

Preface

After his first visit to Singapore, Theodore Sorensen, adviser to and speech-writer for John F. Kennedy, was reported to have told Lee Kuan Yew, “I now feel my life is complete; I have been to Utopia.”¹ Lee, of course, never claimed to have created a utopia even though he actually transformed a Third World backwater with no natural resources into a First World nation. Within a generation, Lee transformed Singapore into one of the most prosperous and advanced nations in the world with his unique blend of Confucianism and Western-style capitalism. Further, the example of Singapore provided Deng Xiaoping, former paramount leader of China, with a blueprint for establishing a harmonious society of which even Confucius would have approved.

Few Asian leaders have achieved the status accorded to Lee and fewer still have had the influence over world leaders that he wielded in his lifetime. He turned Singapore into an oasis of peace and prosperity within a region troubled by widespread political and economic turmoil. A visionary and a pragmatist, keenly aware of Singapore’s limitations, he sought to educate the population and to take advantage of the country’s strategic geographical location. Riding on the wave of globalization, Lee transformed Singapore’s economy and, in the process, turned the country into a world-class financial, commercial and transportation centre. Indeed, Singapore’s port and airport are still renowned for their efficiency and outstanding service today.

1. Tom Plate, <http://www.scmp.com/comment/insight-opinion/article/2098993/>.

Like a father to the nation he created, Lee guided the country as “Minister Mentor” after he had stepped down as Prime Minister in 1990. Moreover, he believed that the family was the true building block of society, rather than the individual. He had great faith in familial values and he deplored the selfish individualism so prevalent in Western societies.¹ Lee made the national interest his overriding concern and pursued it selflessly. The Prime Minister’s Office in Singapore is vested with much power which Lee used for the common good.

In *Datong shu* or “*The Book of Great Unity*,” Kang Youwei (1858-1927) calls for the abolition of the institution of family in his blueprint for a utopian project. Kang acknowledges that it is easier to love one’s children than to obey one’s parents. He also believes that the more people in the family, the more conflicts there will be and that this is one of the basic causes of human suffering. Further, Kang argues that the institution of the family goes against the common good because people tend to give priority to taking care of their own kind. The family is a necessary institution in times of disorder, but it becomes an obstacle in our effort to establish a utopia where there is equality, peace and harmony.

This current work is a study of utopian visions from both Western and Eastern traditions. The writings of Ignacio Ellacuría and other liberation theologians inspired me to explore the utopian idea that, in the midst of suffering, pain and breakdown, a better world is not only possible but necessary.

Thomas More’s portrait on the wall of Denis Chang’s Chambers led me to delve deeper into More’s thought. I am grateful to Lai Pan-chiu and Lauren Pfister for introducing me to *Datong shu* by Kang Youwei. Special thanks go to Patrick Tierney F.S.C., Columba Cleary O.P., Vivian Lee, Patrick Colgan S.C.C., Scott Steinkerchner O.P., Francis Chin and Kim Tansley for proofreading and editorial assistance.

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1. Manish Gyawali, “Lee Kuan Yew’s Enduring Legacy,” <http://thedi diplomat.com/2015/04/lee-kuan-yews-enduring-legacy/>.

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