

## CIVILIZATION: HISTORY, DESCRIPTION, COMMON CHARACTERISTICS AND IMPORTANCE

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### ABSTRACT

*Civilization is a characteristic of people; it is one of the things that set human beings apart from other species.<sup>i</sup> While it is true that all living things form societies, it is only human beings who have a civilization. A civilization provides man with numerous basic needs and wants. One of the aims of this paper is to expound these needs and wants. They are classified as follows: (a) physical and material (economic) needs, such as shelter, food, clothing and tools, (b) spiritual and psychic (religious) needs, such as a worldview, (c) intellectual needs, (d) gregarious (social) needs, such as companionship and interrelationships between people, (e) military,<sup>ii</sup> (f) technological needs, and (g) cultural needs. Another aim of this paper is to provide an overview of the following: firstly, history of civilization; secondly, a description of civilized vs. pre-civilized communities, simple civilizations vs. advanced civilizations; thirdly, an outline of the key components that make up a civilization; and fourthly, an explanation of the reasons for the invention of civilization. The study argues that: firstly, civilization is vital to man's living. Without it solidarity, cooperation and fraternity among people of different nations cannot be achieved; secondly, every civilization, regardless of its size and lifespan, has contributed tremendously to other civilizations. Hence, the reason for describing civilizations should not be to show the superiority of a particular race or ethnicity over other races or ethnicities but to show how the different nations have contributed to the development of other nations. It is expected that this study will contribute to the understanding of the importance of civilization, its history, description, elements and characteristics.*

Keywords: civilization, simple civilizations, advanced civilizations, basic needs, wants.

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### Introduction

What is civilization? What are its characteristics? What constitutes it, and what is its importance? These are the key questions which this paper aims to discuss. Before embarking upon the elucidation of these issues, it is important to point out that:

Firstly, scholars have differences in opinions on a wide range of issues pertaining to civilization. Their differing understandings are the reason for the different definitions of the term civilization. Generally, civilization relates to a 'complex society'. A society is complex when its individuals live in groups of 'settled dwellings comprising cities' and engage in specialized activities. The elements of a complex society include the following: (1) moral and legal systems to govern human conduct; to introduce justice (2) advanced technology to fasten communication and produce consumer items, among others (3) government to establish justice and protect individuals' rights (4) food surplus to sustain the growing population, and (5) culture. Edward Burnett Tylor (1832-1917) in his *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art, and Custom* (1871) writes that culture denotes everything 'acquired by man as a member of society'. The differences between culture and civilization will be highlighted in the forthcoming paragraphs.

Secondly, different scholars describe civilization for different aims which include: (1) to show the superiority of a particular race or ethnicity over other races or ethnicities, and (2) to show how the different nations act in their interactions with one another. However, our contention is that a description of civilization should aim, among others, to provide answers to the following fundamental questions: who are we? Where did we come from? Where are we going?

"It is important that we know where we come from, because if you do not know where you come from, then you don't know where you're going. And if you don't know where you're going, you're probably going wrong." – Terry Pratchett<sup>iii</sup>

It follows from this that the most fundamental question to ask oneself is: who am I? Answers to other fundamental questions are dependent on it. Hence one should find the right answer to this question to ensure that he/she is going in the right direction.

We have divided this paper into four parts describing: firstly, the history of civilization; secondly, the attributes of early and later civilizations and their elements; thirdly, the common characteristics of civilization; and fourthly, the importance of civilization.

### I. History Of Civilization

This section describes the formation of civilization. It enunciates several factors believed to have contributed to the construction of civilization. It deals with the question of how and why civilizations were constructed.

The question of how the first civilization began is popular among the historians and anthropologists. While it is impossible to pinpoint the year when civilization began, it is theorized that the beginning of civilization was when:

Firstly, farming was invented. Farming was the basis of early civilizations; it is the backbone of many things believed to have contributed to the emergence and development of civilizations in the past.

It is believed that farming started in Mesopotamia then in Egypt: “What we call *civilization* arose some five thousand years ago in the Near East (in Mesopotamia and Egypt) and then later in the Far East (in India and China).”<sup>iv</sup> Egypt and China are believed to be the cradle of human civilizations.<sup>v</sup>

There are two kinds of farming: rain-fed or dryland farming and wetland farming. The former is the production of crops by relying on rainfall. The latter is the production of crops using irrigation to maintain regular production. Irrigation is a method of supplying water to plants at regular intervals. The first civilizations had certain features in common. For example, they emerged along river valleys. This made it possible for them to sustain farming. Rivers were also indispensable means of transportation of goods over long distances (long-distance trade); they promoted long-distance trade, which was important factor in connecting different civilizations and stimulating their advancement. Also as mentioned in the Qur’an: “Do not the Unbelievers see that the heavens and the earth were joined together (as one unit of creation), before we clove them asunder? We made from water every living thing. Will they not then believe?” (Qur’an 21:30). It means, without water there would be no life on the earth. Besides providing water, rivers also provided fish for consumption. In ancient Egypt people lived along the Nile. It is as true today as it ever was. Today, rivers are crucial to hydroelectric power creation, the best source of electricity on earth. Electricity is the most important form of energy that has propelled the economic advancement of present-day civilization. It has, among others, contributed to higher agricultural and industrial production. The dependence of the present-day civilization on electricity makes it part and parcel of human life.

Introduction of farming was essential to the invention of tools made out of wood or stone. Tools were needed for cultivating the soil, trapping, killing and skinning animals, making clothes, etc. Therefore, with the invention of farming the need for metal production arose, which subsequently led to the emergence of a group of people specializing in artisanship – the artisans.

Farming was also essential to the establishment of permanent settlements, population growth and development of cities (urbanization) and villages.<sup>vi</sup> It also minimized foraging, i.e. collecting wild plants and pursuing wild animals for food and yielded surplus (bountiful harvest or regular food supply). Additionally, farming was vital to technological development, particularly tool-making technology, a factor which led to advances in agriculture.

Secondly, people settled down, i.e. when they established permanent settlements. This triggered population growth and raised the need for establishment of social, economic and political systems whose objective is to provide solution to the problem of living in a permanent settlement or large community. Permanent settlements eventually led to the establishment of city-states or the rise of kings and bureaucrats. The sole factor that made permanent settlement possible was farming.

Thirdly, people engaged in specialized, non-food-producing activities,<sup>vii</sup> as craftsmen, scribes, artisans, warriors, priests, merchants, administrators, bakers, fortunetellers, priests, etc. Job specialization is one of the most important features of civilization. It is the reason for complex trade and interdependence; i.e., reliance of civilizations on one another to fulfill their needs. Therefore, it isn’t wrong to say that specialization stimulates the advancement of civilizations and creates an environment for its smooth running. More specialization yields more interdependency. Writes the sociologist Norbert Ellias (1897 - 1990):

“As the interdependence of people increases with the increasing division of labour, everyone becomes increasingly dependent on everyone else, even those of high social rank on those people who are socially inferior and weaker.”<sup>viii</sup>

Interdependence among people or civilizations simply means that each one of them has a function for the other. Again writes Ellias:

“when one person (or a group of persons) lacks something which another person or group has the power to withhold, the latter has a function for the former. Thus men have a function for women and women for men, parents for children and children for parents. Enemies have a function for each other, because once they have become interdependent they have the power to withhold from each other such elementary requirements as that of preserving their physical and social integrity, and ultimately of survival.”<sup>ix</sup>

Fourthly, “Small-scale, village-based societies became large-scale ones with cities.”<sup>x</sup> Etymologically, civilization is derived from the Latin terms *civilis*, *civis* and *civitas*, meaning ‘citizens,’ ‘citizen,’ and ‘city.’ They convey the meaning of “living in city.” The first civilizations are believed to have begun in cities which were “larger, more populated, and more complex in their political, economic, and social structure than Neolithic villages.”<sup>xi</sup> It is in the cities where specialized functions, other than food-producing, were performed:

“Whatever else their function, cities were places where the upper classes of early civilizations lived, along with most people who did not produce food. They were the main location of high-level political and administrative activities, specialized craft production, marketing, long-distance trade, higher education, artistic and cultural achievements, conspicuous display, court life, and religious rituals.”<sup>xii</sup>

From the formation of large-scale societies emanated the need for political, economic, social, cultural and religious systems to organize life.

Fifthly, writing was invented.<sup>xiii</sup>Record keeping, history and transmission of culture from one generation to the next were a result of this invention. It also facilitated communication between different people; they acquired and shared with one another “knowledge, experiences, and feelings.”<sup>xiv</sup>Additionally, it “allowed government officials and priests to conduct their affairs more efficiently.”<sup>xv</sup>

Sixthly, a multi-cultural society was formed. That is, when people of different cultures started living together peacefully or with mutual understanding in a community. Religion was one of the factors that contributed to the formation of a multi-cultural society.

Seventhly, a religious system was introduced. It should be noted that no society is known to have existed without a religious system. It follows, then, that a religious system is an integral part of all civilizations. One of the functions of a religious system is to bind people together and reinforce social solidarity. It is the reference of what is right and wrong behavior. This means, it controls people’s behaviours and maintain order in society. The size of the religious system is dependent upon the size of the society. This means “The more complex a particular society is, the more complex the religious system” and the less complex it is, the less complex the religious system.<sup>xvi</sup>

Eighthly, political and economic institutions were invented. The role played by these two social institutions in the emergence, progress and development of civilization is crucial. Without them civilization is dysfunctional. The role of political institution is to create, enforce and apply laws while economic institutions produce and distribute material goods and services. Enforcement and application of laws is central to the prevention of moral corruption and tyranny or arbitrary rule. Aristotle remarked:

“As man is the best of the animals when perfected, so he is the worst when separated from law and justice. For injustice is most dangerous when it is armed, and man, armed by nature with good sense and virtue, may use them for entirely opposite ends. Therefore, when he is without virtue man is the most unscrupulous and savage of the animals.”<sup>xvii</sup>

The above remark indicates that it is not the ruler but the law that is sovereign in the state. Tyranny happens when the ruler places himself above the law; that is when he claims absolute power.

Last, but by no means, the least, a ‘commonwealth,’ or ‘state’ or in Latin *civitas* was formed, i.e. when people came together to make their lives better; when they established a political system or when power was centralized. This necessitated the construction of cities as administrative centres. The term ‘commonwealth’ was first used by Jean-Jacques Rousseau to refer to ‘a political order,’ ‘a well-ordered society’ or formation of a civil society through the social contract to mark the end to the ‘state of anarchy’; that is, “‘a state of independence’ in which men are not subordinate to a sovereign authority.”<sup>xviii</sup>

It is understood from the foregoing that: firstly, civilization indicates a stage of development in human history. It is conceived that human beings developed from savagery to barbarism and from barbarism to civilization.<sup>xix</sup>Both savagery and barbarism are uncivilized conditions. The difference between them as pointed out by Montesquieu (1689 – 1755) is that in the former state or condition people live “as small scattered groups (“nations”), usually hunting, which cannot unite” while in the latter state they live as ‘small united groups, mostly pastoral’.<sup>xx</sup>Contrasted to these two conditions is civilization; that is, a state of development where people “cultivate their lands, use money and are ruled by civil laws.”<sup>xxi</sup>From this it is inferred that Montesquieu considered hunting, pasturage and farming as the distinct phases in the history of mankind. Later Adam Smith (1723 – 1790) added ‘commerce’ as the fourth phase.<sup>xxii</sup>Secondly, civilization signifies the totality of a community’s achievements. It encompasses political, social, economic, religious, moral and technical aspects of development. Thirdly, the pre-civilization communities were: (1) disintegrated and nomadic; that is, they moved from place to place hunting for food (hunter-gatherers), or to be specific, they lived in simple shelters; there were no villages, towns and cities (2) illiterate, which means, they had limited means of communication and no body of literature due to man’s inability to read and write (3) had limited production and subsistence level of living (4) they lived in tribal groups; i.e. they were small or large in population as compared to the civilized communities which are always large in population and multicultural. Rushton Coulborn mentions “quantity” as what differentiates between a ‘civilized society’ and ‘primitive society.’<sup>xxiii</sup>This means a civilized society is large in population, multi-cultural or heterogeneous and has a vast geographical area in contrast to a primitive society which is small in population, homogeneous with small geographical area. It also has advanced technology and complex economic, political and social systems/institutions as compared to a primitive society with simple technology and simple economic, political and social systems/institutions. Ruan Wei writes, “As it (society) grows, it incorporates a huge number of ethnic groups or peoples and a variety of customs, habits, languages, and even religions.”<sup>xxiv</sup>He adds, “A civilization usually develops a complex economy along with equally complex sciences and technologies.”<sup>xxv</sup>

## II. Description Of Civilization

The aim of this section is threefold: firstly, to describe civilization instead of defining it. This is because the usage of the term 'civilization' has changed several times during its history. Many of the definitions given in the past are no longer accepted by modern scholarship due to the dynamism of human society. Hence the best way to understand civilization is to refer to its indicators, which in this section, are outlined below under the sub-topic 'attributes/characteristics of civilization'; secondly, to explain the fundamental differences between simple and advanced human communities or the characteristics of early civilizations and later civilizations; thirdly, to show the interrelationships between culture and civilization, and literacy and civilization. I have devoted the most space to the things that make up a civilization.

#### A. Attributes/Characteristics Of Early And Later Civilizations

It is evident from the above that the term 'civilization' was, in the beginning, used to describe a society with the following attributes or characteristics:

1. Permanent settlements
2. Urban development
3. Organized farming
4. Literacy/writing system
5. Political order (government)
6. Specialized activities (division of labour)
7. Multi cultures
8. Advanced/improved technology
9. Complex institutions

These characteristics were also some of the factors that led to the formation of early civilizations. In the later period, however, the term 'civilization' was exclusively used to describe an advanced society; i.e. a society with the following characteristics:

1. The highest level of development (physically or materially, intellectually, morally, technologically, spiritually and even psychologically)
2. Complex cultures

On the basis of the foregone, one can therefore classify civilizations into two: simple civilizations and complex or advanced civilizations. Simple civilizations refer to the first human communities. A fact worthy of attention is that no civilization is believed to have developed in isolation of other civilizations.

"Civilizations of the classical type were not *de novo*; their basic characteristics were all foreshadowed in earlier stages of society. The term civilization is thus a relative concept and should not be defined in terms of the appearance of some single attribute....From an evolutionary standpoint, the relativity is achieved by thinking not in terms of arbitrary demarking points but of a continuum of directional change....Then the key becomes concerned with 'more' or 'less' advancement along the directional line. The commonplace, because most obvious, notion of the direction cultural evolution has taken is from simple to complex cultures, or the corollary, small to large societies."<sup>xxvi</sup>

It follows from this that simple communities were the cradle of advanced communities; they formed their basis.

"Today's civilizations owe an immense debt to the powerful empires and mighty cities of antiquity. Their inventions, techniques and concepts enabled the advancement of humankind and lay the foundation for life in the modern world."<sup>xxvii</sup>

It is, however, important to note that some of the above mentioned characteristics were non-existent in some of the early civilizations:

"We know of complex civilizations, like the Incas, who did not have a writing system; we know of societies which produced monumental buildings, like in the Eastern Islands or Stonehenge, where neither state-level organization nor writing existed; and we even know urban centres, like the Preceramic Civilization in the Andes (c. 3000-1800 BCE) long before the time of the Incas, which were established before the development of extensive agriculture."<sup>xxviii</sup>

It can be concluded from the above that any society can be referred to as civilization if it possess most or some of the above attributes. It is worth noting, however, that there is no consensus among the scholars with regard to the primary and secondary characteristics of civilization. Primary characteristics of civilization are its basic requirements while secondary characteristics are its complimentary requirements.

#### B. Elements Of Civilization

A description of civilization will not be complete without briefly expounding some of the things that make it up. They comprise, among others, of the following: (1) people with their cultures (2) the state or centralized government (3) writing or literacy (4) religion (5) moral traits that are praiseworthy (6) technology.

##### 1. People

There can be no civilization without people. They are the most essential material element of civilization. It is due to this fact that some scholars define civilization as 'society and its component parts,'<sup>xxx</sup> its economic, legal and moral systems, etc. or society and its distinctive characteristics. The following are some other definitions of civilization as society:

"a human community—a society—located in a particular place and time with government and social order"  
(William McGaughey)<sup>xxx</sup>

"a type of human community or society that has achieved a certain level of culture" (William McGaughey)<sup>xxxi</sup>

"A civilization is a large society possessing a degree of autonomy and internal integration, an agricultural economy, religion, stratification, warfare, and usually cities and writing, or some other method of keeping long term records, as well as central government at least at a regional or urban level" (Melko).<sup>xxxii</sup>

A comprehensive elucidation of this element of civilization requires an exposition of geographic locus; i.e. a particular place – geographic location –where a civilization is located. It comprises of everything at the earth's surface such as trees, animals and water. Without these things made subservient unto mankind, it would be impossible for civilization to emerge. Allah says:

"Seest thou not that Allah has made subject to you (men) all that is on the earth, and the ships that sail through the sea by His Command? He withholds the sky (rain) from falling on the earth except by His leave: for Allah is Most Kind and Most Merciful to man." (Qur'an 22: 65).<sup>xxxiii</sup>

The above verse highlights the centrality of human beings in the universe vis-à-vis other beings. Allah says: "Behold, thy Lord said to the angels: "I will create a vicegerent on earth – *khalifah*..." (Qur'an 2: 30). In their capacity as *khulafa'* (sing. *khalifah*), vicegerents – managers of the earth or the ones with the authority over the earth, human beings have the ability to subdue the earth and its flora and fauna; i.e. to exercise control over them without any resistance. The aim of *taskhir*, subservience – making everything in the skies and on earth serviceable to mankind – is to enable humans to perform their acts of devotion to Allah – '*ibadah*– easily, to "remind (them) of their limitations and to urge them to be humble and thankful to Allah rather than to make them feel superior to any other creatures."<sup>xxxiv</sup>

## 2. Culture

Culture is another important element of civilization. It gives a civilization a distinctive outlook. Unlike other elements of civilization, culture is passed down from generation to generation. It is the factor that defines civilization the most. It is also known as "the social heritage."<sup>xxxv</sup> Like civilization culture is very complex. It entails material (visible) and non-material (invisible) elements. Examples of the former are dwellings, crafts, food, tools, technology, clothing, festivities and utensils. Examples of the latter are symbols, language, values, norms, aesthetics, music, beliefs and attitudes.

It is worth noting that culture and civilization are placed at par by some scholars; they use them interchangeably/synonymously. For example, Edward Burnett Tylor (1832 – 1917) in his *Primitive Culture* (1871) wrote: "Culture or civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society."<sup>xxxvi</sup> According to some other scholars, however, there is a connection between the two terms but they are not identical: "It is true, to be sure, that some part of the semantic content of "culture" coincides with that of "civilization," but the former cannot be used to define the latter."<sup>xxxvii</sup> Regarding the differences between the two concepts, Wei writes: "civilizations are the larger unit from which cultures derive and unto which they are subsumed."<sup>xxxviii</sup> A culture can be described as 'primitive' but not a civilization.<sup>xxxix</sup> The latter is, according to some scholars, "the highest stage of human development."<sup>xl</sup> According to Fernand Braudel, writes Wei, culture is "a specific stage in the overall evolution of mankind, which is lower than civilization," it is a "semi-civilization."<sup>xli</sup> Additionally, culture is a sub component of civilization. This means, any definition of civilization envisages culture. In the light of this meaning, a civilization embodies multiple cultures. This makes it complex as compared to some cultures which are simple: "Cultures can be very small, whereas civilizations are always large conglomerates."<sup>xlii</sup> More so, 'civilization' is "associated with material progress and social organization, while "culture" mostly (is) referring to moral and aesthetic manifestations of the human spirit."<sup>xliii</sup> Like civilization, culture is not static; it "changes with other cultures with which it is brought into contact through commercial or political relations."<sup>xliv</sup> Last, but not least, culture is "the internal character of a society" while civilization is its "external manifestation."<sup>xlv</sup>

## 3. Religion

Religion has always been vital to society because of the functions it performs. It is the pillar of a progressive and enlightened civilization. The following are some of the functions of religion:

1. Regulating behavior. Many rules of moral conduct, if not all, are based on religion.
2. Giving meaning to life.
3. Providing mental peace.
4. Promoting and strengthening social solidarity.
5. Promoting philanthropy.
6. Promoting creativity in art, literature and science.<sup>xlvi</sup>
7. Providing answers to Ultimate Questions; the fundamental questions of God, life, universe and value: Does God exist? Who am I? Where do I come from? What is my purpose? What happens when I die? Why is life the way it is? How did the

universe come about? Will it last forever? How do we know right from wrong? The first question is the most fundamental. It is the prerequisite for answering the rest of questions.

#### 4. Literacy

Literacy is important because it has a civilizing effect on the communities. Revelation of the Qur'an began with the verses that command man to read: "Proclaim! (or read!) in the name of thy Lord and Cherisher, who created-created man, out of a (mere) clot of congealed blood: Proclaim! And thy Lord is Most Bountiful,- He Who taught (the use of) the pen,- taught man that which he knew not." (Qur'an 96: 1-5). Why reading? One important reason is because reading is an outcome of education. Hence, in these verses Allah commands man to seek knowledge; to be educated. There are great benefits that result from education such as transformation of a community from stagnation, primitivism, regress, ruralisation and lower level of living to dynamism, civilization, progress, urbanization and higher level of living respectively. In brief, education is the foundation of individual and societal well-being and development. It is the key to transformation. In contrast, illiteracy is a serious obstacle to individual and societal development.

#### 5. The State/Centralized Government

The 17th-century English philosopher Thomas Hobbes asserted that the state of a community without a government is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." The state or civil society is, therefore, established to guard the society against greed and injustice of some of its members and protect the rights of the people. This necessitates legislation and execution of the law.

#### 6. Praiseworthy Moral Traits

Praiseworthy moral traits are the basis and core of civilization. They are essential for the survival of any society and provide the foundation for the physical development of civilization.

"Ye are the best of peoples, evolved for mankind, enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong, and believing in Allah. If only the People of the Book had faith, it were best for them: among them are some who have faith, but most of them are perverted transgressors." (Qur'an 3: 110).

It is not an exaggeration to infer from the above verse that civilization refers to a community that believes in *al-Tawhid* – the oneness of God, and displays and promotes the praiseworthy moral values such as cooperation: "Help ye one another in righteousness and piety, but help ye not one another in sin and rancor, fear Allah for Allah is strict in punishment" (Qur'an 5: 2); love: "*The believers in their mutual love, mercy and sympathy are just like one body. When one of the limbs suffers, the whole body responds to it with sleeplessness and fever*"<sup>xlvii</sup>; kindness: "And remember We took a covenant from the Children of Israel (to this effect): Worship none but Allah, treat with kindness your parents and kindred, and orphans and those in need; speak fair to the people; be steadfast in prayer; and practise regular charity. Then did ye turn back, except a few among you, and ye backslide (even now)." (Qur'an 2: 83); hospitality: "Has the story reached thee, of the honoured guests of Abraham? Behold, they entered his presence, and said: "Peace!" He said, "Peace!" (and thought, "These seem) unusual people." Then he turned quickly to his household, brought out a fatted calf, and placed it before them. He said, "Will ye not eat?" (Qur'an 51: 24-27) and humility: "...Nor walk on the earth with insolence: for thou canst not rend the earth asunder, nor reach the mountains in height." (Qur'an 17: 37).

#### 7. Technology

Technology is an intrinsic part of civilization. It enables man to do myriad of things without the need for slaves. In the early civilizations technology was needed for toolmaking, construction of dikes to control floods from the rivers and other sources, construction and maintenance of canals and development of irrigation system, building of fortifications and large buildings. Advances in technology have made possible the production of a vast number of goods and services.

### III. Common Characteristics Of Civilizations

In this section, we shall focus our attention on religiosity, worldview, dynamism and heterogeneity as the common characteristics of civilization.

#### A. Religiosity

No civilization is known to have existed without religious activities. Some civilizations were monotheistic while others were polytheistic. The former are civilizations that believed in the existence of one God such as Islamic civilization. The latter are civilizations which believed in many gods and engaged in ancestral worship. They also believed in superstitions. Most civilizations were polytheistic. For example, they believed that natural disasters such as flood, earthquake, volcanos, etc. were caused by invincible forces. Despite the differences among civilizations in beliefs and practices, religion was and continues to be central to the lives of the people as it provides answers to the ultimate question of life, the universe and everything.

#### B. Worldview

Worldview is one of the things that differentiate a civilization from other civilizations. A worldview of a civilization refers to the set of beliefs held by a particular nation or community about fundamental aspects of Reality that ground and influence all their perceiving, thinking, knowing, and doing; it is the overall perspective from which the members of a nation or community see and interpret the world. World here refers to everything that exists around man including the unseen. Man is also part of a worldview. One of the roles of a civilization's worldview is to explain the mysteries of the world such as birth, sickness and death, and the relation between God and man, man and God, individual and society, the rights and responsibilities of parents and children, husband and wife, individual and society and nature and God. Religion and culture are some of the determinant factors of a civilization's worldview. Pursuant to this, one may define a civilization's worldview as cultural-religious beliefs held by a nation

or community to explain the mysteries of the world. A civilization's worldview develops with the development of civilization. Science and technology which are the basis of modern civilization have led to the change of many ancient worldviews and many beliefs developed by Paleolithic ancestors about the fundamental aspects of reality are now regarded as mythic.

### C. Dynamism

By dynamism here we mean "evolution and growth". Civilizations are not static. They are dynamic, which means, they are forever changing,<sup>xlviii</sup> absorbing new nutrients such as culture and religion, and advancing with time. They are complex with a lifespan; that is, they "come into existence, rise and flourish, and go out of existence by a slow process which covers decades or even centuries..."<sup>xlix</sup> Quigley classifies the period or lifespan of civilization into "youth," "maturity," and "old age."<sup>l</sup> This is equivalent to saying that civilization is likened to man. He passes through infancy, youth and maturity, and old age. The dynamism of civilization is yet another factor that makes it difficult to define. It is also a challenger to the retainment of a civilization's identity.

It is remarkable that some civilizations lose their identity; i.e. they are absorbed into major civilizations. It is also remarkable that a civilization that loses its identity may either become indistinct or an offspring of another civilization: "Having passed the initial stage of birth, a civilization may evolve further and grow into an empire..." or die.<sup>li</sup> Loss of identity simply means loss of essential cultural traits.

We are experiencing a trend where many civilizations are becoming offspring of Western civilization due to cultural globalization. The word *globalization* is from *globus*, a Latin word which means 'ball.' It denotes something that pertains to the whole world/Earth. Cultural globalization leads to a dominance of Western culture. Hence it can be seen as the new form of colonialism.

### D. Heterogeneity

Diversity among people is one of the great signs of Allah. He created people from a single self (Adam) but with differences in colour, tribes, races and languages in order to do good to one another, to help one another, to cooperate with one another in righteousness and piety, to support one another, to love one another and to have a good relationship with each other. Hence, these differences are simply perceived as the basis for religious and worldly wellbeing – *hasana fi al-Dunyawa al-Akhirah* and not of conflicts and prejudices.

"O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise (each other) – *lita'arafu*. Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things)." (Qur'an 49: 13).<sup>lii</sup>

*Lita'arafu* is a verb derived from *ma'ruf* and *ma'rifah*. *Ma'arifah* means knowledge. Sharing of knowledge among people and across generations is a fact that cannot be disputed. Therefore, it is true that the foundation of modern science was laid by people of different cultures and civilizations. The transformation of the intellectual life of Western Europe would not have taken place if not because knowledge sharing.

*Ma'ruf* means what is well-known as 'good' and 'virtuous.' Good moral traits are the basis of inter-civilizational interaction. Cooperation is an example of *ma'ruf* which is an anchor to a civilization. It is so important that Ellman regards it as one of the things that constitute the meaning of civilization: "Civilization is the state of condition of persons living and functioning together, jointly, cooperatively so that they produce and experience the benefits of so living and functioning jointly and cooperatively."<sup>liiii</sup> The Qur'an commands cooperation: "...Help ye one another in righteousness and piety, but help ye not one another in sin and rancour: fear Allah, for Allah is strict in punishment" (Qur'an 5: 2).

By heterogeneity being a characteristic of civilizations we mean they are multicultural, multi-religious and multi-ethnic: "civilizations are urban societies with diverse, heterogeneous macrocultures strongly bound together by networks of intense, habitual interactions, especially political, military and economic."<sup>liiv</sup> Therefore, the benefits of civilization "cannot be restricted to few individuals or be limited to certain groups."<sup>liiv</sup> They are 'a collective effort by the whole society.'<sup>livi</sup> Interaction between people of different cultures, races, nations is one of the things that distinguish humans from other species: "A civilization is the highest cultural grouping of people and the broadest level of cultural identity."<sup>liiii</sup> Cultural and economic exchange is therefore one of the characteristics of civilization. Every civilization owes a debt of gratitude to other civilizations as no civilization can function alone without cooperation and association of other civilizations.

## IV. Importance Of Civilization

Every civilization regardless of the creed by which it is characterized has two facets namely, material and spiritual: "civilization denotes both material and moral values"<sup>liiii</sup> or infrastructure (material) and superstructure (spiritual).<sup>lix</sup> "Civilization is an advanced stage in social development that fully supports the education, spiritual, and physical development of its people, with technological advancements for the enhancement of the society, in accordance with the needs of the people."<sup>lix</sup> The relationship between the material and spiritual aspects of civilization is like the two sides of a coin; one cannot exist without the other: "there has been no great civilization without spiritual aspect to it."<sup>lxii</sup> This characteristic of civilization (body and spirit) is a reflection of the nature of human being; i.e. matter and spirit. In view of the fact that matter and spirit are the necessary elements of every civilization, it is not an exaggeration to say that civilization is a signification of a society's material and spiritual achievements. It is "the attainment of both material well-being and the elevation of the human spirit."<sup>lxiii</sup>

The material aspect of civilization entails a wide range of physical items/beings such as monuments, cities, gardens, artwork and tools or machines. It is everything that has a physical form or shape. They indicate human progress and development. To put it briefly, they denote the advancement of knowledge; they are the fruits of knowledge or human creativity.

The spiritual aspect of civilization is the nonmaterial objects. It includes beliefs, ideologies, traditions, ethics, morals and values. Here are some of the examples of ethics that form the foundation upon which a civilization is structured: Love, kindness, truthfulness, selflessness, compassion, integrity, honesty, loyalty, reliability, respect, fairness, responsibility, hospitality and dedication. Ethics is the set of moral principles that are universally accepted. The Qur'an calls them *ma'ruf* (known to all people as good and therefore universally acceptable). The opposite of these is *munkar* (known to all people as bad and therefore universally rejectable). Morals are the goodness and badness of actions or right and wrong, and values are the "individual or personal standards of what is valuable or important." It is this aspect of civilization which is its essence. Remarks the Egyptian poet Ahmad Shawqi (1868 – 1932 A.D) "*innama al-umam al-akhlaq ma baqiyatfa'in hum zahabatakhlaquhum zahabu- Nations are equal to their morals. If their morals disappear, then they also disappear.*"

One can categorize civilizations in regard to matter and soul into two: (1) capitalist or materialist civilizations, and (2) integrated civilizations. No civilization is known to have been purely spiritual. The former are civilizations whose sole objective is physical and material development. The latter are civilizations that strike a balance between the physical and material development, and spiritual well-being; between infrastructure and superstructure. The difference between these civilizations is the beliefs that form their basic attitude toward man and his place in the universe.

The modern civilization, also known as the Western civilization, is a capitalist civilization. By concentrating on material progress, it has made significant contributions to life but it is also held responsible for moral deterioration and psychological illnesses.

"In spite of (the) enormous materialistic achievements, the existing reality shows that this civilization (the Western civilization), has not provided the anticipated happiness, or peace of mind for its people. It has the body of an elephant and the spirit of a rat!"<sup>lxiii</sup>

In a capitalist civilization everyone thinks of themselves separately from others and religion plays a very limited role.

Many scholars have described morality and religion as essential ingredients of civilization saying that without them a civilization loses its anchor.

"Religion is the light of the world, and the progress, achievement, and happiness of man result from obedience to the laws set down in the holy Books. Briefly, it is demonstrable that in this life, both outwardly and inwardly the mightiest of structures, the most solidly established, the most enduring, standing guard over the world, assuring both the spiritual and the material perfections of mankind, and protecting the happiness and the civilization of society is religion."<sup>lxiv</sup>

An integrated civilization is a civilization that pays equal attention to the physical and spiritual developments: "civilization is an advanced stage in social development that fully supports the educational, spiritual, and physical development of its people, with technological advancements for the enhancement of the society, in accordance with the needs of the people."<sup>lxv</sup>

## Conclusion

It is clear from the above that: firstly, civilization is an inclusive term; that is, it covers a wider range of present and past societies; it is progression from savagery, barbarism to enlightenment; that is, from gathering and hunting to planting and domestication of animals, from illiteracy to literacy, from small-scale, village-based societies to large-scale societies with cities, from simple to advanced technology; it is dynamic, which means, it changes throughout time; it is a characteristic of people; it is one of the things that distinguish humans from other species.<sup>lxvi</sup> While it is true that all living things form societies, it is only human beings who have a civilization. A civilization provides man with numerous basic needs and wants. For instance, it provides him with: (a) physical and material (economic) needs, such as shelter, food, clothing and tools, (b) spiritual and psychic (religious) needs, such as a worldview, (c) intellectual needs, (d) gregarious (social needs) needs, such as companionship and interrelationships between people, (e) military,<sup>lxvii</sup> (f) technological needs, and (g) cultural needs.

Secondly, civilization is formed to satisfy human needs. It is worth noting that the benefits of civilization are not confined to a particular race, ethnic group, culture or religion. They are for all mankind. Throughout history human beings have been interactive with one another; they are economically, politically and culturally interdependent. Therefore, some scholars describe civilization as a process of integrating human societies into a single "world system". This process is also known as 'globalization'.

Thirdly, the aim of studying civilization is to show how human societies have changed during their long past. It is evident from the foregone that human societies are not static; they are progressive. The aim of civilization is not to show the superiority of some societies over others. Some scholars hold back from using the term 'civilization' arguing that it is exclusive to the West;<sup>lxviii</sup> it was used by the Enlightened thinkers to glorify the West and the opposite 'barbarism' or 'savagery' to denigrate the non-West. Hence, the term 'civilization' is seen as a justification of the "colonial agendas of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries."<sup>lxix</sup> Instead of civilization the opponents of the term 'civilization' suggest the following for human development: 'urban society,' 'state-level society,'<sup>lxx</sup> 'intensive agricultural society'<sup>lxxi</sup> or 'enlightened nations.' Historically, it is believed that the Greeks were the first to subdivide the society into 'civilized' and 'uncivilized'.



Fourthly, a civilization is distinguished from other societies by the following attributes or characteristics: permanent settlements, urban development, organized farming, literacy, political order (government), specialized activities, multi cultures and advanced technology.

Fifthly, we have classified civilizations with regard to their belief system into two: *tawhidic* and non-*tawhidic* civilizations. *Al-Tawhid* is a transformation factor. It transforms human societies from polytheistic and mythological beliefs to monotheism; the belief in one God. Most of the ancient civilizations believed in many gods. Some believed that the dead continued to influence world affairs in the form of spirits while animals and human sacrifice was a common ritual in many ancient communities.

Lastly, the study of civilization raises two fundamental questions: Who are we? Why are we here? As mentioned in the foregoing, civilization is distinctive characteristic of man. Hence knowing the answers to these two questions is fundamental to the understanding of civilization.

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<sup>i</sup> Justine Jennings, *Killing Civilization: A Reassessment of Early Urbanism and its Consequences*, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2016, p.268.

<sup>ii</sup> For the above classification of needs and wants I am indebted to Carroll Quigley, *The Evolution of Civilizations: An Introduction to Historical Analysis*, Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1979, pp. 54 & 56.

<sup>iii</sup> Terry Pratchett, "I Shall Wear Midnight" Retrieved 5 September 2016 from <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/317062-it-is-important-that-we-know-where-we-come-from>

<sup>iv</sup> Marvin Perry et al, *Western Civilization: Ideas, Politics & Society*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, fifth edition, 1996, p.9. Hereinafter referred to as *Western Civilization*.

<sup>v</sup> It is worth noting that the issue concerning the first civilization to emerge is still unresolved by the historians.

<sup>vi</sup> Most of the early farmers, if not all, settled in villages and this is as true today as it was in the past.

<sup>vii</sup> Richard W. Bulliet et al, *The Earth and its Peoples: A Global History*, vol.1, fourth edition (brief edition), Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2009, p.5.

<sup>viii</sup> Christopher Powell, *Barbaric Civilization: A Critical Sociology of Genocide*, Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011, p. 156.

<sup>ix</sup> Stephen Mennell and Johan Goudsblom (eds), *Norbert Elias on Civilization, Power, and Knowledge: Selected Writings*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998, p. 119.

<sup>x</sup> Time Maps, *The Origins of Civilizations*. Retrieved 31 March, 2016 from <http://www.timemaps.com/origins-of-civilization>

<sup>xi</sup> Perry, *Western Civilization*, p. 9. The term 'Neolithic' is composed of 'neo' meaning 'new' and 'lithic' meaning 'stone.' Hence it relates to the last part of the Stone Age, known as the 'New Stone Age.' It is distinguished from the first two periods of Stone Age; namely, Palaeolithic and Mesolithic by the following attributes: megalithic architecture, spread of agricultural practices and use of polished stone tools. This period marks the development or advancement of human technology.

<sup>xii</sup> Bruce G. Trigger, *Understanding Early Civilizations: A Comparative Study*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 121.

<sup>xiii</sup> Writing is regarded as the hallmark of civilization and it is believed to have officially begun around 3500 BCE. Sumerian, which developed in Mesopotamia, is believed to be the world's oldest known written language.

<sup>xiv</sup> Perry, *Western Civilization*, p.7.

<sup>xv</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.9-10.

<sup>xvi</sup> Boundless, "Functions of Religion." *Boundless Sociology*. Boundless, 26 May. 2016. Retrieved 15 July 2016 from <https://www.boundless.com/sociology/textbooks/boundless-sociology-textbook/religion-14/the-functional-perspective-on-religion-106/functions-of-religion-593-8141/>

<sup>xvii</sup> Andrew M. Kamarck, *Economics as a Social Science: An Approach to Nonautistic Theory*, Ann Arbor, USA: The University of Michigan Press, 2002, p. 74.

<sup>xviii</sup> See Maurizio Viroli, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, trans. Derek Hanson, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p.110.

<sup>xix</sup> See Hans Schoenmakers, *The Power of Culture: A Short History of Anthropological Theory about Culture and Power*, Groningen, Netherlands: University of Groningen, 2012, p.11. Hereinafter referred to as *The Power of Culture*.

<sup>xx</sup> *Ibid.*, p.12.

<sup>xxi</sup> *Ibid.*, p.12.

<sup>xxii</sup> *Ibid.*, p.13.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Rushton Coulborn, *Origins of Civilized Societies*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959, pp. 16-17.

<sup>xxiv</sup> Ruan Wei, "Civilization and Culture" in *Globality Studies Journal*, Issue 24, 28 May 2011, p.1.

<sup>xxv</sup> *Ibid.*

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- xxxviii Ibid., p.1.
- xxxix Ibid., p. 3.
- xl See Schoenmakers' *The Power of Culture*, p. 39.
- xli Ibid., p.3.
- xlii Wolf Schäfer, "Global Civilization and Local Cultures: A Crude Look at the Whole," *International Sociology*, vol. 16, no. 3, p. 304.
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- liii Jennings, *Killing Civilization*, p.268.
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<sup>lxviii</sup> See Jennings, *Killing Civilization: A Reassessment of Early Urbanism and its Consequences*, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2016, p. 272.

<sup>lxix</sup> Jennings, *Killing Civilization*, p. 272.

<sup>lxx</sup> Justine Jennings, *Killing Civilization*, p.268.

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