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## Is There To Be A Third Europe?

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### Outline of Lecture

- I. Introduction
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  - IV. Can Europe Revive Itself?
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### Introduction

We have considered in the last section the general theme of Revolt Against Europe, or the rejection of the Enlightenment tradition. Which leads to the final topic, a question: Is Europe done for, or can we expect a Third Europe?

I would like to answer this broad question by asking and answering three other questions:

- First, what are some of the characteristics of the cultural transition we are living through?
- Second, what lessons for us are there in an earlier period of transition from the Greco-Roman outlook to that of Christianity?
- Third, what possible characteristics of a future outlook can we identify in the present? Has anyone persuasively argued a new direction for Europe as a culture?

### What are the Characteristics of the Present?

Christopher Dawson used the phrase "Revolt against Europe" in at least two of his books: The Making of Europe (1932) and Understanding Europe (1952). He meant by this phrase the theme I have been presenting in the last section of this course: the last 100 years have been a time of questioning, challenging and rejecting many of the principles of the Enlightenment. Europe as a culture is much older than the Enlightenment of the 17th and 18th centuries, but that is the most recent phase of Europe and is the particular stage against which the reaction of the last 100 years has been aimed. What were the Enlightenment principles so rejected? They are easily summarized.

- Man's worth and dignity rest not on his possession of a soul but something akin to the underlying laws of the universe--reason.
- Both human reason and natural law originate with God whose existence is necessary and important because he created a perfect world--a machine of marvelous proportion and regularity.
- Since human reason is identical to natural law, man can know the basic structure of the universe. Science promises even more: Man can have total knowledge of the world and solutions to all problems

which have hitherto stood in the way of perfect happiness.

- One does not have to take this on mere faith; history demonstrates that there has been a progressive increase in knowledge and intelligence. There is no reason to doubt that man can know and do anything he sets his mind to do.
- The measure of social institutions and personal existence is natural law as understood by reason. Thus man has a right to political freedom and to the pursuit of happiness as he defines it.

No wonder this vision was soon challenged. How naive it all sounds today. The "Revolt Against Europe," as we have seen, has been almost a total rejection of all these principles. Remember these topics?

1. The rise of totalitarian, militarized states from whom democracies barely escaped destruction.
2. Two world wars primarily within the group of nations which share the European heritage.
3. The horrors of deliberate genocide during the second war. Genocide also has blighted African politics (Remember the hundreds of thousands of dead Tutsis in 1994 in Rwanda?)
4. Hostility between major global powers and the prospect of mankind's annihilation. (Rogue minor states may still get nuclear weapons).
5. Challenges to the spirit and procedures of the democracies.
6. A universal sense among intellectuals, writers, and artists that, as William Butler Yeats wrote in 1921,

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;

Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,

The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere

The ceremony of innocence is drowned;

The best lack all conviction, while the worst

Are full of passionate intensity.

("The Second Coming")

Not all about the contemporary outlook is anxiety, despair, and alienation. Nonetheless, it is clear that Europe as a culture is in transition. The question is, transition to what? What will be the next phase of Europe or to what will Europe as a culture give way? Part of the answer lies in some encouraging things about the present. Part also lies in the past, in a period similar to our own.

### **The Transition from Greco-Roman to Christian Culture**

The Roman empire in its heyday parallels our own age as a period of cultural transition and gives us reasons to be both optimistic and anxious about our times. As our own age began with the high hopes of the Enlightenment, so the Roman rule of the ancient Mediterranean world began with the vision of eternal peace and security, of prosperity and material plenty, and the enjoyment of the intellectual and artistic riches of the Greco-Roman tradition. Vergil in the epic Aeneid

hailed Rome's unification of the Mediterranean world as the culmination of all the Greek and Roman past and the beginnings of an eternal Golden Age. Rome had brought all peoples together in one lasting order and made the world safe for civilization.

Much of Vergil's ideal was achieved by Rome during the period of the Pax Romana (14-180 A.D.). The emperors did provide stable and efficient government, material wealth became widespread, and Graeco-Roman civilization came to be widely adopted in the provinces. From all parts of the empire came thanksgiving and praise for the Roman achievement. As one orator said:

In your empire all paths are open to all. No one worthy of rule or trust remains an alien, but a civil community of the world has been established...

You have accustomed all areas to a settled and orderly way of life... Though the citizens of Athens began the civilized life of today, this life in its turn has been firmly established by you, who came later but who, men say, are better.

Ironically, the Roman achievement was an empty sterile ideal for many even as these words were being spoken. The conditions which made the empire strong, prosperous and civilized also produced deeper spiritual and emotional needs than the Graeco-Roman outlook could satisfy. The empire did make life safer for its inhabitants. They enjoyed Roman justice. But they paid a high price for this security: the loss of political freedom to an all-powerful emperor; psychological isolation as individuals with no importance in a vast world-state.

Another of the benefits of the empire, material prosperity, also failed to satisfy. More people than ever before enjoyed a better life materially. More goods were produced than ever before. Yet the result was not the diversity and excitement that nurture creativity. Most of what was produced was stamped by monotony and dullness. These qualities, as well as the restless sensualism of the wealthy, suggest that while materialism may have satisfied physical needs it also created other vital needs which it could not meet.

The third attractive feature of the Roman world--civilization and the life of the mind--also was finally disappointing. Despite the quantitative expansion of intellectual and artistic work, making more of the riches of the Graeco-Roman tradition available to more people, there was little creativity in this work. Almost all creative inspiration had gone. Artists and writers seemed to feel that they had little of importance to say. Even the best of them looked backward, imitating earlier work and displaying a pessimism about life. Seneca, perhaps the leading figure of this period, could only suggest that men retreat from the world into personal virtue. And he did not promise that this course had any lasting significance.

Lying behind these obvious shortcomings in Graeco-Roman writing and art were more serious limitations in the understanding of human nature. First, there was no conviction that the individual human being was worthwhile. Second, there was an emphasis on reason alone and a denial that feelings had any validity. Third, there was a stress on this world and a rejection of any transcendent meaning to life. At the same time, growing numbers of people within the empire sought assurances on these points. They sought justification of their individual worth. They felt emotional yearnings for something more than materialism and wanted some justification that their emotional urges were valid. They wanted assurance that they were linked to a superior transcendent power on whom they, as unique individuals, could rely in this world and the next.

Failing to find satisfaction within imperial life and Graeco-Roman culture, men turned to other views of life and in particular to what we today would call a counter-culture--Christianity. Viewed at its beginning by an educated and humane Roman citizen, Christianity must have seemed an outrageous view of life, as unattractive as one of the radical fringe movements or sects or cults of today is to most of us. And yet Christianity embodied the best of the future. It affirmed that the human personality endured beyond death, that the emotions were as worthwhile as the intellect and that the individual was unique and important. It offered man escape from the limitations of his nature and the world. It promised that man could live eternally as the unique personality he had been in life. Christianity gave to man a new emotional imperative and incentive for living: transcendent love as expressed in the central teaching of the cult, the

sacrificial death of God's son for all men. How fresh and invigorating those views were! How like a new wind freshening the stale air of the Graeco-Roman world.

## Can Europe Revive Itself?

This brings us back to the present and the prospects for our future. Is there a new wind today beginning to freshen the stale air of European culture? What, if anything, is waiting in the wings to succeed Europe? Or is it possible for Europe to be invigorated and renewed? In the past Europe has been self-renewing. Does it still have that capacity? The following are some possibilities, but remember that this is one man's view at the turn of the century, a perspective which is in the making. Remember I am talking about possibilities, not necessarily probabilities.

Can Europe revivify itself in ways suggested by [B. F. Skinner](#), the behavioral psychologist, in [Walden Two](#) and other writings? The tenets of Skinner are, with one exception, a more secularized refinement of the Enlightenment phase of Europe. Walden Two is a scientific utopia based on fundamentals of behavioral psychology. Land, buildings, property and children are communally owned. Social control is based upon rewarding desired behavior. Everything from the rearing of children to the social relations of adults is governed by the experimental attitude: to change behavior you change the environment. Skinner assumes that man can lift himself by his own bootstraps by a science of behavior. Man is perfectible. He is capable of building a rational society and a better world. The difference between his view and that of the Enlightenment is that he does not believe freedom and dignity are inherent in man. Indeed, there are no inherent values; the environment is the source of any values. It is possible that behaviorism is the wave of the future. But I think Joseph Wood Krutch got it right when he said, "(Skinner's) utopian projection is less likely to be a blueprint for the Golden Age than for the theory and practice of hell." ([The Measure of Man](#), 1954)

Are we in for some other kind of hell--perhaps the totalitarian variety of Huxley's [Brave New World](#) or Orwell's [1984](#) with prescribed values? Are we due a future of double think and newspeak based upon rigid controls exerted through technology? Perhaps the future does have in store some kind of autocratic regime in which media planners try to deliberately and systematically manipulate us. Technology can and does give us the modern equivalent of the Roman circuses and bread: tranquility through drugs; painless, vicarious entertainment; pornography to divert us; literature which focuses on the glands, not the human heart. All this is possible--but is it probable? Remember that dictatorships of whatever variety are historically short-lived and we have already seen the limitations of materialism and a purely physical life, however purveyed by technology. Technology helped make totalitarianism possible, but technology also makes dictatorship exceedingly difficult. There is too much information available to too many people to control thought and behavior. In addition, there is a fundamental human quality which always stands in the way of attempts to subjugate man: that yearning to transcend the purely physical existence. As Dostoevsky said in the [Brothers Karamazov](#): "The secret of man's being is not only to live but to have something to live for. Without a stable conception of the object of *life* man would not consent to go on living, and would rather destroy himself than remain on earth, though he had bread in abundance."

Some other possibilities for a Third Europe, quickly?

1. Some refinement of existentialism? Individuals living as solitary centers with as much authenticity and commitment as they can muster. That isn't very appealing, is it? Why bother? As a basis for a common culture? Inconceivable.
2. Some synthesis of Oriental mysticism or Yoga and an acceptance of technology? A kind of modern Stoicism, if you will, in which the individual lives responsibly in the real world while remaining inwardly immune to the storm and stress of modern life. But as a basis for a common culture? Not likely.
3. Some traditional non-western religion--Islam, Zen Buddhism? The problem with all these, except Islam, is that they only enable the individual to understand his predicament. Islam is already a common culture for many, but is it conceivably a successor to Europe with its Judaeo-Christian heritage? Again, I see no basis for that happening.

4. A reaffirmation of the Enlightenment, as was manifested in the "Counter-Culture" of the 1960s and 70s? A movement which gripped the imagination and the energy of many of the young, the Counter-Culture purported to recapture the humanism and optimism of the Enlightenment. Its youthful (often, unwashed) disciples called for a new commitment to humane values and a vague program to remake society in their own image. Their utterances at their best were about living, not merely thinking, writing, and speaking, the values basic to the Enlightenment: a world responsive to human dignity and worth; using science and technology to provide for human needs; treasuring mankind's common humanity. But about such matters as sex and religion they were hostile to traditional values, believing them to be oppressive and conducive to hypocrisy. However diffused their program for remaking society was in the 60s and 70s, the counter-culturists did not remain outsiders. Instead, they went mainstream, into education, politics, the law, journalism, and even business. Two of them became the 42nd President of the United States and his First Lady. Is this outlook the basis for a new common culture? Perhaps, depending on how the "cultural war" today between the former counter-culturists and the traditionalists turns out. I say this because American society is split today over whether to erase the Judaeo-Christian heritage of Europe or to retain it. The counter-culturists want to expunge the spiritual heritage; traditionalists want to preserve it and cherish it. The battle is being fought in the media, in print, and the courts. You should pay attention to it, because the outcome may affect your free-speech rights one day.

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My personal philosophy is beginning to show in the preceding sentences. What do you think? And while we're at it, what do you make of "political correctness," another issue growing out of the Counter-Culture era? Even with their purported humane intentions, these people, I believe, constitute a new form of the Inquisition. They may not be able to burn you like the Inquisitors of old, but would they if they could? If your views aren't in the PC lexicon, they don't want to hear them or join in any fair, rational debate. "There's no free speech for hate speech," they say. American academics are mainly PC, particularly in the "elite" institutions, and are hostile to any except their own cherished ideas. Their version of education is not an even-handed approach to ideas, with a due appreciation of the heritage of Europe, but indoctrination in their own ideology. As you have seen in my previous lectures, I have a point of view, too, but I am asking you what you think, which they will not do. (See [Minding the Campus](#) for more detail)

As my courses have stressed, the basis of Europe is the values deriving from the Judaeo-Christian and Greco-Roman traditions. Those values are not dead, *yet*; perhaps they will never die. Do we not need eternal verities? Is there not a fundamental quality in man which yearns for something beyond mere physical existence, and beyond merely rational thought and humane sentiment? Was not William Faulkner in his [Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech](#) (1950), saying this:

I decline to accept the end of man....I believe that man will not merely endure: he will prevail. He is immortal, not because he alone among creatures has an inexhaustible voice, but because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance.

Can Europe exist apart from the spiritual and philosophic tradition which formed the basis for that culture? I don't think so. And better minds than mine have also said it. We have time for only three: two of them very briefly by name and brief quote; the third, a bit more extensively.

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Before turning to these three, let me tell you about a recent and compelling argument made by Jacques Barzun for the perdurability of man the civilized being beyond the chaos and decadence of contemporary life in [From Dawn to Decadence, 500 years of Western Cultural Life](#) (2000). Barzun opines that eventually (after a long period of boredom and blight) some of our intrepid heirs will find in the ruins of our rejected past the basis for "a new future." It is a long work, worth reading, and rereading. What do you think?

The first of the figures who believed that the future of Western civilization depended on the recovery of its Christian core was [T. S. Eliot](#) (1888-1965), the author of "The Hollow Men" and the "Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." In his later years Eliot found his way back to Christianity as the only basis for a revitalized, unified culture. In [Thoughts After Lambeth](#) (1931), he wrote:

“The World is trying the experiment of attempting to form a civilized but non-Christian mentality. The experiment will fail; but we must be very patient in awaiting its collapse; meanwhile redeeming the time: so that the Faith may be preserved alive through the dark ages before us; to renew and rebuild civilization, and save the World from suicide.”

[Arnold Toynbee](#) (1889-1975), author of the 12 volume series, [A Study of History](#) (1934-1961), came to the same conclusion during a monumental study of civilizations and what made them viable. In ["Christianity and Civilization,"](#) an essay in [Christianity on Trial](#) ( 1948), he speculated on the future of Christianity as a spiritual cement for the future:

“There is one unprecedented feature of our own post-Christian civilization which, in spite of being a rather superficial feature, has a certain importance in this connection. In the course of its expansion our modern Western secular civilization has become literally world-wide and has drawn into its net all other surviving civilizations as well as primitive societies. At its first appearance, Christianity was provided by the Graeco-Roman civilization with a universal state, in the shape of the Roman Empire with its policed roads and shipping routes, as an aid to the spread of Christianity round the shores of the Mediterranean. Our modern Western secular civilization in its turn may serve its historical purpose by providing Christianity with a completely world-wide repetition of the Roman Empire to spread over.”

But I want to spend the rest of this lecture on Christopher Dawson, one of my favorite writers and thinkers. In a long series of books and articles, [Dawson](#) (1889-1970) made it his life's work to convince the open-minded that there was only one durable prospect for Europe, the recovery and reaffirmation of its spiritual heritage. Dawson prepared for his mission by rigorous study, but, like Edward Gibbon, he began with an epiphany, as it were, and in the same place:

"Looking back on that Easter day in 1909, Christopher remembered that he went to visit this church and sat on the steps of the Capitol in the same place where Gibbon had been inspired to write *The Decline and Fall*; it was there that he first conceived the idea of writing a history of culture. An entry in his journal later that year refers to 'a vow made at Easter in the Ara Coeli' and stated that he had since 'had great light on the way it may be carried out. However unfit I may be (he wrote), I believe it is God's will I should attempt it'" (From a biography by Christina Scott, [Historian and His World: A Life of Christopher Dawson](#) (1992), p. 49).

He carried out this calling by teaching, speaking, and writing until ill health silenced him in 1962. You will find it particularly appropriate, after taking this course, that one of his goals was to convince educators to teach students that "Western culture was a Christian creation, [and] that Europe is the daughter of Christendom...." ( From "Education and the Crisis of Christian Culture," 1946).

I have given you links so that you can sample Dawson's thought if you are interested. But I think the heart of his argument is best found in his essay, ["Christianity as the Soul of the West"](#) (1932). To give you something really to think about, I want to quote extensively from this essay. Notice several things in these paragraphs:

**Christianity brings the spiritual order into contact and relation with the world of man.**

**Christianity is the only thing that brings deliverance from the tyranny of material force.**

**The two principles of Christianity: transcendence and catholicity (or universality).**

**Christianity gave unity and order to life for a thousand years in medieval Christendom.**

**Christianity lost its unity during the Reformation and secular culture of the Renaissance, and withdrew more and more into the sphere of individual religious life. European civilization began the process of the rationalization and secularization of life, while continuing to draw on the inherited capital of its Christian past to make liberal, humanitarian, democratic reforms during the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries.**

**What are the alternatives? Return to the spiritual roots or turn to complete social materialism devoid of any spirituality?**

**Christianity must regain both its unity and its social activity.**

**Christianity and civilization will always be in tension. Turning to Christianity for political reasons will be fatal to the spirit of Christianity.**

**But secular alternatives have been tried and failed.**

Here is the quote:

In reality Christianity is not merely a moral ideal or set of ideas. It is a concrete reality. It is the spiritual order incarnated in a historical person and in a historical society. The spiritual order is just as real as the material order. The reason we do not see it is because we do not look at it. Our interests and our thoughts are elsewhere. A few exceptional men, mystics or philosophers, may find it possible to live habitually on a spiritual plane, but for the ordinary man it is a difficult atmosphere to breathe in. But it is the function of Christianity to bring the spiritual order into contact and relation with the world of man. It is, as it were, a bridge between the two worlds; it brings religion down into human life and it opens the door of the spiritual world to man. Its ideal is not a static and unchanging order like that of the other world religions. It is a spiritual society or organism that has incorporated itself with humanity and that takes into itself as it proceeds all that is vital and permanent in human life and civilisation. It aims at nothing less than the spiritual integration of humanity, its deliverance from the tyranny of material force and the dominion of selfish aims, and its reconstitution in spiritual unity.

And thus there are two principles in Christianity which though they sometimes appear contradictory are equally essential as the two poles of the spiritual order. There is the principle of transcendence, represented by the apocalyptic, ascetic, world-denying element in religion, and there is the principle of catholicity, which finds expression in the historic, social, world-embracing activity of the Church. A one-sided emphasis on the former of these leads to sectarianism, as we see in the history of the early Christian sects that refused all compromise with secular civilisation and stood aside in an attitude of negative and sterile isolation. But the Catholic Church rejected this solution as a betrayal of its universal mission.

It converted the ancient world; it became the Church of the Empire; and it took up into itself the traditional heritage of culture that the Puritanism of the sectaries despised. In this way the Church overcame the conflict between religion and secular culture that had weakened the forces of Roman society, and laid the foundations of a new civilisation. For more than a thousand years society found its centre of unity and its principle of order in Christianity. But the mediaeval synthesis, both in its Byzantine and mediaeval form, while it gave a more complete expression to the social function of Christianity than any other age has done, ran the risk of compromising the other Christian principle of transcendence by the immersion of the spiritual in the temporal order—the identification of the Church and the World. The history of mediaeval Christendom shows a continuous series of efforts on the part of orthodox reformers and Catharist and "spiritual" heretics against the secularisation and worldliness of the Church. And, as the wealth and intellectual culture of Western Europe increased, the tension grew more acute.

It was the coming of the Renaissance and the whole-hearted acceptance by the Papacy of the new humanist culture that stretched the mediaeval synthesis to breaking-point and produced a new outburst of reforming sectarianism. It is true that Catholicism met the challenge of the Reformation by its own movement of spiritual reform. But it failed to recover the lost unity of Christendom and was forced to lose touch with the dominant movements in secular culture. Thus Christianity withdrew more and more into the sphere of the individual religious life and the world went its own way. European civilisation was rationalised and secularised until it ceased even nominally to be Christian. Nevertheless it continued to subsist unconsciously on the accumulated capital of its Christian past, from which it drew the moral and social idealism that inspired the humanitarian and liberal and democratic movements of the last two centuries. Today this spiritual capital is exhausted, and civilisation is faced with the choice between a return to the spiritual traditions of Christianity or the renunciation of them in favour of complete social materialism.

But if Christianity is to regain its influence, it must recover its unity and its social activity. The religious individualism of the last age, with its self-centred absorption in the question of personal salvation and private religious emotion, will not help us. The Christianity of the future must be a social Christianity that is embodied in a real society, not an imaginary or invisible one. And this society must not be merely a part

of the existing social and political order, like the established churches of the past; it must be an independent and universal society, not a national or local one. The only society that fulfills these conditions is the Catholic Church, the most ancient yet, at the same time, the most adaptable of all existing institutions. It is true that Catholicism has suffered grievously from the sectarian division and strife of the last four hundred years, but it has succeeded in surmounting the long drawn-out crisis that followed the dissolution of the mediaeval synthesis, and it stands out today as the one remaining centre of unity and spiritual order in Europe. If Christianity is necessary to Europe, the Catholic Church is no less necessary to Christianity, for without it the latter would become no more than a mass of divergent opinions dissolving under the pressure of rationalist criticism and secularist culture. It was by virtue of the Catholic ideal of spiritual unity that the social unity of European culture emerged from the welter of barbarism, and the modern world stands no less in need of such an ideal if it is to realise in the future the wider unity of a world civilisation.

But though Christianity is necessary to civilisation, we must not forget the profound difference that there is between them. It is the great paradox of Christianity, as Newman so often insisted, that though Christianity is a principle of life to civilisation even in secular matters, it is continually at issue with the world and always seems on the verge of being destroyed by it. Thus the Church is necessary to Europe, and yet any acceptance of the Church because it is necessary to society is destructive of its real essence. Nothing could be more fatal to the spirit of Christianity than a return to Christianity for political reasons.

But, on the other hand, any attempt to create a purely political or social religion is equally destined to fail. Nothing is more remarkable than the collapse of all the efforts to create an artificial religion to meet "the needs of the age." Deism, Saint-Simonianism, Positivism and the rest have all ended in failure. It is only a religion that transcends political and economic categories and is indifferent to material results that has the power of satisfying the need of the world. As Newman wrote eighty years ago: "the Catholic Church has accompanied human society through one revolution of its great year; and it is now beginning a second. She has passed through the full cycle of changes in order to show that she is independent of them all. She has had trial of East and West, of monarchy and democracy, of peace and war, of times of darkness and times of philosophy, of old countries and young.

And today she still stands as she did under the Roman Empire, as the representative in a changing world of an unchanging spiritual order. That is why I believe the Church that made Europe may yet save Europe, and that, in the great words of the Easter liturgy

"the whole world may experience and see what was fallen raised up, what had grown old made new, and all things returning to unity through Him from whom they took their beginning."

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1. You may find Dawson's Catholicism offputting. Still, consider his central idea that the basis for Europe is those values nurtured and handed on by Christianity. Even Protestants say in the Apostles Creed, "I believe in ... the holy catholic church".

2. Well what do you think? Is Dawson right? Or is humanism and secularism the direction from which we should expect our salvation as a culture?

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