

Elina Kahla

## Russian Idea in Exile

### Mother Maria Skobtsova's Apocalyptic Thought

Mother Maria Skobtsova's (1891-1945) intellectual inheritance has gradually been rediscovered. Pamphlets, verses, prose and visual art have now been reprinted and reached a new audience. Today, we have a nearly coherent portrait of a social radical, religious martyr, philosopher and modernist artist; but still, her worldview presents contradictory perspectives. Mother Maria is known for her 'total love of neighbour', to use the theologian Olivier Clément's utterance. Indeed, love of neighbour was her consciously accepted ascetic assignment which she practised throughout her life epitomised by her participation in the French Resistance and rescue of Jews in Nazi-occupied Paris. In her thought, however, she remained a fervent Russian patriot in exile, a modifier of the Russian idea,<sup>1</sup> and promoter of Russian messianism, which included a wide scenario of eschatological<sup>2</sup> and apocalyptic<sup>3</sup> visions. In today's circumstances of increasing global threats and civil terrorism, the apocalyptic philosophy, understandably, has again proved to be on demand. I would like to argue that whereas for the Western audience the Russian messianistic idea appears outdated, to say the least, in Russia, it continues to

1 The philosophical term 'Russian idea' dates back to V.I. Soloviev (1887-88). In addition, other major Russian philosophers in the 19th and 20th century like E.N. Trubetskoi, Rozanov, Ivanov, Frank, Fedotov, I.A. Il'in and Berdiaev have also written their contributions under that title addressing issues like Russian self-identification, culture, national and global fates, Christian inheritance and its future, reunion of peoples and transfiguration of humankind. *Russkaia filosofia*, 1995, 421-423. See also Maslin 1992. In Soloviev's conception, in particular, the Russian idea focuses on problems of eschatology and on apocalyptic myths dating from the myth of the uncorrupted, sunken Orthodox town of Kitezh. See Shestakov, 1995.

2 'Eschatology' (Maslin, 1995, 641 entry *Eschatologizm*) deals in Russian philosophy with concepts of ultimate purposes of the historical process and cosmos. Orthodoxy thinks that the highest spiritual potential of man cannot be realised in the earthly being, but demands qualitative change both of the nature of the individual and his social surrounding.

3 Apocalyptic visions link back to the Revelation by John and icons depicting the Last Judgement.

be part of the mainstream of national thought and provides nourishment for patriotic sensibilities.

In 1929, while studying Orthodox theology in Paris, Skobtsova published essays<sup>4</sup> dedicated to three prominent Slavophiles – Aleksei Khomiakov, Fedor Dostoevsky, and Vladimir Soloviev. In light of emerging threats in totalitarian Europe, she elaborated on the traditional idea related to the status of Russia as an all-national and God-bearing nation, the Third Rome, and inheritor of Byzantine Christendom. A Russian intellectual, who immigrated to France after the Bolshevik coup d'état, Skobtsova never abandoned her Russocentric mindset. Following Dostoevsky, she asserted that Europe would not be saved through communism, fascism or democracy, but only by adherence to Christ's second commandment in a conciliar (*sobornyi*<sup>5</sup>) spirit, where one is responsible for all, for all individual and national sins<sup>6</sup>. In her writings, she made a strong emphasis on eschatology: The looming World War II, in particular, she interpreted as a necessary process in order to consummate the empirical history. As a part of the process, she believed, Jews would convert into Christianity and Russia would become the leading European nation: “[...] Moscow would become the Mecca of the proletariat and Jerusalem of love for freedom and thus, grave of despotism”.<sup>7</sup>

When Hitler rose to power in 1932, the political, as well as her personal, situation turned Skobtsova to an even more radical path than before. There were no more [monastic] elders in the modern world, she wrote with resignation. At least to some extent she seemed to have followed the Russian tradition of equating saints and religious strugglers with philosophers, that is, for her,

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4 Apart from the separate booklets (Skobtsova 1929a-c), in the essay “Russian Messianic calling”, *Rossiiskoe messianskoe prizvanie* (Skobtsova 2004) she elaborates on Khomiakov's, Dostoevsky's and Soloviev's thoughts.

5 *Sobornyi* does not have a precise equivalent in English. I use ‘conciliar’ (as in Skobtsova 2002), but ‘communal’, ‘catholical’, ‘collegial’ could be possible too. See also Evdokimov, 1994, 277.

6 See e.g. Father Zosima's teaching to Alesha in *The Brothers Karamazov*: “When [a monk] realises that he is not only worse than others, but that he is responsible to all men for all and everything, for all human sins, national and individual, only then the aim of our seclusion is attained. [...]” (Dostoevsky, 1952, 83).

7 “Birth in Death”, *Razmyshleniia o sud'bah Evropy i Azii*, in Skobtsova: 2004b, 513.

national heroism comprised civic, religious as well as intellectual elements. In a modern European state, she felt that old ascetic principles and guidelines for daily behaviour were devalued. The Russian autocracy did not exist anymore, one was free to speak and act according to one's conscience and best knowledge. Skobtsova took the monastic vows, thus wishing to enter the voluntary army of Christ that would participate in the last apocalyptic battle, as she interpreted the growing political threats. Entering monasticism she received an ascetic assignment of the "desert of the human heart" by Metropolitan of Paris, Evlogii,<sup>8</sup> and she whole-heartedly committed herself to serve the needy. Simultaneously, she continued writing. In various pamphlets she repeatedly asserted that she had given up previous teachers and that she spoke in her own name only. It appears that she abandoned the prophets of the Russian idea, but only partially. During the next ten years, she would continue to publish pamphlets on political issues, e.g., juxtaposing totalitarianism in Russia and Germany. She regarded the two forms of totalitarianism as doctrinal heresies and evaluated their significance from a mainly religious, eschatological viewpoint. In so doing, she again relied on elements from the Russian messianism that helped her to be convinced that the Soviet Union was to gain victory from World War II. Orthodoxy, even disguised under the communist heresy, would lead Russians to victory and other peoples would follow Russia, Skobtsova believed in the early 1940s.<sup>9</sup> Facing the catastrophe of war, people would get a chance to repent and join Christ, Skobtsova prophesied in "Inspections on the Fate of Europe and Asia".<sup>10</sup> In summary, it appears that after having denied the old russocentric ideas for a while,

8 Olivier Clément, in: Skobtsova 2002, 11.

9 Of course, Russia's adversaries used religious-political visions as well. For example: "In the visions at Fatima in Portugal 1917, Our Lady of the Rosary spoke of an Anti-Christ. In the propaganda that followed the visions, this Anti-Christ was identified with communism and used to inflame fanatical and widespread paranoia." [...] "It is not impossible that the horror with which Rome, the Vatican, viewed Russia, contributed to its reaction to Nazi Germany, Russia's enemy, and that the Fatima vision, which many Catholics believed had prophesied the Second World War, influenced the Pope's attitude, which at best was pusillanimous and at worst criminal." Warner 1976, 313. One has to emphasise, however, that Skobtsova provided no metaphysical visions or apparitions whatsoever. Instead, she relied on a literary analysis of Orthodox writers.

10 *Razmyshlentsia o sud'bakh Evropy i Azii*, without date, after D-Day, that is, 22.6.1942. Skobtsova 2004b.

Skobtsova easily went back to them. In particular, her radicalism is determined by the apocalyptic religion that demands and glorifies suffering that will be compensated in afterlife.

For a modern reader, Skobtsova's pamphlets provide a coherent development of a social, political and religious fundamentalism. Consequently, it comes as no surprise that Skobtsova's apocalyptic worldview and glorification of martyrdom are in today's Russia read in light of modern problems.<sup>11</sup> Her analysis of mothers' pain in giving birth to death<sup>12</sup> and their successive extremism, thus, deserves particular attention as a part of her version of the Russian idea. The glorification of maternal pain, its link with a cosmological apocalypse and the solace of national electedness are focal elements in Skobtsova's writings that evoke both veneration and reservation. In this essay, I aim to provide a bridge between the three 19<sup>th</sup> century Slavophile thinkers and Skobtsova's own reflections that she developed in the course of the 1930s and early 1940s. Therefore, I start by summarising at some length Khomiakov's, Dostoevsky's and Soloviev's thoughts, which, as it seems, turned into quotidian catechisms among Skobtsova's exiled compatriots. It must be pointed out that Skobtsova, with her renowned countrymen Father Sergii Bulgakov, Nikolai Berdiaev, or Georgii Fedotov, strongly felt it was her mission to preserve the lofty Russian cultural values, or the God-manly process, as she put it. She emphasised that since the Russian émigrés had lost their earthly motherland, the divine one was the only one left and it should be cherished. The stateless condition signified not only a fatal end, but also a new freedom, and it inevitably focussed one's attention toward participation in global affairs. As I will try to demonstrate, Skobtsova strongly emphasised the Russian primacy in world's affairs. This belief, as it seems, is today again acute and explains, to some extent, Russians' lame trust in democracy and

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11 In today's Russia, Skobtsova's life and writings are increasingly linked to the mythology of suffering Russia, of the suffering mothers. Larisa Ageeva (2003, 348), for example, in her recent biography on Mother Maria parallels her contemplation on wars with those of her own generation in Chechnya, generalising her poetry to comprise all mothers' laments.

12 The name of her article from the 1940s. *Rozhdenie v smerti*, In: Skobtsova 2004b.

statehood, but instead a strong demand for national icons which often, perhaps unconsciously, combine religious and civic heroism.

### The Russian idea in 1930s Europe

In the 1910s Elizaveta Kuz'mina-Karavaeva,<sup>13</sup> as she was in that age known, debuted as a poet and artist in the St. Petersburg aesthetic circles. She also was an active member of the Social-Revolutionary party's right wing, and during the Bolshevik revolution, city mayor of Anapa on the Black Sea coast. After a long exodus, Elizaveta Iur'evna arrived in Paris where she studied theology, was active first in the Russian Students' Christian movement, and later, in 1935, founded the radical organisation Orthodox Action. It may appear odd that Skobtsova, fully aware of the Bolshevik campaigns against the Church in Russia, was yet convinced that eventually Russian Orthodoxy was to bring victory and reinstate the utopian empire of the Holy Spirit. The explanation lies in her worldview: She used to interpret philosophical, social and political questions from a religious, Orthodox viewpoint. In this key, she regarded conciliar Bolshevism as a mystical religious heresy, which was more powerful than Nazism based, according to her, on individually-oriented Protestantism. According to Skobtsova, the theocratic impulse prevailed in Bolshevik politics throughout, although the new leaders gave it new masks. The Third International, for example, adapted features of the absolutist idea of the Third Rome<sup>14</sup>, i.e., world salvation in which Russia would play the leading role. In parallel, the Bolshevik organisation of labour was also based on conciliarity –

<sup>13</sup> Elizaveta Iur'evna was born in 1891 and had the surname of Pilenko after her father. In Russian modernist literature, she became known as Kuz'mina-Karavaeva after her first husband, Dmitrii. In 1919, in chaotic circumstances of Civil War, she was remarried to schoolmaster Daniil Skobtsov. He remained her legal husband, although canonically the couple was separated in 1932, when Elizaveta Iur'evna became a nun. She had three children, Gaiana, Anastasia and Iurii, who all died before her. Iurii died as a Holocaust victim in a Nazi concentration camp as well as his mother; both were canonised by the Patriarchate of Constantinople in 2004.

<sup>14</sup> "Our epoch", *Nasha epokha*, Skobtsova 2004, 410. She modifies Berdiaev's ideas. Berdiaev, 1990, 117-118.

each of us was guilty for all, each of us was answerable for each other's sins<sup>15</sup> – and not mechanical (western) collectivism where an individual was enslaved as a mere part of the engine. Thanks to the living tradition of Godmanhood (bogoche lovechestvo) and populism (narodnost') Russia would gain victory over Germany notwithstanding her heretic leaders as epitomised by Stalin. The Great Terror followed by purges against the Church and tortures in concentration camps like Solovki – the Russian Golgotha in Skobtsova's imagery – the author interpreted as signs and symbols of a biblical Apocalypse. Like the medieval monks, or the leading Russian theologians, Skobtsova always related historical events with the Gospels and appealed to her countrymen to accept their Golgotha. She asserted that the 20<sup>th</sup> century martyrs' blood would become the cement of Christianity. Therefore, she appealed to her compatriots to accept their martyrdom in order to fulfil the prophecy of victorious Russia where communism ultimately would deteriorate<sup>16</sup> and Orthodoxy would again be celebrated.

In retrospect, one must acknowledge that she was partly right. The countless 20<sup>th</sup> century martyrs, including Skobtsova herself, and the Bolshevik-led victory from the World War II have contributed to the national self-understanding in a crucial manner. The major point in Skobtsova's philosophy has nevertheless gone somewhat undervalued: She asserted that even Bolshevism appealed to people's religious feelings and this made them victorious. Bolsheviks were not atheists [godless, that is ignorant of God], but struggled against God (protivobozhie). They were no pagans but raised up on and fully aware of Orthodox, theocratic principles that they even heretically wished to renew and reinforce.<sup>17</sup> For a more coherent outlook, let us touch upon some cornerstones of the Russian idea in the following section.

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15 *The Second Gospel Commandment* : In Skobtsova 2002, 59. Skobtsova interprets Dostoevsky in light of the Gospel.

16 Skobtsova 2004b, 11. Foreword by G.I. Benevich.

17 See the article "In search of synthesis", *V poiskakh sinteza*, Skobtsova 2004b.

## Aleksei Khomiakov (1804-1860)

Aleksei Khomiakov was the first to make Slavophile and Orthodox considerations known outside Russia.<sup>18</sup> Khomiakov emphasised freedom of mind and creativeness of spirit as prerequisites for conciliarity and oneness (*vseedinstvo*). These aspects especially evoked Skobtsova's enthusiasm: She emphasised that after emigration the Church affairs were finally free from the tsarist embraces, which provided a totally new perspective in fulfilment of the holy mission. She also shared Khomiakov's harsh criticism of Catholicism, which, apparently, cannot be fully divided from the concrete miseries of the émigré life. Typically enough, Khomiakov presented Russian Orthodoxy in utopian-idealistic terms, while his criticism towards the Western Church was based on empirical history. Skobtsova admits this bias, but shares the same rigid antagonism. Indeed, in analysing her pamphlets, one becomes aware of the saying that Russian thought is notorious for its self-centred utopianism which may result in coarse syllogisms and anecdotal wisdom.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, the antagonism between *svoe/chuzhoe*, 'ours/not-ours' of course, also provides endless material for self-ironic contemplation, such as Berdiaev's famous utterance: "Russians are either apocalyptic or nihilistic".<sup>20</sup> Secondly, reading Skobtsova's oeuvre cannot be extracted from her exploit (*podvig*).

In the traditional vein of national Russian philosophy, Skobtsova paraphrases Khomiakov and provides a list of distinctions between East and West. She distinguishes between *kushitstvo* and *iranstvo* – in order to emphasise the Russians' cultural superiority against the Germans. The Cushite<sup>21</sup> culture,

18 His first pamphlet concerning Orthodox attitudes toward western churches came out in 1853; in Russia, Nikolai I allowed his works to be printed only in 1879. Losskii, 1991, 30.

19 The inertia of Russian thought originates from the Byzantine cosmology: "Russia or Byzantium is an icon of kingdom of heaven that never can change, only be restored, destructed or changed into another icon". Bodin, 1992, 70. As often argued, in Russian thought, as opposite to the West, there has been no scholastics, no positivism, no third way. Russian thought relies on intuition and eschatology; it concentrates on religious endeavour and afterlife instead of improvements of the worldly affairs.

20 Berdiaev, 2000,191. Berdiaev, in his turn, quotes Spengler's idea that Russia is in an apocalyptic revolt against Antiquity, that Russians' global mission is to be the people of the end.

21 Cushite are a non-semitic people in North Africa. Mat' Mariia, 2004b, 540. *Notes*.

according to Khomiakov and Skobtsova, connotes inevitability and magic, whereas the Iranian culture connotes free will and creativity. Although the Christian religion is Iranian, Catholicism has perverted its essence, as well as has done the German ‘conquering spirit’. Authentic Iranian origin is nowhere as evident as in the fundamental characteristics of the Russian [or Slavonic] people. Even the word ‘people’ (narod) is in Russian ‘sharply distinguished’ from the word ‘nation’ (natsiia).<sup>22</sup> According to Khomiakov, anti-étatism or statelessness, as well as organic democratism, and origin of conciliarity based on freedom are distinctively Russian characteristics.<sup>23</sup> For the Russian intellectuals in inter-war France, these characterisations must have served as a remedy to the sores of their humiliated self-respect. Interestingly, some of Khomiakov’s slogans like “the Russian church is alien to Roman imperialism; a Russian is not a conqueror, but a peaceful peasant”,<sup>24</sup> were not only repeated by the exile monarchists, but simultaneously modified by the Bolsheviks.<sup>25</sup> Khomiakov also prophesied: “We belong to those nations as if not included to the membership of mankind, but exist only in order to teach the world an important lesson”.<sup>26</sup> This slogan, it appears, best manifests the utopia of the ‘men of all seasons’, wishing to maintain a superpower, be it factual or imagined.

As Khomiakov identified himself as an ‘anti-statesman’, he ascribed the same feature to the Russian national psychology.<sup>27</sup> For him, the state was a ‘dead shell’, an object of the creative spirit of people that were the real protagonists of the historical process. Russians were anarchists rather than statesmen, ‘political ascetics’ to whom autocracy resembled family structures, as did mir and other communal forums of decision-making. To Khomiakov,

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22 Skobtsova, 1929a, 37.

23 Skobtsova, 1929a, 30.

24 Ibid. 29-30.

25 One of Skobtsova’s merits is to remind us about Bolshevism’s reuse of national idea. For her, Bolshevism was nothing but a Moscow-centred religious heresy. See “Contemplation on the fates of Europe and Asia”, *Razmysleniia o sud'bach Evropy i Azii*, 2004b.

26 Skobtsova, 1929a, 19.

27 As Benevich aptly comments, the idea of so-called “free communitarianism” (*svobodnaia obshchinnost'*) was controversial, Vl. Soloviev and S. Bulgakov, for example, did not share it. See Mat' Mariia, 2004b, 540. *Notes*.

“the ideal Russian statehood is like people’s patriarchal monarchy resting on a well-developed peasant commune expressing its will in the Peasant Duma.” “Thus, people have delegated the use of power to the Tsar, including power in church affairs. The Tsar is the people’s representative in the Church. (But of course not a profane head of the church)”<sup>28</sup> In concluding his idea, Khomiakov manifested the uniqueness of the Russian people and her messianism whose goal is the ideal of Holy Russia.<sup>29</sup> The role of the ‘first place’ [bearer of Christianity] demands humility; the Russian people must be filled both by daring as well as repentance.<sup>30</sup> Russia must oppose evil that occurs in the sphere of politics where controversy between words and deeds often prevails as it did in Byzantium. The task of the Russian people, her religious and global justification, lies in searching for an integrated life and in opposing the secular worldview typical for the European modern culture. Only the Orthodox Church has preserved equality between knowledge and faith; Slavophile philosophy is Orthodox philosophy.<sup>31</sup> Khomiakov criticised Catholicism for ‘betraying Christ’, for deprivation of free will, for denying the holiness of the Scriptures as well as of the Tradition [which are both intentions of the Holy Church]. For him, the universal, undivided Church was the most holy authority, the truth. “Where authentic love, freedom and unity in Christ prevail, there is the Church. [...] The ultimate truth and ultimate authority rest in the church organism living a united spiritual life. That is the free conciliarity in spirit”.<sup>32</sup>

These ideas seem to have turned into leading guidelines for many Russians living in the diaspora. On the other hand, as Benevich aptly notes,<sup>33</sup> not everybody could share these lofty characterisations. The critics did not perceive

28 Skobtsova, 1929a, 31-35.

29 The ideal of Holy Russia equals the ideal of Christian life on a collective-national level. In practise, saints’ lives provided models for imitation; in this key, the concept of Holy Russia – inheritor of Byzantine, the third Rome – has to be understood as an icon of Russian saints. Benevich in: *Mat’ Mariia*, 2004b, 541, Notes 12. Tarasov (2002) for his part has called Russians as the ‘icon people.’ In her visual art, icons and embroidery, Skobtsova also elaborated on the elements of her idea of Holy Russia (Skobtsova, 2004a).

30 Skobtsova, 1929a, 38.

31 *Ibid.* 40.

32 *Ibid.* 55-59.

in atheist, Stalinist Russia attributes of a God-bearing people. Skobtsova herself hesitated at times, yet for her, the Russian idea and primacy of the Russian people always remained more than slogans. In pamphlets and poetry up to her imprisonment in 1943, Skobtsova continuously emphasised the inner freedom of Orthodox Christianity that as best emerged in the stateless and non-hierarchical conditions. She sought new content to illustrate old concepts like conciliarity, oneness, freedom and volunteering in Christ, suffering and wandering. Of course, these were not mere philosophical concepts, but could be apprehended only by concrete imitation of the exploits of the predecessors, factual and literary. In contemplation on the essence of the Russian religious mind, another significant Slavophile, the novelist Fedor Dostoevsky, served as her major apostle.<sup>34</sup> Dostoevsky's religious ideas and his spiritual struggle, as best presented in the novel *The Brothers Karamazov*, appear to have affected Skobtsova to that extent that she deliberately quotes him<sup>35</sup> and debates with him even without mentioning the source. Although Dostoevsky's ideas are well-known, I will, however, summarise Skobtsova's notes<sup>36</sup> in order to highlight which Dostoevskian maxims exactly served her idealism.

### Fedor Dostoevsky (1821-1881)

In exploring Dostoevsky's worldview and trying to fit his answers to problems in modern society, Skobtsova introduces the conflict of the 'Russian boys'.<sup>37</sup>

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33 Mat' Mariia, 2004b, 545, note 14.

34 Skobtsova studied Dostoevsky intensively: already at the age of 15, she lectured on Dostoevsky's philosophy to the workers in St. Petersburg. In France, she made a similar effort, that is, taught the Gospels and prophesied Messianism with the help of Dostoevskian themes and personages. This included the idea of Orthodox Russian sufferers as, often unconscious, saviours, while Shigalevism and Smerdiakovism posed as examples of new paganism and anthill society.

35 Skobtsova's quotations are not always literal; consequently, my translations also may differ from authorised English translations.

36 As Benevich notes (Skobtsova 2004), Skobtsova's analysis partly parallels Berdiaev's work under the same title, "Dostoevsky and Contemporaneity" but hers appears less original.

37 Skobtsova, 1929b, 22.

Already the populists and other young non-established intellectuals suffered from the historical burden of serfdom and misery that Russia had inherited. In particular, they were pained by the concept of free will, which caused them to waver between the ‘ideal of Madonna and the ideal of Sodom’. Dostoevsky’s criticism was written during the decay of monarchy, when atheism had weakened the Orthodox faith and intellectuals had become ‘possessed’ and enslaved by powerful, controversial ideas. He asked, in Ivan Karamazov’s mouth, in order to attain full harmony, is it right that innocent children must suffer? “No,” Ivan replied and returned his ticket to God. Happiness on earth cannot be attained through unredeemed suffering, Dostoevsky claimed, salvation lies only in God and in the synergy between God and mankind. Russian people can only be saved through faith and reliance on love for one’s neighbour.

After losing God, mankind is not capable of bearing the curse of its own will, the meaninglessness of its existence, and pities itself in the face of its inevitable destruction, Dostoevsky continues.<sup>38</sup> When early Christendom was established it was like a new nationality – all-brotherly, all-human, but later, the visible part of the Church started to resemble an anthill, that is, it was corrupted.<sup>39</sup> People became persuaded by the betrayers of Christ, or the atheist followers of French revolution ideals. The betrayers, the man-gods, suggested coerced unification, which, having lost its spirit, had preserved only the graceless letter of Roman Catholicism.<sup>40</sup> At this point Dostoevsky introduces Shigalyov with his theory: “Starting from limitless freedom I end up in limitless despotism.”<sup>41</sup> It means building the Tower of Babel without God, not trying to reach heaven from earth, but pulling heaven down to earth. The possessed man-gods try to reach justice, but end up in bloodshed.

38 *ibid.* 32-33.

39 *ibid.* 35-37. In *The Brothers Karamazovs*, a conflict arose when man-god met God-man, that is, Apollon of Belvedere met Christ. A compromise was made: the Empire adapted Christianity, Church adapted Roman law and statehood. Since the Inquisitor knew that the free will had turned into a burden for humans, he taught them freedom by renouncing it, and to delegate one’s conscience to the few elected. By so doing, people were spiritually enslaved.

40 *Ibid.* 42.

41 *Ibid.* 43.

However, Dostoevsky does not abandon his faith: even a distorted image of man remains an image of Christ, and corrupt mankind is saved by Christ again and again.<sup>42</sup>

Important for the concept of the Russian idea and its messianism, Dostoevsky manifests the Russians' aim at global unification: a Russian wanderer (*skaitelets*) strives for global happiness, nothing less will satisfy him. To become a real Russian, fully Russian, means that one becomes a brother of all people, a universal man (*vsechelovek*), he continues. Dostoevsky's ideal Russian is characterised by universality, and participation in all the suffering, hopes and deeds of mankind. He emphasises that every nation must believe that it alone is the bearer of truth and has the calling to resurrect and rise with its truth; otherwise, it will turn into 'ethnographic material', not into a great people. As the long history of suffering had left Russians alone with Christ-Consoler, people had nothing but the idea of Orthodoxy to rely on. Even the worst criminals and barbarians in their best minutes prayed to God that the sin and stench would end, and that the world would return to its genuine idea. Communism, that is, mechanistic forms of organisation were not for Russians, only unification in the name of Christ, Dostoevsky asserts in Skobtsova's paraphrase.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, he warns that the Russian people is sometimes terribly implausible, Russians always want to suffer, everywhere, as if looking satisfaction in their suffering. The interconnectedness between suffering and

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42 Ibid. 49-53. Skobtsova emphasises that sometimes the sin and stench reveal man's pride and make him conscious of his weakness and, therefore, of the necessity of God. Man must be loved also in his sin, and one should not be afraid of sin. Denial and blasphemy should be seen as outer vestments of the soul, as gorges one has to pass. The crucial teaching by Father Zosima to young Aliosha Karamazov is revealed to him in a mystical encounter at the elder's coffin. "There seemed to be threads from all those innumerable worlds of God, linking his soul to them [...] He longed to forgive everyone and for everything, and to beg forgiveness. Oh, not for himself, but for all men, for all and for everything." Dostoevsky, 1952, 191. Aliosha bows down to earth, kisses the earth, and raises a new person – a struggler and conqueror over the Inquisitor's persuasion. In Dostoevsky's passage, this apex is depicted as the scene of the mystical Cana of Galilee, where Jesus works his first miracle. Alesha comments his ecstasy by saying: "Someone visited my soul in that hour," and had implicit faith in his words. Ibid. By using the same words when speaking about her *metanoia*, Skobtsova pays tribute to Dostoevsky's evangelism. Throughout her oeuvre, one detects Dostoevsky's influence.

43 Ibid. 60-65.

purification leads Dostoevsky to utter his prophecy, that the world will be saved only after being visited by an evil spirit. Simultaneously, he expresses his faith in the people: “We have to bow in front of people and await everything from them – both thought and image, to bow in front of the people’s truth and admit it as the truth”.<sup>44</sup> In 1929 and in her later works, Skobtsova explicitly related Dostoevsky’s prophecy of an evil spirit’s visitation to Bolshevism and believed that Russia would be saved through it. Like Dostoevsky, she also believed that the only authentic, iconic image of Christ had been preserved in the Russian people. In her late poetry about the sufferers in Solovki islands (in northern Russia) as well as in Paris, her pathos was clearly reminiscent of Dostoevsky’s glorification of suffering. Already in her autobiographical fiction on the theme of the Russian revolution *Ravnina russkaia* (“Russian plain”, 1924), in her stylised hagiographic tales and in pre-Revolutionary poetry Skobtsova emphasised free will and purification through sin in tones parallel to her favourite writer.<sup>45</sup> She related communism to Shigalevism, but as was said earlier, she felt communism was stronger, more persuasive and more victorious than German Nazism.

### Vladimir Soloviev (1853-1900)

The last of Skobtsova’s apostles, Vladimir Soloviev, was a beloved mystic<sup>46</sup> whose religious visions ranged from an absolute faith in goodness on earth up to his late period’s pessimism and visions of disaster. In his last work *Three conversations* including the *Tale of the Anti-Christ*, Soloviev contradicted his

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. 65-73.

<sup>45</sup> In *Iurali* (1915), which is greatly reminiscent of *The Brothers Karamazov*, the protagonist passes several ordeals and takes roles as a pupil, teacher, healer, lover and parent, confronts persuasions and conflicts. The conflict between ideas and passions, love and struggle is explored with great emphasis on freedom and love. One should not be afraid of sin, but to bear it and love one another. The novel reveals a feeling of personal electedness and strong capacity, but also despair in front of the inevitable fate of Russia. Skobtsova, 2001.

<sup>46</sup> Soloviev’s ideas inspired greatly the Symbolist movement, with which Skobtsova was affiliated in pre-revolutionary St. Petersburg.

former writings, and wrote that the victory of God's kingdom and reunion of Christian churches would take place only at the end of empirical history. Soloviev, like Khomiakov and Dostoevsky, elaborated on the Russians' messianic role in world history. Unlike the two others, Soloviev was mostly joyful: evil to him appeared as imperfect goodness, ugliness as unfulfilled beauty, lies as unfulfilled truth. He valued German Romanticism and in his search for a perfect religion, he found positive elements not only in Catholicism and Protestantism, but also in Judaism. It appears obvious that Skobtsova's respectful attitude to Judaism, which I will touch upon later, owes primarily to Soloviev. Like Khomiakov and Dostoevsky, Soloviev also posed himself as a universal man (a global citizen, one would say today) in his search for a humanitarian God-manhood and wished to synthesise a perfect religion from the good sides of the existing ones. The God-manly process of peoples' reunion appeared to him as an endless, all-embracing and modern mission.<sup>47</sup> According to Skobtsova's own, similarly utopian interpretation, the God-manly process would eventually save Europe from totalitarianism and destruction.

Apart from the God-manly process, sophiology outlined by Soloviev is another basic element in Skobtsova's concept of Russian idea. Sophiology, or the teaching about the incarnate divine wisdom, brought Soloviev fame especially among the Russian Symbolists. Whereas Logos is the Absolute (*sushchii*), Sophia represents the incarnated idea, relating to creativity.<sup>48</sup> Soloviev's concept of Sophia is also explicitly russocentric. He maintains that the image of Sophia had neither verbal expression nor visual equivalents elsewhere in the Orthodox world except in Russia. The Sophia icon composition indeed has been theologically important while it can be interpreted as a visual representation of Logos' relationship to the united God-manhood.<sup>49</sup> During

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<sup>47</sup> Skobtsova, 1929c, 14–17.

<sup>48</sup> Skobtsova, 1929c, 18. Skobtsova's theory of art is best outlined in her essay "Origins of Art", *Istoki tvorchestva* (1934). She also was active in the Brotherhood of St. Sophia.

his joyful period, Soloviev had believed that history moves towards an all-perfecting link between man and absolute goodness.<sup>50</sup>

Apart from the God-manly process and sophiology, the concept of the ‘elected nation’ occupied Skobtsova. Following Soloviev she argued that the ‘centre’ of the Jewish nation was now located in Russia. It meant that the elected Jewish nation, from the maternal side having given birth to Christ, had thus turned into super-national, existing also in Russia and authorising its electedness, messianism and leading role in world history.<sup>51</sup> The mission included the christening of Jews as a prerequisite of the end of history.<sup>52</sup> In addition, as Russia had inherited the position of the third Rome<sup>53</sup>, she had the historical mission to act as a ‘tertiary court’ between the conflicting East and West. Russia was supposed to create a new synthesis, a God-manly Rome but without repeating the sins of either East [Byzantium] or West [Roman Empire].<sup>54</sup> Soloviev asserted that Russia had survived thanks to her self-denial and shift in everyday practices.<sup>55</sup> The concept of self-denial as a special Russian virtue is widely

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49 In the icon, on the each side of the winged androgynous Christ [=Sophia], John the Baptist and the Mother of God represent the perfect images of creation, the true representatives of mankind (John) and the united church (Mary). “Sophia included them in the picture in order to receive Logos in herself, that God-man Christ could emanate to the world.” Skobtsova, 1929c, 21-22. The concept of Sophia includes religious materialism or ‘pan-psychism’ as well as the unity of man and Nature (in various stages) and existence of world soul or God-thing (ibid.)

50 Ibid. 27.

51 This argument as best describes the tendency to use the Jewish history in the Slavophiles’ eschatological needs. Skobtsova, following Soloviev, promoted Jews’ conversion into Christianity in her wartime mystery *Soldaty*, where a group of Nazi occupiers confer with arrested Jews, communists and Christians. In a fragment, she writes that “Last hour, their last Exodus/By obviousness, let their faith be changed.” [Translations mine – EK]. Skobtsova, 2001, 336.

52 Skobtsova, 2004b, 497.

53 The politically loaded concept of the Third Rome is controversial. Although it is mythically ascribed to the medieval monk Filofei’s teaching, the “concept” dates back only to the late 19th and 20th centuries and philosophers like Vl. Soloviev or N. Berdiaev. 2004b, *Notes* 545 and Sinitsyna, 1998.

54 Skobtsova, 1929c, 29-32. The old sins signified were the ‘double-soulness’ (*dvoedushie*) of the Byzantine Emperor vs. godless humanism of West. Ibid, 35.

55 It has often been claimed that Russians expressed ‘self-denial’ when they first invited Varangians to rule over them and secondly that their Christian-national identity was strengthened under the Mongol yoke. The ‘shift of life practises’ relates to accepting Christianity and hence withdrawing of executing enemies. The Holy Brothers Boris and Gleb are often presented as icons of self-sacrifice. The ‘double faith’ [here = double standard] refers to the period of christianised Muscovite reign when tsarism subjugated old patriarchalism and clergy started to interfere the profane decisions which harmed both the state and the Church. Consequently, Soloviev praised

discussed, according to Soloviev, it requires denying one's spiritual uniqueness in search of reunion. The reunion, in turn, would reinstate Holy Russia and therein, all three services of Christ – as the first priest, tsar and prophet. To Soloviev, the national self-denial serves as a tactical, unconscious tool to save Russia from destruction and to follow its providential mission.<sup>56</sup> Alas, while writing his *Tale of the Anti-Christ*,<sup>57</sup> Soloviev lost his previous enthusiasm. He had envisioned a global God-manly mission for Russia; in the course of disappointment and spiritual crisis he denied it and admitted Rome's primacy. Skobtsova, for her part, never lost her faith in Russia's electedness and eventual victory – alas, even if Russia was led by Stalin and his methods – and she willingly chose martyrdom to serve the global God-manly process.

## The Russian Idea and World War II

We have now taken a short look into the most important elements on which Skobtsova elaborated her own religious philosophy and guidelines for every day spiritual struggle.<sup>58</sup> In the gloomy years preceding World War II, the revived Russian idea continued to inspire the émigrés, although its practical interpretation was debated. Many exiles kept to the old “synodal”<sup>59</sup> forms in their devotion, others denied historical facts,<sup>60</sup> whereas the third ones [like the

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the abolishment of the caesaropapism and the establishment of the Holy Synod by saying that “Peter the Great delivered us from the old-believing *kitaishchina* (mess) and late-born parody of medieval papism.” Skobtsova, 1929c, 38.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 40-42.

<sup>57</sup> Following the Apocalyptic theme, Soloviev envisioned the Anti-Christ, the son of Satan, as the almighty international leader, founder of welfare and justice on earth. The Anti-Christ murders elder John, representative of the Orthodox Church, and the Catholic Pope Peter II. The remains of the not “tempted” Christians’ herd wander into the desert led by a Protestant leader Ernest Pauli. This vision would mean that the churches, the two sides of the truth, will reunite first during the super-historical epoch, the thousand years empire of the righteous. *Ibid.*, 45-48.

<sup>58</sup> Skobtsova wrote about 70 religious-political pamphlets and shorter comments, partly published only posthumously. Eleven were translated into English in 2002, including the important pamphlet *Four Types of Religious Life* (first published in 1937).

<sup>59</sup> See *Four Types of Religious Life*, 2002.

<sup>60</sup> Nikita Struve, publisher of the YMCA Press, mentioned that still in 1926, a Russian archbishop Seraphim (Sobolev) served *molebens* to the Tsar as if he were alive. (Struve 1997).

Eurasians] dreamed of a return to the Soviet Union. Let us now address one of Skobtsova's critical issues, that is, the meaning of being an Orthodox Christian in exile. Under conditions of global catastrophe and war, what is the aim of the religious endeavour? Whom should one imitate? Skobtsova emphasised that a Christian should not only try to save his or her own soul, but to maintain the God-manly process. Not try to avoid 'dirtying one's clothes', giving away spiritual richness, or even destroying one's body, should it happen through rapes, tortures or violent death.<sup>61</sup> She attacked formally observant Christians, for whom the conciliarity, God-manhood and other primary tasks had remained dead issues. In one of her sharpest articles on that theme, in *Four Types of Religious Life*<sup>62</sup>, she condemned the synodal, ritualist, aesthetical and ascetical types of religiosity. In this passionate and provocative pamphlet, she promoted the fourth type, evangelism, as the only acceptable Christianity, which now in emigration had become more in demand than ever before. The greatest advantage of emigration was freedom, she argued; there was no longer state guardianship and no dead synodalist order or Orthodox monasteries. In fact, nothing was left but freedom. Although emigration did not provide any 'big perspectives', neither were there forced labour, Solovki death camps, or 'Shigalyov incarnate' as Skobtsova referred to Lenin, Stalin and the 'general party line'.<sup>63</sup> As Shigalyov's theory had argued, coercion and following Christ were not compatible. Unlike Stalin's, the Christian army needed only volunteers, a demand that could be fulfilled only by the institution of modern monasticism, as Skobtsova suggested.<sup>64</sup>

Skobtsova proposed that modern monasticism needed revision. Based on

61 About rapes, see "Seven chalices" *Sem' chash* (Skobtsova, 2001, 317). An old woman says: "... Holy martyrs, behold / Only your soul untarnished. Shall your body/ Only serve as a discredited cloth of yours." Skobtsova's relation to rapes differs from the classical hagiological viewpoint according to which such passages are censured from a woman martyr's canonical vita.

62 In English, Skobtsova, 2002.

63 Skobtsova: *The Cross and the Hammer-and-Sickle*. 2002, 88. In that article, she touches only upon Communism, but elsewhere Hitler also.

64 The Church lives within limits of history, but it needs a strong army – monasticism, as Skobtsova writes in *Towards New Monasticism. At the Heart of the World*. Skobtsova, 2002, 95.

three traditional vows: chastity, non-possession (*nestiazhanie*) and obedience, only the first one was still relevant while the others had become obsolete. In exile, almost every one was now impoverished and thus a ‘non-possessor’ in a stricter sense than monks of the synodal period had been. Therefore, non-possession could not qualify as a special spiritual virtue anymore. Today it was more important that the monastic was open to the world and sought its neediness. In the traditional (Athos, Valaam) type of monasticism, a special emphasis was given on the vow of obedience purporting absolute obedience to the *starets*, whatever he would demand.<sup>65</sup> In the modern émigré surrounding, there were almost no elders left. Instead, the monk should be obedient to the work of the Church to which he was assigned, that is, to the Church itself, since the Church had now replaced the elder.<sup>66</sup> In the situation without spiritual directorship, there was no other alternative but to accept the folly in Christ. This meant accepting the role model of a modern Vasili Blazhennyi, Basil the Blessed. Basil poses as the prototype of a disguised, self-emptied spiritual struggler, a son who spends his life in rags and poverty under the stairs of his father’s house instead of inheriting his riches. For Skobtsova, Basil’s prototype incarnated the only acceptable form of modern Christianity, Basil is a redeemer in a disguise. Folly in Christ meant denying oneself not only of material but of spiritual richness, that is, sacrificing individual salvation for brother’s salvation. Folly in Christ also purported opposing the corrupt power-holders, laying one’s soul for every suffering neighbour and accepting one’s personal Golgotha. Only by so doing could one imitate Christ in the modern world, and contribute to its salvation, Mother Maria argued in her desperately self-inspecting mystery play *Anna*<sup>67</sup>. One could assume that *Anna* served as the author’s last explicit manifestation of voluntary self-sacrifice; in addition,

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<sup>65</sup> If the elder, that is, one’s model of imitation, fell into heresy, the monk would still obey him, because by disobeying he would sin. On the other hand, “[...] by fulfilling the heretical demands of his *starets*/elder he does not sin, because the very fact of obedience shifts all responsibility for the sin onto the one who is guiding the monk’s life, that is, the *starets*. Ibid. 99.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid. p. 99-100.

<sup>67</sup> Skobtsova, 2001.

it proved to be a self-fulfilling prophecy.

### Motherhood and God-motherhood (bogomaterinstvo)

Apart from topics discussed above, Skobtsova's teaching focussed on the concept of motherhood. The author, like many other writers on the Russian religious mind, merges elements from biblical, liturgical, apocryphal and folklore sources. She also systematically juxtaposes private and collective events of life, seeing that one's personal path, or microcosm, is repeating the Gospels' macrocosm and is meaningful only as its reflection. As a rule, her feminine protagonists<sup>68</sup> manifest strong will and determination. For example, Ruth (Ruf', 1916) accepts exodus and separation from her people, Marina, disguised as a monk, accepts false accusations of fathering a child and endures years-long humiliation while taking responsibility for raising up the orphan. The Venerable Zoe, Fotinia and Mary are powerful models for emulation due to their example of repentance. Their lives are transfigured when fornication turns into repentance and their metanoia is paralleled by a strong will and determination. In particular, Skobtsova examines the metanoia followed by a shock in one's personal life. For example, when the Nazi troops invaded Paris, she wrote: "The gates have suddenly opened into eternity, yesterday's laws have faded, the Lord has visited us".<sup>69</sup> This was not the first occasion she expressed herself so. The deaths of her children had twice made her reconsider her whole existence. As a result of the shock, the mother wished to sacrifice herself in a meaningful way. By paralleling a personal loss with the loss of millions of other mothers, she saw that, although war is a shock, it is also a chance to fill one's religious life with insight and fire. The double shock made her to seek an 'extended motherhood' as a personal calling.

<sup>68</sup> In her stylised hagiographies, *Zhatva dukha*, 2001, we find Marina, Zoe, Fotinia and Mary of Egypt as models of repentance. Especially Mary of Egypt as Skobtsova's monastic patron saint was an important role model for her.

<sup>69</sup> *Insight in Wartime*, *ibid*, 127-129. She wrote somewhat similarly after having lost her child: 'People call it a visitation of the Lord...'. Hackel, 1982, 5, 12-15.

‘To bury a child is if you were dead yourself’, she formulated her suffering and co-suffering, which were transformed into her theology of God-motherhood. Skobtsova believed that man and woman in their imitatio Christi equally need to accept the role of involuntary co-crucifixion and co-suffering. Nevertheless, the involuntary sacrifice relates especially to the mothers, who as the Mother of God must witness and share their crucified child’s lot. She asserted that the cross of crucifixion is two-edged, “a cross that will turn into a sword and will pierce the maternal heart”.<sup>70</sup> In so saying, she meant that Christ’s sacrifice was voluntary, but His mother’s was not. In further contemplation on death, Skobtsova confirmed every human being’s uniqueness and indispensability, confronting thus the teaching in the tale of the biblical Job.<sup>71</sup> When the tormented Job finally regained his health, asses and camels, and conceived new sons and daughters, he was consoled, and the new children compensated for the loss of the dead ones. From a theological point of view, Job’s ultimate joy serves as an example of his unquestioning humility before God. Skobtsova, unlike Job or Father Zosima, could not be consoled by a promise of new children. For her, what is done, God cannot undo; maternal pain and co-suffering for the lost children’s lives cannot be compensated. “My memory is the most lofty, most human, most god-like aspect of a human being, how could it forget, wipe off, destroy [the memory of a child]?”<sup>72</sup>, she asks in agony.

What remains, is the acceptance of the Mother of God’s lot of giving birth and co-suffering.<sup>73</sup> Giving birth as a major metaphor for maternal creation is opposed to the concept of free creation: it is involuntary, it primarily requires humility and obedience. Using Symbolist imagery in the article “Holy Land” (1927) Skobtsova describes the maternal development, or

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70 *On the Imitation of the Mother of God*, Skobtsova, 2002.

71 By providing the example of Job, Skobtsova may have wished to disagree with Dostoevsky’s Father Zosima who found consolation in Job’s example. Skobtsova may also suggested that there was a difference between male and female conditions concerning childbirth and death of a child.

72 “Birth in death”, *Rozhdenie v smerti*. Skobtsova 2004, 246. It is unclear, when the article was written, and it appeared first posthumously in 1947.

73 “And maternity does not mean spiritual age or the measure of an endeavour; it expresses only a humble and obedient striving to participate in another’s Golgotha, to open one’s heart to the stroke of the two-edged sword”. In: *On the Imitation of the Mother of God*, Skobtsova, 2002, 71.

74 “Holy Land”, *Sviataia Zemlia*, In: Skobtsova, 2004,388.

transfiguration, through stages,<sup>74</sup> and emphasises the mother's responsibility and her inseparability from the child's lot. In her concept, mother earth, human mothers and the Mother of God appear as a single creative system with separate aspects.<sup>75</sup> As the following utterance highlights, her theology consists of a tripartite motherhood:

I do not know if anybody could understand the holiness of the earth and holiness of the maternal path if one did not have in front of us its complete transfiguration. Transfiguration and deification of the earth, flesh and mother – that is the Mother of God.<sup>76</sup>

The teaching of co-suffering and gradual transfiguration, as well as the sophiological creativity, discussed earlier, is a manifestation of the fundamental maternal and God-maternal elements in Skobtsova's mindset. What appears noteworthy as critique of Father Zosima's model of humility, is her denial of wiping out the memory of the past. Unlike Job, the author [in her forties] is unable to give birth to more children, and the impossibility to find consolation serves as a catalyst for her radicalisation. When combined with global threats, her pessimism expresses itself in eschatological tones, which will be studied in the next section.

## Russia – New Jerusalem

In the last texts written before her arrest, Skobtsova fervently elaborated on apocalyptic-eschatological themes. Her poetic metaphors like Russian Golgotha, which relates to sufferers of faith at the concentration camp of Solovki in the White Sea; Russia as the Land of Cana, which merges the

<sup>75</sup> Rancour-Laferriere 2001 has paid attention to the cult of the Mother of God as the Intercessor for mankind before God. According to him, the value of the iconic image of the Mother of God and the Christ child may lead to theories of addiction concerning a possibly Russian ideal of avoiding pain through the intervention of one's mother in relation to one's father. In the light of Skobtsova's theology, the Mother of God indeed incarnates the ideal of co-suffering; she is the ultimate model of suffering that has no end or limit. Surprisingly in her theology, the Mother of God also serves as a model for radicalisation.

<sup>76</sup> Skobtsova, 2004b, 389.

<sup>77</sup> See the cycle of wartime pamphlets "Under the sign of disaster", *Pod znakom gibeli*. Skobts-

biblical image of miracle at Cana with Alesha's ecstatic vision in *The Brothers Karamazov*, and the Russian political messianism; or Parisian Solovki, which emphasises the solidarity among sufferers and martyrs across borders, referring to the concept of universal men, reveal her apocalyptic attitude toward the current political events. It appears that she simultaneously worked on pamphlets<sup>77</sup> and verse including larger poems and plays<sup>78</sup> addressing her conception of the Russian idea within the political and historical context. For example, the play "Soldiers" dramatises the (Solovievian) question of reunion between synagogue and church during the on-going Nazi occupation of Paris, whereas the play *Anna* outlines the conflict between the formally pious Pavla and the poor-in-spirit Anna, the author's alter ego. "Praise to labour," 'a psalm', praises the endeavour of man, his electedness to struggle in collaboration with God for the sake of the coming New Jerusalem. "Day of the Holy Spirit", dated 1942, which was the author's last spring of freedom, summarises all of Russian history in its spiritual-allegorical meaning. In the play, Russia conflicts with other nations and the accomplishment of the mission of the Dove, i.e. of the Holy Spirit, appears impossible. The speaker prays, alas, with resignation, for the Spirit to emanate to New Israel, that is, to the people of the New Testament, Russians, to open their eyes.

Further, "Seven chalices" is also about the apocalypse of war. It varies separate scenes: John and Prochoros converse on a desert island when chalices, angels, and other attributes from the biblical Revelation emanate to them. In the second scene situated in a Paris night shelter, alcoholics gather francs for the next bottle and discuss the current affairs; meanwhile, at the stop of evacuees, women moan their misery: loss of husbands, hunger and death of

ova 2004b. In them, she addresses in detail the perspective of world war and categorises, sometimes in harsh demagogic wordings, the role of separate nations in it.

<sup>78</sup> Poemas "Praise to labour" (*Pokhvala trudu*), "Day of Holy Spirit" (*Dukhov den'*) and plays "Seven chalices" (*Sem' chash*), "Soldiers" (*Soldaty*) and *Anna*, were published posthumously. See [Skobtsova 2001](#).

<sup>79</sup> *Soldaty*, 2001, 331.

infants, rapes by soldiers. In a fourth scene, in Israel, Jews wail and wait for the Last Judgement. At the conclusion, alluding to the end of history, Prochoros praises his and John's trespassing into the winged world. As we can see, two of the scenes depict the factual historical surrounding, but the conversation between John and Prochoros, while waiting for the Last Judgement, interprets the events in a supernatural setting. On the whole, the play serves as an ultimate attempt at conceptualising and rationalising suffering.

The third important play, "Soldiers", provides another example of apocalypse situated in Paris: German occupiers interrogate a group of people, among them French patriots, homeless, Jews, communists and a young man. All of them describe their truth and position, each one is equally and impartially presented, as by a Solovievian tertiary judge. This play, too, alludes to the wish for a dogmatic reconciliation between Judaism and Christendom: the young man reminds the soldier of the Strasbourg cathedral's two statues representing two sisters, one of whom has her eyes covered. "The not seeing one holds all the past in herself, while the other one is the mistress of the future".<sup>79</sup> As we can conclude, the above-mentioned works all address the challenge of the war and an attempt to interpret its meaning in light of empirical history and biblical apocalypse. As elsewhere, in these works a central, victorious role is reserved for Russia, the utopian land of Cana or New Israel. Skobtsova appeals to her readers to accept war<sup>80</sup> as the last chance for reunion of believers, although aware of its high price.<sup>81</sup>

80 These writings touch upon World War II, but similar apocalypses were written by her and other Russian modernists before World War I.

81 The author asserts to her friend Konstantin Mochuls'kii that she is not afraid of Russia, which will win and expand its empire from the Arctic to the Indian Ocean. "A great future awaits Russia. But what an ocean of blood." See Hackel, 1982, 100.

82 Skobtsova, 2001, 185. From the cycle *Ozhidanie*, 'Waiting'. [My translation – EK].

## Solovki as a Shelter

In light of the texts written in the late 30s and early 40s, it seems that Skobtsova became all more disappointed in the lack of Christian love for one's neighbour. This question appears to her equally crucial everywhere in the suffering world, in her own sisters' community in Paris as well as in Bolshevik Russia. Her equation of pain and appeal for solidarity among believers is explicit in the fragment of a poem dated 17.7.38:

My bonfire will burn,  
And the sisters will sing,  
And the sweet church bells will ring,  
On the Execution Square in Kremlin  
Or in the strange land, herein  
Everywhere with the faithful praying<sup>82</sup>

As we can see, the global theme emerges in the focus of the above quoted stanza. In addition, it evokes explicit reminiscence of the apex of the Legend of the Grand Inquisitor, where Christ is again condemned to death by the godless Inquisitor.<sup>83</sup> Here as elsewhere the speaker's self-identification with non-conformist Christ is obvious. The second fragment of the same cycle, "Waiting", continues the theme of apocalyptic darkness:

I will accept the Parisian Solovki  
An image of the polar night [...]

In every land, in every gaol again  
I rush to receive Thy gift, wailing and calling.

Let them shackle me in irons,  
If only Thy image is bright and unshackled.  
I will accept Solovki as a shelter,  
Where angels will always sing  
Every spot for me is promised by Thou.

83 "I repeat, to-morrow Thou shalt see that obedient flock who at sign from me will hasten to heap up the hot cinders about the pile on which I shall burn Thee for coming to hinder us. For if anyone has ever deserved our fires, it is Thou. To-morrow I shall burn Thee. Dixi." See Dostoevsky, 1952, 135.

84 Ibid. 185 –186. Dated 22.7.1938.

Only that in human hands  
 Thy living love would not grow callous  
 That Thy fire would not evoke slavish fear  
 That in our poor and blind hearts  
 A flaming blood always would burn.<sup>84</sup>

In these verses, the speaker equals imprisonment in Paris and Solovki. She accepts both of them as a promised land, where the (ascetic) faithful feels like in a shelter with Christ and His angels. Here, as in the above quoted fragment, the greatest danger is exposed by the slavish fear of those sisters and brothers who cannot accept the burning fire for themselves, and try to avoid it by burning others. In 1938 context, this refers equally to the slavish executioners in Stalinist Russia as in Hitler's Reich. Thus, the 'inquisitor's humble flock' breaks the God-manly process, which can be restored only by apocalypse. 'The Parisian Solovki' as an image of 'the polar night', in particular, illustrates this vision.

As Skobtsova's oeuvre has now become accessible for today's readership, we can say that themes of global messianism and successive acceptance of martyrdom were present already in her early, pre-Revolutionary texts. As we know, the intelligentsia welcomed World War I and hoped it would purify and renew their lives. Furthermore, the cultural elite seriously wished Russia would conquer Constantinople and return it to Christianity, that is, under Russia's reign. What comes with Skobtsova's mature years is a more profound voice of a sufferer. She quotes her favourite philosophers, mostly Dostoevsky, frequently but implicitly, and elaborates without hesitation on her personal experience and inner vision. This development she calls accepting the folly in Christ and poverty of spirit, which enforce her to organise heroic, but dangerous actions. At the same time, her Orthodox religious philosophy remains characteristically traditional. At many points, her ideas parallel with those of her notable contemporaries and intellectual companions Sergii Bulgakov, Nikolai Berdiaev or Georgii Fedotov. Nevertheless, her thought often appears more radical, in particular when it comes to the causal effect

<sup>85</sup> quoted the English translation by Hackel, 1982,113.

between her visions and actions, that is, that she prophesied her “fiery end” and consciously risked her life in order to fulfil the prophecy. As for her Russian idea in general, in retrospect one may say that partially it has proved correct: communism in Russia has indeed deteriorated and traditional Orthodoxy has risen. In addition, her thoughts about religion’s political aspects and path of female radicalisation (‘the God-motherhood’, bogomaterinstvo) have not lost their relevance.

As with any aesthetic work, Skobtsova’s poems and versed plays can be received without contrasting them against their genealogy or conceptual background. As the case of Skobtsova’s most famous poem illustrates, although it evoked huge solidarity, the majority of the audience did not relate the poem to the poetess’ fundamental mission, conversion of Jews to Christianity. She wrote a poem on the day when a decree obligating Jews to wear a Star was issued, and the poem quickly circulated in Paris. Its most poignant verses are:

Two triangles, King David’s star.  
No insult, this ancestral blazon.  
It indicates a noble way.  
It marks a chosen nation.<sup>85</sup>

As Skobtsova’s biographer Father Sergii Hackel wrote, the poem had a huge effect on solidarity among the non-Jewish members of Resistance, who chose to wear the Star too<sup>86</sup>. To conclude, Skobtsova’s concept of Russian idea appears not exceptional, but rather conciliar, that is, presenting voices from the choir comprising a continuum of old and new martyrs of Holy Russia. When contrasting her endeavour with Orthodox predecessors, including saints as well as philosophers, and with other Russian female saints of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, her example, however, stands out for several reasons. A true intellectual, her teaching mostly relied on written sources, and as for the teaching of the Mother of God, it totally lacked reliance on supernatural devices. Instead of apparitions, myrrh-exuding icons, or other figures of mystical intercession,

86 Ibid.

Skobtsova's image and concept of the Mother of God is a literary construction and a mirror of her own experiences. Her concept of the imitation of the Mother of God emphasises the maternal creativity, a metaphor for the God-manly process, but it includes also involuntary 'birth-giving' and successive suffering ending in radicalisation. Unlike in the vitae of uneducated women in which the political prophesies often are disguised in visions by the Mother of God or saints and in vivid imagery, Mother Maria Skobtsova speaks explicitly and in her own voice. Although her teaching lacks vernacular elements, it relies on many other traditional devices, in particular, when it comes to the political imagery and apocalyptic symbolism. Her teaching is embedded in the powerful tradition of Russian messianism and self-sacrifice, best hitherto espoused by Dostoevsky. Skobtsova's philosophy is that of the same choir, it strikes not by originality but by deeds and personal testimony.

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## Contributors

*Antti Arjava*

Department of Classical Philology  
University of Helsinki  
P.O. BOX 4 (Yliopistonkatu 5)  
FIN-00014 University of Helsinki  
E mail: antti.arjava@skr.fi

*Stavroula Constantinou*

Department of Byzantine  
and Modern Greek Studies  
University of Cyprus  
P.O.Box 20537  
CY-1678 Nicosia  
E mail: konstans@ucy.ac.cy

*Elina Kahla*

The Aleksanteri Institute  
University of Helsinki  
P.O.Box 42 (Töölönkatu 3 A)  
FIN-00014 University of Helsinki  
E mail: elina.kahla@helsinki.fi

*Alexandr Koptev*

Fallpakantie 8 M 121  
FIN-00970 Helsinki  
E mail: koptev@surfeu.fi

*Thomas Pratsch*

Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der  
Wissenschaften  
Prosopographie der mittelbyzantinischen  
Zeit - PmbZ  
Jägerstraße 22/23  
D-10117 Berlin  
E mail: pratsch@bbaw.de

*Paul Speck* †

*Bernard H. Stolte*

Faculteit der Rechtsgeleerdheid  
Rijksuniversiteit Groningen  
Postbus 716  
NL-9700 AS Groningen  
E mail: b.h.stolte@rechten.rug.nl

*Hanna-Riitta Toivanen*

Vaasankatu 15 C 80  
FIN-00500 Helsinki  
E mail: h\_toivanen@hotmail.com

*Staffan Wahlgren*

Institutt for historie og klassiske fag  
Norges teknisk-naturvitenskapelige  
universitet  
Historisk institutt, Dragvoll  
N-7491 Trondheim,  
E mail: staffan.wahlgren@hf.ntnu.no