

CHRISTOPHER DAWSON,
HISTORIAN OF CHRISTIAN DIVISIONS AND PROPHET OF
CHRISTIAN UNITY

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There can be no question that Christopher Dawson (1889-1970), the great English historian of world religions, cultures and civilizations, was one of the foremost Catholic thinkers of modern times. Displaying a vast erudition in history, politics, economics, sociology, anthropology, as well as of the Catholic theological tradition, it was fitting that he would be offered Harvard Divinity School's first Chair of Roman Catholic Studies which he held from 1958-1962. His published works had won him renown among academic scholars of culture and the readership of all those interested in the role religion plays in the life of a people, and seeking an explanation for the fanatical totalitarian ideologies that would confront Christianity and result in the genocides of a Europe shattered by World War II.

Such works as *Progress in Religion* (1929); *The Making of Europe* (1932); *Christianity and the New Age* (1931); *Medieval Religion and Other Essays* (1934); *Religion and the Modern State* (1936); *The Judgment of the Nations* (1942); *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture* (1950); *Medieval Religion and Other Essays* (1934); *Understanding Europe* (1953); *The Movement of World Revolution* (1959) [later expanded as *Christianity in East and West* (1981)]; *The Historic Reality of Christian Culture* (1965); *The Crisis of Western Education* (1965); *The Formation of Christendom* (1967); *The Dividing of Christendom* (1967); *The Gods of Revolution* (1972) and many articles in periodicals and journals witness to the breadth and depth of Dawson's incisive analyses of Christianity's impact on European history and culture and the movements and trends which would shape today's Western liberal secular and democratic world seeking world hegemony.

From Dawson's impressive books and studies which center on the relation between Christianity and Christian Culture which he declared to be at the heart of Western civilization and its history, this paper will draw upon certain aspects of his thought which would prove of special worth and benefit to students enmeshed in the ideological distortions of history, which accompany the falsehoods and myths of contemporary anti-religious Liberalism. Special attention will be given to Dawson's thought on religious divisions between Christians being a primary cause of the secularization and de-Christianization of Western civilization, the sociological causes of schism and heresy, and above all, as he viewed it in the midst of World War II, "the catastrophe of the secular culture which has taken the place of the traditional culture of Christendom," and his prophetic call for the restoration of Unity among the separated Churches and confessions. (See his *The Judgment of the Nations*, p. 132)

Prof. M. D. Knowles of the British Academy, himself a noted medieval historian, had noted:

What makes Dawson's work especially valuable is that there exists behind it the widest range of knowledge of the non-Christian and non-Western cultures and religions. In his field he was the most distinguished Catholic thinker of this century. He belonged spiritually to a group that included Jacques Maritain, Etienne Gilson, Karl Adam, Pere J. Maréchal, Martin D'Arcy, E. I. Watkins, and others, who were, as thinkers realists and with a strong sense of the values of Western Civilization and of the religious and ethical thought, that has passed from Greece and Rome through medieval Europe in the ambience of the Catholic Church. He believed firmly in the permanent and indeed irreplaceable legacy of the Christian path. (*Proceedings of the British Academy* 57 [London: Oxford University Press, W.1], pp. 446-450.)

For Dawson, as for Lord Acton, religion was the key to history and the essence of a people's culture. Culture referred to a people's whole way of life, based upon a unifying world view, and that view was provided by that society's religion. It was religion that resulted in a "common social way of life—a way of life with a tradition behind it, which has embodied itself in institutions and which involves moral standards and principles" (*Historic Reality of Christian Culture*, 1960). Writing in 1933, as Adolf Hitler was beginning to entrench the antichrist of Nazism in Germany, with atheistic communism already unleashing its ideology of

international revolution across Europe and the world, committing genocide against Ukrainians, murdering Christian bishops, priests, and laity, and establishing its Gulags, Dawson wrote of his own profound convictions, and spoke ominously of European politicians who had turned their back on their Christian heritage:

The central conviction which has dominated my mind ever since I began to write is the conviction that the society or culture which has lost its spiritual roots is a dying culture, however prosperous it may appear externally. Consequently, the problem of societal survival is not only a political or economic one; it is above all things, religious, since it is in religion that the ultimate spiritual roots both of society and the individual are to be found. (*Enquiries into Religion and Culture*, 1933; p. vi)

Nine years later, surveying the carnage of World War II, Dawson commented on the emergence of modern secular man whose alienation from God would occupy the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council twenty years later, observing:

We are passing through one of the great turning points of history—a judgment of the nations as terrible as any of those which the prophets described . . . The old landmarks of good and evil and truth and falsehood have been swept away and civilization is driving before the storm like a dismayed and helmless ship. The evils which the 19th century thought it had banished forever—prescription and persecution, torture and slavery—have returned and with them new terrors which the past did not know. (*The Judgment of the Nations*, 1942. pp.149-150.)

Surveying the history of mankind from its primitive beginnings in impressive books marked by assiduous scientific research and philosophical wisdom, Dawson had no doubt that any true civilization was one that formed man in civility and nobility and was based on a society's acknowledgment of the Sacred and the implicit or explicit existence of the one Transcendent God who would, moreover, reveal Himself in history. The abnormal and even pathological condition of today's modern secular man was emphasized in one of his most important books:

If we look back and out over the world and across the centuries, we shall see how exceptional and abnormal it is (that is, our secularized culture today). It is hardly too much to say that all civilizations have always been religious, and not only civilizations but barbarian and primitive societies also. For, in the past, man's social life has never been regarded as something that existed in its own right as a law unto itself. It was seen as dependent on another more permanent world so that all human institutions were firmly anchored by faith and law to the realities of this higher world. As I have shown in *Religion and Culture* and elsewhere, all the great civilizations of the Ancient world believed in a transcendent, divine order which manifested itself alike in the cosmic order (the law of heaven), in the moral order (the law of justice), and in religious ritual. And it was only insofar as society was coordinated with the divine order, by the sacred religious order of ritual and sacrifice, that it had the right to exist and to be considered a civilized way of life. (*Medieval Essays*)

As a cultural historian, he saw that it was the power of religion as a cultural reality which created a humane material civilization and, moreover, that Western civilization could not survive without Christ—a theme that Pope John Paul II and now Benedict XVI have repeatedly reminded members of the European Union all too eager to dissociate themselves from their people's Christian roots by writing a Constitution that both Popes have termed “godless.”

His studies examining the reasons for the rise and fall of civilizations led him to conclude (and this even before he became a Catholic at the age of 25 in 1914) that: (1) religion is the vital and dynamic element in every culture; (2) the Catholic Faith has been the formative and dominating historical principle in the creation of both medieval Christendoms, Latin and Byzantine; and (3) Christianity was uniquely responsible for the amazing contributions of Western civilization with their world wide impact; and (4) Western man could survive the disintegrating and destructive effects of secularization (i.e., the stripping from all public institutions of Christian influence) only by a rediscovery and reclaiming of its spiritual, specifically Christian foundations.

In the very heyday of Soviet Marxist communism, Dawson had warned his readers:

Both in Europe and America here is a strong anti-religious movement that includes many of our ablest modern writers and a few men of science. It seeks not only to destroy religion, but also to revolutionize morals and so discredit the ethical ideals which have hitherto inspired Western society. But today the solidarity of religion and morals is admitted. If Europe abandons Christianity, it must also abandon its moral code. And conversely the modern tendency to break away from traditional morality strengthens the intellectual revolt against religious belief. (“Christianity as the Soul of the West” in *The Modern Dilemma*, 1932.)

In 1926 Dawson wrote an article in *The Catholic Times* (London) wherein he described his conversion to the Catholic Church which should be of special interest to the present generation of Catholic students oftentimes bewildered by the present state of American society and confronted by a crisis of faith with unparalleled moral challenges facing the Church in the post-Vatican II world. No serious Catholic student of our times can be unaware of what Avery Cardinal Dulles, S.J., recently noted in a commencement address:

We live in a remarkable time. The forces of secularism and unbelief have never raged so furiously...We live in a time of conflicting cross currents. Many of our contemporaries are rejecting the great intellectual heritage on which the civilization of Europe was built. Some no longer believe that the world owes its existence to a beneficent Creator, that there are any objective standards of right and wrong, or that human beings are made for eternal life. Every doctrine of Christian and Catholic faith is being subjected to relentless attack, and for this reason it is essential to have in the Church leaders who can persuasively articulate the grounds of faith. (*St. Thomas Aquinas College Newsletter*, August 2005.)

Dawson’s account of his own interesting conversion to the Catholic Church revealed his future commitment to the cause of Christian Unity. Dawson wrote how he had been disturbed by “a haze

of vagueness and uncertainty hung around the more fundamental articles of Christian dogma” as expressed in the Church of England in which he had been brought up. For a time he lost faith in religion altogether.

As he writes:

The intellectual current was in fact setting away from Christianity, and I felt the first wave of paganism which has since swept the country . . . However, I could not doubt that the spiritual side of life represented something real which could not be explained away as mere illusion. From the time that I was thirteen or fourteen, I had come to know the lives of the Catholic saints and the writings of medieval Catholic mystics, and they made so strong an impression on my mind that I felt that there must be something lacking in any theory of life which left no room for these higher types of character and experience.

. . . Especially my first visit to Rome, at the age of nineteen, came as a revelation to me. It opened out a new world of religion and culture. I realized for the first time that Catholic civilisation did not stop with the Middle Ages, and that contemporary with our own national Protestant development there was the wonderful flowering of the Baroque culture.

. . . The turning point for me came after I had left the University, in the two years before the War [1912] . . . It was by the study of St. Paul and St. John that I first came to understand the fundamental unity of Catholic theology and the Catholic life. I realized that the Incarnation, the Sacraments, the external order of the Church and the internal working of Sanctifying Grace were all parts of one organic unity, a living tree, whose roots are in the Divine Nature and whose fruit is the perfection of the Saints. Thus the life of the Saints is not, as the eclectic student of mysticism believes, the independent achievement of a few highly gifted individuals, but the perfect manifestation of the supernatural life which exists in every individual Christian, the first fruits of that new humanity which it is the work of the Church to create.

The fundamental doctrine of Sanctifying Grace, as revealed in the New Testament and explained by St. Augustine and St. Thomas in all its connotations, removed all my difficulties and

uncertainties and carried complete conviction to my mind. It was no longer possible to hesitate, difficult though it was to separate myself from earlier associations and traditional ties. On the eve of Epiphany, 1914, I was received into the Church.” (See *The Chesterton Review: Dawson Special Issue*, pp. 110-113.)

The love of this English convert for America and his hopes that it would be American Catholics who would build on his intellectual legacy to renew Christian culture and education, again found expression in remarks delivered at Harvard on the occasion of the celebration of his 70th birthday in 1959:

All my life for fifty years I have been writing on one subject and for one cause—the cause of Christendom and the study of Christian culture. When I began, it was in the days of Charles Peguy and Chesterton and my eyes were fixed on Europe and the European tradition. But today I have come to feel that it is in this country that the fate of Christendom will be decided . . . There is a great opportunity here in America today that may never be repeated. That is why I am here. (John J. Mulloy, “Christopher Dawson’s American Campaign,” *The Dawson Newsletter*, Spring 1984, p. 9).

One cannot underestimate today the immense task involved in bringing Dawson’s vision of Catholic culture and education to fruition. In his lifetime he found American Catholic intellectuals opposed to his approach and a lack of sympathy on the part of American Catholic colleges. The task is even more formidable to achieve in our time as we see Catholic university and college administrations and faculties opposed to the implementation of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (the document of Pope John Paul II directed at restoring their institutional fidelity to the Magisterium) and the widespread dissent from Catholic doctrine at all levels of Catholic schooling. Then, too, the situation of historical literacy among young Catholic undergraduates described so strikingly in an article by John J. Mulloy (Dawson’s chief American student and editor and promoter of Dawson’s writings) has not improved.

Again and again, John would tell of meeting bright young Catholic undergraduates who could brilliantly elucidate the abstract concepts of Aristotle and Aquinas and speak knowledgeably about the merits of Don Quixote or Paradise Lost—but could not for the life of them describe the history and culture out of which these achievements

arose. They were largely ignorant of ancient cultures and the factors that led to their decline; they knew little about the rise and expansion of early Christianity, or the reasons for its dramatic success; their knowledge about Western Europe during the Middle Ages was hazy, and they knew even less about the Byzantine Empire; they could not explain the history of the Crusades, much less defend them; they did not know the actual historical record of the Spanish Inquisition; they could not recount the heroic Christian missions of North and South America, or India, China, and Japan; they knew only the barest facts about the Reformation, Renaissance and Enlightenment, and could not speak intelligibly about the Romantic Period or the Victorian Age; their knowledge of the modern anti-Christian ideologies—Marxism, Darwinism and Freudianism—was shallow and, worse yet, they could not effectively reply to them. That lack of historical literacy among young Catholics was in John Mulloy’s view disastrous, and he set out to reverse it. (William Doyno, Jr., in *Sursum Corda*, Summer 1996, p. 52)

For the young Catholic student today, the works of Christopher Dawson constitute an intellectual feast. They provide a magnificent liberal arts education in themselves. They are a wonderful introduction to how the Catholic Church created both Western and Eastern Christendoms, infusing into the peoples of Europe the spirit of the Gospel and fostering cultural riches that would distinguish Western civilization. They also provide a trenchant antidote to the anti-Catholic propaganda disguised as history which was fondly promoted by the 17th-century Enlightenment thinkers and by 19th and 20th-century intellectuals who prepared the way for today’s “Culture of Death.” This same anti-Christian propaganda can be heard resurrected in some of the negative attacks on “traditional values” (code-language for those upheld by the Catholic Church) that are gleefully communicated to the masses by today’s entertainment media. Dawson refuted the popular Anglo-Saxon Whig interpretation of history, with its pseudo-religion of automatic “Progress” and the various materialistic interpretations of history developed by 19th-century scientific positivists and Marxists. He noted the historical consequences of the aberrations flowing from false philosophies and false philosophies of history: namely, the ruin of culture and the collapse of civilization. He especially warned against the philosophical subjectivism resulting in what Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger recently termed “the dictatorship of relativism” dominating much modern thought. He recounted the devastating consequences on youth of a secular humanistic state-controlled educational system. Dawson saw with clear vision that it was the denial of the “primacy of the spiritual” by European and American intellectuals which came to be the

“fundamental Western error”—an error now extending into the third millennium. The young Catholics upon whom the Church depends and to whom the Supreme Pontiffs of our day have appealed to undertake the renewal of both Church and society will find in Dawson not only a superb apologist of the Christian Faith, but also a master-guide for the restoration of a true and genuine Catholic education for souls seeking to serve Christ and His Church.

For those particularly interested in the ecumenism fostered by Vatican II, Dawson’s writings contain valuable insights into the causes of schism and heresy that have brought about the present sad divisions among Christians. In his various essays and books, which treated the formation of Christendom in both Western and Eastern Europe, Dawson reminded his readers that “Medieval Christianity was not wholly Western and not exclusively Catholic.” The Latin, Byzantine Greek, and Syriac Christianity of the early centuries all originally shared in a common Catholic Faith as well as in much of the legacy of the Roman Empire’s Greco-Roman classical thought and literature until great religious schisms led to the separation of various Eastern peoples and their venerable churches from the visible unity of the Catholic Church. A large number of Syrians would reject the Council of Ephesus (431) while other Syrians, Armenians, Egyptian Copts, and Ethiopians would oppose the Council of Chalcedon that took place in 451. Catholics with a romanticized view of Church history and troubled by the doctrinal and liturgical disturbances occurring after the Second Vatican Council should realize that ecclesiastical turmoil and schisms, in fact, increased after each of the first Seven Ecumenical Councils held in the first millennium. In his *Formation of Christendom* (1967) Dawson had noted that:

The great schisms of the ancient Church tended again and again to follow the lines of race, language and nationality. The schism, for example, between Catholicism and Monophysitism [Monophysites were those who rejected the Council of Chalcedon in 451 and afterwards] was part of a general rift between East and West, between the Roman Byzantine Empire and its Syrian and Egyptian subjects. So too, the schism between the Catholic West and the Orthodox East in the Middle Ages was the outcome of a growing cultural and social alienation between the subjects of the [Greek-speaking] Byzantine Empire and the new peoples of the West.

The most tragic schism in the history of the Catholic Church is undoubtedly the Byzantine Greek Schism which would separate the Greek, Russian and other Slavic peoples of the Balkans, and some others in the Near East from the visible unity of the Catholic Church. This ecclesiastical division would parallel the political divide between Western and Eastern Europe. It was the period extending from 1054 to rejection of the 1274 reunion Council of Lyons (attended by St. Bonaventure and to which St. Thomas Aquinas was traveling when he died) that saw increasing social, cultural, and political friction between Latins and Byzantine Greeks. Such conflict only exacerbated the theological discord and estrangement which would culminate in various breaks in ecclesiastical communion between the Pope of Rome and the eastern patriarchs of a shrinking Byzantine Empire, i.e., those of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem. A formal state of schism between Byzantine Constantinople and the See of Peter would exist after the sacking of Constantinople by the Crusaders in 1204. Interestingly, contrary to the belief of earlier Catholic and Orthodox historians there was no schism in the earlier 9th century under the famous Patriarch Photius (c. 820-891). The so-called "Photian Schism," which in both Protestant and Catholic historiography had portrayed Photius as an anti-Papal schismatic directly responsible for the Byzantine Greek Schism, proved to be an historical myth compounding difficulties between Catholics and Orthodox. The distortion of the actual relations between Photius and the Roman Popes of the period was finally exposed in the remarkable researches of the Czech Catholic priest and famous Byzantinist scholar Fr. Francis Dvornik. In reviewing Dvornik's book, *The Photian Schism: History and Legend*, Dawson found striking confirmation of his own long-cherished view that the great religious schisms in Church history "are not to be explained simply as an immense multiplication of individual religious errors." Rather, they constitute "social cataclysms in which a religious error becomes identified with social forces that have no necessary connection with it." In noting the spread of schism among Eastern peoples and the expansion of various Protestant heresies in the West, Dawson stressed "the tendency for the original religious issue to be overlaid and obscured by social and political loyalties which render its solution a hundred times more difficult than it would otherwise have been."

The decisive weight of sociological factors and cultural prejudices he viewed as particularly responsible for the unfortunate rejection of the Reunion Council of Florence in 1439 by a great number of Byzantine Greeks, thereby consolidating the Byzantine Schism which has continued to this day. The Fall of Constantinople to the Muslim

Turks in 1453 marked the end of the Eastern Roman Empire whose Greek-speaking citizens, it might be recalled here, never referred to themselves as “Byzantines.” They were the “empire of the Romans” and always referred to themselves as “Romans,” whereas Westerners were “Latins” and “Franks” and “Italians.” (Interestingly, the term “Byzantine” is a Western label, being invented and first used by 16th-century French humanists who regarded the Eastern Roman Empire which was, in fact, profoundly Christian, as culturally inferior to its ancient past, pagan, Romano-Hellenic civilization). With the Fall of Constantinople and the frustration of the Florentine Union (which it is important to recall was maintained for some forty years in parts of the East), an Empire-centered Church gave way to the rising spirit of chauvinistic political nationalism. Newly won freedom of Orthodox peoples from enslavement to the Ottoman Turkish Empire, in turn, led to the fragmentation of present Eastern Orthodoxy into an assemblage of quarreling ethnic-phyletic churches with conflicting jurisdictions over the same geographic territories. Whether it was question of medieval Byzantine Caesaropapism (wherein the Emperor controlled the administration of the Church) or the present situation of Ethnopapism, wherein Eastern Orthodox national churches with their ethnic character remain hostile to one another and captive to the political and patriotic passions of their civil rulers, the Papacy has remained regarded as a foreign political entity and adversary. This explains much of the historical animosity and opposition to the efforts of both Popes and Eastern rite Catholics for the union of the Churches. Incidentally, Dawson deserves special commendation for attracting attention in his writings to the maintenance of “the Catholic tradition in Europe” by Eastern rite Catholics who suffered terribly for the Faith from horrific persecutions by czars and by Communists. It is they, he noted, who bore “a double witness to the cause of Catholic faith and unity. They above all are the men who hold open the door between East and West” (*Understanding Europe* [1952], from Chapter 5).

As an astute historian who exposed the social roots of schism and heresy, Dawson did not underestimate the force of doctrinal differences that spurred Protestant and Eastern Orthodox Christians to justify their separation from Christ’s one unique Church. With the Byzantines it was opposition to the Catholic doctrine of the Procession of the Spirit and the use of unleavened bread for the Eucharist and then followed by attacks on the universal authority of the Pope over the entire Church, East and West, that became the chief theological obstacles to the restoration of unity between Rome and the Eastern patriarchates which followed Constantinople into schism. In the view of Byzantine

dissidents from the 13th century to our own seeking to justify their schism, these “Latin innovations” were “heresies.” Dawson was to point out with great insight for future ecumenists that sociological factors were a major player in the appearance of schisms and heresies among Christians. As long as political, cultural, and social animosities fueled such divisions, theological dialogue and discussions to resolve doctrinal differences would be frustrated, as was evident in the failure of the Reunion Council of Florence. Dawson explained:

I believe that it is in the question of schism rather than that of heresy that the key to the problem of the disunity of Christendom is to be found. For heresy as a rule is not the cause of schism but an excuse for it, or rather a rationalization of it. Behind every heresy lies some kind of social conflict, and it is only by the resolution of this conflict that unity can be restored...Behind the schism between East and West there lies no mere difference of historical interpretation, nor even any fundamental conflict of theological doctrines, but the impenetrable barrier of national prejudice and popular passion which caused the Byzantines to despise the Latins as “Azymites and cheese eaters” and the Latins to condemn the Byzantines as “akin to the animals, nominally Christians but morally worse than Saracens” . . . It was the Age of the Crusades which changed this mutual antipathy into a state of violent antagonism. (See his *The Judgment of the Nations* and “East and West in the Middle Ages,” a review of Francis Dvornik’s *The Photian Schism: History and Legend*, reprinted in *The Dawson Newsletter*, Summer 1994, no. 3, pp. 7-9).

Dawson’s understanding of the sociological roots of schism and heresy may be regarded as prophetic, though such is commonplace today among ecumenists engaging in theological dialogues and discussions. Catholics have become particularly aware that the continuation of the Byzantine Greco-Slav Schism continues to prevent a united Christian Europe. Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI have made special efforts to implement the renewed ecumenical efforts set into motion by the Second Vatican Council. Hopes for reunion with the Eastern Orthodox Churches are a priority for the Roman Pontiffs who seek not only the end of the sorry divisions among Christians in accordance with the words of Christ that “all may be one,” but also a strengthened Christian identity for the Europe evangelized by St. Benedict, St. Boniface, and the Apostles of the Slavs, Sts. Cyril and Methodios—a Europe now beset by

secularism and sheer unbelief, and needing re-evangelization. It is essential that Catholics grasp the historic truth that the Orthodox Greek and Russian and other Slav populations in the Balkans are part of Europe and are the heirs of a Byzantine culture which has transmitted to them a profound Christian heritage. As Dawson wrote: "It is not possible to understand Byzantine culture if we look at it from the economic or the political point of view. For to a greater extent than that of any other European society, its culture was a religious one and found its essential expression in religious forms [such as monasticism]; and even today it survives to a great extent in the tradition of the Eastern Church . . . The vision of spiritual reality and mystery was the common possession of the Byzantine world." (*The Making of Europe*, 1932; pp. 108-110). It should also be recalled that before the formal schism with Rome it was Byzantine Greek rite Catholicism which held sway in that Byzantine world and which engaged in beginning the evangelization of Russia. Unlike Dawson, too many historians have ignored the Catholic period of the Byzantine Empire before that famous date 1054 when a patriarch and a Roman Cardinal exchanged personal excommunications.

In an address of Pope John Paul II, given in Spain at Santiago de Compostello, November 9, 1982, the Pontiff declared:

The history of the formation of the European nations runs parallel with their evangelization, to the point that the European frontiers coincided with those of the inroads of the Gospel. After 20 centuries of history, notwithstanding the bloody conflicts which have set the peoples of Europe in opposition to one another . . . it can be said that the European identity is not understandable without Christianity, and that it is precisely in Christianity that are found those common roots by which the continent has seen its civilization mature . . .

I focus my attention upon Europe as the continent which has contributed more than any other to the development of the world as much in the field of ideas as in that of work, in the sciences and in the arts. And while I bless the Lord for having illuminated it with the evangelical light from the beginning of the apostolic preaching, I cannot be silent about the critical state in which it finds itself at the dawn of the third millennium of Christianity . . .

Therefore, I, John Paul, son of the Polish nation which has always considered itself European by its origins, traditions,

culture, and vital relationships, Slavic among the Latins and Latin among the Slavs, I, Successor of Peter in the See of Rome . . . from Santiago, utter to you, Europe of the ages, a cry full of love: Find yourself, Be yourself. Discover your origins, revive your [Christian] roots.”

There can be no doubt that Christopher Dawson, scholarly historian of the making of Christian Europe and the Catholic Church’s contributions to Western Civilization, would have heartily approved Pope John Paul the Great’s remarks concerning European identity. To the Supreme Pontiff’s final peroration to “revive your Christian roots,” he would have uttered his own solemn “Amen.” He was prophetic in realizing that the revival of the “Christian roots of Europe” is, however, intrinsically linked to the restoration of the Unity of the separated Greco-Slav Churches of the Byzantine tradition with the See of Peter at Rome, the achievement of which should be the object of our devout prayers.

The concluding words of Dawson’s chapter entitled “Return to Christian Unity” in his masterpiece *The Judgment of the Nations* written in 1942 (22 years before Vatican II’s “Decree on Ecumenism”), provide a fitting conclusion to these brief remarks on Dawson as a Prophet of Christian Unity:

I believe that the age of schism is passing and that the time has come when the divine principle of the Church’s life will assert its attractive power, drawing all the living elements of Christian life and thought into organic unity. For since Christ the Head of the Church and the Holy Spirit is the life of the Church, wherever there is faith in Christ and the Spirit of Christ there is the spirit of unity and the means of reunion. Therefore, it is not necessary to talk much about the ways and means, for the ways of the Spirit are essentially mysterious and transcend human understanding. It may even be that the very strength of the forces that are gathering against the Church and against religion will make for unity, by forcing Christians together, as it were, in spite of themselves; or it may be that the Church will react positively to the situation by a fresh outpouring of the apostolic spirit, as Blessed Grignon de Montfort prophesied two centuries ago. (p. 182)

It may also be that future generations of Catholics carrying out the authentic teachings and directives of Vatican II may witness the surprising emergence in God’s mysterious Providence of a New Christendom.