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## WHAT THEY SAW IN AMERICA: G.K. CHESTERTON'S AND CHRISTOPHER DAWSON'S VIEWS OF THE UNITED STATES<sup>1</sup>

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“WHO IS THE AMERICAN, THIS NEW MAN?” CREVECOEUR FAMOUSLY ASKED. SINCE the discovery and settlement of the continent across the Atlantic, European intellectuals have expended much energy answering this query<sup>2</sup> And ancestral political and cultural connections have made British thinkers among the most intrepid investigators of the character of these new men of the new world.<sup>3</sup> With the United States's attainment of great power status in the nineteenth century and its rise to globalism in the twentieth, however, such inquiries have become more pressing in recent times. Among British Christian writers, G.K. Chesterton and Christopher Dawson were especially interested in the American prospect and arrived independently at remarkably similar conclusions concerning it. Writing almost a generation apart, each man initially characterized, and criticized, the United States as the epitome of modernity. Yet both authors also discerned a tension in American culture between modern and traditional traits. Hence, as America's predominance in the

twentieth century became more apparent to each of them, he hoped that this country could become a beacon of rebellion against modernity and an alternative to his day's despotisms, something both of them considered contingent on American acceptance of a Catholic Christian ethos.

Although Chesterton and Dawson influenced each other in some ways, they arrived at these kindred assessments of America by separate routes. This coincidence in their thought is all the more noteworthy because their ultimately hopeful views of the United States were contrary to the opinions of it usually expressed by members of the two chief intellectual heritages to which they belonged—namely twentieth century Catholic and Christian thinkers and British religious and romantic critics of modernity. These two traditions were generally more hostile to American civilization and more skeptical about its prospects. Comprehending Chesterton's and Dawson's more distinctive attitudes toward that culture, then, will both enrich our understanding of their own social criticism by detailing an atypical aspect of it that is rarely analyzed,<sup>4</sup> and has not been done so comparatively hitherto<sup>5</sup> while also adding currently absent voices to the discourse concerning British conceptions of America.<sup>6</sup>

In his early work (c. 1905-1920), Chesterton tended to depict the United States as quintessentially modern. Echoing Crevecoeur in asking “Of what nature is this people?”<sup>7</sup> Chesterton responded frequently that America was “the most progressive and modern of lands,”<sup>8</sup> even equating “Americanism” and “modernity.”<sup>9</sup> To him, this meant an America that “has really worshipped money,”<sup>10</sup> one typified by millionaires who “only live in order to work,”<sup>11</sup> the frenetic pace of life he associated with such “commercial anarchy,”<sup>12</sup> and an “unnatural” passivity on the part of the populace when confronted with the exploitation and abuses of power by the rich.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, Chesterton thought the United States exemplified the social uniformity he had portrayed as a hallmark of modern life in *The Napoleon of*

*Notting Hill* (1904), and he echoed Tocqueville's fear of the tyranny of the majority.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, he was anxious about any attempts to import American norms into Britain, considering them a form of cultural treachery, as he referred sardonically to "some of our British patriots [who] would like to swamp us in the American civilization" of "newspaper interests, Masonic banquets, and a general moral show of everybody minding everybody's business."<sup>15</sup>

By so using the United States as a foil to Britain, Chesterton was asserting that unwelcome modern trends are "un-English." In making America the exemplar of modernity, he was able to displace his discontents about his own society across the Atlantic, thus purging these evil principles and practices from England in an act of prophetic patriotism.<sup>16</sup> His fears about "Americanization" hence not only reveal a xenophobia characteristic of populist thought, but they also place Chesterton within a tradition of modern British thinkers who have criticized their own culture through critiques of the United States, a heritage of projection and purgation whose core beliefs are summarized well by Martin Wiener:

America offered the least resistance to the dehumanizing tendencies of modernity; it has sold its soul to industrialism...Disparagement of the 'American way of life' seen as the idolizing of technology and wealth-could, from this standpoint, help exorcise these spirits from English culture.<sup>17</sup>

Yet even in his early thought, Chesterton did not wholly disparage American culture. For instance, **he praised what he considered American society's democratic strain**; and, while conceding that sensitivity to public opinion could have the deleterious effects Tocqueville noted, Chesterton still urged Britons "do not despise it" for "it has its uses," especially in what he deemed an undemocratic, modern nation like Britain." Additionally, he often commended a child-like "simplicity" in the American character.<sup>19</sup> Even more importantly, Chesterton suggested that Americans shared his belief in the primacy of theory: "there is really something about the Declaration of Independence that is almost like the stone tables of the Ten Commandments"<sup>20</sup>



He asserted this tension between perceived vices and virtues in the American soul as early as 1906: "while there is no materialism so crude or so material as American materialism, there is no idealism so crude or so ideal as American idealism."<sup>21</sup> Yet in the century's first two decades, he felt unable to discern which set of traits would triumph. As he concluded in 1914,

If ever there was a place in the world where forces whose strength no one knows were coming to an utterly truceless

and largely heartless struggle; where enormous riddles may at any moment answer themselves because no man can answer them ... if ever there was a place where the task of reform was not self-evident and the future of democracy was not secure, I should say that it was in the industrial centers of the United States.... That all these dangers and evils are balanced by good, healthy, and tenacious elements in American civilization, I know ... But that is just the point; the presence of the good things makes it all the more difficult to predict with certainty than if the things were all bad.<sup>22</sup>

Making such a certain prediction, however, was not a pressing concern for Chesterton at this point in his career. America's ultimate fate lacked broad and immediate significance for him, as, at this time, he rejected "the absurd pretence that she holds the future of humanity."<sup>23</sup>

Such a conviction would seem less pretentious to him, though, following the United States' participation in the Great War and the immediate aftermath of that conflict. Chesterton described America's entry into the war as "like the entry of unborn mankind." To him, America was now "the youth of the world," the shaping force of the future: "the Western democracy speaks for our daughters and our sons even more than for ourselves"<sup>24</sup> His sense of urgency about America's role in the world only intensified at war's end. In the post-war era, Chesterton suggested, either American or Prussian ideals would govern Western civilization. While they were "both in a sense progressive" societies, he contended, "what men call Germany is a thoroughly modern thing" that emphasizes an omnipresent, omniscient state, whereas

America retained a reservoir of what he regarded as traditional beliefs, like democracy.<sup>25</sup> Believing that Britain had adopted “Prussianism” in its reconstruction policies through measures that concentrated and augmented centralized state power-like the Education Act of 1918, the Housing Act of 1919, the Unemployment Insurance Act of 1920, and the establishment of a Ministry of Health Chesterton in the 1920s and 1930s sought cultural correctives to the antidemocratic course he thought Britain had mistakenly adopted.<sup>26</sup> It was with this mixture of hopes and fears in mind that he arrived in the United States in January, 1921.<sup>27</sup>

Chesterton’s search for anti-modern models, plus the growing importance of Catholicism to his desired contemporary restoration of ancestral ideals, helped modify his view of the United States. Though he continued to associate America with many modern qualities, his first-hand observations of its culture during lecture tours in 1921 and 1930-1 combined with his fears of Prussianization to promote greater stress on the American attributes that seemed conducive to his own social norms. He hence encouraged what he regarded as these more traditional traits in the hope that a transformed United States would become a guide to Britain and the rest of the West. Not surprisingly, though, this hope finally rested on faith.

In many respects, Chesterton still found America consummately modern during his travels there. He continued to regard it, for instance, as the exemplar of monopoly capitalism and large-scale business. To him, America was still “the largest, most vigorous, and most wealthy expression of the general modern process of Capitalism and Industrialism,”<sup>28</sup> producing the “big Yankee store” that he thought menaced the small English shop, as well as remaining archetypal of the frantic pace of modern life.<sup>29</sup> Additionally, he still deemed the United States a representative of modern cultural homogenization, having “a general impression of unity verging on uniformity” among its citizens; and he continued to

warn about the potential tyranny of the majority.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, Chesterton, like Graham Greene, contended that Americans lacked a tragic sensibility and that, although this “touch of innocence” had a “strange link with Christian humility,” it also fostered a “strange philosophy of Optimism” that “denies the actual reality of evil in experience.” Also like Greene, Chesterton considered this denial of traditional Christian doctrine “the most dismal thing about” Americans.<sup>31</sup> Finally, he maintained that at least part of the country shared modernity’s purported contempt for tradition, being “proud of having no history.”<sup>32</sup>

Yet he also continued to observe other characteristics in U.S. culture that were closer to his own, anti-modern ideals. Initially, Chesterton elaborated on his sense that Americans believed in the primacy of theory, arguing that the country’s criteria for citizenship is ideological rather than ethnic:

America is the only nation in the world that is founded on a creed...

America invites all men to become citizens; but it implies the dogma that there is such a thing as citizenship. Only, so far as its primary ideal is concerned, its exclusiveness is religious, because it is not racial...the American may exclude a polygamist, precisely because he cannot exclude a Turk.<sup>33</sup>

In Chesterton’s mind, that primary American ideal was one he had long considered threatened by modern culture: “It is the theory of equality ... an absolute of morals by which all men have a value invariable and indestructible and a dignity as intangible as death.” While he still recognized that this emphasis on equality could promote the tyranny of the majority, Chesterton also reiterated and expanded on his belief that that “huge power of unanimity and intolerance in the soul of America” could itself be beneficial. He held that this force could defend traditional morality against what he considered the tyranny of the minority of arrogant modern faddists who disdain customary codes: “It was said that the voice of the people is the voice of God; and this at least is certain that it can be the voice of God to the wicked ... a voice they never knew shall tell them that his name is Leviathan, and he is lord over all children of pride.”<sup>34</sup>

  
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Chesterton similarly asserted a tempering anti-modern aspect to other allegedly modern American traits. Altering his earlier view, he claimed that if the United States is personified to some extent by millionaires, it also possesses “a democratic instinct against the domination of wealth.”<sup>35</sup> If its outlook is dangerously innocent, it also continues to contain the cardinal Chestertonian virtues of child-like simplicity, “wonder and gratitude.”<sup>36</sup> If portions of the country are proud of having no history, in others “there are traditions and a great deal of traditionalism.”<sup>37</sup> Turning to history to localize these impressions, Chesterton depicted the antebellum South as the best representative of American resistance to modernity, making it a social order “with which I have a great deal of sympathy.”<sup>38</sup> To him, this “rural civilization” had possessed a “true tradition” that favored “local liberties, and even a revolt on behalf of local liberties,” and that distrusted “the huge machine of centralized power called the Union.” Even its most peculiar institution was “nobler” to him than “the Northern slavery, industrial slavery.” Most tellingly, he concluded that **“Old England can still be faintly traced in Old Dixie. It contains some of the best things England herself has had, and therefore (of course) the things England herself has lost, or is trying to lose...there was something very like Old England in the South. Relatively speaking, there is still.”**<sup>39</sup>

As this passage indicates, Chesterton’s more nuanced later view of the United States also shaped his employment of it as a comparative for Britain. He continued to use America’s course as a warning to his native land by pointing to the triumph of the industrial North over the agrarian South, plus what he considered its growing social ethos of conformity. But he also suggested that Britons could profit by imitating the United States’ purported egalitarianism, populism, republicanism, intellectual vitality, and greater willingness to challenge governmental authority.<sup>40</sup> He even went so far as to conclude that “Americanization” in Britain was really a process of recommitment to ideals that had originated in Britain, had been adopted partially by Americans, and were now being selectively re-imported from the former colony: “In the mere worship of machinery, in the mere worship of money, in the headlong materialism that invests and exploits with blind optimism ... it was England that originally involved the world in this doubtful and dangerous departure from the traditions of Europe.” Hence, as

“it is only American vices that we are intent on imitating,” but since “the real American evil is not so much the result of breaking away from England as of its having remained only too English,” Chesterton contended that “while I should heartily support an Englishman resisting the Americanization of England, I am not quite sure whether what he resists was not originally the Anglicizing of America.”<sup>41</sup>

**Chesterton could thus claim that “I hate Americanization and do not hate America,”** for he believed that American culture contained anti-modern components that could be nurtured to promote a beneficent form of Americanization, one that would be an antidote to post-war Prussianization. He argued that “America, instead of being the open agricultural commonwealth for which its founders hoped, has become the dumping-ground of all the most dismal ideas of decaying epochs in Europe, from Calvinism to industrialism.”<sup>42</sup> Specifically, he continued to discern a tension between American materialism and idealism, but he now specified the nature of that conflict between the United States’s economic system and its political principles, referring to “the modern thing called industrialism” and “the very ancient thing called democracy.”<sup>43</sup>

Industrial capitalism and ideal democracy are everywhere in controversy; but perhaps only here are they in conflict...equality is still the ideal though no longer the reality of America...the reality of modern capitalism is menacing that ideal with terrors and even splendors that might well stagger the wavering and impressionable modern spirit. Upon the issue of that struggle depends the question of whether this new great civilization continues to exist, and even whether any one cares if it exists or not.<sup>44</sup>

Whereas Chesterton had previously been agnostic about this conflict’s outcome, though, he was now optimistic about what he regarded as a favorable resolution. He argued that even American materialism is leavened by egalitarian notions and, more significantly, that the U.S. contained an embryonic peasantry, something he deemed essential for democracy, for “exactly in so far as men are villagers, men are democrats: a peasantry is hidden in the heart of America....It is rather an open secret; covering only some thousand miles of open prairie ... where all those acres are is agriculture, and where all that agriculture is there is considerable tendency towards distributive or decently equalized property, as in a peasantry.”<sup>46</sup>

He held that “in so far as America retains certain rural truths and traditions,” it will “survive and succeed”;<sup>47</sup> and he thought this an increasingly likely prospect in his day, as “America now contains a considerable amount of revolt against Americanism.”<sup>48</sup>

Though somewhat inconsistent on this point, Chesterton generally maintained at this juncture in his career that the distributist ideal was ascendant: “the broad daylight of tradition and ancient truth is coming to end all this delightful nightmare of New York at night. Peasants and priests and all sorts of practical and sensible people are coming back into power ... the turn of the world has come, and the turn of the agricultural countries with it.”<sup>49</sup> He thought that the world-wide economic downturn that culminated in the Great Depression had proved industrialism a failure, making it possible that “the original village virtues of the real republicans of America ... may emerge again as they never emerged during the brief and brittle illusion of a merely vulgar prosperity.”<sup>50</sup> He consequently concluded that if distributist democracy succeeded in the United States, that country could model anti-modern rebellion to other nations, not least its mother-country: **“I think that crossless flag may yet become a symbol of something; by whose stars we are illumined, and by whose stripes we are healed.”**<sup>51</sup>



As this use of prophetic and religious rhetoric implies, Chesterton believed that America’s conversion to his social ideal depended on another kind of conversion. He argued that “there is no basis for democracy except in a dogma about the divine origin of man.” He asserted that modern intellectual trends like Darwinism, Social Darwinism, skepticism, and relativism had undermined secular rationales for equality—along with the religions that had attempted to accommodate these ideas—by emphasizing the inequality of nature. But he thought one form of religion had remained staunch in defending the ancient belief that men are equal in the order of grace

as equally beloved children of God: “against all this irresistible force stood one immovable post.... The dogmatic type of Christianity, especially the Catholic type of Christianity, had riveted itself irrevocably to the manhood of all men. Where its faith was fixed by creeds and councils it could not save itself even by surrender.” Chesterton hence concluded that democracy’s one lasting foundation was Catholicism, and he stressed further that “peasant societies carry on what may be called the Catholic tradition.”<sup>52</sup>

Not unexpectedly, then, Chesterton claimed that **the “real disadvantage of American civilization ... lay in the relation between culture and creed.”** In particular, he argued that what he considered the Calvinist creedal foundation of American culture not only fostered virtues favorable to industrial capitalism, but also inhibited egalitarian democracy through its theological emphasis on a predestined division between elect and damned. To him, “the spiritual vision was not wide enough for the breadth and variety of the brotherhood that was to be established among men.... Their religion was not republican enough; it was not common enough for a Commonwealth. And so at last religion surrendered to the trick of trade.”<sup>53</sup> Chesterton explained America’s inability to develop a peasantry fully in these terms: “the defect by which they fall short of being a true peasantry is that they do not produce their own spiritual food”; and his recommendation for remedying that ostensible failing and creating a distributist democracy in the United States was stark: “So far as that democracy becomes or remains Catholic and Christian, that democracy will remain democratic. In so far as it does not, it will become wildly and wickedly undemocratic.” He concluded confidently that “Americans of intelligence” were becoming increasingly conscious of this choice and were exhibiting “an enthusiasm for the Catholic creed.”<sup>54</sup> Nor did this assessment wane substantially with Al Smith’s 1928 defeat. While Chesterton acknowledged anti-Catholic bigotry as a significant force in American culture, his reiterations of America’s potentially redemptive role during the 1930s suggests that he thought this prejudice was not insurmountable.<sup>55</sup>

Yet Chesterton’s hopes for the United States were too high. His sense of his ideal’s strength, both generally and in America, was clearly exaggerated;<sup>56</sup> and his belief that only Catholicism could sustain it was not shared by

others, like the Southern Agrarians, who were influenced in other ways by Chesterton's distributism and offered cognate models of social reconstruction.<sup>57</sup> Nonetheless, while he often saw what he wanted to see in America, Chesterton's later view of this country still reveals much about the course of his thought during this period. His fears that Britain was dishonoring the sacrifice of those (like his brother Cecil) who had died to defeat "Prussianism," along with his hopes that American post-war power could serve what he considered more traditional ideals, reveals not only a sharpened sense of the perils of modern political ideologies and what is required to refute them, but also an acceptance of Britain's secondary status in the inter-war world. Moreover, although he had not yet become a Roman Catholic formally when he reflected on his first visit to America, his tight yoking of dogmatic Catholicism to distributism in those musings demonstrates how close to Rome he was in spirit at this time, as well as the growing synergy between his sacred and secular solutions. The fact that he separated himself from other anti-modern thinkers who remained more critical of the United States during these years, as well as from contemporaneous Catholic and Christian skeptics like Douglas Woodruff, demonstrates the depth both of Chesterton's concern about Western civilization's direction and of his faith in Catholic Christianity's redemptive power.<sup>58</sup>

Like Chesterton, Christopher Dawson criticized not only modern ideas in his early writing (c.1925-1945), but also the nation he considered their chief embodiment. Dawson argued that, from its founding, the United States was the exemplar of modernity. He contended, as Chesterton did, that "the American tradition is founded on Calvinism;"<sup>59</sup> and he portrayed its revolution as rooted in a merger between the Protestant Reformation's "revolutionary and apocalyptic tendencies" and the Enlightenment's "rationalism and naturalism," a union he deemed "the definite emergence of the modern revolutionary creed." He also thought that "European liberals" saw their ideals justified and their hopes realized in the American uprising's success and its announced break with traditions of the Old World, and that this "myth of the American Revolution" was pivotal in precipitating its French counterpart.<sup>60</sup> To Dawson, therefore, **America's very creation was the consequence of movements he considered major causes of modern secularization, and its success was a filip to forces he deemed destructive of tra-**

**ditional Western culture.**



Given this perceived theological and philosophical pedigree, America became Dawson's archetypal illustration of what was wrong with his own world. He considered American capitalism the epitome of the kind of capitalism that stemmed from the Reformation<sup>61</sup> and he postulated that the United States was probably the only nation in which "bourgeois culture exist[s] in the pure state as a self-subsistent whole."<sup>62</sup> Moreover, he deemed Americans the foremost representatives of the modern belief that progress consists in spreading an "urbanmechanical civilization," of those who want "more cinemas, motor-cars for all, wireless installations, more elaborate methods of killing people, purchase on the hire system, preserved foods and picture papers."<sup>63</sup> Dawson, in his early writing, ascribed such a crude, superficial and insubstantial culture to what he regarded as the country's theological foundations:

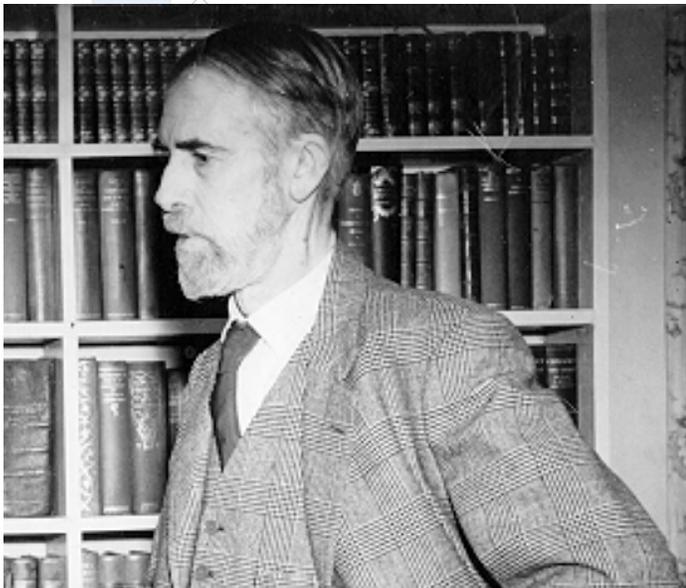
the social effect of Calvinism and of American Protestantism in general is to create an immensely strong moral motive for action without any corresponding intellectual ideal. It is a culture of the will rather than of the understanding—a purely ethical discipline which neglects intellectual and aesthetic values. This attitude remains characteristic of American civilization even in its secular development.<sup>64</sup>

Yet he also feared that without this religious inspiration, whatever its flaws, American civilization would degenerate into "a purely secular type of culture which subordinates the whole of life to practical and economic ends and leaves no room for independent spiritual activity,"<sup>65</sup> and one thus incapable of defending the Western heritage should Europe fail.<sup>66</sup>

Dawson's anxieties about the triumph of materialism, and an ensuing exclusion of the sacred from personal and social life in America, led him logically to compare the United States with the Soviet Union. In the early 1930s, he considered the two nations ethically akin, arguing that both had embraced destructive elements of modernity.

Each country possessed “the same cult of the machine” and the tendency to “subordinate every other side of human life to economic activity,” “a standardized type of mass civilization” and “the breaking down of the family as a fixed social unit.”<sup>67</sup> Despite these alleged similarities, Dawson at this juncture considered the American model the more deadly threat to Britain and the West. Just as Chesterton had contended at one point that “the madness of tomorrow is not in Moscow but much more in Manhattan,” so Dawson maintained in 1930 that the greatest danger here is not that we should actively adopt the Bolshevik cult of Marxian materialism, but rather that we should yield ourselves passively to a practical materialization of culture after the American pattern. The Communists may have deified mechanism in theory, but it is the Americans who have realized it in practice.<sup>68</sup>

As firm as this criticism was, though, Dawson also simultaneously discerned some potentially redemptive qualities in American culture. **He detected, as Chesterton did, a “latent contradiction” between American economic practices and political ideals:** there “is no organic connection between the mechanism and materialism of the new mass civilization and the old ideals of political liberty and social democracy which have their origin in the simpler conditions of an earlier period.” Since the United States “is not wholly materialistic,” retains some pre-industrial idealism, and “its evolution is still incomplete,”<sup>69</sup> Dawson thought, “the great problem of modern culture is to bring these vast potentialities of spiritual development into contact with the higher forms of cultural activity which the older European tradition possessed.”<sup>70</sup> Although such comments foreshadow his later more hopeful attitudes to-



*Christopher Dawson*

ward and activities in America, Dawson’s discussions of the United States into the 1940s are more marked by denunciations of it as the personification of post-Christianity and by warnings to his countrymen to avoid its fate. Such opinions thus situate these writings, like Chesterton’s early ones, within the tradition of those cultural protesters who have sought to exorcise “the American specter” from modern and British life through literary efforts.<sup>71</sup>

Yet, just as Chesterton’s view of America modified in the wake of the Great War, so were Dawson’s opinions altered by the impact of the conflagration that gripped Europe a generation later. Whereas Chesterton had focused his fears on a postwar triumph of Prussianism, Dawson’s concerns centered on the broader peril he thought totalitarianism posed. Dawson had been one of totalitarianism’s earliest foes, arguing since the late 1910s that this system was a uniquely modern one that posed a qualitatively new threat to Christianity and Western civilization in its attempt to eradicate what he regarded as the religious basis of Western culture and replace it with an all-encompassing political ethic. He also contended consistently that only cultural recommitment to Catholic Christianity could be an effective foundation for resisting this perceived menace. In the post-World War II world, however, Dawson recognized that even a religiously revitalized Europe would lack much of its former material power due to the accumulated effects of world wars, economic crises, and imperial breakup. This perception merged with his apprehension of totalitarianism to provoke a substantial revision of his attitude toward the United States.

To be sure, **Dawson still considered American culture in many ways the avatar of modernity.** He argued shortly after the war’s end, for instance, that “the mechanization of social and economic life” had “developed furthest” in the U.S.; and he emphasized often that America exemplified technocratic uniformity. Echoing Tocqueville (and Chesterton), Dawson held that “we see in America how material prosperity and technical proficiency produce social conformity, so that without any intervention on the part of the state, men of their own accord tend to think the same and look the same and behave in the same way.”<sup>72</sup> While he did not think this condition uniquely American, Dawson did insist that “it is in America that the technological order has achieved its greatest triumphs”

and thus that the majorities fostered by its urban mechanism are more tyrannical than those elsewhere: “there is nowhere in the world where a man has to conform more rigidly to a pattern of behavior imposed on him by impersonal mechanical forces than in a great American city.”<sup>73</sup> Additionally, he echoed Greene’s criticism of American innocence abroad, thinking that it made the U.S. hypocritical in handling colonial issues.<sup>74</sup> Lastly, Dawson reiterated his comparison of the United States with its now chief Cold War rival: “in the U.S.A. no less than in the U.S.S.R. we are conscious of the victory of the mass over the individual.”<sup>75</sup>

He also continued to attribute America’s alleged deficiencies to its religious heritage. Ever since its revolution, he claimed, the U.S. had accepted what he considered the Protestant divorce between Christianity and culture, so much so that “the two worlds of private religion and public social order do not touch one another” in that country; he thought this division was reinforced by the constitutional jurisprudence separating Church and State.<sup>76</sup> The end result in his mind (as he thought was so with Protestantism generally) was the steady secularization of American society, so that by 1961 he judged American culture “purely secular.”<sup>77</sup> In the days of totalitarianism, though, Dawson deemed the ensuing American surrogate faith of “a vague moral idealism and a vague rational optimism” a flimsy shield against “the inhuman and irrational forces of destruction that have been let loose in the modern world.”<sup>78</sup> He thought this vulnerability was exacerbated by “the centrifugal tendency that was always present in Protestantism,” as the multiplicity of independent sects in the U.S. precluded the Christian cohesion needed to resist highly integrated totalitarian polities and ideologies.<sup>79</sup>

Despite this diagnosis, Dawson did not adopt a despairing anti-Americanism. Whereas some thinkers (like Greene) concluded from a shared premise of American predominance in the post-war world that its might would be used wrongly, Dawson’s earlier faint hopes for a reformed United States grew stronger as the totalitarian threat became seemingly more dire. He concluded in World War II’s wake (as did Evelyn Waugh and others)

that Western civilization’s fate rested on the U.S.<sup>80</sup> With its new commitment to internationalism and its overwhelming economic and military strength, Dawson thought, America would either become the rallying point for resistance to totalitarianism and a leader of world-wide Christian cultural redemption; or it would continue along its secularist path, adopting the kind of creeping domestic totalitarianism that he also feared for Britain and imposing this model on its satellites.<sup>81</sup> With what he considered the survival of Christianity and its culture at stake, Dawson considered it imperative to encourage any hopeful signs in American civilization; and he began to see more such harbingers in the 1950s and 1960s than he had previously.

In 1952, he repeated his two-decades old belief that the challenge confronting the U.S. was to “reconcile the old spiritual values with the new techniques of mass civilization and mass power.”<sup>82</sup> Six years later he expressed general confidence that Americans could accomplish this task, and he de-

tailed his rationale for this hope in 1961:

In America both the need and opportunity for this are greater than elsewhere. The technological order has been more highly developed than anywhere else in the world, and with it the pressure of secularization has steadily increased. But at the same time America still possesses the priceless advantages of educational and intellectual freedom, so that we are still free to work and plan for the restoration of Christian culture.<sup>83</sup>

The United States, then, became an objective correlative of Dawson’s desired democratic state, one providing and protecting a private sphere.<sup>84</sup> Moreover, by the late 1950s, he was echoing Chesterton’s belief that America was founded on a creed, and was praising the Southern Agrarians for their expression of the “worlds of spiritual experience that still exist under the superficial uniformity of modern secular civilization.”<sup>85</sup>

Like Chesterton, though, Dawson believed that his hoped for restoration of Christian culture and civilization should be constituted on a Catholic foundation. He thought that “it is in America that there seems the

  
*“Dawson deemed the ensuing American surrogate faith of ‘a vague moral idealism and a vague rational optimism’ a flimsy shield against ‘the inhuman and irrational forces of destruction that have been let loose in the modern world.’”*  


best prospect for the development of a Catholic culture,” due to the U.S.’s greater material resources, its numerous Catholic universities,<sup>86</sup> and to Dawson’s sense that American Catholics are the “largest, the strongest, and the most united religious body on the continent.”<sup>87</sup> Acknowledging a history of discrimination against Catholics in the U.S., Dawson (again like Waugh) thought that those days were ending: “a sleeping giant” was now “awakening” due to affluence and assimilation, bringing with it a salvific legacy preserved during years of prejudice, one predicated on healing the Protestant rift between faith and works.<sup>88</sup> To Dawson, then, Catholicism was the “only power in America which stands for these deeper spiritual realities and traditions which secular civilization has lost and for lack of which is dying.”<sup>89</sup> American Catholics, in short, “were the legitimate heirs of a much richer cultural inheritance than anything that American Protestantism knew, and now that they are free to enter into their inheritance, they will ultimately be able to exert an increasing influence on American thought and culture.”<sup>90</sup> He insisted increasingly throughout the 1950s that American knowledge of this Catholic cultural legacy was essential to its new role of world leadership, as this heritage would supply the spiritual roots and energy needed to defend traditional Western and Christian culture against technocratic totalitarianism.<sup>91</sup>

Dawson nonetheless cautioned his American co-religionists against letting a growing assimilation to their society be accompanied by an increased adoption of secularist mores. Echoing his contemporaneous warnings to British Catholics, Dawson held that “there is the risk that it may become too easy for us to accept the standards of our secularized culture and to become assimilated by it. It is therefore all the more important that we should react consciously against it by doing what is in our power to maintain and cultivate the tradition of Christian culture.”<sup>92</sup> He judged the risk worth taking, though, both because of what seemed at stake, and also since he believed that the Catholic patrimony’s transcendence would empower its American adherents to so engage their nation’s norms without capitulating to currently-prevalent secularism: “American Catholics stand out as the one great remaining minority that can never be completely assimilated because it forms part of an international and universal society.”<sup>93</sup> He thus echoed and anticipated ideas of a “Catholic moment” in American life, and an “American epoch” in Catholic history.

Dawson hence found it more than coincidental

when he was invited in 1958 to be the first occupant of the Stillman Chair of Roman Catholic Studies in Harvard University’s Divinity School. He had been offered university positions in the United States previously, but had demurred, usually due to poor health. Indeed, his weak constitution almost prevented his acceptance of Harvard’s offer, as a false diagnosis of tuberculosis delayed his obtaining a visa for months. But Dawson was determined to assume this post. Coming as it did when he was advocating increased Catholic influence in America to guide its global leadership, he regarded the overture as providential: “it is a call.” Celebrating his seventieth birthday in Boston in 1959, he summarized this sense of vocation: “I have come to feel that it is in this country that the fate of Christendom will be decided.... There is a great opportunity in America today that may never be repeated. That is why I am here.”<sup>94</sup>



Dawson was frustrated occasionally by what he considered a lack of interest in his work by Harvard students and faculty,<sup>95</sup> but he persevered in what he deemed his mission, lecturing not only in the Divinity School, but even traveling as far as Houston to promote Christian and Catholic culture. Eventually, however, the strain proved too great and, following a 1962 stroke, he resigned his appointment regretfully and returned to Britain. While he fell short of accomplishing his goal of helping to build a more Catholic America, Dawson’s presence on the Divinity School’s faculty apparently comforted other orthodox Christians, who saw him as a counterweight to Paul Tillich.<sup>96</sup> Additionally, Norman Cantor has judged Dawson’s tenure at Harvard crucial in generating the “wide adherence” which he believes ideas of Christian culture acquired briefly in the United States during the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>97</sup>

Whatever the extent of Dawson’s broader impact, however, his post-war reassessment of America made him (along with Waugh) a rebel among his fellow British rebels. As Meredith Veldman points out,

although anti-Americanism can be seen in the romantic tradition before 1945, it was accentuated by Britain’s decline into a client state of the United

States in the decades after the Second World War. The subordination of British foreign and economic policy to American demands, as well as the growing cultural hegemony of the United States, appeared to threaten not only Britain's independence but also its uniqueness.<sup>98</sup>

Moreover, authors as poles apart politically as Greene and J.R.R. Tolkien were more typical of post-war Catholic and Christian critics in their consistent condemnations of American culture.<sup>99</sup> That Dawson was willing to break with these traditions shows, as Chesterton's similar willingness had, the extent of both his anxieties about totalitarianism and his faith in Catholicism's transformative power.

Peter Conrad has contended that "to the European, the enchantment of America is the variegation of its reality ... The reality of America is selective, optional, fantastic; there is an America for each of us."<sup>100</sup> The Americas that enchanted G.K. Chesterton and Christopher Dawson were protean in just this way. Seen from one perspective, the United States was the incarnation of all they found meretricious in modernity; from another, it was the best opportunity for overcoming the tyrannies of their respective times. The former view predominated in their imaginations initially, as the power of forces they feared seemed to grow along with America's power while Britain's waned. They became increasingly convinced, however, that the United States could-and would-respond favorably to the appeal of what they considered a universal faith. Hence, to Chesterton and Dawson, America was not simply "the last best hope or an awful warning and a cautionary tale."<sup>101</sup> Rather, it contained both wheat and tares, with a fruitful harvest depending on whether or not the good seed was sown in rich cultural soil.

Yet that ground remained rocky when it came to Chesterton's hopes for a distributist democracy or Dawson's for a Christian culture. Despite having some seminal influence in certain circles, their views did not attain wide or enduring cultural currency. Even many of those who agreed that American culture lacked a proper religious basis were not convinced that Catholicism was that fitting foundation.<sup>102</sup> Moreover, several twentieth-century British thinkers who also had a redemptive image of America conceived those portraits in private and personal terms rather than articulating the kind of social and public vision voiced by Chesterton and Dawson.<sup>103</sup> While there is some evidence that John Paul II sees a potentially positive alliance between Catholicism and America's core political principles,<sup>104</sup> other commentators have noted a growing tendency by American Catholics to accommodate modernity.<sup>105</sup> Patrick Allitt's judgment is thus sound: among Americans-including American Catholics-there has been "little patience with fanciful convert schemes such as economic distributism or the finer points of Catholic cultural studies."<sup>106</sup>

Chesterton's and Dawson's practical shortfalls, however, do not diminish the intellectual or historical significance of their efforts. Their depictions of America illustrate the depth of these two thinkers' challenge to modernity, the extent to which their religious beliefs shaped their social criticism, and their willingness to take stands at odds with otherwise likeminded observers. G.K. Chesterton and Christopher Dawson thus helped establish a distinct standpoint from which to view the new American man and so answer Crevecoeur's question. What they finally saw in America was a land of hope, one that could be a light unto the nations by being dedicated to the proposition that the power and the glory belong to that kingdom not of this world.



## NOTES

1 This paper was delivered originally at the 1998 annual meeting of the American Chesterton Society (University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, MN). A version of it will be published in *Christopher Dawson: Historian for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Gleaves Whitney (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2003).

2 The best recent synthetic discussion of this topic is Malcolm Bradbury, *Dangerous Pilgrimages: Trans Atlantic Mythologies & the Novel* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1995). For the continued salience of this issue, see the special issue of *The New York Times Magazine* (8 June 1997) devoted to non-American perceptions of the United States.

3 “Whatever the realities of the Anglo-American relationship, in the minds of participants on both sides of the Atlantic that relationship, in its development, was perceived as being different from other international relationships.” D. Cameron Watt, *Succeeding John Bull: America in Britain's Place 1900-1975* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 159.

4 Commentators on Chesterton's and Dawson's thought usually treat this topic in passing. In Chesterton's case, Maisie Ward offers the most panoramic account, but relies more on anecdote than analysis (*Gilbert Keith Chesterton* [New York: Sheed & Ward, 1943], 524-7, 562-94), as does Joseph Pearce (*Wisdom and Innocence: A Life of G.K. Chesterton* [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997], 254-7, 390-404, 408-10). Other biographical and historical accounts are little more than cursory (See, e.g., Garry Wills, *Chesterton: Man and Mask* [New York: Sheed & Ward, 1961], 154-5; Alzina Stone Dale, *The Outline of Sanity: A Life of G.K. Chesterton* [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1982], 224-6, 279-81; Michael Coren, *Gilbert: The Man Who Was Chesterton* [London: Jonathan Cape, 1989], 223-4, 249-50; Jay Corrin, *G.K. Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc: The Battle Against Modernity* [Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1981], passim). Some thinkers, like Michael Novak, Edward Shapiro, and Kent Hill, have attempted to assess whether America fulfilled Chesterton's hopes and their work is dealt with below. While Robert Royal's "Hotels Are Not Inns: Chesterton and America" (*The Collected Works of G.K. Chesterton*, vol. 21 [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990], 15-34) is more oriented toward the tenets of Chesterton's thought, it does not stress sufficiently the centrality of Catholicism to his outlook and it is also marred by a rather crude misunderstanding of distributism.

Among Dawson scholars, Christina Scott provides an informative narrative of Dawson's work and outlook during his brief tenure in the United States, but does not analyze his ideas in depth nor detail how they had developed over the course of his career (*A Historian and His World: A Life of Christopher Dawson* [London: Sheed & Ward, 1984], 178-203). Chauncey Stillman's memoir is entirely anecdotal ("Christopher Dawson: Recollections from America," *The Chesterton Review* 9 [May 1983]: 143-8). Glenn Olsen focuses more on assessing the contemporary applicability of Dawson's analysis of the American milieu than on analyzing its development and contextualizing it among other Britons' opinions in "American Culture and Liberal Ideology in the Thought of Christopher Dawson," *Communio* 22 (Fall 1995): 702-20. James Hitchcock offers an accurate summary of Dawson's views on American culture, but does not develop his remarks ("To Tear Down and to Build Up: Christianity and the Subversive Forces in Western Civilization," in *Christianity and Western Civilization*, ed. The Wethersfield Institute [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995], 65). Similarly, Gerald Russello provides a valuable precis of Dawson's opinions of America and their context in "Introduction to Christopher Dawson, 'America and the Secularization of Modern Culture,'" *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 3 (Summer 2000): 11-22.

5 There is almost no comparative scholarship of any kind done on these two thinkers. The most thorough attempt is John J. Mulloy, "Christopher Dawson and G.K. Chesterton," *The Chesterton Review* 9 (August, 1983): 226-32. Mulloy's sweeping survey, however, omits any discussion of their akin views on America.

6 With the exceptions noted below, the vast scholarly literature on this topic contains few mentions of Chesterton's attitudes and none of Dawson's. For a representative sampling, see, e.g., Leon Epstein, *Britain-Uneasy Ally* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954), ch. 2; Stephen Spender, *Love-Hate Relations: English and American Sensibilities* (New York: Random House, 1974); J. Martin Evans, *America: The View From Europe* (San Francisco: San Francisco Book Club, 1976); Peter Conrad, *Imagining America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); Marcus Cunliffe, *In Search of America: Transatlantic Essays 1951-1990* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991); Bradbury, *Dangerous Pilgrimages*, op. cit.

Four scholars have explored Chesterton's outlook, none in any detail. George Harmon Knowles offers a good contextualization of Chesterton's views among contemporaneous assessments of America, but his understanding of distributism and Chesterton's application of it to the United States is very crude (*The Jazz Age Revisited: British Criticism of American Civilization During the 1920's* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1955], 144). Allan Nevins is largely dismissive of Chesterton's opinions, especially his stress on Catholicism and distributism (*American Social History As Recorded By British Travelers* [1923; reprint, New York: Augustus Kelley, 1969], 458, 462). Henry Steele Commager is similarly patronizing, claiming that Chesterton's views "can only be regarded as precious," in a sketch of them that is both superficial and inaccurate (*America in Perspective: The United States Through Foreign Eyes* [New York: Random House, 1947], 270). Richard Rapson takes the most account of Chesterton's American notes-despite labeling them "Father Brown in Wonderland" at one point-concluding that "Chesterton brought to bear upon the United States a fresh,

critical, outrageous, and significant perspective—especially upon matters of philosophy and values” (*Britons View America: Travel Commentary, 1860-1935* [Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1971], 222).

7 Chesterton, *Illustrated London News* (hereafter cited as *ILN*), 26 Dec. 1908.

8 Chesterton, *ILN*, 10 Feb. 1906. See also his *ILN* columns of 28 April 1906; 16 March 1907; 29 June 1907; and 27 August 1910.

9 Chesterton, *ILN*, 14 June 1913.

10 Chesterton, *ILN*, 17 Sept. 1910.

11 Chesterton, *ILN*, 22 May 1909. See also his *ILN* columns of 27 Oct. 1906; 9 Oct. 1909; and 1 Oct. 1910. Additionally “American millionaires” are portrayed as villains in *The Man Who Was Thursday* (1908; reprint, New York: Dover, 1986), 82.

12 Chesterton, *ILN*, 29 May 1909. For other references to American “anarchy”—a term of significant opprobrium in the Chestertonian lexicon—see *ILN*, 27 Aug. 1910 and 1 Oct. 1910; and *Appreciations and Criticisms of the Work of Charles Dickens* (1911; *The Collected Works of G.K. Chesterton*, vol. 15 [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989]), 294. For the fast-paced life and its perceived effects, see, e.g., *ILN* 13 Jan. 1906; and 10 Feb. 1906.

13 Chesterton, *ILN* 30 June 1906; and 26 Nov. 1910.

14 See, e.g., Chesterton, *Charles Dickens* (1906; reprint, *New York: The Readers Club*, 1942), 104; and *Appreciations and Criticisms*, 294-5.

15 Chesterton, *ILN*, 27 Aug. 1910. See also *ILN*, 14 June 1913; and 29 January 1916.

16 See, e.g., Chesterton, *Dickens*, 109; and *ILN*, 13 March 1909 for explicit equations of American and British flaws in Chesterton’s early work.

17 Martin Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit, 1850-1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 89.

18 Chesterton, *ILN*, 18 May 1912. See also *ILN*, 5 May 1917; 23 March 1918; and 7 Sept. 1918.

19 See, e.g., *ILN* 30 Oct. 1909; 17 Sept. 1910; 8 April 1911; 27 Sept. 1919.

20 Chesterton, *ILN*, 23 March 1918. See also *ILN*, 8 Jan. 1921.

21 Chesterton, *Dickens*, 102. See also “Time’s Abstract and Brief Chronicle, Act II,” in *The Collected Works of G.K. Chesterton*, vol. 11 (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 69.

22 Chesterton, *ILN*, 28 Feb. 1914.

23 Chesterton, *ILN*, 30 Oct. 1909. See also *Heretics* (1905; *The Collected Works of G.K. Chesterton*, vol. 1 [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986]), 174-85.

24 Chesterton, *ILN*, 14 April 1917.

25 Chesterton, *ILN*, 23 March 1918.

26 For Chesterton’s views on the post-war “Prussianization” of Britain, see, e.g., *The Collected Works of G.K. Chesterton*, vol. 4, *Eugenics and Other Evils* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 293-4.

27 Chesterton’s more earnest interest in the United States in the wake of the war was hardly unique. See Knowles, *Jazz Age*, 21, 1334; and David Dimbleby and David Reynolds, *An Ocean Apart: The Relationship Between Britain and America in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Random House, 1988), 105 for this concern as a general trend among Britons during the interwar years.

28 Chesterton, *ILN*, 19 Dec. 1931.

29 *The Collected Works of G.K. Chesterton*, vol. 5, *The Outline of Sanity* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 151; and *The Collected Works of G.K. Chesterton*, vol. 21, *What I Saw in America* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 128 (hereafter cited as *W.L.S.A.*).

30 Chesterton, *W.L.S.A.*, 160; and *ILN*, 17 Nov. 1923.

31 *The Collected Works of G.K. Chesterton*, vol. 21, *Sidelights* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 567, 552; and *ILN*, 22 Nov. 1930. See also *W.L.S.A.*, 163, 234.

32 Chesterton, *W.L.S.A.*, 171.

33 Chesterton, *W.L.S.A.*, 41-2. Cecil Chesterton had made the same claim, using similar rhetoric—even declaring that the United States was “founded on a creed”—in his *A History of the United States* (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1919), 43, 48-50, 321. Gunnar Myrdal also referred subsequently to the “American Creed.”

34 Chesterton, *WLS.A.*, 48-9, 169-70. See also *Sidelights*, 557. For an embryonic sketch of some of these ideas, see *ILN*, 23 March 1918; and *ILN* 8 January 1921.

35 Chesterton, *WLS.A.*, 177. He had begun to change his mind about this subject even before his first voyage to the United States. See, e.g., *ILN* 18 May 1912; 6 Dec. 1913; and 31 January 1914.

36 Chesterton, *Sidelights*, 523. See also *WLS.A.*, 241.

37 Chesterton, *WLS.A.*, 93.

38 Chesterton quoted in *The New York Evening World*, 1921, Chesterton Archives, Manuscripts Department, The British Library. See also Chesterton, *ILN*, 14 Dec. 1929.

39 Chesterton, *WLS.A.*, 130-2, 148, 207, 205, 202.

40 See Chesterton, *WLS.A.*, 217-18, 248-52, 115, 176-7, 185-9, 1234, 238, 138, 231-2; *Sidelights*, 541; and his *ILN* columns of 17 Nov. 1923, 24 Nov. 1923, and 14 Dec. 1929.

41 Chesterton, *Sidelights*, 596, 582, 550, 597. See also “Exodus from Europe,” *G.K.’s Weekly*, 28 Dec. 1929, 247. Cf. “Are We Inconsistent?” *G.K.’s Weekly* 26 June 1926; and *ILN*, 24 Dec. 1927.

A generation later, American historian Perry Miller postulated the presence of this general dynamic from the other side of the Atlantic. See “The Reimportation of Ideas,” in Bertrand Russell, et. al., *The Impact of America on European Culture* (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1951), 81-95.

42 Chesterton, *Sidelights*, 584, 598. See also *Ibid.*, 523-7.

43 Chesterton, *ILN*, 21 Jan. 1922.

44 Chesterton, *WLS.A.*, 70-1.

45 Chesterton, *Sidelights*, 562, 544.

46 Chesterton, *WLS.A.*, 65.

47 Chesterton, *Sidelights*, 545.

48 Chesterton, *ILN*, 30 March 1929.

49 Chesterton, *WLS.A.*, 67, 102. See also his *ILN* columns of 24 Dec. 1921; 12 July 1924; and 14 March 1931. C.f. *WLS.A.*, 207; *Sidelights*, 623, 629.

50 Chesterton, *ILN*, 19 Dec. 1931.

51 Chesterton, *Sidelights*, 591.

52 Chesterton, *WLS.A.*, 261, 259, 102. See also Chesterton, *Irish Impressions* (London: W. Collins Sons & Co., Ltd., 1919), 143; *ILN*, 4 Aug. 1928; and *All I Survey* (London: Methuen, 1933), 168-9.

53 Chesterton, *Sidelights*, 585-6, 586, 590. See also *ILN*, 28 April 1928.

54 Chesterton, *WLS.A.*, 105, 263, 107.

55 For Chesterton’s views on Smith’s defeat, see *ILN*, 10 Nov. 1928.

56 Thinkers like Michael Novak (introduction to *The Collected Works of G.K. Chesterton*, vol. 5, 29-33), Edward Shapiro (“A Distributist Society,” in *The Collected Works of G.K. Chesterton*, vol. 5, 218-21), and Kent Hill (“Chesterton, Democracy and the Permanent Things,” in *Permanent Things*, ed. Andrew Tadie and Michael Macdonald [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1995], 114-17) have claimed that America became a more distributist society during the twentieth century, but their reasoning is unpersuasive. Among factors their analyses ignore or elide are the persistent prevalence of wage-labor; the increased concentration of wealth in the hands of a smaller economic elite, especially during the 1980s; the growth of agri-businesses, which contradict Chesterton’s notions of peasant principles and his hopes for their spread by restructuring rural life on a centralized, industrial model and thus abetting the dispossession of family farmers; and the continued dominance of a Protestant religiosity and an individualistic ethic in shaping governing socioeconomic attitudes.

57 See the Agrarians’ classic manifesto, *I’ll Take My Stand* (1930; reprint, New York: Harper & Row, 1962) for evidence of this point. In particular, note Allen Tate’s contribution, “Remarks on Southern Religion” (155-175). Though not yet a Roman Catholic when he penned this essay, Tate shared Chesterton’s belief that Protestantism was a “non-agrarian and trading religion,” (168) and agreed that an agrarian culture required a more appropriate theological basis; but, despite implying often that Thomistic Catholicism was such a fitting foundation, Tate consistently elided the opportunity to make this claim explicitly (166-9, 173-5). For the influence of Chesterton (and Dawson) on the central agrarians’ journal, *The American Review*, see Corrin, Battle, 163.

58 Douglas Woodruff, *Plato’s American Republic, Done Out of the Original* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trub-

ner, & Co., 1926). See Knowles, *Jazz Age*, passim for how other cultural critics dealt with the United States in these years. Perhaps the most famous (or infamous) anti-American tract by an anti-modern thinker was C.E.M. Joad, *The Babbitt Warren* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, & Co., 1926). (Joad wrote this volume long before his conversion to Christianity.)

59 Christopher Dawson, "The End of an Age," **The Criterion** 9 (April 1930): 394.

60 Christopher Dawson, *The Gods of Revolution* (London: Sidwick and Jackson, 1972), 45-6, 51 (hereafter cited as *GOR*). Although published posthumously, most of this book was written in the 1930s.

61 See Dawson interview with the *Glasgow Observer*, 1947. A copy of this interview is held in Dawson Correspondence, University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, MN.

62 Christopher Dawson, "Bolshevism and the Bourgeoisie" (1932), in *Dynamics of World History*, ed. John J. Mulloy (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1958), 229.

63 Christopher Dawson, *Progress and Religion* (1929; reprint, Peru, Illinois: Sherwood, Sugden, & Co., 1992), 6 (hereafter cited as *P&R*).

64 Dawson, "The End of an Age," 394.

65 Christopher Dawson, *The Modern Dilemma* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1932), 96.

66 See Dawson, *P&R*, 215; and "The New Decline and Fall," *The English Review* 53 (Sept. 1931): 413.

67 Christopher Dawson, *Christianity and Sex* (London: Faber and Faber, 1930), 6.

68 Chesterton, "The Next Heresy," *G.K.'s Weekly*, 19 June 1926: 233 (emphasis in original), and Dawson, "The End of an Age," 393.

69 Christopher Dawson, *Essays in Order* (New York: Macmillan, 1931), xii-xiii

70 Christopher Dawson, *Enquiries: into Religion and Culture* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1934), 9.

71 Wiener, *Industrial Spirit*, 88.

72 Christopher Dawson, "Religious Liberty and the New Political Forces," *The Month* 183 (Jan. 1947): 44-5. See also "Christopher Dawson," *Jubilee* 8 (April 1961): 27.

73 Christopher Dawson, *America and the Secularization of Modern Culture* (Houston: Univ. of St. Thomas, 1960), 10, 18-19 (hereafter cited as *ASC*).

74 See Dawson to John J. Mulloy, 19 Jan. 1957; and Dawson to Wahrhold Drascher, 22 Nov. 1961. Both letters are in Dawson Correspondence.

75 Dawson, "Religious Liberty and the New Political Forces," 44.

76 Dawson, *ASC*, 17. For the links to the Revolution, see "The Catholic Church and the Democratic State," *Dawson Manuscripts*, University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, MN. Constitutional issues are discussed in Dawson, *The Crisis of Western Education* (1961; reprint, New York: Image 1965), 147 (hereafter cited as *CWE*).

77 Dawson, *Jubilee*, 27. See also Dawson to John J. Mulloy, 22 April 1954, Dawson Correspondence.

78 Christopher Dawson, *Understanding Europe* (1952; reprint, New York: Image, 1960), 169 (hereafter cited as *UE*).

79 Dawson, "Religious Liberty and the New Political Forces," 45.

80 As Daniel Snowman notes, the general sense that Western cultural leadership, for good or ill, had passed to the United States in the train of the war was widespread in Britain: "In the earliest postwar years, above all, it was to America that many British people seemed to have looked for cultural leads ... from the first, the major cultural initiatives and influences came from the bigger, richer, less war-weary of the partners, the U.S.A." Snowman, *Kissing Cousins: An Interpretation of British and American Culture 1945-1975* (London: Temple Smith, 1977), 262. See also Bradbury, *Dangerous Pilgrimages*, ch. 10.

81 See, e.g., Dawson, "Religious Liberty and the New Political Forces," 40-7.

82 Dawson, *UE*, 166.

83 Dawson, *CWE*, 150. See also "The Catholic Church and the Democratic State," op. cit.

84 Dawson detailed the theoretical rationale for this kind of democracy in "Religious Liberty and the New Political Forces," op. cit.

85 Christopher Dawson, "The Tradition and Destiny of American Literature," *The Critic*, Nov. 1957; reprinted in *The Dawson Newsletter* 12 (Fall 1994): 3. See *Ibid.*, 1 for his contention that "unlike any other peoples the United States found their origin in a deliberate act of corporate self-assertion."

- 86 Christopher Dawson, "Education and Christian Culture," *The Commonweal* 59 (4 Dec. 1953): 220.
- 87 Christopher Dawson, "Americans Are An Enquiring, Thinking, Reasoning People," 1957; reprinted in *The Dawson Newsletter* 13 (Summer 1995): 10-11. See also Dawson, "Catholics in the Modern World," *The Tablet* (27 May 1950): 419.
- 88 Dawson quoted in Scott, *Historian*, 194, 193. See also Martin Stannard, *Evelyn Waugh: The Later Years, 1939-1966* (New York: Norton, 1992), 246-9, 271; and George Weigel, "St. Evelyn Waugh," *First Things*, no. 33 (May 1993): 34-5.
- 89 Dawson quoted in "1,247 Graduated from St. John's," *The New York Times*, 15 June 1959, 22.
- 90 Dawson, *CWE*, 83. See also "An Enquiring, Thinking, Reasoning People," 10-11.
- 91 He made this argument most fully in a 29 Jan. 1955 letter to John J. Mulloy, Dawson Correspondence.
- 92 Dawson, "Education and Christian Culture," 220. See also Christopher Dawson, "The English Catholics 1850-1950," *Dublin Review* 217 (Fourth Quarter 1950): 11.
- 93 Dawson, "An Enquiring, Thinking, Reasoning People," 11.
- 94 Dawson quoted in Scott, *Historian*, 181, 198. Ellipsis in original.
- 95 See, e.g., Dawson to John J. Mulloy, 10 Nov. 1960, Dawson Correspondence.
- 96 See John J. Mulloy to Dawson, 30 May 1959, Dawson Correspondence. An affectionate reminiscence of Dawson's Harvard years is found in Daniel Callahan, "Christopher Dawson at Harvard," *The Commonweal* (15 June 1962): 294.
- 97 Norman Cantor, *Inventing The Middle Ages* (New York: Quill, 1991), 331.
- 98 Meredith Veldman, *Fantasy, the Bomb, and the Greening of Britain: Romantic Protest 1945-1980*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 306.
- Such sentiments were not limited to anti-modern protesters. Leon Epstein (*Uneasy Ally*, 35) refers to the "breadth of public resentment concerning a second-fiddle role" felt by Britons; and Denis Brogan points out that this discontent spanned the political spectrum and focused on cultural issues, as both Left and Right "justified their resentment by criticisms of 'the American way of life.'" Brogan, "from England," in *As Others See Us: The United States Through Foreign Eyes*, ed. Franz Joseph (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), 23.
- 99 Greene summarized his life-long disgust with American civilization pithily in 1982: "America is a disaster in its political, ethical, and economic policies. In politics, she is infantile, in ethics totally materialistic, and in economic matters, totally selfish." Quoted in Leopoldo Duran, *Graham Greene: Friend and Brother* (London: HarperCollins, 1994), 57. For a sampling of Tolkien's views spanning nearly three decades, see *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, ed. Humphrey Carpenter (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981), 65, 89, 115, 412.
- 100 Conrad, *Imagining America*, 4-5.
- 101 Cunliffe, *In Search of America*, 310. Emphasis in original.
- 102 Besides the Southern Agrarians, see John Lehmann, "The Lesson of the Pupil," in Russell, et. al., *The Impact of America on European Culture*, 30-3.
- 103 See Conrad, *Imagining America*, clips. 7-9.
- 104 Dennis Teti, "Why the Pope Loves America," *Crisis* 11 (Feb. 1997): 39-43; and "John Paul II on the American Experiment," *First Things* no. 82 (April 1998): 36-7.
- 105 See, e.g., William Pfaff, *Barbarian Sentiments: How the American Century Ends* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989), 185; and Peter Steinfels, "When Is a Catholic Not a Catholic," *The New York Times Magazine*, 7 December 1997, 63-5.
- 106 Patrick Allitt, *Catholic Converts: British and American Intellectuals Turn to Rome* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 167.