

# Kingdom Report

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## Cultural Christianity and the Christian Civilization

There is a difference between believing in God and believing God. The Church needs to fight for a Christian Civilization that believes God. The American Declaration of Independence of 4<sup>th</sup> July 1776 can help us with some foundation truths.

The emerging multi-polar world order is looking more and more as a multi-cultural world order of differing civilizations. The ideological struggle defined by the economics of capital versus labour, communism versus capitalism, democracy versus fascism....these are being superseded by civilizational boundaries.

Russia is defining its national interest boundaries by the collection of Eastern Orthodox peoples (including those in Ukraine), Islam is creating associations of Islamic cultural states, China is unrecognizable as a Communist state. That is because it publicly defines its civilization as being formed by Confusion values. In Japan it is the old Emporer/Shinto religious values that define Japanese.

The most surprising recent development that caught my attention this last week is that I had always assumed India identifies itself as a Hindu State Imagine my surprise when I obtained recent reports of the Modi government now identifying India as a Buddhist cultural nation. And declaring this to be a strategic new direction for India as it forms a Buddhist alliance with other Buddhist cultural nations in East Asia. I have added an addendum to this blog on the relevant recent strategic analysis of this turn of events for those of you interested in more in depth analysis.

My point for the future of Southern Africa: We need to re-order our region into a Civilization space that reflects a majority of people who do not just “believe in God” but a people who ‘believe God” through the revelation of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and a Bible that is the inspired Word of God. So what is the difference?

### Cultural Christianity

The problem we face in the west of what used to be the lands of the Protestant Reformation is that those values that made our civilization are eroding and failing. Real Christianity is being replaced by ‘Cultural Christianity”. They want the fruits of Christian Civilization” without the roots.

The world's richest person, Elon Musk, just announced that he's a "big believer in the principles of Christianity" and "a cultural Christian." Musk's reasons are moral and political – he believes Christianity can boost both happiness and birthrates.

Musk joins many Western conservative thinkers troubled by a rapidly changing world. Some of these thinkers have embraced Christianity to combat these changes. Yet they often struggle to accept Christianity's central supernatural claims, like Christ's resurrection.

In conservative intellectual circles, the receding tide of Christianity is turning. For some, the appeal is aesthetic or political (extra votes for their political cause) or practical (less crime and better workers). The prominent atheist, Richard Dawkins, calls Christianity's core claims "obvious nonsense", but he still identifies as a "cultural Christian" because he enjoys hymns and cathedrals.

Others see moral value in Christianity. The British conservative commentator Douglas Murray calls himself a "Christian atheist", rejecting key Christian beliefs, but valuing its moral ideas like the "sanctity of the individual." US psychologist and media personality Jordan Peterson acts "as if" God exists because, for him, it provides meaning, purpose and order.

Now I like Jordan Peterson. He has done a splendid work as a public intellectual. But he is highly conflicted. His key misunderstanding is about the Cross. To Jordan it is primarily exemplary. It is the greatest example of the self-sacrifice that we are all called to. It is almost as though he seems to believe that by taking on our own form of sacrifice, we too can atone not only for our own sins, but the sins of the world. It's no wonder that he looks and sounds like a heavily burdened man. Indeed, that is part of his great appeal. He is a deeply compassionate man who cares for others and wants to help others. But he cannot be the Saviour.... Nor is Jung and Freud gospel.

In a recent debate between Richard Dawkins and Peterson Dawkins asked "do you believe Jesus was born of a virgin?", Peterson responded, "I don't feel qualified to comment." He also went on to say that it didn't matter if the Bible was divinely inspired or just a product of human evolution. Dawkins rightly pointed out that it makes a huge difference, but Peterson insisted the two positions were essentially the same. It is amazing that Peterson is able to point people to the light, even though he seems to be lost in the fog of Jungian myth, memes and meaning. I watched a lesson he gave in Greece on the meaning of Logos....and I wish he could meet the real Logos.

And that is the problem with Cultural Christianity. It is not only pervasive in the western world but it is pervasive in too many churches. Believing in God is not the same as believing God. That requires a salvation experience with the living Savior.

Here is our problem....

Tom Holland the author of “Dominion” made the historical case that western civilization was not based on Greece or Rome but on the teachings of the gospel of scripture and particular Paul’s epistles and theology of “we are all one neither is there Greek or Jew or gentile, slave or free, male or female”; and that each person made in the image of God is valuable.

The modern world and its values of “human rights” comes from a Christian foundation. Atheists and agnostics are getting the message. They need a world with Christians in it. If it was just a world with the savage ideology of ancient Greece or Rome it would be dog eat dog world far more than it is now. In fact uncivilized.

So they are enjoying the fruits of Christian civilization without understanding the roots of this prosperity.

My admonition.....it is time for we the majority to take back our world and rebuild our civilization with a majority of people who “believe God”. How? Go back to the American Declaration of Independence of 4<sup>th</sup> July 1776. I will quote two paragraphs and make an analysis for our consideration.....

#### **In Congress, July 4, 1776**

*The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America, When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.*

*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.--That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, -- That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government,*

Please note that “we hold these truths to be self evident” in both 1776 and 2024 which same truths were not self-evident in the so-called ‘Golden Age of the Greece of Pericles’ or in the Roman empire of Augustus. It is now self-evident because of the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ all over the world.

Secondly please note that the admission in 1776 America that “human rights” are derived from God. They are not derived from a king or from a government. Government is organized to protect those rights.

Further please note that God is recognized as “Creator of mankind” in 1776 America. That means that as creator He is owner. Man is given rights by God but in return they

come with responsibilities to the Creator. As in what is that God the Creator now requires of His creation.

I assert the following from the Declaration: *it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another*

None of the nations coming out of the creation of western civilization through the preaching of the gospel believe anymore that their human rights derive from God; they look to governments to tell them what their rights are. And increasingly they find their governments far more tyrannical and obstructive of their rights than the English king ever was to the colonists of 1776 America. In Southern Africa it is tyrannical!

The ruling elite of the economic, political and intellectual class neither believe in a Creator to whom they are responsible for their actions. They believe they evolved by chance out of chaos and are subject to the Darwinian laws of the survival of the fittest.

And these are now living in a world created by Christian values but fantasize that if they try at best to act as Cultural Christians they can somehow maintain an orderly world of progress without God or responsibility to their Creator. I predict that world is now and will in future crumble when the inevitable storms hit a foundation built on sand. The West is reverting to the paganism that the missions of the Monasteries and missionaries rescued them out of. Back into the law of the jungle and the darkness of occult shamans and their gods of darkness. Look around Southern Africa!

The remedy and strategy from here? Follow the admonition of the American Declaration of Independence.....

***That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government,***

It is time for the majority of Christians of Southern Africa who believe God and who recognize Him as Creator and giver of life and human rights to redo their constitutions to reflect the values of the gospel of Christ.

In this blog I am not going to address the issue of how and when. That will come. But I want to challenge you to see what other nations are doing whose governments are openly declaring their loyalty and obedience to their religious values.

In this following article is the startling development of what the Indian government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi is doing to promote Buddhism in India and around Asia. And as you read this wherever you see “Buddhism” replace with “Christianity” and where you see India replace with ‘South Africa’ and where you see Modi replace with Ramaphosa and ask yourself if not why not and when are we going to get a government that reflects and promotes our values?

# Bringing Buddhism back as a component of India's strategic culture

**Having shaped the cultural and social fabric of Asia for centuries, Buddhism is central to New Delhi's soft power emphasis**

by Prateek Joshi and Genevieve Donnellon-May November 19, 2024

Can civilizational values reshape Asian international relations? India currently is addressing that question through Buddhism. Some context: While India has a majority Hindu population, its national emblem and the choice of its flag (specifically the white band) were adopted from Buddhist symbols at the time of independence.

Over the last few years, the International Buddhist Confederation, composed of a network of scholars, has been at the forefront of India's outreach to the Buddhist world. The IBC is working towards expanding India's growing ties with the global community of Buddhists. The thrust of the effort, which is sponsored by India's Ministry of Culture, is to explore alternative forms of engagement based on Buddhist principles and civilizational connections. Specifically, India and its Asian allies are working together to develop a new framework grounded in Buddhist values and aimed at guiding multilateral cooperation on development issues.

Addressing the 74th session of United Nations General Assembly in 2019, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi remarked that India had given the world Buddha rather than Yuddha (Hindi word for war/conflict), emphasizing Buddhism as a cornerstone of India's global identity and a path to peace. He has reiterated this message in subsequent international speeches, positioning Buddhism as key to New Delhi's diplomatic approach and response to global tensions.

Even though Prime Minister Modi and the Bharatiya Janata Party famously identify with Hindu nationalism, Buddhism's centrality to Indian and Asian cultural discourse is acknowledged by all political parties across the ideological spectrum.

The extent of Buddhist civilization's expanse across Asia is well known and India's political leadership time and again has reinvigorated this facet in crafting its engagements with Asia. It's simply that, given the global situation, there is an ongoing conversation among Asian countries to adopt some norms on international conduct. The Modi government has even allocated a high budget to operationalize these issues on a sustained basis.

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Notably, Buddha's teachings of rationality, compassion and the interconnectedness/interdependency of all things and beings resonate strongly in India's renewed push for a new normative discourse at the international level. These principles are seen as a foundation for regional cooperation, consensus-building and conflict prevention.

For India, Buddhism represents not only a spiritual tradition but also a diplomatic model for shared prosperity and connectivity across Asia. This aligns with New Delhi's broader international aspirations, aiming to reconcile its global ambitions with regional harmony and prosperity across Asia.

Buddhism has long been a significant element of Indian foreign policy. The historical expanse of Buddhist influence over Asia became an important element in Indian nationalist thought to imagine and portray India's place in Asia.

During the colonial era, also, Buddhism was recognized as a powerful counter by Indian thinkers and reformers to combat social inequalities and, simultaneously, as a unifying force in Asia. While it sparked ideological debates among Indian nationalists, there remains broad consensus on its importance in shaping India's role in Asia, promoting peace and cooperation.

In recent years, Indian foreign policy strategy has placed greater emphasis on soft power in its engagement with Asia. While New Delhi's narrative of civilizational ties and use of Buddhism dates back to independence, it is now manifesting more concretely in its developmental initiatives and international diplomacy.

Buddhism, which has shaped the cultural and social fabric of India and Asia for centuries, is central to this strategy. Key initiatives include the International Buddhist Circuit, relic expositions, restoration of Buddhist temples across Asia and the return of many Buddhist artifacts to India.

The success of this strategy can already be seen. In March this year, relics of Lord Buddha and his two chief disciples were displayed in Thailand, where they attracted over four million devotees. A similar exhibition in Mongolia in 2022 received state-level honors. More recently, in June 2024, Modi attended the inauguration of Nalanda University, the highest center of Buddhist learning in ancient times.

Scholars are increasingly focusing on the life and legacy of Guru Padmasambhava, the Indian mystic who introduced Buddhism to Tibet and the broader Himalayan region. His influence, previously understated, is now gaining renewed attention. Padmasambhava (known as the "second Buddha") is credited with establishing Tibet's first monastery and shaping the region's arts and architecture, including in Bhutan and Nepal. He is believed to have transformed the mountain ranges of the Indian subcontinent into conduits for spreading Buddhist culture.

Furthermore, the ancient Pali language has become a focal point for the Indian government, due to the publication of key Buddhist texts, including the Tripitaka (the earliest texts that make up the Buddhist Canon), in Pali. Originally the language of the common people in Buddha's time, Pali evolved into a sophisticated language as it spread to Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia, influencing languages including Sinhalese, Burmese, Thai and Khmer.

In October 2024, Pali was declared a "classical language of India." Modi marked the occasion by addressing a large gathering of Buddhist monks, many from Southeast Asia, reaffirming India's commitment to preserving "the words of Lord Buddha with their original values."

In recent years, New Delhi has hosted major international Buddhist summits (with IBC as the nodal knowledge partner), bringing together diplomats, scholars, monks and monastic heads from across Asia. These events, inaugurated by India's top leadership, foreground Buddhism's growing centrality in India's foreign policy.

For instance, following the First Global Buddhist Summit hosted by India's prime minister, India hosted the First Asian Buddhist Summit in 2024, with the president of India as the chief guest, reinforcing India's "Act East" policy. This policy emphasizes regional development through cultural ties, including the restoration of heritage sites, scholarships for students and redefining of economic cooperation grounded in civilizational values. The Asian Buddhist Summit concluded with the announcement of the Delhi Declaration, which outlined a framework for cooperation among Asian nations guided by Buddhist principles.

Beyond cultural diplomacy, Buddhist teachings are being applied to contemporary challenges facing the environment, mental health issues and combating disinformation. A notable example is the September 2024 International Buddhist Media Conclave in New Delhi, which brought together global Buddhist media outlets and entrepreneurs to explore technological innovations and new approaches to counter disinformation.

Buddhism's long influence in Asia has shaped the region's art, architecture, ecology and spirituality, encompassing all aspects of life. These initiatives not only highlight India's soft power but also reintegrate Buddhism into Asia's strategic culture, aligning India's developmental goals with those of the region. This approach helps conceptualize an international order grounded in the principles of Buddha's teachings

### **Attention Christians of Southern Africa**

Why can't our nations and people and leaders of Southern Africa not do for the Christian gospel what Modi and India are doing for Buddhism in Asia?