

PREFACE

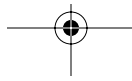


The distance between vision and illusion can sometimes be dishearteningly small. All of us strive to be as clear-seeing as possible, and we may even take pride in our ability to grasp and interpret the world as it really is. However, in our ongoing efforts to make sense of the world around us, we inevitably filter our observations through one or more worldviews. A worldview, or what the Germans call *Weltanschauung*, is not yet a theoretical model capable of being verified or falsified through ordinary methods of demonstration. It is, rather, a pre-theoretical vision rooted in a basic religious commitment interacting with ordinary life experience.



But visions are capable of distortion, and when they become distorted we speak of them as illusions. An illusion gives us a false picture of the world, but its falsity is not always immediately obvious to everyone, particularly in the short term. In fact, an illusion may be so compelling as to persuade countless people of its claims to the full truth. Yet even an illusion is never altogether bereft of the truth, because of the givenness of the world that it sees. This suggests that we stand in need of some means, perhaps even a gift of God's grace, to enable us to sort out the complex relationship between these competing visions and illusions on the one hand, and the world to which they point on the other.

If it were simply a matter of testing the claim that, say, a thirty-five-year-old woman and an eight-year-old girl are walking across the street and turning into





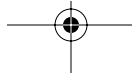
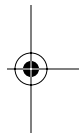
a toy store, then all that is apparently needed are ordinary powers of observation. But it is when we try to make further sense of our common experience that we may find our interpretations clashing. Are we seeing two solitary individuals engaging in a common enterprise through the mutual agreement of their self-interested wills? Are we viewing two members of the bourgeoisie using the leisure afforded them by their dominant position in the capitalist system of production to engage in a nonessential commercial transaction? Are we looking at two citizens of a state taking advantage of its protection to cross a busy thoroughfare safely and enter a limited-liability business enterprise? Or are we seeing a mother and a daughter bound together in an asymmetrical familial relationship characterized by mutual love and devotion? There is a sense in which we are seeing perhaps all of these, since each of these interpretations gives us insight into one facet of a fuller reality.

However, in accepting any one of these as an exhaustive account of reality, we are not simply assenting to the evidence of our senses; we are in fact filtering this through a worldview that, though to some extent shaped by our experience, itself shapes the way we interpret this experience. The implications for politics are enormous: many of the battles in the political realm are shaped, not simply by a refusal of one side or another to “face facts” or to “be reasonable,” as one typically hears, but by differing views of reality rooted in alternative paradigms. In fact, however, as we shall see in this book, many of these different views of politics, under whatever ideological label they may fall, find their origins in a single religious worldview that sees the cosmos as an essentially closed system without reference to a creator/redeemer. In short, for all the apparent conflict among the several ideologies, all are subspecies of the larger category of idolatry, as I shall argue in chapter one.

I cannot claim to have originated this thesis. Others have argued for it in the past, most notably the Dutch Christian economist Bob Goudzwaard in several of his books, including *Capitalism and Progress* and *Idols of Our Time*.¹ At an early stage in my own development, I was strongly impressed by Goudzwaard’s isolation of the connection between ideology and idolatry. Upon reading *Idols of Our Time*, I became convinced that this connection needed to be worked out in greater detail with respect to the several ideologies themselves. Thus Goudzwaard was and remains a formative influence on my own thought.

I am indebted to two more people who have had no small impact on my

¹Bob Goudzwaard, *Idols of Our Time* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1984).

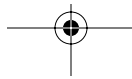


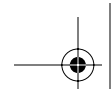


thinking. James W. Skillen has long been associated with the Center for Public Justice and its predecessor organization, the Association for Public Justice. Skillen can only be described as someone who has grown in wisdom and insight with each passing year. His writings display an uncommon measure of the very discernment I have striven to realize, if only in a small way, in the present book. From Skillen I have learned much, including, as far as the present book is concerned: the extent to which God remains faithful to his creation, even in the midst of our unbelief; and the degree to which all of the ideologies fall short in understanding the character of the state as a differentiated political institution with its own unique place in God's world. If our following after various ideological visions has distorting effects on our life in this world, it is nevertheless true that our world still belongs to God and, due to his conserving grace, the impact of sin remains limited. It is also true that, even where the adherents of various theoretical constructs attempt to reduce the state to something else, whether a voluntary association no different from the private club, a commercial enterprise similar to a business, or an all-encompassing focal point of a community's loyalty, pretheoretical experience is easily able to tell the difference between the political community and other communal structures such as the family. The state's task of doing justice, even when it is perverted in some fashion, tends inevitably to reassert itself. This again is due to God's conserving grace.

I owe much to my friend and colleague Albert M. Wolters, who, despite his possibly tongue-in-cheek claim to have little interest in politics per se, has helped me to understand the connection between the ideologies and the ancient gnostic heresy which locates the source of evil not in our rebellion against God and his word, but in something structural in his creation. By failing to distinguish creational structure from spiritual direction, the followers of these ideologies tend to assume that salvation is to be found in freeing humanity from some facet of God's creation and in putting one's ultimate trust in some other facet.

Many other people have been influential or have played a more direct role in my thinking. Among those I have found especially insightful are the following: Abraham Kuyper, the Dutch Christian statesman and polymath, whose reflections on politics and society were framed in response to the sweeping secularization of the nineteenth-century Netherlands; Herman Dooyeweerd, longtime professor of legal philosophy at the Free University of Amsterdam, whose Christian philosophy I have found enormously helpful in understanding the nature of politics and the state; Jean Bethke Elshtain of the University of Chicago, whose writings show an uncommon degree of good sense motivated

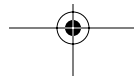
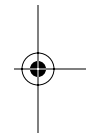


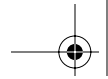


by an effort to steer clear of various ideological agendas; Paul Marshall of Freedom House, Washington, D.C., and Mary Ann Glendon of Harvard University Law School, both of whose writings on human rights have demonstrated the complexities of rights claims in an age when rights are treated as the answer to every political controversy; Roy A. Clouser, whose *The Myth of Religious Neutrality*² and other writings have illuminated the character of the various types of religious belief and their respective understandings of God's world; the late Bernard Zylstra, my former mentor from the Institute for Christian Studies, Toronto, who introduced me to the writings of, inter alia, Hannah Arendt, Leo Strauss, George Grant and Eric Voegelin; Jacques Maritain, whose application of a Catholic neo-Thomist perspective across the broad range of human activities is impressive in its scope; Yves R. Simon, whose reflections on authority and its place in a democratic society continue to ring true decades after he first articulated them; David L. Schindler, whose Catholic Augustinian approach to an understanding of the ideologies is breathtakingly close to the vision for which I am arguing here; H. Richard Niebuhr, whose seminal reflections on the relationship between Christianity and culture have had an impact on so many thinkers in the past half century; Hannah Arendt, Sheldon S. Wolin and Bernard Crick, who understand that politics is simply politics, an irreplaceable, if non-utopian, way of permitting different and potentially conflicting interests to coexist peacefully; and George Grant and Christopher Lasch, a Canadian and an American respectively, who understand better than most that the contemporary ideological cleavage is not always what it appears to be and that the popular, bipolar left-right division in the contemporary political debate is simplistic at best and misleading at worst.

I should acknowledge as well the contributions of others who either read and commented on earlier drafts of this book or in other ways aided in its writing. These include, in addition to Skillen and Wolters, John Hiemstra (The King's University College, Edmonton, Alberta), Fred VanGeest (Dordt College, Sioux Center, Iowa), Anthony Wells (Deputy Correspondence Secretary for Rt. Hon. William Hague, former Leader of the Conservative Party of the United Kingdom), John Fawcett (Buswell Memorial Library, Wheaton College, Wheaton, Illinois), William G. Witt (Episcopal Church), Donald Leach (Wellesley College), Edward A. Goerner (University of Notre Dame), Elaine Botha, Robert MacLarkey, Harry Van Dyke, Jacob Ellens, Michael Goheen,

²Roy A. Clouser, *The Myth of Religious Neutrality* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992).





Justin Cooper and other colleagues at Redeemer University College, John Bolt (Calvin Theological Seminary), Paul Brink (Eastern University, St. David's, Pennsylvania), Michael C. Hogeterp (Christian Reformed Church), Gary Miedema (Tyndale College, Toronto) and finally Douglas R. Johnson, a great friend and fellow undergraduate classmate, who introduced me to the writings of Kuyper and Dooyeweerd nearly three decades ago. Thanks are also due to Redeemer University College itself for providing funding to cover some of the incidental costs associated with the preparation of this book. All of these and more have contributed something to this project. Naturally I take full responsibility for any defects.

Finally, I wish to make a twofold dedication. First and foremost, this book is dedicated to the two great loves of my life, Nancy and Theresa, whose own love for their husband and father is greater than I could ever have imagined. When I began writing this book, I was a bachelor. At its completion I am the proverbial family man, an experience that has enriched my understanding of the issues under consideration here. Second, this is dedicated to my students, past, present and future, who have stimulated my thinking, have been unfailingly loyal and have been messengers of God's grace to me over the years.

Soli Deo gloria. To God alone be the glory.

