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Editor's Note

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Last September the International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations convened its annual meeting in Saint Petersburg, Russia. The meeting was held jointly with the International Pitirim Sorokin–Nikolai Kondratieff Institute, the National Hermitage, and the St. Petersburg Scientific Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

The title of the tripartite conference was “St. Petersburg in the Dialogue of Civilizations and Cultures.” This was to honor the city of St. Petersburg, which was then celebrating its 300th anniversary. The annual meeting was held within the framework of the United Nations General Assembly resolution entitled “Agenda for the Dialogue Between Civilizations” and “The General Declaration on Cultural Diversity” of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization.

As a result of this setting, at the Saint Petersburg meeting many of our members and other speakers lectured on the importance of comparing civilizations and many discussed the contributions an understanding of civilizations can make to world peace. These speakers indicated that both scholarship and the pacific resolution of disputes could be the beneficiaries of our discipline. Who can challenge the value or wisdom of these points?

When I thought about what I had heard, my attention turned increasingly to the potential that our organization itself possesses in these matters. The ISCSA over the past several decades has achieved a great deal in the way of scholarship, but has it advocated for the discipline or spoken out on behalf of world peace? I think it is time to rectify these omissions; we should work to fill in gaps that have been left yawning and not filled. In so doing, we can help advance both higher education and the contributions of higher education to world peace and understanding.

Specifically, I propose that the society as a body consider taking on three new types of activities.

First, we should build a central archive covering the study of comparative civilizations. By this I mean not simply that we should gather the articles we have written or the papers our colleagues have presented at the annual meetings, as we are currently doing. More is needed.

Comparative civilizations as a discipline may deal sometimes with dull detail or broad overgeneralizations, but the subject is hot. I just ran the term comparative civilizations on Google and in .15 seconds I was

informed that there are 81,700 entries. Delimiting it with quotation marks (i.e., the exact sequence of words must be present), I found that there were 4,020 entries. Then, I typed in "course in comparative civilizations" and a total of 43,200 cites came up. In the interest of full disclosure, let me report that when I added the Boolean delimiters to this phrase, only two entries came up.

But the point is clear: there is considerable contemporary interest in the subject. Is not the International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations the appropriate body to collect all the material on the field? I think that we should archive syllabi for courses in the comparative study of civilizations, or certainly for as many as we can gather.

Further, we should also seek to obtain information on how the subject is placed within the university or school curriculum. Is there a specific department for the comparative study of civilizations? Within what school or discipline is it located? Is the study anywhere a required course? What are the criteria and credentials for those who instruct in the field, and from what scholarly disciplines do they come? Is the number of courses in this field and in closely related fields, (i.e., presentations that may compare civilizations but may not be listed that way) rising or declining?

Perhaps such data is gathered somewhere else (Japan might be such a place). If so, then we don't need to do this. But if there is no relatively complete repository anywhere for information on the teaching of comparative civilizations, especially in English, then our organization would be an appropriate vehicle for such an activity. Perhaps we could even obtain a grant to do such work.

Second, we should consider constituting ourselves the accreditation body for the university-level comparative study of civilizations. The field is so wide, and possibly even so amorphous, that there should be some measure of quality offered to universities and colleges worldwide. The scholars who belong to ISCSC are amongst the world's very best in this field. Surely, if anyone is expert in the discipline, and can assess the level of sophistication and accuracy of material being taught, our members can. In the United States, lawyers have the American Bar Association to do this and physicians, accountants, and others have their own specialized, discipline-specific accrediting vehicles.

I am looking at a list entitled "National Institutional and Specialized Accrediting Agencies," published as part of the *Directory of Postsecondary Institutions* by the National Center for Education

Statistics of the United State Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement. As of 1997, a total of 104 such specialized accrediting bodies were recognized in the United States. Many fields are listed here; the comparative study of civilizations is not.

A certification from the International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations that a degree (bachelor's, master's, or even doctorate) in the subject is up to appropriate international standards might be highly valued by colleges and universities. Students would know that the body of information they have been absorbing adequately covers the discipline. Moreover, it is possible that additional institutions would want to teach the comparative study of civilizations once the quality control mechanism existed and was accepted by others.

Third, I believe that the International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations could offer two types of important services for the public by its members.

The first of these would involve sending our members to teach at universities worldwide, especially those in the Developing World or in areas where civilizational conflict might be present. The idea arose during discussions at Saint Petersburg about the International Year for Dialogue Among Civilizations. If we had a staffed central office that was interested in doing this, the ISCSC could correspond with universities everywhere and ask whether they wanted to sponsor a set of lectures, or a short course, by scholars of civilizational studies. These courses could review the principal aspects of contemporary civilizations and explain to students points of conflict amongst the civilizations. What could be timelier? Again, it is possible that funding for such a project could be obtained from foundations, corporations, NGOs, or governmental agencies.

In addition, we could propose that our scholars could be sent to assist in negotiations that might be undertaken between warring parties, when the conflict involves civilizational clash. The new and unofficial Geneva Accord (in Article 2, Number 7) calls for wide-ranging dialogue between Palestinians and Israelis; could we not offer to assist in this process? Our ISCSC scholars could explain the differences that arise as a result of the great variation in worldview of the two cultures or civilizations. Could not the conflicts in Cyprus, or Kashmir, or Chechnya — among others — also benefit from such presentations?

These are three specific steps that the ISCSC could take, in my opinion. They would be capacity-building exercises (and possibly mem-

bership-building) for our organization while simultaneously providing service to colleges and universities everywhere. And, in the third instance, the organization and its membership would help bridge conflicts that currently threaten to bring ever-greater harm to mankind. All it takes is effort on the part of our membership. Since we have the premier collection of experts in the field of comparative civilizational studies, we are the logical entity to do this.

Let me close by noting that I hope that the articles in the present journal will prove of interest and value to you, the reader. Please let my editorial colleagues and myself know your opinions about the journal, what you like and how we may improve what we offer. It is my hope that your new year has been a happy one and that we will all meet in Alaska, for the next annual meeting.

Joseph Drew
Prague