

To See Again the Stars

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After Ideology: Recovering the Spiritual Foundations of Freedom, by David Walsh, San Francisco, Calif.: HarperCollins, 1990. xix + 296 pp. \$29.95.

IF MODERNITY has visibilized the triumph of the machine, if it is synonymous with change and progress in general, it has not had an equivalent success in the life of the soul. More than ever the inner, invisible life discloses radical discontent and disconnection. Material achievement and spiritual well-being are not necessarily confluent; the City of Man and the City of God do not necessarily co-exist. Spiritual disinheritance and dis-possession mark the modern human condition in spite of all our palpable advances. Disorder and alienation manifest the collapse of millenarian experiments rooted in ideological schemes and programs. All the claims of a New Deal and of a Great Society, that in effect we have entered the gates of Eden, ring hollow.

In *After Ideology*, a timely and eloquent book, Professor David Walsh demonstrates that no examination of the crisis of modernity can be complete without discerning at its epicenter the crisis of the human soul. The failure to make such a distinction further solidifies our

spiritual *stasis*, that is, makes us even more the prisoners of our nothingness. Such a failure, then, perpetuates an existential sickness unto death—the kind of spiritual exhaustion that impedes a search for moral and social-political order at all levels of consciousness.

Revolutionary nihilism, Walsh shows, is inevitably the consequence of secular, gnostic, and liberal ideologies that assault biblical and classical traditions and principles. How can modern man recover from the impact of this soul-killing process? This is one of the central questions in *After Ideology*. But it is also the singular strength of this book to move beyond questions, even beyond diagnosis, by pointing the way. Walsh provides here a moral and spiritual compass, a gift that no reader can turn down. In him we have at least one university teacher and political scientist who sensitively comprehends the needs of the soul in relation to the needs of temporal life, and who at the same time is not afraid to speak out on this need of needs. Nor is he afraid to use great and sacred words like transcendence and faith, which he pinpoints as indispensable to the process of spiritual recovery that modern political systems have systematically sought to crush in an age of ideology. The disintegration of the communist nations of East-

ern Europe dramatizes the excesses of ideological barbarism in modern times. Wilfully, however, the American intelligentsia continues to be blind to these excesses with their impersonal idols of liberalism and social action that a John Dewey worked to enshrine in American culture and society. In our own time Dewey's successors have gone beyond him with abandoned prodigality.

At a time, too, when even religious leaders in their outlook and preaching give cause for sorrow, Walsh discloses in impressive ways how one can overcome the closure and violence of the secular world. Throughout, he carefully distinguishes between spiritual lassitude and spiritual death, and the book as a whole holds a life-giving and faith-building message of hope. It is precisely this hope that inspires Walsh's religio-philosophical thesis that descent into the abyss can also become the ascent from it. His sense of reverence is ever confluent with his courage of judgment in page after page of meditative deliberations, rich in their critical content and even richer in their metaphysical lift. Here, in these pages, we have the testimony of a scholar-teacher who refuses to bow down to the chronolatry, to the profaneness and blasphemy of the modern world. And that refusal, too, occasions hope. Walsh reminds us that not all teachers have surrendered to the sundry demonisms that afflict the realm of education; that there are teachers who give their witness with conviction and also with an astonishing authority that emerges as insight and wisdom. Accustomed, if not compelled and even conditioned, as we have been to hearing the heavy and deadening language of impiety in the intellectual community, we may at first even find *After Ideology* startlingly unorthodox in its premises and ethos.

As one ponders Walsh's elucidations and contemplations—all of these the in-

evitable offshoots of honest and hard thought—the royal doors of penitence, as it were, open. In its own humble ways this book facilitates a joyous entrance. Yet it must also be stressed that *After Ideology* is neither a theological tract nor a devotional manual (though the theological and devotional motifs are strong and fervent in the book). This is a serious and disciplined work of scholarship rooted in Christian affirmation. It brings to mind the kind of writings made famous by those remarkable thinkers who, after 1917, made possible the Russian religious renaissance of the twentieth century—Nikolai Berdyaev, Sergius Bulgakov, Konstantin Mochulski, S. L. Frank, N. O. Lossky, Georges Florovsky, *et al.* *After Ideology* points to a resurgence of Christian faith and culture in the contemporary period no less significant than the writings of the great post-revolutionary Russian Orthodox exiles. With them Walsh boldly continues to define a common theme: the re-validation of philosophy and Christian teaching in the modern world. In one sense Walsh is himself a believer-teacher who is in exile in his own nation; he stands unalterably opposed to the decadence of American culture and also to its spiritual renunciations.

Walsh is writing from another country, so to speak. What he has to say in *After Ideology*—the religious positions he defends; the transcendent reality he posits and affirms; the inherently Christian ethos he expounds—clearly marks him as an outsider. His book indicts and contravenes everything that the American intelligentsia prescribes and everything that characterizes American polity. A fearless intellectual honesty and an equally fearless spiritual viewpoint inform the composition of this book from beginning to end. Neither Christian dogma nor apologetics, however, characterize the purpose of the book. Rather, the author is a scholar and thinker who

pleads for order in soul and in society, who wants to recover the transcendent foundation of order, and who believes that a philosophic Christianity is, or should be, the ground of such a search and recovery. The bankruptcy of modernity makes such a religious search all the more urgent. Insofar as we now live in an age in which ideological systems anchored in a secular humanity have been found woefully wanting and inoperative, as well as morally corrupt, and leave in their wake anarchy and nihilism, the need for a post-modern viewpoint that is both viable and pertinent is even more urgent. And central to this need is the rediscovery of philosophy and revelation that is joined to a reconfirmation of transcendent reality of order.

For Walsh the process of restoration is ultimately an either/or process—either order or disorder, belief or denial, Christ or the Devil; in short, either the Kingdom of the Spirit or the Kingdom of Enmity. Walsh views this process—it is in essence a form of spiritual warfare—in the larger historical framework of Renaissance thought, introducing as it did a revised and often antinomian version of Christianity in which the human being became a secular messiah and all distinctions between the sacred and the profane became increasingly blurred. This conflict as it has continued and advanced in more recent times has presented us with a radical transfiguration of man as the man-god. This transfiguration, Walsh rightly shows, has been a failed and false one: The progeny of failed and false ideologies emblemized in social, political, cultural, and economic breakdowns, of which the former Soviet Union is now a monstrous objective correlative.

We have thus reached the omega-point when we must confront the whole problem of human destiny as it screams for spiritual relief in the bitter aftermath of a modern world in which ideologies *in*

extremis have prevailed. Walsh views the present period of history, then, as one in which the lure of ideologies has brought us to the extremity of total disorientation. What comes after ideology? What must we do to emerge from not only the ruins of modernity but also the twilight of ideology? For Walsh these questions are teleological in nature, and they can be nothing less in a world in which nihilism and chaos are the all-too-evident consequences of monolithic ideological dismantlings that reject the tenets of a humane civilization. The bankruptcy of the liberal-revolutionary process of secular and gnostic ideologies creates a vacuum that is dangerous and unacceptable. Walsh views such a vacuum as one that heightens spiritual closure and the total enfeeblement of the value of order. To save us from such a fateful situation that has its end in no-end—in public unconsciousness, abject lostness, unchecked disorder, unending despair—is, for Walsh, the greatest challenge now facing us. Only with the advent of spiritual recovery, of an attained luminosity, he maintains, can we escape from the tyranny of ideological movements in their sundry modern guises.

To recover the philosophic and Christian symbolizations of order Walsh calls on four great writers for guidance and inspiration. Dostoevsky, Solzhenitsyn, Camus, and Voegelin are modern shepherds of being who, Walsh believes, can help rescue us from the furnace of doubt and guide us to repentance and regeneration. In their writings, as in their lives, we view the full drama of the crisis of modernity, and we participate in all of its forms of metaphysical revolt and alienation, but also of spiritual recovery.

The selection of these four exemplars is certainly valid, though it is also one of the drawbacks of *After Ideology* that the criteria for Walsh's selection could be more rigorously explicated. In addition, he fails to examine in more detail the

larger subject of the end of ideology in our time; in this connection, he ignores the important work done by Karl Mannheim, Raymond Aron, Edward Shils. There are, then, some regrettable *lacunae* in *After Ideology*. The reader, as a result, will on occasion have to infer the rationale for Walsh's selection of exemplars in the search for transcendent moral order, as well as to fill in some of the details of the intellectual history of ideology. In any case, the organizational and structural infelicities of the book, in which there are six long chapters, each containing a varying number of subheadings, can sometimes overtax the reader's patience and concentration.

Ordinarily problems such as these can be irremediably damaging. Fortunately this is not true in the case of Walsh's book, for in it we are in close contact with a fertile mind, authentic concern, judgmental authority. Critical integrity and an abundance of insight in the end dispell any quibbling or doubt. Here one sees a cumulative critical discrimination at work and one is the richer for its results. *After Ideology* adroitly challenges one's attention and thought; impels one to re-evaluate conditions and circumstances affecting civilizational order in contemporary life. The true meditative value of this book is to be found in how it affects one's view of moral and spiritual issues of the first importance—issues that our evangels of enlightenment would prefer to deconstruct or silence. Walsh consistently resists the large encompassing moral apathy and spiritual indifference that are in themselves the legacy of a modernity that has not been adequately questioned or inspected. In its critical integrity *After Ideology* commands our respect; its diagnostic focus, prophetic findings, and prescriptive powers are heightened by its religious commitments and acceptances. Walsh's own holding to a religious position is in itself as para-

digmatic as that of his four exemplars of spiritual concern and transfiguration.

In its total exposition and commentary—the critiques of selected texts from Dostoevsky, Solzhenitsyn, Camus, Voegelin are judicious and sensitive in illustrating their cathartic spiritual meaning and ascent—*After Ideology* stresses a quintessential fact of human existence arrogantly dismissed by the liberal intelligentsia: that political order is first and last dependent on the order within the human soul. This is the crux of Walsh's position, and he develops it forcefully in the great moral line of an Irving Babbitt, who urged modern man to convert the idea of value into the life of value, and a Simone Weil, who beckoned modern man to become a geometrician in the apprenticeship of virtue. Walsh's warning that modern liberal democracy, when lacking moral and spiritual foundations, invites disintegration, has especial relevance for Americans. And indeed today we see the violent spectacle of this disintegration in every facet of our national life. Clearly anthropocentrism is an implicit ideological dimension of contemporary society and must be perceived as such if a new awareness is to prevail. For Walsh the four writers he presents to us as paradigms of spiritual release from the abyss of modernity instance victory over ideology and all its dominions.

After Ideology is an encouraging book; in particular, from the Camus who believed in the necessity of some kind of rule and some kind of order it takes its positive cue of steady resistance both to the spirit of negation and to the monolithic secularization of the West. To be sure, the Americanization of the mind, as Gottfried Dietze memorably describes it, is itself a disturbing and far-reaching phenomenon that should perhaps make Walsh more cautious about the scope of his religious contentions and conceptualizations. The American situation, as we are so often dramatically reminded,