

## **The saving of the Jews: The Case of Mother Maria (Scobtsova)**

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The courageous spiritual achievement (*podvig*) of Mother Maria (1891-1945) is well known thanks to Fr. Sergy Hackel's book<sup>2</sup> and other publications.<sup>3</sup> Along with Fr. Dimitry Klepinin and other fellows of the "Orthodox Action" group, Maria rescued Jews in France during the Nazi persecution. Along with her son and members of the group, Maria was arrested in 1943 by the Gestapo. She died as a martyr in 1945 in the Ravensbruek concentration camp.

Maria's involvement in rescuing Jews was not unique. Both Christians and non-believers demonstrated courage in these activities. However, Maria was an Orthodox religious thinker, poet, and artist, a prominent activist of the religious renaissance among the Russian intelligentsia. In this piece I analyze some of her works that demonstrate her thinking on the "Jewish issue" and that reflect her spirit, thought and creativity.

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<sup>2</sup> Prof. Sergiy Gakkal, *Mat Mariya, (Vsetserkovnoe pravoslavnoe molodezhnoe Dvizhenie, Moskva, 1993), first English edition 1965, German translation 1967.*

<sup>3</sup> K. V. Mochul'skiy, "*Monahinya Mariya Skobtsova,*" *Tretiy Chas*, (New York), N1, 1946, pp. 64-73; T. Manuhina, "*Monahinya Mariya,*" *Noviy Zhurnal*, New York, vol. 41, 1955; T. Stratton Smith, *The Rebel Nun, the Moving Story of Mother Maria*, (Souvenir Press, London, 1965); *Mère Maria Scobtsov, Le Sacrement du Frère*, Preface d'Olivier Clément, (Le Sel de La Terre, Paris, 1996); Grigori Benevitch, "Mother (Skobtsova): A Model of Lay Service," *Religion, State & Society*, vol. 27, N.1, March 1999, pp. 101-109.

Orthodox Action began in 1935 among Paris émigrés. It was prompted by influential Russian philosophers and social activists such as Fr. Sergy Bulgakov, Nicholay Berdyaev, George Fedotov, Konstantin Mochulsky, Ilya Fondaminsky, and, of course, Maria herself who was the chair of the group. Despite their differing viewpoints, they all were strongly influenced by Vladimir Soloviev. Berdyaev came up with the name for the organization, taking it from Soloviev's Second Speech on Dostoyevsky (1882). "Dostoyevsky preached a living Christianity and believed in a universal Church, a universal Orthodox "action."<sup>4</sup> Orthodox Action was designed to help Orthodox Russian émigrés facing great hardships. The charitable and educational organization developed from small-scale activities to those that would impact the future of the whole world. The Russian intelligentsia often considered itself to be responsible for the entire world.

When World War Two broke out, everyone was forced to make decisions and moral judgments. Because of the persecution of the Jews in France, people had to address the "Jewish question." Vladimir Soloviev once said, "The Jewish question is a Christian question."<sup>5</sup> When Jews were first persecuted, Maria said, "There is no Jewish question, there is [only] a Christian question."<sup>6</sup> Both Soloviev and Maria hoped that authentic, active Christianity—however understood—might change the Jews' attitude toward Christianity and Christ. The notion of "action" arises in this context. Addressing Christians in 1884, Soloviev said, "Show them (i.e., the Jews) a Christianity that is visible and palpable, for them to have something to join."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Vladimir Solov'ev, *Sobranie Sochineniy* (Moskva, 1990), vol. 2, p. 304.

<sup>5</sup> Vladimir Solov'ev, "Evreystvo i Khristianskiy vopros" in Tayna Izrailiya, *Evreyskiy vopros v Russkoy religiozno misli*, Boykov V.F. (ed.) Sofiya, Moskva, 1930 p. 55.

<sup>6</sup> Prof. Sergiy Gakkel, op.cit. p. 134.

<sup>7</sup> Vladimir Solov'ev, "Evreystvo i Khristianskiy vopros" in Tayna Izrailiya, *Evreyskiy vopros v Russkoy religiozno misli*, Boykov V.F. (ed), Sofiya, Moskva, 1993, p. 79.

By Christian action, Soloviev meant his project of a universal Christian theocracy in which not only the Orthodox with their Tsar, and the Roman Catholics with their Pope, and Protestants with their scholars and preachers, but also the Jews could participate. Soloviev thought that the latter strived for concrete, earthly action: the establishment of the world on religious, theocratic foundations. For Maria, Orthodox Action appeared at the time of the Nazi occupation. This was different than it was for Soloviev who saw it applicable at the end of the nineteenth century, namely, saving the Jews. The current situation at the end of the twentieth century poses new questions. Today the voice of Sergei Lezov censures the whole tradition of Russian religious philosophy. He does not believe that Maria's actions to save the Jews (in hopes of their turning to Christ), provides an example of a 'Christian solution' to the Jewish question.<sup>8</sup>

Mother Maria's multi-faceted legacy includes articles, poems, art, and drama, many of which focus on the Jewish theme. The basis of her theory is presented in an unpublished article entitled "Reflections on the destinies of Europe and Asia" (1941). She wove a tapestry in 1940 that she called "The life of David." It was not only artistically brilliant, but also impressive in size. It was 5.2 meters long, and 78 cm wide. It presents eight episodes of King David's life with the Psalmist himself depicted in the center.<sup>9</sup> Started during the Jewish persecution, it related very much to the Jewish issue.

In his articles, "The New Testament Israel" and "The History of Future Theocracy," Soloviev devotes fascinating passages to the personality of King David. But for Soloviev the Jewish theocracy of King David's is a type of universal theocracy which the Russian thinker hoped to see realized on earth. Maria seems to construe King David as a man dedicated to God and who glorified Him throughout his whole life. As a poet, David the Psalmist was an archetypal figure for Maria. But he also related to the Jewish theme. Christians call Christ "the Son of David," and the Virgin Mary, "David's Daughter." Both expressions point to Christ's relation to the Jewish people and the House of David. One of the central elements in Maria's

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<sup>8</sup> See Sergey Lezov, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

<sup>9</sup> This tapestry is currently preserved at St. John the Baptist Monastery in Essex, United Kingdom.

theology is her teaching about the Mother of God.<sup>10</sup> We see Maria's opposition to the Roman Catholic dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary in her treatises. Following Fr. Bulgakov,<sup>11</sup> she believed that one could not isolate the Virgin Mary from the whole of humanity. But the teaching of the Immaculate Conception virtually separates her from humanity in general and from the Jewish people in particular.

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<sup>10</sup> See her articles, "On the Imitation of the Mother of God," and "On the Veneration of the Mother of God," "The Holy Earth," as well as a number of poems, drawings, and icons.

<sup>11</sup> See Prof. Sergiy Gakkel, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

It is impossible to ascribe to the Mother of God any special descent apart from that of the whole of humanity. Doing so would place her beyond the limits of humankind and do away with the possibility of God's Incarnation. This would falsify the *raison d'être* of the Hebrews of the Bible, effacing, in a sense, its messianic vocation and the work of God's people Israel.<sup>12</sup>

For Maria the Jewish people play a crucial role in preparing the Messiah's advent. The absence of the veneration of the Mother of God among Protestants and the distorted veneration of her among Roman Catholics was considered to be one of the causes of the distortion of the idea of Christ. According to Fr. Sergy Hackel, Maria was involved in polemics with a German pastor who denied the Jewish descent of Christ altogether.<sup>13</sup>

### **The Impact of the Russian Revolution on Mother Maria**

Elizaveta Iurievna Kuzmina-Karavaeva (later to become Mother Maria) was actively involved in the Russian Revolution and a shining example of the liberal intelligentsia. In 1917 she joined the Socialist Revolutionaries (SR) whose leader was Alexander Fedorovich Kerensky, the head of the provisional government. Kerensky was one of the few ethnic Russians among the members of the Central Committee of the SR party. At least 80% of them were Jews<sup>14</sup> and they held top positions in the Party. The SR was one of the most radical parties involved in the Revolution, and it had more members than any other party. This provides a glimpse of the extent of Russian Jewish involvement in the Revolution.

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<sup>12</sup> *Mat' Mariya, Vospominaniya, stat'I, ocherki*, YMCA Press, Paris, 1992, vol. 1. p. 115.

<sup>13</sup> Prof. Sergiy Gakkel, op. cit. 130.

<sup>14</sup> See Andrey Dikiy, *Evrei v Rossii I v SSSR*, Blagovest, Novosibirsk, 1994, p. 462.

What mattered for the people during the Revolution were the slogans and promises of the leaders rather than the ethnic makeup of the leaders. The SR's ideology could be traced to the populists: they were against monarchy, oligarchy, bolshevism, and they favored people's capitalism. The right wing of this party (where Kuzmina-Karavaeva belonged) was quite patriotic. From 1917 members believed that Russia should continue its war with Germany. This is why SR lost its influence. People did not want to fight anymore. Jewish members of the Central Committee of the right wing SR behaved like patriots of the Russian states. Unlike the Bolsheviks, who insisted upon the cessation of the 'imperialist war,' they turned it into a proletarian messianic war of all countries against their 'oppressors.'<sup>15</sup> This is important for understanding Maria's attitude toward the Jews after 1941.

In her 1941 "Reflections on the destinies of Europe and Asia," Maria addressed fellow members of Orthodox Action. In this article she expressed her realization that the Jews would never join any universal messianic kingdom. This contrasts with Vladimir Soloviev's hope of a universal theocracy in which all Christians and Jews would participate.

In the middle of the twentieth century the totalitarian states that implemented the messianic idea appear as the persecutors of both the Church (especially the Russian Orthodox, which were Maria's kin) and the Jews (in the case of Germany). Maria rejects all materialistic explanations of the 'Jewish problem.'

The acuteness of the Jewish question appears to have absolutely no explanation when one approaches it from a political, or economic, and almost any other perspective. They say that the Jews are the major representatives of capitalism. But we know that the percentage of the rich among the Jews is as negligible as it is in any other nation...The political role of the Jews does not find its expression in any specific position which they prefer, but is distributed among all possible spirits and factions of modern society, so that, being a member of one party [e.g., SR – G.B.], a Jew by the same token finds himself fighting

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<sup>15</sup> The SR party understood the state to involve the entire Russian populace. In contrast to the right wing of the SR party, among the Bolsheviks (whose Central Committee consisted of 75% Jews--see A. Diky op. cit., p. 461), messianic ideas of world-wide revolution were predominant. Lenin succeeded in convincing his party comrades to reject waging the "bourgeois-patriotic" war. The Bolsheviks thus took power, purportedly giving the people peace and land. Soon enough, however, this peace was broken by the Civil War, and the land taken away.

against another Jew, who is a member of another party [e.g., Bolshevik  
- G.B.].<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> From Fr. Sergei Hackel's archive, p. 41.

"No," Maria concludes, "a rationalist explanation here will not do."<sup>17</sup> Maria explains the persecution of the Jews in the context of the persecution of any individual or people by the 'kingdom of this world'--the deified state (Rome). In 1941 she wrote:

Once again the dead state, the deified and extolled idea of Rome, wishes to assert itself [by] bringing about the death of every living personality, whether that of an individual or a people. Israel (the Jewish people) is one such living personality; moreover, that it is all that, and therefore any fight against it becomes something fundamental, a matter of principle, going beyond any political or economic framework, all abstract, artificial doctrines. And in this is the honor of Israel. In this is the meaning of the sacrifices it offers.<sup>18</sup>

Maria opposes not the state as such, but the deified state which claims the whole world as its own possession, and that uses messianic ideology (such as communism or Nazism) to support this claim. It is precisely such a state that poses a threat to the personality of both the individual and the people. For such a state the agent of history is neither the people, nor the human person, but itself. An idea of this kind inevitably comes into conflict with the "personality of the people," personified for Maria by the Jewish people, who managed to preserve itself despite its lack of its own state or land. Regarding the "personality of a people," Maria writes:

There is no argument as to whether the Jewish people existed only while the kingdom of Israel was in existence, now that it has emerged anew with the new Jewish state in Palestine. Clearly, it has existed without interruption. This people existed as a bearer of its historic destiny, as a living, authentic personality.<sup>19</sup>

Maria mentions that from the viewpoint of the principle of Rome, Israel must have long since been dead. But in fact she turned out to be more alive than Rome and the multitude of its successors. Maria takes the point further when she says:

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. p. 42.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

What is characteristic of the Jewish people is its self-definition...Everything may change, external forms may disappear, lands may be taken away, but the personality of the people remains, for God created it immortal and eternal. So this people's personality, Israel, stands before God who created it, not before a god it created itself, as is the case in Rome. This is one of the most significant aspects of Israel's monotheism. As unique, absolute and perfect person--as Persona--God faces His image and likeness, His chosen people, Israel, which represents...the person of any people.<sup>20</sup>

As Maria continues to define her concept of the personality of a people, one may note that it is her Christian re-interpretation of the notions developed by Russian Slavophiles and populists:

...this people's personality can sin and fall, it can come to dSRve God's condemnation, but it remains a person somehow directly related to God's will, responsible before God's will.<sup>21</sup>

Vladimir Soloviev once wrote in a similar vein that

A people, although it is a collective being, is still real, manifest, whereas humanity, since the confusion of tongues, has turned into an abstract notion that does not exist at all as a real, inwardly solid whole.<sup>22</sup>

There is a contradiction between such notions as “a people's personality” and the “person” as such, but at the present level of consideration, this opposition is not necessary. For Maria the Jews are thus the "people's personality." It is precisely this character of life in Israel as the people's personality that she explains the fact that Christ was one of the Jews according to the flesh.

Throughout its ancient history Israel, in a certain sense, was bearing God. One had to have been a person for the absolute Person to become incarnate in one.<sup>23</sup>

Israel is a “person” because God made a covenant with him; a covenant can only be made with a person.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid. p. 36.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. p. 37.

<sup>22</sup> Vladimir Soloviev, "Evreystvo i Khristianskiy vopros" in Tayna Izrailya, *Evreyskiy vopros v Russkoy religioznoy misli*, Boykov V.F. (ed.), Sofiya, Moskva, 1993, p. 54.

<sup>23</sup> Archive, p. 38.

This is the proper context for understanding the persecution of the Jews. According to Maria, Nazism strove to assert its nation-state at the expense of all other nations, and its first target was the Jewish people that exemplified “the people.” There is a difference between Maria's perspective and that of the defenders of human rights who consider the attitude towards Jews as a kind of criterion for respecting human rights. Maria perceived the persecution of the Jews not as a violation of human rights, per se, but as a threat to the "personality of the people." The persecution of the Jews was a threat to *all peoples* including her own Russian people and the Germans that chose Nazism as a kind of suicide.

The salvation of all people, including the Russians, from Nazism is inseparable from the salvation of the Jews. This notion explains Maria's apparent bias toward the Jews at the expense of her own people (i.e., the Russians) whom she exposed to danger while saving the Jews. She understood very well that Nazism could destroy or enslave all peoples and that Jews were but the first victim.

But Nazism was not limited to the persecution of the Jews. Together with other totalitarian forms of state, Nazism strove to suppress the individual personality--and in this case, the struggle was against Christianity. One's personal belief is not individually owned and used, but comes in a societal context. One is not allowed to be alone and have a privatized faith. One must sacrifice to Caesar's genius. One's soul becomes Caesar's property.<sup>24</sup>

Thus, the personalities of the people and of the individual asserted in the Old and New Testament respectively, have come under attack by totalitarian regimes in the twentieth century. In the War situation of the 1940s the Church should have been compelled to stretch out its hand to the Jewish people, open its heart to it, and support the anti-Nazi resistance. This was Maria's understanding of the purpose of Orthodox Action at that moment of history and in the situation in which she found herself.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

A Christian is called to become a godparent of the Jewish people. By God's will he is placed face-to-face with his elder brother, who once fell away.<sup>25</sup>

This parallels the figures of Esau, who once sold his birthright, and of Jacob-Israel, respectively. Maria alludes precisely to the episode of Esau and Jacob's meeting each other face-to-face after a long period of separation caused by sibling rivalry. They meet and forgive each other (see Gen. 33). She makes a similar analogy with the Church and the Jews. If the Church is the true Church, then it is she who, above all, is responsible for her relationship with the Jews.

I recall two famous statues in Strasbourg cathedral--the Old and New Testament Churches. The Old Testament statue has a band over her eyes and her staff is not broken. The sighted New Testament Church, empowered by her truth, must be able to take the band from the eyes of her sister. It seems to me that the fields are already white and are only waiting for the reapers of the harvest. And the Prince of this world does everything to prepare those reapers, drawing an untrespassable line between himself and them, banishing them from his earthly city, from his Sodom and Gomorrah, upon which sulphurous rain is to be poured.<sup>26</sup>

Remarkably, Maria here recounts the Biblical account of Lot's two daughters, interpreting it historically without prejudice. She relates one daughter to the banished New Testament Church and Russian Orthodox émigrés, and the other daughter corresponds to the persecuted Jews.

Maria hoped that Christianity would not manifest itself as a dominant state religion, which it had been in Russia, but as a religion persecuted by the Prince of this world, a religion that would be prepared to succor the persecuted Jews and hasten their conversion to Christ.

Sergei Lezov criticized Maria and her tradition when he wrote:

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

Our philosophers V.S. Soloviev, N.A., Berdyaev, and even our Orthodox martyr Mother Maria all had an *idée fixe* about the salvation of the Jews in Christ. The documents published by the priest Sergy Hackel shows that when the genocide was at its height, Mother Maria was dreaming that the Holocaust would somehow hasten Israel's baptism. So dreadful it is: for Mother Maria was herself saving the lives of French Jews, and yet she was unable to see them as brothers and sisters, 'mere' human beings, people, whose forebear many times went to their death, or banishment, in order to avoid our Christian salvation in Christ.<sup>27</sup>

Lezov might be somewhat correct regarding Soloviev's idea of theocracy, but his criticism of Maria appears less justified. First, Lezov mistakenly assumes that Maria was dreaming of anything in particular. She was far from being a dreamer. Her saving of the Jews was a practical act of loving her neighbor, and her prophecy of the Jews turning to Christ was an insight rather than a dream. Moreover, her insight was eschatological, requiring perfect love towards those about whom a prophecy is pronounced. While saving the Jews from death, Maria sees Christ crucified together with the persecuted Jews.

The Son of David, the Messiah, unacknowledged by his people, is now crucified together with those who once did not acknowledge Him. The Cross of Golgotha is laid upon the shoulders of all Israel. And this Cross lays down an obligation.<sup>28</sup>

How did Mother Maria come to see Christ crucified together with the Jewish people? She interprets Christ's words that love rendered to those in squalor and misery is rendered personally to Him (Mt. 25:31-46). If squalor and misery is really that, then

Christ is really present in His humility and we accept such a person in the name of Christ's love not for the sake of a reward, but because we are aflame with this sacrificial love...and are united in it with Him, that is, with His sufferings on the Cross. Thus we suffer not for the sake of our own purification and salvation, but for the sake of those in squalor and misery, in order that their sufferings be alleviated by ours. One cannot love sacrificially in one's own name; one can sacrificially love only in Christ's name, that is, in the name of God's image revealed to us in a human being.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Sergey Lezov, op.cit., p. 401.

<sup>28</sup> Archive, p. 43.

<sup>29</sup> Mat' Mariya, op cit., vol. 1, p. 215.

These are Maria's reflections on her experience of sacrificial love to her own--Russian, Orthodox folk. And these thoughts contain nothing that would pertain to a specific religion. The application of them to Maria's mission of saving the Jews is inappropriate.

Mother Maria mystically saw the Jews as belonging to Christ through her own sacrificial love to them in the name of Christ. The Christians who were saving the Jews--the Church, including Maria herself--were willingly crucified together with the Jews for the sake of their salvation. The Christians represented Christ's body and in this sense Christ Himself. The saved Jews participated in Christ's body. He was broken for them in a very literal sense. This liturgical aspect of Maria's teaching on neighborly love has proven difficult for her modern critics to understand. Many deny that the liturgy may be interpreted this way.

Thus, those saved were not outside Christ's body, but in a sense (potentially or at least passively), participated in it. This point throws light on the fact that the Jews (irrespective of their confession) in Maria's community received certificates stating that they belonged to this community. Those certificates were not spurious. The primary element in Maria's attitude toward the persecuted Jews was compassion, sacrificial Christian love. And it is only on these grounds that Maria arrives at her vision of Christ crucified with them. Her next step was eschatological:

Now one can speak of something unheard of and impossible before, namely, of the Christian Church of the people of Israel, of the end and fulfillment of the times.<sup>30</sup>

Whether such an expression as "the Church of the people of Israel" is theologically correct is open to debate. But what matters is that it is the vision of Christ crucified for the sake of the Jews' salvation that allowed Maria to speak of the possibility of the acknowledgement by the Jews of Christ as their Savior. According to Maria, the Jews already participate in Christ's body insofar as Christians sacrifice themselves for them.

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<sup>30</sup> Archive, p. 43.

In saving the Jews and in sharing their sufferings, Maria has willingly identified herself with the victims of Nazi violence. At the same time she saw the possibility of a Jewish response to this by identifying themselves with Christians who were making suffering from violence a voluntary matter. She had the person of Ilya Fondaminsky before her as an example—a prominent SR activist, a patriot of Russia, a Jew, and a fellow-member of Maria's Orthodox Action group. Although in his heart he had long since come to believe in Christ, Fondaminsky did not wish to be baptized immediately. He considered such an act to betray his people. However, when the Jewish persecution began, he received baptism and shared in the sufferings of his people.<sup>31</sup>

Maria's poem, "Two triangles, a star..." was written in 1942 in connection with the order by the German administration that all Jews should wear the Star of David. In this poem Maria calls the Jewish people to bear the sufferings they received as their lot—not as something forced upon them by external violence—but willingly. Not as Simon of Cyrene bore the Cross of Golgotha, but as Christ Himself bore it:

And let you, who bear the signature  
Of the six-angled star,  
Learn to answer willingly  
To the sign of bondage.<sup>32</sup>

It may be noted that the latter image, the six point Star of David, was interpreted by Soloviev as the prophetic sign of godmanhood. The upper triangle corresponds to God, worshipped in the Holy Trinity, and the lower one to a human being, created in the image and likeness of God. Maria's call to the Jews was, in fact, an appeal to godmanhood. Lezov says that Maria was not able to see the Jews as "mere" human beings. He says:

The human beings whose forbears many times went to their death or banishment in order to avoid salvation in Christ, it is he who fails to see the Jews as 'mere' human beings since he sees them not as just humans, but as religious Judaists.

Thus, for Lezov, Jewishness and Judaism are inseparably linked.

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<sup>31</sup> Ilya Fondaminsky perished in Auschwitz, but accepted these sufferings willingly in the name of Christ. See Prof. Sergiy Gakkel', op. cit., p. 128.

<sup>32</sup> English translation by James Kates to whom I express special gratitude for his translations of Mother Maria's poems.

Maria saw the Jews as *persecuted*. They had special features. Helping them was not only due to ordinary human pity, but was theologically and spiritually motivated. When she encountered those who for obvious reasons were afraid and hated their persecutors, Maria testified that their sufferings could be transfigured in Christ. As a true Christian one should save not only the body, but also the soul. To save from fear and hatred through the willing acceptance of the sufferings that the world hurls upon one was the foundation of Maria's hope. Under the influence of the Christians who rescued them and willingly sharing their sufferings, the Jews would turn to Christ.

Despite my admiration of Maria's achievement, I am a bit perplexed at her treatment of the heritage of the nineteenth century and the philosophy of the Slavophiles and Vladimir Soloviev. Regarding the emergence of the "Christian Church of the Jewish people," Maria seems to forget that conversion to Christ is a *personal* act, and that the Russian Orthodox Church is not really the Church of the Russian people. The idea of the Russian people as 'Christian' and 'Orthodox' was shown to be illusory in the twentieth century. Although individual representatives of the Jewish people may turn to Christ, one cannot possibly speak of the "Church of the Jewish people." Maria was not sufficiently aware of the tension and contradiction that exists between an individual person and what she called "the personality of a people." She wrote clearly that the idea of the Christian state is a relic of the past, but the notion of a 'Christian people' is also a relic of the past. A Jew by birth is no longer inevitably a Judaist by faith. All this has created a *sui generis* situation in which every human being must define himself or herself regarding faith or unbelief.

There is some truth in Lezov's reproach of Maria's motivation in saving Jews. It is not true that Maria was saving them out of charity, without the desire to convert. The truth is that conversion of the Jews could only be a personal activity. And Maria and her fellow workers were saving *individuals* first and foremost. On the spiritual and practical levels, (if not on the theoretical), then Maria understood it precisely thus.

Maria believed that by crucifying herself for those she was saving (whether Russian or Jew), they became participants in Christ's body. She understood that

sacrificial love for one's neighbor was not only an "imitation of Christ," but also an "imitation of the Mother of God." The imitation of Christ was related to vertical love, to one's aspiration toward God, to what Maria called one's personal Golgotha. What is characteristic of this love is, first of all, a filial attitude to God, allowing a person to overcome all bondage of this world and transcend it. A Christian who imitates Christ is, according to Maria, ready

...in torment, suffering and sorrow--in whatever way--to be born for eternity, to enter the Father's house and to be there together with those who have gone through these pangs before or who will yet go through them.<sup>33</sup>

This love toward God makes one capable of accepting sufferings willingly and conquering the natural fear of death. This love makes death a testimony to God, of our heavenly Fatherland and of the resurrection of the dead. Unlike the imitation of Christ (one's own Golgotha), the imitation of the Mother of God, is, according to Maria, a participation in the Golgotha of one's neighbor, one's fellow man.

Maternity implies neither spiritual maturity nor the scale of one's *podvig*; what it expresses is just humility and a yielding impulse to participate in another's Golgotha...to open up one's heart for the strike of the double-edged sword. It can be said more simply and with one word. Maternity means love.<sup>34</sup>

Using the image of the double-edged sword, Maria relates the prophecy of Simeon the Righteous (Lk. 2:25) to the episode of the *Theotokos* standing at Golgotha, at the Cross of Her Son. According to Maria, every Christian should imitate the love of not only Christ, but also of Mary His mother, thus actively representing the image of not only the God-man, but also the Church (i.e., His Body). The Church is, indeed, a Mother, not only for Christians, but for everyone who may turn to Her. As a member of the Church, every Christian is endowed with not only the grace of God's Sonship, but also with the grace of all-embracing maternity.

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<sup>33</sup> Mat' Mariya, op. cit. vol. 1, p. 215.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., vol. 1. pp. 104-105

The idea of "all-embracing maternity" was revealed when Maria's (then Elizabeth Skobtsova's) daughter, Nastya, died in 1926. Nastya's coffin was opened in 1931. As Maria testifies, some distinctive "all-embracing maternity" was revealed to her at that time.<sup>35</sup> As if having identified herself with the earth in which the remains of her daughter were laid, Maria had a sense of transcending the limitations of her body and being prepared to embrace everyone in her love. Theologically speaking, Maria related this experience and the grace of "all-embracing maternity" to the Mother of God, who, at the moment of Christ's death and burial, became the New Eve, "the Holy Earth," the Mother of all creation. In her articles Maria more than once follows Orthodox theologians in calling the Virgin Mary a "holy" or "new" earth. One of Maria's first theological articles has precisely this title: "The Holy Earth." Thus for Maria, the Virgin Mary was not only a daughter of the Jewish people, the Daughter of David, but also the "Holy Earth," i.e., the deified creation, which even after her Dormition remains connected with the whole of creation. The Most Holy Virgin is "Holy Earth"<sup>36</sup> because, on one hand, being God's creation, she has one nature in common with all humanity and can be called "Earth" (the human being was made of earth, see Gen. 2:7). On the other hand, in virtue of the Incarnation and Christ's sacrifice, the curse is removed from this "Earth" and it becomes "holy," that is, one land that all human beings have in common. The image of "Earth" becomes for Maria an image of the natural unity of humankind and the whole of creation--that unity which in God and by His grace renders love towards one's neighbors "all-embracing" indeed. (It was not long after the revelation of 1931 that Maria took monastic vows.)

The unity of the Virgin Mary with the whole of humankind and the whole of God's creation was extremely important for Maria. She believed that it was Russian Orthodoxy that "made the *Theotokos* a kin to earth."<sup>37</sup> She developed an intuition of the Mother of God's unity with the whole of creation. (This idea becomes even clearer in the context of the polemic against the Latin dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, which tears Her away from the whole of creation.)

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<sup>35</sup> Prof. Sergiy Gakkel', op.cit., p. 35.

<sup>36</sup> Mat' Mariya, op.cit., vol. 2, p. 189.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, p. 124.

It is this understanding of maternity that Maria showed not only to the Russians, but also to the Jews. As her biographers testify, Maria showed the same kind of maternity in the Nazi concentration camp. All crucified victims were crucified with Christ in the person of His saints.<sup>38</sup>

One of Maria's favorite prayers was the prayer of the eighth century monk, Saint Joannikius the Great:

My hope is the Father, my refuge is the Son, my protection is the Holy Spirit, Holy Trinity Glory to Thee.<sup>39</sup>

Maria cites this prayer when she speaks of the life of this saint in her book, *The Harvest of the Spirit*.<sup>40</sup>

The house for the homeless and sick immigrants that she organized with her fellow-workers from Orthodox Action was still no more than a shelter. However, during the Nazi persecution this house was transformed into a real refuge. One may note that in French (the language of the country where Maria was living), a "refuge" is translated as *sanctuaire*, which also means a holy, sacred place--a sanctuary. Maria's very heart, which opened itself to the pain of the world, was sanctified by Christ's love. God, who is the protection and refuge for everyone who comes to Him endows those who imitate Him with the same grace to embrace everyone in love.

In her imitation of Christ and His Mother, Maria sacrificed herself for the salvation of both her Russian kin and the Jews, but she also blessed the sacrifice of her son, Iuri, her only living child,<sup>41</sup> who also willingly died in Christ's name for the salvation of the Jews. Thus, by blessing the sacrifice of her son, Maria showed God's love equal to her love for her own son.

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<sup>38</sup> See Prof. Sergiy Gakkel', op. cit., pp. 145-164.

<sup>39</sup> E. Yu. Skobtsova, *Zhatva Duha*, Vodoley, Tomsk, 1994, p. 14.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Her first daughter, Gayana (meaning "of the earth"-- A. Ch.) returned to Soviet Russia where she died in 1936.

One of Maria's last works was a magnificent poem entitled, "The Day of the Spirit." It was written on May 24, 1942 in Paris not long before her arrest by the Gestapo. In the style of apocalyptic literature, we find an astounding image of the Holy Spirit crucified. The suffering of the Holy Spirit, shared with Him by the Mother of God, and by Maria herself, is nothing other than the image of a rejected grace, of freedom and God's love, which nevertheless is poured over humanity. Christ's sacrifice was performed by the Holy Spirit (see Heb. 9:4). Therefore, the rejection of the Spirit is also the rejection of Christ's sacrifice.

In her awesome apocalyptic vision there is a moment in Pontius Pilate's courtyard where all the resurrected nations gather to crucify—not Christ anymore—but the Holy Spirit. Maria's articles demonstrate the image of resurrected nations that was connected to the resurgence of nationalism and paganism. In the twentieth century the latter theme is especially important. The combination of Pilate and the "nations" corresponds to the Roman ideal of the universal empire combined with pagan nationalism. (Maria dwells upon this in her "Reflections on the Destinies of Europe and Asia.")<sup>42</sup> The "nations" crucify the Holy Spirit, thus manifesting a kind of anti-Pentecost. In other words, if in Pentecost the Church (which is the unceasing activity of the Holy Spirit), is the principle of unity, and the subjects that are being united are the persons elected from all the nations, the principle of unity in anti-Pentecost is the universal empire (of the Anti-Christ), and the subjects that are being united are the nations (*goim*) that reject the grace of the Holy Spirit. Although this poem is not directly related to the Jewish theme, it seems to me that it can serve as an important warning as we enter the third millennium, a warning all the more important because it comes from such a person as Maria.

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<sup>42</sup> See Archive, pp. 32-33.

In conclusion, I refer to one important problem widely discussed in Russia today. According to historians about one million Russians participated on the German side in various army divisions in World War Two. Only a few thousand Russian émigrés fought on the side of the Allies.<sup>43</sup> Capitalizing on the hatred of many Russians for the Soviet regime, the Nazis managed to plant them in the hope that with German help they would liberate Russia from the Bolsheviks. Referring to the Jews' active involvement in the Bolshevik Revolution and in the establishment of Soviet power building,<sup>44</sup> the Nazis ignited in Russians and other Slavic peoples hatred towards Jews and Bolsheviks, thus acquiring more collaborators.

From this perspective, the *podvig* of Maria and her fellow-workers from Orthodox Action gains even more significance. They too were perfectly aware of the active involvement of Jewish communists in the Bolshevik Revolution and the persecution of the Church,<sup>45</sup> but they were not tempted to support the Nazis in their anti-Semitism, nor were they deterred from helping the Jews. It is clear that pity for the persecuted would not be, in itself, sufficient motivation in this situation. A Russian person must have felt no less pity for his or her Motherland, and for the mother Church. The temptations experienced by Russians exposed to Nazi propaganda were demonic indeed. That is why so many fell prey to them. It is

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<sup>43</sup> Mihail Nazarov, "Tayna Rossii" *Russkaya Ideya*, Moskva, 1999, p. 93.

<sup>44</sup> Andrey Dikiy, op. cit. pp. 142-218.

<sup>45</sup> Fr. Sergy Bulgakov, a spiritual father of Mother Maria wrote: "As for Bolshevism, historical truth demands that we acknowledge...the fatal character of the fatal influence of Jewry at the head of the communist clique, regardless of the fact that the great majority of the Russian state belongs to different nationalities, and first of all to Russians" (*Christianity and the Jewish question*, YMCA Press, Paris, 1991, p. 67). Mother Maria however, is more accurate, for she rightly says that Jews participated in different political parties, not only the Bolshevik. In any case their activity in the Russian Revolution and in atheist propaganda was well-known to Mother Maria.

At the same time I must note that in her concept of the persecution of the Jews by the deified state (Rome), Mother Maria pays no attention to one important fact. The Jews, as a "personality of a people," which has its own interests, may come into conflict and indeed sometimes were in conflict with the interests of the nations among which they lived. However, in Mother Maria's article, the Jews, together with Orthodox Christians, appear to be absolutely innocent victims. I think that though the genocide of the Jews cannot be justified on any grounds, it is better to avoid the idealization of the Jewish people as if the Jews are always persecuted and unfortunate. Certainly in the situation when the Jews needed to be saved, it was not the time to accuse them or to say that this persecution was God's dreadful punishment upon them. Perhaps nobody except Jews themselves can speak in this way. From this viewpoint Mother Maria's thoughts are irreproachable. At the same time I do not think that Maria gives the last and absolutely true answer about the reasons and character of the persecution of the Jews and of Orthodox Christians. I have touched on this theme in my article "The Russian Orthodox view of Post-Auschwitz Theology" in *Theology After Auschwitz and the Gulag*, St. Petersburg School of Religion and Philosophy, St. Petersburg, 1997, (ed. Natalia Pecherskaya), pp. 88-105.

necessary to mention this to make clear that pity for the persecuted cannot itself explain Maria's behavior. It was grounded in the clear understanding that the whole problem of the relationship between Christians and Jews, i.e., between spiritual Israel and Israel according to the flesh, cannot be resolved on the Christian side other than through sacrificial Christian love.

Maria and her fellow-workers clearly perceived that the spiritual animosity of Nazism towards Christians found its expression in involving the Church in the extermination of the Jews (Israel according to the flesh). Through approval, toleration, or even direct collaboration, spiritual Israel (the Church) was led into war with Israel (according to the flesh). The very nature of the Church was perverted along the line of Manichaeism. Only a few of those under Hitler could completely overcome this temptation. They chose the opposite way: the New Israel could not remain indifferent to the extermination of Israel (according to the flesh), and had no right to participate in this extermination. Instead, they must try to save the Jews. In this sense, Maria's *podvig* is inseparable from that of the martyrs in Russia who, when the Bolsheviks persecuted the Church (including the Jews), forgave their enemies and prayed for their salvation.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> See my article, "The Russian Orthodox View of Post-Auschwitz Theology" in *Theology after Auschwitz and the Gulag*, St. Petersburg School of Religion and Philosophy, St. Petersburg, 1997, (ed. Natalia Pecherskaya), p. 101, and my article "Judaism and the Future of Orthodoxy" in *SIDIC*, vol. XXXII, N. 2, 1999, pp. 15-20.