

## Amsterdam Lectures 2012-13:

### The Ways of Modern Orthodox Theology: Part I

#### Lecture VIII: St Maria of Paris (Mother Maria Skobtsova) and Orthodoxy in the Modern World

25 april 2013, Revd. Prof. Andrew Louth

##### *Life*

Born Elisabeth Pilenko, in 1891 in Riga (present-day Latvia). 1895: moved to Anapa, on the NE Black Sea coast. 1906: after death of her father, the family moved to St Petersburg. While still at school in St Petersburg, she met the poet Aleksandr Blok, and became interested in Marxism. 1910: married D.V. Kuzmin-Karavaev, half-sibling of Nikolai Gumilev, through whom she was introduced to the artistic circles in St Petersburg that revolved round Gumilev and his wife, Anna Akhmatova. Elisabeth herself was a poet (with several published volumes), writer (a novel), artist and embroiderer—all of which she kept up throughout her life. 1913: Elisabeth left her husband and moved to Anapa, spending her time between Anapa and Moscow, where her daughter, Gaiana, was born later that year. Moved in the radical and artistic circles of Moscow. 1917: joined the Socialist-Revolutionary Party. 1919: married Daniel Skobtsov; two children: Yuri and Nastya (Anastasia). 1920: left Russia, arriving in Paris in 1924. 1926: Nastya died—turning point for Elisabeth, who began to look to the monastic life. 1927: separated from her husband. 1932: tonsured as the nun, Mother Maria, by Metropolitan Evlogy. From that time onward, Mother Maria sought a new kind of monasticism in the world. In a house in Paris, 77 rue de Lourmel, she established her ‘community’, where the homeless were welcomed and support provided for the destitute. A number of other places were established, including a house of convalescence at Noisy-le-Grand. During all this time, alongside her work with the poor and destitute, 77 rue de Lourmel became a centre for philosophical/religious discussion and cultural activity (1941, March: Nina Berberova read her ‘Resurrection of Mozart’ to an audience of about 100 in the canteen at rue de Lourmel). With the invasion of France by Nazi Germany in 1940, M Maria became prominent in helping and protecting the Jews. 1943: arrested, together with the rector of the church at rue de Lourmel, Fr Dimitri Klepinine. Already in 1941, one of her strongest supporters, Ilya Fondaminsky, a Jew, had died in Auschwitz, shortly after his baptism. 1943: Yuri, her son, and Fr Dimitri died in Buchenwald. 1945: on 31 March (Good Friday on the Western Calendar) Mother Maria gassed at Ravensbrück. 1987: declared one of the ‘Righteous among the Nations’ at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem. 2004: Mother Maria, along with her son, Yuri, Fr Dimitri Klepinine, and Ilya Fondaminsky, glorified as saints by the Œcumenical Patriarchate.

##### *Some characteristics of her theology*

- Central principle: love, embracing both love of God and love of our neighbour
- Principle of *sobornost*
- Godmanhood
- Personhood
- Complementarity of Christ and the Mother of God

- ‘Hell has already been’

*Types of Religious Life*

- The synodal
- The ritualist
- The aesthetic
- The ascetic
- The evangelical

*Bibliography (very selective, and largely English)*

Mother Maris Skobtsova, *Essential Writings*, with an introduction by Jim Forest (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 2003)

Sergei Hackel, *One, of Great Price* (London: DLT, 1965; published in a revised version as *Pearl of Great Price*, Crestwood NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press) [brief, compelling biography]

Xenia Krivochéine, *La Beauté salvatrice: Mère Marie (Skobtsov) Peintures – dessins – broderies* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2012) [even briefer, but with lots of pictures, illustrations, and a detailed time-line—which draws particular attention to her cultural involvement]

There have been various articles with material on or by St Maria. I have found the following useful (or, it might be more accurate to say, I have found the following):

*Le Message Orthodoxe* 140 (I – 2004): *Les Nouveaux Saints Orthodoxes de France*, [article by Tatiana Victoroff, ‘Mère Marie, poète’, 29–34; and Sainte Marie Skobtsov, ‘Poèmes’, 35–7; ‘Le present et avenir de l’Église’, 38–46]

*Le Message Orthodoxe* 146 (I – 2008), Elisabeth Skobtsov, ‘«Terre Sainte»’, 4–21.

See also for a detailed bibliography, see;

<http://www.incommunion.org/2004/10/18/mother-maria-skobtsova-bibliography/>

Last updated, apparently, in 2002, it is often a bit weak on useful things like pagination of the articles cited.