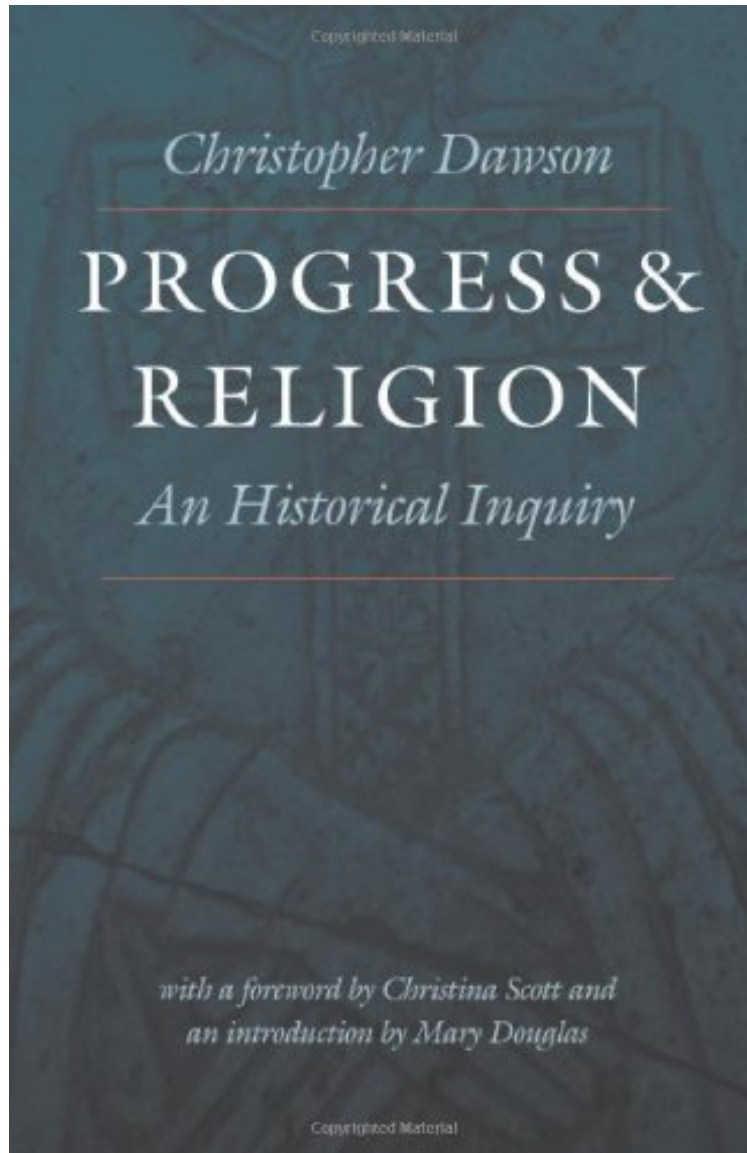


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## Progress and Religion: An Historical Inquiry (Worlds of Christopher Dawson)

*Christopher Dawson*

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**Christopher Dawson : Progress and Religion: An Historical Inquiry (Worlds of Christopher Dawson)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Progress and Religion: An Historical Inquiry (Worlds of Christopher Dawson):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy R. HolvastFascinating reading for those working on the

relation culture and christianity. A classic and indispensable for understanding Dawson. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. The Story of Everything By Canadian Joe Dawson's magnum opus and (completely non-polemical) alternative to more presumptuous historians like Wells and Toynbee: a simple narrative of human history from its prehistorical roots in shamanism (discovered via anthropology) through the "immense debt" owed to the Archaic Civilizations of the great rivers, through the great migrations of the late second millennium and mankind's consequential spiritual great awakening, into historic times, up to and including the rise and fall of the 19th Century Religion of Progress. The narrative is compelling. 39 of 39 people found the following review helpful. Brilliant By Steve Jackson Christopher Dawson (1889-1970) was one of the premier Roman Catholic thinkers of this century. Dawson's central concern was the relationship between religion and culture. Dawson drew on an extensive knowledge of history, philosophy, sociology and theology to illuminate this connection from the beginnings of history to the modern age. Although some of his books remain in print, Catholic University of America Press is printing new editions of his most important works. This edition of Progress Religion contains a forward by Dawson's daughter Christina (1922-2001) and an introduction by the well-known sociologist Mary Douglas. Progress Religion, which came out in 1929, is perhaps Dawson's most important work. Dawson argues that at the center of any great civilization is its religion, and this religion animates and gives it a sense of purpose. This is particularly the case with Christianity. "[T]he victory of the Church in the 4th century was not, as so many modern critics would have us believe, the natural culmination of the religious evolution of the ancient world. It was, on the contrary, a violent interruption of that process which forced European civilization out of its own orbit . . . ." [p. 126.] The Western Church vivified society by breaking with oriental spiritualism and showing that "human intelligence . . . finds its natural activity in the sphere of the sensible and particular." [p. 137.] It would make an interesting study to compare the work of Dawson with that of Robert Nisbet. Like Nisbet, Dawson was learned in the area of sociology and drew upon an extensive knowledge of sociologists such as Le Play, Comte and Durkheim. They both saw Rousseau as one of the chief villains. As Dawson said, Rousseau effected a "new Reformation" and was the ideological godfather of the French Revolution. They both wrote extensively on the idea of progress. However, whereas Nisbet was "pious skeptic" (according to Prof. Gottfried), Dawson was a believer and his work contains a greater sense of urgency. Indeed, some of his writings between the wars were quite prophetic.

Foreword by Christina Scott and Introduction by Mary Douglas Progress and Religion was perhaps the most influential of all Christopher Dawson's books, establishing him as an interpreter of history and a historian of ideas. It has been described as a brilliant work of synthesis, for in this single volume he outlined his main thesis for the history of culture, which was his life's work. Anthropology, sociology, philosophy, religion, and history formed the backdrop for the key idea of his thought, namely, that religion is the soul of a culture and that a society or culture which has lost its spiritual roots is a dying culture. To Dawson, a return to the Christian culture that had formed Western civilization was the only remedy for a world adrift. Dawson was writing in a period between the two great wars of the twentieth century, a time when some thought that the idea of progress had finally been discredited by the carnage and barbarism of the First World War. Progress and Religion was clearly intended to challenge the doctrine of progress, the rather naive but persistent belief that 'in every day and in every way the world grows better and better.' Dawson argued that Western civilization was at a turning point and confronted with two real choices: reappropriate a vital Christian culture or move increasingly toward more dangerous and alienated expressions of consumerism and totalitarianism. In Progress and Religion, he contends that no culture could truly thrive if cut off from its religious roots. PRAISE FOR THE ORIGINAL EDITION: "Progress and Religion is undoubtedly a brilliant book. Its argument is closely reasoned, admirably presented, lucidly expressed. Its standpoint is original and suggestive, profound and illuminating. Without exaggeration, it may be regarded as one of the books of our generation." The Manchester Guardian, 1929 "A book of vast learning . . . a theme which invites the consideration of a stately procession of the greatest names in the history of the world's thought." The Scotsman, 1929

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