

Hope in Troubled Times

Excerpt from *Hope in Troubled Times: A New Vision for Confronting Global Crises*, by Bob Goudwaard, Mark Vander Vennen and David Van Heemst, with a Foreword by Desmond M. Tutu (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2007)

Citizens for Public Justice and Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, are pleased to announce the release of *Hope in Troubled Times: A New Vision for Confronting Global Crisis*.

With the world's current and ongoing technological advances, it would seem that we are daily progressing toward a healthier and happier planet. But planetary problems, such as worldwide poverty, environmental degradation, and widespread terrorism continue to cripple our global community.

Hope in Troubled Times provides a biblically founded perception of the world's current events at a time when so many in our violent and broken world experience despair and succumb to apathy. The authors not only offer real-world solutions to these critical worldwide issues, but they question the authority of technology, recognizing it as a potential idol that hinders progress. The choice is obvious. We either make care for others and the earth a priority, or we watch as humanity, and the world it inhabits, suffers.

CPJ is pleased to offer you this short excerpt from *Hope in Troubled Times* to whet your appetite and encourage you to read further. Please refer to the form on the back page to order your copy(ies) from CPJ.

In Chapter 1 we expressed amazement at how many recent book titles contain the word "end". 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. That new sense has encouraged us as citizens to retreat into our own small worlds. Even if our own worlds may also be crumbling, at least many things remain more or less under our own control.

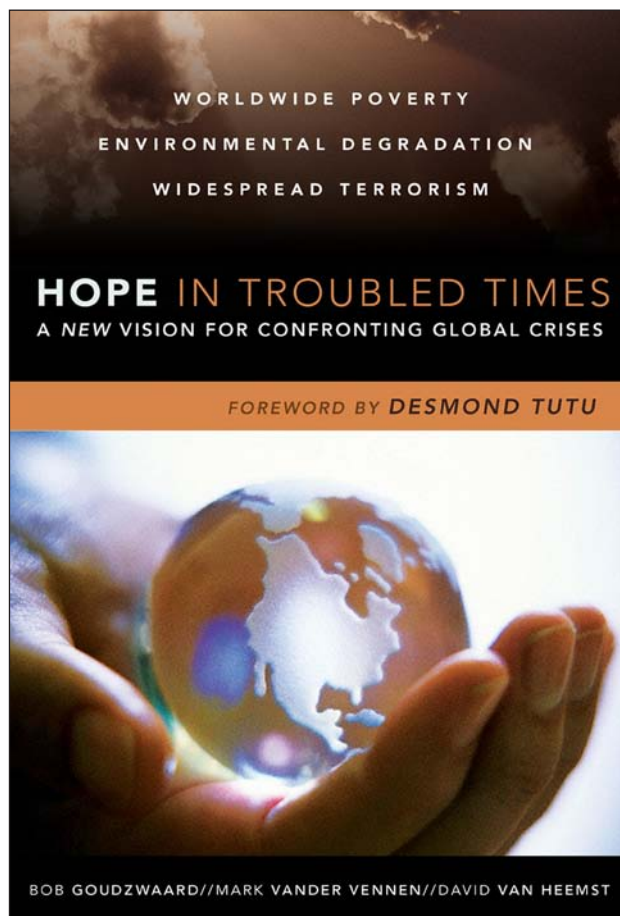
In the chapters that followed we moved, step by step, closer to a possible explanation for this strikingly prevalent sense in the Western world. Clearly there are influences at work, particularly in Western society, which morph into paralyzing and seemingly autonomous powers. By themselves, there is 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 almost 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.

This hypothesis strikes us as the only reasonable explanation for why so many people today feel that the future is now moving unpredictably, for good or for ill, beyond their control.

The hypothesis sounds quite heavy, and no doubt it is. But if it is true, and the evidence points in that direction, then it also opens up a window onto genuine hope. For it means that the so-called end of our history is by no means an inescapable fate. Today's general feeling of insecurity is actually not a sign that the powers now dominating us are beyond our control. On the contrary, it is a sign that we have abdicated our human responsibility. We have off-loaded our responsibility to chart society's course, letting the powers that be handle that task. We are tempted to say, "There Is no alternative." And after that perspective has become entrenched, we have no choice but to believe the illusion either that the path history will take us down will be positive, even providential, or that the world really is a malicious, unsafe place from which one had better hide.

But how does this insight



actually inspire hope and not despair? As authors, this question requires us to articulate at least in part the very roots of our faith. That need in turn calls to mind the invitation issued in Chapter 1. There we identified the aim of this book: to stimulate and contribute to the broadest dialogue possible. And we invited readers to participate in that exchange on the basis of their own deeply-held convictions about life. In our experience, genuine dialogue occurs only when each participant, in an environment of safety and mutual respect, lays open their deepest convictions for examination and review by others. From there, the dialogue's participants can often locate areas of common ground and explore genuine partnership around concrete action steps. All of us live in the same world and share in the human condition. Indeed, it is our hope that people representing various basic beliefs and orientations will find themselves able to embrace and even improve upon much of the concrete guidelines, real-life examples and policy proposals offered. Together we faithfully seek to contribute to actually turning around the scourges of global poverty, environmental degradation, and war....

But what actual positive steps, both small and large, make sense at this particular juncture in history?

Naturally, our positions as people differ. The nature and difficulty of positive first steps will vary according to our situations. Yet our choices, our steps will display a certain commonality. They ought to flow in the same stream. To enhance that likelihood, consider one of three practical guidelines by which to take stock of or measure the suitability of potential creative steps. We call it the periscope guideline.

The Periscope Guideline

To grasp the periscope guideline, recall Chapter 1, where no fewer than four separate case studies illustrated that a number of current approaches do not solve today's problems and sometimes even aggravate them. We thus saw that in spite of intensive development and loan programs for the poorest countries, poverty in those countries has increased, not decreased. In spite of higher military expenditures, insecurity in the world has heightened rather than diminished. In spite of every regulation and accord, the global environmental situation has degenerated. And in spite of the advent of free global financial markets, the monetary tensions in a number of countries have risen, not fallen. Why is that the case?

From the knowledge we have accumulated in the previous chapters, we may now identify the source of the pain more clearly. In each situation, at every turn, political and other decision-makers display an overestimation of faith in the means of progress that they apply as the solution, such as environmental technology, military technology, modern organizational techniques and the pursuit of maximum economic growth, or in the financial instruments they deploy, such as conditional loans and the promotion of free financial markets. Decision-makers defend these instruments and tools to a much higher degree than their successes could ever explain or account for. They often promote them as if they were inherently capable of saving the day, or, following a more prevalent notion, as if they will make us pay if we veer off of their promised path of liberation. Decision-makers repeatedly summon us to follow the way of the market or to swear off interfering with the dictates of the

Bob Goudzwaard (PhD, Erasmus University) is professor emeritus of economics and social philosophy at the Free University of Amsterdam and a former member of the Dutch Parliament. He recently chaired a two-year consultation between the World Council of Churches, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Both within and outside of his extensive political career, Goudzwaard has been deeply involved in international development issues. He is a frequent public speaker in North America and serves as a consultant to Citizens for Public Justice.

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economic and technological forces of progress, as if living gods have spoken. So it is that unmasking the gods is utterly necessary today. For as soon as we believe in economic growth, technological progress, the free market and even democracy, we gradually regress into



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a narrowing of perspective until we fall prey to the illusions already woven into people and nations today.

The situation of the contemporary world is not unlike that of a submarine submerged deep under the water. Small windows onto reality supply only a narrow and limited view of the surroundings, just like the tiny portals of a submarine reveal only a fraction of the immediate area. Submariners know that a widened view requires a periscope. A periscope would give back a comprehensive perspective; it would permit us to scan the whole horizon above, not just part of it. *The Oxford Dictionary* defines *periscope* as “*peri*: roundabout; *scope*: look; a periscope can see things otherwise out of sight.” Perhaps then a periscope is exactly what our situation today requires. It is the shrunken view of reality, the fixation of our gaze solely upon the interior of our fast-moving ship, that blocks the quest for actual solutions.

How do we locate such a periscope? What constitutes a broad, real-

istic view of reality today? Remember that ideologies possess a power or force by which they influence currently-held norms and warp values. With ideologies, values like justice, love, truth, freedom, solidarity and *oikonomia* (economy) become emptied and then re-filled for the sole purpose of legitimating certain ends and justifying the means required to implement them. Ideologies thus cripple the original power of these profound, direction-setting ways. Perhaps then regaining the original meaning of these ways could serve as our periscope. By reclaiming their original breadth, perhaps a broad, unclouded view of reality will have an opportunity to return, not just in the abstract, but particularly in the concrete.

Let us then try to apply the periscope guideline to the four problems sketched in Chapter 1, while testing its practical value and significance.

(1) Naturally, it is possible to financially help or assist impoverished countries. But by itself such intervention

does not prevent the deepening of their poverty. Poverty subsides only when *justice* prevails in the interaction between the rich and poor countries. The requirement of justice awakens us to the deliberate exclusions described earlier. It exposes the hypocrisy of the rich countries’ rigid, harsh insistence that the poor countries do better at exporting, while at the same time they themselves protect their own markets with high tariffs for their own products. Wealthy countries also flout the requirements of justice when they and their banks hoard the creation of international currencies entirely to themselves, resulting in the reality that the poorest countries, if they cannot increase export revenue, must permanently borrow from the rich countries. Their debts therefore keep piling up, and the perpetual net transfer of capital from the South to the North every year is the result.

(2) Naturally, protection and safety are a legitimate personal and national need. Pursuing them can even be a duty.

*...I am delighted to commend **Hope in Troubled Times** to you.*

*In our troubled world, apartheid is not the only ideology that has programmed the thinking and the behavior of people. Ideologies of identity, materialism and security undermine development and progress in so many parts of the world. Yet at the center of this book is a message of hope. The authors are inviting us to join the winning side. Contrary to all the evidence, **Hope in Troubled Times** makes the audacious claim that ideologies of identity, limitless materialism and absolute security have already been defeated. Bob Goudzwaard, Mark Vander Vennen and David Van Heemst are not “optimists” but realists. Their specific proposals are the stuff of “political realism”. For in God’s world, where each of us is God’s precious child and where the risen Jesus is reconciling all things, the last word does not belong to vicious ideologies but rather to the One who tenderly holds our history in his hands. God’s justice, forgiveness, truth, mercy and love—they shall overcome.*

I accept the invitation offered by the authors, and I wholeheartedly invite you to do the same.

*from the Foreword by **Archbishop Emeritus Desmond M. Tutu**, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate*

***Hope in Troubled Times** provides the kind of hope that can only come from seeing the darkness more clearly. It is a hope energized by the intellectual excitement of original insights into the nature of the ideologies and idols that hold us captive, and the possibilities for setting the captives free.*

***The Honourable Bill Blaikie, MP**, Deputy Speaker, Dean of the House of Commons, Canada*

A profound analysis of root causes of—and root solutions to—the problems that plague the modern world. A provocative compass for taking us, step by small step, out of the woods. This book offers powerful understanding to thinkers and doers alike.

***Armine Yalnizyan**, research associate, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives*

But on balance, today the national goal of self-protection has become entirely one-dimensional, and it simply cannot bring *peace*. Self-protection, while a valid goal, is not synonymous with peace. *Peace* is primarily a way or path for us to walk down, as a number of responsible peace movements have long understood (such as Project Ploughshares - www.ploughshares.ca). On it we fall down and get up again. On it lies the radiance of the Messiah himself: “[He will] guide our feet into the path of peace”, sang Zachariah (Luke 1:79). And it is impossible even to arrive at the path of peace-building, much less walk down it, by clinging incessantly to ever-expanding arsenals of weapons of lethal destruction.

(3) Naturally, it makes sense to devote technology to conserving energy and resources and to taking care of the environment. By itself, however, the application of technology falls short of the requirements of *oikonomia*: good stewardship. *Oikonomia* requires that all economies (including our own) comply

with the capacity of the earth to sustain life and to nourish everyone in the world. Genuine stewardship therefore requires that we be prepared to rein in our consumption desires in such a way that all of the world’s inhabitants can have a good life. “Economy” in the Biblical sense means first and foremost the “caring administration” of all that has been entrusted to us. If we do not adopt at the beginning of our plans the requirement to care for what has been entrusted to us, then our actions will fail.

(4) Naturally, there is nothing wrong with financial markets operating on a global scale. Under certain conditions of freedom, they can even be highly beneficial. But how quickly we hear the word *freedom* misused here! *Freedom* in the biblical sense does not mean life without rules. Rather, it involves persons and nations refusing to become enslaved to an alien power. “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery,” wrote the Apostle

Paul (Gal. 5:1). Consequently, when the entire world increasingly subjects itself to the tyranny and volatility of financial markets, which we have left entirely to their own devices, then we have literally endorsed insanity and relinquished freedom. Such markets are driven by little more than greed and speculation. Markets are to freely serve real economies, not the other way around. We therefore need to reanchor the creation of international currency in the soil of what the world genuinely needs, in relation to both consumption and production.

These comments illustrate that we require a concrete, vital sense of life-norms in order to return to a real, expanded societal perspective, one that takes in the whole horizon. An expanded perspective is not closed in upon itself like a circle, but opens out on all sides, like a cross. But a cross possesses, at its center, an internal tension, one that calls us to pay the price of candid self-criticism.

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