



## **The New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia: Their Significance for People in the West**

**Why do Orthodox Americans, French, Swedes, and those outside Russia need to revere the New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia? It is clear what they did for Russia, but why are the Russian New Martyrs so significant for people in the West? Why should we pray to them? “PravMir” asked several people to respond to these questions.**

*Father Andrew Phillips, Rector of St. John the Wonderworker Orthodox Church in Colchester, England:*

First of all, the New Martyrs and Confessors are multinational, not merely Russian, or even only East Slav, Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarusian. Like the Soviet Union, the Russian Empire was multinational. At once there comes to mind the heroic examples of the Royal Martyr Tsarina Alexandra and her sister the Grand Duchess Elizabeth who were Anglo-German by blood and upbringing. They represented the best of the West, but they were brought to Paradise by their faithfulness to Russian Orthodoxy. Then there were Nicholas (Johnson) (+ 1918), who was Anglo-Russian, or St John of Riga, who was Latvian. And there were many, many others of many nationalities, united by only one thing, the Russian Orthodox Faith.



Tsar-Martyr Nicholas with the Royal Martyr Tsarina Alexandra and her sister the Grand Duchess Elizabeth

Their witness is not political. They all witness to the Church; they are above party or partial politics of left or right. Christ and His Church are paramount for them and they were ready to die for Him. Yesterday, for instance, in Munich [the New Martyr Alexander \(Schmorell\)](#), a victim of Nazism, was canonized by the Church Outside of Russia with representatives from Russia and his name was added to the list of New Martyrs and Confessors. Their sacrifice is not political, it is spiritual – a witness to the values that are not of this world, a witness to the fact that our human destiny is not here, but on the other side, which all human beings are called to and for which we must prepare in the here and now.

Then there are the numbers involved. This is greater than the numbers who were martyred for Christ in the first three centuries. So far over 30,000 have been officially glorified by the Church, but there are many more. It has been noted that this number appears to be linked with the number of churches open in the Russian Orthodox Church. The consciousness of the New Martyrs and Confessors is what has changed Russia over the last 20 years and will change it further, if people continue to repent and be Churched, taking on the spiritual and so moral values of the Church. I believe that the Russian Orthodox are at the



beginning of this process, that there is still far to go.

We recall the words of Tertullian, repeated by St Cyprian of Carthage: ‘The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church’. I have baptized many people from Russia because of the witness of the New Martyrs and Confessors. ‘It cannot be that all was in vain’, said one of them. ‘I cannot live and ignore their spiritual feat’. In Russia of course tens of millions have been baptized over the last 20 years. Although the West still has little idea of the New Martyrs and Confessors, but word is spreading.

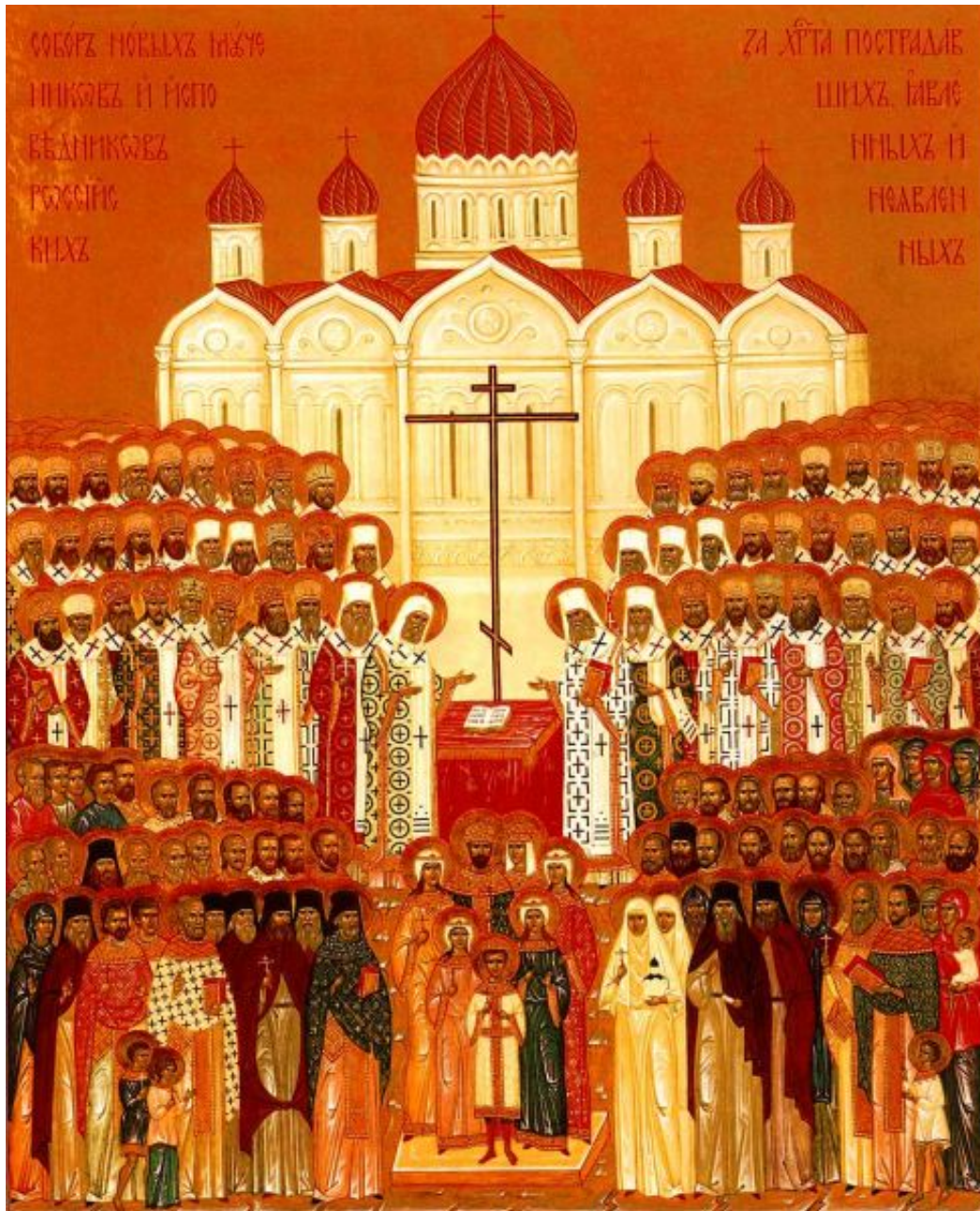
In them there is an alternative to the empty consumerism and indebtedness to materialism of the West and the Western system which has spread worldwide. This system is based on individualism, the convenience and comfort of the ego bubble of self-absorption. Opposed to this is the spirit of sacrifice, to sacrifice us for a great and noble cause. The only alternative to the spiritual deprivation and poverty of Western materialism is the love of Orthodoxy of the Martyrs and Confessors, the New Saints. This is not of the political left or right, which simply argues about the details of distribution of material benefits. The Church offers another system, which says that justice and just societies are good, but that the salvation of our soul is more important. In fact there will only be just societies when the human souls which make them up are convinced that Christ and His Church, against which the gates of hell will not prevail, is at the aim and at the heart of our lives. Where is the proof of all this? It is in the New Martyrs and Confessors. If they were willing to die for Christ’s Church, then we must also be willing to do so. In this sense the example of the New Martyrs and Confessors is a warning to the West: Repent before it is too late.

***Father Sergei Sveshnikov, Rector of the world’s first parish named in honor of the New Martyrs, in Mulino, Oregon:***

I think that this question can have several different answers, perhaps even on an individual level, but I would like to focus our attention on two.

First of all, for Christians, saints are the standards of life in Christ. In canonizing a saint, the Church gives us a canon, a rule to follow. In this sense, Russian saints are important to the French in just the same way that French saints are important to the Russians – as examples and standards for anyone who wants to lead a Christian life. In Christ, there is neither Greek nor Jew; so, when we think of Saint Stephen, we do not often think of the fact that he was a Jew or understand what he did for Israel, but rather see him as an example of the kind of faith and boldness in Christ to which we all should aspire. In much the same way, Americans or Europeans or Asians or Africans who learn about the New Russian Martyrs will undoubtedly find them to be examples of faith and love that were shaken by “neither tribulation, prison, nor death.”[1]





But there is another aspect of the glorification of the New Martyrs which may be important to both Christians and non-Christians alike. The New Russian Martyrs are a constant reminder to all who are working to build heaven on earth without God. Nowadays, we think of the communists as some evil people who set out to torture and murder, yet this is simply not true. The communists believed that they were building the infamous “bright future” for everyone in the world – a future of freedom, equality, brotherhood, [2] and happiness for all. People in the Soviet Union did not think that they lived in an oppressive and totalitarian society. In fact, they were convinced that their country was the most democratic and free in the whole world. They earnestly believed that they were building a life which was “better and richer and fuller for every man, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement.”[3]

This almost sounds Christian. Doesn't Christ want all to be happy? Didn't He come to free us? Aren't we brothers and sisters? And weren't all men created equal? All this is true, but not quite. To give people



freedom, equality, and brotherhood in the kingdom of God, Christ sacrificed Himself. To give people the same in the kingdom of communism, communists sacrificed the people. According to Feodor Dostoevsky's horrifyingly accurate analysis, one hundred million people would die for the success of the revolution in Russia. [4] Not all of them were Christians, not all of them died for Christ, but Christ died for each and every one.

For three decades the Russian Orthodox Church has been lifting up the holy lives and deaths of the New Martyrs as an example for the faithful and a reminder to the whole world. It is a reminder that when people reject the "one thing needful," [5] when they reject Christ, they follow a path of destruction—millions of human lives ground up to feed the communist beast, and no "bright future." "By their fruits you will know them" [6]; and the fruits of godlessness are blood, death, devastation, and collapse. There is only one ending to the story of the Tower of Babel. And it would be a horrible mistake to think that communist ideals can be substituted with those of capitalism—the result will inevitably be the same. The only path which leads to the true bright future for mankind is Christ.[7] For as long as we chase after "the bright future," the "American Dream," or the same "rose" by any other name—humanity is destined to failure. It is only when we start seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness that all other things will take their rightful places in our lives.[8]

***Cornel Dascalu, Sunday school teacher and parishioner of the Holy Virgin Mary Orthodox Cathedral, Los Angeles, California:***

For Orthodox people in America or Europe, or in any place outside of Russia, the subject of the New Martyrs is of primary importance. Violence was done to members of the Body of Christ and it is this thinking that tells us that they are of us and we of them, even today. I do not speak Aramaic or Greek, or Latin for that matter, but we still honor and remember the martyrdom of those under tyrannous rulers. That is the key, to remember. The good thief cries, "Remember me!" To be remembered, kept alive in the mind, is part of the salvation process. Alive in Christ, whether here or on the other side, is to be thought of by God. Russia's many martyrs are also an admonition to us that the seemingly friendly world around us of today can change into a ferocious and murderous abattoir tomorrow. Will we respond as they did? If we were thrown down a well, as were Grand Duchess St. Elizabeth and Nun Barbara, would we sing our hymns in the deep dark before grenades followed to silence us? No need to recall macabre deaths in the coliseums of the ancient world, we have had and have them still here in our century. The non-Christian world is silent about their lives, no movies, no documentaries, no journalistic investigations. But they live! And we witness to their witness before an idolatrous world that Christ lives.

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[1] From the kontakion to the new Russian martyrs.

[2] Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité is the motto of France since the Third Republic. This also became a prominent motto of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union: "Peace, labor, freedom, equality, brotherhood, happiness for all people."

[3] This happens to be John Truslow Adams' definition of the American Dream (Epic of America).

[4] *The Possessed*, 1872. Later, Solzhenitsyn noted the exact correspondence to the number of victims of the revolution.

[5] Luke 10:42

[6] Matt. 7:16



[7] John 14:6

[8] Matt. 6:33