

Mother Maria Skobtsova



Each person is the very icon of God incarnate in the world.



There once was a nun who refused to be tamed.

She was a twice-divorced, avowed atheist, chain-smoking, revolutionary, Orthodox nun, who smuggled Jews out of WWII Paris—and died in solidarity with them.

If she was able to be a beacon of hope in the darkest of times, then it must be possible for me, too.

- ❖ Poet and Essayist
- ❖ Revolutionary
- ❖ Mother
- ❖ Divorcee (twice)
- ❖ Mayor
- ❖ Refugee
- ❖ Orthodox Nun
- ❖ Martyr of Ravensbrück
- ❖ Saint



Life in Russia

- ❖ Born Elisabeth Pilenko in 1891 Latvia
- ❖ Father died when she was 14
If there is no justice, there is no God!
- ❖ Poetry and Marxism, Alexander Blok
- ❖ Married at 18
- ❖ Transformation begins—Alexander Nevsky Seminary, St. Petersburg, first child, divorce
- ❖ Russian Civil War—political winds change
- ❖ Arrested, jailed, sentenced, reprieved *1



To Paris: Transformed by Grief to Love

- ❖ Married the judge who freed her, fled to safety in Paris 1923
- ❖ 1924 death of Anastasia, age 5, transformed her vocation *2
- ❖ Devoted to social work, philosophy, needs of émigrés
- ❖ Guided by Fr. Sergei Bulgakov, renowned theologian
- ❖ Divorced and searching again
- ❖ 1932 Her Bishop, Bishop Evlogy, suggested monastic life, but she rejected the cloistered life for “monasticism in the world.”

The Asceticism of the Open Door—Mother to All

- ❖ Prayer and contemplation alongside activism. *3
- ❖ Metropolitan Anthony Bloom of London, then a young medical student, met her and was shocked by her lifestyle. *4
- ❖ Old boarding house became her convent. *5, *6



77 Rue de Lourmel



Piety, piety, but where is the love—that moves mountains?

Love your neighbor

She insists that the love of neighbor is not an extra set of duties we take on in the Body of Christ. It IS what it IS to be in the Body of Christ. You're there with them, and that's it! But that solidarity is also a fertile solidarity. We bring one another into life in this! And it most definitely does not stop for her at the Church door. -

R. Williams *7

Liturgy after the liturgy....*8

Israel

- 1942

Two triangles, a star

The shield of King David, our forefather.

This is election, not offense.

The great path and not an evil.

Once more in a term fulfilled,

Once more roars the trumpet of the end;

And the fate of a great people

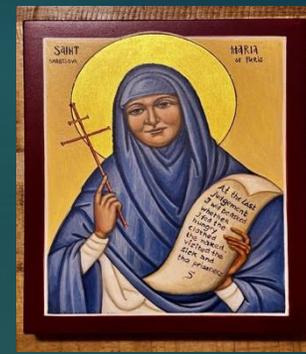
Once more is by the prophet proclaimed.

Thou art persecuted again, O Israel,

But what can human malice mean to thee,

who have heard the thunder from Sinai? *9

Love in Action



- **The "Trash Can Rescue"**: During the 1942 Velodrome d'Hiver roundup, Maria was working at the stadium where thousands of Jews were held without food or water. She coordinated with garbage collectors to smuggle Jewish children out of the stadium hidden in **trash cans**.
- **Forged Documents**: Working with Father Dimitri Klepinin, she issued thousands of fake baptismal certificates to protect Jews from deportation.
- **Escape Networks**: She collaborated with the French Resistance to hide Jews in her hostel and facilitate their escape to unoccupied Southern France. *10

Ravensbrück 1942-1945

- ❖ Ministry of motherhood continues
- ❖ Testimonies of survivors *11
- ❖ Died on March 30-31, 1945 (Good Friday/Holy Saturday)
- ❖ Soviet troops liberated the camp one month later



Sainthood

- ❖ On January 16, 2004, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople decreed the official glorification of Mother Maria (Skobtsova), her son George (Yuri), and her assistants, Father Dimitri Klepinine and Elia Fondaminskii.
- ❖ 2004 Recognized and commemorated by The Episcopal Church and included in the lectionary of lesser feasts and fasts for July 17. *12



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On The Breath of God: The Life of Maria Skobtsova. A musical written by Jerry Holsopple and Justin Poole (2025) Eastern Mennonite University.

<https://jerryholsopple.bandcamp.com/album/on-the-breath-of-god>

--For a transcript and audio of Rowan Williams' 2025 seminar on Mother Maria, please email me at mzt3522@gmail.com

*Rejoice, virgin mother of God,
Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you.
Blessed are you among women,
and blessed is the fruit of your womb,
for you have borne the Saviour of our souls.*

Rachmaninoff Vespers 1915, Ave Maria

<https://youtu.be/xWoQbUCocEU?si=YBp3sHSQnG2xWWx4>

