

# What About... Putin's Russia?

By Dave DeWitt and Steve Sebastian

## First a Brief History of the Russian Orthodox Church

In the year 988 A.D., Prince Vladimir was ruling Russia from Kiev (the current capital of Ukraine). Vladimir sent envoys to the Jews, the Muslims, the western Roman Catholics, and the Eastern Orthodox to select a religion for the Russian people. He chose Eastern Orthodox Christianity, reportedly because they had the most beautiful church buildings. So the Russians were mass baptized as Orthodox Christians. This brought not just the Orthodox Church but Christian culture to Russia.

Kiev remained the capital of Russia, and the center of Russian Orthodoxy, for the next 400 years. But during that time, Russia (centered in Kiev) fell to the Mongols. In 1237, the Kahn came across Russia, destroying everything in his path. One visitor reported that no town or village remained standing, and dead bodies lay everywhere. But during the rule of the Kahn, a monk named Sergius of Rodonez moved to the forests 15 miles north of Moscow. A monastery formed around him, which is still the headquarters of the Russian Orthodox Church to this day. In 1380, Sergius convinced Dmitry, the prince of Moscow, to lead an allied rebellion, which was successful in defeating the Kahn in Moscow. This had the effect of (1) the eventual downfall of the Kahn throughout Russia, (2) the establishment of Moscow as the headquarters of the Russian Orthodox Church, and (3) Moscow replacing Kiev as the principal Russian city.

The two centuries from 1350-1550 are called the Golden Age of Russian Orthodoxy because of the many beautiful (gold-covered, onion-domed) churches that were constructed and the elaborate liturgy that was established. During that time, in 1453, the Muslim Turks captured Constantinople (today's Istanbul, the center of Eastern, Greek, Byzantine, and Orthodox Christianity). So Ivan III, emperor of Russia at Moscow, took it as a sign from God that Moscow was "The Third Rome." Rome was the first center of Christianity, then Constantinople, and now Moscow and the Russian Orthodox Church. His son Ivan the IV (Ivan The Terrible) then titled himself a Tsar (after the Roman Caesars) and beheaded all those who opposed him. This lasted until the 1600s, when a conflict between Tsar Peter the Great and the Patriarch was resolved by Peter replacing the Patriarch with a council called "The Most Holy Synod," which ruled the church until the Communists took over in 1917. But with the fall of Communism in 1989, the Orthodox Church resumed power.

## Vladimir Putin and Christianity

On April 4, 2014, Pat Buchanan posted a letter with the following information, much of it quoted from Breitbart News, London:

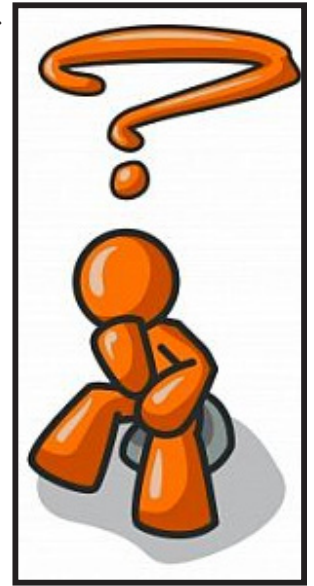
"Crimea," said Putin, "is the location of ancient Khersones, where Prince Vladimir was baptized. His spiritual feat of adopting Orthodoxy predetermined the overall basis of the culture, civilization and hu-

man values that unite the peoples of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus." Russia is a Christian country, Putin ... spoke of Russia as standing against a decadent West: "Many Euro-Atlantic countries have moved away from their roots, including Christian values." Indicting the "Bolsheviks" who gave away Crimea to Ukraine, Putin declared, "May God judge them..." In 2013, the Kremlin imposed a ban on homosexual propaganda, a ban on abortion advertising, a ban on abortions after 12 weeks, and a ban on sacrilegious insults to religious believers.

On March 24, 2014, "Liberty Voice" published the following comments by Robert Pannier:

Putin declared that he would provide defense of Christians throughout the world, as part of his overall foreign policy. He would defend

Christians from persecution wherever they were... Putin has taken the first steps in making this happen, by denying numerous U.N. resolutions demanding that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad abdicate his position as head of Syria. Al-Assad has a long-standing record of supporting Christian churches in Syria, and there is a growing amount of violence against Christians and churches within areas that are now controlled by rebel factions... Putin believes that Russia is the new leader



in supporting Christian values and morals.

Notice:

1. Putin is aligning Russia with Christianity, not Communism. He is identifying himself with Prince Vladimir, who brought Christianity to Russia in 988, and condemning Lenin's Bolshevik party that brought Communism to Russia in 1917.
2. Putin is claiming that Russia is a Christian nation because the Orthodox Church "predetermined the overall basis of the culture, civilization, and human values that unite the peoples of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus."
3. Putin is taking the conservative moral high ground against a decadent West by imposing "a ban on homosexual propaganda, a ban on abortion advertising, a ban on abortions after 12 weeks and a ban on sacrilegious insults to religious believers."
4. Concerning the Ukraine, Putin's position is that it has been part of Russia and Orthodox Christianity for over a thousand years (since 988), Kiev being the original capital and center of Russia and Russian Orthodox Christianity. The West (especially the European Union) is trying to take the Ukraine away from its Christian roots and turn it toward the debauchery of the West.
5. Concerning Syria, Putin is supporting al-Assad because he is protecting the Christian churches in Syria, whereas the radical Muslim rebels would close them and persecute the Christians. Putin claims to be the protector of Christians everywhere, in Syria against Muslim radicals and in the Ukraine against the hedonism of the West.

And the Russian people love it. According to the VCI-OM All-Russian Public Opinion Research Center, since the beginning of 2014, Vladimir Putin's rating has risen 15 percent and stands at 75.7 percent—the highest in the last five years. Russians generally love two things: (1) Russian imperialism and (2) the Orthodox Church. And Putin is promoting both.

### Why Is This Important [In Our Opinion]?

#### A. End time prophecy includes a strong king of the North, which will occupy territorial Russia.

Ezekiel 38:15; 39:2—*You will come from your place **out of the remote parts of the north**, you and many peoples with you, all of them rid-*

*ing on horses, a great assembly and a mighty army; ... and I will turn you around, drive you on, take you up **from the remotest parts of the north** and bring you against the mountains of Israel.*

Daniel 11:40; 44—*At the end time the king of the South will collide with him [the antichrist], and **the king of the North will storm against him** [the antichrist] with chariots, with horsemen and with many ships... But **rumors from the East and from the North will disturb him** [the antichrist], and he [the antichrist] will go forth with great wrath to destroy and annihilate many.*

Without discussing the details, any literal view of Scripture dictates a strong northern (territorially Russian – Ezekiel 38:1-3) power at odds with both Israel and a decadent wealthy western (resurrected Roman) empire of the antichrist. No one should say, "This is that," but this is a whole lot **like** that.

#### B. We should not equate conservative principles with biblical Christianity.

Putin (who claims to be baptized as an Orthodox Christian when he was a month and a half old) is setting himself up as representing a conservative traditional culture (opposing homosexuality, easy divorce, feminism, late-term abortion, promiscuity, pornography, and euthanasia). But so do the Muslims. Like the New Testament Pharisees, Putin represents an application of the Law of God, but not the God of the Law. The Eastern Orthodox Church (unlike Islam) is indeed Christian, in the sense that it holds to the Trinity, the necessity of the cross of Christ, a literal resurrection of Jesus, and a historical Bible. But they do not believe in the sufficiency of the cross or the Bible. And they do not proclaim the Gospel.

#### C. Christianity is about a personal decision to follow Christ, not cultural or national traditions.

Christianity, as defined by Christ and the apostles, is about *whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life* (John 3:16), not establishing a national culture. In the mind of the Orthodox, there is no separation between church and state. Putin is not promoting the salvation of individuals, he is using the Orthodox Church and western debauchery to promote Russian imperialism.