

# Is the West Worth Defending?

There are many people who will cite the West as something which is under threat and something for which we should be prepared to fight to defend. Depending on which defender of the West is pontificating, the threat comes from Russia, or from Islam, or from China, or from some enemy within the West itself. The question is, however, meaningless unless we have a clear understanding of what exactly is meant by the West?

For some people the West is that civilization which grew from the meeting of Athens and Jerusalem, encompassing the philosophy of the former and the theology of the latter. For others the West is that civilization that has emerged in Europe and America since the Enlightenment and which is characterized by secularism in politics and relativism in philosophy. The older West has been called Judeo-Christian civilization or simply Christendom. The post-Enlightenment West has been called Liberalism or simply Modernity. The problem is that the earlier West has not been replaced by the latter West, in the sense that Modernity can be said to have eclipsed Christendom. On the contrary, the two civilizations continue to exist side-by-side, in contradistinction and conflict.

The post-Enlightenment West has tried to crush the Christian West at various times. We think perhaps of the so-called Glorious Revolution in England in 1688, the French Revolution in 1789, and the Russian Revolution of 1917. With regard to the last of these, it is important to insist that the Bolshevik Revolution was a Western Revolution, regardless of whether we consider Russia to be part of the West, because the ideas of Marx and Engels, as heirs of the philosophy of Hegel and others, were very much of the post-Enlightenment Western tradition. If Russia is not of the West, the Russian Revolution was the imposition of post-Enlightenment Western values on the Russian people, an act of what might be called

cultural imperialism. Yet, according to Alexander Solzhenitsyn, the Nobel Prizewinning writer, it is wrong to see Russia as being distinct from the West. Considering Russia to be part of that older Western Civilization, known as Christendom, Solzhenitsyn insisted that Russia and the West were essentially part of the same threatened Christian civilization, and that both had succumbed to the evils of post-Enlightenment modernity:

*"Today, when we say the West we are already referring both to the West and to Russia ... And ... there are ills that are characteristic, that have plagued the West for a long time and now Russia has quickly adopted them also. In other words, the characteristics of modernity, the psychological illness of the twentieth century, is this hurriedness, hurrying, scurrying, this fitfulness – fitfulness and superficiality. Technological successes have been tremendous but without a spiritual component mankind will not only be unable to further develop but cannot even preserve itself. There is a belief in an eternal, an infinite progress which has practically become a religion. This is a mistake of the eighteenth century, of the Enlightenment era."*

If, therefore, Western Liberals see Russia as an enemy of their West, many Western Christians, agreeing with Solzhenitsyn, see their Eastern Orthodox brothers as allies in the traditional West's war against the new West's Modernity.

Having defined the two Wests, we can now answer our original question. Is the West worth defending?

If one believes in the traditional West, or what might be called Christendom, it is worth defending not merely against alleged threats from the East, such as that of Islam, but against those from within posed by Western Liberalism. If, on the other hand, one believes in the post-Enlightenment West, it is worth defending not merely against threats from the

East, such as Russia, but against the threat from within posed by Christendom. In short, we should respond to the question of whether the West is worth defending by first asking the more important question of which West it is that we are being asked to defend.