Is There Any Reason to Hope?
Introducing a New Book

A new book by Bob Goudzwaard, the Center’s 1999 Kuyper Lecturer, written with Mark Vander Vennen and David Van Heemst, has just been released by Baker Academic: Hope in Troubled Times: A New Vision for Confronting Global Crises (www.bakeracademic.com/hopeintroubledtimes). Among the troubles of our times that the book addresses are global poverty, environmental degradation, and terrorism.

While it is true that Goudzwaard and his co-authors offer a penetrating analysis of the dominant global crises of our day, one could also describe this book as an assessment of the spirits of this age. The book is not primarily an attempt to weigh and measure all the technical details of these crises; instead, it is an attempt to expose what underlies them. The book, in that sense, is primarily about myths, ideologies, and idolatry, as the second chapter explains.

Because of their deepest faiths and longings, people throughout the world commit themselves, through various institutions and patterns of behavior, to goals of prosperity, national security, power, and self-realization that often turn out to be roads to hell rather than roads to genuine peace and satisfaction. Competing ideologies collide with one another, producing the extremes of wealth and poverty, immense power and tragic weakness, resources in abundance and the lack of even food and water.

Is there no way out of the “ominous spirals” into poverty, global warming, and violent terrorism? Yes, say the authors, there is hope, hope grounded in faith, in a way of life that challenges the false ideologies and idols of our times.

Bob Goudzwaard is professor emeritus of economics and social philosophy at the Free University of Amsterdam. Mark Vander Vennen, who has translated and edited earlier books by Goudzwaard is a writer and social worker in Ontario. David Van Heemst is a professor of political Science at Olivet Nazarene University in Illinois. Hope in Troubled Times weaves together themes and arguments in Goudzwaard’s earlier books, Idols of Our Time and Globalization and the Kingdom of God.
The following excerpts from *Hope in Troubled Times* will give you a flavor of the book. For more about it, including the Table of Contents and a longer excerpt from it, go to www.bakeracademic.com/hopeintroubledtimes.

**Hope in Troubled Times**  
(excerpts)

**Ideologies in Action**

“Ideology,” “idolatry”—these words may still sound heavy and miles removed from us and our own world. Perhaps we feel angry at the accusation that we may have something to do with them. Certainly we ordinary people, we Westerners, are not possessed, goal-crazed, or fanatic. Even the mere suggestion goes too far.

But the distance between us and ideology is not as great as we may think. To begin with, an ideology does not need a broad base of support to exist. It can prosper on a small scale in any of our lives. All of us know of times when a certain goal takes on extraordinary importance for us. We may feel threatened by the possible loss of jobs, children, spouses, or money, or we may set our hearts on acquiring something that suddenly seems within reach. Then we utilize everything at our disposal to reach our goals. The goals become something that we pursue with all the strength we can muster. If necessary we adjust our standards a little, just as the dominant ideologies do, in order to give us more room to act as we like.

Ideologies do not arise accidentally. They need deep injustices or threats to take hold. The ideology of identity, which aims for the preservation of group or national identity, is a case in point. . . . When self-preservation becomes our highest goal, then we deem whatever contributes to it as strong and whatever detracts from it as weak. Further, the all-encompassing desire for self-preservation can lead us to redefine good and evil, whereby good becomes whatever preserves us and evil becomes whatever threatens us. In the aftermath of September 11, did not President Bush declare, in a paraphrase of John 1:15, that “the light [America] has shone in the darkness [the enemies of America], and the darkness will not overcome it”? These words have echoes of a nationalist ideology. If this ideological impulse is allowed to progress, its cures will be worse than the illness, and the means for maintaining order will slip out of control. And then it will be too late.

But the ideology of identity is even closer to us than this. The heart of it—the decision to protect one’s own identity at any expense—touches more than just national identity. The goal of self-preservation can infiltrate any human group or organization. . . . So much suffering on this earth has its root in this ideological distortion. How else can we explain the many persecutions of Jews throughout history, especially in the midst of so-called Christian nations and communities? How else can we explain the permanent state of misery for the world’s most desperately poor?

Indeed, the ideology of national or group identity lies within reach of us all

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Hope Awakens Life

The subject matter of this book is hardly uplifting. We have traced vigorous ideologies to which nations and peoples cling. We have discussed the rise of autonomous powers that impose their will on us as gods. And we have spoken of ominous spirals that, like violent whirlpools, pull us in and under.

In chapter 1 we expressed amazement at how many recent book titles contain the word “end” [The End of History, The End of Nature, etc.]. The titles indicate the profound uncertainty preoccupying many people today, academics and otherwise. But they also mark out a line in the sand or a watershed moment in time. It is as if the future has struck off on its own path, largely independent of our own hopes and desires.

In the chapters that followed we moved, step by step, closer to a possible explanation for this strikingly prevalent sense in the Western world. Clearly there are influences at work, particularly in Western society, which morph into paralyzing and seemingly autonomous powers. By themselves, there is nothing evil about technology, the economy, money, the market, and the exercise of power in the service of justice and reconciliation. But the modern project of creating a malleable society, organized to suit our own goals, has given them an exalted status. Their enthronement process has gone so far that we begin to see these forces as living, self-propelling powers. We then follow them as gods wherever they go, initially because we expect their progress over time to deliver only good things, but later because we find it difficult to escape their hypnotic influence. From that point on, we may feel that the ability to chart our own future has been whisked out of our hands. There seems to be no recourse, no ability to withdraw us from where these dynamic powers and forces could ultimately bring us. And then a sense of betrayal and paralysis creeps in.

[In confronting these ideologies, the hope that we authors have] is real because, at its core, it is not a human creation. It attaches itself directly to the faith that God is deeply engaged in all of human history. The God whom we confess has already fundamentally conquered the power of evil through his Son. Jesus is therefore worthy to hold “the whole world [including our future] in his hands.”

This is not loose religious prattle. On the contrary, in our view it is directly and specifically oriented to each of the fundamental and gripping problems outlined in the previous chapters.

Our sense of the reality of hope in today’s world is inspired by three themes: the active presence of the Spirit of God in our time, the sign of the cross as an antidote to the closed circles and spirals of our age, and the concrete implications of the “morning star” as the biblical image of hope.

Many of us have lost awareness of this kind of hope. Ideological hope comes only by the grace of a few tiny cracks in the wall that throw slivers of light onto our bleak situation. That hope is then extinguished as one by one the cracks disappear and the darkness envelops us. But this is the opposite of Christian hope. Christian hope is a hope of contrast: it revives in the middle of the night, just when the darkness seems to overpower us.
The biblical image of hope is the morning star. The morning star often appears between two and three o’clock at night, when the darkness is complete and the faintest sign of morning is not yet visible. So small that it threatens to vanish, the star seems unable to vanquish the overpowering darkness. Yet when you see the morning star, you know that the night has been defeated. The morning star brings the morning in behind it, just as certainly as Jesus brings the kingdom in behind him. “I am . . . the bright Morning Star” (Rev. 22:16). These were Jesus’s last words to his disciples. They appear as words of comfort on the last page of the Bible.

How do we act on this image of hope?

Living out of messianic hope is different from just waiting passively. It requires that we leave our protective shelters behind and put our future, our prosperity, and if necessary our whole lives in jeopardy for the sake of love, truth, and justice. Indeed, growing into God’s story implies growing into a living obedience to the risen Lord.

The image of the morning star also means that we ourselves are neither able nor called to dismantle today’s demonic spirals and deified powers. Instead, we are called to take first steps, small beginning acts of undistorted justice and unperverted love in the midst of powerful ideologies.

Viewed through the lens of Scripture, the widening ways of God—justice, peace, stewardship, love, truth, freedom—challenge us with a desperately needed, life-awakening appeal today. They urge us to do genuine justice to the poor; to integrate a living practice of peacebuilding into our acts of justice, stewardship, and mercy; and to build an economy of care, an economy of enough. Will our governments, labor unions, businesses, other organizations, and we ourselves listen to this appeal? And will we inscribe it into a personal and national economic program?

It is time to put such a program in place, not because the program itself can help us, but because its implementation will be a sign of our willingness to repent, to turn our ways to the only One who can and who will help us.

—The Editor