The Spiritual Vision of Russian Unity

On May 17, 1948, just three days after Israel declared independence, the Soviet Union officially recognized the nation of Israel, becoming one of the first countries to do so. During the UN debates, Soviet Ambassador Andrei Gromyko endorsed the restoration of the ancient Jewish homeland, undermining British colonial influence in the Middle East. Czechoslovakia, aligned with the Soviet bloc, supplied crucial arms to Jewish forces during the 1948 Arab–Israeli War.

Decades later, the collapse of the USSR led to large scale emigration of Jews from Russia and the Ukraine to Israel. After a break following the Six-Day War in 1967, Israel and Russia resumed diplomatic relations on October 18, 1991, Less than two months later, on December 5, 1991, The Soviet Union recognized the Ukraine's independence. Yet such recognition was predicated upon a shared Slavic base culture—a foundational system of inherent values resting upon fundamental moral and religious principles.

While Israel as the Jewish homeland was birthed approximately four thousand years ago with the Abrahamic covenant, the conviction that the chosen people possess on this basis an irrevocable claim to the territory has come under frequent opposition. The surrounding nations of Lebanon, Syria, Iran, Jordan and Egypt, unite around the envisaged destruction of Israel. This "negative identity" raises awkward questions concerning substantiality and historical coherence. Indeed, such an identity bears striking parallels within the current Russia Ukraine conflict. Yet on what basis does such an identity develop?

Russia and the West

Previously, I have situated the current conflict as a continued manifestation of the post Enlightenment historical incompatibility between the Western secularism and Slavic theocentricism. The region is a flashpoint precisely because it stands upon the fault line separating Western individualism and resultant moral relativism with Slavic theism defined by objective reality and absolute morality. Assisted suicide is an excellent example of the contrasting viewpoints, with the UK being the most recent Western European nation to legalize this grave moral debasement.

To return to the Slavic view as the normative Russian position: Ukraine is not a separate country but an integral part of the broader "Russian World"—a spiritual unity of Eastern Slavic peoples under shared history and tradition. While the West portrays Ukraine as a courageous underdog, the Russian perspective sees it as a wayward sibling, forever vexed by the riddle of its own existence as a denial of its true Russian identity.

Putin has criticized the West's influence in Ukraine, particularly NATO's expansion and Western support for the Ukrainian government, framing Russia's military actions in "Novorossiya," historically part of the Russian Empire, as defensive. Indeed, The Kremlin's number one objective in the current war with Ukraine is Russia's security and therefore its existence as a state. "We are one people," Putin has claimed, whereby the divisions between Russians and Ukrainians are artificially constructed.

But what motives might the West have for antagonizing Russia to the extent that Putin suggests? The Slavophiles, who emerged prominently in 19th-century Russia, provided a robust critique of Western rationalism, which engendered a worldview prioritizing material progress and technological advancement. Russia's emphasis on communal spirit "sobornost", underscores the difference between Western individualism and the Russian ideal of spiritual unity. Indeed, such integral vision exposes the folly of what Pope Benedict XVI termed 'the dictatorship of relativism'.

The slogan "Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality," conceived as a distinctly Russian response to the French revolutionary ideals, encapsulates a vision of Russian identity grounded in faith, loyalty, and language. Russia stands as a sign of contradiction to a misguided Europe, invoking symbols that protect Russia from the corrupting influences of Western "pseudo-wisdom" and superficial notions of freedom. These symbols—the Orthodox faith, devotion to the Tsar, and the Russian language—constitute a spiritual bastion that unites the population, embodying the sacred essence of Holy Rus'.

Moreover, the Russian language and Cyrillic alphabet act as a unifying force, connecting its speakers as "brothers of one family." Holy Rus' represents a common treasure shared equally by the Tsar and the people, bridging the divide between the ruling elite and ordinary citizens. This divinely endowed legacy, infused with a mystical sense of shared history, presents a point of confusion for Western secularism predicated on atheist egalitarian ideals. Consequently, Holy Rus' celebrates a cohesive community defined by spiritual unity embodying a cultural defense against foreign influences perceived as alien to the Russian soul, such as the aforementioned Assisted suicide.

The Novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky frequently juxtaposes this Russian spiritual tenacity with the superficial intellect of the European-influenced intelligentsia. For Slavophiles, Holy Rus' is both sacred and inseparable from the Russian landscape: a humble nation devoted to simplicity and selflessness. Its destiny lies in embracing others in fraternal love while guiding them toward the light of true faith, characterized by an introspective messianism of the covenant rather than outward expansionism.

This dual vision encompasses both the "Third Rome" and the humble spirituality associated with the legendary city of Kitezh, fabled to have vanished to escape Mongol invaders, representing a hidden Russia focused on repentance and otherworldliness. Russia as a nation rests on something deeper: its true borders lie not in geography but in its encounter with divinity.

It is noteworthy that while, from an ethnological standpoint, Western atrocities such as the holocaust sought to harm other races, the Soviet atrocities of the 20th Century were purely self-directed and self-contained. In this sense the sufferings of population of the USSR can be read of self-inflicted. This links to the prominence of suffering in Russian Orthodox theology.

A Cultural and Spiritual Vision of Russian Unity

The independence of Ukraine from the USSR severed the "sacred places" from the Russian cultural landscape, including the Caves Monastery and St. Sophia Cathedral in Kiev, as well as Poltava and Sevastopol. For centuries, the term "Russian" has encompassed the identities

of the Little Russians (Ukrainians), Great Russians (Russians), and Belarusians. Archimandrite Lavrentii (1868–1950) encapsulated this interconnectedness: “as it is impossible to separate the Holy Trinity of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit— they are the One God—so it is [equally] impossible to separate Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus; together they are Holy Rus’.”

Holy Rus’ serves as the cultural and spiritual core of the Russian nation, striving for holiness. It forms the backbone of the Russian World, which unites not only the Russian diaspora but also all individuals—regardless of citizenship—who share the Orthodox Christian faith, the Russian language, and a collective historical memory.

Lasting peace is predicated on the recognition of Holy Rus’ as a covenant, a base culture—a foundational system of inherent values resting upon fundamental moral and religious principles.