

What Putin is Doing Right... and What the West is Not Doing at All

This weekend's *Wall Street Journal* featured an interesting article about Hungary, a former Soviet bloc country that fled to NATO after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and is now moving closer to Putin's Russia. As the article mentions, it is one more example of the break up of the Cold War anti-Soviet alliance, and another diplomatic victory for Putin.

But more importantly, it returns us to the issue of why it is that the West is experiencing this long, slow breakup—and what Putin is doing right.

Here is what Putin is doing right and what the West is—not doing wrong—but not doing at all: First, he is providing his people with a transcendent meaning and purpose through an official religion, that of Christianity, while the West thinks it can keep cultural cohesion through meaningless secular liberal abstractions.

What Putin knows that Western leaders seem not to appreciate at all is that every culture needs a religion at its heart to function in a stable way. Communism failed for the lack of a real one and the West is failing now because it has abandoned the one it had.

And, ironically, the one the West had is the one that Putin has got now: Christianity.

I haven't been to Russia, but what people who have been there in recent years tell me is that all the symbols of the old Soviet regime are gone—all those, anyway, except the ones set

in concrete. And those are probably not long for this world. In their place are Christian symbols, primarily icons. In fact, icons are everywhere in Putin's Russia. Putin has—cleverly or wisely, depending on your view of him—figured out that Marxism served for a time as the *de facto* religion of the old Soviet regime. It worked to the extent it could given its failure to economically sustain the people. But the failure of Marxism left them with the need for a new religion—which, in the case of Russia, is the old one.

Old Imperial Russia is back with a vengeance, along with the religious system which sustained it—the Russian Orthodox Church.

Hence, the icons.

About this Russian political leaders are unambiguous. In fact, Russian leaders are now saying what is now practically impossible to say about our own country: Russia, they say, is a Christian nation. Russian leaders now explicitly and openly promote it.

While liberals in the United State press for free speech restrictions and more limited religious freedoms under their secular Sharia law, the Soviets are proclaiming political freedom and teaching Christianity in their schools.

While liberals in Europe and the United States, unhampered now by the moral restraints of Western religion, promote the most preposterous and radical points of gender theory and racial politics, the Russians are promoting traditional values.

Go figure.

Of course, you can appreciate the negative reactions to this. Yes, Western liberals will say, they talk freedom, but look at the shortened lifespans of those who openly defy Putin. That's

a legitimate point. And, they will say, Putin can talk about Christianity all he wants, but what about the persecution of religious minorities in Russia? Another good point.

One thinks of the debate over Constantine and whether, despite making Christianity the state religion in the late Roman empire, he believed it himself. Was it a sincere religious conversion or was it the calculation of a political leader who knew how to read the tea leaves in a culture that was already largely Christian?

But the bottom line is that it didn't matter. The declaration that Rome was Christian had the same effect either way, and its influence on later history would have been the same whether Constantine was sincere or not.

You can concede all the proclamations of the doubters' points and still ask why that has to delegitimize the main one, that Russia is openly defying the liberal secular West on one of the advantages the West has always claimed it had over the Russians: that it had a culture informed by religious values while Russia was atheistic.

The roles are now reversed. Western leaders, noticeably sanguine about the Islam of their new immigrants, are ambivalent at best and hostile at worst to traditional Christianity, and increasingly trash the values that go along with it. In the West, the traditional altars have been desecrated, and, as in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, the tops knocked off the crosses, leaving a "T"—symbolic for "Technology."

Technology, and the economic wealth it represents, is the new religion of the West. But it doesn't satisfy the soul. The West is giving to its people things they can live for. But Putin is giving his people things they can die for.

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[Image Credit: [The Kremlin](#)]