

Beware the Easy Path that Leads to Destruction

I met Arkady and his family in Leningrad in the summer of 1988. Being half Jewish had limited his educational options. He'd converted to Russian Orthodoxy, but took a dim view of current church leadership. For baptism, he'd sought out an elderly priest whose ordination pre-dated the revolution. He was a contributor to *samizdat*, the underground publications by which many critical-thinking Russians expressed their political dissent. In him I detected a deep spirituality, uncommon among professing Christians in the so-called Free World.

Thinking of him reminds me of an old cartoon featuring an exasperated preacher sermonizing before dozing parishioners. The caption read something like this: "If I were preaching in the Soviet Union, I might get arrested, but at least someone would be paying attention."

It's commonplace to suppose that religious faith is deepened in circumstances of oppression, trial, or suffering. There are no atheists in foxholes, it's been said. This seems generally to be true. Which makes me wonder, How does one get typical Americans, who lead materially comfortable, politically quiescent, lives, to take seriously the looming perils of our time?

I'd like to think that the Trump presidency has awakened many complacent people who were previously paying scant attention to major issues in our public life. I'd like to think that it's now widely recognized that many of our best, highest, and noblest values are under threat. I'd like to think that we are witnessing the coalescence of various elements in our body politic that will help bring about a spiritual revival, and with it, a deepening religious faith that will accomplish the transformative change needed to re-direct the future course of our nation and the world.

Thus far what we have seen from the President and most of the ruling party has been utterly reprehensible, not to mention incompetent and ridiculous. I'd like to think what I've just said seems patently obvious, but I know that to many it is not. This makes me worry that things will get much worse before they get better. Somehow, people who are comfortable or acquiescent regarding what is now happening to our country must be shaken and moved to a much deeper understanding of the human condition and a much deeper religious faith. Otherwise we will remain captive of the illusion that things are, or are becoming, more or less as God wants them to be. They definitely are not.

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