

Wrestling with the Modern State

Christopher Dawson and the Background to *The Crisis of Western Education*

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In 1961 Christopher Dawson published *The Crisis of Western Education* to promote the study of Christian culture in Western Universities, especially religiously affiliated institutions, as the means of revitalizing Western civilization. *Crisis* outlined the history of Western education and the need for its revival in a form different than a pragmatic secular approach, a classical humanist approach, a “Great Books” approach, or a Thomistic-philosophical approach, each of which competed for influence in educational circles after World War II. Dawson confronted the relation of the secular state to education, claiming that “universal education,” promoted by the modern state, was “very largely responsible” for the “secularization of modern culture.” He insisted that Christianity and secularism “are inevitably and in every field irreconcilable with one another.” He hoped that his program, if implemented in universities, would influence primary and secondary education by producing well-informed teachers who would teach young students their cultural heritage. Dawson noted that the “vital problem of Christian education is a sociological one: how to make students culturally conscious of their religion; otherwise they will be divided personalities—with a Christian faith and a pagan culture which contradict one another continually.”¹ The crisis of modern education was both political and cultural.

This article examines the development of Dawson’s educational ideas and their reception in the United States. The first part demonstrates that Dawson’s perspective on the modern state,

which he developed in *Religion and the Modern State* (1936), *Beyond Politics* (1939), and *The Judgement of the Nations* (1942), reveals the logic behind his educational proposals and acceptance of public education. While condemning the ruthless secularism of the modern state in its various forms, fascist, socialist, and democratic, Dawson realized that Christians could not retreat completely from public life and must work through the culture to transform secular institutions to meet Christian goals. The second part of the article asserts that the poor reception *Crisis* received in the United States can be explained by the context, both Catholic and secular, of the post-World War II environment. The content of *Crisis* was not new. Dawson had published most of it between 1946 and 1960 while engaging Catholic critics opposed to his approach. By 1957, after struggling to gain Catholic support for his plans, he wrote that his project could apply to secular universities as well. But Dawson had less support in the secular scene than he had in Catholic circles. Dawson's earlier critiques of liberalism placed him on the political right in the United States. The post-World War II conservative intellectual revival in the United States had a significant Catholic influence but possessed a stronger hostility to the state than did Dawson. Thus, Dawson's crowning work failed to attract a following, and Dawson's reputation, especially after his 1962 stroke, declined so that today he is little known.

The Catholic Revival of the early twentieth century shaped Dawson's career and reputation in both Europe and the United States. The Revival, which began in Europe, had its roots in the renewal of medieval scholastic philosophy by Pope Leo XIII in the 1880s. The neoscholastic movement, which dominated Catholic higher education in the United States in the early twentieth century, used reason to support the claims of faith. Following St. Thomas Aquinas and Aristotle, the neoscholastics believed that human beings could comprehend reality, God's existence, and the proper order of creation through reason. Neoscholastics rejected the subjectivism and determinism of modern philosophy. As William Halsey has suggested, neoscholasticism was both "aggressive" and optimistic. By billing itself as the common-sense

philosophy for Everyman, neoscholasticism refused to be confined to the cultural margins. Secularists, who had long considered Catholics as unintellectual and superstitious, found Catholic Thomists attacking secularism on philosophical grounds. Philip Gleason has argued that neoscholastics saw philosophy, rather than theology or history, as the integrative discipline that provided the intellectual framework for all other branches of knowledge.² Dawson, while not a philosopher, participated in the Catholic Revival.

After World War I, European intellectuals fought to make sense of the horrific destruction suffered throughout Europe. The established order had failed, and numerous competitors jockeyed for political, cultural, and economic control of post-war Europe. Sheed & Ward, Dawson's publisher, agreed to publish a series of short books, *Essays in Order*, designed to present the Catholic point of view. Dawson, an editor of the series, would collaborate with other European Catholics, for example, Jacques Maritain, Peter Wust, and E. I. Watkin, to engage modernity and articulate a Catholic vision for cultural renewal. Dawson believed that Catholic intellectuals could help revive Western civilization by restoring an "intellectual community of European culture."³ To this end Dawson participated in several projects with new and established Catholic journals and joined an ecumenical intellectual organization, The Moot, to promote Christian efforts to confront the forces of secularism.⁴ Much of his subsequent intellectual career was shaped by the direction he took in his introductory essay to the *Essays in Order* series.

In his introduction, Dawson defined the crisis of Western civilization as a spiritual one stemming from the rejection of Christianity as the principle of order. Philosophical materialism comprised part of the crisis, while "the attempt to treat the spiritual order and the business of everyday life as two independent worlds which have no mutual relations" represented the other problem. Secularism had drained Christianity of its rigor. But, Dawson noted, "men demand of religion that it should be in touch with realities, that it should offer some solution to the social and intellectual problems of the modern world and that it should be at the service of human needs."⁵

The secular alternative to Christian order, "Liberalism and Progress," had been discredited in part by the events of the twentieth century. By removing many of the "restrictive factors" on human behavior, modern politicians had destroyed the "balance" needed by human beings. Liberation from restraint had not made life better but instead had led to social chaos and violence. The Industrial Revolution and capitalism, for example, had reshaped human life but brought enormous human and cultural costs. Progress, therefore, was neither a "necessary" nor "automatic process."⁶ "The exaltation of man and the idealisation of Nature led to the depreciation and denial of spiritual reality," Dawson charged.⁷ This position was no longer tenable after the destruction of the Great War.

Catholicism, for Dawson, provided the remedy to modern ills by taking spiritual reality and the transcendence of the Divine seriously. "Catholicism stands essentially for a universal order in which every good and every truth of the natural or the social order can find a place," Dawson wrote. Thus, Catholicism seeks "to order the whole of life towards unity, not by the denial and destruction of the natural human values, but by bringing them into living relation with spiritual truth and spiritual reality." Catholics had to engage the world around them and not "remain passively content with their own possession of the truth." Catholics could not segregate the "natural and the supernatural orders." Instead, Catholicism realized that the world was infused with spiritual significance. Thus, "there is not the smallest event in human life and social history but possesses an eternal and spiritual significance." Catholicism, he warned, has no "definite solution" or a "formal programme" for all material problems.⁸ The Catholic, however, by engaging the specific context of the modern world was to be an instrument of Divine grace. As Dawson mentioned at the end of his essay later in the volume, "[a] Christian has only to *be* in order to change the world, for in that act of being there is contained all the mystery of supernatural life."⁹ Catholics, simply by taking a place at the modern table, aroused powerful opposition.

Dawson identified four major challengers to the Catholic ideal of unity, all of whom sought unity and order in secular terms. Communism, Dawson feared, threatened Christian order. So, he said, did liberal democracy, which accepted economic materialism and secularism.¹⁰ Socialism and nationalism comprised the final two threats to Christian order. Dawson labored during the 1930s to point out the deficiencies in these four challengers. He also identified the “new bureaucratic state, that ‘coldest of cold monsters,’” as a tremendous threat to human life. Modern cultural development had led society “into an individualistic atomism” which subjected individuals to the merciless power of the modern state. The state exerted “a more irresistible and far-reaching control over the individual life than was ever possessed by the absolute monarchies of the old regime.”¹¹

Dawson’s critique of modern life led him to consider reform. In respect to his claims about Catholicism, did Catholicism present a viable alternative to the rest of the powerful ideologies? And, if it were true that Catholicism prescribed no “formal programme,” then how would Catholics unite for effective action?¹² Catholics, acting as Catholics, did not control the political apparatus of any of the major European countries. Could Catholics attach themselves to existing movements—perhaps one of the four challengers to the Catholic principle of unity—or would they have to find a separate way? Dawson’s line of argument inevitably led him to propose a plan of action. For if Western civilization was in crisis and Catholicism held the solution, then Catholics would have to develop and implement a program of reform and renewal. This would thrust them into the political arena and force them to confront the modern state. Dawson always repeated and built on his previous writings. The problems he identified in 1931 would be addressed in turn. He first directed his attention to Catholicism’s competitors and then developed a strategy for Catholics to use the modern state to further their goals.

When Dawson penned *Religion and the Modern State* in 1936, he joined a broader intellectual project of critiquing the growing power of the nation state. During the 1930s and 1940s several works

challenged the rise of the modern state from a variety of perspectives. *I'll Take My Stand* (1930) by the Vanderbilt Agrarians, Frederick Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom* (1944), George Orwell's *1984* (1949), and Richard Weaver's *Ideas Have Consequences* (1948) were a few of the works that made a significant intellectual impact in the Anglo-American world. Dawson wanted to entitle his work *The New Leviathan* to summarize the message of the book, but, despite Dawson's opposition, his publisher gave the work the title *Religion and the Modern State*.¹³ The book continued the themes of his writings in *Essays in Order* while his findings led to further book projects.

Dawson noted that Western civilization had "something profoundly wrong" with it that "must be cured before modern civilization" could "become really healthy." The "path of progress" had been particularly "bloody" for Europe.¹⁴ For Dawson the most dangerous artifact of modern civilization was the modern state, which he traced to the "process of secularization in Western history." Religious violence in the aftermath of the Reformation had destroyed "religious unity and religious faith" while challenging "those objective and moral standards and values which provided a spiritual basis for social and political life." Stronger nation states arose to check the destructive violence. Dawson pointed out that the strengthening of the state in the twentieth century was a "spiritual reaction against the materialism of nineteenth-century bourgeois society." The new states, especially fascist and communist ones, justified their existence on spiritual grounds as forming "a new spiritual community" of the nation. For Dawson, this development was particularly dangerous for the state had become "a competitor with the Church on its own ground."¹⁵ The modern state claimed greater inclusivity and provided a pseudo-spiritual bond of unity. It demanded the "whole of man." Dawson preached intellectual resistance: "Christianity is bound to protest against any social system which claims the whole of man and sets itself up as the final end of human action, for it asserts that man's essential nature transcends all political and economic forms."¹⁶ By the 1930s, church and state represented not only rival institutions but also opposite philosophical positions on human nature.

Dawson believed that the state sought “control in every department of life” and used several powers to achieve its end. First, the state introduced “universal compulsory education.” This “put into the hands of the State the power and responsibility of forming the minds of the youth of the nation.”¹⁷ The control of young minds contributed to the state’s efforts “to control public opinion in general by its organs of instruction and propaganda,” including the media. Second, the modern state initiated “universal military service,” a necessary prerequisite for the total wars of the twentieth century. Finally, the state extended its “economic control,” which was “now the most important factor of all.”¹⁸ By attempting to control private property, the lives of young men, and the minds of its population, the modern state would try to “guide the life of its citizens from the cradle to the grave.” Dawson warned: “The new state will be universal and omniscient.” It would “not tolerate any interference with its educational functions” or any other parts of its control. He concluded: “It will be impossible to go one’s own way, as in the old days, and leave the state in control of politics. For there will be no department of life in which the state will not intervene and which will not be obliged to conform to the mechanized order of the new society.”¹⁹ Dawson sounded like the most strident of libertarians in his condemnations.

Dawson believed that Christians could respond to the dire situation in a variety of ways but hesitated to prescribe any particular response. The Church could condemn the state “and prepare itself for resistance to the secular power and for persecution.” Or it could “ally itself with the political and social forces that are hostile to the new State.” The Church could “limit its resistance to cases of State interference in ecclesiastical matters or in theological questions.” The Church could also explore whether its current difficulties with nation states were temporary and that “the new forms of authority and political organisation” might be “reconcilable in principle with Christian ideas.”²⁰ Dawson admitted that “it is much easier to state the objections ... than to find a solution” to the problems. In *Religion and the Modern State* he did not propose a definite strategy. He concluded that “the true social function of religion is not to

busy itself with economic or political reforms, but to save civilization from itself by revealing to men the true end of life and the true nature of reality.”²¹ But Dawson’s statement did not answer the dilemma he set out earlier. He merely repeated his earlier critiques.

Dawson did indicate false starts at reform but would wait to elaborate his solutions in later writings. He charged that none of the major competitors for establishing order—National Socialism, communism, and liberal democracy—would work. All were “really three forms of the same thing” and were “moving by different but parallel paths to the same goal, which is the mechanization of human life and the complete subordination of the individual to the state and to the economic process.” All three movements owed debts to Christianity. Nationalism owed “its high and almost mystical conception of the nation as a spiritual unity” to Christianity, while liberalism and democracy relied on the Christian tradition for “their humanitarian idealism and their faith in progress.” Socialism’s “passion for social justice, and for the rights of the poor and disinherited,” came from Christian culture.²² But all three rejected the full message of the Gospel. Finally, Dawson reminded his readers that “no age has the right to call itself Christian in an absolute sense,” thus negating a romantic attempt to revive a previous age. This point separated him from Catholic distributists like G. K. Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc.²³ *Religion and the Modern State* proved to be a diagnosis without a proposed cure.

As World War II broke out in 1939, Dawson published *Beyond Politics*, which built on *Religion and the Modern State* and provided more concrete proposals. Recognizing that Christians must choose sides in the coming conflict, Dawson believed that the Western democracies were the only hope. But he made it clear that Christians should support these governments in their efforts against National Socialism and communism as a temporary measure. They should not adopt the philosophy of liberalism that undergird these powers. *Beyond Politics* functioned as an extended critique of liberalism.

Dawson separated democracy from liberalism and then showed the flaws of each. He pointed out that “democracy and dictatorship

are not opposites or mortal enemies, but twin children of the great Revolution.”²⁴ Democrats of the late eighteenth century misidentified liberty as the “right of the mass to power.” As the example of the French Revolution demonstrated, pure mass democracy became destructive and dangerous. “A pure democracy,” Dawson indicated, “which sets equality above every other social value can adapt itself to a totalitarian organization as easily as a pure autocracy.”²⁵ In fact, nineteenth-century liberalism, Dawson believed, arose partially in reaction to the democratic excesses of the French Revolution. Liberals sought “to diminish the power and prestige of the community in favour of the individual.” Thus, they made the state “police-man and keeper of the peace” and the “inglorious and necessary servant” of the community. Dawson believed that liberalism left religion isolated and separated from “social reality,” allowing the liberal state to become “the servant of material interests which developed unguided and unchecked, in an atmosphere of spiritual anarchy.” The state assumed “responsibility” for the “smooth functioning of the economic machine.” When the economy failed, liberalism itself was called into question and communism, socialism, and fascism arose to address the weaknesses of the liberal state.²⁶ The aggressive organization of communities under liberalism’s competitors made a *laissez-faire* approach an inadequate solution to modern problems.²⁷ Something positive was necessary.

Dawson believed that Christians could organize groups to promote the renewal of culture and spiritual traditions in order to transform the modern state. Liberalism had been a “half-way house” that supported freedom “without metaphysical certainty or Christian dogma.”²⁸ By embracing a free society and then pointing the way back to the transcendent order, Christians could renew Britain. Dawson himself was heavily involved in such a movement in the 1940s, the short-lived, ecumenical Sword of the Spirit movement. He insisted that Great Britain had to “transform” its “disordered society into a living community without sacrificing the old liberal-democratic ideals of freedom and humanity.”²⁹ The Church played a role in this but had to be independent of the state and remain dedicated to its spiritual mission.³⁰ Distinguishing his

position from classical liberalism, Dawson noted, "The Church's real enemy is not the State but the World; that is to say secular civilization considered as a closed order which shuts out God from human life and deifies its own power and wealth."³¹ Thus, Christians should work to "transform the world by bringing every side of human existence and every human activity into contact with the sources of supernatural life." For Dawson this meant that Christians should even seek to influence "the modern State, that new Leviathan." It, he noted, "must be transformed and reconsecrated, as the power of the barbarian warrior became transfigured into the sacred office of a Christian King."³² Dawson indicated that his solution to the problem of the modern state was to take it over, transform it, and use it for good. He would suggest ways to do so in his 1942 book *The Judgement of the Nations*.

The Judgement of the Nations continued Dawson's analysis of the modern state and called for a renewed commitment to spiritual unity to combat the powers of darkness during World War II. In the foreword to the book, Dawson noted that it took him four years to write the piece and "cost me greater labour and thought than any book that I have written."³³ The world faced its greatest crisis as "liberty and reason are being destroyed by the very powers they created." "Humanity" was "slipping blindly and helplessly toward the abyss." Western civilization, founded on the ideals of Christianity, faced "new powers armed with all the resources of modern scientific technique, which are inspired by the ruthless will to power, that recognizes no law save that of their own strength." For Dawson, "Britain and America" stood "as the bulwark of freedom of the world." They could preserve the Western ideal of freedom that came from "the Christian belief in the absolute and unique value of the human soul which infinitely transcends all the wealth and the power and the glory of the world." "Christianity and humanism and social freedom" shared a "spiritual affinity" that must be appreciated by all who sought to preserve the West in its hour of crisis.³⁴

Dawson believed that disunity weakened Western culture and would play a major role if the Allies (representing what remained

of Western culture) suffered defeat in World War II. In *Judgement* Dawson indicted religious disunity above all for the plight of Western culture. Since the Reformation, Protestants and Catholics had been unable to recognize their common cultural inheritance and instead had divided into different social groups. Each group then justified its existence with different ideologies and theologies. Religious disunity, in part, led to the creation of the modern state that was now destroying Western culture. Dawson believed that Christians as well as liberals opposed to totalitarianism must “recall” the “essential values” that they “must preserve at all costs.” The old political parties could not achieve this restoration. “It can only be done,” Dawson insisted, perhaps referencing his own participation in the Sword of the Spirit movement, “by the free co-operation of all those who recognize their inherence in the common spiritual tradition of Western civilization and the necessity of creating an organic communion between the scattered and disorganized elements of freedom which still exist though they are politically divided and almost powerless.” This new freedom movement could use the “new powers that man has acquired during the last half century ... in the service of freedom.”³⁵ The secularization of Western culture—the “dislocation between religion and culture”—could also be rectified by a revival of the unified “spiritual vision” of Christianity.³⁶

Dawson devoted the second half of *Judgement* to plans for restoring Western culture. He confronted first a major difficulty. Dawson celebrated freedom and attacked the modern state for its ruthless efficiency. But, if Western Christian ideals needed restoration in order to triumph, could Western leaders use their power—and thus the power of the modern state—to plan a culture of freedom? Dawson tentatively answered in the affirmative. “The planning of culture cannot be undertaken in a dictatorial spirit,” he noted. The medieval cultural arrangement provided guidance. “In the Middle Ages,” Dawson contended, “religion did in fact create the cultural institutions that guided and controlled the mind of society, so that all the higher activities of culture were, if not scientifically planned, at least given spiritual form and unity.” Dawson

recognized that any attempt by the state to establish a religious group to plan culture was doomed to failure.³⁷ Instead, only religious unity could inspire a vibrant religious culture that could begin consciously directing the broader culture.

Christian intellectuals, according to Dawson, must lead Western culture to true freedom. Intellectuals must point to "Christian freedom, not a freedom of economic materialism and individual selfishness." Christian intellectuals must push for "a social order directed to spiritual ends, in which every man has a chance to use his freedom for the service of God according to his own powers and gifts."³⁸ The new society must protect elements that "have hitherto been left to take care of themselves," particularly individual freedom.³⁹ This necessitated not solely an intellectual defense but protection by the state.

Dawson implied that Christians must infiltrate the modern state to have a chance at renewing the culture of the West. He envisioned Christian bureaucrats at the controls of the apparatus of the modern state. Dawson affirmed that two principles governed his proposal, "freedom of association," which would guard against the totalitarian claims of the state, and "freedom of vocation," an ethic of "personal responsibility" that "subordinates the profit motive to a non-economic end," which would, presumably, allow individuals to resist the lure of power. He acknowledged, "There is obviously a danger that bureaucratic planning may destroy freedom no less completely than totalitarian dictatorship." But, he wrote, "it is not necessary and inevitable, since the system is not in itself irreconcilable with the principle of freedom of vocation." Dawson trusted a Christian-administered modern state in which the "public servant" was "a freeman and a citizen." Freedom of association alone would "expend itself in an anarchic proliferation of rival and overlapping groups" or would "degenerate into an exploitation of group selfishness in which comradeship becomes an excuse for graft and corruption." But when joined to the principle of vocation, it could "serve the higher order of culture" and create "the conditions under which man's freedom is spiritually fruitful." Dawson concluded: "If this spirit can be applied to the new

conditions of mass society, it is conceivable that a planned society might be created without the destruction of freedom either by impersonal bureaucracy or by inhuman tyranny.”⁴⁰

Thus, Dawson’s vigorous critique of the modern state, begun a decade earlier, ended in a call for Christians to use the state to achieve their goals. This could be done through a shift in cultural outlook rather than in the aggressive style of practical party politics. He envisioned Christians undermining the claims of the modern state through practicing and promoting Christian culture and its intellectual supports within society and the state’s apparatus. Dawson’s solution to the problem of the modern state led him to propose in the 1950s a plan to staff the most vigorous bureaucracy of the modern state—the educational system—with workers imbued with an understanding of Christian culture.

The massive destruction to Western civilization caused by World War II both frightened Dawson and prompted him to search for a cultural rebuilding program in education. For approximately fifteen years following the War, Dawson wrote pieces on his plans to implement a Christian culture curriculum in Catholic colleges and actively debated many Catholic scholars in the pages of journals. His status in America grew after Harvard University named him the first Stillman Chair of Catholic Studies in 1958. The United States intrigued Dawson, who remarked at his seventieth birthday celebration in Massachusetts that the “fate of Christendom” would be decided in America.⁴¹ Dawson believed that if his educational proposal would be implemented in the United States, a society that devoted a plethora of resources to education, many of the challenges posed by secularism could be met. He picked up where *The Judgement of the Nations* left off and tried to apply his solutions in a new context. The American scene proved more challenging than Dawson anticipated.

The American Catholic world Dawson entered had been shaped by the controversies among Catholics, Protestants, and American liberals from the 1920s through the 1950s. The massive immigration of the early twentieth century revived American nativism. Nativists often collaborated with the emerging progressive

movement, which preached loyalty to a centralized nation state and “American values.” The Catholic hierarchy in the late nineteenth century, fearing the loss of Catholic identity, had expanded significantly the parochial school system. The mixture of parochial schools and new immigrant cultures created a Catholic subculture that frightened other Americans. During the 1920s, for example, the revived Ku Klux Klan and an invigorated American Freemasonry attacked Catholics as superstitious, uneducated, and disloyal Americans. Anti-Catholicism hit its apex in Al Smith’s failed presidential bid in 1928.⁴² In addition, as historian Douglas Slawson has noted, the movement among progressive forces in the wake of World War I to create a federal department of education came partially as a response to the feared “otherness” of the Catholic population. Several states considered banning private education, a measure targeted at Catholic schools.⁴³ During the 1930s, secular liberals pointed to the popularity among Catholics of the radio priest Charles Coughlin, who openly admired Mussolini, and the Catholic support of Franco in the Spanish Civil War as proof of Catholic attraction to fascism and authoritarianism and Catholics’ incompatibility with democratic culture.⁴⁴ By the late 1940s and 1950s, as John McGreevy has noted, social scientists, looking to further demonize Catholicism, published statistical analyses of economic and social indicators in Catholic and Protestant countries to demonstrate Catholic inferiority. In 1949, Paul Blanshard published *American Freedom and Catholic Power*, a warning about growing Catholic political power in America, to the acclaim of militant secularist intellectuals such as John Dewey and Bertrand Russell.⁴⁵ Clearly, Catholics in America faced determined cultural and institutional resistance.

Catholics responded to the hostility in a variety of ways, especially celebrating the Catholic Revival. The Catholic Revival, according to Arnold Sparr, reached its heyday in the United States between 1935 and 1960. Neoscholasticism, while a main feature of the Revival, was not the only facet of Catholic thinking. Revival thinkers shared the view that secularism was the main problem of modernity, causing economic, political, social, and religious

disorder. They believed that Catholicism offered a viable, reasonable way to escape secularism. Advocates of the revival saw themselves, as Douglas Slawson has noted, as standing for the “traditional values” that would save the United States from cultural collapse. Sitting on the sidelines, therefore, was not an option for Catholics. Many Catholics believed, Philip Gleason insists, that they could “simply persuade society to accept their position.”⁴⁶

The Revival branched off in different directions as individual Catholics focused on particular solutions to secularism’s challenges. The result was a fractured movement. The liturgical movement of Virgil Michel, Dorothy Day’s Catholic Worker, distributism, the Catholic Legion of Decency, Frank Sheed’s Catholic Evidence Guild, and various educational reforms, including the ideas of Christopher Dawson, demonstrated a diverse array of tactics and positions. Arnold Sparr and Philip Gleason maintained that the development of “the theology of the Mystical Body of Christ” and Christopher Dawson’s language of culture provided intellectual coherence to the movement, but clearly Catholic Revival thinkers varied widely on political and economic issues.⁴⁷

The diversity of the Catholic Revival made collective efforts at reform difficult, as Christopher Dawson would discover. In his book on Catholic higher education in the modern United States, Philip Gleason noted that Catholic intellectuals in the 1930s, many of them neoscholastics, tried to devise a plan of curricular reform “to specify how the liberal arts ideal should be actualized through the curricular content of Catholic colleges and universities.” The efforts of Aristotelians Robert Hutchins and Mortimer Adler at the University of Chicago to implement curricular reform through the Great Books program inspired many Catholics. Other intellectuals sought to apply the recommendations of John Henry Newman’s *Idea of a University* to reform. Efforts at reform halted with the advent of World War II, but after the war, Catholic educators, anticipating an influx of new university students due to the G.I. Bill, sought to define a liberal arts education to which all could agree. A number of Catholics argued for the integration of religion and the liberal arts with the rest of the curriculum. As Gleason

discovered, there was much discussion but little consensus on the proper Catholic education. Reform stalled.⁴⁸

Christopher Dawson entered the existing discussion on education with a 1946 article in the European journal *Lumen Vitae*.⁴⁹ Those American Catholics familiar with the Catholic Revival knew Dawson's work well. Thus, he came to the discussion as a respected authority. Dawson connected his positions on education with his conclusions in *The Judgement of the Nations*. Acknowledging that secularism was the crux of the problem and that public education seemed to spread this view, Dawson warned that a secularized society was "inhuman in the absolute sense—hostile to human life and irreconcilable with human nature itself," a position that he had elaborated upon in *Judgement*. Dawson noted that "it is only by the rediscovery of the spiritual world and the restoration of man's spiritual capacities that it is possible to save humanity from self-destruction." For Dawson that was "the immense task which Christian education has to undertake."⁵⁰ He indicated that universal education had destroyed the "old hierarchy of divinity, humanity and natural science that was the tradition of European higher education" and had instituted utilitarianism as the reigning philosophy of the school. In higher education, specialization, a function of the utilitarian search for employment, continued the downward spiral. These approaches destroyed the humanistic basis of learning. Dawson questioned the ideal of universal education: "Indeed the extension of public education—that is to say the attempt of a single uniform educational system to mould the whole mind of the whole community by a single all embracing educational system—only increases the mass mindedness of modern society without raising its cultural standards or deepening its spiritual life."⁵¹ While suspicious of universal education directed by the state, Dawson realized that it was a powerful tool. The above quotation reveals that Dawson's main concern was not the power of the government over the minds of its citizens but the particular forms and doctrines of the secular schools that destroyed culture and spirituality.

Dawson's comments on education invoke, to echo the sociologist Joseph Varacalli, the idea that Catholicism must be presented

as a plausible way of life.⁵² The Enlightenment critique of Christianity painted it as a religion of simpleminded fools and hypocrites with impossible ideals. Dawson noted that “Christian education is ... an initiation into the Christian way of life and thought, and for one thousand two hundred years, more or less, the peoples of Europe have been submitted to this influence.” Christian education was “not only an initiation into the Christian community, it was also an initiation into *another world*: the unveiling of spiritual realities of which the natural man was unaware and which changed the meaning of existence.” Drawing upon his own education, he noted that he learned “more—much more—during my school days from my visits to the Cathedral at Winchester than I did from the hours of religious instruction in school.” These visits to the “tombs of the Saxon kings and the mediaeval statesmen Bishops gave one a much greater sense of the magnitude of the religious element in our culture and the depths of its roots in our national life than anything one could learn from books.”⁵³ In other words, Dawson learned that Catholicism had shaped the world he inherited. It had, at least at one time, been a viable cultural force. Such a realization meant that Christianity could be a plausible alternative to secularism.

Dawson criticized the approach to religious education since the Reformation and pointed to a cultural solution. The use of the Catechism, which began in the sixteenth century, as the “method of religious instruction was of Protestant origin.” While Dawson appreciated the “wider diffusion of literary culture and the intellectualizing of religious education” that emerged from the Renaissance and Reformation, he also saw in its effects an increased stress on “the practical and utilitarian elements of culture.” “The fact is,” he maintained, “that culture by itself—even a humanist culture that is intellectually aware of the spiritual values of Christianity—does not possess the power of restoring or transforming the life of society.”⁵⁴ Dawson wanted an educational system that conveyed the reality of Christian culture and the possibilities of Christian life. Only such a system could save Western civilization from the trap of secularism.

Four years later, Dawson returned to his idea of Christian culture and offered clarifications about the content and purpose of his proposal. He noted two failed approaches to education. First, the classical humanist system of the study of the classical world would not suffice. Dawson noted: "The primary school taught children their letters, the grammar school taught them Latin and Greek, so that educated men everywhere possessed a common language and the knowledge of a common literature or two common literatures." But the traditional humanist education appeared to the moderns as "shockingly narrow and pedantic."⁵⁵ Thus, it suffered serious attacks in the nineteenth century from those who wanted students to learn modern contributions to knowledge. Second, the nationalistic approaches to education in which students study the "conflicts and rivalries of the various European states" was also defective. It ignored the cultural unity of Western civilization. Dawson insisted that "education has meant the transmission of culture."⁵⁶ The culture of the West was a Christian one in its foundation. He noted that educators should "accept the existence of Christian culture as an objective historical fact, and try to understand it by its own ideas and to judge it by its own standards, as classical scholars have done in the past with regard to the culture of the ancient world." A Christian culture approach would demand a new disposition to study. "Instead of these ways of looking at the past from outside as something alien," Dawson continued, "let us try to study Western Christian culture from the Christian point of view—to see it as a new way of life which was brought into Europe nearly nineteen hundred years ago when St. Paul set sail from Troy to Macedonia and gradually expanded until it became accepted as the universal standard of the European way of life."⁵⁷ This did not mean that Christians should view the study of Christian culture as an ideological project. Rather, Dawson saw the study as historically grounded and defensible through practical, reasoned arguments.

Dawson's 1952 book *Understanding Europe* contained a chapter on education entitled "The Problem of the Future: Total Secularization or a Return to Christian Culture," which repeated,

at times verbatim, points from his 1946 and 1950 articles. He stressed that “the secularization of modern culture is inseparably connected with the secularization of modern education and the passing of control from the Church and the old teaching corporations to the modern state.” Dawson clarified his use of the term “culture,” noting that it did not signify solely the culture of the elites. Christian culture represented the varied ways of life of the Mystical Body of Christ. The “mystery of faith brings all men together at the heart of life,” and faith is “the beginning and end of Christian culture.” He insisted that in the “Catholic view there is an organic relation between religion and culture.” If secularism triumphed completely, not only Christian culture but also the faith faced danger. “The great obstacle,” he concluded, “is the failure of Christians themselves to understand the depth of that tradition [Christian culture] and the inexhaustible possibilities of new life that it contains.”⁵⁸

Dawson expanded his comments on education in a 1953 lecture at University College, Dublin, by linking his views to those of John Henry Newman and by clarifying his historical approach to the study of Christian culture. Beginning the lecture with the observation that “the survival of a civilization depends on the continuity of its educational tradition,” he noted that the disillusionment of Western intellectuals in the face of two destructive world wars had called into question the validity of the cult of progress and the traditions of Western civilization as a whole. Dawson turned briefly to Newman’s thought. Newman, he wrote, “stood for the principle of unity in education, in religion and in culture” and understood the connection between Christianity and the West. Dawson believed that Newman foresaw the dire consequences for both education and culture of the separation of the liberal arts from theology and the replacement of theology by the “science of nature.” The fragmentation of the disciplines into “a jungle of competing specialisms” inevitably resulted.⁵⁹ Dawson commented again on the flawed approach of Renaissance humanism in confining its study to the ancient world. But he also critiqued the new program of study proposed at Columbia University, which

advocated an “encyclopedic” study of modern civilization. The program was too “vague” for Dawson, even though he acknowledged that it did have relevance to the lives of students. Dawson insisted that a “unified study of Christian culture which would include Christian philosophy, Christian literature and Christian history, studied in close relation with one another,” would be the best program. He noted that this meant studying different historical periods, not simply the European middle ages. For Dawson, “[t]he more deeply the student penetrates into this great religious and cultural unity [of the Christian West], the more aware he will become of the essential continuity of Western civilization and of the spiritual dynamism and fecundity of the Christian tradition.” While acknowledging that his proposal might not be “practical” politically in the context of the modern university, Dawson believed that “the survival or restoration of Christian culture involves not only the fate of our own people and our own civilization, but the fate of humanity and the future of the world.”⁶⁰

In 1953 and 1954 Dawson published articles on education in *Commonweal* that encouraged American Catholics to battle for education within the wider culture. Recognizing the specific hostility to Catholicism in English-speaking cultures, he indicated that the existing “ghetto” solution was untenable, a theme that resonated with many American Catholic intellectuals who were seeking to reduce the hostility of American Protestants and liberals. Dawson pointed out that since the English Reformation, English-speaking Catholics inhabited a world that viewed them with contempt and suspicion. Shut out of the institutional life of the culture, Catholicism, in the interest of self-preservation, had to thrive in ghettos. The clergy studied religion while the lay people learned catechisms and secular knowledge. “If you cut down to the bone of religious faith and leave people with nothing else but the bare right of practicing their religion in a completely alien culture,” Dawson concluded, “you are left with nothing but the fleshless skeleton of Catholicism.”⁶¹ He admired the “spiritual vitality of the Faith” in the “factory towns of England and the United States” but noted that “this witness was paid for by an

immense leakage of those who were unable to withstand the pressure of their cultural environment and by the narrowness of the type of Catholicism which survived." English-speaking Catholics were "forced to live by sheer faith, naked in an alien culture." The individual "spiritual merit" of such Catholics "may be all the higher, but his chance of social survival is much smaller and his opportunities to influence the society of his age much more restricted." In noting the difficulty of practicing a religious culture so widely removed from the dominant secular culture, Dawson compared ghetto Catholicism to that of the Germanic barbarian converts in the early Middle Ages: "It was in fact practically a culture-less Catholicism, a society of Christian barbarians."⁶² Thus, English-speaking Catholics in particular needed to study Christian culture and appreciate the plausibility of Catholic culture. Dawson wrote in 1954:

What is vital is to recover the moral and spiritual foundations on which the lives of both the individual and the culture depend: to bring home to the average man that religion is not a pious fiction which has nothing to do with the facts of life, but that it is concerned with realities, that it is in fact the pathway to reality and the law of life.

This meant recapturing higher education from the "secularists." "What I am thinking of is the need for educated Catholics to influence contemporary culture by broadening and deepening their own understanding of Catholicism and of Catholic culture," he wrote. Dawson told American Catholics that their job was very important because "it is only through the medium of culture that the Faith can penetrate civilization and transform the thought and ideology of modern society." Christianity, Dawson believed, "breaks down the close self-centered world of secularist culture and gives human society a new spiritual purpose which transcends the conflicting interests of individual and class and race."⁶³ The study of Christian culture, therefore, promised to inaugurate a new age in American Catholicism.

American Catholics responded to Dawson's challenge in several journal articles, frequently criticizing his approach and warning of the hostility of the modern state to Dawson's project. In the Jesuit *America* magazine, educator Helene Magaret noted that Dawson's proposals were "idealistic" and unworkable. She wrote: "If the Catholic liberal-arts college is to function in the American community, it must meet the educational demands of its secular milieu. This is not a matter of choice; it is one of survival." Secularists tolerated the "Catholic educational system" only because it agreed to meet their demands. Catholic educators, functioning in "intellectual market places" of American higher education, must "provide the student with the best possible Christian cultural background" while offering "all the materialistic trivia of the modern world" in order to meet the utilitarian demands of students.⁶⁴ In Fordham University's journal *Thought*, Herbert A. Musurillo attacked Dawson's program for its slighting of the classics and its impracticability. Like Magaret, Musurillo pointed to the problem of the state. He wrote: "And that the suggestions should come at a time when all religious groups are striving to promote civil tolerance among themselves and to elicit the attention of the State, strikes me as peculiarly unfortunate."⁶⁵ In other words, Catholics should keep their heads down and continue their current program in order to avoid the wrath of the state. Another Jesuit, Robert Harnett, who had worked in the 1930s on a course of studies using Newman's *Idea of a University*, lodged minor complaints with Dawson while agreeing with much of his analysis. He doubted the proposal would work given the hostility of the secularists. He wrote: "If those who control the policies of the National Educational Association would pay any serious attention to the proposal that contact be re-established with Christian culture, they would never have led us to where we are in the first place."⁶⁶ The critics indicated that Catholic higher education needed the approval of the state to be relevant in modern America. If the state would fight Catholic higher education, then why would students potentially damage their future careers by attending Catholic universities? In other words, these critics recognized the significant power of the

secular state over education and sought to accommodate this power in order to survive as a distinct group. Dawson would have to answer these critiques.

From 1955 through the publication of *The Crisis of Western Education* in 1961, Dawson published shorter pieces on education that broadened his proposal in order to answer the challenges put forth by his critics. He recognized that public education, directed by the modern secular state, would not disappear in the short run. Any proposal thus had to take into account the vast power of the state.⁶⁷ Dawson had initially directed his proposals on education to a Catholic audience but by 1957 had expanded his program to include public schools. He wrote in *Commonweal*:

If we want to preserve Catholic education in a secularized society, we have got to do something about non-Catholic education also. The future of civilization depends on the fate of the majority, and, so long as nothing is done to counteract the present trend of modern education, the mind of the masses must become increasingly alienated from the whole tradition of Christian culture.

He noted that universities must educate future public school teachers in a Christian culture program so that they could pass on this knowledge to their young pupils. "Universities and other centers of higher education" needed to "take the first step." This would "by degrees affect the whole tone of public education."⁶⁸

He linked this strategy to the Oxford Movement of the nineteenth century, one of his favorite areas of study. The Oxford Movement demonstrated "what a university movement can do" by providing an "interesting example of the way in which a movement on the university level can change the climate of public opinion and bear religious and social fruit."⁶⁹ Dawson recognized that many of his Catholic critics were neoscholastics or classical humanists who fundamentally disagreed with a historical approach.⁷⁰ Several critics, including Musurillo, feared Dawson was a mere propagandist for the medieval world. Dawson rejected the suggestion that the

study of Christian culture “would have a narrowing and cramping effect on the mind of the student.” Instead, “it is eminently a liberal and liberalizing study, since it shows us how to relate our own contemporary social experience to the wider perspectives of universal history.”⁷¹ Dawson’s assurances seemed designed to assuage secularist fears as well. By portraying his program as non-aggressive, non-sectarian, and broad-minded, Dawson hoped to make it palatable to secularists. The historical character of the program separated it from the project of neoscholasticism, which secularists certainly opposed.

Dawson’s *The Crisis of Western Education*, then, developed out of the years of discussion about his educational proposals. He incorporated the responses of his critics in the book, demonstrating his willingness to address the particular historical context of his American Catholic audience. The themes as well as many passages from his articles on education since 1946 appeared in *Crisis*.⁷² The book began with a brief discussion of culture followed by a history of education in the West (chapters 1–5). Dawson devoted two chapters to education in the United States, one on secular trends, and one on Catholic education (chapters 6–7). Dawson believed that American Catholic culture had been heavily formed by the influence of the Irish upon the American Church as well as the broader cultural push for economic prosperity. He diagnosed secularism as the main problem facing modern society and criticized both the rise of the modern state and its attempts to use mass public education to spread its ideology (chapter 8). Dawson then elaborated on the study of Christian culture for four chapters (chapters 9–12). He stressed the need for students to understand the plausibility of Catholic culture. He noted the importance of a historical rather than philosophical approach to Christian education. He also indicated a few specifics about his program, outlining six eras of study from the Birth of Jesus to the modern age. Dawson made it clear that he was not advocating the exclusive study of the medieval period or calling for a Great Books program. He did advocate the use of the apparatus of the modern state to make innovations in public education, clearly consistent with his

conclusion in *The Judgement of the Nations* and his responses to the debates over education during the 1950s. Dawson insisted: "The only real solution is to change the cultural environment which has made it possible for this unnatural state of things to develop." It is only through "the medium of culture," he insisted, "that the Faith can penetrate civilization and transform the thought and ideology of modern society."⁷³ Dawson's *Crisis of Western Education* served as the solution he offered to the problems of the modern state that he had diagnosed thirty years before.

The cool reception from American Catholics to *Crisis* could have been predicted from the debates over education Dawson had witnessed in the 1950s, but the burgeoning postwar American conservative movement offered another possible clientele for Dawson's programs. Dawson rarely commented on practical politics or his current political positions in his writings. His critiques of the modern state and of liberalism, however, made him a natural ally of the emerging intellectual right. Russell Kirk, for example, greatly admired Dawson's work. Like American Catholics, however, the American right divided into different factions, depriving Dawson of enthusiastic allies in the conservative intellectual movement.⁷⁴

During the 1950s, as historian George Nash has shown, the American right included three main groups: libertarians, traditionalists, and ex-communists. Concerns with protecting free markets, a limited state, and maximizing individual liberty consumed the libertarian wing of the movement. Libertarian writers like Ludwig von Mises and F. A. Hayek focused more on economic themes rather than educational schemes. The traditionalist wing, represented by men such as Russell Kirk, L. Brent Bozell, and Richard Weaver, advocated virtue as the primary political end. Educational concerns fit more naturally with this group. In addition, a number of Catholics, particularly refugees from Eastern Europe, added a religious element to this wing. But anticommunism and support for free markets consumed much of the discussion. This wing was not necessarily engaged in the movement of the Catholic Revival and thus moved in different intellectual circles with different

intellectual concerns. Finally, the ex-communists, especially Whitaker Chambers, supported winning the Cold War as the primary concern of the American regime. All three groups of right-wing intellectuals found cultural topics interesting, but none believed, as Dawson did, that the solution to the problem of modernity was a revival of Christian culture within the educational system.⁷⁵

Educational concerns played a role in conservative thinking during the postwar period, but conservatives tended to focus more on the power of the state, free markets, and forging a political movement to reshape American politics. William F. Buckley's *God and Man at Yale* (1951) famously warned of anti-Christian indoctrination at America's best universities. In Buckley's *National Review*, the major publishing organ of the postwar right, a number of writers engaged issues of education.⁷⁶ Free-market advocacy also unified many American conservatives. Given Dawson's hostility to laissez faire, as he expressed in *Beyond Politics*, these thinkers would not find much to celebrate in his political writings. The primary concern of the conservatives during the 1950s and 1960s was settling on an ideology that could unite the various wings of the American right. Frank Meyer's "fusion" of traditional and libertarian ideals, mixed with a vigorous support for fighting the Cold War, eventually held together the conservative intellectual movement.⁷⁷ By this time, however, Dawson had faded from view. He suffered a stroke in 1962 and retired from Harvard and public life. In addition, American conservatives engaged American Catholics in the 1960s on political issues and the social teaching of the Church rather than on practical matters of education.⁷⁸ Milton Friedman's *Capitalism and Freedom*, published a year after *The Crisis of Western Education*, became, according to George Nash, one of the most influential conservative books of the 1960s.⁷⁹ Dawson's works faded from memory.⁸⁰

The debate over Christopher Dawson's proposals for education revealed how limited the influence of an intellectual public Christianity could be in the post-World War II world. Despite being one of the most distinguished intellectuals of the important Catholic Revival of the early twentieth century and having a

transatlantic reputation, Dawson failed to win many allies, and thus his efforts had little immediate effect. His “natural” constituencies, American Catholics and American conservatives, had fragmented into competing groups. Although many agreed that the power of the modern state posed a danger to both Christianity and Western civilization, they could not agree on a common solution to the problem. Dawson’s solutions faced several obstacles in the United States. Many university professors were secularists who would have fought the inclusion of a program of Christian culture studies. His program, if implemented, would have required strong centralization of the public school system in order to coordinate the needed curricular revisions. The centralization of American public education was a hot topic in the early 1960s due to the nationwide struggle over desegregation and continues to draw impassioned commentary. In addition, Dawson’s dismissal of “ghetto Catholicism” and his advice to engage the culture implied that there was one main culture in which to assimilate or engage. But in the United States, a culturally diverse place with enduring regional differences, assimilation or accommodation to the broader culture is a more complex task than Dawson recognized. Interestingly, the varied reaction to Dawson’s educational proposals affirm his own trenchant analysis of the power of secularism through the arm of the modern state to shape a common mind hostile to Christianity. Catholic educators seemed to fear the state’s power over the culture and thus met the demands of the secular educational establishment in order to make their institutions relevant to secular culture. Dawson’s analysis of the modern state, then, rather than his educational solutions, proved to be his most prescient political writing.

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Franciscan University of Steubenville, who introduced me to Dawson's works in 1992.

Endnotes

1. Christopher Dawson, *The Crisis of Western Education* (Steubenville, OH: Franciscan University Press, 1989), 102, 107, 187.
2. Philip Gleason, *Contending with Modernity: Catholic Higher Education in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 105–123, especially 119; William M. Halsey, *The Survival of American Innocence: Catholicism in an Era of Disillusionment, 1920–1940* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980), 2; Arnold Sparr, *To Promote, Defend, and Redeem: The Catholic Literary Revival and the Cultural Transformation of American Catholicism, 1920–1960* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1990), 4–16; and Bradley J. Birzer, *Sanctifying the World: The Augustinian Life and Mind of Christopher Dawson* (Front Royal, VA: Christendom Press, 2007). Birzer places Dawson in several intellectual contexts, including that of the Catholic Revival.
3. Christopher Dawson, "General Introduction," in *Essays in Order*, eds. Christopher Dawson and J. P. Burns (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1931), xix.
4. For the details of Dawson's life see Christina Scott, *A Historian and His World: A Life of Christopher Dawson* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1992). An excellent essay that helps to set the English context for Dawson's career is Aidan Nichols, "Christopher Dawson's Catholic Setting," in *Eternity in Time: Christopher Dawson and the Catholic Idea of History*, eds. Stratford Caldecott and John Morrill (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 25–49. Birzer, *Sanctifying the World*, 120–121.
5. Dawson, "General Introduction," in *Essays in Order*, vi, viii–ix.
6. *Ibid.*, xi.
7. *Ibid.*, xvi.
8. *Ibid.*, vi–vii.
9. Dawson, "Christianity and the New Order," in *Essays in Order*, 243, emphasis in the original. See also E. J. Oliver, "The Religion of Christopher Dawson," *Chesterton Review* 9 (1983): 161–165.
10. Dawson, "General Introduction," in *Essays in Order*, xii.
11. Dawson, "Humanism and the New Order," in *Essays in Order*, 162.
12. Dawson, "General Introduction," in *Essays in Order*, vi.
13. Birzer, *Sanctifying the World*, 123–143. The information about the title is on page 137.

14. Dawson, *Religion and the Modern State* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1936), xii–xiii. See Scott, *A Historian and His World*, 122–127.
15. Dawson, *Religion and the Modern State*, 43–44. Dawson's comments on fascism led to continued misunderstanding of his position. Some charged that he was soft on fascism. See Scott, *A Historian and His World*, 125–127. Patrick Allitt, *Catholic Converts: British and American Intellectuals Turn to Rome* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 258–259. Birzer, *Sanctifying the World*, 142–146.
16. Dawson, *Religion and the Modern State*, xv.
17. *Ibid.*, 47, 46.
18. *Ibid.*, 55, 46.
19. *Ibid.*, 55–57.
20. *Ibid.*, 49.
21. *Ibid.*, 107, 125.
22. *Ibid.*, xv, xxi.
23. *Ibid.*, 120. See Birzer, *Sanctifying the World*, 28, 152, on Dawson's differences with Belloc.
24. Christopher Dawson, *Beyond Politics* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1970), 40–41. See Scott, *A Historian and His World*, 131–133.
25. Dawson, *Beyond Politics*, 47, 48.
26. *Ibid.*, 74–76.
27. *Ibid.*, 56.
28. *Ibid.*, 101.
29. *Ibid.*, 84. Birzer, *Sanctifying the World*, 193–204.
30. Dawson, *Beyond Politics*, 91–92.
31. *Ibid.*, 112–113.
32. *Ibid.*, 115.
33. Christopher Dawson, *The Judgement of the Nations* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1943), foreword (no page number). See Scott, *A Historian and His World*, 147–151. See Birzer, *Sanctifying the World*, 197–198, 206.
34. Dawson, *Judgement of the Nations*, 3, 6, 10, 14, 16.
35. *Ibid.*, 48–49.
36. *Ibid.*, 67, 152.
37. *Ibid.*, 83–84.
38. *Ibid.*, 127.
39. *Ibid.*, 133.
40. *Ibid.*, 133–137. See Birzer, *Sanctifying the World*, 214.
41. See Allitt, *Catholic Converts*, 270. See also Dawson's comments on the United States, some of which he repeated in *The Crisis of Western*

- Education*, and in his 1960 lecture "America and the Secularization of Modern Culture" (Houston, TX: University of Saint Thomas, 1960).
42. See John T. McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2003), 127–188. Halsey, *The Survival of American Innocence*, 1–19. Douglas J. Slawson, *The Department of Education Battle, 1918–1932: Public Schools, Catholic Schools, and the Social Order* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), xii–xvi, 1–45. Arnold Sparr, *To Promote, Defend, and Redeem*, 4–16.
 43. Slawson, *The Department of Education Battle, 1918–1932*, xii–xvi, 1–45.
 44. On this point, see Jay Corrin, *Catholic Intellectuals and the Challenge of Democracy* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002). McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom*, 170–173.
 45. McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom*, 167, 179–180.
 46. Gleason, *Contending with Modernity*, 245. Sparr, *To Promote, Defend, and Redeem*, xi–xvi. Slawson, *The Department of Education Battle, 1918–1932*, xiv, xvi.
 47. Arnold Sparr, *To Promote, Defend, and Redeem*, xi–xvi, 102–121. Gleason, *Contending with Modernity*, 146–163, quotation on 148.
 48. Gleason, *Contending with Modernity*, 163, 246–260. One book-length contribution to this dialogue, which leaned on Dawson's theory of culture heavily, was Leo R. Ward, *Blueprint for a Catholic University* (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder Book Co., 1949). Sparr, *To Promote, Defend, and Redeem*, 99–121. For a readable treatment of the Great Books movement, see Alex Beam, *A Great Idea at the Time: The Rise, Fall, and Curious Afterlife of the Great Books* (New York: Public Affairs, 2008).
 49. One of the most perceptive essays on Dawson's views and how they relate to modern education and intellectual trends is Russell Hittinger, "Christopher Dawson: A View from the Social Sciences," in *The Catholic Writer*, ed. Ralph McInerny (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1991), 31–47. See also Philip Gleason, "Christopher Dawson and the Study of Christian Culture," *Chesterton Review* 9 (1983): 167–171; Bruno Schlessinger, "Responses to Dawson's Ideas in the United States," *Chesterton Review* 9 (1983): 171–176; R. V. Young, "The Continuing Crisis," in *The Crisis of Western Education* (Steubenville, OH: Franciscan University Press, 1989), ix–xxiii; Christina Scott, "The Vision and Legacy of Christopher Dawson," in *Eternity in Time*, 20–22; and Birzer, *Sanctifying the World*, 215–243.
 50. Dawson, "Education and the Crisis of Christian Culture," *Lumen Vitae* 1 (1946): 214. Gleason notes that this article was reprinted in pamphlet form in Chicago in 1949. See Gleason, *Contending with Modernity*, 255, 395.

51. Dawson, "Education and the Crisis of Christian Culture," 205.
52. Joseph Varacalli, *The Catholic Experience in America* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006), 33. Varacalli uses the phrase "plausibility structure."
53. Dawson, "Education and the Crisis of Christian Culture," 206–208.
54. *Ibid.*, 209–211.
55. Dawson, "The Study of Christian Culture as a Means of Education," *Lumen Vitae* 5 (1950): 172–173.
56. *Ibid.*, 181, 174.
57. *Ibid.*, 183–184.
58. Dawson, *Understanding Europe* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2009), 195, 202, 203, 206. See Birzer, *Sanctifying the World*, 225.
59. Dawson, "Education and the Study of Christian Culture," *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 42 (1953): 293, 297.
60. *Ibid.*, 299–302.
61. Dawson, "Education and Christian Culture," *Commonweal* 59, no. 9 (December 4, 1953): 219. The theme of escaping the cultural ghetto was important to Catholics in the context of secular and Protestant attacks on Catholicism. The most famous expression of this during the time was John Tracy Ellis, "American Catholics and the Intellectual Life," *Thought* (1955): 351–388. An excellent treatment of Ellis's talk as well as the broader context of this question can be found in Patrick J. Hayes, *A Catholic Brain Trust: The History of the Catholic Commission on Intellectual and Cultural Affairs, 1945–1965* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011), chapter 5.
62. Dawson, "Education and Christian Culture," 219.
63. Dawson, "Future of Christian Culture," *Commonweal* 59, no. 24 (March 19, 1954): 597–598.
64. Helene Magaret, "Barriers to the Organic Curriculum," *America* 91, no. 23 (September 4, 1954): 542, 544. Dawson addressed this point again in *Crisis of Western Education*, 152–153.
65. Herbert A. Musurillo, "Dawson's Program," *Thought: Fordham University Quarterly* 30, no. 2 (1955): 186. Dawson's responses to Musurillo can be found in "The Study of Christian Culture in the American College," *Catholic World* 173 (1956): 197–201; and Musurillo, "Correspondence: Mr. Dawson Replies to Father Musurillo," *Thought* 31 (1956–1957): 159–160. Dawson addressed this point again in *Crisis of Western Education*, 155.
66. Robert Harnett, "The Dawson Challenge: A Discussion," *America* 93, no. 3 (April 16, 1955): 76.

67. Dawson, "Problems of Christian Culture," *Commonweal* 62, no. 2 (April 15, 1955): 34–36. In a 1952 book review Dawson noted that "orthodox Christianity has always recognized the authority of the state as a power ordained by God to which the Christian owed obedience and service." Dawson, "The Problem of Christ and Culture," *Dublin Review* 226 (1952): 66.
68. Dawson, "Education and the State," *Commonweal* 65, no. 17 (January 25, 1957): 426–427.
69. Dawson, "Problems of Christian Culture," 36. On Dawson's views of the Oxford Movement, see Peter Nockles, "Introduction" to Christopher Dawson, *The Spirit of the Oxford Movement: And Newman's Place in History* (London: Saint Austin Press, 2001), xv–xxxiv; and Marvin R. O'Connell, "Dawson and the Oxford Movement," *Chesterton Review* 9 (1983): 149–160.
70. James Hitchcock, "Postmortem on a Rebirth: The Catholic Intellectual Renaissance," *American Scholar* (Spring 1980): 220–222.
71. Dawson, "The Study of Christian Culture in the American College," *Catholic World* 182 (1956): 200.
72. For other articles not discussed previously that contributed ideas and passages to *Crisis*, see Dawson, "Universities Ancient and Modern," *Catholic Educational Review* 56 (1957): 27–31; and Dawson, "American Education and Christian Culture," *The American Benedictine Review* 9 (1958): 7–16.
73. Christopher Dawson, *The Crisis of Western Education*, 173, 178. See also Scott, *A Historian and His World*, 195–197.
74. A good summary of the fragmented nature of American Catholics and American conservatives in the 1950s is Patrick Allitt, *Catholic Intellectuals and Conservative Politics in America, 1950–1985* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), chapters 1–3. Kirk wrote an introduction to the 1992 edition of Christina Scott's biography of her father, *A Historian and His World*. Birzer frequently compares Kirk's and Dawson's ideas. For one example, see *Sanctifying the World*, 67–69. For Kirk's acknowledgement of Dawson's influence, see Birzer, 9.
75. George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America since 1945* (Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 1998), 118. The summary of the three positions comes from Nash's book. Allitt, *Catholic Intellectuals and Conservative Politics in America*, 60–77.
76. See Nash, *Conservative Intellectual Movement in America*, 136, 144. For a good contrast of one important conservative's thought with Dawson's, see two of Willmore Kendall's essays on education from the same period:

- “The Function of a University” (1957) and “Who Should Control Our Public Schools?” (1958) in *Willmore Kendall Contra Mundum*, ed. Nellie D. Kendall (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House, 1971), 537–553.
77. See Nash, *Conservative Intellectual Movement in America*, 141–171.
78. Nash, *Conservative Intellectual Movement in America*, 292–293. Allitt, *Catholic Intellectuals and Conservative Politics in America*, 83–120.
79. Nash, *Conservative Intellectual Movement in America*, 268.
80. Allitt, *Catholic Converts*, 271–272. Reviews of Dawson’s *Crisis of Western Education*, some positive, others negative, include Leo R. Ward, Review of *The Crisis of Western Education* in *The Review of Politics*, 23 (October 1961): 531–534; N. R. Tempest, “Review of *The Crisis of Western Education*,” *British Journal of Educational Studies* 10 (May 1962): 206–207; Arnold Toynbee, “Review of *The Crisis of Western Education*,” *International Affairs* 38 (July 1962): 378; and Justus George Lawler, “Review of *The Crisis of Western Education*,” *Harvard Educational Review* 32 (Spring 1962): 214–220. See also the obituary for Dawson by some of his former colleagues at Harvard. Daniel Callahan, Mildred Horton, Francis Rogers, Bernard Swain, and George H. Williams, “Christopher Dawson: 12 October 1889–25 May 1970,” *Harvard Theological Review* 66 (April 1973): 161–176.