

## Rod Dreher As A Symptom.

Nowadays, when I speak about American "intellectual" class, I cringe. No, it is not just the issue of an ongoing disaster which American foreign policy is, or cooking of books in terms of American economy--a euphemism for Stock Market. It is because there is nothing intellect-related in this class and most importantly, there are no indications whatsoever that any improvement is expected. Colonel Lang, evidently, had it with this American "academe" and wrote some really succinct observations on this issue.

It is an excellent piece and I strongly suggest to everyone to read it. Now that we established a framework of sorts, I can go back to my shtick which long ago became my part-time job of sorts and repeat all over again--American Russia Studies field is a wasteland of ignorance, propaganda, cliches and stereotypes. It is literally dominated by two types of people: those who have no clue or those who have their own agenda, with the latter being by far the largest contingent. The fact that American "academe" which allegedly specializes in Russia has no clue about the subject of their study can be easily observed through the well documented, and easily referred to, events of the last 20 years. A bunch of neocon baboons and mediocrities such as Obama completely destroyed Russian-American relations because they thought that Russia would crumble. Well, we know the result, don't we? In civilized societies such "scholars" and politicians would have been long ago ostracized and had their sinecures removed. Not in the United States.

But if that wasn't bad enough, a new, much larger disaster, has struck the field of American Russian Studies field, which, probably, now will never recover from a complete epistemic closure--Rod Dreher visited Russia. It is an unmitigated catastrophe on unimaginable scale since this guy [who has a degree in "Journalism"](#), that means no viable tools for sensible generalizations, started writing his impressions about Russia in *The American Conservative* which today culminated in an Exhibit A of American so called "intellectual" class inability to learn anything. Coincidentally, Dreher's piece is precisely about that--inability to learn. How ironic. The title of Dreher's piece is symptomatic for a history, especially Russian history, ignoramus:

Bang! There you go, from the start--drawing historical parallels between two countries which have dramatically different histories in virtually every single aspect of their existence. Recall, if you will, my constant warnings about those parallels. From my latest:

*This brings us to the more important issue—historical parallels. Drawing historical parallels is an extremely dangerous business wrought with huge risks of miscalculation and learning wrong lessons. History, certainly, does provide some valuable lessons but at this stage the entirety of the term history, as it was understood even fairly recently, does not reflect the immense complexity of human development and activity for the last roughly hundred years. Those developments can no longer be described within traditional frameworks because an greater number causalities are being afflicted not just due to human nature but now to the technology created by and in service to it*

But, of course, Rod Dreher knows better and without much ado pulls out what he calls "revered" (revered by who?) piece of the so called "Russian history" by [James](#)

[Billington](#). Billington's 1966 opus [The Icon and the Axe](#) is your typical Cold War fodder filled with all so familiar narratives of Russia's origins to a now pretty standard routine of quoting great Russian writers (Dostoevsky, of course him) trying to show that Russian culture, that is pre-Revolutionary culture, the culture of Russian aristocracy and land-owners, pretty much ended with 1917. As Dreher narrates:

*According to Billington, in the 1890s, younger Russian elites became frustrated with the country's long struggle towards constitutional liberalism, especially when the reactionary Tsar Alexander III took over from his assassinated father, a (relative) liberal who had ended serfdom. The new generation of intellectuals and artists moved into two different directions: dialectical materialism (that is, Marxism, whose leading exponent at the time was Gyorgi Plekhanov), and transcendental idealism, along the lines of the visionary Christian thinker Vladimir Soloviev. Plekhanov, the father of Russian Marxism, wanted to revitalize society through working-class revolution. Soloviev, an Orthodox Christian, but one strongly influenced by Western Christianity, sought social renaissance through a return to a kind of religious mysticism. Writes Billington, "The materialists claimed to be the heirs to the traditions of the iconoclastic Sixties [1860s]; the idealists claimed to be developing the traditions of Dostoevsky's aesthetic and religious reaction to iconoclasm." What drove them was "the exasperation of a new student generation with the subjectivism, pessimism, and introspection of the age of small deeds." Writes Billington, the "new radicals of both right and left" were both seeking "some new philosophic bedrock on which to stand."*

Let me make a short commentary here: it is easy to "learn" about culture, it is sure as hell not Signal Processing or Differential Equations. That's the point, only highly trained people provide solid opinions on such topics. Let's put it this way, unless a person has a damn serious scientific background, he cannot pass a sound judgement on a variety of complex issues related to modern civilization and its main driver--industry and technology. On culture? Oh boy, what a wonderfully unstuck field it is, one can go and "interpret" the shit out of anything without even referring to things which actually matter. I can wax philosophical and "cultural" whatever I want. Anyone with even basic education and average intelligence can concoct a couple of narratives which will simultaneously prove, say, Dostoevsky as being correct and wrong on some critical issue. In the end, Tolstoy's Anna Karenina can also be "explained" simultaneously as both a victim of Russia's upper class peculiarities and social dogma, and as a self-centered psycho-bitch--both characterizations work. That is the nature of "humanities" which rely as much on a spin as on actual facts. In the end, Strobe Talbot was educated on Russia by arguably best Western scholar on Russian culture and intelligentsia Isaiah Berlin. Boy, what a waste of time that turned out to be, either due to Talbot's lack of intellect, which I totally can conceive, or Berlin not being a great mind and teacher--this one is hard to believe.

But here is the problem, after Dreher spent a month in Russia, visited here and there some churches, spoke to some fringe figures and now tries to draw parallels between Russia and US. Sadly, Dreher, I guess after he found out who he was meeting with in Moscow, removed the piece called *Moscow Diary*, but my comment to him remained on Disqus:

*Rod, pardon me, but you are wasting your time and learning nothing of value in Russia and about Russia, especially when one considers a category of public you meet, I don't understand why you went there,*

*when you could have wrote same thing by reading materials about Russia in US media.*

He met, totally expectedly some "dissident" so called "Christians", one of them was, if my memory doesn't fail me, after Dreher removed his "Diary" was Mr. Ogorodnikov--a rather shady figure who still tries to pass for Christian Democrat and still listens to Radio Liberty, which characterizes him extremely well. These were this kind of "dissidents" about who Russian Orthodox Church had this opinion:

*В конфликте между религиозными диссидентами и представителями государственных структур Церковь, в лице иерархов, занимала позицию государства, в первую очередь, потому что официальная поддержка диссидентов могла навлечь на Церковь новые гонения. Другой причиной было то, что среди религиозных диссидентов было много людей, оторванных от подлинной церковности, для которых протестная деятельность становилась самоцелью. Позднейшие годы со всей убедительностью показали правильность такой позиции церковного руководства. Когда богоборческого государства не стало люди, привыкшие бороться против чего угодно, лишь бы бороться, направили свою энергию против Церкви.*

**Translation:** *In the conflict between religious dissidents and representatives of the state structures (in Soviet times), the Church as represented by Hierarchy took the position of the state, primarily because of the fear that Church's support for these dissidents could inspire new persecution. The other reason was the fact that among religious dissidents many people were detached from true Church and for who the protest activity was the main purpose. Later years demonstrated convincingly the correctness of such position by Church. When the godless state disappeared, people who got used to protest against anything, as long as they could protest for the sake of protesting, directed their energy against the Church.*

That's warmer and this definition covers pretty much most (not all) of the Soviet dissidents and Russia's professional "protesters" today. As long as the pressure on Russian state is maintained, the better it is. Moreover, nowadays Russian Orthodox Church is viewed by many in the West as a part of the Russian State and as such is perceived as an enemy. I wonder (wink, wink) if Dreher removed that post after recognizing the fact that some of his contacts in Russia could hardly be representative of Russia and Russians in general, and Russian Orthodoxy in particular. But it is, indeed, a peculiar fact that he removed that post. Yet, even if recognizing this fact, references to ANY Russian experiences, as Billington limited them to pre-1917, not to mention drawing any parallels to the United States, even if one would find a degree of commonality in a classic liberal thought between Russian intelligentsia and Western thinkers (after all, Tolstoy even carried a medallion of Jean-Jaques Rousseau all the time), any parallels are not only incorrect, they are harmful.

Two things which all those Russia "scholars" in the United States fail to grasp about Russia because it is beyond the grasp of most of them:

1. Russian peasant commune and its world-view;
2. War.

These two factors explain why Bolsheviks were able to get and hold on to power for

so long, the same as why Bolshevism transformed itself into something else entirely in Stalin and post-Stalin period.

Crimean War, a simple fact, Russian Army faces Anglo-French force, armed with rifles, with smooth bore muskets which barely have a half range of British and French arms, not to mention not being in the same league in terms of accuracy. I will abstain from comparing respective fleets. Russia loses the war, is humiliated and is forbidden to have any fleet on the Black Sea. As none other than Grand Duke Konstantin noted:

*We cannot deceive ourselves any longer; we must say that we are both weaker and poorer than the first-class powers, and furthermore poorer not only in material terms but in mental resources, especially in matters of administration.*

Did this thought ever visited Dreher or Billington when almost exactly 50 years from humiliating defeat in a Crimean War, Russia will be humiliated yet again in Russo-Japanese War with Russia's Baltic Squadron annihilated at Tsushima by Japanese Fleet in one of the most lopsided defeats in history. Almost surreal defeat which exposed Russia's weakness. Then comes Revolution of 1905 precipitated both by humiliation of Tsushima and by [Bloody Sunday](#). Then comes its suppression with Russia's peasantry, when not executed, literally whipped--yes, villagers crowded at the central square, with Cossacks administering public whipping of men and women. Russia was literally whipped in 1905-07. And then comes WW I. I have to put it politely, American history, even when one considers Civil War looks almost tame compared to what even old Russophobe and falsifier of Russian history Richard Pipes called "rougher political climes".

In what state Russia approached WW I is a separate topic, especially after everything became public and was generally settled--for Russia WW I was a catastrophe which resulted in millions upon millions of killed, maimed, displaced and, in the end, proved Grand Duke Konstantin's post-Crimean War diagnosis correct yet again, this time on a gigantic scale. Can some American journo who can not even speak Russian and who writes some fantasies about some Benedict Option even comprehend what effect those wars which saw millions of Russian lives wasted for the reasons which are beyond his grasp had on Russia and Russians? I am sure he has no clue as one would expect from a product of US humanities "education". Then it is no surprise that one will try to find some elusive symmetries between Russian and American history when in reality there are none and can not be. I am not sure Rod Dreher had time to actually get himself into the memorial on Poklonnaya Gora in Moscow, but in the Hall of Memory and Sorrow there are 2, 660,000 small chains with tear drops on them, each chain symbolizing 10 people, in all--a memory of 26,660,000 Soviet citizens who died in WW II. Remarkably, those 2,660, 000 chains is roughly the number of Russian soldiers killed in WW I, without civilians. If Dreher wanted to experience epiphany, he should have gone there to take in a remote physical representation of what almost 2.7 millions killed look like as tear-drops. I think he would have had some answers, maybe, and would avoid drawing parallels to a fate of an American nation (???) which has no grasp of horrors of continental warfare and no experience with it.



Then maybe, all those platitudes about culture, GULAG and other Cold War cliches and falsities will yield to an attempt, as late Father Robert Tobias wrote to perceive great depth and maybe understand that real Russian Church is not just in, however magnificent, Orthodox Cathedrals but in this:



Or in this, the closest one can get to living and dead marching together as one.



If that is not a spiritual religious experience, I don't know what is and that is how Soviet Flag flies proudly by, in many cases, people wearing Christian cross. But that is the fact which is beyond comprehension of the American intellectual class, the thing they cannot wrap their brain around, the same as inevitable leaning to the REAL Left of Russian society. They just don't get it in the US and Rod Dreher is a symptom of this narrow mindedness which cannot be cured, with protracted pseudo-intellectual discussions about Russian culture or without them. But I repeat myself.