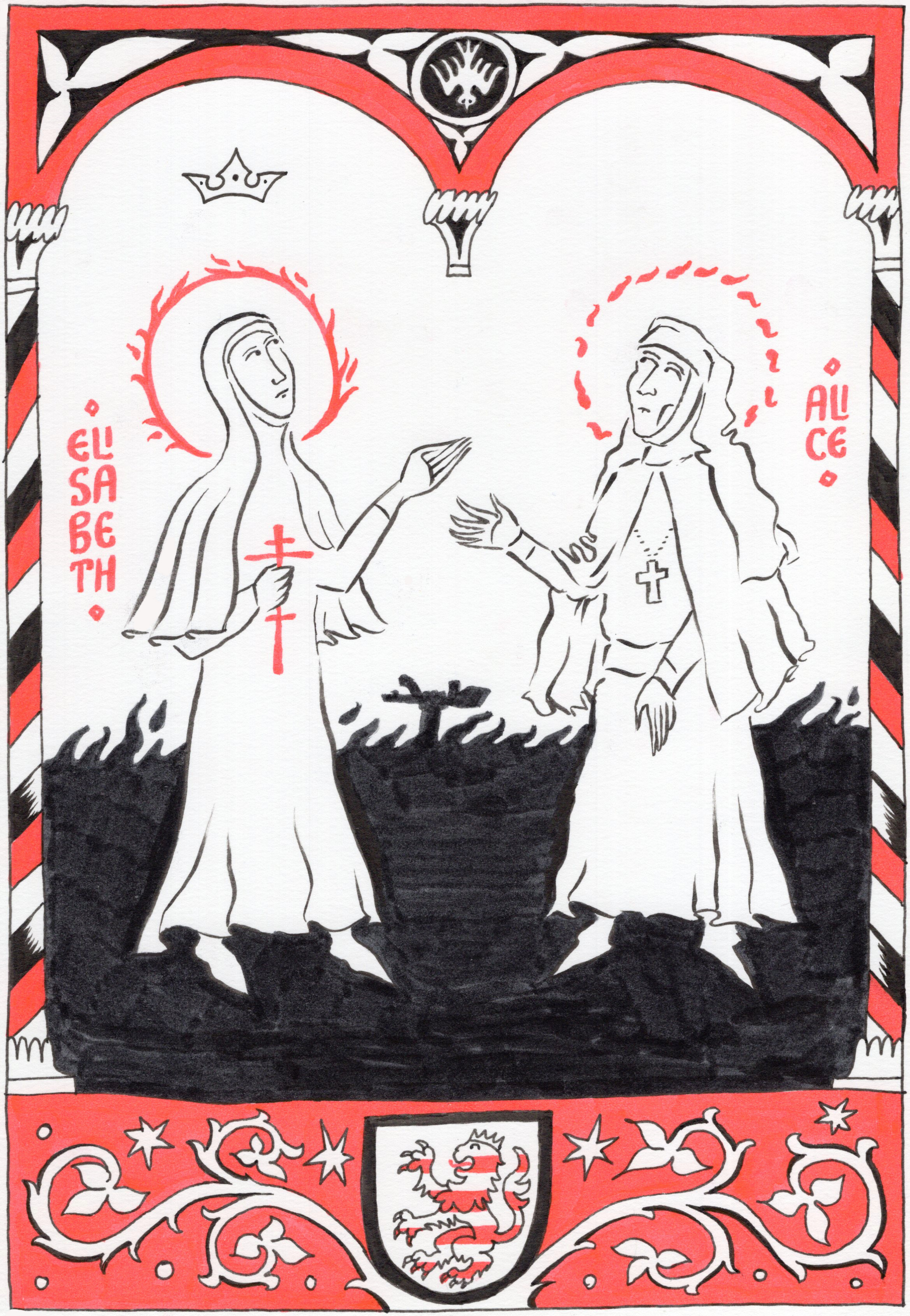
ELISABETH
ALICE

Facing page: Saint Elizabeth and Princess Alice. Drawing by Andrej Strocaŭ.

The Two Princesses

Katherine Kelaidis and Inga Leonova

Amid the diversity of twentieth-century Orthodox saints, the stories of two women, Princess Alice of Greece and Grand Duchess Elizabeth of Russia, illustrate how lives that begin in high privilege can develop into service and even martyrdom. Contemporary discourse tends toward a negative view of privilege, especially privilege bestowed by accident of birth. What it fails to consider, however, is the ancient tradition of *noblesse oblige*, the obligations bestowed by high birth. While individuals from privileged backgrounds sometimes fail to live up to these expectations, the tradition itself is responsible for widespread charity and service to those of lesser means. In the case of the two twentieth-century German princesses turned Orthodox saints, fidelity to this principle led to extraordinary personal feats and contributions to the Church that might have not been possible for those born into humbler positions.

Grand Duchess Elizabeth Feodorovna of Russia

Saint Elizabeth of Russia is perhaps best known in the Orthodox world for her martyrdom at the hands of Bolsheviks in 1918. Before her heroic death, she created the first female diaconal community in Russia. The life that culminated in these events was both typically royal and uniquely ecclesial. Born Princess Elisabeth of Hesse and by Rhine, she married into the Russian royal house, as later did her younger sister Alexandra—to the displeasure of their grandmother, Queen Victoria, the reigning monarch of the largest empire the world had ever seen. Elizabeth's correspondence with her husband, Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich, and her letters to close friends and relatives show that her marriage was characterized by deep respect and love. She and her husband also became excellent partners, sharing both political and personal convictions.

Nevertheless, the Grand Duke was also surrounded by gossip about his ostensibly "untraditional" sexual proclivities, and various memoirs as well as courtier correspondence suggest that his marriage to the dutiful and humble Princess Ella was merely arranged for propriety's sake. This gossip was bolstered by the fact that the marriage was childless, fueling a bizarre hagiographic claim that Sergei and Ella, both deeply religious, had taken vows of celibacy prior to their wedding vows. Be that as it may, the Grand Duchess exercised the duties required by her new position with fastidiousness and, according to her correspondence and her friends' memoirs, joy.

Since the rules of the Russian Church during this synodal period permitted marriages to non-Orthodox Christians, the Lutheran-born Princess Ella did not convert to Orthodoxy until seven years into her married life. Her letters as well as memories of her contemporaries describe her deep religious devotion as well as her "growing into" Orthodoxy as she assumed the culture of her new home. Finally, in 1891, she told her father, Grand Duke Ludwig IV of Hesse and by Rhine: "I have been constantly thinking, reading, and praying to God to show me the right path, and I have come to the conclusion that only in this religion can I find true and strong faith in God, which a person must have to be a good Christian. It would be a sin to remain as I am now—belonging to one church in form and for the outside world, but praying and believing inside myself as my husband does."[1] The childless couple were a favorite aunt and uncle to the many royal children in their orbit, including becoming the official guardians of the children of Grand Duke Paul when he was exiled from Russia following an affair.

Grand Duchess Elizabeth, as a royal spouse and the wife of Moscow's governor general, became the patron of many charitable organizations. Although shy at first about her prominent position, she eventually utilized both her natural managerial talents and her significant strength of character to benefit her initiatives. She was universally loved, which helped bolster the image of Grand Duke Sergei, who was widely regarded as cold and arrogant. While fulfilling the social role of a royal in high society, she was known to sell some of her jewelry and invest parts of her allowance in charitable projects. Even more importantly, she possessed exceptional fundraising talents, so projects under her patronage benefited from private contributions.

The Grand Duchess enjoyed a deep friendship with the future Tsar Nicholas, four years her junior. Being married to his uncle not only allowed her to call herself, playfully, his "auntie Ella," but, more importantly, created a relationship of seniority, which the strong-willed and purposeful Elizabeth exercised liberally over a much weaker and compliant Nicholas. Both Elizabeth and Sergei were deeply invested in the love affair between Nicholas (Nicky) and Elizabeth's youngest sister Alice (Alix). Contrary to popular belief, the romance was opposed on both sides of the family, with the greatest contrarian being Queen Victoria herself. With prophetic insight, the Queen wrote to another granddaughter in 1890: "The state of Russia is *so bad*, so rotten, that at any moment something dreadful might happen & tho' it may not signify to Ella, the wife of the Thronfolger is a most difficult and precarious position."[2] The greatest obstacle to the marriage, however, was not so much the opposition of the families as Alix's reluctance to convert from Protestantism to Orthodoxy, as was required of the wife of the heir to the throne. The correspondence between Ella, Nicky, Alix, and Sergei, partially written in code, reads like a nineteenth-century romantic novel, albeit with heavy religious overtones. Ella spent years persuading Alix to convert. Finally, following Ella's own formal conversion in 1892, and worn out by Nicky's relentless courting and her own passion for him, Alix agreed to become his wife. They were married in 1894, setting on its course a fateful series of events that ended in colossal tragedy for the royal family and their country.

When Nicholas ascended the Russian throne after his father's sudden death in 1896, he was completely unprepared to become supreme ruler of a complicated empire already mired in

[1] T. Korshunova, E. Ponkratova, and O. Trofimova, eds., *Письма преподобномученицы великой княгини Елизаветы Феодоровны* (Moscow: Православное Сестричество во имя Преподобномученицы Елизаветы, 2011), 139.

[2] Richard Hough, ed., *Advice to My Grand-Daughter: Letters from Queen Victoria to Princess Victoria of Hesse* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975), 110. The "Thronfolger" was the heir to the throne.

revolutionary activity. His dutifulness and sincerity were no compensation for his lack of natural suitability for the role. Elizabeth tried to influence the indecisive Tsar. Her hagiographic image as a meek and mild saint leaves out her hardline positions on domestic politics, aligned with those of her husband rather than the more liberal government. In a letter dated March 20, 1899, following major student unrest in Russian universities, Elizabeth urges her royal brother-in-law to discipline the rebellious students and their professors, expelling them from the universities and even sending the leaders into military service. She calls on the Tsar to "rule with a rod of iron" for the good of the country: "Look at those emperors who ruled firmly—society must be taught it dares not scream or muddle."[3] In this and subsequent letters, she berates the ministers, advises the Tsar on dealing with the problematic ones, and encourages the harshest measures against revolutionaries. After the assassination of the minister Sipyagin in 1902, Elizabeth lamented the government's reluctance to try the terrorists in military courts and to apply the death penalty.

Елисавета
1904.

Grand Duchess Elizabeth in 1904 and 1910.

The letters reflect her exasperation with the emperor's mildness and the government's paralysis in the face of increasing unrest. There was also another cause for her concern: her sister, Empress Alexandra, at once strong-willed and mentally unstable, had developed an attachment to "spiritual guides" of various stripes, and through her the royal couple became embroiled with various "healers" and "hypnotists." One cannot help but feel sympathy for Tsar Nicholas, doomed to maneuver between the strong women closest to him: his mother, Empress Maria Feodorovna, his sister-in-law Elizabeth, and his wife, to whom he was blindly devoted. Yet it was Elizabeth who clearly perceived the horrible consequences of the royal family's "enchantments" for the situation in Russia, which called for sobriety of mind and spirit.

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[3] *Письма*, 157.

With the beginning of the disastrous Russo-Japanese war, both royal sisters threw themselves with great zeal into caring for the wounded and humanitarian projects for the military. European royal women were expected to learn nursing and to utilize their training should their countries require it. Elizabeth's letters are full of reports of successful fundraising and substantial aid shipments to the front.

On 17 February 17, 1905, the ultimate tragedy struck: Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich was murdered when a terrorist threw a bomb at his carriage. The doom Elizabeth foresaw when the Grand Duke expelled twenty thousand Jews from Moscow, blaming them for the revolutionary unrest, had come true. This tragedy marked a turning point in Elizabeth's life. It was almost as if she had received divine sanction to leave the life of the court and devote herself to the charitable service that alone filled her life with meaning. As she declared in the first days of her widowhood:

> My hospital is an intense comfort to me; I never thought it could be so calming to know those simple souls with their little interests, their great faith in God, and unbounded patience—how they bear their own wounds is marvellous; one feels so small next to that patience. Never worry for me, nothing prints itself on me to make me nervous physically or morally—I have a feeling of belonging to those who suffer—that I want to be my aim in life; personal sorrow is gone, there is no room for it. Serge . . . is at rest, such rest we on this earth can't find: how can and dare I long for him to return? I have and will stand alone—I who never did a thing without his advice, it seems strange to me. I manage it—but what must be must be, and perhaps that is my strength that God does not allow me to lose courage. . . . All charity-work gives so much joy in spite of many a very bitter disappointment, but that is good—it pushes one on.[4]

Elizabeth even visited her husband's murderer in jail and interceded on his behalf with the Tsar and the courts, to no avail. She was able to forgive and to plead for his life to be spared. This act revealed true Christian discernment: to forgive for herself while at the same time acknowledging the need for stern management of the entire revolutionary situation. On her husband's tombstone she had inscribed, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do." (Luke 23:34)

Elizabeth not only paused her social appearances, as mourning protocol required, but actually dismissed her court. Without formally taking vows, she assumed what was essentially a monastic rule of life. Within a year, much to the displeasure of her family—especially Nicholas and Alexandra—she disposed of her entire jewelry collection. A third was returned to the state coffers, a third she gifted to various family members, and the rest, including her wedding ring, she sold for charity. She assumed her late husband's position as the head of the Imperial Palestinian Society, a highly political post that represented Russia's interests in the Middle East under the guise of religious investment, but she devoted herself solely to the patronage of pilgrims and the Society's many charitable causes. She also assumed her husband's duties as head of the Russian Red Cross.

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[4] Princess Irene of Prussia to William Boyd Carpenter, Bishop of Ripon, March 12, 1906, quoted in Elizabeth Jane Timms, "A 'lost' letter from Ella?" https://royalcentral.co.uk/features/a-lost-letter-from-ella-126636/.

All these duties, laborious as they were, the Grand Duchess considered secondary to what became her life’s main purpose. In 1907, with money realized from the sale of her jewelry, she purchased a plot of land in Moscow to establish the Convent of Martha and Mary.[5] The commune comprised a hospital, a chapel, a pharmacy, and an orphanage, all run by a sisterhood of women who had not taken monastic vows but were united by their commitment to Christian charity.

The enterprise was scandalous to the mainstream Russian Orthodox Church. It was born of Elizabeth’s deep dissatisfaction with the lack of charitable ministry in Russian monastic communities, which were traditionally inward-focused and devoted solely to spiritual practices. Her initiative was decried in traditionalist circles as foreign and “Protestant.” It was here that the Grand Duchess’s royal status was decisive. Elizabeth had enough powerful allies at court and among the hierarchs to support her cause and establish the convent as an institution. Her vision was of a diaconal commune, and she lobbied tirelessly for official recognition of an order of “deaconesses of the cloth” (as opposed to the liturgical deaconesses).

Tsar Nicholas with Elizabeth and other family members at the Convent of Martha and Mary, 1914.

The proposal came amid an ecclesiological renaissance in the Russian Church, and Grand Duchess Elizabeth’s vision received enthusiastic support from progressive theologians and hierarchs, including Metropolitan Vladimir of Moscow (who later became the first hieromartyr under the Bolsheviks) and professors of the Moscow and Saint Petersburg Theological Academies. On April 9, 1910, Elizabeth received a blessing as abbess of the convent and the sisters as its deaconesses in a special service written by Bishop Triphon (Dmitrievsky). It is worth noting that, while the Grand Duchess did not pursue the restoration of a liturgical role for deaconesses, she wrote that she would receive this restoration “in humility”:

> Times have changed, and it is not appropriate to grant women the right to participate in the clergy. Humility is achieved with difficulty, and the participation of women in the clergy can introduce instability into it. . . . When the question of restoring deaconesses arose, many church people were uneasy about their ordination and participation in the clergy, even though the essence of the matter remains the same: deaconess sisters perform the same works of mercy as ordained deaconesses. When I composed my statutes and showed them to many church people and to the hierarchy, they explicitly approved the fact that deaconesses would not be part of the clergy, and instead of ordination, they would wear a mantle. . . . However, if the future Synod of the Russian Church deems it necessary to restore the institution of deaconesses fully, I, as a faithful daughter

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[5] While the establishment is commonly known as “The Convent of Martha and Mary,” it never received monastery status and most of the sisters were not nuns.

> of the Church, am ready to submit. But it would take away from us weary laborers a bright beacon, that is, a connection with God already on this earth in anticipation of eternity.[6]

A proposal for full restoration of the order of deaconesses was on the agenda of the Moscow Council of 1917–18. Tragically, the chairman of the committee, Metropolitan Vladimir (Bogoyavlensky), was murdered by the Bolsheviks in Kyiv in January 1918, and soon thereafter the work of the Council was cut short.

The Grand Duchess' dedication to the work of the convent and her turn to a deeply ascetic life created a rift between her and Nicholas and Alexandra, who were both annoyed and scandalized by her devotion. They refused to attend her dedication as the head of the commune. Elizabeth's letters to the Tsar reflect her sadness at this estrangement, but she never shied away from using her royal position to benefit her cause. The hospital run by the sisterhood benefited from the contributions of the luminaries of Moscow's medical community. The scope of charitable work exercised by the convent was enormous, especially considering its size, and the Grand Duchess became known as "The Angel of Moscow."

The rift with the Tsar and Tsarina was exacerbated by Elizabeth's steadfast opposition to the "elder" Grigory Rasputin and the enormous influence he wielded over the royal couple. She tried tirelessly to awaken the Tsar and her sister from their enchantment with this man. Moreover, she felt the need to chastise the Tsar for what she perceived as his own transgressions against the Church, such as his patronage of Buddhist monks. And yet, amid these significant and even dramatic disagreements, Elizabeth still appealed for his royal benevolence toward her enterprises and her many charges. Her influence on ecclesial matters was unprecedented, and it was entirely due to her entreaties that the Russian Church managed to secure its part of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the most disputed of all Christian sites.

Elizabeth's fear of the doom Rasputin was bringing to the royal family and the country led her not only to support all opposition to the "elder," but even to support the conspiracy that resulted in his murder in 1916. Her last letter to one of the killers, Prince Felix Yusupov, the best friend of her foster son Grand Duke Dmitry and a son of her close friend Princess Zinaida, contains words of encouragement: "May God bless and guide you, for in your hands lies the ability to do boundless good, not only for a few individuals but for an entire country. But remember, my child, that in fighting against the forces of evil, everything must be done with prayer."[7] After the news of the murder, she sent supportive telegrams to Dmitry Pavlovich and to Zinaida.[8] When this became known to the Tsar and Tsarina, they ended all contact with her. On December 29, she wrote to Nicholas in a last attempt to explain her belief that he and Russia had been liberated from the yoke of darkness. The letter remained unanswered.

After the February and October Revolutions of 1917, despite the abdication of Tsar Nicholas and the ensuing violence, the Convent of Martha and Mary kept attending to the wounded, the sick, and the poor. Despite many pleas, the Grand Duchess refused to leave the convent or the country. German Kaiser Wilhelm II sent first the Swedish and then the German ambassador to Elizabeth, trying to convince the German-born princess to leave Russia for Germany. According to the memoirs of Countess Alexandra Olsufieva, “The Swedish Ambassador who represented a neutral country was received by the Grand Duchess and tried to convince her to follow the advice of the emperor. Having carefully listened to him, she responded that she had no doubts that the terrible times were at hand, but that she was going to share in the fate of her new homeland and would not abandon her spiritual family, the sisters of the convent. With these words, the Grand Duchess Elizabeth rose, signaling the end of the audience. She had signed her death sentence.” [9]

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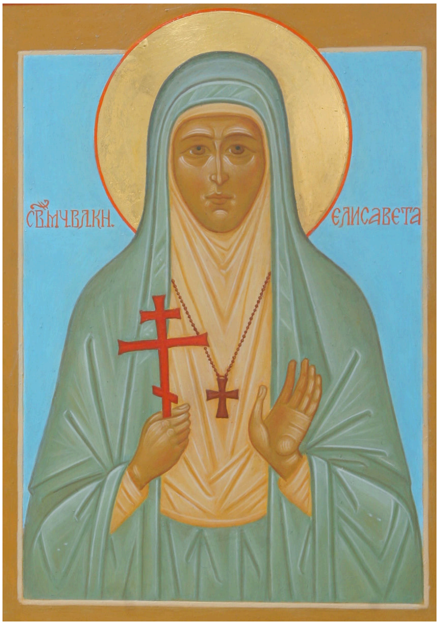
[6] Grand Duchess Elizabeth to Professor A. A. Dmitrievsky of St Petersburg Theological Academy, quoted in E. B. Belyakova and N. A. Belyakova, "Святаяпреподобномученица Елизавета Федоровна и вопрос о пути русского монашества," *Pravmir*, https://www.pravmir.ru/svyataya-prepodobnomuchenitsa-elizaveta-fedorovna-i-vopros-o-puti-russkogo-monashestva/.

[7] *Письма*, 366.

[8] "I just returned late yesterday evening after spending a week in Sarov and Diveevo, praying for all of you, my dear ones. Please provide me with detailed information about the events in writing. May God strengthen Felix after the patriotic act he has undertaken. Ella." *Ibid*, 244.

On May 7, 1918, Elizabeth was arrested, together with Sister Barbara and Sister Ekaterina from the convent. She was sent to Alapayevsk by way of Perm and Yekaterinburg. Despite rude treatment by guards on the way, the Grand Duchess managed to send letters to the sisters of the convent, instructing them in prayer and patience with love and concern. On July 18, her captors cruelly murdered her, pushing her and a number of of companions alive into a shallow mine, tossing in grenades, and filling the mine with burning wood. The killers testified that the Grand Duchess and her companions sang “O Lord, save your people” and other hymns until the smoke completely filled the mine. When the White Army recovered the bodies in October 1918, they discovered that the Grand Duchess had bandaged the others’ wounds with strips of her own garments. Grand Duchess Elizabeth and Sister Barbara were eventually buried in the Church of Mary Magdalene in Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives. She was canonized by Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia in 1981, and her sainthood was acknowledged by the Moscow Patriarchate in 1992.



Icon of Saint Elizabeth by Mirra Meylakh.

Alice, Princess Andrew of Greece and Denmark

On November 20, 1947, Princess Elizabeth, heir to the British throne, married the dashing young navy lieutenant Philip Mountbatten. The first splash of color to enter the drab world of postwar Britain and arguably the first great event of the television age, the wedding was a spectacle with the particular sparkle of royalty. Amid the parade of kings, queens, princes, and prime ministers streaming out of Westminster Abbey, however, was a small, dark figure wearing the robes of an Orthodox nun. The woman was none other than the groom’s mother, an extraordinary woman whose tumultuous and often tragic life provides a shocking record not only of the tribulations of the twentieth century, but of what it means to live a life in the service of others—a meditation on the Christian use of privilege, one might say.

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[9] *Ibid*, 21.

Born in the Tapestry Room of Windsor Castle on February 25, 1885, Princess Alice of Battenberg was a great-granddaughter of Queen Victoria and a niece of Grand Duchess Elizabeth. In short, she, too, was a child of power and privilege. The eldest daughter of Prince Louis of Battenberg and Elizabeth's sister, Princess Victoria of Hesse and by Rhine, soon learned that this accident of birth was not without its complications, to say the least. By the time she was a toddler, it was clear that the princess was not acquiring language skills as quickly or clearly as other children. She was ultimately diagnosed with congenital deafness. Her mother's response to her daughter's disability reflects the peculiarities of royal circles, the strange ways in which the mystique of monarchy can often create a golden cage for those within its grasp.

Princess Alice in 1927 and 1967.

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The nineteenth century saw the dawn of modern education for the deaf and by the end of the century, there were a number of highly regarded schools and even a university dedicated to educating deaf children. Princess Alice was a contemporary of Helen Keller, the famed deaf-blind American activist. Keller had been born into America's merchant elite, a world obsessed with progress and at least ostensibly interested in meritocracy. Her father, consequently, sought out the leading teachers and advocates for the deaf and blind to find innovative, modern ways to raise his daughter. Such was not the fate of Princess Alice. Never mind that royal children would not go to school for another generation. For a family whose position was based on notions of superior blood, the idea of publicly seeking help for a genetic defect was unthinkable. Alice, her mother decided, would have to find a way to survive in a world that would make no accommodations for her. For the most part, Alice did just that. She learned to lip-read in what were then the three working languages of the British court: English, French, and German. And she internalized any difficulties she was experiencing as her own, developing a sense of difference that accompanied her for the rest of her life.

Alice had to expend considerable energy to communicate, but the life of a royal woman in the late Victorian and early Edwardian age was one of constant social obligation. At noisy candlelit dinner parties, she read lips over extravagant, view-blocking centerpieces. When her feeble residual hearing caught giggling at the other end of the dinner table, she dared not ask what had caused the commotion, deciding reflexively the laughter was directed at her. It was an isolating and presumably exhausting existence. So it probably should not be too surprising that when she met the young Prince Andrew of Greece and Denmark, second son of the Greek king, at the coronation of King Edward VII, she was immediately smitten. The Greek prince's English was poor and, as a consequence, he spoke slowly, facing Alice the entire time. It was attention she had never received before.

The couple married in October 1903, with Alice's aunt Grand Duchess Elizabeth as well as Tsar Nicholas, Tsarina Alexandra, and their daughters in attendance. Princess Alice left for Greece, where she could reasonably have expected to live the quiet life of a minor royal wife. And in the beginning that is exactly what she did. She had four daughters, carried out royal duties, and kept a home for her military officer husband. But this quiet, predictable life did not last for long. The romantic ideal of the long nineteenth century was coming to an end and the upheavals of the twentieth loomed on the horizon. Alice had been born into an intricate web of royal connections that spread across Europe from London to Moscow, and she had married into what was Europe's most unstable monarchy. She was about to find herself in the middle of the storm. On the eve of a succession of political and personal crises, she had a fateful meeting. At the wedding of Grand Duchess Maria of Russia and Prince William of Sweden, she spent time with Grand Duchess Elizabeth, who was preparing to launch her convent. It was another twenty years before Princess Alice formally converted to the Orthodox faith. However, there is little doubt from her diaries and the recollections of those she spoke to at the time that her conversations with her aunt regarding religion, and more importantly the proper living of a Christian life, shaped the way the princess thought about her life on the eve of what turned out to be its most tumultuous period.

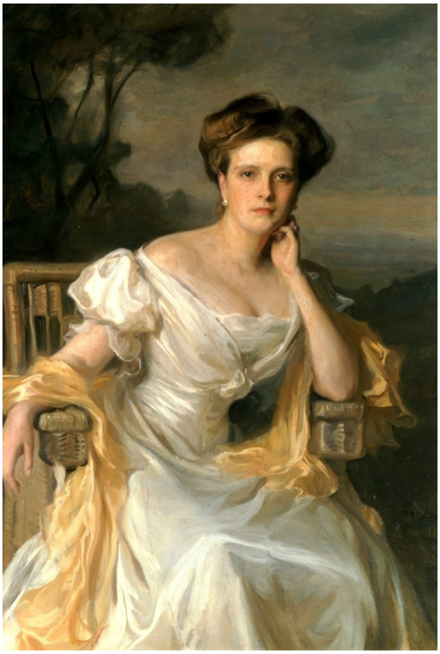
The Balkans War, that uncredited first act of World War I, dragged Greece and its Balkan Christian neighbors into a conflict with the dying Ottoman Empire, both an old enemy and former imperial master. Greece entered the conflict already beleaguered by political upheaval and economic instability. It was in this conflict that Princess Alice first revealed herself as something other than an ordinary royal woman. She went to the front lines and worked as a nurse, work for which she was awarded a Royal Red Cross. Princess Alice excelled in her role as a battlefield nurse, but the chaos of Greek politics and the disruptive events of World War I forced the family into exile in June 1917.

They returned briefly in 1920, but Greece's defeat in the Greco-Turkish War led them to flee once again. On the night of the escape, Alice gave birth to her fifth child on the kitchen table. She hid the newborn Prince Philip, future Duke of Edinburgh, in an orange crate as the family sneaked off in the middle of the night.

The family settled in a small house on the edge of Paris. Life in exile was hard. Alice's husband Andrew took up the life of a European playboy. She became increasingly religious, formally becoming Orthodox in 1928, though in practice this had been her religion since her marriage. It was during this period that Alice began what her family would characterize as a descent into madness. For the rest of her life, her religious faith and her fragile mental condition were indistinguishable to those around her. She was sent to a sanitarium and stayed there for eight years, as her daughters all married German aristocrats and her son, Prince Philip, was sent to England and placed under the care of her brother Louis, Lord Mountbatten. Upon her release, against the express wishes of her family, Alice chose to return to Greece, renting a small two-room apartment above the Benaki Museum. The year was 1938 and everything was about to change.

By April 1941, Axis troops had occupied Athens. Everyone, including Winston Churchill, was desperate to get Alice out of Greece—everyone, that is, except Alice. The princess moved from her small flat to a three-story Georgian house in the center of town. From there, she threw herself into humanitarian relief. Working with the Red Cross, she organized soup kitchens and brought in medical supplies from Sweden. She set up two shelters for lost and orphaned children and organized a nursing circuit through Athens' poorest neighborhoods. And she hid a Jewish family within the wall of a house that had once belonged to the King of Greece.

It was an act of defiance made all the more spectacular by the fact that Nazi officers regularly visited the house, checking on the well-being of its mistress. Alice was, after all, a German princess, not to mention the mother-in-law of three of their brother officers. Princess Alice was defiant in the face of their concern. When one unlucky caller asked what he might do to make her more comfortable, the princess answered matter-of-factly, "You could leave my country."



Princess Alice. Portrait by Philip de László, 1907. Private collection of the British Royal Family.

Despite the open disdain she showed the occupiers, she used their concern for her well-being to access what others desperately needed: food, clothing, and medical supplies. Princess Alice was given them quickly and willingly by the brutal invaders. She just as quickly and willingly passed them along to those who were wanting for them. By the time Athens was liberated in October 1944, Princess Alice was living in desperate poverty, writing to her son that she had eaten only bread and butter for several weeks. Her commitment to the people she served was highlighted when, as the Second World War gave way to the Greek Civil War, she chose to stay in Athens once again, caring for the hungry and sick. It was only her son's wedding in 1947 that finally compelled her to return to England.

While she had lived a life of service and devotion for some time, it was not until January 1949 that Princess Alice formally set out to form an order of nuns. The Christian Sisterhood of Martha and Mary was inspired in no small part by the work of her aunt, Grand Duchess Elizabeth. Alice herself, taking the monastic name Alice Elizabeth, thrived in her new world. She traveled not only around Greece, but around the world, even after her daughter-in-law became Queen Elizabeth II. It was on one such trip to India, where she wowed the Indian activist Rajkumari Amrit Kaur with the depth of her spiritual hunger and religious knowledge, that she fell ill. She was brought back to England to live with her son and his family, and died in Buckingham Palace on April 21, 1967, just as a military junta came to power in Greece. She was initially buried at Saint George's Chapel, Windsor, but in 1988, her grandson, then Prince of Wales—now King Charles III—helped fulfill her last wish by reburying her on the Mount of Olives. In 1994, she was honored in Israel as one of the "Righteous among the Nations." Fatefully, her final resting place is in the Church of Saint Mary Magdalene, not far from the remains of her aunt, Saint Elizabeth.

Privilege is real. It would be a mistake to think it only belongs to the realm of the rich and famous. A person who asks her royal brother-in-law to use a palace for a dinner for wounded veterans and a person who texts his cop brother-in-law asking to dismiss a parking ticket for his girlfriend are both using their privilege. Yet it would be wrong to assume that exercising one's privilege is inherently immoral. Morality implies agency, but privilege is very much an accident of circumstance, as the royal princesses understood. What *is* a matter of morality is how one uses one's privilege. The Orthodox calendar is filled with the names of those whose lives were marked simultaneously by privilege and service, and we would be remiss to ignore how often the opportunity for the latter arose out of the former. Scripture tells us that "it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God" (Matt. 19:24). Often when this verse is quoted as a way to repudiate the potential for holiness among the wealthy, Jesus's ensuing assertion that "with God all things are possible" (19:26) is ignored. But as the lives of the two German princesses turned saints show, holiness finds a prince and a pauper alike. ❃

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