

"The World in the Post-1990s"

Part Three
by Bassam M. Madany

In part 1 of *The World in the Post-1990s*, we surveyed various theories about the future in the aftermath of the fall of the Soviet Union, and the end of its dominance over Eastern Europe. The USSR was captured by an ideology, which promised a "*brave new world*" if the principles of its dialectical materialism were universally applied. The hope of Marx, Lenin, and Stalin was nothing less than the coming of an earthly Paradise.

Instead of realizing this dream of an earthly heaven, the Marxist experiment witnessed one of the most ruthless centuries in recorded history. The Soviet dictators were infamous in their use of brutal force and treachery as they worked on the realization of their utopia. Instead of lifting up the lives of the peoples of Russia, the Ukraine, and the former Russian possessions in Asia, Russian Communism was instrumental in the liquidation of millions. During the thirties and the forties, some of the most ardent believers in this ideology were themselves persecuted by Stalin, forced to confess their so-called treason, and were executed.

The virus of Marxism spread beyond the USSR. The subversive activities of Soviet Communism became a worldwide phenomenon. In the West, many intellectuals were converted to its totalitarian dream. It is very hard to understand how some of the brightest graduates of British universities who acted as moles for the Soviet Spy agencies while working for the British Intelligence agencies. In the USA, certain intellectuals were duped into accepting Marxism and joined the ranks of the Communist Party. There was, for example, the Alger Hiss case during the early fifties. He worked for the State Department, but at the same time, he was spying for the KGB. Another name that came to the attention of the American public was Whittaker Chambers. Having left the Communist ranks, he came forward to the authorities with the charge that Alger Hiss was actually a Soviet spy, and had been sharing with them over a long period, secret documents of the State Department. While several big names in the establishment came to Hiss' defense, a congressman from California, Richard Nixon, believed in the honesty of Chambers and pursued the case. Eventually Alger Hiss was indicted and imprisoned. But he never confessed his betrayal of his country!

The end of World War II accelerated the activities of International Communism. Several Eastern European countries fell under the grip of the USSR, including that part of Germany that was occupied by the Red Army in 1945. In the late forties, this ideology triumphed in Mainland China. Before too long, the USA got involved in the Korean War. It was hardly over, when the USA got trapped in a new theater of operations in Vietnam. By the time these two wars were over, we had lost over 100,000 of our men.

The 20th century witnessed the temporary triumph of ideology until it abruptly ended with the fall of the Berlin Wall. Some historians and political scientists began to

theorize and set forth the "**End of History**" thesis. They claimed that, since the end Communist domination, Western ideals and institutions would become universally accepted and practiced on a worldwide scale. Professor Samuel Huntington of Harvard University, disputed this thesis in his book, The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order. Rather than seeing the rise of a global Westernized culture, Huntington forecast the rebirth of the old civilizations. In turn, they would be informed by the traditions of their religious roots. This explains the reason for Huntington's classifications of the several emerging "worlds" based on their distinct cultures.

What are the conclusions of Huntington's thought-provoking book? As Christians who are committed to the supreme and final authority of the Word of God and to the historic Christian tradition, may we accept the underlying thesis of Professor Huntington without any criticism?

Before I venture my own views of **The Clash of Civilizations**, I would like to mention two critiques of Huntington's work. During the Kosovo crisis, Samuel Berger of the National Security Council, ventured a severe criticism of Huntington, dismissed the relevance of the religious affiliation of the Albanians and their allegiance to Islam. He said, and I paraphrase from memory, that the planned NATO intervention would "bury for good the theories of the Harvard professor."

A more serious critique of *The Clash of Civilizations* came from Thomas L. Friedman, the Foreign Affairs columnist for *The New York Times*. In his latest book, The Lexus and The Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization, published in 1999, he deals with the impact of the Communication Revolution on the global scene brought about by the computer and the Internet. He mentions several works that have appeared since the end of the Cold War dealing with the shape of the future. Among them, he refers to Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man*, and to Samuel P. Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order*. Friedman makes this observation about both Huntington and Fukuyama:

While all of these works contained important truths, I think none of them really captured the Post-Cold War world in any holistic way. Huntington saw cultural conflicts around the world and wildly expanded that into an enduring, sharply defined clash of civilizations, even proclaiming that the next world war, if there is one, 'will be a war of civilizations.' I believe that ... Huntington vastly underestimated how the power of states, the lure of global markets, the diffusion of technology, the rise of networks and the spread of global norms could trump their black-and-white (*mostly black*) projections.

Turning to Fukuyama, Friedman considered that his book with the startling title, **The End of History**, implied finality to this triumph that does not jibe with the world as I find it.

I do not want to be a harsh critic of Friedman's book. It has excellent chapters that explain the new world of economics in layman's language. Furthermore, I had appreciated greatly his first book published ten years earlier, From Beirut to Jerusalem, which manifested his genius in reporting about strife-torn Beirut as well as the complicated politics of Israel. However, I don't think that his enthusiasm for the

globalization of commerce and communications negate the centuries-old traditions, say of China, India or the Muslim world. The decade of the nineties provided us with a miniature of both the possible and probable conflicts that would prevail in the new century.

A new factor must not be neglected, much as the advocates of Multiculturalism make the mere mention of it as a sign of bigotry and racism. I refer to the presence of large and growing minorities of Muslims all over Western Europe and North America. Before the 1950s, Muslims lived mainly in Daru'l Islam, i.e., in the Household of Islam. But the population explosion in many parts of their world, coupled with the great demand for labor in Western Europe, brought about the influx of millions of Muslims into Western Europe. Add to that, the changed immigration laws that took place in the USA in the 1960s encouraged a similar influx of Muslims into North America. What would be their impact on the lands that allow complete freedoms to all? Would they be able to forget their baggage, their worldview that has never separated religion from politics and culture?

Writing as an historian of civilizations, Samuel Huntington possessed a better vantage point to forecast the future than the young and well-traveled Friedman. In the last chapter of *The Clash*, Huntington writes:

The overriding lesson of the history of civilizations, however, is that many things are probable, but nothing is inevitable. Civilizations can and have reformed and renewed themselves. The central issue for the West is whether, quite apart from external challenges, it is capable of stopping and reversing the internal process of decay. Can the West renew itself or will sustained internal rot simply accelerate its end and/or subordination to other economically and demographically more dynamic civilizations? P. 303

Professor Huntington pointed out in a very frank way the dangers of existing minorities that do not, or cannot, assimilate into the Western civilizations and their basic values.

Western culture is challenged by groups within Western societies. One such challenge comes from immigrants from other civilizations who reject assimilation and continue to adhere to and to propagate the values, the customs, and cultures of their home societies. This phenomenon is most notable among Muslims in Europe. In Europe, Western civilization could also be undermined of its central component, Christianity. Declining proportions of Europeans profess religious beliefs, observe religious practices, and participate in religious activities. The multiculturalists are, as Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., said, 'very often ethnocentric separatists who see little in the Western heritage other than Western crimes.' Their 'mood is one of divesting Americans of the sinful European inheritance and seeking redemptive infusions from non-Western cultures.

Samuel Huntington has issued a clear warning regarding the disintegration of Western culture. He attributes a major role for Christianity in the development and formation of what is known as the Western Civilization. However, he does not manifest a clear adherence to the core of the Christian faith, its foundation on the Holy Scriptures, and the centrality and uniqueness of the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ within

the Christian tradition. This is no harsh criticism of an eminent teacher who possesses an encyclopedic knowledge of the history of civilizations. But nowhere in my reading of his remarkable work, did I discover any sign of a firm commitment to the historic Christian faith.

I found this book missing a central point of a Christian view of history. Over 1500 ago, Saint Augustine of North Africa (354-430,) wrote his great work, The City of God, in the aftermath of the fall of Rome. He elaborated a philosophy of history that was informed by the Biblical revelation. He emphasized the ultimate triumph of the Kingdom of God and the transitory and imperfect nature of all human orders. This great work on a Christian philosophy of history warns us against accepting any utopian scheme, be it religious or secular. But this does not mean that Christians must remain passive as they live in the present world, and ignore the general principles of the Bible that apply to this world and the necessity to work them out in the areas of justice and righteousness.

Furthermore, Christians at the beginning of this new Millennium should not hesitate to proclaim that everything good and beautiful in this Western Civilization, has had Christian roots. More than ever, their testimony should be bold in rejecting all theories and policies that work for the emergence of a vaguely defined global civilization, fashioned according to the dreams of the multiculturalists and religious pluralists. Had the church in the Apostolic and post-Apostolic ages surrendered to the norms and values of the Roman Empire, Western Civilization with its best features would have never seen the light of day. While praying sincerely the prayer of the early church, **Maranatha, Lord Jesus come**, the church must practice its faith in all the areas and dimensions of life, domestic, ecclesiastical, political, economics, and international relations. Genuine Christianity, based on the uniqueness, finality, and superiority of the Lord Jesus Christ, must be proclaimed throughout the globe. While busy working on the earthly manifestations of the *City of God*, Christians must live their lives in the light of the Christian Hope, i.e., waiting patiently and eagerly for the return of the Lord of History. He alone will bring about universal righteousness and lasting peace.