

NEW MARTYRS AND CONFESSORS OF RUSSIA
Rom. 8:28-39, Luke 21:8-19

By Archpriest Peter Olsen
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In 1872 the famous Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky wrote a prophetic novel called "Demons" which foretold the future Russian Revolution. During the early part of the twentieth century the Russian monarchy collapsed, the empire was embroiled in chaos and revolution, and eventually an atheistic totalitarian regime assumed power over the government. A major goal of this new regime was to completely obliterate and destroy the Russian Orthodox Church. First the Tsar and the Imperial family, as well as all the Romanovs and their relatives, were brutally murdered. Next the Communists set their sights on all of the clergy and monastics, as well as many famous artists, entertainers, writers, scholars, and intellectuals, who were either murdered or incarcerated in concentration camps. Many churches, monasteries, and shrines, as well as many sacred objects, such as the holy relics, the holy icons, and the holy vessels, were desecrated and destroyed. Many of the crown jewels, as well as valuable sacred objects of the Church, were sold abroad for money to support their evil schemes. Sacred objects which were made of gold or silver were melted down and converted into cash. The tombs of royalty and of saints were opened and blasphemed. The incorrupt relics of saints were subjected to scientific experiments. Some churches were converted into theaters, clubs, and anti-religious museums. The tricolor Russian flag was replaced by a red flag with the symbol of a hammer and sickle. The national anthem was rewritten. Some sacred objects which escaped destruction, such as the famous Trinity icon by St. Andrei Rublëv, and the silver sarcophagus which held the relics of St. Alexander Nevsky, were placed in museums. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the liberation of the Church, many Church properties, including these two holy objects, have been returned to the Church. The Russians who escaped the Soviet tyranny and terror that were repatriated back to Russia according to the Yalta Agreement were executed when they returned home. Most of the seminaries and theological schools were closed and it was forbidden to print religious books. Church schools and the teaching of religion to children was forbidden. The church went back to the days of early Christianity when the Christians celebrated the Lord's Day in secret in the catacombs. Not only was Christianity considered to be illicit, or illegal, but all forms of worship and belief in God as well.

Grandmothers secretly baptized their grandchildren. Many icons and holy objects were hidden by the Orthodox with the hope that one day the Church would again be free. Children were forbidden to wear a cross, so grandmothers embroidered the image of the cross on their grandchildren's undergarments in order to escape the prying eyes of the Soviet teachers. We see the same thing repeated whenever or wherever the Christians have been persecuted, such as when the Ottoman Turks conquered Constantinople. Today the Christians are the most persecuted religion in the world. The presence of Christianity in the Holy Land and in many other places in the Middle East has almost virtually disappeared.

The Soviets found that it was not as easy as they may have imagined to completely obliterate the Russian Orthodox faith. Beginning in 988 with the baptism of Russia, Orthodoxy was now deeply embedded in the psyche and society of what is called "Holy Russia." At the onset of WWII the Soviets sought the Church's help to raise the morale of the people. In order to facilitate this, there was a temporary lessening of restrictions. You see, the Russian Orthodox Church never turned its back on Russia and always loved and supported the Fatherland. Although a demonic and evil government had assumed power, the Church continued to love and pray for Russia and for her liberation from the forces of evil. The government also found that the Church was useful for propaganda purposes. KGB agents infiltrated the Church and, for example, used ecumenical gatherings as a forum to preach Marxist ideology. At one point the government created their own pseudo-church which was

meant to replace the authentic Russian Orthodox Church — it was called “The Living Church.” This “Church” was a farce that was collectively rejected by the people. The “Living Church” inculcated a number of uncanonical and bizarre innovations. Hitler tried the same thing when he created a pro-Nazi “Church” which was meant to replace the German Lutheran Church. His phony church was also rejected by the people who saw it for what it was.

When the Soviet Empire collapsed under Gorbachev, the Russian Orthodox Church was eventually liberated and permitted to freely function again. This does not mean that throughout the world secular governments never interfere in the internal work of the Church or try to use the Church for political and secular reasons. Since its earliest days this has been a part of Church History. We have witnessed this in our own times with the creation of the schismatic “Orthodox Church of the Ukraine.”

Let us today honor the memory in particular of all the Holy New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia who suffered under the atheistic Communist regime. The Orthodox throughout the world will never forget them and will honor and pray to them for as long as the world should exist. Holy New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia pray unto God for us! Amen.



Butovo, just outside Moscow, was a main execution site where more than 20,000 people were shot to death and buried during the Stalinist terror of the 1930s. Butovo’s victims ranged from peasants and factory workers to czarist generals, Russian Orthodox hierarchs, priests and other clergy, German Communists, Latvian writers, invalids and even Moscow’s Chinese launderers, dozens of whom were executed as enemies of the people. Among the notables executed at Butova were Soviet military commander Hayk Bzhishkyan; Tsarist statesman Vladimir Dzhunkovsky; the painter Aleksandr Drevin, film actress Marija Leiko, and photographer Gustav Klutsis who were all Latvian; Orthodox bishop Seraphim Chichagov, and Prince Dmitry Shakhovskoy; former President of the State Duma Fyodor Golovin; the first Russian aviator Nikolai Danilevsky; composer Mikhail Khitrovo-Kramskoi; theoretical physicist Hans Hellmann; anthropologist Ivar Lassy; five tsarist generals and representatives of Russian noble families such as the Rostopchins, the Tuchkovs, the Gagarins, the Obolenskys, the Olsufiyevs, and the Bibikovs.

The phony “Patriarch” of the Tikhon of Moscow’s vestments.



“Living Church” wearing St.