Apocalypse:

…Prelude to Enlightenment

(an historico-religio-cultural interpretation of 'civilized war' at the dawn of the Third Millennium)

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Introduction

> "Our purpose is not to simply follow a process, it is to end the terrorist threats of the civilized world…We are defending both ourselves and the *safety and survival of civilization itself*" (VP Dick Cheney, 31 January 2003, CNN.com, emphasis added)

As I write this paper, the United States of America is assembling a massive military presence around the nation of Iraq: the ancient land of Mesopotamia – *the crucible of civilization*. The purported official rationale for this assemblage is to force the leadership of Iraq to abandon its "weapons of mass destruction." While this is certainly an illumined goal – indeed, the prospects for the whole world would be greatly increased with the elimination of weapons of mass destruction, by *all* nations – the ideological rhetoric interspersed between the purported rationale suggests that there are other, underlying motivations. In this vein, the campaign is being justified with the inveighed moral pretext of "ridding the world of evil," inferring that the USA is on the side of 'good' (i.e. 'God?'). The implication of VP Cheney's opening speech is that the USA is also on the side of 'civilization.' After Iraq has been subdued and conquered, we have been informed that other members of the proclaimed "axis of evil" may be next.

Despite a clear and explicit separation of church and state in the Constitution of the United States, the current leadership of the USA appears to be embarking on a religious crusade of some kind. Looking back at the contentious election of 2000, we can remember that the current president was heavily funded and supported by fundamentalist religious lobbies of both Christian and Judaic persuasions. This president, who regards himself as deeply religious and ran on a platform of "compassionate conservatism" and a promise to "restore morality to Washington D.C.," was then installed, with what seemed to be ideological biases, by the Supreme Court. Once in power, the new administration then proceeded to stack the bureaucracy with staunch conservative and neo-conservative elements, many of whom, like the Attorney General, openly espouse religious orientations as a matter of policy. Given these developments, and considering that the latest 'arch-enemy' of the USA is a scattered band of religious fundamentalists of the *Islamic* persuasion, is it really an exaggeration

to say that the proposed military operation in the former land of Mesopotamia is inspired to be a religious crusade?[1]

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Maybe; but there is still more to this unfolding drama; for it was, more precisely, in ancient Sumer – right there in the southeast corner of present day Iraq – that the world's first true cities appeared. "Civilization" – derived from the Latin root *civitas,* meaning 'city' – is essentially the culture of cities, city life. Those first Sumerian cities inaugurated an entirely new mode of life on Earth, a completely novel and untried way of being, with characteristic social, economic, and religious patterns of organization that were distinctly different from the perennial, pre-civilized modes of life. From those incipient beginnings, the cultural pattern called 'civilization' eventually diffused throughout the entire globe, forcefully displacing the pre-civilized pattern, gaining in strength and momentum and magnitude as it proceeded.

I find it extremely significant that three of the world's most influential religions – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – can ultimately trace their roots back to ancient Sumer, the crucible of civilization. These three religions are, in one way or another, currently embroiled in the military and moral confrontations of the day. Also, significantly, all three religious orientations – in marked contrast with pre-civilized orientations – articulate a monotheistic cosmology and postulate a definite starting point in time (history) leading up to a definite end-time. This end-time, highly emphasized in all three religions, appears amidst the languaging and imagery of a final showdown between the forces of 'good' and the forces of 'evil,' culminating in a grand conflagration that will cleanse the Earth of all 'evil-doers.' This will be the long-anticipated "Judgment Day" – *the end of the world* – Apocalypse.[2]

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I also find it extremely significant, and quite a bit worrisome, to think that right there on those desert plains where the first cities appeared, right there where the gears of civilization were set in motion, right there where a cosmology conceiving an eventual and final end-time had its roots, right there is occurring at the moment a massive military build-up by the USA with the professed moral mission of "ridding the world of evil." What are we to make of these incredible occurrences? Are we in fact witnessing, in these days, the convergence of myth, prophecy, and reality?

In the interest of not appearing sensational or alarmist, and instead simply collating, synthesizing, and interpreting available data, consider the following report written by Walter Russel Mead on WashingtonPost.com, Sunday, February 2, 2003:

> In a June 2002 CNN/Times Magazine poll, 59% of those surveyed said they think the Revelation prophecies will come true. Seventeen percent said the biblical prophecies of the end of the world would be fulfilled in their lifetimes…apocalypse anxiety has moved into the mainstream of American politics and culture…In a worst case, but not unlikely scenario, Biblical prophecies of Armageddon could become self-fulfilling. Zealots

> from any of the three great monotheistic faiths could set off a chain reaction of strike, counter-strike and mass death."

This is mainstream media so casually reporting! Ironically, almost cynically, this startling report appeared beneath a banner advertising the 'Wizards' basketball team, announcing "Wizardry in motion." How prosaic.

And this is not isolated reporting. In a 14 February 2003 article for the *Chronicle of Higher Education,* author Paul S. Boyer writes:

> Does the Bible foretell regime change in Iraq? Did God establish Israel's boundaries millennia ago? Is the United Nations a forerunner of a satanic world order?
>
> For millions of Americans, the answer to all these questions is a resounding yes. For many believers in biblical prophecy, the Bush administration's go-it-alone foreign policy, hands-off attitude toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and proposed war on Iraq are not simply actions in the national self-interest or an extension of the war on terrorism, but part of an unfolding divine plan.
>
> [R]eligion has always had an enormous, if indirect and unrecognized, role in policy formation...
>
> And that is especially true today, as is illustrated by the shadowy but vital way that belief in biblical prophecy is helping mode grass-roots attitudes toward current US foreign policy. As the nation debates a march toward war in the Middle East, all of us would do well to pay attention to the beliefs of the vast company of Americans who read the headlines and watch the news through a filter of prophetic belief.
>
> Abundant evidence makes clear that millions of Americans – upwards of 40 percent, according to some widely publicized polls – do, indeed, believe that Bible prophecies detail a specific sequence of end-times events.

In this paper, I want to examine all these phenomena from a 'whole systems' perspective and see if I can get to the core of the issues. Some immediate questions arise: Is this current march into "war without end" really some kind of unconscious self-fulfilling prophecy? Or is this march a calculated and deliberate action by religiously influenced people who believe Judgment Day is close at hand, and now it's time for the prophecies to be fulfilled? Or maybe what is happening is just all part of a larger cosmic cycle whose prominent objective manifestations need to be realized no matter *who* the specific actors or actions are, and over which we have very little control. Perhaps every living planet in its conscious evolution goes through this kind of growth phase? As if it needs to be said, there certainly seems to be more to this unfolding drama than simply

removing one nation's "weapons of mass destruction," and maybe there is even more to it than simply gaining control of oil reserves.

Whatever the case may be, I will reach my conclusions by the following methodology: First, analyzing the conditions in ancient Sumer that contributed to the rise of the cultural pattern called 'civilization,' describing the nature of civilization in its nascent state; second, tracing the global diffusion of civilization and delineating its characteristic consequences as it proceeded; third, making a connection between a certain religious orientation and the pattern of civilization and contrasting this with pre-civilized religious orientations; and finally, proposing that the wild, disharmonious global dynamics we are witnessing today were inevitable, inescapable, and were inherent in the initial cultural momentum that was inaugurated in ancient Sumer.

Design considerations for a (personally anticipated) *post*-civilization phase will follow.

Sumer: The Crucible of Civilization

Many scholars pinpoint the provenance of civilization to 10,000 years ago,[3] coinciding with the emergence of agriculture as an institution, when human beings first began

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abandoning mobile, hunter-gatherer modes of life in favor of sedentary, tilling-the-land types of existence. By focusing on this point in time, these scholars are, in effect, equating ‘civilization’ with ‘agriculture;’ but I think that is a misrepresentation of available concepts and terms. Sedentary, agricultural, village-based lifestyles were surely a major transformation (usually called a “revolution”) from the previous peripatetic modes of life, but this transformation, this phase, was intermediate to full-scale civilization, and had defining and distinguishable characteristics of its own. These kinds of ‘village-based’ societies established and proceeded for some 5000 years before the first actual cities appeared. Many sedentary, agricultural, village-based societies have persisted even to the present day without assuming those distinctive qualities and characteristics of ‘civilization.’ This distinction is, I believe, very important and is central to any discussion about ‘sustainability.’ I am of the camp, in accordance with the etymology, that deems civilization to be exclusively a *city-based* cultural pattern. By this definition, what is described as ‘civilization’ could not have appeared until the emergence of the first true urban centers, some 5000 years ago, circa 3000 BC.[4]

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Of course, these first true urban centers did not spring up spontaneously, all at once: there was a more or less gradual transition punctuated with ever-accelerating spikes of rapid technical advance along the way. Settlement in the region of Mesopotamia proceeded in the following manner:

"Excavations…have shown us the gradual development of farming and the establishment of settled village communities over the highland zones of the Near East between 9000 and 6000 BC" (Whitehouse, p.30). This was the celebrated origin of agriculture; it occurred on the piedmont zone between the Zagros mountains and the drainage basin of the Tigris and Euphrates river systems. Butzer (in Struever, p.211) goes so far as to say that "this hearth region provided the biological materials [seed plants and herd animals], intellectual achievements, and cultural associations that underlie the civilizations of western Asia, northern Africa, and Europe." Agriculture originated on the piedmont because there was located an abundant diversity of biological resources and because there was received adequate enough rainfall to practice 'dryland farming' techniques.

At some point and for some reason the people began moving off the piedmont and relocating onto the desert plain of the drainage basin. "The Mesopotamian plains were occupied rather late in prehistory, for the simple reason that the environment is unsuitable for the kinds of subsistence economy practiced [in the highlands] before 6000 BC. The first Mesopotamian settlements on the northern plain belong to the early sixth millennium and their agriculture was already dependent on irrigation, while the southern plain [Sumer] may not have been settled before 5000 BC" (Whitehouse, p.40). The Mesopotamian plains are just not as hospitable as the rolling hills of the piedmont: they are so scorching hot by mid-Summer that the planting of crops must wait till

October; there is scant rainfall, a relative absence of biological resources such as timber and perennial food plants, and the desert plains are largely devoid of mineral resources.[5] These plains are also located at the crossroads between travelers (or

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raiders) coming from Asia, Africa, or Europe, so establishing settlements there exposed them and made them vulnerable to plunder. On top of all that, the necessity of irrigation just adds more workload to the day. For all these reasons, it can be safely assumed that moving down onto the plains was less desirable than or preferable to staying up in the hills, and that the people must have done so only out of compulsion – this compulsion being none other than increased population pressure.

Robert Adams (in Struever, p.576) divides this period of expanding population on the Mesopotamian plains from 6000 to 3000 BC into three distinct developmental phases: “Incipient Agriculture,” “Formative,” and “Florescent,” and later shows that these developmental phases can be applied to any proto-civilization. In Mesopotamia, the “Incipient” phase saw the initial establishment of small communities on the banks of streams and rivulets, with relatively modest, ‘family-scale’ or ‘community-scale’ irrigation projects supporting a subsistence agriculture.

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The “Formative” period, lasting up till about 3800 BC, saw the propagation and spread of distinctly ‘village-scale’ communities, as a whole embodying a fairly consistent, regional – what is called “Ubaid” – cultural motif. Adams says “the tempo of cultural change was slower at this time and its basic institutional patterns persisted in their relation to one another” (ibid, p.573). This relative stability is essentially true of village-scale settlement and cultural patterns wherever and whenever they may arise.

Apparently, the population continued to grow for, “the “Florescent” era saw the emergence of stratified urban society commanding a wide range of specialized technologies and based on intensive irrigation agriculture under centralized controls of a theocratic nature” (ibid). The “Florescent” era in any proto-civilizational development spectrum is associated with “a period of growth during which a distinctly *civilized* pattern of living emerge[s] out of a folk-village substratum” (ibid, p.574, emphasis added).[6] “Finally, the “Florescent” era was followed by the onset of the Dynasties, with

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a growing emphasis on militarism and a city-state political organization that came increasingly under the centralized control of secular forces" (ibid).

I want to emphasize here that this militaristic "Dynastic" period emerged around 2900 BC as a direct consequence and parallel development of – as concomitant with – the widespread emergence of settlements of *city*-scale; and the assumed herding of people into the cities was a direct consequence and parallel development of an expanding population. This is urbanization; this is the appearance of full-blown civilization. The people didn't *choose* to build the first cities because they thought it was a good idea – no, they were forced into them by circumstances. Those people awkwardly finding themselves in the new crowded conditions were experimenting with entirely novel lifestyles, the likes of which nobody had yet experienced anywhere on Earth. And what kind of lifestyles did they initiate?

To be sure, societies of this size and complexity of organization manifested many 'emergent properties' not originally possible at village-scale, properties such as: writing and literature, theoretical science, organized religion and philosophy, monumental architecture, specialized professions and art forms, law codes, etc. But hand-in-hand with these developments arose less savory properties, such as strict political and

religious hierarchies, the increasing concentration and consolidation of arbitrary centralized power, a professional ‘ruling’ class, etc. “Civilizations are built upon the systematic exploitation of major portions of their populations, who till the fields, weave the cloth, build the monuments, [dig and maintain the irrigation canals], and fund the lifestyles of the wealthy and powerful” (Pollock, p.218). Despite a commonly held image of grandeur, progress, sophistication and refinement – and overwhelmingly believed to be an obvious improvement over pre-civilized (i.e. village-based) societies – the full package of ‘civilization’ actually comes as a mixed blessing.[7]

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In order to get a good feel for the consequences inherent in a civilized stage of development, with its innate stratified hierarchies and rigid centralized power structures, consider the following description: “Authorities agree that sometime early in the third millennium BC an increasing secular political trend grew into an established hereditary military kingdom in several of the Lower Mesopotamian cities, hence their use of the label *Dynastic Era.* It is also agreed that this political trend was accompanied by increased militarism and warfare…The fifteen to twenty independent Sumerian cities grew increasingly “urban,” probably by concentrating defensively” (Service, p.209-210). “Since virtually the whole of the era is marked by some evidence of warfare it may be suggested that population had expanded nearly to the limits that the land would afford” (Adams in Service, p.210).

One gets the picture here of highly concentrated, dense urban cores containing populations far exceeding the carrying capacity of the local desert ecology. Each city-state is commanded by a military ruler-king, naturally-selected no doubt for his aggressive, iron-fisted, willful character, not necessarily for his wisdom or humanity. This head of state must continually consolidate and project military power in order to prevent encroachments on contested arable lands or in order to seize opportunities for encroachments on neighboring city-states that should happen to display a weakness. This is the beginning of the “intersocietal anarchy” described by Schmookler as being the “defining characteristic” of civilization. Once initiated, it is no exaggeration: this cultural pattern, arising from over-population, leads to a perpetual state of warfare where competing power-blocs must continually contest one another in ever-more heated exchanges for control of ever-more dwindling resources. In this paper, I am attempting to support the notion that this momentum initiated in ancient Sumer is

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inexorably connected with the events of today; once the gears of civilization were set in motion, an eventual attempt at global empire was predetermined.

At this point it could be retorted that civilization does not hold a monopoly on warfare and violence, that pre-civilized peoples also engage in aggressive, destructive, even cruel acts, that these qualities are, in fact, inherent to 'human nature.' To this I would strongly disagree. It is true that tribal peoples have territorial skirmishes, and may occasionally conduct raids on their neighbors, but their militarism is largely boisterous ceremonial pageantry, a means for 'male bonding,' a tradition for venting pent-up remnant emotions from the pre-sedentary way of life. In some cases, once the brightly adorned contestants are lined up in the field, taunting one another, the instant someone gets hurt the warriors disband and return to their villages.[8] Nowhere in the

pre-civilized world can we find examples of the ‘total annihilation’ mentality that regularly fuels an advanced civilized campaign.

As an example from Sumer to illustrate this sort of mentality at its incipient beginning, in this case 4700 years ago, regard this translation of history from an ancient clay tablet: “Sargon, the king of Akkad, fought with the men of Ur, conquered them, laid waste to their city, destroyed its walls; laid waste E-Ninmar, destroyed its walls, laid waste its territory from Lagash to the sea, washed his weapons in the sea; fought with the men of Umma, conquered them, laid waste to their city, destroyed its walls” (Kramer, p.324). “Laying waste” to a city meant, among other things, destroying its temples, burning everything that was flammable, hauling off all the precious metals and stones that could be found, and massacring its inhabitants. Despite inflicting such senseless slaughter, destruction, and terror, Sargon is considered to be one of the ‘great kings.’ No doubt inflamed with hubristic megalomania, this personality trait enabled him to succeed mightily in his ambitions; and it could be hypothesized that this personality trait became hereditarily selected in all the successful ruler-kings who followed, right up to the present day. For Sargon to be so decisively victorious while marching all over the countryside, he must have possessed some sort of technical advantage in weaponry.

I want to make one more point before closing this section and moving on to the task of tracing the diffusion of this civilized cultural pattern throughout the world, culminating in the contentious global situation of today.

Redfield’s influential book, *The Primitive World and its Transformations,* defines two fundamental patterns of human cultural expression: the “moral order” and the “technical order.” “The point upon which we are to insist…is that in [the] early condition of humanity the essential order of society, the nexus which held people together, was *moral*…Each precivilized society was held together by largely undeclared but continually realized ethical conceptions” (p.15, emphasis added). And then he draws the contrast: “The technical order is that order which results from mutual usefulness, from deliberate coercion, or from the mere utilization of the same means. In the technical order, men are bound by things, or are themselves things. They are organized by necessity or expediency” (p.21). “[C]ivilization may be thought of as the antithesis of the folk society” (p.22).

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Redfield goes on to characterize the cultural expression of ‘civilization’ as a dominance of the technical order; not that the moral order is completely extinguished – it just gets complexified, rationalized, and at times convoluted. In the “intersocietal anarchy” that was the civilized condition of ancient Sumer, the city-state with the most technological expertise and the one most successful at regimenting its populace and mechanizing its process – this technicizing of society rationalized as an evolved moral order – held a decisive advantage in military engagements. This industrious drive for increasingly advanced technological expertise was inevitably focused on developing superior weapons and weapon systems, and this priority continues amongst civilized powers until the present day.[9]

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This was where ancient Sumer held a comparative strategic advantage over its neighbors. Standing out from a general background of resource paucity was an abundance of one mineral in particular – bitumen, solidified oil. Apparently the stuff used to seep up to the surface and form into thick globs. Collection could be accomplished by merely gathering at the surface. Now, considering that the Early Bronze Age was initiated right there in Sumer, coincidentally circa 3000 BC, and considering that the refining, molding, and fashioning of the new alloys required extremely high temperatures, then a society that could go out and gather oil globs in its backyard surely held a technical advantage over its rivals. As a result, we could expect the Sumerians to have been especially proficient at metalworking in general, and superior in weapon-making specifically. This enabled them to efficiently kill one another and then, as the cultural pattern spread, for their descendants to efficiently kill others.

The conclusion is: oil therefore was intimately instrumental in the rise, entrenchment, and diffusion of the cultural pattern called civilization. The presence of oil ultimately ensured that the Sumerian model would triumph and predominate.

The Diffusion of the Sumerian Model: The Spread of Western Civilization

The Sumerologist Samuel Kramer wrote a book entitled *History Begins at Sumer,* in which he outlined thirty-nine Sumerian "firsts" in human recorded history, including: the first schools, the first bicameral congress, the first taxation, the first pharmacopeia, the first "Farmer's Almanac," the first [distinctly Western] cosmogony and cosmology, the first [distinctly Western] moral ideals, the first literary debates, the first Tale of Resurrection, the first Heroic Age, the first "sick" society, the first Messiahs, the first sex symbolism, labor's first victory, etc. Kramer gathered all this information and evidence by deciphering the cuneiform inscriptions on some of the tens of thousands of clay tablets catalogued, stored, and left behind by the Sumerians – and so the actual practice of creating and recording a written history is one of their firsts. Among other influential

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firsts, to this list could be added the use of ‘money’ as a medium of exchange and the buying and selling of private property, including real estate.

Since Sumer was also the first civilization – that is, the first society to organize itself around an urbanized, city-based cultural pattern – it could be said that the diffusion of these Sumerian innovations was the diffusion of civilization itself. At this point some clarity needs to be introduced because ‘civilization’ is conceived as germinating independently in five other regions: Egypt, China, the Indus Valley, Mesoamerica, and Peru. In order to substantiate the proposition made at the beginning of this paper, namely that the destabilizing global dynamics of the day are an inevitable culmination of the cultural momentum initiated in, specifically, Sumer, I want to show that this generalized model is not quite accurate, that we really are dealing with a *singular* cultural and ultimately cosmological dissemination.

Of these five other so-called “cradles of civilization” Egypt is a special case, so I will address her first. Egyptian civilization is accepted to have begun around 3100 BC when the legendary Menes succeeded in merging the northern and southern bipartites of the country into a unified ‘nation.’ This date, of course, is concurrent with the origin of Sumerian civilization – and indeed there was influential cultural diffusion, mostly from East to West – but for the most part Egypt, owing to its unique geographical position, remained insular, nurturing its own distinct form of cultural Florescence. Toward the end of its ‘classical’ phase Egypt was eventually conquered by armies from Mesopotamia who installed their own secular hereditary hierarchy, so the development of a distinctly ‘Egyptian’ brand of civilization was prematurely truncated.

I explored the rise of Egyptian civilization in some detail in a previous paper: “Classic Egyptian Settlement Patterns.” What I discovered was surprising and in many cases completely contradictory to the general civilized pattern found in Sumer. Most striking was the fact that *ancient Egypt never developed true urban centers* – there never were any real cities. There were elaborate temple complexes, necropolises, and regional trade ‘towns’ but throughout its duration the vast majority of the population remained dispersedly settled in the multitude of villages lining the banks up and down the Nile, organized into twenty-two regional ‘nomes.’ Thus, ancient Egyptian culture remained always *village-based,* and so the title Egyptian ‘civilization’ may actually be a stretch of the definition.[10]

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This distinction is not at all arbitrary or frivolous and is completely relevant to the propositions I am developing in this paper. By remaining dispersedly *village*-based, the people of ancient Egypt maintained some sort of regional political autonomy and avoided being ‘under the yoke,’ so to speak, of megalomaniacal, despotic, military ruler-kings. There was of course Pharoah, but to these people Pharoah *was* divine, and largely a ceremonial, theocratic figure that the people were happily *willing* to support – no coercion necessary. Interestingly, by remaining decentralized and village-based, a polytheistic cosmology also was maintained, with each nome venerating a heraldic patron deity of its own.

One of the crucial reasons for classic Egypt avoiding urbanization and thus autocratic rule was the difference in irrigation regimes between there and Mesopotamia. By the time the Nile gets to Egypt it assumes a gradual, meandering profile. Each October the river reliably flooded its banks and deposited fresh silt up and down its entire course; thus, the agriculture could remain broadly distributed because it didn’t matter where the farmers were along the river, they could be assured the water

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would come. “By contrast, the relatively high waterhead and insufficient flood surge of the Tigris and Euphrates necessitated a complex but shallow, radial canal network. In this type of system, the canals are continually filled with silt and a large labor force must be employed to keep the system uncongested. Thus, the Mesopotamian model required a centralized command structure, furthering the entrenchment of that society’s despotism” (Mare, p.27).

Another “cradle of civilization,” the Indus Valley, was home to the so-called Harappan culture. The first cities on this alluvial plain did not appear until circa 2500 BC, well after the initial Sumerian emergence. The Florescent period of this civilization was very short-lived, “the fall of the civilization or the onset of its decline…came not long after 1900 BC” (Whitehouse, p.121) – and this decline has been attributed to some sort of natural disaster from which the people never recovered. Because of its relative proximity to Mesopotamia, and because of the five-hundred year time-lag, this Harappan culture could be considered a Sumerian diffusion that reached a proverbial ‘dead-end.’

The two American examples did not reach Florescent stage until many millennia after the two Near East examples, so diffusion was certainly possible but by no means, we are assured, demonstrable. Nevertheless, “It…seems possible to group the four civilizations as *representatives of a single type or class of social system*” (Adams in Struever, p.593, emphasis added). “All clearly became civilizations, in the sense in which that term is being defined here as a functionally interrelated set of social institutions: class stratification, marked by highly different degrees of ownership or control of the main productive resources; political and religious hierarchies complementing each other in the administration of territorially organized states; a complex division of labor, with full-time craftsmen, servants, soldiers, and officials alongside the great mass of primary peasant producers…The attainment of civilization, from a diachronic point of view, was expressed in each of the four areas by a series of parallel trends or processes: urbanization, militarization, stratification, bureaucratization” (ibid, p.592). As it turned out, the two American experiments were soon truncated by the Spanish conquest (a Sumerian diffusion), supposedly at stages functionally equivalent to Old Kingdom Egypt, so we will never know if they might have matured uniquely.

By going back to the origins like this, recurring themes become apparent in the emergence of the cultural pattern called civilization, no matter where it originates. What Adams calls the “attainment of civilization” I would more likely describe as the “unavoidability of civilization” in those regions where population pressure begins to exceed local ecological carrying capacity. At this stage in societal development, political and religious hierarchies invariably form enabling the concentration and consolidation of arbitrary power in the hands of a few, those at the top of the pyramid. Finally,

institutionalized as ‘states,’ this power-centralizing mandate facilitates and promotes effective intersocietal competition over access to ever-dwindling resources by funneling decisions through a centralized command structure.

By proceeding in this way, I am attempting to lay the foundation for what will follow – demonstrating that the cultural composite called ‘Western’ civilization is really just an advanced and amended outgrowth of the singular, distinctly ‘Sumerian’ brand of civilization. In a long sequence of intersocietal contests of power, the militaristic, power-centralizing trajectory set in motion in ancient Sumer has come now to contest control at a global scale. From this perspective, it is the final grand culmination – the ‘omega point’ – of the civilized worldview and cultural patterning inaugurated in Sumer that we are experiencing in the disruptive global developments of today.

Further, I want to offer evidence to reinforce the claim that a 5000-year cycle – 3000 BC to 2000 AD – is nearing completion. In order to do that, it will be informative to trace a brief history of this 5000-year civilized cycle.[11] I offer my apologies up front to

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any serious student of history offended by such a terse treatment of such a complex affair. My purpose is to bring into relief the broad outlines of a generally recurring pattern.

And now to return to Sumer: Irrigation in desert climatic conditions is inescapably accompanied by salinization. This is because rapid evaporation in extreme heat leaves salts accumulating on the surface. For this reason, the civilizational structure incorporated at Sumer, dependent as it was on massive, centrally-coordinated irrigation projects, was doomed to failure – it was not the least bit sustainable. The more intensively the land was used, the less fertile it became; productivity eventually peaked and then dropped off dramatically. Indeed, the territory of former Sumer is now a deserted wasteland, with strange conspicuous mounds and surreal ziggurats rising up out of the lifeless blowing sands. Of course, this exhaustion of the soils took many generations and while it was in process the people didn't just roll over and give up – no, they gradually spread out and took their lifeways and worldview with them. Sumer was eventually abandoned.

Babylonia became the next center of civilized power. This was essentially an evolved expression of Sumerian civilization: the same hereditary kingships, the same initial cosmology and pantheon of gods including the same creation story, the same ecological context, the same language base and socio-economic institutions – all were transferred north. Babylon (ironically, very close to present-day Baghdad) inherited the Sumerian model, learned from it and improved upon it. While greater Sumer always remained a scattered band of independent, competing city-states, Babylon centralized *regionally* and thus achieved the notoriety of innovating and advancing civilization to the scale of *empire*. By doing so, it was able to vastly expand its resource base and area of territorial control. 'Empire' is implicit in 'civilization;' there is an isomorphic continuity across scales.

Babylonia was eventually eclipsed by Assyria, still further north. By this time the entire Middle East was a perpetual battleground as one empire would rise to prominence only to be contested and defeated by an upstart rival. War was perennial, unremitting, the preferred instrument of foreign policy and the vehicle by which a ruler-king would consolidate his power and memorialize his name. The Assyrians, the Persians, the Ramessid Egyptians, the Hittites, the Phoenicians of Ugarit, the Hebrews when they had a chance – all were embroiled in a continual state of "strike, counter-strike, and mass death." Civilization, whatever the warrants of its associated cultural improvements, had degenerated into the militaristic power-plays of elite groups vying

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with one another over the control of territory and resources. In the end, everybody lost, especially the common people whose lives were continually disrupted by marching and marauding armies, and who were always being conscripted to fight the battles of some vain-glory monarch. It was a pitiful period: the epitome of Schmookler's "intersocietal anarchy."

Into this hornet's nest marched an outside invader from the northwest – Alexander of Macedonia. Hellenistic civilization, the new center of Western power, by this time had already peaked and was actually on the decline. Nevertheless, demonstrating a decisive improvement of technicized organization and weaponry, Alexander was able to conquer the entirety of the known civilized world. (Isn't this remarkable? What were his motivations? Why was he out conquering nations when he could have been at home playing with his children?) No doubt his accomplishments were facilitated by the weariness of a Middle East that had experienced perpetual warfare for some 2500 years. In any case, Alexander seeded Hellenistic cultural settlements everywhere he went – and this proved to be a long-term consolidation of Western influence. The Middle East, being the intersection and crossroads of three continents, came to assume a 'cosmopolitan' character, hosting a smorgasbord of philosophies, cosmologies, and new ideas. Re-cognizing this context will become important when the area's influence on contemporary organized religion is evaluated.

Soon after Alexander, Hellenism passed on to Rome, the new seat of Western civilization. Rome, learning all the lessons from the past, achieved an empire of unparalleled proportions. Roman civilization pierced deeply into Europe, challenging and disrupting the nature-based paganism of the indigenous peoples there, derived as it were from the boreal ecological conditions of its context. The centralizing power mandate of successful civilization also reached unparalleled, if not absurd, proportions in the embodiment of 'Caesar' – the 'ruler of the world.' In the pinnacle of secular, megalomaniacal, hubristic contortions, Caesar commanded the decision of life or death over millions of people. Rome eventually imploded, due to over-extension, internal moral decadence, the hoarding of wealth in the hands of the elite, and critically, in a recurring pattern of civilization, by exploiting its resource base – social, natural, and financial capital – to the point of exhaustion.[12] Many people have already made the comparisons between the decline of Rome and the current state of affairs in the USA.

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After Rome's collapse came a period of confusion called the "Dark Ages," when the advance of Western civilization, begun in Sumer, seemed to stall. This period was probably not so confusing or "dark," however, for the tribal, village-based people living close to the land. "Dark" seems to be employed for the conspicuous absence of control by the secular, centralized, autocratic power structures characteristic of civilization. The Roman Catholic Church attempted to fill the gap.

But civilization was not to be deterred; for it already had established a foothold on the European continent. In due course, civilization re-arose under the guise of the "Holy Roman Empire" of Charlemagne, oddly centered in Aachen, Germany. Once again, warfare and imperial conquest became the predominant and preferred tools of foreign policy. Europe was plunged into a bloodbath that lasted for a thousand years or more.

In due course, Great Britain arose as the new torchbearer of Western civilization. Boasting an empire that spanned the globe, facilitated by a superior Navy, Great Britain incorporated all the lessons learned from empires past and achieved new heights of power and control. Through the institution of colonialism, Great Britain assured the subjugation and tribute of distant peoples scattered throughout the world. This projection of power was accomplished through superior technological achievements and capabilities: advanced military power (and the will to use it) and industrial capacity.

By the 20th century, the center of power of Western civilization had shifted decisively even further west landing in the United States of America. Toward the end of

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the century the USA had achieved complete global hegemony – total dominance in military and economic might. The civilized cultural pattern of ever-increasing concentration and consolidation of power had reached an uncontested climax phase. With the introduction of institutionalized "globalization," however, the centralized power structure has now lost a land base. 'Empire' is now in the minds of a small group of hyper-wealthy elites scattered about the globe, disconnected from and without allegiance to any polity. This group seems perfectly willing to exploit, pilfer, and exhaust the resources of any nation or people to satisfy their avaricious ends.

In this cursory outline of history, we saw the seat of Western civilization shift gradually north and west. With a point of origin in Sumer – the southeast corner of present-day Iraq – it transmigrated through Babylonia, Assyria, Greece, Rome, Germany, and Britain, before finally landing in the USA. Throughout this transmigration, the essential characteristics remained the same. In the ultimate irony, the USA, the new seat of civilized power, is now almost unilaterally assembling a massive military presence in Kuwait, right there across the border from the ancient Sumerian desert plains. *The seat of Western civilization is preparing to overrun and conquer its own point of origin.* Does this not represent the culmination and completion of a grand five-thousand year cycle? Does this not hint at the possibility that civilization itself is about to be regenerated, reconstituted, reborn?

The Religion of Western Civilization

Now that a cursory historical-cultural foundation has been laid for the preliminary understanding of current events, it's time to take a look at the function of religion in all this; for, as stated in the introduction, shrill religious sentiments seem to be playing an influential role in the choices being made. Since I am no student of religion, and have no firm convictions of my own, I will step very lightly on this subject. As stated previously, my purpose is to gather, collate, synthesize and interpret available data, finally arriving at a conclusion that, perhaps, will help to shed light on the dynamics of the day and answer the pressing question, "How did we get to this?"

Some general observations have already been made: Three of the world's most influential religions – in order of appearance, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – have their origin in the Middle East, and all three can ultimately trace their roots back to Sumer (as will soon be shown). All three religions articulate a monotheistic cosmology – just one and only one creator-God. Thirdly, all three have pronounced eschatologies

emphasizing a definite ‘end-time’ – variously referred to as ‘Apocalypse,’ ‘Armageddon,’ ‘Judgment Day,’ ‘Rapture,’ etc. What can be learned by looking at the interrelationships between these three religions, between them and the generic cultural pattern of Western civilization, and between this regionally composite religious orientation and religious orientations with provenance outside the Middle East? A good place to begin this inquiry would be to go back to the point of origin, once again Sumer.

“In the course of the third millennium BC the Sumerians developed religious ideas and spiritual concepts which have left an indelible impress on the modern world, especially by way of Judaism, Christianity, and Mohammedanism [Islam]. On the intellectual level Sumerian thinkers and sages, as a result of their speculations on the origin and nature of the universe and its *modus operandi,* evolved a cosmology and theology which carried such high conviction that they became the basic creed and dogma of much of the ancient Near East” (Kramer, 1963, p.112).

Apparently Sumerian theology consisted of a pantheon of gods, “[humanlike] in form but superhuman and immortal, who…guided and controlled the cosmos in accordance with well-laid plans and duly prescribed laws” (ibid, p.113). “When these gods (in their original Sumerian forms or in the later Akkadian, Babylonian, or Assyrian) are named and counted, the list runs into the hundreds…[however] they were headed by a pantheon of Great Gods” (Sitchin, 1976, p.87). The pantheon of Great Gods (and Goddesses) was conceived as an Assembly or Royal Court and always numbered ‘twelve.’ New gods or goddesses appeared as old ones departed but the final number was always twelve. Sitchin claims that later Hittite, Vedic, Greek, and Roman pantheons, also centering upon the number twelve, had their origins in this early theology.

What was distinctive about the Sumerian brand of theology, especially in contrast to indigenous conceptions, was that the gods and goddesses were so obviously, tangibly *anthropomorphic.* Though capable of superhuman feats (like creating the Universe!), they were still so human-like in character: they ate, drank, slept, displayed emotions like love, hate, fear, jealousy, loyalty, infidelity – they even procreated through sexual intercourse, and could do so with humans. And of course, mirroring the structure of their society, the pantheon was headed by a dominant male figure – ANU – ‘King of the Gods,’ whose throne and abode was in Heaven. ANU rarely came down to Earth.

“As for the technique of creation attributed to these deities, our Sumerian philosophers developed a doctrine which became dogma throughout the Near East, the doctrine of the creative power of the divine word. All that the creating deity had to do, according to this doctrine, was to lay his plans, utter the word, and pronounce the name. This notion of the creative power of the divine word was probably also the result of an analogical inference based on observation of human society: if a human king could

achieve almost all he wants by command, by no more than what seemed to be the words of his mouth, how much more was possible for the immortal and superhuman deities in charge of the far realms of the universe" (Kramer, 1963, p.115).

The second most powerful figure of the Sumerian pantheon was ENLIL, eldest son of ANU. ENLIL was given sovereignty over the Earth. The extent of his power is revealed in an ancient clay tablet translation:

> ENLIL
> Whose command is far reaching;
> Whose "word" is lofty and holy;
> Whose pronouncement is unchangeable;
> Who decrees destinies into the distant future…
> The Gods of earth bow down willingly before him;
> The Heavenly gods who are on Earth
> humble themselves before him;
> They stand by faithfully, according to instructions.
> (Sitchin, 1976, p.93)

In another translation, ENLIL's relationship to civilization is revealed:

> ENLIL
> When you marked off divine settlements on Earth,
> Nippur you set up as your own city.
> The City of Earth, the lofty,
> Your pure place whose water is sweet.
> You founded the Dur-An-Ki ["bond-heaven-earth"]
> in the center of the four corners of the world.
> (ibid, p.94)

All of the other cities had representative deities as well; and the vicissitudes of fate befalling any particular city was attributed to the relative favor or disfavor of the representative deity.

That is Sumerian theology at a glance. Since any society's theology is the cosmological and metaphysical translation of its worldview – worldview used here in Redfield's sense of "one way to characterize universal human nature" (p.90) – then the connection between the seminal Sumerian theology and the socio-political organization of civilization becomes apparent. By invoking an anthropomorphic, dominantly ruling male figurehead, with capricious emotional moods and given the authority of command by decree, the Sumerians were authentically projecting onto the cosmos their own existential reality encapsulated in their worldview. If the isomorphic association

between the prevailing worldview of Western civilization and this seminal theological orientation is correct, then we would expect to find a similar theological orientation anywhere that Western civilization has diffused; and this proves to be so.

How does this prevailing civilized orientation compare with pre-civilized orientations? To make this comparison meaningful, it's important to clarify some terms:

First, religion, defined as "the expression of belief in and reverence for a superhuman power recognized as the creator and governor of the universe" (American Heritage) already assumes an 'external agency' mentality in contrast to an immanent, self-organizing worldview. Organized religion – generally headed, transmitted, and mediated by a professional priestly class – is a term usually reserved for a society at a *civilized* stage of development; it is not quite accurate to apply the term 'religion' to a pre-civilized stage of development. Instead, pre-civilized societies embody cosmologies, metaphysics, and myths coherently organized and integrated into what could be more correctly termed 'spiritual traditions.'

Second, 'pre-civilized' could be equated with 'indigenous.' I have been using 'pre-civilized' and 'village-based' interchangeably. At this stage of development, a human society has an intimate, reciprocal and long-term relationship with a particular ecosystem, a particular place. Socio-economic patterns revolve around drawing subsistence from a specific bio-geo-ecological context, potentially indefinitely. "[S]tress on the interrelatedness of diverse aspects of individual, community, and natural life suggests that the "balance" or harmony of an indigenous lifeway is a homeostatic condition…[the spiritual tradition is] a type of feedback mechanism assuring human adaptation to a changing environment" (Grim, p.xxxv). "Each [indigenous] society carries…an "environmental imaginary," a way of Imaging nature, including visions of those forms of social and individual practice which are ethically proper and morally right with regard to nature" (ibid, p.xli).

A *pre-civilized* spiritual orientation, then, in accordance with its existential reality, projects onto cosmos (order) qualities such as reciprocity, balance, and cyclic renewal, and is designed to ensure long-term maintenance. Whether in the form of gods and goddesses, divine spirits, nature-beings, or unseen forces, the supernatural realm remains multifarious, accessible, and is interrelated with and immanent to the people's daily affairs. It has been acknowledged that agricultural, village-based societies universally accentuate a spiritual tradition emphasizing the fertility of the Goddess (Eisler, 1988).

A *civilized* religious orientation, in accordance with *its* existential reality, seems to emphasize the concentration of power into a single, omnipotent, male individual figure-head. This individual is conceived as an 'external agent' whose formidable powers of creation (insemination) are responsible for the emergence of the world and for its

continual maintenance. The people are deemed vastly inferior to this omnipotence and must forever make amends for being less than perfect and for continually transgressing sacred laws dictated by the deity. Such, at least, is the nature of the three religious orientations that can trace their roots back to ancient civilized Sumer.

But what about this association? Why is Sumer repeatedly so influential?

In Genesis 11:31 we find that a man named A'bram and his family "went out of Ur of the Chaldeans to go to the land of Canaan." This was circa 2000 BC; the overthrow of the Third Dynasty of Ur was about 1960 BC. Of course, Ur is one of the prominent Sumerian city-states and Canaan is the region of present day Israel-Palestine. In Genesis 12 the story continues: "And YAHWEH proceeded to say to A'bram: Go your way out of your country and from your relatives and from the house of your father to the country that I shall show you; and I shall make a great nation out of you and I shall bless you and I will make your name great."

This remarkable passage describes the conception of the eventual nation of Israel. We can infer that A'bram (later Abraham) was a *Sumerian* who apparently had a special destiny with the deity. He must have held an important position in Ur because he was given a tremendous responsibility: to be the seed of a whole new nation. "The first person to be called a Hebrew in the Old Testament is Abraham in Genesis 14:13…not as an ethnic term, but as an appellative…"one who crosses" [from place to place], a transient, a nomad" (Meek, p.6). The word 'Hebrew' is derived from the Sumerian-Akkadian HA-BI-RU. The rest of the Old Testament is devoted to tracing the early history of the descendants of Abraham of Ur. This history, as an accurate reflection of the ancient Near East, is a saga of continual, never-ending warfare and conquest, with the dislocated Hebrews forever seeking security in the land promised to them by YAHWEH.

"The relevant parts of the Bible were collected and edited very late, between 600 and 100 BC – and edited, moreover, to fit in with the beliefs and experiences of the redactors" (Cohn, 1993, p.129). What this authority is saying is that the accepted chronology of the Bible was actually reconfigured well after-the-fact to accommodate the prevailing points of view and intentions of its organizers. For example, "The account of creation in Genesis 1…is almost certainly a sixth-century work" (ibid, p.133). The sixth century is when the elite of Israel were exiled in Babylon.

Surprisingly (or not so surprisingly considering their point of origin), it turns out that the early Hebrews were polytheistic. After leaving Egypt *en masse* at the time of the mythical Exodus, circa 1200 BC, and then settling piecemeal in the hills of Canaan, they naturally incorporated elements of these indigenes into their own spiritual traditions. "Originally EL was the supreme god for Israelites as he always had been for Canaanites…What is certain is that by the time they became aware of themselves as a people the Israelites had adopted YAHWEH as their patron god" (ibid, p.132). We see

here a gradual transition from a polytheistic to a monotheistic interpretation. YAHWEH, of course, was a fierce warrior-god, and jealous too, who could smite the enemies of Israel.

Cohn goes on to assert that exclusive monotheism did not appear until Second Isaiah, at the time of the exile, circa 540 BC. “I am YAHWEH, and there is no other, besides me there is no God” (Isaiah 45:5). This was a revolutionary statement at the time and a complete deviation from the traditional pattern of Near Eastern theology. Cohn postulates that this break and this innovation were necessary to provide solace to the displaced and downtrodden Hebrews (now yet Jews) of the time. “The ‘YAHWEH’ alone movement can be understood as a particularly ingenious response to a situation of permanent insecurity…no matter what disaster befell them, it was presented as further proof of YAHWEH’s righteousness as well as his power. This was something new. Constantly repeated divine punishment inflicted, quite explicitly, for constantly occurring national apostasy”(ibid, p.143).

“For you are a people holy to YAHWEH your God; YAHWEH your God chose you to be a people for his possession, out of all the nations on the face of the earth…it was because YAHWEH loves you, and because of his keeping the sworn statement that he swore to your forefathers…And you well know that YAHWEH your God is the [true] God, the faithful God, keeping covenant and loving-kindness in the case of those who love him and those who keep his commandments” (Deuteronomy 7: 6,8,9).

How comforting and reassuring it must have been, in times of crisis, to know that there is a God out there who has selected your people to be his ‘chosen ones,’ to receive special attention and benediction. That by itself is not so spectacular – there are people all over the world who have Gods looking out for them. All of the tribes or city-states of the ancient Near East, for example, would invoke their patron deity before entering battle. What *is* spectacular is to make the leap and say that there is *one and only one* God – no others – and this singular God has chosen your people, among all the tribes on Earth, to be His special breed. That’s quite a big leap; where does that leave everybody else outside the tribe?

I’ve always thought it to be curious that people as wide ranging as, for example, a medieval king of England, a philosopher in the waning days of the Roman Empire, or a present day farmwife from Iowa could put so much faith in and identify so strongly with what amounts to be the ethnic history of a tribe from the Middle East.[13] Then again, to

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read the Holy Book and discover that there is only one God, and he is jealous and wrathful, and he has chosen a certain people for special consideration…well then, if I'm not going to completely alienate myself from God, from the singular divine presence in the world, then I'd better line up and accept these teachings. If they should prove to be true, and I have unwisely erred by rejecting them, then the consequences for me could be very serious indeed.

Monotheism proved to be a very powerful theo-cultural innovation, as well as a potential tool for instilling obedience. Jesus, as a Jew, continued in this mono-tradition; yet, being so much a mystic, he was primarily and intently emphasizing the *Unity of Creation*, as all mystics are wont to do. Douglas-Klotz insists that the message of Jesus has been greatly distorted by translating the fluid Aramaic, in which his thoughts and words were spoken, into the more mechanistic Greek, Latin, and English. For example, the King James translation of the "Lord's Prayer" begins: *Our Father which art in Heaven.* Douglas-Klotz says the original Aramaic has a message more to the tune of: *O Birther! Father-Mother of the Cosmos; You create all that moves in Light"* (p.11). The implications are decidedly different between the two translations: one sets the stage for the justification of autocratic kingship and the other opens up polytudinal opportunities for growth. The same is true with the oft repeated phrase "The Kingdom of Heaven," which has a very different meaning in its original Aramaic than it does in the English of King James, translated as it is from Greek sources. The Kingdom of Heaven is not a

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monarchy in the sky but rather an internal state of wholeness that can be reached by aligning oneself with Divine Will.

Finally, Islam, the third participant: “Allah is formed by joining the definite article *al* (meaning “the”) with *Illah* (“God”). Literally, Allah means “the God.” Not *a* God for there is only one. *The* God” (Smith, p.218). Both the Muslims and the Jews can trace their lineage back to a single common ancestor: none other than Abraham of Ur. Mohammed considered himself to be the culmination of a long line of prophets, including Moses and Jesus, who had guided and influenced the Near East for millennia. Being the culmination, he had the final word: *La ilaha illa Allah!* – There is no God but Allah! This was a potent and apparently eagerly received message, for within a hundred years after its birth in the sixth century CE, Islam had spread from “the Atlantic Ocean to the confines of China.” It continues to spread today, encompassing one-fifth of the world’s population.

My purpose in the past several pages has been to demonstrate that these three vital religions which arose in the Middle East, and which are seemingly embroiled at the moment in a contest of wills with the potential to erupt into what has been characterized as “the clash of civilizations,” are essentially espousing the same point of view. They are all coming from the same source; they are all part of the *same* civilization – *Western* civilization – with its distinctive monotheistic, ‘external agency,’ patriarchal cultural character. If there is indeed but one God, then they all must be talking about and worshipping *the same one*. Once fully understood, this observation alone has the power to deconstruct any justification for war-posturing in the region in defense of one’s religion.

“All the major contemporary traditions of the Middle East – Jewish, Christian, and Islamic – stem from the same source, the same earth, and probably the same language. All originally called God either *El* or *Al,* which means “That,” “the One,” or “that One which expresses itself uniquely through all things.” From the root arises the sacred names *Elat* (Old Canaanite), *Elohim* (Hebrew), *Allaha* (Aramaic), and *Allah* (Arabic). If this simple fact became better known, I believe there would be much more tolerance and understanding among those who consciously or unconsciously perpetuate prejudice between what are essentially brother-sister traditions” (Douglas-Klotz, p.8).

Apocalypse: Prelude to Enlightenment

I began this paper wanting to demonstrate some kind of clear connection between a certain starting point in time – the beginning of history, coinciding with the emergence of civilization in Sumer – and a distinct end-point in time – the prophesied Apocalypse. I wanted to see if I could frame the fervor of fundamentalist religious sentiments of the day as a subconscious expectation of apocalyptic beliefs. In all this I was only partially successful. I was able to rationalize, in a cursory way, the claim that the socio-economic, socio-cultural, and socio-political meta-pattern inherent to Western civilization is not sustainable – that is, it cannot be continued indefinitely in its present form and so at some point will reach a terminus. At that time, the metaphysical foundations underlying Western civilization will necessarily undergo a complete transfiguration, transmutation, and/or transformation. Could this be the substantiation for Apocalypse? Maybe; but there are still many loose ends. I have yet, as I was hoping, to find any evidence to support the notion that there was an apocalyptic tradition in the seminal religion of ancient Sumeria, and so innate to its civilization.

Apparently all the peoples having their origin in the civilization-cradle of the Mesopotamian plains agreed that the Universe began in the outward moving creative act of a god (or gods) who set in motion the established order, and decreed laws for its ongoing maintenance. It was absolutely essential for the people to obey these laws so that the order would be maintained. Except for some occasional, distracting – if at times devastating and disruptive – intrusions by Chaos into this established ordered Cosmos, the world was basically immutable: it would continue on in its current form into perpetuity. Ubiquitous to this civilized cosmology was a 'combat myth:' "A young hero god, or divine warrior, was charged by the gods with the task of keeping the forces of chaos at bay; and in return he was awarded kingship over the world" (Cohn, 1993, p.227). This was the metaphysical foundation for civilization; it justified the hereditary institution of autocratic kingship. Then:

> Sometime between 1500 and 1200 BC Zoroaster [the prophet Zarathustra] broke out of that static yet anxious world-view. He did so by reinterpreting, radically, the Iranian version of the combat myth. In Zoroaster's view the world was not static, nor would it always be troubled. Even now the world was moving, through incessant conflict, toward a conflictless state. The time would come when, in a prodigious

> final battle, the supreme God and his supernatural allies would defeat the forces of chaos and their human allies and eliminate them once and for all. From then on the divinely appointed order would obtain absolutely: physical distress and want would be unknown, no enemy would threaten, within the community of the saved [elect] there would be absolute unanimity; in a word, the world would be forever untroubled, totally secure.
>
> Unheard of before Zoroaster, that expectation deeply influenced certain Jewish groups – as witness some of the apocalypses and some of the writings found at Qumran. Above all it influenced the Jesus sect, with incalculable consequences (ibid).

Zoroaster's, then, was the first apocalyptic vision.[14] Zoroastrianism was adopted as the court religion of Cyrus the Great, whose Persians conquered Babylon in 538 BC in a 'clash of civilizations' the magnitude of which had never been seen. Cyrus subsequently released the Jews from exile, who then gradually dispersed, only some going back to Palestine. To the Jews, Cyrus was considered to be a deliverer sent by Yahweh.[15] As the Persians and Jews, especially the elites, co-existed for many years afterward, their cosmologies were cross-fertilized.

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It is then in Qumran where apocalyptic writing resurfaces, with a vigor and a vengeance. Qumran was located in the hills above the Dead Sea, in the “wilderness,” distant from the populated centers of the Judea of the time. Qumran was home to a purist, idealist, Judaic sect called the ‘Essenes,’ who occupied this site from the middle of the second century BC to 68 AD. They set up a quasi-monastic community who assiduously and religiously observed Mosaic Law; by doing so they believed they were re-establishing the covenant with Yahweh. Israel at the time was a chaotic mess: there were conflicting priesthoods; practicing Jews were being viciously persecuted by the Antiochian oppression; Roman imperialism was on the rise; everywhere the Essenes looked they saw iniquity and injustice. And so these purists removed themselves to the hills to live their ideal vision as a “pious community of the faithful.”[16] And there they began to write; and they wrote consistently up until 68 AD when they were slaughtered by the Romans. Their distinctively ‘apocalyptic’ style of interpreting and generating scripture had an astounding influence on the thinking of the times:

> *1 Enoch, Jubilees,* the *Community Rule* from Qumran, the synoptic gospels, the Book of Revelation are very different works – but an eschatological [after-life] preoccupation is evident in all of them, while

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> the world is viewed in ever more dualistic terms with the passing generations. In varying degrees, the authors of all these works were conscious of the destructive supernatural which had been working to frustrate the divine intention down the ages, and was still doing so. They were also convinced that in the very near future that power and its human agents would be overthrown by the angels of God and reduced to nullity. A universal judgment would be held – with, in some versions, a transcendental Messiah as judge. *Time and history would come to an end,* to be succeeded by the eternal kingdom of God, established on this Earth. The true servants of God, endowed with immortal and unageing bodies, would live as denizens of that kingdom for evermore, while the rest would be cast in a fiery abyss. These contrasting fates would befall also the dead, who would be resurrected for the purpose" (ibid, p.220, emphasis added).

It must be remembered that to the general population these ideas were absolutely revolutionary; these were Jews writing and yet these concepts were not found anywhere in the Hebrew Bible. It must also be recalled that Jesus was a contemporary who no doubt interacted with the community, and John the Baptist was an Essene who went out on his own solo mission. The Essenes were the scholastic representative voice of a people who had been conquered and beaten down for centuries by one oppressor after another, and I imagine by that time they were just plain sick of it. In their thinking and writing they were searching for a reason or a mechanism to explain the perennial nature of their conflict and suffering.

One possibility came from a foreign philosophical source: this philosophy conceived that there was an agency in the world hostile to the unfolding of the divine plan, antagonistic to peace and prosperity. This agency was the embodied form of outright 'evil' – Satan, Belial, the Devil. The solution was evident: by steadfastly clinging to the 'good' as much as possible, by making a way of life out of it and diligently adhering to the sacred laws, then surely God would take notice and come down to Earth with his angels to defeat the evil presence once and for all, leaving the people reconciled. This was the hope, the vision, the prophecy – the very purpose of the religion. These ideas were consolidated in the apocalyptic writings in Qumran and then eventually diffused throughout the nascent Christian world. The Essenes were the proto-type for the Christian Brotherhoods and monasteries that would follow.[17]

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Their hopeful, anticipatory rationalizing was understandable, but by formulating such an uncompromisingly black-white, good-evil, dualistic cosmology, they were just perpetuating more divisiveness and strife. Since they – the Essenes and early Christians – were the 'good,' the 'holy,' the 'righteous,' it meant that everybody who was different, who didn't measure up to their standards, was evil. The implications were: on Judgment Day, only those who were part of the sect will be selected to sit by the side of God, and they shall enjoy bliss forever after; those who aren't part of the sect are 'sinners,' and on Judgment Day will be thrown into the fiery abyss to face torment forever after. Doesn't this sound a little drastic and intolerant? But that's exactly the way the Qumran apocalyptic and other writings were presented.

In the original Jewish and Christian versions of the Apocalypse, the Earth will be cleansed of unrighteousness and then the Hosts of Heaven will descend to *re*-instill an *earthly* Paradise that will last a thousand years. "On Earth as it is in Heaven." The Muslim iteration is a little more ethereal: There will be "a day of reckoning which is foreshadowed by the most awesome terms [reminiscent of the imagery in the Book of Revelation]: "When the sun shall be folded up, and the stars shall fall, and when the mountains shall be set in motion…and the seas shall boil…then shall every soul know what it hath done"" (Koran, lxxxi, as quoted in Huston, p.233). Judgment will be based on how well the individual has lived up to the laws of the prophet Mohammed. Those that fail the Judgment go straight to a fiery Hell to be tormented forever. Those who pass issue straight to Heaven where all manner of joyous, sensual delights await them. There is no intermediate, in-between, or relative finale: one single earth-life is a testing ground for the soul deciding either of two lasting eternities. How does the economics of this situation work?

By internalizing any of these apocalyptic doctrines – Jewish, Christian, *or* Islamic – it's very difficult to be moderate or neutral, to walk the Middle Path: "You're either with us or you're against us." You're either on the side of Good (the God) or on the side of Evil (the Devil) – no middle ground, no accommodation for di-plomacy. The logic is: If you're on the side of Good, you're obeying *our* Laws and reading *our* Scripture and praying to *our* God. Since most people in the course of their daily lives – raising their children, managing a living, contributing to their community, etc. – would admit they're doing their best to be 'good,' then adherence to these apocalyptic doctrines automatically projects onto one's opponent or competitor the label of 'evil.' Ultimately, this results in a lose-lose situation. This sounds like a divide and conquer strategy to me. May I suggest that the real opponent, the real villain is civilization itself?

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To close this section, here's a vivid example of this one-sided intolerant posturing, from the Koran: "The Lord asked His children, "Whom will you worship after me? They all answered, "We will worship the same One Allah Whom you, your forefathers Abraham, Ishmael and Isaac acknowledged as their Allah and to Him we all surrender as Muslims" (as quoted in A'la Maududi, p.101). This is the very heart of the contention in the Arab-Israeli world. The patriarch Abraham of Ur had two sons: one by Sarah named Isaac; one by Hagar named Ishmael. Isaac went on to be the seed of Judaism and Ishmael went on to be the seed of Islam. They had the same father! What we are experiencing is a filial rivalry! Who was this Abraham who still has so much influence on the world?

Conclusion: Enlightenment?

In the opening quote of this essay, VP Cheney insisted that his purpose was to protect the *survival of civilization itself.* This seems to be an extreme statement. The question begs: What exactly is being saved? As this paper now draws to a close, we're in a much better position to evaluate this kind of question.

At this point, I must defer to Andrew Bard Schmookler, scholar of civilization, and his theory called *The Parable of the Tribes: The Problem of Power in Social Evolution,* a theory I've been paraphrasing all along. As an educational study, Schmookler proposes a scattered group of societies interacting in a region. Once just *one* of those societies chooses a policy of coercion, force, and aggression, then *all* must inevitably adopt the same posturing or else be swallowed up and vanquished. Schmookler posits this to be the situation on the ancient Sumerian plains at the beginning of the process called 'civilization.' Since he says it best, I will quote at length:

> As people stepped across the threshold into civilization, they inadvertently stumbled into a chaos that had never before existed. The relations among societies were uncontrolled and virtually uncontrollable. Such an ungoverned system imposes unchosen necessities: civilized people were compelled to enter a struggle for power (p.20).

Schmookler labels this phase of evolution "intersocietal anarchy:"

> The anarchy among civilized societies meant that the play of power in the system was uncontrollable. In an anarchic situation like that, no one can choose that the struggle for power shall cease. But there is one more element in the picture: *no one is free to choose peace, but anyone can impose upon all the necessity for power.* This is the lesson of the parable of the tribes (p.21).

Schmookler continues his theory:

> But the reign of power derives far less from the struggle for power in itself than from the selective process that struggle generates (p.22). Selection sorts through the wide variety of cultural possibilities, inexorably spreading the ways of power…As the parable of the tribes

> spreads the ways of power, what looked like open-ended cultural possibilities are channeled in a particular, unchosen direction (p.23).
>
> The continuous selection for power has thus continually closed off many humane cultural options that people might otherwise have preferred. Power therefore rules human destiny…As the selection for power continued, it ultimately would favor those whose hunger for power exceeded their material needs. In the beginning, people struggled because they truly needed room to live. As civilization developed, the struggle became more one for the kind of *Lebensraum* that represents a love of power for its own sake. The struggle for power developed a life of its own that would feed an unnatural growth in the "necessities" imposed by power upon humankind. The selective process insured that it would most definitely not be the meek who inherited the earth (pp.23, 24).
>
> The evolution of civilization is therefore marked by a perpetual (though sometimes interrupted) escalation in the level of power a society must possess to survive intersocietal competition (p.24)…Once mankind had begun the process of civilization the *overall direction* of its evolution was inevitable" (p.26).

And this brings us right back to the momentum and events of the present day. Perhaps what the Vice President is alluding to when he speaks of "the survival of civilization" is ensuring that this process of ever-increasing centralization, concentration, and consolidation of arbitrary power remains uninterrupted, unchallenged.

As I think back to the Essenes, doing their very best to live what they believed was a righteous, pious life, doing their very best to make sense out of the perpetual bloodshed they observed as commonplace to their existence, I can't help but wonder where they perceived the source of 'evil' to be. Recalling some elements of their lifestyle may provide a clue: They chose to sequester themselves in the hills away from the cities where they could self-subsist by working the land; they set up a communal system where private property was turned over to the community; there was a hierarchy but the person sitting at the head of the table was the one who had been in the community the longest. Overall, they seemed to prefer voluntarily regressing to a *pre*-civilized, agrarian, egalitarian mode of life. It was in this context that they practiced their religious ideals and pursued their intellectual strivings; and it was in this context that they conceived and recorded their apocalyptic visions.

As to the source of so-called evil, the early Qumran writings rail against the unfaithful Jews, especially the 'false' priesthood installed by the Antiochian oppressors. "Later…the most passionate denunciations are directed against the Romans…The Romans, who ruled directly over Judaea from 6 AD onwards, were generally hated by the Jews. Where the corruption and ineptitude of their procurators resulted in war, they found the sectaries of Qumran so intransigent that in the Summer of '68 they destroyed

the settlement and exterminated its occupants…it is worth quoting the account that Josephus gives of the conduct of Essenes when tortured by their last enemies" (Cohn, p.191):

> The war with the Romans tried their soul through and through by every variety of test. Racked and twisted, burned and broken, and made to pass through every instrument of torture in order to induce them to blaspheme their lawgiver or eat some forbidden thing, they refused to yield to either demand, nor ever once did they cringe to their persecutors or shed a tear. Smiling in their agonies and mildly deriding their tormentors, they cheerfully resigned their souls, confident that they would receive them back again (ibid).

This undaunted mood of the Essenes is so reminiscent of the accounts of early Christian martyrs persecuted by the Romans that the names could be interchanged. Isn't it remarkable that the group who "exterminated" these Jewish originators of the Apocalypse, their final opponents, were not Semitic but Roman? Rome: the civilized seat of imperial power. Why were the Romans even there? Why weren't they in Rome?

And now I close this treatise with another extended quote by Leonard Cohn, from his highly influential (to this paper) book *Cosmos and Chaos: The Ancient Roots of Apocalyptic Faith:* Analyzing the Book of Revelation by John, he interprets relevant passages thusly:

> The first beast and his assistant – the latter now called 'the false prophet' –and the kings of the earth and their armies muster to do battle with Jesus. This battle of Armageddon ends in total defeat for the demonic powers and their human allies. The beast and the false prophet are captured and thrown alive into a lake of fire. As for the kings and their armies, they are killed by the sword issuing from Jesus' mouth. An angel summons the birds: 'Come and gather for God's great supper, to eat the flesh of kings and commanders and fighting men, the flesh of horses and their riders, the flesh of all men, slave and free, great and small!' – and the birds duly gorged themselves. The glory of Rome is at an end: voices from heaven proclaim, 'Fallen, fallen is Babylon the Great! She has become a dwelling for demons, a haunt for every unclean spirit, for every foul and loathsome bird' [Revelation 18:2]. And while that fall will be greeted with lamentation by the merchants and sea-traders of the earth, the followers of Jesus will rejoice: 'But let heaven exult over her; exult, apostles and people of God; for in the judgment against her he has vindicated your cause!'[18:20] (p.217).

The way I read this, ‘Babylon’ is being used here as a metaphor for ‘empire;’ it is empire that is to be judged against.

Catherine Keller, in her fascinating book *Apocalypse Now and Then: A Feminist Guide to the End of the World,* interpreting the same passages, concurs: “The Apocalypse, in other words, “reveals” the global sin as less traditionally religious than economic. The spiritual foulness of the empire emanates from the gross capital accumulation of its elites…Lamenting the loss of humble joys, the angel’s song acknowledges that the common people suffer from socioeconomic collapse as much as their oppressors…John depicts the cause of the system’s collapse in terms of its own internal contradictions. Babylon will be burnt and devoured by “her” own beasts, an apt allegory of the voracious power drives at the top of the pyramid as well as of the unsustainable practices which eat up its base. Evil will collapse under the weight of its own corruption. Then the city will burn. “Hallelujah!” they sing in heaven” (p.75).

Epilogue: Design Considerations

I tend to think of civilization as an unavoidable stage in a planet's conscious evolution. Through the dynamics of excessive population growth, human societies will eventually come into conflict with one another over access to resources. If left unchecked, this population growth will inevitably lead to resource scarcity. At some point, probably out of desperation, one group will act aggressively and seize the resources of its neighbors at which point the whole cascading cycle of civilization will be set in motion. As per the ever-increasing power maximizing mandate played out over succession, one group will eventually attempt to seize control of resources at a global scale.

This 'inevitability theory' sounds convincing; yet there are numerous examples of pre-civilized societies living in close proximity to one another for millennia without ever stepping over that threshold into deliberate pillage and plunder. These societies seem to have internal mechanisms, some that could be called 'spiritual,' that discourage excessive population growth. The goal seems to be to maintain an optimum equilibrium between a society's size and their impact on the supporting environment. Then what went wrong in those pre-civilized societies of ancient Sumer?

The apocalyptically-minded authors of *1 Enoch* relay a story from antiquity of how a group of 'fallen angels' lusted after 'the daughters of men.' Finding themselves trapped by their new density and unable to return to their 'lofty state,' these *Nefilim* proceeded to disgorge and reveal the 'secrets of civilization.' This is supposedly the origin of 'evil.' In *The 12th Planet,* Zecheriah Sitchin, after poring over scores of Sumerian clay tablets bearing inscriptions that describe scenes like "fiery chariots rising to the sky" and "gods descending from the clouds" makes an interesting case that the Nefilim were, in fact, extraterrestrial astronauts. He postulates that these space visitors came to Earth to mine for minerals. The settlements (bases) they set up were those first cities on the Sumerian plain; this location was chosen no doubt for its easily accessible oil resources, used in the process of refining the metals. Sitchin's case is just a more scholarly presentation of Von Daniken's familiar *Chariots of the Gods* speculation.

Was civilization, then, seeded from outside the telluric system? This speculation does seem plausible – even if fantastic – especially when considering that everywhere

civilization has entrenched itself the result has been environmental collapse.[18] In this sense, civilization appears to be an alien thought-form that is ill-adapted to earthly conditions.

Yet the purpose in this final section is not to speculate or mythologize but to offer tangible design considerations. What concrete actions can be taken now to prepare for the *post*-civilization, *post*-empire phase? This question carries the seed of its own fulfillment.

A prevailing characteristic of all pre-civilized cultures, by definition, is that they never grew their settlements beyond *village*-scale. As a fundamental principle, *sustainable* economies never grow beyond the capacity for their encompassing ecologies to support them. The 'village' is integrated right into this ecology as a living system embedded in larger living systems, as a metabolizing 'organism' engaging in a *conscious* exchange of mutual reciprocity. The culture of the village has strict taboos against excessive population growth. In all respects, the village-based culture seeks to maintain conditions of internal and external homeostasis – *and this is the formula for sustainability.* The cosmology is resoundingly earth-centered and place-based. The worldview is life-supportive and life-nurturing. The people consider themselves to be *of* the Earth, in egalitarian kinship with Earth's other living creatures.

To prepare for the eventual completion of the 5200-year cycle known as 'civilization' – a completion often termed 'Apocalypse' – we begin now by learning how to design and implement truly ecological villages – 'ecovillages' – not in a regression to a *pre*-civilized phase but as a succession to a *post*-civilized phase of planetary evolution.

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