

Review
The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order

Samuel P. Huntington
New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996

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Here is a grand theory of geopolitics for our present post-Cold War era. Huntington believes the world is not on a path to unity but is sharply divided between competing civilizations, especially Western Civilization vs. Islamic Civilization vs. Sinic (Chinese) Civilization (the other major civilizations: Latin American, African, Hindu, Orthodox, Buddhist, and Japanese). In the Cold War, ideology mattered; in this era, religion, culture, ethnicity, and shared history matter more. The West is in comparative decline on the world scene.

Huntington states his case well, explains it thoroughly, and defends it extensively. He explores the status and likely future of the major civilizations on the world scene, especially setting each in relation to the West. He studies inter-civilizational conflict and war thoroughly, and, from that, offers us no comfort. In the end he gives some global policy critique and recommendations for the West, with a very brief note at the very end about the need for all civilizations to find common ground together.

Huntington gives serious attention to religion, but with no expectation or even consideration that there might be major conversions of peoples from one religious adherence to another – something that actually did happen in the 20th century. Still, he shows the kinds of circumstances in civilizational histories when that sort of thing occurs. He expects to see a continually-eroding global consensus on human rights issues, which does not bode well for freedom of religious activity, and thus for international mission, evangelization, or alleviation of anti-Christian persecution. He sees the West in a dangerous state of moral decline, and, even from his secular perspective, would welcome a revival of Christianity, seeing it as important for a positive future for Western Civilization overall. For Huntington, Christianity is useful. But, to him, is it true? If not, how could such a lie be good?

A fascinating, powerful, instructive, very important book; thorough, erudite, even well-written. It represents the state of the art in geopolitical thinking and writing, instructive on many important international questions, large and small. He did not convince me on every point, but certainly on most. This was published 5 years before 9/11, and that attack was an explosive vindication of his theories.