

Clash of Civilizations: Its Misconceptions and Its Challenges to Christianity

(An abstract)

Chong Ho Yu

Director of Testing, Measurement,

Assessment, and Research

Applied Learning Technology Institute

Arizona State University

U. S. A.

Since the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001, the thesis of “clash of civilizations” introduced by Samuel Huntington has been a controversial topic in the academic arena as well as in the media. The issue is germane to Christianity because religion plays a crucial role in defining civilizations. Unfortunately, many criticisms against the thesis of “clash of civilizations” are based upon misinterpretations. As a result, those rebuttals are nothing more than attacking a straw man. The purpose of this article is to outline the major notions of Huntington’s thesis and to debunk several common misconceptions as follows: (1) Clash of civilizations is inevitable and it provokes conflicts. (2) The thesis is used by the American new conservatives to justify their aggressive foreign policy. (3) The thesis demonizes the Islamic culture. (4) The thesis is a political theory only. Nonetheless, certain weaknesses could be found in Huntington’s thesis. For example, while the thesis has post hoc explanatory power for past events, its predictive power for the future is weak. Further, quantitative analysis

indicates that intra-civilization conflicts or intra-religious conflicts are more frequent than clashes between different civilizations during the late 20th century. Nevertheless, both Christianity and Islam are characterized by universalism; thus one should not simply dismiss the clash thesis. Although different diagnoses and ways of resolutions – such as “dignity of difference” and cosmopolitanism – were proposed as a remedy to the clash, it seems that there is no viable course of action at the present time.