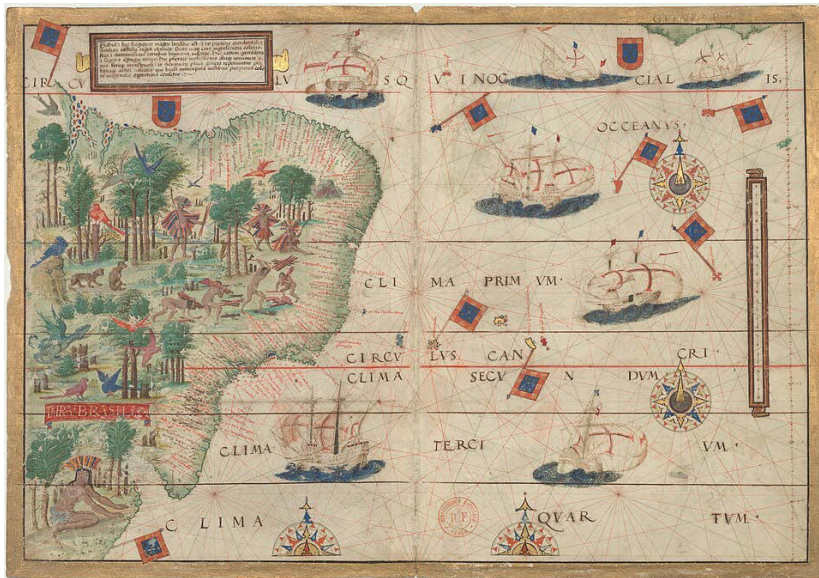


Utopian Experiments in an Emerging Global Order (1550–1600)



Introduction

Thomas More wrote *Utopia* only a few years after Europeans' arrival in the Americas and one year before the Reformation began dividing Western Christianity. These two developments, colonialism and the Reformation, sometimes unfolded independently of one another and sometimes intertwined. Both inspired new creative energies in Europe and the Americas about what the future of the world might look like. As these processes unfolded, some Europeans continued to imagine possibilities for the future as the world they knew expanded and diversified. As they did so, some even copied elements of More's *Utopia*. By mid-century, this type of utopian writing even became its own genre. Such writings often included a dialogue with a sailor or other world traveler who had returned to Europe to tell stories about a hitherto unknown land—an island, a city or both—that hosted an ideal society that functioned in some ways parallel to European norms and in other ways critical of them.

As the genre spread, common tropes emerged. Imagined cities were generally well-organized and often symmetrical

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Utopian experiments of the later 16th century

Conclusion

in design, with wide straight roads. They had quality sanitation and impenetrable fortifications. They had legal codes that were both easily understandable and unchanging, and thus usually did not require lawyers, which authors regarded as either a symptom or cause of corruption. There were often restrictions on travel, movement, immigration, and the import of foreign goods. Censorship was common and successful. Authors imagined harsh punishments for frivolities like socializing at taverns, disobeying authorities, playing games of chance, and engaging in flirtatious behavior. Most of these imagined societies also closely surveilled sexuality and family life. Authors imagined capital punishment being used for a range of offenses, including lying, adultery, and fornication. These imaginary societies often only permitted leisure activities that were healthy for the body or mind, like sports, listening to lectures or sermons, and reading philosophical or edifying works. There was sometimes considerable shared property as well as uniform clothing and housing.

As utopian writing became a genre, authors' creativity decreased when compared to More's *Utopia*. Often authors presented idealized worlds where the goals being promoted by governing elites in real life were actually achieved. European states now increasingly sought to regulate acceptable beliefs, printing, sex lives, family matters, alcohol use, travel, immigration, and wearing clothing that challenged gender binaries or was deemed too erotic. The difference between fiction and reality was that authors of utopias did not have to grapple with the challenges that came when people ignored, skirted, or actively resisted such efforts. That is, while More meant his "no-place" as a witty joke and social commentary, these utopias were becoming models to which readers were supposed to aspire in real life. They were still imaginative, but in the service of promoting rigid models of conformity, rather than unlocking creativity.

Key Terms:

Taqui Onqoy

Huacas

Santidade

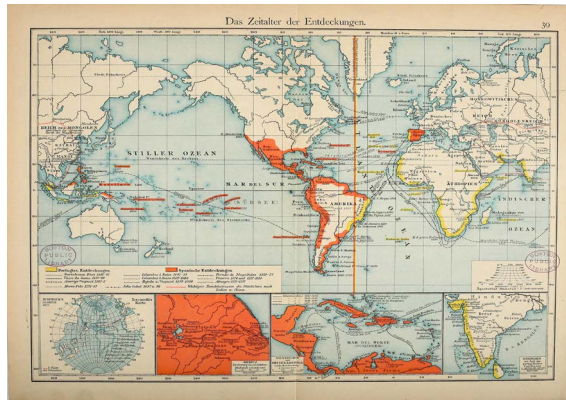
Land without Evil

Fort Caroline

John Calvin's Geneva

Consistory

Meanwhile, people in the Americas and Europe were involved in a series of real-life experiments to realize their own utopian visions. In the late 16th century, leaders of the most powerful states of the Atlantic World—Spain, Portugal, and France—envisioned expansive, even universal empires under the rule of a Catholic monarch. But those out of power—the enslaved, the dispossessed, the persecuted, and the exiled—in some cases embraced alternative visions of the future that imagined outcomes in which they might come out on top. In what follows, we’ll look at four examples of the persistence of utopian thinking that allowed the powerless to envision hopeful futures for themselves.



Map of Spanish and Portuguese colonial empires in the 16th century.

Utopian experiments of the later 16th century

Taqui Onqoy in Peru

In the 1560s and 1570s, one such movement emerged in Peru among peoples who had previously been a part of the Inca Empire. The movement called Taqui Onqoy (though there are various English-language spellings) started in the region of Huamanga (in the Andes Mountains roughly between Lima and Cuzco), and spread across the Peruvian highlands. Followers of Taqui Onqoy imagined the imminent rebirth of the creator god Pachacamac and called for a return of Incan ways and a rejection of Spanish culture and authority. They practiced a variety of initiation rites and other rituals, including ceremonial drinking, the use of body paint, animal sacrifices, and a kind of frenetic dancing that gave the movement its name—Quechua for “dancing/singing sickness.”

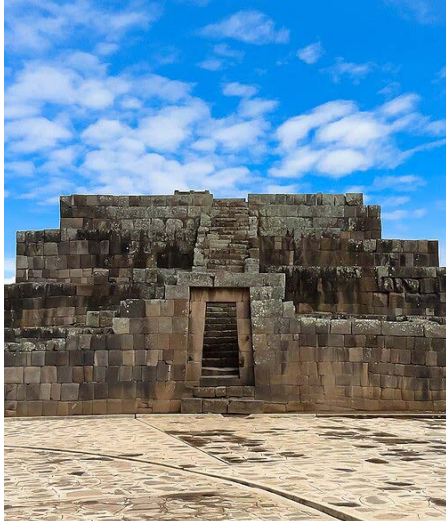


Peru’s highland landscape.



Location of the contemporary province Huamanga in Peru.

Followers of Taqui Onqoy also believed that spirits called *huacas* embedded themselves in natural objects like rocks, streams, or lakes. Because the *huacas* were angry about the Spanish introduction of Christianity to the Andes, they also incarnated themselves in humans, causing the possessed person to fall into a trance, swoon in ecstasy, lose consciousness, chant, offer prophecies, and preach about the return of the old religion. Taqui Onqoy followers held multi-day ceremonies through which a person possessed by a *huaca* received salvation in the Incan religion. Taqui Onqoy preachers traveled through Andean villages, urging people to reject their Christian baptism and restore worship to the *huacas*. Leaders, who included women



An Incan ushnu, or sacred structure, in the shape of a pyramid located in Ayacucho, a center of Taqui Onqoy.

as well as men, decried the atrocities of the Spanish. They also disinterred relatives buried in Catholic churches, reburying them following local Andean practices, which included burials in *chullpas* (above-ground burial structures) or *machays* (burial coves), where they provided gifts of food, drink, and clothing to the deceased. By rejecting Christianity, as well as European names, clothes, and food, and reverting to the old ways, they believed they could bring about a resurrection of the Incan Empire and a restoration of an idealized autonomy and dignity.

For Taqui Onqoy's followers, their anticipated triumph would be accomplished by *huacas'* victory over the Christian god, not direct violence on their part. Taqui Onqoy, therefore, had no military organization. Many thousands were galvanized by a dream of a future free of colonialism made possible by the supernatural defeat of the Spanish. By the 1570s, however, the Spanish colonial apparatus had violently suppressed Taqui Onqoy, dealing a serious blow to dreams for a future for Peru without enslavement and coerced conversion.

Santidade in Brazil

The Santidade of colonial Brazil constituted another utopian movement that blended anti-colonialism with a religious appeal to an Indigenous past. The earliest record for the Santidade movement comes from a report written by



A Tupinambá family, as painted by the sixteenth-century English artist, John White.

a Catholic missionary from the Jesuit order from 1549 that provided the name we know it by today. For decades, the Portuguese had been forcing a mix of free and enslaved Indigenous peoples to work on plantations. Portuguese men also had both coerced and consensual sex with Indigenous women, resulting in mixed race children known as *mamelucos*. The Jesuit account of Santidade from 1549 described traveling Indigenous prophets who acted as the reincarnations of ancient Indigenous heroes, encouraging followers to join them through ritualized tobacco smoking and dancing, and preparing for a golden age of prosperity in which work would no longer be required, crops would grow on their own, and the ancient ways of the region's Tupí-speaking peoples would return after years of colonial disarray. Followers of the Santidade movement rejected Catholicism and invoked Tupí stories of

the Land Without Evil (*Yvy Maraey*), a utopian paradise overseen by the gods in the mythic past they believed would return in the near future. The Tupí believed that a spiritual leader known as a *caraĩba* (or *pajé-açu*) could communicate with spirits in the Land Without Evil, interpret their messages, and even reincarnate as one of them. As the Portuguese expanded their colony and intensified their system of enslavement, the Santidade movement became increasingly anticolonial. Many Tupí-speaking peoples fleeing Portuguese rule imagined the Land Without Evil as a paradise free from the violence, cruelty, enslavement, diseases, and death they associated with the coast.

The best records of the Santidade movement come from the 1580s, around what today is known as the Bay of All Saints, in the northeastern Brazilian region of Bahia. By this point, the Santidade movement increasingly blended Tupí religious traditions with Christian rites, even as it explicitly rejected Christianity. It also incorporated rituals and traditions introduced by enslaved West Africans—many of whom came from the region around the kingdom of Kongo described in Reading 1—who were forcibly moved to the region by the Portuguese in the early 1580s. By about 1585, Bahia had about 8,000 free and enslaved Indigenous residents, another 2,500 Indigenous people living in Jesuit missionary villages, but now also 3,000 enslaved Africans. Soon after their arrival, many West Africans escaped enslavement and joined the Santidade movement. Many of them may have brought with them ideas about the “land of the dead” (described in Reading 1), as well as the idea that supernatural spirits (called *nkita* or *simbi*) intervened in this world on behalf of the living, an idea common in the kingdom of Kongo.



Map of the Bay of All Saints, Brazil, late 17th century.

In 1585, we learn of a Tupí-speaking *caraĩba* known either as Antonio, Tamandaré (the ancestral deity he reincarnated), or simply the “Lord of the World.” Antonio had been raised as a Christian convert in a Jesuit mission, which at some point he fled and established himself as a religious leader at a place the Tupí called *roigagçu*. Antonio taught that a paradise was imminent, at which point work would no longer be necessary, and the god Tupanasu would eliminate diseases, destroy the Jesuit churches, end enslavement of his people, and make members of the Santidade movement “lords of the white people.” It seems clear that Tupinambá (an ethnic group of Tupí speakers from the region) formed the bulk of Antonio’s followers, but the group was also multiethnic and included West Africans and many others who escaped



Black African women in Brazil. The images are from the 1700s, but the first West Africans arrived in Brazil in the 16th century.

slavery to join. According to reports, Antonio's Santidade followers anticipated their imminent conquest over white colonists, followed by their independent rule as a free commonwealth. Believers, who understood themselves to be saints, expected their new holy community would no longer want for food or drink, and would ultimately lead to a Day of Judgement in which their oppressors—the Portuguese—would be punished and justice restored. According to testimonies at trials in 1591, believers taught that “God our Lord would descend from the sky to the earth and that God would change this world, and that when God came here to the earth all would die, and that after they died, they would rise again.” Another witness explained that they taught that “God was coming now



View of a cross in the historic center of Salvador de Bahia, Brazil.

to free them from their captivity in which they were and to make them lords of the white people and that the whites would become their slaves.” Followers of the Santidade movement not only associated whiteness with evil, but also justified violent resistance to colonialism and enslavement, rather than simply waiting for supernatural forces to bring justice.

Colonial officials, missionaries, and plantation owners grew anxious about this challenge to their authority. From their perspective, the movement threatened to lure away converts to Christianity and to build solidarity between Indigenous Brazilians and West Africans, as well as Brazil's free and enslaved people. Colonial officials sent a *mameluco* man named Tomacauna (whom the Portuguese called Domingos Fernandes Nobre) with a team of natives and *mamelucos* to find Antonio and his followers in the forests outside of Brazil's capital city of Salvador de Bahia. Tomacauna's team found the Santidade group, and worshipped with them for a time, including participating in what Tomacauna described as a sacred procession with Antonio at the head, men divided from the women, and children following behind.



Historic city center of Salvador de Bahia, Brazil.

After a short time, Tomacauna and his men escorted a group of these believers to the plantation of Tomacauna's employer, Fernão Cabral de Tayde at Jaguaripe, across the Bay of All Saints from Salvador. Remarkably, the slaveowner Cabral offered the group religious freedom in exchange for their work as laborers on his plantation. The congregation was led by a woman named Santa Maria, also called “Mother of God” (also apparently the wife of Antonio), who had

stayed back at *roigagçu* with some of his followers. The group at Jaguaripe built a temple and a village on Cabral's land. The congregation soon attracted free and enslaved laborers from other plantations—Africans and Indigenous. Other Santidade congregations emerged around the bay. They also committed violence against property associated with the slave system itself, including attacking plantations and churches.

After about three months of this, the Portuguese governor of Brazil, Manuel Teles Barreto, sent armed squads to end the Santidade movement. The sugar plantation owner Bernardino Roberio de Gram and his team burned down the temple at Jaguaripe, arrested some of its leaders, and brought surviving sacred objects and books to Governor Barreto. The governor also sent armed troops to hunt down and destroy other congregations. Antonio was tried and found guilty. According to some reports, he was then handed over to a group of Tupinambá who killed him. Other reports indicate that he fled safely into the wilderness. Meanwhile, the Portuguese Inquisition sent the “Mother of God” to Portugal. It also found Cobral and Tomacauna guilty of collusion. Still, the Santidade movement remained a concern for years for colonial officials, afraid that an alliance of Africans and Indigenous Brazilians might endanger the future of the fragile Portuguese colony.

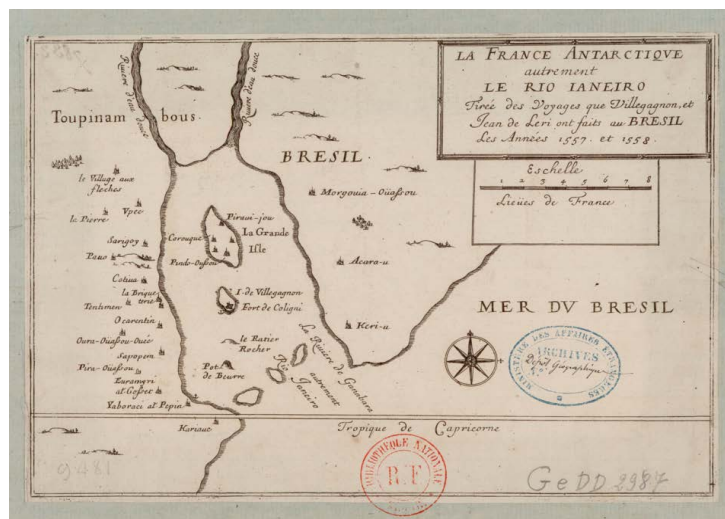


Contemporary view of Jaguaripe.

French Protestants in Florida

For religious minorities who faced intense persecution in post-Reformation Europe, the Americas also offered opportunities to imagine building utopian communities from scratch. In the second half of the 16th century, the best examples of this come

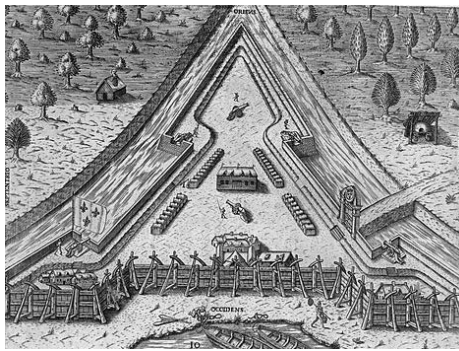
from French Protestants fleeing intense persecution both from government officials and ordinary Catholics willing to take the law into their own hands. In the 1550s and 1560s, many thousands of refugees fled France for safe havens elsewhere in Europe. During this period, groups of Protestants also imagined that they might find freedom from such dangers in the Americas. In 1555, the nobleman Gaspard de Coligny led an expedition of about 600 men and women to establish a safe haven at the present-day site of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Coligny wrote soon after arriving, “I intend to make here a refuge for the poor faithful that are persecuted in France, Spain, and elsewhere across the sea, so that ...



Map of “Antarctic France,” the attempted settlement at the present-day site of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

they can serve God purely according to his will.”¹ However, before they made much headway in building their Protestant utopia, their venture failed due to a combination of internal disputes among the colonists and Portuguese attacks.

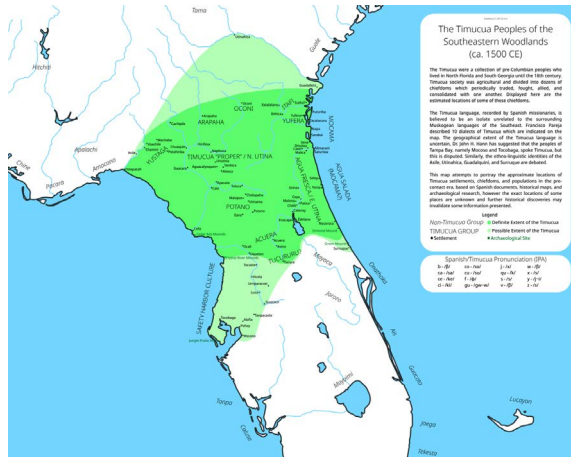
In 1562, Coligny helped organize and fund another effort to create a model Protestant colony, this time in present-day Florida, led by two other Protestants, Jean de Ribaut and René Goulaine de Laudonnière. That year, two ships arrived at the mouth of today’s St. John’s River (which runs through Jacksonville). After building a stone marker to claim French sovereignty, they moved further north to present-day Parris Island, South Carolina, where they established a colony they called Charlesfort. Some colonists quickly returned to France to arrange for more supplies, while some 25 stayed to build a settlement. Though they received help from an indigenous group of Timucua people to rebuild after a fire, they soon faced internal disputes which led to a mutiny and ultimately the abandonment of the colony.



Depiction of Fort Caroline

In 1564, Laudonnière returned to the stone marker they had built two years earlier to establish a new colony, Fort Caroline. Timucua people who lived there helped them with this construction, too. When they were done, the settlement had a ditch around it and earthen ramparts. At the new site, Laudonnière led worship services for the small group of French Protestant colonists, who did not have their own pastor. This newly imagined French Protestant utopia in Florida faced multiple

unsurmountable challenges. First was a lack of food—they began to wear out the welcome offered by Timucua leaders with repeated requests to feed them. They also sowed mistrust with their Timucua ally, Chief Satoria, by forming an alliance with a rival. Before Fort Caroline was even complete, Laudonnière decided to return to France. As ship construction for that purpose was still underway, in



A map of the Timucua and surrounding groups, ca. 1500.

summer 1565, Ribaut arrived with about 800 men on seven ships to fortify the colony. At about the same time, though, they had to weather a hurricane, after which Spanish ships under the command of Pedro Menéndez de Avilés arrived to remove the French from Florida altogether. Menéndez’s men established a rival settlement nearby known as St. Augustine, and then launched an attack on Fort Caroline, killing 140 French settlers and hunting down and



Explore More..

To learn more about French Protestant arrival and encounters in North America, check out this video

- [The French in Florida](#)

killing most who escaped. A few men who survived the massacre at Fort Caroline tried to build a new fortification at Cape Canaveral. When Menéndez learned of this, he allowed them safe passage to return to Europe if they abandoned their effort.

French Protestants in Geneva



Geneva, c. 1600.

Religious visions for the future in the Americas described so far proved ill-fated in the face of the military power of Spain and Portugal. Within Europe, there were possibilities for the safe construction of religious-based utopias when political conditions allowed. The best example of such is the independent Protestant city-state of Geneva, across a mountainous border from the Catholic state of France. The realization of this

vision was dramatically strengthened by

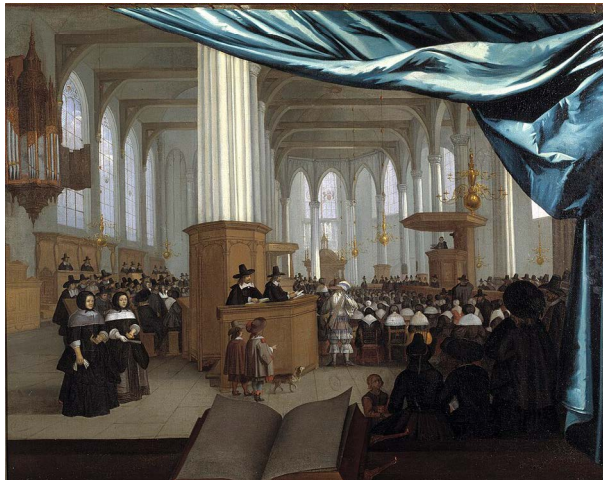
the arrival in Geneva of many thousands of French Protestant refugees fleeing persecution back home, attracted across the border by Geneva's promise of a religious utopia. The leading figure in this effort was John Calvin, a French Protestant refugee himself, who had been recruited to guide the city's church.

Calvin's religious vision for the city—which began in earnest in 1542—included an effort to promote purity of worship. This included replacing Catholic saints, iconography, and elaborate ritual traditions with simple Bible-centered worship. It also included a strong commitment to keeping the Christian community pure, which meant monitoring the beliefs and behaviors of churchgoers to a degree never before attempted. Calvin and his supporters believed that maintaining discipline over the Christian community constituted the “sinews” of the church, meaning that it both held it together and gave it strength. Aiding in this effort were Calvin's fellow pastors as well as a group of elders, 12 lay men who helped oversee and regulate Christian belief and behavior. Geneva's pastors and elders—who together formed a body called the consistory—

monitored beliefs and religious practice, but also identified and punished incidents of sexual impropriety (adultery, premarital sex, visiting brothels, or having sex they deemed unnatural), gambling, drunkenness, usury, quarreling, wearing flamboyant or overly sexual clothing, profane dancing or singing, and blasphemy or swearing. The pastors—mostly fellow refugees from France—and elders punished spiritual infractions and forwarded crimes to the city council when they felt it was appropriate.



Portrait of John Calvin, c. 1550.



Depiction of simplified Bible-centered Protestant worship.

In the initial years of their operation, Geneva's pastors faced opposition from locals, but over time, their authority solidified, in part driven by increased immigration of like-minded French Protestant refugees. By 1555, Calvin's supporters had consolidated their authority. Opponents of the strict disciplinary regime were purged from government offices; some were banished or even executed. After this, the numbers of infractions investigated and

punished by the city's consistory increased. From 1560, the consistory summoned about one in eight adults every year. In 1561, those who did not reconcile for church offences were also subject to civil punishments. Geneva is sometimes seen as the 16th-century state that came closest to an ideal Christian commonwealth.

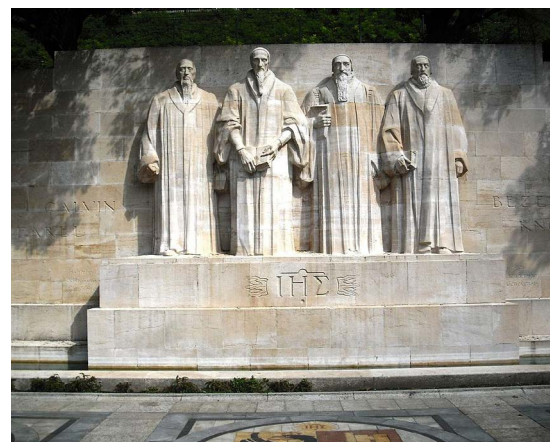
Causes for Excommunication in Geneva, 1564–69			
Offense	Number	Offense	Number
"Scandals" and lying	347	Theft	62
Domestic quarrels	302	Ignorance of doctrine	53
Quarrels with others	258	Clandestine marriage	50
Fornication and lubricity	160	Business fraud	42
"Rebellion" to elders	151	Gambling	35
Quarrels with kin	126	Dances and "profane songs"	33
Drunkenness	102	Usury	27
"Superstition"	69	Gluttony and idleness	23
Blasphemy and swearing	66		

Source: E. William Monter, "The Consistory of Geneva, 1559–1569," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 38 (1976): 479.

Chart of the number of people excommunicated from Geneva between 1564 and 1569, organized by the reason.

In practice, though, Geneva could never measure up to its utopian ideals in the long term. Conflicts between political leaders and pastors persisted. Complaints about the immorality of residents continued and even increased. While Geneva's international reputation as a model of Christian belief and practice soared in the 1560s, its international

influence was already waning by the 1570s. Internal conflicts were increasing, and the limitations of its idealism were apparent. Part of the reason for this short shelf-life of Geneva's Christian utopianism was that it inherited the political, economic, social, and cultural structures of the pre-Reformation city. Powerful entrenched interests limited the scope of pastors' efforts. Economic rationales, family relations, and friendships meant that people sustained ties with Catholics or others who did not meet the city's standards. Indeed, the high numbers of infractions punished by Geneva's consistory only reinforces the conclusion that its strict system of discipline was not eliminating bad behaviors. Its defenders have pointed out that it was not meant to; after all, according to their belief system, sinfulness was an unavoidable part of human experience, not something that could be eradicated by human action. Regardless, it remains the case that if extraordinary institutional supports to promote Christian idealism



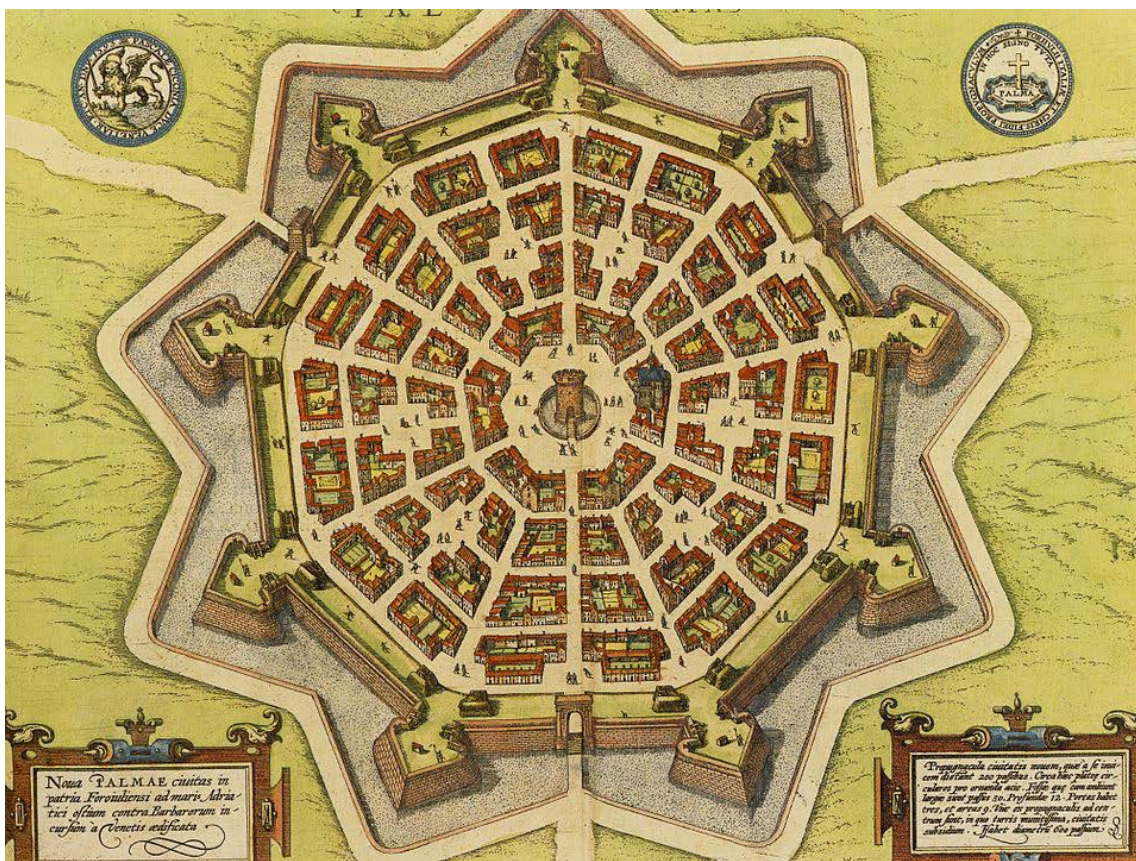
The so-called Reformation Wall in Geneva, celebrating the city's history as a Protestant center.

encouraged a culture of piety for some, they also bred public resentments, underground dissent, and sly deceptions among many. By the 1580s, Geneva's pastors had backed off their more thoroughgoing attempts to reform society. By the end of the century, Geneva was still a symbol of Protestant utopianism, but in practice it functioned like an ordinary city, where diversity in beliefs and lifestyles required a degree of compromise.

Conclusion

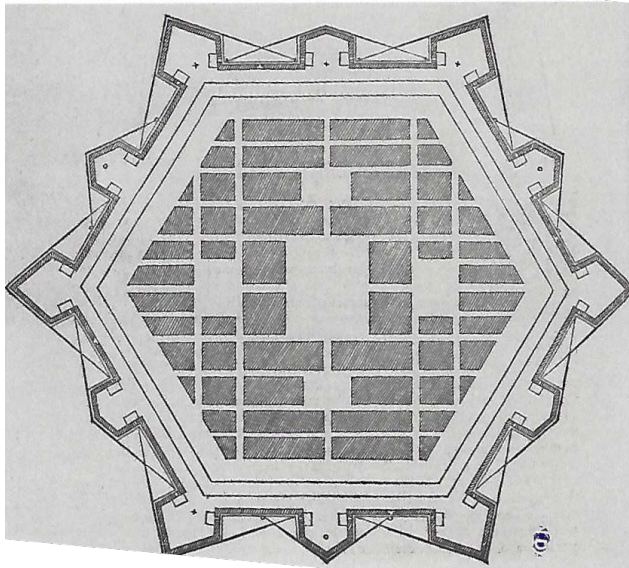
In an earlier lesson, we learned about two kinds of utopian visions that took root a century before the trans-Atlantic exchanges of the 16th century. In cultures across the Americas, sub-Saharan Africa, and Europe, idealized visions of the past and/or present future blended with some supernatural unfolding of the world that might resolve tensions or conflicts. In such cases, the existence of ideal spaces was embedded in the cosmos itself. As we saw in Reading 1, in 15th-century Italy there also emerged a culture among architects that envisioned more practical steps for how humans with adequate knowledge and foresight could create perfected communities. In some ways, Europeans' colonial ventures in the Americas represented the extension of such sentiments in the physical world. As we have seen here, alternative visions of utopian futures also challenged such ideas. Utopias, thus, proved perfectly capable of serving as roadmaps for domination as well as imaginative tools to challenge it.

Meanwhile, by the late 16th century, professional architects largely abandoned interest in utopian urban design. After all, as cannon technology improved during the so-called "gunpowder revolution," cities threatened by war were being quickly reduced to rubble. Architects stopped imagining new utopian cities and



The Venetian model city of Palmanova, 1572-1680.

became experts in designing more effective military fortifications. There were still some experimentations with urban designs, but the chief object of such efforts was defense from military sieges, not socially engineering utopian societies. For instance, in 1563, when the French Protestant Bernard Palissy designed a city whose streets formed a spiral design, his intention was to create an impregnable refuge from Catholic attack, not to promote an ideal Christian community. But, for the most part, books on designing future cities became centrally concerned with increasing the number of defensive angles against artillery attacks, managing supply lines, and firing back against siege machinery. Few urban designers even bothered to discuss matters such as how to arrange housing or the placement of public buildings, let alone how to promote a perfectly ordered society.



Pietro Cataneo's version of a model city, which became rather standard for what was actually built in the later 16th century.

Were these changes part of an unavoidable shift across the 16th century from imaginative idealism to practical realism? Asked another way, could the four utopian visions described in this reading—Taqi Onqoy, Santidade, Protestant Florida, and Protestant Geneva—have prevailed against the military and political challenges they faced? You might debate what forces led to your conclusion regarding each case in class. But one thing is certain. The outcomes were by no means *inevitable*. They depended on what the diverse people involved—not in equal measure

or with equal resources, to be sure—believed was possible (and preferable) in the world. Could developments have led people to have imagined and then built different outcomes? Definitely. If these four ventures look unrealistic today, that's only because we know the outcomes of the modern era. But while these efforts were underway, colonialism remained uncertain and fragile, the universal aspirations of the Catholic Church still faced major challenges, and the trans-Atlantic trade in enslaved people remained experimental. As the 17th century dawned, however, the imaginative window that had opened over the last century by humanism, global encounters, and religious reforms began to close as a new global order slowly emerged.

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Map of the Timucua peoples and some surrounding groups, CC BY-SA 4.0, KiwiNova, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Timucua-And-Surrounding-Groups.png>

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