, p.4.

emphasis of meaning is set on a particular time or period in the world viewed as a *historical process*. The concept *secular* refers to the *condition* of the world at this particular time or period or age. Already here we discern the germ of meaning that easily develops itself naturally and logically into the existential context of an ever-changing world in which there occurs the notion of relativity of human values.⁵

As part of its denial of the reality of the world, utopian thinking resists the idea of a natural or objective world. This is one aspect of Western history which Muslim utopians warn the Muslim world against. In utopian thinking, the objectification of the world or nature was the beginning of man's overthrow of religion. Consequentially the discovery of an objective nature and its laws is considered to be in opposition to the teaching of religion. This objectification of nature, which utopian sees as a 'disenchantment' of it, is one aspect of Western history which utopians understand as the beginning of Godlessness in Western history: 'This divesting and demeaning of nature to a mere *thing* was indeed the fundamental element that started the process of secularization in Western Christianity and the Western world. Christianity failed to contain and christianize these elements, and unwittingly, then helplessly, allowed the secularizing developments engendered by alien forces within its bosom to proceed relentlessly and inexorably along the logical lines in philosophy, theology, metaphysics and science until its full critical impact was realized almost too late in modern times'.⁶

⁵ Ibid, p.14.

It is an integral aspect of utopian thinking among the Muslims of Southeast Asia that to discover nature or the natural world is a negative development which threatens the integrity of religious faith. This image of the conflict between the knowledge of nature and religious faith is often portrayed as the ultimate tragedy of Western history, *the West* functioning in this context as the symbol of atheism or at best as an adulterated or corrupted religion (secularised religion). Through the analogy of the West, utopian thinking among the Muslims of Southeast Asia conjures the dreaded scenario of the development of a rational religion, leading to the demystification (the objectification) of the natural world. A characteristic formulation resting on the anti-thesis of religion and nature is reflected in the following warning by utopian thinking to Muslims: 'As the Gods were driven away from their respective domains in nature, Greek philosophy was transformed from the symbolic interpretation of nature to become more and more concerned with explaining nature in plain naturalistic and purely rational terms reducing its origin and reality to mere natural causes and forces.' Such naturalistic and rational thinking is seen as a fatal element lying in wait to adulterate Christianity in its tragic history: 'When Aristotle introduced Greek philosophy to the Roman Empire and of the West, this pure rationalism and concomitant naturalism, stripping nature of its spiritual meaning that the intellect alone could recognised and seek to fathom, were already prevalent factors in the interpretation of the Roman world view. No doubt other forms of philosophy that recognised the spiritual significance of nature, a contemplative intellectualism or metaphysics, still existed in both Greek and Roman worlds, but Aristotelianism held sway over the rest, so that by the time Christianity appeared on the scene pure rationalism

⁶ Ibid, p.26.

and naturalism had already dominated the life and mind of the Latin peoples. Christianity itself came under the influence of this naturalistic portrayal of nature devoid of symbolic significance, and reacted to this influence by demeaning the Kingdom of Nature and neglecting serious contemplation of it in favour of the Kingdom of God having no connection whatever with the world of nature.’⁷

In raising the scare of *secularism* or *secularization* among Muslims, which is seen as the process of *dereligionising* them, utopian thinking draws the anti-thesis between divine history and secular history. The religion of Islam is identified with the former while Christianity is tragically portrayed with the later. Through the anti-thesis of divine history and secular history and the identification of Islam with the former, utopian thinking banished Muslims from the world of action and preclude them from developing existential consciousness of their human conditions in history and the real world they live in. In this manner of speaking, Muslims are plucked out of history, rendered *ahistorical* and denied of legitimacy for self-determinism.

In this process they are denied of their humanism, plunged into an *ahistorical* world in which they do not need to do much as it is already complete in all its perfection. Against this idealized picture of non-action, Muslims are warned of the tragic option of sharing the fate of Christians suffering the burden of living and confronting their humanism in history. In the following formulation we have a characteristic and recurring motif in the utopian thinking of Muslims: ‘The Western concept of religion does not in our view come under the category of

⁷ Ibid, p.30, 31.

revealed religion in the strict sense as applicable to Islam... A revealed religion as we understand it is complete and perfect in its adequacy for mankind from the very beginning. The Holy Qur'an says that Islam is already made complete and perfect for *mankind* and this claim to perfection is substantiated from its very beginning by history. The name *Islam* was given to the religion from the very beginning just as the name of *Muslim* was given to denote the adherents of the religion from the very start. The Revelation itself was completed during the lifetime of the Holy Prophet, who may God bless and give Peace! who himself interpreted it in his life and whose Sacred Law he patterned in his teachings, his thoughts and sayings and model actions (*sunnah*). Even his Companions and contemporaries acted and behaved in a manner divinely inspired to become the standard and criterion for the future; and they questioned him urgently whilst he was yet among them on every conceivable and actual problem of daily life and right conduct and thought and action and guidance that summarized the needs of mankind and whose answers would suffice for man for all ages and generations to come.'⁸

To utopian thinking, the revelation of religion and the ushering of divine history represents the beginning and the end of history, leaving little scope for human action and creativity as all had been resolved and predetermined by the Prophet and his Companions: 'They all acted in a concerted and significantly knowing manner emphasising their consciousness that this was the Final Revelation from God, the Ultimate Religion for mankind, the Last Prophet to appear among men. That age in history became the Criterion for the future, as the

⁸ Ibid, p.27.

future truth and values that guide to it were all there, so that Islam and the time of the Holy Prophet (may God bless and give him Peace!) is always relevant, is always adequate, is always 'modern' or new, is always ahead of time because it transcends history. In this way the essentials of what made religion a truly revealed one was completed and perfected.'

This notion of a completed and perfect divine history is contrasted against moving history with living and acting man as its content: 'As such it transcends history and is not subject to the kind of self-searching 'evolution' and 'development' that Christianity experienced and will continue to experience. Though some of us use the terms 'tradition' and 'traditional' in the context of Islam yet these terms do not and are not meant to refer to the kind of tradition that originated in man's creative activity which evolves in history and consists of culture.' Just as there can be the beginning and the end of history only in divine history, there is also the beginning and the end of philosophy in the perfection and completeness of Islamic philosophy: 'Since Islam is the religion which transcends the influences of human 'evolution' and historicity, the values embodied in it are absolute; and this means that Islam has its own absolute vision of God, of the Universe, of Reality, of Man; its own ontological, cosmological, psychological interpretation of reality; its own world view and vision of the Hereafter having a final significance for mankind.'⁹

Within utopian thought of Muslims, the assertion by man of his existence, his attempt to realise his potentials or his exploration of it, is considered as invalid

⁹ Ibid, p.27, 28.

or illegitimate. Human experience, struggle, achievement or otherwise, is considered as a movement against God. It is seen as a futile, vain and irreligious endeavour to wrench freedom from God; a movement which is thus characterised as the anti-thesis of religion. In this way history itself, in the sense of man's struggle to understand himself and realise his humanity, is denounced and its legitimacy denied. This attitude is reflected in utopian evaluation and judgement on the history of the Renaissance. It is precisely the crystallization and the gradual emergence of the humanistic spirit that utopian thinking vehemently opposed. It is man's growing confidence in his humanity accompanied by his increasing understanding of his natural world that utopian finds objectionable and threatening. Note the following judgement and denouncement of the Renaissance: 'Western philosophy developed resolutely and logically alongside the secularising science. Man began to be conceived more and more as in terms of emphasising his humanity, individuality and freedom. Already he was rid of the gods of nature who all fled from his rational onslaughts which made nature natural for him to act upon, and now his self-assertion by means of a secularising philosophy and science sought to wrench his freedom from God of the Universe so that he might act freely upon the nature confronting him...In the 15th and 16th centuries, during the period known as the Renaissance, Western man seemed already to have lost interest in Christianity as a religion. They engaged eagerly in the pursuit of knowledge and the revival of ancient civilisation which they were beginning to acquaint themselves with again after what was to them a period of decay, a period in which Christianity seemed included. They emphasised the importance of the newly discovered ancient sources and rejected mediaeval standards and methods. They were thrilled by the "discovery" of the world and of man, and lost interest in

mediaeval theology and metaphysics as the interpreter of reality in favour of the “new” or modern scientific interpretation. In this interpretation they laid emphasis on man and his place in the universe. The very name *Renaissance* which means “to be born”, surely reflects the intellectual atmosphere of the period in which Western man felt himself being born into a new world of new possibilities; a new realization of his powers and potential.¹⁰

According to utopian thinking, the worst possible fate for man, which had come to past in Western civilisation, is to be caught in an objectified natural world with the necessity of falling back on their own human resources; in other words to be faced with the burden of their human conditions in facing life challenges. Herein lies the utopian element in this style of thought, that is its denial of a basic fact of human life in general. This is the explanation why the utopian thinking of Muslims is intellectually and philosophically alienated from worldly affairs. Take the following critique of what it perceived to be the tragic circumstance of the modern man as wrought by secularism: ‘The disenchantment of nature and terrestrialization of man has resulted, in the former case, in the reduction of nature to a mere object of utility having only a functional significance and value for scientific and technical management and for man; and in the latter case, in the reduction of man of his transcendent nature as spirit emphasizing his humanity and physical being, his secular knowledge and power and freedom, which led to his deification, and so to his reliance upon his own rational efforts of enquiry into his origins and final destiny and his own knowledge thus acquired which he now

¹⁰ Ibid, p.33, 34.

sets up as the criterion for judging the truth or falsehood of his own assertions.’¹¹ Essentially what is being censured here is man’s rootedness in his life and the world he lives in.

As can be discerned in the above discussion, utopian thought among the Muslims of Southeast Asia has a specific image of the West. The West is seen essentially as the embodiment of atheism or Godlessness, a perfect example of the defeat of religion. As a consequence of the overthrow of religion, the West is plunged into a moral crisis and a bottomless pit of philosophical and spiritual vacuum. It succumbs to relativistic values against the background of ever-changing conditions. Western humanity is seen as the epitome of human arrogance and superficial existence. Cast off its religious or spiritual moorings, Western civilisation is caught in self-doubt and meaninglessness. Lacking absolute values and exposed to the mercy of philosophical and moral relativism, Western civilization develops as a fertile ground for all forms of immorality to take roots.

It is important to note that the utopian thinking of Muslims is not interested in the West in the light of intellectual or objective history. The West represents quite a different meaning or significance to utopian Muslims. The interest in the West is symbolic and only by way of imagery. To them the West symbolises what they should not be. It is a moral psychological construct representing their paranoia and inner fears for themselves. The ‘West’ in utopian thinking has little reference to the objective west as commonly understood. It is a

¹¹ Ibid, p.35.

symbol and an imagery upon which they project the image of their opponents and enemies. In warding off rival ideas and discrediting them within their own society, utopians find the image of the immoral, atheistic and troubled 'West' a potent and efficacious bogey. It is fatal for rival ideas and their advocates to be identified with the image of the 'West' as projected by utopian thinking.

Besides functioning as the bogey, the image and symbolism of the West is also an effective boost to self-pride and cultural ego. The image of atheistic West in a moral crisis is a reaffirmation of the perfectibility and completeness of Islam. The thinking runs that the West is in such predicament because they deviated from the path prescribed by utopian Muslims, that of divine guidance and man's denial of his humanity and history.

Consistent with its derogatory attitude towards history and man's place in it, utopian thinking subscribes to its own idea of a hierarchy of knowledge. Knowledge is classified as of two kinds, namely knowledge given to man by God and knowledge acquired or developed by man. It ascribes the highest status to religious knowledge or knowledge of the first category as it pertains to the hereafter which is more abiding and real. As it is given by God, such knowledge is considered as 'real' and 'absolute' knowledge. As for knowledge of the second category, it is ascribed a much lower or inferior status. The basis this lowly ranking lies in the idea that such knowledge is acquired and developed by man. Another reason for the lower status is that being acquired and developed by man such knowledge is not absolute and subject to change and revision. It is therefore 'less certain' and hence unreliable. Utopians warn Muslims against knowledge

developed by man which are characterized as 'false knowledge' posing as 'real knowledge'. This category of knowledge include science, the humanities and the various branches of the social sciences like anthropology, linguistics, sociology, psychology, philosophy, history and many others. On the pursuit of these knowledge, utopians counselled Muslims not to make it a serious goal in their lives as 'the individual man has no time to waste in his momentary sojourn on earth, and the rightly guided one knows that his individual quest for knowledge of the second kind must needs be limited to his own practical needs and suited to his nature and capacity, so that he may set both the knowledge and himself in their right places in relation to his real self and thus maintain a condition of justice.'¹²

The various branches of the social sciences are particularly frowned upon in utopian thinking as they are seen as the handmaiden of secularism and secularization, branches of human knowledge which had been responsible for the undermining and overthrowing of religion in the West. Utopian thinking warns Muslims against such disciplines and portrays them in the image of atheistic or evil forces.

This paper attempts to portray a style of thought which it terms as *utopian*, followed by an extraction of the social meanings of its main ideas. It considers the style of thought being studied as part of the social tension of group dynamics in Southeast Asia where ideas compete to interpret reality and the human conditions for society. Although utopians would like to believe that their theoretical position is free of the social process and transcends it (hence

¹² Ibid, p.79.

transcending history), nevertheless their style of thinking and ideas are socially and politically determined. The paper has not attempted to analyse the social, political and historical impact of utopian thinking on the lives of Southeast Asia, which the author feels to be great and profound. This paper contends itself with outlining the main features and ideas of utopian thinking, setting the style of thought within the theoretical framework of social thought and the sociology of knowledge. This is undertaken in the belief that our understanding of religious life in Southeast Asia could be enhanced by studying it socially or politically, rather than merely studying it as a theological phenomenon. Studying the Muslims through the process of social thought and the history of ideas refines further our analysis, instead of merely focusing our attention on general phenomenon like 'Islamization', 'Islamic resurgence', 'Islamic reflowering', 'dakwah' or 'Islamic revivalism'. Needless to say the utopian style of thinking does not represent all Muslims in Southeast Asia. The approach of the sociology of knowledge had been adopted precisely to highlight the fact of group dynamics which must of necessity involve many other trends or styles of thought besides utopian thinking.

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