This article explores the viewpoints of two world historians, Jared Diamond and Christopher Dawson. Diamond, author of *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, has a scientific view of the past. Dawson, a prominent Catholic metaphistorian, sees God’s Providence in history. Their differing historical perspectives highlight three issues: the relationship between history and science, the role of religion in society, and the significance of the individual in history. In examining these issues, Diamond and Dawson present contrasting interpretations of the rise of the West in world history. On this basis, finally, the two project deeply contrasting views of the future.

The striking fact that confronts any historian of world history is the emergence and dominance of Europe over the last five hundred years. This once-obscure peninsula was suddenly catapulted into economic, political, and cultural prominence over the rest of the world. An early and influential scholar in the field of world history took this remarkable fact as the inspiration of his book, *The Rise of the West*.1

The reaction to this controversial and, in many ways, politically incorrect fact has divided the profession into two opposing camps; Eurocentric historians and multiculturalists. Eurocentric historians argue that it was no accident that the West rose to such importance. The reasons given vary, but most stress the importance of Western religion or culture. Opposing them, multiculturalists see nothing special in Western Civilization. Multiculturalists offer a range of explanations: Some emphasize the “stolen” resources of the New World that enabled the West to dominate the globe. More commonly, the current situation is seen as temporary; the West will soon be replaced by another area of the world, usually predicted to be the Far East.2

This division has generated a stimulating debate, marked by strong emotions and racial undertones. Two historians who stand on opposite sides of this divide are Jared Diamond, author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Guns, Germs, and Steel*,3 and the late Christopher Dawson (1889-1970), a renowned Catholic historian chosen to deliver the famed Gifford Lectures. A comparison between Diamond and Dawson reveals deep differences, not only concerning the rise of the West but also in their understanding of world history.
Three issues stand out for comparison:

First, Diamond’s and Dawson’s respective approaches to history highlight an old debate about the relationship between history and science. Should history become more scientific and use the techniques of the natural sciences? Or is history too complex to fit into a scientific category?

Second, what is the role of religion in history? Does religion inspire people to act according to the better angels of their nature? Is there a divine plan? Or is religion simply a tool to control the masses?

Finally, what is the significance of the individual in history? Do some individuals transcend history, driving it into paths unknown, or is the individual buried under larger forces beyond his control?

With a Ph.D. in physiology, Jared Diamond has an unusual background to write a history of the world. Commenting on his book, Diamond writes, “the book’s subject matter is history; but the approach is that of science.” Pressured by journalists to explain his book in one sentence, Diamond offers this summation: “History followed different courses for different peoples because of differences among peoples’ environments, not because of biological differences among peoples themselves.” Currently, there is a tremendous disparity in material wealth in the world, with some areas enjoying great riches while other, less fortunate areas are mired in a degrading poverty. Keenly aware of the “lopsided outcome” of the modern world, Diamond is determined to use a scientific approach to fill in the “intellectual gap” that prevents explanation of this phenomenon. More importantly, Diamond seeks to fill in what he sees as the “moral gap” as well. Diamond believes most people in the West account for this “lopsided outcome” by resorting to racist explanations. While they may not voice these opinions in polite company, Diamond is convinced that most people secretly hold these views, and he aims to repudiate them.

Diamond’s book has a unique starting point: 13,000 years ago, when all the major continents had been settled and all human societies led a hunter-gatherer existence. At this time, the race toward civilization and eventual world domination is at the starting line and it is anyone’s guess who will win.

The continents of Australia and North and South America fell quickly out of the running due to the mass extinction of large mammals known as megafauna. Diamond believes the mass extinctions of megafauna were not caused by disease or climate change; rather, they were exterminated by hunting (the “overkill hypothesis”). This mass extinction at such an early date had drastic consequences for the future of these continents. With fewer large mammals there were fewer
potential candidates for domestication. With livestock limited, food production would be limited, leading to smaller populations, and, perhaps more importantly, people would not build up immunities to a whole host of deadly diseases, many of which have their origins in livestock. When Europeans, disease-scarred veterans of the Black Death and other deadly infections, arrived in the Western Hemisphere, the Indians did not stand a chance. Having no resistance to many seemingly ordinary diseases, Indians died by the millions. But, as Diamond makes clear, their fate was sealed thousands of years earlier with the mass extinctions of the megafauna.

The continent uniquely suited to the initial development of agriculture was Eurasia. The Fertile Crescent, in particular, had a wide range of environments, which led to a variety of potential plant and animal candidates for farming and domestication. Sedentary agriculture was the precondition to gaining the tools necessary to dominate the world.

To return to the original question: Why did Europe become dominant over much of the world? According to Diamond, it is a natural result of the environment. Most of the technology, crops, and domesticated animals that Europe possessed were inherited from the Fertile Crescent, an outcome due to the unique east-west gradient of Eurasia, which facilitated this transfer. But unlike the Fertile Crescent, which was a fragile environment and is now mostly desert, Europe had the advantage of a vigorous environment that has sustained agriculture for thousands of years. With these ultimate factors in place, Europe could develop the proximate factors of guns, germs, and steel necessary to strike out toward world domination.

Diamond ends his book by calling for a new kind of history: one that uses the scientific method. Armed with this method, historians would study cause and effect and arrive at general principles, much like scientists do. The difficulty would be accounting for all the variables in human societies. But Diamond is confident this can be done: “I am thus optimistic that historical studies of human societies can be pursued as scientifically as studies of dinosaurs.”

Opposed to Diamond’s scientific history stands Christopher Dawson. Born in Hay Castle in Wales in 1889, Dawson was educated at Trinity College, Oxford, and eventually held the Chair of Roman Catholic Studies at Harvard. Influenced by John Henry Cardinal Newman, St. Augustine’s City of God, and, perhaps, his future wife, Dawson converted to Catholicism in 1914. He has been described as one of the most important Catholic historians of the past two hundred years. Particularly in the 1940s and fifties, Dawson was one of the
most widely read Catholic historians. However, in the post-Vatican II world, Dawson’s work lost much of its appeal and he was relegated to obscurity. In recent years Dawson’s writing has undergone somewhat of a revival with republication of a number of his books. His work has drawn renewed attention because Dawson sought to answer questions that have come into sharper focus since 9/11: What is the purpose of the West? Is it unique? Is there a deeper meaning to Western Civilization?\(^{12}\)

Even a cursory study of these two historians reveals more than a disagreement about the details of the past; it is also a difference of methodology. Dawson wrote what has been described as *metahistory*. The term apparently derives from the *Metaphysics* of Aristotle, in which he speculates on the ideas behind his conclusions. In much the same way, the metahistorian seeks to go beyond a recounting of facts and attempts to find meaning and significance—a pattern in history. Karl Marx sees class conflict, Spengler theorizes the life cycle of civilizations, and feminists see the oppression of women through history. Today, this type of history is dangerous ground for a historian to take a stand. However, as Dawson points out, all the great historians of the past—whether Toynbee, Hume, or Gibbon—were metahistorians. Only when history formed an alliance with philosophy did it become influential. Dawson comments on the tension between traditional history and metahistory:

> The academic historian is perfectly right in insisting on the importance of the techniques of historical criticism and research. But the mastery of these techniques will not produce great history, any more than a master of metrical technique will produce great poetry. For this something more is necessary—intuitive understanding, creative imagination, and finally a universal vision transcending the relative limitations of the particular field of historical study.\(^{13}\)

For Dawson, a special relationship exists between the study of history and Christianity,\(^{14}\) because the doctrines of Christianity are embedded in history. This makes Christianity a historical religion, unlike Buddhism, for example, which requires no understanding of history in order to understand its tenets. Dawson believed that to be ignorant of history was to fail to be a true Christian. The study of history was also a study of theology. Consequently, Dawson took as his metahistorical inspiration not philosophers, but theologians—the most important being St. Augustine, who saw an eternal struggle between the City of Man and the City of God.
Christianity depends upon history, so it is important not only to arrive at the correct historical facts but also to interpret these facts correctly. As Cardinal Newman points out, the doctrines of Christianity constitute a type of “public property” and are liable to distortion by secular historians. Consequently, history becomes a battleground between secular and religious historians. Edward Gibbon blamed Christianity for the fall of the Roman Empire; Renaissance and Enlightenment historians denigrated the Middle Ages as a time of ignorance and superstition. As a result, it is important for Christians to have a correct understanding of history not only to understand their faith but also to combat their enemies.

According to Dawson, history has a spiritual element, and the metahistorian, guided by the Holy Spirit, seeks the truth in history. “Whatever else is obscure,” he commented, “it is certain that God is the governor of the universe and behind the apparent disorder and confusion of history there is the creative action of the divine law.”\(^{15}\) History, in Dawson’s view, is the record of the unfolding of the Divine plan in which the Incarnation serves as the single, most momentous event. Consequently, Dawson’s writing is far different from that of most historians. Though it is difficult for some to follow or to accept, it tends to be poetic and quite powerful.\(^{16}\)

But this point of view leads to the first major criticism often leveled against Dawson as a historian. Outside of Catholic circles, a chasm exists that is difficult to bridge; his speculations have little value to those who are not likeminded.

Dawson was aware of these criticisms. His defense was that religion is best understood by those who believe in the reality of the spiritual realm. To reduce religion to human rationalization is to dismiss a practice that has been of fundamental importance to every human society that has ever existed. The secularization of culture that has taken place in the modern world is of recent origin and to believe that the current techniques of historical inquiry, which discount religion, are superior to older approaches would be to discount all the great thinkers of the past, such as Confucius, Plato, Aristotle, all of whom believed in the existence of a higher power. It would be to place oneself in the historical minority.\(^{17}\)

In many ways, the difference between Diamond and Dawson is reminiscent of an age-old conflict between history and science.\(^{18}\) Dawson wrote about this conflict, observing, “there is a mutual distrust” between the two disciplines.\(^{19}\) History is a discipline that is difficult to define; it is not strictly a science but it is also not a mere recitation of past events. However, in order to examine the past accurately, the two
disciplines must be seen as complementary. Dawson wrote that science has an important role to play, for it is “impossible to understand the life of man and society without the natural sciences[,]” and it is “impossible to understand a society or a culture in purely historical terms.”20 The scientist plays a key role in examining people’s adaptation to the environment, which determines their economic activity and way of life. But there is a danger, according to Dawson, if science decides to leave history behind and go it alone. Scientists have always been tempted by “the dream of explaining social phenomena by the mathematical and quantitative methods of the physical sciences and thus creating a science of society which will be completely mechanistic and determinist.”21 This temptation is strong because the scientist looks down on history as a “mere literary exercise,” while science exists on the “higher plane of exact scientific method.”22 Inevitably, what the scientist discovers is a past that is governed by universal laws, just as in the sciences. These laws give rise to simple explanations of a complex past.

Like most simple explanations, they can be very seductive. For example, Karl Marx claimed history was governed by the scientific law of economic materialism, which he used to explain all aspects of society, including government, class divisions, and even art and literature. In a similar fashion, Diamond explains the past according to a single variable, the environment. Not only is this simple explanation appealing, it has the added benefit of educating people out of their presumed racial prejudice.23 Dawson notes that these explanations, though attractive, have little staying power: textbooks are “strewn with the corpses of defunct systems” that seek to explain the past according to scientific laws.24 One has the impression that Diamond’s interpretation, though intriguing, is a passing trend and will one day say more about the era in which it was written than it will about the time that came before it.25

Dawson recognizes that science and history are not enemies but need to cooperate to present a balanced picture of the past. The scientist is unaware that man does not live by bread alone: He is a spiritual creature. Dawson believes that what makes each society unique is not its relation to its environment but its culture. Each society possesses a “common conception of reality, a view of life.”26 Though people may inhabit the same geographical environment, they can differ entirely in culture if they possess different spiritual and intellectual traditions. What makes people unique is not their environment, or language, or race but their spiritual outlook: “differences of spiritual outlook and tradition .. are seen in the contrast of Hellene and Barbarian, Jew and Gentile, Moslem and Hindu, Christian and Pagan. In all such cases there is a different conception of reality, different moral and aesthetic standards, in a word, a different inner world.”27
Dawson believes Western culture is unique among the world’s cultures. The great Eastern civilizations “realized their own synthesis between religion and life and then maintained their sacred order unchanged for centuries and millennia.”\textsuperscript{28} Non-Western societies look inward, producing cultures that in Dawson’s opinion are not as capable of future growth and development. The key to Western culture is Christianity, which gives the West an outward, missionary character, and thus an insatiable appetite for exploration, discovery, and evangelization. The dynamism so characteristic of the West is lacking in oriental cultures.

The beginnings of Western culture are found in the period after the fall of the Roman Empire. This period witnessed the coming together of three quite different and separate traditions: the religion of Christianity, which arose in the Near East; the Greco-Roman culture of the Classical world; and the so-called barbarians who invaded and subdued the Empire.

This strange mixture produced Western civilization. The great cultures of the East are what Dawson describes as “autochthonous growths”—areas where religion, people, and culture sprouted from the same soil. This difference is significant, for the West combines diverse elements that result in a dynamic tension. This tension tends to be creative and at the same time fragile, prone to fragmentation. After the fall of the Roman Empire, monasteries played the pivotal role in preserving classical culture, which during the Renaissance became the basis for an educational program called humanism. The traditions of humanism and Christianity came in fertile contact with each other, resulting in a “unique world-changing character.”\textsuperscript{29} Dawson believes Christianity and humanism are “super-ideological in character”; in other words, they “create ideologies, but are not created by them.”\textsuperscript{30} The architects of the modern ideologies, whether “Marx and Mazzini, John Stuart Mill and Herbert Spencer, Saint-Simon and Comte, Herzen and Proudhon,” were all Europeans grounded in a Western culture formed by Christianity and humanism. Dawson notes that their believers have “spread abroad to the four corners of the world,” where they have been set against each other.\textsuperscript{31} It is only in Europe that these ideologies can be best understood and revised.

Dawson divides the civilizations of the world into four groups: China, India, Islam, and Europe. Through most of history, these civilizations lived in relative isolation from one another. Europe played the key role in breaking down the barriers that had isolated the great civilizations and thereby bringing about what is now one world. Dawson believes that this achievement is so significant that there is nothing that
compares to it since the original creation of civilization. The Western penetration of the ancient civilizations has had far-reaching consequences, for this new world civilization has been deeply influenced by Western values.

Even in Dawson’s day the study of world history was controversial. History that focused on Europe and its colonies was tainted as ethnocentric. Dawson was in favor of the new study of world history but, unlike his colleagues, he advocated a return to European history, writing, “it would be a mistake to kick away the ladder of European historiography before we have found a foot hold in the new world.” According to Dawson, it is only by the route of the West that the modern world can be understood. The West, its traditions and ideologies, give a unity and understanding to world history not found anywhere else.

The expansion of the West was not just material. The West became intensely interested in the unknown world of Eastern philosophy and religion. This, in turn, led to the growth of a native educated class and a nationalist spirit in the lands the West dominated. Dawson writes, “Thus it was the West that created Indian nationalism by giving India a new sense of its cultural values and achievements.” Other groups such as Greeks, Persians, and Arabs have recorded the customs and manners of foreign peoples but before the Europeans, none, Dawson observed, had “ever succeeded in getting inside the minds of the societies that they studied and comprehending their culture as a living whole.” An essential characteristic of the West is to have an understanding of and a deep appreciation for other cultures. Dawson was quite aware of the greed and exploitation that accompanied Western expansion, but Westerners were also the greatest defenders of the exploited. The current multiculturalism is a product of this distinctive Western attitude.

Western exploration of Eastern culture resulted in a new oriental nationalism. But this nationalism was contradictory. On the surface it reacted against the West to throw off the oppression of Western colonialism. However, the reformers had no desire to return to the cultural traditions of their own past. These nationalist leaders were deeply attached to the Western tradition. Dawson makes this clear:

The new order in Asia is the work of the new classes that were created by Western education and Western economy, and they have more in common with their opposite numbers in Europe and America . . . than with the priests and princes and peasants who were the authentic representatives of the tradition of Asiatic culture.
Once in power these nationalist leaders proceeded to modernize their society far more thoroughly than the Europeans had ever dreamed. The awakening of a political consciousness was the product of the West’s influence, as formerly there was no notion of the common man participating in government. Dawson wrote, “No doubt oriental and African nationalism is itself of Western origin, like so much else—like democracy and representative government, engineering and sanitation, newspapers and popular education, broadcasting and atom bombs.”

To Dawson, Christianity is the leaven that makes the bread, but for Diamond religion has a strictly utilitarian role. It serves a dual purpose: Religion solved the problem of how strangers, unrelated to each other, could live together harmoniously by creating a broader sense of community in which strangers care for and even love each other; and it was used to justify the transfer of wealth from the affluent to the government elites and society’s poor. Religion justifies this type of economy, which Diamond terms a kleptocracy, and, as a result, the rule of the central government.

Diamond also sees a downside to the formation of an official religion. Religion is used to justify the conquests of the government, creating a religious and patriotic fanaticism that is unheard of in tribal societies. This zeal can take a dreadful toll in bloody wars. Tribes have limited manpower and any military action is undertaken in a way that keeps causalities to an absolute minimum. This fanaticism is one of the many advantages that complex states have over tribal societies.

Diamond diminishes not only the spiritual element but also the role of the individual in history. This is apparent when Diamond addresses the question of why technology evolved at different rates on different continents. “Why were Eurasians, rather than Native Americans or sub-Saharan Africans, the ones to invent firearms, oceangoing ships and steel equipment?” Diamond regards this question and its answer as the central problem of the book. Diamond is convinced that most people in the West secretly harbor the assumption that some people are innately more intelligent than others and that this is the reason for the disparity in the development of technology.

Diamond dismisses what he terms the “heroic theory” of inventions: that a few geniuses suddenly appeared to devise a wide array of new technologies. Diamond declares that the course of history has never been altered by the appearance of one individual. He attempts to show that technology is based upon sedentary agriculture and its ability to produce food surpluses, which in turn permits specialists who can devote themselves full-time to developing technology. Eurasia had the important ingredients to develop new technology, and Europe was fortunate to be on the receiving end of many of these ideas.
Diamond allows no role for the individual to mold, change, or shape historical events. The drive and determination of men like Alexander the Great, Napoleon, and Adolf Hitler, not to mention artists like Michelangelo and Raphael, are “scarcely relevant.” These men play no role in Diamond’s history. Their place is taken by poisonous almonds or acorn-burying squirrels. The great men of history are merely “individual idiosyncrasies,” variables that make the job of the scientist more difficult.42

Similarly, cultural innovations such as the caste system in India or Confucian philosophy are “wild cards” which, Diamond suggests, might best be explained by the “chaos theory,” as in some fields of science. However, societies contain many “cultural idiosyncrasies” unrelated to the environment; consequently, Diamond has little ability to explain them. Diamond concedes that at times there are “historical patterns that remain puzzling” even after the scientist has performed his analysis.43 But Diamond remains convinced that some unknown environmental explanation, yet to be discovered, does exist. Diamond is aware that he can be charged with “geographic determinism”44 but offers no defense. His answer is contained in the subtitle of the book: “The Fates of Human Societies.” His book is not history but fate based on a crude environmental determinism. According to Diamond, environment does determine destiny.

Diamond’s book contains many fine ideas, such as his outline of the criteria for domestication of animals and his description of the evolution of germs. Especially fascinating was his chapter on how Africans became dark-skinned. But Diamond repeatedly reveals on which side of the cultural divide he resides. To describe the expansion of Europe, he uses inflammatory terms such as “extermination,” “kill,” and “decimate.” In sharp contrast, his description of how the black Bantus migrated and eventually dominated Sub-Saharan Africa employs the euphemism “engulfing,” which Diamond describes as a “neutral all-embracing word”—though he admits killing, decimation, and conquest played some role.45 A scientist is expected to be open-minded and to be neutral in his handling of the evidence. Use of this type of language reveals a bias that undermines his claims of objectivity.

Out of the pages of *Guns, Germs, and Steel* emerges the myth of the noble savage reborn.46 In Diamond’s account, Europeans happened to be perfectly situated and contributed little to their eventual dominance. To counter what he regards as Western racist beliefs, Diamond overcompensates. Non-Westerners, such as his friend from New Guinea, Yali, are more intelligent. The most common causes of death among New Guineans are murder, tribal warfare, and accidents.
Those who are less cunning or intelligent are killed while those who are fit survive and contribute to the gene pool. In a more advanced society, the unfit have a greater chance for survival, thereby passing on their genetic traits. Diamond concludes, “in mental ability New Guineans are probably genetically superior to Westerners” but have been restrained by their environment.” His analysis smacks of a social Darwinist who laments that the wrong people won.

Diamond does not realize that what is important is not the material wealth of a society but its culture and values. The West has supplied the framework of values on which the world’s debates take place today. The fiercest and most sophisticated critics of the West have been Westerners or those who are Western-educated. This ability to stand outside of one’s society and criticize it is a uniquely Western habit, one that is commonly attributed to the prophetic tradition of Judaism. This tradition in the West has a long line extending back to Bartolomé Las Casas, Erasmus, and Voltaire—and extending in more recent times to Diamond himself.

Diamond is excellent in providing the context for the expansion of the West, but he fails to provide the why. Societies have motivation, ambition, and an element of will. Dawson believes the answer lies within a Classical Culture that has been shaped by Christianity, giving the West an outward missionary character that is unique when compared with other civilizations. Dawson also believes in the power of the individual to dramatically change history. No one changed the course of history more radically than Jesus of Nazareth. A man born in a cave in a remote part of the world, had a meteoric public career and then was executed as a common criminal. Yet his teaching so inspired future generations that today his spiritual descendants have spread throughout the globe, transforming the world. This is one of those “wildcards” that is hard for a scientist to account for, but for a metahistorian like Dawson much easier to understand and explain.

Not only do Diamond and Dawson have differing views of the past; maybe more importantly, they also have profoundly contrasting views of the future. As a scientist, Diamond believes that he is better equipped to predict the future than the historian, and he bravely takes his own advice in his follow-up book Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed. Diamond examines diverse failed societies, such as the people of Easter Island, the Anasazi of the American Southwest, or the Mayans of Mesoamerica. He analyzes the causes of these failed societies and concludes that in each case the environment had been devastated by deforestation, soil erosion, climate change, or overpopulation, with drastic consequences for the societies involved.
Diamond theorizes that it is only a matter of time before a similar collapse will occur in our own world. He believes the main culprit to be population growth, which will eventually outstrip the earth’s dwindling resources.

During the era when Dawson wrote, it seemed that nationalism and ideology had become so powerful that endless wars would be the result. The contradiction was a modern world that was both united as never before and threatening to destroy itself. As a Christian and metahistorian Dawson ponders these issues and contemplates the future direction of humankind. Dawson believes that religion is the only solution to warring nations and nuclear suicide. This leads us to a second potential criticism of Dawson. In our own day, the roots of the conflict between the West and Muslim extremists is religious in nature. Religion appears to be a divisive force that needs to be downplayed not promoted. Dawson recognizes that whatever world unity has been achieved is the result of secular and not religious forces. Aware of the potential dangers, he concedes that “the fundamental differences between Eastern and Western civilizations (are) of a religious nature. . . . It must be admitted that there is a real difficulty here. . . . faith in God has not always led to peace and goodwill among men.”

Despite these doubts, Dawson believes the current situation presents a unique opportunity for the advance of Christendom. Though the world culture is primarily a secular one, and Christians are a minority, Dawson advises that we must not lose sight of the fact that “we believe as Christians that the hand of God is at work in history and that the great revolution of world culture that is taking place before our eyes is the instrument of divine purpose.”

To Dawson the stage is now set for evangelization on a worldwide scale. Previously, the peoples of the world have been isolated. Yet today, the Church is finally in a position to fulfill its historic destiny. Dawson compares Christianity’s present situation in Asia to its infancy two thousand years ago. At that time the ancient Near Eastern civilizations were on the decline. These civilizations had ceased to provide for the spiritual needs of their people. Still, the resistance of these ancient societies to an upstart religion was just as strong as that of China, India, and Islam today. Despite the odds, Christianity unexpectedly triumphed, and the competing religions and philosophies were almost entirely wiped out. The modern world, according to Dawson, suffers from this same spiritual hunger. “As in the ancient world,” Dawson wrote, “there will be a free market in ideas and any apostle of any creed who is able to satisfy the spiritual needs of modern man will obtain a hearing.”
As a Catholic, Dawson, of course, believes that “Christ is the only answer to the world’s spiritual need.”52 The most fertile ground for this new evangelization, Dawson predicts, will be found not among tradition-bound peasants, but in the same place as in the ancient world: among the dispirited masses of the cities. In the past the great Christian cities bore the names of “Antioch and Ephesus and Corinth and Rome.” Dawson sees a day when the leading Christian cities will be “Calcutta and Bombay, Tokyo, Shanghai, Canton, Singapore.”53 Considering the state of today’s society and the seemingly insurmountable obstacles to converting Asia, all this may sound like the ravings of a madman, but, Dawson would probably reply, to be a Christian means to have faith and, above all, hope.54

In their differing views of the future, Diamond’s grim outlook contrasts sharply with Dawson’s optimism, which sees the West in much the same role as the chosen people of the Old Testament. If Dawson is to be believed, then an understanding of the West and of world history reveals that we are on the threshold of a new era.
Notes


6. Ibid., 25.

7. Ibid., 25.

8. Ibid., 24.


20. Ibid, 22.


23. See Diamond, *Guns*, 420–425, for a comparison of history with science. William McNeill points out that currently the cosmos to scientists is a “chaotic and changeable world” that is based on the point of view of the observer and science that once seemed so objective now increasingly resembles the study of history. See McNeill, “History and the Scientific Worldview,” *History and Theory*, 37, no. 1, (1998), 1–13.


27. Ibid., 76.


29. Ibid., 114.

30. Ibid., 112.

31. Ibid., 114.

32. Ibid., 33.

33. Ibid., 32.

34. Ibid., 37.

35. Ibid., 37-38.
36. Ibid., 44.
37. Ibid., 169.
39. For an alternative point of view, see Lawrence Keeley, War before Civilization: The Myth of the Peaceful Savage (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). Keeley uses ethnographic and archeological evidence to argue that warfare in prehistoric times was far more total than warfare waged by more advanced societies.
41. Ibid., 239–264. For another point of view, see Stanley Jaki, Science and Creation: From Eternal Cycles to an Oscillating Universe (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1986). Jaki argues that Christianity furthered science because it conceives of God as a rational being who created a universe with consistent physical laws. He examines seven non-Christian cultures and concludes that science suffered stillbirths in them because they were burdened by religious frameworks that could not separate the divine from its creation.
42. For an opposing point of view see Sidney Hook, The Hero in History (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2008).
44. Ibid., 408.
45. Ibid., 385.
46. For an alternative point of view see Robert Edgerton, Sick Societies: Challenging the Myth of Primitive Harmony, (New York: Free Press, 1992). Edgerton challenges the idea that cultural practices, such as cannibalism and head-hunting, are simply adaptations to a society’s environment or these practices would have been abandoned.
47. Diamond, Guns, 21.
49. Dawson, Christianity in East and West, 184.
50. Ibid., 197.
51. Ibid., 203.
52. Ibid., 204.
53. Ibid., 207.