

Similar Georgian responses to the lessening of traditional belief systems in Western societies from Christopher Dawson and J.R.R. Tolkien

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ABSTRACT: This article seeks to explore the turning away from the shock of World War I by two Oxford contemporaries, both experiencing their horror at ever increasing materialism and the loss of the Christian faith. For both it was essential for any spiritual survival, that modern man return to his spiritual heritage, either through fables exploring the patterns of human existence, or through an understanding of the tragedy of lives dominated by materialism.

The Mental Climate and the Use of Myth

The similarity of ideas between Christopher Dawson (1889-1970), the noted Catholic historian, and J.R.R. Tolkien (1892-1973) was, most likely, a cultural coincidence rather than the work of one man being a direct influence on the other. In much the same way that Darwin and Wegener both came to the conclusion that evolution was responsible for the vast diversity of species on this planet, so too were the conditions in which Dawson and Tolkien lived conducive to their independently conceiving of similar religious and, so, social philosophies. Both men, being influenced by the depth of history behind the European civilisation—and the Catholic religion of which they were part—had questioned the ‘progress’ of the early twentieth century, and its acceptance of shocking warfare and found a society which was in dire need of moral direction. They each saw the need for remembering established myths, through the use of folklore of traditional European culture, to act as a foil against the growing materialism of modern ideological political and economic models of twentieth-century civilisation.

Tolkien was sympathetic with the use of traditional material by the Old English poets and their inclusion of ancient mythology, as he saw in it a powerful way of counteracting the modern symbols of greed and destruction. Such uses of myth, Tolkien believed, opened the reader to a different understanding of their own world through taking them ‘outside

Time itself’, a technique he embraced in his own works of fiction.¹ In the same way that Tolkien saw the importance of fiction in recreating within society an understanding of the importance of folklore in redressing the damage done to modern thinking so; Dawson saw a need for the religious mythology to be re-instated within Western society, especially to oppose the debasing of culture in England.

Each saw too clearly the ‘advances’ that came from rejecting a traditional society—one that was based on an agricultural model—to a more urbanised society that kept the majority of people employed in factories, and to the pronounced lessening of a culture rich in European heritage. Dawson’s work in history revealed his theories of ‘progress’ in European society, one which had hitherto relied on an overarching religious viewpoint, whereas Tolkien was more circumspect in his fictive works by conveying therein only the least obvious spirituality based on his Catholicism. Both men agreed that religion was the unifying feature of a society, without which it would lose its culture, and that this loss of culture was currently happening in Europe, since a greater reliance was placed on a mechanised world rather than on these men’s imagined medieval and integrated ideal.

And so to Dawson

The historian Christopher Dawson (1889-1970) was concerned with Western society’s growing rejection of its past traditions, not only on a personal scale, but also within the intellectual realms, and thus his challenging of its accepting a new focus on a worldly ideology. Dawson’s theories of Progress are contained within his meta-historical view of the world that sees religion as a powerful unifying element in the continued health of a civilisation’s culture.² The Western culture was one founded on its daily interactions with religion through perhaps hundreds of generations, with the latest form of it being Christianity. This can be seen most clearly through the different artefacts with which we associate a culture such as its artistic and literary output, and from the influence that religions have had on their subject matter through the centuries. Dawson’s intent was to promote what he saw as the positive influences of religion in guiding the historical record, by keeping it bound to a set of moral values which, though they may change over time, are yet based in

¹ Ryan, J.S., *Tolkien’s View: Windows into his World* (Zurich and Jena: Walking Tree Publishers, 2009), pp. 157-158; Tolkien, J.R.R., *The Lord of the Rings Trilogy*, rev. edn (London: Harper Collins, 1991); Tolkien, J.R.R., *The Hobbit*, 5th edn, Kindle edn (Australia: Harper Collins, 2012); Tolkien, J.R.R., *The Silmarillion*, ed. by Christopher Tolkien (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1977); Tolkien, J.R.R., *The Book of Lost Tales I. History of Middle-earth, vol. 1*, ed. by Christopher Tolkien (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1984).

² Ryan, p. 143.

thousands of years of religious ideals. Many of his historical views, which are permeated by these Christian beliefs, such as there being a ‘moral as well as material difference between cultures,’ have been criticised by other historians of Dawson’s generation.³ They have argued that this pursuit of history with such an obvious bias ignores the needed neutrality which history requires.⁴ Dawson rejects this idea, as all history is written from ‘one or another perspective’; and as such, no history is ‘written in a vacuum’.⁵

Although others saw Dawson as ‘one of the principal social thinkers of his century’, and an intellectual whose approach to history was ‘lauded by other eminent social critics including Barbara Ward and T.S. Eliot’, there remain many attacks on the religious influences ascribed by him and found throughout his historical narratives.⁶ Norman Davies had charged Dawson with a failure ‘to illuminate the pluralism of recent centuries’ in his ‘Catholic thesis of history’, and Hayden White remarked that Dawson ‘prefers the ‘sedatives’ of religion to the certainties of science’.⁷ And today, Dawson’s work has been seen to challenge the modern theories of history, as well as the ‘Enlightenment notions of the autonomy of reason and progress’.⁸

The Stages in all Civilisations

In his early work, *The Life of Civilisations*, Dawson had maintained that civilisations have a three-step life-cycle moving from a period of growth, through a period of ‘Progress’, to a period of maturity.⁹ The movements of synthesis and disintegration of the old to the new within these periods would determine the life-cycle of a civilisation.¹⁰ Each civilisation requires a spiritual tradition one that ‘gives a common view of life and a common scale of values’ and which allows the civilisation to possess an ‘inner unity’.¹¹ Dawson’s ‘Progress and Decay in Ancient and Modern Civilisation’ outlines how the changes in Europe in the twentieth century had seen the degeneration of its culture, due particularly to the ‘disappearance of that unquestioning faith in the future and the absolute

³ Quinn, D., ‘Dawson’s Creed’, *The American Conservative*, Feb. 2010, p. 19.

⁴ Echeverria, D., ‘Christopher Dawson Revisited’, *Fides et Historia*, 29.3 (1997), 24-37. (p. 35).

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Schwartz, A., ‘Confronting the ‘Totalitarian Antichrist’: Christopher Dawson and Totalitarianism’, *The Catholic Historical Review*, 89.3, (2003), 464-488 (p. 464).

⁷ Quinn, p. 19.

⁸ Carter, S.G., ‘The ‘Historical Solution’ versus the ‘Philosophical Solution’: The Political Commentary of Christopher Dawson and Jacques Maritain, 1927-1939’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 69.1, (2008), 93-115 (p. 93).

⁹ Dawson, C., ‘The Life of Civilisations’, *The Sociological Review*, 14.1 (1922), 51-68 (p. 51).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

value of our civilisation'.¹² The once powerful faith that the 'forces of enlightenment' would be victorious over ignorance, and that the ideals of 'Humanity, Liberty and Progress' would prevail had been overtaken by the 'spiritual disillusionment' brought about by the Great War, industrialism and international finance, all powers over which the everyday person had no control.¹³ Although there was an awareness within society that the 'old traditional local despotism' had been overcome, it had been replaced by the 'infinitely more formidable power' of a 'machine-made civilisation'.¹⁴

Dawson's *Progress and Religion : An Historical Inquiry* follows these earlier arguments even further as he described how civilisations can only be considered 'culturally vital' if they possess a religion which, in turn, determines the cultural form of that society.¹⁵ The doctrine of Progress, he argued, had occupied a 'position of eternal truth, universal validity, and so it is considered to be self-evident in any kind of rational thinking' in modern European society, an abstract theory that one is no longer allowed to criticise.¹⁶ What Dawson believed these theories of Progress were lacking was cognizance of the equally important social factor of degeneration.¹⁷ The economic, intellectual and political progress had been 'cheapened and vulgarised into a practical apology for the late nineteenth century industrial civilisation', one that was 'losing its hold on its true cultural traditions'.¹⁸

Dawson had argued that we could not separate ourselves from the social and intellectual environment of our civilisation and that, if we could now begin to trace the history of the idea of Progress, it was because it had 'begun to lose its hold on the mind of society'.¹⁹ His thesis, one arguing that for a civilisation to be vital it must be based on strong religious influences, was anathema to the intellectuals of the early twentieth century. While other academics embraced a more secular society, Dawson saw this progress, with no discernible moral boundaries, as something that would inevitably lead to the continued degeneration of European society. Philosophers and scientists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had focussed on the universe 'as a mechanical system', whilst historians of this era were interested only in 'facts and events'.²⁰ Dawson had fought long to remind society of the debt that their

¹² Dawson, C., 'Progress and Decay in Ancient and Modern Civilisation', *The Sociological Review*, 16.1 (1924), 1-11 (p. 1).

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Dawson, C., *Progress and Religion: An Historical Inquiry* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1929), p. viii.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁷ Dawson, C., 'Progress and Decay', p. 2.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁹ Dawson, C., *Progress and Religion*, p. 4.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

civilisation owed to the moral structures of religion, and so he saw only the further degeneration of his society in the future.

A people is not an accumulation of separate individuals artificially united by conscious agreement for their mutual advantage; as Locke and the French philosophers had taught; it is a spiritual unity for which and by which its members exist.²¹

What the Secular Has Done

In *The Historic Origins of Liberalism* Dawson furthers his case by examining the new structure of Western society that came about from the secularization of society after the Enlightenment and its following revolutions.²² Historians have generally agreed that this led to the ideology of Liberalism that is thought to have shaped the resultant changes in society.²³ Dawson, however, saw the outcome as being one shaped by ‘class interest’ and ‘selfish greed’ with a victory not for democracy, but rather in favour of ‘oligarchy’ and ‘privilege’ as the new ruling elite were essentially ‘controlled by the great Whig families’ and money was transformed, in the minds of Europeans, from ‘the root of all evil’ to now being considered in the light of being the ‘mainspring of social life’.²⁴

And so to Myth

Myth and religion echo the deepest significance to our lives and, on a much larger and at times adumbrate the epic scale of our history. Both Tolkien and Dawson well understood that mythology and religion, while separate entities, were linked. As Ryan points out, both men have cited Andrew Lang’s argument that though religion and mythology are two distinct things, they have, over time, become ‘inextricably entangled’.²⁵ This is not to say that either man thought that mythology held any religious significance, but, rather, that ‘once a story has become popular it may be given cosmological significance’.²⁶ An individual may, over time, imbue a story with greater value, introducing meaning to elements that embody a ‘mysterious and intangible’ something that can often be ‘mistaken’ for religion.²⁷ This entangling, as Tolkien explained, is when

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

²² Dawson, C., ‘The Historic Origins of Liberalism’, *The Review of Politics*, 16.3 (1954), 267-282 (p. 270).

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Ryan, J.S., *Tolkien’s View*, p. 144.

²⁶ Dawson, C., *Progress and Religion*, p. 86.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

‘something really higher is occasionally glimpsed in mythology’, and is misconstrued as ‘Divinity’.²⁸

Tolkien, in his several fictive works, had seen himself as creating a ‘secondary myth’ which draws on the ‘original myth’ that had been ‘metamorphosed’ by his own experiences and knowledge.²⁹ In these creative writings Tolkien was able to apply a universal truth, that of a cyclical pattern of devolution within a society that comes to rely less and less on religion.³⁰ The ideals of his own and his fictive society, though they were taken from an early Western set of traditions, were now being diminished at all levels of the social order. Tolkien saw the twentieth century as being spiritually smaller, less heroic and fouler than previous ages, as the beauty he perceived in religion was being sacrificed for ‘efficiency’. As a friend of Tolkien’s put it:

It is, indeed, manifestly not the case that there is any law of progress in ethical, cultural, and social history.³¹

Though Tolkien believed that to create analogies to Christianity within his imagined world of Middle Earth was abhorrent to his Catholic faith, many academics continue to draw inferences between elements of each.³² One of the most common is the link that is found, by some academics, between the Holy Communion of the Catholic faith and the *lembas* bread which Frodo and the other members of the Fellowship are given by the elves of Lothlorien.³³ Other instances that are used include the ‘Christ-like’ quest of Frodo, the re-birth of Gandalf and the image of Mary that is said to be shown in a number of different female characters of ‘Middle-Earth’ including Galadriel.³⁴ Frodo, it is argued, cannot be taken as a figure who fulfils the role of Christ, as he does not offer himself up for sacrifice for the redemption of the world; rather, he survives the journey that was undertaken, nor does he pass over to the

²⁸ Tolkien, J.R.R., ‘On Fairy-Stories’, in *Tree and Leaf*, Kindle edn (London: Harper Collins, 1964), location 354.

²⁹ Ryan, J.S., *Tolkien: Cult or Culture?* rev. edn (Armidale, NSW: Heritage Futures Research Centre, 2012), pp. 3, 176.

³⁰ Tolkien, J.R.R.: *The Lord of the Rings Trilogy; The Hobbit; The Book of Lost Tales I.*

³¹ Lewis, C.S., *The World’s Last Night and Other Essays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovitch, 1952), pp. 103-104.

³² Bofetti, J., ‘Catholic Scholar, Catholic Sub-Creator’, in *The Ring and The Cross: Christianity and the Lord of the Rings*, ed. by P.E. Kerry, et. al. (Lanham: Fairleigh Dickinson, 2010), Chapter 7, pp. 193-204 (p. 193).

³³ Birzer, B.J., ‘Not a Hippie Cult Figure: The Christian Gifts of J.R.R. Tolkien’, *New Oxford Review*, 68.10 (2001), 25-29 (p. 28).

³⁴ Person, J.E., Jr., ‘The Transcendent in Tolkien’, *Modern Age*, 45.3 (2003), 274-277 (p. 276).

West by himself, but, rather, he is in the company of other selfless figures, Bilbo, Gandalf and the elves.³⁵

The Artist in Tolkienian Thoughts

Tolkien has, instead, argued in *On Fairy-Stories* that the ‘true artist is a sub-creator, creating in the image of God, reflecting His glory and revealing a small part of the true joy that will be experienced in Heaven’.³⁶ For Tolkien had seen his duty, while he was living in the growing agnostic and atheistic society of Europe, as creating a ‘new myth’ which would counter the ‘follies of pride and power’ through its reflection of the ‘true myth, the story of Christ’.³⁷ The themes of Tolkien’s works have been deemed to reflect many Christian values: ‘justice and mercy, the economy of grace, the persistence of evil, and the demand for hope’.³⁸ Aragorn’s character, in *The Lord of the Rings*, is one filled with many of the virtuous characteristics found in Christianity, and though a king of his people, he is plagued by doubts as to his worthiness to lead.³⁹ He is a man whose reverence for his ancestors is similar to that shown by Catholics toward their saints.⁴⁰

Little do I resemble the figures of Elendil and Isildur as they stand
carven in their majesty in the halls of Denethor. I am but the heir of
Isildur, not Isildur himself.⁴¹

Aragorn returns to bring healing through the land of the dead, to check the evil throughout his land and to show the dignity of labour and service—all qualities ascribed to religion.⁴² Tolkien did not ‘discuss religion directly’ in his work, but, rather, used his knowledge of Catholicism to ensure his sub-creation honoured God through the spiritual ‘atmosphere’ he conveyed.⁴³

Although it has been argued that there is no compellingly Christian spirituality to be seen in *The Lord of the Rings*, this has been disputed, as its atmosphere closely follows the Catholic faith, not in detailed allegories or symbolism, but, rather, in its ‘emphasis on the choices of humans’ and on the importance of ‘singular historic events by which the

³⁵ Morillo, S., ‘The Entwines: Investigating the Spiritual Core of The Lord of the Rings’, in *The Ring and The Cross: Christianity and the Lord of the Rings*, ed. by P.E. Kerry, et. al. (Lanham: Fairleigh Dickinson, 2010), Chapter 4, pp. 106-118 (p. 112).

³⁶ Tolkien, J.R.R., ‘On Fairy-Stories’, location. 927.

³⁷ Birzer, p. 26.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

³⁹ Tolkien, J.R.R., *The Lord of the Rings Trilogy*.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Tolkien, J.R.R., *The Lord of the Rings Trilogy, The Fellowship of the Ring*, p. 324.

⁴² Zaleski, C., ‘Habits of Hobbits’, *The Christian Century*, 120.12 (2003), 37 (p. 37).

⁴³ Ryan, J.S., *Tolkien: Cult or Culture?*, pp. 180-181.

fate of the world is changed'.⁴⁴ Though Tolkien's focus on Christian motifs has been widely criticized, there is evidence in the modern audience numbers for both the books and the movies based on Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* that such stories, founded on these traditions, do resonate in a world where the human mind is seeking a deeper meaning that cannot be found in the current urbanised way of life.

Terrible Change in Europe

The changes wrought on European society by its increasing Industrialism were seen by both Tolkien and Dawson as fragmenting the rich European traditions which had formed its dynamic culture, particularly in the medieval era, and so had caused a de-humanising effect upon society. Dawson had grieved that:

Everywhere the old independent standards of life and the old self-sufficient agrarian economy have broken down, and the world has become a single community, with an international economic life and common ideals of material civilisation.⁴⁵

This, in its turn, had changed the relationship between man and nature, 'destroying the biological equilibrium between human society and its natural environment', thus leading to a population that had become more 'uniform' and 'artificial' over time.⁴⁶ Tolkien's views were similar, in that he also saw anything to do with Industrialism as being 'mass-produced', ugly, 'inferior' in workmanship, and machine-guns and bombs being the 'inexorable' products of factories.⁴⁷ This reliance on a mechanised world, Tolkien believed, showed the 'biological inferiority' and a 'false reaction to the environment,' one which was first illustrated by Dawson, further, it proved that man's imagination could do no more than 'reach for the splendid notion of building more towns of the same sort on other planets'.⁴⁸ This was, Tolkien reasoned, an age of 'improved means to deteriorated ends'.⁴⁹

His orcs represent the great masses of people during the Industrialisation of Europe who were no longer surrounded by the green spaces of an agrarian ideal, but, rather, were confined within the polluted factories of an industrialised urban landscape. A landscape that was lacking in even the most basic elements of aesthetic appeal, and from which the human soul received no nourishment, was indeed, a space so

⁴⁴ Morillo, p. 114; Zaleski, p. 37.

⁴⁵ Dawson, C., *Progress and Religion*, p. 207.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 211-212.

⁴⁷ Tolkien, J.R.R., 'On Fairy-Stories', location 795.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, location 825.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, location 840.

wanting in meaning as to cause the soul to shrivel upon itself. Dawson, too, saw this in the secularisation of Western culture that came about because of the intellectual revolution that refused to acknowledge the debt owed by the modern society to the traditions of its Christian past. He held that history needed to keep a record of the 'life-cycle of each civilisation' to determine whether it was currently in decline, something he was sure that the industrialisation of the Western world indicated, or whether it had passed through the decline and reached a new synthesis.⁵⁰

Mechanisation Means Destruction

Within Tolkien's imagined Middle Earth, the mechanisation that accompanied the growing industrialisation of Western society corresponds to the destruction of the natural environment around both Isengard and the Shire depicting the great evil at work.⁵¹ The changes, to the natural beauty of Isengard, that Saruman orders the orcs to undertake, where it had once been 'green and fair, it was now filled with pits and forges' with a 'dark smoke' that 'hung and wrapped itself about the sides of Orthanc'.⁵² Where once there had been avenues, 'green and filled with groves of trees', nothing green in the 'latter days of Saruman' grew any longer.⁵³

The roads were paved with stone-flags, dark and hard; and beside their borders instead of trees there marched long lines of pillars, some of marble, some of copper and of iron, joined by heavy chains. Iron wheels revolved there endlessly, and hammers thudded.⁵⁴

This vision of a traditional agrarian ideal that had been overset by the unthinking changes of heavy industry are also reflected in Tolkien's imagined Shire as a result of Saruman's creating 'a little mischief in a mean way' for the returning Hobbits.⁵⁵

Tolkien, as the artist, was able to undo these changes to Middle Earth in a way that he was unable to change the world in which he lived. The machines were destroyed and the natural environment was allowed to return, and in the case of Samwise's present from Galadriel, they had helped, to recover to its former state, with the 'biological equilibrium' now restored.⁵⁶ In his imagined Middle Earth, Tolkien had confronted the modern, industrialised world and, instead, produced a work from which

⁵⁰ Dawson, C., 'The Life of Civilisations', p. 1.

⁵¹ Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, p. 341; Tolkien, *The Two Towers*, p. 197; Tolkien, *The Return of the King*, pp. 362-369.

⁵² Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, p. 341.

⁵³ Tolkien, *The Two Towers*, p. 197.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 197-198.

⁵⁵ Tolkien, *The Return of the King*, p. 362.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 368-369.

‘man’ can take hope, in the ‘face of the monstrous forces which he has created’ but has no control over.⁵⁷ Unfortunately he was unable to make material changes to the world around him other than changing the mindset of people to question the thoughtless ‘progress’ of the new industrial world through his fictional narratives. Dawson’s artistic approach was to confront the problem in the academic world by consistently pushing his philosophy to widen the scope of historical understanding, and so to include a view of history through the lens of a set of traditions and morals that came from an earlier and church-blest Western intellectualism.

Where Dawson saw a spiritual disillusionment and growing lack of unity within the European society, Tolkien held fast to an optimistic outlook based more on a ‘Christian humanist tradition’.⁵⁸ Both men had seen a number of dire changes to their society wrought by a new understanding of the world that is based more in a mechanised, more technologically based view of the modern world that culminated in the Great War and the resulting philosophical and moral changes in national politics and spiritual fervour. These were the beginnings of an ‘ideologically inspired terror’ that was to be continually repeated throughout the twentieth century.⁵⁹ Tolkien’s optimism as manifested in his texts’ good persons is a distinctive presence in his work, as seen in his heroes when they face overwhelming situations, and so, time and again, they convey a sense of restrained hope in that they can improve the outcome for their, and succeeding, generations such as when Gandalf supposes:

Other evils there are that may come: for Sauron is himself but a servant or emissary. Yet it is not our part to master all the tides of the world, but to do what is in succour of those years wherein we are set uprooting the evil in the fields that we know, so that those who life after may have clean earth to till.⁶⁰

Tolkien’s writings after the Great War countered the prevailing tendencies of pessimism seen in such authors as George Orwell and, later, Ray Bradbury, both authors whose dark and melancholy vision of the world became the new norm for dystopian fiction, a trend in literature which would continue through the twentieth and into the twenty-first century.⁶¹ Tolkien’s conviction was that war was not to be viewed from the extremes of an entirely militaristic nor a pacifistic viewpoint, but,

⁵⁷ Ryan, *Tolkien: Cult or Culture?*, p. 181.

⁵⁸ Ryan, *Tolkien’s View*, p. 148.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Tolkien, *Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*, p. 185.

⁶¹ Bradbury, R., *Fahrenheit 451* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1953).

rather, that there was a sense of glory in a just war. In *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien's hero Faramir expresses Tolkien's views on war when he talks to Frodo of the ring:

Not if I found it on the highway would I take it I said. Even if I were such a man as to desire this thing, and even though I knew not clearly what this thing was when I spoke, still I should take those words as a vow, and be held by them.⁶²

The characters of *The Lord of the Rings* outline Tolkien's philosophy in that war is not for glory or triumphs, but, instead, for individual exceptionalism and that their own motivations should encompass, similar to the hobbits, 'love and loyalty', with an overall mission to restore a cosmic harmony.⁶³

Another Similarity of Thought

A direct relationship between religion and social progress was to be seen in both Tolkien and Dawson. Much of Dawson's early work included his 'brilliant work of synthesis' in *Progress and Religion* (1929) where his examination of cultures was shown to rely on the interaction between religion and the social progress of that society.⁶⁴ Dawson had explained that the 'intellectual element' of a culture is its 'soul and formative principle'.⁶⁵ He gave the example of early European settlers who had considered the Aborigines of central Australia to be 'utterly devoid of religion or morality,' due to early anthropological theories which related such abstract notions to the material cultures of a people.⁶⁶ As the Aborigines had little material culture, their 'wealth of ceremonial which surpassed in elaboration the religious practices of many advanced' cultures was too often overlooked.⁶⁷

In his own lifetime, Dawson saw the rise of the totalitarian and communist states as the 'result of a spiritual vacuum' and a 'testimony to the morally bankrupt status of the modern, secularised culture' of Europe.⁶⁸ He had used this as an example to explain that, no matter how 'outwardly prosperous' a society may seem, if it had lost its 'spiritual roots' its culture was already dying.⁶⁹ Indeed, Tolkien's views on the connection between religion and social progress are almost omnipresent

⁶² Tolkien, *Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*, p. 361.

⁶³ Ryan, *Tolkien: Cult or Culture*, p. 159.

⁶⁴ Ryan, *Tolkien's View*, p. 146.

⁶⁵ Dawson, C., *Progress and Religion*, p. 76.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Echeverria, p. 30.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

in his fictional world, as is shown by the outcomes for his different characters, for his heroes receive no great monetary rewards, but, rather, they are compensated in ways that are more spiritual in nature, the love of friends and family and with something as simple as walking through a beautiful landscape. Though the hobbits live a humble existence, they are, similar to Tolkien himself, surrounded by the simple, earthy pleasures of the Shire, an environment where evil is shown to labour only in vain as the hobbits live surrounded by deep contentment.

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And the Loss of Tradition

The loss of many traditions in the post industrial age had led to the growing secularism of Europe, one which was of concern to both Dawson and Tolkien as they were devout Catholics and tended towards conservatism. Each had lived through the changing political climates of Europe including fascism, Nazism and communism, and they were appalled by the lack of humanism during this time. Although Britain itself remained a monarchy, the growing reliance on science to fuel the 'progress' of society had pushed religion to the outer edge. European philosophers such as Nietzsche had 'embraced the irrational and the passionate', dispensing with the 'vener of love, Judaism and Christianity'.⁷⁰ Dawson himself believed that the 'pseudo-religions' such as communism and nationalism evolved from the absence of spirituality in a society, where religion was of less importance and the culture became more 'decadent,' as had happened in 'modern, industrial, bourgeois, secularised' Europe.⁷¹

These pseudo-religions became a 'kind of theocracy' rather than a political order, as was shown by Hitler's Nazism with its 'powerful instrumentalities of integration', ultimately moving from a 'political and economic movement' to having a cult-like status which, once divorced from Christianity, became a 'principle of hatred and destruction'.⁷² Though there were considerable 'material advances' made, there was no 'corresponding spiritual progress' with Europe moving in the direction of 'social anarchy'.⁷³ According to Dawson, this dissolution of European cultural unity showed a 'loss of faith in themselves,' and it was the 'ultimate source of the disorders and discontents of Europe'.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Birzer, p. 26.

⁷¹ O'Callaghan, P.A., 'The Dynamics of World History: A Review', *The American Catholic Sociological Review*, 18.3 (1957), 251-252 (p. 252).

⁷² Fitzgibbon, G.F., 'The Cyclical Theory of Christopher Dawson', *The American Catholic Sociological Review*, 2.1 (1941), 34-40 (pp. 38, 40).

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

⁷⁴ Park, R.E., 'Enquiries into Religion and Culture: Review', *American Journal of Sociology*, 41.1 (1935), 109-111 (pp. 110-111).

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The March of the Secular

Tolkien, like Dawson, also saw secularism as harmful to the unity of a society. Three characters in *The Lord of the Rings* whose loss of faith held in their power the possible outcome of the fate of the side of good.⁷⁵ Boromir, in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, plagued with doubt from the outset, lost faith in his quest and in his companions, with the result being his giving into temptation and so attacking Frodo, to claim the ring for Gondor, in the mistaken belief that he would be able to master its terrible powers.⁷⁶ Tolkien, however, illustrates how the Catholic virtue of redemption, in Boromir's case, can operate, as his final acts are those of moving bravery, in trying to save his friends and, in his confession to Aragorn as he lay dying, of the wrong he had done to Frodo.⁷⁷ This is in contrast to the pride-filled characters of Denethor and Saruman, whose loss of faith is too powerful to be altered, as both consider themselves to be intellectually superior to the other characters and this arrogance shows their inability to be redeemed.⁷⁸ Denethor thrice rejects the 'moral code of his culture' and is rebuked by Gandalf for 'slaying himself' in 'pride and despair'.⁷⁹

Dawson's belief that the 'process of secularisation arose not from a loss of faith, but from the loss of social interest in the world of faith', is what differentiated his view from that of Tolkien.⁸⁰ Europe, in this time of upheaval between capitalist and communist ideologies, had 'outgrown its faith' and so was left with a set of religious practices that no longer fulfilled the needs of its commercial and plutocratic society.⁸¹ Dawson saw that, in comparison with other civilisations, such as India, China and Islam, Europe was entering a time of cultural dissolution. People were struggling with their disillusionment and were becoming less united in their common traditional views compared to the increasing communist 'spiritual revolt' against the new materialism of European culture.

These new ideologies disrupted many noble cultures and traditions across Europe, and so leaving a cultural vacuum in societies which was eventually filled by globalisation and the rise consumerism which replaced customary practices. Dawson's greatest concern was that the

⁷⁵ Tolkien, *Lord of the Rings*.

⁷⁶ Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, pp. 516-519.

⁷⁷ Tolkien, *The Two Towers*, p. 12.

⁷⁸ Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*; Tolkien, *The Two Towers*; Tolkien, *The Return of the King*.

⁷⁹ Holmes, J.R., "Like Heathen Kings": Religion as Palimpsest in Tolkien's Fiction', in *The Ring and The Cross: Christianity and the Lord of the Rings*, ed. by P.E. Kerry, et. al. (Lanham: Fairleigh Dickinson, 2010), Chapter 5, pp. 119-144 (p. 119).

⁸⁰ Park, p. 111.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

general populace of Western societies would know only of the information from their current age and not be influenced by the body of knowledge accumulated by previous generations, especially that of Christianity.

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In Summary

Both Dawson and Tolkien are shown to have had similar social philosophies where the moral guidance of the Christian religion is thought to be the cornerstone to their civilisation's continued cultural growth. Dawson's meta-historical works concentrated on proving his theses, including that of religion being the unifying factor in the continued vitality of a culture. The re-focussing of much of European culture away from Christianity had, therefore, resulted, Dawson believed, in a loss of unity and the growing degeneration of its society to one with more secular interests such as the economy. This had begun with the growth of industrialism as the cornerstone of its doctrine of progress at the cost of its cultural traditions. In response to this growing secularism, both Tolkien and Dawson had created works which embraced what they saw as being higher values than those shown by the current society, in an effort to bring these traditions back to the notice of the populace. Tolkien's views, whilst sympathetic to Dawson's, do not mirror them. Moreover, both men agreed that there is a link entangling religion and mythology, that religion and intellectualism are the soul of a culture, and that they found the change from an agrarian culture to a mechanised one totally repugnant.

Tolkien was influenced less by Dawson's historical writing than he was by living in Europe at a time when secular, warring Europe's reliance on the products of industrialism left a gaping hole in man's humanity. As practitioners of a belief system that was decreasing within their society, both Tolkien and Dawson were responding to their times and trying to halt what they perceived as the destruction that had been caused to European society and its ancient and reflective traditions.

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Tolkien as a gateway to traditional (earlier European) folklore for modern and post modern man

The fictional writings of the late Professor J.R.R. Tolkien have long been classical texts throughout the English-speaking world, and now they are found to be both read and enjoyed much further afield than the countries already English-speaking. The characters created therein and their physical and mental landscapes are so much further savoured as a result of the Tolkien films made in both the magnificent alpine and the finely wooded temperate landscapes of New Zealand.

In essence the major stories from his pen, and the vast corpus of related tales published after his death offer modern man something of the soul's dilemmas and concomitant doubts that modern man had apparently lost. Not only is C.G. Jung helpful here in the task of interpreting the texts, but their humanity has made so many of his characters and their timeless dilemmas of loyalty, trust, and the responsibility of quests conducted for many others accessible to many nations and age groups. Both of your editors have studied the professor's works and made some contribution to the now global scholarship of his creative writings.

Pleasingly J.R.R. Tolkien has been re-visited by folklorists from Europe, the Americas, and not the countries of East Asia, as Google Scholar has been making abundantly clear. Thus the style and thrust of the first two articles in this issue may be deemed to represent both the application of significant folkloric tales from Europe's yesterdays to real history, or to the deeper philosophical issues at the core of modernism. In short, even as Christopher Dawson has become a guiding light to the American scene, so Professor J. R. R. Tolkien is one of the most influential and respected of the writers and scholars who can afford both philosophical and spiritual illumination to both modern, and post-modern man and woman. And the second piece gives us some notion of the almost certain source for so much that is at the heart of *The Hobbit* and so of *The Lord of the Rings*. Indeed, Tolkien is to be regarded as one of the most sensitive and creative of the writers treating of folk belief and legendary landscapes in his own further tales of the (European) imagination.

J.S.R. and R.J.S.