

Putin's Orthodoxy: A Few Ideas about His Religious Views and the New Russia

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Vladimir Putin is fairly mute about his own religious views. Being a member of the Communist Party is no evidence of atheism. Its evidence only of conformity. Party membership was essential for having any a career of any substantial kind, especially in the security services. Military and police careers were, as in all societies, attractive to patriots and nationalists, though it had to be a “Soviet” rather than a specifically Russian nationalism. However, he does say that he was secretly baptized by his mother at 18 months in Petersburg at the Cathedral of the Martyrs Alexandria and Antonia of Rome. From this, it is safe to say that Putin was secretly taught the faith from a young age.

According to his mother, it was the day of St. Michael and all the Angels, so it had to be November 21st. Putin's views are, in his own words, to be internal, and never the subject of a show. The cross that his mother gave him at the Sepulcher Church in Jerusalem he wears always. In his house many years ago, a fire broke out from the heating unit of the sauna malfunctioning. Worried that the cross, which he had left near his bed, was gone forever, once of the workmen found it perfectly intact in the midst of all the rubble.

Putin stated on Larry King that he sees this event as a miracle and a “revelation.” His personal commitment to Orthodoxy never wavered afterwards. Normally he goes to obscure, rural churches to spend the holidays, wishing to avoid the cameras and distractions of the major cities. His natural constituency is the Orthodox population, who, as polls have stated since the mid 1990s, trust the patriarch more than anyone else in Russia, even more than Putin himself.

Unlike Slobodan Milosevic, Putin is clearly comfortable and at home in an Orthodox setting, and his ritual movements are smooth and comfortable, not jerky and artificial as might be expected for a hypocritical display. Milosevic was noted for his awkwardness in Orthodox churches in the 1990s, suggesting he had no experience in them. The only time he seemed slightly stiff is when, upon kissing an icon, the background noise was of hundreds of cameras taking pictures.

In 2012, 65,000 gathered at the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow to defend the church against Pussy Riot and other attacks on it. Other than they, only the True Orthodox have attacked the Moscow Patriarchate, not for its ecumenism solely, but in general. This sort of emotional extrapolation is unjustified. As biker gangs, Donbass militias and an entire new national Orthodox culture is being rebuilt, the tiny, splintered and arrogant True Orthodox Church (TOC) sects offer no alternative, create more confusion and have rejected being a part of this rebirth. By their fruits and all that. . . .

The Moscow patriarchate deserves censure for its actions within the WCC and overtures towards a Roman church whose present pope rejects his own position (as he believes in universal salvation). They have long condemned Marxism, admitted to their forefathers' role in creating the New Martyrs. These same have been canonized. While officially ecumenism, the MP has thousands of Brotherhoods rejecting this practice and maintains a political stance that militates against such universalism. The illegitimate splintering of the TOC, exclusively on non-dogmatic

grounds, is at least as grave of a sin as ecumenism, removing the moral high ground from these groups.

Yet, with all that, the TOC always seems to find some new reason to hate the Moscow Patriarchate. Only about 10% of the clergy today was consecrated under the old regime, so that condemnation wears thin. The illegitimate Tsars of the 18th century did everything the Bolsheviks did against the church, but these Freemasons (such as Peter I, Biron and Peter III) seem to get a free pass. Peter I and Catherine II, neither of whom was Orthodox, purged the church and reduced it to about one-third of its former size. Bishops were chosen based on their adherence to the regime solely, and yet, these TOC crusaders say nothing. This strongly suggests they are being less than honest.

Yet, the TOC cannot be ignored. This writer is a happy part of it after all. Patriarch Sergius was chosen by Stalin as the overseer for the church's destruction. One does not need canons to show he had no legitimacy. St. Peter of Krutitsa, the bishop who had a greater right to the Patriarchal title than Sergius, rejected Sergius under the worst form of torture designed to force his acceptance. In 1926, Agafangel, another bishop with a good claim to the patriarchate, was released from prison. Lying, he said Peter gave the *locum tenens* position to Sergius.

If Peter died, so the law stated, the temporary position would go to Kyrill who saw Sergius as a fraud. Then, Agafangel, then Arseny and finally, if all the above were incapacitated, Sergius. Yet, even as “*locum tenens*,” an ad hoc position with little power, Sergius acted as a patriarch. He served the GRU. Antony Khrapovitsky, the spiritual leader of the White Armies, condemned Sergius while recognizing his impossible situation. That is the reasonable course. His actions were worthy of censure, yet, few of those reading this would have done differently.

December 1926 Sergius himself is arrested and released the end of March, 1927. At this time, there were three groups: the Provisional Council under metropolitan Gregory, Sergius and independent bishops largely cut off from events. Sergius recognized the Living Church and generally manifested his Leftism that he was known for during his time as bishop in Finland.

Putin is far superior for the church than Peter the Great and many others. Non-Orthodox monarchs in Russia history include Peter I, who was a materialist Freemason. His successor, the mockery “Catherine I,” who was a former prostitute from Germany taken as war booty by Peter. She was placed on the throne in mockery, similar to the French Revolutionaries placing a prostitute on the throne of the Bishop of Paris during the terror. Lord Biron, a Freemason who ruled while the two “Empress Annas” tried on outfits), Peter III who was a Lutheran, soon murdered by, Catherine II, a Deist and vehemently anti-Orthodox and anti-Russian. Alexander I dabbled in the occult, while Alexander II was generally secular. At the same time, these and other monarchs placed atheists and masons as head of the synod on a regular basis. Yet, the TOC sees this has having no effect on the nature of the church. There is no “Sergianism” claims back then. Putin is far more Orthodox than those monarchs.

Putin's concern with ecumenism with Rome is puzzling. His constituency is Orthodox and nationalist. He has only to lose with this policy. Yet, no one else on earth right now has done more to strengthen and spread Orthodox than Putin and the Moscow Patriarchate. The TOC is in no position to complain given their own sins and schisms.

On February 13, 2012, Putin condemned the Red forces, included the church Sergius was soon to lead, for “undermining the spiritual foundations of Russia in their persecution of the Orthodox church.” he said this with the Patriarch sitting next to him. The patriarch looked visibly uncomfortable and stiffened at these words.

Regardless of errors and problems that are inherent in all human facts, Putin and the Moscow Patriarchate remain the sole and exclusive Orthodox government in the world. The TOC's hypocritical and pious condemnations of this place them in an uncomfortable position, especially since they have no moral high ground at all. Claims to “persecution” when their members are arrested are hollow, since these groups are not large or significant enough to even bother the President or his cabinet. It is a sort of self-exaltation that these groups see themselves as constantly under state surveillance. What is more, many of these Russian nationalists in the TOC are Putin's natural constituency. What does he gain with baseless persecution? Even if they were not, what's the point? These groups have little influence and its dropping and more and more schisms develop.

The behavior of these hierarchs and clergy among their own groups show a lack of moral sense and an ingrained self-seeking. To think they are also, on occasion, involved in criminal behavior is not ludicrous. They will find any reason to condemn the government that has failed to support them, provide them with jobs or recognition. In no way can the TOC see itself as an alternative in Russia since they are self-condemned: they have anathematized each other. Despite my theological agreement with them, their present state of disunity and its cause render them worse than useless.

Back in 2001, Izvestia interviewed Putin's spiritual father, the Archimandrite Tikhon (Shevkunov) of the Sretensky Monastery. This was December of 2001, probably prior to anyone really knowing too much about his policy agenda. The Archimandrite stated:

Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin is really an Orthodox Christian really, and not nominally. He confesses, receives communion and is aware of his responsibility before God for the ministry entrusted to him from on high and for his immortal soul. The burden and severity of the problems he is undertaking to solve and his responsibility for these is truly enormous. Anyone who really loves Russia and wishes her well can only pray for Vladimir Vladimirovich whom the Providence of God sent to deliver Russia.

The Archimandrite was himself sent to prison by the old KGB and had members of his family perish because of them. Thus, Putin's background in this organization did not initially endear him to the President. However, he soon was convinced of Putin's Orthodox mind. In his book, the Archimandrite writes:

Combining the modern Russian state with past forms, Putin has undertaken a huge effort to connect it to the heavens. The construction of churches, the reconstruction of destroyed parishes, monasteries and the revival of Russian shrines has become an urgent matter for Putin. For the dark, soulless landscape that was imposed on Russia after 1991 – one dominated by nihilism, anger, and nonsense mercantile scams – Russia was in a condition completely unsuitable for any future development. Anything built in this context, any laboratory or university, immediately plunged into the abyss of a toxic lifestyle. The restoration of churches and monasteries is truly the creation of huge sewage treatment plants which are to filter and processing the fetid waste of the 1990s. It is the construction of spiritual filters through which passes the poisoned spirit of the

Russian people.

In his visit to Valaam, Putin stated that “without Orthodoxy, there would be no Russia.” On the website of the Valaam monastery, they speak of the sincerity of the President's faith. They state that visiting the northern shrines was a “turning point” for Putin and began a sincere conversion. He ensured that there was a minimum of meetings and no talk of politics. On August 16th of 2001 Putin first began his pilgrimage and acted like an “ordinary believer.” He walked the three kilometers to the main monastery to St. Nicholas' skete. He then decreed that the island of Anzer be granted officially to the church and more specifically, the monastery of Solovki.

On the 1025th anniversary of the baptism of Rus under St. Vladimir, Putin stated:

Today, when people are again looking for moral support, millions of our fellow citizens see their Russian Orthodox religion as a beacon. Trust the wise pastoral words of the Russian Orthodox Church. Her selfless, educational and social service demand respect. Her public authority and peacekeeping efforts aimed at strengthening the harmony and stability of Russia, as well as her efforts to restore the historical ties among peoples, and especially with our compatriots abroad, has been her legacy. It is also important that a new level of state-church relations has developed. We act as genuine partners and as co-workers in solving the most pressing domestic and international challenges in the implementation of joint ventures for the benefit of our country and people.

On the 90th anniversary of the restoration of the Patriarchate, Putin stated:

The Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church helped the people survive the agony of the 20th century. It helped defend the faith, to unite the flock and to save not just the church, but the ideas of Christianity. And later, already in a revival of religious life, the Church has helped continue his tireless service. And today, we appreciate the desire of the Russian Orthodox Church to return the ideals and values to Russian society that for centuries were our spiritual landmarks (Putin, 2007).

It is common to condemn Putin for being a “KGB agent.” the truth is that the security services of any nation attract nationalists. Few doctrinaire Marxists existed in the USSR. This is the exclusive domain of capitalist universities. Putin has condemned Marxism and communism. He has stated that the fall of the USSR was a great “catastrophe.” Indeed it was: Solzhenitsyn said the same. The destruction of the Soviet economy in a few years and its liquidation into the bank accounts of a few Jewish oligarchs is well known. The USSR was preferable to the 1990s in Russia. The life expectancy of the Russian male went down to under 60 years.

To be a career man of any kind in the USSR, one had to join the party. Spouting a few slogans that no one believed is a minor price to pay for the ability to feed one's family. Putin clearly (albeit secretly) rejected the party's atheism. He was and is a Russian nationalist. My book, *Russian Populist: The Political Thought of Vladimir Putin* shows this at great length. I've translated some speeches and writings that have not seen the light of day in the west. The revelations of Putin's secret baptism make sense out of his post-soviet career and ideological development.

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