

National Identity: Man's Invention Or God's Creation?

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Samuel P. Huntington, author of the 1998 best-seller *Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, has more recently written another book thoughtful Christians may want to review: *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity*. Huntington brings to the forefront something that others usually leave unsaid, or state only implicitly: the centrality of Americans' self-portrait in the formation of domestic and foreign policy. But of course! Who Americans believe themselves to be plays a pivotal role in their laws and policies.

We in God's church know the national identity of major Western peoples. We know that the founding stock of America was of Israelite descent. Who does Mr. Huntington think we are? Who do the objects of his criticism, the liberal cross-nationalizers so prevalent in government, business, finance, education, and law today, think we are? Who do the American people at large think they are? Huntington offers many answers and raises some questions at the same time.

According to Huntington, Americans do not at all share a common view of who they are. The cleavage is not around the liberal-conservative fault line or even the isolationist-internationalist debate. Rather, the dichotomy is between nationalism and cosmopolitanism. We will look first at the cosmopolitan view, then at its counterpart, nationalism.

The Transnationalists

The word *cosmopolitan* plays so little role in current American discourse that it requires definition. *Cosmopolitan* comes from the Greek words *kosmos* and *polis*—world and city. A cosmopolitan person has made the world *his* city. He feels at home in *all* the world, and is, by Webster's own definition, "not restricted to any locality, field of activity, or sphere of thought." Any good cosmopolitan will surely tell you that he shuns parochialism as narrow close-mindedness, but embraces tolerance, diversity, inclusiveness, and universalism. Morally, he is bound to be a relativist; politically, he is almost always a liberal; religiously, he exults in his atheism. He is proud to consider himself a "change agent," believing that the world should change America.

However, the cosmopolitan's anti-nationalism plays the biggest part in forming his view of America's national identity. A cosmopolitan, virtually by definition, does not identify with his nation of birth so much as with his role as "citizen of the world." To him, national sovereignty has no proper place in policymaking. Patriotism is passé. To be cosmopolitan is to be transnational—to cross national identities, to mix them. The cosmopolitan is a cultural syncretist *par excellence*. Transnationalism is, for Huntington, the essential part of the profile of a cosmopolitan.

Huntington identifies three sorts of cosmopolitans: universalist, economic, and moralist.

1. The *universalist* takes his cues from the old idea of "melting-pot" America: Folk from around the world have come to America, have gladly accepted her culture, and have successfully assimilated into it. As the world's peoples come into contact with American goods and culture, they too recognize the appeal of the "American way of life," and ultimately buy into it. That way of life is universally appealing, avers the universalist.

"The distinction between America and the world is disappearing because of the triumph of American power and the appeal of American society and culture." This seems to be the approach of current President George W. Bush.

2. The *economic* cosmopolitan, writes Huntington, "focuses on economic globalization as a transcendent force breaking down national boundaries, merging national economies into a single global whole, and rapidly eroding the authority and functions of national governments." This is the approach taken by WTO officials and by executives of multinational corporations. This appears to be the approach of former President Bill Clinton.

The result of economic transnationalism is that many

multinational corporations see their interests as separate from America's interests. As their global operations expand, corporations founded and headquartered in the United States gradually become less American. . . . America-based corporations operating globally recruit their workforce and their executives . . . without regard to nationality. The CIA . . . can no longer count on the cooperation of American corporations as it once was able to do, because the corporations view themselves as multinational and may not think it in their interests to help the U.S. government.¹

3. The *moralistic* cosmopolitan believes that a person's highest commitment must be to the so-called world community. Commitment to "humanity" must supersede commitment to nation (and even to family). This sort of cosmopolitan "decries patriotism and nationalism as evil forces and argues that international law, institutions, regimes, and norms are morally superior to those of individual nations." Cosmopolitans of this ilk "abandon their commitment to their nation and their fellow citizens and argue the moral superiority of identifying with humanity at large." Not surprisingly, the International Criminal Court and the Kyoto Accords are among their favorite causes. Clearly, this is the approach of liberal academics and clerics. Just as clearly, former President Jimmy Carter falls into this category.

The following medley of comments from today's academics tells the story. One professor, arguing that "patriotic pride" is "morally dangerous," advocates that people should show "allegiance [to the] worldwide community of human beings." Another believes it is "repugnant" that students should be taught that they are "above all, citizens of the United States. . . . [Our] primary allegiance . . . should not be to the United States or to some other politically sovereign community [but to] democratic humanism." Yet another perceives "the evil of a shared national identity," submitting that the decline of national sovereignty is "basically a positive phenomenon."

Across the board, cosmopolitans "view national boundaries as obstacles that thankfully are vanishing, and see national governments as residues from the past whose only useful function is to facilitate the elite's global operations," Huntington says. They believe

that national sovereignty ought to give way to "individual sovereignty" so that the international community can act to prevent or stop gross violations by governments of the rights of their citizens. This principle provides a basis for the United Nations to

intervene militarily or otherwise in the domestic affairs of states, a practice explicitly prohibited by the UN Charter.²

Huntington estimates that, worldwide, there are today about 20 million of the various sorts of "cosmocrats," an elite corps which will probably double by 2010. Since about 40% are Americans, cosmopolitans comprise "fewer than 4% of the American people."

The Nationalists

Ninety-six percent of Americans are on the other side of the divide. This overwhelming majority tends to be far less liberal, and more traditional, than their cosmopolitan leaders. Their profile includes a widespread "religiosity," founded largely on the "dissenting Protestantism" imported from England by the Puritans. "With adaptations and modifications," the early settlers' "Anglo-Protestantism" has "persisted for three hundred years." It is in this religiosity, Huntington asserts, that the exceptionalism of America is grounded:

Religiosity distinguishes America from most other Western societies. Americans are also overwhelmingly Christian, which distinguishes them from many non-Western peoples. Their religiosity leads Americans to see the world in terms of good and evil to a much greater extent than most other peoples. The leaders of other societies often find this religiosity not only extraordinary but also exasperating for the deep moralism it engenders in the consideration of political, economic, and social issues.³

This pervasive religious culture, Huntington claims, is what makes America what she is. Immigrants *become* Americans by accepting that culture.

Throughout American history, people who were not white Anglo-Saxon Protestants have become American by adopting its Anglo-Protestant culture and political values. This benefited them and the country. Millions of immigrants and their children achieved wealth, power, and status in American society precisely because they assimilated themselves into the prevailing American culture. . . . At the heart of that culture has been Protestantism.⁴

The public's traditionalism and conservatism, according to Huntington, also has its roots in Anglo-Protestantism. He points out that the cosmocrats' ubiquitous liberalism statistically correlates with their irreligiosity. Just as importantly, religious commitment also correlates with nationalistic fervor:

Individuals who are more religious also tend to be more nationalist. . . . Most European peoples rank low in their belief in God and their pride in country. America ranks with Ireland and Poland, close to the top on both dimensions. . . . Americans are overwhelmingly committed to both God and country and see them as inseparable.⁵

These are the nationalists, for whom patriotism is everything but passé. These are the "God Bless America" Americans, fiercely loyal to the nation. Declares Huntington,

Overall . . . Americans overwhelmingly and intensely identify with their country, particularly compared to other peoples. While American elites may be denationalizing, Americans . . . remain "the world's most patriotic people."⁶

Who Is Right—the Public or the Elites?

The cosmopolitan elite perceive America's national identity springing from her mission to *change* the world. To them America is the world's change agent, the facilitator of the new world order. They see America as a coach, mentoring the world's peoples into successfully adopting a brave new world of liberal democracy and market economies. Their allegiance is to the team—the world—rather than to the coach.

The traditionalist and nationalist public sees America's national identity springing from a vital need to *preserve* whatever it is that makes America different—and better—than the world. To much of the public, American culture is not on a par with other cultures but superior to them, producing a better lifestyle. That culture must be preserved.

As disparate as they are, both of these definitions of national identity grow from *individuals'* worldviews. Both definitions are subjective, representing as they do the feelings, aspirations, and opinions—perhaps even the dreams, imaginations, and fantasies—of a subset of the American polity. Both definitions are internally generated, reflecting personal prejudices and beliefs. Both definitions mirror to some degree the social and economic standing of their adherents. To the extent that they do, both definitions bespeak *personal* interests rather than national interests. Personal identities interweave with perceived national identities.

Both definitions are, for all these reasons, dead wrong.

National identity, like personal identity, is not rooted in thinking, but in *being*. People are not what they imagine themselves to be, not what they hope they are, not what they wish they might be. Personal identities are real—not insubstantial, will-o'-the-wisp fantasies. People are what they are. They can change, can become something different, but at any given point in time, people are what they are. A child knows this. Self-help psychology is wrong-minded because it fails to take into account this elemental fact. We are not what we "psych" ourselves up to be; rather, we are what we are. Reality contradicts Descartes dictum, "I think therefore I am." What we are is not the result of what we think we are. Picasso, too, was wrong: Everything we can imagine is *not* real.

Nationhood is much like personhood; national identity is not what people want it to be or imagine it to be. National identity is what it is. It is objective, not subjective. It is imposed from the outside, not fabricated from the inside. It is certainly not homespun. *America's national identity lies in what God says it is, not in what her folk want it to be.*

God's name, *El*, is in the name *Israel*: He prevails on Israel's behalf. God personally renamed Jacob "Israel." God Himself identified Israel as great (Genesis 12:2); teeming with people (Genesis 13:16); prosperous, especially in the case of Joseph (Genesis 49:25); separate from other nations (Numbers 23:9); overspreading the planet (Deuteronomy 33:17); and a witness to the nations (Isaiah 43:19). As part of His creative process, God created Israel's national identity. No amount of idiosyncratic fabrication on the part of Israelites will change that identity. A rose by any other name is still a rose.

Samuel Huntington is unaware of the true national identity of America. The effete cosmopolitans do not know it; the public at large is ignorant of it. God has revealed it to His true church. It is only a matter of time before God disillusiones nationalist and transnationalist Israelites alike, teaching them their real roots. The rose will then bloom (see Isaiah 35).

Endnotes

1 Huntington, Samuel P., "Dead Souls: The Denationalization of the American Elite," *The National Interest*, Spring 2004, p 5.

2 *Ibid.*

3 *Ibid.*

4 *Ibid.*

5 *Ibid.*

6 *Ibid.*