

How deep is humanity's civilisation? Is our refinement real, or are we just kidding ourselves, our airs and graces mere smears of lipstick daubed on the savage beast within? Have we been smart enough long enough now that the lessons have sunk in deep, or is our sophistication mere surface veneer and high-shine polish? How much have the lessons of cooperation, civility and enlightenment been absorbed? How far has two thousand years of Christian forgiveness, gentleness and love penetrated into our communal psyche? Does the polite mask of compassion drop off when we think nobody's looking? If someone started to scrape away the Obama glittering on the surface, how long would it be before they reached the Trump beneath? How far have we moved on from solving all our arguments with sticks and stones, how far from headhunting the tribe next door, from rioting when the queen marries a Spaniard, hanging the ship's monkey because we think it's a French sailor or burning eccentrics and outsiders because they're witches and faggots? How far? Not far.

Before you slump head in hands into your pew, there is good news. Despite the perennial good-old-days trope of grumpy old people everywhere, for the moment, the world as a whole is a much better place than it was a hundred, fifty, twenty years ago. Undeniably, there are pockets of terror in the world where humanity seems to have become sucked down a vortex of horror. The broader picture, however, shows humankind now richer, better fed, healthier and happier than it has ever been in the two hundred thousand or so years we've been tapping our dainty dancing feet on the earth. We're more widely travelled, more knowledgeable, more welcoming and accepting than we've ever been. We are much less violent, less hostile, less insular, we are much less, in a word, tribal. And all the better for it. But there's no guarantee that it's going to stay that way.

When a child is born she does not enter the world with a brand-newly created Eden-fresh human psyche. That freshly-hatched personality is not a blank slate: it is another layer of sediment lain atop the deposits that have settled over the human millennia. We are all our history, and the less enlightened aspects of our nature— like fossils in the geological strata— are there deposited in the layers of our being; dormant for now, but all it takes is a shadow to fall and up the sickly shoots will crawl. And before you know it, we're daubing on the battle woad, calling out the posse and our oh-so elegant minuet has become a war dance.

When I was little more than a babe myself, I studied for a degree in social psychology. It's a science that only really got off the mark in the aftermath of the

second world war, and thus some of its most iconic experiments, its seminal moments are immensely pessimistic. Social psychology started with the big questions: how can we understand the behaviour behind the cataclysm that had only recently engulfed the globe- how could the holocaust happen? How could civilised people commit the Rape of Nanjing? How could the horrors of Nazism and Stalinism happen? How could humans rain such death and destruction on each other?

These were the questions the first social psychologists asked (these days it's more likely to be marketing research- what sort of cornflakes do you prefer, at least that's the only work I ever got) and the answers they got back to those big questions were deeply pessimistic. Civilisation, it seems, is only skin deep.

One particular study, led by American scientist Muzafer Sherif is totemic. Here's what they did. They randomly divided the 12 year olds at an American Boy Scout summer camp into two separate teams, the Eagles and the Rattlers. Each team was taught to cooperate- doing activities that required all the group to pull together in order to succeed, building shelters, drawing water and so on. And then they were placed in a series of competitions with the other group, for a paltry prize. All a bit obvious and artificial you might think. But when the researchers sat back and watched, everything you would expect of unsavoury tribalism developed: strong identification with their own group, hostility to the other, stereotyping, name-calling and finally- and catching the psychologists completely unprepared- a full scale riot. Bear in mind these boys were all friends with each other before being arbitrarily divided into Eagles and Rattlers. There was nothing in the slightest bit important they were competing for. Group membership was entirely random so there was nothing to be proud about for being in one group or the other. But almost without prompting the groups became tribes and the tribes went to war. When the riot was over, they were all best friends again. It's chilling how quickly we can form a tribe, how extreme we can become about it- and how little it means later.

You don't really need to be a professor of psychology to work this out. You just need the World Cup.

Although I am unlikely to be disappearing up an ivory tower any day soon (not even if you sprinkle glitter on it), clergy do have it drilled into them in theological collage that we have to make the effort to understand vaguely where everybody else is coming from. So when the World Cup comes around I will go against my every instinct and sit down and watch it when England is playing. Usually this only demands 3 hours of my time every four years, so it's light work. So this year I sat down to

watch England play Columbia (with the sound down: I always think football looks better than it sounds). And you know, I found myself drawn in to England's drama, edge of my seat when they almost scored, despondent when it went to penalties, amazed when they snatched victory from the jaws of defeat rather than leap head first into the gullet of humiliation. What an utterly bizarre state of affairs, becoming emotionally tied up watching eleven people I will never meet kicking an inflated pig's bladder around a field with further 11 people I am even less likely ever to meet. The only thing I share in common with the England players rather than the Colombian ones is that I reside somewhere in the same fifty-thousand square miles as them. Along with 55 million other people.

I find nationalism illogical and inexplicable. I know that my being born where I was born rather than somewhere else was simply random chance. I'm deeply suspicious of flag-waving, because so often in history wrapping yourself in the colours has been just a few goose steps away from persecuting minorities. I would like to think that I don't have a patriotic bone in my body but in the presence of that pig's bladder, there was proof positive that there must be a tiny splinter in me somewhere determined to be a member of the Eagles or the Rattlers. In brief, the tribal instinct runs deep.

If you've ever looked at the early history of Christianity, you will have noticed that not long after the ball got rolling, things became pretty gory. The main danger in coming to the early church was not boredom or being dragooned onto the tea rota, but being marched off to be martyred. Quite a lot of our predecessors came to a sticky end in the persecutions of first the Romans, and then everybody else. Those young women pictured in our stained glass window all ended up involuntarily in pieces, in the stomach of a lion or similarly dispatched. And that's because Christianity was seen to be a threat because it was seen to put itself beyond tribal loyalties. Despite lots of the early Christians- including St Paul- going to great lengths to try to show that this wasn't the case they were rarely believed because it self evidently wasn't true. Although the interests of church and chieftain may sometimes coincide, Christianity was and always is a threat to tribal loyalties. Faith cuts through tribalism.

This is why the Church of England has always been at great pains to state that despite its name and despite having the tribal leader as its supreme head, it is *not* a national church, but that part of the universal church that is in England.

And yes, there is a chosen people— Israel— and that sounds tribal enough, but they are chosen to make the whole world God's chosen people.

So, the great prophecies of Isaiah climax in his vision of all the nations coming together to worship under one God.

When St John sees his visions of heaven what he saw was  
*“a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages”*

The last command Jesus gives to his disciples before his ascension is:  
*‘Go, make disciples of all nations.’*

All those things which give us identity- nationhood, ethnicity, tribe, family, even our genetic make up, powerful though their effects on our lives may be, all those things which give us identity are arbitrary matters of chance and accident. We could have been born somewhere else, into a different family, with a different genetic mix. For each one of us, the possible lives are infinite. It could always have been another way. Except for one thing.

Nations arise from tribes and tribes emerge from families and every last human being on this earth is a member of the same family, because we all are children of the same heavenly Father. We are all subjects of the Kingdom of Heaven. And there is no tribalism in the Kingdom of God.