

THE FERMENTATION OF CIVILIZATIONS

EVALUATING HUNTINGTON'S "CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS"

By John Henry

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And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us"

Acts 17:26-28

Satellite television is broadcasting Western civilization, its accomplishments and calamities, every waking hour around the globe. Hollywood and Madison Avenue, constructs of a market driven democratic economy in the West, have quickened the pace of development and economic growth in the final decades of the 20th century. The microchip has ushered Western civilization into a new age of ever more rapid development and information transfer to individuals through the World Wide Web. But the rapidity of these recent developments in earnest of globalization, while leading individual participants toward shared materialistic western values, has uncovered deep animosities in civilizations outside the "international community" of Western civilization. Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations" accurately declares the future will be about "civilizations," but he fails to recognize what was described in St. Augustine's opus "City of God," that civilizations of "light" and of "darkness," have fermented in conflict at every stage of history.

Modernism has yielded the paradoxical world of centripetal and centrifugal forces pushing and pulling individuals and groups simultaneously toward Western globalization and localized ethnic nationalism. Conflicts along the "velvet curtain" of Eurasia between the East and West have stirred age-old rivalries and erupted into bitter ethnic and religious struggle. The modern nation-state, only 350 years in existence, could not abrogate the clash of civilizations. The bipolar ideological struggles of the Cold War only suppressed the ancient antipathy of the Roman Catholic Croats and Eastern Orthodox Serbs in the former Yugoslavian republics. Huntington does not take into consideration the Biblical view of man, his fallen nature and the redemptive view of history.

The elements of civilization, shared religious values, language, history, customs, and institutions, have always been at the root of conflict between peoples and nations. Abram, from Ur of the Chaldees, separated from his people in deference to an unknown deity with the promise that he would be the father of many nations. A new civilization was to be born, but not without cost. Israel has

survived conflicts with her neighbors in every generation. Civilizations expand as a perceived identity and destiny is passed along through generations and preserved through closely cherished values. Israel grew in the womb of Egyptian captivity and formed in the wilderness of Sinai. Nevertheless, the civilization of the Israelites expanded into neighboring territories, some of which still exist today. Similarly, the modern Western amalgamate of Israel, has expanded into territory once held by nomadic Arab goat herders in Palestine. The cherished homeland of the Israelites was once that of another civilization, perhaps the Canaanite peoples, the self proclaimed Palestinians. The ideas that create a civilization have prodigious power for evil or for good.

Civilizations will sustain expansion only so long as they are morally potent. Civilizations that vanish are crushed under the weight of their own corruption. Western civilization, though largely secular, is grounded in a Biblical Theism originating again from one individual, Jesus of Nazareth, and the history of the Jews leading up to his life and ministry. This historical individual is the central focus for Western civilization. The ferment of Western civilization is the revealed truth in Jesus Christ. The God of Abraham, personal and all-powerful, created everything. Moreover, every individual can know something of God's nature and character through studying creation. Though dependent on creation, we are responsible for it. Created in God's image with tremendous value, we have freedom and creativity within limits. God sent His Son to atone for sin because of the fallenness of man, radically implying individuality and demanding accountability. God, though separate from His creation, is involved in every detail of life. Individuals also transcend creation through the arts and their imaginations in science & commitment to social reform. These views of God and man, the individual and the group, the citizen and the state are the product of Biblical revelation. The "Clash of Civilization" might best be described in the Roman, Greek & Jewish national, religious, and ethnic events leading up to the birth of Christ, His ministry, His arrest and conviction, crucifixion and resurrection, and commissioning of the Church, the most potent force in the world. Jesus compared the Kingdom of God to a little yeast that leavened the whole lump.

The vision of Mohammed, of dubious origin, has fermented a movement of implied violent Islamic expansionism. Any non-Moslem areas are referred to as Dar Ul-Harb or the "Sea of War" and may be attacked. Claiming to be the prophet of the one true God Allah, Mohammed incited a furor among Arab peoples in the early 7th century that has ethnic, national, and religious virility. A brilliant, if not demonic, mobilization effort is built upon the five pillars of Islam. Modern Islamic movements such as the "Muslim Brotherhood," the "Palestine Liberation Organization" have generated radical revolutionary and violent attacks on Israel and anyone who opposes their view of their fundamental right to liberate Palestine. The HAMAS Islamic Resistance Movement, more radical than the PLO, has declared Jews the target of all their "holy wars." The vision and values of the Islamic civilization is best described in their view of a martyr; those Moslems killed in the Jihad or "righteous war" are deemed martyrs with special dispensation to heaven regardless of the atrocities committed or people killed in the process.

Russian civilization is an enigma. This Slavic people have sought for their identity and destiny in fighting and pushing back invaders. Pagan Russians wisely adopted the Eastern Orthodox Christian religion in 988 AD after a visit to Constantinople. However, Mongolian invaders conquered Russia in 1244 AD and subjected the people to autocratic rule for nearly two centuries. When Ivan the Terrible pushed back the Mongols, their conquest for territory correlated with their need for self-preservation. However, they were backward in the 17th century when Western Europe had experienced a Renaissance and Reformation. Peter the Great sought to "westernize" Russia in hopes that the people could catch up to the Renaissance. Lenin's revolutionary activities after World War I took root in Russia's uncertain identity. Communist totalitarianism and expansionism flourished as the people once again found the conquest for territory correlated with their need for self-preservation. Today, after the fall of communism, it is no different. Angry and humiliated, they have a strong political sentiment embodied in Zyuganov, the Communist Party Chief, who blames the West for all Russia's problems since 1054 AD, the year of the Great Schism between the Eastern Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Church.

Clashes of civilizations occur along fault lines dating back as far as 135 AD when Emperor Hadrian expelled the Jews from Israel no longer recognizing them as a province of the Roman Empire. Western and Islamic fault lines date back 1300 years. Huntington quotes M. J. Akbar, an Indian Muslim author, saying, "The West's next confrontation is definitely going to come from the Muslim world. It is in the sweep of the Islamic nations from the Maghreb to Pakistan that the struggle for a new world order will begin." The challenge for the West is in how to interpret the impending conflict. Huntington's view is mainly that the secularized Western world may fail to recognize the conflict is more than modern, economic, political, and ideological. True, but Huntington ignores his own advice as he offers only modernist, secular solutions. He says, "A world of clashing civilizations is inevitably a world of double standards; people apply one standard to their kin-countries and a different standard to others." This Fatal Attribution Error of international relations, justifying self and blaming others based on type or conditions, is happening every day in relationships between human beings in every culture. This is not a phenomenon of the "clash"; it is the nature of the human heart. Political considerations should not give way to religious in Huntington's age of the "Clash," political considerations of the West should be formed in religious considerations. For example, sympathy and support for the Bosnians should not supercede concern about the Croatian attacks on the Muslims. Western diplomacy should be informed by Biblical principles.

The West continues to lead with open information, military force when appropriate, and humanitarian responses through the leadership of transnational agencies in all cases. The conflicts of the future will not be centered solely on civilizations, but on failed states, environmental crises, and scarce natural resources including water and air. A free Russia can still find its identity and destiny as the gospel is allowed to ferment in that nation. The gospel of Christ is not a Western phenomenon; it is universal and its principles will "fit" in every culture. Huntington says "Western concepts differ fundamentally from those prevalent in other civilizations" and that these concepts have "little resonance in Islamic, Confucian, Japanese, Hindu, Buddhist or Orthodox cultures." Should Calvin have contextualized his "Institutes" for a hierarchical, non-democratic,

feudal, church-ruled state? Huntington says the central axis of world politics in the future is likely to be a conflict between "The West and the Rest." Level Three Analysis of the predictability of nation-states in a uni-polar system, currently existent with the United States as the only super-power, will easily determine the behavior of other states toward a balance of power. This behavior is not because of a clash of civilizations, but predictable nation-state behavior. Huntington's thesis seems to argue that different civilizations simply do not relate; if that is the case, then universal civilization is the aim of the Biblical Christian. In the absence of Biblically informed principles, secular leadership will lead through policy. The IMF and the UN, if left unchecked by Biblical Christian leaders in the West, could represent merely Western imperialist control over non-Western nations. The "Clash" is either the confrontation of light of the Gospel of Christ against the darkness in the nations through a realistic and redemptive view of man, or it is merely a clash of civilizations in darkness.

"And it shall come to pass in the last days, [that] the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people"

Isa. 1:2-4