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INTRODUCTION

Ideology, Religion and Idolatry

We live in extraordinary times. Not long ago it seemed as if the world was locked in an eschatological standoff between two superpowers and their ideologies. During the forty years of the Cold War, both sides expended much energy in an attempt to win the hearts and minds of the world's peoples for either communism or liberal democracy. Although old-fashioned considerations of national interest were certainly involved in this protracted struggle, especially in its later years, the Cold War was unique in that it was based primarily on a clash of opposing *ideas*. If during this time people defected to the other side, such as Kim Philby or Arkady Shevchenko, they were not so much betraying the home country as demonstrating a belief in the ideas undergirding the other country's political and economic system. In this context the entire notion of loyalty to country took on a rather different color than it had in previous conflicts. To be sure, the Cold War was not the first ideological conflict, but it was probably the longest lasting.

Yet in the post-Cold War era—if that is what we might call it—we are experiencing an unprecedented shakeup in longstanding loyalties to such ideas that we may properly label *ideologies*. The most dramatic of these developments has been the collapse of communism, which occurred with astonishing rapidity in late 1989 in Eastern Europe and finally led to the dismemberment of the So-



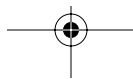
viet Union itself in late 1991. Although most of us on the outside were startled at this, those on the inside, especially Christians, seemed to understand that the Marxist-Leninist system would not last. Indeed, by the end it is fair to say that the ideology had been dead for some time, at least within the hearts of the people. In 1989 appearances simply caught up to the living realities of what people actually believed.

Scarcely less dramatic was the unexpectedly quick end to apartheid in South Africa orchestrated by F.W. de Klerk and Nelson Mandela. For decades Afrikaners¹ had believed—or had attempted to convince themselves—that the way to solve the problems of a plural society was to separate forcibly the various ethnic groups and to “allow” them to develop along their own lines under separate political institutions. Apartheid was further grounded in an ethnic nationalism that celebrated the greatness of Afrikanerdom, including its history, its language and even its particular brand of Reformed Christianity. By the time apartheid came to an end, even most white South Africans understood that it had been a destructive policy. Nothing less than a kind of nationalist faith had to die before apartheid could finally be abolished.

Somewhat less dramatically perhaps, we in the West are experiencing nagging doubts about our own ideologies, especially liberalism and democracy. Liberalism, as we shall see, is based on a belief in the primacy of the individual, and we seem now to be suffering the consequences of an untrammelled individualism in the form of a variety of intractable social ills. An emphasis on rights without the counteremphasis on responsibilities leaves us with precious little basis for genuine community, as we North Americans are learning to our great regret. Even democracy, which values community more highly than liberalism does, has degenerated into something approaching a pure majoritarianism allowing little genuine space for potentially dissenting communities and distrusting anything that might detract from loyalty to the democratic people. Democracy has become popular again, especially in the former communist countries. But there it is synonymous with the consumer-driven prosperity of such countries as Germany and the United States, and not with the public virtues needed to make a participatory political system work.

In Canada national unity is threatened by the clash of two mutually incom-

¹Afrikaners are South Africans of Dutch, French Huguenot and German descent who trace their origins to the establishment by Jan van Riebeeck in 1652 of a trading post at the Cape of Good Hope for the Dutch East India Company. Their language, Afrikaans, is a derivative of Dutch.



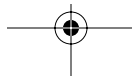
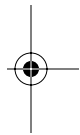
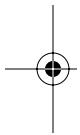


patible ideologies, liberalism and nationalism. In English-speaking Canada the dominant ideology, as in its southern neighbor, is liberalism, with its abstract notion of the equality of all individual citizens. In French-speaking Canada, especially in the province of Quebec, nationalism is the dominant ideology. Under its influence most Québécois believe in the equality of the two founding nations, French and English. Given these two contrasting notions of equality, it is not surprising that recent attempts at constitutional reform have met with failure.

Ideologies, in short, are not about to come to an end in this post-Cold War world, despite occasional predictions to the contrary. After the struggle between communism and liberal democracy faded into history, other ideologies have moved in to fill the vacuum left by the collapse of communism, most notably ethnic nationalism and radical Islamism. Non-Leninist Marxism itself is often said to be in decline, except possibly in Western academia and in Latin America, where it has taken the form of liberation theology. But a cluster of postmodern ideologies have come into being based on similar premises, namely that one's concrete position in life, whether economic class, gender, or race, determines one's overall worldview. This has encouraged what has come to be variously labeled the politics of difference, the politics of recognition or identity politics.²

So what is an ideology? At this point I shall tip my hand and indicate that I view ideologies as modern types of that ancient phenomenon idolatry, complete with their own accounts of sin and redemption. From the beginning of its narrative, Scripture inveighs against the worship of idols, false gods that human beings have created. Like these biblical idolatries, every ideology is based on taking something out of creation's totality, raising it above that creation, and making the latter revolve around and serve it. It is further based on the assumption that this idol has the capacity to save us from some real or perceived evil in the world. This is a book about political ideologies; the ideologies we shall discuss here have to do with politics and its place within human life. To be sure, they touch other areas of life as well, but we shall largely limit our discussion to assessing their impact within the *state* or *political community*, which is *that community binding together citizens and their government for purposes of doing and maintaining justice*.

²See Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Democracy on Trial* (Toronto: Anansi, 1993), pp. 65-90; and Charles Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 225-56.





Politics and Ideas

At various times it has become fashionable to claim that ideology is a thing of the past with no real relevance for the contemporary political scene. In 1960 Daniel Bell argued that after the Second World War, ideology had come to an end and had been replaced by a widespread consensus that the principal issues of the day were primarily technical in nature.³ In a growing postwar economy, issues of distribution that had once fueled socialist movements and had polarized labor and management were being supplanted by the purely administrative concerns of a society increasingly seeing itself as wholly middle class. This supposed consensus was shattered in the United States a few years later by the failure of President Lyndon Johnson's domestic and foreign policies and by the emergence of the New Left.

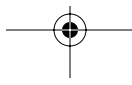
Nevertheless, a generation later, with the Cold War fading into the past, Francis Fukuyama argued that history itself was ending. The temporal succession of days and years would continue, of course, but history in the Hegelian sense of an ongoing conflict of ideas was drawing to a close. In 1989 liberal democracy had scored an apparently final victory over the forces of Marxism-Leninism, which had once seemed so impregnable but finally collapsed with such remarkable speed and so little violence. With the nearly universal acceptance of "liberal democracy" in the wake of communism's demise, all that was left for humanity to do was to settle into a rather bland bourgeois existence in which sameness would replace diversity and thereby supplant the conflicts engendered by the latter.⁴

Much of this premature heralding of the death of ideology may stem from a certain measure of wishful thinking. It may also, as Bernard Crick correctly points out, flow from a certain hostility to the continuing give and take of politics, which in this present life knows no end.⁵ There is some irony in this. The followers of ideologies often wish to impose their own simplistic conception of a monolithic social order on the complexities of a real society. But those ringing the death knell for ideology are themselves in the grip of a worldview through which they filter their perception of the political realm, though they are typically reluctant to label it an ideology as such. Bell and Fukuyama are not really harbingers of a new social order lacking ideological commitments; they are

³Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties* (New York: Free Press, 1960), esp. pp. 393-407.

⁴Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

⁵Bernard Crick, *In Defence of Politics* (Harmondsworth, U.K.: Penguin, 1993).





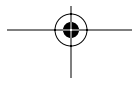
simply forecasting the triumph of their own pet ideology, which for both is some combination of liberalism and democracy, augmented by the technocratic guidance of social scientists. At the dawn of a new century, however, it should be obvious that ideology per se is not on its way out, though specific ideologies may have lost their attraction.

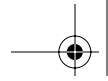
This underscores the need to define ideology as a concept before we can proceed to explore its particular manifestations. Like politics itself, *reflection* about politics has an ancient pedigree, going back to at least Plato and Aristotle. Often this reflection has taken the form of describing in empirical fashion the actual arrangement of political institutions or the activities of rulers and the ruled. Aristotle is perhaps the first empirical political scientist, and is reputed to have written extensively on the constitutions of one hundred fifty-eight cities and tribes, including Athens. But just as often political theorists have gone beyond the empirical and set forth what they believe to be the ideal or best political system. The most famous example of this is, of course, Plato's *Republic*. What we have come to call ideologies can perhaps be said to follow in the latter tradition.

History and Definitions

Despite ideology's roots in Plato's and Aristotle's philosophies, most accounts trace the origins of the concept itself to Antoine Destutt de Tracy (1754-1836), who coined the term at the beginning of the nineteenth century. For Destutt de Tracy *idéologie* is intended to be a comprehensive science of ideas whereby the scientific method can be applied to gain an understanding of the process of forming ideas. Following John Locke and Étienne Bonnot de Condillac, he believes that a scientific *idéologie* must be based on an analysis of the sensory elements of which ideas are composed. Any knowledge that cannot be immediately grounded in sensory experience must be rejected as having no scientific basis. Destutt de Tracy's *idéologie* is, therefore, intended to be rigorously empirical and excludes such phenomena as religious and mystical experiences, which are not strictly experiences at all because they are not rooted in sensation. Obviously *idéologie* is quite different from our contemporary ideology. But it should perhaps be noted that for Destutt de Tracy, scientific knowledge can be used to improve the conditions in which human beings live. Thus even this early form of ideology can already be said to imply action of some sort.

Others have defined *ideology* to imply inaction, or perhaps counteraction. Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820-1895) define *ideology* neg-





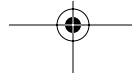
atively, though some of their successors, notably Lenin, would recover a more positive use of the term. For Marx and Engels the animating force behind the historical process is the class struggle. At any particular historical stage, whether this be feudalism or capitalism, one class rules over another and uses the power at its disposal to keep the lower class under its control. Its ability to do so depends on keeping the latter quiet. In a capitalist society the continued rule of the bourgeoisie hinges on the proletariat being convinced that its oppressive conditions are something other than what they are. If industrial workers are denied the vote (as they generally were up to the end of the nineteenth century) and forced to work long hours under harsh conditions, it is because this is in accordance with the natural order of things. Perhaps it is even the will of God. In other words, the bourgeoisie must create and reinforce a “false consciousness” in the proletariat to prevent in them a true consciousness of the real reasons behind their oppression.

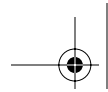
Marx and Engels label this false consciousness *ideology*, a phenomenon including politics, law, morality, religion and metaphysics.⁶ Everyone is by now familiar with Marx’s oft-quoted dictum that religion is the “opium of the people.”⁷ This does not mean, as some think, that the bourgeoisie has arbitrarily invented something called religion and imposed it on the proletariat. Rather, it arises out of the real miseries and aspirations of the oppressed. But like a narcotic, religion deadens pain and makes people passive in the face of oppression. It keeps them from taking action to change these conditions, and it even prevents them from recognizing them for what they are. Ideology includes virtually everything that exists in people’s consciousness and it has come into being as a byproduct of class struggle. *Ideologists*, then, are guilty of turning the order around—of assuming that ideas have an independent existence and determine the real world of social and economic relations. What began as a positive, scientific enterprise in Destutt de Tracy has thus become in Marx and Engels a negative phenomenon based upon a false view of the real world. Since their time, then, it is not surprising that ideology has more often than not had a derogatory connotation, even for those opposed to Marxism.

A variation of this concept of ideology has been advanced by the German sociologist Karl Mannheim (1893-1947). Deeply influenced by Marx, Max Weber and German historicism, Mannheim distinguishes between ideology, a basically

⁶Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (1845), chaps. 1, 4-5.

⁷Karl Marx, “Introduction,” in *Critique of Hegel’s Rechtsphilosophie*.





conserving force, and utopia, a force for social change. Working out of what he labels a “sociology of knowledge,” he argues that ideology consciously or unconsciously masks the concrete realities of a culture or era, or of an individual’s life. In its particular form, ideology consists of “opinions, statements, propositions, and systems of ideas” which are not to be taken at face value but must instead be “interpreted in the light of the life-situation of the one who expresses them.”⁸ In its total form, ideology describes the *Weltanschauung* of a “concrete historico-social group” or of a particular historical epoch. In both cases, although ideology is a form of false consciousness, as in Marx, it is not necessarily rooted in class struggle but in a life-situation which includes factors other than economic. Ideology itself, however, is fundamentally psychological in nature and must be analyzed as such. It is usually not simply a pack of deliberate lies, but is a function of the social situation in which people find themselves.⁹

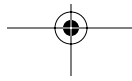
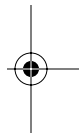
Utopia, by contrast, describes a state of mind that transcends the real world and conduces to behavior that tends to break the bonds of a prevailing order. Mannheim’s utopia is not an ideal social arrangement that is unrealizable in an absolute sense, as the term tends to be used in popular discourse. It does not transcend all existing states of affairs; it transcends only a particular state of affairs. In this sense, the social conditions that utopians are striving to realize are relative and not absolute utopias. Like ideologies, utopias too are ways of thinking that are incongruent with a current status quo. But while ideologies do not strive to replace the latter with a new social order, utopias do just that. Ideologies are therefore conservative, while utopias are revolutionary, if only in a relative sense.¹⁰

For both Marx and Mannheim, then, ideologies are types of false consciousness which are used to justify an existing social order and which their proponents may or may not believe. They are nevertheless put forward as true accounts of reality, while they in fact function so as to hide that reality from the vast majority of people. By preventing them from seeing the world as it is, ideologies are thus deeply conservative and tend to militate against change. If we accept this account of ideology, then perhaps the “Myth of the Metals” in Plato’s *Republic* falls into this category since it is a kind of “noble lie” used by the philosopher-kings to secure popular acceptance of their superior fitness to

⁸Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1936), p. 56.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 61.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 192-263.





rule. Similarly, in Walter Bagehot's nineteenth-century England, monarchical trappings conceal for most of the populace the fact that the prime minister and cabinet actually run the country. Thus the institution of the monarchy confers a legitimacy on the activities of the government, which the person of a mere practical politician would be unable to do.¹¹ In the United States it may perhaps be said that American civil religion, with its focus on the liberal ideals of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, is also an ideology in Marx's and Mannheim's sense.

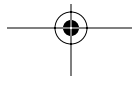
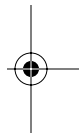
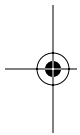
But why ascribe to ideology a basically conservative role? Why differentiate between ideology and utopia? Cannot erroneous ways of thinking also be called into the service of new social and political projects? Hannah Arendt (1906-1975), Bernard Crick (1929-) and Václav Havel (1936-) clearly believe they can. According to Arendt, whenever a purely rational construct, conceived within the realm of thought, is imposed upon a community, it threatens to put an end to that action and speech necessary to constitute and maintain the free political realm. Ideologies attempt to offer a total explanation for the world and its history and thus "all ideologies contain totalitarian elements."¹² They read the whole of reality through a single idea and deny the possibility that any genuine knowledge can be attained through experience apart from that idea. In contemporary parlance, they exempt themselves from a "reality check." It is a short step from ideology to totalitarianism, which not only interprets the world through a single idea but also attempts to mold it in accordance with its inexorable logic. Hence ideologies such as Nazism and communism have caused much suffering in their attempt to control the supposedly autonomous historical forces they have ostensibly revealed.

Following Arendt, Crick too believes that ideology threatens the continued existence of politics in his specific sense. Here ideology is once again a force for change, but the change it effects is the extinction of legitimate societal diversity and of the ongoing conciliatory process flowing out of it. Ideological thinking "is an explicit and direct challenge to political thinking."¹³ For Crick, as for Arendt, ideology is connected with totalitarianism. The latter is antipolitical because it attempts to eliminate different interests and to mold the people in accordance with a single idea. It tries to simplify the complexity of society into a monolithic vision, often of a utopian character. Politics is limited, while total-

¹¹Walter Bagehot, *The English Constitution* (1867).

¹²Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973), p. 470.

¹³Crick, *In Defence of Politics*, p. 34.





itarianism is not. Politics is content to make do with the existing state of society and to conciliate whatever interests are currently there. Ideology attempts to remake, not only government, but “education, industry, art, even domesticity and private affections.”¹⁴ All of these are accountable to this all-embracing ideology, which, in trying to politicize society, ends up destroying politics altogether.

For Havel, ideology threatens not only politics but also the ordinary aims of life itself, as it continually did in his native Czechoslovakia from 1948 until the collapse of the communist regime in November 1989. “Ideology is a specious way of relating to the world.”¹⁵ In what he labels the “post-totalitarian” societies of the former Soviet bloc, ideology claims to offer the people a sense of identity and dignity while in reality stripping them of this. “It is a world of appearances trying to pass for reality.”¹⁶ It constructs a world which assimilates all people into a self-contained alternative pseudo-reality in which slavery passes for liberty, censorship for free expression, bureaucracy for democracy, and arbitrary power for legal authority. Under such a regime people are compelled to “live within a lie” in which they are made to deny the real aims of life, with all its humanity and unpredictability. In Havel we find ideology realizing its darkest potential.

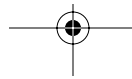
Of the thinkers surveyed above, four use ideology in a largely pejorative sense. Marx, Arendt, Crick and Havel see it as something to avoid, though certainly for different reasons. For Marx it is an impediment to the coming of the new socialist society, but it is nevertheless destined to pass away once the latter has finally occurred. Ideology slows the pace of change by blinding people to the need for change. For Arendt, Crick and Havel, by contrast, ideology is a destructive force insofar as it attempts to transform societal diversity in accordance with a false, unitary conception of human life and history. For Mannheim, ideology is neither good nor bad in any ultimate sense; it simply exists. It does, however, play fundamentally the same conservative role it plays for Marx. Only in Destutt de Tracy does ideology take on an unequivocally positive character, but for him it means something other than what it does for later thinkers. Leaving him aside, the other five are united in seeing ideology as involving some sort of erroneous thinking or falsification of reality.

More recent observers have followed Mannheim’s example and attempted to articulate a neutral conception of ideology. They have, furthermore, maintained

¹⁴Ibid., p. 40.

¹⁵Václav Havel, *Living in Truth* (London: Faber & Faber, 1986), p. 42.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 44.





a kind of agnosticism toward the truth or error of its contents. According to Isaac Kramnick and Frederick M. Watkins, ideologies are “patterns of politics, beliefs that introduce normative visions into political life.”¹⁷ Max J. Skidmore similarly sees ideology as “a form of thought that presents a pattern of complex political ideas simply and in a manner that inspires action to achieve certain goals.”¹⁸ David E. Ingessoll and Richard K. Matthews agree with this view of ideology as simplifying of reality and action-oriented, but they see it also as justifying both the action taken and the worldview on which such action is based.¹⁹ Mark O. Dickerson and Thomas Flanagan add to these elements the observations that ideology is a social, and not merely personal, belief, and that its tenets are “more or less” logically coherent.²⁰ These are fairly typical definitions taken from standard textbooks in the field. All have to do with the interrelation between ideas and actions as applied to politics, and all attempt to take a more or less clinical, empirical approach to the concept.

Ideology in Christian Perspective

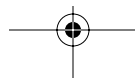
Christians are, of course, concerned with truth, both in absolute and relative senses. Truth is an attribute of God, and Jesus calls himself the way, the truth and the life (Jn 14:6). He further tells us that “you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (Jn 8:32). If Marx, Mannheim, Arendt, Crick and Havel are correct in asserting that ideologies represent fundamentally flawed conceptions of the world, then we Christians are obligated to take them seriously and to try to discern in exactly which ways they go wrong. But there is perhaps a paradox inherent in the present enterprise and its relation to truth. I take it as axiomatic that Christians seek the truth above all. I shall concur with the tradition that sees ideology as a type of false consciousness, and will argue further that it is rooted in the biblical category of idolatry. Nevertheless, I admit that I cannot “prove” the truth of this definition any more than the above figures can do so for theirs. Since I cannot do so, there is perhaps a danger of falling into a nominalism that holds that all definitions are arbitrary, or into a relativism that drains truth of any real meaning.

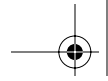
¹⁷Isaac Kramnick and Frederick M. Watkins, *The Age of Ideology: Political Thought, 1750 to the Present* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1979), p. 2.

¹⁸Max J. Skidmore, *Ideologies: Politics in Action* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1993), p. 7.

¹⁹David E. Ingessoll and Richard K. Matthews, *The Philosophic Roots of Modern Ideology: Liberalism, Communism, Fascism*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1991), pp. 5-10.

²⁰Mark O. Dickerson and Thomas Flanagan, *An Introduction to Government and Politics: A Conceptual Approach*, 6th ed. (Scarborough, Ontario: Nelson Thompson Learning, 2002), p. 128.





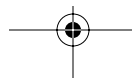
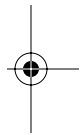
There may be no wholly satisfactory way out of this quandary. If not, then I am willing to live with it and hope the reader can do so too. But there may be at least two ways to diminish its significance. In the first place, as we have observed above, the notion of ideology as involving erroneous or distorted thinking has a long history extending at least back to Marx. Even now, labeling someone an “ideologue” is hardly a compliment and is close to being an outright insult. In this respect, my own definition does not radically depart from ordinary usage. In the second place, I believe a case can be made that those phenomena normally classified as ideologies do indeed originate in idolatrous religion. These include liberalism, conservatism, nationalism, ideological democracy and socialism, among others. Since these phenomena are almost universally labeled ideologies, then I believe there is some justification in drawing a connection between idolatry and ideology. To some readers this may seem an outrageous claim, but I ask them to bear with me as the argument of this book unfolds.

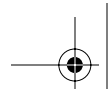
Preconditions for the Rise of Ideologies

In defining *ideology*, I shall assume that many, if not most, of the definitions recounted above are in large measure correct. Or at least they have fastened on to significant elements necessary to a full understanding of it. Therefore, my own comments below draw on them to a great extent, though I do hope to put them in a different light. To begin with, we need to ask why the ideologies arose when they did and what are the preconditions for their coming into existence.

First, we must be aware of the long tradition of political theorizing that stands in back of the ideologies, which can be said to recycle much of the material of these ancient theories. For example, it is sometimes thought that liberal individualism is an unprecedented philosophy that would have been unthinkable prior to the Enlightenment or perhaps the Renaissance. In its modern form this is certainly true. Yet if we look back to the post-Aristotelian philosophy of epicureanism, we are struck by the similarities between this philosophy and that of, say, Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), who lived two millennia later. Individualism, as it turns out, is not so new after all. The modern ideologies have thus received much of their content from these older theories. The writer of Ecclesiastes tells us that there is nothing new under the sun. Not surprisingly, then, the inventors of an ideology rarely create *ex nihilo* its intellectual ingredients; they have simply recycled them from earlier ideologies and political theories.

Is there a difference, then, between political theory and ideology, as I seem to be implying thus far? Again, the distinction may seem arbitrary, but others



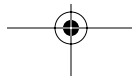
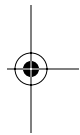


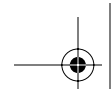
too have attempted to distinguish different modes of reflection on politics. Leo Strauss (1899–1973), for example, distinguishes among several of these, including political philosophy and political theory. For him political philosophy is the highest form of such reflection because it concerns itself with attaining knowledge of the good political order and of that which is right by nature. It aims to replace opinion with genuine knowledge. Political theory, by contrast, is more “praxis” oriented. It aims at translating reflection into policy, but it does not question the fundamental assumptions underlying such reflection.²¹ Insofar as it wishes to put ideas into practice without necessarily testing their truth, ideology may perhaps be said to fall into the category of political theory in the Straussian sense. For others, however, political theory, philosophy and ideology are synonymous. For present purposes, I shall assume that ideology is a kind of popularized form of normative political theory or philosophy.

The second precondition, somewhat ironically, is the preaching of the Christian gospel, as Bishop Lesslie Newbigin points out. Although the gospel stands in implacable opposition to the various pseudo-gospels put forward by the ideologies, the announcement of the good news of Jesus Christ paves the way for the possibility of false messiahs to promise another path to salvation.²² Why? In contrast to such religions as Hinduism, with their more static conceptions of reality, Christianity is a historical religion based on a succession of real events leading to humanity’s redemption. The Bible is not simply a collection of ethereal wisdom assisting the soul in its ascent to the divine. It is a record of actual occurrences whereby God has intervened in history to save his chosen people, most notably by rescuing Noah from the deluge, calling Abraham into Canaan, leading Moses and the Israelites out of Egypt and preserving a remnant through exile in Babylonia. Finally and most significant, of course, God has revealed himself in the birth, life, suffering, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ for our salvation. We are furthermore assured in the Bible and in the creeds of the church that Jesus will one day come again to inaugurate his eternal kingdom and to make all things new. However, given the propensity to sin, once people have come to expect salvation as a real historical possibility, they soon begin to look for it on other terms. Newbigin makes the intriguing observation that the only places in India where Marxism has gained a foothold are precisely

²¹Leo Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy? and Other Studies* (New York: Free Press, 1959), pp. 9–53, esp. pp. 13, 27–40.

²²Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1989), pp. 122–23. Newbigin (1909–1998) was a long-time missionary to India and bishop in the Church of South India.





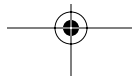
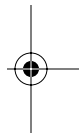
those parts, primarily the south, that have been thoroughly evangelized.²³ Similarly, in the development of socialist and nationalist movements in the Middle East, Arabs of Christian origin have played a disproportionately large role.²⁴

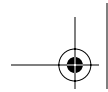
Thus the third precondition contributing to the rise of ideologies is the secularization of the Christian faith and of the cultures—beginning with the West—which have historically been shaped by this faith. As Western culture has further spread its influence to other parts of the world, its distinctive form of secularization, including the allure of the ideologies, has followed in its path. Secularization does not entail the diminishing authority of the institutional church over nonchurch communities, though it is sometimes taken to mean this. In an increasingly differentiated society, a phenomenon we shall further explore in chapters seven and eight, such “secularization” is normal and even to be expected. In the sense used here, however, secularization means nothing less than the increasing rejection of the Christian faith by society as a whole, even as it continues to work within frameworks owing much to its redemptive-historical teachings. We need not pretend that premodern Europe was wholly and consistently Christian in all its ways to recognize that at the Renaissance and Enlightenment the intellectual trendsetters of Europe turned decisively away from traditional Christianity. This is not to say that every philosopher living during these eras was an overt atheist, though a number certainly were. More typical was adherence to a vague deism conceiving God to be little more than a supreme artificer absenting himself from the world following his initial creative act. The deistic god is simply a watchmaker who winds up his handiwork and thereafter leaves it to run by itself. God may be creator, but he is not sustainer and certainly not redeemer.

Fourth, the ideologies presuppose the possibility of mass political movements. It is no accident that the rise of ideologies has coincided with the advent of democracy and the expansion of political participation. Up until the nineteenth century the word *democracy* was not held in high regard. Given that education was confined to the few and that statesmanship was regarded as a profession whose personal qualifications were as specialized as those of a physician, it was thought irresponsible to leave political decision-making to the passions of an untutored majority. Democracy, to our forebears, was synonymous with mob rule. Consequently, the older political theorists did not address themselves primarily to a

²³Ibid., p. 122.

²⁴Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 21.





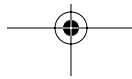
popular audience. Debate over political principles was limited to the educated and no one expected that such principles would gain large followings.

Today, of course, it is otherwise. Throughout the forty years of the Cold War, the two superpowers justified their own existence in ideological terms and saw themselves as locked in a battle for the hearts and minds of the world's masses. One implication of this popularization is that, while the classic political theories were generally formulated in a careful and systematic manner, the modern ideologies are packaged somewhat eclectically for mass consumption. It is not surprising, then, that such ideologies are often internally inconsistent. For example, economic and moral libertarianism are usually to be found in different packages along with other, less harmonious, nonlibertarian elements.²⁵ In North America those calling themselves political liberals and conservatives have simply embraced different sides of the broader liberal agenda with bits of socialism, nationalism and other strains thrown in. This is as true of Ronald Reagan as of Bill Clinton, of Brian Mulroney as of Pierre Trudeau.

The dissemination of ideologies to a mass market would be impossible if it were not for the fifth precondition, namely, the dramatic increase in technical capabilities available to governments, and to political movements and parties. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries technical developments took a further leap ahead with the industrial revolution. These breakthroughs have accelerated in the last two centuries, resulting in today's information revolution. Vastly improved means of transportation and communication have facilitated the propagation of ideas to millions of people with a swiftness unavailable to the first book printers. Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew K. Brzezinski have emphasized the technological factor in the rise of totalitarianism, namely, the availability to the leaders of such potent means as radio, newspapers, motion pictures and other more subtle techniques of psychological manipulation.²⁶ But such means

²⁵ Charles Taylor makes a similar point about the internal inconsistencies of the parties to most current political debates in *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 95: "Right-wing American-style conservatives speak as advocates of traditional communities when they attack abortion on demand and pornography; but in their economic policies they advocate an untamed form of capitalist enterprise, which more than anything else has helped to dissolve historical communities, has fostered atomism, which knows no frontiers or loyalties, and is ready to close down a mining town or savage a forest habitat at the drop of a balance sheet. On the other side, we find supporters of an attentive, reverential stance to nature who would go to the wall to defend the forest habitat, demonstrating in favor of abortion on demand, on the grounds that a woman's body belongs exclusively to her." See also Dale Vree, *From Berkeley to East Berlin and Back* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985), pp. 137-47.

²⁶ Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1965), pp. 129-47.





have also been serviceable to the popularization of ideologies that are not as overtly totalitarian in nature. Enhanced technical capabilities, coupled with the wider sense of community effected by the nation-state, have thus proved to be serviceable to the rise and proliferation of ideologies.

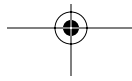
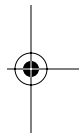
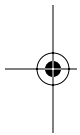
These recent developments are in large measure positive ones and have had undoubted benefits for much of humanity. It is certainly appropriate that as literacy spreads and people come to take an interest in the affairs of state, they should be acknowledged as active participants in the political community and that the government's authority should be exercised in a consultative fashion. We shall explore this further in our discussion of democracy in chapter five. It is also fitting that technical capacities be developed in accordance with the potentialities God has built into his creation. But just as all positive developments have a negative side, so also has the resulting expanded sense of community created fertile ground for the growth of the ideologies.

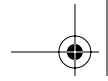
Ideology as Religious: Toward a Definition

Given the preconditions articulated above, it is appropriate to proceed to an account of ideology itself and to isolate its peculiar characteristics. I believe ideology can be understood in terms of five basic characteristics.

First and foremost, as hinted thus far, ideologies are inescapably religious. I am tempted at this point to equate completely ideology and religion, though it perhaps might be more accurate to say that an ideology *flows out of* the (idolatrous) religious commitment of a person or community. The use of the word idolatry may seem provocative in contemporary discourse because it implies that one religion is making truth claims exclusive of other religions. Although such claims are regarded by many as offensive in this postmodern age, the fact is that religion by its very nature makes such claims. Any attempt to relativize religion risks making it less than what it claims to be and thus trivializes it, despite the fact that such an effort may have grown out of a sincere desire to make room for it. Consequently, idolatry must still be admitted to be an operative category.²⁷ Furthermore, as Paul Marshall has observed, idolatry is not simply one more sin, of which pride, envy, lust and so forth are other examples; in fact, "all sin is an expression of the basic sin of idolatry, of putting something else in

²⁷At the same time, it is probably accurate to observe that even from a Christian point of view, not all non-Christian religions are idolatrous in the sense outlined here. In particular, because Judaism and Islam are theistic religions that arguably worship the same God as Christians, these two, at least, can be said also to oppose idolatry.





the place of God.”²⁸ Idolatry, in other words, is the origin of all other sins, as indicated by its proscription being ranked as the first precept of the Decalogue.

Idolatry takes something within God’s creation, attempts to elevate it above the boundary separating Creator from creature, and makes of it a kind of god. Because religion is all-embracing, idolatry further tries to bring the rest of creation into the service of that invented god. The sort of idolatry we know best from Scripture is the obvious variety in which people fashion an imagined personal deity out of wood or stone, build temples, contrive liturgical rites and pay sacrifices to it. The Old Testament prophets tirelessly denounce the worship of false gods to which Israel and Judah constantly fell prey. But idolatry also manifests itself in more subtle ways. Human beings are inevitably worshiping creatures, though not all humans will admit this of themselves. An atheist denies belief in God but may effectively worship rationality, artistic prowess or military might as god. Even nominal believers in God may in fact serve such idols as financial success, social prestige or political power. Because idolatry in this second sense is so oblique and less overtly experienced as such, we often do not recognize it for what it is. It is in this sort of idolatry that ideology is rooted.

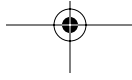
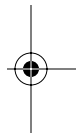
The connection between idolatry and ideology is forcefully made by Bob Goudzwaard, who argues that the religious nature of human beings can be understood in terms of “three basic biblical rules”: First, everyone serves a god of some sort. Second, everyone is transformed into the image of the god she serves. Third, people structure their society in their own image.²⁹ Augustine states this in terms of two basic principles: our hearts are restless until they rest in God;³⁰ and a commonwealth is united by shared objects of love.³¹ If the members of a community love God and seek to do his will, then the structures that order their common life will reflect this. If on the other hand, its members love such things as material wealth, individual rights and the all-powerful state, this shared love will work itself out in ways that affect the welfare of the community. If their hearts attempt to find rest in those things that do not really bring rest, this continued restlessness will express itself in social and political institutions. In short, the worship of idols brings practical consequences for the shared life of persons in community.

²⁸Paul Marshall, with Lela Gilbert, *Heaven Is Not My Home: Learning to Live in the Now of God’s Creation* (Nashville: Word, 1998), p. 190.

²⁹Bob Goudzwaard, *Aid for the Overdeveloped West* (Toronto: Wedge, 1975), pp. 14–15.

³⁰Augustine *Confessions* 1.1.

³¹Augustine *City of God* 19.24.



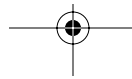


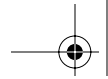
Second, if ideologies deify something within God's creation, they inevitably view this humanly made god as a source of salvation. Thus each of the ideologies is based on a specific soteriology, that is, on a worked-out theory promising deliverance to human beings from some fundamental evil that is viewed as the source of a broad range of human ills, including tyranny, oppression, anarchy, poverty and so forth. As Goudzwaard puts it, "The mature ideology is a false revelation of creation, fall and redemption."³² Christianity sees Jesus Christ as the source of salvation; the ideologies see salvation coming to us through, for example, the maximization of individual freedom, the communal ownership of all wealth, the liberation of the nation from foreign rule, the submission of individuals to the general will and so forth. This is not to say that salvation in Jesus Christ necessarily manifests itself apart from ordinary policy alternatives in the political realm. Indeed a redemptive understanding of politics—as opposed to the totalitarian pretense that politics itself redeems—requires the fleshing out of the divine calling to do justice in terms of carefully worked-out concrete programs. Yet even if justice should require greater individual freedom, a certain redistribution of wealth, national independence, or greater consideration of the common good, the single-minded pursuit of such goals is not itself of a salvific character and will likely produce destructive consequences. This is where a Christian understanding differs radically from that of the ideologies.

Of course, salvation is always *from* something deemed evil. For orthodox Christians the creation is good because a good God brought it into being. Sin is not to be located in creation but in the rebellion against God and against his purposes for creation. By contrast—and this is the third characteristic—the ideologies tend to locate the source of this fundamental evil somewhere within the creation. "Identifying its own source of evil," Goudzwaard writes, the ideology furthermore "erects its own antithesis between good and evil."³³ Thus the ideology can be seen to partake of that ancient heresy of gnosticism, for which the physical world is deemed intrinsically sinful, and salvation is viewed as deliverance from its supposed confines. Eric Voegelin (1901-1985) has made much of the connection between the modern mass ideological movements and gnosticism. In Voegelin's estimation, gnostics are dissatisfied with the world, which they deem "intrinsically poorly organized." They believe that salvation from the

³²Bob Goudzwaard, *Idols of Our Time* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1984), p. 25.

³³*Ibid.*





world's evil is possible within the immanent historical process and that this will require a structural change in the "order of being"; finally, they believe that the means of effecting such change necessitates seeking a special knowledge—or *gnosis*—available only to the gnostics themselves.³⁴ Voegelin's isolation of this relationship between the ideologies and gnosticism is compelling, and his account of the gnostic attitude seems largely correct.

What is lacking from his analysis, however, is an understanding of how gnosticism relates to the Christian understanding of creation, fall and redemption. According to Voegelin's account, Christianity teaches that the fulfillment of human nature is to be found in the "*visio beatifica*, in supernatural perfection through grace in death," and that "Christian life on earth takes its special form from the life to come in the next [world]."³⁵ Although there is a large measure of truth in his eschatological account of the Christian faith, it suffers from the misconception that the kingdom of God is discontinuous with the historical process and cannot be manifested within it. To be sure, the final consummation of God's kingdom does await the second advent of Jesus Christ and his promise to make all things new. In this respect, creation's ultimate fulfillment comes from outside creation itself and is not simply implicit within it, as a number of the ideologies and some "historicist" Christians teach.³⁶ Yet this fulfillment is precisely the *fulfillment of creation* and not the attainment by a noncorporeal soul of some intelligible form detached from God's world. Indeed Voegelin's "order of being" appears to owe more to a static Platonic notion of being than to the Christian understanding of creation order, a principal difference being that the latter is distorted by sin yet capable of being redeemed by grace to fulfill its intended purpose. Because Voegelin posits too sharp a division between the present life and the life of the world to come, he is thus unable to see that redemption is, once again, "creation regained."³⁷ Furthermore, if gnosticism is, in Charles Norris Cochrane's words, based on "an absolute antithesis between matter and spirit" and denies "the unity of the cosmos,"³⁸ then Voegelin



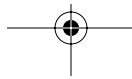
³⁴Eric Voegelin, *Science, Politics & Gnosticism* (Chicago: Regnery Gateway, 1968), pp. 86-88. See also his *The New Science of Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952); and *From Enlightenment to Revolution* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1975).

³⁵Voegelin, *New Science of Politics*, p. 88.

³⁶See, e.g., Oliver O'Donovan's discussion of "eschatology and history" in *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1986), pp. 53-75.

³⁷Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1985), pp. 42, 50-51.

³⁸Charles Norris Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture: A Study of Thought and Action from Augustus to Augustine* (New York: Oxford/Galaxy, 1957), pp. 159, 369.





himself has not entirely succeeded in eluding its grasp.

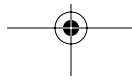
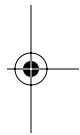
Yet if we can manage to take Voegelin's central insight into the character of gnosticism, separate it from his heavily platonized account of Christianity, and place it within the biblically informed context of creation, fall and redemption, then there is much to be derived from his analysis of the ideologies. According to Albert M. Wolters, gnosticism tends to depreciate one dimension of God's creation, thus effectively ontologizing evil and salvation, which are identified with something intrinsic to the structure of creation itself.³⁹ The ideologies do precisely the same thing. Thus liberalism sees community, or any heteronomous authority, as uniquely threatening to the well-being of the autonomous individual and thus a source of evil. Libertarians tend to see government as this source of evil. Conservatives tend to see the dynamic character of creation, that is, change and development, as a source of evil. Collectivist ideologies, for example, socialism and nationalism, tend to distrust individual freedom or other alternative communities, thereby identifying their existence with evil. Along with this gnostic tendency comes a propensity to deny the goodness of creation and a concomitant inability to discern the creation order altogether.

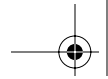
Fourth, given this defective soteriology, it should not be surprising that ideologies have a fundamentally distorted view of the world, and hence of government and politics. This distorted worldview has tremendous consequences for political practice, because people inevitably live out their religious worldviews. Because the followers of ideologies see the world as belonging not to God but to themselves, they misunderstand the character of the world in a rather basic fashion. Perhaps they see it as a chance combination of atoms and molecules capable of being shaped to their liking. Or they may see the state as the source of order in the world and effectively make it totalitarian, as, for example, in Nazism and Marxism-Leninism. Conversely, they may see the state as the principal source of evil in the world, as does the libertarianism of Friedrich von Hayek and Ayn Rand. Inevitably, this distorted view has profound implications for policymaking and for concrete political practice.

Fifth and finally, in the modern ideologies goals supplant principles. As Goudzwaard puts it, the adherent of an ideology is "possessed by an end."⁴⁰ Or, to echo the familiar maxim, the end justifies the means. Rather than seeing justice as a norm governing political action from the outset, ideology sees it pri-

³⁹ Albert M. Wolters, "Facing the Perplexing History of Philosophy," *Tydskrif vir Christelike Wetenskap* 17, no. 4 (1981): 10.

⁴⁰ Goudzwaard, *Idols of Our Time*, p. 14.



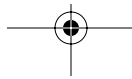


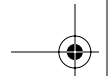
marily as a final goal of such action. (Therefore even pragmatism, so often seen as the opposite of ideology, is itself an ideology, given its goal orientation.) The relevant question thus becomes, not whether the state is acting justly, but *whether it is acting so as eventually to achieve justice*. Under the latter approach, justice is seen as an ideal located somewhere in the future, and whatever one does in the here-and-now is permissible if it serves the ultimate attainment of this goal. One can safely put aside for today the immediate issues of justice, as long as current means are serviceable to a better tomorrow. Future justice can therefore be seen to excuse present *injustice*. Here is where sacrifice inevitably enters the picture. If, as Christians believe, the shed blood of Jesus Christ is the sacrifice for our sins, then the ideologies offer a surrogate source of salvation that may also call for bloody sacrifice. In its own way, as Goudzwaard observes, the ideology “imitates the suffering and death of the Messiah” and can thus be seen as a kind of counterfeit Christianity.⁴¹

That human beings set goals for themselves and their communities is, of course, nothing new or remarkable. The capacity to project into the future and to formulate plans accordingly is implanted by God and is part of how he has created us. But in the ideologies these goals take on a life of their own. They are in the first place rooted in the predominant secular belief in human autonomy, according to which human beings determine the course of their own lives without reference to God’s will. In the second place, these goals themselves become gods to which ordinary flesh-and-blood people may have to be sacrificed. It is by no means incidental that the two unquestionably worst ideologies of the twentieth century, namely, Marxism-Leninism and national socialism, left scores of millions of deaths in their wake. Other ideologies have been less obviously destructive but have nevertheless exacted some sort of human toll, perhaps in broken marriages and families, abuse of workers, unemployment, widespread poverty or environmental degradation.

Earlier I expressed reluctance to see ideology and idolatry as identical. This is because most of the ideologies we shall explore can be said to be rooted in a single human-centered religion, often known as *humanism* or, more commonly, *secularism*. Secularism may be described as an idolatry which, as its name indicates, worships some created thing, or more than one thing, within the *saeculum*—the present age. These ideologies are therefore part of a larger spiritual family and as such share significant assumptions about humanity and their rela-

⁴¹Ibid., p. 25.





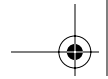
tionship to their fellow human beings, the rest of the world and God. Thus we shall see that despite the professed enmity existing between different ideologies, such as liberalism and socialism, their animosity might better be interpreted as a kind of sibling rivalry. Brothers and sisters may constantly quarrel with each other in the same household, and when they grow up they may further drift apart, both emotionally and geographically. Yet they are unlikely to be able to conceal that they are closely related because of similar physical appearances. Blue eyes may run in the family, as may high cheekbones and a roman nose. Thus, even while they are protesting their mutual differences, the evidence of their blood relationship remains for all to see. It is the same with the ideologies.

According to Allan Bloom the whole world is divided between the followers of John Locke and Karl Marx—between liberalism and socialism.⁴² While the configuration of human ideological loyalties is surely more complex than this statement suggests, and despite the fact that this ideological cleavage has diminished considerably since 1989, it does point to an important truth about the contemporary political debate, namely, that its very parameters have been determined by this secularist religion, whose principal tenet is a belief in human autonomy. Because of this religion's impact, it is no longer doubted that human beings shape their world autonomously. Rather, the principal controversies revolve around the issue of who is the bearer of that autonomy, the individual or some form of community. Those who question autonomy altogether are effectively left out of the discussion. The fact that the world's principal collectivist ideology is in decline and individualism is (at least for now) in the ascendancy has not fundamentally altered this picture. Nor is it likely to do so in the near future.

I shall not pretend that the foregoing presents an exhaustive account of ideology. Undoubtedly one could add other characteristics to these five, which would enhance our understanding of it, but these seem to me to be the most important. Two points still need to be made, however, before we move to the next section. First, if ideologies flow out of an idolatrous worldview, does this mean that they have no positive features or nothing to teach us? Not at all. In chapter seven I shall explain what I believe to be the best way of assessing the ideologies from a Christian viewpoint. Here I shall say only that if ideologies err by making a god out of something in the creation, and if that created thing nevertheless remains good, then it stands to reason that the ideologies and their followers have uncovered fragments of the truth which perhaps even Christians

⁴²Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), p. 217.





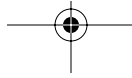
have failed to see. In fact one might argue the need to assess the good in an ideology before we can begin to understand its deformations. How else can we explain that otherwise good and decent German citizens succumbed to the attractions of national socialism in the 1930s and 1940s? Or that so many intellectuals in Europe and North America, scandalized by the suffering caused by the Great Depression, would turn to communism for answers?

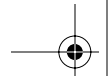
Second, in the midst of the struggles among the ideologies and of the distortions they impose on individuals and communities, God remains faithful to his creation. This explains in large measure how it is possible for the ideologies to have fragmentary insights into the truth. But it also means that even the most deceptive of ideologies is incapable of altogether misshaping the world, including human society, in its own image. Good marriages and healthy families are still possible in a liberal political order, where the forces of individualism might otherwise tend to erode these basic institutions. As Michael Walzer has observed, a liberalism untempered by other, longstanding restraints and allegiances would be unendurable.⁴³ Not only unendurable, but indeed virtually impossible. Particular loyalties tend to survive, even in the midst of a totalitarian regime openly discouraging all ties other than to itself. In this respect, while capitalism, as the economic counterpart of liberalism, manifests itself in a variety of ways, it is not appropriate to speak in an unqualified way of “capitalist society,” as if capitalism were capable of subjecting the whole of human life and relationships to the market. Certainly it is possible for capitalism to distort, for example, family life, but it cannot remake or undo it entirely, notwithstanding recent warnings in some circles of the family’s imminent demise. For this we may rightly thank God, who faithfully upholds his creation order in the midst of our disobedience.

The Classification of Ideologies: Left and Right

There is no generally accepted scheme for classifying political ideologies, and those that exist are not especially helpful. One of the more common and, I would argue, least helpful is to group them along a so-called left-right spectrum. The use of left and right is so widespread, in fact, that it deserves some comment. Many people use these labels as if they had some invariable content well known to virtually everyone since time immemorial. If we label Margaret Thatcher a rightist, what precisely are we saying about her political beliefs and policies? If we label

⁴³Quoted by Elshain in “Feminists Against the Family,” in *Real Politics at the Center of Everyday Life* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), p. 151.





the late François Mitterrand a leftist, what do we expect our hearers to assume about him? Often these terms are used in a derisive fashion as a way of discrediting those with whom we disagree. By using them we may inadvertently tell more about ourselves than about our political opponents. Why do we use them then? Do they actually communicate something? Are they worth keeping?

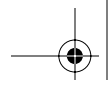
The use of left and right originates in nothing more remarkable than the seating arrangement of deputies to the French National Assembly after 1789. Traditional monarchists were seated to the right of the speaker, while republicans were seated to his left. As monarchism diminished as a significant force and as radicalism and socialism came onto the scene, the configuration of political parties changed and their places in the parliamentary chamber drifted to the speaker's right.⁴⁴ At the outset, those on the right favored monarchical sovereignty while those on the left supported popular sovereignty. Thus the basic criterion for locating the parties and their ideologies along the continuum was their respective attitudes toward possession of political power.

Needless to say, this criterion is all but obsolete today. No one would seriously suggest that the basic difference between Mitterrand and Thatcher is that, while Mitterrand was a democrat, Thatcher is a monarchist. Rather, the meaning of left and right has changed over the decades as different clusters of issues have come to supplant earlier issues in importance. At various times in France and elsewhere, the overriding issue has been between clericalism and anticlericalism—between those supporting the prerogatives of the institutional church and those wishing to strip the church of its power. In such a context the clerical parties were seated at the right and the anticlerical parties at the left of the chamber. Perhaps as a consequence of this historical peculiarity, there is an enduring popular tendency to see any Christian involvement in politics, ranging from the European Christian democratic parties to the American Christian Coalition, as a phenomenon of the right. Moreover, many Christians themselves tend to gravitate toward parties that position themselves on the right.

Through most of the twentieth century, however, one's place on the left-right spectrum has been largely determined by one's attitude toward social and economic equality. Social democrats and communists, for all their considerable

⁴⁴This drift has taken place so much that in contemporary France, parties named Radical and Social Democratic are now positioned to the right of center as part of the *Union pour la Démocratie Française*, a coalition of moderate conservative parties formed in 1978 to support then-President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing. See J. E. S. Hayward, *Governing France: The One and Indivisible Republic* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1983), p. 82.



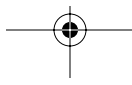


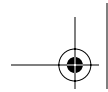
differences, aspire to distribute the wealth of society equally among its members. Classical liberals and fascists are miles apart, especially in their regard for individual freedom, yet both believe that human beings are either inherently unequal or at least tend to become unequal through the exercise of different individual potentials. Racists are on the extreme right because they believe not only that some people are superior to others, but that such superiority is biologically fixed. Communists are on the extreme left because they believe that virtually all human differences, and the inequalities rooted in them, are culturally determined and thus capable of being eliminated. (In fact, communist societies have been invariably inegalitarian and have succeeded only in creating what Milovan Djilas labeled a “new class” consisting of members of the bureaucracy and the party.⁴⁵ But despite the quite different reality, communism’s aspirations remained egalitarian to the end.)

In their last days, however, something quite remarkable occurred in the Soviet Union and those countries that had adopted its political and economic system. With the coming of Gorbachev and his twin policies of *perestroika* (reform) and *glasnost* (openness), the range of permissible political debate widened considerably and the left-right spectrum actually reversed itself. In the late 1980s, someone like Boris Yeltsin and the late Andrei Sakharov were considered men of the left, while hard-line Communist official Yegor Ligachev was described as a rightist. Gorbachev began his career as party leader on the left but was quickly outflanked by more radical reformers. By 1990 he was being seen as an embattled centrist, but scarcely a year later, following the failed coup of August 1991, he was being perceived as a rightist, hopelessly attached to a system that was in the process of collapsing. Obviously in this context attitudes toward the distribution of economic goods were not considered the decisive criterion for determining who stood on the left and who on the right.

Thus the terms *left* and *right* are unhelpful for at least three reasons. First, they are relative to the issues of the day and therefore cannot be said to have a universally accepted meaning. This is perhaps not the most important reason for rejecting them, but it should at least make us mindful of the fact that, if we criticize someone for being too far to the left or too far to the right, we are doing so by criteria which are hardly set in stone and are likely to change tomorrow. Furthermore, if we label ourselves centrists, we may inadvertently be accepting the Aristotelian definition of virtue as the mean between two vicious extremes.

⁴⁵Milovan Djilas, *The New Class* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1957).





This is not the only account of virtue possible, and the Christian would do well to assess it in a spiritually discerning manner.

Second, the left-right spectrum is one-dimensional and necessarily fastens onto a single overriding evaluative criterion at the expense of many possible others. Why focus so heavily on distribution of economic resources? Why not analyze ideologies in terms of their respective attitudes toward the scope of governmental power? Or freedom versus authority? Or diversity versus unity? Or democracy versus aristocracy? Conceivably, then, we might have to employ several matrices in a multidimensional model. If we were to choose only two such matrices and position them perpendicular to each other, we might end up with something like figure 1. This is one possible two-dimensional way of organizing political ideologies that is an undoubted improvement over the one-dimensional spectrum.

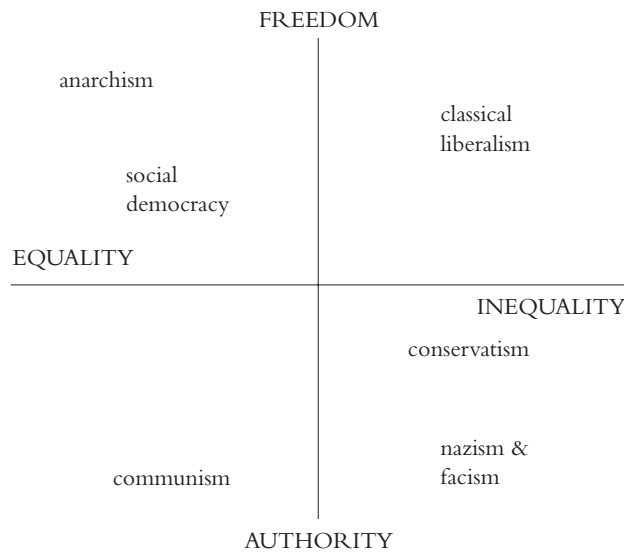
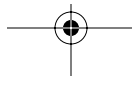


Figure 1. An example of a two-dimensional organization of political ideologies

But there is a third reason for rejecting the left-right spectrum, which even a multidimensional model cannot address. It cannot account for the *religious* differences that may exist among the various ideologies. Most of the modern ideologies are members of the same religious family, as observed already. In some fashion each makes humanity into a god, and thus they have much in common. But they differ on which manifestation of humanity they choose to worship. As





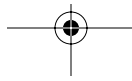
we shall see, liberalism idolizes the individual, socialism the economic class, and nationalism the nation-state or ethnic community. Although one might conceivably create a spectrum that places ideologies along a continuum between individual and community, it would be unable to distinguish among varieties of community. Furthermore, there is a cluster of political doctrines that would be difficult to place along any continuum. Such would include European Christian democracy, the radical Islamism of al-Qaeda and Hamas, and the Hindu nationalism of India's Janata Party. The rather basic differences among these historic religions could not be easily captured by a one-, two- or multi-dimensional model.

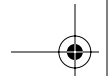
For all these reasons, I would prefer to banish right and left from the political discourse altogether. Since this is not likely to happen, however, I ask readers to be aware of the deficiencies inherent in these terms and not to place too much significance in them. However, two other labels have somewhat greater validity, and these are *progressive* and *conservative*, which are often seen as synonymous with left and right respectively. Here I shall do no more than to say that in theory I see progressing and conserving as two mutually compatible and necessary activities that ought not to be played off against each other. A fuller discussion of this will be encountered in chapter three.

Discerning the Spirits in the Ideologies

Now that we have accounted in some measure for ideology as a general phenomenon, we shall turn in chapters two through six to examine the individual ideologies themselves, beginning with liberalism, and moving on in succession to conservatism, nationalism, democracy and socialism. I shall not pretend that everything to be said of the ideologies must necessarily be organized into these five categories. Many readers might wish to see an in-depth analysis of, for example, anarchism or feminism or perhaps even environmentalism. Others might note the conspicuous absence of syndicalism, fascism and Nazism. Still others might wish, in the wake of terrorist attacks in North America, the Middle East and south Asia, to see a treatment of what is now being labeled Islamism. Some might further argue for the existence of an ideology of patriarchalism or even postmodernism. There are at least three reasons why these will not be treated as fully as the ideologies to be discussed in the next five chapters.

First, fascism and Nazism grow out of a kind of nationalism and can be viewed as particularly destructive variants of that ideology. Syndicalism and an-





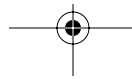
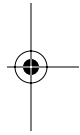
archism are two versions of socialism, as are Marxism and Marxism-Leninism and its permutations. Second, I believe that the five ideologies covered in this book are indeed the most influential in our modern world, notwithstanding the apparent shift, at least in the West, from modernity to postmodernity. To be sure, feminism has been extraordinarily influential in the twentieth century, particularly during its last third. But, as a number of observers have pointed out, there are liberal feminisms, conservative feminisms and radical feminisms akin to Marxist socialism. In short, much of what we shall write concerning the “big five” ideologies could also be said of the several feminisms. Even Islamism bears many of the same features as European nationalism, Marxism-Leninism and fascism, as some observers have pointed out.⁴⁶

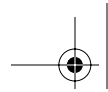
Third, in treating as many as five ideologies, I fear I am already spreading myself too thin. This is perhaps a bogus reason for not covering what some might consider significant material, but all books must work within limits. One simply cannot do everything within a few hundred pages.

As for the chapters themselves, we shall not follow a particularly strict pattern in dealing with each ideology in turn. One might, of course, use the same, or at least parallel, internal headings within each chapter to illustrate a certain unity of method applied to the whole. One thinks in this respect of Thomas Aquinas’ way of dealing with hundreds of theological and philosophical questions in his magisterial *Summa theologica*: first posing the question, then listing possible objections, citing a relevant authority to the contrary, stating his own response to the question, and finally answering each objection in turn. Such a method certainly makes for consistency, but such consistency comes at the price of readability as well as of a sense of the uniqueness of each issue to be addressed. It would seem better to probe each of the ideologies on its own terms, to explore its unique and unrepeatable contours, and to adjust one’s method accordingly. Thus each chapter will look at its subject matter in a somewhat different manner, coming at it from a slightly different angle.

For example, it seems evident that there is a certain familial relationship among liberalism, democracy and socialism, with the first having begotten the second, and the second having generated the third. Thus with these three lineal ideologies we shall devote some space to articulating internal historical developments within the ideology that have led logically to the rise of the succeeding

⁴⁶See, e.g., Daniel Pipes, “The Western Mind of Radical Islam,” *First Things* 58 (December 1995): 18-23, and *Militant Islam Reaches America* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2002).





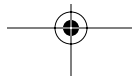
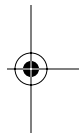
ideology. Although not all liberals are destined to become ideological democrats and not all ideological democrats are fated to become socialists, the connections among them are nevertheless as evident as the various physical and psychological characteristics that tie human generations together. Conservatism and nationalism are not as evidently in the same line of descent, although the latter is certainly largely compatible with the presuppositions of ideological democracy. Because conservatism developed as a response to the three lineal ideologies, its familial relationship to them is more like that of a first cousin or first cousin once removed. Nationalism has roots in both conservatism and the three lineal ideologies alike. But less space will be devoted to illustrating nationalism's place in the family tree.

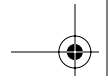
That said, however, six common themes will bring together our discussion of the several ideologies:

- First, what is their creational basis?
- Second, what facets of God's creation have they rightly focused on even as they have effectively deified them?
- Third, what inconsistencies have led to internal tensions within the ideology itself?
- Fourth, what do they see as a source of evil?
- Fifth, where do they locate the source of salvation?
- Sixth and finally, to what extent are they able to account for the distinct place of politics in God's world?

These themes will not necessarily be addressed in the same order in each chapter, but they will be addressed in some fashion.

As readers make their way through these chapters, they should note that the portraits drawn therein represent the ideologies in their pure, unadulterated forms. In the real world the boundaries separating them are hardly airtight, and flesh and blood socialists, for example, often carry within themselves assumptions more properly characteristic of, say, liberalism or nationalism. This apparent eclecticism illustrates two things: first, the interrelatedness of the ideologies themselves and second, the inevitable human tendency to think and to live in ways that are not always fully consistent with the principles one claims to follow. If, as we shall note in chapter seven, Christians often style themselves socialists and liberals without attending sufficiently to the spiritual roots of socialism and liberalism, then it is not surprising that professed liberals should





often harbor socialist or conservative ideas or that some people will combine a number of ideological positions in their own unique approaches to the political realm. This does not, however, mean that they are nonideological, as some might claim; it does mean that they are not sufficiently conscious of the ideological underpinnings of their own positions. One of the purposes of this book is to raise the level of general awareness of the ideologies and their powerful influence in the world at large.

Chapters seven through nine represent the heart of the argument of the book, which is that it is possible to transcend the ideologies and to embrace a spirit more compatible with the Christian understanding of creation, fall and redemption. Some might argue for an explicitly Christian ideology, while others would argue for a so-called objective, rational approach. We shall do neither of these here but will argue instead for a biblical—and hence creational and redemptive—understanding of politics and its place in God’s world. We shall, in short, offer an alternative vision—one which, it is to be hoped, will take us beyond the reductionisms and idolatries of the ideologies insofar as it offers a truer and fuller account of the world and of politics. Two Christian traditions have proven to be particularly helpful in offering guidance in this direction: the tradition of Roman Catholic social teachings rooted in the neo-Thomist revival of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the neo-Calvinist movement arising at the same time in the Netherlands and spreading into the English-speaking world in the late twentieth century. These, we shall argue, continue to have relevance for doing politics at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

