



Religion and the Rise of Western Culture

Christopher Henry Dawson

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In this new edition of his classic work, *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture*, Christopher Dawson addresses two of the most pressing subjects of our day: the origin of Europe and the religious roots of Western culture. With the magisterial sweep of Toynbee, to whom he is often compared, Dawson tells here the tale of medieval Christendom. From the brave travels of sixth-century Irish monks to the grand synthesis of Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century, Dawson brilliantly shows how vast spiritual movements arose from tiny origins and changed the face of medieval Europe from one century to the next. The legacy of those years of ferment remains with us in the great cathedrals, Gregorian chant, and the works of Giotto and Dante. Even more, though, for Dawson these centuries charged the soul of the West with a spiritual concern -- a concern that he insists "can never be entirely undone except by the total negation or destruction of Western man himself."

Religion and the Rise of Western Culture Details

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From Reader Review Religion and the Rise of Western Culture for online ebook

James says

This is a brilliant book written by a great historian . It explains how we got here and why.

Lucas Petry Bender says

Grande estudo sobre a civilização medieval europeia que nos leva a refletir sobre um dos aspectos mais fascinantes do cristianismo, qual seja, a "ambivalência" de Cristo (simultaneamente Deus e homem), a imanentização do absoluto transcendente na história, e ao conseqüente dualismo da cultura cristã que funda o espírito ocidental. São questões que extrapolam o estudo histórico desta obra, mas esse é o seu ponto de partida e de chegada.

Michael says

This is an extraordinarily penetrating and elegant examination of the nature of medieval culture. If you have an interest in the history of the Middle Ages, this is top notch. If not, this book is probably not for you. If you are instinctively hostile to the notion that anything of redeeming value occurred in this epoch, or that the medieval Church played a hugely important and constructive role in the development of Europe and western civilization, you should probably go read something by Christopher Hitchens instead. This is very academic, not written for popular audiences. The immensity of the author's knowledge of these times is staggering. Some prior knowledge of the Middle Ages and Church history is required in order to appreciate his argument.

Chris J says

That this book is a 3 and not a 4-star says waaaay more about my ignorance than any shortcoming in Dawson's writing. This book caused me to feel the canyon-sized gaps in my knowledge of the Middle Ages. I simply didn't know enough for the book to make more of an impact on me...pearls before swine.

Still, I did glean a good deal from the book and on the whole enjoyed it. I can see myself attempting this book again in ten years when maybe I'm not such a dumbass.

Steve says

Dawson understood the roots of our culture.

Francisco Segundo says

Talvez porque o livro tenha origem em uma série de palestras, ou porque exija uma boa bagagem de história, algumas linhas argumentativas são cheias de buracos, quando não bruscamente interrompidas. Senti falta de um pouco mais de desenvolvimento. O autor traça a idade média quase como uma época de renascimento - em oposição àquela ideia de idade das trevas - e coloca o cristianismo como um dos atores principais da época, por meio do resgate de todo desenvolvimento cultura e científico da antiguidade clássica realizado pelos mosteiros. Além disso, apesar da importância dada à Roma, fala da importância da santificação do trabalho dentro dos mosteiros, o que representa uma valorização do camponês e reconhecimento, pela primeira vez, de seu papel dentro da sociedade medieval (contraponto à sociedade escravocrata). Trata o cristianismo como a primeira cultura de traço universal, o que ajudou o Ocidente a sobreviver a todo tipo de ataque e a se expandir por meio da conversão dos bárbaros.

Não deixa de dar a devida importância para a relação entre Estado e Igreja, falando inclusive da corrupção interna que surgiu na Igreja a partir do momento em que ela começa a emergir como poder supranacional. Descreve também o papel das catedrais na formação das primeiras Universidades no século XII (principalmente Paris e Bolonha) e como a escolástica e os estudos de lógica desenvolvidos nessa época ajudaram a formar as bases do pensamento científico, que mais tarde se expressaria no Renascimento.

3,5!

Joshua Mccroskey says

I found Dawson's account of the expansion of Christianity to the barbarian tribes of northern Europe fascinating.

Don Lowrance says

The wonderful review of the effects of Christianity on western culture during the medieval age.

David says

A must for history lovers.

Peter B. says

This was an insightful book on the dynamics involved in the formation of Western culture in the Middle Ages. Far from being a stagnant period, this book does a good job explaining the various eras of medieval history and the diverse cultural forces at work, especially focusing on the impact of Christianity. It was a helpful account how Christianity disciplined the nations in Europe from the fall of Rome to the 13th century.

Some quotes from the book:

"Nevertheless throughout the whole history of Western Europe down to the last century the absence of unitary organization and of a single uniform source of culture did not destroy the spiritual continuity of the Western tradition. Behind the ever-changing pattern of Western culture there was a living faith which gave Europe a certain sense of spiritual community, in spite of all the conflicts and divisions and social schisms that marked its history." (16)

"Moreover the liturgy was not only the bond of Christian unity. It was also the means by which the mind of the gentiles and the barbarians was attuned to a new view of life and a new concept of history...As we have seen, the archaic [pagan] ritual order was conceived as the pattern of the cosmic order, and consequently its typical mysteries were the mysteries of nature itself represented and manifested in the dramatic action of sacred myth...The Christian mystery, on the other hand,...was not concerned with the life of nature with culture as a part of the order of nature, but with the redemption and regeneration of humanity by the Incarnation of the Divine Word.

"But since the Incarnation and the whole redemptive process were historically situation, the Christian mystery was also an historical mystery—the revelation of the divine purpose manifested on earth and in time, as the fulfillment of the ages. Thus instead of the nature myth which was the key to the ritual order of the archaic civilization, the Christian mystery is based on a sacred history, and liturgy develops into an historical cycle in which the whole story of human creation and redemption is progressively unfolded."? (40-41)

"For the divine right of the anointed king was counterbalanced throughout the greater part of the Middle Ages by its conditional and revocable character; and this was not a mere concession to theological theory; it was enforced by the very real authority of the Church. Here again the influence of the Old Testament tradition of theocracy was paramount, so that the medieval monarchy, and most of all the medieval empire, possessed a theocratic character in a different sense from that which is to be seen in the Byzantine Empire, or in the absolute monarchies of Europe after the Renaissance and the Reformation. Nevertheless even in these later periods it is not difficult to find examples of the older view of the limited and essentially dependent nature of divine right. Throughout these periods, both in Catholic and protestant Europe, there was a large body of opinion which acknowledged the Divine right of kings without admitting that this involved the principle of Passive Obedience, so that there is an historic connection between the modern idea of constitutional monarchy and the medieval tradition of kingship." (93)

[St. Benedict, critiquing the Papacy of his time:] "For if you are to do the work of a prophet you need the hoe rather than the sceptre."(247)

"If there is any truth in what I have been saying...such moments of vital fusion between a living religion and a living culture are the creative events in history, in comparison with which all the external achievements in the political and economic orders are transitory and insignificant." (274)

Adam Marischuk says

A scholarly analysis of the contribution of the Catholic Church to Western Culture

Renowned scholar, historian and Catholic convert Christopher Dawson delivered the 1948-49 Gifford

lectures and those lecture notes would eventually become *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture*. Despite being published in 1950, the book still is relevant, and perhaps authoritative today. The book lacks the indignation of the diatribes being hurled across the political divide between Catholic and atheist social commentators, and is instead a scholarly, sober and balanced analysis of the role of the Church in developing those aspects of western culture many seem to take for granted.

Firstly, I need to get the bad out of the way: why isn't there a new edition without a foreward from the disgraced Archbishop Weakland available?

I believe much can be gleaned from the list of chapters, as these perennial subjects provide the foundation of any understanding of the Middle Ages:

- I. Introduction: The Significance of the Western Development
- II. The Religious Origins of Western Culture: The Church and the Barbarians
- III. The Monks of the West and the Formation of the Western Tradition
- IV. The Barbarians and the Christian Kingdom
- V. The Second Dark Age and the Conversion of the North
- VI. The Byzantine Tradition and the Conversion of Eastern Europe
- VII. The Reform of the Church in the Eleventh Century and the Medieval Papacy
- VIII. The Feudal World: Chivalry and the Courtly Culture
- IX. The Medieval City: Commune and Guild
- X. The Medieval City: School and University
- XI. The Religious Crisis of Medieval Culture: The Thirteenth Century
- XII. Conclusion: Medieval Religion and Popular Culture
- Appendix: Notes on Famous Medieval Art

There are many gems in the book as Dawson's writing is fluid and enjoyable, his conclusions informed and well defended, his examples lucid and pertinent.

"The conversion of Western Europe was not achieved so much by the teaching of a new doctrine as by the manifestation of a new power, which invaded and subdued the barbarians of the West, as it had already subdued the civilized lands of the Mediterranean." (p. 35)

"But while in the Mediterranean the monks were retreating from the dying culture of the ancient world, in the North monasticism was becoming the creator of a new Christian culture and a school of the Christian life for the new peoples of the west. " (p. 49)

"...how necessary it was to distinguish between the essentials of the Christian way of life and the accidents of Byzantine or Latin culture, which the missionaries were apt to regard as a necessary part of Christianity. [and from the footnote]For example, it seems from this document that the question of wearing trousers preoccupied the minds of Byzantine missionaries in the ninth century no less than of English and American missionaries in the nineteenth. But whereas these modern missionaries encouraged the wearing of trousers as a part of Christian civilization, the Byzantines banned them as a pagan and barbarous custom." (p. 107-108)

Marty says

The Creation of Christian culture in the heart of Western Man

A sweeping summary of the rise of the church. Dawson has a detailed knowledge of hundreds of key players. He links the conversion of the Kentish and Gaulish kings. This was not the interplay of church and state, but rather the beginning of creation of biblical culture by the missionaries. Or consider the end of the 'geographic' dark ages. Francis travels to the Caliphate. (Yes, St Francis). Franciscans establish mission in Beijing, attempt international treaty with 'the khan' in central Asia - all this in the 13th century. A great intro from a scholarly and sympathetic perspective.

Pauline says

An absorbing read.

Graychin says

The latter half of Dawson's 1947-49 Gifford lectures, collected in this volume, explore the influence of Christianity in the medieval synthesis of western culture and the birth of the elusive but demonstrable *something* that once upon a time went by the name of Christendom. Dawson was a Catholic as well as an historian but this isn't mere apologetics. It's solid stuff, well drawn and insightful, that moves from the barbarian invasions to the era of St Francis. Western culture gets some bad press these days, much of it undeserved. This book might help set the record straight on a few things.

Erik says

Recommended by James Schall in Another Sort of Learning, Intro to Part 2, as one of Seven Books by Christopher Dawson.
