

# THE ESSENCE AND DECADENCE OF CIVILIZATION

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## I

Historians have traditionally understood the range of human activity over the millennia to have been 'linear,' meaning that events have proceeded causationally from ancient times to the present, and that we of the modern world are in some degree necessarily influenced by what has gone before us. Associated with this understanding is the notion that the modern age, since it is the inheritor from past ages, must be superior to past ages in knowledge, enlightenment from superstition, personal freedom and material affluence. Undoubtedly there is some justification for this view, but to one thoroughly indoctrinated in it out of ignorance of the past, there come gasps of wonderment when he/she learns of ancient achievements. A list of just Hellenic accomplishment would include the application of levers, cranks, screws and cogwheels in ancient Greek industries, popular entertainment by marionettes in automatic theatres, war machines operated by air pressure, even automatic door openers, and washing machines that delivered water and mineral soap. In the sciences, the original discoverer that the earth traveled around the sun was Aristarchus, 1800 years before Copernicus. The Earth, known to be a sphere, had its diameter estimated by Eratosthenes, who erred only by eighty kilometers. Anaxomandes discussed the evolution of life from lower forms, long before Charles Darwin, and Democritus speculated upon the atomic nature of matter. Schools of the Hellenistic Age were supported by the state, and at the Alexandrian Museum were lectures on astronomy, geography, physics, mathematics, botany, zoology, anatomy and medicine, where research by vivisection was done on animals. In their laboratories the Alexandrians discovered the nerves and learned that the brain controlled the limbs, a fact already known to the ancient Egyptians. In the earlier Age of Pericles, freedom of the intellect was championed by the Sophists, who openly rebuked the old religion and sought natural causes for earthly and celestial happenings. For males who were not slaves, the development of the individual reached its pinnacle in the Greek city-states, where democratic government complete with paid citizen juries was practiced. When the Romans came on the scene, companies were organized to build roads, bridges and aqueducts, which had shares daily sold to the public as in a modern stock exchange. Apartment living became common. The more fortunate merchants and bankers decorated their houses with the finest furniture, carpets and hangings, and had ornate bronze utensils, baths and sanitary conveniences. A more elaborate house would have tile pipes for conducting hot air to living rooms.

Time and again, in various geographical areas, remarkable achievements were realized in separate and distinct societies, societies which are lumped by the linear historian as the "ancient world". Accordingly, the "modern world" is the direct inheritor of what anomalous progress was made in the past grand age of ignorance, regardless of significant distinctions between concepts of the West and those of by-gone ages. Such distinctions involve our Western thought on space, for example, that would have seemed odd to an ancient Greek. Where we think of a straight line as "the shortest distance between two points," to the Greek mind it was the edge of a block. He/she was concerned with the immediate, sensual "here and now". Consequently, the most favored art form of ancient Greece was sculpture, whereas that of the West has been music. How different the basic outlook of these two societies, yet the Classical world is held to be the direct progenitor of the West. In like manner, the West differs significantly from India which cared nothing about time and never produced an historian. By contrast, ancient Egypt was completely concerned with time, and the subtle influence of time's unidirection was the essential motif of giant hallways, and statues that are meant to be viewed only from the front. In their psychological foundations ancient societies differed remarkably from each other, and from the modern West which in this respect must be considered an entity on its own.

Each civilization has had a unique life, and where there is life there is also death. To the superficially educated, the destruction of a great civilization comes with it being overrun by barbaric hordes, with, presumably, the example of Rome in mind, or through war that brought an end to the Aztec and Carthaginian empires, and which is especially easy to believe in today's age of atomic weapons. This popular view, of course, contains a grain of fact, but is not the kernel of truth, as any informed historian would readily agree with Toynbee's comment that of twenty-one occasions where civilization has been established, nineteen societies perished, not because of conquest but because of evaporation of substance from within. In

other words, where a civilization has been erased from the world we should first look for evidence of decline inside its structure, for this is the enigma: the great societies of the past, like living organisms, have shown cultural deterioration on their own, when their institutions became spiritless, formalized, hierarchical, ruthless shells, which less sophisticated but more vigorous peoples did us the service of ending.

Thus we come to a new realization, that not only did each past civilization possess a character unique to itself alone, after a period of strength and growth each experienced, on its own, internal debilitation and death. Knowing this, the pattern of history loses its 'linearity' and takes the appearance of cycles; which automatically leads us to ask about the West. Is it, too, subject to the same prospect of internal decay? The 'linear' view is not paramount for no reason. In it we can take comfort, for regardless of what conditions may be like at present we can look forward to an ever improving future. There is nothing more certain than progress; history proves it. Our optimism and confidence are shaken the moment we perceive that modern civilization might contain the same mortality of ancient societies, whose skeletons today dot our global landscape.

What evidence, then, do we have that our modern West is no different from past worlds in the sense that it possesses a life destiny, that like them it is subject to birth and decay, and must obey biological laws? To answer, we must explore world history on a holistic basis and see if parallels do exist between the various civilizations, more appropriately named *high cultures*, i.e., Sumerian, Egyptian, Mycenaean, Chinese, Indian, Mexican, Andean, Classical, Near Eastern and Western. The exercise will have more than academic importance since our perceptions have an obvious influence on the decisions we make. Political policies, in particular, will be different if a problem at hand is viewed inevitable and of long term seriousness rather than a temporary aberration, and also modern social trends might be better evaluated in the knowledge that "there is nothing new under the sun".

The most remarkable parallel that can be drawn is between the Classical world and the Western,<sup>1</sup> for reasons that both developed around large bodies of water, the Mediterranean in the case of Greece and Rome, the Atlantic in the case of Europe and America, and both high cultures were originated by essentially the same race. Both began as the product of fusion, when barbaric invaders overran a more ancient and decadent society: the Dorian invasions in Greece over the remains of Mycenae, the Germanic invasions in Europe over the Roman Empire. Such invasions of vigorous barbarians over stagnated societies appear to be an encouraging factor in the birth of new dynamism, as occurred also with the Chow invasions of China and the Aryan invasion of India.

After the barbaric invasion a feudal system developed in Greece, headed by Homeric lords, just as Europe was ruled by feudal barons. Egypt's Pharonic Old Kingdom, the Chow era in China ruled by Chow princes, and Vedic India dominated by rajahs, represented the same feudal ages in those respective high cultures. Society has a hierarchical structure at this early stage, as well as always being intensely religious. So come eras when pyramids, temples and cathedrals are built, when religious thought is deep and religious "truth" is unquestioned.

Cities grew with the beginning of a commercial class and demise of the feudal order, while feudal territories merged into states. In China this maturation took place during the Spring and Autumn era, in India at the close of the Vedic era, in Egypt at the time of the fifth dynasty. The Mayan cities of Tikal, Copan, Naranjo and Piedras Negras flourished, as did Pachacamac, Chimú, Nazca and Tiahuanaco of the Andean Civilization. These are periods of unique perceptions and consequently of creativity in the arts and pure sciences, when people see the universe through new eyes and set out to explore for its own delight. New styles, concepts, innovations and techniques originated that formed the cultural basis of the different high cultures, e.g., the Doric style of Greek architecture, the Gothic of the European. Such early stages are periods of original thought and creativity, of prototype as opposed to stereotype, and the essential soul of each high culture molds those creative expressions, even in the formation of the state. As the Greeks were concerned with the immediate, their concept of nationhood was limited to the city-state, that could be seen round about, whereas to the soaring Gothic spirit the nation could have a spacious extent. The Greeks spread commercial colonies throughout the Mediterranean just as European colonies later spread around the globe. Most notable of the Greek colonies was Syracuse, with opulence not unlike that of colonial Latin America.

The erosion of the feudal order is accompanied by reformation in religion and denouncement by religious leaders of the old social structure. Apollo was the god of Greece's Olympic faith, a god of poetry

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<sup>1</sup> This historical vision follows the presentation of Amaury de Riencourt's "The Coming Caesars".

that symbolized harmony and beauty, whose prevalence became replaced in the seventh century BC by Dionysus, the god of the Orphic-Pythagorean social reformists. In like manner, Egypt's Heliopolitan clergy attempted to destroy the goddess Isis and replace her worship with that of the original sun-god, Ra, Buddha attacked Brahmanism with its caste privileges, and Islam was a religious revolution that eliminated much of Near Eastern art, to become the religion of traders and merchants. Similarly, Protestantism attacked Europe's Catholic faith, discarded the idea of religion as inspirator of the arts and became the pragmatic religion of dynamic capitalism.

With reformation, philosophical thought distanced itself from religion. Rationalism became a necessary adjunct to scientific inquiry, and 'free thinking' was the gentlemanly standard. The Goethes, Kants, utilitarians and empiricists of the West, the Sophists and Epicureans of ancient Greece, the Chinese schools of Mo Ti, Tzu Ssu, Mencius and Shang Yang, of the Indian Lokayata and Paribbajadas, and the rationalism of the Islamic Mu'tazila, were all expressions of an "Age of Reason" in their respective high cultures.

Kings fell and new forms of more egalitarian government arose. The nation concept became more powerful and both Greece and Europe, bursting with internal energy, put their stamp on the known world with the conquests of older civilizations. Thus Alexander conquered Persia and Egypt just as later Europeans subjected India and China. The Greek cities even experienced an "industrial revolution," highlighted by enterprising Corinth. An age of unlimited optimism, peace and opulence ensued, known as the Hellenistic Era of the Classical world, the Victorian Era of the Western. By this time, art had passed its last stage of genuine cultural expression, with the change from Doric to Ionian, from Gothic to Baroque. Pure culture became solidified and secondary to practical undertakings, collecting and cataloguing; scientific inquiry became the servant of medicine and engineering, art in the employ of commerce and luxury. Confidence was supreme and culminated with such constructions as the Titanic, the "unsinkable" ship.

But political and social upheavals mark the end of this purely cultural stage of great societies. All high cultures have experienced a period of fratricidal "world wars": the Peloponnesian Wars of Greece; the period of Warring States in China; in India when the states of Kosala, Avanti, Vidha and Licchavi clashed; the wars of Sumeria that ravaged Ur, Uruk, Nippur, Eridu and Lagash; the destruction of the Mayan world with the conflicts between Uxmal, Mayapan and Chacmultun; the rise of the revolutionary Khurramiyya and Muhammira of the Near East; and, of course, the First and Second world wars of the West. This period may have associated with it a people closer to their barbaric roots who feel biologically superior to the effete populations of the older states. Thus the militaristic Macedonians entered Greek history as did the Prussians in Europe, as well as the Toltecs of Mexico whose stark architecture and fierce art supplanted the more ornate of the Mayas.

These periods of convulsion indicate a metamorphosis in the life of high cultures when genuine creativity has passed and the pure thought of by-gone ages is utilized for pragmatic works. Diffusion of ideas, art forms and patterns of social behavior from the centre of a civilized area is slower than the diffusion of material goods such as tools, weapons, vehicles, etc. The result is often stronger states at the edges of a civilized area than in the centre, because the centre is hampered by vested interests in the employment of its own innovations and because it devotes a larger part of its energy to nonmaterial culture. Inevitably, then, on the margins of a high culture are states predestined to swallow their worlds, which usually, in addition to their material advantages, have established beforehand the necessary psychological and social patterns. Thus it was with Rome, a state on the outskirts of Greek culture, that eventually dominated Classical Civilization. It was little different with Chin, the state that conquered the whole of China, and of Akkad, the city that conquered the Sumerian world, or of the Turks in the Near East. The Aztec Empire if not destroyed would have embraced Mixtecs, Toltecs and Maya, just as the empire of the Incas conquered the Huari and Tiahuanaco peoples of the Andes.

Such world empires are efficient, pragmatic, legalistic and egalitarian. The achievements of Rome were not those of philosophy and art; rather they were of engineering, in the construction of aqueducts and highways, and of Roman law, which in that age of the 'common man' could postulate: "Better that a guilty man go free than an innocent man be convicted". Then as now a person was innocent until proven guilty. Women gained near equality with men, and could be more influential in society than was ever possible in ancient Greece. The practice of freeing slaves grew and laws protected the enslaved. The Roman Empire offered security from pirates and war, and produced an age of unrivalled prosperity upon every land, where roads, bridges, aqueducts, public baths, amphitheatres, constructed sewers, porticos, triumphal arches and grain elevators could be found. Eighty thousand kilometers of road crossed the civilized world, and lighthouses circled the Mediterranean which was speckled with ships carrying huge quantities of goods in regular shipping lanes. The empire was a free trading zone that stretched across the known world. The Pax Ro-

mana became a byword. Exploitive imperialism became a practice of the past. Political authority did not require that one be born a Roman, not even the position of emperor: Trajan was a Spaniard, Severus an African, Diocletian and Constantine were Illyrians. Cities grew cosmopolitan, every free man of the Mediterranean world was granted Roman citizenship in 212 AD, and the government of Rome came to be a world government, ruling for the benefit of all peoples who were extended the same protection of justice, law and order.

"But the obedience of the Roman world was uniform, voluntary and permanent. The vanquished nations blended into one great people, resigned the hope, nay even the wish, of resuming their independence, and scarcely considered their own existence as distinct from Rome."<sup>2</sup>

Psychologically and sociologically the Roman era was little different from the present American. At that time, sensing a loss from former Greek predominance, intellects condemned the leveling Romanization of the world just as Americanization is frowned upon by many today. And, to complete the picture, the East, represented by Persians and Jews, was as hostile to Rome as communist Russia to the United States. The world then was also divided between East and West. The former empire of Alexander in Asia was forever lost to the Romans, and that area, later to hold the Near Eastern high culture, was a constant source of trouble. Alexander the Great imposed Greek culture upon unwilling peoples, which was artificially rooted among them as the Europeanization of Peter the Great among resentful mujiks and clergy. The result was, when the opportunity was seized by the eastern nations to reclaim their own destinies, they became implacable enemies of those powers, Rome and America, that inherited the mantle from Greece and Europe.

The similarity between Roman and American characters was evident from their beginnings. Like the Puritans, the early Romans despised flippancy, instability and anything trifling. They had a sense of responsibility, earnestness and discipline. They revelled in hard work and had simple tastes. In contrast to the early Greek outlook such moral qualities do not suggest imagination or sense of beauty, but it is with such austere qualities that all world empires are begun, and with their loss is associated the downhill slide of the entire civilization. The pursuit of wealth, displayed in their dress, table, houses and furniture, and sensual gratification, became the standards by which Roman life was measured. Great villas arose, supported by slave worked plantations that could undercut the price of grain produced by independent farmers, resulting in the shrinkage of that sturdy class from which Rome, in earlier times, had drawn her armies. Since the country market for manufactured goods was drastically reduced, city industries could no longer dispose of their products and rapidly declined, their unemployed becoming a state burden. Cities enlarged, Rome itself containing one million inhabitants, and drained the countryside of wealth. Rome was filled with a shiftless mass that lived on state doles of meat and grain, that was content with the entertainment of bloody spectacles. Old Roman temples became disused, while imported gods and religions gained popularity. Lack of interest in public affairs increased, formerly responsible citizens turned indifferent. Celibacy and divorce became common, forcing Augustus to pass laws favoring marriage. Yet sterility was sought and the Romans as a race disappeared from history.

Much the same picture is presented in every high culture after the establishment of its world empire. Conflicts and crises increase the need for a strong executive, resulting in the growth of the plebian power which eventually assumes total control. Julius Caesar merely fulfilled an inevitable trend, that was likewise fulfilled by Shih Hwangti of China, by Chandragupta of India, by Sargon II of Sumeria, by Thutmose III of Egypt, and is today exemplified by the growth of the American Presidency. The ensuing periods of decline are ages of giant cities filled with effeminized masses and the high culture surrendering to a mediocre mass of fellahin. From then on there are no grand exploits, one decade is the same as any other, and history becomes the chronology of world dictators. The scene is then set for new waves of barbarians to conquer and create anew. The cycle is complete.

## II

The specter of ten entirely different high cultures undergoing the cycle of birth and decline may lend an aura of inevitability to the process, and pessimism regarding our present Western Civilization since such natural 'aging' would be impossible to stop. Noted historians like Oswald Spengler did consider the vari-

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<sup>2</sup> Gibbon: "The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," vol. 1, p. 49

ous high cultures as living organisms, that were born for no apparent reason but once born had to follow biological laws to their end, hence the English title of his book: "The Decline of the West". Such a fatalistic view leaves the realm of science and enters mysticism. If social development from barbarism follows a defined sequence, that is because the laws of nature, in this case of human nature, are definite and limited. Through the sciences of Sociology, Psychology and Economics we understand and can predict the outcome of social trends in the modern world, and there is no reason why an understanding of the much larger society, embracing an extended period of time, cannot be achieved.

To be sure, there has been no paucity of theories on the rise and fall of civilization, these usually of an environmentalist or circumstantial nature indicative of the liberal disposition of present academia. There has been the leisure theory which postulates that people will erect monuments, develop writing and evolve government only when some are relieved from constant toil, and the hardship theory, advanced by historian Arnold Toynbee, which suggests the contrary, that civilization is a response to an unpromising environment. There is the climate theory which presents the notion that warm countries must be less advanced because of the lassitude a warm climate induces, in contradiction to the historical fact that civilization began in warm countries: Iraq and Egypt. A popular paradigm today is that civilizations collapse because of environmental degradation, especially of soil infertility, yet Egyptian Civilization ended regardless of its Nile banks being renewed with annual floods. A misconception in the public mind is that material progress and luxury are the cause of society's decadence, but such a flourishing epoch as the Renaissance was hardly noted for asceticism. In all these theories the one essential ingredient is missing: it is *people* who are the cause of society, whether the society is dynamic or decadent. To understand the rise and fall of civilization we must first understand the human being.

Instead of trying to milk only past eras for their secrets, possibly an understanding of the reasons for the rise of high cultures may be facilitated by first giving attention to some modern nations that have ascended into the historical limelight. The Soviet Union was a case in point, where over 250 million people were propelled from a backward, agrarian society to the chief military threat of the West in a few decades. Yet Peter the Great, one of the ablest and most dedicated of rulers, failed to westernize Russia. The reason he failed was his inability to inspire the Russian masses with faith in his reforms; instead he actually antagonized the clergy and peasants with those forced innovations. Here we have the first insight into meaningful social change: *mass enthusiasm is essential*. This the Bolsheviks inspired by offering the hope of a "workers' paradise," backed by an inevitable law of history. Once the fallacy of that hope was realized the Soviet Union fell apart, which was not necessary only from failed economics. The Soviet Union was above all an *ideological* construction.

In other nations the wave to modernize has usually taken the form of nationalism. In Germany, industrialization was accompanied with national fervor, as in Turkey, Kemal Ataturk was enabled in his plans to modernize that country by a genuine nationalist movement. Chiang Kai-shek, on the other hand, did not know how to set in motion a soul-stirring enthusiasm in the Chinese masses; consequently he was replaced as China's leader by the communists, who did. Japanese industrialization was not facilitated by nationalism so much as by the Shinto religion which taught abject submission to the emperor, and was supported by the Meiji oligarchy. The consequence of this ideology was that Japan resisted the incursion of Western ideas, whereas the social and economic structures of India and China disintegrated with European colonialism. While resisting institutional collapse, Japan was able to incorporate Western material culture.

Whenever we examine rapid modernization in nations of present history we usually find that a collective idea has proven immensely helpful, if not crucial. Integral to such a collective idea is an extravagant hope for the future. People imbued with such hope become amazing achievers, for they are fired by faith. Given such righteous causes, backed by destiny, believing their opponents are the incarnation of evil, and filled with the spirit of self sacrifice, the adherents of mass movements are geared for formidable, resolute action. The Communist believes he/she is an agent working within the social destiny of mankind, justifying any tactic used against corrupt and exploitive capitalist powers. National Socialist control of Germany lasted only thirteen years, a time span within which that party took a defeated, depression racked nation and came within a hair's breadth of conquering Eurasia, then held off the world during years of total war. Without possessing a collective faith society is atomized into its component individuals, who are without common motivation for mass enterprise and without extraordinary drive beyond personal want. The organizational and motivational assets of a mass movement in present day nations appear evident.

If the ideological state of mind has proven helpful and perhaps indispensable in the development of modern nations, might it not also prove the decisive factor in the rise of high cultures from agriculturalism? Looking at the earliest phase of any high culture, nations have not yet congealed and the manifesta-

tion of a mass movement in a nationalist sense is impossible, but we do find during this earliest stage an intense involvement with *religion*. Of course, a spiritual belief will produce different results on society than a political ideology, that produces results most identified with progress, but the earliest phase of the high culture cycle is not marked by material advancement. The best known today of such epochs is the Middle Ages, when Gothic cathedrals were constructed and care was placed in religious art that resulted in the masterpieces of the Renaissance. It is the same with all high cultures, whether in the erection of ziggurats, pyramids or temples: the most profound cultural expressions bear a religious stamp, that besides being filled with artistic embellishment are usually of massive size, indicating the employment of much manpower and therefore suggesting popular involvement.

Looking at the first cities in history, the Sumerian, we find that they were cities totally dedicated to a god, as the city and its territory were considered the estate of that god and its inhabitants were considered as nothing more than religious servants. The ranking of city importance did not depend on size of population, or on amount of commerce, but on the importance of the god it enshrined. Eridu was a holy city because it was the shrine of the god Enki, whom it was believed created mankind and the arts. The Lugal, or high priest of each city, issued orders for the maintenance of canals, fields, walls, workshops, etc., not in service of the city's people but of its god.

In Classical Greece also, every city-state had its own cult and favored deity: Athena of Athens or Diana of Ephesus. Symbols of the gods were in every household, the dwelling of the king having a shrine. Every autumn the Athenians celebrated the Greater Mysteries, and after those celebrations, which lasted days, none less than the Senate met in extraordinary session to examine whether anyone was guilty of profaning those celebrations. Anyone guilty came under the threat of death. In 399 BC Socrates was condemned to death by the Athenians for his impious teaching regarding old beliefs. The Olympic Games did not originate as athletic competitions but as contests to impress the gods. Pilgrims filled the sacred road leading to the hall of the Mysteries at Eleusis, some performing self mutilation, and as in every early society the great public buildings of Greece were temples, not government buildings or structures of business.

Even capitalism has not been untinged by religion in a dynamic way. Max Weber, in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, noted that all societies have had capitalism, but not all, if any before the West, have known it practiced as a calling, with an ethos beyond mere acquisition. Weber observed the people involved with the building of nineteenth century capitalism, and found a total preoccupation with the making of money, more than necessary for the satisfaction of need or the quest of enjoyment. Wealth was an end in itself, motivated not by the fruits of possession, which were hardly considered, but by a belief that wealth was the ultimate purpose of life, to be pursued for its own intrinsic virtue. National qualities could not account for this conviction because his study was among people of the same nation, Germany; rather he found that a difference in economic achievement divided between Protestants and Catholics. Even the type of education each received reflected different predispositions, Protestants preparing for middle class business life, Catholics preferring the humanities and crafts. Weber traced the economic orientation of Protestants to Calvinistic predestination, which taught that although an individual could not determine his/her salvation, one's worth could be known through works. The result was an induced work ethic that produced phenomenal capital expansion in Protestant lands, even after Calvin's original doctrine was forgotten.

By such consideration of religion's importance in a growing high culture we see that it cannot be ignored as a contributing force in the rise and flourishing of civilization. From the perspective of society, religion has consequences in that it: 1) gives inner motivation for both individual and mass enterprise beyond immediate personal concerns, 2) directs people's attention toward specific goals, preparing them for unified action, 3) gives a 'world view' to the whole society. The main point is that commitment to a *Cause* separates a person from egoistic wants as an individual and places that person in the service of something above the self. People imbued with an ideology are self-sacrificing, and look upon personal gratification as ignoble, upon materialistic preoccupation as a foolish concern. Any selfish or egotistical motivation cannot be identified with the Cause and is therefore secondary, or even a work of the devil. All striving is for the "glory of God," and any windfall, victory or promotion is by "Divine Will". By identifying with a collective body devoted to a holy Cause, individuals share in the aspirations of that body and find a common peoplehood, promoting pride, hope, confidence and worth. Where there is an ideal concept, the ego is diminished; where there is a life purpose, there is aesthetic motivation; where there is a sense of belonging, there is energy for mass achievement. This realization of religion's importance to society has not been noted here for the first time, but has been made numerous times, most pointedly by Jim Nelson Black, author of *When Nations Die*, who found that whether in India, China, Palestine, Greece, Carthage, Africa or South

and Central America, religion has been foundational to the great societies, and when it passed out of people's lives, their societies ended.

As to why, Chaos Theory gives a clue. This is a mathematical theory that has come to prominence in recent years to describe nonlinear dynamic systems such as fluid turbulence. Its most startling discovery is that creation in nature is realized by a delicate balance between the forces of stability and forces of instability, in the interface between order and chaos, and these laws of pattern formation are universal, the mathematics is the same everywhere. We can expect civilization to be of the same genesis, meaning we should look for the same interplay of stability and instability within its structure, and we indeed find it in the tension between the individual with his/her freedoms, as the source of chaos, and of social ideology as the source of order. The progress of civilization comes from the balance between these two forces, from the individual who is ultimately the originator of discovery and invention, and from ideology that gives social motivation and structure. A nation of strong individualists will require a strong ideology, which because of their individualism will produce a dynamic society, but also because of their individualism without a strong ideology will be the more decadent and destructive of the civilization they construct. Social progress is realized in neither a state of barbarism nor in rigid ideological regimes. It is in the balance between freedom and submission, in deference, that high cultures unfold. We may postulate the permutations:

strong individualism + strong ideology  $\Rightarrow$  dynamic progress

weak individualism + strong ideology  $\Rightarrow$  stagnation

strong individualism + weak ideology  $\Rightarrow$  decadence, barbarism

weak individualism + weak ideology  $\Rightarrow$  animal existence

An example of the first would be the Western world until the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, of the second would be the ideological regimes of Islamic and Communist countries, of the third would be the present-day West, and of the fourth would be most areas of the third world.

Devotion to a great Cause can be extraordinary, whether the Cause is spiritual like Christianity or worldly like Communism. People commit body and mind, life, limb and property to their holy crusade. Food and sex are secondary. They can laugh at torture. Since the zealot thinks little of personal welfare compared to belief, he/she cannot give much importance to the concerns of humanity, so when we see mass movements spreading, whether Christianity, Islam, Fascism or Communism, there is always blood flowing. In the mind of the believer the concerns and objectives of the Cause rule out the concerns of the individual or of humanity. Everything except the Cause becomes expendable. An example of how these psychological implications of a Cause override the supposed purpose of the Cause itself is given by Christianity. Scriptural Christianity emphasizes love, equality, forgiveness and pacifism. Practiced Christianity has had contempt for the heathen and "lost," has preached a strong sense of guilt, and has unleashed some of the most savage wars in history. The fervent expectation of fundamentalist Christians today is that they are living in the "end times," a period of plagues and war that will obliterate most of humanity. Jehovah's Witnesses have allowed the death of their children rather than permit them blood transfusions. Here ideology takes first place, not human concerns. The same could be said of Communism, where regardless of its emphasis on human fraternity, as a Cause has thought little of liquidating millions.

Such mass movements may not historically occur merely because of ideology, but because of catalytic conditions that prepare people emotionally for the acceptance of belief. Poverty, especially new poverty, is traumatic, and can be the spawning ground for social change when an idea inspires people with renewed hope. It was during the era of Western Europe's Dark Age immediately following the collapse of the Western Roman Empire, when the minds of Europeans were clean slates with memory of both empire and barbarism lost, when people were submerged in grinding poverty, that Christianity germinated into something more than a spiritual philosophy. It was then, within eighty years from the Abbey of Saint Denis to Beauvais, that the greatest Gothic cathedrals took shape upon the landscapes of Western Europe. Although the social conditions of the Dark Age did not last, subsequent religious expressions in European history indicate the transference of a deep rooted mass ideology over the generations, that gave the name seldom used today: *Christian Civilization*.

If the psychological inducement of a Cause is crucial in the life of civilization, the loss of that in-

ducement must also be significant. Looking at the high culture cycle, we in fact find that in each case the high culture declined after an age of skepticism toward the old belief. All high cultures have had profound influence upon intellectual development, evidenced from calendars, mathematics, writing, inventions and scientific inquiry. Not only are education and expanding knowledge the reasons, the city itself is a mental stimulus as it brings personal confidence and introduces more chance of easy transference of ideas than a rural community. This growing intellectual refinement of civilized people inevitably places them in conflict with the mystical and irrational beliefs of their forbearers. The most ardent 'Bible thumpers' today are hard pressed to rationalize their doctrine in the light of modern knowledge, few today believe that woman came from man's rib, and this conflict was no less evident in ancient societies once nature's phenomena were understood to be natural events that could be predicted. In Greece, for example, the gods seemed banished from the sky by Thales predicting a solar eclipse and proclaiming that heavenly bodies moved in accordance with fixed laws. The Sophists openly took up the challenge of science and directly opposed belief in the gods, for which they often were driven from cities and had their books burned.

And so the period is reached, at some time or other in the life of a high culture, when religion no longer possesses its former vitality. This loss does not occur in one generation; the new irreligion develops because of renewal of generations, when the older fails to arouse the younger with its own convictions. Of what consist the lives of people when they are deprived of their life purpose devotion? The one main way that they can fill this vacuum is with themselves. Thus, in contrast to an age when people were psychologically oriented with an ethical striving, the undermining of religious sentiment leads to a new age when the search for *happiness* becomes paramount. With the undermining of ideology people have no recourse but to fall on themselves for motivation, thereby changing the high culture from one of great music, painting, philosophy, ideas, that in great measure were inspired by the old ideology, to one of pragmatism and concern for the masses. Everything becomes geared for *use* by people, to promote their "happiness". Endeavor then must be justified by utilization, for the average citizen does not require fine art and philosophy. Roads and material enjoyment are of more vital concern. Cultural innovation of centuries combined with desires and intelligence impel a vast expansion of trade, fabulous feats of engineering and an increase in wealth. Outwardly people become sophisticated; inwardly they become egoists, but as egoists they differ from barbarians only in their domesticated tameness, resulting from a refined mode of living.

Since religion up to this point was so important to civilization, it is reasonable to expect a crisis, and it is now that the high culture matures into the latter part of its development, from the 'Greek' stage to the 'Roman'. The first manifestation of crisis is the replacement of religious devotion with nationalism, a well known phenomenon, an example occurring in the Canadian province of Quebec whose population for generations had been devoutly Catholic, but where, with the infringement of the modern world, religion was replaced by the nationalist cause of separation from Canada. On the scale of the entire high culture, waning religious devotion transposes into virulent nationalism, which in turn leads to international rivalry and consequent 'world wars' that draw into being the 'Roman' power giving rise to the imperial state. This is an historical fact demonstrated by every high culture after its age of rationalism.

From there it is simply a question of time to the more blatant manifestations of social decadence. It is this, the people centeredness of a 'modern' world, that underlies the slide from discipline to permissiveness, from thrift to ostentatious materialism, from morality to sensuality, from the sublime in the arts to the exotic and erotic, from defense to pacifism, from nationalism to universalism, and the entire gamut of examples from striving to degeneration. Because humanism, pacifism, equalitarianism, liberalism, communism, universalism, all stem from the same people centeredness of a high culture that has lost its soul, they can all be classified, from the point of view of history, as decadent ideals. Decadence may even include the dysgenic rot of the populace, since with the establishment of a mass society selective forces are eliminated, and in combination with the materialist, hedonist sterility of propertied classes the whole tendency is then to balance numbers in favor of mediocrity.

It is the psychological, value giving and motivational properties of a holy Cause, more than the moral teachings of religion as such, that provide the underlying benefit of religion to a dynamic society. The religions of early high cultures in Asia, Carthage and Central America were absolutely immoral if we take the carnage of human sacrifice as an immorality. The Mayan religion was composed of the grossest superstition, with no ethical doctrine whatever. The licentiousness of ancient Babylonian religious tradition was scorned by the Hebrews, as it was by the Greek historian, Herodotus, yet Babylon was a dynamic focus of civilization. The Western world grew out of Christianity, which has moral teachings, but the humble serfs of the Middle Ages knew precious little of those teachings. The prime motivating factor of religion is

its *idealism*, when people become secondary with their lives and possessions in the service of something above themselves. Thus we see massive efforts made in the expression of that idea, in stone, absorbing much manpower in spite of the meager homes and possessions of the people. Although the Egyptians were well advanced in stone masonry by 2900 BC, and construction of a Pharaoh's tomb required organization and trained leaders, the largest city of the time, Memphis, was built of sun baked brick and wood. To a materialist this is madness. No such idealism is evident in barbaric religion. A barbaric religion is one where the gods, not man, are secondary, who have to be placated to avoid a curse, bribed to encourage fertility and the growth of crops, who are worshipped through fear or petition, not devotion. A barbaric religion is never proselytizing, it never seeks converts. An approximate distinction can be drawn between barbaric religions and those of high cultures, as in the former the gods serve man whereas in the latter man serves the gods.

It may be objected by the eugenicist that there are many examples around the world where people do have their lives filled with religion without them contributing significantly to the cultural history of mankind, and that where inspired by noble Causes, this would not be possible without a sound genetic base in the first place. First, it is not true that intellect is required for sincere belief, and may actually be an impediment to it, so where we find sincere belief we do not *have* to find great cultural and technical innovation. Secondly, high population caliber in no way guarantees that people will automatically be devoted servants of a great ideal. The boat building and warrior skills of the Vikings and their courage in crossing stormy seas testify to the worthy caliber of those ancient people, yet their court consisted of nightly drinking bouts. One king, Fjolnier, drowned in a vat of mead. It is often assumed that the Mongol Empire was won by massive onslaughts; in reality the Mongol warriors were at times outnumbered by those they vanquished. Regardless of acumen, in both cases neither Viking nor Mongol produced a growing, organic society of their own, here termed a high culture, but instead succumbed to the social organisms they invaded. Unlike the Puritans with Christianity, or the Arabs with Islam, what both Viking and Mongol lacked was a life purpose devotion, except possibly to war.

In presenting the above motivational explanation for the rise and fall of civilization it has not been the intention to negate the obvious importance of environmental and eugenic factors. An indigenous technologically advanced civilization is unlikely among the Inuit, as it is among the Sahara Bedouin, for reason of their discouraging environments; and equally true is the claim of eugenicists for the need of substantial numbers of constitutionally and intellectually sound people within a population. The trouble with both of these explanations is that, emphasizing solely the *ability* of populations to rise and prosper, they are premised on the notion that given such ability populations must indeed rise and prosper. No such premise can be automatically established. Ability is a necessary condition, of course, but it is not a sufficient condition. Furthermore, a viable theory is required not only to explain the rise and fall of high cultures, it has to explain their pattern of development, i.e., the massive expenditure of energy on nonutilitarian works during their early stages in contrast to later periods when emphasis on utilitarianism is actually the prelude to decline. This reversed character of the high culture cycle does not make sense if civilization were simply the result of people's struggle for animal existence.