

# "The World in the Post-1990s"

Part Two  
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We have already learned from our previous lecture, that even though there are many optimists who assure us of the continual triumph of the West, claiming that its values have become universally accepted, Professor Samuel Huntington disagrees. **He affirms that modernization does not imply Westernization.**

Towards the end of the previous lecture, I said:

It is neither prejudice nor a willingness to ignite old conflicts between Islam and the Rest, but simply a realism that requires us to consider that the major challenge of the new century is how to coexist with the growing radicalization of Islamic societies in a globalized world. The age of conquests and re-conquests belongs to the past. The worlds of Samuel Huntington, much as they want to live according to their own cultural traditions, still remain very interdependent. New problems of giant proportions have arisen: **desertification, the lack of adequate water resources for the soaring populations of most Islamic countries, the growing pollution problem that besets the developing countries, all of these facts require the attention of the whole world.** There may be nine distinct worlds, rightly classified, as such, on a cultural basis, but there is only one **oecumene**, one inhabited earth, one world, in which we all live, and one atmosphere that we all share!

What should our position be vis-à-vis the challenges of the New Millennium, and especially, our relationship with the Islamic World? Since the nineties, the West has been unable to formulate a rational and consistent policy to guide our international relations with the more than forty Islamic countries of the world. This can be seen in our rushing to come to help Muslim minorities in Europe, but failing to lift a finger to help the African Christians in Sudan who have lost more than a million of their people in a struggle with the Muslim government. We talk about human rights, but are selective in our going to the help of victims of oppression should they happen to be Christian. Is it because African Christians are of less human value than the Muslims of Bosnia or Chechnya? Are we motivated solely by an ill-defined **national interest**, which may be nothing more than a materialistic concern for our economic prosperity?

When we come to Chapter 4, we notice a very sobering title, The Fading of the West: Power, Culture, and Indigenization. I would like to quote at length from the opening words:

"Two pictures exist of the power of the West in relation to other civilizations. The first is of overwhelming, triumphant, almost total Western dominance. The disintegration of the Soviet Union removed the only serious challenge to the West and as a result the world is and will be shaped by the goals, priorities, and interests of the principal Western nations, and perhaps an occasional assist from Japan. As the one remaining superpower, the United States together with Britain and France make the crucial decisions on political and security issues; the United States together with

Germany and Japan make the crucial decisions on economic issues. The West is the only civilization which has substantial interests in every other civilization or region and has the ability to affect the politics, economics, and security of every other civilization or region. Societies from other civilizations usually need Western help to achieve their goals and protect their interests." (Page 81)

Does not this picture prove the triumph of Western ideals and culture? Why resist the facts that inform us about the greatness of Western nations and the almost universal acceptance of their ideals? But this bold assurance of the West and its global triumph over other civilizations had already been questioned at the end of World War I. The German "writer on philosophy of history, Oswald Spengler (1880-1936), wrote a two volume book that was translated into English under title *Decline of the West* (1918-22), in which he predicted the eclipse of Western civilization." (Webster's Biographical Dictionary, 1943) Spengler had the foresight to see that notwithstanding the great existing empires of Britain, France, The Netherlands, Spain, and Portugal, yet the seeds of decline had already set in among the Western nations. In his old age, he must have noticed with great sorrow, the beginning in his own country of the rise of National Socialism under the leadership of Adolph Hitler. World War II that followed a few years later, while bringing about the victory of the Allies over Germany, Italy, and Japan, nevertheless exhausted their resources. They began, with Britain first to dismantle their huge possessions in Asia and Africa. Then followed the Cold War and the tremendous rivalry between the Free World and the Communist World. The Korean War, the Vietnam War on a large scale, followed. This list does not include the many regional wars such as the one fought by Pakistan and India over Kashmir, and the many Arab-Israeli wars.

So, after enumerating all the factors that point to the greatness of Western culture and its achievements by the end of the 20th century, Professor Huntington gives us the other half of the total picture.

"The second picture of the West is very different. It is of a civilization in decline, its share of world political, economic, and military power going down relative to that of other civilizations. The West's victory in the Cold War has produced not just triumph but exhaustion. The West is increasingly concerned with its problems and needs, as it confronts slow economic growth, stagnating populations, unemployment, huge government deficits, a declining work ethic, low saving rates, and in many countries including the United States social disintegration, drugs and crime. Economic power is rapidly shifting to East Asia, and military power and political influence are starting to follow. India is on the verge of economic takeoff and the Islamic world is increasingly hostile toward the West. The willingness of other societies to accept the West's dictates or abide by its sermons is rapidly evaporating, and so are the West's self-confidence and will to dominate."

In a sense, both pictures of the West as depicted above are true when taken together. Yes, the West at present looks quite dominant, economically and militarily. We Americans like to refer to our country as the only "remaining superpower." But there is no insurance policy that can guarantee the continuation of our status. For greatness does not merely consist in the areas of economics and military power. Rome, at the time of the Lord Jesus Christ was mighty powerful. Its empire stretched from the southern borders of Scotland to Palestine. Eventually Rome fell, as it could no longer

resist the advancing forces of the Germanic tribes. And while the Eastern Roman Empire (known also as Byzantium) lasted for another millennium, yet it succumbed under the attacks of the Muslim armies of the Ottoman forces. Constantinople, the Rome of Eastern Christendom became Istanbul, its magnificent churches were gradually changed into mosques beginning with 1453.

Huntington lists "three major characteristics" regarding the decline of the West.

"First, it is a slow process. The rise of Western powers took 400 years. Its recession could take as long. In the 1980s the distinguished British scholar Hedley Bull argued that 'European or Western dominance of the universal international society may be said to have reached its apogee about the year 1900.' Spengler's first volume appeared in 1918 and the 'decline of the West' has been a central theme in twentieth-century history. The process itself has stretched out through most of the century."

"Second, decline does not proceed in a straight line. It is highly irregular with pauses, reversals, and reassertion of Western power following manifestations of Western weakness."

"Third, power is the ability of one person or group to change the behavior of another person or group. Behavior may be changed through inducement, coercion, or exhortation, demographic, political, technological, social, or other resources."

Professor Huntington argues further that these resources necessary for change "peaked early in the twentieth-century. In other words, at present, we do not seem to possess this necessary quality for genuine renewal. Furthermore, after a long sleep, non-Western cultures have awakened. Once, especially during the colonial era, they may have admired the West, and especially its military power. Nowadays, non-Western nations deride Western values and affirm their own. And remember that these cultures have been, and are still nurtured by their religious traditions. While secularism increases in the West as witnessed by the divorce between morality and political office, non-Western nations proclaim loudly and clearly the greatness of their religions. They seek to integrate their faith in all aspects of their culture, including the political realm. Witness, the recent triumph of the Hindu party in the national elections and the decline of the secular Congress party that began with the Nehru, the British educated Indian leader. Needless to mention the Islamic countries that are witnessing the rise of radical Islam. This phenomenon manifests its most clearly in the attempts to recreate political regimes similar to the rule of Muhammad in Medina and his successors, the Caliphs.

Certainly, it is not my intention to over-emphasize the probability of a dark future for the West. But one cannot, when witnessing the tremendous changes that have taken place lately on the global scene, but be alarmed at the acceleration of the "Decline of the West."

Our ultimate hope, as Christians remains in the great Christian hope, that of the coming of Jesus Christ at the end of time to establish his great and glorious Kingdom. But in the meantime, Christians must begin at home, i.e., in their families and churches. Indeed the fate of Europe at the dawn of the 16th century looked very dark. The Ottoman Turks were expanding their domination of Europe. Twelve years after the writing of the 95 theses of Martin Luther, the Turks laid their first siege against Vienna. Had the Austrian Empire fallen to them, one shudders at what would have

happened to the rest of Europe. The Reformation, notwithstanding unfortunate religious wars that followed it, saved Europe, not only from the Turks, but gave its nations the moral and spiritual resources to gradually change all aspects of life. While disclaiming all claims to a necessary knowledge of American history, yet I can assert that our country, with its basic laws and institutions, could not have come to exist. So, what we urgently need is another deep Reformation that would affect all aspects of our life and culture. And this can only begin within the Church of Jesus Christ. In the end, we can do no better than repeat the prayer of the New Testament Church:

**"Maranatha." Lord Jesus come quickly.**