THE SKEPTIC ARENA

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How Russians survived militant Atheism

to embrace God

by Walter Rodgers for the Christian Science Monitor

(From 1984-89 he was an ABC News correspondent in Moscow)

*Sometimes really huge news stories occur that receive almost no notice, but they are seismic just the same. Today, less than 20 years after the collapse of the officially atheistic Soviet Union, Russia has emerged as the most God-believing nation in Europe, more so than Roman Catholic Italy or Protestant Britain.*

So Wally, are you trying to claim that millions of Atheists suddenly found God? Here's a possibility that you might think about: the rulers who tried to impose Atheism by force failed, and when the leadership changed and allowed public religious practice to resume, it simply resumed.

According to the Wikipedia article on "religion in the Soviet Union" there were more than 50 million Christians in the Russian Orthodox Church alone ... and that was before the breakup. To that, add another 50 million Muslims and it becomes clear that religion was flourishing in Russia before the breakup even though the government tried to restrain it.

So Russia did not "emerge" as the most God-believing nation in Europe. They have always been the most God-believing nation in Europe despite government attempts to take the "opium" away from the people.

*The independent Public Opinion Fund poll discovered this spring that 82 percent of Russians now say they are religious believers.*

Wally, that's pretty close to the percentage worldwide, including America (about 85%). That means we are living in a world where 6 out of every 7 people not only believe in, but actually worship invisible ghosts; and in the case of Christians, Jews, and Muslims, worship a brutal monster who threatens to torture billions of humans forever.

The only reason their beliefs aren't considered insane is because the majority gets to define insanity. But by any objective definition, their beliefs are insane.

*Given the brutal and ruthless repression by Joseph Stalin of the Russian Orthodox Church and all religion, this is truly a remarkable statistic.*

Wally, it only shows you can't force truth on those whose beliefs were never based on truth to begin with. Modern humans must learn critical thinking skills if they are ever to find the courage to stand up to the threats from the spirit world. Until they do, they will remain enslaved to religious terrorism.

*It is a testament to the babushkas who would not capitulate to Soviet bullying. Hoorah for the hero grandmothers of the motherland! Against all odds they have won.*

Wally, so you believe Christianity survived because of elderly Russian grandmothers? I thought you people always credited Jesus every time something goes your way?

*Those stooped, graying old ladies with head scarves, deeply creased faces, and stainless steel-capped teeth were scorned, mocked, and ridiculed by Communist officialdom during the 74 years of official Soviet atheism because they were religious believers. Dismissed as babas and crones, they were, however, the true soul of Russian society.*

Wally, you're kind of a nut, aren't you?

*When the Kremlin’s Soviet Politburo or the Central Committee apparatchiks raced about in their Chaikas and ZIL limousines, the babushkas quietly went about dutifully kissing their religious icons because those were their only windows to a better world.*

Wally, religious delusion is what many people have resorted to throughout history to sustain them through horrible times. That doesn't mean, however, that delusion was the best choice.

*The babushkas devotedly stood guard over decaying churches, lighting candles amid the dilapidation and ruin. These spiritual sentinels were virtually helpless to prevent decades of Soviet looting of their churches. But the babushkas refused to allow the flame of faith to go out in Russia, even if it was only their own.*

Wally, the flame of faith is still burning brightly all over the world. Education has proven to be no match against threats of eternal torture.

*In the worst of times, Stalin’s thugs dynamited spectacular Orthodox cathedrals.*

Wally, the most spectacular thing about those cathedrals was the spectacular sums of money spent on them that could have been used for schools, hospitals, food, and things that actually advance, rather than retard, civilization.

*They sent the Russian clergy to the gulags;*

Okay Wally, I'll agree that the gulags were a little excessive. I think 6 months of community service would have been more appropriate for swindling people out of their money.

*they discriminated against believers in hiring and education;*

Wally, the same thing is happening right now in America ... only in reverse.

*and they stole the churches’ priceless religious icons, selling them in the West for precious hard currency.*

Wally, if they got $5 for the whole lot, they overcharged.

*All the while, the impoverished babushkas eked out an existence living on a few kopecks and handfuls of lard as they scurried in the shadows of their darkened churches, doing their best to protect and police these shrines, demanding dignity and decorum from all who entered. The babushkas’ critical role outside their churches was at least as central to Russian society as their role in preserving religious ritual.*

Wally, perhaps if they had applied themselves to more useful pursuits, they might have improved their lot in life, not to mention the lives of their families as well.

*With Soviet mothers working at full-time jobs, it was these grandmothers who raised generations of Russian children, teaching them whatever morality and ethics they could because the Communists had dismantled the traditional rudder of societal morality, the churches.*

Wally, if we could just eliminate all of the vile religious morals that are promoted in your "good book," modern morality and ethics would likely lead to a much-improved planet.

*As a Moscow correspondent during the 1980s, it was my impression that the most traumatic event in a young Russian child’s life was losing his babushka. In my mind’s eye, I can still see a young Russian boy about 8 or 9 crying bitterly over what appeared to be the coffin of his grandmother. The boy was seated on a wooden bench, with his parents and a group of gravediggers, all of them bouncing along on an open flatbed truck in a heavy snowstorm just outside Moscow. This was no funeral train, just an uncovered farm truck followed by an American correspondent and his wife unable to pass on the icy roads. The raw image of the falling snow; that boy’s red, tear-streaked face; and the babushka’s coffin covered with spruce boughs still sticks with me a quarter-century later. Russian society owes an enormous debt to its babushkas, and not just for refusing to let the religious faith of its people be extinguished by the supercilious sneers of Lenin and Stalin.*

Actually Wally, they have done a great disservice to humanity by perpetuating belief in ghosts. A belief that drains meager family resources, and wastes countless hours that could be put to more productive use. In fact, any use would be more productive than talking to ghosts ... who aren't there.

*This indefatigable force of grandmothers helped preserve Russia’s rich cultural heritage for 74 years.*

Wally, from a rationalist's point of view they helped preserve ignorance and superstition. Personally, I don't consider that a rich cultural heritage.

*From the humble icon corners of their huts to the retelling of the classic Russian folk stories, they preserved and perpetuated a culture free of the socialist claptrap taught in state schools.*

Wally, you left out that they also perpetuated a culture free of science and reason. I know that's true because fundamentalist Ghost Worshipers in America do the same thing.

*On reflection, perhaps the candles of the Russian soul were too bright to be totally extinguished by Marxist ideology;*

Wally, it is more likely that they were just too stupid.

*Russians never totally forsook their religious heritage.*

See Wally, isn't that what I said in the beginning? I knew you would come around to my point of view.

*During World War II, as Russian soldiers were marching to the front, poems tell of Russian women whispering “God bless you” as the boys went off to the slaughter.*

Wally, remember that Wikipedia article I touted earlier? Well, here is an excerpt from it:

"the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union in 1941 forced Stalin to enlist the Russian Orthodox Church as an ally to arouse Russian patriotism against foreign aggression."

Wally, when people are foolish and childish enough to believe in an afterlife in fairyland, you have a much better chance of convincing them to throw away their lives for your benefit. Imams are the prime example of that principle. You will never hear of an imam blowing himself up, but these "men of God" have no compunction about sending little children off to end their lives in an explosion of metal debris.

Rational people cherish life because they understand that it is all they've got and all they're ever going to get. They are far less likely to throw their lives away to benefit the wealthy and powerful, and also less likely to take life, because to them, it actually means something.

*Russian women even wore gold crosses inside their blouses. Asked why, one explained to me with some embarrassment, “Just in case.”*

Wally, in case of what?

And why didn't you ask her why God allowed tens of millions of Russians to be slaughtered in war by a Catholic megalomaniac?

*The institutional church was re-created in later Soviet years to perpetuate the farce of religious freedom.*

Wally, we also have a farce of religious freedom here in America. You should hear Christians scream anytime a Muslim attempts to exercise a religious freedom. I tell you Wally ... it's hilarious. The Christians line up for miles with their "No Sharia" signs.

*But everyone knew the KGB had infiltrated the Orthodox clergy to make sure religion did not take root again. That may explain why adherence to organized religion (in particular the Orthodox church) lags far behind belief in God. To honor this spiritual resilience, Russia’s President Dmitry Medvedev should consider commissioning statues to “the eternal babushka.”*

Wally, that's a real productive use of money during a worldwide recession. I vote we do the exact opposite, and melt down every single one of those useless religious statues and use the money we make to build a few million schools and hospitals.

*They could be installed on all those vacant Lenin pedestals. Why not pay tribute to all the fearless grandmothers who preserved Russian culture and faith when everyone else had given up?*

Wally, if those old ladies could have been persuaded to use their time and effort to help educate the youth in science and reason instead of promoting Ghost Worship, there is no telling how much further along Russia might be by now.

<http://www.csmonitor.com/Commentary/Walter-Rodgers/2011/0616/How-Russians-survived-militant-atheism-to-embrace-God>

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THE SCIENCE SEGMENT

20% of US Cancer Cases Are Second Cancers;

and not a recurrence or spread of an original tumor

but a brand new form of cancer

Second cancers are on the rise, with nearly one in five new cancer cases in the US now involving someone who's had the disease before. But when doctors talk about second cancers, they mean a different tissue type or a different site, not just a reccurrence or spread of the original tumor.

About 20% of cancers in the United States now are second-or-more cases; in the 1970's it was only 9%. Over that period, the number of first cancers rose 70%, while the number of second cancers rose 300%. One patient has had 8 types of cancer over the last two decades, all treated successfully.

This is partly a success story: More people are surviving cancer and living long enough to get another type of cancer, because the risk of cancer rises with age. Second cancers also can arise from the same gene mutations or risk factors, such as smoking, that spurred the first one. And some treatments that help people survive their first cancer can raise the risk of a new cancer forming later.

Medically, second cancers pose special challenges: For example, radiation usually isn't given to the same area of the body more than once, and some drugs also have lifetime dose limits. Psychologically, a second cancer is often more traumatizing.

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FAMOUS QUOTES

Denis Diderot

(no biography - previously quoted)

"Man will never be free

until the last king

is strangled with the entrails

of the last priest."