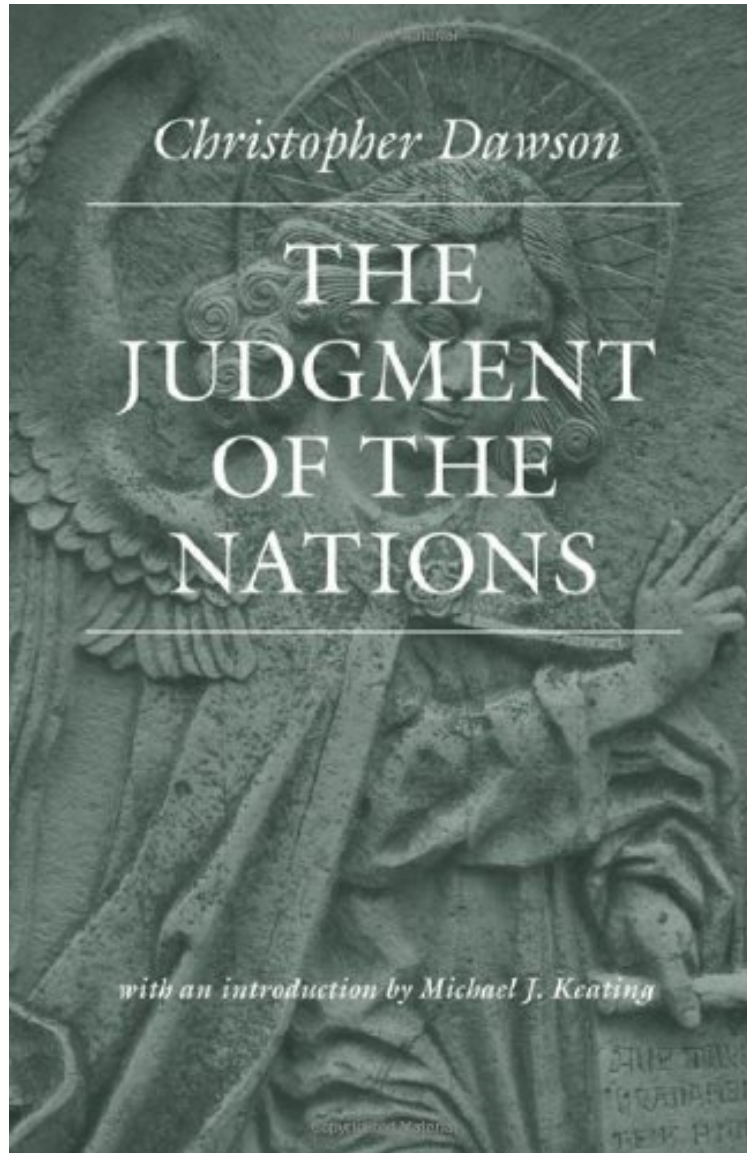


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Christopher Dawson

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Christopher Dawson : The Judgment of the Nations (Worlds of Christopher Dawson) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Judgment of the Nations (Worlds of Christopher Dawson):

26 of 26 people found the following review helpful. History as if God Exists and Christ is its CenterBy David M. Pence"This great central truth (the Christian doctrine of the transformation of human nature in Christ) has been obscured and often forgotten by the religious individualism of the last two or three centuries which conceived

salvation as a happy after-life to be attained by pious individuals as a reward of their moral perfections or religious practices. But the Christian idea of salvation is essentially social. It has its roots in the Old Testament in the conception of the People of God and the prophetic teaching of the restoration of Israel and the progressive manifestation of the divine purpose in history. ... The mystery of the Incarnation is the birth of a new humanity through which man is incorporated into the unity of the Divine Body... All temporal events and all changes in culture are in some way to be related to this central reality." (Christopher Dawson, Judgment of the Nations) Armed conflict especially with the contest in doubt often clarifies for religious men the larger drama shaping the role of nations in God's Divine plan. CS Lewis' Mere Christianity grew from his radio addresses in England during WWII. Judgment of the Nations by another wartime Englishman, Christopher Dawson, was written from 1938-42. For Dawson, the cohering principle of national cultures is religion. Thus, he argued that the eleventh-century schism between Latin Catholics and Greek Orthodox as well as the 16th century Protestant Reformation tore asunder the spiritual unity that bound the empires and nations of Europe. The great wars of the twentieth century were the failed attempts of the West to socially organize itself apart from this lost religious center. "The racialist ideology like the Communist ideology ... was an attempt to find a substitute for the spiritual reality in some other social element which is primary and indestructible. But Europe ... was a spiritual reality and cannot be replaced by a biological or economic unit, for these belong to a different plane of social reality." Dawson is explicit in a chapter on the failure of the League of Nations. He thought its universalistic tendency (a league of all existing states) was too wide and its real political-military basis (the military supremacy of a small group of founding Powers) too narrow. He argued that "the very idea of international law" ... has "its ultimate basis in the belief in a transcendent spiritual order... a natural and divine order to which States and peoples as well as individuals were subject". His emphasis in positing natural law was not its accessibility to human reason but its grounding in the Eternal Law of the spiritual order from whence it springs. Surveying the wreckage of armed atheism, he was unafraid to call for a more solid religious basis for the next international structures of agreement. His lesson went unheeded. The United Nations was organized by legitimatizing all existing States as equal voting members, rewarding war victors with the Security Council, and positing individual rights as a transcendent. The creature-the human person with no reference to God--and some rather dubious States claiming sovereign rights of their own became the twin golden calves of the new international order. For Dawson the basis of democracy in a Christian order "derived its strength 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." The consequences of this thought was "the transference of the center of thought and action to the supra temporal and religious sphere." This definition of man in terms of his immortal soul is the categorical opposite of the celebration of "the dignity of the person" which has become a Church mantra morphing into a maidservant for atheistic individualism and the autonomy movements. This distinction seems so slight. This surrender of the sacral terminology that roots man in the spiritual order is what Dawson called "subliminal Christianity." That tragic strategy of organizing society on the values of a desacralized ethical humanism plowed the ground for the subsequent armed atheisms of Nazism and Communism which Dawson and England confronted in 1940. Dawson had learned from Augustine that history is a linear dynamic process ending in the realization of God's purposes. He does not ask us to return to medieval Europe but to understand that once there was a Europe united by a social reality that both allowed and transcended bonds of fatherland, blood and language in a wider body of nations. Because the Christian view of history "is a contemplation of the Divine irruption in time" this can happen again especially if Christian men do the intellectual work to infuse the nations' discourse with spiritual purpose. This was the basis of the Sword of the Spirit movement modeled after the prophets of Israel who "in all the crises of history that changed the course of history saw the hand of God and for each crisis there was a corresponding Word which it was the mission of the prophet to declare". What full throated men were Dawson and Cardinal Hensley of that movement advocating a total war against the Nazis. "Total" meant a war effort which understood the spiritual stakes of the conflict which if unattended would leave even military victory incomplete. Winston Churchill once said that the only adequate defenders of Britain's war aims were Cardinal Hensley and himself. How different these men were from the thin-chested orthodox Catholic graduate students today who sip their lattes and find one more scholastic fine point keeping them from their nation's battlefields. As American evening news has become a mixture of consumer reports and medical updates for individuals, our moral theology has become a list of principles and values accusing history and public actors of being imperfect. The rights revolution is extended to stem cells waving their banners and this is considered deep thinking at Catholic conferences. The purpose of the nations and protective authority is eclipsed. Better to scold the City Fathers to forgo capital punishment and war then to seriously address how to establish civic authority to fight evil at home and abroad. But the religious awakening in the Islamic Mideast with its deep Shia -Sunni rifts, the great threat to Christians at the fault lines of these popular outpourings, the fall of the Soviet Union, the bizarre inadequacy of the atheist sexual left, the rise of a Christian global South, the mastery by the Asian tigers of the machinery of industry and the market...and their assertion of authoritative Confucian and Asian morality against the intemperance of "Western values": All these await an outpouring of the Spirit, a new spiritual coherence of the Church and a new alignment of the nations. The "Modern West" is just what Dawson said it would become if it lost its spiritual center. It decayed; it died; and it is rotting. Its name is an unbounded concept of time and space. For it

has no defining limits in sacred space or holy season. In Advent of 2011, a high status feminist from America visited Geneva and told the nations of the world to glorify the unspeakable while a high status feminist from Germany told the nations of Europe to come out speedily with their hands raised high and their national treasuries laid low. These foes are not as tough as the military forces of Japan, Germany and the Soviets. They reign because we Christian men are decidedly weaker and less magnanimous than the men of Dawson's day. But the fate of the nations is not dependent on men alone. We await an irruption of the Spirit. As Michael Keating in his forward reminds us, "it was in hope of bringing the compelling Christian vision once more to a western society, that had forgotten God to its own great hurt, that Dawson published the book." Dawson understood the sinews of old Europe and in this book he championed a new confederation of European nations whose core identities would be Christian. Both West Germany's Adenauer and France's DeGaulle would favor this approach after WWII. In later books Dawson recognized that many more nations of the South and East could be configured under a spiritual banner. He envisioned a new alliance of nations-each with its own vocation. This would no longer be limited to a single region. He foresaw that the Church would once again provide the only truly supranational community which would temper the nations while respecting their organic sacral character. This realization could surely be one of the yet maturing fruits of Vatican II. The Modern West is dead, but the Church amidst the nations is alive and well. Give thanks for this reissued book and sit with Mr. Dawson anew. The judgment of the nations sharpens the sword of the spirit. The language of Christian historians and foreign policy analysis must become ever more grounded in the spiritual realities which will give light to our day. In the midst of war Professor Dawson knew both the depravity of the enemy and the power of God. On the book's last page, he encourages us, "For the powers of the world formidable as they may appear are blind powers which are working in the dark and which derive their power from negative and destructive forces. They are powerless against the Spirit who is the Lord and Giver of Life."

Christopher Dawson wrote *The Judgment of the Nations* in 1942, in the midst of the horrors of World War II. He took four years in the writing of it, years, he claimed, "more disastrous than any that Europe had known since the fourteenth century." By his own admission it had cost him greater labor and thought than any other book he had written. It is, perhaps, his most characteristic work. Dawson argues in compressed form for what he laid out more systematically in other books: his view that the West was at an hour of crisis and was fighting for its life as a civilization. He did not view the disasters of the two World Wars as the cause of that disintegration; they were rather symptoms of a much deeper malaise, that of the loss of the spiritual vision that had created and sustained Western culture through the centuries. He lays out his understanding of what might be necessary for the West to reengage its spiritual and cultural roots and find a new way forward. For Dawson, such a restoration could not be coercive, but needed rather to be based upon a new perception of the inherent cultural creativity of Christianity. *The Judgment of the Nations* was widely praised upon publication. *The Guardian* called it "an appraisal of the contemporary situation by an historical thinker of the first importance," and the *Irish Independent* "a monument, alike of historical and of philosophical erudition." It was Dawson's hope in this work to describe the nature of the spiritual struggle Europe was facing, to map out its true lines, and to point the way through an impending and perhaps probable disaster to a renewal of European life, a renewal whose success or failure would have a decisive impact on the entire world.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Christopher Dawson (1889-1970) is recognized as one of the most important Catholic historians of the twentieth century, authoring numerous books, articles, and scholarly monographs. Dawson was lecturer in the History of Culture, University College, Exeter; Gifford lecturer; Charles Chauncey Stillman Chair of Roman Catholic Studies at Harvard University from 1958 to 1962; and editor of the *Dublin Review*.

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